
SAFE
HAVEN
HEATHER SMYTH

# Safe Haven

*by Heather Smyth©*

Doctor Beverly Crusher hummed gently to herself as she strode purposefully through the corridors of the Starship Enterprise. She was undoubtedly happy, and it showed in the slight smile on her beautiful features, the light in her blue eyes and the innate inner glow, putting a spring in her step and a sway in her hips. Clasped in her hands was a very special gift. She had searched long and far, eventually parting with some genuine latinum to secure its purchase. It was an integral part of her plan, soon to be sprung on the unsuspecting recipient. That it was none other than Jean-Luc Picard, Captain of the magnificent ship in which she travelled was no coincidence. She and the Captain shared a history of many years, their friendship growing, deepening, until a month ago when, quite unexpectedly, they became intimate.

It had been a normal meeting over breakfast, something they had both enjoyed for a long time. A chance to catch up on ship's gossip, discuss coming missions...an opportunity to start the day with a smile. Beverly had arrived a little earlier than usual and, not finding Jean-Luc in the living area, ventured into his bedroom. He stood in the bathroom, freshly showered, wearing nothing but a white towel around his waist. Beverly was enraptured watching the play of muscles on his lean frame as he shaved himself. Unable to make a sound, she stood there watching, the heat growing within her.

As he finished shaving, Jean-Luc caught Beverly's reflection in the mirror and turned slowly to face her. They stood like that for several slow seconds, each looking deeply into the eyes of the other. Unable to stop them, and not wanting to, Beverly's feet carried her the short distance to stand in front of Jean-Luc. Reaching up, she traced a line from his eyebrow to his jaw then gently drew her fingers across his lips. In response, Jean-Luc leaned his head into her hand and sighed deeply. Taking her in his arms, JeanLuc delicately brushed his lips over hers, teasing and testing and eventually kissing her with all the love, tenderness and passion he had felt for this woman for so long. In the short distance between the bathroom and the bedroom their clothing was shed, and they

made love as Jean-Luc had always dreamed they would, with nothing but the stars as mute witnesses.

What had finally triggered this wonderful change in their relationship was a mystery to both of them, but ultimately their joy surpassed all else and they gave up trying to analyse it. The change in them both was evident to all who knew them. Gossip about them became the staple diet of all ranks; the one thing not questioned was the "rightness" of the relationship...that and why it took so long.

Having arrived at the captain's quarters Beverly momentarily paused, and as the doors parted, entered.

"Hello Mon Chéri. Where have you been? The croissants are getting cold." A basket of the delicious pastries wafted their aroma in the cabin.

"You missed me? How sweet. Actually, it's all your fault. I had notification of a parcel to pick up." Jean-Luc noticed one of Beverly's hands was behind her back.

"A parcel? What has that to do with me?" Beverly found his perplexed look very endearing. Taking her hand from behind her back, she presented him with her surprise.

"It's for you. Here."

Giving him a gentle kiss, she placed the parcel in his hands.

Eyebrows raised and with a boyish grin on his face, he opened the present.

"Oh Beverly, a book! An authentic book!"

Sighing with pleasure, he turned the book over in his large hands, gingerly stroking the cover. Beverly suppressed a giggle when the perplexed look crept back onto his face but laughed out loud when he faced her with such confusion.

"Sailing. Everyone Can Do It." Beverly...I don't understand. Please don't misunderstand me, I'm very happy to receive such a rare gift, a book like this would have been very difficult to find, but the topic...I'm the Captain of the Federation flagship. Do you think my skills need upgrading?"

Watching Beverly closely, Jean-Luc was rewarded with the glint of mischief in her eyes.

"Just what, exactly, are you up to?"

"Well, we have two weeks leave coming up soon." "Yes..."

“I’ve been doing some research, and I think I’ve come up with the perfect place to go.”

Jean-Luc squinted his eyes and frowned.

“And that is...”

“Gerallum.”

“Gerallum? I’m not familiar with that name. And the book?”

“You read it and learn how to sail a boat.”

“I gathered that, but Beverly, I could learn to sail on the holodeck much easier than...”

Beverly placed her hands on her hips and lifted her chin.

“That would be cheating Jean-Luc!”

“Cheating. I see. It would be cheating to learn to sail on the holodeck, but not if I learn from a book?”

“Yes.”

Jean-Luc sighed.

“Let’s get back to...Geranium?”

“Gerallum.”

“Ah yes, Gerallum. What, precisely, is Gerallum?” Beverly’s face lit up, her eyes sparkling.

“It’s an out of the way planet in the Deranus Expanse. The inhabitants provide recreational facilities for off worlders. By all accounts it’s a beautiful planet JeanLuc. It’s covered mostly by water with the landmasses being groups of extensive archipelagos, many of them uninhabited. They specialise in boating holidays. They have craft from all the Federation worlds and, about five years ago, built a fleet of Earth-type cruising yachts, styled on the popular craft of the late nineteen hundreds.”

“I see. But why do I have to learn from the book?”

“The San, the inhabitants of Gerallum, believe that people learn more about themselves and their loved ones, if they learn to sail together with as little knowledge as possible. The information package stated that reading an instructional text would be sufficient to start with. I chose to give you a book from that era both as a gift and, well, to get you into the mood.”

At that, Jean-Luc’s eyebrows rose.

“I don’t recall needing help to get in the “mood.”

Beverly didn’t miss the lustful look sent in her direction.

“Now you just stop that! We’re both on duty in ten minutes.”

“Ten minutes? If we cut a few corners, I think we could manage that.”

“Jean-Luc you are positively wicked! Where’s that stoic, reserved, icily cool Captain I fell in love with?”

“Out to lunch!”

Jean-Luc quietly closed the distance between them until they were nose to nose.

Beverly could feel his hot breath on her lips.

“I never dreamed you could be so passionate...or so damned attractive...tempting...”

Beverly didn’t get to finish her sentence, as Jean-Luc lifted her in his arms and carried her into his bedroom. Despite his assurances, they were both late for duty.

Striding from the turbolift, clutching the book, Picard

took his customary place in the command chair, recently vacated by his First Officer, Will Riker. Although they had been aboard for over a year, the new ship still caught Picard unawares. He cast his eyes over the bridge, noting how smoothly the crew went about their duties. The pain of losing the Enterprise-D had passed but Jean-Luc knew it would take some time before this new vessel would be imprinted in his mind as his old ship had been.

“Report Number One.”

“All is well Sir. No pressing ship’s business. We’re running straight and true for the Embo colony at warp five. Doctor Selar has designed the new facility and barring any complications, we should have it built in approximately eighteen days. We received a communication burst about an hour ago by subspace. Apparently, their equipment is a little dated and can’t punch through a signal strong enough for sustained contact. We expect to have them on visual in two days. The Prime Minister said the tremors were subsiding and they were holding their own with injuries and infection. The seismic equipment is a problem, apparently the institute was damaged in the initial tremor, but they think they can make do. Our ETA is five days and that should give us plenty of time to complete the modifications to the Equivac modules.”

“Thank you, Number One. As usual you have everything under control. You have the Bridge; I’ll be in my ready room.”

“Doing a little reading Sir?”

“Hmm, indeed.”

As the doors to the ready room closed, Will caught a wry smile from Counsellor Deanna Troi. The telepathic bond they had developed so long ago was still active to a certain extent and Will felt the brush of Deanna’s mind on his. Leaning in and he said sotto voce: “You look like the cat that swallowed the cream.”

“That’s not far off Will”, she replied, also in a quiet voice. “It’s so wonderful to feel such joy and contentment coming from the both of them. The captain is by nature a very private person, and over the past few years I’ve felt a growing loneliness in him. It’s gone Will. He’s head over heels in love and for probably the first time, he is willing to show it. I know Beverly feels the same way and feeling these emotions from two such dear friends brings a palpable joy for me...although I’m not getting a lot of sleep.”

“Not enough sleep? Why?”

“Will, I feel their emotions. Think about it.”

A deep frown creased Riker’s face. Suddenly he blushed, the redness creeping up from his neck to bloom fully on his face.

“Oh! Yes, well...umm that would be a little

disconcerting.”

An impish giggle was his only reply.

“Have you found out anything about their leave?

“All Beverly would tell me was they were going sailing on Gerallum.”

“Sailing? Gerallum? I didn’t expect that.”

“What did you expect Will?”

With a shrug of his broad shoulders Will replied: “Oh I don’t know really. The captain so rarely takes leave. I just assumed he would go to an archaeological dig somewhere...maybe Anthos Prime.”

“With Beverly? You’ve got to be joking. Can you imagine Beverly sitting alone on a rock in some desolate area, fending off insects and dust, while the captain grubs around in the dirt? I don’t think so.”

“So, what are they going to do? Sailing you said...as in a boat with sails?”

“Hmhm. Beverly insists they learn together on the yacht. She gave him an ancient book about it. It’s from the same era as the boats they will sail.”

“What is it with you women? He already Captains the Enterprise...what more can she want. And another thing, we sail...sort of...at least that’s what the passage through space is called. I will never understand women.”

“I think you do pretty well my love, but perhaps it would be easier for you to not question that which you don’t understand.”

“I’m deeply offended...I think...”

Sharing a companionable chuckle, the officers settled into their shift.

Jean-Luc had made himself comfortable on his sofa, a glass of Earl Grey tea close by and the old book in his hands.

*Good Lord. Tacking, clews, booms, fife

rails...surely it can’t be that complicated? All we have to do is pilot the craft from island to island.*

Becoming somewhat bored he closed the book, reasoning that it would all become evident at the appropriate time. He got up and stretched, grinning in a very Gallic way when he registered his sore muscles. Sighing contentedly, he rounded his desk and sat down.

“Computer access all recent information on Gerallum and display on the ready room monitor.”

It was only with a Herculean effort that he managed to read the text and not think about Beverly. The hours they were apart were tortuous for him, the times they shared discussing ship’s business worse as he couldn’t touch her.

He was very tempted to go to Sickbay just to see her, but he knew she had a job to do as did he, so he quelled his desire and concentrated once again on the work at hand. The hours crept by and eventually his shift came to an end. After handing over to the new shift and bidding Will and Deanna goodnight, he made his way to his cabin with all the haste he could justifiably make. It was very difficult not to run but he managed and soon found himself in his quarters. Jean-Luc knew that Beverly’s shift ended an hour after his, so he took the opportunity to shower and shave. He then dressed in a silky emerald shirt, loose and open in a vee

exposing his chest and a pair of black trousers of a soft Larzin material, finishing off his attire with a pair of soft leather shoes.

He cast a critical look in the mirror and satisfied, left his quarters. Anyone seeing him would know he was on a mission.

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Beverly was tired but happy. Sickbay had been relatively quiet, and she had finally caught up on the outstanding files she had been neglecting. After handing over to the "night" staff, she exited sickbay and walked the short distance to her cabin. She was totally unprepared for what she found. Everywhere she looked there were vases of beautiful flowers from all parts of the galaxy, their delicate fragrances tantalising her senses. In the middle of the room a table had been set with fine China and silver cutlery. Snow-white linen made up the tablecloth and napkins; the embossed design echoed on the seats. In the subdued, soft light the crystal ware gave off prisms of breathtaking light.

She was delighted and slowly pirouetted taking it all in.

He spoke softly, his deep baritone sending a shiver through her body.

"Why don't you go and have a shower and put on something comfortable while I call up our dinner."

With a nod, Beverly left the room. In truth at that moment in time she was speechless. Discarding the uniform and slipping into the bathroom, she enjoyed a shower, the hot water relaxing and soothing her. With a towel twisted up encasing her wet hair she moved into her bedroom and selected a pair of black leggings, a short royal blue skirt and a loose-fitting white pullover.

By now, Beverly could smell some very enticing food, and she snickered when her stomach rumbled. Taking a brush, she took the towel from her hair and sauntered into the living area where she casually sat and brushed the damp auburn tresses. Every now and then she would gently touch the beautiful flowers that were nearby.

She felt Jean-Luc approach and looked up to see him standing in front of her.

"Dinner is served."

Offering his arm, he escorted her to the table and seated first Beverly, then himself.

There followed a sumptuous meal accompanied by some exquisite wines from the Picard estate and an increasing level of sexual tension. Not wishing to be rushed, Jean-Luc rose from his seat and stood next to Beverly.

"Computer, dance selection, Picard theta two eight."

As he offered his hand Beverly rose gracefully and melted into Jean-Luc's strong arms. At first their movements were restrained and a little tense but soon relaxation came, and their bodies seamed together and they moved as one.

Neither was aware the music had stopped. They continued to sway gently together, Jean-Luc softly nuzzling Beverly's neck, his hands gently rubbing up and down her back. Jean-Luc's arousal was evident, yet still he held her and swayed in time to the non-existent music.

"Jean-Luc I want you to make love to me."

"I intend to, I just want to hold you a little longer Beverly."

Looking into her eyes he said softly: "You are exquisite. You overwhelm me and I am lost in you. I love you with a depth and certainty I've never experienced before."

They danced together in the silent cabin, two people who had become one and after a while retired to Beverly's bedroom and made love, falling to sleep entwined together, still as one.

"Incoming message from the Gerallum shuttle Sir."

Standing and tugging down his uniform, Picard faced forward.

"Thank you, Number One. On screen."

"Greetings Captain. I am Taran Pli, the escort for your journey. I will be alongside in one point three Standard hours. I look forward to meeting you, it is an honour to have the esteemed Captain of the Enterprise as our guest."

"Ah...thank you Mr. Pli. We will be ready to beam over when you arrive. Picard out."

The grinning face of Taran Pli abruptly disappeared leaving a somewhat embarrassed Picard to endure the wide grin of his First Officer. Although nothing was said, the humour was easily felt. It was not often Jean-Luc Picard was the butt of anybody's derision, especially on the Bridge in full view if his crew.

"Picard to Doctor Crusher."

“Crusher here, Captain.”

“Our transport is due in about an hour. Are you finished packing?”

“Just about.”

“Very well. I will meet you in transporter room three then in say...an hour?”

“Acknowledged. Crusher out.”

“I have a few things to clear up Number One. Meet us in the transporter room. You have the Bridge.”

“Aye Sir.”

Sometime later a slightly irritated Picard was waiting in the transporter room, trying to resist the urge to pace. At the opening of the doors, he was treated to what could easily have been a small circus. Will entered first carrying two large hold-alls, followed by a red-faced Beverly, a personal bag slung over one shoulder, another bag secured on her arm and a PADD in her free hand. Both officers were laughing uproariously and were stunned to see the stern face of their commanding officer so obviously affronted. Clearing their throats, they dropped their luggage and took on a more appropriate demeanour.

“Beverly we are only going for two weeks. What on earth have you brought all that luggage for?”

Beverly stole a sideways glance at Will, who wisely lowered his head and ignored her. He was in enough trouble.

“Well, you know me Jean-Luc. Be prepared, that’s my motto. Besides, a girl has to have all she needs to be comfortable you know. I don’t intend to “rough it.””

“So, it would seem. Perhaps you could enlighten me as to why you are twenty minutes late then? Our transport has been hailing every five minutes despite my explanations.”

“Oh Jean-Luc, stop being a bear. So, I stopped to say goodbye to a few friends. Where’s the harm...?”

One look at the dour face of her Captain was enough to silence Beverly. Lowering her head she uttered a small “My apologies, Captain” and left her compatriot to bear the brunt of his Captain’s displeasure.

“The ship is yours until my return. Try and make your mission more successful than you were at getting the

Doctor here on time.”

Somewhat shocked at the harsh words, Will looked at his Captain and just caught the ghost of a smile. His suspicions were confirmed when Picard surreptitiously winked as he stepped up onto the transporter pad. With the chastened Beverly beside him the two lovers and their luggage shimmered and disappeared.

Once again on the bridge and after seeing the safe departure of the shuttle, Will settled into the command chair.

"Mr. Data, set course for the Embo Colony and engage at warp five. Mr. Tarc relay a sub space message to Prime Minister Phillips and put it through to the ready room. How long until we are in visual communication range?"

"A little over four hours, Sir."

"Actually, it's four point eight si..."

"Thank you, Mr. Data."

Will had been seated for only a few minutes when the scratchy link was made to the colony.

"Prime Minister, thank you for speaking to me."

"No problems Commander. What can I do for you?"

"I just wanted you to know that Captain Picard and Doctor Crusher have left and we are en route to you and should reach you in two days. How is everything going?"

"Actually, quite well. I know there was some concern about Beverly going on leave; I'll miss seeing her...we knew each other from our Academy days. But really, everything is settling down. The aftershocks have passed and we're making do with what we have. Your arrival should see everything put to rights. I must say we are looking forward to seeing you. It was very hard at first. I believe we're a stronger unit now. Nothing like a little adversity to bring people together."

"Indeed, Prime Minister. If anything happens call. We can exceed warp five in emergencies. Keep in touch. Riker out."

Having materialised on the shuttle, Jean-Luc and Beverly were confronted by the obsequious Taran Pli.

"Welcome, welcome esteemed guests! Oh, what a great honour it is, how fortunate are we to have the famou..."

"Thank you, Mr. Pli. I..."

"Please, please, call me Taran, I would be soooo delighted!"

“Very well, Taran. As I was saying, whilst on leave I am simply Mr. Picard, my companion is Doctor Crusher. How long till we reach Gerallum?”

“Oh just a few short hours. Perhaps you could regale me with tales of your adventures. I pulled quite a few ropes...is that the term?...to get this assignment you know. It’s not how you know...” As he said this, he tapped his ear. I’m fully up to date with Earth sayings and gestures. I take quite a chuff about it. Now tell me Captain...sorry...MR. Picard. Cough, cough, poke, poke, eh?...Just how many Romulans have you killed?”

Jean-Luc lowered his head and sighed, wondering how long it would be till he strangled the redoubtable Taran Pli.

“Actually Taran, The Captain, sorry, Mr. Picard is on stress leave. As his personal physician I must ensure he is kept calm at all times. I’m afraid his anecdotes would be far too stressful for him to recount. I would like him to just sit quietly, perhaps reading something calming, for the duration of the trip.”

Moving closer to Pli she whispered...

“It’s his nerves you know...he’s ready to crack. Could become murderous at any time. Best leave him to me. I can sedate him if necessary.”

All this went unheard by Picard, who was taken aback to see a look of sheer terror cross the pliant features of Taran Pli.

“Come now Cap... Mr. Picard. We’ll just sit down and

read a nice book and let Mr. Pli drive the shuttle. We won’t cause any trouble now, will we?” Jean-Luc leaned close.

“What the devil are you up to? What did you say to him?”

Looking over to the cockpit and seeing Pli engrossed in his piloting, Beverly leaned in and kissed Jean-Luc quickly.

“Trust me sweetheart. Be Prepared, remember? Oh, by the way, can you froth at the mouth?”

“What?”

“Never mind.”

A very perplexed Picard finally settled to read the sailing book but was disconcerted at the continual stares and tut-tutting from Pli. It was with great relief when they landed on Gerallum and were handed over to the hotel manager.

They were shown a very nice suite of rooms and a rather, (thankfully as far as Jean-Luc was concerned), subdued manager informed them that they could dine in their rooms or attend dinner in the lounge, pointing out that formal attire was expected.

"We like to keep a certain standard. We found that people of all species appreciate making the effort. It adds to the ambience. Dinner is served at eight sharp."

"Thank you, that sounds delightful."

The manager left and Beverly came up behind JeanLuc and wound her arms about him.

"Wanna test the mattress?"

As she murmured this she nibbled on his ear.

"If you continue doing that, I will lose all semblance of control and ravish you, possibly repeatedly."

"Promises, promises... Be Prepared, remember?"

"You know, you would look very captivating in a scout uniform."

"A what?"

"Never mind...come here."

Sometime later the two sated lovers were idly lying on their bed debating the merits of dressing for dinner.

"I'm just not convinced of the necessity of formal attire purely for eating purposes. And we'll have to shower and I'll have to shave, whereas on the other hand we could simply lie here and have dinner brought to us."

"Jean-Luc! Where's your romantic side? There's something very sensual about formal dining. All that pretence, manners, all at arm's length...no touching...heated looks. And besides, you look stunning in a tux. Of course there's always afterwards, all that tension has to have a release." That sold him.

"Race you to the shower!"

They made quite an entrance. Conversation stopped and heads turned to watch the passage of the stunning red head and her dashing, elegant escort.

Dinner was grand, the dishes cooked superbly and presented beautifully. Jean-Luc found the wines surprisingly good and coupled with an excellent waiter, proved an outstanding evening.

Jean-Luc looked longingly into Beverly's eyes, and she knew exactly what he wanted. Jean-Luc's libido had been a very pleasant surprise to Beverly; it was yet another aspect of himself he hid so well.

She wasn't going to succumb so easily though and leaned over the table and said seductively: "I've been wined and dined. Now I would like to dance."

Jean-Luc sat up straight and placed the flat of his palms on the table.

"As you wish, m'Lady."

Rising gracefully, he took Beverly's hand in his and led her to the dance floor. Taking her in his arms they flowed with the music around the floor. It wasn't music Picard was familiar with, but an alien composition, intriguing and lulling at the same time. As they had done on the Enterprise they danced alone, oblivious to all around them. It took a gentle cough from the *maitre* for them to realise the dining room was closing. They walked hand in hand back to their room and took advantage of the mild evening by visiting the balcony of their suite. There, beneath the night sky, they made use of the lounge, Beverly being proved quite correct about the release of tension. Sometime later they moved to the large bed and slept peacefully in each other's arms.

"Commander, we have achieved orbit around the

Embo colony."

"Thank you, Mr. Data. Tell me, does this planet have a name?"

Data tilted his head in a familiar way, forming his reply.

"It has a designated number, Sir and at present there is a competition ongoing in the colony to find a name. There is evidence of inhabitation dating back many millennia. However, the inhabitants were extremely primitive and, as far as we know, did not name the planet."

"What happened to them?"

"Unknown, Sir."

"Well, it will remain a mystery. We're not here on an archaeological dig. Mr. Data is Prime Minister Phillips available?"

"Yes, Sir. Putting her through now. On screen."

"Commander! Good to see you."

Riker was somewhat taken aback. The woman who faced him had a subtle charisma that crossed the distance between them, not the least dulled by the electronic medium. A handsome woman of indeterminable

age, she was obviously both intelligent and charming. Will was immediately attracted, and Deanna felt the change in him instantly.

"Have a good trip?"

"Yes, thank you, Prime Minister. With your permission, my crew will begin beaming down the prefabricated buildings and supplies. My Chief Engineer, Geordie LaForge, will be bringing a team and equipment to re-establish your seismic readers and Acting Chief Medical Officer Dr. Selar will be arriving with medical supplies, portable operating suites and equivacs. Food will be supplied at stations provided, clothing and bedding likewise. Water purification is a priority, and Commander LaForge will make it his next job after the seismic equipment. The rest we will prioritise as we find it. Is there anything you would like to add?"

"Not really Commander. You seem to have everything under control. We did have some trouble with sewerage, but we managed... a stopgap arrangement, but it will do until your engineers can get to it. Commander, I would like to extend our heartfelt thanks for your help. One doesn't realise how far away one is until something like

this happens. Your help is invaluable."

Riker smiled and lowered his head.

"Prime Minister, if it's not too presumptuous of me, would you like to have dinner on board the Enterprise?"

For a moment Will thought he'd overstepped the mark. Painful seconds passed as Will almost squirmed under her intense gaze.

The Prime Minister maintained a steady gaze then seemed to come to a decision.

"I would be delighted, thank you. What time?"

Letting out a breath he was unaware he was holding, Will said: "Twenty hundred hours, if that's not inconvenient."

"Not at all. I'm looking forward to it. Until then...Embo out."

Will stood staring at the blank screen. Deanna took the opportunity to study him.

"Strong woman..."

"Captivating."

What followed was a shining example of well-oiled machinery in action. With practised ease teams of specialists and tonnes of equipment were beamed down to the stricken planet. A triage team designated and flagged the most serious medical cases to be treated on the Enterprise,

the remainder housed and treated in the prefabricated hospitals. Such was the professionalism of the crew they required little guidance. Will found himself almost redundant, answering only questions of delegation. He mused how Captain Picard overcame the tension. Everything was done by remote; Will missed the hands-on approach. Such was the role of the captain in situations like this.

Regardless of his misgivings, he still found things to occupy himself and it was with a modicum of surprise when he heard Deanna say: “You’d better organise dinner and get changed.”

Will’s head snapped up.

“Hell’s Bells! I’d forgotten all about it. Thanks

Deanna.”

“You’ll remember soon enough.”

Will didn’t hear the rejoinder; he was already at the turbolift door.

“You have the Bridge...” Then he was gone.

With more haste than he was happy with, a dinner was prepared in the aft observation room. Almost at the run, Will made it to the transporter room just as the operator signalled that the Prime Minister was ready to beam up. With a determined effort, Will got control of his panting and was composed when the dignitary materialised on the pad.

In person she was even more commanding and Riker was drawn by her personal manner.

“Prime Minister, welcome aboard the Enterprise.”

“Thank you, Commander.”

“If you will follow me I will take you to the dinner.”

The pace was set by the Prime Minister, she was happy to amble along, taking in all she saw and asking insightful, intelligent questions.

Eventually, she asked the obvious.

“What a magnificent ship Commander! It’s vast.

How is it you don’t get lost?” Will chuckled softly.

“You get used to it. I’ve been around starships long enough to see them in my sleep. Here we are. After you,

Prime Minister.”

With a small inclination of his head, Riker ushered his guest into the observation lounge.

Prime Minister Phillips entered and was delighted with what she saw.

“Oh Commander...it’s breathtaking.”

“I never tire of it. Please Prime Minister, call me Will.”

“In that case, when we’re alone, you must call me Julie.”

“A beautiful appellation, like it’s owner.” A shrewd look passed her face.

“How kind of you. Do you say that to all you female companions?”

“Only the beautiful ones.”

At that they both laughed, the formality of the situation relaxing considerably. Each took a plate and helped themselves to the many and varied dishes. After dinner, Will took his guest for a stroll through the arboretum, again impressing the dignitary.

All too soon, the evening drew to a close making Will wistfully wish that she would suddenly decide to stay the night...with him.

“I must be getting back now, Will. It was a lovely evening, as close to perfect as you can get. They stood in the transporter room, both unwilling to end the moment.

“Will you come planetside and let me repay you in kind? I used to be an adequate cook in my day.”

‘It would be my pleasure.”

“Till then...goodnight Will.”

“Goodnight Julie.”

It was some moments until Will left the transporter room. He kept seeing her in his mind. Already he was looking forward to the coming dinner.

The next day dawned free of cloud, with a gentle breeze blowing, just enough to lift wisps of Beverly’s hair in a manner Jean-Luc found alluring. Packing their bags and arranging for the luggage to be delivered to the marina, the intrepid pair made their way to the yacht club. Checking in, a San by the name of Arnparr took them through a mind-boggling maze of piers and jetties eventually stopping at the bow of a sleek yacht.

“Here she is...Nimrod. All you need is on board. I suggest you unpack and settle in, and I will return later to brief you on the different functions and supply you with the charts you will need.”

Making sure the luggage had indeed been delivered Arnparr left them to stow their belongings.

“Jean-Luc isn’t she beautiful? So sleek and powerful looking. Nimrod. What a good name. Did you see the sails and ropes? You know, I think the outside floor...”

“Deck.”

“What? Oh yes, deck, is made of wood. Are we going to use charts? Real paper charts? How fast do you think she can go? Wouldn’t it be great if we could swim alongside? Jean-Luc...what’s wrong? You’ve not said a word since we came aboard.”

Jean-Luc spread his arms and sighed.

“I haven’t had a chance. I was waiting until you had to breathe. May I speak now?”

The look of contrition was heart melting.

“I’m sorry Jean-Luc. I did get a little carried away.”

“Yes...well. I think you’re quite right in saying this vessel is beautiful. Sleek, that’s a good word for her. We can look closer when we’ve unpacked. In the meantime, we have work to do.”

They were just finishing when Arnparr joined them.

Things had gone smoothly until Beverly started putting her excess clothing in Jean-Luc’s hanging space. A rather heated discussion ensued, ending when Beverly took JeanLuc’s face in her hands and kissed him. As his eyes drifted shut, Beverly knew the argument was over. He would no longer resist. Beverly knew it was his kind nature behind his acquiescence, but the truth was he could deny her nothing. If she asked him to capture a comet and put it in a bottle he would do everything in his power to make it so. She loved him for it all the more.

Arnparr was adept at his job. Imparting just enough information so as not to confuse his clients, he patiently explained all the yacht’s features and the function of the equipment.

“I know it’s a lot to take in, but things will become clearer when you are actually at sea. There’s one thing though. Gerallum has no weather grid. Wind changes and high seas can hit without warning. Listen for the forecast every day and try to stay in sight of the islands at all times. If you run into difficulties push the red button on the transponder and help will be dispatched.

“Well, that’s about it. If you don’t want extra provisions, you can leave whenever you’re ready. Just hail the tender and you will be towed from the marina. Have a great cruise.”

After Arnparr left the couple looked at each other and laughed.

Regaining their composure, Jean-Luc caught the attention of the tender and soon they were being towed free of the yacht basin. Wishing to show his expert knowledge, Jean-Luc fitted the foresail and the mainsail whilst they were being towed and grinned smugly when Beverly showed her surprise. The tender retrieved its cable and, after wishing them a good time, returned to its berth at the yacht club.

Rubbing his hands together Jean-Luc said

imperiously: "Let's hoist the sails."

Beverly gave him a look of ignorance and said:

"How do we do that?"

"Ah!...One pulls on the halyards."

Beverly rolled her eyes. "Oh of course. How silly of me to forget. And the halyards are where?"

Casting his eyes about and a close inspection of the mast revealed two ropes, that when pulled, brought a response from the appropriate sails. With a triumphant grin Jean-Luc hoisted the main sail then the jib. Then he stood there with a perplexed look on his face. Approaching the gently flapping sail he searched for the clew to which to attach the ropes that controlled the sail.

"What's wrong?"

"I'm not sure."

Beverly tried to get a better look at the headsail.

"Do you want some help?"

"No, you keep steering. I'll sort it out."

Sighing and chewing her lip, Beverly opined: "JeanLuc...that sail doesn't look right. Are you sure you don't want some help?"

Picard cast an irritated look aft.

"It's fine, everything is fine!"

Jean-Luc looked at the ropes in his hands then back at the jib. Following the line of the sail aloft he suddenly realised what was wrong. He had hoisted the sail upside down. Not wishing to provoke a sarcastic remark from Beverly about his seamanship, he dropped the sail without a word and refused to turn around when she called to him.

"You still don't want any help?"

"No, thank you."

"Why did you drop the sail?"

“There was a problem with it.”

“Oh.”

As quickly as he could, Jean-Luc rehung the offending sail and had it aloft again in short order. With a snort of satisfaction, he secured the ropes and made his way to the cockpit and the waiting Beverly.

“Now what Horatio?” Beverly sneered.

“If I’m not mistaken, we have to position the boat so the sails can fill and provide momentum. At the moment the wind is dead ahead and yachts such as this cannot sail directly into the wind, so we have to turn this wheel to make the craft respond.”

Beverly took a firm grip of the wheel and slowly turned it. Sure enough the yacht came around, and the sails filled quickly.

“Now keep it there and I will use these winches to pull the sails in until they draw properly.”

Suddenly the yacht began to move, gaining speed rapidly. As the craft’s sails were further trimmed, the boat listed alarmingly away from the wind causing Beverly to whoop with delight.

“This is marvellous Jean-Luc! What do we do now?”

Jean-Luc slipped below and came out with some charts in his hands.

“We keep going like this for a while then we change course. That island you picked is over here and unfortunately, that’s where the wind is coming from. We will have to do a “tack” or two, it’s sort of a zig zag approach.”

“What are those symbols on the map?”

“These charts are quite comprehensive. Every reef, hazard, marker buoy is marked, it’s quite astonishing.”

“How long will it take to get there?”

“Hold on, I’ll check the computer.”

A few minutes passed and as she waited Beverly revelled in the grace and beauty of the yacht.

“All right, provided the wind stays constant we should make the island just before night fall. There is a safe anchorage marked on the chart so in the meantime we can do nothing but enjoy the ride. And, by the way, the island is uninhabited.”

That brought a wicked smile to Beverly’s face.

Tilting her head and fixing Jean-Luc with a loving look she said: “Happy? Are you glad you came?”

Taking a deep satisfying breath Jean-Luc returned her gaze. “Anywhere with you would be perfect and yes, I’m very happy.”

The lovers shared the occupation of the helm; at one stage Jean-Luc went below and emerged with a platter of fruit and cheeses and a bottle of wine. Indulging in this leisurely lunch was delightful and the friends enjoyed telling each other anecdotes until they lapsed into a warm silence.

Some hours passed when Beverly excitedly pointed at the low profile of an island. There had been several “Land Ho’s”; all proving to be the wrong one, but this time she was rewarded with a nod from Jean-Luc.

“That’s it. When we get closer, we can drop the sails and use the engine. There are some nasty reefs, and the channel isn’t very wide.”

“Aye, aye, Captain, Sir!”

The wry look Beverly received was priceless and she laughed out loud. Jean-Luc was charmed and kissed her. Not to be out done, Beverly wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him deeply. As often happens when they got distracted, they forgot about the yacht and the world around them. It was the frantic flapping of both the main sail and the jib that finally broke the spell.

“What a racket. What’s going on?”

“I think the boat moved off course when you let go of the wheel. Don’t worry about it. The sails have to be like this to be lowered...I think. While I drop them would you start the engine?”

“No problem.”

Beverly disappeared below and looked over the engine compartment. The starter was obvious, a large red button with a sign saying, “Starter Button”. Upon pushing it she was rewarded with the sound of an old-fashioned engine coughing to life.

By the time she came on deck Jean-Luc had dropped the sails and was busy stowing them. Shortly thereafter he joined Beverly in the cockpit.

“There should be a gear lever somewhere nearby. We need to engage the forward gear in order for the propeller to work.”

“What does it look like?”

“I’m not exactly sure. When Arnparr was showing me these controls I was distracted by that blouse you were wearing. Are you aware of what happens when you lean forward?”

“Uh huh.”

“You did it deliberately?”

“Uh huh.”

“Wench...hussy...”

“Did you like it?”

“Yes.”

“Do you want me to stop doing it?”

“No.”

“Case dismissed.”

Just when Jean-Luc was about to remonstrate with her, Beverly lifted a small hatch revealing the missing engine controls.

With a look of triumph, she tossed her hair and said:

“Anything else I can do for you?”

“Hmph!”

With the chart open before him Jean-Luc carefully guided the yacht through the markers and eventually dropped anchor in a stunning little cove. Out of the breeze it was warm, and the scent of flowers wafted gently off the land.

“Shall we go ashore?”

“Why not. There’s an inflatable dinghy under the foredeck. I can inflate it in no time.”

“Why don’t we swim ashore? It’s not far and it would be refreshing.”

“Well...I suppose so. I’ll get our togs.”

“No need.”

As she spoke Beverly began to undress and was standing naked before he could say anything.

“You game? I’m off.”

Beverly climbed over the safety rail and executed a perfect dive then struck out for the shore.

Jean-Luc stood motionless watching his beautiful lover swim away from him. As if by their own volition, his hands began the task of undressing, and it wasn’t until he entered the water that he regained his senses.

Beverly was waiting for him in the shallows and pulled him down to lie with her. Their kisses, at first languid and gentle gradually became ardent and urgent. They made passionate love in the small waves of the island completely oblivious to everything around them.

The day had passed quickly for the crew of the Enterprise. Their training and experience made for efficient and competent application. Will had been busy enough to distract himself from the coming dinner, but as the end of the shift approached and it became clear that he wouldn't be required to work overtime, his mind became firmly fixed on the intriguing Julie Phillips.

He arrived at her quarters at the appointed time and was surprised to find himself somewhat nervous. His discomfort was immediately dispelled the second the doors opened.

She was stunning. Dressed simply in a shimmering floor length midnight blue dress, her dark hair rested unadorned on her shoulders.

"Will! Please, come in."

"I took the liberty of bringing a bottle of wine, I hope it's suitable. Captain Picard's family owns a vineyard on Earth, and they produce some outstanding wines. When he gave me this, he said I was not to drink it alone."

"What a lovely sentiment. I met the captain once some years ago. I was too intimidated to say anything, but he seemed to be very engaging."

"He is indeed. What have you cooked? It smells delicious."

Julie waved her hands.

"Oh, you know...a bit of this, a bit of that." Trying to peek around the door, Will laughed.

"You're not going to tell me, are you?"

"Absolutely not. I will tell the medical staff in case you don't survive. Other than that, you're flying blind!"

At that they both laughed and as the mirth passed, they gazed at each other frankly. Will took Julie's hand in his, kissed it and said: "You are an exceptionable woman, Julie Phillips."

He was delighted to see her blush, endearing her further in his heart.

Fanning herself with her hands and chuckling gently, she led Will to the living area.

"You, William Riker are a charmer. I will have to keep an eye on you."

Dinner was a resounding success, simple yet delicious. The conversation was centred mostly on the rehabilitation of the colony and the effects of the tremor. Will was keen to discover more about his host

and to that end, he asked the occasional question of her and was puzzled by her reluctance to talk about herself.

Together the pair cleared the table and put the dishes in the recycler then taking the wine, settled into the comfortable chairs in the beautiful atrium at the rear of the quarters.

"This is so lovely. You're lucky it survived the tremors."

"I know. There are several fountains and ponds that didn't make it, and we lost all the ornamental fish, but that's a pittance compared with the rest of the colony. We knew there was a certain instability with the geology of this planet, yet the benefits far outweighed the risks. In any case settlement was put to a vote and the result was unanimous. In retrospect we may have been somewhat arrogant. Why is it we become so damned wise AFTER the event?"

Will was a little taken aback by the intensity of her statement and decided he wanted to know more.

"Tell me, how long have you been Prime Minister?"

"Too bloody long! No...I didn't mean that. Oh hell, I honestly don't know. I certainly didn't want the job. I envisioned myself tucked away at the institute happily doing my research, but when nominations were called for the leadership, my name was submitted and no matter how many times I refused they kept at me. They seemed to see something in me I didn't know existed. So here I am. Somehow years have gone by and I'm no closer to finishing my research than I was when we arrived."

"Are you sorry?"

Julie looked frankly at Will and drew a deep breath.

"No. I would be lying if I said I'd not felt satisfaction in this position, it's just that I don't want to admit that the person I was, I'm not anymore."

"What was she like?"

"Despite the study, she was quite a tearaway I can assure you! In those days I took what I wanted in both

hands and to hell with the consequences." Will smiled wistfully.

"I rather like the sound of that. And now? Still willing to push the envelope?"

"Depends..."

"I see. What if I told you I find you very attractive and that I would like very much to kiss you?"

Again, Julie looked into Will's eyes and liking what she saw, moved closer.

"Are you sure you can weather the storm?"

"It's part of my training."

Their lips met, their eyes closed, and they began a voyage of discovery as old as time.

After their dalliance in the water, Beverly and JeanLuc made their way up the beach, stopping at the skirt of vegetation that tumbled down from the escarpment. Peering into the gloom, Beverly reached behind her for Jean-Luc's hand.

"C'mon Jean-Luc. Let's go exploring!"

"Beverly! I hate to be the one to point this out, but...we're naked."

Delightedly, Beverly looked Jean-Luc up and down.

"Yes, we are...so?"

Jean-Luc began to feel decidedly uncomfortable.

"Well, you know...there maybe thorns...nettles...who knows what may assail us."

Turning to her lover and looking imperiously at him, she muttered: "Oh gosh, we wouldn't want to damage anything would we?" At the hurt expression she threw back her head and laughed. "You know what I'd really like?"

"I shudder to think."

That earned a gentle poke in the ribs.

"A freshwater wash."

Craning his neck up to see over the foothills, JeanLuc spotted what he was looking for.

"If we follow the beach around for a bit, we should find just what you need."

Making their way back to the waterline, Jean-Luc took Beverly's hand in his and together they walked in the shallows, navigating their way through the waterworn rocks, marvelling in the diversity of life that proliferated there.

"Over there, I think that's what we've been looking for."

Gingerly stepping over the bastion of rocks, the couple were delighted to find a freshwater creek flowing briskly into the sea.

"How did you know?"

“If you look at the topography of these hills and the escarpment, you can make out a crease in the land leading down to the shore. Water would have no choice but to follow that course. It was odds on there would be a creek.”

Taking his face in her hands Beverly said gently:

“You are remarkable.”

“Well...thank you. Come on, it probably gets deeper up stream.”

Stepping into the warm water they strolled then waded up stream finding the temperature growing cooler the deeper the water became. Without warning, Jean-Luc, who had been leading, suddenly disappeared into a deeper pond. He surfaced without harm, beckoning to Beverly to join him.

“Watch the first step...”

Laughing, Beverly dived forward, coming up in front of Jean-Luc.

“I love you...” “And I you...”

They kissed and sank slowly beneath the surface.

Some time later they were walking back to the point where they would swim back to the Nimrod. Reaching that point they stood in each other’s arms and listened to the evening calls of the birds as they prepared to sleep. “What an absolutely perfect day, Jean-Luc.”

“Mmm.”

“Will you wash the salt off me when we get back?”

“Mmm.”

“I’ll wash you too.”

“Mmm.”

“Jean-Luc?

“Mmm?”

“I don’t want dinner...I want you.”

“Mmm, oh yes...”

The next morning, the sailors hauled up the anchor and made their way under power back to the open sea. They both enjoyed the difference in the yacht when the sails were hoisted, and the motor silenced. Beverly revelled in taking the helm and Jean-Luc was enchanted watching the meticulous way she made her course adjustments as they sailed. Although neither of them had ever sailed a craft of this vintage, it was soon evident that the rudiments were well understood.

“I was having a look at the charts. If we by-pass the next island group, we could make our next landing at a cluster of islands, the largest of which has a thermal lake, an extensive cave system and some archaeological ruins.”

“Didn’t Arnparr tell us to keep in sight of the islands?”

“Well, yes, he did, but Beverly these islands are only a few miles extra to travel if we sail in a straight line which I think we can do with this wind. If we were to stay in sight of land, it will take us miles out of our way.”

“And this has nothing to do with the fact there are ruins on these islands...”

The look on Jean-Luc’s face was priceless. At that point in time the Captain of the Federation Flagship was nowhere to be seen. In his place was a boy with his hand caught in the biscuit tin.

“Ruins. Oh well, I suppose I’m interested in seeing the ruins, but what about the thermal lake? Wouldn’t you like to bathe in a warm freshwater lake?”

Beverly peered at the captain, trying to see behind the innocent visage that faced her.

I don’t believe you’re so altruistic Jean-Luc, but I’ll go along with it on one condition.”

“And that is...?”

“We go to the lake first. Not a fleeting visit, not a glimpse-and-run tourist look. A real swim, walk, discover kind of look.”

“Done! You have my word.”

Grinning at each other, Jean-Luc made the course corrections that would carry them across the open sea for the first time.

Will became aware of his situation as he woke to the sound of his insistent communicator. He instantly remembered the previous night and instinctively reached for his companion in the bed. Feeling around and encountering nothing but the cool sheets, he switched his search to find his tunic top to silence the comm unit. Finally finding it, he was untangling the badge from the material when Julie wandered in with a cup of coffee.

“Enterprise to Commander Riker!”

“Riker here.”

“Commander, thank goodness! We were...”

"What can I do for you Geordi?"

"Commander we've got the seismic gear up and running and I don't like the readings we're getting."

"What's wrong?"

"There's pressure building. It's bad and getting rapidly worse."

"Have you sounded warnings?"

"Aye, Sir, but we need you to give the orders to initiate evacuations."

"I'm on my way Geordi. Do whatever you think necessary until I get aboard. You have my authorisation to evacuate and clear any channels you need."

"Aye, Sir! LaForge out."

Concerned, Julie sat on the bed.

"What can I do?"

"Julie, we need to get everyone out of the buildings. Can you do a colony wide broadcast? Warn the most amount of people at one time?"

"Yes! We have an emergency override for all media. I'll get on to it immediately."

As they spoke, they both retrieved their clothes and dressed. Taking her in his arms Will said: "Take care, my love. I'll contact you as soon as I can." Stepping to one side he said: "Enterprise! One to beam up."

Striding onto the bridge, Will was immediately assailed from all sides.

"Whoa! One at a time. Darnell, where are the construction crews?"

"They have withdrawn to the plains to the south of the city, away from the fault, Sir."

"And Kek...the medical personnel?"

"Sir, Dr. Selar reports they are en route to the same area as the construct crews. All seriously wounded have either been admitted to the sickbay onboard or treated and released."

"Deanna, how many teams unaccounted for?"

"Only one, Commander. Water purification team two hasn't reported in. They were working in the subterranean wells in the northwest. Communication is weak at best.

The rock structure is interfering with our signals."

"Can we transport through it?"

"No, Sir."

"Commander Data, take an away team and retrieve team two."

"Aye, Sir."

"And Data. Take some pattern enhancers and keep in touch."

"Understood, Sir."

"Mr. Kek, keep a close watch on them."

"Aye, Sir."

Seeing his orders being carried out and sensing his crew needed no more instruction, Will settled into the Command Chair and cast a worried look at Deanna.

"This couldn't have come at a worse time. The population has only just begun to come to terms with the recent disaster. They're not ready for this!"

"They're stronger than you think, Will. With Prime Minister Phillips' good leadership and a little help from us, they'll prevail. If the tremors continue and it appears the planet has become unstable, we'll find someplace else for them to go. They will carry on Will. You must hang on to that thought and do your job to the best of your ability."

Knowing more was said than the words she spoke, a grateful Will looked at his beautiful Counsellor.

"What would I do without you?"

"Persevere."

On the planet Data and his team had made their way to the entrances to the underground wells. Proffering his tricorder, Data frowned at the results.

"We are not close enough for a clear scan. We must enter the wells."

The entrance was nondescript, giving no hint as to what lay within. In the space of a few minutes the team found themselves at the head of a spiral staircase and began their descent.

They had travelled down two levels when Data brought his team to a halt. Standing perfectly still, Data indicated silence. Tilting his head from side to side in a curiously cat like gesture, Data suddenly broke into a run.

"Sir! What's wrong?"

"I can hear someone in distress!"

With his team at his heels, Data flew down a further three flights of stairs, coming to an abrupt halt that almost caused quite a collision with his team.

Sorting themselves out they found Data talking earnestly with a bruised and bloodied human.

“Ensign Tark. Please render medical assistance to

Prime Minister Phillips.”

“There’s no time! We’ve got to get...”

An ominous rumble cut short the Prime Minister’s words. Data kept his footing as the people around him fell to their knees. Small chunks of material fell from the roof and with an ear-splitting crack, a rift opened up, rapidly crossing the floor and bisecting the stairs. There followed an eerie silence.

“Is everyone all right?”

Dusting themselves off, each person checked another until they were sure all were well.

“As I was saying...we don’t have time to waste. There is one of your teams trapped in here and two colonists who went to render aid.”

“Prime Minister, I thank you for your assistance, but

I would prefer it if you returned to the surface with Ensign Tark.”

They stood for a moment, neither giving ground until Data recognised the determination etched on the Prime Minister’s face and knew she would not back down.

“Very well. We will continue our search.”

The group had only descended a further three levels when they came to a fresh fall of rocks. The remains of the two colonists could be seen amongst the rubble. They were obviously dead.

Out of habit, Data consulted his useless tricorder. The action made him smile...such a “human” thing to do. Turning to the group he said: “We will dig in teams. Each of you will dig with me for one hour. Lieutenant Fullarton, you will start. Ensign Tark, please see to the Prime

Minister’s injuries now.”

As Data and the Lieutenant began the digging, Ensigns Tark and Ellis helped Julie to sit and gently began to treat her wounds.

“My tricorder’s useless but I can tell you’ve broken your left arm and collar bone and there’s a nasty cut and abrasion on your head.”

“Nothing serious then...”

The ensigns noted the grim smile and gave their own smiles in return.

“What happened Ma’am?”

“I was keeping tabs on everyone’s movements...you know, the evac was going so well...all the groups had reported to their stations, and I was making my to the Northern safe ground when I was informed your water team was missing. I know how troublesome these wells can be with communicators, and I surmised the crew hadn’t been contacted about the impending tremors, so I sort of took a detour with two volunteers and was on my way down when the first quake hit. I’m ashamed to say I obtained my injuries doing nothing more spectacular than falling down some stairs.”

“Well, we’re glad that’s all you did Ma’am.”

They were all startled when Lieutenant Fullarton shouted: “Sir! Here...I can get through.”

“I will go Lieutenant. In my absence you will be the ranking officer. If I do not return, make sure you get your people back safely.”

“Aye, Sir.”

Using his powerful body, Data wriggled through the small opening to find himself in a black, dusty space. Switching to night vision he swept the surrounding area only to find an inert Bolian body, partially buried by rubble. He carefully made his way to the crewman to find, sadly, that he was dead. Data scanned the far rock fall with his enhanced eyes and noted where to start his excavations. It took mere minutes for him to make a small fissure appear and was rewarded with weak cries from inside. As he enlarged the rift Data was careful to encourage the victims, and it wasn’t long before he was with them.

Incredibly the three survivors were injured but ambulatory and were united with the rest of the party very quickly. Data retrieved the body of the fallen crewman and together they all walked gingerly up until they found their passage blocked by more rock falls.

“We are very close to the surface. I believe the pattern enhancers will be sufficient to achieve beam out.

We should deploy them at these points.”

Having indicated their optimum positions Data activated his communicator.

“Enterprise...Do you read?”

“We have you, Commander. A little scratchy, but readable.”

“Very well. Six to beam directly to sick bay. Energise.”

Within a few minutes of their safe arrival, Will Riker walked briskly into sickbay.

"Mr. Data. Report."

"We retrieved the water purification team, Sir. Unfortunately, Ensign Tam was killed, as were two colonists. During our search we came across Prime Minister Phillips. She had been trying to warn the team and was injured in the subsequent tremors. Dr. Selar is treating her now. I can report her injuries are not serious and her life signs are strong. I have put the body of Ensign Tarn in the morgue."

At this news Will stiffened but said nothing. He let his eyes wander over sickbay taking in the well-practised activities.

"Well done Mr. Data. Exemplary as usual."

After Data had left Will hovered near the treatment room until he was called back to the Bridge. Catching Alyssa Ogawa's eye, he asked to be informed when the

Prime Minister was out of surgery then left, his mind already on a hundred other things.

Jean-Luc Picard was having the time of his life. Beverly had finally relinquished the wheel and not only was he experiencing the sheer joy of sailing a beautiful craft, he was also treated to the sight of Beverly up on the bow, wedged in the pulpit, her head thrown back and that stunning mane of fire streaming in the wind. With every rise as the yacht lifted to the seas Beverly would grip the forestay and swing. Picard was entranced. He felt his heart singing.

Every now and then a slightly harder gust would hit the boat, and she would heel a little more. At first Jean-Luc didn't notice it but when a particularly hard gust pushed the yacht over alarmingly Jean-Luc decided it was time to call Beverly back to the cockpit.

As she made her way aft, she looked over the stern and Jean-Luc saw a frown on her beautiful face.

"What's wrong?"

In answer, Beverly pointed over his shoulder.

Turning, Jean-Luc felt his own frown form.

"Where did that come from?"

"I haven't a clue."

A feeling of unease descended upon them.

"Did you listen to the forecast this morning?"

“No...we were “busy”...remember?”

“Ah...yes. That looks like a storm and a big one at that.”

Beverly looked steadily at Jean-Luc.

“Should we call for assistance?”

“Beverly, this is an ocean-going vessel. I’m sure a little wind and rain won’t bother us. However...we should shorten sail.”

“Shorten sail...? You’re not making this up, are you?”

“No. When the wind freshens a smaller sail area must be presented to the wind, otherwise the boat could become unmanageable, or she could be dis-masted.”

“That’s not good, is it?”

“Emphatically, no.”

Determined to be of help, Beverly said: “Ok. What do we do?”

Jean-Luc felt an up welling of pride and love for his courageous companion. “You take the wheel, and I will change the jib first then the mainsail. Be careful though. There is increased pressure on the rudder, making her harder to steer.”

After changing positions Jean-Luc went to the forward section to retrieve a smaller jib. Unfortunately, the sails had been bagged without their ID tags showing so it took Jean-Luc much longer than expected. Rising through the fore hatch, Picard was dismayed to discover the wind was blowing harder and the malevolent clouds were almost over them. Struggling with the sail bag, Jean-Luc finally made it to the forestay and began to attach the new sail. Whilst unravelling the jib the yacht slammed into a wave knocking Picard of his feet. He tried valiantly but couldn’t save the sail bag from going over the side. Grasping the handrail, he made it to the mast and lowered the halyard, thus dropping the first jib. He then transferred the ropes from the old sail to the new, returned to the mast and with the help of a winch, raised the new sail. He felt well satisfied, as it had been a very hard task, with waves coming over the boat and being all but a novice, though he knew his work was incomplete.

The next thing to do was to get the redundant jib below out of the way. To that end he stuffed it down the fore hatch. Now he was ready to tackle the main. Walking on the high side of the heaving deck he studied the situation and having made up his mind said to Beverly: “You will have to come up into the wind to release the pressure on the sail.”

They were having to yell at each other now, such was the force of the wind, waves and rain which had started to pelt down.

Struggling, Beverly hauled on the wheel bringing the bow of the yacht closer to the eye of the wind. By now the mainsail boom was jerking and flapping about viciously. Unable to undo the shackle, Jean-Luc was about to go below for a tool when the boat suddenly lurched and the mainsail boom whipped across the cockpit with dreadful strength hitting the side of Jean-Luc's head, the sickening dull thud heard even over the cacophony of sound already assailing their senses and flinging him onto the top of the life rail. Like a lifeless doll he went limply overboard, his body catching on a broken metal splice and ripping his skin and muscle open from shoulder to hip. All this took only seconds.

Beverly opened her mouth to scream but the wind tore it away. Letting go of the wheel she watched, as if in slow motion, Jean-Luc's body roll onto his back, catching at the last second, a rope that tangled around his ankle.

The yacht was now out of control. With far too much sail up the boat was at the mercy of the elements. Beverly searched frantically for the rope that held Jean-Luc. So intense was her concentration she never saw the huge wave that hit the Nimrod broadside and rolled her over like a toy. Beverly was thrown headfirst into the heaving seas. The majestic yacht hesitated only briefly upside down then continued to complete the roll.

Dazed and confused, Beverly had no idea what had happened. She was choking and vomiting at the same time...at that point in time she honestly thought she was about to die. Treading water in the maelstrom she caught a glimpse of the now wrecked yacht and miraculously, JeanLuc.

*Oh, help me...help him...Let him be alive.*

It was extremely difficult to reach the boat. For each metre she made she thought she went back two, yet she wouldn't give up, and her efforts were rewarded when she reached the derelict yacht. In a panic she looked for JeanLuc and when she couldn't find him, she nearly gave up but as she rounded the stern, she saw him floating on the side away from the wind. She was aghast.

*Oh please...be alive. Please, please.*

Using the same rope that saved him from being irretrievably swept away, she reached him and immediately checked his carotid artery for a pulse. Despair welled in her heart when she couldn't feel anything, but she calmed herself and tried again. Beverly cried out loud when her cold fingers detected a weak throb of life.

*Now what?*

Beverly looked dubiously at what was left of the once beautiful yacht. The mast had been torn off and there was a deadly tangle of wire, rope and ruined sails. However, Beverly knew the yacht was their only chance of survival. Supporting Jean-Luc's inert body to the stern, Beverly discovered the cut away transom allowed fairly easy access. Heaving first herself and then with significant difficulty lifting Picard she manoeuvred him on board. She sat for a moment regaining her strength then started clearing a space on the cockpit lockers and having done that, lifted Jean-Luc onto the locker tops. Finally, she was able to examine him.

Already a bloody stream was emanating from him. He was deeply unconscious and when Beverly gently turned his head she gasped. A dreadful split ran from his right eyebrow to the back of his head; the top of his ear smashed beyond recognition. She then opened the short-sleeved linen shirt only to be further shocked by the ghastly laceration that ran the length of his torso, exposing muscle and bone and bleeding heavily. Beverly looked about her desperately, trying to find something...anything to bind the wounds and stop the bleeding. Grabbing a tatter of sail, she rolled it into a sausage and placed it over the tear and rolled Jean-Luc gently on to it to keep it in place.

Another piece of sail was wound around his head. A stopgap measure at best, but it would have to do until she could find something better.

What she saw was chaos. She didn't even have a shelter to keep the pouring rain off.

It was then that she remembered the first aid kit below. Crouching on her knees she peered under the wreckage to the hatchway. The water in the yacht was inky black and Beverly knew she risked possible death to go in there.

*Think Beverly...What would he do?*

*The rubber dinghy!*

Beverly was loath to leave Jean-Luc, and she hesitated before she moved yet she knew without help he could die. So, taking great care on the sluggishly rolling boat she made her way to the forward hatch. It had been blown open during the roll and Beverly knew that a sail had been stuffed down the hatch, but she was saddened to find a complete mess. More filthy black water with unidentifiable objects floating around. Beverly knew that she could stand with her head just poking out of the hatch and with that in mind she slipped feet first into the mess. She shifted her feet around until she found what felt like the rubber dinghy. Taking a deep breath, she ducked under and grasped the object and brought it to the surface. Her joy at achieving her goal was immediately soured by a broken bulkhead timber had speared straight through the dinghy and a sinister slash rendering it useless as a rescue boat. Nevertheless, undaunted, she took her prize back to the cockpit – by all means a very dangerous exercise. After checking Picard and satisfying herself she could leave him a few minutes longer she cleared a space for the dinghy and pulled the inflation cord. The effect was instant, if a little disappointing. With a sharp pop the dingy reached a state of semi-inflation only to subside as the air escaped from the tears. It meant little to Crusher. When it seemed the process had finished she was able to force her hand in far enough to feel for, then grasp the med kit she knew was there.

As soon as she opened the kit she set about cleaning and dressing the wounds. There was no protoplaser to close the tears and the antibiotics had been ruined along with the hypospray, yet Beverly was happy to have the little she did have. Taking four ultra-absorbent gel packs, she placed them along the length of the tear running the length of Jean-Luc's torso, forming a protective barrier, then secured them with strips of dressings. Moving to his head, she placed another gel pack on the wound, using the remnants of his shirt to make it fast. After making JeanLuc as comfortable as possible, Beverly went back to the companionway to find the distress button. Something had smashed the cover and broken the red knob, but she pressed it anyway. Reaching again into the dinghy Beverly liberated a rain catcher, which she split and used as a covering for them both and a multi-tool, comprising a laser and fid. By the time she finished it was almost dark and as she settled down to wait for help, she wondered if they were going to make it.

It was a gentle bumping that woke her. At first, she couldn't understand where she was, gazing about dazedly, then the memories flooded back causing her to gasp. Her eyes fell on Jean-Luc, and she noted his head move with every bump she felt. She then realised the list on the boat. It seemed to be tilted over, the side rhythmically touching the sea floor.

*That can't be right...*

She cast the thought aside and turned all of her attention to Jean-Luc. Sometime during the dreadful night his bleeding had stopped from both the head and torso wounds. Though still unconscious, of more concern was his rising temperature. Beverly carefully tore a strip from Jean-Luc's shirt and soaking it in seawater, used it to bathe Picard's face. Looking around for the first time, Beverly discovered that, during the night, the yacht had been driven over the outer reef and onto the beach of a small island cove. She scoured the horizon, then the island, seeing nothing. No sails, no aircraft, no smoke...nothing. It was as if they were the only people on the planet.

Prime Minister Phillips lay quietly listening as Dr.

Selar gave her prognosis. The Vulcan was unmoved at Julie's protest when told to rest for the next twenty-four hours on board the Enterprise.

"I can't do that Doctor. You don't honestly expect me to lounge around on this ship while my colony is in a crisis?"

"I expect you to follow my instructions Ma'am.

Every effort has already been instigated to ensure the safety of the populace below. Your responsibility is to present yourself in optimum condition in order to function at you best."

With growing irritation, Julie pugnaciously stood closer to the Vulcan. "Are you ordering me to stay?"

"I am not in a position to do that Ma'am; however, I will be informing Commander Riker of my recommendations and your refusal to abide by them."

"Fair enough."

As she stalked out of sickbay, Julie heard Selar contacting Will.

Following the computer's direction to the transporter room, Julie found a surprisingly subdued Will at the doors.

She knew instinctively something was wrong.

"What is it?"

Will looked intently into her eyes and taking her by the shoulders said: "Captain Picard and Doctor Crusher have been reported missing. We have to leave immediately to aid in the search. Julie...This isn't the time or the place, I know you've been ordered to rest and I also know you won't. Please, just take care of yourself. I have left mission specialists with equipment and supplies and also two shuttles. Once the engineers find a stable area, set up and wait for our return. You will have replicators and all you will need."

They embraced then and for a few sweet moments sought comfort in each other's arms. A quick kiss and she was gone. Will knew she would have the colony well set up when he returned. Taking a big breath, Will put aside his thoughts of Julie and set his mind to the search for his two dear friends.

A flash of blue was the only sign as the mighty ship jumped to warp eight in a race to save her master.

It had been about an hour, and Beverly knew she had to get them both ashore. The question was...How? She sat and thought a while, looking at the things that surrounded her and soon a plan formed. Leaving her patient, she found a piece of torn sail and fitted it into the cockpit. Then, very gently, she lowered Jean-Luc's loose body onto the sail remnant. His head was to the bow, his feet facing the stern. Knowing, as the boat was aground, that she could stand with her head and shoulders out of the water, Beverly let herself over the edge. The water was warm and pleasant, although she didn't notice it, and when she pulled on the sail hem, it slipped easily over the cockpit floor despite Picard's weight. There was only a drop of 10cms to the water, but it was somewhat difficult as the yacht was heeling so much. By taking her time and adjusting the captain's body frequently she finally managed to float him free and made her way to the shore. Thankfully there was no surf to contend with and when her burden touched the sand, she had to bend and drag him as gently as possible up the short beach and into the bush, which grew, thickly to the high tide mark. Settling Jean-Luc and again checking his temperature with her hand, she left him to make the first of many trips back to the yacht to retrieve everything she thought could be useful. As the tide receded the damage to the craft became more evident. The broken mast had punched a hole in the hull and was wedged there like a drunken

arrow. A deadly web of metal rigging, ropes, sail and flotsam littered the area around Nimrod and Beverly felt a pang of sorrow at the destruction of something so beautiful.

By the time she was finished, she was exhausted but satisfied. Around her was a pile of things with which to make shelter, collect water...almost everything except what she needed to treat Jean-Luc properly. During her work she tended to him often but still he hovered in unconsciousness. Beverly was deeply concerned but could do nothing but keep him as cool as possible.

On one of her forays to the boat she noticed the water level had dropped a little inside and she decided to try and find the med kit. With the yacht lying on its side, Beverly knew it would be very dangerous as everything not tied down had been thrown about when the boat rolled. Gingerly placing her feet one after the other, she entered the black foul-smelling water. She tried to do what she had in the fo'c's'le, but the area was too great. She was, in effect, walking on the galley area and had just realised that when she suddenly stepped into the port bunk recess.

The water immediately closed over her head and as she twisted, trying to regain the higher ground, her ankle became jammed. Panic seized her and she froze in terror for some slow seconds then burst into sudden motion trying to free her foot. She felt the skin above her ankle being cut and just as she thought she would surely drown, her foot came free and she was able to grab the bulkhead support and step onto the gimballed oven, her head breaking free of the filthy water. Gasping and pulling her hair from her face she decided not to try again under those circumstances. She knew the tide might drive the boat further onto the beach and if that happened, she could bail out the water. She couldn't salvage the craft, but she could salvage its contents. All she needed was a little luck.

It had been some hours, and Beverly had been dozing when an odd gurgling sound woke her. Jean-Luc's body was rigid and trembling violently and he seemed to be choking. Quickly rolling him onto his uninjured side, Beverly began to clear his mouth when he suddenly snapped his jaws, closing on her fingers and his tongue. Blood spurted from his mouth and Beverly screamed in pain and almost fainted when she felt the bones of her fingers break. Yet still Jean-Luc's jaw spasmed. Abruptly his head snapped back, and his mouth opened, and the

convulsion slowly passed. Smelling the acrid scent of urine, Beverly knew Jean-Luc had released his bladder. She checked him as best she could, finding the pupil of his right eye dilated. Frantically she grabbed the laser and, using the narrowest beam, opened a small hole in JeanLuc's skull, exposing a blood clot. Once the pressure was released, his pupil became reactive, and Beverly sighed in relief. She then made her way to the shore to wash the mangled fingers. As she entered the water, a stinging from her ankle reminded her of her previous close call and for the first time, she gave in to tears. Crouched in the water, her hand a mass of pain, she watched as the teardrops fell and mingled with the sea.

When she had regained herself, she made her way to her treasure trove and found the cockpit bucket. She took it to the sea, filled it and took it back to wash Picard. He was calm again, although Beverly thought his pulse was a little weaker. At least his temperature was stable...too high...but stable.

After her ministrations she found a sharp shell, (wanting to conserve the power cell of the laser), and used it to cut some thin strips of sail cloth. Together with some slivers of a woody material, she splinted her damaged fingers. They throbbed abominably and she knew infection was likely, but she treated them, nonetheless.

She was becoming thirsty and using the trick JeanLuc had taught her, she was lucky to find a small creek flowing a short distance away and with the bucket, took a quantity of fresh water back to the captain. Again, using a suitable shell, she carefully opened Jean-Luc's mouth and washed away the blood and then managed to get him to drink a little. She was intently cleaning the appalling wound on his torso when his hand gently closed on her arm. Beverly couldn't hold back a gasp of fright. She looked down at Jean-Luc to see his eyes open, although they were mere slits. The swelling and bruising had spread to the side of his face giving his face a grotesque look.

"Hello there. Glad you finally decided to join me."

His first efforts to speak were ineffectual but after Beverly gave him some more water, he managed an audible croak.

"Who hit me?"

"Not "who"..."what". You were trying to shorten sail and the boom hit you."

"Why?"

“Why?...Oh, there was a storm. After you were hit you went overboard then the yacht got knocked down. In fact, she went right over, a full 360-degree turn. I was thrown clear, and you were caught in some ropes.”

“The yacht?”

“Wrecked, but she did make it to here, wherever here is. She’s over there, in the shallows. I’ve found fresh water, and I think these fruits are edible.”

“My tongue?”

“You bit it during a convulsion.”

“Other injuries?”

“You’ve got a bad whack to the head, certainly a fractured skull, a gash running from your shoulder to your hip on your right side, your right eyebrow is split...in fact the split goes all the way to the back of your head, the top of your right ear is err...damaged, and there are some broken ribs...oh, and I think your left arm is broken but I don’t have a clue as to how you did that.”

“And you?”

“I’m fine. A sore ankle and some bent fingers. I had more trouble with the belly full of seawater I had. Yuck!”

“Rescue?”

“I don’t know. I pressed the transponder, somehow, I don’t think it’s working. We have four days till we were due back, so presumably, we may have to make do till they realise we’re missing.”

Beverly gently stroked Jean-Luc’s head.

“If we...not sighted...look for us.”

“What?”

“Stay in sight... Island beacons.”

Beverly thought about this for a while. She didn’t want to tax Jean-Luc, and she knew he was trying to tell her something important.

“Do all the islands have a beacon?”

“Yes.”

“And as we passed beacons, our progress was noted?”

“Yes.”

Beverly ran her uninjured hand through her hair, trying to gather her thoughts.

“So, when we didn’t pass an island for a day and a night, they would know something was wrong.”

“Yes.”

“Ok, we have island beacons, what does the yacht have...where is it?”

“Old fash...radar...masthead.”

“The masthead? You mean the top bit of the mast? I think that’s the bit that’s sticking out of the hull. Is it a working thing...does it matter if it’s wet?”

“No...no work parts...coded reflector.”

“So, when the beacon picks up the signal, it’s coded, and they know who it is?

“Yes.”

Casting a speculative look at the beached yacht she said: “Jean-Luc, it will be dark in a few hours, and I want to build us a shelter for the night. I’ll try and get the reflector tomorrow morning, first thing.”

“Kay....”

As she watched he slipped into a fitful sleep, so Beverly took her chance and set about building a shelter from the sails, fronds from the local plants and thick grasses that abounded. Hampered by her injured hand, it took some time to build a shelter she felt was sufficient, but she prevailed and was satisfied with the final outcome. Next, she collected some tempting looking fruit and some more water. With sundown the temperature dropped markedly so Beverly drew a sail over both of them and snuggled as close as she dared to Jean-Luc, not wanting to increase his already high fever and finally fell into a troubled sleep of her own. Her last coherent thought was that it would be a long night.

The Enterprise entered orbit of Gerallum in record time and Will had beamed down to the Tour Director’s office within minutes of arriving.

“I am Director Essum. Your message reached us last night, please, come into the chart room.”

Looking down at the charts spread before him, Will said,

“Do you know where they are?”

“Let me put it this way...We know where they’re

not.”

“Director Essum...”

“Bear with me Commander. The day they went missing, we had a force 11 gale. That’s cyclone strength. They were noted here, on Xi3 and were expected to pass Ja2 next day. They didn’t and they didn’t stay at Xi3. They either decided to sail across open sea to a distant island group or something cataclysmic happened to the yacht.

Either way, we can’t find them.”

Placing his hands on the chart table Will said with exasperation: “Could the yacht weather the storm?”

“Yes...if handled correctly. The thing is Commander, we like our guests to learn as they go, at their own pace. They are advised most strongly to stay in sight of the islands at all times. That way they are within easy distance of help or shelter if anything occurs. If your people chose to ignore that advice, then they did so at their own peril.”

“I understand Director, but do you have any idea where they are?”

“We recovered some wreckage we believe is from the Nimrod, but with the storm...it’s a big ocean Commander.”

“What can we do to help?”

“Is your vessel capable of picking up radar signals?” Will straightened and thoughtfully stroked his beard.

“Radar?...I...I’ll have to check.”

Slapping his communicator, Will barked...

“Riker to Enterprise!”

“Data here, Sir.”

“Mr. Data, can the Enterprise pick up radar signals?”

“....Yes, Sir. It will take some adjustments.”

“Make them. Riker out.”

Turning back to the director, Will said: “Anything else?”

“I’ll let you know. You’re welcome to stay.” “Thank you.”

Slatted sunlight flickered across Beverly’s face. She made the mistake of stretching and immediately regretted it. She ached all over and the heat and throbbing in her hand signalled the expected infection. She sat up slowly, the throbbing in her head matching the throbbing in her hand. Checking Jean-Luc she was frightened to find his breathing distressed and his pulse further weakened. His fever caused a tremor to course through his ravaged body, and the bandages were caked with serum and pus. As quickly as she could, Beverly fetched some clean water and carefully stripped the soiled bandages from Jean-Luc’s wounds.

Better able to inspect the wound, she was dismayed to see a dark puncture in the deeper part of the laceration. There was no way to determine how deep it went, all she could do was hope his internal organs were undamaged. Disgusted and worried by what she found, she couldn't help the tear that escaped and trickled down her face.

"Don't cry lovely..."

"Jean-Luc! Did I wake you?...I'm sorry if it hurts. I must clean these wounds...there's infection..."

"S'ok... Can't feel hand..."

"What? Which hand?"

"Left..."

Knowing the arm was most likely broken, Beverly gently touched his left hand. Finding it cold she felt up the arm for a pulse and found one near the elbow. Feeling back down the arm, Jean-Luc groaned through clenched teeth when she found the break.

"Jean-Luc the break in your arm has impeded the blood flow. I'm going to have to straighten it and splint it...Jean-Luc...it will hurt...a lot."

All he could do was nod in return. Beverly gathered the things she needed and again took the injured arm in her hands.

"I'll be as quick as I can."

With that she placed his elbow between her feet and took hold of his hand. As she pulled hard Jean-Luc screamed and started to retch bringing up little but bile.

Quickly she splinted the arm, winding strips of sailcloth around it until she was satisfied it was done properly.

Picard was panting and trembling, a gentle whimper escaping his dry lips.

Wiping his face with a wet cloth, she gently said: "It's over Jean-Luc. Rest now."

Within a few minutes the captain had drifted off to sleep, occasionally groaning in his pain.

Beverly knew she was running out of time. Her hand would soon make her sick and she would then be unable to look after Jean-Luc. The trepan of his skull and the suspected internal injuries, along with everything else made survival more and more remote for Jean-Luc. Her only hope was the reflector and to that end she waded out again to the yacht.

The mast had perforated the hull on the side that was “up” and although that was good, it posed a problem. Beverly couldn’t reach it without climbing out on the mast. The boat had settled further into the sand so she felt sure she could make her way to the mast end without tipping the boat, but she only had one fully functional hand. It would be difficult to say the least however there was no other choice but to start. Getting on board was easy as was getting to the hull puncture. Stepping onto, then sitting astride the mast was quite another thing. The rigging was festooned all around and more than once she snagged her legs on shards of broken metal as she swung her legs backward and forwards. Negotiating the top spreaders was difficult but she persevered and finally reached the masthead. That was when she realised, she had nothing to prise the masthead fitting off. She sat there, 3 metres up in the air, her legs bleeding, her broken fingers and her head throbbing utterly defeated. It was a tinny clanking that eventually broke through her daze. Looking listlessly down she saw an odd-shaped piece of shining metal. She stilled it with her good hand and peered closely at it. ARD was stamped into the metal along with some smaller print. Laying along the mast, Beverly brought her face closer and read...

Activated

Radar

Deflector

She read it again, then again, before letting out a whoop. Of course! It wouldn’t be inside the mast. It had to be outside to work! And, blessedly, it was attached with a simple shackle. She had to use her teeth, breaking one, but she retrieved her prize and held it aloft yelling with delight.

When she got back to Jean-Luc she dropped to her knees in fright. He was lying so still; so pale she thought he had died. It wasn’t till she felt his weak pulse, (twice for certain); that she knew he still lived. Taking the damp cloth, she wiped his face calling his name gently.

“Jean-Luc...Jean-Luc, come on my love, wake up...”

He groaned softly and raised his good hand but didn’t open his eyes.

“Jean-Luc...I’ve got the radar deflector...Do you remember? We talked about the island beacons. I went to the yacht and got the deflector.”

Slowly, painfully, Jean-Luc nodded his head.

“What do I have to do? Do I have to climb to the beacon on this island?”

"No....off the ground...a tree...up as high as..."

He tried to open his eyes and failed. Taking her hand in his he lifted it up as high as he could.

"Ok, I understand. Get the deflector up the tallest tree I can find. Does it matter if the deflector is sort of...well...bent?"

"No...I don't know...how bad?"

"It's got four blades. Two of them are bent and I can't straighten them. I tried."

"No matter. Still have to..."

"I know. Climb. I'll give you a drink and some of the fruit. It's all right, I had some last night, then I'll go and find the tallest damn tree on this flyspeck island!"

Using her trusty shell, she peeled and thinly sliced three varieties of fruit and slowly fed them to Jean-Luc. Even eating caused considerable pain as his lacerated tongue came in contact with the acidic fruit. Water followed and Beverly felt a little better about him when she left, having finally gotten him to eat.

Walking down to the beach she swept her eyes left and right looking over the tree line. Settling on two likely specimens, she set off into the undergrowth. Barefoot and clad only in shorts and a sleeveless top, she couldn't help but graze and scratch her way through the bush. At last, she reached the first of the two trees and looking up knew she was defeated. There were no branches within reach and with her damaged hand, she couldn't even consider shimmying up. That left the other tree somewhere to her left. Eventually she found the tree by literally walking into it. Standing back and rubbing her head, she was delighted to see two branches, which had recently come adrift, probably during the storm, and were hanging down, still connected to the trunk. Without hesitation, using both feet and her good hand, the deflector in her teeth, she clambered up the ancient tree until she could go no further. For a while she just stared as she caught her breath. All around the sapphire sea, dotted to her right by a series of islands, small and large. Before securing the deflector to the topmost branches she held it aloft in her hand saying a prayer of deliverance to any God who happened to be listening and then carefully made her descent.

As she approached their shelter, she knew immediately what had happened. She could smell it. Running the last few steps, she fell to her

knees and held Jean-Luc's head as he vomited wretchedly. Amongst the remains of the fruit and water was a quantity of blood and Crusher didn't know if it was from his tongue or from some undiagnosed internal injury, it mattered little. They needed help...and soon.

The crew of the Enterprise had been on tenterhooks for the past few hours. The level of tension was excruciating and all on board wanted to help in finding their missing officers. Will had finally managed to stop asking Data for a report every five minutes but found it impossible to sit still. Seeing his discomfort, Deanna leaned over and said: "Patience Will. We know they're there. We will find them."

"Can you sense anything Deanna, anything at all?"

"As I told you before, I can't. I don't know why...I've sent an enquiry to Betazed about Gerallum via subspace. I've heard nothing yet."

"I'm sorry Deanna. It's just that I feel so damned useless! Here we are sitting in the flagship of the Federation, the cutting edge of technology available to us and we can't find two people on a yacht that would fit in

our smallest shuttle bay. It's ridiculous!"

"Will, you know..."

"Commander! A radar signal of the correct configuration has just been detected. Coordinates coming in...we've got them!"

"Beam them directly to sickbay! I'm not taking any chances. Mr. Data, Inform Director Essum and advise him of our success and relay the coordinates for possible salvage. I'll be in sickbay. Deanna, you have the Bridge."

As Will left the Bridge Deanna went to Data and squeezed his shoulder.

"Well done, Data. If I were lost, I wouldn't want anyone but you to be the one searching for me."

"Thank you, Counsellor, that is most gratifying. May I tell you that the signal was extremely weak and somewhat garbled? I had invaluable help from Lieutenant Simon Fullarton in clearing the signal and identifying it." Deanna looked kindly down at her friend.

"I'll let Commander Riker know. You have the

bridge Data, I'll be in sickbay."

Deanna entered sickbay and stood stock still. A hive of activity at the best of times, the level of tension was almost unbearable for the

empath. Closing her eyes and erecting the mental barriers, she walked to Will and stood by his shoulder.

"How are they Will?"

"Not Good. God Deanna, the Captain...if he were to die...I don't..."

Standing in front of him, Deanna looked up into his troubled face.

"Will we have them, and we have the best medical facility available. We can't do better than that. And you know what, Will Riker? They have each other. Somehow it will be enough...I feel it."

Will took Deanna in his arms.

"Yes, they do. And I have you, dear friend."

"Always."

Beverly at first refused flatly any attempt to see to her injuries, preferring to direct the attention to Picard, but fatigue and the infection in her hand finally drove her to seek aid. It was an uncomfortable two hours for her as the mangled fingers were cleaned, set and closed, the infection treated and the myriad of cuts, scrapes, abrasions and the tears on her legs caused by the mast were each treated and healed.

Still running on adrenalin, Beverly quietly entered the surgery suite and watched as the staff fought their battle for the captain's life.

In the two hours she had been away his broken arm was treated, the huge laceration and the broken ribs healed, and the rampant infection brought under control. As she stood quietly two independent teams worked on him. One team were intently studying a readout of his brain activity as they struggled to repair the dreadful damage to his head, the other team were trying to find the source of haemorrhaging in his stomach. Obviously, the puncture had done considerable damage. Beverly listened as the Doctors spoke quietly amongst themselves...

"The splenic rupture has been sealed, as is the abdominal tear. I can't see...what's the monitor got to say?"

"It says the liver's..."

"Pressure's falling! He's going into cardiac arrest! Synaptic failure imminent! Isocorticle stimulators!"

Beverly closed her eyes trying to close out the urgent voices...

"Clear!...Again, up to eight. Clear!...Again, ten this time. Clear.... We've got a pulse! Stabilise!"

Feeling strong hands on her shoulders, Beverly turned to see the gentle face of Will Riker. Saying nothing he took her in his arms, lifted her and carried her from the room. She didn't protest, she didn't complain and when he laid her on a med bed she just lay quietly staring at the roof.

"Deanna?"

"She's in shock Will. You go; I'll stay with her."

Will left them and went to stand at the door of the operating suite. He could do nothing, but he could still be near his Captain, he would stand there as long as it took.

It was many hours later when the weary medical staff finally felt they had stabilised the captain enough to feel some optimism for the first time. Dr. Selar went to Beverly and reported.

"We have managed to repair all but a portion of cranium. It was so badly shattered, we've had to place the area in stasis and apply an osteo regenerator. Captain Picard will remain sedated and in a static energy field for the next 24 hours. After that, depending on his progress, he may be woken. We will assess his condition then."

"As for you Doctor Crusher, your condition is, at the moment, poor. You are relieved of duty until further notice, and I recommend you report to your quarters and rest."

Beverly gave Selar a particularly hard look, but it was all show. Truth be told, she was exhausted and wanted nothing more than a hot shower and something to eat. Her plan was to return when Selar went off duty. However....

"Counsellor Troi, may I request you accompany Dr. Crusher to her quarters and see that she abides by my orders?"

"My pleasure Doctor."

Troi received the same sour look, but Beverly went quietly, exiting sickbay with as much dignity as she could muster. Deanna followed after a few moments and the journey to Beverly's cabin was taken in silence. As Crusher took her time having a shower, then a light meal, Deanna waited patiently and when Beverly approached her to suggest they return to sickbay, Deanna reached up and swiftly emptied the contents of a hypospray into Beverly's neck. Leading the subdued Crusher to her bed Deanna said as she tucked her in: "Dr. Selar says "Pleasant Dreams"."

Deanna was under no such orders and returned to sickbay to find Will dozing in a chair next to the captain.

Quietly pulling up a chair, she joined him in his vigil.

They were woken many hours later by a gentle shake to find Data and Geordi wanting to relieve them and were eventually persuaded to leave for their cabins.

Beverly awoke and, as habit dictated, stretched her lithe body and reached a questing hand to feel the warm body of her lover. Satisfied that he was there and warm she devoted some time to sorting out her day. Although well on the way to recovery, Picard still had some light therapy to undergo and some more osteo treatments to his head. The debilitating headaches were receding and, as Beverly reminded him almost daily, he realised just how lucky he had been.

The Enterprise had stayed in orbit three days at

Gerallum and assisted in the salvage of the Nimrod. Both Beverly and Jean-Luc were pleased their beautiful little ship was going to be repaired and apologies were made for their errant sailing behaviour.

Jean-Luc was still on medical leave, although Beverly had badgered Selar until she was passed fit for duty. Beverly wanted to be on hand to oversee Jean-Luc's remaining treatments.

She turned on her side, holding her head in her hand and studied her sleeping lover.

The scars were fading rapidly and once the regenerator plate was removed from his head there would be little to indicate how close he had come to death. As she thought of this, tears welled and, one at a time, slowly made their way down her beautiful face.

"Don't cry lovely."

"Oh, Jean-Luc..."

He held her close willing all his love into her to ease her pain; they stayed like that for a long time, eventually falling to sleep.

It was an enquiry from sickbay that woke them. The captain was late for his appointment and was Dr. Crusher going to be on duty?

Their showers and light breakfast were taken with the gentle banter of lovers, and they were still chuckling when they arrived at sickbay. After the therapy was complete, Jean-Luc was delighted to be visited by his First Officer.

"Number One! It's good to see you. How have you been treating my ship in my absence?"

"With all the respect she deserves Captain."

“I should think so. By the way, where are we going?”

“Back to the Embo colony, Sir. We left some crew and equipment there; I thought it would be nice to go and pick them up.”

“Yes, that would be a nice gesture. There’s nothing worse than being assigned a ship, then have it desert you on some god forsaken planet in the middle of nowhere.” The men both laughed.

“We’ll be there in three days Captain. I will introduce you to the Prime Minister there. A very remarkable woman.”

At this, Picard raised his eyebrows. “Remarkable, eh? That’s one meeting I’m looking forward to.”

Jean-Luc watched as Will left and turned a questioning eye to Beverly.

“Yes, I think so. Deanna said they got quite “close” during the ship’s stay.”

“Is Deanna all right with that?”

“Apparently.”

Jean-Luc smiled knowingly. “Hmm, interesting.”

“Come on you old softy, let’s go get some lunch and go fool about.”

“Fool about? Is that an officially sanctioned medical treatment?”

“Absolutely!”

Smiling lecherously and raising his eyebrows he sighed,

“Oh, good.”

The great starship cruised uneventfully to the Embo colony and settled into orbit at eight hundred hours. Will’s hail was answered, and he was overjoyed to see the smiling face of Julie greeting him and his ship.

The tremors had gradually subsided, trailing off to nothingness. The colony had been relocated to a more stable area, and the sequestered crew had done a marvellous job in setting up the beginnings of the new town. Will invited Julie to dine on board to catch up with both JeanLuc and Beverly and she duly arrived at the appointed time looking beautiful as always.

The dinner was held in the forward observation lounge and Picard was immediately intrigued by the relationship between the Prime Minister and his First Officer. That they were attracted to each other was obvious and both Beverly and Jean-Luc enjoyed the subtle flirting that went on. Once dinner was over the couples went their separate ways, Will and Julie ending up in Will’s quarters. It wasn’t long before they were in

each other's arms and the love they made was joyful and deeply satisfying.

They lay entwined for a long time, but it was Will who broke the spell.

"We have to leave the day after tomorrow."

"I know."

"You won't come with me, will you?" He stroked her side gently.

"No. You know, it's weird. I fought tooth and nail against taking this position. I didn't want it...all I wanted to do was my work, my research. But now? I couldn't imagine doing anything else. And you know what? I'm damned good at it!"

At that they both laughed.

"I won't ask you to stay. I know what your job...this ship means to you, but I will tell Captain Picard what a gem he has in you."

"Oh, shucks! Hey! We've still got tonight, all day tomorrow and the next night. What say we go for the record?"

"What record?"

"I'll show you..."

Two days later the Enterprise left orbit to begin a mapping survey of a distant star cluster. Jean-Luc was still off duty, and it was a sombre, tired Riker who sat in the command chair.

"Sir, engineering reports maintenance of the warp core is complete. We have warp power available." "Very well, Mr. Data. Is the course laid in?"

"Aye, Sir."

"Then proceed at warp five. Engage."

The First Officer sat back and sighed dejectedly.

"Will, do you want me to cover for you? You look worn out and I can tell you're unhappy."

"It's all right Deanna. It's self-inflicted, I'll survive." Deanna patted her friend's leg.

"Well, if you want to talk..."

"I know, thanks dear friend."

Several decks below, Jean-Luc had just completed his last osteo treatment. Therapy had also ceased and all he was waiting for was clearance to return to duty. And he was becoming a pest.

"Beverly...I'm fit! In fact, you know just how fit I am..."

“Jean-Luc! Keep your voice down! Do you want the entire sickbay to hear of your prowess?”

Somewhat chagrined, Picard lowered his voice and his head. “Please Beverly, you know I’m all right. Give me back my ship...Please?” Beverly sighed.

“Just how am I supposed to combat that? You must’ve been a dear little boy...Ok, I give up. One more lunch...in Ten Forward...then you can go back to the Bridge.”

A very relieved Captain literally beamed. “Thank you.”

Later, in Ten Forward they were talking about what had happened and how lucky they were to get away with it.

“If it wasn’t for you my love, I would be dead.”

“I don’t want to think about it. But you know what I missed?”

Jean-Luc took Beverly’s hands in his, gently stroking her wrists with his thumbs.

“What?”

“Seeing the thermal lake. You gave your word if I remember correctly.”

Jean-Luc lowered his voice seductively. “Want to go back for another try?”

“Hmm, let me think....NO! However, you could take me to Cirrus VII. They have thermal lakes.” Jean-Luc looked up sharply.

“And everyone has to bathe nude.”

Beverly smiled innocently. “I know.”

“Beverly...!”

The End.