

IDIC

1010

LOG 14 TNG

ISSUE



a
Star Trek
fanzine

CONTENTS

The Deceivers	by Heather Noyce	P 3
Riker's Temptation	by Helen Connor	P 10
Solutions	by J Schmidt	P 11
Deanna's Nightmare	by Margaret Connor	P 42
Young Riker's Championships	by Sherry Golding	P 43
What an Enterprise	by TQ	P 46
Deja Q	by Christine Jones	P 51
A Sacred Word	by Sherry Golding	P 52
Lal	by Christine Jones	P 56
Full Circle	by J Schmidt	P 58

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IDIC



IDIC is a fan-run club with approximately 900 members world-wide - roughly 100 live outside Britain, half of these in America. It is run by Janet Quarton, Sheila Clark and Valerie Piacentini, all of whom have been active in Star Trek fandom in Britain for many years - Janet and Sheila since 1974 and Valerie since 1976. Sheila and Valerie are also well-known as fan writers, although neither has written anything recently.

The late Gene Roddenberry was an honorary member; and we have as honorary members several of the actors and production staff of Star Trek, including James Doohan, George Takei, Walter Koenig, Mark Lenard, Patrick Stewart, Marina Sirtis, John de Lancie, Michael Okuda and Rick Sternbach.

We put out a newsletter, usually of 100 pages, six times a year, in February, April, June, August, October and December. We say in each newsletter when the next one is due, and so far they have always sent out on time.

In the newsletters, we print news, views and reviews. We cover everything from The Cage, through Classic Trek and the movies to The Next Generation and beyond. We try to keep a balance between CT and TNG and (now) Deep Space 9 although of course only a few of us in Britain have as yet seen 4th, 5th or 6th season TNG or any DS9 (unless we attend conventions or have bought the CIC videos).

We welcome member participation. The Postbag, at 30 - 35 pages long, is a forum for (polite) discussion on anything arising from Star Trek. Articles on any aspect of Trek are most welcome, as are book and (especially) zine reviews. All we ask is that the material you send is original - ie has not been printed anywhere else.

One of our activities is the support of Guide Dogs for the Blind. We have used stamps, and ask members to send in any that they can (these are sold to dealers); we also do some fund-raising, both through the newsletters and at conventions; so far we have sponsored 4 dogs, and one of our members has donated a dog she bred. Venus, Aero and Jade have all qualified and are now working; Lindsay and Sadie are still in training.

Dues for one year (6 newsletters) are, as of spring 1993, U.K. £7.50; USA/Middle East £13.25 (USA \$23); Europe £9.50; Australia/Japan £14.50. Payment (in sterling) can be by cash (your risk, but paper money or British stamps only please), cheque (we can take bank drafts or personal cheques in dollars from America only) or Visa/Mastercard. Enquiries about the club should be sent to Janet Quarton, 15 Letter Dail, Cairnbaan, Lochgilphead, Argyll, Scotland.





THE DECEIVERS

by

Heather Noyce

Captain's Log, Stardate: 4175.4

The Enterprise is in orbit around the planet Maylor. My orders from Starfleet Command are to try and talk with the planet's leader.

I have no idea of who or what it is that my crew, and for that matter myself, are about to meet. All that Starfleet could tell me was that this planet called Maylor is close to the Federation's boundary with the Romulans.

I do not like the idea of taking my ship and my crew this close to the Romulans. The slightest thing could give the Romulans the excuse to start a war with us, but I have my orders and our mission is, after all, to seek out new life and new civilizations. I can now only hope that this mission will be a peaceful one.

I have called a meeting of all my senior bridge officers. All I can do now is wait...

The Captain sat at the head of the conference room table and waited until all his staff had gathered.

"Data, what did you come up with about the planet Maylor?" asked Picard.

Lt Commander Data placed both hands on the table and said, "I have been studying all available information that the ship's computer could find, and I have discovered some very intriguing facts about this planet. Would you like me to tell you what I have discovered, sir?"

"Yes, Mr Data, please continue," Picard said.

"The planet Maylor is class M and it is much like Earth, sir."

Commander Riker asked, "Data, are you telling me that Maylor is another Earth?"

"Not exactly another Earth, Commander," Data said. "It has no axial tilt and therefore no seasons. Maylor's atmospheric components are nitrogen, oxygen, argon, carbon dioxide and water. It's also believed to contain neon, helium, methane, krypton, hydrogen, nitrous oxide, carbon monoxide, xenon and ozone. It has a surface temperature of 98 degrees; this does not change."

Riker said, "So we have a planet that's like Earth, but with no summer, autumn, winter and no spring. Sounds rather odd to me."

Picard said, thoughtfully, "So can I assume that we're not dealing with a humanoid race, Mr Data?"

Lt La Forge put in, "Data, what are they like? I mean if they're not Human..."

"The Captain has made a correct assumption, Geordi. They are not humanoid - they are a group of lizardoid beings, who call themselves Deceivers. They are all omnivorous, feeding on both plants and flesh, sir," Data said.

"Data, the question becomes this, are these lizardoids dangerous?" asked Riker.

"I would not say that the Deceivers are dangerous, Commander, but they are also known to have some dealings with the Romulans and the Ferengi," said Data.

"That would mean that if the Romulans and the Ferengi are involved, they must have something worth having, or something that they can trade with. Am I right, Data?" Riker asked with a small smile.

"That is correct, Commander. They have an abundance of gold and iron that they dig and burrow in the earth for. This they sell or trade to the Romulans and the Ferengi for information on how to build ships and buildings. Apart from the fact that they are miners, all other information on Deceiver technology is unknown at this time, sir," Data said.

"Is there anything else that we should know about the Deceivers?" asked Picard.

"There is only one thing, Captain - I believe it would be of great interest to us if we could get one of the Deceivers on board the Enterprise," Data said.

Picard looked thoughtful and then he said, "I do believe that Mr Data has the only answer that we need, and that is to beam one of them aboard."

It was Commander Riker who spoke first, saying, "Captain, do you think that's safe? Having a Deceiver on board the Enterprise could be asking for trouble."

Lt Worf said grimly, "The Deceiver will not get the opportunity to make trouble."

"Very well. Mr Data, Mr La Forge, I want you to do a complete sensor scan of the planet. Locate a building or place that could hold someone of importance," said Picard. Both officers left the room.

The Captain addressed the officers who were left. "This meeting is now adjourned. Thank you all for your support." With that all the officers left the room to return to their duties on the bridge, leaving Captain Jean-Luc Picard alone with his thoughts.

A while later, with all the officers were back on the bridge, Lt La Forge and Lt Commander Data were busy conferring. Finally -

"Captain, we've completed a full sensor scan of the planet's surface," said Lt La Forge.

"Very good, Mr La Forge, but do you have a lock on one of them?" asked Picard.

"Yes, Captain, we have a lock on one of the Deceivers. He is in what would appear to be some kind of government building," said Data.

"Mr La Forge, contact Mr O'Brien in Transporter Room 3 and let him have those co-

ordinates. Mr Riker, Mr Data, Mr Worf, would you come with me to Transporter Room 3. We have to greet our guest. You have the bridge, Mr La Forge," said Picard.

Data, Riker, Worf and the Captain were greeted by Mr O'Brien as they entered the Transporter Room.

"Captain, I am ready to beam the whatever-it-is on board," said O'Brien.

"Mr Worf, set your phaser on stun," ordered Riker, unnecessarily.

"Energise, Mr O'Brien," said Captain Picard, taking a step back from the transporter. Within seconds a lizardoid being was on board the Enterprise.

He stepped down from the transporter pad; his bright purple hair stood up on end, as if he were in shock of some kind. "Where am I? What - or who - are you?!" he asked.

The Captain took a step forward and introduced himself. "I am Captain Jean-Luc Picard of the USS Enterprise, representing the United Federation of Planets. My apologies for your unexpected arrival, sir, but it is necessary that we speak to someone in authority. May I ask who I am speaking to?" asked Picard.

The lizardoid glared at Picard, saying, "How dare you bring me here against my will! I am Minister Raptor of Maylor. Picard, you will return me to my office immediately!"

But all that Picard said was, "Mr Worf, escort Minister Raptor to his quarters, and have his cabin guarded."

"Aye, sir. This way, Minister Raptor," Lt Worf growled.

"No!" stormed Raptor. "How dare you keep me here! I do not want to be escorted anywhere. You are an ugly race of beings, and I demand that you return me to my people! Picard, I order you to do as I say!"

"Minister Raptor," said Picard, who was clearly unmoved by this outburst, in a voice of authority. "If I may remind you, Minister Raptor, you are on my ship. And as ship's Captain it is I who will give the orders. Now will you kindly go with Lt Worf, and when you have had time to calm down, we will talk with you."

"Take our guest to his quarters, Mr Worf," ordered Commander Riker.

"Aye, sir," said Worf escorting Minister Raptor out through the door.

When they'd gone it was Riker who said, "Captain, I don't think he's telling us the truth. I felt like we're being deceived by the Deceivers."

Picard turned to Data and said, "What do you think, Data, can we trust him?"

Data looked thoughtful and said, "Captain, I believe that Commander Riker is quite correct in saying that the truth is not being told here. The Deceivers are indiscernible, uncaring. You should proceed to talk to him, but with extreme caution, Captain," warned Data.

Having determined what to do next all three officers headed back to the bridge. Data, Riker and the Captain had hardly been on the bridge a minute, when something of immense force and power suddenly shook the Enterprise. All bridge crew were thrown to the floor. Riker started to get to his feet; rubbing his arm he asked, "What the devil was that? Captain, are you all right, sir?" he added as he saw Data helping the Captain to his feet.

"I am fine, Number One," replied Picard. "Report, Mr La Forge - what the hell hit us?"

Lt La Forge answered his Captain, saying, "Sir, we were fired on by a Romulan warbird. She just came at us from out of the blue."

"Mr Data, scan the area. Are there any more Romulans out there?" asked Picard.

"All scans read negative at this time," Data said. "But the Romulans could be cloaked, Captain."

"Very well, Mr Data, we will stay on yellow alert for now. But the question now becomes, why? Why did they attack us?" questioned Picard.

"My guess would be that it was an attempt to frighten us, Captain," Riker said, "and with your permission I'd like to go get some answers to this from Minister Raptor."

"Permission granted, Number One," said Picard, heading for his ready room. "You have the bridge, Mr Data; and keep me apprised. I want to know if that Romulan ship comes back again - is that understood?" the Captain said.

"I understand fully, Captain," was Data's reply.

Meanwhile Commander Riker was nearing his destination, Minister Raptor's quarters; but as the First Officer approached Raptor's cabin he could not see any sign of the guard. *That's very odd*, thought Riker, taking a closer look at the cabin door. A trail of blood led from where the guard should have been, and it led right inside the now closed cabin door. Riker slapped his comm badge. "Riker to bridge. I am outside Raptor's quarters and the guard has gone; he is either dead or badly injured. There's a trail of blood leading into Raptor's cabin and I don't like the look of this at all. I'll need reinforcements right away."

Much to Riker's relief it was Picard's voice that said, "Don't worry Number One, I'm on my way with Lt Commander Data and Lt Worf. Do not enter Raptor's cabin until we get there. Is that understood?"

Commander Riker didn't have very long to wait before the Captain, Data and Worf joined him outside Raptor's cabin door. With another guard now outside the door, the two officers and their Captain entered the room.

"Set phasers on stun," reminded Riker. He was glad that Lt Worf had brought them along - *but then Worf is a good Security Officer, being a Klingon warrior*, thought Riker.

They split up once inside the cabin. "Over here, Commander," came Lt Worf's voice. "I have found the guard, sir, and he's wounded badly; we need to get him to sickbay."

Riker and Picard came to Worf's side. A blood-soaked blanket was wrapped around the injured guard's leg. But where was Minister Raptor? Picard hit his comm badge saying,

"Sickbay, this is Captain Picard. We have a medical emergency in Raptor's quarters."

"Crusher here, Captain. I am on my way, sir."

It wasn't long before Dr Crusher arrived. As soon as she saw the injured guard she said, "If I don't get this man down to sickbay soon he'll die. He's lost a lot of blood. What happened to him?"

"As yet, Doctor, we do not know," said Picard. "Mr Worf, help the Doctor to get this man to sickbay while the Commander, Mr Data and I deal with Raptor." Lt Worf picked up the injured man and carried him out with Dr Crusher behind him.

Riker and Picard were surprised a moment later when Lt Commander Data entered the room with Minister Raptor slung over his shoulder and shouting, "Put me down! Now! How dare you pick me up? I want to go home!" stormed Raptor.

"Data?" questioned Riker. "I thought you were in the room with us?"

Data put the Minister down and said, "I was, sir. But when you and Lt Worf and the Captain were seeing to the injured guard, I saw Raptor leave the room when Dr Crusher came in. So I followed him and brought him straight back here. I think that he might have succeeded in his attempt to escape if I had not stopped him," Data said, keeping a firm hold on Raptor's arm.

"I commend your quick-thinking action, Mr Data," said Picard.

"I concur, Captain," said Riker. "We were nearly deceived by a Deceiver."

Picard, Riker and Data went over to Raptor. "I suggest that you start from the very beginning, Minister Raptor, or I'll leave you alone with Mr Data. The choice is all yours," said Picard with a small smile. "Do we stay, Minister? Yes or no?"

When the Minister still did not answer, Picard said, "Very well, Minister, Commander Riker and I will wait outside while you talk with Mr Data. Number One, come with me. We'll wait outside, shall we?" said Picard and they headed for the door.

"No! Picard, please wait! I'll tell you anything that you want to know. But I beg of you, please don't leave me alone with him!" said Raptor.

Riker and Picard came back into the room. "There is one thing that we must know, Minister, and that is - did you harm that guard?" asked Riker.

Raptor paced the floor, then he went right up to Riker and said, "How dare you imply that I, Minister Raptor of Maylor, would even touch one of your ugly old guards! The very sight of you makes me feel ill. He was injured by the Romulan attack on your ship. I helped him, Riker. Yes, I helped him."

"How did you know that it was the Romulans who had attacked us?" asked Riker.

Raptor eyed the Commander and said, "I did not... know. I... guessed it was them."

"Minister Raptor, if you are lying to us I will find out," said Picard.

Raptor sat down and said, "But Picard, I do not know why the Romulans did this."

"He is not telling the truth, sir. He is lying. He does know why," said Data.

"Minister Raptor, just calm down and tell us in your own words what happened here," said Picard. Then he slapped his comm badge saying, "Counselor Troi, please report to Raptor's quarters."

"I'm on my way, Captain," came the soft voice of Deanna Troi.

It wasn't long before Counselor Deanna Troi entered the room. She went to Riker's side. "Captain, I'm sensing great danger. It's Raptor. He's concealing a weapon," said Troi.

"Data, search him," ordered Picard.

"Don't you touch me!" Raptor said waving a blunt knife at Data. "I will kill you! I will kill you all as you are so very ugly!" he panicked.

Data took the knife away from Raptor with almost insulting ease, saying, "You will not harm me or anyone in this room. I also advise you hand over the phaser as well."

Raptor retorted, throwing the phaser down at Data's feet, "Here, take it, you ugly Human, and don't stand so close to me! It makes me ill."

Data frowned and said, "But I am an android, sir, although theoretically I am classed as a Human."

"That is enough, Mr Data!" said Picard crossly. "Now then, Minister Raptor, I think that it is time you stopped this larking around and told us the truth. I would like some answers - and I'd like them now!" ordered Picard.

Data looked puzzled. "Inquiry. I am not familiar with the term 'larking around'." he asked.

Riker answered him. "Data, it means to mess about, to make disorder."

Data then said, "Ah, I see. To confuse, embarrass, to avoid the truth, to - " He stopped right there as he caught the look of annoyance on Picard's face.

Minister Raptor said, "Oh, very well, Picard, I will tell you what I know."

Picard, Data, Riker and Troi all sat down to hear what Raptor had to say. Raptor began to talk. "My people are Maylortians, but you would know us as Deceivers. We have limited space flight, and the Romulans promised us that if we gave them gold and iron they would help us. They told us they would help us build better space ships. Also they promised to let us into their secret of the Romulan cloaking device."

"I wouldn't have thought that the Romulans would give *that* secret away," said Riker.

"We found that out, Commander Riker. The Romulans warned us that a Federation starship was on its way to destroy us. They said that they would help us if it came to war. But the Ferengi took off when they heard that a Federation starship was on its way."

"And did the Romulans help you?" asked Deanna.

Raptor hissed, saying, "No. Apart from that one attack on your ship, they have left us to deal with the Federation on our own. Before the Romulans came, we wanted peace with the Federation, not war. But the Romulans would not listen."

"The question now is, will your people want peace after all that the Romulans have said to them?" asked Picard.

"Message from sickbay, Captain. The guard is going to be all right," said Data, "and the ship's no longer at yellow alert. The Romulans have gone, sir."

After an hour of talking Picard, Riker, Data and Troi had come to an agreement on how the Federation could help Minister Raptor's people. Finally, Captain Picard said, "Minister Raptor, a delegation from the Enterprise will beam down with you to your planet. There we will meet with the planetary government to discuss your plea for peace."

Raptor said, "You are an infuriating race. But I must, even if it does disgust me to say it, thank you for your help, Picard."

"Mr Data, escort Minister Raptor to Transporter Room 3," said Picard. "Number One, I'm leaving you in command of the ship, while Mr Data, Counselor Troi and myself beam down to the planet with Minister Raptor."

Having said that they all left the room. Riker headed back to the bridge, while Picard and Troi headed for the Transporter Room.

When they entered the Transporter Room Data and Minister Raptor were waiting for them. O'Brien was at the transporter controls.

"Energise," said Picard and with that command they left the Enterprise, to beam down to the planet Maylor to meet with Raptor's people, leaving Commander Riker on board in command until his Captain came back.

An hour later the landing party was back safely on board the Enterprise. Back on the bridge Picard said to Riker, "Well, that was a very successful meeting, Number One. At least we've got a preliminary treaty and an agreement for a full diplomatic meeting as soon as one can be arranged."

Captain Jean-Luc Picard gave a sharp tug at his Starfleet uniform and said, "Mr Data, set course for Starbase 15."

"Aye, sir, course plotted and laid in. Heading 046 mark 174, at warp 2 on your command, Captain," said Data. He turned and smiled at Wesley and Wesley smiled back.

Captain Picard sat in his command chair and leaned back. He looked to his left at Counselor Deanna Troi and allowed himself a smile. Then he sat up straight and said, "Mr Data, engage."

And with that command the USS Enterprise jumped into warp speed. They were on their way to Starbase 15, for a long-awaited and well-deserved shore leave for all the crew of the Enterprise.



RIKER'S TEMPTATION

Ah, Riker, my good fellow,
A gift I give to you.
What's that? What is it?
Why, it's the power of the Q.

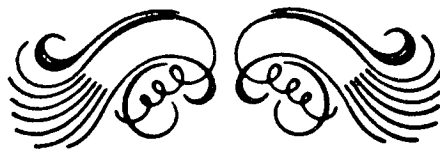
Come, Riker, be inventive;
Play this game with me.
Then Human ingenuity
I shall plainly see.

Use the power, Riker -
Oh, it shall be such fun!
That's it, wave your hand,
Behold what you have done.

Picard - you've spoiled it!
SEE - I'd almost won.
I find you most annoying -
You simply AREN'T FUN!

Well, Riker, my good fellow,
Here you'll have to stay;
But don't you others worry -
I'll be back again - some day.

Helen Connor



SOLUTIONS

by

J Schmidt

"The decision has been made. You will hand the child over now."

"Papa." He looked down at her. When he looked across the room, anger showed in Kroll's face.

"The child belongs with its natural family," the judge said.

"He never wanted her before. Why now?" Kroll demanded.

"He's willing to compensate you for any expenses that you have incurred."

"I don't want his money." Kroll was ready to hit out.

"Papa, I don't want to go," she said.

She glared at her grandfather." Shut that child up now."

"There is no need to shout at her like that. She knows what she wants," S'drew said, trying to reason with the judge - someone had to try and calm things down.

"That has nothing to do with it." As soon as the judge had said this Kroll stormed from the room.

"The child will leave now. Any attempt at stopping her grandfather from taking her will be seen as contempt of this court," the judge warned sternly.

"Can we say goodbye in private?" S'drew asked.

"Just get it over with," her grandfather said.

"Kayta, be good. Do as your grandfather says." S'drew could see the tears welling up in her eyes. "Kroll's outside."

Kayta ran out of the room. "Don't let him take me away," she begged, tears started to run down her face.

"Stop that," Kroll said harshly. Kayta wiped the tears away with her sleeve and sniffed.

"Remember, honour, dignity and pride," Kroll said as he knelt down in front of her.

"I will." Kayta flung her arms around his neck.

"Your time's up." Two arms dragged her away from Kroll.

"No! Papa, please!" she shouted to Kroll.

"Shut up," her grandfather said. Kayta tried to break free from her grandfather's grasp.

"Stop that now, you worthless halfbreed!"

Kroll leaped to his feet. "Get your hands off her!" Kroll stood there facing her grandfather with anger burning in his eyes.

"Out of my way, Klingon scum."

Kroll grabbed hold of Kayta and pulled her towards him.

"You will pay for this. Judge!" her grandfather shouted, pulling her back.

"What can the judge do to me?" Kroll laughed as he said it. Kayta kicked out with her feet and her grandfather let go of his hold on her.

"Run!" Kroll shouted at her. Kayta took one look at him and ran as fast as she could. Where she was heading for she didn't know - still, anywhere had to be better than being with her grandfather who called her bad names.

"Lt. Samms, report to the bridge."

Why now? she thought to herself. Just when everything was going so well. Every time that she tried to write her story down she was interrupted.

"I'm on my way," she said. It was probably something small but important. It was her job to make sure that all the paperwork was in order for the Captain. So far things had gone all right, but this wasn't what she had joined Starfleet for. There was something wrong with their way of thinking, which meant that she'd ended up as a clerk instead of being an engineer which she really wanted to be. Still it wasn't her place to put them right; and at least she got to visit the bridge, which was more than some people got to do.

Kayta left her room as it was - there wasn't any time to tidy it up. Her fathers would be ashamed if they ever got to see the state of it. She still missed them, even though it hadn't been all that long since she'd last heard from them. So far no-one had asked her about her family; her friends in the past had found it hard to believe that she had two fathers, especially considering what races they were. S'drew had always told her that they were IDIC in action. That wasn't so true when Kroll came home drunk - then S'drew could be very unVulcan, the language that he came out with, shocking. At least they showed their feelings, unlike most people. That was the one thing that she hated, people keeping things from her.

The turbolift reached the bridge; Kayta's eyes strayed to the main viewscreen.

"Lieutenant," Picard said.

"QI'yatl," Kayta said out loud.

"If I could have your attention Lieutenant?"

Kayta looked across the bridge to where Picard was standing. "Sorry, sir," Kayta noticed that she was being glared at by Worf.

"Do not use that sort of language on my bridge again," Picard said. Kayta blushed. "Have those reports been sent to Starfleet yet?" Picard asked her.

"Four hours ago, sir. Is there anything else that you wanted to know, sir?" Kayta asked.

"No. You may go," Picard said to her.

"Sir." Kayta tried not to notice whether anyone was looking at her or not. The only thing that she wanted to do was to get off the bridge again as fast as possible. *Why had Picard called her there just to ask her a routine question?* she wondered.

Once inside the turbolift Kayta thought about what she should do next. There was no point in going back to her quarters - someone or something would turn up to disturb her. What she needed was to be with people who would talk to her but not ask too many questions.

"Ten Forward," she said finally. The turbolift set off. By the time it reached its destination she had everything sorted out in her mind. She walked out of the turbolift, into Ten Forward and up to the bar.

"What can I get you?"

"Plomik soup and Rokeg blood pie," Kayta replied

"Are you sure?"

"I know what I'm doing," she replied. Whenever she felt down she ate things that reminded her of her fathers; it made her feel closer to them

On the bridge, Picard was waiting for a response to his hailing of the strange vessel.

Kayta looked out of the window in Ten Forward. She'd never seen anything like it. Well, that wasn't exactly true. Once she'd seen some designs that S'drew and Kroll had done... *No it can't be*, she told herself. Then she saw the design on the side of it - a large IDIC. *Surely*, she thought to herself, *they would have told me if they were planning anything like this*. They didn't have secrets in her family.

Finally the strange vessel replied to Picard's hail. He was slightly surprised by what he saw.

"Captain Picard. I am S'drew and this is Kroll," a male Vulcan said.

"What are you doing here?" Picard asked

"It would be better if we could discuss this matter with you in person."

Picard thought for a moment, then he agreed. After all it certainly wouldn't do any harm to have them where he could keep an eye on them.

S'drew and Kroll beamed over to the Enterprise, both thinking about what Kayta would say when she found out what they'd done. They were met in the transporter room by Picard, who was accompanied by Worf.

"Captain," S'drew said, "we mean you no harm." Worf looked at them cautiously.

"If you will follow me," Picard said. He could sense that there was definitely something

very strange going on.

"Of course," S'drew replied.

Kayta finished her meal and left Ten Forward. She was going to find out what was going on. If it *was* them, they'd have a lot of fast explaining to do! How dare they keep secrets from her? They'd never done it before, so why now? *It just isn't like them*, she thought to herself. Kayta walked down the corridor. *Maybe*, she thought, *it isn't such a good idea to go charging into something that I know nothing about*. If it was them, they would come to see her eventually. As she walked down the corridor Kayta wasn't really paying attention to where she was going. Suddenly she felt herself bump into someone. Quickly she looked up. It was Lt. Commander Data.

"Sorry, sir. It was my fault entirely." She felt awful. It was turning out to be one of those days when nothing would go right.

"Lieutenant," Data said, then continued walking down the corridor. Kayta just stood there not knowing how she should have reacted.

"We can talk in here," Picard said to S'drew and Kroll. They followed him into the observation lounge. They looked around the room, then at Picard. "Please be seated. What is it that you wish to discuss?" Picard asked.

"Our daughter," S'drew said.

"What has that got to do with my ship?" Picard asked

"She is a member of your crew," S'drew said, realising that Picard was having trouble following him.

"Your daughter?" Picard said.

"Perhaps I should have said our adopted daughter - Lt. Kayta Samms." *Humans!* thought S'drew. *They can be so difficult to explain things to at times*. "We have decided that it is time to start introducing suitable..." S'drew paused for a moment, then Kroll spoke. "Husbands." *That was honest and to the point*, thought Picard. S'drew just looked at Kroll.

"I see," Picard said.

"Would you object if we brought two choices to meet Kayta?" S'drew asked. He knew that Picard could object and that was his right.

"Does your daughter know about this?" Picard asked.

"No, but she doesn't have to see them if she doesn't want to." *Not that we'd give her much chance to do that*, thought Kroll.

Picard thought for several moments before speaking, "You will have to discuss this matter with your daughter." *Hopefully that would straighten things out*, he thought.

"So you have no objections," S'drew said.

"As far as I'm concerned this is a personal matter between you and your daughter. Now if you will excuse me, Lt. Worf will assist you to find her." Picard left the observation lounge feeling that this would cause him a lot of problems in the near future.

Worf escorted S'drew and Kroll out of the observation lounge. Neither of them said anything to him but he noticed the looks that they kept giving each other.

Kayta continued walking down the corridor not knowing where she was heading. Then she saw them in front of her.

"What the hell are you two doing here?" It was only after she'd shouted that she saw that Worf. "Er... sir." She went a very deep shade of red. What did he think of her now?

"Your parents wish to speak with you. Excuse me," Worf said, then he left.

The three of them stood there not knowing what to say. At last, "You are mad at us, aren't you?" S'drew said.

"That is an understatement." Kayta frowned as she said it. She wasn't just mad at them, she was furious.

"Are we going to stand here all day?" Kroll asked bluntly.

"I have things to do and people to see," Kayta said as she stormed off down the corridor. They weren't going to get away with treating her like that. *It wouldn't, she thought, do any of us any good trying to discuss things while I'm so angry.* If anything it would only make things more difficult.

"Come back here now!" Kroll shouted. Kayta carried on walking away from them. Then she heard heavy footsteps behind her. Kroll grabbed hold of her arm

"You will listen while we talk," he growled

"Suppose I don't want to listen?" Kayta tried not to look at him while she spoke to him

"You have no choice," Kroll said. Kayta could tell by the tone of his voice that he meant it.

"If you're going to put it that way," she replied sarcastically.

"Don't forget respect for your parents." Kroll knew that she would be even angrier after they'd told her their plans. Together they walked back to where S'drew had remained standing.

Kayta looked at Kroll; already she was starting to lose her anger at them. Whatever their reason for turning up like this, it had to be a good one.

"So what are we going to talk about?" Kayta asked.

"It would be better if we discussed this in your quarters," S'drew said. Kayta looked at

them,

"My quarters... well... " She knew that they wouldn't approve of the state her quarters were in.

"You have let your standards drop," S'drew said. Kayta merely nodded. "There is somewhere else that we can talk?" he asked.

"There is Ten Forward. I go there when I want company." *They can take that any way that they want to!* Kayta thought to herself.

"Shall we go?" S'drew asked. He knew that he was going to have to be the calming influence. He had known it since they had finalised their plans for her future.

Kayta walked with them back to Ten Forward. There were a lot more people in it now. She suddenly felt very self-conscious at being with her parents. It would give everyone something to talk about. Kayta led them to an empty table and they sat down.

"No scenes," Kroll warned her.

"Why didn't you tell me that you were coming?" Kayta asked.

"It was a last minute decision. We have decided that it is time to start seeking a husband for you," S'drew explained. He waited for her to say something. Kayta sat there in silence. "We have brought two possible choices with us," S'drew continued. Kayta tried to stay calm. "You are under no pressure to choose yet." S'drew could tell that Kayta was upset and he knew that it was to do with their plans for her. "Try to think of this logically," he reasoned.

"Logically. You expect me to be looked over by your choice of husband and you expect me to be logical?" Kayta was getting angry again and it started to show in her voice.

"You will do it," Kroll said. He saw no point in being tactful.

Kayta sat there trying to take in what they'd said. *It wouldn't do any harm,* she told herself. She could always turn them down as unsuitable later on.

"All right. But if I don't like them that's the end of the matter," Kayta said confidently.

"Of course we wouldn't want you to marry someone that you didn't get on with." *S'drew, she thought, can be very charming when he wants to be, and it's one of those times now.*

"Tell me about them." She smiled as she said it. The more that she could find out the better - she could always use it to get rid of them.

"Solek, a very respected man. A healer." Kayta just nodded as S'drew listed Solek's qualities.

"He sounds very interesting," Kayta said.

Then it was Kroll's turn. "Krieg, a warrior. Strong, ambitious, with influence." That was all that Kroll told her about Krieg, but she had expected him to be blunt and to the point.

"I'll see them. But no promises will be made." *That'll keep them guessing*, she thought. "I have someone to see now - I'm already late." Kayta got up to leave. "I'll be back later to see your choices," she said before leaving them sitting there.

Kayta didn't bother to cast a backwards glance as she left Ten Forward. She had to talk to someone, but who? She still didn't know many people and those that she did know she wasn't very close to. If she didn't sort things out, and soon, she was going to be married to someone that she barely knew. There had to be some way that she could get out of it without upsetting her parents too much.

S'drew and Kroll stayed in Ten Forward, not knowing what they should do next. Kayta had reacted in the way that they had expected her to.

"What now?" S'drew asked, breaking the silence.

"Stay until she comes back," Kroll replied.

"And if she doesn't?" S'drew knew that she would do anything to get out of the position that they had put her in.

"She will come back," Kroll stated. He knew how to handle her if she didn't do as he wanted; more than once he'd punished her for disobeying his rules.

"If we went back to the ship we could prepare Solek and Krieg for when they meet Kayta." S'drew knew that it might be a shock for them - after all Kayta could be very unpredictable when she wanted to be.

Kayta got into the nearest turbolift and headed for engineering. There was bound to be someone there. It was one of her favourite places on the ship. Nobody minded her visiting it and she liked to watch people working. When the turbolift arrived in engineering she got out. All she needed was someone to talk to - it didn't matter who, or whether they even listened or not.

"Hi."

She turned to see who had spoken to her. "Oh, it's you, Barclay," she said

"I was just leaving," Barclay muttered.

"Sorry, I'm in a bad mood." Kayta tried to look really sorry.

Barclay stood there looking at her. Usually she was nice to him. As far as he knew he hadn't done anything to upset her. "Want to talk about it?" he suggested.

"How long have you got?" Kayta asked. He was, she thought, a nice enough person. "I've got parent trouble. They want me to do something that I don't want to do." She waited for him to inquire further. It was, she thought, something that he couldn't help her with.

"It can't be too bad." Barclay realised that he'd said the wrong thing when he saw the look on Kayta's face. "As bad as that?" Kayta nodded. "Are you going to tell me or not?" he

asked.

Kayta thought for a moment before speaking. "They want me to..." She hesitated. "To-get-married-to-someone-that-I-don't-even-know."

She could tell that he was shocked by what she'd said.

"Oh," Barclay said. He didn't know what he should say to try and make her feel better. "Can't you get out of it?"

Kayta glared at him. Did he think she was that stupid? "How? Got any ideas?" That would throw him! O at least she thought it would.

"Tell them that you can't," he replied.

"You don't know my parents. They can be very stubborn and determined when they want to be," Kayta said.

"Send a message to them." It all seemed so easy to him.

"They're on board now," Kayta said. She was starting to get annoyed at his stupid ideas.

"You'll have to introduce me to them," Barclay said.

"That isn't such a good idea." Kayta didn't know exactly why it wasn't. There was just something in the back of her mind that told her it wasn't.

"Why not?" Barclay asked.

"One's Vulcan. The other's Klingon." She saw the look of disbelief on his face. "I'm adopted and I've got two fathers." Barclay went very pale. It was, she thought, the last few words of what she'd said. Well it wasn't an everyday thing to have two very different parents, never mind them both being the same sex!

"Always knew that there was something different about you," Barclay said, trying to make light of it.

"I'm not in the mood for jokes," Kayta said angrily.

"Sorry. I'd still like to meet your parents," he said apologetically.

"Really?" She sounded happier - not a lot, though.

"Maybe I could talk them out of it."

"I wouldn't bet on it." He didn't stand a chance - still, anything was worth a try, she thought to herself.

S'drew and Kroll had left Ten Forward and returned to their ship. Solek and Krieg were waiting for them. Krieg was getting impatient.

"Why is it taking so long?" he demanded.

"Patience," S'drew said, trying to calm him down. "You will both get to meet Kayta soon. Everything has been arranged." Things would have to be handled very carefully or it would turn out to be very difficult and complicated for everyone involved.

"If you will accompany us we will beam over to the Enterprise." S'drew was finding it difficult to think logically. What they were doing was not ethical at all. It bothered him that he was having these thoughts - he knew that Kroll was having no such doubts. Solek and Krieg followed S'drew and Kroll.

Kayta was still in engineering talking to Barclay. He was really sweet when he wanted to be. She'd never seen this side of him before - perhaps it was the fact that she'd never had much reason to talk to him before. He was so understanding; whether he knew what to do or not about her problem she didn't know or care.

"What you need is someone with imagination to get you out of this," Barclay suggested.

Kayta looked around for the kind of person that he'd suggested.

"Do you have anyone in mind?" she asked smiling at him.

"You're looking at him," he replied.

Kayta laughed. The look on his face changed. "I never knew that you had an imagination." Well she didn't - in fact she didn't know all that much about him.

"Just leave everything to me," he said reassuringly. Already he was working out a way to help her. The less that she knew, the better.

S'drew, Kroll, Solek and Krieg beamed over to the Enterprise.

"You will meet Kayta one at a time, in a public place. No touching." S'drew aimed this last remark at Krieg. S'drew knew what Klingons could be like - after all, he had been with Kroll for some years. Both Solek and Krieg nodded their acceptance of the arrangements. Then all four of them headed towards Ten Forward. S'drew had decided that this was the best place for the meetings to take place; a careful eye could then be kept on the proceedings.

"Listen, where are your parents now?" Barclay asked Kayta.

"Ten Forward. Why?" she asked. What was he going to do? That was what she wanted to know.

"Go back and wait there. I'll join you soon," he said. It wouldn't, he decided, take long to get things arranged. "Try to act normally and don't worry," he continued.

Barclay saw the look of concern on her face. *It's all right for him to tell me not to worry, he doesn't have to sit there listening to two complete strangers,* Kayta thought to herself.

"All right," Kayta replied. She still wasn't very sure about him. Still, if he had a plan

then all she could do was to hope that it worked. If not, she still might find a way of getting out of this.

Kayta left engineering still puzzled about what was going to happen. 'Act normally,' he'd said, but how? She made her way to Ten Forward. All the time that she was walking, Kayta kept taking deep breaths to try and keep calm, and at the same time she was trying to think of things to say.

Solek sat alone in Ten Forward. He knew that he was being watched and why. It didn't bother him; after all it was logical. To him, logic was everything; even this meeting was logical. There was, after all, no logic in finding out that your bonōmate was unsuitable.

When Kayta entered Ten Forward, she saw that her parents were sitting with a Klingon. Nearby was a Vulcan on his own. *That must be Solek*, she thought to herself. She walked over to him.

"Excuse me. Are you Solek?" Kayta waited nervously for his reply

"You are Kayta?" He answered her question with another one. It was something that she didn't really like but was used to from S'drew.

"I am. May I sit down?" *Politeness*, she thought, *doesn't cost anything*. It might even help things to go more smoothly. She sat down without waiting for his reply. They sat there not knowing what to say to each other. In the end it was Solek who broke the silence.

"What is your position on board?" he asked. Solek's voice was more exact than S'drew's had ever been.

"I'm the Captain's Yeoman," Kayta said. Solek looked at her blankly. She knew then that something was wrong - obviously he didn't think much about her position. The main thing on her mind was - where was Barclay?.

"I do not think that we are compatible." Solek rose and left.

Kayta sat there even more confused than before. After a few moments she heard someone sit down next to her. She turned her head. So this was Krieg. He was heavier-set than Worf and a lot older, if looks were anything to go by.

"You will do," he said. His words made Kayta angry. She tried not to look at him - that was easy enough to do - but she couldn't get away from that awful smell. Slowly she moved away from him. Krieg noticed what she was doing and grabbed hold of her arm.

"Take your hands off me!" Kayta glared as she said it. It was then that she saw Barclay enter Ten Forward. He walked straight to where she was.

"Would you mind taking your hands off my girlfriend?" Barclay said with a straight face.

Kayta was finding it hard not to smile.

"You should defend your property better," Krieg snarled.

S'drew was starting to get concerned. This was not supposed to happen; *Kroll should be doing something*, he thought, yet he was just sitting there enjoying it.

"I will stop this now," S'drew said as he got up.

Kayta sat watching as S'drew came over. "This meeting is over now. You are highly unsuitable. You will leave now," he said. Krieg just laughed at S'drew and tightened his grip on Kayta's arm.

"You're hurting me," Kayta said.

"Shut up, female. As for you, Vulcan, this has nothing to do with you," Krieg growled. He stood up, let go of Kayta's arm, then he hit S'drew. S'drew stumbled backwards. Kroll leapt to his feet and before anyone realised what was happening he had his hands around Krieg's throat.

"Kroll! No!" Kayta shouted. She knew that if he wanted to Kroll could easily break Krieg's neck. That was the last thing that she wanted to happen.

"No-one touches S'drew," Kroll said directly to Krieg. By now S'drew had got to his feet.

"Kroll, he didn't hurt me," S'drew said, hoping that Kroll would listen to him. He often did, but it looked as if this was going to be one of those times when he wouldn't. Kroll turned his head slightly, still keeping one eye on Krieg while he did so.

"I'm just teaching him a lesson in manners," he said bluntly. He then increased the pressure on Krieg's throat.

"Release him now," a deep voice boomed. S'drew turned to see who had spoken. "Release him now," Worf ordered.

"No," Kroll replied before he looked to see another Klingon. Worf drew his phaser.

"I will fire," Worf said. Kayta looked at them.

"It is a matter of honour," Kroll said. It was his duty to protect S'drew and he had already failed once.

Kayta could sense that there was something wrong with S'drew, though physically he looked all right. It was then that she realised what exactly was wrong and it had to do with the way that Kroll was behaving. Cautiously she made her way to where S'drew was standing. She had seen the signs before.

"The fire?" she whispered to him, and S'drew nodded. Now she had to get Kroll to release Krieg, if only for S'drew's sake. Kayta thought for a moment before acting.

"Kroll, listen to me. Don't dishonour S'drew in this way." She could only hope that reason prevailed. If not then S'drew would suffer. She watched for Kroll's reaction. Slowly he slackened his grip on Krieg's throat. A sense of relief flooded over her.

"I think he has learned his lesson," Kroll said, laughing as he threw Krieg to the floor. "He's all yours," he said to Worf.

Barclay had stood watching what had happened. If anything her parents certainly weren't as boring as he had expected them to be.

"We are sorry for any trouble that has been caused," S'drew said to Worf.

"This will be reported to the Captain," he said. *How like him*, thought Kayta. Nothing ever seemed to disturb him. Kroll was usually like that, except when S'drew had the fire. They would have to do something about it.

Kroll and S'drew now turned their attentions to Barclay.

"You are Kayta's choice?" Kroll laughed as he said it. Kayta blushed.

"Yes," Barclay replied. He looked at Kayta. He could tell that she was embarrassed - still, it was a bit too late to back out now. Anyway, they still might try to introduce her to other suitable husbands. Once it was all over with she probably wouldn't want anything more to do with him, and already he was wondering how he would deal with it if it came to that. She was growing on him; he didn't feel clumsy or nervous around her. There was something about her that boosted his confidence.

"Hadn't we better sit down?" Kayta asked them. They made their way back to the table where S'drew and Kroll had been sitting. Kayta sat down first, but when Barclay tried to sit next to her he found Kroll and S'drew sitting on either side of her,

"Sit there," Kroll said pointing to a seat opposite them. Barclay sat where he was told to.

"So you are seeing Kayta," S'drew said.

Barclay felt all of his confidence suddenly leave him. "Yes," he mumbled, not quite sure of how they would react.

"You are no warrior," Kroll said, looking at him. He wasn't anything special so why had she picked him as a possible choice? Barclay was starting to feel more and more nervous as they sat there.

"Reg works in engineering," Kayta said. Barclay looked at her. He hadn't realised that she knew his first name. Kayta smiled at him, which seemed to put him at ease.

"Have you been seeing Kayta for long?" S'drew asked. He didn't really want to ask all these questions but it was necessary to do so. After all he didn't want Kayta to make a mistake that she would regret later on.

"No, not long at all, sir." The 'sir', he thought, might impress them - or at least it would show that he had respect for them, which was very important to him.

He was, thought Kayta, handling things very well. She knew what her parents could be like with all their questions - after all they'd asked her a lot in the past! They were always like that with her friends. They still had to answer her question of why they wanted to find a husband for her.

"S'drew, why did you bring Solek and Krieg to meet me," she asked.

"So that you could choose a husband," Solek answered honestly.

"But why?" She saw the look on Kroll's face change.

"That doesn't concern you," Kroll said bluntly.

"She should be told the truth." S'drew looked at Kroll as he said it. They both remained silent for a few moments, and it was S'drew who then spoke first. "Perhaps your friend should leave."

"I want him to stay. Please." Kayta gave them her saddest look.

"If he has to," S'drew said somewhat reluctantly. Kayta could tell that they were annoyed with her request.

"Your grandfather has decided to find you a husband himself." S'drew was finding it hard to tell her.

"But he can't do that, you adopted me!" Kayta exclaimed. She hadn't seen her grandfather since that day outside the judge's office when she'd run away.

"He can. In fact, he has already done so. Your grandfather and his choice are on the way."

Kayta sat there first looking at S'drew then at Kroll. "No, you can't let him do this to me. He has no right!" Kayta shouted at them.

"He has every right to do so. We never legally adopted you." *How*, she thought, *can S'drew sit there and tell me this after so long? They lied to me!*

"You've got to stop him. I won't do it!" Tears started to run down her face.

"We can't do anything. That's why we brought Solek and Krieg. If you were already married or bonded then you wouldn't have to have anything to do with his choice," S'drew explained.

Kayta could tell that S'drew was getting more and more emotional; it was only a matter of time before his logic failed him altogether.

Barclay decided that he should say something if only to try and make her feel better. "What's wrong with your grandfather?" he asked Kayta.

"He's - " she stumbled over the words - "an Orion." There, she'd said it! She hadn't wanted to, but she had. "I'll understand if you want to leave." She hung her head.

"What we have to do is to work out a way to stop your grandfather once he gets here," Barclay looked at her and smiled.

"Doesn't it bother you at all?" She dreaded his reply.

"No," he replied honestly. Kayta gave him a faint smile. She decided that she was getting to like him more and more as time went on. He was nothing like the rumours that she'd heard about him. He was, she thought to herself, a very charming man, even if he was older than she. He also seemed to understand her problem and he was at least trying to help.

But why was he doing it? What was there in it for him? So far S'drew and Kroll hadn't spoken to him very much - that, she thought, was probably because he wasn't what they had in mind for her. She knew that it was too early to tell whether she had any true feeling towards him, but she had to admit to herself that she had felt something when he'd said, 'my girlfriend.'

"Kayta, do you think...?" S' drew left the rest unsaid.

"Of course you can use my room to meditate in. But remember I did warn you about the state of it," Kayta said. She knew that her excuse didn't sound very convincing. S'drew and Kroll left Ten Forward.

"Where are you going to sleep?" Barclay's words brought Kayta back to reality.

"Sorry, they won't need my room for long. They always meditate together." She looked at him; she could tell that he didn't really believe her. So what if he didn't, it was his word against hers. All she could do was to hope that they wouldn't start to argue. As long as they kept the noise down everything would be all right. If she had to she could always sleep in her office - she'd done it once when she'd first come on board, though not since.

Thoughts of what would happen if they started to argue and made too much noise started to go through her mind. *It could, she decided, turn out not only to be a very complicated but embarrassing situation which they'd never be able to forget. Perhaps, she thought, I should tell someone... just in case.*

S'drew and Kroll went into Kayta's room. It was in a worse state than they had expected it to be - she had really let her standards slip. Still there wasn't anything that they could do about it - after all, it was her life. By the time that they had finished tidying it up it wasn't the same room.

Kayta sat in Ten Forward looking straight at Barclay. She could tell that he was thinking and she knew what he was thinking about; her problem. *It isn't really fair, she thought to herself, to burden him with all my troubles.*

"I was thinking of inviting you back to my room to try and sort out this mess, but it's fully booked." Kayta smiled at him. Would he take the hint or not?

She was somewhat surprised when he replied. "There's always my room."

She looked at him and thought for a moment before speaking "Just to talk?" she asked, not sure if she'd heard him correctly in the first place.

"Just to talk," he said, trying to reassure her. He didn't want to take things too far too fast - that would only spoil things for the future. So far they seemed to be getting on. If there was anything that he could do to improve their friendship he would.

Together they stood up. Barclay wrapped an arm around Kayta's waist. He waited to see if she would object; when she didn't he turned and smiled at her, and she returned the smile. There was, she thought, something very reassuring about being with him. Never before had she felt this way about anyone except for her fathers. If she was being truthful with herself she'd never had much luck with men. It wasn't that her fathers had stopped her from

seeing men, they'd never interfered with that part of her life until now. It was just that they tended to frighten off anyone that she met after a while. It could, she thought, be very daunting being introduced to her parents for the first time. Kroll usually growled a lot - still, he did that most of the time. The only men that her fathers had introduced her to were usually either Vulcan or Klingon and they tended to be a great deal older than she.

Barclay and Kayta left ten forward. Kayta noticed that they were being watched - still, it wouldn't do any harm. In fact, it would make it seem as if something was really going on between them. That, she thought could be really useful for when her grandfather finally arrived. The only problem was that she was starting to fail for him and she knew that she couldn't let that happen. *Think of it logically, she told herself; he's just a good friend and that's all there is to it.* It didn't work. Slowly they walked towards Barclay's quarters; his arm tightened around Kayta's waist. Suddenly he stopped and turned to face her. He bent his head towards hers. Their lips touched.

"Excuse me," a deep voice boomed. Immediately they separated. They both looked at the owner of the voice.

"What can I do for you, Lt. Worf?" Kayta asked. She knew that she must have been blushing. She also knew that flattery wouldn't work on him, though she could get round Kroll when she really had to.

"The Captain wishes to see you and your parents. Where are they?" Worf asked.

"In my room, meditating." Kayta tried to sound as if she was telling the truth, but whether he would believe her or not was another matter entirely.

"In that case I will accompany you, to see if they have finished meditating." Kayta's heart sank. Now what could she do? She knew that there was no way that she could allow anyone into her quarters because of what S'drew and Kroll were likely to be doing.

"I'll go in first and check that everything is all right." Kayta's voice was starting to falter. She looked at Barclay and hoped that he could tell something was wrong. Even if he did, there was very little that she could do. Already scenes of what would happen once she opened the door to her quarters flashed in front of Kayta's eyes.

Together all three of them walked down the corridor towards Kayta's quarters. She saw that there were several people standing in the corridor. It was then that she heard the shouting. Suddenly she wished that she was somewhere else. She tried to take deep breaths, but it didn't work.

"What is going on?" Worf demanded.

One of the people in the corridor spoke. "They're having an argument in there." Worf did not look at all convinced.

"I don't think that we should bother them just now," Kayta said.

"I will go in," Worf said firmly.

Kayta looked at Barclay then at Worf. "I'll sort them out. After all, they are my parents." She tried to look confident.

"You may be injured." Worf looked at her. There was definitely something going on and

he would get to the bottom of it.

Kayta looked at the door to her quarters, then opened it. She only just managed to duck as one of her chairs was thrown. She stood up and screamed at the top of her voice.

"Kroyka! Mev!" Kayta could only hope that they would listen to her. Kroll already had her other chair in his hands, but when he saw her he put it down.

"We have to see Captain Picard," she said. She stood there as they regained their composure.

Barclay and Worf waited outside her quarters. It had gone very quiet after she had screamed. Barclay was getting concerned, as was Worf, but for different reasons. As far as Worf was concerned it was his duty to protect the crew and the ship, and he did not like failing.

Suddenly the door to Kayta's quarters opened. She walked out followed by Kroll and S'drew. She smiled at Barclay to put his mind to rest.

"Shall we go now?" she said. There was, she thought, very little that could go wrong now. All she had to do was to be patient and keep calm then everything had to work out all right.

Kayta led the way; Barclay joined her and walked by her side. He felt unsure whether he should put his arm around her waist again. He thought about it for a moment then decided against it, more for his own safety than for any other reason. Although he liked Kayta and at first he had liked her parents, now he wasn't so sure. They scared him - more precisely, Kroll scared him.

Worf kept watching what Kroll and S'drew were up to. So far they had given him no clue. He knew however that they, as well as Kayta, were keeping a secret from him.

S'drew leaned on Kroll for support. The fire still burned, yet he had to try and keep control of it if only for Kayta's sake. They must have caused a great deal of trouble for her and none of it was her fault. *Captain Picard, thought S'drew, is at least - or seems to be - a reasonable sort of man. When we explain what has happened and why he is likely to understand.*

When they reached the bridge Kayta felt nervous. She'd been on the bridge before, so it wasn't that - it was the fact that she was possibly going to say goodbye to her career within the next few minutes. Surely her Captain would listen to reason? What made it worse was that none of it was her fault - at least not directly. She'd never asked them to come.

Picard was waiting for them in his ready room. He had to put a stop to whatever was going on. He didn't usually interfere in family matters but they'd left him *no choice*; they were disrupting his ship.

"Enter," Picard said.

"You wanted to see us, sir," Kayta said quietly. She tried not to look at him. That, she thought, would only serve to make her feel more nervous than she already was.

"Yes. I don't think that it is necessary for you to stay, Mr. Barclay." Barclay turned to

leave.

"Captain, we did apologize for the incident in your ten forward. Things got out of hand, that I admit. Perhaps Kroll shouldn't have attacked Krieg so violently, but he had good reason to," S'drew said. They all watched for Picard's reaction.

"Your actions have caused a great deal of trouble and inconvenience to my crew. It would be best if you left immediately," Picard said.

Kayta lowered her head in shame. "I'll resign now and leave with my fathers, sir," she mumbled. Maybe, she thought, it was for the best. It would at least stop her grandfather from finding her so quickly.

"You were not included, Lieutenant. However, I will listen to what you have to say," Picard said firmly. He looked at her; whatever was bothering her had to be sorted out.

"I didn't want them to come, sir, but they had no choice. My grandfather's coming - he'll take me away!" Kayta blurted out. She waited for Picard to say something. When he didn't she felt even worse. She felt the tears starting to well up, but she knew that she couldn't start crying here, of all places. Kayta looked at Barclay, who still hadn't left, for support.

"What has your grandfather got to do with this?" Picard asked. Things weren't even starting to make sense to him.

"S'drew and Kroll never legally adopted me. The judge said that I had to go with my grandfather, but I ran away from him. Now he's coming with a husband for me." Kayta was finding it harder to keep holding the tears back. She sniffed.

"I see. However, you are an adult therefore you have a choice. I will not interfere in that choice unless it interferes with your duties on this ship." Picard gave her a faint smile. There wasn't a lot that he could do to help.

Kayta tried to look happier, but couldn't manage it. She was still worrying about what would happen when her grandfather arrived. He could - and probably would - cause more trouble than her fathers had done, then she really would be in big trouble. If it came to the worst she could always go with her grandfather, if only to stop him from hurting anyone. She knew that he was capable of doing that - if not him personally then someone who worked for him. Even as she'd been growing up she'd heard stories about her grandfather and what he did for a living. They hadn't been very nice stories either; there was only one thing that she could tell and that he was evil. Not just bad in the normal sense of the word; he was depraved, malignant and vile and that was when he was in a good mood. She could only guess at the sort of husband he had lined up for her. Whoever it was had probably paid a lot of money for her - when it came down to it that was all she was to him, another commodity to be sold to the highest bidder.

"Thank you, sir," Kayta said quietly.

"I expect you back on duty soon, Lieutenant," Picard said. Kayta nodded even though she knew that she wasn't on duty for a few more hours. It would give her time to compose herself and that was what she needed most.

Silently they left the ready room leaving Picard sitting there.

"Lieutenant," Worf's voice boomed. Kayta looked at him. What did he want with her

now? She walked over to his station.

"Yes, Lt. Worf?" she said nervously. There wasn't a lot more that could go wrong for her now.

"Interesting parents," Worf said. Kayta smiled at him.

Kayta stood in the turbolift with Kroll, S'drew and Barclay. None of them knew what to say to each other. Finally it was S'drew who broke the silence.

"Kroll and I will leave now. There is nothing more that we can do for you. Come with us - at least you will safe." S'drew looked at her waiting for her reply.

"No, I'm staying. Running will only prolong it." Kayta smiled at Barclay.

"Remember you have the power. Use it," Kroll said. Of course she remembered about the power that she had, it was just that she hadn't wanted to use it. The thought of leaving had briefly crossed her mind but she had decided against it; she would have had to give up everything that she had worked so hard for.

"I will use it when the time comes. If I have to," she said.

"Do not leave it too late," Kroll warned her.

Kayta threw her arms around S'drew and hugged him, then she did the same to Kroll, who growled.

"Take care of each other. I'll let you know either way."

The turbolift stopped and S'drew and Kroll got out. Kayta felt an arm go around her shoulders. She looked and saw that it was Barclay.

"Don't worry, you've still got me," he said trying to cheer her up. She gave him a faint smile. He was right, she thought to herself, she still had him although if it came to a fight he wouldn't be much use to her at all. Well, at least he was very understanding and he had a great deal of imagination. All the time she was learning more and more things about him that she liked. When she had first met him she hadn't known him very well, but now it was as if she'd known him all her life.

"If it comes down to it, I'll marry you," Barclay said. Kayta just stared at him. Barclay noticed that she'd gone very pale.

"I mean it." *Why hasn't she said something,* he thought to himself. "Well it's only an idea," he said, wishing that he'd never said it the first place - at least a part of him thought that, somewhere else there was a part of him that really meant it. It actually surprised him that he could feel this way about someone and be totally open to them about his feelings towards them; he'd never done anything like this before.

"Where to now?" Barclay asked Kayta. He wasn't quite sure whether she would still like him or not, and that mattered to him.

"I have to tidy up my quarters. Those two probably wrecked it." Kayta thought about

what he'd said. It was very flattering in a strange sort of way. Kayta knew that she should be absolutely furious with him but she wasn't. After all, she told herself, how could she possibly be angry at someone who was as caring as he was?

As the turbolift carried on to its destination, Kayta tried hard not to smile at Barclay but the harder she tried not to the more she got the urge to smile until finally she couldn't help but smile at him. Barclay returned the smile; it was then that he knew that she wasn't really angry at him for what he'd said. The turbolift doors opened, Kayta got out, then turned to face him.

"Did you really mean it?" she asked hesitantly with a searching look in her eyes.

"Of course I did," Barclay managed to say before the turbolift door closed.

Kayta almost floated back to her quarters. She came back down to earth with a huge bump when she saw the state of her room. It was even worse than before. Straightaway she started to tidy it up. One of her chairs was completely ruined - it was the one that had been thrown. She'd never have dared to do anything like that to the furniture at home, she wouldn't have been allowed to. Her fathers had always taught her to respect other people's property and now they'd gone and done this to her. Still, these things did tend to happen, but luckily not all that often.

It didn't take Kayta long to get her quarters into a reasonable state. Then she decided to get something to eat; she would be back on duty in a few hours and she really needed to get her act together. It was not only expected of her, it was a great responsibility. One mistake by her and there would be trouble for a lot of people, especially the Captain, and he would not be amused.

Kayta checked to see what time it was. Nearly time for her to go back on duty. She got changed and took a deep breath then left her quarters. As the door opened she saw Barclay propped up against the door frame.

"Just thought I'd go for a walk," he said, smiling.

"Really? And where were you intending to go for this walk?" Kayta asked casually.

"Your office."

"Sorry to disappoint you, I'm on the bridge. I'm going to be late, so if you'll excuse me - "

Kayta said. She turned to leave quickly. Barclay strode after her, he grabbed hold of her arm.

"Wait, I need to talk to you now!" he said.

"I can't be late - I've been the cause of too much trouble lately." Kayta tried to break free of his grip.

"Five minutes, that's all I'm asking for." He sounded as if what he had to say was important.

"You talk, I'll listen, we walk. You can explain to the Captain why I'm late." Kayta was starting to get impatient; what was so important that it couldn't wait for a few hours?

"About what I said earlier. Thought any more about it?" Barclay asked.

"Ask me again on the bridge," Kayta said, smiling at him. *This, she thought, is going to be fun.*

They got into the turbolift. "Bridge," Kayta said. When the turbolift reached the bridge Kayta got out. As she did so Barclay followed her. She knew that she was being watched by the rest of the bridge crew, especially the Captain.

"You are late, Lieutenant," Picard said. He looked at her then at Barclay.

"It was my fault, sir," Barclay said. Kayta looked at him. What was he going to do? Something very imaginative, she hoped.

Picard waited for Barclay to explain further.

By now everyone was taking quick glances at Barclay. *Has he lost his nerve?* thought Kayta. Just as she was starting to think that, Barclay got down on one knee.

"Let me take you away from all this. Be mine for eternity," he proclaimed. Kayta was finding it very difficult not to laugh at him. Most of the bridge crew looked at him as if he'd gone mad. "My heart's desire. Without you I'm but a mere shell of a man," he continued.

"Why don't you go play with the warp engines?" Kayta said.

"For you, anything," Barclay said.

"Get up!" Kayta hissed at him.

"Only if you'll be mine," Barclay replied.

"Yes, I'll be yours. Now get up leave me alone! I have work to do!" Kayta said. She tried to sound angry with him when she wasn't at all. She should have known that he'd do something like this. Deep down inside she felt wonderful - it was all so flattering. Barclay got up, kissed her hand and got into the turbolift.

"Until later," then he blew her a kiss. Once the turbolift doors closed Kayta turned a very deep red.

"He's got imagination," she said to no-one in particular. Well it was true, that was one of the things that she liked about him. He certainly knew how to surprise her.

"If you have quite finished, Lieutenant," Picard said sharply.

"Yes, sir," Kayta replied. She breathed a sigh of relief; for a moment she'd thought that he was going to put her on report for what had happened. For some reason she wouldn't have minded that at all. She knew that her Captain would have been within his rights to do so. It was sort of sweet of him not to have done that after all the trouble that had been caused over her. The only thing was that she wasn't sure about was whether you could *really* class the Captain as being sweet - it was probably against some regulation or other, and after all it could cause a breakdown in discipline if word got out.

Kayta followed Picard into his ready room. She sat there half listening to him as he went on about reports that needed filing. She just kept nodding her head and giving him faint smiles - she could do this job in her sleep it was so easy.

Picard got the distinct impression that he was talking to himself. Still, as long as she did the work to his high standards...

"Is that all, sir?" Kayta asked.

"For the moment." Kayta got up to leave. "If you could stop Mr. Barclay from giving a repeat performance...?" Picard added.

"I'll try, sir," Kayta said just before she left the ready room.

Things between her and Barclay had started to happen so fast that it made Kayta feel nervous. She wasn't usually a nervous sort of person, in fact it was often the opposite, she tended to make people around her nervous. Why, she didn't know; it had always been that way - perhaps it was the way that she had been brought up. Her fathers had always told her to believe in herself. That was what she'd always done, but now she didn't feel so confident. What if she was making a huge mistake? It was, she decided, too late to suddenly change her mind; she would just have to live with her decision and make the best of whatever came later. At least she liked Barclay a great deal and it wasn't as if he was repulsive or anything - she could do a lot worse for herself. What she needed was to have something to take her mind off everything. Kayta thought for a moment before deciding what to do. She picked up her pile of tapes and started to work. There wasn't a lot to do, so after she'd finished it she checked to see if there was anything else that needed to be completed soon. It seemed that the more she got into her work the less time it took her to finish it. That was one problem with the job - she tended to be finished earlier than she felt she ought to have been. Once everything was done she tried to concentrate on her story, but her mind kept wandering. Maybe the stories that she'd heard about him had been exaggerated. There was also the possibility that her grandfather was dead. For some reason that made her feel good - the thought that someone might have done her a big favour made her feel even better. If he was dead, she thought there was no hurry to marry Barclay. Perhaps if they got to know each other better and over a long time they both might decide to call the whole thing off. The last thing she wanted to do was to hurt him.

Soon Kayta found that it was time that she took a break. Slowly she stretched her arms then got up. She didn't really feel like being on her own so she left her office and walked down the corridor. There wasn't anyone around that she knew - in fact besides the Captain, whom she worked for, and Barclay, she didn't know many people at all. She knew that she would have to change that otherwise she would be very lonely.

Kayta continued to walk down the corridor, then she decided to go to her quarters - after all there was bound to be something there that she could do. When she finally got to her quarters she went in, and started to look around for what she needed. Nothing was in its usual place; that was what happened when you tidied up. When everything had been in a mess she could find anything just by looking, now she really had to hunt for it. Finally she found what she was looking for. Quickly she picked up her study tapes and returned to her office. Once there she started to study; she was determined to get a transfer to engineering and she knew that the only way that she could get it was to study then apply for a retraining course at the Academy. That would mean that she would have to leave the Enterprise, but it would be worth it in the end. What Barclay would think about it barely crossed her mind.

Being captain's Yeoman tended to be a dead-end job - after all there wasn't much in the way of promotion unless you wanted to move sideways, either into the J.A.G office or the diplomatic corps, neither of which she wanted to do.

Kayta was finding it easy to study - she always had. It did have its drawbacks; after a while things stopped being a challenge and they began to get mundane and repetitive, after which she started to lose interest in whatever she was doing. She wondered if things would go that way with Barclay; she hoped not. Things always seemed to be so difficult and complicated for her. Maybe it was time that her luck changed for the better. The next time that she looked she realised that her shift was supposed to have been over hours ago. She packed her things up and left her office. This time instead of going back to her quarters Kayta headed for Ten Forward. What she really needed to do was relax, though she knew that that wouldn't be as easy as it sounded. The totally unexpected tended to happen to her. At least she couldn't ever say that life was boring.

When Kayta reached Ten Forward she noticed that people were looking at her. So word of what Barclay had done had spread - gossip and rumours always spread faster than the facts of any event. *It would be interesting*, she thought to herself, *to listen to what stories were going round*. She wouldn't even bother to try and set them straight - after all people preferred to think the worst. She walked over to the bar and got a drink, smiling politely at people, puzzled as to why they were even bothering to try and be polite. Surely they knew what she was thinking about them? If not she could make it very clear if they came too close.

Kayta found an empty table, sat down and stared out at the stars. They looked so beautiful - why hadn't she noticed before? Maybe she'd just taken them for granted. She closed her eyes for a moment and relaxed. She heard a faint sound across from her and slowly opened her eyes.

"Hi," Barclay said smiling at her.

"Shouldn't you be on duty or something?" Kayta looked at him.

"Just thought I'd see how you're doing," he said.

"I'm doing just fine," Kayta replied. She saw that he was looking at the tapes on the table. Barclay picked one up and read the title of it.

"I've always wanted to be an engineer," she said quickly.

"Well if you need any help..." He hadn't realised that she wanted to do improve herself. It didn't bother him - in fact he would give her any help that she needed. "See you later," Barclay said hopefully.

"Maybe. If I get stuck," Kayta knew that he would be pleased to see her if only for a few minutes. Anyway the more time that she spent with him the more that she would get to know him; besides she thought it would give her a very good reason to visit engineering.

Kayta watched him leave, then she got herself another drink and returned to her table. She kept looking at the stars. What would her fathers think of her marrying Barclay? They seemed to like him - if *like* was the right word. Perhaps they would think that things were

happening too quickly. Still, she liked things to be exciting.

Barclay went back to engineering. He was, as time went on, feeling more and more confident. Kayta definitely had something to do with it, of that he was certain. *Maybe, he thought, some of her confidence is rubbing off on me.* As soon as he entered engineering people started to congratulate him. Mostly they were people who'd hardly spoken to him in the past. They all wanted to know the same thing - when was the wedding going to be? They obviously thought that something had been going on for some time for things to be happening so fast. There was, he thought, much more to getting married than just asking Kayta and her saying yes.

Her grandfather stormed around his bridge; he'd just got word that she'd been warned. That was too bad, he thought, now she'd have time to try and get away. No matter where she went he would find her eventually. He'd got a very good price for her without the buyer even seeing her. A very trusting person - too trusting, he thought. He hadn't seen her since she was little; she'd been a spirited thing then, and he hoped that she hadn't lost any of it. That had been the deciding factor in her price. He had it all planned; even now things were well in hand. If necessary he would use force to get her. He was certainly making a huge profit from her. Other people had paid for her upbringing and education. No doubt she would object to being sold - still, there wasn't a thing that she could do about it; after all he was her legal guardian.

Kayta finished her drink, picked up her study tapes and left Ten Forward. She would have to sort things out about the wedding. Where she should start she didn't know - still, how hard could it be to arrange something like that? She realised that she would have to talk to Barclay - after all it was going to be his day as well. Slowly she made her way back to her quarters. It was a mess again - still that didn't matter, she preferred it that way. Her quarters looked more lived in the way they were, and it made her feel more comfortable. Kayta started to think about when she was married to Barclay. Things would have to change a great deal. How, she could just imagine; no more doing what she wanted when she wanted to and she'd have to keep things tidy all the time. She hated even the thought of it. She tried to push the doubts to the back of her mind. It worked to a certain point but they were still there.

After a while Kayta got undressed and climbed into bed. She tried to sleep, but she didn't even feel sleepy. She lay there thinking until she felt even more confused than she had before. It was at times like these that she really needed her fathers; they always helped her to see things more clearly. How much time did she have left until her grandfather arrived? she wondered. She would have to be married by then. Finally she couldn't stand lying there any more, so she got up and looked through her clothes. Appearances had to be kept up no matter what was going on, and most of her clothes were what she'd had for years. When she'd needed new ones it had usually been S'drew who'd gone with her, so they were all fairly restrained. Eventually she found something that Kroll had bought for her. She put it on and checked to see how she looked. When she left her quarters Kayta held her head up, confidence flowing through her. She noticed that people were looking at her, she decided to go to engineering and see Barclay. It would certainly give him a surprise.

When she arrived in engineering Kayta started to look round for him. Then she saw him. He had his back to her. Quietly she walked over to where he was standing.

"When's your break?" she asked.

Barclay spun round. "You look great," he said in surprise.

"Thanks," Kayta smiled at him.

"Five minutes," Barclay said.

"I'll go wait over there. I wouldn't want to disturb you," Kayta said. She went and stood where she was partially hidden. She started to laugh inside, this was turning out to be great fun. What they needed to do, she thought, was to talk about what they were going to do next. Kayta stood there waiting for Barclay.

Barclay walked straight past where Kayta was hidden.

"Where are we going?" she asked from behind him.

He spun round. "You shouldn't do that," he said, looking at her.

"Why? Don't you like surprises? Someone with your imagination should," Kayta said. She decided that it was time for her to make the next move. She still wasn't sure of how he would react - *nothing ventured*, she told herself.

"We need to talk about what happens next." Even she wasn't really sure of what she meant.

"Next?" Barclay said, surprised.

"About my grandfather." They had to get something sorted out. It was just a matter of time before he arrived.

"You heard what the Captain said," Barclay told her.

"You haven't heard the stories about him that I have. He's probably sold me," Kayta said bluntly. She looked at Barclay, who'd gone very pale. "That's why we have to have a backup plan. The only thing that interests him is money." Kayta waited for Barclay's reaction.

"Money?" He was shocked. How could she be so honest about everything?

"Yes. Someone is going to have to offer more for me," Kayta explained. Already she was working out a plan.

"How much do you think he'd want?" Barclay asked, wondering if he had enough to pay for her.

"250 to 500," she said.

"Credits," Barclay said hopefully.

"Thousand." Kayta saw his face drop.

"I'll never be able to get that much," he said.

"You don't have to, trust me. Want a coffee?" Kayta said. The money wasn't a problem - even if he wanted more she could get it and fast.

"Later," he said.

Kayta looked at him disappointedly. "I'll see you later, then. I have something to sort out." She gave him a hug before leaving.

Kayta left engineering, thinking about her plan. It was simple; all she had to do was to get someone to put in a higher bid. It couldn't be too obvious so that ruled Barclay out. No, it had to be someone that she could seem to be afraid of - in that case it was also no use asking Lt. Worf; her grandfather would never believe that she was afraid of him. There were very few people on board that she *was* afraid of. She knew that eventually she would think of someone, all she needed was time. But time was running out fast for her.

Kayta headed back to her quarters - she was starting to feel tired. She knew that she should really go to sleep, but she couldn't lose so much time. Once back in her quarters she lay down on her bed for a few minutes and closed her eyes.

The next thing that happened was that she was wakened by the sound of her door chime. She got out of bed and went to answer the door.

"Can I come in?" It was Barclay.

"Excuse the mess," Kayta said.

Barclay walked in past her. *What mess?* he thought to himself.

"I've been looking for you," he said. Kayta sat down on the bed.

"I came straight back here to think. Guess I fell asleep," Kayta explained, so that he wouldn't think that she had been avoiding him.

"Have you found a better solution yet?" he asked.

"Not yet." She still felt half asleep. "Do you want a coffee or something?" Kayta thought that she might as well be polite to him even though she didn't feel like it.

"No. About your earlier solution. It's a good idea - it's just so much to find," he said. Kayta gave him a knowing smile.

"I mean who's got the money to outbid his buyer?" Barclay said. He still hadn't got over the shock of how much her grandfather would want. It was a lot of money to find, and at such short notice too.

"I have," Kayta said casually. The blood drained from Barclay's face. "That's why my grandfather wanted me in the first place," she explained.

"Hail that ship," her grandfather ordered. His buyer was getting impatient - already he'd tried to lower the price twice.

"They are responding," an underling said. Her grandfather stared at the viewscreen as Picard's face came into focus.

"I want my property back," he demanded.

Picard looked at him. It had turned out to be a much more complicated situation than he had at first thought it to be.

"What exactly is this property that you want returned?" Picard asked.

"My granddaughter. Hand her over now." Her grandfather's voice raised its tone.

"There are laws to stop me from handing over someone as if they were property," Picard explained without much success.

"Then I will take her by force," her grandfather said.

"Surely we can discuss this matter," Picard said.

"There is nothing to discuss. I want my property back *now*." Her grandfather was getting more angry by the minute.

Picard motioned for the link to be cut. It would take a great deal of sorting out before things could return to normal.

Kayta looked out of her window and saw another ship. So her grandfather had arrived at last. Well, she was more than ready for him.

"We have to see the Captain now." She straightened her clothes and was out of the door before Barclay had had a chance to say anything. Kayta headed for the nearest turbolift; she tapped her foot as she waited for it to arrive and for Barclay to catch up with her.

"Hurry up, time's running out!" she snapped impatiently. The plan was already worked out in her mind. Whether or not she could get the Captain to agree was the unknown factor.

By the time that the turbolift arrived on the bridge Barclay was feeling very nervous and no matter how hard he tried he just couldn't see anything that could work. Her plan didn't even sound as if it could work.

"Captain," Kayta said loudly, "are you going to hand me over to him?" She looked straight at Picard. Her heart started to beat faster.

"Into my ready room, now," Picard replied sternly. Kayta's heart sank - she looked across at Barclay.

"Yes, sir," she said quietly, then she followed Picard into his ready room.

"I will not have members of my crew bursting on to the bridge when it suits them," he said to Kayta.

"I know that I have been the cause of a great deal of trouble, but I never wanted any of it to happen. I apologize, sir." She paced up and down in front of his desk. "I'll go with him, if it'll stop anymore trouble being caused," Kayta said, knowing that he wouldn't hand her over.

"Is that what you want to happen?" Picard asked her.

"No, but..." she started,

"He has threatened to use force," Picard said bluntly.

"There is a way out of this, sir. But you're not going to like it."

"What do you mean by 'a way out'?" Picard asked, dreading her reply.

"If someone offers him a higher price he will take it," she explained. There wasn't another way that she could see to get out of it without anyone getting hurt.

Picard thought for a few moments. It did seem as if he'd been left with very few options. Her idea seemed to be a sound one although he had no idea as to how she would persuade her grandfather to take part in it.

"Who is going to offer more on your behalf? Mr Barclay?" Picard asked.

"That's the problem, sir. I can get the money, as much as I need." Kayta continued pacing up and down; it helped her to think better.

"Have you thought about what could happen if your plan fails?" Picard said. He had to make sure that she was prepared for the worst.

"Yes, sir. This is the only chance that I have to get rid of him for good. If it doesn't work I won't be much worse off," Kayta replied. She was ready for anything that happened, even if it meant that she had to go with her grandfather.

"As long as you understand the risks," Picard said. "What is my role in this plan?" he asked.

"To introduce the idea of another buyer to my grandfather, sir," Kayta said.

"I see. That still leaves the question of who is going to buy you," Picard said.

"It would be more effective if it was someone that I could appear to be afraid of. That unfortunately rules out Lt. Worf," Kayta said. Picard nodded.

"Commander Riker?" Picard said.

"He's..." Kayta tried to think of the right words. "Too attractive, sir." Kayta blushed.

"Lt. Commander Data," Picard said. They were running out of choices.

"I feel nervous around *him*, sir," Kayta said.

"Go back to your quarters. I will attempt to arrange things," Picard said, reassuring her.

"Thank you, sir," Kayta said before leaving. Only time would tell whether her plan would work or not.

Kayta left the ready room feeling a lot happier. Barclay still stood on the bridge waiting for her.

"Well?" he asked anxiously.

"The Captain's taking care of everything," Kayta said to him before getting into the

turbolift.

Barclay followed her, not quite sure of what had happened between her and the Captain, but hopefully she would tell him later.

Picard sat in his ready room, thinking about what Kayta had tried to talk him into. He'd only agreed, somewhat reluctantly, because it was the only option available without using force. He stood up and straightened his uniform, then he left his ready room and strode onto the bridge.

"Mr Data, I have a special assignment for you," Picard said.

"Sir?" Data replied.

"I would like you to buy Lt Samms." It sounded a lot worse than he thought it would.

"For what purpose, sir?" Data asked, curious about his Captain's strange request.

"To stop her from being removed from the Enterprise," Picard explained.

"And when I have bought her, sir?" Data wondered what his Captain would do with her.

"Hand her over to Mr. Barclay. Let's hope that he can keep her out of trouble," Picard said.

Kayta looked at Barclay,

"Data's going to bid for me," she said. Barclay didn't look very pleased. "Smile," she said. Didn't he trust her?

"I wanted to bid for you," he said. If anyone was going to buy her it should be him.

"If you'd bought me you'd regret it. If we ever had a row you would bring it up," Kayta said. Well, he would. Besides she knew that he didn't have the money.

"I wouldn't," he said indignantly. How dare she suggest such a thing.

"It's something that I have to sort out. If you want to watch you can. Only stay calm and don't say or do anything," Kayta told him. If he caused a scene, then her grandfather would suspect that something was wrong.

"Open hailing frequencies," Picard ordered.

"Frequencies open, sir," Worf reported.

"Captain," her grandfather said. "Are you willing to hand her over now?"

"There has been a development. Someone else is interested in your granddaughter," Picard said calmly. "We should discuss this matter in person." Picard watched as her grandfather smiled.

"If you will allow me to beam over, I'm sure that this can now be sorted out to everyone's advantage," her grandfather said. This could turn out to be a great deal more profitable than he had at first thought. He could double the price to his buyer and get away with it.

"Certainly," Picard said, then he motioned to have the link cut. "Have a security team standby in transporter room 3." He was going to take no chances. At the first sign of trouble he would have her grandfather detained.

"Get the buyer in here," her grandfather ordered.

"Sir," an underling replied, hurrying off the bridge. A few minutes later the buyer, an elderly overweight Ferengi, arrived on the bridge.

"Where is she?" he demanded.

"There is another party interested. The price has now doubled," her grandfather said. It felt good.

"Who?" the Ferengi asked. This could be a ploy to make him pay more for no reason. There was a lot at stake; he was buying for someone else. He could, he realised, be left with a loss instead of a huge profit.

"A Starfleet officer," her grandfather said smugly. "The highest offer gets her. I'm going over to their ship now. You may accompany me - that is, if you are still interested,"

"I will accompany you," the Ferengi said.

Kayta had gone back to her quarters. Barclay had gone very quiet. *He's sulking*, Kayta thought to herself. "Time to wait," Kayta said loudly. How could she get him to talk to her. "As soon as this is all over I'm going to apply for engineering," she said to Barclay. She waited for him to reply. He didn't. Kayta started to pace up and down. *Why can't it all be over with now?* she thought to herself.

Barclay sat watching her pace up and down; it was starting to get on his nerves.

"Will you stop doing that!" he said brusquely.

"No. It relaxes me. If you don't like it, leave," Kayta said, annoyed at him.

"I'm not leaving until this is all over. Don't forget I'm the one who's helped you out," Barclay replied.

"I'm sorry. This waiting is really getting to me," Kayta smiled at him. She knew that it wasn't fair to take her anger out on him. "Forgive me please," she said.

"Of course." Barclay returned her smile. Barclay admitted to himself that he was on edge over her plan. He tried not to think about what could happen if anything went wrong.

Kayta's grandfather and his buyer beamed over to the Enterprise.

"Where is your Captain?," he demanded of Worf.

"Follow me," Worf said gruffly. He gritted his teeth and escorted them to the observation lounge.

Kayta stopped pacing up and down when she heard the door chime. She went over and opened it. Data stood there looking at her.

"The Captain has told me to escort you to the observation lounge," he said.

"Here, look after this," Kayta said handing a tape to Data. "You're going to need this, it's the money," she explained. Kayta felt slightly nervous at handing the tape over.

"Come on," she said to Barclay. He followed her out of her quarters. All three of them walked down the corridor. Suddenly Kayta felt shaky, she didn't want to go through with her plan.

"I don't feel too well," she said to Barclay.

"It'll all be over soon," Barclay said trying to reassure her. He felt nervous as well, only he was managing not to show it.

They carried on until they reached the observation lounge. When they walked in Kayta saw her grandfather already sitting and next to him was a Ferengi - *His buyer*, she thought to herself.

"So where is this other party?" her grandfather asked.

"Lieutenant. Please take a seat," Picard said. Kayta sat down. Barclay leaned against the door frame. "Lt. Commander Data is the interested party," Picard said, watching for any reaction from her grandfather.

Kayta kept looking around the lounge. She tried taking deep breaths but it had no effect. Her only hope now rested on someone who wasn't even Human - *Or should that be alive?* she thought to herself.

"How much?" her grandfather asked Data.

"One million credits," Data replied.

"The asking price is two," her grandfather said smugly.

Kayta looked at Data. *Make your next move*, she thought.

"Two and a half," the Ferengi said. Kayta could feel his eyes undressing her.

"Three," Data said. What he was doing could be classed as illegal, but there was nothing in any law that he knew about stopping a person buying themselves.

The Ferengi looked first at Data then at Kayta. "Why do you offer so much for her?" he asked.

"Because - " Data started to say.

"Shall we get on with the bidding?" her grandfather said. He sat back in his seat, waiting to see who would pull out first. He'd only expected one million at the most for her; now the price had trebled in the space of a few minutes. There was no knowing how much she would go for, but he was certainly going to be even richer.

Barclay leaned against the door frame watching the proceedings. He wanted to take part but he knew that if he tried anything Kayta would be absolutely furious with him.

"It's up to you, Jarnock," her grandfather said, looking at the Ferengi.

"Three and a half," he said somewhat nervously. He was only working for someone else; any higher and he would make a loss.

"Lt. Commander?" her grandfather said, looking at Data.

Data thought for a moment then he said, "Four".

Kayta looked nervously around the room. Was it all over?

"Any more bids?" her grandfather asked.

"No," the Ferengi said.

"You can of course pay?" her grandfather asked Data.

"Yes," Data replied handing over the tape that Kayta had given him.

"Good," her grandfather said. "I have no more business here." Her grandfather then got up and left. The Ferengi quickly followed him.

"Yes!" Kayta screamed once her grandfather had left. Data looked at her, puzzled.

"You are pleased at losing four million credits?" he said.

"Oh - didn't I tell you I think that I got the tapes mixed up?" Kayta said.

"What exactly did that tape have on it, Lieutenant?" Picard asked.

"Just something I was writing," Kayta said. Then she smiled at them.



DEANNA'S NIGHTMARE

What's this music I hear?
It seems all around me.
It can't be natural
It really confounds me

It's getting much louder
I feel I'm going mad.
They don't understand
That it's really this bad.

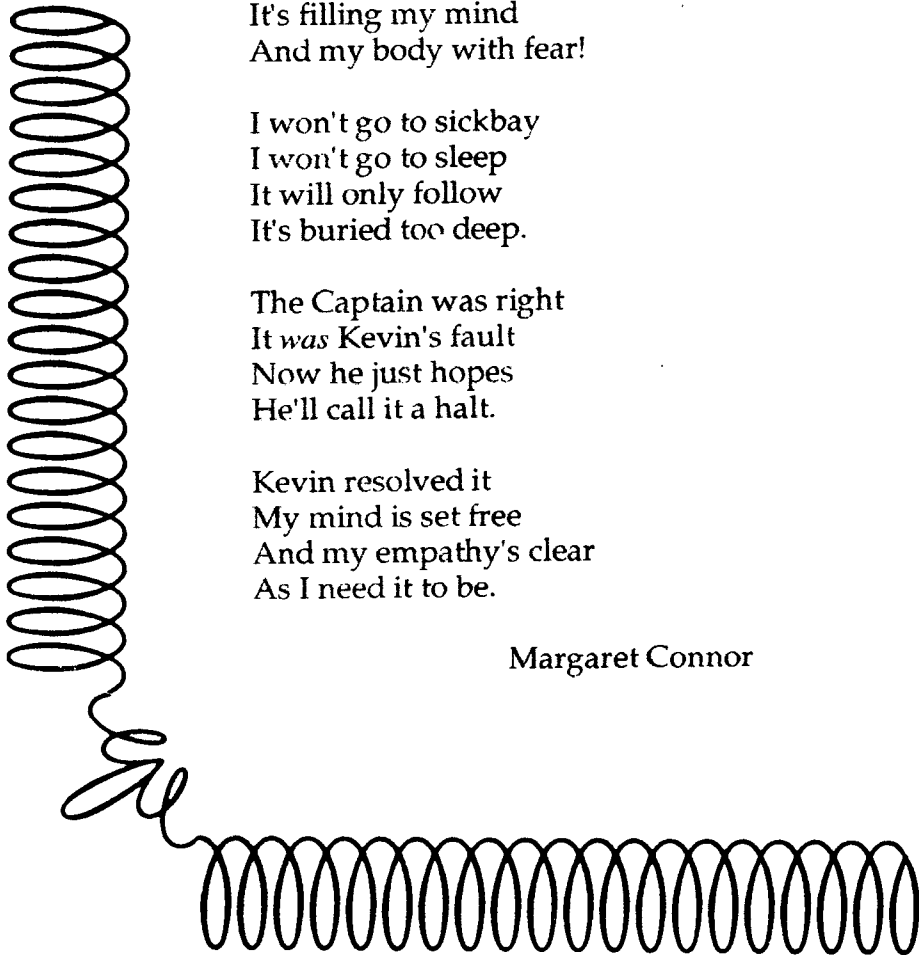
Oh Beverly, help me!
Stop this sound I hear!
It's filling my mind
And my body with fear!

I won't go to sickbay
I won't go to sleep
It will only follow
It's buried too deep.

The Captain was right
It *was* Kevin's fault
Now he just hopes
He'll call it a halt.

Kevin resolved it
My mind is set free
And my empathy's clear
As I need it to be.

Margaret Connor



YOUNG RIKER'S CHAMPIONSHIPS

by

Sherry Golding

Young Riker felt the determination, the power, even the thoughts of the young man wearing a yellow T-shirt and black shorts who sprinted towards the long jump. He was incredibly fast! The wind tore at the man's clothes and the gentle rain washed away the sweat as the beginning of the long jump came close. His feet touched the line and he took a flying leap. Riker's fists clenched tightly, his mind silently urging the man on.

He landed! Sand belted him in the face, blinding him for a second. For a while he stood there, not daring to look at what he had achieved, fearing to hear the worse. Only when he realised he had broken a record did he turn to face the applauding crowds, excitement rising high within him.

Riker felt the man's high spirits, and the triumph helped him to find his own confidence. Riker had watched the competitors since early morning, waiting impatiently for his own events. Their determination and power had been felt by all those who watched, for it was the day of the championships to determine who would play for Earth against the other worlds in the Olympics. All these competitors were putting in everything they had. To win would be the greatest achievement one could ever know. A marvellous experience, not just being someone, but being the best! It was indeed the greatest gift one could ever wish for; it would leave an everlasting memory, a gift which could never be thrown away. Even the rain could not prevent what they hoped to achieve - the greatest goal in their lives.

Riker's mind relaxed; he felt confident. As he walked to the start of the 100 m, he caught sight of the many people who were watching. If he was the fastest in Starfleet, then he would win now, surely! He looked at the others, some Human, some aliens from other worlds. Muscles showed in every part of their bodies; their faces were hard and determined. Suddenly, Riker wasn't so sure; they too were the fastest on their own worlds. How fast? Only at the end of this race would he know the answer.

Starting position. The finishing line seemed far away, almost as if it were impossible for him ever to hope to reach it, yet he knew he was incredibly fit. He felt terrified. What if he didn't win? What would his father and friends think of him then? Would all his dreams only be dreams which could never be real?

Riker's eyes blurred and he felt weak as he watched the huge Andorian in front of him raising a phaser towards the sky. He had an expressionless look on his face that told of boredom. He took his time, and Riker began to feel weaker. *Calm down!* he thought. *Calm down or you will lose!*

The phaser sounded! It was so sudden that for a nanosecond he was startled; he froze for the merest fraction of a second.

The aliens had already left the starting point. Coming back to reality, Riker chased away his thoughts and sprinted after them. His knees buckled; for a split second he thought he would fall, but then he was running smoothly, picking up speed and kicking up the sand from under his feet. He passed four aliens, feeling their incredible power, so strong that it almost knocked him over. The Klingon who was winning was very fast. Riker was catching up,

however - he was just coming to the Klingon's side when, almost as if he had felt Riker there, the Klingon increased speed, his determination greater than anyone else's Riker had felt that day.

Riker too increased speed, his determination growing. They were alone, their power, their speed, even their thoughts felt by the silent crowd. The finishing line was coming closer; the rain heavier. Thunder echoed in the overcast sky, shattering the intense silence.

Their power became stronger with the increasing speed. Only one could win; each was determined that he would be the winner. The Klingon was overtaking Riker again, almost as if he had been waiting for that last moment to go beyond his capabilities, setting a new record. Riker felt disillusioned. He wasn't going to make it. He was no longer the fastest.

Yes, he was!

Was he really going to give up now? *Is that what an athlete does at the last moment, give up, when he thinks all is lost?* Riker knew he too could go beyond his own capabilities if he really wanted to. Surprising himself, he increased speed as easily as he had only just imagined he could. Confidence; that was the most powerful thing, and used at the right time could only let one succeed.

They were running side by side, both refusing to give in, both setting out to prove which was faster. As the finishing line came closer, Riker used the last ounce of whatever he had and tore away the light ribbon with his body, beating the Klingon by a couple of inches.

As Riker turned to face the Klingon he saw the others still running and heard the crowds applauding. He had finally run against someone who was really as fast as he, and who loved athletics as much. He felt sudden pity when he saw the defeat on the Klingon's face. He had lost... yet not totally; his determination had left a special memory in the hearts and minds of everyone who had watched. The Klingon was the fastest on Kling and today had been the second fastest on Earth - but if he had to face Riker again, it was possible that he would win. Neither was unbeatable; one had just won today and would eventually run in the Olympics. Riker watched his face and realised that to have run in those events would have been the most important thing in the Klingon's life. Riker had won today, and that would be recorded. No matter what his next decision would be, he would still be today's winner.

Did the Olympics mean as much to him as it did to the Klingon? He loved running, but to see someone else's dream shattered by something that was only a secondary interest to him would have left an empty feeling inside him. The decision was easy to make. He wasn't going to take away the Klingon's most important dreams. It wasn't that important to Riker to run against the other worlds. He just enjoyed running; it was his pride that wouldn't let him accept defeat. He had little to prove. He was fast, and running against other worlds wouldn't make him any more than he already was, whether he won or lost.

It was easy to decide to drop out and let the Klingon have the Olympic place. He had nothing left to prove. Surely giving another life form, who had done really well and who needed so much to live out his dreams, was more important than doing something he already knew he was good at.

Riker told the judges his decision and then walked away, the rain soaking him. He felt good.

He knew he had made the right decision.



WHAT AN ENTERPRISE

by T.Q.

Characters Transporter Manager
 Head Driver
 Booking Clerk
 Tour Guide
 Chief Mechanic
 Tea-Lady
 Secretary
 YTS Trainee

Scene The General Office of a dilapidated coach hire company. The HEAD DRIVER and TEA-LADY are in conversation at one table, the MANAGER is half-buried in paperwork and the BOOKINGS CLERK is trying to make sense of a customer on the telephone. Enter TRAINEE and TOUR GUIDE, who sit and listen.

CLERK Yes, sir, we have two seats on the coach to Bath on Thursday... I see, sir. I am afraid I cannot help you there, sir, as the only seats left are in the smoking section of the coach. Well, sir, that will have to be arranged on the day as I have no power to move passengers from seats which they have already paid for, but if you wish to exchange seats with someone on the day then I am sure they will help. Thank you. (Puts phone down).

MANAGER What was all that about?

CLERK The customer wanted two non-smoking seats and all we had were two smoking seats. I suggested that he exchange places with another pair of passengers in order to...

MANAGER OK, I get the picture. Jonathan, when's that mystery tour due out?

DRIVER In about an hour.

TEA-LADY Where are you taking them?

MANAGER I'm sure we'd all like to know.

TOUR GUIDE Especially me.

DRIVER Well, I thought I'd go the long way round to Blackpool.

GUIDE For one moment I thought he was going to say Southport.

MANAGER Why's that?

GUIDE The last time he tried that we nearly ended up a submarine.

TRAINEE Eh?

DRIVER I took the wrong turning.

GUIDE What he means is that he had an argument with the Newburgh swing bridge.

DRIVER Stop exaggerating, Mike.

MANAGER I heard something about that. We had quite a few frightened passengers.

DRIVER It was all right when I took my car that way.

MANAGER There's quite a difference between a car and a 30-foot coach.

CLERK Excuse me, sir, but you have less than half a coach here.

MANAGER Eh?

CLERK The coach is less than half full. Should I add the passengers from tomorrow's mystery tour as well?

MANAGER No. They paid for tomorrow's tour and they will quite logically want to go tomorrow.

CLERK Oh.

Enter CHIEF MECHANIC.

MANAGER Well?

MECHANIC Fixed it, I think. What did you do to that coach? It looks like it's been through a hedge.

GUIDE It has.

DRIVER Don't exaggerate.

GUIDE I do not exaggerate. You hit a hedge during that 5000-point turn.

DRIVER: I give up.

MANAGER Any more tea, Marina?

TEA-LADY I suppose so. You'll have to calm down a bit, you two. I know we can't do much for Mike, that's just the way he is, but this company'll get on better if you don't argue so much. Poor Lee's furious at what you did to his favourite coach.

DRIVER OK, sorry.

MECHANIC Accepted.

MANAGER The tea-urn's broken as well.

MECHANIC Not again.

TEA-LADY Yes. Again.

The telephone rings.

CLERK Hello. Enterprise Coaches? Oh, hello again, sir. What? You would like to change your booking? That would be impossible sir, because we cannot advertise spare places at this time...

MANAGER What's the problem?

CLERK He now wishes to change his booking.

MANGER Here, let me talk to him. (Takes phone) Hello, can I help you? Yes, sir, I know you're booked on the coach for Bath but I'm afraid it's too late to alter the booking to go to Windsor tomorrow as the coach is full. I could give you a refund. Oh thank you, yes, sir. (Puts phone down).

DRIVER Well?

MANAGER He'll take a refund, thank God. I wish we didn't have so many customers like him.

GUIDE Me too. Remember that Italian we had, what was his name?

DRIVER Ferengi?

GUIDE That's him. Got very drunk and nearly wrecked Tiger Three. We were picking up bits of upholstery for a week.

MECHANIC It even got into the transmission.

MANAGER Mmmmm.

Enter SECRETARY.

TEA-LADY I wondered where you'd got to.

SECRETARY I've been sorting out the damage reports for Tiger Three and the repair bill for Tiger One after the altercation with the swing bridge. You do realise we need a 2 per cent fare increase to cover this?

MANAGER You're joking.

SECRETARY I wish I was. As things stand we're going to have to do something quickly or there won't be an Enterprise Coaches left to run.

MANAGER Suggestions?

DRIVER Sorry, can't help. Got to get Tiger One on the road. Come on, Mike.

Exeunt DRIVER and GUIDE.

TEA-LADY You could cut down on the petrol bill.

MANAGER And have shorter trips. Don't be ridiculous.

TRAINEE How about combining under subscribed trips?

MANAGER Shut up, Wil, you're sounding like him (indicates CLERK) now.

CLERK You could always purchase smaller coaches to make up for the lack of passengers ...

MANAGER (by now furious) When I want your opinions I'll ask for them, OK?

TEA-LADY Calm down, this is going nowhere.

MANAGER You're right, as always.

The radio crackles near the CLERK's head and he jumps slightly.

DRIVER (over radio) Tiger One mobile.

MANAGER Good.

DRIVER Er ... we have a slight problem, sir.

MANAGER What's that, Tiger One?

DRIVER We picked up a passenger in the yard, a Mr Ferengi?

MANAGER And?

GUIDE We've confined him in the coach lavatory, sir. He brought three bottles of Lambrusco with him and he's already drunk two.

MANAGER What're you going to do with him?

DRIVER Well, I thought I might make a slight detour.

MANAGER Where to?

DRIVER The nearest police station, drop him off there and get back to business.

In the background can be heard "Torna A Surriento" very flat.

MANAGER Is that him?

DRIVER It is.

MANAGER What do your other passengers think?

DRIVER I don't know, they've all got cotton wool in their ears.

The MANAGER laughs.

MANAGER Good thinking, Tiger One.

DRIVER It wasn't my idea, sir.

MANAGER No? Whose was it?

DRIVER One of the passengers, sir.

MANAGER Well thank him for me.

DRIVER Thank him yourself, he's the one who knocked Mr Ferengi out so we could lock him in the lavatory.

MANAGER Is he there?

PASSENGER I am, sir.

MANAGER You averted a nasty accident, Mr ...

PASSENGER My name is unimportant. The safety of your coach and its passengers is.

GUIDE I've never seen anyone knocked out like that before. Quick, silent and very effective.

PASSENGER It is something I learned a long time ago.

DRIVER Well thank you again.

PASSENGER There is no need to thank me. The coach was in danger and it was the logical thing to do.

MANAGER Tiger One, you'd better get going.

DRIVER Yes, sir. (Radio clicks off).

CLERK I would not mind meeting that fellow ... is that the correct word?

MANAGER It is. We'll make a booking clerk of you yet.

TRAINEE Wonder who he was?

CLERK His manner of speaking would indicate he is not from the local area.

MANAGER Agreed. Where, then?

DRIVER (on radio) Tiger one calling.

MANAGER Go ahead Tiger One.

DRIVER Sir, our mysterious passenger.

MANAGER What about him?

DRIVER He has a message for you.

MANAGER Go ahead.

GUIDE He won't say it so I will. "Live Long and Prosper."

MANAGER Peace and Long Life.

A "mm" in the background. Radio clicks off.

MANAGER Where did he come from?

TEA-LADY You know him?

MANAGER Oh yes, from a very long time ago.



DEJA-Q

Kicked out by your people,
To the Enterprise you came,
No longer immortal,
Life was no longer a game.

At first they didn't believe you -
After all, they'd met you before.
Now you need to know how to act Human,
So they let Data have that onerous chore.



It wasn't as easy as you thought,
You weren't used to working in a team;
And when they wouldn't let you take charge,
From your ears you could almost see the steam.

Now you're back amongst your people,
You're immortal once again,
You soon realise they're all glad to see you go,
For them your visit was rather a strain.



Christine Jones



A SACRED WORD

by

Sherry Golding

Captain's Log, Stardate 52494.9. A distress call has brought us to an unusual planet, Zion I, whose occupants are said to be the toughest fighters in the universe. It is believed that almost two thousand years ago some space travellers visited the planet. The son of the planet's leader has an unusual disease which, I believe, is not contagious.

I am transporting Dr Pulaski, Commander Riker and Lt Worf down to the planet, on Starfleet's orders. They are to attempt to find the cause of this unknown disease and if possible find a cure. If successful, it will be a wonderful scientific experience as it would allow us to take this new-found medical knowledge into other parts of the Galaxy, where, on unexplored planets, this disease may well exist. Dr Pulaski is hopeful, as I am, that this mission and examination will be a success, and a new medical and scientific development.

"Sir, away team reporting. Have been met by the planet's Vice President and are now on their way to the laboratories," said Lt Fletcher from Worf's station.

"Very well, Lieutenant," said Captain Picard, standing. "I'll be in my ready room if anyone should need me. Data, you have the bridge."

The crystals rained on the three Starfleet personnel as the Vice President, a huge muscular humanoid, led them to an old, seventeenth-century-Earth-style lab. Riker looked at Worf. Was science here that underdeveloped? After two thousand years?

The Vice President stopped and stepped in front of the two men. "Your Doctor is the only person permitted to stay. You will be shown round the grounds."

Riker began to speak, but Dr Pulaski silenced him with a show of her hand. "I'll be all right," she told him. "Can you show me the boy?" she asked.

The Vice President turned his head and Riker followed his gaze to see another huge humanoid, wearing a black pyjama-like suit, coming forward. He looked tough and alert; over his right arm he carried a long, evil-looking, thick-bladed sword.

"Go with the guard," the Voice President ordered. "He will show you the grounds."

"The grounds?" Worf's lip curled as he looked at the guard.

"Come with me," the guard said, his voice robot-like.

Worf's lip curled even further; Riker touched his arm. "Lieutenant, I think this guard wants us to go with him to the grounds."

"Yes, sir, I gathered that." Worf's voice was thick with disgust.

They were led through some raining crystals and then through a blinding white light. Some gardens appeared, beautiful crystal lakes, crystal trees... The sounds of Kai, the sounds of blades clashing, attracted Worf; he turned. To his right fought ten warriors, their swords dazzling under the lights, their kicks graceful but powerful, their - Worf stepped forward as if he were in a dream.

"Martial Arts, Commander! Laido... karate... kung fu - all combined - "

A guard turned sharply. Swiftly and deliberately he brought down a long knife towards Worf's face. The Klingon stepped back, reaching for his phaser. Another guard grabbed his arm to stop him. Riker quickly reached for his, and it was kicked from his hand. He looked up, shocked and confused. What? What was -

"You! You say the sacred word. That is forbidden!" said the first guard.

"Sacred word?" asked Riker. "Lt Worf was only talking about your style of fighting - our word for that is 'martial arts'. I don't - "

A knife came down near Riker's face. Riker looked at Worf, confused.

"That is forbidden word!" repeated the guard.

Riker looked at the guard; Worf looked at Riker. Martial Arts? A sacred word? Why? For what reason should a purely descriptive phrase be termed sacred?

A bell sounded in the distance. The practising warriors stopped... and froze as if they were stones. There was a long silence. Riker felt suddenly trapped, as if he was in a very crowded place. Only Worf seemed unaffected, unimpressed, as a man walked forward, calmly, radiating great power.

The leader!

"You." He looked from one to the other. "You have used the sacred word. It has been forbidden to use this word."

"That word, which you say is sacred, is not sacred to us," began Riker.

"How dare you say it is not sacred! For that, you will fight to the death - *your* death," the man said with quiet menace.

"It is only a word," argued Riker, his voice reasonable. "Only a name. A name is hardly worth killing for."

The knife became closer; so close that Riker nearly choked.

The leader obviously realised that an explanation was called for. "A book, 'The Martial Arts', was given to us by the Gods when life first began. All this world's knowledge, all that we know, we learned from the Word, and with it we became strong and invincible. We hold this word dear to our hearts. Unless you have permission, to speak it is disrespectful at best, sacrilege at worst."

"It is not the word which has given you power and skill; it is yourselves, what you have

developed by practising. The word by itself is meaningless," Riker insisted. "We also have known martial arts since life first began on Earth. The knowledge was given to you as it was given to us, not by Gods but by our ancestors, to defend ourselves from existing dangers. That is what martial arts is; defending ourselves, not competing against each other, not killing unless there is a good reason - "

"Your words grow more and more disrespectful. You will go to the fighting arena now - or we will destroy your Starship."

"They will not understand, Commander," said Worf.

Riker looked at him. "No, it doesn't seem as if they will," he replied angrily.

"Walk!" ordered a guard.

Riker shrugged and walked over to where the warriors still stood as if frozen. He looked at Worf. "Lieutenant - your communicator - "

"I thought of that, sir. It is not working."

Riker looked sharply at him. "Isn't - ?"

The warriors charged. Instinctively, Riker reached for his phaser. His heart raced; it wasn't there. Wham! A kick sent him flying backwards. He landed on his back and rolled out of the way as a sword came hurtling towards him. It hit the ground with a thud and Riker felt the earth shake as if from an earthquake. He scrambled up to see Worf belting a warrior in the face with the back of his hand. The warrior fell like a rock, blood spouting.

Riker dodged a powerful spinning kick and with incredible speed and skill, front-kicked a new opponent in the groin. The warrior dropped to his knees, screaming in pain. Riker turned - and felt as if steel had smashed him across the side of the head. He spun, blood blinding his left eye. Another blow! He fell to the ground like a rock, his ribs feeling as if they had been shattered. A blade came plunging towards him -

He rolled out of the way and it plunged into the earth. He looked up. Worf! Worf was behind Riker's opponent. Riker tried to stand but nausea and pain hit him. He fell again as Worf swung his opponent around and struck him with full force. He went flying and hit the ground like a sack of potatoes. Worf's lip curled as he looked round the warriors lying injured around him; beside some of his exercise programmes, this had been almost too easy. He reached down and helped Riker to his feet as the leader approached.

"Did you enjoy that, sir?" he growled.

The man stared, stone-faced, at him. "I should kill you."

"You are welcome to try," Worf said grimly. "But what will you achieve? Killing us will not change what we have said about your 'sacred word', sir, and will not change the fact that people do know this word, and speak it, over nearly all the Galaxy."

"No! How... "

"'Martial Arts', sir, is a military skill. Everyone who defends himself, everyone who knows how to fight, is a martial artist."

"You are profaning the sacred word again," hissed the man.

"Sacred. Yes, sir - to you; but we are not from your planet. What you believe is up to you, but don't expect others to follow your... religion. The Humans believe in freedom of choice and speech. They believe what they wish to believe in, sir."

"Not while you are on Zion I."

"We did not come here as unwelcome guests; we came here by invitation to see if we could help a sick boy. It was not our fault that your Vice President sent us to watch your men training, nor was it our fault that no-one told us of your laws until now."

The leader looked at him.

"Please restore communications with our ship - now," Worf finished.

There was a moment of silence, then the man nodded. "You and your Doctor may return to your ship. We no longer need your help. You are our enemies; we do not want you here."

"Enemies, sir? Is there reason to be?" asked Worf, honestly puzzled. He tapped his communicator. "Transporter room, beam up away team. One injured."

A flash of light rendered the men invisible. They, and Dr Pulaski, materialised on the transporter platform; Pulaski, still holding a medical instrument in her right hand, looked up with surprise.

"What's going on?" she asked angrily. "I didn't ask - "

"Doctor, Commander Riker needs your help," Worf interrupted her. She turned. One look at the bleeding Riker made her forget everything else. She rushed over.

The automatic doors opened to admit Captain Picard, who looked straight at Worf. "Lieutenant, Data has just informed me of an injury. "

"Commander Riker, sir," said Worf, glancing down at the First Officer.

Picard looked across at Riker, lying with Pulaski bending over him. "Worf? What happened?" he asked.

"I'll log in the full report, sir. Briefly, sir, those on Zion I have a 'sacred word' - 'Martial Arts'. They wanted to kill us to protect the name."

"'Martial Arts'? Why on Earth..."

"I will log a full report, sir."

Pulaski stood and punched a button on the wall. "I want a medical team in the transporter room immediately," she ordered.

Picard touched her arm. "Doctor?" he said.

"He'll live, Captain. A few broken ribs, concussion - "

The intercom chimed. "Captain Picard, the people below demand that we leave this area

immediately, because of our 'hostile attitude'."

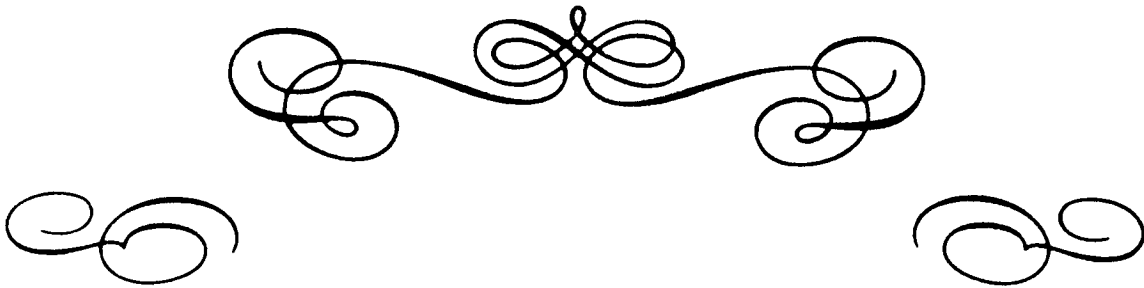
Picard pulled a face. "What - ?"

"Well, Captain, since our attitude is 'hostile', that boy will obviously die," said Pulaski sarcastically. She returned to Riker.

Picard watched her, confused and concerned, before crossing to the intercom. He hit a button. "Navigation, plot in a course away from here, anywhere, at warp four, and execute."

"Yes, sir," came the reply.

The ship shot forward smoothly and Picard left the transporter room silently and quickly.

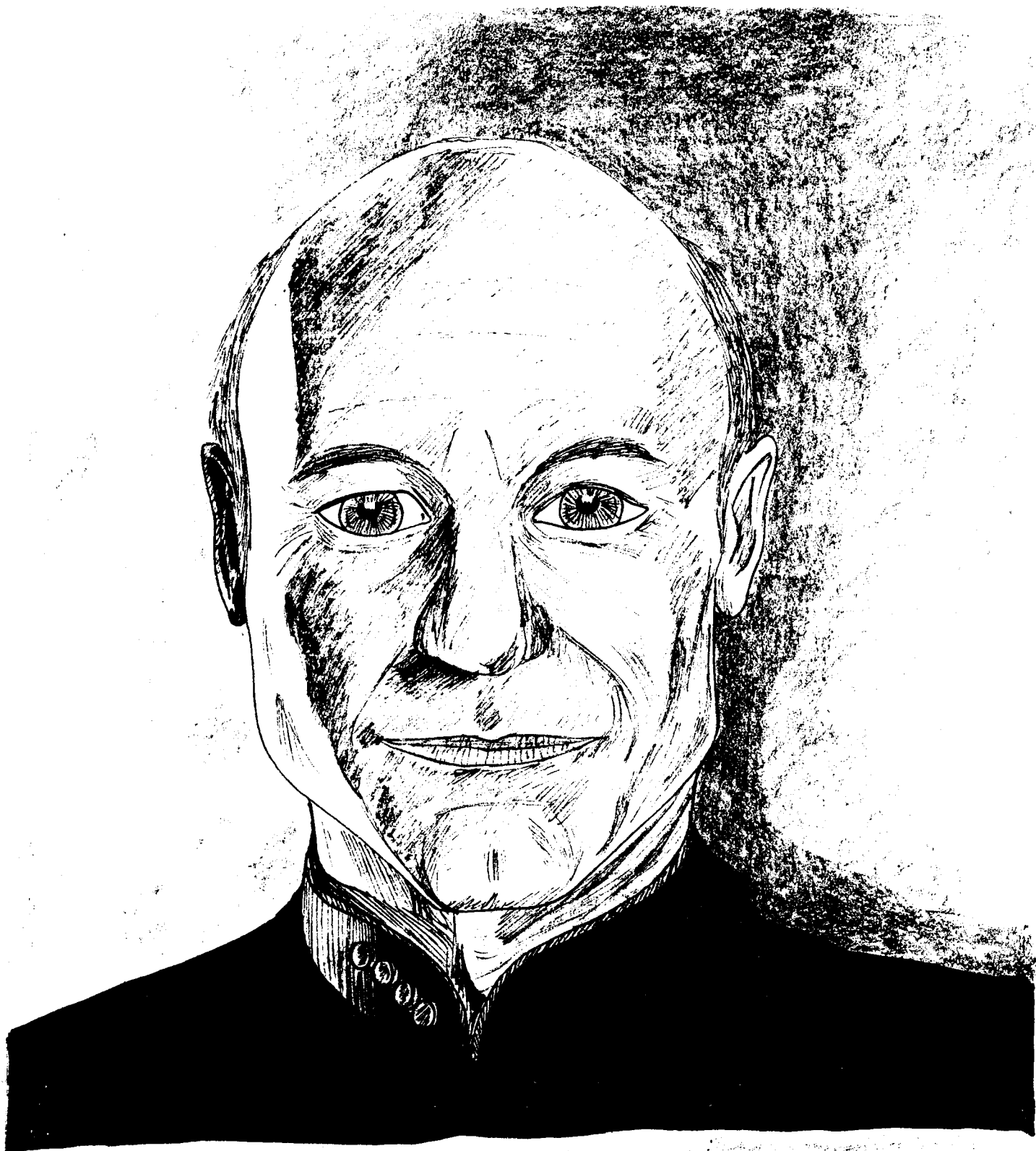


LAL

Created by one who claims unable to feel,
 Yet he gave you a name that means 'beloved'.
 Not quite flesh of his flesh,
 But still a part of him,
 He taught you a part of him,
 He taught you from his own experiences,
 As all parents do.
 Soon you learned more than he had -
 You learned to feel.
 But this ability was to bring about your death,
 No matter how hard he fought to save you.
 But all was not lost,
 A part of you was saved.
 You so enriched your father's life,
 That he transferred all your memories to himself,
 So that you would always be a part of him.

Christine Jones





FULL CIRCLE

by

Jacqueline Schmidt

She sat on the wall watching them. Why wouldn't they let her play with them? The ball landed at her feet; she jumped off the wall and picked it up. She held it out and he snatched it from her. Her foot hit his shin. That would teach him!

Just then her father called her in. There was no point in staying out if no-one was going to play with her.

"What were you playing?" her father asked her,

"Nothing, they wouldn't let me." He looked down at her sad face.

"Tomorrow we're going to see Uncle Robert - he's just come home." Her face lit up; he always brought her a present back with him. It was good to see her smile, which wasn't very often now. "Off to bed now," her father said.

She went to her room and got ready for bed. He would be in soon to tuck her in and to read her favourite story. She snuggled under the covers. Her eyes closed before he'd finished the story.

The following morning she got dressed and gobbled her breakfast down. "Hurry up, Daddy!" All through the journey she kept asking when they would get there.

"Soon," her father kept replying.

Her face lit up when she saw the house. It was always good when she visited it. Sometimes they went camping. As they pulled up outside the house she could see her uncle standing in front of it; with him was someone that she didn't recognize.

Her father got out first. She followed him, standing behind him, not quite knowing what to make of the stranger.

"Mouse," her uncle said. She hated that name. "This is Worf. He's part of our family now."

"Do you want to play?" she tried, smiling at him.

"I am a warrior,"

"I know how to climb trees. Do you?" He said nothing.

"Mouse, why don't you go see what I've got you, it's round the back. Worf, you go with Mouse," her uncle said.

Already she knew that he wasn't going to be much fun. When she saw her present her eyes lit up,

"Look what I've got. Just what I wanted!" In front of them was a small bundle of fur. "Do you like animals?" *Surely he must like something*, she thought.

"What is it?" he asked.

"A sehlat. They come from Vulcan." He looked at her; it meant nothing to him. "They're used as pets and guards. It's like a cross between a dog and a bear. Do you know what *they* are?"

"No."

"I'll show you a picture of them. There's a book inside." She lead the way back to the house, where she showed him pictures of different animals and where they came from.

Her father came into the house with her uncle. They were discussing where Worf should go to school.

"The problem is, I don't know how much he's already learned," her uncle said.

"Why don't I test him here?" her father said. Mouse sat there listening to what was being said.

"Let him test you here. It's better than at school," she whispered to Worf.

"Why?" he asked.

"He's the principal. Anyway, if you go to the same school as me I'll have someone to play with," Mouse said.

"I don't play with girls," Worf replied.

"Pig," Mouse said, annoyed at him. Worf pointed to a picture in front of them. Mouse couldn't stop laughing. Worf looked at her. He didn't understand what she was doing.

"All right you two, that's enough," her father said, looking at them. "Mouse, have you got a name for your pet yet?" he asked. Mouse looked at him. She hadn't thought about it.

"Worf can pick it," she said.

"But it's your pet. Worf?"

Worf looked at them then shrugged his shoulders; he wanted nothing to do with it. "Khalaas," he finally said.

"That's a good name," Mouse said, looking at her father.

"You can't call a sehlat Khalaas," her father said.

"Why not?" Mouse asked. "What about I.D.I.C.?" she went on defiantly. Her uncle

interrupted before her father could say anything else.

"I like it - it's certainly unusual," he said. Mouse stood there, a very determined look on her face. Her father knew just by looking at her that there was no point in arguing, and after all it was her pet. She bent down and picked the small bundle of fur up.

"I'll look after you, but Worf can play with you sometimes," she said.

"I don't want to play with you or your pet," Worf said. Mouse looked at him. She would sort him out later. No-one in the family spoke to her that way. There wasn't a lot that she could do about outsiders but he would have to learn the family's rules. Already she was thinking of ways to trip him up. Obviously he knew very little about the way that they lived, so she could have a lot of fun at his expense.

Finally they all sat down to eat. Mouse watched what Worf was eating - his food was different.

"Why's he got different?" she asked.

"Because some things we eat might make Worf ill. Do you want to try some?" her uncle asked.

She thought for a moment before saying, "Okay." Her uncle handed her a green pastry; she took a bite.

"It's good. Do you want some chocolate, Worf?" Mouse asked.

"After tea. You know the rules," her father reminded her.

"I'll give him a whole bar," she said.

"No you won't, you'll make him sick," her father said.

Worf just sat there listening. *How dare they talk about me as if I wasn't there!* He got up and went outside. Mouse shrank down in her seat.

"Worf, come back here now!" her uncle shouted.

"Please may I be excused," Mouse asked quietly. Her father nodded. She went outside to join Worf.

"Ignore them. All adults are the same." She held out a small packet. "Chocolate. Try it," she said.

"But..." Worf looked at her.

"What they don't know can't hurt them."

He took the packet from her and bit into it. It tasted sweet.

"You didn't take the wrapper off. Let me show you how," Mouse said taking the packet back. She unwrapped it then gave him it again.

"Now taste it. Better?" she asked.

Worf nodded. *Why is she bothering to be kind to me?*

"Don't eat it all at once or you'll be sick and I'll get into trouble."

"I don't like it here," Worf said,

"Why not? You've got a home and a family," Mouse asked.

"You aren't part of my family," Worf said, looking at her.

"I want my chocolate back now," Mouse said snatching it from him.

"You said..." Worf looked at her confused.

"I thought you were my friend. Now you're not I'm going to eat it myself," Mouse said angrily.

"I'll tell your father," Worf said. It was all so confusing for him.

"Go on, I don't care. If you don't like it here go home!" she shouted at him.

"I can't," he said loudly.

"Why not?" Mouse asked.

"It's gone," Worf replied.

"What do you mean, it's gone?" Mouse was wondering what he was talking about. Worf turned his back to her.

"Worf, tell me please," she begged.

"No." Why didn't she just leave him alone?

"Right, I won't speak to you ever again. Just wait until you go to school!" she shouted at him.

Worf spun round to face her. "What do you mean?" he asked cautiously.

"They won't like you either."

"Why?" he asked, wanting to know more.

"You don't even *look* Human."

"You look Human to me," he said. What was she talking about?

"And what do you know? I'm a Travain, I can fly. You can't," Mouse said defiantly.

"No-one can," Worf said, not believing her.

"Watch this," Mouse said. She undid her jacket and stretched out. "See, they're my wings," she went on. The next time that Worf looked at her she was gone. "Up here!" He looked up. He found it hard to believe that she had been telling the truth.

"I want to do that," he said.

Mouse laughed at him and said, "You can't, you haven't got wings."

"Come down from there now,"

"Father." Mouse landed next to Worf.

"You know the rules. No flying." She could tell that he was angry with her.

"I was just showing Worf," she tried to explain.

"You should know better by now. What if someone had seen you?" her father looked at her.

"If they start anything I'll hit them," she said looking at him.

"You will do no such thing," her father said, shaking his head.

"They're stupid thinking I'm different," Mouse said.

"Things are hard enough for you as it is without you causing more trouble for yourself." What was he going to do with her?

"Why do they hate me so much?" she asked, looking at her father.

"People hate what they can't or don't want to understand," her father said.

"Worf's different. Will they hate him as well?" Mouse asked.

"No more questions. Inside now," her father said. He followed them inside. Mouse pulled a face at him. "I saw that."

When they went inside her uncle was waiting for them. "Time you were tested, Worf," her uncle said.

"What about me?" Mouse asked, not wanting to be left out.

"Okay, you as well, Mouse. Now remember, do your best. That's all I ask of you," her father said.

"I'll beat you," Worf said, boasting.

"You won't," Mouse said. Who did he think he was? She was the best in her class! She'd show him.

They sat down to do their tests in different rooms. Once they'd finished them her father marked them. Mouse sat there waiting for him to tell her how she'd done.

"Worf, you scored the same as Mouse. That means you'll be in her class. It will take some time for the other students to get to know you." *If ever*, her father thought to himself. Mouse's tormentors now had someone else to pick on. There was no doubt in his mind that Worf could handle anyone who was out to get him.

Mouse and her father left, taking Khalaas with them. She didn't see Worf again until a few days later when he entered the classroom where she was sitting.

"We have a new student. His name is Worf. I'm sure that you will all do your best to help him settle in," her teacher said.

Worf looked around the room. The only one who was smiling was Mouse.

"Go take the seat next to Polly."

He looked around. Who was Polly? There was only one empty seat and that was next to Mouse; he walked over and took his seat.

"Where were we?" the teacher asked. Mouse raised her hand.

"Yes, Polly?"

"The first contact with the Romulans."

"That's right."

The word 'Romulans' made Worf fill with anger. He sat there in silence as they were told how the war had started and the number of casualties and the outcome of it.

"You must understand that the Romulans, despite being our enemy, had logic on their side. To them we were intruding in their space," the teacher explained.

Finally Worf couldn't take any more. He stood.

"Worf, sit down. If you have something to say please raise your hand."

He remained standing. "The Romulans are butchers," he said.

"Worf, sit down now," the teacher said. Mouse then stood up next to him. If he hated the Romulans so did she.

"Polly, sit down," her teacher ordered

"No, I want to learn about Klingon history," she said defiantly.

Her teacher looked at her, shocked. "That is not on the study plan," the teacher said.

"What about Travain and Vulcan history? That's what I want to learn not about the bloody Romulans," Mouse said loudly.

"You will not use that sort of language in my classroom." Her teacher glared at her as she said it.

"So when do we get to do them?" Mouse asked.

"They are not on the study plan - as you well know," the teacher tried to explain.

"Why not?" Mouse asked.

"It is not the school's policy, that is why." *This child is a troublemaker*, thought the teacher. Something would have to be done about her, and the sooner the better.

"Then the school is breaking the law. Under the articles of the Federation - I quote, 'Every sentient being shall receive education to the highest standard which will'," she took a deep breath then continued, "'will contain both cultural and historical information about their race of origin'," Mouse finished speaking, then she looked at her teacher who had gone very pale. Worf looked at her. It was his fight, not hers, yet he admired her knowledge.

"Class will now have a break," her teacher said somewhat shakily. Now Polly had gone too far, quoting the articles of the Federation at her! If they'd known what she was they never would have given her father the position. The whole family was dangerous.

Mouse stood against a wall watching the rest of the class playing. No-one ever bothered to ask her. She knew why. It didn't bother her much now - after all as soon as she was old enough she was going to apply to enter Starfleet. In the meantime they couldn't stop her from trying to set them straight. She had learned from her uncle what people like her teacher were called: bigots and xenophobes. He'd said that after being asked to see Mark's teacher. He'd been asked to write an essay on who he would like to be, and he'd written that he'd like to be a Travain like his cousin. There had been a lot of arguments over it. Now Mark went to school off-planet where there were all sorts of different people living together. That was the sort of place where she wanted to go, not have to stay where they called her names.

Worf stood on his own. He had no need for friends - they were a liability to a warrior. He noticed that Mouse was also standing on her own. The next time that he looked there was a crowd round her, shouting. "So you think you're better than us, do you?" one of the crowd taunted.

Mouse looked around. There were so many more than before! "At least I have a brain - not like you," she replied. Then a hand struck her face. It drew blood. She took a deep breath and counted to ten. She wasn't going to let them drag her down to their level - besides, she'd promised her father no more fighting, no matter what happened.

"Pretty Polly, Polly want a cracker!" they started to shout, then they started to hit her. *How much longer will they carry on?* she thought. She was starting to feel dizzy.

"Worf, help me please," she managed to cry out before collapsing on the floor. Worf ran to where she lay. Now they were kicking her. He tried to drag them off her.

"Go home, Klingon!"

Worf growled. They ignored him, then he started to hit them. Screams filled the playground as they ran. He caught up with them and continued to hit them. Their teacher came out, alerted by all the noise.

"Stop that at once! We're not Klingon savages here!" her teacher barked.

Worf went over to where Polly was; she started to get up. "He's not a savage, you are," Mouse shouted.

"Inside at once," her teacher ordered. Worf helped Polly to her feet.

"You will both be punished for fighting," her teacher said.

"But - " Mouse started to protest.

"No buts. We don't want your sort here."

"We have the right to live where we want. Bigot!" Mouse screamed. Worf looked at her. He couldn't believe what she was doing, but in a way she was fighting back.

"You are under my care, and as long as you are you will do as I say." The teacher glared at her.

"Xenophobe!" Mouse screamed at the top of her voice.

"So you think you're better than me, do you? Who do you think your father is going to believe?" her teacher asked.

"Me. I never lie," Mouse said, standing her ground.

"Really. The sooner you leave the better. And that goes for the savage as well," her teacher said.

"Tough, I'm not leaving. Are you, Worf?" Polly asked.

"No, a warrior does not leave a fight unless through death," he replied.

"Coo," Polly said, then she turned her attention back to her teacher. "You don't teach that a Travain found this world, do you?" she said.

"That is not true," the teacher objected.

"I should know, it was a member of my family who found it!" Polly said.

They were then both marched to her father's office. He remained seated as the teacher told him what had happened.

"Polly," he finally said, "did you call your teacher a bigot?"

She looked at the floor. "Well, she is", she replied quietly.

"That is not the sort of behaviour that I expect from you. Worf, did you hit the other children on purpose?"

"They started it. They hurt Polly," Worf tried to explain.

"You should have told someone," her father said.

"Who?" Worf asked.

"Another teacher," her father said, knowing that this would have done no good at all; yet he had to be seen to punish them. "You are both suspended from classes for two weeks. I hope that this will teach you to behave better in future."

Polly's teacher tried to object.

"I don't see anyone who hit Polly here for punishment," he said.

"Er, well... " the teacher muttered.

"That will be all," her father finally said.

As soon as they had left his office Polly smiled,

"Why are you doing that?" Worf asked her.

"The holidays start tomorrow, so we don't miss any classes," she said.

"And after that?" Worf wanted to know what she was going to do.

"We teach them a proper lesson in manners," she answered.

"Your father... " Worf said.

"I can twist him and Uncle Robert round my little finger. Don't worry."

She has a point, he thought, they can't do much more to us. Still, they would have to be careful not to make things too rough for themselves.

Together, they spent their holidays on guard in case anyone started trouble. One or two of the others tried it but came off worst. Then it was time for them to go back to school. Things were easier now, the others had been warned off by their parents who wanted no part in the 'feud'. They continued their studies, coming top in everything. When it was time for the entrance exam to the Academy they were both lucky enough to get in. It was what both of them wanted.

When they first arrived at the Academy there were those who made comments about Worf being a Klingon, but that was as far as it went. Once they realised that he was good at what he wanted to make his career they left him alone. Polly studied hard trying to make sure that she could get into the legal service.

Whenever they had time off Worf practised, but occasionally they went out from the Academy, especially during the holidays. As it was too far to return home they stayed on Earth. Often Polly would drag him to all sorts of places. To her, he no longer seemed to be just her cousin. He was, she thought, someone very special.

Then suddenly Klingons were in fashion, so if you were seen with one you were very popular. Overnight everyone wanted to be seen talking to her and Worf. This stopped them from relaxing, not that Worf ever did much of that. That was the one thing about him, he was always working; she didn't know how he did it. Their final exams came and went, they both received high grades, then they had to go their separate ways.

"Don't worry, I'll write and tell you everything that happens, if you will," Polly said, looking at Worf.

"There will not be time to write," Worf said stiffly.

"Make time for me. Please," Polly said.

"I will see," Worf replied. Polly hugged him.

"See you soon, Worf," she said just before she left. That was very doubtful as they were going to be stationed so far away from each other. Polly kept her promise and wrote to him; his letters arrived regularly, filled with all the things that he had done. If anyone else had written them she would have accused them of boasting, but she knew him better than that.

Her life in contrast seemed very dull and predictable. She never got the chance to go far and until she got higher up that was the way it was likely to stay; still, she had made her own choice of career.

Then it happened. She got her chance to travel. They needed someone who spoke Travain. Now she could really show them what she could do when given the chance. Why they needed a translator she didn't understand - still, they were very important so they got what they wanted.

"Now you understand the importance of this mission. It's to ratify a treaty," her boss, Commodore Brown, explained.

"Of course, sir," Polly replied. She hated it when he talked down to her.

"The lady in question is... shall we say, rather elderly, so at no time are you to upset her," Brown continued

"Of course, sir." As if she didn't know how to behave properly!

"The treaty was arranged over eighty years ago, but it has never been ratified," Brown said, looking at her.

"May I ask why, sir?" Polly said.

"There were unusual circumstances involved," Brown said. Polly knew better than to ask any further when he was in this frame of mind. Still, whatever the reasons they had to have been good ones.

When everything was packed Polly waited nervously as they were beamed up to the Enterprise. Now she would be able to see him again - that was if they could both get time off together.

"Captain Picard, may I introduce my assistant, Lt. Adams," Brown said, smiling.

"Sir," Polly replied.

"This is my First Officer, Commander William Riker, and Lt. Worf, Head of Security," Picard said.

"Sir - " Polly wondered if she had spoken out of turn - "I already know Lt. Worf. We were at the Academy together," she said nervously.

"You did not mention this earlier," Brown said, looking at her strangely.

"I didn't think that it was important, sir," Polly replied.

"Is there anything else that I should know?" Brown asked.

"No, sir," Polly knew that he was upset with her by the tone of his voice.

"I don't like surprises," Brown said harshly.

Then Riker spoke. "If you will follow me I will escort you to your quarters,"

"Is the Admiral on board yet, Captain?" Brown asked casually.

"He arrived on board shortly before you did," Picard replied.

"If you could arrange a meeting for me? There is a great deal to discuss," Brown explained. He was going to upset a lot of people before they arrived at Travai. Polly looked at him. There was something going on, something that she hadn't been told about - still, she was only his assistant so he wouldn't tell her everything in any case. She racked her brain trying to think of which Admiral it was, then it came to her in a flash.

She'd heard about him in history and about his connections with Travai. He had to have something to do with the treaty, especially if it was so important to the Federation. All this meant was extra work for her, while her so-called 'boss' got all the glory that went with such an important mission. Still, she would get to see something of Worf, even if it was just for a few hours.

Once Riker had shown them to their rooms she realised what she had in store for her. Hers was nothing more than an office with a bed in it,

"I hope that your room is satisfactory," Riker said politely.

"Yes, thank you, Commander. It's fine," she replied half-heartedly. If this was what she was expected to put up with then she'd just have to manage somehow. Still it could be worse, she told herself, but not much. One day when she was as important as *him*, she wouldn't allow her assistant to have anything as small as this. *No wonder he gets through more assistants than anyone else*, she thought to herself, *especially if he treats them like this*.

"I'm in the next room, if you have any problems," Brown said, smiling at her.

"I'm sure that there won't be any, sir," Polly replied.

"I expect that report to be finished by the time that I return from my tour of the ship," Brown said.

"Is there anything else after that, sir?" Polly asked, dreading the reply.

"No, just complete it then get ready to meet the Admiral," Brown said.

"Yes, sir," Polly replied. She waited until he'd gone into his room before smiling. She quickly completed the report, then she went for a walk. She had to be careful in case he saw her and decided to give her something else to do as he usually did. Still she could have something to eat instead of snatching the odd snack when she could find the time. That was the main problem with being his assistant - you didn't get a great deal of sleep or time off. Often she'd thought of transferring to someone else, even a Vulcan would have been better than Brown. In all the time that she had worked for him she'd never seen him eat or relax a great deal, not even at the functions she had to attend with him. Then she noticed that it was

nearly time for him to return from his tour. Quickly she returned to her room and got changed into her dress uniform. It always felt uncomfortable especially around her back; still she was expected to wear it. That was one of the other legal things about the job she disliked. Despite all its faults, however, she enjoyed working in the legal department.

When she stepped out of her room he was standing waiting for her.

"You are late," Brown said.

"I'm sorry, sir. The report is completed," Polly replied.

"Tidy yourself up," Brown continued. She looked at her uniform. There wasn't anything wrong with it, still, she straightened it. *Anything for a quiet life*, she thought to herself.

"Better. Remember the Admiral is a very important person. Let me do all the talking, and speak only when spoken to," Brown said, looking at her disapprovingly.

"Of course, sir. Is there anything else that I should know?" Polly asked.

"He has not brought his assistant so you will serve as his as well as mine," Brown said. Polly could swear that he was gloating about it. *How dare he!* she thought to herself. She had enough work to do as it was, never mind doubling it.

"Who do I take orders from?" Polly asked; she wanted to know whose came first.

"The Admiral, then me. You will not allow it to interfere with your work for me." Polly looked at him. *No time off* was what he really meant - *still it can't really be helped*, she told herself. Maybe when they reached Travai she might be able to relax.

Polly walked behind Brown to the Admiral's quarter's. The door opened and she took a deep breath.

"Sir, I hope that we aren't disturbing you," Brown said, smiling.

"Not at all. Please come in," the Admiral said. Polly looked at him. He looked pleasant enough - still, appearances could be deceptive. She stood until she was asked to take a seat. She could tell from the look on Brown's face that he wasn't very pleased. *It serves him right*, she thought, *for acting so important*.

"This is my assistant, Lt. Adams," Brown said, introducing Polly.

"It is a great honour to meet you, sir," Polly said nervously.

"What a charming assistant you have," the Admiral replied. Polly blushed.

"The reason I am here is to discuss the treaty." Brown assumed an air of importance.

"She is still being stubborn about it. But then she always was stubborn," Admiral Chekov said reminscently.

Polly watched as Brown stood up and started to pace up and down the room.

"It is vitally important that it is signed straight away. It has been left for too long," Brown stated.

"I know all that, but she is within her rights to refuse to sign it at this late stage. She just needs more time," Chekov explained.

"We do not have time," Brown declared.

"Then make it," Admiral Chekov said. Polly had never seen anyone stand up to her boss before. He was caught in a trap - he had to have the treaty signed, but he couldn't risk upsetting anyone important.

"I'll leave the details to Lt. Adams," Brown said, then he left.

"Pompous, isn't he," Chekov said.

Polly looked at the floor then spoke. "It's not my place to say, sir."

"The Lady Cho San is still very cautious about the Klingons," he explained.

"Many people are," Polly agreed.

"You're not, are you?" Chekov asked bluntly.

"No, sir, they're different, that's all," she replied.

"They are still warlike," the Admiral continued.

"Not all are." Had she said the right thing? "I meant no offence, sir," she said, apologizing.

"I'm sure that none was intended. I have known the Lady Cho San for a very long time," he said. Polly noticed that whenever he said her name he smiled.

"I read about her before we set off on this mission," Polly explained.

"Then you understand her misgivings," Chekov said. Polly nodded although she didn't understand why he was telling her all this.

"Cho San is very special," he went on. There had been rumours about just how close they had been, but there were so many rumours that you didn't know which ones were true. Still, it gave her something to talk about when she had some free time. "We met a very long time ago on another Enterprise. I was an Ensign then," the Admiral continued.

Polly looked at him. She found it hard to imagine him ever being an Ensign, but he must have been once. "We become good friends but she had other duties that came first." Chekov smiled as he said it. "We must get on with the preparations. Security is the main issue," he added.

"Perhaps Lt. Worf could be of some assistance," Polly suggested.

"He should have some ideas as to how to best protect the delegates," Chekov said. Polly looked at him. That was the first that she had heard about any delegates.

"Delegates, sir?" she said, surprise in her voice.

"He didn't tell you, did he?" Polly shook her head. "Cho San wants as many as possible

of those she knew in Starfleet to be there," the Admiral explained.

"Is that why you are going back, sir?" Polly asked.

"You can imagine what would happen if Travai were attacked during the signing," the Admiral said. It was too awful to even try to imagine. "Starfleet tried to stop her from going ahead with the idea. They had to back down in order for her to sign the treaty," the Admiral continued.

"Do you wish me to send for Lt. Worf now, sir?" Polly asked.

"Yes, the sooner this is sorted out the better," Chekov replied.

Polly touched her com badge. "Have Lt. Worf come to the Admiral's quarters immediately," she said. A few minutes later Worf appeared.

"Sir, this is Lt. Worf," Polly explained. The Admiral looked straight at him.

"Sir," Worf said.

"Lieutenant, I want you to arrange extra security for the delegates on Travai. You will work with Lt. Adams on this matter," the Admiral said. He then handed Polly plans to the palace. "You may go now," he said, dismissing them.

"Sir," they replied in unison, then they left. As they did so Polly wondered if the Admiral had planned it like this on purpose. Still, you didn't question the motives of an Admiral.

"You do realise that we will have to spend a great deal of time working together on this," Polly said casually.

"Yes," Worf replied stiffly.

"First I need to go to my boss for a list of the delegates attending," Polly explained.

"I am never off duty so any time you wish to discuss the arrangements is suitable," Worf said.

When they got to her room, Brown was waiting for her.

"This report was not prepared correctly. Do it again," he said.

"Sorry, sir, it will be ready for you in a few minutes," Polly said, apologizing.

"What's he doing here?" Brown asked, looking straight at Worf.

"The Admiral has requested the Lieutenant's assistance in providing security for the delegates," Polly explained.

"Remember that my work takes precedence," Brown warned her.

"There will be no treaty signing unless everything is arranged according to the Lady Cho San's wishes," Polly said. She only just heard him say, "Damn Klingons," as he left her room.

"Ignore him," Polly said, handing a list of delegates to Worf. She then sat down and put

her feet on her desk.

"Should you not be doing the report?" Worf asked.

"There's nothing wrong with it. I'll take it in to him again in a few minutes," Polly said smiling at him. "He'll never notice it's the same one." This was going to be a lot more fun than she had at first thought. As long as she did what the Admiral wanted she was all right - after all, *he* couldn't really tell the Admiral off, could he?

"Worf, have you eaten yet?" she asked, almost as an afterthought.

"No." Worf looked at her.

"Would you care to have dinner with me? Purely business," she said, reassuring him.

"Where? Here?" Worf asked.

"No, I can't eat in here, it's too small," Polly explained.

"Ask for a bigger room," Worf replied.

"I don't want to cause trouble when I've only just come on board," Polly said.

"There is enough room in my office," Worf said. "We will not be disturbed there," he continued.

"Good idea, Worf," Polly said, smiling at him. Worf carried the list of delegates and the plans of the palace while Polly walked by his side. Several people looked at him as they walked down the corridor. *We must*, she thought to herself, *look unusual*. Finally they reached his office; it was so much bigger than hers.

"What would you like to eat?" Worf asked her.

"Anything, as long as it takes ages to eat. I need to get away from *him* for a while," Polly said.

"If you dislike him so much why do you stay in your position with him?" Worf asked.

"No-one else will work for him. Still, at least it got me to see you again didn't it?" Polly replied.

"And Khalaas?" Worf asked.

"He's on Vulcan with my father. He loves every minute of it," she said. Worf handed her a steaming mug of coffee; she tasted it.

"That's better. I don't get much time to eat or do anything else lately," she said.

"What arrangements did the Admiral have in mind?" Worf asked.

"Something discreet but you know it's there." Polly wondered if she had said it the right way.

"Why so much for a simple treaty signing?" Worf asked. He needed to know everything

that she did.

"A lot of Starfleet's top people are going to be there," Polly explained.

"So Cho San is a very important person," Worf said.

"Very important. Travai is still very rich in dilithium. But the treaty that allows mining was never signed. So she could, if she wished, stop the mining at any time," Polly explained. Worf looked at her. "There are a lot of people who would give anything for the mining rights. The Romulans, the Ferengi, for instance," Polly continued.

"The Romulans would not risk it," Worf stated.

"The Ferengi would," Polly said.

"Surely she knows what the Ferengi are like," Worf said.

"She is a very stubborn person, according to the Admiral, and who should know better than him?" Polly said.

"The Commodore does not like me." Worf changed the subject.

"He doesn't like anyone, full stop. He got a dressing down from the Admiral for trying to rush Cho San into signing the treaty." Polly smiled as she said it, remembering what had happened.

"I do not trust him," Worf said, making his opinion clear.

"I know, there's something different about him. He never lets down his guard. I've never seen him relax once - it's as if he doesn't have to," Polly said complainingly.

"That is an admirable quality," Worf said.

"Worf, it's not natural for a Human to be like that. They don't have your Klingon stamina," Polly said.

"You should complain," Worf said.

"I'm stuck with him - at least for the moment. He does very little of the work and gets all the credit. Still, he might just get his comeuppance soon," Polly said hopefully.

Worf wondered what she had in mind. Nothing that was going to cause *him* trouble, he hoped. "Do not make things too harsh for yourself," he warned her.

"Just like my father always says," Polly said. Not that anything could make things worse than they were at the moment. In fact her plan might just make them better. After all he couldn't replace her without the Admiral asking a lot of very awkward questions and that might just put the treaty on hold, especially if Cho San got to hear about it - which she would.

Together they worked out a plan that would protect the delegates if there were attacks from the air and ground at the same time. Worf was covering for all eventualities - it was, in his view, better to be over-prepared than leave anything to chance. After all there were a great many things that could go wrong with so many important people there.

"All we need to do now is get the Admiral to okay these plans, then I can start on the draft treaty," Polly explained.

"That means you will have less time for rest," Worf said looking at her.

"I'll manage somehow, but if you want to you can always make sure that I get some time off," she suggested.

"That is not part of my duties," he replied stoically.

"So lie. Say that you want to check on the security arrangements," Polly said, wondering if he *would* visit her. If he did it, there would be the bonus of giving her a chance to get away from the Commodore for a while.

"I will consider what you have said," Worf said escorting her out of his office. "I have other duties to attend to," he explained.

"See you later, Worf," Polly said, as she left.

"Perhaps," he said. Worf then returned to the bridge.

"Did everything go as expected, Lieutenant?" Picard asked when Worf took up his station on the bridge.

"Yes, sir," he replied.

"I understand that Lt. Adams is working as his assistant," Picard said.

"Yes," Worf replied.

"She must be a very capable person," Picard commented. Worf wondered why his Captain should be interested in Polly.

"She has always been so in my view, sir," Worf said.

"That is good to hear, Lieutenant," Picard said.

She has always been able to carry out her duties in a very professional way, thought Worf. If she needed help she was not afraid to ask for it, unlike others he knew.

Polly sat in her room thinking of ways to take some of the credit away from Brown. It would be difficult, yet the Admiral would surely testify that it was she who had done the bulk of the work. She took a deep breath; she still had a great deal of work to look forward to when they reached Travai, for she would have to translate for the rest of the delegates. There had to be some other reason why she was chosen to go - she didn't even speak it fluently, and there were universal translators. She'd often wished that she could have learned more about her mother's culture, but other things had got in the way of her doing so, mainly the amount of work that Brown continually gave her. If anything went wrong then it would be her fault alone, not his, then her career would be over before it had even got started properly. Why was he so strange compared to all the other people that she knew and had met? She would have to find out later. If it was anything remotely important she would report it to the Admiral immediately. He was certainly a very special person; as well as being high up in Starfleet he

was also an important link to Cho San. Just what exactly had gone on between them was still being debated because no-one dare ask either one straight out. One thing was certain, they both had a great deal of power.

While Polly sat there waiting for *him* to come and check her work, she picked up the list of delegates attending the signing. So many important people, all of whom were connected to Starfleet in one way or another. If anything happened...

She tried to stop herself thinking about the worst scenario. Worf was in charge of the extra security - there was no way that anyone could get past *his* precautions. Her mind started to wander. What if there was a spy? It wasn't uncommon for someone to be working for either the Romulans or the Ferengi. They would love to get rid of most of Starfleet's leaders in one go.

It is, she thought, pointless speculating on what might happen. The ship might be hit by something or the engines could implode - there is nothing certain in life. She knew that through long experience.

Brown paced up and down in his room. The Klingon was not in his plans. He would have to discredit him somehow. His masters would not be pleased if he failed this simple task... at least, it had been simple to start with. He would have to come up with an alternative plan before they reached Travai. If he could get his hands on the security arrangements for the palace then he might just succeed. Then he realised - all he had to do was to ask Adams for the plans and she would give them to him!

Brown went to her room. "Have you finished that report yet?" he asked. Polly handed it to him.

"I'm going to need the plans for the palace's security to check that everything is in order," Brown said casually.

Polly looked at him. "I'm sorry, sir. They've already gone to the Admiral for his approval," she said, hoping that she didn't look as if she was lying.

"You did what?" Brown shouted at her in outrage. This made things even more complicated.

"I thought it would be all right, sir," Polly said.

"Make a copy then bring it to me in my room," Brown ordered her.

"Yes, sir," Polly replied.

Brown then stormed from her room. Polly watched him leave. There was definitely something wrong, but what it was she couldn't quite work out. She would have to talk to Worf about it later before she took any action. If she acted before she had real proof then things would look very bad for her and Worf. Polly then left her room and took the security plans to the Admiral. She decided that she would have to mention Brown's orders to him.

"I thought you should know, sir," she said, "the Commodore wants a copy of the security plans."

"Under no circumstance give him a copy," the Admiral said firmly.

Polly looked at him. "May I ask why, sir?"

"No," the Admiral replied.

"What about Captain Picard?" Polly asked.

"No-one but the three of us are to see those plans until we get to Travai," he explained.

"Yes, sir. Will there be anything else?" Polly waited for his reply.

"Just keep me informed of what the Commodore does," the Admiral said.

"You mean spy on him, sir?" Polly said, surprised.

"Granted it is unusual, but it is important. Take no risks; if he starts to suspect anything inform me, and I will take matters further."

"Yes, sir," Polly said, then left the room. *So there is something going on*, she thought to herself. She didn't really like the idea of spying on her boss, but if that was what the Admiral wanted her to do she would follow his orders. Polly headed for the nearest turbolift - she needed to talk to Worf now rather than later. He would know what to do.

"Bridge." Polly took a deep breath and waited for the turbolift to reach its destination. Then she stepped out of it.

"Excuse me, sir. I need to have a word with Lt. Worf," Polly said.

"Of course, Lieutenant," Picard said.

"If I could use your ready room?" Polly asked.

Picard looked at her. "I'm sure you have nothing to discuss that cannot be said in front of the rest of the bridge crew," he said.

"I'm sorry, sir, but I am acting on orders given by the Admiral," Polly explained.

"In that case, of course," Picard said. If he was annoyed by the Admiral's apparent lack of trust he gave no sign of it.

Polly went into his ready room, Worf following her.

"Is it safe to talk in here?" Polly asked.

"There are no listening devices," Worf replied.

"Good. I have to spy on the Commodore for the Admiral. He doesn't trust him," Polly explained briefly.

"You need my help," Worf said.

"I want to make sure that he doesn't find out what I'm up to," Polly said.

"And if the Captain asks what I am doing?" Worf said. It was a problem for him.

"You are acting on the Admiral's instructions and that he is to ask him," Polly said.

"Captain Picard will want to see the security plans," Worf said.

"Tell him the same thing about those," Polly said. "If necessary give them to someone you trust not to look at them," she told him. "Then you can truthfully say you do not have them."

"There is someone," Worf said.

"Good. I will see you later," Polly said, smiling at him as she left the room. "Thank you so much for the use of your ready room," she told Picard.

"Is there anything else that I can do for you?" Picard asked.

"No, sir." Polly threw a glance at Worf, who had returned to his station. She got into the turbolift and left the bridge.

Picard watched as she left, then he too looked at Worf.

"Lieutenant, can you explain what is going on?" he asked.

"You will have to ask the Admiral, sir. I am acting on his orders," Worf replied.

Picard hated puzzles. "Number One, you have the bridge. I'm going to find out what is going on," Picard said.

"Aye, sir," Riker replied.

Picard left the bridge. There would have to be a good reason for all this secrecy - though if the Admiral would not tell him, there was very little that he could do about it. When he reached the Admiral's quarters the door was already open. Picard went in. There was blood everywhere.

"Sickbay! Emergency, Admiral's quarters," he said, pressing his com badge. He saw the Admiral's body lying on the bed, and felt for a pulse. Nothing. How could it have happened on his ship? Who had done such a thing and, more importantly, why?

The team from Sickbay arrived as did a Security team. There was nothing that they could do - the Admiral had been dead for some time before Picard had entered the room. An investigation would have to start straight away. Whoever had done it had been certain of not getting caught in the act.

Worf stood outside the Admiral's quarters waiting for Picard to speak.

"Lieutenant, do you have any idea who might have done this?" Picard asked him.

"No, sir," Worf replied. He had his suspicions but was not certain, so he said nothing.

"Have Lt. Adams see me now," Picard ordered.

"Yes, sir," Worf said. *How could Picard suspect Polly of doing something like this? She hated violence... and anyway she hadn't had time to do it.*

Polly stood in front of Picard, waiting for him to accuse her. She was surprised when he didn't. Was it a trap? Would Worf tell him what the Admiral had said? Then she realised who had had the chance to do it.

"Lt. Adams, I don't like having to do this," Picard said.

"I understand, sir," Polly said.

"When did you last see the Admiral?" Picard asked.

"When I took him the security plans earlier," Polly replied.

"Do you have the security plans now?" Picard asked.

"No, sir. After the Admiral had seen them I gave them to Lt. Worf as ordered," Polly continued.

Picard looked at her. He couldn't very well ask her straight out whether she'd killed the Admiral or not.

"You will be detained in the brig until this..." Picard paused for a moment... "murder has been solved." Polly looked at him, shocked. What was happening? "Lieutenant, I don't like this at all," Picard went on.

"I understand, sir. It is your duty. Just... watch out for the Commodore," she said.

"Explain that remark, Lieutenant," Picard said. There was something that she wasn't telling him.

"The Admiral didn't trust him," Polly said. What would it take for him to believe her?

"Lt. Worf, escort Lt. Adams to the brig," Picard ordered.

"Sir?" Worf looked at Polly then at his Captain.

"That is an order, Lieutenant," Picard said.

"Yes, sir," Worf replied. Polly looked at him; there had to be some way of proving that she didn't do it. They said nothing to each other as Worf led her to the brig. He showed her into a cell, then he activated the forcefield.

Polly sat down on the bed. There was nothing that she could do. Escape, as well as being impossible, would have been completely pointless; if anything it would have gone against her. She lay down and tried to sleep.

Worf could not believe that the Captain suspected her. There was no reason for her to kill the Admiral. He returned to the bridge.

"Sir, Lt. Adams did not kill the Admiral," Worf said loudly.

Picard turned to face him. "Lieutenant, I know that you are a friend of Lt. Adams - " Picard said.

"She had no reason to do it, sir," Worf said.

"Lieutenant, that is enough," Picard said firmly.

"Sir, it is obvious that someone else killed the Admiral." Worf looked at Picard.

"Explain your reasoning, Lieutenant," Picard said.

"Counselor Troi would be able to determine whether she is lying or not," Worf said.

Picard thought for a moment before speaking. "Well, Counselor?" Picard asked.

"I can't guarantee anything, sir," Troi said.

"I want this sorted out before we reach Travai," Picard said.

"Sir," Troi said; she left the bridge and headed for the brig.

Polly was still lying on the bed when Troi arrived. She looked up. "What do you want?" Polly asked.

"Worf says you didn't do it," Troi said.

"And what do you think?" Polly asked.

"You didn't do it," Troi said.

Polly looked at her in surprise. "Well, am I going to get out of here or not? There's still a lot of work to do on the treaty."

"It would be for the best if you had nothing more to do with the treaty," Troi suggested.

"Covering yourselves. Well, just make sure that it doesn't backfire," Polly said.

Troi left with the impression that Polly had a good idea as to who had murdered the Admiral but not why. She returned to the bridge.

"She didn't do it, sir," Troi reported.

"Are you certain?" Picard asked, looking at Troi. "Of course you are. Have Lt. Adams released, but I want her watched."

"Sir," Worf said.

"Whoever it is is still on board my ship and I want them found," Picard said. He still had his doubts over releasing her, but if she was guilty she was certainly covering it up well, and she was bound to make a mistake sooner or later. Hopefully sooner. He dreaded to think of what could happen when they reached Travai if someone got hold of the security plans. It was a heavy burden for him to carry, yet he had to; it was his duty to carry out orders whether he

liked them or not. Starfleet would not be pleased about what had already happened, and how could he explain it to Lady Cho San? She might back out of the treaty over it, especially if they were as close as it was rumoured. Surely she wouldn't hold him responsible? After all, he was certain that it wasn't one of his crew. Worf was usually right in his evaluation of people; it was his duty to protect the ship and all those on board it. Picard had never known him to be wrong. He only hoped that this wasn't going to be the first time.

Polly was released, then went back to her room, only to find that the door wouldn't open.

"Looking for something?" Brown's voice said from behind her. "You are no longer permitted to work on the treaty," he said gloatingly.

"Of course. If you could just get me my personal belongings, I'm sure that the Captain can arranged alternative accommodation," Polly said calmly.

"Give me the security plans," Brown ordered her.

"I don't have them," Polly explained.

"Who has?" Brown's voice took on a menacing tone.

"As far as I'm concerned the Admiral's last orders stand," Polly said bluntly.

"I will not tolerate this kind of behaviour!" Brown shouted at her.

"My clothes, please," Polly asked calmly. Brown opened the door to her room, went in, picked up her clothes and threw them at her. Carefully Polly picked them up from the floor and walked down the corridor towards Worf's room. He was there.

"Come in." He looked up at the door as it opened.

"Got any room?" she asked, then - "He wants the plans."

Worf wasn't surprised by what she had said; in fact he had been expecting it.

"I can handle him," Worf said.

"What about your Captain?" Polly asked.

"I have never disobeyed an order," Worf said seriously.

"Get the plans back and give them to me," Polly said.

"Why?" asked Worf, who wondered what she was up to.

"I lie a lot better than you," Polly said, smiling at him.

"Do not do anything too risky," Worf warned her.

"So you do care after all," she said, laughing. Then they heard someone outside. Worf opened the door and found Brown standing there.

"I want the security plans now," Brown demanded. Neither of them said anything. "There is something going on here," Brown said accusingly.

"Leave my room now," Worf growled.

"I will report this to your Captain," Brown said as he left.

"I think it's time we told your Captain," Polly suggested.

"Why the sudden change?" Worf asked.

"He scares me now."

"No-one will harm you," Worf said, trying to reassure her.

"My hero, always there when I need you," Polly laughed.

"You sleep in the bed," Worf told her.

She shook her head. "The floor."

"That can be sorted out later," Worf said.

"I'm planning something, but I'm not going to tell you what." Polly could tell from the look on his face that he was worried about her. "Trust me," she added.

"It is my job," Worf protested.

"I'm finished, so it doesn't matter what happens to me," Polly said.

"When we catch him - " Worf growled.

"It's my word against his," Polly warned.

"When they have the facts," Worf said.

Polly was having doubts; if anything went wrong she would be to blame. There was no way that she could have the death of someone else on her hands. As long as Brown didn't get the plans there was hope. But who was he working for? The one thing that kept coming into her mind time and time again were the mining rights. With so many different parties from outside the Federation wanting to get their hands on them, the stakes were high. Travai would be stripped and left barren if past experiences were anything to go by. If the only alternative to that was to kill him, she would.

Polly sat there watching Worf. He hadn't changed much - still as hard working as ever and as headstrong, but maybe time had tempered him a little. Worf knew the risks of what he was doing; he was trained but she was not.

"I have made a false set of plans," Worf said looking at her.

"All we have to do is make sure he gets them," Polly said, "then whatever he does it won't matter," she continued.

"You learn fast," Worf said.

"Maybe, but there's plenty that I could still learn."

"You have to know how to protect yourself."

"I do know." Although she didn't like violence she was able to defend herself.

"You'll give him the plans," Worf said.

"No, I'll give them to your Captain, that way *he* won't suspect anything," Polly said, smiling. Worf thought about her plan for a moment then he agreed.

Cho San sat in the palace, in two minds whether to ratify the treaty or not. Still, she was looking forward to seeing *him* again.

"Your Highness," a voice disturbed her thoughts.

"Yes?" she replied without looking up.

"Another vessel has arrived."

"The Enterprise?" she asked.

"No, my lady."

"Make our guests comfortable. I will join them shortly," she said. Cho San knew that he would be there soon. He had never let her down so far. Calmly she got up and went to meet her guests. There were so many people here... *After all it is an important occasion*, she thought to herself. This would not be happening if she had signed the treaty long ago. Still she had had her reasons for not doing so.

After leaving Starfleet things had happened so quickly, quite apart from trying to get her home back. At first she had thought that the sickness was to do with delayed shock. She had certainly had a shock when she found out the real cause of it.

"That's impossible, Doctor," she protested.

"The baby is due in less than six months," he said. Cho San sat down. What was she going to do? He'd left. They'd agreed his place was in Starfleet.

"What am I going to do?" she asked.

"There is no disgrace in raising the child on your own," the Doctor said.

"And when people ask about its father?" she wanted to know.

"He died."

She looked at the Doctor. "I couldn't lie to everyone," she said.

"Tell the truth, then. That is your only alternative," the Doctor suggested.

She left his office. There was so much to consider. In the end she decided to keep the

child with her. He had long since grown up. There had been sorrow at his death, but he in turn had left a family.

Since that time long ago there had never been anyone else. He still held a very special place in her heart. Occasionally they had met, and she had followed his career with great interest. Now he was coming back to her, this time for good.

Cho San looked around the reception hall. She knew that the Klingons had already arrived. She didn't like it one bit, for she still hated them for what they had done in the past. Yet they were all on the same side now, she reminded herself. Politeness was the order of the day - though when they had gone she would have every trace of their ever having been there removed. She knew that there were other parties besides the Federation interested in the mining rights so she had to be on her guard. Still, there was enough firepower coming to ensure that things didn't get out of hand.

Slowly she walked around the reception hall, smiling and nodding to people as she passed them. Several bowed to her.

"My Lady, the Klingons wish to speak to you," a voice behind her said.

"Of course." She walked over to where the Klingon delegates stood.

"Gentlemen, I'm so pleased that you were able to come," Cho San said, lying.

"It is a long time since a Klingon last stood on Travain soil," one of the delegates said.

"Yes, once enemies, now friends," Cho San said trying to smile.

"The palace was here at the time of the battle?" the other delegate asked.

"Yes, as was I. Please enjoy your visit. If you will excuse me," Cho San said before leaving. Hate flared in her heart.

Worf returned to the bridge. Should he do as Polly suggested, or inform his Captain of her plans?

"Captain - " Worf started to say.

"Yes, Lieutenant?" Picard said, looking at him.

"Lt. Adams has..." He stopped in midsentence. "Has decided to give the security plans to you," Worf finished in a rush.

"Thank you for informing me, Lieutenant," Picard said.

Worf felt better. There was no doubt in his mind that something was going on and it all centered on the treaty. They would soon reach Travai, then he would find out if she was right. He hoped that she wasn't for all their sakes. There would be so many deaths of innocent people.

Polly sat on the bed, thinking. There was very little that she could do now except wait. It was boring waiting for Worf to return. There had to be something that she could do to occupy her time. Eventually she found something to write with. She would, she decided, write something for him as a surprise. He deserved a gift of some sort. She set to work, but she couldn't concentrate on it. A piece of writing wasn't enough somehow, especially after all he had done for her. It needed something very special to repay him. He would be surprised - after all it had been a long time since they had been together in the way that she had planned. Things were complicated but not so much so that she couldn't do what she wanted to do. Would he go along with her present? That was the only uncertain thing. If he didn't, that was his choice and she wouldn't be offended by it. Still, it would prove to be very interesting if he did.

Worf kept an eye on any messages that the Commodore might try to send. What was he up to? He would have to make his move soon... or had he already made it without anyone being aware that he had done so? The Klingon felt restless; he preferred to be active. There was something both pointless and wasteful in too much rest. He still could not understand how Humans could spend so much of their lives asleep. He always had to be doing something, whether it was being on duty or training. He preferred his own company most of the time, but he still needed other people. There was always a time when he needed them, but he still felt apprehensive about trusting them with his life; it was a remnant of his early life that had stayed with him.

Cho San was starting to get impatient. Why was everyone being so nice to her? She hated false flattery - the truth was what she wanted to hear. They were afraid of hurting her feelings, that was what it was, that and making her change her mind about the treaty. She wouldn't do that, but they didn't know it, so she could get away with anything that she wanted to and there wasn't anything that they could do about it. She knew that she could have a great deal of fun at their expense. Perhaps for the next party of guests she could arrange a traditional welcome? The children would love that; there was something very funny about imagining senior Starfleet officers soaked.

As the visitors couldn't beam straight into the palace they had to walk up. Slowly she made her way up to the top of the tower and waited.

The Enterprise reached Travai. This was the moment that Picard had not been looking forward to. How could he explain what had happened? Would she refuse to sign the treaty? He beamed down to outside the palace.

"I am Captain Jean-Luc Picard from the Enterprise," Picard shouted outside of the gates to the palace. "I have come for the treaty signing."

"Do you come in peace?" a distant voice asked.

"I do," Picard answered. Suddenly water poured down onto him. "What the - ?" Picard looked up. Children! Why weren't they under control?

"Sorry," a voice said. He looked up and there was Cho San. "I just couldn't resist it," she said, trying not to laugh.

"It's perfectly all right, Your Highness," Picard said, watching her descend from the tower.

"Not it's not - don't be afraid to say so either." Cho San laughed again. She knew that he was really quite angry but wasn't showing it. She would have to make up for it later. Slowly she climbed down the stairs and went to greet him in person.

"Don't be afraid of me like the others are," she said.

"I'm not afraid of you, My Lady," Picard said politely.

"Then please call me Cho San. Where is Pavel?" she asked, looking around.

"I think that you should sit down," Picard suggested.

"Something's wrong, isn't it?" Cho San said, looking at him.

"Admiral Chekov has been murdered," Picard said. There was no easy way to tell her what had happened.

"You have found the guilty party?" Cho San asked.

"Not yet, My Lady," Picard said. He looked at her. She seemed so pale. "Can I get someone to see to you?" he asked.

"No, I will be all right. If you will excuse me, the rest of the delegates have to be informed of this immediately," Cho San said rather shakily. Slowly she walked away. She had to keep breathing deeply; there was no way that she could react in front of all these people.

When she entered the reception hall everything went quiet.

"Ladies and gentlemen. I have an announcement to make. Admiral Chekov has been murdered." She could hear gasps of surprise ring round the reception hall. Everything seemed to be going very fuzzy.

"Get a doctor! Your Highness!"

She tried to stand. Why couldn't she? She had to remain calm; there was no point in panicking, it wouldn't do her any good.

"Take it easy." An arm helped her to stand straight.

"I'll be all right in a few minutes," she said.

"Let me be the judge of that. The signing will be postponed indefinitely." She recognized the voice as being that of her Doctor. She could hear faint mutterings going round the reception hall. *Let them*, she thought. Until his killer was caught and brought to trial she was not going to do anything except rest.

"Escort me to my room," she said faintly. Her Doctor helped her to her room. "Send Captain Picard to see me in a few minutes," she said.

"You are not strong enough to have visitors," her Doctor protested.

"Do as I ask now," she said firmly. The Doctor looked at her; he had never seen her so angry before. If she didn't take things easy she would only make her condition worse. He had to do as she asked.

"Captain. Her Highness wishes to see you - but I can only allow you a few minutes with her," the Doctor said.

"I understand," Picard replied.

"I must warn you, she has not been well for some time," her Doctor explained.

"I wasn't aware of that," Picard said.

"She wanted no-one to know." The doctor then showed Picard into Cho San's room. She was propped up in bed.

"Doctor, you may leave us alone now," she said. The Doctor had a defiant look on his face, but as she shouldn't be unduly upset he left reluctantly.

"Please sit down. Here." She pointed to the bed.

"I hope that you are feeling better now, Your Highness," Picard said.

"It was just the shock. Tell me, Captain, do you have any suspects?" Cho San asked.

"I am certain that it was not one of my crew. They had no reason to harm the Admiral," Picard said confidently.

"So that leaves the treaty team. Tell me about them," Cho San said. Picard told her all that he knew about the treaty team.

"Pavel was a good judge of character. If this Lt. Adams had meant him any harm he would have had her removed from the team," Cho San said.

"Then that just leaves the Commodore," Picard said quietly.

"He's the one."

Picard looked at Cho San. How could she be so certain? "But there is no proof," he reminded her.

"I don't need proof. I don't want him coming down here," Cho San told him.

"There will be trouble." *A great deal of it!* Picard thought to himself.

"Not if they want the treaty to be signed." Cho smiled as she said it. She thought Picard had a very good point. "This Lt. Adams - she is good at her job?" Cho said.

"Very capable, so I'm led to believe," Picard said.

"In that case have her come down here. Are the extra security arrangements ready?" Cho San asked.

"Yes, but I haven't seen them; I was told to ask the Admiral, but..." Picard hesitated.

"Have your Chief of Security come down with Lt. Adams. That's if you don't mind, Captain?" Cho inquired.

"Not at all Your Highness," Picard said.

"Please call me Cho San, Captain," Cho said.

Picard left her room. She was certainly a remarkable person; was there nothing that could stop her? If anything happened to her, who would take over? There hadn't been any mention of a successor and he hadn't liked to ask, especially as it could have been taken the wrong way with her being so ill. Picard decided that he would have to find out more in case the worst happened. After all, the Federation needed what Travai had.

Polly waited for Worf to return from the bridge. She hoped that she was wrong about everything, yet it seemed as if she wasn't. Hopefully this would be the biggest mistake of her life. Her career would be over in any case but she had to do it.

Picard returned to the Enterprise. The Commodore would not be pleased by what he had to tell him. Still if that was what Cho San wanted then he had to make sure that the treaty was signed. He went to see the Commodore in his room to inform him of Cho San's wishes.

"She can't do that. I will not tolerate this kind of behaviour!" Commodore Brown shouted.

"I fully understand your feelings, but she is threatening not to sign the treaty if you are on the planet," Picard tried to explain.

"Surely there must be someone else on board who can handle this. After all, Lt. Adams is under suspicion of murder," Brown said, trying to calm down.

"That has not been proved. My Head of Security will be there at all times," Picard said.

"I hate to say this Captain, but I think he is hiding something," Brown said.

"I will not have groundless accusations thrown around about my crew," Picard said defensively.

"Do you happen to know where Lt. Adams is staying?" Brown smiled as he said it.

"In her room," Picard said. He wondered what the Commodore was leading up to.

"No, she's staying in Lt. Worf's room," Brown gloated.

"What my crew does off duty is none of my business," Picard said angrily. "If you will excuse me, sir?" The word 'sir' got stuck in his throat. *There's definitely something going on*, Picard thought to himself and he didn't like it one bit. He went to see Lt. Adams; she wasn't in her room as he had expected her to be, so he decided to see if what the Commodore had said was true. As he approached Worf's quarters he could hear music coming from inside. He touched

the door panel. Polly heard the sound and opened the door.

"Captain. Can I help you?" she asked.

"I was told that I could find you here," Picard said.

"The Commodore. Please come in," she said allowing him to go in past her.

"Her Highness wishes you to deal with the treaty signing," Picard said.

"But - " Polly said, shocked.

"The Commodore has been told. He was annoyed - to say the least,"

"I will do my best, sir," Polly said, trying to sound confident.

"Lt. Worf will accompany you," Picard said.

Polly smiled. "When do we leave, sir?"

"Straight away," Picard replied. He then left Worf's quarters still wondering what exactly was going on. It seemed as if she had been right about the Commodore so far, yet there was a lot of explaining to do by all sides.

Polly sorted out what she thought she would need. How long she was going to stay on the planet was uncertain. This was her big chance; what puzzled her was, if Her Highness had spoken to the Captain why had she been asked in the first place? Once she had packed her things she went to the transporter room.

Worf joined Polly in the transporter room.

"Ready for it, Worf?" Polly asked, smiling at him. There was no response. Still, she should have known better than to try and tease him in public.

After they had beamed down they walked up to the palace gates and announced their intentions, after which they were allowed to enter.

"Her Highness wishes to speak with both of you immediately," a servant said. Polly and Worf followed him and entered Cho San's room.

"My Lady," the servant said.

"Leave us," Cho San said then she looked up. "You are Lt. Adams?" she asked.

"Yes, Your Highness, and this is Lt. Worf, Head of Security on the Enterprise," Polly said, noticing the way that Cho San was staring at Worf.

"The security plans - may I see them?" Cho San asked.

"The Lieutenant has them," Polly said.

"No-one has seen them, of that I am certain," Worf said. He then handed the plans to Cho San.

"Why so much extra precaution?" Cho San asked.

"There are many who do not wish the signing to go ahead," Polly explained.

"Unfortunately that is true," Cho San said, smiling at both Polly and Worf. "Lt. Worf, where did you grow up?" she asked.

"Khitomar, then Gault," he replied, not knowing why she had asked the question in the first place.

"Khitomar. A great tragedy, but much good has come from it," Cho San said.

Worf looked at her then replied, "Yes".

"I want nothing to go wrong with the signing," Cho San said.

"You can be assured that nothing will go wrong," Worf said.

"The Commodore will send for his employers. There may be many ships coming," Cho San said.

"My Lady. There are many Starfleet vessels in the area, and with your permission the Klingons could be summoned," Polly said.

"Lieutenant," Cho San said to Worf, "no offence is intended but I do not trust the Klingons."

"Yet you talk freely to me, and there are delegates from the Empire present," Worf said.

Cho San looked at him for a moment, then she decided to speak.

"Yes. But there are still too many memories of the past here," she said.

"If you delay asking the Klingons there may be many needless deaths," Worf said bluntly.

"You may leave now. I will think of what you have said. Rooms have been prepared for you," Cho San said, dismissing them. As soon as they had left she began to think over what they had said. It made a great deal of sense to her; still she did not like the idea of asking the Klingons for help, even though not doing so could mean deaths. It would take her some time to make sure that she made the right decision. It was, after all, a very important one for the whole of Travai.

The Klingons, although they were allies now, had caused her and Travai a great deal of pain in the past. But she knew that she would have to put the past behind her in order to protect the future of everyone.

Worf looked at Polly. What if Her Highness did not do as they had asked? Polly could sense that he was very uneasy.

"She will make what she thinks is the right choice," she said.

"And if it is the wrong one?" Worf asked bluntly.

"Then it will be on her mind for ever. The fact that she didn't trust the Commodore means that she takes us seriously," Polly replied.

"I have to organize the extra security," Worf said.

"I'll find out what I can from the other delegates. Someone has to know something, even if it's just gossip," Polly said.

"And what good will that do?" Worf asked.

"The more proof that we have of something going wrong the better the chance we have of stopping it from happening. The Klingon delegates will be very helpful," Polly said.

"And if they do not wish to talk to you?" Worf doubted that they would reveal anything to her.

"There's no point in dealing with negatives, they only make things worse," she replied.

"I will see you later," Worf said. They then both went their separate ways.

Polly found the Klingon delegates sitting round a table drinking.

"Gentlemen," she said. They looked up at her.

"What do you want?" one of them said gruffly.

"Information."

"We know nothing," he replied.

"In that case allow me to buy you all a drink." Polly fetched them several drinks.

"This information?"

So they were interested, she thought.

"It's nothing. Just... rumours."

She smiled when he said it. "So we do talk the same language after all."

"There is one who is willing to betray all parties," the Klingon said.

"Really. I heard that the Klingons were involved," Polly said casually.

"Be careful what you say, Human," he growled.

"I know it's not true. After all, you belong to an honourable race," Polly said.

"Many Humans think that is not so," he replied.

"I am one of the enlightened ones." She smiled as she said it.

"We would help if asked."

"Perhaps we could talk later." Polly smiled again as she left the table. At least they could be relied upon to help out, if only for the sake of their honour. Still they weren't telling her the whole truth. If the Commodore suspected anything, he could change his plans or even cancel them altogether. Hopefully she would be able to carry on as if there was nothing wrong. She already had the Klingons ready to fight.

Cho San made her choice, and she could only hope that it was the right one. She got out of bed and dressed. She then headed for the main hall. They were bound to be there; she would tell them that now they could do as they had planned. As for the Klingons, it was up to them if they wanted to get involved. Her Doctor saw her and tried to get her to go back to bed.

"You are not strong enough yet," he argued.

"Out of my way. This is important," Cho San replied.

"So is your health. At your age you should be taking things easy".

"And what has my age got to do with it? I'm perfectly all right." Cho San then stormed off down the corridor. *How dare he bring my age into it! That has absolutely no bearing on anything!* She supposed that it was to do with the fact that there was no successor as yet. Where her family was now she had no idea. Perhaps she should have them traced just in case... It would make things a great deal easier for the bureaucrats when she was gone. *If they've had no training for it, so much the better,* she thought. They would have to make their own mistakes and learn from them as she had done. If they couldn't be found she would have to appoint someone to take her place. *That, she thought, could be very difficult. There aren't many people that I would trust to lead Travai.* It wasn't that she hadn't enjoyed being ruler - there had been plenty of what could be called business trips on Starships and people being very nice to her. But that wasn't everything; she would have given it all up just to be with him, and now it was too late. He was gone for good, never really knowing how much he had meant to her. She thought that he would have at least guessed about the child, yet he had never said anything. She had thought to tell him a long time ago but for some reason had decided against it. She thought that he would have wanted to give up his life to take care of his responsibilities. That was laughable; she had never wanted anything except for him and that was the one thing that he couldn't give her. He had planned to retire soon then they would have been together, but he had had one last thing to do. *If only...* she thought. Her life had been filled with if onlys. Now was the time to do something to make his memory last. He would have wanted that.

Polly met up with Worf in the main hall.

"Everything is arranged," he said.

"The Klingons will help," Polly told him.

"How?" Worf said, slightly surprised.

"I charmed them. It's easy. I've had enough practice on you over the years," Polly replied

smugly.

"All we need now is for Her Highness to make her decision," Worf said.

"Lt. Adams."

Polly spun round. "Your Highness!"

"I have decided to act on your information. As for the Klingons, I will leave them up to you," Cho San said.

"Thank you, Your Highness. We won't let you down," Polly said.

"You do understand that there will be many amongst my people who will not be pleased that we once again have Klingon vessels in orbit," Cho San said.

"That is only natural considering the past. However, this time they will save Travai not destroy it," Polly replied.

"That is all I am going to say on this matter. The rest is now in your hands," Cho San said. Both bowed their heads as she left. Cho San felt relieved that she had finally decided what to do. Still the final test was yet to come. The council would object strongly to her plans, yet she could charm her way round them if she wanted to.

"What did I tell you?" Polly said, looking at Worf. "Everything is going to be all right".

Worf just looked at her. "I will speak to the Klingon delegates. They will not like being asked for help by a..." He hesitated.

"A female. They will, especially as I got round them last time," Polly said.

"It would be safer if - "

"Come with me, then," Polly said. Together they headed off to see the Klingon delegates.

The Commodore was starting to panic. Everything was going wrong! His masters would be extremely displeased with him. He had promised them the mining rights and no matter what happened he had to make good that promise - his life depended on it. It was also a matter of family pride. He was going to be the one who took revenge for what she had done. The smear on his family was still there - they would never forget or be allowed to forget while she was still alive, and no matter what the cost it would soon be over. It had been easier for him since his father had changed the family name; no-one had even suspected him of being a Lowery. The story had been passed down of how she had had his great-great grandfather court-martialled for bigotry. Whether it was true or not no longer mattered. He had already sent the message that would bring his masters. Soon the whole planet of freaks would be on its knees begging for mercy. But there was still one sticking point - the security plans. He had to have them.

They found the Klingon delegates.

"So you decided to come back," the leader said.

"Of course. This is Worf, a friend," Polly said. Worf decided that he should say something.

"The Romulans are coming," he said.

"So," the leader said.

"They must be stopped," Worf said gruffly.

"Why?" The leader of the group was toying with Worf.

"They will kill many," Worf's voice was starting to show his anger.

"What is your role in this matter?"

"Khitomar."

Polly looked at Worf. She could tell that it hurt him to even mention the name of his former home.

"And what do you know of Khitomar?" the leader said, glaring at Worf.

"I survived it," Worf said.

"That is a good reason. Name another."

Polly thought that she had better say something. "If you do not help, then it will be said that Klingons are afraid of Romulans."

One of the delegates jumped up. "This no concern of yours, female," he said.

"These are my people and I will not let them die needlessly," she said.

The delegate sat down. "You have spirit for one so small. We will help you."

"That is good. We need ships, as many as you can get here, and soon," Polly said.

"And the attack?" the leader of the delegates asked.

"We don't know when. It's important that the traitor suspects nothing. He's going to get false plans, so that makes our job easier," Polly explained.

"Laying a trap? Clever for a female," the leader said, Polly just smiled at him. There was nothing that she couldn't do with a little help.

Cho San sat in the main hall talking to several of the delegates.

"I hope that you have recovered, Your Highness."

"I do feel better now, thank you for your concern." All they were bothered about was

getting the treaty signed as soon as possible.

"I thought that Commodore Brown would have been here," one of the delegates said in passing.

"I will not have him on Travain soil."

They looked at Cho San, shocked. "Why?" someone inquired further.

"I don't trust him. Now, if you will excuse me..." That had put the cat amongst the pigeons. That saying always made her laugh - at least it did when she was in a better frame of mind. There was too much depending on them. If they failed Travai would become a graveyard.

Cho San walked off leaving the delegates to make their own conclusions about her comments on the subject of the Commodore. She wondered what he had against Travai. Oh, she had enemies but none who were willing to attack Travai just to get to her. They could just as easily arrive proclaiming themselves to be friends then kill her without any harm coming to anyone else. That was the sort of enemy she had made over the years. Still whatever his reason it had to be very important to him - especially if he was going to ruin so many lives just to get her.

The Klingon delegates sent a message to the Empire asking for vessels to be sent. They explained why they needed them. Although they had been beaten by Travai in the past they would help them, if only to stop anyone from saying that they were behind the whole thing. The vessels would be here sooner than the Human had expected - they'd told her very little to make it seem as if they weren't prepared for what was about to happen. Despite the fact that they were now at peace with the Federation they were still regarded with some distrust in certain quarters, who thought that they could use the treaty to their own advantage.

Polly beamed up to the Enterprise. She had the plans already to give to him. The only problem was, would he trust her? If not, then everything that she and Worf had planned would be next to useless. Hopefully he would be taken in by her plan. She wished that Worf could be with her when she handed the plans over... just as a precaution. He had other things to attend to, or least he had said that he had. *Typical of him*, she thought to herself, *always undermining my part of the plan*. And it had all been her idea in the first place. So what if he *was* the Head of Security, *she* was the treaty team. By now it was a well-rehearsed routine between the two of them, one always teasing the other. It came as second nature after so long, yet she longed for them to be the way that they had been at the Academy. Maybe she should try to speed things up, after all if it was left up to him things would never be sorted out.

Worf had worked out a better way to defend the palace. There was no point in telling Polly - after all she wasn't very important. She'd really have something to say if she ever found out what he thought about her. Still, she did have spirit - that was her main asset. She also had guile and he admired that, especially in people who looked too weak to be any threat. Over his career he had found that those were the sort of people who you could ask to do anything and they would, even if it meant risking their lives. Not that he would risk her life unless there was no other choice. Besides, he didn't want to be the one to have to explain to his

mother what had happened to her. Anyone who got in his way would have to take the risks as they came. People who spent too much time flattering others were worthless in his opinion. He had to admit though that Polly was always honest and had been in all the time that they had known each other.

Cho San carried on walking on down the corridors of the palace, thinking about what she would do if things turned out wrongly.

There was no way that she could condemn her people to a life of slavery under either the Ferengi or the Romulans. There would be those who stayed, thinking that things would carry on as before, then there would be those who fled to start a new life elsewhere, forever blaming her for what had happened; finally came those who would die in battle, whether soldiers or innocent victims - victims of a battle that they had no right to be in. She had not yet decided which path she would take, but hopefully it would be the right one. She would have to make that choice when the time came or it would be made for her.

How much longer before the supposed attack? She wished that it was already over. Then at least there wouldn't be the tension in the air. Security squads surrounded the palace; she wanted no more of it. But that only raised the question of who would take over after she was gone, and that was the only truly difficult decision that she had to make. Other choices could be left. Maybe she had been too harsh in saying that no man would ever rule Travai - still, it wasn't too late to change her mind. Even if it was only a temporary measure people would be more at ease. She searched for her Doctor; finally she found him.

"I have something to ask you," Cho San said.

"Yes, My Lady," he replied.

"I want you to look for my family after I'm gone," she said.

"And if - " He stopped in mid-sentence.

"If there aren't any left? Then Travai will have a president," she said.

"Are you sure that you wish to do this?" he asked, somewhat nervously.

"Of course. I may be old but I'm not brain dead yet!" she snapped at him. Why did everyone treat her as if she was stupid or something? *There should be a law against it, she thought to herself, but no-one would take any notice of it anyway.*

Polly approached the Commodore's room, her heart beating faster and faster the closer to it she got. She took a deep breath and touched the door com panel. Was he sending a message to his employers? She'd love to catch him before he sent it. Her plan depended on that. Worf would have been better doing this; he really could lie better than she, for his face didn't give him away. The Commodore opened the door.

"What do you want?" He sounded cautious.

"I've got the plans for you." Polly held them out. He took them and went back inside his room. The door closed and Polly breathed a sigh of relief. *It's all over, she thought to herself;*

now she could relax. As she set off down the corridor, the door to his room opened again, very quietly. This time the Commodore followed her down the corridor. Her mind was on other things; by the time she realised what was happening it was too late. She slumped to the floor. The Commodore stood over her, laughing, then he walked away.

Worf started to get worried. She should have been back by now. Deciding that there was something definitely wrong, he contacted the Enterprise, to find that no-one had seen Polly since she beamed up. A Security team was ordered to check out the Commodore's room just in case. By the time that they found her it was too late - she was already dead. They searched for the Commodore but he had managed to leave the ship.

Worf exploded with anger when he heard the news. She'd never stood a chance. He should have gone instead! It was too late to do anything now except carry on with the plans that they had already made. She would have wanted that... In reality he didn't know what she would have wanted to happen after she was gone. He knew however that he would get the Commodore even if it meant the end of his career in Starfleet. Already he was thinking of ways to kill the Commodore, preferably slowly. Brown was the only person with any motive to get rid of her and his sudden disappearance only led to the conclusion that he was the guilty party.

He would have to tell Cho San. How she would react he didn't know. He found her in the main hall making an announcement to the delegates.

"So everything is under control," she finished saying.

"Excuse me, My Lady. May I have a private word with you?" Worf said.

"Of course. Are you alone? Where's Lt. Adams?" Cho San asked.

"The Commodore." The two words said it all.

"Find him," Cho San said.

"I'll do it myself," Worf said.

Cho San returned to the center of the main hall. "The signing will take place immediately."

The room went silent. Suddenly an explosion rocked the palace. It was too late! The enemy was already here! Chaos broke out, yet Cho San stood there; they weren't going to make her leave. Worf started to shout instructions to the Security teams that surrounded the palace. More explosions rocked it. The sky outside was lit up by flames and smoke, and screams filled the air. *Where are the Klingons?* Cho San thought.

Shuttles started to land just outside the palace gates; as soon as their occupants stepped out they came under heavy fire. People ran for cover. All Cho San could hear were the screams. The nightmare had returned. The children! She had to help them.

"Worf to Enterprise. Come in." All he could hear was static. He had to think quickly. Protect Cho San or fight? *Fight* was what he decided to do. He fired his phaser till it failed him, the power gone. There were swords on the walls of the palace; he pulled one off the wall. He tested its balance and his hand tightened around the hilt of the sword. Worf then ran towards

the main gates.

Outside the palace the Security squads were losing ground. It seemed all was hopeless; they started to retreat. Behind them more Romulans appeared by transporter. They were cut off. Worf managed to get several of the delegates to help him open the gates.

The Enterprise, as soon as it had detected the Romulans decloaking, had gone to red alert. Picard had ordered the shield to be raised, as did the other Captains. It looked as if they were going to be outnumbered when suddenly several Klingon vessels appeared as if out of thin air. The Romulans, realising that it was now they who were outnumbered, started to recall their troops from Travai, while some of the Romulan Captains decided to try and make a fight of it. Two Romulan ships tried to break out of formation in an attempt to escape, only to be pursued by Klingon battle cruisers.

Worf and the delegates started to approach the Romulans on the ground. It was then that Worf noticed the Commodore in the middle of the Romulans. He would pay for what he had done! Slowly Worf advanced towards him.

Cho San decided that she couldn't stand by and watch as others died for her world. She found a phaser that someone had dropped, picked it up and walked out of the main gates. Her hand started to shake, not with fear but with anger. The anger exploded. She fired at a group of Romulans, only for them to fire back. She was hit. Trying to remain standing she raised the phaser again. This time they fired first.

Worf concentrated on getting to the Commodore, cutting his way through the Romulans with the sword that he had in his hand.

The Commodore looked around. The group of Romulans that he had been with had retreated, leaving him unprotected.

Worf moved closer and swung the sword. Blood seeped from the Commodore's chest. He tried to stagger away from Worf but fell backwards onto the floor. Worf stood over him, sword poised once again to strike out, then he lowered it.

He slowly looked around at the destruction.

Why did he feel so tired?

Why did he always have to lose someone in battle?

