

[See Chapter 1/title page for disclaimers and rating](#)

Jonathan Archer was tired. He was tired physically and he was tired of endless nights of worrying, and most of all, he was tired of missing his children. On top of that he felt old. Not that being in his fifties was old, but he felt it now. Most of it had to do with the constant worry that wore at him like the chronic dripping of water against stones. The job of captain came with plenty, but those weren't the ones that tended to drag him down. No the thing that was making him old and tired was family. He stood from his desk and moved to the view port, taking in the stars. His hand came up to knead the stiff muscles in his neck in an unconscious gesture. The stars still had the power to soothe him. Even with all the changes his life had taken, the stars were his constant, as was T'Pol. If he had known what he was getting into when he had asked her to stay aboard Enterprise, fought for her to stay, would he have run the other way screaming? It was an amusing thought, and though tempting at times, he wouldn't change anything. He was a man who thrived on the challenges of life, and being a husband and father were two of the hardest and most rewarding. He had spent the majority of his adulthood confident in his choices, certain space was his one true love, and that home, hearth and family were not meant to be, at least not in the traditional sense. The stars and the ship would be his home; and his family would be a crew of subordinates and friends. He had been half right. The stars and ship were his home, and his crew, family, but thirteen years ago, a beautiful Vulcan had invaded his space and he had fallen in love with her and she had given him a daughter. Five years later she had presented him with a son. With the love of a good woman and two beloved children, his life was complete. He had a daughter as lovely as her mother to dote on, and a son, bright as a star, to carry on the Archer name, and he was content with that. He had not asked for nor wanted this third child. In some ways he resented it, for it had removed his children from his life and posed a constant risk to it's mother. But he couldn't hold that resentment for long, nor could he hold the impersonal it. The doctor had told them it was a little girl, and he tried to imagine what she would look like, be like, when he finally held her in his arms. Perfect, and precious, just like her siblings.

A wave of longing swept through him. He missed his children as he had never missed anything before. Even with the chaos of work and the random chatter of the Tucker children, the ship still sounded empty. There was no bickering in his quarters from high pitched voices. There were no storms and tantrums, nor was there wild laughter and giggling mischief. He wouldn't have thought he would miss it. In fact, he had savored the silence for the first few weeks and felt guilty for it. Now, however, he wanted it, right along with the hugs and the certainty they were there. Each time he saw them it seemed they had grown and changed. He sighed and turned away from the view port. A quick glance at the

clock told him Delta shift had the bridge. It was late and he was tired, and if he couldn't hold his children, he could his heart, and share a few quiet moments with her and the child she carried. The missing he would just have to deal with. It would be over soon enough, and he would never let them out of his sight again.

With a nod to the lieutenant on duty, he slid into the 'lift and headed to his quarters. The door to the main room opened with ease. Over the years the living space had changed drastically. What had once been two dorm like single rooms with a storage area between them had erupted into a small comfortable living room, dining room combination with three small bedrooms. He and T'Pol had taken over his room while T'Pol's room had been converted into two smaller bedrooms. When the Tuckers had started their family, the arrangements had been similar. In fact, several walls had been knocked out to enlarge the area for children. He still didn't think children on a starship were practical, but he didn't have too many options with his family, and the Tuckers were content to stay as well. It worked for all of them because Enterprise kept the best engineer and communications officers in Starfleet. As he looked around the living room, he felt a pang at the missing clutter that indicated children were present, and was unable to stop himself from heading into the smaller rooms his children slept in. Someday perhaps Starfleet would see the necessity of setting up rooms like a small apartment rather than an impersonal dorm, but he didn't see it happening any time soon.

The trip through the children's' rooms had done nothing but make the ache in his chest grow so he didn't linger as long as he would have liked. He rubbed absently at his chest as he moved toward his room. He would contact Soval and talk to his children and assure himself they were well.

As he entered the bedroom his eyes were drawn to the elegant, shadowy figure standing by the window. T'Pol was as graceful as ever, even with the swell of pregnancy bowing her belly. In fact, he couldn't remember a sight more beautiful. His arousal was swift and sure, and he regretted he would be unable to do anything about it. Even after thirteen years she had that power over him and he hoped it never faded. Bathed in starlight, she looked soft and magical, like a dream and almost as elusive. He shook away the flash of fear that swept over him as she turned. Even in the softer light her face was pale and drawn, her eyes bruised. This baby had been so much harder on her than Zack had. As he came up behind her, he wrapped his arms around her belly and drew her gently against him, shifting her so her back was against his front. He dropped a kiss on the top of her head and just held her, his hands resting contentedly on the mound of her stomach. "Are you feeling okay?" She didn't sleep much, hadn't for most of the pregnancy but anything serious would have been routed to him. She hardly worked anymore. If she was up to it, she worked in his ready room or in their quarters, but more often than not she was resting or in sickbay. He would be glad when this child was born and she grew stronger. He only hoped the baby had her constitution. Either way, once she was born, her parents, both of

them, were getting fixed.

T'Pol patted his hand in a comforting gesture. "You worry too much. The baby was restless and so was I."

He nodded against her head and hugged her tighter. She felt as though she would break apart in his arms. "I was thinking about the children and missing them. They are in for quite a surprise when they get home."

T'Pol nodded. She tried not to think too far ahead where her pregnancy was concerned, but now that her time was coming near, she was more open to the possibilities. "I have missed them as well."

"Do you think they will like having a little sister?"

"Considering how much they enjoy the Tucker children, I believe so. It doesn't matter though, they have a limited choice in the decision."

Jonathan chuckled and nuzzled her neck. "True. I've been thinking... We can't keep calling the baby her and it. I think we should start thinking about what we want to name her."

T'Pol stilled in his arms, barely breathing. Then she relaxed against him once more. "I've been... uncertain."

He understood what she was saying. "I know. To give her a name makes her even more real." His hands soothed over the mound of his child and he smiled as a little foot connected solidly with his hand. "I don't think it would hurt any less to lose her now, with or without a name."

Again T'Pol nodded. Communication with words was rarely needed between them now. Even with a limited telepathic link to share their thoughts, the need was not there. It was available and convenient, but not necessary. They knew each other well enough that in most cases they knew what the other was thinking. "I was thinking perhaps we should name her after your mother as T'Lin is named after mine."

Jonathan smiled at the thought. "No, I don't think so. We've got a theme going with our children. I would like to name her after her mother."

T'Pol squeezed his arms lightly. "Given your penchant for nicknames, that would not necessarily be a bad thing, but I would like something different for our child."

Jonathan's grin grew wider and he backed T'Pol away from the window. He sat in the chair he had been aiming for and drew her into his lap, turning her slightly so he could see her face. Her arms looped around his neck and her head rested

on his shoulder. One of his arms supported her back, while his free hand moved in soothing circles on her belly. "Okay, so we get to negotiate here." At her raised brow he dropped a kiss on her mouth. "Compromise?" The brow settled and she shifted to find a more comfortable position. The contact spawned other thoughts and he blew out a deep breath. "Little girls, what names can we come up with for little girls..." And thinking that, he hoped to distract himself; but it wasn't helping much. He could feel the exhaustion rolling off of her, and he snuggled her closer. "What about T'Mir after your great grandmother, and Diana after mine?"

T'Pol blinked at him, love curling even tighter around her heart. That he would remember amazed her. She had told him of her great-grandmother years ago, and though the children had heard stories, it rarely came up. The more she thought about it though, the more certain she was. Her great grandmother had been the first Vulcan woman to come in contact with Humans, and had even lived companionably among them. She desperately wanted that ease of relations for her children, but feared it would not be something she would see in her lifetime. "Yes, I... it is a good, strong name."

Jonathan smiled. It was a good name, and he liked the sound of it. He pressed lightly on the odd shaped lump that could have been a head or a bottom. "T'Mir Diana Archer, a blend of yours and mine just like she is. A strong name for a strong child." *I hope.*

Words drifted away as they sat. The weariness in Archer was still there, but it didn't seem as noticeable with T'Pol in his arms. She had eventually fallen asleep, and though his arm had long since gone numb, he was reluctant to move. He shifted slightly, stretching more until he was somewhat comfortable and she was draped over him like a blanket. She barely sighed with his fidgeting, and once they were both settled, he too slept.

Unease settled around T'Pol, amplifying the discomfort that constantly plagued her. She tried to ease into a sitting position and move carefully off her husband's lap without waking him. Neither endeavor was successful as she struggled up. Jonathan silently assisted her when he realized her need. Frustration seemed her constant companion, especially as the child grew, frustration and fear. Though neither were logical for a Vulcan, they were as natural as breathing to a pregnant mother. She accepted Jonathan's help silently and moved into the bathroom. Once the door was closed, she rested her head against it and rubbed the nagging ache in her back. There was something else bothering her too, a silence in her mind that she couldn't quite place, and a nagging unease that something was wrong. Even as she tried to shake it off, awareness clicked into place. Something was wrong with T'Lin. The part of her mind that hummed with awareness of her oldest child was silent. Though it had been muted severely by time and distance, it had still been there. As quickly as she could, she exited the bathroom and went in search of her husband. They needed to check on the

children, now.

She entered the living room to find Jonathan on the comm. The familiar voice of Admiral Forrest registered and she shifted so that she could see him. The children were supposed to be on their way to Earth. Surely he had talked to them. She was about to ask when she noted the grim look on the Admiral's face. She leaned against her husband as the older man spoke.

Forrest took one look at T'Pol and wished he could send her away. It was hard enough to tell Jonathan what he had to say, it was another to talk to both parents, especially when the health of one was at risk. He could tell by the look in her eyes that T'Pol knew this was not a social call. Better to get it over with, and then he too could do his grieving. "I'm sorry to disturb you so late..." He sputtered off. Niceties seemed so out of place, but he didn't know where to begin. "Jon... T'Pol... Damn... I don't know how to tell you this, I don't want to believe it." He ran his hands through his hair in frustration and tried again. "Over the last few months there has been an increase in attacks on ships throughout the quadrant. The general consensus is that it is a combination of Klingon and rogue Andorian attacks."

Jon's eyes narrowed. "That's why you've called us back to Earth. Starfleet wants to attempt a plan to eliminate the aggression."

"Yes..." Forrest closed his eyes. "That's only a part of why I called." His eyes when he opened them were bleak. "I received a call from the Vulcans. The T'Barra was attacked ten hours ago. The Vulcans received a distress call, but when they got to the ship there was nothing left but debris. Nothing..."

Jonathan's mind drew a blank until he heard T'Pol gasp, and then the realization slammed into his brain with the force of a sledgehammer. His mind could not wrap around it though. "Our children?"

Forrest shook his head, tears clouding his vision. "I'm so sorry Jon."

It didn't make sense, couldn't seem possible. He shook his head, denying it to himself and the others. It just wasn't possible that he wouldn't hold his beautiful children again. It wasn't supposed to be like this, they were supposed to grow up and grow old. He was supposed to be able to see them do so. Grief, sharp and deep swamped him and he nearly doubled over in pain. His mind tried to shut down, but he wouldn't let it. He grabbed the grief, wrestled it, realizing that it was amplified by T'Pol's grip on his shoulder. He forced it down with anger and locked it away. Denial was his strongest point. "I can't believe that Admiral. I would know, I would feel it if my children were gone. It's just not possible."

T'Pol's fingers dug harder in his shoulder. It all made sense now. Logic deserted her as grief moved in. She had never felt anything so overwhelmingly

destructive. She swayed under the force of it, causing Jonathan to look up in concern. His arms closed around her and she tried to draw on his strength, his control. "The silence Jonathan... death explains the silence in my head where T'Lin used to be." It was too much for her and she collapsed.

Jonathan caught her as she went down and swung her up in his arms. He couldn't accept it. The Vulcans had to be wrong, even T'Pol, and yet he knew she believed it. He turned to Forrest. "I want every piece of information you have on the attack. I want who, where and when, and I want it now." He didn't wait for Forrest to answer. T'Pol was his focus, T'Pol and revenge.

Seven hours later Jonathan was again staring at the stars. He was still tired and still felt old, but the anger that had fed him earlier was gone. Now it was defeat that swamped him, rather than despair. It was sheer will that kept him going. He had come to the mess hall to get a cup of coffee, but the stars had distracted him. Funny, a few hours ago they had seemed bright and alive and full of promise, and now they were dim, a leftover light from something that no longer existed. He felt like that, an echo of what he had been. He had taken T'Pol to sickbay and left her in Phlox's care while he recruited the troops. He had barely been able to get out what had happened when Phlox had called him to sickbay. T'Pol it seemed was unable to handle the stress of loss and pregnancy. Her body had decided to release its precious burden. After nearly an hour of surgery, both mother and child were in critical condition, but alive. He wondered for how long. It seemed incomprehensible to him that he could have been so amazingly happy one moment and so lost the next. If T'Pol left him, how would he ever survive? No T'Lin, no Zack, no T'Pol... he could barely stand it. He couldn't even consider his infant daughter. He was already trying to distance himself from her.

He flinched as a cool hand rested on his arm. His eyes abandoned the stars and focused in on his communications officer. She looked as bad as he felt. Her husband stood behind her, his hand resting lightly on her shoulder. The grief he had been holding in spilled at their compassion and he fought for composure. He faced the stars once more, but all he could see were things he could no longer touch. "Pixie would have been thirteen next month. T'Pol and I were considering a surprise party for her. You only become a teenager once..." His voice broke on the words. Why oh why had he ever had children? He hadn't realized something could hurt so damn bad.

Hoshi had released his arm and was drawing soothing circles over his back, trying to comfort him as she would her children. "Jon..." There was nothing she could say that would ease the pain. She could barely accept it herself. Children and starships... for the first time she felt the urge to pack up her young and send them back to Earth. She shot Trip a desperate look, hoping for some help from that quarter.

Trip took his friend by the arm and guided him into a chair while Hoshi went to get some coffee. While the captain had been in sickbay with T'Pol, he and Hoshi had both slipped back to their quarters. They had watched their daughters sleep and held one another. Grief was rampant through the ship as the news had spread like wildfire, and yet no one had approached the captain with clumsy declarations of sorrow. Most of the crew had watched the Archer children grow up. Everyone from Chef to laundry personnel had talked to them and played with them, tutored them and loved them, just as they had the Tucker brood. It seemed impossible that such vitality was gone and they were all trapped in this loss. Like his captain, Trip wanted vengeance, but as a friend he offered comfort. He glanced at Hoshi as she set down the coffee cups. He tried to imagine, just for a minute, losing his whole world. He might, though he didn't know how, survive the loss of his girls if he had Hoshi with him, but if anything were to happen to her... He shook off the thought, grateful that he didn't have to try to cope with that. There was enough heartbreak in losses he had to deal with. He felt a little guilty as well. A week ago Hoshi had given birth to the fifth Tucker girl. Like T'Pol, her pregnancy had been conceived on a lush little planet, but unlike T'Pol it had been an easy one, and an easier birth. He wondered if his little Samantha would ever get a chance to play with the sick little girl in medical. He rested his hand on Jon's arm. "You should get some rest. It will be a while before we hear anything new."

Jonathan took a sip of his coffee and shook his head. "I can't sleep without T'Pol. I can't..." The overwhelming grief was being pushed back by will once more. Now wasn't the time, not yet. "How are the engines taking the strain?"

Trip took the change of subject gracefully. "We are holding steady at 4.5. Travis says we could squeeze a bit more out of them, but it wouldn't last long, and we can't afford to blow any relays."

Jonathan nodded. His eyes were blurring. He tried to shake it off and concentrate on the facts. Forrest had sent them everything the Vulcans had at the moment. The T'Barra had been a small vessel, geared more for transport than combat. Whoever had hit her had known exactly how to disable her and had done so in less than an hour. The attackers had then disappeared, leaving only an Andorian signature behind in the debris when the P'Tarrol, which had been the closest ship, had arrived in response to their hail. While the Vulcans tracked the Andorian signal, the Enterprise was heading at her fastest reliable speed to join them. Jon stood suddenly. "I need to check on T'Pol."

The Tuckers shared a knowing look as the youngest of the Archers was not mentioned. They said nothing as Jonathan walked out of the room.

Sickbay was dark and quiet but for the beep and lights of the monitors. Jonathan

entered and went to stand beside T'Pol. She looked for all the world like something out of a fairy tale and he desperately wanted to kiss her to see if she would wake up. It was stupid and irrational and he didn't care. He leaned over slightly and brushed his mouth across hers. His eyes were closed as he whispered "wake up sleeping beauty." He hadn't really expected it, had no hope of it, but was comforted somewhat in the doing. He was startled out of his thoughts by a loud, shrill beep, and automatically looked at the monitor near T'Pol to see what was happening. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary, but there was another beep, this one followed by a strained cry. The very reed thin quality identified the owner, and despite his misgivings, he found himself moving closer to the covered crib to the right of T'Pol's bed. He cautiously peaked into the glass lid and took in the tiny form of his daughter. She was very active, arms and legs moving, much as Pixie had done in her cylinder. Though early by Vulcan standards, her mother had managed to carry her a full nine months. She looked stronger than Zack had at birth. In fact, she looked stronger period. One little fist swung and pulled free the tubing at her nose. This caused the monitor on the crib to beep loudly yet again and more insistently. He was about to open the crib when Dr. Phlox came in. "Ah Captain. I am glad you are here. I was hoping of course that you would get some rest but I wasn't counting on it." The doctor's enthusiasm lightened his heart somewhat, and then he felt guilty. How could Phlox be happy when the children were dead? The doctor continued as if Archer's death glare had bounced right off him. "This little girl is doing so much better. It seems once free of the stress of her mother's womb, and birth, she is bouncing right back. If she continues to progress we will be able to remove her from the incubator."

Archer shook his head, afraid to hope. "T'Mir... We named her T'Mir." He glanced back at his wife. "How is T'Pol doing?"

The smile slipped for a moment. "She is stable, Captain, but she has not regained consciousness. I don't think she wants to and I can understand why."

"Yes..." He watched as Phlox flipped up the lid expertly. The physician wasted no time adjusting the tubing back into T'Mir's tiny nose. He then scooped up the little girl and wrapped her in a clean blanket. With barely a glance at the captain, he thrust the baby in her father's arms. Jonathan was so startled he nearly dropped her, but the warm weight felt both familiar and too good, and he cuddled it to him. He didn't notice Phlox's grin as the doctor prepared a bottle for the newest addition. Before he realized it, he was ensconced in a rocker by T'Pol's bed, singing a lullaby as he fed his daughter. The tears that slid silently down his cheeks were a combination of wonder, joy, and the deepest of sorrows.

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