

# Star Trek: Independence Into the Night

By Dnoth

**Stardate: 51006.6 (3 January 2374)**  
**USS Mendez, Executive Officer's Quarters**  
**In Orbit of Earth**

It had been only 2 months since the second Borg attack on Earth. The *Mendez* sat helpless near a spacedock; one of several ships in line to be cannibalized before it's scrapped. In the mean time, the battle damaged *Steamrunner* class still served as barracks for its surviving crew.

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"Well then, why take the command if you don't want it?" asked Susan Windslow.

Ethan's uniform bore a new fourth pip. They were in their bedroom while he packed a large container. "Don't do this, Sue."

She persisted, "You've told me several times how you never cared for being in the command division." Susan sat on the edge of the bed, "And you said your XO experience here has only reinforced that."

Ethan paused and placed his hands on the dresser. His back was turned to her, "I can't say 'no' to them. Not during a war."

Susan got up and embraced Ethan from behind, "There are other ways you can serve. You're one of the best engineers in the fleet."

Ethan smiled. He turned, still in her arms, "Appealing to my ego is very wise."

They kissed and shared a giggle.

"So will you turn down the *Bismarck*?" pressed Susan.

Ethan broke her gaze and began shaking his head, "I can't."

Susan broke the embrace, walked away a few meters, and turned back, "The *Bismarck* will be on the front lines, Ethan!"

"That's where Starfleet needs me," rejoined the new captain.

Her response was quick, "Starfleet doesn't know its ass from a hole in the ground!" Ethan stopped listening, so she toned down a bit. Susan moved closer, "You could be developing new weapons systems or shielding. It would be a waste for you to be on the front."

"Sue..." began Ethan.

"Paul is only four years old; Jeff is 9. They need their father," pleaded Susan.

The low blow grabbed Ethan, "Don't you think I know that?"

"Then tell Command 'no!'"

Ethan raised his voice to a commanding tone, but not to a yell, "There are a lot of other people out there with children. They're fighting and dying, what about them?"

It only took Susan a moment to gather her thoughts, "I can't change that. I can change this situation!"

"Don't you think this is hurting me enough?" asked Ethan. "Don't you think it kills me inside to leave you three for god-knows how long?" He stepped next to her, tears forming in his eyes, "But I won't let down Starfleet or the Federation!"

Susan now shared his tears, "But what if you don't come back?"

Ethan managed a grin through the sobbing, "Then your mother will eventually drive you insane and you won't have to worry about it anyway."

A burst of laughter came from both of them. After it died down, they hugged.

"God, I'm going to miss you," cried Susan.

Ethan's face was wet as well, "I'll come back, even if I have to haunt you in your dreams."

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**Stardate: 51048.1 (18 January 2374)**  
**USS Bismarck, Main Shuttlebay**  
**In Orbit of Mars**

The large compartment was bustling with activity. Cargo was being moved, crew members were embarking and station engineers were disembarking. The main doors hung open, revealing the once red planet beyond.

"Can I look around your new ship, dad?" asked Jeff.

Ethan grinned and patted his son on the shoulder, "I sorry buddy, there's no time. You, Paul, and mom have to go back on the shuttle now."

"I don't want to go yet!" Paul cried.

Ethan knelt down as he hugged the boy, "Sorry, dad has to go win the war now."

Paul seemed satisfied with the answer. He wiped at his tears, "Ok."

Next, he squeezed Jeff, "Be good, I love you."

His eldest son returned the pressure as best he could, "Love you, dad."

Susan eagerly awaited her turn. They had decided before hand to not cry in front of the boys. They clinched each other, neither wanting to let go.

"I'd much rather you annoy me in real life, than haunt me," offered Susan.

The hug ended. With a smile, Ethan said, "I'll do my best."

Susan then ushered the boys to the aft of the shuttle. Right before they rounded the corner, Jeff looked back, "Kick some Dominion butt, dad!"

Ethan laughed and tried desperately to hold in his tears. "You bet I will, bud!"

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Susan Windslow watched from the shuttlecraft window as the *Centaur* class ship warped into subspace. A flash of light and he was gone.

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