

Star Trek: Torrent

How Long Shall Mercy Suffer?

By Professor Augustine

Captain's Log, stardate 2264.5, U.S.S. Torrent, NCC-1423, Captain Samuel Bradwell recording. We have been ordered to open negotiations with the nearby planet of Hondel. The people of the planet have just achieved Warp Drive but unfortunately they find themselves dangerously close to the Neutral Zone.

The system was a very scarcely populated one, and the *Torrent* cut a impressive figure in the night sky. It had two warp nacelles attached directly to the main saucer section, a large engineering hull that came down from a squat neck, and open shuttle bay. The white paint of the ship was clearly a Starfleet vessel, and the bright red racing stripe down the secondary hull was the final touches on the paint job.

To the naked eye the ship would have not looked very indistinguishable from many other stars in the sky. Even from the surface of Beta Sigma the ship was just a lone dot. The away team though saw the ship as home. The three security team officers followed their commander while she negotiated with the alien leaders. “The Federation places a high priority on life of all kinds. You would be much safer with us than the Klingons.”

The Ambassador was still not sure of the alien female wearing the golden Starfleet uniform, but he was interested in the proposal. “My government has not given me permission to say anything other than trade negotiations will be suspended.”

Commander Diana Sullivan sighed, “I would like to know why your government wants to cut negotiations with the Federation. We are a peaceful people and we care for those in our borders. We have a good reputation with the people in this quadrant, so what is the problem?”

He looked from one direction to the other, it was almost like the Ambassador had something to hide. “You see, we have lost two ships in a sector of space not far from here. My leaders are worried that the ships have been destroyed by the Klingons to keep us from joining the Federation.”

That said, he looked at the nice woman as if she were an executioner and then turned to leave.

In a moment of haste Commander Sullivan jolted forth. “Wait a minute! If we can determine what has destroyed your ships the will you consider joining the Federation?”

He looked back at the smiling woman. “Well, yes, that would be just fine. We don't have the ships to spare, you see. Thank you Commander Sullivan. If you do us this one favor I will ask my government to reopen negotiations with the Federation.”

A smile came across her face then she flipped open her communicator and gave the order to teleport. The next thing she saw was not the red grass of the planet, but the familiar face of her commanding officer.

Captain Samuel "Sam" Bradwell always smiled when he knew his First Officer completed a task as important as this. “Well, Number One, how long before we can start stationing ships in this sector?”

The security team walked down off the transporter pads and went to their respective stations. The Commander stepped down as well. “We have to talk alone please, Sir.”

He knew it was about the mission, and gave a nod to the transporter chief to clear the room. He was not a very imposing man, short in stature with a thick mat of brown hair covering his head in curly loops. He was only thirty and had never commanded a ship before, but his friend, Admiral Forrester, had faith in him. Samuel Bradwell had been in command for one week when the ship left spacedock. He was worried his orders to open trade negotiations with these people were not going well. "Did the negotiations go well, Number One?"

For a moment the Captain held his breath as she began to speak. "Not good, Sir. The Hondel have just come out of a brutal world war that killed millions. Had it not been for the development of warp drive in their culture they never would have reached the stars and stopped fighting among themselves. Now they've gotten into space and learn their planet is positioned between the Federation and the Klingon Empire it makes them suspicious. They don't want to get dragged into another war, and I can't blame them."

Bradwell sighed. "So the mission failed then did it?"

"Not exactly, you see they have a very small number of ships that have warp drive, and two have been destroyed. They were lost in a expanse of space we could explore, and if we discover the nature of the disappearance the Hondel

people will consider joining the Federation.” Diana looked at her Captain trying to make the connections in his mind. It was like watching a detective link up one clue to another.

Samuel was intrigued by the mystery, but he was ordered to orbit the planet. Finally he shook his head, “Why did you make this the thing that our negotiations hinge on?”

“Sir if we can prove the ships were not destroyed by the Klingons then they won't fear further loss of ships - they will know something natural happened to them. Can we lay in a course for that tract of space?” Diana knew her Captain was a stickler for orders and did not want him to deny her request based on bureaucratic concerns.

Finally, he gave in. “Let me talk this over with Starfleet and see what they say. For now, lay in a course, but remain in orbit. Understood?”

Commander Sullivan smiled, “Yes sir, I will tell helmsman Corey to do just that!”

Nights were never the same after he lost her. He dreamed of the Vulcan spy he lost on that planet so long ago. The woman he would never get over, and who haunted his dreams no matter how occupied he was. The sound of

rushing water and her death scream were always the way he woke from his nightmares. Captain Bradwell looked around the empty bedroom as he shot upright and saw nothing was in the room with him. His computer was beeping, and he knew it was the response he had been waiting for. He rubbed the sleep out of his eyes and walked over to his desk as Admiral Forrester began speaking in the recording. "Captain Bradwell, your new orders are to lay in course for a long tract of space known as the Dead Sea."

He shook his head and rubbed his eyes again then began looking for his communicator. The nightmares were gone from his conscious mind now and he was keenly aware he was not going to see her face ever again. "Bradwell to the Bridge. We just got orders to change course for the Dead Sea. Lay in a course and engage at maximum warp."

He heard the typical reply and stood to find his uniform. It was hard getting used to all the responsibility that came with command - maybe that was why the nightmares persisted. As he dressed he tried to figure out how long the trip to the expanse would be and he knew it would not be long. He picked up his log recorder off his personal desk and toggled the record button. "Captain's log, stardate 2265.7. We are en route to a expanse of space where dozens of ships have vanished. Starfleet's hope is that by

discovering the reason for losses we will be able to reopen negotiations with the Hondel.”

The Bridge was a bustling hub of activity, the older design of having two computers in the command pits instead of one made for more noise. Commander Sullivan was talking to other crewmen operating the phaser turrets and Lieutenant Keller was arguing with someone else. The screen was showing the upcoming field. At first they saw just dots of metal then those dots became a large, floating scrap yard. Commander Sullivan and the rest of the crew became as silent as the grave while they approached. “Beginning scan of the Dead Sea. So far, no survivors.” That was Ensign Harrison at the science station and he knew the chance of finding survivors in all that wreckage was slim.

From the captain’s chair Sam could make out several different types of ships that had been reduced to rubble. He wondered the same thing: *How the hell could anyone survive in that debris field?* Suddenly there came a shout from the science station: “Picking up something on scanners sir! The blip is small, but it just appeared on our screens,”

Captain Bradwell turned around to face the science officer but still kept an eye on the object. “It is awfully small for a manned ship, could it be a probe?”

Commander Sullivan asked “Should we raise shields, just in case that is a weapon?”

Bradwell smiled at her request. She was thinking like a tactical officer and getting really good at it.” No, Number One. I don't think we need to worry about raising shields just yet.”

Less than ten minutes later Samuel Bradwell was eating his words as he learned his lesson. A long, thin beam began to shine from the probe and Bradwell began kicking himself inside his head.

“Sir, the probe has fired a long range scanner beam that is powerful enough to penetrate the hull!” Everyone could hear the terror in the voice of the young lieutenant as he shouted out the warning.

It all happened so fast that Bradwell had little time to realize just what his people were doing. The Bridge was filled with a searing bright light, the klaxon alarm began to sound and then he passed out.

When Sam opened his eyes he was looking up at his friend Chief Medical Officer Sarah McKenzie as she shone another light in his eyes. “Well it's good to see you're still not a morning person,” she said sarcastically as Samuel sat up and saw he was in Sickbay with Commander Sullivan to his right. “You wake up worse than any of my kids and I have five fully grown ones!”

The Captain asked: “What the devil happened, Doc?”

The older woman with graying hair opened her first aid kit then said, “Well, everyone was knocked out by that damn beam. When I came too I got my med teams to work examining the crew. You were the last to wake up and before you ask, Lieutenant Jensen is in temporary command.” Sarah had learned one thing in her long years serving in Starfleet Medical: Captains made the worst patients possible.

Sam shook his head, looked over at his First Officer and saw her strapped into a scanner. Concerned, he asked: “What's wrong with her?”

The Doctor shook her head, “Got some strange readings when I first examined her. That beam had an odd reaction to her.”

Sam's mind was spinning now as he looked over his First Officer. Jensen was in command and he needed to be up there. Feeling strong enough to stand, he swung his legs over the side of the bed and got to his feet. He then reached out and touched the communication panel on the wall. "Mister Barksdale, how is engineering doing?"

For a moment there was no reply. Just before he hit the panel again he found the voice of Commander Vernon Barksdale chime in saying "Just fine Captain. The warp reactor is running just fine."

"Alright then." To himself he quietly added: "At least Commander Sullivan is the only one who was seriously hurt." Sam turned off the device and turned to see his First Officer lying unconscious on the operating table and then he decided to leave. He was no good to her here.

As he strode through the corridors he considered his feelings. Growing up, hospitals had always made him nervous, but Sarah McKenzie was one of the best doctors he had ever known. He actually enjoyed going to see the older woman, as she always had stories about her family to tell while she examined you. Now he was worried about his friend Diana Sullivan who was for some reason the only person harmed to date.

When he walked into the command bridge he saw the nervous officer giving orders to his fellow lieutenants. Jensen was senior lieutenant on the ship, and that meant he was used to being in charge of others but not the whole ship. The middle aged man was actually fifteen years older than the heroic Captain who stood not two feet away. He stood up, smiled at the Captain and said, "I am relieved of command, Sir?"

"Yes, Lieutenant Jensen, I am here to resume command," Sam gave the formal reply. He declined into the colorless command bridge chair as Jensen turned to go back to his station. Bradwell looked at the screen still showing the debris field and considered.

From the science station Lieutenant Harrison, the junior lieutenant who had just been promoted from ensign two weeks ago, said: "Just thought I should let you know, Captain. Sir, we have tracked the probe back to its point of origin. It's an M-class planet on the other side of the debris field."

"Good job, Son. Link up your information to helm control then the navigator can lay in a course." On screen the image of their route appeared and he saw the distance to the planet.

]The helmsman turned to the Captain. “Sir, may I ask where is Commander Sullivan?”

“She is still in sickbay getting examined. Until she returns to duty Lieutenant Jensen you are acting First Officer.” Now the worry began to sink in. He knew that probe did something to his friend and he would rip apart Hell to find out what.

Another burst of sound came from Science Station One as the computer scanner looked over the upcoming planet. “New data coming in, Sir. High levels of dilithium with no population to speak of.”

His interest piqued, Sam was distracted as a beeping sound came over the intercom system. It was Dr. McKenzie. “Captain, we need to talk.”

Sam stood up, and walked over to the turbolift. On the way out he said: “Mister Jensen, you have the Conn.” The officer stood, and eagerly walked over to take the center seat for the second time in two days. He seemed to relish the opportunity.

As the doors closed he heard McKenzie’s voice ask: “Are you in private?” Her question seemed silly to him for a moment, but the Captain looked to see if he was alone before speaking to her further.

“Yeah, what's the problem?” Captain Bradwell was not used to Dr .McKenzie wanting to talk like this.

A sigh came over the intercom. “Well I found out what was wrong with Commander Sullivan.”

“Yes, well out with it.”

“She's pregnant. Sir, I think you'd better get down here.”

Samuel shook his head, “I'll be down there soon.”

The sickbay was empty except for the lone bed with its sole occupant who looked asleep. Dr. McKenzie walked around her with a computer scanning her constantly. “Good, you're here. I just detected the pregnancy on my last scan and knew you would want to see it.”

“I am assuming she was not pregnant prior to our leaving dock, correct?”

“Yes, Captain. Furthermore the fetus has grown exponentially since the last scan. If it was a normal pregnancy she would be about three months along.” Dr. McKenzie looked down at the computers. “I told her the news and suggested that she get some sleep.”

There was a pause between them and Captain Bradwell sighed as he looked down at the woman asleep by him. “Is there a chance we can abort the pregnancy before it grows?” It was making him uncomfortable talking about his friend like she were not even here, and yet she was laying right beside him.

Dr. McKenzie shook her head. “I would advise against it, Sir, on the grounds that the pregnancy was started by aliens therefore it should not be stopped by us. If I tried to abort the child I can't guarantee her safety.” In her life she had been privileged to deliver lots of babies but none like this one.

He looked back at his friend who knew what was happening to Diana, but knew nothing of the consequences that could ensue. He swore to her: “No matter what happens I will solve this problem and keep us from meeting with the same fate as all the other ships that have gone this way.”

Doctor Sarah McKenzie smiled as she sat in her office, and tried to look like she was ignoring the vow her Captain had made. He was one of the best officers she ever served with, only thirty two, and he was earning the loyalty of his crew by every action he made. This was only one demonstration,

and she knew he would get to the bottom of this mystery soon. Commander Sullivan lay there, asleep while the crew struggled with the peril surrounding her current problems. They were the only two in the sickbay now, the Captain had left to go and save the day. However it still felt as though Sarah McKenzie was all alone, and light years from her large, loving family. All the problems she was having trying to extract the child were strange, and under normal circumstances they would have been dealt with easily. These were far from normal though, and as she went about looking through other options she knew the child growing at an uncommonly fast rate may pose a greater risk than any Klingon fleet in history.

On the bridge Lieutenant Jensen was looking at the screen with the others while Lieutenant Keller tried to decode the message they had just received. It was a spoken message and the creatures that sent it were keeping themselves concealed. “Got the translation finished, Sir!”

“On main viewers!” Lieutenant Jensen shouted as he waited eagerly for the video message. Sometimes the crew could see the nervous excitement that was welling within the young officer, and they had to contain the very same emotion to do their jobs properly.

Captain Bradwell walked into the bridge as he watched the screen shift from a star field showing a planet to a message, and just like the lowest ensign he was holding his breath. The voice was simple and slight as he spoke the words everyone had waited for. “Attention alien ship, we have sent a probe out to meet you already, and judged you uncivilized. However like all who trespass on our borders we sent you a test to see the value you place on life. We will check in with you when the test is completed.”

Bradwell clapped his hands in a fist as the revelation hit him like water crashing into a beach. “Commander Sullivan! It’s a first contact test! No wonder Doc was not able to abort the baby.” He was talking to himself, and when he realized he was on the bridge all that control that came with being the Captain came back to his thoughts. A notion came to mind: *perhaps the aliens have tampered with the Doctor's thinking, influencing her to do her best to prevent the pregnancy from being terminated. Had they done the same with anyone else? Or am I simply becoming paranoid?*

Lieutenant Jensen heard his Captain's vocal musings and was shocked. “What does Commander Sullivan have to do with all this?”

Curtly, he said: "I will explain later." A little thought crept into his head that left him feeling sick. *Did these aliens do the same thing to all the ships that came through here? If so, then what did they do differently than we are?"*

"Captain's log, stardate 2265.8. The crew knows that Commander Sullivan is pregnant and we are operating under the belief that it was a result of the beam fired at us by the alien probe. Now the only question is: what will happen next? It has been two and a half hours and Dr. McKenzie says the baby is almost ready to be delivered."

In sickbay, Doctor Sarah McKenzie saw the nervousness expressed in her friend, Diana Sullivan. "Don't worry now. We will beam the baby out when you go into labor. It's safe for you and the baby. Are you excited, nervous, or mixed feelings?"

Diana had an unbelievable look on her face. "I don't see how you could even ask me that! I don't want this baby; I never wanted one! I just want it out of me and taken care of by someone else!" Then Diana saw the hurt look on her friend's face. "Look, Sarah, don't take it personally. I just never wanted children. I'm not nurturing like you." She hoped that would make her friend understand, but the hurt look on her face told a different story.

Doctor Sarah McKenzie shook her head, dismayed. “That's fine, it's your choice. I guess you don't care that it's a boy. When he is born, and if you still don't want him, I will be happy to adopt the boy. My husband and I have five grown children, it will be nice to take care of another one.” The doctor walked away from her patient, confident in her victory and proud of her mercy.

Half an hour passed and they set up a small transporter pad to prepare for when Commander Sullivan went into labor. Then came the wait.

On the bridge the navigation the officer suddenly shouted: “Captain, three objects are surrounding the ship. They seem to have a strong power sources.”

Sam was drawn back from his concern for his XO. “Understood. Shields up! Yellow alert!” The viewer showed the three peculiar objects just as the helmsman said: “I think they're powering up their weapons!”

The moment was shattered as over the intercom the voice of Dr. McKenzie came with the noise of a crying child in the background. “We are proud to report a new life has come into the universe. The mother is doing just fine and will be able to return to duty in a day.” At the same time

the smaller ships surrounding the *Torrent* backed away slowly. The smaller ships were triangular shaped craft, and they were each about the size of a shuttlecraft. They didn't go far and still surrounded the much larger Starfleet ship and thus the standoff began.

Sam watched the results from the Captain's chair. "Well, I don't think we have to worry about being destroyed today," he said confidently. Now, the only question was what would happen next?

The baby looked normal in every sense of the word, but when he looked up at Commander Sullivan it was like he knew she was his mother. It was uncomfortable and unnerving to see the baby look at her like that as Doctor McKenzie took him away.

As she watched the baby taken into another part of sickbay Commander Sullivan felt nothing at all. It was a disturbing sensation as not a week ago she had stood on the homeworld of the Hondel people and promised them that she and all of Starfleet loved life. She felt a sickening sense of hypocrisy sneaking up on her.

The child grew at a phenomenal rate. Within hours the boy watched his mother working on the computer next to her

bed and a deep seated distrust began to settle in his heart. The woman had delivered him and he knew *that* somehow as naturally as he knew how to breathe.

Two days later found him and the other woman was teaching him basic Earth history as his daily education required, and when her back was turned he asked: “Where did my real mother go?” A new look had come over the face of the older woman named Doctor Sarah McKenzie that he had never seen before. The boy had been raised by Sarah, she was a nice woman, and she had introduced him to some of the other brothers and sisters he would meet on Earth when the *Torrent* returned, but there was something wrong. He knew for some reason that Sarah was not his biological mother.

It was suddenly strange to be called on her lie. “I don't know what you're talking about, Jay. Now, let's get on with our lesson.” Taking care of a ten year old was fun, but when the child was only two days old, and mentally as well as physically a ten year old, things got complicated.

The small room they were in had a camera. Ever since his birth the boy had been under tight surveillance. It was not something she was comfortable with, but when he said that she looked immediately to the camera. “Jay, don't talk to your mother that way. I have raised you. Let's go back to

our lesson.” Sarah was married to a teacher back home, and they had each home schooled their children until early adult hood, so being a school teacher was not something she was unaccustomed to.

The boy looked down to the floor and began to read the datapad while she looked in awe. “I really don't need to hear the lesson about Khan during the Third World War, Mother. I want to know where my real mother is. Let me think here, she is an important officer, I think, so she would be on the bridge.” He was trying to take into account the design of the ship he had lived on, and without seeing any schematics of the *Torrent* it was hard for him to get a good grasp on it's overall design.

At that point the doors slid open and Captain Samuel Bradwell, along with two redshirt officers, came walking into the room. The men were carrying phaser pistols and they aimed them at the boy. Both of the guards hated doing this. They had been told the baby was not normal and possibly an alien intruder of power and strength beyond measure, but he still looked like a kid. They had been well trained and no matter what order they were given it would be obeyed. The conversation being shared inside the small room was being heard outside as well, and the boy was sending shivers down their spines as they heard the mature sounding dialect he spoke with.

He folded his arms and said, “How do you know all this? I insist you give me some answers before I let these men test their weapons.” Bradwell was never good at any threats - he always assumed it was one thing that may prevent him from being a good father but he always wondered what it would have been like to raise a child with T’Mol.

The boy smiled at the proud man. “I would like to see the bridge. I think my real mother is there. Is it a small bridge like all other *Korolev*-class ships?” The boy looked up at the ship Captain as if he could read his thoughts.

Sam looked at Dr. McKenzie with the most accusing expression he ever showed. Sarah held up her hands and swore: “Captain I swear I never told him a single thing about what kind of ship he is on. I just raised him like any other of my children.” Sarah knew the boy was unusual and she also knew he didn't like being lied to. It was very unnerving to have the boy just born a few days ago and already look and act with such maturity. Then a thought crept into the usually locked down morals of her mind that she would never have confessed to ever harboring. *Maybe I should have told the truth, and let you die of an abortion, you monster!*

Captain Bradwell saw the boy look at her and then said: “What do you mean, you should have let me die?”

“Security, I want you to keep guard over this alien life form. Keep your phasers on stun.” Then he looked at his chief medical officer and pointed to the door. “I think we should talk alone, Doctor McKenzie.” She looked down at the boy she had raised, the boy who should have been calling her mother and acting like her son, but instead had untold abilities. He may have even thrown her under the bus and let the secret of his birth out. The two officers walked out into the corridor and when they had locked down the doors Bradwell let loose. “You went on record and told me that there was no way an abortion could be performed. Is that true or not?”

Sarah closed her eyes. She always hated being yelled at and now the hateful face of her father yelling at her years ago came back to haunt her. She gathered her thoughts together. “Captain, I have told you the truth, there was no way to perform the procedure without killing the mother in the operation. Also, I knew the pregnancy was a result of the alien probe. I remembered what had happened when the other ships went through this area of space and theorized killing the baby might result in our destruction.”

Captain Bradwell shook his head. “So, in other words the operation could have happened but you did not feel comfortable doing so because of the risk to your patient right?”

“Correct, Sir. However, I am a mother and have always wanted children, so when I found out Commander Sullivan did not want the boy I was ecstatic. It meant another chance to have a baby. But I was thinking that, Sir. I never wanted, even for just a moment, to throw that infant out of an airlock. I don't think this was an abduction, but I do think it was a first contact mission.” They had taught her in Starfleet medical that not all alien races reproduced the same way and that all life should be preserved. This was the most important piece of morality she knew and she was not about to sacrifice that so Commander Sullivan could not have to raise a baby. Then there was the threat to her ship, she knew that if the baby had been killed all lives would have been lost on board, would it have been her fault then?

“None of this changes the fact that boy knows things no human child should know considering his isolation. Being able to tell me what class of ship we're on without reading any computers, possibly by reading your mind? I don't think it is wise to let the boy around other human children.” He was frustrated as he felt his hands were tied. “If I try to get him off my ship then the powerful alien force that destroyed those ships out there in space may turn and destroy us. We need to know what happened on those other ships before we can make a proper determination about this situation.” He put his hand on the shoulder of his

friend. "Sorry the boy did not turn out the way you hoped, Sarah. I know you're a good parent, and an even better Doctor, but I need to think about this as a possibly dangerous first contact."

As she sat in the command chair Commander Diana Sullivan felt an odd feeling stir within her and knew it was regret. She remembered she had once seen Dr. McKenzie talking over subspace with her family and it looked so nice to have that many people who loved her. Then again, her husband was a teacher and lived on Earth to take care of her children, a normal family unit. She had been raised on starships her whole life and the most time she had ever spent on Earth was when she was a cadet at the Academy. She felt she would have been a poor choice to have raised the child. Dr. McKenzie was far more qualified to care for the boy, she reasoned. Then why was she so guilt stricken? The boy was still growing rapidly and he was becoming harder and harder to ignore.

She reminded herself the Captain had given orders to search the debris field for an intact ship then see if an internal recording could be found. So far there had been no luck. She had to fight to keep her mind occupied and hoped there would not be any guilt lurking in her bedroom late at

night. A shiver went up her spine as she looked out to see a familiar Vulcan ship that was still mostly in one piece. “Scan that ship, see if the internal security recordings were left intact when it was destroyed. I also want to know if life support is still functioning. If we can't link with their computers we may have to board her.”

From the science station Lieutenant Harrison scanned the old ship with the ruined ring that once provided gravity for the whole crew. “Our computers are trying to link up with theirs, but no link up is available at this time. I am however seeing several computer banks still intact and functioning properly.”

Sullivan smiled, the science officer was damned good at his job, and she was proud of him for that. “Good job. Is life support functioning well enough to beam over an away team?” She knew that Captain Bradwell would have to lead the team. He knew more about Vulcan technology and society than anyone on board.

“Affirmative, Commander. We could beam over a small team for a short amount of time.”

“Good, I will inform the Captain and make plans for them. Pull us alongside, Mister Jensen. You have the bridge.” She stood up and walked out of the room to the lift. The doors closed and the guilt closed in around her. The sense

that somehow she had failed her morality and the only other person on board she knew who suffered from guilt was her friend the Captain.

In his office, Sam Bradwell sat reading the scans of the damaged ship, haunted by the memory of the Vulcan woman had been paired with him back when their two governments ran joint operations together. They went on survey mission after survey mission together going in under deep cover taking notes on amazing civilizations from first hand experience until that Patel mission.

The memories were still vivid. They were on the planet when they found out the poll shift was about to occur, and there was nothing to do. The smell of the smoke from that industrial era city still filled his nostrils when he recalled that day, knowing that the whole city would be covered in ocean in minutes and their only hope was immediate communication with the Vulcan ship in orbit. He had made friends with many of the workers, but he had to conceal his true identity as the final hours of their lives approached. Lives he was helpless to save.

They had gone to the edge of the city that had been settled in between two large mountains when the rush of water came. That roaring sound that haunted him every night

when he lay down in his bed. His heart was torn as he relived that he never even got to say goodbye to her. Memory took its cursed hold on him at times and when the doors opened he was relieved to see his First Officer standing stoic and calm as ever.

“Captain, you asked me to inform you when the scans of the field were completed. We have found a Surak class ship that has the majority of its internal computers still intact. We can mount an away team and retrieve the computer information but we will have to do so manually.”

Sam looked down at the readouts flowing over his desk. He knew what they meant and he did not want to face that. He sighed and said: “I know no one else has spent time abroad one of those ships like I have. Therefore, you will need me to lead the team.”

Commander Sullivan shook her head, “That was the general idea, Captain. I don't know of anyone else on this ship who could find his way around that Vulcan ship other than you.” It was true, no one else had the experience dealing with the Vulcans other than the Captain, and to be honest deep within her she was scared of leaving the ship. Even though Starfleet was known to work with the Vulcans no one ever got a detailed internal schematic of their ships.

Then the Captain had worked with T'Mol, his Vulcan co-operative, and learned all about their culture.

“Very well, Number One, plan the away team and inform me of any alien activity in the vicinity.” He had to be brave now, he told himself. He was going back to the same type of ship that saved him, but could not beam out the woman he loved. The woman who could never expressed love for him, but he knew the sentiment was there nonetheless.

As she walked out the door she saw the distress on his face, and yet he was still going to face it. She had to admire that very much. Before she led the room she paused and turned back to the Captain. She knew about his history as well as the Doc and their friendship helped break down the barrier of rank. She asked her question. “Does the guilt ever go away Sam?” She knew the man would be interested in what posed the very personal and unusual question.

He sat there, and gave a thoughtful King Solomon like furrow to his brow. “Well, Diana, I don't think so. I always face that mission in my dreams. Nothing my psychologists ever did for me gave those dreams cause to leave. Why, Diana? What do you have to be guilty for?”

She knew the question was coming but it still didn't make it easy to answer. “When Doctor McKenzie told me I was pregnant I wanted to kill the child. I didn't even think

twice. I look at the boy who is still growing and sometimes I hate myself for giving him up. I spent my life going from one starship to another and never had anyone but my parents. When I went to the Academy I had friends, but after four years they never spoke to me again. I have this deep seated self hatred when I look at what I thought, versus what I was taught at Starfleet Academy.” She saw a surprised look on his face, but a sympathetic look as well.

“I hate to say this to you, but I don't have any answers. I really think you have to find your own.” Sam nodded to her.

It wasn't much, but she was grateful. She shook his hand and then left the room. As she walked away she knew for once a taste of what guilt must feel like.

The away team had gathered together with the Captain and were waiting for the operator to finish putting in the coordinates. The two redshirt security guards were armed and ready for anything they might encounter on the Vulcan ship.

The Captain gave one final briefing. “It should not take us too long to pull this off. We just need to find the computer

bank, and download the intel to our tricorders. Chief, we are ready to beam out.”

Without further delay the transporter effect occurred and the team vanished. Diana Sullivan watched them go then turned to command the ship from the bridge. As she walked down the corridor to the nearest turbolift she found a young man was standing before her. He was not wearing a uniform but he looked very determined to speak with her. “Can I help you?” she asked, concerned that this stranger was walking the halls unescorted. He looked very familiar then she remembered: *the boy grew at an abnormal pace and he kept growing when he was born.*

He looked hurt. “It was less than two days ago and you forgot about me.”

The temptation to call him Son was far stronger than she ever expected. “I didn't forget. What is your name?” She saw the tears wanting to well up in his eyes and felt all that guilt wall up with the power of a rushing tsunami against a straw embankment. He looked like her, and the brown hair he sported had been a direct lineage from his mother.

“My mother, the woman who raised me, called me Jay McKenzie, but I always knew you were my real mother. I know because you were angry with my people who in your opinion made you get pregnant with a child you didn't

want. You wanted to abort me, and yet I was still born. Your life was threatened and yet I was still allowed to live. Dr. McKenzie told the guards I was not a threat to you and I am not. I just wanted to see you before my people asked me to return.” He was smiling even though he looked like he was fighting back the same swelling sadness that Diana was.

“What do you mean, before your people take you back?” Yet another question crept into her mind. *How old is he? A teenager? Maybe a very young teenager.*

“My people are very isolationist in their philosophy and the way we gain surveillance on civilizations we may make first contact with is by creating one of our children and giving the civilization every chance to kill the child. We use this to judge the quality of mercy that civilization has or even if they're capable of it. If the people on the ship choose to kill the child then we treat that ship the same way they treated the smaller, helpless life form.” He paused to let that sink in before sadly continuing. “In a few moments I will be taken back to my people and share with them all the knowledge I have gained while here. They have already judged you worthy of survival, Mother, but they still will not make first contact with you.” He saw the conflicting emotions swelling and rising in her and wished he could do something to help.

All that feeling of self-loathing she felt was now gone and she just felt used. "You took it upon yourselves to create life, send that life to a race that may kill it and then judge the race if they kill the baby?" She was incredulous.

"Yes, we cannot know how your morals direct your actions until we see those morals in effect. I must admit, Mother, I was worried you would kill me while I was helpless inside you, but you surprised me - and my people." He gestured outwards. "All these other ships failed because they chose to kill the child. You chose to stand for mercy and that was your saving grace."

Diana was angry but not sure who at. She saw Dr. McKenzie watching the alien over his shoulder but kept her presence to herself. "So does that mean we can go on our way and the destruction of ships along this route will stop?" She remembered what she said to her friend, the Hondel Ambassador, only a few days ago and then recalled that all she said about her morality and ethical teachings had been put to the test.

"I think you know that I cannot answer that, Mother. However, Federation ships will always be allowed through unharmed." He was trying to be as understanding as

possible, but as hard as he tried to contain it a slight air of smugness shone through his exterior.

Sullivan shook her head, “Well, that will have to do then. I will inform the Captain when he gets back that we may go and we will place warning buoys around your stretch of space to keep people away. “

Jay smiled at his mother and the two women watched as a brilliant shimmering light began to fill the corridor and then he quickly vanished.

It seemed like an eternity that the two women stood in the corridor each mourning the loss of a boy they considered to be their son. Then the voice of Captain Bradwell came over the intercom to break their stupor. “Captain Bradwell to Commander Sullivan. We finally got the internal data from the Vulcan ship and you are not going to believe what I found.”

Diana could not help but smirk. “The Vulcan ship was destroyed the minute the crew decided to abort the baby that mysteriously appeared inside one of the women, right?” Commander Sullivan could not help but sound disinterested as she spoke. She had no idea what she should feel other than numb.

“How did you.... never mind I will meet up with you in a few moments.” His voice faded and then there was silence between the two women standing in the empty corridor.

“One of us needs to tell him, or maybe we both do.” Sarah didn't know what else to say.

When Captain Bradwell returned to the *Torrent* they informed him as the three walked to the bridge all what had occurred. Commander Sullivan told the whole story with the Doctor adding points here and there. Finally, they reached the bridge and as the Captain sat down in the center seat the helmsman spoke to him.

“Captain, we have set course to return and orbit the Hondel's home planet.” Having reported, he turned around to face the view screen, ready for their next adventure.

Sam felt a little anticlimactic. While he had been running his little errand of inquiry Diana and Sarah had been making the real discoveries. At least he had learned a few things about the Vulcan cruiser her people would appreciate knowing. It was a consolation. Still, he was left sitting there as Commander Sullivan went to the tactical computer directly to the right of the helm. As he watched he felt that old companion creep up on him. The guilt he

had was still there, but at least his First Officer looked as if she had assuaged her feelings over wanting to abort the baby. T'Mol would never leave him, she would always be there in the back of his mind no matter what may happen. He could see her face, with the short jet black hair and pointed ears like pillars on either side of her face. He sat there in silence thinking about all the ship had gone through, and when they made orbit again he could only hope that the negotiations would go far better this time since they came with the answers they had sought. At least someone had theirs.

Sam waved towards the viewscreen. “Ahead, warp factor three.” Time to get back to work.