

STARDATE 2376.08.22

RESEARCH STATION 057

LIEUTENANT T'IRA'S QUARTERS

At the scheduled time, the console in T'ira's quarters chirped and when she answered subspace, a crisp-looking young human man appeared. "Please hold for Doctor Vier."

With another chirp, the secretary was replaced with the image of a Trill woman with a kind, smile-lined face. She was a mature woman but not past her prime, with dark hair pulled back loosely, enough to see the spots that framed her face. "Hello, Lieutenant T'ira," she said warmly. "It's a pleasure to meet you. I was glad to learn that you're interested in the mentoring opportunity."

T'ira squirmed in her seat a bit, getting comfortable before sighing happily and replying. "Hello Doctor Vier, it is also a pleasure to meet you." She said with a warm smile, "Yes, I feel it would be an excellent opportunity for myself and everyone involved." She laced her fingers together and placed them on the table.

The expression that T'ira saw on Doctor Vier's face was not unfamiliar -- a moment of surprise as she processed the pleasant smile upon an unmistakably Vulcan face. But as with many people T'ira met, she then returned the smile with a distinct curiosity. "From what I've heard and read about you, Lieutenant, you have a singularly unique perspective about many things. Your record is glowing with positive words about your education and service."

T'ira nodded, feeling a sense of pride, "Why thank you, Doctor. I try to pride myself on my education and service by learning as much as I possibly can, when I can."

"That's a quality I very much admire. I feel that your experience gives you a great deal to offer as a mentor to inspired young scientists. How do you feel about the prospect of transferring away from your current project? It's a small ship with a lot of crew pulling double duty. Most of the senior staff are also managing development and research projects in addition to their usual tasks. I know your career has been mostly in the lab but I feel confident you have the necessary skills to take the position of operations manager."

"It would be an honor, Doctor. Thank you for having such faith in me. And operations manager? I feel I am up to the task." She said scratching her ear in thought, one of her little quirks.

Doctor Vier had a demeanor that was friendly in spite of her level of authority and extent of career. "I imagine you're asked this a lot, but believe me, it's relevant to our conversation and this project. I'm sure you're well aware that you're a fairly unusual person in that your relationship with your human and Vulcan sides is well... at least in my personal opinion, balanced. But I must say I find it intriguing to meet someone with your genetic make up who is able to access their emotions without being overwhelmed by the intensity of the Vulcan spirit."

T'ira scratched at her ear again, and sighed lacing her fingers back together, a small smile coming to her lips. "Thank you, Doctor. Growing up without my Vulcan father was tough, but my mother taught me all she knew. Emotions are important, and were I born full Vulcan, I know if I would not be the same person."

The doctor gave an approving smile at the response. "I agree, Lieutenant. I have the honor to be on my fifth lifetime and if there's anything I've learned, it's that emotions are important. Emotions and knowledge. And to nurture both of those things requires support and guidance, as I can tell you know. I think you'll do very well as a mentor."

T'ira inwardly beamed, talking about knowledge and emotions was one of her favored pastimes. She could go on and on, but business needed to be taken care of.

As Doctor Vier spoke, her eyes drifted to the computer panel atop her desk, tapping out some commands with soft blips until the colors on the LCARS on T'ira's display shifted. The subspace channel was being treated with aggressively heightened security.

"Lieutenant T'ira, the opportunity that I have to offer you is quite a bit more than meets the eye. But accepting this assignment includes receiving high levels of security clearance and access to highly sensitive Starfleet R+D documentation and assets. Are you prepared to take on the responsibility that comes with keeping the Federation's technological secrets safe?"

Upon hearing the doctor's sentence, she tilted her head and blinked. "Why of course, Doctor Vier. If there is one thing I am quite good at, is keeping secrets safe. I feel I can hold whatever the Federation needs me to right here." She said tapping her head.

"I was hoping you would say that, Lieutenant," Doctor Vier said with a genuine smile. "Welcome to an outer ring of Starfleet's inner circle. We'll discuss your security codes at a later time." She lightly threaded her hands in front of her and leaned forward with the sparkle in her clear blue eyes of one scientist to another about to share a breakthrough.

"While the Innovative Young Minds Project is real and something close to my heart and something that you will be a part of, in the big picture it's only a... philanthropic extra-curricular

activity for the USS Sagan. The IYMPs will be allotted a small section of the ship, shared with your hydroponics bay. The ship itself will be performing routine duties well within the limits of Federation space. Chauffeuring scientists, transporting sensitive materials, collecting samples. But the true mission of the Sagan is as a test bed for Starfleet's most recent technological developments. It's outfitted with a number of bioneural computers being tested for various new uses. The engineer you'll be working with on IYMP is a bioneural specialist pursuing several avenues of new technology."

T'ira kept herself from happily bouncing with a pleased sigh. "I am excited to work with the IYMPs."

"And as I mentioned in my communique, you're welcome to propose a botany related project but your personal primary objective is something of far more gravitas."

Doctor Vier leaned closer to the display, looking into T'ira's eyes.

"How much do you know about the history of artificial intelligence, Lieutenant T'ira?"

She thought for a second, her brow slightly furrowing, "Unfortunately not as much as I should, Doctor. I am aware of new breakthroughs on the horizon though. "

"That's all right. It's a very specific branch of the sciences to be well researched in. You'll know plenty about it by the time we meet in person."

Here she sat back, relaxing into a more leisurely conversation. "I'm sure that you are well versed in how our time is seeing rapid technological advancements with the invention of bioneural gel. Half of the projects here at R+D are various uses for the gel, including my team -- the team that you're now a part of. We have created an android with a bioneural gel matrix. It's completely unlike any artificial intelligence ever developed or encountered and it can /feel/ and has a distinct sense of self."

Here, she paused to take in the half-Vulcan's reaction.

"It can feel?" she said quietly, "Someone can give it a handshake and it can just feel that, and knows between good pressure and bad pressure. I'm astounded. I'm honored to be part of this!" she said with a large smile on her face, Vulcan side be damned, she was excited and happy.

Vier smiled wide enough to show her teeth and crinkle her eyes. There was no mistaking the look of a proud, accomplished scientist. "It -- Rather, /he/ -- He picked his gender about a year ago now. And he can feel far more than just pressure. He has every sense we have, some more heightened than others. Touch, smell.... well, not taste. That's sort of... an issue. But anyway, most importantly he feels /emotions/. He has the most advanced neural network ever created, but he wasn't designed to be a computer full of data. He was made to /feel/ and to grow."

T'ira clasped her hands under her chin "He can feel emotions!" she said happily, "Oh my goodness, this is so fascinating, I'm intrigued and excited to work with him, what is his name?"

"His name is Chuck," Vier replied, clearly beaming at T'ira's response. "It's not the name I was hoping for but such is working for Starfleet. He is a prototype for a technology that would move certain machines away from being simple tools and instead making them our allies and companions. In the future, a cadet like Chuck could serve as an assistant to science and engineering officers. Although he's not permanently connected to an informational network, it's possible to augment the design with a limited library, enough to make for a decent stand-in for a computer. The difference being that he's invested in your safety and wellbeing and will have your back in an emergency.

But that's quite a ways away. For now, he's been sentient for two and a half years. His cognitive and emotional development has been much like a child, though in non-linear and unpredictable ways. At this point in time he has a childlike innocence, though he looks in his late teens. But at the same time he has the sort of solid understanding and awareness of the galaxy and its people as any adult Federation citizen."

Silent nodding as Doctor Vier spoke was her method of communication. She was mentally taking notes and smiling. "And what will my work be with Chuck? Or rather what will his work be with me?"

"Much like the IYMP students you'll be acting as a sort of mentor to Chuck. This will be his first time outside the R+D facility and it's difficult to predict how he will be under the new conditions. His emotions have been known to be very intense at times and there's no way for us to know what's in store for his future. Functionally, he'll assist you with your research and routine operations functions for several hours, a few times each week.

He'll also be studying with the Sagan's chief engineer who will also act as Chuck's 'doctor' as it were. Lieutenant Naja will also play a similar role to you for the IYMPs, from engineering's side. Both the on board team for Project Blueblood and the Innovative Young Minds Project are being managed by Lieutenant Commander Jarit Del, so you'll be reporting directly to him once you settle on the new ship. Del is a psychologist and a counsellor who will be monitoring Chuck's emotional wellbeing and recording his progress. He'll also be the one who structures Chuck's schedule and will be the head instructor for the IYMPs.

But as much as he needs a therapist keeping an eye on him, what he really will need is friends. He needs people to turn to for more than just clinical wisdom. He's not yet had the opportunity to relate to another's experience or feel another relate to his own. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand completely, Doctor. I feel I will be a great mentor and friend to Chuck!"

"I think so too. I'm already looking forward to him meeting you." Her smile was particularly wide and warm as she appreciated T'ira's enthusiasm. She gave herself a tiny shake and schooled her expression into something more professional then continued, "Welcome to Team Blueblood. Your mission aboard the Sagan will begin in just about three months. You can expect to be arriving at Utopia Planitia stardate 2377.01.17. For the time being, I'd like you to remain at your current posting to wrap up anything you need to with your current project. Your superiors will be informed of your reassignment. You'll be receiving new security credentials and a LARGE set of documents that you'll need to review by the Sagan's launch. I'd also like you to plan two weeks of shore leave for yourself prior to reporting for duty. Until then, our only subspace communication will be regarding the Innovative Young Minds Project. Do you have any other questions?"

"I understand, and no I do not, Doctor. Thank you once again for this opportunity." T'ira smiles once again, a pleasant one.

"I'll look forward to meeting you in person in a few months. Take care." With that, the channel closed.