

*Space...the final frontier.*

*These are the voyages of the starship U.S.S. Monarch.*

*It's mission is to explore, to seek out life, to represent and defend the Federation in unexplored space, and...*



# To Boldly Go

All Things New

Cleve Johnson

Doctor Janice Stuart reclined on the couch of the apartment that her husband had secured near Starfleet Headquarters while they

waited for the new U.S.S. *Monarch's* completion. She picked up the book that she had started a few days before and opened to the page where she left off reading. She made it through the second paragraph when the annoying sound of the door chime started, announcing a visitor. Jan laid the book

on the nearby table as she rose from her reclined position. "Computer, identify visitor," she said in a clipped tone.

*"Identity Starfleet, active. Hathaway, Admiral Robert G., Chief of Starfleet Operations."*

Jan's mood changed immediately at the announcement of the visitor on the other side of the door. "Enter," she said, and the computer-controlled door obeyed her command.

"Am I intruding?" the gray-bearded man asked warmly.

Jan smiled at her husband's uncle. "You're always welcome, Admiral," she said with a gleam in her eye.

"Admiral?" the man said with a hint of disappointment. "You've been part of the family for more than a year and you still call me Admiral?"

Jan walked up to Hathaway and kissed him on the cheek, his beard tickling her chin in the process. "I'm sorry, Uncle Bob," she said sweetly. "It's hard to see your rank pips and not

say it...out of respect for you and your position.”

Hathaway chuckled. “Just remember, Janice, that we’re family first...”

“...and Starfleet officers second,” she finished the sentence for him. She gently took his arm and led the admiral into the apartment. “Can I get you a drink?”

Hathaway nodded as he made his way to the nearest chair. “Since I’m off duty I’ll take a martini,” he replied, sitting down. “I like it shaken, not stirred,” he added.

“Rob likes his the same way,” Jan stated as she walked into the kitchen area. Within a few minutes, Janice returned to the main room with Hathaway’s drink. “Of course, it’s rare that he drinks anything stronger than hot apple-cinnamon tea,” she continued the conversation that began before she left to make the drink for her uncle-by-marriage.

Hathaway accepted the glass and put it to his lips. His eyebrows rose as he sipped it. “Now that’s a martini!”

Jan smiled as she sat in the chair across from Hathaway’s. She didn’t know the admiral well—having been separated by more than a hundred fifty light years—but knew him well enough to see the look of concern etched on his face. “Is something wrong?”

The admiral’s demeanor swiftly changed from doting patriarch to Starfleet flag officer. “There is a problem, but I want to wait for my nephew to hear what I have to say,” he replied. “When is he due back?”

“I expect him any time,” Jan said. “When not giving guest lectures at the Academy he’s conducting interviews to pick senior officers. I think he’s meeting with one of the candidates for first officer this morning.”

“I don’t envy him that,” Hathaway stated under his breath, which made Jan laugh. “Do you have any guesses as to who he’s leaning toward?”

Jan shook her head. “I’m afraid he’s being tight lipped about that,” she

said. “I know that he has sent his choices for security chief and chief engineer to Admiral Olanski for approval.”

“I know Patricia has approved Lieutenant Mills for security,” Hathaway said. “And I’m pretty sure that Commander Li will be a shoe in for chief engineer. He and Robert were at the Academy together.”

“Commander Li and Rob?”

“Yes. They were in the same graduating class.” The admiral started to lift the glass to his lips again when he noticed the book on the table. “Bridge officers’ guide? Are you wanting to be a bridge officer, Janice?”

The doctor smiled. “Yes...and no,” she said. Jan saw a look of confusion enter Hathaway’s face. “What I mean is I still want to be a Starfleet doctor, but I want to push myself to do more. I want to expand my horizons.”

“Plus a promotion would be a nice added benefit,” Hathaway said.

Jan nodded. “Well, I probably have thought about that more than I

should," she said. "But I have to admit that I'd feel more comfortable married to a ship's captain if I were at least a full commander."

"I suppose you're right," Hathaway said. "What does Robby think about it?"

Jan smiled. She always thought it humorous that the admiral referred to a forty-two year old man as 'Robby.' "He's very supportive, but I try not to ask him to help me study."

"Why not?"

"He's been so busy the last few weeks, getting ready for his new command," Jan said. "We're supposed to be on leave, but he's not had too much free time."

"You've been in Starfleet long enough to know that things rarely settle down for a starship captain. Even when on leave."

Jan rolled her eyes and smiled at the admiral. "Unfortunately, I think you're right about that."

Hathaway leaned forward and took Jan's hand. "One thing is certain, my dear," he said smiling. "My nephew showed good sense in marrying you."

"Why do you say that?"

"Not many Starfleet spouses are as understanding as you," Hathaway said.

"It takes two, Uncle Bob," she said. "Rob is probably the most understanding man that I have ever met. He knows that a successful marriage takes give and take from both of us."

"Maybe that's why I never married," Bob stated. "I was always too rigid to give."

Jan's eyes twinkled as she thought about Hathaway's statement. "I think that you have deprived some poor woman of having a wonderful life with you," she said as she rose from her chair.

Just then the door slid open and Rob Stuart entered the apartment.

"You're right on time." Jan approached her husband and kissed him. "Your uncle's here."

Rob walked to Hathaway, now standing, and grasped his hand firmly. "How are you Uncle Bob? I didn't expect to see you until the weekend."

"I thought I should give this news to you personally," he said.

"What news?" Rob's forehead creased as he instinctively knew that he was about to hear bad news.

"The *Monarch* launches day after tomorrow."

"What!? I don't have a full crew yet," Rob exclaimed. "The engines have been tested at warp power, but the ship still has some work before she's ready."

"She'll be ready. Admiral Olanski's office has been working around the clock to make the necessary crew assignments," Hathaway stated. "You may not have a full compliment, but it will have to do. You'll have the opportunity to pick up additional crew enroute."

"What's happened, Uncle Bob? Why the rush?"

"One of our scouts, the U.S.S. *Columbus* was surveying unexplored space a couple sectors beyond Mira," Hathaway said. "That's the area you were to be assigned anyway, so the *Columbus* was sent to pave the way for you," he stated. "We lost contact

with it three weeks ago. Then it showed up at Pacifica yesterday morning.”

“What happened to it?” Jan asked.

Hathaway turned his attention to the doctor. “We’re still trying to sort that out,” he said. “The ship had minor damage. Nothing that can’t be repaired, but the mystery involves the crew’s whereabouts.”

“What?” Rob exclaimed.

“The ship was controlled by the holographic backup crew,” Hathaway stated. “We found the CO sedated, in sickbay under the care of the EMH. He’s in a state of shock and unable to answer any questions at this time.” Hathaway sighed. “I need you to go to Pacifica to pick up Commander LaSalle. Hopefully, he’ll be coherent by the time you get to him. Find out what you can and trace the *Columbus*’ original course to see what happened to the rest of the crew.”

Rob turned and walked to the window that overlooked the San Francisco Bridge. He started to get the feeling—the one he used to get during

the war that would churn his stomach right before going into battle. “The *Monarch* isn’t ready yet, Uncle. Isn’t there another ship you can send?”

“All available ships were sent to help defend Klingon space from an alien invasion force two weeks ago,” Hathaway said. “The *Monarch* is the best ship capable of completing this mission. Actually, you’re the best *person* available that can complete this mission successfully.”

Rob, still looking out the window, rolled his eyes. There were other more capable ship captains he was sure, but his uncle had seen qualities in Rob that he did not always see in himself. He had a difficulty acknowledging that at times.

“We need to know what happened to that crew and rescue them if possible. We need to know if there’s a new threat to the Federation.”

Rob turned to face his uncle. “Then we’ll just have to overcome our difficulties and get the job done,” he said. He held out his hand to the admiral, who shook it heartily. “I won’t fail you, Uncle.”

“You never have, Robby.”

Jan, who had quietly observed the conversation, stepped closer to the two men. “Well, I guess we better get packed,” she said. “I have to get sickbay in order.”

Hathaway nodded. “And *you* need to decide on your first officer,” he said to Robert. “I believe that your choices for the other senior positions have been approved.”

“That’s good news,” Rob said. “And I know who I want for my XO.”

“Who?” Both Jan and Hathaway said in unison.

\* \* \*

Commander Marcus Grey sat on a bench overlooking the campus of Starfleet Academy. He thought about all the good times that he had as a cadet, the people he had known. He had not kept in touch with most of his classmates over the years, but he did have fond memories. He remembered the day that he met his wife while sitting in the very spot he now occupied. She had tripped, falling right into his lap as he tried to

study for his warp theory exam. Marcus always accused LaDonna of doing it on purpose, although she never admitted to it. Fond memories. Because of the Dominion War, all that remained of LaDonna Grey were Marcus' memories...and their son.

Commander Grey's mind abruptly returned to the present by a young midshipman who made as much sound as one could make by walking heavily on the grass. "Excuse me, Commander," the nervous young man said to get Grey's attention.

Grey turned his head. "Yes, cadet?" Grey talked with an even, cordial British accent. "What can I do for you?"

The cadet stood at attention. "With your permission, sir, I have a message for you from Starfleet Command." The young human mechanically raised a PADD, offering it to the officer.

Grey reached out to accept the device from the cadet. "Thank you, Mister..."

"Winters, sir."

"At ease, Mister Winters," Grey said as he activated the PADD and skimmed through the message. "Tell me, cadet Winters, how you became my personal mailman."

"I work in the Academy communications office, sir."

"Do you like it? Working in the communications office, I mean?"

"It is neither a matter of like or dislike, sir," Winters stated. "It is merely my assigned duty at the present time."

Grey smiled at the young man, who reminded him of another cadet fifteen years earlier—himself. "I always thought that duty was such a bore when I had it a number of years ago." Grey patted the cadet's shoulder. "Regardless of the duty, try to enjoy it...at least a bit."

"Yes sir. Thank you sir."

"Carry on, Mister Winters."

The cadet snapped to attention. "Aye aye, sir." He quickly turned and hurried across the campus toward the building that housed the communications office.

Grey watched the young man depart and wondered if he had been that rigid during his stint at Starfleet Academy. He decided that he had been worse. He smiled as he looked back at the orders displayed on the PADD's screen. The message was short and clear.

**To: Commander Marcus Grey,  
Service #SG-1980-MG-7**  
**From: Starfleet Command,  
Office of Personnel**

**You are hereby assigned to U.S.S. Monarch, NCC-88522 as first officer effective stardate 55541.1. You are required to report to aforementioned starship no later than 1700 hours, same stardate.**

**Patricia Olanski, Admiral  
Chief of Starfleet Personnel**

Marcus turned the PADD screen off and briskly started across campus. His ship had, literally, come in.

\* \* \*

Jan was busily packing her and Rob's personal belongings when the door chime sounded. "Come in," she said.

The door slid open, revealing a man wearing the uniform of the Starfleet Marine Corps. He was young, possibly mid-to late-twenties. His hair was light brown and cut short as most Marines preferred to wear it. He stood at attention, waiting on the doctor to acknowledge his presence.

"Is there something I can help you with, Marine?" Janice asked.

"Lance Corporal Tyree at your service, Ma'am," the young man said with a distinct southern drawl. "I'm here to help transport your belongings to the *Monarch*, Ma'am."

"I didn't know that Rob was sending anyone this soon," Jan stated.

"He probably doesn't know that I'm here, Doctor," Tyree said. "Major Craddock sent me to help you."

"And who is Major Craddock?"

"Major Craddock is my commanding officer, Ma'am," Tyree said. "He commands the Marine

detachment assigned to the U.S.S. *Monarch*."

"Oh," Jan said surprised. "I wasn't aware that any Marines were assigned to the ship. Well, I'll take any help that I can get. If you could help me move the storage units out of the bedroom, I'd be grateful."

"Yes Ma'am." Tyree said. He started to follow the Janice when she almost stumbled. The young corporal grabbed her by the arm to steady her. "Are you okay, Doctor Stuart?" he asked as he helped her sit on the couch.

Janice held her head as she sat down. "I just go a little dizzy," she said. "I've been pushing myself to get packed. I'll be fine."

"You jest sit here and rest, Ma'am, while I bring the containuhs out. Tyree went into the room and started carrying the various storage containers to the living area. He meticulously stacked the plastic boxes in the room's center. After the third trip to the bedroom, Tyree brought out the last of the boxes. "This was the last

one, Ma'am," he said. "Are ya feelin' okay, Doctor Stuart?"

"Much better, thanks," Jan said as she started to stand. "You're very kind, Corporal."

Tyree offered his hand to help Jan stand. "Is there anything that I can get for you, Ma'am?"

"No, I'm fine, Corporal," Jan said. She looked around the room and spotted a container on the counter that separated the living area from the kitchen. "On second thought, could you get me that box on the counter and put it with the rest."

"My pleasure, Ma'am," Tyree said as he walked over to the counter. He picked up the container and placed it on top of the other containers. "Is there anythin' else to go, Doctor?"

"No, I think that's it," Jan said. "Thanks for all your help."

Tyree placed an isolinear homing sensor on top of the neatly arranged containers in the center of the room. "I aim to serve, Ma'am." He tapped his combadge. "Tyree to *Monarch*. Please lock onto isolinear tag number seven-

seven-tree-wun tango and transport directly to the captain's quawtuhs."

"Acknowledged," a voice said and within seconds the storage containers were surrounded by sparkling light as they faded into nothingness.

Tyree offered his arm to Jan. "With your permission, Ma'am, may I escort you to the ship?"

"Certainly, Corporal," Jan said as she put her arm in his.

Tyree tapped his communicator again. "Two to beam up," he said. "Eruhize."

Doctor Janice Stuart and Corporal Tyree disappeared from the Stuarts' apartment.

\* \* \*

Captain Stuart looked around the engine room. It was the largest engine room that he had ever seen on any starship that he had served aboard. He turned to the chief engineer, Henry Li, who he had known since their days at Starfleet Academy. "Very impressive, Henry," he said. "So

will be able to launch in less than two days?"

Commander Henry Li nodded to his old-time friend, who had just become his CO. "She's space-worthy now, Robert. We can launch in less than thirty minutes if you wanted to."

Stuart chuckled. "I think we'll wait until the scheduled time, Henry," he said. "So what's still needed?"

"The long-range sensors need to be calibrated. Warp drive is available, but there's a slight misalignment of the matter injectors," Li said. "I have teams working on those now, so they should be done in three to four hours. The corps of engineers is still working on the marine barracks."

"Marine barracks?" Stuart's forehead wrinkled when he heard that comment. He had not been informed that Starfleet Marines would be aboard. This mission was developing more and more into one of potential combat instead of one of exploration. "Why do we need marine barracks?"

"I figured you knew," Li stated. "Starfleet is putting marines on most *Sovereigns* now."

Stuart contemplated his newly discovered information. It was certainly a policy that Starfleet—and his uncle—failed to inform him of. "Well, I'll have to talk with Starfleet about that," Stuart said, trying to not be too upset. "Is there anything else that I should be aware of?"

"Nothing that I'm privy to."

"Very good, Henry," Stuart said. "It's good to have you, especially with your previous experience on the *Sovereign*. In addition to chief engineer, you will also be my second officer."

"I appreciate that, Robert, but my interests are strictly engineering."

"I know, but you are a full commander," Stuart gently protested. "You never would have taken the bridge officer's test if command didn't pique your interests on some level."

"Well, maybe a little," Li replied. "Actually, my former CO pushed me to take it."

Stuart smiled. "Okay, so command is not what you want. But I still need a second officer and you're the best choice." Rob could see the

reluctance on Henry's face, but the tight launch schedule did not permit the luxury of waiting for another qualified person to be assigned the position. The *Monarch* would be leaving the Sol system without a full crew compliment anyway.

The chief engineer considered the situation. He realized that his allegiance to Starfleet and to his duty took precedence over his personal preferences. "Very well, Robert. I accept."

Rob patted Henry on the shoulder. "I look forward to serving with you, Henry. We'll make time to reminisce about our good old days at the Academy."

\* \* \*

“Welcome aboard, Commander Grey,” Lieutenant Jennifer Mills stated as the newly appointed first officer stepped off the transporter pad. “I’m Lieutenant Mills of ship’s security, sir. Captain Stuart asked that I escort you to the bridge.”

“Thank you, Lieutenant,” Grey said. “Lead the way, if you please.”

Lieutenant Mills, followed by Commander Grey left the transporter room. This was Grey's first time aboard a *Sovereign*-class starship. He hoped that the challenge would be all that he had heard from those who served aboard the growing number of this class.

\* \* \*

Later that afternoon Jan Stuart stood in the quarters that had been reserved for the captain...and being the captain's wife, she benefited from sharing one of the most luxurious staterooms onboard. She looked around the living area, shaking her head at the pile of storage containers in the center of the room. She didn't hate packing and unpacking, but with her studies and the task of getting sickbay ready...well, setting up her and Rob's quarters would have to wait. She turned toward the door and left the room.

\* \* \*

“I thought that the *Monarch* is an exploratory vessel, Uncle,” Rob Stuart said as he looked at Admiral Hathaway's image on the monitor. “Why is there a marine detachment assigned to me?”

“Don't be upset Robby,” the admiral gently cajoled his nephew. “It's not uncommon for *Sovereign*-class ships to have marines assigned to them. Besides, you're heading for uncharted waters and you don't know what's out there. They may come in handy. And besides that, we don't have a full compliment of trained Starfleet security personnel to give you right now.”

“I guess I don't have much of a choice then.”

Hathaway smiled at his nephew. “I'm afraid you don't, Rob. You may not like this either,” the admiral said, “but a small squadron of *Peregrine*-class fighters has been assigned to you as well. You'll pick them up at Starbase G-6 enroute to *Pacifica*. I'll have the squadron's personnel files uploaded to your ship's computer within the hour.”

Rob shook his head. "No offense, Uncle, but I thought Starfleet's mission...my mission...is one of exploration."

*"You know that exploration is at the forefront of all that Starfleet stands for, but we have to be ready to defend the Federation...and our interests,"* Hathaway stated in his fatherly tone of voice. *"And remember that the Columbus' crew disappeared under mysterious circumstances. Finding out what happened to them is your primary concern."*

"You're right, of course," Rob said reluctantly. He remembered his role as *defender* during the Dominion War, the Vendoth invasion, and a number of other small skirmishes—Rob tired of that role, but knew that it was a necessary part of being in Starfleet. His destiny had always been to explore the unknown. He only wanted to fulfill that destiny. "I only wish that the universe would allow us to put conflict behind us so we could get back to the challenge of exploration and discovery."

*"As do we all,"* Hathaway agreed. *"On a more positive note, you'll also be picking up a first contact specialist at G-6. A Betazoid civilian by the name of Elsen Rab. He comes highly recommended."*

"A first contact specialist? That at least sounds promising," Rob said. "Okay, Uncle Bob, I made the decision to accept this command. I'll accept everything that comes with it...including Starfleet Marines and fighter squadrons."

The door chimed, interrupting Rob's conversation with his uncle. "Ah, that must be my new first officer," he stated. "I need to go, Uncle. I'll talk with you again before we launch."

*"Take care, Robby."* Hathaway's image faded and the Federation seal appeared on the computer terminal's screen.

"Enter," Stuart said in response to the chime.

Lieutenant Jennifer Mills, followed by Commander Grey, entered the captain's ready room. They stopped in front of the desk and came

to attention. "Commander Marcus Grey reporting as ordered, sir," the new first officer stated.

Stuart stood and stretched out his hand toward Grey, who grasped it firmly. "Welcome aboard, Commander," Stuart said with a smile.

"Thank you, Captain," Grey replied.

"Please sit down, Commander," Stuart said. He turned his attention to the security chief. "Thank you Lieutenant."

"Sir." Mills turned and started toward the exit.

Stuart sat down behind his desk. "Well Commander, congratulations on your new assignment."

Grey smiled. "Thank you, Captain," he said. "I appreciate the opportunity that you are giving me, sir."

Stuart allowed a slight grin. "Don't thank me yet, Commander. I'm not giving you anything," he said. "You're going to earn it."

"I wouldn't have it any other way, sir."

"Good," Stuart replied. "We're on a tight schedule, Exec...you don't mind me calling you Exec, do you?"

"Not at all, Captain."

"Good. Well as I was saying, we're on a tight schedule and I would like for you to get started with your duties as soon as you get settled."

"Of course, sir," Grey replied. "What are your orders?"

"I would like you to put together a bridge crew rotation schedule based on the standard three-shift model," Stuart said. "I would like it to go into effect by the time we launch."

"Understood sir. I'll have it on your desk for approval by 0730 tomorrow if that is soon enough."

"That will be fine," Stuart said. "All department heads will be reporting to you, so make a point of introducing yourself to each one at your earliest opportunity."

"I'll make that a priority, Captain."

"Good," Stuart said. "You will have plenty of opportunity tomorrow evening. I'm putting on an informal dinner in the captain's mess at 1730

hours so the senior staff can get acquainted."

"I look forward to it, Captain. If that is all, I should get started on my duties immediately."

Stuart held up his hand to indicate that he wasn't finished. "Hold on, Exec. You'll find that I'm rather laid back in my command style," he stated. "Before you get to work you should probably make arrangements to have your personal effects brought on board. Do you have family that will be coming?"

"I have a twelve-year-old son named Ian," Grey stated. "My parents will be keeping him on Earth."

"We're going to be away from Earth for a long time, Exec. Possibly two or three years," Stuart said.

"He would like to come, but I'm not sure that I could raise him as well as my parents will...being a single parent, as it were."

Stuart remembered reading in Grey's file that his wife had died a few years ago—a casualty of the Dominion War. "It's your choice, Exec, but I think the boy would be better off being with

his father. Especially during his teenage years."

Grey considered what his new CO said. He knew that Stuart was a married man, but did not know if he had children of his own. "It could be difficult for him without friends."

"I'm sure that he'll make friends. There are a few members of the crew with children on the ship. Some are close to Ian's age."

Grey nodded. "I was not aware that other children were on the ship. Thank you, Captain Stuart. I will consider having the lad join me."

Stuart smiled. "Don't take too long to think about it, Exec. We leave day after tomorrow," he said. "I just want you know that your son is welcome to come with us."

"Thank you, Captain," Grey said. "I'll contact him tonight and we'll talk it over."

Stuart swiveled in his chair. "Good," he said as he stood up, indicating that the meeting was over. Grey, following his captain's cue, stood as well and snapped to attention. Stuart walked around the desk and,

once again, shook the first officer's hand. "It's good to have you on the *Monarch*, Commander."

"Thank you, sir," Grey replied. "I look forward to serving with you, too, Captain."

"One other thing, Exec," Stuart said. "My wife has been studying to take the bridge officers' test. As first officer, you will help her prepare and administrate the test."

"Understood Captain."

"Now don't give her any special consideration because she's the CO's wife. Treat her like you would any other officer."

"I assure you that there will be no special favors, sir," Grey stated.

Stuart smiled. "Welcome aboard, Exec."

\* \* \*

Janice finished downloading the crew medical files from the main database located at Starfleet Medical. She picked up her tricorder and started to put it on the shelf behind her desk when the nausea hit. She set the device back on her desk and

reached for her stomach, trying to settle the queasiness. She slowly moved toward her chair and sat down. She mustered enough energy to call out to her staff in the next room.

An attractive Vulcan woman entered the CMO's office. Like Janice, she wore the blue tunic of a medical officer and the rank pips to signify that she also held the rank of lieutenant commander. "How can I help you, Doctor Stuart?"

"Can you get me some phenol, Doctor M'Tan?" Jan asked. "I'm feeling a little nauseous and dizzy."

M'Tan stepped out of the office and returned with her medical tricorder. She scanned Janice and raised an eyebrow. "I believe congratulations are in order, Doctor," she said. "Based on previous observations of expectant fathers, I imagine that Captain Stuart must be excited."

"I haven't told him yet," Jan said.

"Forgive me, Doctor. I assumed that this was a planned pregnancy."

"It is," Jan stated as she continued to gently rub her abdomen.

"I just didn't think it would happen so soon."

Doctor M'Tan stepped out of the office once again. When she returned, she held a hypospray. She stepped behind the desk and pressed it against Jan's neck. "You conceived five weeks, six days ago," she said. "Have you scanned yourself, Doctor?"

Jan looked at her colleague as the nausea dissipated. "No," she replied. "Is something wrong?"

"No, Doctor Stuart," the Vulcan said. "But there is something that you should be aware of."

\* \* \*

Rob hung the last picture—a painting of the starship *Providence*—on the wall behind his desk. It was a gift from the crew of his former ship. He looked around the room, satisfied that he could get a job as an interior decorator if he ever retired from Starfleet. "Jan should love this," he said to no one but himself.

As Rob admired his own handiwork, the door to his quarters slid

open and Jan walked in. Rob could see how tired his wife appeared. "I was beginning to wonder what happened to you," he said as he approached his wife to kiss her.

"I'm really tired, Rob," Jan said. "I just want to go to bed."

"Without eating?" Rob said. "I can replicate something for you."

Jan gave a half-hearted smile. "That's sweet, dear," she said while slowly moving toward the couch. "How 'bout a bowl of chicken soup and some saltine crackers."

Rob started toward the replicator. "Computer, give me Chicken Kiev with a baked potato and broccoli for two."

Within seconds two plates materialized with the food that Rob requested. He carried the two dinners to the living area and set them on the table in front of where Jan sat.

"I said I wanted a bowl of soup and some crackers," Jan snapped.

"I thought you would like your favorite meal," Rob said as he took away her plate and set it back inside the replicator slot. "Recycle," he

ordered the computer. "Give me a bowl of chicken noodle soup with saltine crackers on the side."

Rob returned with the soup and crackers and set it in front of his wife. "Hard day?"

Jan nodded. "I'm just tired," she said. "I didn't mean to bite your head off."

"You've seemed tired a lot recently, honey. Is something wrong?"

Jan took a bite of one of the crackers that Rob had given her. She slowly chewed on it while she contemplated how to tell Rob what Doctor M'Tan had revealed earlier. The direct approach would probably be best. "I'm pregnant."

Rob's face lit up. "Really?! I didn't think it would happen this soon," he said. "I didn't stop my injections until we decided to accept the transfer."

Jan smiled at her giddy husband. "You don't mind?"

"Mind? Of course I don't mind. We decided that if we were going to have children, it needed to be soon."

Jan reached for Rob's hand and squeezed it. "I have something else

to tell you," she said with a serious look that told Rob that his wife was concerned about something.

"Is the baby okay?" Rob asked nervously.

"Very healthy," Jan replied. "But we're not having a baby, Rob. We're having *two* babies."

Rob's mouth opened, but nothing came out as he tried to talk. He was not sure that he heard Jan correctly. "Did you say we're having twins?"

"Twins," Jan echoed. "A boy and a girl."

Rob stood up and gently pulled Jan up to a standing position. He gently put his arms around her and kissed her passionately. He didn't stop until Jan pushed him away.

"Hold on, lover boy," Jan gasped. "You gotta let me breathe."

Rob smiled at his wife as he still held her hands. "Sorry, dear. I'm so happy that I...well, I don't know." His face illuminated the room. "Let's celebrate."

Jan pulled her hands away, forcing Rob to let go, as she sat back

on the couch. "I'm glad your excited, but I need some rest," she said. "Maybe we can celebrate when things settle down."

Rob smiled again. "Alright, honey," he said. "We'll wait."

"Thanks, Rob," Jan said just before lifting the spoon toward her mouth. "And thank you for getting our quarters squared away. I'm not sure when I would have done it."

"It's the least that I could do with all the work that keeps you busy in Sickbay," Rob said. "Anything I can get for you?"

"Just some space so I can relax," Jan said. "I'm expecting tomorrow to be pretty busy in sickbay with all the crewmembers' physical exams."

\* \* \*

**P**retty busy was an understatement, Jan realized as she performed her eighth examination. Even with a staff of three additional doctors, twelve nurses—six of them working alpha shift to update crew records and assisting the doctors with crew examinations and

inoculations as needed—Jan felt overwhelmed.

Karen Ingalls, the head nurse, led a young ensign to Doctor Stuart. "Doctor, Ensign Wilson said that he hasn't been sleeping well lately and feels a little run down."

Jan forced a smile as she scanned the young officer. "I think I know how you feel, Ensign. Everything looks okay except maybe your immune system could use a boost," she said. "Karen, please give him four units of Xanthosyn three."

"Yes Doctor." The head nurse retrieved a hypo from the nearby table and injected the young officer. "This should help, Ensign."

"I'll be right back," Jan said as she left the exam table to go to her office. She returned with a bottle of maroon-colored liquid. "Here you go, Ensign," she said. "Take thirty milliliters of this with each meal and you should notice an increased energy level within a few days."

"Thank you, Doctor," Ensign Wilson said as he jumped off of the exam table. "With your permission, I

need to get back to duty." The young man accepted the bottle from Doctor Stuart and exited sickbay.

"You seem to be feeling better today, Doctor," Nurse Ingalls stated.

"I'm feeling much better," Jan replied. "I have to remember to eat and rest more often."

"How did the captain take the news? About having twins?"

"He was actually excited about that," Jan said. "I worried that he would be overwhelmed, but I think the news made his day."

"I'm a twin," Karen stated. "We used to fool our friends when we were kids, pretending to be each other."

"Identical twins," Jan said. "Fortunately, these two won't be able to do that since there's one of each."

"Have you picked out names yet?"

"I'm not even a full six weeks yet, Karen," Jan said. "Rob and I haven't discussed names. We have time."

"The time will go by quick."  
"I'm sure it will," Jan said.

**R**ob Stuart entered the marine barracks searching for the officer in charge of the detachment. He looked around the large room full of bunks, stacked three high, but did not see anyone except a few members of the corps of engineers that were installing wall lockers.

One of the engineers noticed Stuart looking around and approached him. "Can I help you, sir?" the man asked. Clearly, he felt a little nervous about having the CO looking over his team's shoulder while they worked. High-ranking officers in the area tended to slow down his workers.

"I'm looking for Major Craddock," Rob said. "The computer said that he was in the marine barracks."

"I think he's across the corridor, sir. In the other bay."

Rob nodded with a slight smile. "Thank you." He exited the bay, leaving the work crew to finish construction. The door to the other bay opened automatically, allowing Stuart to step in. He saw three marines

talking—one officer and two gunnery sergeants.

"Attenhut," one of the gunny's said vociferously.

"As you were," Stuart said. "Major Craddock, could I have a word with you please?"

"Aye, Captain," Craddock said. He nodded to his top NCOs. "First platoon can beam up and get their gear stored within the hour. The other bay should be finished by 1400. Then second platoon can beam up."

"Straight away, sir," one of the sergeants replied.

Craddock quickly strode towards Stuart. "You wanted to see me, Captain?"

"I'm going to be honest with you, Major," Stuart began. "I am concerned that marines are aboard my ship."

"You don't like marines, Captain?"

Stuart chuckled. "Don't get me wrong, Major. I have nothing against you or the marines," he said. "I just see Starfleet's mission as one of peace and exploration. And since we're not

at war, I don't see the need for a combat unit assigned to me."

"I understand sir. May I speak freely?"

"Absolutely."

"I agree that Starfleet is primarily an organization that is devoted to exploration," Craddock stated. "However, I understand that we're going into an area that is new to us and that the first ship sent there for the initial survey returned without its crew."

"Then you've been briefed on the situation." Stuart said it as more of a fact than a question.

"Yes sir. I am also told that you don't have a full security team available. Frankly Captain, you need me and my marines."

Stuart decided that he liked the major. Anyone who could stand up and give his opinion directly to a superior officer without hesitation walked into Stuart's good graces. "You're correct, Major. I do need you and your marines. I want you to understand your role on this ship."

"My orders are to provide a security force for the *Monarch*, sir."

"Your orders are to work with and support security, Major," Stuart said. "I want you to understand that my chief of security is Lieutenant Mills and you will follow her orders."

"With all due respect, Captain, I do outrank Lieutenant Mills."

"Yes, but she is my security chief. I want you to support her and her department to the best of your ability. Can you do that?"

"Aye aye, sir," Craddock said. He was slightly perturbed, but tried to not to broadcast his feelings to the CO. "Will there be anything else, Captain?"

"There is one thing. I would like you to join me and the other senior officers for dinner in the captain's mess at 1730 hours."

"Why thank you, Captain. Will it be a formal gathering?"

"No, standard duty uniform will be fine," Stuart said. "It's going to be more of an informal gathering to get to know one another."

"I'll be there, Captain."

"Good," Stuart said as he stretched out his hand. "Welcome aboard, Major."

"Thank you, sir," Craddock said. "I look forward to serving with you."  
"And I, you, Major."

\* \* \*

The senior officers sat around the large table eating and talking. Delicacies from a dozen worlds, as well as the more common Earth cuisine, had been laid out in buffet style per the captain's request. Stuart wanted to make his crew feel comfortable by allowing them to have a variety of food to choose from instead of him choosing a particular dish to be served by the mess hall waiters.

The atmosphere of coziness apparently made the officers at ease with each other and more importantly, with their new commanding officer—exactly what Stuart had intended.

Rob tapped a spoon against his wine glass to halt the conversations between his officers. All eyes focused on Stuart, now standing. "I know that we have just met, but I want you all to know that I have full confidence in each one of you. I will brief you all tomorrow about our mission before we launch,

but tonight is for getting to know one another." He lifted his wine glass. "Here's to a new ship, a new crew. May both be known as the best in Starfleet."

Each of the officers raised their glasses and took a sip of the contents—Chateau Picard.

Henri Li lifted his glass in the air. "Here's to our new CO," he said, followed by several others who voiced their agreement.

"To new worlds," Commander Grey said.

"And congratulations to Captain and Doctor Stuart who will soon become new parents," Commander Li said.

Both Rob and Jan smiled as they held hands, looking into each other's eyes. Rob, in spite of a mission that might not turn out to be pure exploratory as he had hoped, was a happy man. He had a wife who loved him and he would soon become a father. Robert P. Stuart, captain of the newly commissioned U.S.S. *Monarch*, lifted his glass once more. "To all things new."

**To be continued...**

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U.S.S. *Monarch*, NCC-88522  
*Sovereign-class*

Type:	Explorer
Length:	674.4 meters
Beam:	240.0 meters
Draft:	82.5 meters
Mass:	3,250,000 metric tons
Decks:	24
Production Base:	San Francisco Orbital Star Yards
Accommodations:	750 standard
Shuttlebays:	2
Shuttlepods:	4
Shuttlecraft:	8
Runabouts:	4
Workbees:	10
Fightercraft:	8
Escape Pods:	195

\*I would like to thank Peter Koester for the above information, taken and slightly modified from the U.S.S. *Dauntless Sovereign-class Ship Systems Manual*.