
Seeking Solace
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By Heather Smyth. ©

Beverly Crusher, Chief Medical Officer of the Starship *Enterprise*, stood open mouthed within the confines of her office, staring at the just closed doors. Her seventeen-year-old son, Wesley, the young man who had always been quiet, studious and compliant, in effect a dream child, had just told her to fuck off.

Admittedly his behaviour these last few months had been growing steadily worse, the insubordination, the rudeness and disrespect, the outright surliness had been garnering both comments and complaints for some time now, but until he uttered those particular words, Beverly had thought it was just a phase, something he would grow out of.

Having raised her brilliantly gifted son on her own since he was four, Beverly was as close to him as any mother could be to her son and, since her best friend and sometimes lover, Captain Jean-Luc Picard had made Wesley first an acting Ensign, then later a full Ensign, he had coped well with the responsibility and seemed to revel in the duties his rank afforded him. His deteriorating behaviour had been worrying the Doctor and she had asked him several times to talk to her, to tell her what was wrong, but with each attempt to break through the thicker and thicker wall he was building around himself, only made him more surly. And that had led to the present. His latest misdemeanour was to tell Lieutenant Geordi LaForge to…" Go jump", when asked to assist in a routine diagnostic in Engineering. Geordi, not unaware of Wesley's downhill spiral had contacted his mother before putting the young Ensign on report. Beverly was appalled and immediately ordered…she knew asking would get her nowhere…Wesley to report to her in Sick Bay.

He took his own sweet time, but he did eventually show up, his posture slovenly, his arms folded insolently across his chest.

Not knowing quite what to make of his attitude, Beverly allowed her anger to take the fore and admonished him severely, not only as his mother, but as a superior officer.

To her utter astonishment he rolled his eyes, told her to "Fuck off", then turned on his heel and exited the office without so much as a backwards glance. Beverly was absolutely outraged. She immediately followed Wesley out of the office, grabbed his shoulder and spun him around.

Unfortunately, Wesley took that badly. He shrugged off her grip saying hotly: “Shit, Mom!”

Her reaction was purely instinctive. She slapped him across the face, seething. “Don’t you *ever* talk to me like that again!”

Wesley was so angry, Beverly actually thought he was going to hit her, but he kept enough control to say sarcastically: “Is that an *order*, Sir?”

With her own control teetering on the edge, Beverly pointed to the doors and shouted: “Get out!”

Beverly turned and stalked to her office, studiously ignoring her shocked staff. For perhaps the first time in her life with her son, Beverly didn’t know what to do. She snapped her mouth closed and fisted her hands, placing them on the desk and leaning on them.

In desperation she went to the one she always took her problems to. Lifting her head, she asked: “Computer, location of

Captain Picard.”

“Captain Picard is in his Ready Room.”

Knowing he may be very busy due to their current mission, Beverly decided to call before simply showing up. “Crusher to Picard.”

His deep mellifluous voice was something she had always found very soothing and comforting. “Picard here, go ahead, Beverly.”

With her fingers crossed, Beverly said quietly: “Jean-Luc, I need to talk to you. Can I come up now?”

He only hesitated for a second. “Of course, Beverly.” Breathing a heartfelt sigh of relief, Beverly uttered: “Thank you, Crusher out” and was out the door barely before she finished speaking. As she headed for the exit, she called over her shoulder: “Selar, I’ll be on the Bridge, you have command here until I return.”

The Vulcan Doctor’s reply was lost as Beverly almost ran out of Sick Bay.

Captain Jean-Luc Picard was a meticulous man. His quarters and workspace were always neat and tidy, and he took care with his appearance. He was the epitome of the senior officer he was. It was little wonder this accomplished and near legendary Starfleet officer was Captain of the Federation’s Flagship.

And yet, though to most he seemed distant and austere, to those select few who were close to him, he was warm, kind and giving. He was by nature

altruistic and carried within him an almost insatiable desire to explore. He was the ideal man for his job.

His relationship with Beverly was complicated, as it always had been. He had fallen in love with her at first sight but she was in love with his Chief Science Officer who just happened to also be his best friend so, although it caused him significant pain, he did nothing, said nothing as Lieutenant Commander Jack Crusher wooed then married the love of JeanLuc's life.

Their marriage was a successful one, despite the lengthy absences they endured and when Wesley was born Jean-Luc helped his best friend celebrate.

Then, four short years later, disaster struck. Jean-Luc, as Captain of the Stargazer, had sent his Science Officer on an away mission – a mission that was supposed to be straightforward. But things went horribly wrong, and Jack Crusher paid for the snafu with his life.

Jean-Luc had been devastated, so bereft he disobeyed standing orders and beamed down to the planet, risking his own life to retrieve the body of his best friend. He then had the unenviable task of contacting Beverly, to look into those innocent blue eyes he adored so much and tell her husband and father of her son was gone.

Jack's body was put in stasis and, all through the long journey home, Jean-Luc tried to come to terms with his emotions. Crippling grief, certainly, but also crushing guilt for having secretly loved the wife of the man he had sent to his death.

He remembered how Beverly had looked at him as she opened her door and how the wide-eyed little boy at her side had seemed to take the news that his daddy wasn't ever coming home again so very well.

Jean-Luc had taken Beverly to the morgue then supported both mother and son during the funeral, but his compassion had limits. To be so close to the woman he still loved under those circumstances eventually became too much to bear.

He left them, retreated to his ship and left orbit as soon as he could. It hurt and confused Beverly and she tried many times over the ensuing months to contact the captain, but as each communiqué went unanswered, she eventually gave up. For Jean-Luc it was torture incarnate as he tried desperately to put Beverly out of his mind, knowing as he did what his silence would be doing to her.

Ten years passed and Jean-Luc had thought he was finally over Beverly Crusher. That was until her name crossed his path as he was going over the appointments for his new ship, the *Galaxy* class Flagship, the USS *Enterprise*-D.

Starfleet Medical had recommended her for the post of CMO on the new ship. Jean-Luc's artificial heart accelerated, and, with sudden realisation, his face fell as he came to face the fact that he was still in love with her. There was no way he wanted her on his ship.

He contested the recommendation and, having received a rebuttal, complained outright to the Admiral in charge. All it got him was a stern rebuke. Beverly Crusher, he was informed, was not only the best qualified for the job, but she was also a brilliant scientist and researcher, and Picard should be grateful to have her. Case closed.

So, it was a very reluctant Captain who finally accepted that he was going to have to deal with his feelings for Beverly once again.

The CMO wasn't on board when the *Enterprise* left Earth. She, the First Officer and a few other crew members were to be picked up from a distant planet, so it was a few days before JeanLuc finally laid eyes on the woman and, in typical Beverly style; it was in an unconventional way.

The new *Galaxy* class ships were designed to have families on board. That meant children, not something Jean-Luc was comfortable with. One of his first standing orders was…No children allowed on the Bridge, yet Beverly's first encounter with her former friend was to come up to the Bridge with her fourteen-year-old son.

Jean-Luc was outraged, but Beverly had calmly reminded him her son was still in the turbolift, technically not on the Bridge. Stymied, Jean-Luc had stared at the boy and the resemblance to his late father had sent a spike of grief through Jean-Luc so potent that he overrode his own orders and invited the boy onto the Bridge.

In that first instant, something was forged between Wesley and the Captain and, although he would never admit it, Jean-Luc slowly, over time, became the father Wesley had so sorely missed.

As for Jean-Luc and Beverly, their relationship was rocky from the outset, not helped when Beverly, after only a year on board, took the post of Chief Medical Officer at Starfleet Medical, but, once she returned again, over time, their bond became one of profound friendship and love, culminating with

intimacy several years later. They became each other's rock, confidant and anchor. They ate breakfast together every morning and dinner most nights. The crew got used to seeing them together so much and the Command staff were aware of the commitment between the two.

So, Jean-Luc, who although predictably busy, didn't hesitate to accommodate Beverly when she called.

He was at the replicator when the chime sounded, so, having just ordered himself an Earl Grey and knowing who was at his door, he also ordered a hot lemon tea. As he carried the cups to his desk, he called: "Come."

Beverly breezed in, blue lab coat flapping. Before JeanLuc could utter a sound, the red-head plonked herself down in the seat in front of his desk and ran her fingers through her hair, saying forcefully: "Jean-Luc, I don't know what to do about

Wesley. For God's sake, help me!"

Unruffled and, as always in control, Jean-Luc silently pointed to the cup of steaming tea in front of the agitated woman. She made an "Oh" with her mouth, smiled and took a sip. Jean-Luc sat back, also sipping, while he thought over what Beverly had said. Eventually he sighed.

"I'm not unaware of your difficulties, Beverly. Wesley's name has been appearing more and more on reports, none of which have been very good."

Beverly closed her eyes briefly and sighed.

"I just don't know what to do, Jean-Luc. I've tried to talk to him; I really have but he just gets surlier. I even talked with his friends, teachers and department heads and they all said the same thing. He's uncommunicative and, when pushed, becomes belligerent. Do you know what he said to me only twenty minutes ago?"

Jean-Luc shook his head silently.

"He told me to…fuck off! Wesley…my son…told me to fuck off. I didn't believe it…I still don't, it's just so out of character. And to top it all off, I was so incensed I slapped him across the face! Jean-Luc, I have *never* struck my son…not once in his life."

Jean-Luc was shocked. He knew Beverly and Wesley had always had a very good relationship and he couldn't understand what had precipitated such a paradigm shift in the lad. He sat forward, his expression sympathetic.

"I don't know what to say, Beverly. Were you talking to him as his mother, or as a superior officer?"

Beverly tilted her head back and sighed. "A bit of both, I suppose. The thing is, I was angry with him, and I let it show, and he had no hesitation in displaying his displeasure."

The two lovers sat in silence, contemplating the dilemma. Beverly sat forward and reached for Jean-Luc's hand. "Would you talk to him? You know…man-to-man."

Immediately uncomfortable, Jean-Luc shook his head. "I don't think that would help, Beverly."

Pugnaciously, Beverly blurted: "Why not?"

Jean-Luc sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. "Beverly, I am his Captain. It's not my place to talk to him about discipline, that's Will's job."

Exasperated, Beverly lifted her hands to give her words form. "Will has already tried! Apparently, all Wesley did was roll his eyes and say "whatever" then left without being dismissed. But maybe you could…I don't know…talk to him like a father. Perhaps he would listen to you. I tell you, JeanLuc, something is very wrong here."

The captain sighed and ran one hand over his bald head. The very last thing Jean-Luc wanted to do was talk to Wesley like a father. He sat back and shook his head. "Well, I don't know what to say, Beverly, other than to tell you that if Wesley continues to be insubordinate, late for duty and insolent I will have no choice but to relieve him of duty…permanently."

Dismay marred Beverly's beautiful face. She stood and summoned a wan smile. "Okay, thanks anyway. I'll try one more time to talk to him."

He nodded and she rose and went to the doors but stopped just shy of the sensor. She looked over her shoulder, forlorn hope in her eyes. "You're sure you won't change your mind?"

He tried to take the sting out of his next words with a sad smile. "No, Beverly…I can't be what you want, I'm sorry." Giving a nod of acceptance, Beverly left.

The Doctor's day was a long one, especially considering she had only half her mind on her job. Fortunately, it was a very quiet day in Sick Bay, and she was able to devote most of her time to her dilemma. What to do about her wayward son?

At shift's end, Beverly went to her quarters, initially determined to have it out with Wesley, but, once inside her cabin, she had another idea. After a quick shower, she put on civilian clothing, her thought to downplay her role as CMO

and Wesley's superior officer. She sought to remind her son that she was, first and foremost, his mother.

Having asked the computer as to his whereabouts and finding him in his quarters, Beverly stood outside, taking a deep breath to make sure she was calm. The fingers of one hand pressed the annunciator, the others crossed in hope.

Wesley sneered when he asked the computer who was at his door. Instead of simply bidding the caller entry, he stalked to the door and pressed the release, saying curtly before Beverly could open her mouth: "What do you want?"

Keeping calm with an effort, Beverly offered a small smile and said softly: "May I come in?"

Wesley shrugged and turned on his heel, expecting his mother to follow, which she did. He then turned and confronted her. "All right, you're here. What do you want?"

Beverly gestured to the chairs. "Can we sit down?"

Becoming increasingly angry, Wesley snapped: "What for? You're not staying!"

Ignoring his outburst, Beverly sat on the small sofa and looked up at her angry son. Very quietly she said: "What is it, Wesley? Why are you so angry? Is it me? Have I done something to hurt you?"

That seemed to cut through his anger. He plonked himself down opposite his mother and lowered his head.

In the ensuing silence, Beverly said softly: "You can talk to me, Wesley; you have always talked to me."

He raised his head and gave Beverly a look that made her gasp. His eyes were not the eyes of a seventeen-year-old; they were those of a much older person. He lifted his hands, as if in supplication. When he spoke, his voice was intense. "What was Dad like?"

At first confused, Beverly shook her head. "What do you mean?"

Wesley stood, hesitated, then sat again. He took a deep breath, trying to control himself. "I want to know what Dad was like."

Frowning, Beverly shrugged. "But I've told you that, Wesley. He was a good man, a kind man and a wonderful father and husband."

Wesley's voice dropped. "I want to know more than that!"

Casting about for the information her son so desperately seemed to need, Beverly said with exasperation: "He was a fine officer, brave, committed; he had a wicked sense of humour…"

This time when Wesley rose to his feet, the anger was back. "I want to know more! I don't want to know how fucking great he was, I want to know *who* he was!"

Her own anger getting the better of her, Beverly stood and glared at her son. "Why? Are you set upon besmirching his memory? Do you want me to tell you he was a bastard? Because I can't!"

Now yelling, Wesley seethed. "Well, who can? Who can tell me what he was really like?"

Beverly blurted out her reply before she gave it any thought. "Captain Picard! He and Jack were best friends…they served together for some years! If anyone can tell you what your father was really like, it's him."

Beverly saw the realisation in her son's face and the ramifications of what she'd just done hit home. Hastily she said: "Don't go to him Wes; he doesn't want to talk about your father."

Wesley glared at his mother and said succinctly: "I think it's time you left."

She tried one more time. "Wesley…"

He pointed to the doors. "Leave! These are my quarters, and I want you to go…NOW!"

With no other option but to obey, Beverly went to the doors, but as she left, she gave one last warning. "Leave the

Captain alone about this Wes."

The doors closed and Beverly heard something crash against them from the inside. Her first thought was to warn JeanLuc, but there was always the chance her son would heed her warning, so she decided to let sleeping dogs lie.

Three days went by, and Wesley's anger simmered away, just under the surface. He had indeed heeded his mother's warning partly because, although he was aware of the bond between him and the captain, he was still somewhat intimidated by the man. But he was driven; he *had* to know what he sought. So, in the early hours of the fourth day, Wesley found himself standing outside his Captain's quarters. It was oh one twenty and he hadn't asked the computer if the captain was awake or not. To Wesley it was irrelevant. He needed to know and now was the time. He swallowed and pressed the annunciator.

Jean-Luc was just on his way to bed. Dressed in his night attire and robe, he had let time slip through his fingers by becoming engrossed in a book. It was only drooping eyes that eventually convinced him to put aside the tome and go

to bed. He was halfway across the living area when the door chimed. He stopped in his tracks and asked cautiously: "Computer, what is the time?"

"The time is oh one twenty-two hours."

Jean-Luc Picard had never turned away anyone who sought his assistance, but it was rare that he was disturbed at this hour without prior warning. With a deep frown marring his handsome face, he went to the doors and pressed the release. Somewhere, deep inside him, he wasn't surprised to see Wesley standing there and he also knew *why* he as there.

Adopting his Captain's persona he said in his clipped accent: "Do you know what time it is, Ensign?"

Wesley shrugged. "No, Sir…late, I guess."

Still austere, Jean-Luc's eyes were hard. "Yes, Ensign, it's very late Why are you here?"

Wesley sighed. He'd expected this reaction from his Captain. Considering his behaviour over the last few months he'd been surprised the captain had put up with him as long as he had. "I need to talk to you, Sir."

Jean-Luc's façade stayed in place. "Well, I was just going to bed. Perhaps some other time, Ensign."

Wesley boldly looked into his Captain's eyes and said quietly: "Please, Sir…it's very important to me."

Those eyes, so like his late father's, shattered Jean-Luc's resolve. His straight shoulders slumped, and his head lowered. Defeated by this lad's father's memory, Jean-Luc said softly:

"Very well, Wesley, come in."

Jean-Luc went to his favourite chair and gestured to Wesley to sit opposite, on the sofa. Once they were settled, Jean-Luc said wearily: "This is about your father, isn't it?"

Wesley nodded. "Yes, Sir."

Jean-Luc sat back, crossed his legs and folded his hands on his lap. He sighed. "Wesley, I don't think I can tell you anything more than you already know."

Wesley shook his head, trying to keep his anger at bay. This was the one person on the entire ship who would not tolerate his bad behaviour. "I don't believe that, Captain. You and my father were best friends. I know he was a good man, I know he was a fine officer, and Mom has told me what a good

father and husband he was, but, Sir, I want to know who he was. Who was Jack Crusher?"

Sadness crept over the captain's face as the memories came flooding back.

"He was my best friend…Jack-o-lantern…Jack-of-all trades. Your mother was right, Wesley, he was a good man…the best."

Knowing his Captain was warming to the business at hand, Wesley tried his luck. "You got into some…fun?"

Jean-Luc's smile was wistful. "Oh God, yes. Although I'm not sure I should tell you about those times."

Wesley sat forward, his gaze intense. "Yes, you should! Please, Captain. It will help me immensely."

Jean-Luc sighed and laid his head back on the headrest, staring at the ceiling. In a soft voice he said, with some amusement: "Now you must remember this was well before he met your mother."

Wesley nodded silently, unseen by the captain.

"We had a habit of visiting the seediest bars we could find whenever we had a stopover at any planet. We drank too much, got into fights and…often spent the night with…less than reputable women."

Wesley grinned. "Prostitutes?"

"Hmm. I remember this one time when your father managed to end up with an Orion female. It took our ship's Doctor two days to repair the damage. Jack learned a very valuable lesson that night. Never have sex with an Orion female, especially one on heat."

Wesley chuckled, imagining his father's embarrassment. "What else?"

His smile widening, Jean-Luc's eyes twinkled. "He had a rather…unfortunate reaction to red wine and we had a very important conference with some Admirals one day. The night before I inveigled your father into drinking two bottles of red wine with me. Well, he managed to get through the conference all right, although God knows how, but once back on the ship, he was banned from the Bridge."

Confused, Wesley asked: "Why?"

Jean-Luc laughed gently: "Because his flatulence was so bad no one could stand to be near him!"

Jean-Luc spent the next half an hour regaling Wesley with anecdotes of his father's life aboard the Stargazer and with each word, the man Wesley never really knew took shape in his mind.

Eventually Jean-Luc yawned and rubbed at his eyes. "It really is late, Wesley."

Becoming suddenly serious, the lad said softly: "I know, Sir, there's just one more thing I need to ask."

Jean-Luc sat forward, placing his elbows on his knees, clasping his hands and looking into Wesley's eyes. "Yes?"

Deadpan, Wesley dropped his bombshell. "Did you send my father to his death so you could have my mom?"

Jean-Luc was outraged. He wanted to yell, he wanted to throw something, but what he really wanted to do was wrap his hands around Wesley's throat and throttle him. Instead, the only outward sign of his towering anger was a tightening of his hands. His voice, however, was deceptively soft as he said one word.

"No."

Wesley was aware of his Captain's anger but seemed unable to stop himself once he'd started. "But it was kind of convenient, wasn't it? I mean, you two are lovers, aren't you?"

Keeping control of himself with a Herculean effort, JeanLuc stayed calm. "We are now, but that has only occurred over the past few years."

Wesley looked doubtful. "But you've loved her for ages. Did you love her when she was married to Dad?"

Through clenched teeth, Jean-Luc muttered: "Yes." Wesley's tone became scornful.

"Then he must have known! I've seen the way you look at my mother…God, everybody does. Don't tell me my father didn't know!"

Wiping his hand over his face and trying desperately to remain calm, Jean-Luc explained. "Yes, I loved your mother, I have done so since the first time I saw her, but I was very careful, Wesley. I never said, or did anything inappropriate, and I was especially careful around both your father and your mother when we were together. As far as I know, neither of them knew. And as for your father's death, that was an away mission that was supposed to be straight forward that went horribly wrong. No one, least of all me, could have known what was to happen. If you like, I can make available to you the logs of that mission so you can see for yourself; I had nothing whatsoever to do with his death, other than being his Captain and ordering his deployment." Jean-Luc's stoic expression didn't hide the pain in his eyes.

Wesley's glare faded and he lowered his head. "I'm sorry, Captain…it's just that…I remember you coming to our home, I remember Mom falling to pieces and you comforting her. Then you helped us through the funeral, but then you just…left. I always thought that proved your guilt."

Putting his head in his hands, Jean-Luc tried to keep his tears at bay. When he spoke, his voice was very rough. "It was guilt, Wesley. I had felt guilty loving my best friend's wife for years. I left because I couldn't stand to be near her anymore. I wanted her…the grieving widow, the woman who had just lost my best friend and her husband…and I wanted her still. I was so ashamed of myself…I just had to get away…put some distance between us, try to gain some sort of perspective."

Wesley's eyebrows rose. "So that's why you never answered any of her communiqués?" Jean-Luc nodded silently.

"I think she hated you for that. You hurt her."

He sighed deeply. "I know. I was a coward, Wesley. It's not something I'm proud of."

They sat in silence for a while before Wesley said with some derision: "You got her in the end though, didn't you."

Jean-Luc, growing tired of the whole discussion, stood and said with as much authority as he could muster: "It's time for you to leave, Mr. Crusher."

The young man shook his head, his smile cold. "I don't think so, Captain. This is part of my problem, and I need to hear from you how it came about. After all, like I said, you got Mom...and Dad is dead."

Jean-Luc stared hotly down at Wesley, but he could see the determination in his eyes, eyes so like his father's. Slowly, Jean-Luc retook his seat and sighed, rubbing again at his eyes.

"You accept I had no part in your father's death, that I had absolutely no ulterior motive, other than that of being his Commanding Officer that sent him on that mission?" Wesley nodded and sighed. "Yeah, I believe you."

Jean-Luc gave a decisive nod. "And you believe that, although I was in love with your mother even before she married your father, I did not act inappropriately?"

Wesley gave Jean-Luc a long look, one of speculation, but eventually nodded. "Yeah."

Keeping his voice even with an effort, Jean-Luc asked softly: "Then why do you make it sound like your mother was some kind of prize I won at the

expense of your father? Wesley, I loved your father like a brother, I would never have deliberately hurt him, but he has been gone a very long time and your mother and I…well…we found in each other something we both needed."

Insolently, Wesley sneered: "Sex."

His patience near its end, Jean-Luc snapped: "It's more than that, dammit…much more! Wesley, whether or not you approve, your mother and I love each other. That is not going to change. Now you are almost an adult, don't you think it's time you started acting like one?"

Wesley glared at the older man and snorted. "I've had sex; it didn't make me lose my perspective."

The young man was surprised to see a small smile appear on his Captain's face. With the wisdom of his years, Jean-Luc sighed as he told Wesley: "That's because it was just sex, Wesley. There's a huge difference between having sex and making love. One day I hope you find that out for yourself."

The gentleness of his tone stole some of Wesley's angst. He huffed and waved a hand. "So, are you and Mom going to get married?"

The captain shrugged. "I've no idea. Perhaps, one day, but for now we're both comfortable with our relationship as it is."

Wesley looked into Jean-Luc's eyes and saw nothing but honesty and love. What remained of his anger evaporated. He offered a small smile and a self-depreciating shrug. "Mom has been a lot happier since you and her…"

Jean-Luc held up a hand, silencing the lad. "We've both been happier, Wesley, and I have high hopes that we will continue to be happy…as long as we have you with us, not against us."

Shame washed over Wesley, and he sighed, rubbing at his brow. "I'm sorry, Captain…I've been such an idiot, haven't I."

Jean-Luc sighed. "Now that I know what's been troubling you, I understand your behaviour, but Wesley, all this could have been sorted out months ago if you'd just said something."

Blushing, the lad lowered his head. "I know, Sir, it's just…I had this picture of my father in my head, and it was incomplete. I knew you were the one I should have come to… but I thought…because of you and Mom…"

Jean-Luc rose from his chair and went to sit beside Wesley. He laid a paternal hand on the lad's shoulder and gave it a squeeze.

"It's all right, Wesley, I do understand. You just remember that your father was as wonderful friend, man, husband and father. He was kind, funny, generous, brave and loyal…much like his son."

Tears welled in Wesley's eyes, and he did something that rocked Jean-Luc to his core. Wesley flung his arms around JeanLuc and hugged him tight. Jean-Luc hesitated only a second or two before he tentatively returned the embrace.

It was Wesley who broke it, wiping his eyes with embarrassment as the captain tried to make out nothing had happened. The lad stood, bringing his Captain to his feet also.

Wesley stuck out his hand and Jean-Luc took it.

"Thank you, Captain…thank you very much."

Jean-Luc smiled and said softly: "I will always be there for you, Wesley, you only have to ask."

Sniffing and wiping his nose on his sleeve, Wesley nodded.

"I know that now, Captain. Good night, Sir."

Jean-Luc stood for some time looking at the closed doors before he went to bed. His dreams were filled with Jack.

Wesley went to bed and cried himself to sleep. The next morning, he was up early. He knew his mother shared breakfast with the captain, and he wanted to catch her in her quarters before she left. It only occurred to him she may have stayed the night with the captain when he approached her door, but such was the lateness of the night when he'd left his Captain, he doubted that was the case.

He straightened his shoulders and cast a critical eye over his immaculate uniform Taking a deep breath, he pressed the chime.

Beverly had showered and dressed and was drying her hair when the chime sounded. Thinking it might be Deanna Troi, the ship's Counsellor, she called out cheerily,

"Come in, Dee."

Wesley stepped cautiously into his mother's quarters only to find she was in her bedroom. Rather than have her come out and be confronted, he called out: "It's me, Mom."

He heard the question in her voice as she replied: "Wesley?"

He said nothing, just stood uncomfortably in the living area, going over what he wanted to say. Beverly appeared, her hairbrush still in her hand. Again, she said cautiously: "Wesley?"

He summoned a small smile. “Hi, Mom.”

She ran her eyes over him, quickly seeing the vast improvement in both his appearance and his attitude. Deciding to let him set the pace, she said with a non-committal nod:

“Good morning.”

Wesley’s smile widened.

“I hope you don’t mind me dropping by like this, I know you want to get to the captain’s quarters for breakfast.”

Smiling for the first time, Beverly shook her head. “You’re always welcome, Wesley. What can I do for you?”

This was it…the time for honesty. “I went to talk with the captain last night.”

Beverly’s face fell. “Oh. How did he take it?”

Shifting his feet nervously, Wesley shrugged. “He seemed to be okay with it.”

Beverly nodded, but her frown remained. “What did you talk about?”

Wesley gave a one shouldered shrug. “About Dad, mostly…and you a bit…and you and the captain a lot.”

Beverly was deeply disturbed by this but judging by how her son seemed to be feeling much better; the Doctor chose to let it go. “I see.”

Wesley took a deep breath and looked his mother in the eyes. “The thing is, Mom, I want to apologise to you. My behaviour these last few months has been really off and I’ve treated you very badly. I want you to know it won’t happen again. I’m sorry, Mom, really sorry.”

Beverly stood stock-still, his words reaching deeply inside her. Then, almost in slow motion, she lifted her arms, her eyes twinkling with tears. She whispered: “Come here.”

Wesley went willingly, his own eyes moist. They hugged silently before Wesley pulled back and said in an uneven voice: “Marry him, Mom. You love each other and you’re happy together.”

She lifted her head and laughed before slapping Wesley’s shoulder. “Mind your own business…brat.”

Wesley chuckled, then put his hands on his mother’s shoulders. “I have to go now, Mom, I have a lot of work to do to make up for the last few months.”

Beverly kissed his cheek and nodded. “See you later?”

He nodded. "Okay." He turned for the door but hesitated at the threshold. "Mom, will you tell the captain something for me?"

She nodded silently.

"Tell him that he's been like a father to me, and although I miss Dad, the Captain has made my loss easier to bear."

Tears welled again as Beverly said quietly: "I think he knows Wesley, but I'll tell him. I love you, son."

The lad grinned. "You too, Mom."

It was a very thoughtful Beverly who approached her lover's quarters that morning. Although inordinately pleased her son had found the peace he sought concerning his father, there was the problem of Jean-Luc and his years-long unwillingness to talk about Jack Crusher, not even to Beverly. So, when the doors opened to reveal a tired looking Captain, the Doctor knew he was going to be reticent over their morning meal.

Beverly allowed his protracted silences and morose attitude, but when she gently asked: "Want to talk about it?" and was studiously ignored, her temper rose.

Keeping control of herself, Beverly took a deep breath and placed her knife beside her plate. Making sure she didn't sound adversarial, Beverly said softly: "So you'll talk about you, me and Jack with Wesley, but not with me."

Staring down at his half-eaten croissant, Jean-Luc froze. He stayed like that as Beverly said: "Don't you think it's time we cleared the air about him?"

Jean-Luc's eyes slowly lifted to look into Beverly's, and she almost gasped at the depths of sorrow she saw in them. "What do you want me to say, Beverly? You know I was in love with you from the moment I first saw you. You also know how guilty I felt about that, which was only compounded when Jack died under my command."

With a frown on her face, Beverly leaned forward, confronting her lover. "And do you still feel guilty, Jean-Luc? Do you think our relationship is illicit because of the circumstances?"

He sighed and rubbed his weary eyes. "No, of course not."

Beverly's voice softened. "Then why won't you ever talk about him with me?"

Tears welled in the captain's eyes. He tried manfully to prevent them, but they spilled down his cheeks anyway. In a broken voice he said: "Because it

causes too much pain." Confused and a little hurt, Beverly said softly: "And yet you had no trouble talking to Wesley about him."

Jean-Luc picked up his serviette and wiped his eyes and face, taking the time to regain his composure. When he spoke, his voice was firmer. "Wesley needed to hear what I had to say, he had questions only I could answer. I had a duty, both as his CO and as Jack's best friend to help him in any way I could."

Now clearly hurt, Beverly shook her head. "And don't I have the same rights? I am your best friend and lover, if you can't talk to me about my deceased husband then there will always be a wall between us called Jack Crusher. I don't want that, Jean-Luc…do you?"

He lowered his head and sighed, saying softly: "No."

"Then talk to me, Jean-Luc, talk to me about Jack."

And so, he did. Jean-Luc had to call his First Officer to tell him to cancel the morning briefing and Beverly had to inform Sick Bay that she would be late for duty, but they talked and talked until at last the ghost of Jack Crusher was laid to rest. They laughed and they cried, but when Jean-Luc was finally silent, he felt a great weight had been lifted from his heart.

He stood and went to his lover, taking her hands and drawing her to her feet. They hugged, then kissed tenderly.

Beverly moved her mouth close to his ear to whisper,

"No more secrets."

Jean-Luc nodded and kissed her again. "I promise."

End.