

# Memories of a Little Bird

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The Federation Starbase floated in space quiet and serene, a Starfleet runabout waiting in dry dock, ready to depart. Inside the cockpit, the pilot tapped the communications terminal.

"Starbase 173, this is the U.S.S. Heimdal requesting permission to depart." A short silence followed, and then gave way to a male voice.

"Permission granted Heimdal, have a safe journey."

"Affirmative control, thank you. Release docking clamps."

"Docking clamps released."

The Heimdal moved slowly away from Starbase 173 and out into space. The pilot, a young lieutenant locked the autopilot to the pre-chosen coordinates and sat back in the pilot's chair, gently rubbing her swollen abdomen. She was very pregnant. As if in afterthought, she sat up.

"Computer advise me when we are within communications range of the Onias sector."

"Affirmative." The computer acknowledged.

"Computer how long until we reach Research Station 992?"

"Ten hours twenty-four minutes present speed."

The lieutenant sat back again and continued to stroke her stomach, quietly humming to herself. Her intelligent blue eyes scanned the stars as she hummed. "It won't be long now sweetheart and you can see the stars too." She smiled as she felt her unborn daughter stir slightly and become still again.

"We'll see daddy before long. He always gets anxious when he can't talk to you for a few days." She smiled wide. "And Uncle Alex will be there too. He's already bought enough baby stuff to fill a starship." She stared at the stars for a few minutes and decided to sleep before reaching the research station. She made her way carefully to the rear of the runabout and lay down on the bunk.

Inside the command center of Research Station 992, the tactical officer monitored the screen in front of him. He was a

big man in his fifties with a severe military haircut. He had alerted the facility commander who was off-duty as soon as he had picked up the anomaly.

"Report." The commander's voice ordered over the intercom.

"We have something on long range scanners sir." The tactical officer reported.

"Is it a runabout?"

"Not unless she has a cloak that we didn't know about. All indications point to a spatial distortion consistent with that produced by a cloaked ship."

"I'm on my way."

Barely two minutes elapsed before the commander was in the command center. He studied the screen and watched the blip become larger as it got nearer to the facility. He was tall and fair in his early thirties with intense green eyes.

"We have the permission of the Romulan government to man this facility, guaranteed by the Emperor himself." He said. "Why would they be sneaking around in cloaked ships?"

"It's possible that it isn't a Romulan ship." The tactical officer said so that only the commander could hear. "If the Romulans didn't want us to detect them, they could have avoided us all together."

"Go to yellow alert." The commander ordered.

"Aye sir." The officer obeyed and the facility was placed on yellow alert. The tension that had begun to gnaw at the commander was evident. The tactical officer noticed it and stood up as the commander was about to leave. "Look David, she isn't due for several hours." He patted his friend and commanding officer on the shoulder with one huge hand.

"Besides, she's a smart cookie. She'd never approach if there's trouble."

"I just can't help worrying." The commander smiled. "She's due soon and I couldn't stand it if anything happened to them."

"Been there three times myself ya know." The officer smiled. He nodded to the tactical screen. "It's probably nothing."

"Yeah, probably. Three little Bubenhofers running around, and all girls." The commander smiled again. "I bet you

couldn't wait for their teen years."

"We won't even go there commander." Bubenhofer grimaced. "Besides, little Reed is of the female persuasion, so you'll have the same headache yourself when the time comes." He said, shaking a thick finger at the younger man.

"Touché. How about coffee when the shift ends?" The commander smiled, hiding his true nervousness.

"Half an hour?"

"Great. See you in the mess."

The commander left the command center trying to calm down, with little success. The war with the Klingons was heating up, and they had proven to be murderous and bloodthirsty in the extreme on many occasions. He had listened to Bubenhofer's war stories too many times he thought. He tried not to think about it and reminded himself of what Bubenhofer had said. She's a smart cookie. He smiled to himself as he entered the long hallway to the mess hall. She really is a smart cookie, he thought. He was much more at ease since his old friend had arrived. Alexander Bubenhofer, retired Federation Colonel and now Starfleet lieutenant. I'll probably have to listen to the tale of how he exploited a hidden loophole in the regulations to get into Starfleet at his age again, he thought. This made him smile again. Oh well, he earned it.

The Heimdal computer voice alerted the sleeping lieutenant that the research station was within communications range.

"Computer, contact Research Station 992." She said groggily.

"There is no response from Research Station 992." The computer reported.

"Keep trying." She said.

"There is no response on any channel." The computer responded after a short silence.

She took the pilot's seat and tried again. "This is the U.S.S. Heimdal calling Research Station 992, do you read?" She received no response and sat back, becoming worried.

"Computer, put the planet on the main viewscreen." The image of the beautiful forest planet filled the viewscreen, floating in the blackness of space. "Computer, set course for 93 | *Originals*

the research station."

Another hour and the runabout was descending through the atmosphere of the planet and the sun was beginning its climb in the morning sky. Lieutenant Reed set a course for the colony with the research facility. Long before she saw the colony, she saw the smoke. She looked at it in extreme magnification and felt suddenly nauseous. Never enter an unsecured area, especially in wartime. She could almost hear her uncle's voice as she remembered his warning. She set the ship down roughly a kilometer from the colony, a strong uneasiness coming over her. She took a tricorder and phaser and cautiously walked the distance through the dense forest to the edge of the colony. Before she reached the colony she could smell the smoke. Fighting nausea again, she made her way carefully to the edge of the compound. From the cover of the trees, she surveyed what was left of the colony, now a burnt and blackened ruin. Tears streamed down her face and she forced herself to sit down and gather herself. After scanning the area for survivors and alien lifesigns she headed for the research station on the far side of the colony at the edge of the forest.

"I hope whoever did this isn't still around." She whispered to herself. Making her way quickly toward the station, she surveyed the damage as she went. Ruined buildings and bodies were everywhere. Not just Federation personnel, but dead Klingons as well. Fighting the urge to cry again, she reached the station and hurried through the smashed section that was once the entranceway. Entering the wrecked command center, she began to search for survivors through the acid smell of circuitry fires and smoke. Federation and Klingon bodies littered the floor. Near the command console were three men, all dead. She recognized Parlin and Wilmer, former classmates at the Academy. The other man was larger than the others with graying hair cut military style. "Oh no." She wept as she knelt and stroked Bubenhofer's rugged face. He had multiple severe bat'leth wounds. Several dead Klingons surrounded the area where he lay. "A soldier to the end." She said softly, remembering how he had often said that about himself. A sudden strong chill came over her as she stood up and searched the rest of the command center. At the

spot where the controls for the shield generator had been, several more bodies lay strewn on the floor. As she approached, she noticed one lying face down. "No!" she dropped the phaser and tricorder and ran frantically to the prone figure. She knew him even before she turned him over. She knew immediately that he was dead too. Defeated, she sat weeping, gently rocking her dead husband in her arms.

Just after midday, Samantha Reed sat in the cool shadows of the forest covered in perspiration, recuperating from her exertions. In a tiny clearing behind the research station lay four new graves. She held a holimage and traced the outline of the man's smiling face with her finger while gently rubbing her stomach with the other. Tears welled in her eyes again as she stared at the face of her best friend and strongest supporter, her lover and the father of their precious baby girl. Her husband of just over a year. "I'll raise her right David, I promise." She said, softly kissing the holimage. "I'm sorry I haven't picked a name yet." Suddenly, she cocked her head slightly. What she thought she had heard grew louder, becoming the unmistakable sound of an approaching ship.

Quickly gathering her things, she retreated deeper into the forest and watched the direction of the sound. Moments later, a B'rel class Bird of Prey came to rest at the edge of the colony, south of the spot where she had entered the compound. She scanned with her tricorder, terrified that Klingons were there, just inside the Romulan Neutral Zone. Shortly, a second Bird of Prey sat down close to the first one. She continued to watch as the Klingons disembarked from their ships and began to search the buildings. Some began to search the bodies, even the dead Klingons. Fighting panic, she decided to make her way back to the Heimdal and leave. She knew her chances were slim, but she wasn't going to make it easy for them.

At the colony, one of the Klingons hailed a superior and showed him his tricorder. A slowly moving red blip inched along on the tricorder screen. The Klingon commander bellowed orders and headed toward the forest with two others. With a slight head start, Reed made her way to the Heimdal despite her heavy burden and earlier exertions. She reached the runabout barely ahead of the Klingons. They seemed

uninterested in exerting themselves in the chase until they saw the runabout. Reed took the pilot's seat and the Heimdal slowly lifted off.

"Computer, activate main viewscreen."

On the screen, she could see the three Klingons loom into view with their weapons drawn. The runabout lifted off directly in front of them as they fired their disruptors. She heard the blasts hit the ship.

"Warning, the attitude controls are offline." The computer reported.

"Engage back-up." Reed said as she turned the Heimdal away from the pursuing Klingons. They continued to fire at the Heimdal until she was out of range.

"Back-up system is offline." came the unemotional response from the computer.

"This is going to be fun." Reed sneered as she fought the controls. The runabout cut an erratic path over the forest and was becoming too difficult to handle so she decided to find a place to sit down. She tapped the communications terminal and activated the automated distress beacon. "The bad guys know I'm here anyway." On the screen, a mountain loomed in the distance. "That looks about as good as it's going to get." She guided the ship toward the mountaintop, which was approaching faster and faster. "Come on baby, just a little further." Reed cut the engine and tried to glide in. The treetops did their part to slow the runabout but the landing was anything but soft. A "cranding" she thought to herself later.

Luckily, the Heimdal went down with no explosion or fire. After some moments Reed stirred, bruised and dizzy. Letting her disorientation pass, she slowly relaxed and regained her senses. Taking stock of her injuries, she noticed a swollen lip, bruised forehead and very agitated fetus. "Sorry sweetheart. I'll try to be more careful." she said, rubbing her stomach again. She quickly located the Klingons on the ship's scanners.

"Fourteen point eight kilometers. Well, that gives me a little bit of a head start." She quickly busied herself taking inventory of her supplies and giving herself a hypospray to guard her baby against any ill effects of her exertions. Satisfying herself as to her provisions, she started off in what

appeared the least difficult direction. She had noticed caves in the face of the nearest mountain. She checked her chronometer and felt that she could reach them by nightfall and decided to head that way. For two and a half hours Reed fought the terrain, the biting insects and the ever-present nausea until she came to the mouth of a ravine leading to the mountain with the caves. She rested briefly and started into the ravine with newfound determination.

Several hours later at the Heimdal wreck the Klingons ransacked the runabout, then destroyed it, mainly to stop the distress signal. Those who had been following Reed were joined by several others and were in hot pursuit of the Starfleet officer. The dense forest made landing a Bird of Prey impossible so the Klingons continued on foot. This too, proved very difficult, slowing them down. The sun hung low in the sky and the approaching darkness slowed them even more. They halted to check their tricorders, growling with pleasure at the stationary red blip. The Klingon commander issued orders and started to make camp accompanied by his two original companions. The others resumed the search.

Reed sat in the entrance of the cave using her tricorder to track the Klingons. She noticed that the instrument was malfunctioning, not showing species, only the lifesigns. "Six point two kilometers. Klingons don't get tired as fast as humans." She had heard the many horror stories of what Klingon males did to human females before the Khitomer Accords. Since the Klingons had evidently destroyed the research colony, she was fairly certain that she would not be spared. She set her phaser to kill and injected herself with stimulants to stay awake, sitting back against the cave wall to wait. She noticed the lifesigns separating on the tricorder. "So, I guess it only takes three big, strong Klingons to take out one pregnant Starfleet officer." She checked their distance again. "Five point six kilometers. Looks like we'll see the sun come up together."

She watched the tricorder and tried to decide on a course of action. She was too exhausted to run any more. She decided that her only hope was to try and ambush the three coming for her and hold out until help arrived. A very slim hope, she knew, but she refused to give up completely. She put the

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tricorder down and ate some rations. She took out the holoimage again and smiled at the young man who smiled at her. She felt the tears coming again and put the picture away. Picking up the tricorder again, she was puzzled at what she saw. Three red blips coming toward her and that was all.

"What the hell?" She checked her tricorder and tried again. Three red blips four kilometers away and nothing more.

"Looks like they got tired and beamed up. That leaves three." She had no sooner said it than the question popped into her head. Why didn't they beam over here right in front of the caves? She watched excitedly as the blips drew closer. When they were within a hundred meters, the three became four. "Wish they'd make up their minds."

Suddenly the sounds of shouts and curses mixed with disruptor fire came echoing from below the caves in the forest. Moving to the mouth of the cave onto a wide ledge, she stared in vain in the direction of the commotion. The sun had set and the moon had not risen, leaving the forest in total darkness. As suddenly as it had begun, the commotion ceased. Grabbing the tricorder again, she was utterly puzzled. One red blip approaching her position. "My god, am I going crazy?" She sat down to ponder the situation. She decided that someone may have survived the attack and dispatched the three Klingons pursuing her. Now, she waited in anticipation mixed with fear of the unknown. Nervously, she checked the tricorder again and saw one red blip moving erratically. "A friend?" She wondered aloud. "Less than a hundred meters." The blip wasn't moving toward her position any more, but appeared to be circling her position. "Come on, come on, I can't take the suspense!" She put the tricorder aside and began listening. After several minutes the sounds of someone or something climbing toward her position became obvious. Then the thought struck her and she gasped. A predator? Quickly grabbing the phaser, she leveled it at the barely visible cave entrance.

Soon, the life form was just outside the entrance to the cave. The darkness was impenetrable and Reed was shaking terribly. It just stayed where it was, silent and terrifying. She suddenly began to feel very nauseous. The tense silence was unbearable and she had a momentary urge to fire at the

entrance, just to penetrate the oppressive darkness. After a few moments the sounds resumed, but were definitely moving away from her hiding place. When she noticed that, she nearly became frantic. The life form continued to move away, the sounds becoming more distant. "Please don't leave me." She wept quietly. She slumped against the cave wall spent and weeping. The nausea had increased considerably. She began digging in her pre-natal field kit for something to relieve her discomfort. Without warning, she suddenly had a contraction, which nearly caused her to fall over. She decided to lie down, afraid to move. "Not now, please, not now." She realized that her physical exertions over the past twenty some hours combined with the anguish and anxiety of her situation had all combined into her current predicament. She tried to get comfortable on the cool cave floor and relax. She hadn't realized how exhausted she was until now, but she wouldn't risk more stimulants. Very shortly, she was asleep with the phaser set to kill in her hand.

Several hours later, Reed slowly opened her eyes in the dimly lit cave. She struggled to rise, dizzy and sick. The best she could do was crawl to a sitting position. She placed a hand on her stomach. "Please sweetheart, stay put for a little while longer." She noticed a small lantern type object in the middle of the cave floor. It wasn't hers. She slowly crawled to the tricorder. The screen showed a stationary red blip very close to her position and five more approaching from the same direction that the Klingons had come hours before. She lay down again, very sick, another contraction wracking her body.

"Please sweetheart, not yet." She pleaded weakly. Shortly, she was unconscious again.

Several more hours later, just before sunrise, Reed slowly regained consciousness. Moaning weakly, she raised herself up on one elbow but didn't try to rise. She slowly opened her eyes and started at a huge figure looming over her. Trying frantically to focus her eyes, she became aware that the phaser was gone. Slowly her eyes obeyed, and she found herself face to face with a dark form that seemed to be holding a long instrument or weapon in one hand. A bat'leth! She thought almost hysterically. The form was looking straight at her from the mouth of the cave. "Who are you?" She pleaded

almost inaudibly.

"I am Commander Bralak." The figure thundered, causing Reed to jump involuntarily.

Reed then realized that the figure might not be Klingon. As her eyes focused, she realized that before her stood a massive Romulan armed with a wicked looking sword. Relief flooded through her severely weakened body and she collapsed back onto the cave floor. The Romulan came closer and turned the lantern up a notch. He looked more like a Vulcan than a Romulan with no hint of cranial ridges. In a Starfleet uniform, he would go unnoticed except for his size. She could see that he was a very large man dressed in an unfamiliar uniform and in need of medical attention with several wounds on his chest and arms. Some were crusted over with dried blood, but some were obviously fresh. He sat down not far from her, sheathing his formidable weapon.

"I was investigating reports of Klingon ships in this sector when I monitored your attempts to contact your colony." He explained. He began digging in Reed's pre-natal kit. "We scanned the colony when we arrived and saw that it had already been destroyed. We destroyed several Klingon ships in orbit." He noticed her watching him. "My transporters went offline after I beamed down. We will have to wait until they are repaired before we can leave."

"I'm.." She started.

"Lieutenant Samantha Reed." He finished.

"If you're hungry, I have some rations left." She offered, trying to appear unperturbed. She tried to rise but her weakened body wouldn't cooperate.

"I am looking for something to ease your discomfort. You are very close to delivery, I'm afraid."

"I think that is a logical assumption." She said, managing a slight smile.

"Very sharp, even though I am a Romulan, not a Vulcan." He smiled.

"Sorry. Bad joke."

"Not at all." Bralak found what he was looking for. "I'm afraid this will be the last dose." He gently injected Reed in the neck. After a moment, she sat up with his help.

"Thank you." She said sincerely. "For everything."

Bralak smiled and offered Reed some of her rations, which she refused.

"You must eat." He scolded. "You must keep up your strength."

"And you must have some medical attention." She scolded back.

"I will be alright."

"Really? Well, you're bleeding again." She said. She reached out and touched his right arm, which had resumed seeping the green fluid Romulans used for blood. "You need to let me treat you. I have some medical training."

"Perhaps later." He said. He began to apply pressure to stop the bleeding.

Reed lay down again, trying to get comfortable. Bralak moved to the mouth of the cave and began cleaning his sword. She became very interested in him. She could see that he was unlike any Romulan she had ever seen or heard of. For one thing, he carried a sword and wore a uniform that looked more like a short kimono than anything else she could think of, reminding her of images she had seen of samurai from earth's past. The most striking thing however, was his size. He was bigger than the biggest Klingon she had ever seen. Not just tall, but massive as well.

"I've never seen a Romulan sword before." She told him. "I didn't even know that Romulans had swords."

"The katan has been an integral part of Romulan combat training and martial philosophy for many centuries."

"It looks like swords I've seen in museums on Earth."

"History says that the sword as well as many other elements of our military culture were brought back from another planet long ago." He said. He continued cleaning the weapon, polishing the razor sharp edge and checking all the fittings for damage. Reed tried to get comfortable again. She watched Bralak for a while and fell asleep.

Lieutenant Reed awoke in terrific pain. Bralak was bending over her, dabbing her forehead. He locked his fierce black eyes on hers.

"It is time." He said. "Your child will be here within two hours at most." Reed put her tiny hand on his.

"Please save my baby." She pleaded.

"I have delivered two of my own children." He said proudly.

"How many do you have?" She asked, more to calm herself than for any other reason.

"Seven. All sons." He answered, still tenderly dabbing her forehead.

"No daughters?" She asked, tears welling up.

"I had a daughter, but she died when she was but four Terran years of age." Bralak's face tightened. "That is why I leave no Klingon alive."

"I'm sorry." Reed fought back the tears. "What was her name?"

"Ralisha. But I called her little bird." He said, looking away.

"I'm sorry if I brought back a painful memory." She said.

Bralak smiled and patted her hand. "There is nothing painful in my memory of my precious little bird. She enriched my life for a time." He began dabbing her forehead again. "Do not think of it."

Reed noticed a subtle change in his actions and knew that she had opened an old wound. She tried to think of something to say, but decided to keep her mouth shut. Once more, she had a violent contraction. She squeezed his hand until her knuckles turned bone white. She looked at Bralak, the fear obvious in her eyes.

"Courage." Bralak said. "You will be alright."

"Please save my baby." She begged. "She's all I have left."

"Will you trust me?" He asked.

"Yes, please save my baby." She begged again frantically, her crystal blue eyes becoming frantic.

Bralak placed his fingers on her temples and fixed her eyes with his.

"I didn't know Romulans could mind meld." She said.

"There is much the Federation doesn't know about us." He told her. "Our thoughts are merging; our minds are becoming one." His gaze held hers and gently penetrated her consciousness. Shortly, Reed became calm and drifted into semi-consciousness. When the time came, Bralak prepared to deliver her baby.

Reed awoke slowly, a strange feeling of calm washing over her. Bralak leaned against the cave wall clutching a tiny bundle, the morning sun warming the mouth of the cave. He was covered in perspiration.

"Is she alright?" She asked desperately.

"She is impressively so." Her huge savior smiled as he rose and brought the infant to her mother. Reed extended her arms anxiously. Bralak smiled again and handed the tiny bundle to her. The new mother inspected every square millimeter of the newborn before she allowed her anxiety to subside. Wrapping the infant securely, she relaxed and cuddled her.

"I can never thank you enough commander."

"Unnecessary. It was indeed fortunate that I was in the area." He said. "Some of my crew should arrive shortly. We will then be able to leave." He moved to the cave entrance and gazed out over the forest as Reed prepared to feed her daughter. "Besides, I never ignore a chance to kill Klingons." Reed fed her baby, burped her and continued to cuddle her while she slept. She felt somewhat rested now, despite her ordeal. She tried to recall the cascade of images that had flooded her mind while in the mind meld with Bralak. One image appeared more strongly than any other. The image of a beautiful baby girl with striking black eyes in a pale, chubby face floated in her mind. She knew that this was Ralisha, the daughter that Bralak had told her of. The realization brought another sensation surging suddenly forward. Reed's mind was flooded with powerful emotions. The baby girl was replaced by a slightly older, but still very small child with those same striking intelligent, curious, innocent eyes. She seemed to swim in a warm sea of love and pride. Then slowly her face lost its smile, its healthy glow and the good feelings were replaced by sudden, terrible anguish. Reed opened her eyes and realized that she had been experiencing Bralak's deep love for his daughter, and his numbing loss when she had died. Turning away from the cave entrance where Bralak stood she wept quietly for several moments. She was still weeping when the tricorder beeped. Bralak looked at it and picked up his sword.

"More Klingons?" Reed asked softly as she wiped her eyes.

"Unknown." Bralak said. "I will take a look around. Remain

here and try to keep the little one quiet." He handed her the phaser.

"I wondered what happened to it." She said.

Bralak turned to leave but stopped short momentarily at the cave entrance. He turned back to look at Reed and her infant daughter briefly and left without a word. Reed huddled in a corner of the cave, baby and phaser in hand, listening for any sound of Bralak returning. She waited for hours until the sun had set. To pass the time, she talked to her daughter and sang to her. She dug through her supplies and found a holoalbum. Once more she wept as she looked at the images of her dead husband and Bubenhofer. "This is your father," she wept, once more tracing the man's face with her finger. "He used to talk to you and read you stories." Turning a page, she found an image from her childhood. "This is Colonel Alexander Bubenhofer, retired." She smiled. "He was my uncle, and the best friend of your grandpa Reed, your father's father." She said. "He called himself your godfather. The little chubby girl he's holding is your mommy." She wiped her tears away and studied another image from years gone by. "And this is Uncle Alex, your grandpa Reed and your daddy on a hiking trip." She closed the album and put it away, still reeling from the tragedy of the past day.

Digging through her rations, she found something to eat and activated the lantern. Finally, she heard someone approaching and had to fight the urge to call out. As the sounds grew closer, she leveled the phaser at the cave mouth. Bralak staggered through the entrance and immediately leaned against the wall. He had fresh wounds on his face and head, and was bleeding badly.

"You're hurt!" Reed gasped, startling the newborn, who voiced her displeasure in no uncertain terms. She placed her baby gently on the floor of the cave close to the lantern and stumbled to where Bralak stood. He was nearly unconscious and at first couldn't focus on her. She took his arm and guided him toward the lantern.

"I'm afraid our guests will not be joining us for dinner." He said, leaning his sword against the cave wall.

"We don't have the extra rations anyway." She replied, helping him sit down. Blood and perspiration flowed freely

from wound and pore. She rifled through her med kit and found the antibiotic, injecting him as he slipped into unconsciousness. Reed cleaned his wounds as best she could and stopped the bleeding, singing to her daughter in an attempt to quiet her, but she knew the Romulan had lost a great deal of blood. "You'll be ok." she kept saying, knowing that he didn't hear her. "You have to be ok." she whispered when she had finished. She gathered up her baby and sat close to Bralak.

Bralak's consciousness drifted serenely in the void as a great bird of prey drifts on currents of air. All was black, yet he could hear voices in the distance. "He should be coming around." An unfamiliar male voice said. "Will he be alright?" another asked. This voice was female. And familiar. Slowly the darkness receded a bit, and warm light began to displace it. Blurred images came into view, slowly taking shape as his eyes focused.

Three new, advanced Romulan Warbirds and an Intrepid class starship orbited the planet in the Onias sector. In the sickbay of the Starfleet vessel, Lieutenant Reed, the ship's captain, ship's doctor and a huge Romulan officer surrounded a biobed.

"He's coming around." The thin Trill doctor said.

"Will he be alright?" Reed asked for the hundredth time.

On the biobed, Bralak stirred to consciousness.

"General, are you well?" The towering Romulan asked.

"It would seem so Takal." Bralak answered groggily. The Starfleet captain, a Vulcan, stepped closer.

"General Bralak, I am Captain Salek of the U.S.S. Trident." He said graciously. "We responded to a distress signal from Lieutenant Reed, and found your ship in orbit. When we had spoken to your first officer, we learned of their transporter problems and beamed you aboard."

"Many thanks captain." Bralak said sincerely. "It would seem that I am recovering."

"With all the antibiotics and cellular regenerators in your system, you should never have another injury as long as you live General." Reed chimed in, emphasizing the word General.

"Which won't be long if you insist on slaughtering every Klingon in sight by hand." The doctor added.

"Indeed. Never say never lieutenant. I plan to live for a long time." He smiled back. "Are you well?"

"Very." She told him.

"And the little one?"

Reed uncovered her baby's head and showed her to Bralak.

"General Bralak, meet Ralisha Alexandra Reed." She said proudly. Bralak and Reed shared a smile while the others stood around awkwardly.

"She seems to have an affinity for exobiology." He said, pretending to study the infant. "Or Botany perhaps."

"You never know." Reed said, still smiling. She placed the baby next to Bralak on the biobed.

"Maybe we'd better leave these two alone for a minute." The doctor suggested.

The others in the room tried not to hurry out of the uncomfortable situation and regroup in the hallway outside. Bralak cradled the infant in his unbandaged left arm. The newborn cooed, comfortable and unafraid.

"I think I'll step outside for a moment too." Reed said. She left her baby and her protector together in sickbay. When she was gone, Bralak admired the tiny child. Whispering so that no one else could possibly hear him, he uttered two simple words as the baby grasped his massive finger.

"Little bird."