

“We need to get to shelter, fast!” Stuart shouted over the sounds of energy weapons flying over his head.

Doctor Edwards tapped her combadge. “Edwards to Nelson,” she shouted.

No response.

“Nelson, please come in,” the doctor pleaded, anxiety filling her mind. “Edwards to McKinney,” she continued to try to reach someone from the away team.

“McKinney here,” a voice finally answered. *“Ensign Nelson is dead, Doctor,”* McKinney stated in as calm of a voice that he could manage. *“He tried to get to the shuttle to send a distress call, but it was destroyed by an energy blast from the sky shortly after he entered.”*

Energy beams zipped through the air, coming closer to Stuart’s and Edwards’ position as they huddled behind a boulder. Stuart tapped his badge and joined the conversation between the doctor and Chief John McKinney. “Did he have time to transmit the message, Mac?” the captain asked.

“He may have had time, Sir,” McKinney replied, *“But the way our luck has been going I wouldn’t count on it.”*

“The doctor and I are pinned in,” Stuart said. “We’re going to try to fight our way back to your position.”

Edwards could hear the alien stormtroopers coming near. They certainly did not try to keep their presence unknown with all the noise that they made. But then, when an attacking force outnumbers its enemy by ten times what need is there to be quiet?

Stuart pulled the doctor’s arm toward him so he could speak in a volume that would not be detected by the unseen foes that had attacked. “I want you to run to that grove of trees behind us,” he said. “I’ll cover you.”

“And what about you?” Edwards demanded. “How will you get there?”

Stuart faked a grin. “I guess you’ll need to cover me once you’re in position.”

Edwards worried for her captain, her love. She felt like hitting Stuart for putting himself in danger but decided to kiss him instead.

“What was that for?” the captain asked.

“For luck,” the CMO replied.

Stuart genuinely smiled at the woman whom he loved. “I prefer to trust in providence over luck,” he said.

The doctor returned his smile. “Divine, or the starship?” she asked.

“Right now, I’d settle for either,” Stuart replied. “Now get ready to run on the count of three,” he said, returning to command mode. “One.”

A burst of energy whizzed within half a meter.

“Two,” Stuart continued to count as Edwards prepared to bolt out from behind the rock that she hid behind.

“Three!” Stuart yelled as he jumped from behind the rock and began firing his phaser.

Edwards ran as fast as she could. Faster than she had ever thought possible. She heard the weapons fire behind her as she dodged from left to right. She saw the thick trees nearing as she ran and tripped over a stump. Fortunately, her fall saved her from catching a beam of energy in the back that had just been released from an alien’s weapon.

Stuart had ducked back behind the rock, but he kept firing with the intensity of a rabid dog. *I need to protect Jan*, he thought over and over. *Just need to hold them off a few more minutes.*

Edwards glanced back to make sure Rob was alright. He was. And she bolted again straight for the forest and took cover behind the biggest tree she could find. She breathed heavily as she gathered herself together. “I made it,” she said over the open com signal. “I’m in position to cover you.”

“I’ll be joining you shortly, Jan,” he said. *“I want you to know that I love you and if we get out of this mess...”*

“You can tell me *when* we get out of this mess,” Jan interrupted. “Now get your tail back here!”

Stuart liked Jan’s “spunk”, as his great-grandfather would have called it. Hopefully, he would get the chance to find out more about her “spunky” side. *“I’m coming out now,”* he said.

Jan saw Rob take off running as two aliens rose from their cover to take aim. Jan didn’t have much time to think as she began firing her phaser at the gray-skinned aliens. She hit one in the chest, stunning him cold, but the other got off a shot in Stuart’s direction. Stuart, however, instinctively jumped to the ground and rolled back into a running position, dodging the blast.

Stuart kept running and felt the energy of an alien weapon pass close by his ear as he saw Jan firing from behind a tree to protect him. And then he saw Jan’s lips begin to open in what appeared to be a scream.

Jan couldn’t get a good shot at the alien without hitting Rob. She tried to yell at him to hit the ground, but it was too late. She saw the alien level his weapon, taking aim, and a jolt of pure energy come out of the barrel. She screamed as the energy from the weapon struck Rob Stuart in the back.

“Noooooooooooo!”

To Boldly Go: A Time to Die...A Time to Live

A U.S.S. Providence story

By Cleve Johnson

Blake Adams shot to a sitting position in his bunk. The nightmare had revisited him as it had done a hundred times over the past four years. And this time would hopefully be the last.

“Lights,” Blake said. and he rose from his bunk as the computer illuminated his quarters. “Adams to Doctor Edwards,” he said into the air.

“*Edwards here,*” the doctor’s voice came through the intercom system.

“I had the dream again,” Adams stated.

There was a momentary silence before Edwards replied. “*I’ll meet you in my office in fifteen minutes,*” she finally said.

Chapter 1

Rob Stuart finished packing his duffel bag as the door chime sounded, indicating that he had a visitor. “Come,” the captain said.

The door slid open with a woosh and Commander Leeson stood at the door but did not enter.

“Ah, come in Exec,” Stuart said as he tossed a book into his duffel. “Looking forward to being in command for a few days?”

Leeson stepped into the captain’s quarters with her hands clasped behind her back. Her posture reminded Rob of the typical stance that T’Les would take.

“Why so somber?” Stuart asked his first officer, noticing the serious look on her face.

“I’m concerned about this mission, Sir,” she stated.

“Nothing to be concerned about, Exec,” he said. “It’s just a simple rendezvous.”

“I’m not talking about the rendezvous, Captain,” Leeson said testily. “I don’t like the idea of leaving you on an alien planet in the middle of nowhere for over a week.”

Stuart saw his first officer’s concern and her resolve to not allow him to be placed in a situation that might be dangerous. Of course, he did not consider a scientific away mission as dangerous. Stuart thought Leeson was being overly cautious. Then again, he respected Leeson for standing up to her CO when she thought that she was right.

“You will be back in eight days,” Stuart said.

“Eight days is a long time, Captain,” Leeson argued. “Especially when your only means of transportation is several light years away.”

Stuart closed his duffel bag and swung the strap over his shoulder. “We’ll take one of the warp shuttles in case we need to get off the planet,” he stated. “Will that ease your mind?”

Leeson blocked Stuart’s way out of his quarters, standing silently. She finally sighed and stepped aside in order for Stuart to walk out. “I don’t understand why the *Bradbury* can’t come all the way here to pick up the *Kennedy* survivors,” she grumbled.

Stuart walked out of his quarters and down the hall toward the nearest turbolift with Leeson right behind him. “The *Bradbury* has a tight schedule and a deadline to arrive at the Pacifica Science Symposium,” Stuart said. “By making a rendezvous at Sector 145-B we are helping the *Bradbury* meet the deadline.”

“I still wish you would reconsider this away mission, Sir,” Leeson said, “but I will obey your orders.”

Stuart stepped into the open turbolift doors and turned toward his first officer. “I know that I am leaving the PROVIDENCE in good hands.”

And the doors slid shut.

Chapter 2

Captain’s Personal Log: Stardate 57712.6

It’s been over four years since the death of my best friend and I still cannot accept it. The doctor and I have considered a plan to deal with our grief, but until recently we did not have the capability or the courage to attempt it. It will mean the end of my career, possibly the careers of all the senior officers. But saving the life of my friend is worth much more than my career. Besides, if successful, the past four years will have happened very differently.

Blake Adams sat in the CMO’s office, across from her desk. He stared intently into her eyes, silently conveying his thoughts as if the doctor could read his mind. “It’s time, Jan,” he finally said.

Janice Edwards leaned back and stared at the floor. “Are you sure this is the right thing to do, Blake?” she asked.

“It’s the right thing, Jan,” Blake said without a hint of hesitation. “It’s right for you. It’s right for me. It’s right for Rob.”

“And what about what’s right for all the lives that will be affected?” Jan asked. “We’re talking about changing the timeline.”

Blake shook his head. “I really don’t care,” he said. “The only thing that matters is getting Rob back.” Blake stood up and began to pace. “And I can only believe that the past four years will only change for the better with Rob as part of it.”

Jan’s eyes began to moisten. “I know he was your best friend, Blake,” she said. “And I believe that if he was alive today, he would be my husband.” Jan wiped a tear from her eye. “I’m just not sure if this is right.”

Blake stopped pacing and turned, looking Jan straight in the eye. “I’m doing this with or without your help,” he stated. “If you can’t do it, will you at least stay quiet about it?”

Jan stood and stepped toward Adams. “I will help,” she stated, “but I don’t know if it’s right.”

Blake smiled. “Now we need a few more allies to pull this off.”



Lieutenant Commander Mary Goodman, her husband, Lieutenant Commander James Goodman, Doctor Janice Edwards, and Chief Petty Officer John McKinney sat around the conference room table. James Goodman, being partially empathic, sensed that Edwards was anxious about this meeting. He did not know what the source of her anxiety was, but he knew that her feelings were in quite a disarray.

Blake Adams, recently promoted and given command of the starship *Providence*, entered the room and sat in the seat reserved for the CO. He hesitated as he sat and looked intently around the room. James had known Blake pretty well and also sensed anxiety in him. But Blake's anxiety had more intensity and determination behind it than the doctor's.

"You're all wondering why I called you back from shore leave early," Blake said. "I am going to ask you to do something that will be unorthodox, risky, and ...," he paused. "...a direct violation of regulations."

Everyone in the room, except the doctor, shifted in their chairs. James realized that the doctor already knew what Blake would say next. And he began to sense that her determination to do what Blake was about to ask the rest of them had increased.

"If anyone refuses to go along with what I am about to say," Blake began. "I will allow you to return to your shore leave." Blake looked around, seeing that everyone had focused their full attention on him. "All I ask is that you keep this to yourselves even if you decide not to help me."

Blake explained his plan to go back in time to save their former CO from being killed on the surface of "New Earth".

"Violating the Temporal Prime Directive will have serious repercussions," Mary Goodman stated. "The last four years may change for many people," she added.

"I realize that," Blake said. "Frankly, I don't care."

"I'm with you, Captain." It was Chief McKinney who spoke.

"Thanks, Mac," Blake replied.

James, who had been staring at the table, looked toward his captain. "I'm with you, too," he said. "But how do we keep the rest of the crew in the dark?"

"They're on shore leave and not do to report back onboard until the day after tomorrow," Jan interjected.

"Commander Green is due to report in tomorrow morning," Mary said. "And some of my engineering staff will be checking in tonight."

"What about getting the ship out of the spacedock without clearance?" James wondered out loud.

Blake thought a moment. "I have an idea," he said. "But I'll need Mary to make it work."

Mary sat still in her chair, staring at Blake. "I will do as you ask, providing James agrees," she said.

"James?" Blake looked at the ship's counselor inquisitively.

"We're with you, Captain," Goodman said.

Blake smiled and noticed Janice Edwards wearing a smile as well. "May the wind be at our backs."

Chapter 3

Commander Leeson stepped out of the turbolift onto the bridge. She strolled to the center seat and slowly sat in it. “We’ll be leaving orbit in ten minutes,” she said.

“What course, Skipper?” Blake asked cheerfully.

Leeson allowed herself a slight grin, realizing the respect that Blake was bestowing upon her by using the same endearing term that he reserved for the captain. “Course zero four two mark four,” she said.

“Laid in,” Blake replied. “Ready to engage at your command, Sir.”

“Commander T’Les,” Leeson began, “Please conduct a long-range sensor sweep before we leave orbit.”

“Yes Sir,” T’Les replied stoically.

“Shuttlecraft *Decker* has departed, Skipper,” Blake stated. “Shall I leave orbit?” he asked.

Leeson stared at the main viewer, watching as the shuttle descended toward the planet. “Good luck, Captain,” she mumbled.

“Mel?” Blake tried to get the first officer’s attention. “Commander Leeson,” he said louder.

“Sorry Blake,” she stated. “Leave orbit, one-half impulse.”

Blake wondered why Melanie seemed worried. Then he began to worry a little, also. Until this moment, he had not thought about the possible dangers that Rob and the rest of the away team might encounter without the aid of the *Providence*. But he sensed concern from Leeson, and he began to get a funny feeling in his gut as well.

“I have completed the long-range scan, Commander,” T’Les stated. “I have nothing unusual to report.”

“Thank you, Lieutenant Commander,” Melanie replied. “Blake, engage at warp eight.”

Did Blake hear Leeson correctly? Warp eight would get them to the rendezvous point well before schedule. *Why would she want to do that*, he wondered. Blake Adams then realized that she wanted to rendezvous with the *Bradbury* and get back to the away team quickly. Just in case.



Four alien ships traveled past the asteroid belt of their home star system. By Federation standards, they were slow. The ships did not have impulse drive and only minimal warp capabilities, but their defensive systems could almost match that of scout-class vessel built by Starfleet.

The commander of the task force stood behind the ship’s pilot, staring into the star-lit void through the forward window. He silently looked on as thoughts of hatred filled his mind. Hatred of the invaders that had entered his planet’s only colony world. The commander had every intention of destroying the invaders. Or die trying.

The alien turned and sat in the chair behind the pilot. Pushing the communication button on the armrest of his chair he began to give orders. "All ships, this is your commander," he said. "Prepare to activate hyperlight engines."

The gray-skinned alien paused and looked around the small control room of his ship. He had a genuine heartfelt pride in his crew.

"Within four cycles," he continued, "we will engage the alien invaders. They will kill us or we will kill them."

The alien crew continued at their tasks while listening attentively.

"Whatever the gods wish will be accomplished," the commander said. "Our fate is in their control. May we find favor in their eyes."

The ships jumped into warp space to encounter the destiny that awaited them.

Chapter 4

The U.S.S. *Providence* floated within the zero-g docking bay of Deep Space 11. Engineering personnel began entering the ship from the docking port that the ship was attached to in its berth.

Lieutenant Commander Mary Goodman and Chief McKinney finalized their work just as a new crewman reported for duty. Crewman First Class Joseph Manelli reporting for duty, Sir," he said respectfully.

"Welcome aboard, Crewman Manelli," Goodman replied. "Have you been assigned quarters yet?" she asked.

"Yes Sir," the nervous crewman answered. "I was hoping to start work as soon as possible, Commander."

McKinney grinned mischievously at Goodman. "How about assigning Mister Manelli to the warp core monitoring station," he stated.

Goodman took the Chief's cue. "Good idea, Mac," she said. "We were just getting ready to began the warp core startup procedure."

The eager young crewman practically tripped over his feet to get to his station. "Thank you, Sir," he said nervously. This is my first deep space assignment," Manelli added.

Goodman looked at McKinney, feeling guilty about what Manelli was going to be put through. Mac felt bad as well, but what the senior officers were about to do was the right thing, as far as he was concerned.

"We'll begin startup in five minutes," Goodman stated.

"I better complete the modifications to the deflector array," McKinney said as he started to walk toward the exit hatch.



Captain Adams, Doctor Edwards, and Counselor Goodman sat in the ready room. The three thought about the unsanctioned mission that they were about to embark on. Each one was determined to follow through with what they knew was a direct violation

of regulations. What they knew was the moral thing to do.

“Anyone want to back out?” Blake asked. “This is the last chance to change your minds.”

James and Jan sat silently, but each of them simply gave their captain a smile.

“Me neither,” Blake replied to their silence. “As soon as the alarm sounds, I’ll contact the dockmaster while the two of you make sure the few members of the crew get off the ship.”

As Blake finished his sentence, the door slid open, revealing Blake’s new first officer.

“Commander Green,” Blake said in a shocked tone of voice. “I wasn’t expecting you until tomorrow morning.”

Green stood at attention. “Commander Green, Ronald H. reporting for duty, Captain,” the officer said stiffly. “I wanted to be prompt,” he added.

“Sucking up to the CO already?” Jan teased.

“At ease, Commander,” Blake said, standing up to offer a handshake. “Welcome aboard.”

The two shook hands and Blake pointed to an empty chair. “This is Janice Edwards, ship’s doctor and James Goodman our counselor.”

“Pleasure to meet both of you,” Green said warmly.

The intercom beeped.

“Adams here.”

“We’re ready to begin startup, Captain,” the voice of Mary Goodman said.

“Very good,” Blake replied. “Proceed.”

“Want something to drink, Commander?” Blake offered, trying to act normal so that his plans would not be uncovered.

Green shook his head. “No thank you, Sir,” he said. “I just wanted to report in and get to work.”

“I’m afraid there’s not much to do,” Blake said. “Except for the engineering staff, the crew won’t be back until late tomorrow or the next day.”

“I believe in getting to know my crew,” Green said. “I reported early so that I could review the personnel files before we launched.”

“That’s very admirable,” Blake said. “Before you start, I think you should have a tour of the ship.”

“Thank you, Sir,” Green replied heartily.

Blake rose from his chair. Each of the other officers followed his lead.

“I have some work to do in sickbay,” Edwards said.

“I also have some work to do,” Goodman stated as he and the doctor headed for the door.

Blake waited until the others left and motioned for the first officer to exit the ready room. “After you, Commander.”

“This is my first time on an *Ericsson*-class,” Green commented. “And I’m liking what I see so far.”

Blake felt pride rise within himself. “She’s small, but the *Providence* is the only ship that I could ever want to command.”

Green looked around the small bridge, locking his eyes on the XO’s seat to the right of the CO’s. “I look forward to serving on her.”

Blake smiled. “I think you’ll enj...”

The klaxons sounded *red alert* status, interrupting the captain.

Adams tapped his combadge. “Engineering, report!”

“*Magnetic seals are failing on the antimatter pods,*” Mary excitedly replied. “*We’re looking at a warp core breach in less than four minutes!*”

“Can you stop it?” Blake inquired, his voice remaining calm.

“*Sorry Captain.*”

“Evacuate your staff, but I need you to stay there until we get the ship away from the station,” Blake said.

“Anything I can do, Captain?” Green asked excitedly.

“Get to the nearest transporter room and beam to the station,” Blake ordered. “Lieutenant Commander Goodman and I will join you soon.”

Green ran to the turbolift and left the bridge.

Blake sat in the center seat. “Computer, activate holographic bridge crew,” he said.

The holograms appeared at each of the stations as Blake continued to work out his plan. “Tactical station,” he ordered. “Hail the station.”

The viewscreen activated and a lieutenant in her mid-twenties appeared. “*This is dock control,*” the officer announced. “*What’s wrong, Captain?*”

“Our core will breach in about three minutes,” Blake lied. “The ship is being evacuated now. I need mooring beams released and the main space doors opened.”

“*What do you have in mind, Sir?*”

The chief engineer and I will remain on board until we clear the station,” Adams began. “We’ll set the ship on automatic and beam back to the station before it goes to warp.”

“*Understood, Captain Adams,*” the lieutenant stated. “*Dock control out.*”

The viewer went blank. And Blake knew that his plan was going to work.



Mary worked the master controls station. She carefully monitored the “deteriorating” magnetic seals. She tapped her combadge. “Engineering to bridge,” she said.

“Go ahead Mary,” Blake’s voice said.

“Everyone is out and Mac has almost completed realigning the deflector to emit chronometric particles.”

“Good work,” Blake replied. “Once we go to warp, transfer engineering controls to the bridge.”



The *Providence* cleared the large space doors that separated the docking berths from the coldness of space. It gracefully swung around and headed away from the station at full impulse speed. Then, it disappeared into warped space.



Blake turned as the turbolift doors opened. James, Mary, Jan, and Mac entered the bridge and approached the center. “Computer, deactivate holographic bridge crew,” he stated. “Mac, would you like to fly this baby?”

Mac’s face lit up like a Christmas tree. “It would be a pleasure, Captain.”

Jan sat in the XO position as Mac took the CONN position. May Goodman had already positioned herself in the OPS/Engineering station behind the CO’s chair. James, however, decided to stand near his wife.

“I guess we’re committed to going through with this now,” Mary said.

James put his arm around her. “There is a time for everything, and season for every activity under heaven,” he said. “A time to be born and a time to die.”

“Those words sound familiar to me,” Blake said. “Is it from a poem?”

James shook his head. “No,” he replied. “I quoted that from the Bible at Captain Stuart’s memorial service.”

Blake turned and faced his friend. “Rob had his time to die,” he stated. “And now, he will have a time to live.”

Everyone was silent.

“Now let’s change history,” Adams said as he turned to face the viewer. “Prepare to open a temporal vortex.”

Chapter 5

Captain’s Personal Log: Stardate 53924.1

This away mission has been almost like a vacation. Among the geologic and faunal classification, I still find time to spend with Jan. I am planning to ask her to marry me, but I’m not sure when the right time will be. I hope to work up the nerve to ask her before the Providence returns in two days.

Stuart closed his tricorder and left his tent. He saw Janice Edwards treating a scratch that Ensign Nelson received from a thorny tree limb.

“Problem?” he asked as he approached.

“Nothing serious, Captain,” Nelson said.

“You need to pay more attention to your surroundings,” the doctor half-scolded. “I don’t detect any infection, but stay at the camp for a couple hours before tromping around in the woods,” she added.

“Aye, Doctor,” Nelson replied jovially.

The young science officer left Stuart and Edwards alone as he walked toward his tent to rest.

“Take a walk with me?” the captain asked.

Edwards smiled. “Sure,” she said as she offered her hand to Stuart.

The captain of the *Providence* took Edwards’ hand and they walked out of the camp area.

“This is a beautiful planet,” Edwards said as she walked with Stuart.

Rob Stuart smiled. He had not felt this happy since he had known, and almost married, Kathleen before her death. Stuart knew that he loved Janice. Knew that he wanted to marry her. He also knew the loss that he felt when Kathleen died. Could he bring himself to take risk of marrying someone who he potentially could lose in the line of duty?

“You’ve been quiet for awhile,” Jan said as a matter of fact. “What are you thinking about?”

“I was just thinking how beautiful this place is,” Stuart said as he pulled out his tricorder and began to take readings of the area. “Almost as beautiful as my favorite doctor,” he said. “But not quite,” he added.

“What’s that for?” Edwards asked as she pointed to the captain’s recording device.

“We don’t want Ensign Nelson and Chief McKinney to think we’re out on personal business, do we?” Stuart joked. “After all,” he added. “A CO has to maintain a certain professional demeanor.”

Janice slapped Rob’s arm as she laughed. Of course, he could not help but laugh himself. But when the laughing was over, Rob took the doctor in his arms and kissed her.

But their moment of passion was interrupted by Rob’s tricorder, which he neglected to turn off. A warning beep alerted the two Starfleet officers of potential danger.

“What is it?” the doctor asked.

Stuart read the readouts on the device. “Spacecraft are landing nearby,” he said. “I’m reading several dozen alien lifeforms.”

“Alien?” Jan inquired nervously.

Stuart continued to monitor the tricorder. “Readings match those of the Tranak.”



The starship *Providence*, under Blake Adams’ command, exited from a vortex of temporal energy. The crew of five officers immediately saw four Tranak ships orbiting the planet.

“We’re too late,” Edwards gasped.

“Maybe not,” Adams said. “Computer, activate holographic science officer.”

A simulated science officer appeared at the appropriate bridge station.

“Scan those ships and the planet,” Blake ordered. “Quickly!”

The hologram read the monitors and worked the touchpad controls. “Each of the orbiting ships is inhabited by three Tranak,” he stated without emotion. “Four shuttles have landed on the surface less than a kilometer from a Federation shuttlecraft, and two dozen Tranak are moving quickly toward the encampment.”

“Mac,” Blake said. “Get to the transporter room.”

“Yes Sir,” McKinney said as he ran to the turbolift.

“James, take the helm,” Adams said. “Mary, activate holocloak program Alpha Two G-Seven.”



“We need to get to shelter, fast!” Stuart shouted over the sounds of energy weapons flying over his head.

Doctor Edwards tapped her combadge. “Edwards to Nelson,” she shouted.

No response.

“Nelson, please come in,” the doctor pleaded, anxiety filling her mind. “Edwards to McKinney,” she continued to try to reach someone from the away team.

“McKinney here,” a voice finally answered. *“Ensign Nelson is dead, Doctor,”* McKinney stated in as calm of a voice that he could manage. *“He tried to get to the shuttle to send a distress call, but it was destroyed by an energy blast from the sky shortly after he entered.”*

Energy beams zipped through the air, coming closer to Stuart’s and Edwards’ position as they huddled behind a boulder. Stuart tapped his badge and joined the conversation between the doctor and John McKinney. “Did he have time to transmit the message, Mac?” the captain asked.

“He may have had time, Sir,” McKinney replied, *“But the way our luck has been going I wouldn’t count on it.”*

“The doctor and I are pinned in,” Stuart said. “We’re going to try to fight our way back to your position.”

Edwards could hear the alien stormtroopers coming near. They certainly did not try to keep their presence unknown with all the noise that they made. But then, when an attacking force outnumbered its enemy by ten times what need is there to be quiet?

Stuart pulled the doctor's arm toward him so he could speak in a volume that would not be detected by the unseen foes that had attacked. "I want you to run to that grove of trees behind us," he said. "I'll cover you."

"And what about you?" Edwards demanded. "How will you get there?"

Stuart faked a grin. "I guess you'll need to cover me once you're in position."

Edwards worried for her captain, her love. She felt like hitting Stuart for putting himself in danger but decided to kiss him instead.

"What was that for?" the captain asked.

"For luck," the CMO replied.

Stuart genuinely smiled at the woman whom he loved. "I prefer to trust in providence over luck," he said.

The doctor returned his smile. "Divine, or the starship?" she asked.

"Right now, I'd settle for either," Stuart replied. "Now get ready to run on the count of three," he said, returning to command mode. "One."

A burst of energy whizzed within half a meter.

"Two," Stuart continued to count as Edwards prepared to bolt out from behind the rock that she hid behind.

"Three!" Stuart yelled as he jumped from behind the rock and began firing his phaser.

Edwards ran as fast as she could. Faster than she had ever thought possible. She heard the weapons fire behind her as she dodged from left to right. She saw the thick trees nearing as she ran and tripped over a stump. Fortunately, her fall saved her from catching a beam of energy in the back that had just been released from an alien's weapon.

Stuart had ducked back behind the rock, but he kept firing with the intensity of a rabid dog. *I need to protect Jan*, he thought over and over. *Just need to hold them off a few more minutes.*

Edwards glanced back to make sure Rob was alright. He was. And she bolted again straight for the forest and took cover behind the biggest tree she could find. She breathed heavily as she gathered herself together. "I made it," she said over the open com signal. "I'm in position to cover you."

"I'll be joining you shortly, Jan," he said. *"I want you to know that I love you and if we get out of this mess..."*

"You can tell me *when* we get out of this mess," Jan interrupted. "Now get your tail back here!"

Stuart liked Jan's "spunk", as his great-grandfather would have called it. Hopefully, he would get the chance to find out more about her "spunky" side. *"I'm*

coming out now,” he stated.

Jan saw Rob take off running as two aliens rose from their cover to take aim. Jan didn't have much time to think as she began firing her phaser at the gray-skinned aliens. She hit one in the chest, stunning him cold, but the other got off a shot in Stuart's direction. Stuart, however, instinctively jumped to the ground and rolled back into a running position, dodging the blast.

Stuart kept running and felt the energy of an alien weapon pass close by his ear as he saw Jan firing from behind a tree to protect him. And then he saw Jan's lips begin to open in what appeared to be a scream.

Jan couldn't get a good shot at the alien without hitting Rob. She tried to yell at him to hit the ground, but it was too late. She saw the alien level his weapon, taking aim, and a jolt of pure energy come out of the barrel.



The next thing that Jan saw was John McKinney behind the transporter console. Next to him was Ensign Nelson, alive and well. He must have been beamed aboard before the shuttle had been destroyed. She looked and saw Rob Stuart standing on the transporter pad next to hers. All she could do was hold him tight. And cry. Then she noticed one other person in the transport chamber—Chief John McKinney.

McKinney stared at his other self behind the console. He wondered what was going on when the door slid open and revealed Blake Adams wearing a captain's rank insignia.

“Welcome aboard,” he said. Then Blake walked up to Stuart and hugged him, not willing to let his best friend go.

Stuart was not sure what to say, but this was the strangest experience that he had ever encountered. “What's happening, Blake?” he asked, pulling away from his friend. “Explain to me how there can be two Chief McKinney's,” Stuart demanded.

Blake stepped back and sighed. He didn't want to tell everything to Stuart, but he did not see how he could make up a plausible cover story, either.

“We came to rescue you,” Adams stated. “From the future.”

Chapter 6

“What's our ETA, Commander T'Les?” Melanie Leeson asked as she watched the star-streaked viewscreen.

“Four hours, thirteen minutes, twenty-one seconds,” the Vulcan science officer stated professionally.

“Rob will be wondering why we're back ahead of schedule, you know,” Adams stated.

“I'd rather get back early and find out everything is normal than take the chance of finding them dead,” replied the first officer. “My intuition says that something is going to happen.”

“I didn't know you were part Betazoid, Mel,” Blake said, trying to be jovial to

hide his own concern. He did not like leaving his friend and the other members of the away team on a planet that had been attacked once before. Even if it had been fifteen years since that mysterious attack had taken place.

Suddenly, Blake Adams thoughts were interrupted by the science officer.

“Commander Leeson,” T’Les said. “Long-range sensors have detected four alien vessels and one Starfleet vessel in orbit around ‘New Earth’.”

“Starfleet vessel?” Leeson wondered out loud. “What Starfleet vessel would be out here without our knowledge?”

T’Les turned her head toward the first officer as she continued to work the sensor controls. “I am not reading a transponder signal, but readings indicate that it is a *Galaxy*-class starship,” the Vulcan stated.

“Increase to maximum warp, Blake,” Leeson commanded.



“A group of Tranak ships is in orbit with us,” Captain Blake Adams told Stuart as they walked through the corridor of the *Providence*.

“Any idea why they attacked us on the surface, but not the ship?” Stuart asked.

The two captains entered a turbolift. “Bridge,” Blake said as the doors slid shut. “They probably are deciding the risk of attacking a *Galaxy*-class starship,” Blake said.

“The holocloak,” Rob Stuart said under his breath. “That explains why they haven’t attacked the ship yet. But not the initial attack.”

The turbolift doors opened and they walked onto the bridge. Stuart was immediately greeted by Doctor Janice Edwards with very long, drawn-out kiss.

“I thought I just left you in the transporter room,” Rob said in a state of shock.

Edwards grabbed Stuart and hugged him tightly. She didn’t care who witnessed her affectionate display. “I’m just so glad to see you alive again.”

“Blake, you better fill me in on the details,” Stuart said.

“Almost four years ago,” Adams began. “You and Ensign Nelson were killed by the Tranak. Jan and Mac were able to fight them and hide until the *Providence* arrived.”

“I was killed?” Stuart could not believe it.

“Yes,” Blake continued. “And Mel was promoted and given command of the ship. She is now in command of a *Defiant*-class starship.”

“When were you promoted?”

“Last month,” Blake started to say. “Actually in about three years, ten months from now,” he corrected himself. “T’Les took command of a science vessel a couple months before I took command of the *Providence* and Yoshi is Melanie’s first officer.”

Stuart rubbed his head, trying to keep up with all this new information. “I see the Goodmans are still here,” he said, stating the obvious since he saw them at the back of the bridge. “What about Lieutenant Saleh?”

“He’s not been heard from in over a year,” Blake stated. “He said he had to resign and return home.” Blake shrugged his shoulders. “He was missing from the ship within a few hours.”

Stuart began to pace and almost sat in the CO’s chair, but changed his mind, realizing that this ship was under Blake’s command. He decided to sit at the first officer’s position instead. “I can’t believe that you came back to change the timeline, Blake.”

Blake stepped toward Stuart. “When you were killed,” he said. “I promised Jan *and* myself that if ever I had an opportunity to change what happened, I would.”

“But this is a direct violation of the…”

“As far as you’re concerned Skipper,” Adams interrupted. “This is present reality. Not a change of history.”

“It’s a change to your history, Blake!” Rob Stuart was showing a little bit of anger—a side of his personality rarely seen.

Blake sat down next to his former CO. “Rob,” Blake began. “Everyone on this bridge knows what we did was against the rules. Everyone here also knows that it was the right thing to do.”

“Not everyone, Captain,” a voice said from the open entrance to the main conference room.

Blake Adams swung around and saw his new first officer, Commander Green, pointing a phaser at Stuart. “What are you doing, Commander Green?” Blake demanded. “I thought you evacuated off the ship with the engineering crew.”

Green’s eyes shifted between Adams and Stuart. “I can’t let you tamper with the timeline, Captain,” he stated coldly. “Stuart was supposed to die down on the surface. If he dies here the original timeline will probably be corrected with very little difference.”

Blake Adams slowly stepped toward Commander Green. “Put the phaser down, Commander,” he said.

Green turned the weapon toward Adams. “I don’t want to hurt you, Captain,” he said. “But you have messed up our history. And I have to fix it.”

Blake stopped and held out his hand, palm up. “I am ordering you to give me that phaser, Mister Green,” he said in an angry tone.

Green did not waiver. “I do not take orders from a traitor, Sir.” And Green turned the phaser back toward Stuart and moved his thumb over the trigger.

The phaser discharged, but Adams had already lunged toward the first officer. Captain Blake Adams fell to the deck, knocking Green’s weapon to the floor with him. Stuart and James Goodman rushed to tackle Green before could recover the phaser. A punch from Stuart caused Green hit the tactical console with his head. Green was unconscious.

Rob Stuart turned to see the doctor already feeling for a pulse on Blake’s neck. He feared the worse. And Stuart knew that his fears were confirmed when Edwards looked up with tears trickling down her face, shaking her head.

Stuart knelt down beside his friend. Emotion welled up within him as he struggled to maintain composure. “He gave up everything to save me,” Stuart said. “His command. His career. His life.”

Edwards stood and took Rob Stuart’s hand in hers. “This is not the end, Rob,” she said. “Blake is still alive in this time period. He’s on the *Providence*.”

Rob stared at Blake’s body lying in front of him. “But in less than four years, he will die again.”

Edwards gently lifted Rob’s chin, allowing their eyes to meet. “That future has not been determined yet,” she stated. “*This* Blake Adams’ timeline has been altered.”

Stuart turned and slowly walked toward the turbolift, not saying another word.

Jan Edwards started to follow, but a silent shake of James Goodman’s head told her to give Stuart space.

Chapter 7

The *Providence* came out of warp space and approached the ships in orbit of the planet designated as New Earth. The Federation vessel, skillfully piloted by Lieutenant Commander Blake Adams, came alongside the *Galaxy*-class starship that was facing the Tranak ships.

Commander Melanie Leeson watched the main viewer to see if any battle damage could be detected. There was none, which relieved Leeson greatly.

“Commander,” T’Les said.

“You have something, Commander T’Les?” Leeson responded

“I am getting a transponder code from the other Starfleet vessel,” the Vulcan said. “It matches our own. As illogical as that may seem.”

“Open hailing frequencies, Yoshi,” Leeson said as she stiffened her posture into a professional manner.

“Frequencies open, Commander,” the tactical officer stated.

“This is Commander Melanie Leeson of the U.S.S. *Providence*,” the first officer said. “We’re looking for our away team. Do you know their status?”

Janice Edwards appeared on the main viewer. “*We are all safe and secure, Mel,*” Edwards said. “*We will beam over shortly.*”

Melanie Leeson closed the channel and glanced at Adams. “Blake, would you like to greet the away team when they return?” she asked.

“You bet I would,” Adams replied as he rose and hurried to the turbolift.



Robert Stuart stood in the officer’s lounge, staring at the planet below. Staring at the stars. Staring into the future. He just lost his best friend. But his best friend was still alive on the other starship *Providence*. *Temporal mechanics will drive me crazy*, he thought.

The doors to the lounge opened and Jan Edwards, the future version of Jan Edwards, stepped in. She stopped behind Rob and placed her hand on his shoulder. “Rob.”

Stuart turned and made eye contact with the doctor. “I’m totally confused by everything that’s happened today,” he said. “Or has it even happened yet?”

Jan chuckled. “Time travel has a way of messing with your mind if you try to make sense of it.”

“What happens now?” Stuart asked.

Jan pondered the question, not sure how to answer. “You and the away team go back to *your Providence*.”

“What will happen to you?” he asked.

“We will return to our own time,” the doctor said. “We’ll find a nice little corner of the galaxy and stay out of the way of our other selves.”

Jan paused and held Rob by the hand. She stroked his hair and hugged him. “Before the Tranak attacked us, you were going to ask me something,” she said. “Am I right?”

Rob stared at the doctor for a moment. Then, letting go of her hand and turning toward the large viewports, he lowered his eyes and sighed. “I was going to ask you to marry me,” he finally admitted.

Jan walked toward him and stood beside Stuart. She looked out the window. “Then ask me,” she said. “I can guarantee the answer will be yes,” she added.

Rob turned and looked into Jan’s eyes. “Will you marry me?”

“You’re asking the wrong Jan Edwards,” she stated sadly. “You want to ask the one who is waiting in the transporter room.”

Stuart grinned. “Temporal mechanics again,” he muttered.

Edwards, trying not to be jealous of her younger self, kissed Stuart and hugged him tightly. “May we be happy together,” she said.

Epilogue

Stuart, Edwards, McKinney, and Nelson were materializing on the transporter pads as the door to the room wooshed open. Adams walked in just as the away team solidified.

“Welcome aboard, Skipper,” Blake said, relieved that the team was safe.

“Thank you,” Stuart replied. And he grabbed Blake in a bear hug.

“What’s that for?” he asked, surprised at Rob’s emotional display.

Stuart rested his hand on his friend’s shoulder. “Captain’s prerogative,” he said. “Stuart to bridge,” he said.

“Leeson here, Captain.”

“It seems that the Tranak claimed this system as a colony several years ago,” Stuart stated. “And we’re trespassing.”

“Orders, Sir?”

“Prepare to leave orbit,” Stuart said. “And send our apologies to the Tranak for our inadvertent intrusion on their territory,” Stuart added.

“Yes, Captain. Bridge out.”

McKinney and Nelson excused themselves and left the transporter room. Jan Edwards started to follow, but Stuart gently grabbed her arm and brought her close to him. “Blake, I want to thank you.”

“For what?” Adams was perplexed. Actually, he was confused.

Stuart smiled. “I can’t go into details,” he said. “But I owe you my life.”

Blake was totally confused now. And his face revealed his confusion.

“I also owe you *our* lives,” Stuart added, referring to the doctor and himself. He squeezed Jan’s hand tightly and looked into her eyes.

Blake saw that Rob’s attention was focused on the ship’s doctor. And he knew that he should make a discreet exit. “Maybe I should get back to the bridge,” Blake said as he backed away from the other two officers, running into the wall.

Jan chuckled as she watched Adams leave the room clumsily. “What’s with him?” she wanted to know.

“He probably figures that I wanted to be alone with you,” Stuart replied. “And he’s right!”

Jan Edwards felt like she was in heaven, alone with the man that she loved. She felt safe. She felt special. She felt like Rob would be with her forever. And Jan’s feelings were completely correct.

“Jan,” Rob had started to say, but he was unable to complete his sentence when the doctor interrupted him.

“Yes,” Jan said. “I’ll marry you.”

Rob was taken aback. “At least you could have let me finish asking,” he playfully rebuked Edwards.

Before the future Blake Adams altered his own history, the captain of the starship *Providence* had died. But as he kissed his new fiancée, Stuart knew that this was the time to live.

The End