

To Boldly Go:

The *Starquest* Adventures

Devotion

by Cleve Johnson

Captain's Personal Log: Stardate 54072.3

After helping the Seleri avoid a planetary disaster, possibly a near-extinction event, we are on our way to rendezvous with the U.S.S. Republic, which will take Doctor Heseke to represent his planet to his people's 'cousins' on Sauria. My former commanding officer, Captain Charles Gardner, informed me this morning that my uncle, father, and brother are aboard. It seems that both my father and brother had time off from their careers and requested transportation to come for a visit. I am happy to spend time with them; however, I hope they understand that Starfleet does not usually provide starships as a civilian transportation service. It is only because my uncle is the Starfleet Chief of Operations that they have been granted the privilege. I have a feeling that Uncle Bob is still trying to improve his relationship with my dad, as he has tried to do since Mom was lost at Wolf 359 all those years ago. Dad blamed Starfleet, and Uncle Bob has been the personification of Starfleet in Dad's eyes. Maybe I can bridge the gap between them.



Captain Rob Stuart entered his ready room and was surprised to see Doctor Edwards sitting on the couch. He noticed a bottle of wine and two glasses sitting on the coffee table. He smiled. "Make yourself at home."

"You told me that I was always welcome in your ready room," she quipped.

"I meant when I was here," Rob said.

"You *are* here."

Rob shook his head as he smiled and walked toward the doctor. He stopped in front of her and took her hand to help her to a standing position. "What's the occasion?" He nodded to the wine bottle and glasses.

"I just figured that after today, you will be too busy for us. After all, your family is coming to see you."

"I figured that both of us would be busy," Rob said. "I want you to spend time with my family, too."

Jan smiled and put her arms around Rob's waist. "I'm looking forward to meeting them, but they're here to see you."

"Well, what if...what if they would become your family, too?"

Jan stared into Rob's eyes. She suddenly realized that what she wanted, even though she had suppressed it, was what Rob Stuart was inferring. He was asking her to marry him, and she admitted to herself that she had hoped for this moment. "I...I..."

Rob did not wait for her to struggle to find the right words. He leaned toward her and kissed her. When he pulled away, she blinked and smiled the widest smile that Rob had seen from her. “In case I wasn’t clear, I love you, and I’m asking you to marry me.”

Jan closed her eyes and opened them again. “I know what you’re asking, Rob.”

“So, what do you think, Jan? Do you want to share your life with me?” Rob waited for the doctor to answer, and he started to worry while she remained silent. “Am I moving too fast?”

Jan shook her head and looked into Rob’s eyes. “No. I’ve been waiting...hoping that you would ask me. I’m just pausing for dramatic effect,” she teased as her face lit up. “Yes! I’ll marry you!” She wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled him close to kiss him again. “Let’s not wait. Your family will be here tomorrow, so let’s have the ceremony while they’re here.”

“What about *your* family? Don’t you want them to be present for the ceremony?”

“They aren’t available. Mom is negotiating a trade agreement between Bajor and Cardassia, and Dad is on Betazed.”

“I thought your mother had retired from the Diplomatic Corps.”

“Semiretired. They called her up because she is one of the few who understands the intricacies of bringing Bajorans and Cardassians to the same table without the two sides trying to kill each other. There is still some bad blood between the races.”

“I see. She does have a reputation for being one of the Federation’s most successful ambassadors,” Rob said. “But why is your father on Betazed?”

“I told you that he’s a neurosurgeon. He was asked to head up a team of doctors on a case involving a serious brain injury. He’s an expert when it comes to injuries to the telepathic center of the Betazoid brain.”

“I don’t want to cause any problems between you and your parents if we don’t wait until they’re available.”

“You’re not. They were at my first wedding. After my divorce, Dad said that he and Mom must have brought bad luck to my marriage and said that if I ever found someone else...”

Rob cocked his head back slightly. “Bad luck?”

Jan smiled. “He was joking, of course, but he did say that he wasn’t surprised. He always had a feeling that Paul would put his career first and me second.”

“Are you worried that history might repeat itself?”

“Not with you, Rob.” Jan gently placed her hand on his cheek. “I know that your career is important. Mine is too, but I believe that our careers are not as important as our family and friends, or each other, if it came down to it.”

Rob smiled. “It might be a bit tricky at times, but I’m convinced that we can balance between work and our personal lives.”

“Agreed,” Jan replied. “Well, we have some plans to put together in a short time. I need to talk with Mel. I’m going to ask her to be the maid of honor. Will your brother be the best man?”

Rob shook his head slowly. “My brother and I get along well enough, but Blake is the one person who is as much a brother to me as Sean is. Maybe more so in some ways.”

“And Sean won’t be offended?”

“No, not at all,” Rob said. “I’ll ask Captain Gardner to perform the ceremony if that suits you.”

“It’s the privilege of a ship’s captain, and since you can’t officiate your own wedding, then I have no objection.” Jan smiled.

“Who will give you away?”

“Good question. I’ll need a stand-in for my father.” Janice started thinking about those she served with, and the counselor was the first person she thought of. “I’ll ask James Goodman to fill that role.”

“Sounds good to me.”

“This is a small ship and there are not too many places large enough to hold a large group of people. I suppose the main cargo bay or the shuttle bay might work.”

“Neither seems to be a proper venue,” Rob said. “Would you mind if we kept the ceremony small and simple?”

“What do you have in mind, Rob?”

“I have a holodeck program of a small chapel, but the holodeck can only hold about ten people comfortably.”

Jan’s curiosity was piqued as she wondered why Rob had a chapel program. “Are you a religious man, Rob?”

“It depends on how you define religion, but I do have faith in a higher power—God, if you will.”

“I believe in God, too, but I haven’t practiced any particular form of religion since I was a teenager.”

“I understand. It seems like many of us humans don’t openly express our faith as in centuries past,” Rob said. “Maybe that is an area that we can grow in together.”

Jan nodded. “I would like that. Right now, I need to track down Mel, and you need to talk to Blake.”

“We never opened the wine.” Rob’s eyes glanced at the bottle and glasses sitting on the table next to them.

“Let’s save it for dinner. Shall we have an impromptu engagement party with our senior officers?”

“That’s a fine idea. I’ll let them know to be in the main conference room at 1800

hours for dinner. Other than Blake and Mel, let's wait until then to make the announcement." Rob kissed Jan once more, and she turned to make her way to the exit.



The senior officers gathered in the main conference room. The captain and CMO were the only ones not yet present. Except for Commander Leeson and Lieutenant Commander Adams, the officers were wondering and speculating why the captain had called the meeting. They wondered even more about the formal dinnerware. Blake and Melanie pretended not to know anything when asked, which drew James Goodman's suspicions. He sensed that the two were holding back the truth.

The door opened with the usual whoosh sound, and Rob and Janice entered the room. They were followed by three people dressed as servers pushing metal carts containing replicated steak dinners for each officer. There was a large salad and bowl of plomeek soup for Lieutenant Commander T'Les since, as a Vulcan, she ate only vegetarian dishes. One of the servers maneuvered a cart containing a few bottles of wine near the table. He opened the first bottle and started pouring the dark red liquid into each of the officers' glasses. The other servers began to serve the food plates.

Counselor Goodman, who was one-fourth Betazoid, immediately realized that the servers were not members of the crew. "I take it that Mister Adams has been programming new holograms?"

Blake smiled. "I needed something to do, James. I figured a fancy meal wouldn't be complete without the appropriate wait staff."

"Begging your pardon, Captain, but what is the special occasion?" Lieutenant Nakamara's curiosity would not let him stay silent. He knew that he spoke on behalf of every officer.

"Well, Yoshi, I'm glad you asked," Stuart said. He had not yet sat down, and neither had the doctor, whose seat was next to his. He waited until the server with the wine bottle finished pouring before saying anything further. After the servers completed their tasks and exited the room, the captain took the doctor's hand in his and drew her closer to his side. "Doctor Edwards and I wanted you to all hear the news at the same time, and we wanted you to celebrate with us. This afternoon, I asked the doctor to marry me."

All the officers, including the usually emotionless Vulcan science officer, began clapping. They all smiled, including T'Les to a small degree, and offered their congratulations and good wishes. Each one stood and lifted their glasses as Blake led them in a toast to the happy couple. "Skipper, may you and Janice have many happy years together."

"And may you be fruitful and multiply," the counselor added. James, before joining Starfleet, had majored in theological studies before studying psychology and once considered a different path for his life. He even considered taking a position as a chaplain at one of the many starbases before deciding to serve as a ship's counselor.

Rob and Jan laughed, but they had not yet talked about the possibility of children. It was a discussion to be tabled until another time, so the captain diverted the

conversation by saying, “May the same be said for you and Mary.”

Lieutenant Mary Goodman blushed and smiled as she looked down, feeling the warmth rush to her cheeks. “Someday, Captain,” she managed to say softly.

Rob looked at his senior officers and appreciated each one of them. Not only were they the best team of Starfleet officers he had worked with but also his friends. He could not imagine a more cohesive group of people to be associated with. “Please be seated and enjoy your meal.”

They all did as requested and began to eat except for the chief engineer. Lieutenant Commander Jeron Lexra, a Trill, had the memories of five lives. He was fascinated by human customs, including mating and marriage rituals, but he had not taken as much time studying those rituals as he might have if he previously had known any humans who committed to wed. Lexra had read about some of the customs and respected the one about having those close to the couple stand with them during the ritual. “Captain, who will be standing watch with you and the doctor?”

“Blake has been my best friend for a few years, and he has agreed to be my best man.”

Jan glanced at the first officer. “And that is the same relationship that Melanie and I have shared. I met her at Starbase Eighty-two six years ago when she was assigned as a security officer. She reported to the medical center for her six-month examination, and we hit it off right away. We’ve been good friends ever since.” She placed her hand on Leeson’s shoulder. “There is no one else I would rather have as my maid of honor.”

Lexra nodded, but he was not sure of the terminology the captain and doctor used. He thought that the groom would be the best man at the wedding ceremony. Clearly, he needed to do some research.

“When is the wedding, sir?” Yoshi Nakamara asked what he knew everyone else wanted to know.

The doctor answered. “We will have to let you know after we talk to the *Republic*’s captain.”

“Yes, he will officiate, but he doesn’t know that yet,” Rob said.

Several of the people at the table started laughing.



The *Ambassador*-class starship slowed to sub-light speed and the stars that were streaking by came to a halt as the mighty cruiser engaged its impulse engines. It approached the rendezvous coordinates.

Captain Charles Gardner rose from the captain’s chair as he watched the image of the U.S.S. *Starquest* approach. “Full stop, Mister Richards,” he said to the helm officer. “Paul, please inform our guests that we have rendezvoused with the starship *Starquest* and to report to transporter room two.” Gardner started to turn and walk toward the turbolift.

The first officer, who had been standing next to his CO, nodded his acknowledgment. "Right away, sir," he replied. "Sir...?" The first officer stepped closer to Gardner.

"Something else, Paul?" Gardner said as he stopped and turned to face the XO.

"I request permission to accompany you to the *Starquest*," Paul stated.

"May I ask why, Commander?" Gardner inquired curiously.

"It's a...personal matter, sir," he replied. "There's someone I need to talk to on board."

Gardner smiled at his exec. "Old girlfriend?"

"Something like that."

Gardner smiled and slapped his first officer's shoulders. "Why don't you wait until you're off duty? There will be plenty of time."

Paul started to protest but decided to let it drop. "Aye Captain."

Gardner turned and entered the turbolift.



Rob Stuart and Jan Edwards walked through the corridor, talking. "I'm looking forward to meeting your dad and brother. I can't wait to see their expression when you tell them the news," Jan said.

"My dad is a university professor. I expect that his reaction will be rather stoic. He will carefully evaluate the news, and then he will respond."

"So that is where you get it from." Jan had a sparkle in her eye as she teased her fiancé.

Rob smiled. "Well, I suppose you're right, but I don't think that I'm stoic." The doors opened and the couple entered the transporter room.

Chief McKinney looked up from his console as the couple entered the room. "Just in time, sir," he said. "They're ready to beam over now."

"Thank you, Mac," Stuart said. "Where's Mister Adams?"

The transporter chief shrugged his shoulders. "I haven't seen him, Captain."

Stuart looked at the doctor. "He made a point of telling me that he wanted to be here when Captain Gardner arrived."

"Maybe he decided to replicate a gift for his old captain," Jan suggested.

Stuart rolled his eyes at that. "Not likely. Blake's not much on giving gifts."

Just then, the door slid open, and Lieutenant Commander Blake Adams entered, somewhat out of breath. He carried a box with a ribbon tied around it. "Sorry I'm late," he said while still trying to regulate his rate of respiration. "I replicated a little gift for Captain Gardner."

Stuart didn't say anything, but he looked at the doctor, who was giving him one of those "I told you so" looks. The captain did not respond to her gaze. Instead, he turned to Chief McKinney at the console while trying not to smile. "Energize."

The columns of energy lit up the transport chamber. When the beam faded, four people stood on the pads. Rob did not know who to greet first—his father, brother, uncle, or Gardner. Fortunately Rob did not have to decide between them since Admiral Hathaway, his uncle, waited on the platform with Captain Gardner, to allow Rob's father and brother first opportunity to reunite with him.

"Welcome aboard," Rob said to the guests.

His father stepped off the transporter pad and embraced his youngest son. "It's good to see you, Robert," the eldest Stuart said. "You're looking well."

"You are, too, Dad," Rob replied. Rob then turned toward his brother. "But *you're* starting to get a few gray hairs."

"You gave them to me, little brother," Sean Michael Stuart II stated as he embraced Rob.

After letting go of his brother, Rob turned to face the doctor, who had remained in the background. "This is Doctor Janice Edwards. She is the ship's chief medical officer and...my fiancé."

The doctor stepped forward, smiling, and offered to shake the hand of her future father-in-law. "A pleasure to meet you both."

Slowly, Sean Stuart, the elder, shook the doctor's hand. He seemed unsure as to how to respond to the news. To Rob's surprise, he grinned broadly and hugged Jan. "This is unexpected, but...welcome to the family."

Rob's brother started smiling and hugged the doctor. "I came all this way to spend time with my brother and now I find out that I'm about to have a sister!"

Bob Hathaway stepped off the transporter platform and joined in the hugging. "Congratulations to you both. May you have many years of happiness." He shook Rob's hand vigorously.

Rob, smiling widely, turned to face Jan. "This is Uncle Bob."

"It's good to meet you, Admiral," Jan said.

"If you are joining the family, I think you should call me 'Uncle Bob' as well."

"I can do that, sir...Uncle Bob," Jan replied.

Captain Charles Gardner quietly stepped down from the platform and looked at his former first officer. He shook Rob's hand and gently pulled him aside. "I want to offer my congratulations, but I think you need to know something."

Rob saw the concerned look on his former CO's face. "What's wrong?"

"My first officer wants to come over to see an old girlfriend. I think that the old girlfriend might be your future wife."

“I don’t understand, Chuck. Why do you think that?”

“My first officer’s name is Paul Edwards, and I suspect that...”

“Oh, I see.” Rob started to frown. He nodded slowly. “That’s Jan’s ex-husband.”

“Maybe he just wants to visit for old times’ sake, but I have a gut feeling.”

“I know that your gut feelings are usually reliable,” Rob said. “I remember when you had a *feeling* about the Breen scout ship we encountered before they allied themselves with the Dominion and Cardassians.”

“Yes, I remember that, too. Never trust a Breen.” Gardner smiled momentarily before his expression became more serious. “You don’t have to give him permission to beam over if...”

Rob held up his hand. “No, I don’t think I need to bar him from my ship. I will let Jan know and leave the decision up to her if she wants to talk to him or not.” Rob forced the thought of Jan’s former husband and any threat that he might pose out of his mind. “Listen, Jan and I want to get married in the next day or two. As a fellow ship’s captain and my friend, we would like you to officiate.”

Gardner smiled and shook Rob’s hand again. “Of course, I would be honored.”

“Please, come and meet her.” Rob led Gardner back to the others and interrupted the conversation. He placed his hand on Jan’s shoulder and directed her to face Gardner. “Jan, this is Captain Charles Gardner. What I know about command, I learned mostly from him.”

Gardner shook the doctor’s hand. “It’s good to meet you, Doctor.”

Janice smiled. “Rob has told me a few stories about when he served as your first officer.”

“I hope that most of them were good,” Gardner said as he smiled. “And I’m sure that I have a few stories that I can tell you about Rob.”

“I look forward to it, Captain.”

“Chuck.”

“Then you should call me Jan.”

Rob was extremely pleased that his family and his friend had accepted Jan into the fold so easily. He was about to say something when he heard Blake clear his throat. “Sorry, Blake. We didn’t mean to ignore you.”

“No problem, Skipper. You and the good doctor are the main focus right now, but I wondered if I could have a word with Captain Gardner.”

Gardner nodded. “Of course, Mister Adams. It’s good to see you again, too.” He, followed by Blake, walked a few meters away so that the two of them could talk without disturbing the family reunion. “How have you been, son.” Gardner had always called Blake son during his days on the *Republic*.

“I’m doing well, sir. I have something for you, Captain Gardner,” Blake said as he

handed the wrapped box to his former captain.

Gardner accepted the gift and tested the weight by lightly shaking it. “What is it?” he asked. “It could be a nest of Rigellian fleas knowing your sense of humor.”

“You may not want to shake it too hard,” Blake said. “Open it.”

Gardner gently opened the box and found himself speechless as he saw its contents. “I don’t know what to say,” he muttered.

“I thought I should replace the one I broke a couple of years ago,” Blake said.

Gardner remembered the time when *then*-Lieutenant Adams played one of his practical jokes by hiding all the mementos and knick-knacks that he had collected in the ready room. Blake had dropped Gardner’s most prized possession—a crystal replica of the *Constitution*-class starship *Republic* that had once sat on the corner of his desk. Now, thanks to a sentimental gesture by the more mature Blake Adams, Gardner’s crystal replica had been restored. “Thank you, son,” he said. “This means a lot to me.”

Blake started to blush—a new experience for him. “It’s the least I could do, Captain.”

“Now it’s my turn to give you something.”

“Sir, that’s not necessary.”

“Well, it’s not for you *personally*, but I heard that you recently lost a Type-9 shuttle. I have a replacement for you to come over to pick it up at your convenience.”

“Oh, thank you.”

“And as a bonus, I’ve authorized to transfer you an additional Type-8 as well.”

“On behalf of the skipper, thanks.”

“Well, you’re out here in uncharted territory, so you might as well have a spare.”

“I hate to break this up,” Rob interrupted. “But our first officer has prepared a reception in the officer’s mess hall. And afterward, I will give you all the grand tour of this little starship.” Rob led the way with Jan, Blake, and each one of the guests following him out of the transporter room.



The reception was a success, and Rob’s family enjoyed the tour. Although his father still had reservations about Starfleet because of his wife’s death, he was proud of his son for his accomplishments. He was even more proud of Robert for his role in saving the Federation and Earth, specifically, from the invaders from another galaxy several months earlier. “I don’t know that much about starships, son, but this one appears to be a fine one; however, it does seem lacking in personal space.”

“Yes, it is a little cramped compared to *Providence* and *Republic*, but it serves its purpose well,” Rob said. “We’re making a difference and making many discoveries to further our knowledge of other stars and planets. We’ve met a few new intelligent species, too.”

“Now that you are getting married, are you considering applying for a job on Earth or maybe at a Starbase?” Rob’s father did not usually show too much emotion, but he had worried about Rob’s safety over the years. Space was a dangerous place. Encounters with the Borg, the Dominion, and most recently the Vendoth proved it to be true.

“I had not planned to, Dad.”

“What about a family, Robert? If you plan to have children, then this ship is not the most suitable place to raise them.”

Rob knew that his father was making a good point, but he was an explorer at heart and his place was on the bridge of a starship for the foreseeable future. “Jan and I have only scratched the surface when it comes to discussing children, and I think that we *will* have children someday. I agree that this ship is not suitable for raising a family, but for now, this is where we want to serve. Like I said, we are making a difference. I’m sure that when we want to start to have children, we will make the necessary changes to keep them safe.”

Rob’s father did not press the issue any further because he trusted his son’s judgment, but he still worried—silently. “I’m sure that you will. So, when is the ceremony?”

Rob faced his father. “I just asked her to marry me yesterday, so we have not had the chance to make all the plans other than we are going to keep it a small affair in the next day or two. Jan and I will finalize plans later today.”

“You’re not rushing into this, are you, son?”

“I don’t think so. Jan and I have known each other for more than eighteen months.” Rob smiled at his dad. “I seem to remember stories about you and Mom knowing each other less than three months when you decided to get married.”

“Point taken. But our engagement went on for nearly six years until we both had completed our education.”

“And we are well past that phase of our lives,” Rob said. “You and Mom met when you were eighteen. I’m forty-one years old, Dad, and Jan is forty-five.”

“A piece of advice?” Sean Stuart raised his eyebrows as his eyes opened wider.

“Of course, Dad.”

“Never reveal your wife’s age to other people if you want to have a happy marriage. Especially if she is older than you are.”

“Rob let out a slight laugh as he smiled at his dad. “Message received.”

“Are there any other words of wisdom that I can give you before you and Janice wed?” Sean Stuart realized that he may have misspoken out of hubris and quickly repented of it. “That was arrogant of me, Robert. I apologize.”

“It’s okay, Dad. I know that you have my best interests in mind.” Rob patted his father’s shoulders simultaneously and held onto them. Before letting go, he smiled at his father. “I respect your wisdom and love you. Rather than words of wisdom, though,

I would ask you for one wedding gift.”

“What gift would that be, my son?”

“Heal the rift between you and Uncle Bob. I know that you equate him with Starfleet and blame Starfleet for Mom’s death, but that blame is misplaced. At least when it comes to Uncle Bob.”

Sean Stuart lowered his eyes momentarily and looked back into his son’s eyes. “Actually, your uncle and I spent some time together on the trip here, and we shared good memories of your mother. I realized that all these years of blaming him were misplaced, as you say. I deeply grieved her loss—so much that I neglected to realize that although I lost my wife, he lost his sister and felt as much grief as I had.” Sean’s lips moved just a notch upward. “I forgave Bob *and* Starfleet as I recognized that the blame was firmly on the Borg. Our relationship is on the mend.”

Rob nodded and smiled at his dad. “I’m glad to hear that.”

“I didn’t want to dishonor your mother’s memory by being at odds with her brother.” A tear started to form in the corner of Sean Stuart’s left eye. “Well, I should stop monopolizing your time. I know that you want to catch up with your brother. He recently was named to lead one of the theoretical science teams on the Atlantis Project. I’m sure that he wants to tell you about it.”

“And I want to hear about it.”

“I will spend more time getting to know Janice while you and Sean Michael talk.” The elder Sean Stuart patted his son’s arm and returned to the table with the others, and he informed Sean the younger that he should spend time with his brother.

Rob waved Sean Michael over so that he could find out about his brother’s promotion and the work that he was doing.



Later that day, Rob and Jan entered one of the small holodecks. Rob activated the chapel program. At the front of the chapel, there was an upraised platform with a cloth-covered wooden table centered against the wall. Two lit candles were on the table with an open Bible between them. Attached to the wall above the table was a Star of David on the left and a cross on the right. Both were made of wood and simple in design. The side walls appeared to be cedar wood with two floor-to-ceiling light panels that glowed dimly to slightly illuminate the room. The floor was made of smooth oak planks joined together to fit perfectly. Facing the platform was a padded chair with a wooden rail and a padded cushion to kneel attached to the front of the platform about two meters from the chair.

“This is your chapel?” Jan looked around and took in its simplicity. “I like it. This will be perfect for the ceremony.”

“Should we add more chairs or remove the one to have standing room only?”

“Let’s add chairs,” Jan said. “We only need enough for your father, brother, and uncle. Oh, yes, one for the counselor after he gives me away.”

“Computer, replace the chair with a row of four chairs, two positioned on each

side of a two-meter space to allow people to walk between them. Add a wedding candle on the table behind the Bible.”

The additional items appeared out of thin air in response to Rob’s order.

Rob, standing beside Janice, took Janice by the hand and leaned his head on her shoulder. “All we need to decide is when the ceremony will take place.”

“Let’s do it the day after tomorrow,” Jan said.

“We can do that, but why not tomorrow?”

“I want you to have more time to spend with your family. It might be some time before you have the chance to do it again. And this will be the last time you will have to spend time with them as a single man!” Jan started smiling.

Rob returned the expression and placed his arm around Jan’s shoulder. “I appreciate that.” He then remembered what he learned from Gardner earlier. “Oh, there is something that I need to tell you, something that I had not had a chance to tell you earlier.”

Jan turned to face Rob and saw that he was...concerned. “What is it?”

“Chuck told me that his first officer’s name is...Paul Edwards.”

Jan stared at Rob momentarily but quickly recovered. She placed his hand on her fiancé’s face. “What does that have to do with us?”

“He wants to see you.” Rob kept a neutral demeanor, but he struggled with how he felt about it. He struggled with the idea that Jan might want to talk with her ex-husband and with the reason that the *Republic*’s first officer wanted to talk with her. Rob was not usually the type of person to become jealous, and he hoped that what he was feeling was not that. He could not be sure.

“Oh, well I don’t know why he wants to see me. I was the one who initiated the divorce.” Jan thought about how Paul had put his career ahead of their lives together. She always felt that she had to take a back seat to what he wanted, which eventually led her to realize that she would not be Paul’s second love. For a long time, Jan thought that Paul’s Starfleet career was his mistress and that he continuously cheated on Jan. She later realized that Paul was married to Starfleet and that she—Jan—was the mistress. Her devotion to him waned, and she came to a point when she no longer loved him and initiated divorce proceedings. Of course, Paul was blindsided and did not understand. He had begged her to reconsider, but it was too late. The marriage was over, and Paul, reluctantly, agreed to exit the relationship amicably. “I wonder why he wants to see me.”

“Chuck didn’t say. I don’t think that he knows why.”

“I don’t see a reason to see him, Rob.”

“Maybe it would be good to see him...for closure.” Rob half-smiled. “But it’s your decision.”

Jan laughed. “I got closure when the divorce was finalized.”

“Maybe *he* needs closure.” Rob’s eyes were sympathetic. “But I don’t know the

man. I will go along with whatever you decide.”

Jan wrapped her arm around Rob and buried her face in his chest. After a few seconds, she let go and took a step back. “I’ll see him. He doesn’t know about us, does he?”

Rob shook his head. “Not that I know of. I doubt Chuck would have said anything. Is there a reason Paul shouldn’t know?”

“No, of course not. But he never *really* understood why I divorced him. It wouldn’t surprise me if he wants us to get back together.” She laughed again. “No chance of that happening.”

“Good to hear,” Rob replied with a grin. “I’ll let Chuck know that Paul can beam aboard when his duties allow if that is okay with you.”

“Thank you, Rob.” Jan placed her hand on his face. “Do you want to be present?”

“Only if you want me to be, but I trust that you can handle the situation.”

“You’re not jealous?”

“There’s no reason to be.” Rob started to smile and held up his right hand with his thumb and forefinger together with a couple of centimeters of space separating them. “Well, maybe just this much.”



Later that day, Paul Edwards beamed aboard the *Starquest*. Chief Petty Officer John McKinney provided directions to the sickbay, and Edwards made his way to the doctor’s location. He entered the sickbay and saw his former wife sitting at her desk in the partially glass-encased circular alcove. He walked toward her and stopped in the open doorway. “Hello, Janice.”

Jan looked up. “Hi, Paul. Please have a seat.” She pointed to the chair on the opposite side of the desk.

“It’s been a long time,” Paul said as he sat down.

“Yes, it has. Congratulations on your posting as the *Republic*’s first officer.”

“Thank you. It won’t be long until I am its captain. Captain Gardner will be promoted soon and assigned to a new *Sovereign*-class ship.”

“Well, congratulations...again,” Jan said. “I’m sure that you will make a fine captain.”

“Thank you. That is what I wanted to talk to you about, Janice. *Republic*’s CMO will be going with Gardner, and I would like you to be his replacement.”

Jan’s eyebrows rose as her forehead wrinkled. “Oh? Well, I appreciate the offer, but I’m happy with my posting here.”

“But if you were on the *Republic*, we could...maybe we could work out what went wrong and...”

Jan cut Paul’s statement short. “I don’t want to burst your bubble, Paul, but I

know what went wrong, and I tried to explain it to you a long time ago. You were either not listening to me or you were oblivious to the situation. I wasn't satisfied with taking a backseat to your career then, and I certainly would not be willing to do it now."

"I...I'm sorry that I was so focused on my career that you felt as if I didn't love you."

"I never doubted your love, but your love for your career was more than it was for me." Jan shifted in her chair and leaned forward, placing her hands face down on the desk. "I stopped loving you a long time ago, and I don't want to rekindle our former relationship."

Paul's mouth started to open but nothing came out immediately. He came on board hoping that he could make amends and start fresh. He hoped that he could woo his former wife again. Perhaps if he had more time to spend with her, he could change her mind. "Well, I'm sorry that you feel that way. Would you still consider the job offer? You're a wonderful doctor and would be the best pick for my CMO." If he could convince Janice to commit to a transfer to serve with him on the *Republic*, he felt sure that she would eventually change her mind about him.

"Paul, I appreciate the offer, but this is the ship that I am serving on as the chief medical officer. Even if I wanted to serve on a different ship, I have other considerations."

"What considerations would keep you on a science vessel? You would have more opportunities on *Republic*."

"Paul, the answer is no. Please accept that."

Paul let out a deep breath in frustration as he lowered his head. He stared a few seconds at the desk and then lifted his head to face Jan."

"Would you at least have dinner with me this evening? For old times?"

Jan was tiring of Paul's selfish tactics. She knew him and knew the way he thought. She knew that he would try to wear her down to get his way. Now, she realized, was the time to break the news to him. "I have dinner plans with my fiancé's family this evening."

"Fiancé?" Hopelessness and devastation came upon him. It showed on his face. "You're getting married?"

"Day after tomorrow," Jan replied.

He shook his head vigorously back and forth. "No, no, no! That can't be."

"It can be, Paul, and it is. I'm marrying Captain Stuart."

Stuart. Paul was familiar with the name since Gardner had told frequent stories about him when he served as *Republic*'s first officer. He had never considered Stuart's reputation something to compete with...until now. "You left me because you thought I was putting my career ahead of you, but now you are marrying another career-minded captain? And this one is the CSO's nephew, so you should know that he would put his career above anything and anyone."

“He’s not like you, Paul. Rob and I have discussed it at length, and we will both work hard to balance our personal and work lives. I’m convinced that if there ever came a situation where he had to decide between his devotion to Starfleet and his devotion to me, he would put me first.”

“Are you sure about that?” Paul’s face was starting to turn red as his voice started to increase in volume.

Jan took notice of Paul’s reaction, so she decided to be careful not to respond in the same way. She forced herself to remain calm. “Paul, you need to leave. Go back to your ship and accept that you and I are never getting back together. I’m marrying Rob Stuart in less than forty-two hours, and there is nothing that you can say or do to stop that.”

Paul, still sporting redness in his face, stood up abruptly, turned, and exited the office. Before he reached the door leading out of sickbay, he turned to face Jan and thrust his finger toward her. “We’ll see about that!” He turned and rushed out of the room.

Jan had never seen Paul act like that in all the years she had known him. She was not a psychologist or a psychiatrist, but she knew enough to recognize obsession, and Paul was certainly showing the signs. She tried to separate her feelings and step outside of her situation to help her decide what she should do—not by her personal feelings but according to her duty as a doctor and as a Starfleet officer per regulations. Tapping the combadge on her chest, she activated the communications network. “Sickbay to Captain Stuart and Counselor Goodman.”



“It does sound like he is displaying obsessive behavior or at least borderline obsessive behavior,” Goodman said. “Do you want to submit a report to his CO?”

“No, I don’t want to do anything to jeopardize his career or get him into trouble,” Jan said, “but I am concerned that he might let his emotions overpower his judgment.”

“Good, I’m glad to hear that, Jan.” Goodman smiled. “I was hoping that you were not wanting to do anything to get back at him.”

“You think I’m a vengeful person, James?” She said it lightheartedly.

“I’ve never thought that about you, and the way you answered my question convinces me even more that you’re not. But I do think that Commander Edwards might eventually become a danger to himself and possibly others if his behavior continues.”

“You don’t think that what I described might just be a short burst of anger?”

“That could be the case, Jan, but I think that we should err on the side of caution.” James turned his attention to Stuart who stood off to the side, listening intently to the conversation. “Skipper, I believe it would be prudent to keep Commander Edwards off *Starquest*.”

“He wanted to see Jan, and he has done that. As far as I’m concerned, he has no other reason to come aboard. I’ll inform security.”

“Maybe you should let Captain Gardner know, too.”

“Do you think that is necessary, James?” Rob moved closer to Janice and took her hand. “I don’t want to plant a negative view of his first officer.”

“I understand, Skipper, but the commander needs to be observed to see if this behavior was a one-time outburst or if it will continue as a pattern.”

“I’ll contact Chuck and let Jan explain what happened. I’ll ask that he keep what we share in confidence.”

“That sounds like the best thing to do, Skipper. I think that you should also include *Republic’s* counselor.”

Rob looked at Jan and saw that she reluctantly nodded her head. He turned his attention back to the counselor. “Thank you, James. I appreciate your counsel and your candor.”

“My pleasure, Skipper.” The counselor left sickbay so Rob and Jan could do what they needed to do.

Jan was troubled and concerned about the possible repercussions for Paul, but she knew that Counselor Goodman’s advice was sound and the right thing to do. “Doctor Matal is due to come on duty in a few minutes. Maybe we should contact Chuck from your ready room.”

“Good idea, honey. We want to keep this matter private.” Rob did not feel animosity toward Jan’s ex-husband, and he did not want to malign his character; however, he agreed with James that informing Edward’s captain and ship’s counselor was necessary for all involved. It was even necessary for Paul’s benefit—for his mental and emotional health.

A moment later, Doctor Rasa Matal entered the sickbay. She smiled at the captain and CMO. “Good afternoon, Doctor Edwards. Captain.”

Rob smiled at the Bolian. “Doctor.”

Jan also smiled. “I’m glad you’re here early, Rasa. I have some things to take care of.”

“Of course, Doctor. Congratulations to both of you.”

“Jan’s smile widened. “Thank you.” She turned to face Rob, and the two exited sickbay.



“Don’t worry, Robert. Counselor Masini will discreetly keep an eye on Paul, and I will make up some reason to keep him from making any more trips to Starquest.”

“We appreciate it, Chuck,” Rob said. “I don’t want this to be a part of his record since this is a personal matter.”

“Don’t worry about it. He’s a fine officer, and I’m sure that he will make a fine captain. He drives himself to be the best officer in Starfleet, but he hasn’t realized that his goals are set so high, that the pressure he puts on himself to reach them could lead him down the path to disappointment if he’s not careful.” Gardner scratched his head. “You

know, I think what set him off was the shock of finding out his ex-wife was getting married to another man, and he wasn't prepared to admit that there was someone else that Jan would be interested in someone other than him. Maybe he's smarting because of a bruised ego."

"Hopefully, that's all that it is," Jan said. "Thank you for keeping him on a tight leash."

"Don't mention it." Charles Gardner turned to another subject. *"Have you decided when you want to have the ceremony?"*

"Day after tomorrow. Does 1330 hours work for you?" Rob asked.

"Yes, that should be fine." Gardner paused at the sound of the door chime to his ready room. *"Duty calls. I'll talk to you later."*

"Thanks, Chuck." Rob pressed the control on his desk to end the transmission. He looked at Jan and leaned toward her to kiss her.

Jan held up her hand to block Rob's lips. "We're late for dinner. Your family is waiting for us."

"They can wait a few more minutes." He kissed Jan as she smiled and put her hands around his neck.



"You wanted to see me, Captain?" Paul Edwards stood just outside the ready room door.

"Yes, please come in, Paul," Gardner stated rose from his chair and made his way to the replicator. "Can I get you something to drink?"

"No thank you, sir."

"Computer, Black coffee. Hot." Gardner turned back toward his first officer after retrieving the steaming cup. "Have a seat, Paul."

"Certainly, Captain."

Gardner walked behind the desk and sat down. He observed the XO before speaking. He knew that this man was a fine officer and would be a good successor to take command of the *Republic*. He had to make sure that his judgment of Paul Edwards was not flawed. "I understand that you and Doctor Edwards were once married," he stated factually.

Edwards nodded. "That's correct, sir."

Gardner leaned forward and rested his elbows on the desk. He clasped his fingers together. "I don't make a habit of meddling in the personal lives of my crew," he said. "But you need to understand that Captain Stuart and I served together for several years. And I consider him a good friend."

Edwards said nothing, but he knew that the captain must be aware of Janice's intention to marry Stuart, and the next words out of Gardner's mouth confirmed it.

“I will be officiating at Doctor Edwards and Captain Stuart’s wedding the day after tomorrow, and I want you to know that I understand what you might be feeling.”

“Captain, I appreciate what you are trying to say, but I intend to talk Janice out of going through with the wedding. She doesn’t realize what she’s doing.”

“Now, Paul, you don’t *really* believe that do you?”

“Yes, I do, Captain.” Paul’s face started to turn red as he struggled not to clench his teeth.

“It’s out of your hands. I think that is best if you refrain from contacting Doctor Edwards.”

“Is that an order, sir?”

“It’s a suggestion, Commander. A very strong suggestion,” Gardner said. “Now this *is* an order—You will not go aboard *Starquest* for *any* reason.” Gardner stood up and straightened his uniform jacket. “I won’t say anything else on the matter, but please understand my position. Dismissed.”

Paul Edwards stood up and stared blankly at his captain. He blinked his eyes slowly and nodded. “Yes, sir.” He turned stiffly and left the ready room.

Gardner sat down again after the doors shut behind his first officer. *That could have gone better*, he thought.



Rob and his brother entered the officer’s lounge and made their way to the table closest to the window. They sat across from each other as they continued their conversation. “So, what is the next step in the Atlantis project?”

“Well, brother, that is a good question.” Sean Michael Stuart had been wondering what the answer to that question was as well. “This project has been ongoing for more than a decade, and it seems like we’re stuck. Nobody knows how to raise the ocean floor above the surface without risk of setting off a chain reaction of uncontrolled seismic anomalies.”

“Sean, you have always had a way of complicating an explanation that could be said simpler. You mean earthquakes, right?”

Sean smiled at his younger brother. “Right. Earthquakes and volcanoes. To increase landmass above the ocean’s surface, we would have to cut a new tectonic plate, but it would have to be done perfectly or we could severely threaten the entire planet.”

“I can see the dilemma,” Rob said. “It wouldn’t be good to destroy the planet while trying to improve it.”

“I’m wondering if it would be best if we ended the project and left things the way they are. Maybe we should leave Earth as it is and let it continue to develop naturally.”

“You should suggest that, Sean.”

“I would, but it’s been suggested before, and the person who suggested it found himself looking for a new job.”

“Sometimes, one needs to put the good of the world before oneself,” Rob said.

“Like you did when the Vendoth attacked Earth.” Sean narrowed his eyes and stared at his younger brother. He was grateful for the outcome, but he felt just a little jealous that Rob’s contribution was a frequent topic of their uncle’s conversations during the last few weeks.

Rob noticed the stare and wondered what was on his brother’s mind. He heard a certain tone in Sean’s voice—the same tone when they were teenagers and Rob had aced the astrophysics portion of his Starfleet Academy entrance exam. He intuitively decided to play down his role in the Vendoth crisis by shaking his head. “I played a small role. Many others bore the greater burden.”

Sean leaned back in his chair and smiled. “You’re still as modest as ever, Rob. You never give yourself enough credit for your accomplishments.”

“Would you prefer me as a braggart?”

Sean momentarily looked down at the table before making eye contact with his brother again. “Sometimes I wish you would. It would make you less perfect.”

“I’m far from perfect, Sean.”

“Not in the eyes of some people,” Sean quickly countered as he leaned forward and rested his forearms on the table.

“Uncle Bob?”

Sean slowly nodded his head. “Yes, Uncle Bob. He was practically singing your praises the entire trip from Earth.”

“I’m sorry, Sean. You should know me well enough to know that I don’t like the limelight.”

“Maybe that’s why *he* keeps bragging about you. He knows that you won’t do it yourself.” Sean started to relax and leaned back again. “I’m sorry, brother. I get a streak of jealousy running through my veins when I think about my life and compare it to yours.” He let out a slight laugh. “You’re even getting married before me.”

Rob tried to lighten the mood by smiling at his brother. “I didn’t deliberately intend to beat you to the altar. It just happened. And why do you think that you should compare our lives? We’re different people. Neither one of us is better...or worse than the other.”

Sean considered his brother’s words and nodded. “I suppose you’re right, bro. And I’m sorry that I brought a dark cloud to your upcoming happy event.”

Rob smiled again. “You didn’t, but I want you to know that I’m proud to be your brother. I’m proud of your contributions to the Atlantis Project...even if it turns out that it has to be abandoned.”

“Thank you, Rob. I appreciate that, but I’m afraid that my accomplishments and the accomplishments of the thousands of people working on the project won’t mean anything if reclaiming a land mass from the ocean depths doesn’t happen.”

“Remember what Mom taught us when we were kids?”

Sean nodded and smiled. “Yes, I do. She said that there’s no such thing as failure even if it looks like it.”

“Even when things don’t go as planned, there is always something to be learned from the attempt,” Rob added. He turned his head when he heard the swoosh of the doors sliding open and saw his fiancé enter the mess hall. He stood as he motioned to her. “Over here, Jan.”

She approached the table, smiling as she walked. “Sorry, I’m late.”

“No worries,” Sean said. “It gave Rob and me some time to catch up, but I am starting to get hungry.”

“Well then, let’s go to the replicator and order breakfast,” Jan replied.

The trio replicated their breakfast, returned to the table, and enjoyed a pleasant conversation.



The next day was the big day. The ceremony was simple and short, but that was what Rob and Jan wanted. Afterward, those few in attendance congratulated the newlyweds and left the holodeck to go to the officer’s mess, which had been decorated appropriately for a wedding reception. The senior officers were present along with a few of the non-commissioned officers and Rob’s family members. Charles Gardner and Doctor Heseke were present, and the Seleri ambassador inquired about the significance of a wedding reception. It was a foreign concept on his world.

Meanwhile, Admiral Robert Hathaway talked with his nephew. “And are the two of you going to get off the ship for any kind of honeymoon?”

“Doctor Heseke suggested we go to Thallas, which is a planet less than five light years from here,” Stuart said. “He says it’s a world with more than eighty percent of its surface covered by water and some very beautiful islands.”

“Inhabited?” Hathaway asked.

“Heseke said that there was a benign amphibious race of sentient beings that lived there; however, the information is based on the historical records from two to three millennia ago when the Seleri still explored space.”

“Be careful,” Hathaway said. “And make sure you have a good time.”

Stuart smiled. “We plan to. We’ll make sure to take multiple scans from orbit before going to the surface and try to locate an isolated place to land. If we can’t find one, then we will stay in orbit and enjoy the view.”

“A shuttle is not the best venue for a honeymoon, Robby.”

“We’re taking the *Waverider*. It will be *Elizabeth*’s maiden voyage.” Rob enjoyed the expression on his uncle’s face.

“Elizabeth?”

“I named the Waverider in honor of Mom.”

A tear started forming in his eye, and he lifted a finger to wipe it away before it started to roll down his cheek. He had been close to his younger sister, and any honor given to her was a cause for his emotions to manifest. “I’m sure that she would appreciate your devotion to her memory.”



Rob and Jan entered the Waverider shuttle bay and were greeted by the first and second officers. “We’re getting a top sendoff,” Rob stated.

“We didn’t want you to leave without saying goodbye,” Leeson said.

“I also wanted you to know that the *Republic* left orbit ten minutes ago,” Blake said. “They finally got Commander Edwards out of his quarters.”

“Say again?” Rob inquired.

“It seems a computer malfunction locked him in his quarters,” Leeson said. “And it seems that it mysteriously corrected itself a few hours later.”

“And what do you think could have happened, Blake?” Rob asked.

Blake’s eyes lit up, but he didn’t let on like he knew anything about the malfunction. “I’m not sure,” he replied. “Are you suggesting I had something to do with it?”

“You did go over to fly our new shuttles back.”

“It was a quick trip, Skipper. Even I need time to play a practical joke that involves programming a computer to seal someone in his quarters.” Blake smiled.

Rob lifted an eyebrow as he studied Blake’s expression. He decided that the less he knew about this *malfunction* was better left unsaid, so he took Jan’s arm and escorted her aboard *Elizabeth* without pursuing the matter. Rob, standing on the ramp, turned and faced the two officers. “Exec, the ship is yours until we return. And try to keep Mister Adams out of trouble.”

“Will do, Captain.” Leeson waited until the ramp to the Waverider closed, and then she turned her head to face Adams. “Keeping you out of trouble might be too much for me to handle...unless you cooperate.”

Blake offered his arm to Melanie Leeson, who locked her arm in his, and they walked out of the bay as the atmospheric forcefield activated and the Waverider separated from the ship. The doors closed behind them, and Blake’s sheepish grin returned. “I thought I cooperated with you rather well with you already.”

Leeson could not stifle her amusement as she thought about the malfunction that trapped Paul Edwards in his quarters. “Don’t you dare tell Rob that the malfunction was my idea.”

“Your secret is safe with me, Skipper.”

“And don’t call me Skipper.”

Commander Melanie Leeson and Lieutenant Commander Blake Adams walked arm in arm as they assumed their duties as the acting captain and first officer of the U.S.S. *Starquest* while the Stuarts enjoyed their time away.

The End