

STARDATE 2376.06.11

## USS PERSEUS GALAXY CLASS

That afternoon, after the communique from Doctor Vier, Jarit left his office and headed toward the USS Perseus' school rooms, timing his arrival to be within the last few minutes of class. It wasn't long before the first kids began filtering out, some meeting other parents, some heading back to their quarters on their own. Jarit slipped into the classroom, giving a friendly nod and wave to Korin's teacher as he searched for the familiar spotted face of his 12-year-old.

The teacher smiled and waved back, but was otherwise busy with putting their classroom back in order. Their students were children of Starfleet's best of the best, but they were after all still children, and there was plenty in the classroom that needed to be tidied up.

Korin was still at his desk, doing similarly, and once he'd slung his bag over one shoulder he looked up and saw Jarit. "Dad!" he exclaimed, and ran over to hug him, uncaring of what his classmates thought.

Jarit's heart swelled with fondness at the sound of Korin's voice, and he opened his arms to welcome the embrace, stooping a little to meet him. He savored these moments, knowing that the days when it wasn't cool for Korin to be seen hugging his father would come eventually. "Hey, kiddo," he replied, offering a grin when he pulled away to take in Korin's face, to push his luck by ruffling his son's hair. "Get into any trouble today?" he teased.

Korin wiggled and groused, but in a good natured way. He didn't mind Jarit's doting. Indeed, he had clung a bit to his dad--or more accurately--to their relationship, outlasting his peers in need for parental love and approval, where others his age were instead making the switch to prioritize looking towards each other, forming new social bonds. Korin sucked in a breath and looked guilty. "I, um, got a 90% on my history exam," he admitted.

Despite Korin's evident worry about the grade, Jarit's face betrayed no disappointment. In all honesty, He had been impressed with Korin's academic performance since they transferred to the Perseus. But he understood that the standards that Korin had set for himself were high, and he respected that desire for achievement. "Lower than you were hoping for, hm?" he replied with an easy curiosity. "What do you think was the hardest part of the test?"

Korin stole a guilty glance at his teacher, who appeared to be involved with grading, but was no doubt listening in. It was something he had been slowly learning; adults listened even when you

didn't think they were. So he started moving towards the door, hoping to take their conversation outside. "I'm good with things that I can, you know, put into, into, like a story, but just remembering names and dates is really hard," they cleared the door of the classroom, "And reaaallly boring," he added once he thought they were out of earshot of his teacher.

Jarit picked up on Korin's hesitation, and happily followed him back out of the school room, smiling and greeting a few of the other parents along the way. He chuckled a little at Korin's pronouncement regarding the subject of Federation history. Despite being the second of Del's hosts to enter Starfleet, neither Olet, nor now Jarit, felt a particular excitement about the topic. "Ah, yes. Memorizing names and dates can be a particularly dry activity." He grinned down at Korin as they walked, and felt a passing pang of emotion to think that in a few short years, he might be looking -up- at his son instead. Onar had been a tall man, barely an inch shorter than Jarit, so it was likely that Korin too, would grow up tall. "I'll tell you a secret, Korin. When I was your age, I barely broke 70% on most of my history tests. Sometimes, a subject just doesn't spark passion. That's ok. You don't have to love every school subject."

"I know, I just..." Korin trailed off, his words crowding his mouth, closing it. He wanted to make both his father and his teacher proud, he wanted to succeed at everything required of him, he wanted to have that neat row of good grades at the end of each term. Everything where it should be. Predictable, steady, safe.

"It's gotta be important though, right? Otherwise why else would they teach it?" he pressed the subject, hyper focused on his own worries, not thinking to ask why his father had shown up to pick him up from school. It wasn't that rare an occurrence anyway.

Jarit let his hand come to rest on Korin's shoulder, giving it a squeeze as they reached and entered the turbolift. "Deck 9," he directed the computer, then turned his attention back to Korin. "Sure, everything you learn in school is useful in some way or another, that's true. But remember, a 90% won't damage your future in anyway, I promise." A pause while he looked over Korin's face, and the concern still etched there. "I tell you what. I'll bet I can find us a holodeck program that can help make learning those names and dates easier. Sometimes putting a picture or a story to those lists of data can be just the thing for getting them to stick in your brain. What do you think?"

Korin groaned, but half in a good natured way, and when he looked up at his dad he was smiling. "Alright, if you think it'll help you review," he teased. And he was always happy to get holodeck time, even if it was to review for his least favorite subject.

Jarit would easily admit that he lived to see that smile, and a rush of warmth rose in his chest. "How considerate of you," he teased back with a wink, resisting the urge to scruff Korin's hair a second time. He was making an effort to limit the potentially embarrassing Dad Stuff to once or twice a day. Three, max. "How are you feeling about lunch? I don't have any appointments this afternoon. Our place or ten-forward?"

Your choice.”

"Aw man, can we go to ten-forward?" Korin asked with excitement. In his mind it was a space mostly for adults, and it was exciting to get to go there, no matter how many times they went. By now he was, at least subconsciously, starting to piece together the little clues that something was up, but it was easily dismissable in his excitement to go to the ship's lounge.

"Well, then. Let's go! Computer, Deck 10," he amended his earlier command, and set their path to the ship's lounge. Children were discouraged during the night shifts, but during the day hours, it wasn't uncommon to see a kid or two in the plush grey chairs, having a meal with their family. Over their lunch (which Jarit allowed Korin to choose), he kept the boy occupied with conversation, encouraging him to talk about the subjects he did like and whether he'd decided on a science project for the research module coming up in his class. He kept the talk light-hearted, steering away from frustrations and toward topics he knew would be engaging.

Korin had a tendency to fret, to worry, but Jarit knew how to set him at ease, help him to keep from focusing on the things that bothered or worried him, and to turn instead towards the good, the exciting and hopeful. This kind of soothing behavior came so easily to his dad that Korin almost took it for granted, but he was getting old enough to be able to start seeing his dad as a person, and not just an all-encompassing almost god-like figure in his life. But truth be told, he was happy to ignore this realization for as long as possible. It wasn't until they were close to their quarters that Korin remembered what he had been sensing earlier, that there was News. Reflexively he started bracing himself for whatever it was.

Jarit was observant enough to notice this change in behavior, and he was even a little bit proud that Korin was intuitive enough to pick up on his father's nervous energy. When they were back in their quarters, Jarit sat on the plush sofa, patting the seat beside him and calling Korin over. There was little reason to drag things out further, not when Korin clearly could sense that something was up. "Come sit with me for a minute, Korin. I guess you can tell that I have something important to talk about with you." He tried to maintain a friendly air, to assure his son that neither of them were in any sort of trouble. Nonetheless, a knot was already forming in his throat, a flash of memory tugging at his control, reminding him of sitting down like this on Trill, of having to tell Korin that his Papa wasn't coming home.

"OK," Korin said with a small voice and a dry mouth. He sat, tensing, trying to relax, just making his nerves worse.

That small, scared voice tugged hard at Jarit's heart, and he reached out for Korin's face, fingers brushing over his spots as he tucked a bit of hair behind Korin's ear. "I want to talk about our future, yours and mine. Today, I spoke with an old friend, Doctor Vier, someone I knew very well when I was Olet Del. She's a very talented scientist and she is working on a couple of special projects that could become very important to the Federation. She wants our help, both mine, and yours. She thinks we are just the right kind of family for this assignment. Of course, if

we were to accept her offer, it would mean a transfer to new ship. A brand new, and significantly smaller, research ship. I told her that I needed to talk with you first, because you and me, we're a team, right?"

"Right dad," Korin confirmed, smiling despite his fears in the face of a still very uncertain bit of news. A transfer wasn't anywhere near the kind of worst-case-scenario his imagination could come up with. Of course, with his dad right here, his worst fears were already disproven. After taking a deep breath or two his nerves started to calm, and the possibility that this could be an exciting opportunity started to dawn on him. All at once Jarit's words registered. Research ship, smaller, new. The nature of their conversation over their meal colored Korin's outlook--he could see the brighter side of this much easier now than he might have had an hour or so ago. "So, so tell me about it, do we know anyone else who will be on the ship? What's her name? What kinds of research? How much smaller? How new?"

Jarit allowed himself a tiny sigh of relief. Questions were good. Questions meant curiosity, and curiosity could be nurtured, encouraged. "Well. It's called the USS Sagan. She's a Nova-class ship, powered by bioneural gel packs, similar to the Voyager. You remember learning about the Intrepid class ships, right? It's still fairly new technology and Starfleet wants the Sagan to study some new applications. We would be part of the very first crew to fly her. I don't know exactly how many other people will be onboard, but most likely less than a hundred."

Korin sat back, listening and intent, but realizing he had been sitting unnaturally rigid, leaning forward, even. "That, that is small," he agreed, a little amazed that a ship that size would even be bothered with. But there were others like her, and not every vessel could be one of the impressive behemoths that stood like shining crown jewels in the fleet. And small could mean safe. Indeed, perhaps they truly would be too small to be bothered with.

"Sagan?" he asked in recognition, getting back to happier thoughts, "Like the old Earth teacher and scientist?" There was a little bit of history that he had enjoyed; Earth scientists of the late 20th century who helped nurture and guide the research and institutions that eventually became Starfleet.

Jarit smiled proudly at Korin's knowledge, and he nodded. "Yes, that's right. I guess not all history is boring, hm?"

Korin smiled and ducked his head in embarrassment and acknowledgement. "I like the older history I guess, some of it, I dunno. I like learning about the, the people who were there at the beginning, you know? The ones who didn't know how or when their dreams would come true, but their dreams were so big that they caught up other people in them, and those people helped make the dream come true." He grinned, "Come on, that's way more cool than just memorizing names and dates."

"Well, I can't argue with that." Korin's enthusiasm was infectious and Jarit couldn't help but tug him close for a hug. "I am so proud of you," he hummed, kissing the top of Korin's head before

letting him go. "I'm glad you find people like that inspiring, Korin. If we were to accept this assignment, we might even have the opportunity to be there at the start of some grand dreams too. That's what research and development is all about. Exploring new frontiers of science and technology, and finding ways to help people."

Leaning into the hug Korin didn't try to pull away, but let his dad hold him for as long as he would. "I think I'd like that, dad," he said, "I think maybe this will be okay."

"A thank you, Korin. I think so too." A tangible weight was lifted from Jarit Del's spirit to hear Korin's words. He could let himself start to feel excitement about their future. This really could be good for both of them. Give them both direction and purpose again. A good next step toward healing. "I didn't even tell you the best part," he added with a wide grin, and a wink. "The Sagan is going to be equipped with two holodecks."

"What! No kidding, on a ship that small!?" Korin was practically bouncing in his seat. "Are they, are they doing some kind of holo-related research? Testing new technologies? Could, could I help test it?"

Jarit held a finger up to his lips, in a gesture of secrecy. "Well, nothing is confirmed yet, but Doctor Vier did hint that the Sagan is getting some state of the art holo-technology, and I have a feeling I'm gonna need help testing a few new program ideas I've already got swirling around in the ol' brains." He tapped his head and patted his abdomen.

The more Korin thought about this ship, the more it took on a rosy hue in his mind. Smaller ship, less demanding of his father's time... Sure the two holodecks were a plus, but underneath his enthusiasm for the technology was the desire to simply spend more time with his dad doing something fun away from the demands of a huge starship. He laughed at his father's playful gesture. Then an important question came to him, one that he'd neglected to ask. "When do we leave?" And for a split second of irrational fear, he worried that the answer was going to be, I'm leaving, but you aren't. No, he already knew he was going. Jarit had said family, they were both going.

"The Sagan's maiden voyage will be at the start of the new year, so we've got about 6 months to get ready and make our plans. There's a lot to do and a lot to talk about so that we're prepared, but I believe in us. We can do this together. You and me are the best team, right?" He held out his hand, palm up.

Korin grinned and grasped his father's hand, "The best team," he confirmed. The clasp turned into another hug. His mind buzzed with excitement and more questions. How would he keep quiet about this? Six months! That was going to feel like forever! "I'm glad I get to come with you," he admitted in complete innocent truthfulness, his face half squished against Jarit's shoulder.

Jarit held on to his son tightly, dipping his head to lay a kiss on the top of Korin's head. He could still remember what Korin had smelled like when he was a baby. "I wouldn't take the assignment if you couldn't come with me. I will never leave you behind again. I promise you that, Korin."

Korin pressed his face fully against his father's chest. "Thanks, dad," he said, his voice small and muffled. He felt safe here, and was reluctant to let go.