

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

Jonathan rose silently from his bed and slid on a pair of sweat pants. It had been nearly six months since the children had been retrieved and still he couldn't stop himself from getting up during the night and checking on them. Teams had gone to work and expanded the children's rooms. The boys slept in one while the girls got the other. Pixie didn't seem to mind sharing a room with the baby, in fact, the child was never far from her. T'Pol had located a baby harness and adjusted it to Pixie's frame. Wherever Pixie went, she had T'Mir strapped to her, and if she didn't Zack or Aidan did. The baby wanted for nothing between the three of them and was strong and healthy now.

Enterprise had returned to Earth for the conferences she had been called home for initially, and the children had been reunited with V'Lar and Soval. The elders had been just as relieved as the children, and made a point to spend some time with them. Aidan and T'Mir, as well as the Tucker girls, were also included in the activities when time allowed.

While on Earth, Archer had looked into Aidan's family and found that the boy truly had no one left. He had briefly considered turning the child's care over to someone else, but the boy's attachment to the Archer children and their attachment to him was unbreakable, and after a talk with both his wife and children, Jonathan Archer had petitioned for legal adoption of the boy. When asked, Aidan had stated his place was with Zack and Pixie. Archer offered him his name and the boy accepted. He was a well behaved child and took excellent care of the others. He dedicated himself to his studies and had taken an interest in medicine, which thrilled Phlox to no end.

Jonathan entered the first room as quietly as possible and wasn't surprised to find the beds empty. More often than not he would enter Pixie's room and the boys would be sprawled across the small bed with her. He knew he should probably object, but he just didn't have the heart for it. The children seemed to need each other, and they didn't know he was obsessed with checking on them. When he went to wake them in the morning, they were usually back in their beds, or already awake. He figured it was a comfort thing and they would grow out of it. He entered Pixie's room, surprised to find her gone. A quick check of the crib showed T'Mir was missing as well. He tamped down on the panic and headed back to his own room, slipping into a sweat shirt. His eyes lingered briefly on the naked form of his wife. He ached to join her and wake her slowly, passionately, but the need to locate the children was stronger.

Slipping silently from his quarters, he headed for the turbo lift. He had a pretty good idea where they were. The first few times this had happened he had panicked. Now he just headed there automatically. Years ago one of the cargo

bays had been transformed into a combination school room and play area. It was there he found the children. They didn't notice the door opening so he slid inside and watched them from the shadows. Heavy mats covered the floor on one side of the bay. T'Mir was firmly strapped into an infant swing at the edge of the mats and the three youngsters were facing off. A random strategy of attack and defense raged in their actions as they fought. Were he not secure in their skills, Archer would have been worried, but all three had taken an active interest in different fighting styles. He only prayed there would come a time when they didn't feel the need to practice so much. He understood it for what it was, a need to feel in control, to not be a victim, to be strong. He had talked to the children, tried to help them through it, but they weren't inclined to tell him everything they had been through. He had been able to piece things together from their individual responses and from talking to V'Lar and Soval, but he couldn't help feeling he had let them down and now they no longer felt comfortable. T'Pol had suggested that maybe they were protecting them as parents from things that would hurt them. He couldn't imagine anything hurting as much as not having the children, but knowing they had been hurt and he couldn't change it, couldn't convince them to confide in him or another adult, came in a close second.

His eyes slid over his son. The boy was quick and alert, his moves strong and sure. The gauntness of before was gone. In fact, the boy seemed to have gotten taller, but he was also more solid, sturdy looking than before. At the rate he was growing, Jonathan was pretty sure the boy would be taller than his father. He bit his lip as Zack went flying over Aidan's shoulder. He hit the floor with a solid thunk, but was back on his feet in seconds. Both boys were shirtless and sweat ran down their backs. The scar on Zack's neck was faint now and caused him no problems, but the reminder of it made Jonathan ache for his child. While active, the boy was much more subdued than he had been. He rarely fussed about anything, and was the first to join his mother for evening meditation. As the days passed, the child became more Vulcan-like in his behavior. As before, T'Pol thought it was about control, specifically the things Zack had control over. Jonathan was inclined to believe her.

A soft grunt of pain drew his attention to his daughter. Like the boys, she was dressed in loose trousers. She was also clothed in a snug, sweaty tank top. He winced as he noted once more how much she had changed. She was beautiful and delicate, and turning into quite a young lady. He wondered briefly if he should have T'Pol talk to her, then figured it was probably a job for both of them. T'Pol and Phlox had been working with her to discover the depths of her healing abilities. She could heal a cut or even a break on it seemed any type of creature, but the task drew from her, usually exhausting her in a matter of moments. They were leery about having her practice the skill because even minor injuries seemed to take a lot of effort. T'Lin didn't particularly care for those skills anyway, seeing them as a necessary evil. She much preferred martial arts training. He didn't like the rough training she engaged in, but understood her need for it. She eagerly absorbed everything he, her mother and Malcolm chose to teach her.

They had even started researching the fighting techniques of some other races in an effort to allow her to learn all she wanted to know. Like her brother, Pixie had become more subdued, but she still balked some at meditation. She preferred to use her own method to relax and think and after a bit of discussion, they were inclined to let her have her way. Three days a week she meditated with her mother and brothers, and three days a week she could be found in the gym performing tai chi or some equally related art. Sundays she usually spent with him. It was still stilted and awkward but it was getting better. The two of them could be found in the gym doing some weight training. Afterward they would watch a water polo match or play with Porthos or something equally easy. Later the boys and T'Pol would join them and they would spend some quality family time. It was necessary to rebuilding their relationship and their family and he loved every minute of it. He found time for each of the boys during the week and T'Pol did the same. They hadn't gotten to the point where they took the children's presence for granted again, and he hoped he never did. He continued to watch the children, barely noticing as the door opened and T'Pol came in. He smiled as her hand curled in his. The two of them stood for a long time, watching as the children continued to practice different holds and maneuvers.

T'Pol tugged lightly on his hand, drawing him to the door. "They are safe, Jonathan."

He resisted for a moment and then let her pull him out the door. "I know. I just had to make sure."

"I check on them as well. You can't fight their monsters for them Jonathan, not anymore."

"I have to try. I keep thinking if I watch them, if I take better care of them, I can reverse the wrongs that have been done to them."

"You can't change it, you can only be there for them now."

"I know, but I have to try."

She gave him a knowing look and guided him to the turbo lift. "Better we teach them how to fight their demons on their own so they are not defenseless when they are alone."

"I know you're right, but I can't help how I feel."

Her hand came up and stroked his cheek. "Your feelings are part of what drew me to you. After all, how could a man with so much passion, so much love, so much emotion, possibly survive? And yet, not only do you survive, but you live each day to the fullest, thriving and growing and yet remaining the same. You have drawn me into your existence and I find myself willingly trapped here as

long as you are with me."

As the lift doors closed, he pulled her into his arms. "I love you T'Pol. I think I have from the first moment I saw you."

One delicate brow rose. "You had an odd way of showing it. I believe you threatened to knock me on my backside."

His hands slid down to cup the anatomy in question. "And a lovely one it is too." He kissed her gently.

She slid from his arms as the lift opened, taking his hand once more and leading him to their quarters and into their room. "It occurs to me, that you might seem more sincere if you show me."

A brilliant smile crossed his face, and the worries of the night fled for the moment as he lifted her onto the bed. "My pleasure, Ashal-veh."

And it was.