

Giving Life



Sean O'Keefe

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By Sean O'Keefe 2021©

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Not everything that happens on the *Enterprise* was all glitz and glamour. Sometimes it was the mundane things that brought challenges all their own.

Like any other function on the ship, Lifeboat Drills, as they had been affectionately known as for centuries, were a necessary, if dull, chore. Given the history of ships with that particular name, it was a good thing, too. Rachel Garrett was concerned that the *Enterprise* curse would strike her ship as well.

After all, the original Starship *Enterprise*, the NX-01, had barely survived its run-in with the Xindi and, once the ship returned to Earth, there had been serious consideration given to scrapping her. Such was the level of damage sustained in their all-too-frequent skirmishes.

NCC-1701 was destroyed by Kirk at Genesis. Her successor barely survived Khitomer. The *Enterprise-B* was lost out there – somewhere.

Yes, it was an illustrious name, yet it seemed to draw a lot of unwanted attention. Rachel was ready to take on a fight – to the death if necessary – but she didn't invite them. She would rather solve her difficulties diplomatically. It was the true calling of the Federation

Flagship. The *Enterprise-C* was meant to fly the flag for the benevolent organisation she represented, not go in guns blazing. It tended to give people the wrong idea.

As she stood in the Recreation Deck, Rachel was reminded once again what a headache it was running these drills. In fact, she could feel one coming on right now.

She stood on the small stage set at one end of the room that was provided for entertainment purposes as well as the odd lecture. This room was dedicated to the crew's enjoyment, so there was plenty of space for games and sports. Today, it was packed with people who were off shift and who were only here because their duty called them to. Those on shift were exempted from this exercise – they were needed to keep the lights on.

Rachel stepped up to the small lectern and it took a moment for all conversation to cease. She then addressed those present. “Good evening, everybody. As you know, Starfleet mandates these lifeboat drills, and we will comply to the best of our abilities. The deck officers will now organise you into your appropriate groups and we will then do a quick, dry run. Make sure you don't eject yourselves. I don't need the paperwork and you don't want to be doing that while the *Enterprise* is at warp.”

An involuntary shudder went through the group. There had been stories about what happened when a ship unexpectedly dropped out of warp. It was never pretty.

The Captain made her way over to the deck officer who would be running Deck One – Lt Commander Darya Bat-Levi. The attractive lady with the silver streak through

her luxurious, long, black hair was marred by a scar that tracked its way down her left cheek to the jaw line. Her prosthetic legs and left arm were not so obvious – a legacy of an accident that had nearly claimed her and had taken her beloved twin brother.

The ever resourceful and efficient woman took her duties seriously. There was little room in Darya's life for humour these days. The ship's second officer was one of the best in the fleet.

“Glemoor, Bulast, Garrett, Simmons and I will be in pod One. Castillo, Jameson,”

Rachel tuned out at the point. She knew what she needed. She found filling her head with superfluous information just gave her a headache.

Her gaze was drawn to Doctor Jo Stern, her CMO, who was making her way through the crowd before her. She looked like a woman on a mission and Garrett wondered why the Doctor wasn't assembling with the rest of her shipmates for the exercise. Jo was part of Alpha shift just like she was.

She should have guessed when Jo pulled up in front of her and said: “Captain, I've got to talk to you about an urgent matter.” Then her glance over at Bulast was all she needed to know what was coming next.

Rachel drew her aside and said, quietly: “I thought we already discussed this. We can't afford the time right now.”

Jo's eyes narrowed. She was never one to hide what she was feeling or thought. “Lieutenant Bulast is a

valuable member of this crew and it's the least we should to. Surely this mercy mission can wait an extra half hour."

The Captain crossed her arms in annoyance. "And just what am I supposed to tell Starfleet? I can't just pull over to the curb so Darco can perform his little ritual."

The Doctor's eyes went wide at that. It was clear she was offended. "Little ritual?! You have no idea how important it is to an Atrean that we do this!"

Rachel responded in kind. "If we don't, is it likely to kill him, Doctor?"

Jo lost a little heat. "No," she admitted. "It won't. But it could impair his efficiency."

The notion bothered the Captain. The nature of their mission called for her people to be operating at their peak. Knowing her Communication's Officer was no doubt listening to their conversation, she turned and asked him directly: "Is this true, Mister Bulast?"

Darco Bulast wasn't the tallest Atrean their world ever turned out, nor the most assertive, but he certainly knew his stuff. So, when the mostly humanoid male sauntered over to the Captain with an embarrassed air about him, she noted it wasn't the only thing that she observed. He seemed a bit off his game. "Captain?" he asked, even more sheepishly than usual.

Any further questioning would have to be put on hold as, out of the corner of her eye, Rachel noticed Darya hold up her portable siren. With a quick blast, everyone was on the move.

Before the Captain could take a step, Jo grabbed her

forcefully by the elbow and kept her from budging. “Don’t put this off, Rachel. It’s important.”

Not understanding at all, she shook her off and just said: “Okay!” before joining the milling throng.

To her consternation, Rachel was the last to arrive at their assigned lifepod. The door was open and, not wanting to waste another second on this annoying diversion, she sauntered inside and took the only remaining seat. However, to get to it she had to step over Darya who, due to her prosthetics, often found it difficult to navigate tight spaces. She noted Thule Glemoor, Engineer Simmons and Darco were already strapped in. Politely, they all acknowledged her arrival with “Captain”.

As she was returning their gestures, and having to step past Darya’s long, stiff legs, her foot got caught in a belt strap and she landed in the Commander’s lap, throwing her backwards. Bat-Levi’s left elbow jerked and connected with the escape pod emergency eject button.

To their horror, their drill suddenly became the real thing. The door slammed shut with a hiss. Outside, the corridor hatch slid closed, and the overhead light flashed red.

Knowing what was about to happen next, Rachel thought to scramble for her seat. However, her quick-thinking second officer beat her to it. She wrapped her mechanical arm around her Captain’s chest and held on tight.

The lifepod jolted savagely as it was ejected from the

top of the saucer of the *Enterprise* at warp. The warp bubble sustained it for a short time, but its trajectory carried it off course, away from her mothership. When it dropped out of warp, only its built-in inertial dampener kept its occupants from becoming strawberry jam. All the same, even for those who were strapped in, the activity was violent to say the least. While Darya managed to keep a hold of the Captain's torso, her arms and legs were thrown about wildly, connecting with several of the crew, even knocking poor Engineer Simmons unconscious.

When the interior of the tiny space settled down, its occupants finally had a moment to take stock. With a slight whirring sound, Darya let go of Rachel and the Captain took her first deep breath she had managed for the last minute.

"God, woman, you've got a tight grip!" she said, not unkindly. She rubbed her bruised ribs tenderly. "This is going to take a ton of Tylenol to cure." Having finished taking stock of her own lack of injuries, she turned her attention to the others. Darya went left, Rachel went right. Both women knew there was nothing more for them to do as the pod's beacon would have activated automatically once it had ejected. It was now only a matter of time before they were recovered.

Garrett glanced over at Bat-Levi, who gave her a verbal report as the Captain checked over her other officers. "Simmons will live. It looks like you caught the side of her head with your foot." She heard Darya gave her an analgesic hypo. "This'll numb the pain when she wakes

up. She's going to have one heck of a headache."

On the other hand, the Captain did not have much to do as the others simply nodded to one another, flexed their muscles, then unbuckled themselves. All the same, Rachel noticed a nasty bruise on Glemoor's jawline. Some part of her anatomy had probably intersected with him during their jettisoning. She leaned in for a closer inspection, but Thule moved away. He was always guarded with his personal space.

"I am fine, Captain," he said, with no sign of any discomfort. The Naxeran's golden eyes gave away nothing, as usual. Rachel mused to herself that the man could be ordered to guard a bridge and he would fight on with one arm and one leg and totally ignore the injuries.

On the other hand, Darco seemed more than a little distressed. "What's the matter, Lieutenant?" Garrett asked.

Plaintively, Bulast looked up at her and asked: "How long do you think it will be before we're recovered?"

The Captain shrugged. "With the transmitter blasting away in subspace, it should be only a matter of minutes before the *Enterprise* finds us and transports us aboard."

Darco seemed a peculiar mix of relieved and even more distressed. It was as if he could not make up his mind. "Yes, Captain," he said. Then he simply sat back in his seat, dejected.

Not knowing what to make of the little man's attitude, Rachel decided she might as well get comfortable. There wasn't anything else to do but wait.

Fifteen minutes later, both senior women were beginning to wonder. By this time, young Ensign Jean Simmons had come around and was nursing the mother of all headaches, but even she had noticed the distinct lack of something very big.

The *Enterprise*. Where was she?

“This is taking too long,” Darya said. Of the two senior women, she was always the least patient. However, Rachel she knew she hadn’t beaten her by much.

Bat-Levi began moving, her servos complaining as they always did. Rachel wondered if she liked it that way.

“Simmons, if you’re up for it, give me a hand to check the beacon.”

The young, dark-skinned ensign needed no further encouragement. She shifted out of her seat, flipped up the base and the two women began examining the glowing circuitry underneath.

It took only a moment before Darya said: “Dreck.” The annoyed look on the Captain’s face was as good as an order, so Darya expounded. “This piece of ...” Darya reigned in her temper rather than loose the string of invectives she really wanted to give vent to, “substandard equipment burned out a fraction of a second after it activated. I couldn’t even make matzo with it.”

Rachel sighed. She noted the slightly panicked look on the ensign’s face, but she put her at ease. “The *Enterprise* has the most powerful sensors Starfleet has yet created. While it may take them a little time, they will find us. After all, they’re not about to take off and leave her

captain behind.”

Simmons gave her an embarrassed smile. “Yes, Ma’am.”

Rachel turned to Darya. “Check to see if this thing has set us on course for a planet...”

It was Darco’s groan that stopped her. The man looked like he was in physical pain. Had she hurt him when they had ejected, and he simply hadn’t told her?

“What’s the matter, Lieutenant?”

Bulast looked up at her apologetically. “I’m sorry, Captain. I was hoping to do this privately, but I’ve run out of time. I must let her go.”

The Captain shrugged. It wasn’t like there was anywhere else for them to be right now. She was aware that Bulast’s mother had recently passed, and he had requested time to mourn her properly, but for some reason he had requested it be done at sublight, and, as their mission required, they remain at warp for some time, they could not afford the luxury. “By all means, Darco. Do what you must.” Rachel beckoned the others to sit back and leave the Atrean alone.

Darco slid to the floor and onto his knees. With his eyes closed, his head down and his arms bent and extended outwards as if in supplication, he simply said: “Mother, thank you for my life. I set you free.”

To the amazement of all in the tiny space, a golden light seemed to emanate from Darco’s very being. Slowly, it became brighter and took form, as if it was a *different person* within him. As the others watched, mesmerised,

they saw it was like Darco, but female. Soon, it moved to separate itself from him. It floated into the space before the younger man and turned to face him. The look on her face was the very essence of a mother's love. As quiet as a whisper, they heard her say: "Darco, my son. I will love you always."

Darco, his eyes wide open and filled with adoration for the mother he knew he had recently lost, bade her farewell. Knowing this would be the last opportunity he would have to share his heart with the woman who brought him into the world he said: "Goodbye, Mother. Thank you for giving me life."

The golden being touched him lovingly on the forehead one more time before quickly resolving to a single point of light and vanishing from their view.

There wasn't a dry eye in the room. Even the mighty Thule Glemoor was moved.

Now a lot more centred and relaxed, Darco Bulast got to his feet once more and took his place. He gave his captain a grateful, polite smile. "Thank you, Ma'am. What you have seen is not for the eyes of Outworlders, so I would appreciate you keeping it to yourselves. It is an intensely private matter."

Rachel cast a questioning glance around the other occupants of the room, and they all gave her an assenting nod. They would keep it to themselves.

"Understood..." Rachel said as the transporter beam took them all.

Shortly after, in Sickbay, Doctor Jo Stern was checking them all over for injuries considering their minor ordeal. The doctor was a keen observer, and she noted Darco's change in demeanour immediately.

"He went through with it out there, didn't he?" Stern asked Garrett as she sat on her diagnostic bed and the two of them were alone.

The Captain nodded. "You know about that?"

Stern rolled her eyes. "You don't get to be the CMO of a starship without learning a few things, you know?"

Rachel cast a glance over at Darco, who was lounging on a bed on the other side of the room. He seemed at ease now, at peace with the world. "Well, no sooner was it all over than he said: It's a personal thing and can we keep it to ourselves. Now, I'm still no closer to understanding what I saw."

There were times when Garrett was convinced that the Doctor had a mean streak through her. The grin she was giving her was full of malicious mischief. "Doctor..." she said with a touch of warning.

Stern gave in with a light chuckle. Quietly, she said: "You've heard it said that human mothers give life to their children by carrying them for nine months, then giving birth to them."

Garrett was quite familiar with it as she was a mother herself. "Your point being?" she asked, becoming impatient.

Jo looked at her, surprised her friend hadn't put it together. "For Atrean mothers, they take it *literally*. Their

mothers infuse babies with some of their own life force *in vitro* to help sustain them. When they're grown, they need to surrender this when their parents pass. They have to let them go." Her voice trailed off at end. Rachel knew Jo was recently orphaned.

"How was it?" Jo asked.

Vision turning inward, the Captain's mind turned back to that tiny space out in the void. Yes, she had been in pain, but that moment watching Darco saying goodbye to his mother's spirit was one of the most magical moments in her life. "It was beautiful," she said.

The Doctor laughed. "Ah, no. I mean, how was it being ejected into space in a perfectly good pod, Captain Lifeboat?"

Totally annoyed, Garrett pushed herself off the bed and headed towards the door. "If I hear one person on this ship even whisper that name, I'm going to stuff *you* into a pod and eject you into space."

Stern watched her march out of the room, not doubting a word.