

## The Return of the Phoenix

It didn't matter if it was on a planet or in space; Mondays were Mondays, and James T. Kirk hated them. Everything bad he and his crew encountered, all of the catastrophes and calamities they faced, always seemed to fall on a Monday, and today was no exception. At 0600 the Communications Officer had detected an automated distress call from *The Seeker*, a Vulcan survey vessel, but an engine problem prevented the *Enterprise* from arriving at *The Seeker's* location for another three hours. Why the engines had suddenly malfunctioned after earning top marks during a drill yesterday was just as much a mystery to Scott as to anyone else on the ship, but Kirk knew his chief engineer wouldn't stop investigating until he discovered the cause. When added to Dr. McCoy's nagging about how he was overdue for his annual physical, Kirk knew that this was going to be one of those weeks that felt as long as a year.

Ah, well. At least he had his trusty coffee to see him through the rough spots.

"Are you getting any response to your messages, Lieutenant?" he asked as *The Seeker* drifted into view. It floated listlessly in space, giving no indication that anyone aboard was still alive.

"None, sir," Lieutenant Uhura answered, her head cocked as she listened through her earpiece. "I'm transmitting on all frequencies, repeating the message in Federation Standard and the Vulcan language. It just keeps replaying the automatic distress call."

“Keep trying to get through. Mr. Spock, are you picking up any life readings?” Kirk swiveled his chair in the direction of the science station.

Spock remained focused on his station’s readings as he responded, “Only two, Captain, a Vulcan and a human.”

Kirk’s brow furrowed. “Why would a human be on a Vulcan survey vessel?”

“Some Vulcan survey vessels will offer a position to an offworlder as an exchange of ideas and opinions. If a human met the qualifications for the position, there would be no logical reason not to accept one aboard. The problem, Captain, is that a ship of *The Seeker*’s size would have had approximately 120 Vulcans aboard, but I can detect the life signs of only one.”

To a stranger, Spock sounded completely normal, but Kirk could detect the faint sound of strained control in his First Officer’s voice. The thought of over a hundred Vulcans dead on their vessel, bitter to Kirk, was a galling burden to Spock, who felt the deaths of his fellow Vulcans more keenly than he would ever admit out loud.

Well, Spock might not admit it out loud, but Kirk wasn’t going to sit and wait if there were two lives that could be saved. “Lt. Uhura, call Dr. McCoy to the transporter room,” Kirk directed, heading for the turbo lift. “Mr. Spock, you’re with me. I’m not waiting for answers.”

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“You okay, Jim? Need a hypo? The air’s pretty thin here.” McCoy placed his hand on Kirk’s elbow to steady him after the captain stumbled slightly upon materializing.

“I’m fine, Bones,” Kirk waved him off. “I just need a couple minutes to acclimate.” *The Seeker*’s atmosphere was configured to Vulcan normal; the two humans required a few minutes

to adjust to the sudden change from the *Enterprise*'s Earth-normal atmosphere. Spock, who was already used to the different climate, began to work on restoring the lights from the emergency settings to the normal ones.

Once working, the lights performed their job too well, illuminating the interior of the vessel to showcase the bodies sprawled around the transporter chamber. Every face was frozen in a rictus visage of shock. Kirk swallowed bile, nauseous at the thought that he hadn't stumbled from the thin air but from tripping over the body of a young Vulcan woman who had died on the transporter pad. The confusion and terror on her face would have been horrifying enough on a human, but they were blood-chilling on a countenance that never betrayed the slightest hint of emotion.

"What caused this?" Kirk wondered.

McCoy already had his tricorder out and was scanning one of the bodies. "There are no signs of physical injuries; my tricorder is saying they all died of heart attacks."

"Brought on by fear?" Kirk suggested.

"No, I don't think so. They were afraid; that much is clear, but it was something external that caused their hearts to stop. It's as if something delivered a lethal dose of electricity that simply stopped their hearts."

"Captain, I'm picking up a life form reading—Vulcan, male, unconscious. It's coming from the corridor." Spock swung his tricorder in the direction of the door. "Readings indicate that the human survivor is located on the bridge."

“You and McCoy take care of the Vulcan; I’ll see if I can locate the human.” Kirk gingerly navigated the maze of bodies as he stepped down from the transporter platform and made his way to the door.

There were fewer bodies in the corridor, and one of them was still breathing—obviously the Vulcan survivor Spock’s tricorder had detected. His breathing was shallow, and he had a large green bruise on his right cheek, but McCoy seemed confident that he would be all right. Leaving the young Vulcan in McCoy and Spock’s care, Kirk proceeded to the bridge.

The scene there was not much different from the other parts of the ship, but Kirk noticed that the captain had some wounds that indicated he had struggled against his attacker. Anyone—or anything—that could overpower an adult Vulcan male could pulverize a human in mere seconds. Apart from the two survivors that Spock detected, however, no other living being had been located on *The Seeker*.

*What caused this?* Kirk wondered. He looked up as Spock entered the bridge. “How is he? Is he awake?”

“Yes, Dr. McCoy was able to revive him,” Spock reported. “He was confused and disoriented, but on the whole his condition is not as serious as it might be, given the conditions of the other victims. His name is Sortek; he is a linguistics student from the Vulcan Science Academy and was serving as a translator as part of a work-study opportunity.”

“Does he remember what happened?” Kirk pressed.

Spock shook his head. “He claims he has no memory of the attack—he heard the sound of fighting, went to see what had happened, and then something hit him and caused him to black out.”

A groan attracted the officers' attention, and they both turned in the direction of the sound. With considerable effort, one of the prone bodies was pushing itself into a sitting position. The young woman ran a hand through her short brown hair and shook her head, blinking rapidly; the other hand fumbled around on the floor as she pushed herself upright. As soon as her hand encountered one of the dead bodies, she stared, horrified, and gave a small scream.

Instantly Kirk was at her side, helping her to her feet. "It's all right, miss; you're perfectly fine here."

She turned her terrified blue eyes on the captain. "What happened here?" she choked out. "What happened to them?"

"We were hoping you would be able to tell us, Miss..."

"Taylor," she supplied. "Zoe Taylor. Who are you?"

"I'm Captain James T. Kirk from the starship *Enterprise*." Kirk gave one of his most reassuring smiles. "This is my first officer Mr. Spock."

Taylor nodded numbly. "Are they all like this? Is everyone dead?"

"Our sensors detected only two survivors, yourself and Sortek," Spock informed her blandly. "Everyone else is dead."

Taylor's hand rose to her mouth in horror. "Everyone?" she whispered.

"Everyone."

Taylor gave a low, shuddering sob and began to collapse. Kirk caught her before she fell and eased her back to her feet, shooting Spock a look that clearly indicated he thought his first officer

could have used a bit more tact. Spock's face indicated that he believed he had behaved perfectly logically.

"We'll get you on the *Enterprise* for treatment," Kirk told her. "There will be time for questions later."

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Kirk and McCoy watched from the doorway of sickbay as Taylor and Sortek chatted with each other from their beds. Taylor was doing the majority of the talking; Sortek offered some observations every now and then but mostly served as listener.

"I don't know, Jim. I just don't know." McCoy shook his head.

"You don't know what, Bones?" Kirk prodded.

"Something's not adding up about those two. I can't put my finger on it, but something's not right," McCoy mused. "I just can't figure out how they managed to survive when everyone else died."

Kirk chuckled. "We haven't even asked them anything yet. You told me to leave them alone until they were feeling better."

"I know that. I also know that something bigger is going on here."

"A human intuition, Doctor?" Spock entered sick bay and joined the conversation.

"Laugh all you like, Spock, but I know something isn't right," McCoy snapped.

The irritation in McCoy's voice caused Taylor and Sortek to stop talking and turn their heads towards the door. "Did you want to see us, Doctor?" Taylor asked.

“No—I’m sorry I raised my voice. You two can go back to talking.”

“Actually, Miss Taylor,” Kirk interrupted, “there were a couple of questions I wanted to ask you and Mr. Sortek—if you’re feeling up to it, that is.”

“I cannot speak for Miss Taylor, but for myself, I believe I am sufficiently recovered to answer your questions, Captain,” Sortek assured him.

“I’m feeling better, too, sir,” Taylor added.

Kirk wanted to grin at how opposite the two convalescents were, Taylor with her easy smile and expressive face and Sortek with his careful, polite reserve. But the mass murder of a shipful of Vulcans was nothing to grin about; these two were the only witnesses to an inconceivable massacre, and it was his job, unpleasant as it was, to learn as much as he could and, if possible, to bring the murder to justice.

Kirk was unsure of the best question to ask first, but Spock had already made up his mind. “Did either of you get a glimpse of whatever or whomever killed the crewmembers of *The Seeker*?”

“Everything happened too quickly for me to get a good look,” Sortek answered simply. “As I previously told you and Dr. McCoy, I heard the sound of fighting and went to see what was happening. I was rendered unconscious before I could get a good look at anything.”

Spock’s eyes narrowed slightly, but he turned to Taylor next instead of questioning Sortek further. “And you?”

“I’m afraid I don’t remember anything at all,” Taylor shook her head. “I was sound asleep in my bunk; I didn’t hear anything. The next thing I know, I’m waking up on the bridge...” She trailed off, her eyes distant as she relived the chilling memory.

Sortek reached out and touched Taylor lightly on the shoulder. She blinked, startled out of her reverie, and smiled. Spock’s eyebrow flicked upwards, but he remained silent.

Kirk had noticed it, too, but he decided to ignore it for the time being since Spock had obviously elected to do the same. “Do you know of anyone who would want to harm the vessel, perhaps steal any research you had?”

Taylor shook her head vehemently. “The Vulcans make their research available to all! No one would have to steal what would be freely given.”

“Do you have something to add, Mr. Sortek?” Kirk had noticed an almost imperceptible spasm pass over the young Vulcan’s face, indicating that he was aware of something his human colleague was not.

Sortek hesitated briefly. “We were not supposed to talk about it with outsiders...but I suppose it does not matter anymore. Captain, are you familiar with the planet Loresie?”

“Only generally—it’s one of many planets where a highly-advanced civilization died out years ago. There were some disputes over who had jurisdiction of the planet and its remains. I don’t recall if that disagreement ever got settled.”

“And that was what we were not supposed to mention. Only recently Vulcan was granted permission to mount an archaeological expedition to Loresie. We had just finished our work there when...this happened.”

“So that was why no one talked much during our stay there,” Taylor mused. “I had no idea the whole thing was so hush-hush.”

“You mean you were unaware of your own location the entire time?” Spock’s voice remained level, but Kirk could tell how incredulous his first officer was.

“I stayed on the ship the entire time, and no one told me where we were. I just tried to translate the different manuscripts that were given to me each day, but I didn’t know which civilization they were from.” Taylor turned to Sortek. “Was I the only one who didn’t know we were at Loresie?”

“No. There were only five of us who knew where we were. We were instructed not to tell the others because we didn’t want the news to be known too early that Vulcan had been granted special permission to visit Loresie. We were going to announce it once our findings were ready to be published.”

“Are any of those findings still intact?” Spock inquired. “They may contain something that would explain why someone would attack *The Seeker*.”

“I assume they are still intact,” Sortek answered carefully. “I do not know if there was any damage to our computer systems, but if they are undamaged, you will find they contain the records from all of our surveys, including Loresie.”

“I’ve got some of my notes in my trouser pocket, too,” Taylor added, getting out of her bunk and crossing the room to the storage locker that held her *Seeker* uniform. She dug around in the pockets before producing several crumpled pieces of paper and handing them to Spock. “It’s mainly my rough drafts; I don’t know how helpful they’ll be.”

Spock accepted them dubiously, noting their wrinkled state. “They may prove to be most insightful, Miss Taylor.”

He waited until he and Kirk were in the corridor before voicing his concern. “Although I am loth to agree with Dr. McCoy on anything, in this case I share his suspicions. Something does not ring true with their story. Sortek knows more than he is telling, and as for Miss Taylor—she is involved somehow in what happened to the crew, although to what extent I do not know.”

Kirk’s eyebrows shot up. “That’s a pretty bold accusation to make, Mr. Spock.”

“Bold but logical, Captain,” Spock countered. “Consider the fact that Miss Taylor stated she was asleep when the attack began, yet when we found her, she was in her work uniform. Also consider how Sortek seemed anxious to avoid having her remember anything about waking up on the bridge.”

“Couldn’t he just have been showing concern for his colleague?” Kirk questioned.

“Jim, he touched her. You know how Vulcans endeavor to avoid physical contact.” On seeing his captain’s skeptical expression as he undoubtedly remembered all of the times Spock would grab someone to push to safety, he added, “I am less uncomfortable with physical contact because of my human heritage. But you cannot use my behavior as the basis for judging a full Vulcan like Sortek. I *know* what is normal for Vulcans, Captain; I was raised among them. So believe me when I say that Sortek’s behavior indicates that there is something else going on here, something that he has not—perhaps will not—divulge.”

“I’ll take your word for it, Spock. Do you think you might be able to persuade him to divulge?”

“I shall attempt to do so, Captain. I may get an opportunity to question him further when I go through the record tapes of *The Seeker*.”

“See that you do. I’ll tell McCoy to keep an eye on Miss Taylor, see if her behavior starts to give anything away.”

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Taylor’s behavior did not indicate that she was concealing anything of great import. She was willing to help the *Enterprise* crew go through *The Seeker*’s records to see if anything they had discovered on Loresie held clues as to who or what had attacked the ship, and she readily answered questions about her work with the Vulcans. Sortek was also an invaluable font of information; if a record was damaged or incomplete, he supplied the missing information from memory. But Kirk and Spock noticed how he never strayed far from where Taylor was working, and if she ever thought back to the attack, Sortek was quick to distract her.

“It’s like he’s got some kind of sixth sense about when she’s talking about what happened,” McCoy complained to Kirk one afternoon. “Whenever I try to talk to her, see if she’s remember anything, Hobgoblin, Jr. magicks himself into the room and changes the subject! From a medical standpoint, it’s not healthy for Zoe to keep suppressing her memories. She needs to actually talk about what, if anything, she remembers—but Sortek isn’t letting her.”

Kirk took a swig of his coffee. “Do you think he’s afraid she could incriminate him?”

“Who knows? If you want an expert on Vulcan psychology, you really should talk to Spock—I can barely understand the mind of a half-Vulcan, let alone a full one. I wanted to give you my opinion on Zoe; humans I can understand.”

“Other than your concerns about Sortek, does Miss Taylor seem all right?” Kirk asked.

“Oh, she seems fine—she’s been very eager to go through *The Seeker*’s records and help figure out what happened. That’s where she is now, in fact—no idea where Sortek is, though. He’s probably not too far away in case he has to interrupt her memories again.” McCoy shook his head. “He just seems oddly protective of her. If he were human, I’d say he was in love, but he’s a Vulcan. Who knows what he’s really thinking?”

“Are you fighting with Mr. Spock again, Doctor?” Uhura entered carrying a PADD, catching the tail end of McCoy’s grumblings.

“No more than usual,” McCoy shrugged. “What can I do for you, Lieutenant?”

Uhura hesitated. “I—I’m not quite sure how to explain what I saw, but... I know it’s absurd, but I think something on Loesie affect Zoe Taylor’s mind. I don’t know how else to explain it.”

“What did you see?” Kirk wanted to know.

“I went down to the lab where they were going through the findings from Loesie since I’ve always been curious about the language. Zoe saw me and asked if I could help her double-check some of her translations. We were going over her translation for a poem about their goddess”—Uhura showed Kirk the notes on her PADD—“when she suddenly got very pale, and her eyes seemed to stop focusing on what was around her. She snapped out of it after I shook her by the

shoulder, and she said she was going to get a drink of water. Once she left, I figured I'd better tell Dr. McCoy what happened in case it's a sign of something more serious."

"I'll catch up with her later and see if I can get her to talk about what happened," McCoy responded. "Her medical records are clear, but this could be a side effect of what happened on *The Seeker*."

"But there's something else, something about why this particular poem seemed to affect Zoe," Uhura continued. "At first I thought the poem we were translating was written in honor of a goddess, but...well, take a look at the final sentences."

Kirk took the PADD from Uhura and read, "The Seeker searches for an answer, but she is not what was expected. We sleep, but she brings life, for her name is Life." He looked back to his communications officer. "I'm not sure I understand."

"Some poem, it doesn't even rhyme," McCoy complained.

"It's not going to rhyme in Federation Standard, Doctor," Uhura explained patiently, "but it rhymes very beautifully in the Loresian language. And as for its connection to Zoe, well, the reference to a Seeker is hard to ignore. After all, that was the name of the Vulcan vessel where she and Sortek served. But the final part, 'her name is Life,' is a dead giveaway. You see, the name Zoe is Greek for life."

Kirk and McCoy exchanged startled glances. "Well, it wouldn't be the strangest thing we've ever encountered," McCoy began.

The shrill blare of the klaxon cut him off. Sulu's voice broke in, "Red alert! Security, report to the auxiliary control room immediately! Auxiliary control room is under attack. Repeat, auxiliary control room is under attack!"

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Spock and Sortek were already present and helping the security team break through the door when Kirk, McCoy, and Uhura arrived.

"What happened?" Kirk demanded breathlessly.

"I am not certain, Captain; all we know is that someone has broken into the auxiliary control room and sealed the door," Spock reported.

"We've broken through, Mr. Spock," one of the security lieutenants interrupted.

The doors slid open to reveal Taylor standing over three prone bodies.

Kirk began to order the security team to fire their phasers when Sortek pushed himself forward. "Zoe, no!"

Taylor's head snapped up, and the cold determination in her blue eyes caused everyone to take a step back. "Sorry, Sortek. Not this time."

"Fire!" Kirk barked.

Just as Taylor stepped towards Kirk, the security team fired simultaneously, and she crumpled to the floor.

"Their phasers were set to stun. She's alive but will be unconscious for a while," Spock told his captain.

Kirk turned his attention to the crew members on the ground. “Bones?”

McCoy knelt to examine them. “They’re unconscious...but they’re definitely alive; she didn’t kill them.” He looked up at the security officers. “Help me take them to sick bay.”

“Including her, sir?” one officer questioned, indicating Taylor.

“Yes,” Kirk answered for McCoy. “But make sure she’s restrained.” He whirled to face Sortek. “And you have some explaining to do, mister.”

Sortek was the perfect image of inscrutability. “I do not understand, Captain.”

“Oh, yes, you do.” Kirk closed in on the young Vulcan. “When you told her to stop, she said, ‘Not this time,’ indicating that there was a previous time you had to stop her from doing something similar. Well?”

Spock turned one of his piercing gazes onto Sortek as well. Sortek stared forward stoically, not making eye contact with anyone. “I do not have anything to say.”

“You could very well be tried as an accomplice to murder by concealing what you know,” Spock stated flatly. “Is it logical to gamble your life and career in this way? Is it logical to protect the person who murdered 118 of your own kind?”

“She didn’t know what she was doing!” Sortek blurted unexpectedly. Upon seeing Kirk, Spock, and Uhura’s startled expressions, he regained his composure and continued, “She truly did not realize what she was doing aboard *The Seeker*. It resembled sleepwalking, in a way. I do not believe she was aware of her actions until I distracted her.”

Kirk and Spock exchanged curious glances. “Perhaps you’d better start from the beginning,” Kirk suggested.

Sortek gave a small, resigned sigh. “On the night *The Seeker* was attacked, I was alone in my quarters, about to go to sleep when I heard shouting and fighting. I dressed and left my quarters to discover what was happening and help in whatever way I could. There were bodies everywhere, and the sound of fighting just kept getting louder.

“Eventually I located the source of the fighting—it was Miss Taylor. All she had to do was place her hands on the sides of the neck to send her opponent screaming to the floor. And no one could touch her, either; anyone who tried was burned.”

“Some of the bodies we found did have substantial burn marks on their hands, Captain,” Spock interrupted.

“I called her name, and she whipped around to look at me,” Sortek continued. “There...there was something in her eyes that seemed...well, dead, for lack of a better word. The light seemed gone. When I spoke her name again, she blinked rapidly and started to look around. I think she began to realize something of what she had done. I was about to ask her what had happened when she looked at me again and struck me across the cheek. That is all I remembered until you came to the ship, Captain Kirk.

“I’ve been watching Miss Taylor carefully ever since we were brought aboard the *Enterprise*. It was obvious from the start that she did not remember what she had done, and I wanted to be sure she did not remember. I did not know what would happen if she did become aware of her actions aboard *The Seeker*. I did not know what would happen if she was unable to cope with what she had done, and I did not want to put the *Enterprise* in danger.”

“Why didn’t you tell anyone else what she had done?” Kirk demanded.

“You would have locked her in the brig and placed her on trial for a crime she did not remember committing,” Sortek returned evenly. “Where was the justice in that? If she did remember and did not go mad, I would have encouraged her to turn herself in for what she had done. To have reported her while her memory was incomplete would have accomplished nothing other than to anger and frighten her.”

“Did you notice Miss Taylor behaving unusually before she attacked *The Seeker*?” Spock inquired. He shot a cautionary glance at Kirk, who was beginning to look dangerously apoplectic.

“No, she acted normally all day,” Sortek answered. “I have no idea what could have caused her to act the way she did, either that day or just now. What I do know is that she was not herself on either occasion. You have gotten to know her during our stay; you know what she is normally like.”

“What I know is that Miss Taylor was responsible for the attack on *The Seeker* and just now attacked three of my crewmen,” Kirk ground out. “It’s safe to say that I don’t know what is normal for her.”

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“How are they doing?” Kirk asked McCoy when he and Spock arrived in sick bay.

“The crewmen are a bit sore and groggy, but they’ll live,” McCoy told him. “As for Zoe...well, see for yourself.”

Taylor was strapped to one of the beds in sick bay, her eyes focused unblinkingly on the ceiling. She didn't look up when Kirk and Spock came to the bedside, but she spoke slowly. "I guess an apology isn't enough for what I've done, Captain, is it?"

"No, but it's a start. Sortek said that you also attacked the crew of *The Seeker*. Is that true?" Kirk probed.

"Yes. It's true," Taylor nodded. "I didn't remember at first, but I remember it now. I remember everything now." She gave a small smile. "Sortek was kind to try to protect me, but there was no escaping the truth. In the end I was bound to remember; I had no choice...but I am grateful that Zoe Taylor was given a few extra days of freedom."

"But you *are* Zoe Taylor, are you not?" Spock questioned.

"Oh, I am," Taylor affirmed, turning her head towards him, "but it is one of many names I have had over the years. Before I was Zoe Taylor, I was Eve Stanley. And before that, I was Vita Chambers. And so on and so forth stretching back, oh, about five hundred years."

"But who are *you*?" Kirk pressed.

Taylor's smile got wider—and a little sadder. "My name—my real name—is Olise, and I am a native of the planet Loesie." Upon seeing the surprise on the two officers' faces, she added, "I know what you're thinking—the people of Loesie died thousands of years ago; how can I be here? Well, it's a very long story, Captain. Would you like to hear it?"

"What I'd like to hear is your reason for murdering all of those Vulcans aboard *The Seeker*," Kirk told her bluntly.

Tears began to trickle out of Taylor's eyes. "That was an accident, Captain; you've got to believe me. I never meant to hurt anyone, least of all my shipmates. But when I started to remember...well, it was like a battle was raging in my head. I was torn between Zoe and Olise and was caught somewhere in between the two, and all of that rage spilled out and triggered my attack."

"You killed over a hundred Vulcans," Kirk repeated.

Taylor was crying in earnest now. "I'm sorry. A thousand times I'm sorry. I never meant to kill anyone," she hiccupped.

"What caused you to remember your Loesian nature?" Spock wanted to know.

Blinking away her tears, Taylor replied, "It was the poem I was translating; it was written to trigger my awakening. When I eventually returned, I wouldn't have any memories of my real identity, so the poem served as the prompt to reawaken my old self. It failed initially on *The Seeker*, but here on the *Enterprise*, I was able to finally remember."

Spock paused to reflect on this. "The odds that you would be on the right ship to read the poem are astronomical, too high to be a coincidence."

"Nothing was a coincidence, Mr. Spock; it was all arranged long ago. My people arranged it."

"They *arranged* it?" Spock could not keep the incredulity out of his voice.

"It's part of that long story I mentioned earlier. Perhaps I'd better tell it now.

"Long ago—I'm not certain how long it's been; living on Earth for so long has messed up my time sense—Loesie was ruled by a king and queen, King Rothgard and his wife Queen Betta. I was taken to the castle when I was just five years old and was trained as the queen's handmaid. I

grew up watching the greatest rulers our planet had ever seen guide our people into a time of peace and prosperity that was unparalleled in our history. But that peace and prosperity made us too soft, and we were unprepared when the Ceraes attacked.

“There is little information in today’s databases about what the Ceraes were like, but what information you do have is inaccurate. It doesn’t say, for example, how warlike and cruel they were. I lived through the Earth-Romulan wars, but I tell you that the Ceraes made the Romulans look like amateurs. We suffered defeat after defeat at their hands, and our military had no way of defeating them.

“With his armies failing him, the king decided to see if his scientists had a solution. And they did, but it was highly experimental, and they had no guarantee it would work. For several years they had been experimenting with time travel and time manipulation, the ability to shape events in the past and the future to meet certain needs. They could do it on a limited scale, but they couldn’t promise the king that it would work the way he had in mind—to place everyone on the planet in suspended animation, trick the Ceraes into thinking we were already dead, and then send someone through time to wake us up once it was safe. It was a desperate plan, but by then, we were all desperate.

“The temporal engineers manipulated events in the past and the future that would allow the carrier to find the way back home and awaken us. They even implanted the memory-trigger in the poem I was translating. All that we needed was a volunteer.”

“And that was when you stepped forward?” Kirk interrupted.

“No. The queen was supposed to go. She was the first to volunteer; she wanted to save her people. The king was reluctant to let her go, but in the end he agreed. I was supposed to escort

her to the time chamber, but on our way there, the Ceraes began to bomb the city. She was trapped, crushed, under a pile of rubble. I tried to free her, but it was too late. She was dying. Before she died, she gave entrusted the mission instructions and memory-trigger to me and told me to go in her place.

“There’s little to tell after that. The time chamber delivered me to Earth, suppressed my old memories and gave me a new identity so if the Ceraes had managed to track my departure, they wouldn’t be able to learn where I went next. From Earth I was supposed to go to Loresie, but the calculations were off. I arrived on Earth before it had the capabilities for space flight. I was forced to wait. Fortunately, my people have—had—the ability to renew their bodies when they were growing old and wearing out. Like the legendary phoenix of your world, Captain, our bodies die, and new ones are born from the remains. I renewed myself in this fashion for five hundred years—purely on instinct since my memories were all suppressed. But I have been to Loresie, and I remember everything. I remember who I am, why I left, and why I must go back.”

“An extraordinary tale,” Kirk remarked, “but surely you realize you still have to answer for the deaths of the crew of *The Seeker*.”

“I know, Captain,” Olise nodded, “and I am willing to do whatever I have to do. But first I ask that you take me back to Loresie.”

“Out of the question.”

“But I must go back!” Olise pleaded. “If I don’t, the queen will have died for nothing! Let me go back, let me awaken my people, and then I will do whatever you ask!”

“You will be taken to Vulcan and put on trial for your crime,” Kirk continued relentlessly. “It is doubtful whether someone with your bodily renewal can be put to death, but it is likely you will face punishment rather than a trip back to your old home.”

“But I must go back,” Olise repeated in a whisper. “I must.”

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“Isn’t there some way we could take back to Loresie first, Captain?” Spock asked when he and Kirk were alone in the corridor.

Kirk shot his first officer a surprised glance. “I’m a bit surprised you’re on her side, Mr. Spock, considering that she massacred an entire crew of your people.”

“I am not on her side,” Spock answered calmly, “but I am extremely interested in her story. Up to now historians knew virtually nothing about Loresie, but now we have a survivor who claims she is here to revive the inhabitants from their suspended animation. We have a chance to revive a dead civilization, Jim. To leave them in their hibernation when we have the ability to awaken them would be a gross injustice.”

“You make a very convincing argument, Mr. Spock,” Kirk responded slowly, “as usual. But how can you ignore the deaths of *The Seeker*’s crew?”

“I am not. She should stand trial for what she did although it sounds as if she had no real control over the process and its consequences. But before we take her to stand trial, why not take her back to Loresie and let her fulfill her mission?” Spock questioned. “If nothing else, it will give her a chance to prove the veracity of her story.”

“Innocent until proven guilty, is that it?” The corner of Kirk’s mouth quirked up in a smirk. “I’ll tell you something, Spock—I want to help her, too. I’m half-tempted to take her back to Loresie regardless of what she’s done, and I don’t know why. Could it be an effect from the temporal engineering she mentioned, the scientists from the past reaching out and manipulating my emotions in the present so I’m sympathetic towards her?”

“It is likely, Captain,” Spock admitted reluctantly. “That is another reason why I suggested we take her back to Loresie. I suspect that one way or another, the *Enterprise* is meant to take her there, so we may as well do it on our terms.”

“You really don’t think we have a choice in this matter?”

“Not exactly. We do have choices, two of them—either take Olise to Loresie on our own or wait for some outside influence, perhaps even Olise herself, to take control of the *Enterprise*.”

“Well, when you put it that way...” Kirk half-joked. Resuming his professional demeanor, he walked over to the intercom. “Kirk to bridge.”

“Bridge. Sulu here.”

“Mr. Sulu, set course for Loresie, warp factor 3.”

\* \* \*

Kirk reflected that Loresie was the image of what everyone imagined a dead planet looked like—the sky was grey and sunless; grass grew in scattered, pathetic patches, and crumbled parapets still reached up to the heavens.

“This must have been a beautiful place,” he mused out loud.

“No, the sky was always this color,” Olise remarked absentmindedly as she scanned the area with a tricorder, her brow furrowed in concentration.

Sortek watched the results over her shoulder, asking no questions, merely observing. He had taken the news that his colleague was really a centuries-old alien whose purpose was to rescue her people with his standard, unruffled Vulcan calm, yet Kirk, Spock, and McCoy could tell he had been no less incredulous than the rest of them when they first heard her story. Still, he had volunteered to beam down to Loesie with them for reasons that only he knew. Kirk and McCoy suspected it was love, triggering a lengthy discourse from Spock about Vulcans and foreign emotions.

“It’s this way,” Olise suddenly announced, heading into one of the ruined buildings. “The readings are faint, but I think this is where the planet-wide suspended animation controls were kept.”

McCoy watched as she and Sortek disappeared into the black archway. “Do we follow them?”

“We’ve come this far,” Kirk shrugged. “Besides, no matter what we find in that building, Sortek and Olise are coming back to the *Enterprise* with us.”

“You don’t think she’ll try to escape, do you?” McCoy questioned as he fell into step beside Kirk and Spock.

“Highly unlikely, Doctor,” Spock shook his head. “How would she live here? The planet is barren; there is no way to support any kind of life here. Of course, if she is successful in reviving her people, they will likely have the necessary terraforming technology to make the planet able to sustain life again.”

McCoy's hand trailed along one of the walls in the corridor. "It's hard to imagine this place ever being able to sustain life before this."

"In here, Captain," Olise called out. "I think it's still working!" She was bent over a dusty control panel, engrossed in her work. Sortek stood close at hand, pushing buttons when directed to do so.

"This is all in remarkably good condition for being so old," she remarked as she continued to work. "According to these chronometers, Loresie has been dead for two thousand years. But all of that's about to change. Push that red button up on the left, Sortek." She looked up at a monitor and smiled in satisfaction as little green dots popped up on the screen.

Suddenly the green dots changed to red, and an alarm sounded in the background. Olise let out a heart-wrenching wail and buried her face in her hands.

"What happened?" Kirk demanded. "Did it fail; are they dead?"

Olise shook her head, still hiding her face in her hands. "Those aren't Loresian life signs on the screen," she sobbed. "Those are Ceraesian!"

Even Spock and Sortek seemed startled at that announcement, almost ignoring the steadily-growing pounding echoing ominously in the corridors. Olise continued to sob for several more seconds before lifting her head and wiping away her tears.

"We should leave now. They'll kill us as soon as they know we're here. Captain Kirk, you'll have to raze the planet entirely." She rose and headed for the door, but Kirk grabbed her arm.

“I’m not going to raze anything, Olise,” he told her bluntly. “That is not our way. You’ve lived in the Federation since its inception; you should know that. Let’s just wait to make any drastic decisions. They might not be the same as you remember.”

“You wait for certain death, Captain,” Olise argued. “You’ve never encountered these people; I have, and they are merciless! They are not interested in discussion; they only know death! We’re wasting time arguing; we’ve got to get out NOW!”

The pounding reached a crescendo, and hordes of cloaked and hooded figures pour through the doorway. Kirk, Spock, and McCoy drew their phasers while Olise and Sortek backed towards the wall. Olise whimpered and grabbed Sortek’s hand, which the young Vulcan tried and failed to extricate.

One figure, taller than the rest, moved to the front of the army. Kirk had faced death many times before; to face it now was nothing new to him, but the corpse-like aura emanating from this apparition was enough to chill even his blood.

“Who has awakened us?” the figure demanded in a raspy voice that sounded as if it was coming from the bowels of the earth.

Kirk decided to first try the diplomacy he had been advocating to Olise. “I’m Captain James T. Kirk of the Federation starship *Enterprise*. We have come in peace to”—

He was cut off abruptly when the figure roared and grabbed him by the throat, holding him high above the ground. Spock and McCoy didn’t have a chance to fire their phasers as they were quickly disarmed by two other figures, each holding an arm across their throats and applying slow, steady pressure.

“Do not attempt to misdirect us, little man,” the figure threatened. “You could not have released us from our sleep; you are not Loresian and would not have known the key. Who has awakened us?”

“I have.” Olise released Sortek’s hand and boldly stepped forward, her expression frightened yet determined. “I am Loresian. I am Olise, First Handmaiden to Queen Betta, keeper of the key. I came to awake my people from their slumber, but it appears you got to them first. It doesn’t matter to me if you kill me; I have nothing left to live for anyway. All I ask is that you spare these others. Their races are young; and they have no real skill in war. Killing them would merely be a disappointment and would serve no purpose.”

“Olise?” Sortek questioned gently, moving to stand beside her.

“I’m sorry it has to end this way, Sortek,” she apologized. “If it makes any difference, you were a good colleague and an even better friend. If you get out of here alive, find some way to remember me.” She turned her attention back to the cloaked figure, her gaze set in steely determination. “Do your worst.”

Slowly the figure lowered Kirk back to the ground and gestured for the others to release Spock and McCoy. He advanced on Olise, gradually lowering his hood. The face beneath was thin and pale, but the dark eyes were kind and understanding. It did not look like an evil face.

It most certainly was a face that Olise recognized, judging by her reaction. Her hand flew to her mouth in shock before she knelt in front of the man. “Your Majesty! Forgive me...I had no idea...”

“Rise, Olise. It wasn’t your fault. No one was supposed to recognize me.” He gently helped her back to her feet and nodded at the other figures. One by one they all lowered their hoods, revealing faces that looked drawn and tired but very much alive.

“Forgive me if I’m interrupting, sir, but...who are you?” Kirk wanted to know.

“Oh, where are my manners?” Olise fussed. “Captain Kirk, this is King Rothgard, ruler of all Loresie. Your Majesty, this is Captain James Kirk, commanding officer of the *Enterprise*—that’s the Earth ship that brought me here. With him are his science officer Commander Spock and his chief medical officer Dr. Leonard McCoy. And this is Sortek, a colleague from one of my human lives. Mr. Spock and Sortek are Vulcans.”

“Is that so?” Rothgard gazed at both of them quizzically. “It would appear much has changed on Vulcan while Loresie has been sleeping. I am pleased to see that your people have managed to stop fighting so much amongst themselves and learn to work together in peace.”

“You have heard of Vulcan?” Spock queried curiously. “How? You have been in suspended animation for approximately two thousand years.”

“Our scientists were aware of life on other planets for some time. They would observe these other civilizations from afar to study their similarities and differences to our own in the hopes that one day we might make new allies,” Rothgard explained.

“But how are you here?” Olise interrupted. “If it’s not impertinent of me to ask,” she quickly added. “But the scanner showed Ceraesian life forms, and everyone here is dressed like one of their warriors!”

“After your departure, the Ceraesians captured one of our scientists and tortured the key out of him, so we took the precaution of disguising ourselves as Ceraesians before entering suspended animation. That way if they attempted to send someone forward to awaken us, we could trick them into thinking their own people had already succeeded in destroying us. One of our technicians even rewired the scanner to make our life signs read as Ceraesian to make the subterfuge as complete as possible.” Rothgard turned his attention back to Kirk. “I apologize for your rude welcome, Captain, but we had to be sure of your intentions before we revealed ourselves.”

“Apology accepted,” Kirk nodded, absentmindedly rubbing his throat. “If you require any assistance, the Federation would be more than willing to help you. It’s not every day an entire civilization comes back from the dead, and I am sure there is much we can learn from each other.”

“You make a generous offer, Captain,” Rothgard answered, “and one we may well accept. It’s very obvious that the galaxy is a much different place than it was two thousand years ago; some insight and guidance in this strange new world would be most welcome.”

“I would be willing to help, too, Your Highness,” Olise offered. “I’ve lived through the founding of their Federation and understand something of how the politics work. I can also give some advice about which planets would be strong allies and which we should avoid.”

“Indeed?” Rothgard smiled at the former handmaiden. “I can see that the galaxy is not the only thing that has changed during our slumber. My wife would be very proud of you if she were here.”

Olise smiled bashfully and looked at the ground. Kirk hated to ruin her joyous reunion with her own people, but he felt that if he did not say something now, he would never find a chance to say it. “Olise will not be able to stay with you. She must come back with us.”

“What? Why? She belongs with us,” Rothgard argued.

“I must go with them, Your Majesty,” Olise echoed. “There was a problem with the memory-trigger, and in the confusion of personalities, I...killed.”

“Killed?” Rothgard’s eyebrows shot up in disbelief.

“Yes,” Olise nodded shamefacedly. “I was on a survey ship with over a hundred Vulcans when I came across the memory-trigger, and...I killed every one of them—except for Sortek. He’s the one who snapped me out of the confusion. But the others are all dead because I could not control the transition, and I must stand trial for their deaths. It was the bargain I made to come back here—in exchange for passage to Loesie, I promised Captain Kirk I would not try to escape.”

Rothgard’s face held a pained expression. “Such a high price,” he murmured. Regaining his composure, he continued, “I would not dare ask you to go back on your word, but I do not intend to let you go through this alone. Null?”

The horde parted to admit a young man with a remarkable similarity to the king. “Olise, I’m sure you remember my son Null. He will accompany you and act as your defense. You did not abandon your duty, and we will not abandon you now.”

Olise curtsied to the prince. Null bowed in return.

“Since Olise must return on the *Enterprise*, I would like to stay in her place,” Sortek offered. “Consider it a gesture of goodwill, a sign that we do not bear any animosity towards her.” He turned his attention to Olise. “I understand that you could not control your actions on *The Seeker*, which is why I believe the courts will be lenient with you. And this way, we can begin to exchange knowledge and cultures without waiting for the legal processes to finish.”

“I would be willing to accept your assistance,” Rothgard replied. “What do you say, Captain?”

“I have no authority over Sortek. He is free to make his own decisions,” Kirk answered. “I will say, though, that I think he is making a very valiant offer on behalf of his friend.”

Sortek gave him a quizzical look. “My reasoning is perfectly logical, Captain Kirk. My friendship with Olise has nothing to do with my motives.”

“I still say he’s in love,” McCoy hissed to Spock. Spock merely raised an eyebrow.

Olise stepped towards Kirk and took his hand. “I’ll never be able to properly thank you for what you’ve done, Captain. It...it means the world to me—literally.”

Kirk chuckled. “You can thank me by going to your trial, taking whatever punishment they give you, and serving your king as best you can after that.”

Olise grinned. “I think I can do that.”

*Finis*