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The Twisted Tales

To Then, And Back Again

**Star Trek: Titan
Meets
Quantum Leap**

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Chapter 1

“It seems to me, that the man upstairs must have quite a sense of humor. Just when I think I have things figured out, he throws me a curve ball.”

“Leaping through my history has been an ‘interesting’ livelihood to say the least. And God knows, he has shown me life from some interesting perspectives. I’ve been a Negro man in the old South, a working single parent, an acne faced teenager, a soldier in Vietnam, and even a victim of Down’s Syndrome. And just when you think he’s run out of junk to toss your way, he goes into his stance, winds up, and delivers....”

Dr. Sam Beckett knew this room. He thought so, anyway. It looked like... yes; it was the quantum accelerator chamber at his old lab! He had finally done it! He had finally leaped home!

Now all he had to do was find AI. The experiment was finally over.

He turned toward the door to the chamber to leave and was nearly run down by a tall lanky man in a black uniform.

“Counselor Troi! Are you alright?”

Sam looked at him astonished. He had no idea who this person was, or what he was doing in the lab. “Uh, yes. I think so.”

“I’m so relieved. I don’t know what happened. We were working in the control room when all the systems just suddenly came on. We got some phenomenal readings though. This is so exciting! We had no idea any of this stuff still worked.”

“Still?”

“Well, Counselor. It is a little surprising to find hardware from the 20th century in working order.” Reginald Barclay cocked his head and looked worried. “Are you sure you’re alright, Counselor? You seem a little ‘lost’.”

“Actually, I am feeling a little out of balance. Perhaps I should find some place to sit down.”

“I think maybe we should have the Doctor look at you.”

“No, really. It’s not that bad. I’m feeling much better.” Sam had to establish when he was. This person had mentioned ‘hardware from the 20th century’. So was he no longer in the 20th century? And if so, when? And how did this happen?

Barclay had stepped away, eyeing the Counselor while appearing to talk to himself. When he returned, he was treating the Counselor like Sam could remember treating his invalid grandmother. “Why don’t you come in here and sit down.” He gently took the ‘Counselor’ by the elbow, leading Sam into the old control room. Seating Sam at one of the consoles, he continued to look very concerned. He then pulled a gray object out of his uniform, opened it, and started waving in around in the air in front of the Counselor.

“No apparent radioactive residuals. That’s good.”

To his left, Sam heard an odd whooshing sound. Turning toward it, he saw two beings appear in a sparkle of light. Literally out of thin air!

Both were in the same black and gray uniform as the other man, except one had a maroon shirt underneath instead of gold, while the second was wearing

teal. The maroon shirted man, tall with a beard, rushed to Sam, but Sam could not take his mind off the other one. It looked like a dinosaur! About 7 feet tall, with greenish-gray skin and standing on its hind legs, it reminded Sam of the smaller predatory dinosaurs he had seen depicted in some of the latest science journals. Raptors they were called because their skeletal structure actually resembled a bird. The creature's forelimbs were better developed than any dinosaur illustration Sam had ever seen, indicating a more advanced animal. But what was it doing in uniform?

Kneeling to Sam's level and taking Sam's hand in his, the bearded man exclaimed "Deanna! Are you all right? What happened?"

This fellow seemed awfully 'intimate', and he had called Sam 'Deanna'. "I think I'm fine." Looking at the hand the maroon shirted fellow had taken, seeing the long fingernails typical of a woman, Sam realized this was going to be another 'unique' leap.

The 'dinosaur' in the teal shirt pulled out a small box shaped device, flipped it open, and began running it up and down Sam. In a slow, and extremely lispy speech, it announced its findings. "According to theeeesssse readingsss, you are in an extreme agitated sssstate. Pulssssse highly elevated, like your sssserotonin and adrenalin levelssss." The creature looked at Sam in a manner that Sam was not sure he liked.

"Something wrong, Doctor?" asked the bearded man.

'Doctor?' thought Sam. How can that be? A lizard as a doctor!

"Not ssssertain. Jusst ssssome unussshual readingsss. Nothing I can sssay are harmffful. I would like to return to the *Titan* wittthhh her, Captain, for a more tthorough eccsssamination, esssspecially sssince we have no idea what happened here. Correct, Mr. Barclay?"

"Well. Technically, that's true. But Doctor, I would rather keep the Counselor here, so we can run some scans of her ourselves." The man he had first met here seemed ready to burst out in euphoria over this incident, yet also seemed to Sam to be sheepish enough to have difficulty in dealing with these others as equals. And the bearded one had been called 'Captain'. And what was the *Titan*?"

"I assssume you are not trying to sssay tthhat I and my ssttaff are unable to conduct a tthorough eccsssamination of the Counssselor?" The Doctor was difficult to read, but actually seemed amused more than upset, which Sam saw as a positive thing, for now. "Don't worry, Mr. Barclay. I will relay the fffull resssultsss of the eccsssamination to you immediately afffter it iss complete. I have no need or intensshhion of wittthhholding infffformation fffrom your invesstigasshhion team."

"And you would have better equipment for that type of exam. I see you point, Dr. Ree."

"Then it's settled," commented the Captain. Tapping a badge on his uniform, he spoke in general. "Captain Riker to *Titan*. Three to beam up."

'Beam up'? What was going on here? This was totally beyond Sam's comprehension.

THE TWISTED TALES: VOLUME 1
TO THEN AND BACK AGAIN

Captain Riker offered a hand to the Counselor/Sam, obviously wanting him to stand up, so Sam did so. He had no idea what to expect next.

“Energize” said the Captain.

Suddenly, Sam felt frozen in place. A shimmering light show was going on around him and the control room of the Quantum Leap laboratory disappeared around him...

To be replaced by a room he did not recognize, but which was obviously more advanced in design. Another uniformed person was standing behind a control console, presumably operating the equipment that had just brought them here.

And he was feeling very nauseated. And dizzy.

Captain Riker noticed immediately and reached to catch Sam. “Whoa. I think the Doctor had better get you to sickbay quickly. You’re pretty badly shaken.”

“Agreed. This way Counselor, Captain.”

As they left the room, Sam noticed a reflection of the person Captain Riker was helping along. Not nearly as tall, slender, and very definitely a woman. And a very attractive one at that. “Oh boy.”

Chapter 2

Sickbay was virtually empty, which Sam was glad to see. This Doctor had mentioned a thorough examination, and Sam had never been involved in such a thing that did not involve walking around in a poorly designed gown. And the apparent fact that he was about to be examined by a predatory lizard didn't help his nerves any. So he was very surprised when the Doctor led them to a large table in the middle of the room with a fairly comfortable looking surface on it. Captain Riker supported her to the table then seemed to prepare to lift him onto it.

"I can do this" Sam retorted, not sure if he wanted this individual getting too close, at least for now. He lifted himself onto the table and waited.

"Lie down, Counssselor. It doesss not bite," offered the Doctor.

Sam wasn't worried about the table biting. "Don't I even get a gown?"

The Doctor and the Captain looked at her in surprise then at each other. Riker's expression showed exactly what was going through his mind. Whoever the 'Counselor' was, the Captain knew that things were not right. Sam realized he would have to be careful around this one. He was pretty bright and no slowpoke. Considering that the other one was a doctor, presumably a medical doctor, and then it was quite intelligent as well. That could be good or bad for this assignment.

"No need, Counssselor. You need only to lie down assss you are." Dr. Ree was looking at her/him suspiciously. To Sam, it felt too much like he was being eyed as prey.

"Oh." Sam looked at the table more specifically then swung his legs up onto it. As he lay down, he noticed a unit mounted on the ceiling. Whatever it was, it showed no sign of movement.

A few seconds after lying down, a large display screen on the wall came to life, showing what looked like a scan of the patient's body as well as a plethora of monitoring indicators and readouts. Sam realized that the unit overhead was a medical scanner of some kind, and a very sophisticated one at that. Having medical degrees himself, he had to admit, his interest was now peaked.

"Ssserotonin and adrenalin levels returning to normal. Ssstill sshhowing an agitated ssstate, but not asss sseriousss."

"I would expect that." Riker looked at the Counselor, smiling slightly, then turned back to the monitors with the Doctor.

"Sssertainly true." The Doctor continued to look over the readouts. Noticing something, he looked at Riker for a moment. The Captain could tell that something was not right and that the Doctor did not want to just blurt it out in front of Deanna.

"Doctor. Shouldn't we prepare a direct link of your data to Mr. Barclay on the surface?" asked the Captain, looking for a way to get the Doctor away from his patient.

"Yesss. I sssee no reazzon not to." He left the room seemingly to attend to it, with the Captain right behind him, but as soon as they were out of view, the Doctor spun around. Riker was so close that he had to hop quickly to avoid the

Doctor's tail. "Sssometthhing hasss deffinitely occurred to your wiffie. I am picking up nothing at all that consserns me from a purely phyzzical ssense, but I can detect no sssigns at all of her telepatthhic abilities. It's as if tththey are no longer tthhere."

"How can that be?"

"I do not know, yet."

"Anything else?"

"Two minor things. I am ssseeing a ssslight rezzzidual of gamma radiasshhion, but not at all dangerousssss. Only a 0.3 persscent increassse over ambient. Tththeoretically notthhing at all, just unusshhual."

"And?"

"I am detecting chronoton particlezzz."

"Time travel?"

"Tthhat is the only tthhing we know of tthhat produces tthhem. But was sshhe even out of the laboratory?"

"I don't know, but I can find out. I'll have a talk with Mr. Barclay right away." Riker did not relish the idea of interviewing the brilliant but erratic engineer. Reginald could be an absolute genius, but his techno-babble hurt after a while. Still, this was important. It was for Deanna.

"I would like to keep her here and run sssome more detailed ssscanss, sssee if I can detect anytthhing elssse anomalousss."

"I always follow the Doctor's orders," said Riker as he turned to go.

"Tthhat isss not what Dr. Crusshher told me."

Riker looked a little surprised. "You know her?"

"I wass in Ssstarfleet Medical when sshhe sserved tthhere."

Riker nodded and slowly continued his turn toward the biobed in the middle of sickbay. "Wonderful" he noted, trying to sound positive.

Sam looked up as the Captain returned, seeing the odd look on his face. "Something wrong?"

"Uh, no. It's just..." Riker couldn't help but grin widely. "Why didn't you tell me that Dr. Ree knows Beverly?"

Sam knew who Dr. Ree was, but had no idea who 'Beverly' referred to. "I didn't know it either."

Riker nodded, apparently placated. "Well, I'm going to check on Barclay, see if he has any more of an idea of what happened. Then I'll need to return to the bridge. But if I'm needed for any reason, don't hesitate to contact me."

"I won't. I'm fine" Sam responded, less sure of that answer than the preceding one.

Dr. Ree returned, having ordered a set of tests to be done on the Counselor. "I want you to ssstay here for a while longer, let me run a few tesssstss."

"I guess that's alright, although I am very tired."

"You've been tthhrough a unique, and somewhat traumatic ecssperienssse."

"That's an understatement," mumbled Sam.

"Pardon?" asked the Captain.

"Oh, uh nothing. Just lamenting on dumb luck."

The Doctor continued. "Ass ssssoon ass I'm done, I will releassee you to return to your quarters, ass long ass I find notthhing to be worried about. Until tthhen, relacss and let uss do our job." With that, the Doctor returned to his office.

"And I'll see you after I come off duty." Riker leaned over and kissed the Counselor, which confirmed Sam's belief that the two of them were, in some intimate way, related.

With the room emptied again, Sam took the time to look around. Wherever he was, it had to be the future. Which was both exciting and disturbing. He had never leaped to a time period other than his own lifetime. Theoretically, it shouldn't have been able to happen. So what had went wrong?

"Sam! This is incredible!"

"Al?" Sam twisted on the bed to see Al looking in amazement at the advanced technology surrounding him. "Oh, am I glad to see you!"

"I'd imagine." Al was still looking stunned at the situation.

"What happened? Am I where I think I am?"

Al finally came over to the biobed. "Well, Ziggy is still working on that, but it won't be easy. Let's face it. His database on the future is a little limited."

"I know. How could we even dream up some of this stuff? Do you at least have some idea of where and when I am?"

"Ziggy's working on it."

"Well, he better get up to speed, because I have no idea what I am here for and I think I'm supposed to be married."

Suddenly the doors to sickbay flew open and three men rushed in, searching for something. One withdrew a scanning device like the one Sam had seen the Doctor use earlier. He waved it around the room then brought it to point directly at where Al's hologram was standing.

"There. About three meters ahead."

"You mean the Counselor?"

"Holy cow, Sam. I think they can see me," exclaimed Al.

"Not the Counselor. Just to the right of the Counselor."

Sam wanted to know what was going on. "Excuse me. What is going on here?"

A taller wiry human advanced, still pointing the scanner right at Al. "Sorry Counselor. Ship's sensors detected an intruder..." He walked up to where he would have been toe to toe with Al, had Al actually been there. "In fact, I'm detecting some sort of an EM field right here."

"That's too freaky, Sam. I'm outta here." With that, Al opened his portal and disappeared.

"Hey. It's gone."

Another one of the men, a heavier than usual oriental looking fellow, came to peer around the first man's side. "Are you sure it was there? I didn't see anything."

"Neither do I." Sam interjected.

"I'd say it was a malfunction if only the ship's sensors or my tricorder had picked it up, but not both. Something was here."

“Well it’s gone now,” commented the third person, which Sam suddenly realized was blue skinned, bald, with an unusual bifurcation down the center of his face.

Dr. Ree returned to the room and immediately demanded to know what was going on. The security guards informed him of what the ship’s sensors and the guard’s tricorder had found.

“Jusst a sssimple EM sssignature? Notthhing elsse like gamma radiasshion or chronoton particlezz?”

The guards looked at him strangely, but said nothing beyond answering his question with a negative.

The Doctor actually appeared, even to Sam, to be contemplating this response. A very disturbing thing, on the face of a reptilian. “Tthhen iff tthere is notthhing elsse ffor you to deal wittth, may I have my sickbay back? I wissh to continue my ssscientiffic invessstigasshion?”

One of the guards gave the Doctor a slightly sideways glance, very obviously considering the Doctor’s statement to be some kind of a joke. He apparently didn’t think ‘lizards’ were capable of science.

With one long, fast step, Dr. Ree closed the gap between them and was snout to nose with the much shorter human. He exhaled rapidly, and then appeared to be taking in the human’s scent. Then, without backing off a micron, opened his mouth just enough to give a menacing sounding hiss. His tongue flicked just past his lips then disappeared again. The Doctor’s eyes had squinted slightly, like a predator watching it’s prey.

Though he tried his darnedest not to show it, the oriental guard did flinch. His taller human company stepped back a bit, obviously very concerned and not wanting a confrontation.

“Let’s get out of here, guys,” offered the oriental guard.

The three security guards turned to leave as the Doctor called out. “And send me copies of your sensor logs. I want to see what you detected myself.”

“Aye, Sir” answered the tall man

Turning back to Deanna/Sam, Dr. Ree made a funny, interrupted gargly sound. Apparently, Sam was making an odd face, for he partly stopped, but not completely. He nodded toward the door, “SSSometimes, it is a good tthhing to look like a creature from a child’sss nightmare.” The odd sound repeated itself a few more times, and Sam realized it was a laugh or chuckle. The Doctor had found the whole incident comical.

“Shame on you, Doctor.”

Ree looked up, seemingly concerned now. “Counssselor. Do you not believe him to be too old ffor any permanent damage to occur?”

Oh, a professional question. Or that was how it sounded. “You’re probably correct.”

Ree hesitated. “I happily deefffer to you on psychological mattersss, Counssselor.”

Sam, despite being a little leery of this creature, was still curious. “So, don’t your people have creatures like us in your nightmares?”

“We do not have nightmaresss.”

"But you do dream, don't you?"

"Yesss. All living creatures with developed brains have dreams."

"Do you ever have dreams about creatures like humans?"

"Yesss. Fffrequently, in fffact. Our dreams are sssimply not about ssscary creaturesss."

"So what do you dream about?"

"Prey."

Sam was suddenly paralyzed. Prey? Humans? How could humans be working with these...things if they thought of humans as prey?

Dr. Ree was 'chuckling' again and Sam realized he had just had his leg pulled. From the Doctor's point of view, it had probably been worth it. Sam was reasonably sure the look on his face had been what they used to call a 'Kodak moment'.

"That's good, Doctor. You really had my attention there, for a moment."

Then he put on a amusing looking smile and came to the side of the biobed. "Well, Counssselor. I have been programming a ssseries of detail ssscansss to be conducted on you, but fffirst, I would like to take a blood sssample. As you know, your blood may contain clues ffflsshed from your otherssss ccellss for sssome hours or even days. I am curious to sssee what I fffind."

"Alright, if it will speed me along and get me a chance to rest." Sam began rolling up his sleeve. "We'll see how you are with a needle."

"Needle? Deanna, you know as well as I that needless have been rarely used in mediccine in well over a hundred years. And not at all, exssscept perhapss in sssertain laboratory activitiesss sssinsse the development of hypo-ssspray technology." Ree looked at the patient with greater concern. "I'm beginning to tthhink your memory hass been affffected."

Thinking fast, Sam responded, "It was a joke, Doctor. Just a joke. Trying to relieve a little tension."

"Deanna. You have never been tenssse around me in the sssix monththhss we have been onboard the *Titan*, and fffrom what I hear, you were a wonderffful passhhient for Beverly." Reaching into his pocket, the Doctor took out a tubular device that Sam guessed to be about eight inches long, with one end tapered. He examined something on the side of it, and then turned it to point the tapered end away from him. He reached down to take the Counselor's hand and gently pressed the tip against the back of her hand. With a hissing sound, Sam felt a tingle in the area it touched, and then noticed a small, clear vial loaded into a slot on the side of the device. Quickly, the vial began to fill with what looked like blood.

Sam wanted to exclaim something, since injections and drawing blood had always made him just a touch uptight. This was painless, almost without you even knowing it. Actually, the hissing sound was the worst part, especially if you were not prepared for it.

"Sssee. No more needless."

"Sorry Doc. I used to joke with Beverly about some of the old medical technology."

"I would think that with a name like "Crusshher" and the fact that doctors used to be called 'bone crussherss', that she might be a little bit sensitive to the subject." Ree removed the vial and took it to an assistant, then returned. "Alright, let's see what the scanners can tell me. Computer, begin scanning sequence for Deanna Troi-Riker, Ship's Counselor."

"Scanning" replied a disembodied voice.

Sam watched the display as the Doctor examined the results. He said nothing, except for occasionally mumbling "next level" or "continue". The computer was performing all this automatically. Some of what he saw he did not recognize at all, but other things he did, thanks to his medical background.

When the process was completed, the Doctor waited for a few seconds, and then turned to his patient. "No apparent damage. I guess you were just shaken up for a while. How do you feel?"

"Tired. Do you think it would be possible for me to return to my quarters?"

"Considering that I can find no medical reason to keep you here, I guess that would be as good of a next step as any. I recommend that you return to your quarters and rest. I will contact Commander Vale and have you kept off the duty roster for at least twenty-four hours."

"If that is what you insist." Sam tried to keep the relief out of his voice, since he had no idea what his duties were. Obviously, there was a lot he needed to learn. Like what a 'ship's counselor' was. And when and where he was. It looked like he was in the future, which should have been impossible. The Quantum Leap Project experiments had all pointed toward the leaper not being able to travel outside his own lifetime. Which basically ruled out travel to the future. Something else was going on here.

Riker rematerialized in the control room of the old facility that Barclay and his investigation team was trying to unlock the secrets of. When he arrived, Barclay was nowhere in sight, but a young ensign was working on a panel of components that had been pulled from the wall.

"Ensign. Can you direct me to Mr. Barclay?"

The Ensign contemplated for a second. "I haven't seen him in a while, Sir, but I think he was headed for the main computer room. Through that door, take a right, then the next door on the right."

"Thank you, Ensign." Riker followed the directions that the Ensign had provided and found Barclay, leaning back in a chair and staring at a monitor on a portable computer unit that had been set up. A second man in a gold shirt, apparently of East Indian descent, accompanied him.

"That is incredible. I can't believe that 20th century man was even considering that."

"Well, Sir. It is well known from literary works of the time that time travel was being thought about."

"Yes, but in the form of science-fiction. That is usually significantly ahead of the scientific thinking of the day."

"It sounds like you've found something," Riker interrupted.

THE TWISTED TALES: VOLUME 1
TO THEN AND BACK AGAIN

"C-C-Captain!" Barclay stammered out. "Ah, yes, indeed we have. We may have uncovered the purpose of this facility."

"Which is...?"

"Well, you could say it is a form of time travel."

"Time travel." Riker did not like the sound of that. Every experience he had with it had been down right irritating. "Why would they be doing that?"

"Unknown at this point, but it appears they were trying to 'maintain the past'. That they thought the time line of the past could undergo changes and that it needed to be 'corrected from time to time.'"

"But a specific past leads to specific future, doesn't it? So how would they know if the past had been changed?"

"Theoretically correct. Either there is some information we don't possess about their experiments or they perhaps knew something we do not. It's difficult to tell at this point."

"Reg. The Doctor and I need to know what happened before, when Deanna was here."

"Well, the team was in the process of hooking up the new reactor we built to meet the power specifics of this equipment when you and the *Titan* arrived. I heard through a friend at Starfleet Command that you would be here for a few days and decided to ask you and Deanna to come down and see what we had found."

"I am aware of all that. What about today?"

"Oh, well, we were going to test the power hookup while I was taking Deanna on her tour. We had made it to the control room when they interrupted and asked my assistance on what they thought was a control problem. I was not watching the Counselor and I guess she wandered into the experiment chamber."

"Ok, so then what?"

"Well, I looked over the control panel and realized they had not initiated one of the stages of power conversion. So, I started it and as soon as I did, everything came on. The entire system powered up. We were so amazed that it even could. Then we heard an abbreviated scream from the experimental chamber. I cut the power feed and went to the chamber where I found the Counselor. I called for you and the Doctor and then brought her back in here to wait for you."

"That's it?"

"Well, yes. The power was only on to the system for a few seconds or so. I was more concerned that the Counselor may have been shocked or something. Is she alright?"

"She is acting a little off. The Doctor is still examining her. You didn't see what actually happened?"

"No, actually, I had my back to the chamber. Lt. Schmidt said he saw the lights flash in the chamber, but we thought that was merely the power coming on to them. At first, I thought that was what had startled the Counselor, but then I realized that her scream had sounded odd, so I went to check on her."

"That's all you know about it?"

“Well, no, not completely. We now know what the project was trying to do; based on the information the Lieutenant just brought me. He has been working very diligently on restoring the files that are still on the old computer systems. Needless to say, they are in very bad shape after so long, but he has managed to restore a few files. They are just so badly fragmented that it has taken over a week to get what he has.”

“May I see it?”

“I don’t see why not.” Barclay turned to the portable computer terminal. “Computer, replay introduction.”

The screen went snowy then cleared to show a middle-aged man seated behind a large desk. “Good afternoon. My name is Dr. Samuel Beckett and I would like to introduce you to the project that my team calls ‘Quantum Leap’. What is Quantum Leap? To be simple about it, it is an attempt to strive farther into the world of quantum physics than man has ever done before, to a place where popular physics as we know it today will intersect with another plane, that of time.”

“That’s pretty plain. He makes no bones about it.”

The recording of Dr. Beckett continued. “Using a quantum particle accelerator, I believe, based on my calculations, that it will be possible to alter the quantum signature, the ‘time stamp’, of an individual at a particular point in time to that of another quantum signature in that individual’s own life time. It may be possible to revert an individual to an earlier point in his or her life and change things that have happened, changing the individual’s existence in residual ways. The full extent of how this will occur and to what extent the ‘leaps’ can be controlled are not yet fully understood, but my team is prepared to forge ahead on both the theoretical and practical sides of this experim.....” In a sudden blurring, and a wash of snow, the recording faded.

“That’s all we have so far.”

“It’s not much, but it does explain one thing.” Riker was clearly skeptical if this shown any light on the subject.

“Really? What is that?”

“Dr. Ree’s initial examination showed residual chronoton particles on Deanna.”

Barclay’s eyes became as big as his hands. “Chronotons! That can only mean that the Counselor did experienced some sort of time travel. Incredible!”

“How about from the technical side? Have you gotten any further?”

“We haven’t tested any more since Deanna’s incident. I was about to return to the control room and check their progress.”

“Let’s go.”

Riker and Barclay returned to the control room to find the team of Starfleet engineers had pulled apart one of the control panels. “We may have discovered a problem with the power feed. The way the system is set up, it has a variety of safety measures, some of them quite crude, built in to prevent a power overload. One of them is a simple manual switch with a mechanical system to turn itself off if the amperage goes too high. I think they used to call them ‘breakers’.” The Ensign handed Barclay the small device. “It apparently cut out the same time

THE TWISTED TALES: VOLUME 1
TO THEN AND BACK AGAIN

you turned off the power manually. When we tried to power up again, it wouldn't let us."

"But you can now?"

The Ensign leaned over to another switch on the panel and turned it on. Power hummed through the old equipment. Monitors began to come on, indicator dials snapped to attention and backlit pushbuttons shined.

"Wow." Barclay's face lit up and Riker knew the engineer was looking forward to being elbow deep in the newly operational toy.

Chapter 3

Sam exited the sickbay fully intending to return to his quarters, and then realized that he had no idea where that was. Based on the nuances he had picked up in conversation so far, he believed that he was on some kind of ship. Since he had never been on a ship that didn't move a little with the water under it, he was leaning toward the possibility that he was on a spaceship. If so, he had a couple of friends at NASA that he would have willingly traded places with just now.

Either way, he had to make a decision soon and get moving. People were already watching him, so Sam headed down the corridor, trying to look relaxed. It wasn't easy.

After a few yards, he realized he was in a corridor that was curving as he went. And so far, he had passed one corridor that crossed his path, but it appeared to be straight. Didn't take a rocket scientist to recognize the logical deck arrangement: concentric wheels with interconnecting spokes. Which meant that if he wasn't careful, he could find himself going in circles.

With a few more steps leading to an ending of this corridor, Sam decided to take one of the spokes. He had no idea if he was going toward the center of the wheel or away, but he figured he would find out soon enough. But that corridor ended without any outlet. He turned around and returned to the first curved corridor, looking around.

"May I be of assistance, Counselor?"

Sam turned to see a tall, statuesque female with shoulder length straight black hair. "Oh, um, I'm afraid I'm turned around. I was trying to get to my quarters."

One of the woman's eyebrows rose slightly, as if Sam's response perplexed her ever so slightly. "If you ever need directions onboard, simply ask the computer." As the woman nodded toward the wall of the corridor, Sam noticed her ears protruding through the long hair. They were pointed.

Trying to act like he really did belong on the ship, Sam snapped his fingers in 'recollection'. "That never occurred to me."

"Are you alright, Commander? Would you like me to assist you?"

Very straight forward, and helpful, but Sam didn't want this person tagging along till he knew more. "No, that's fine. I can take it from here."

The 'elf' woman looked at him as if his phrasing was mildly confusing, but simply uttered an "Aye, Sir" before continuing her trip. Sam watched her go, then wondered how to proceed. The Doctor had spoken to the computer, so Sam decided to follow the example.

"Computer, where are my quarters?"

"Deck 4, section 3."

"Ah. OK, where's that?"

A section of what appeared to be just a dark plastic trim panel on the corridor wall lit up with a schematic of the area on the ship. A blinking indicator seemed to show where his quarters were.

"Good. Now, how do I get there from here?"

“Please follow the illuminated indicators.”

Sam saw a large arrow form beside the map and point toward the end of the corridor. There, a door opened to reveal a room. A very tiny room, in Sam’s opinion. Very much like an elevator car, he realized, as he stepped in and looked for the controls. The door closed and Sam heard a slight hum as the car took off, taking only a few seconds before it stopped again and the door opened. The corridor outside ran in both directions, but an arrow again appeared in the plastic-like panel, pointing right. Sam followed it, marveling as it moved with him. As he came to a crossroads, the arrow changed to indicate that it wanted him to turn left. He did so and the arrow appeared in this corridor, directing him on. A few yards on it changed to a red circle. In the circle was white lettering ‘Deck 4, Section 3, Quarters 16. Capt. William Riker, Cmdr. Deanna Troi.’ Next to it was a door labeled simply ‘16’.

“Oh boy,” said Sam. He was apparently sharing his quarters, with a man! This was going to be different. He hoped it meant he was married, but he had never leaped into a married woman before. And he judging from the rank on the sign he might be married to the Captain. Things clicked, and Sam suddenly realized why the ‘Captain’ had been acting the way he did. “OOH BOY!”

Sam stepped toward the door and it opened, allowing him inside. The quarters were large and luxurious compared to anything he had seen on a ‘ship’. Across the room, he got confirmation of this other supposition. Outside the tall set of windows was the Earth, set against a brilliant starfield.

The sight made him both excited and uneasy. It punctuated the fact that he had no idea what was going on in this universe or what he had to do. And how was he going to find out more?

Maybe? “Computer, Who am I?”

“Commander Deanna Troi, Ship’s Counselor, *U.S.S. Titan.*”

“Can you show me?”

Sam heard a low beep from what looked like a desk and saw a translucent screen begin to rise out of the surface. He realized there was some kind of desktop computer terminal set into it. Seating himself in the chair, he saw a picture of a lovely dark haired woman with expressive eyes and a slightly impish smile. He looked around and saw a second room. Sure enough, it was a bedroom and right off of that was a bathroom, with a large mirror. That confirmed it. Looking in the mirror, he saw the same face that was in the computer screen.

“OK. All right. You’ve done this before, Sam.” He returned to the desk and looked at the information displayed with the picture. A fifteen-year veteran of something called Starfleet. Ship’s Counselor. Whatever that was? He continued down to the personal data. He, or she, was married. Recently, in fact, which brought back memories of what he had heard of various newlyweds and their tendency toward being overly amorous in the early stages of matrimony. This could be a very busy leap.

Sam read on. He, or she, had degrees in psychology, including xenopsychology. That he could possibly muddle through, though he would need to figure out the latest stuff, which was probably a lot considering how far in the

future this was. And come to think of it, how far in the future was he?

“Computer, what is today’s date?”

“Current stardate is 04642.3.”

Great. They had a new dating system as well. “How does that correlate to the”, what was it? “To the ‘Old Earth Calendar’?”

“Current date, in the old earth calendar, is August 6, 2381.”

The thought staggered him. He was almost 400 years into the future.

Apparently, he was supposed to be partially alien as well. Something called a Betazoid. Amazing. Not only had humans from earth met ‘alien life forms, but were apparently intermarrying with them, and could have children with at least some of them. Reading on, he learned that being Betazoid was supposed to mean he had some kind of special telepathic and empathic abilities. That could definitely pose a problem.

Some help from AI would really be helpful now, but if Ziggy had no database from the future, naturally, then what good would AI be?

“You’re going to have to watch yourself on this one, Sam?” AI had returned, but was watching cautiously. “Just a note, your ‘substitute’ said you could shut off the internal sensors in your quarters and allow me to be here. Maybe. Got to go.” And he again opened his portal and retreated.

“Wait. AI?” Turn off the sensors in his room? Ok, it was worth a try.

“Computer, turn off all the sensors watching this room.”

“Internal sensors for Living Unit 16 are now offline.”

That had been easy.

“Captain to Counselor. Dear, our systems show that the internal sensors in our quarters have been turned off. I don’t think that’s a good idea. Right before they were turned off, we detected another EM signature, just like the one in Sickbay when you were there earlier. It appears you may be the key to something.”

“I was...” Sam couldn’t say that he wanted no more interruptions. The Captain might realize that he had yet to be interrupted by security and couldn’t have known about the second incident. And either way, Sam had a feeling he was about to be overruled. “Just thinking. I guess I must have been thinking out loud. Sorry. It won’t happen again.”

There was a pause. “Very well. We’ll reset the sensors. I think you had better take the Doctor’s advice and get some rest.”

“I think you’re right. I’ll do so immediately. Thank you.”

“Good night. Riker out.”

Well, so much for that theory. Now what?

“Psst. Sam? Did it work?” It was AI again.

“The Captain found out immediately. They turned them back on.”

“Oh. Okay, I’ll be right back.” And he disappeared again.

“AI! Dang it.”

“Captain to Counselor. Sorry to interrupt, Deanna, but we just detected another of those EM signatures, just momentary, in our quarters. Is there anything there that you can detect?”

“I don’t see anything.”

"This is starting to worry me. Very well, I'll let you get some rest."

"Really?" Sam was getting annoyed.

"Yes. This time, I promise."

"Thank You."

"Captain out."

Sam had no idea what to do. Every time AI appeared, there was a security alert. Obviously, these people were so advanced, they could detect the holograms that were the means for he and AI communicating. That didn't seem too surprising, considering the object he was standing on. What else could these people do? Well, he had already been 'beamed'. But that had to be a short-range device, or they wouldn't have needed spaceships like this. Probably had 'ray guns' too.

"I still don't understand. How did I get here?" Deanna Troi was feeling a little upset. It was starting to dawn on her that not only was she in a different place, but also a different time. She had to get back.

But, in the mean time, she had to be very careful. She could not give this 'AI' anything that might upset the timeline. One slip of the tongue and anything could happen. She could wipe out herself, or Will. Anybody.

"Well...we really don't know. This has never happened to us. I mean, Sam has leaped many times before, but never into the future. We have no frame of reference to work with. We can't advise him. And this weird thing about my hologram being detected. That's just spooky." AI looked over at Deanna. Wow! What an attractive woman! But, he had to get his mind back on what was important. "I can understand how this must be upsetting for you as well."

"Actually, I've had worse. Try waking up as a Romulan."

"A what?"

"Never mind." She should not have said that. She had to remember what was going on here. "So, this Dr. Beckett has been leaping back and forth through time for a while now, ever since he stepped into that 'quantum accelerator'."

"Exactly. But, it has always been into history, from the time period of his own lifetime. He would jump into a person that was about to do something or have something done to them that would change history, and we would know because we would have Ziggy's database on what history should be."

"And this Ziggy is...?"

"Oh. That's just our affectionate name for the computer."

"You name your computers?"

"Well, no, not all of them. This one has just been so cantankerous that, well, he's almost taken on a personality. So, one day, someone started calling him Ziggy and the name stuck. Heck, I don't even remember who or where the name came from."

Peculiar, thought Deanna, but not unheard of. Even Chief O'Brien had a few choice names for pieces of equipment that he found especially difficult to work with. But none of his names could be called 'endearing'. "All right. Can you at least tell me if I will ever get back?"

“Well...based on past experience, I would say: Yes. The person Sam has leaped into always returns to normal after Sam has done what he was sent there to do and leaps to another.”

“How do you know?”

“When Sam leaps, the one person is replaced by another. That is usually where we get our first clues about where to look in history to find what Sam has to do”

“So this ‘Sam’ goes through time, replacing other people with himself, while those others are held against their will till ‘Sam’ is finished with their bodies?”

“Well, sort of. That’s a very simplistic view of it, Ms. Troi.”

“It’s Mrs. Troi to you.” Deanna had already read some unsavory emotions from this character, though she had to admit, he had been a gentleman outwardly. But this whole situation was just irritating her. And worse, someone else was in her place, both as Ship’s Counselor and Will’s wife. And a man, no less!

She just had to maintain her calm and think through this. Like all the unusual things she had encountered since joining Starfleet, there had to be a logical, scientific explanation. She, and hopefully others back in her time, would be working on this too.

“Ma’am. For starters, it would really help if we could figure out a way for me to talk with Sam without being detected. The exchange of information would be invaluable.”

‘Al’ was right. That certainly would help. “You said he tried turning off the room sensors and they turned them back on.”

“Correct.”

That would be typical Will. He’d be very protective of her, since he probably thought something was wrong with her. Where could Sam go and turn off the sensors and not have Will get suspicious of it? Perhaps her office? But how to get Sam there without suspicion? “You said Dr. Beckett would look, sound, everything just like me?”

“Yeah. To anyone from that time, he will be you. I’m the only one who sees him as he really is.”

“I wonder...”

“What?” Al was as perplexed as he could get and completely out of his league. For now, he was content to let this woman from the future come up with ideas. Ziggy sure wasn’t helping any.

“I have certain gifts that most people don’t have. I am just curious if Sam has them now.”

“What kinds of gifts?”

“Nothing that can help us now.” Oh, what to do? Deanna was at a loss. “I wish I could contact Reg.”

“Who’s Reg?”

“The Starfleet engineer who invited me down to this lab of yours. He was working on getting it operational again.”

“Why?”

“They had no idea what it was for. Reg thought that by making the systems work again, he might be able to discover its purpose.”

“Sounds like you’re onto something. Is he good?”

“A certifiable genius, in his odd sort of way. He might be able to help, if I could contact him. But you said that is impossible.”

“The only way we can communicate with Sam is through the hologram, which is tuned to my brainwaves. I’m the only one who can use it. And Sam is the only one who can see it. Well, until those sensors on your ship saw it. But I don’t think they know what it is yet. At least, I hope not.” No, more like AI was praying that they did not.

“We have to make effective contact with your Dr. Beckett first. Then, maybe we can figure this out.” Deanna was surprised Barclay didn’t have it all figured out by now. Of course, maybe he did and she just didn’t know it. For all she knew, he and Will could be trying to get her back right now.

“Is there someplace on this ship where there are no sensors to pick me up?”

“Not that I am aware of. But, if we could get him somewhere else and turn the sensors off, someplace where he would not be disturbed.” Where would that be? “As soon as the sensors go off, a smart officer is going to scan for my location, since this has all been happening around ‘me’, figuratively, of course.”

“So they can track you all over the ship with these sensors?”

“Actually, the main way of locating a person is with the communicator.”

“Some type of phone?” AI was amazed. Everyone carried a phone with them in the future. His time period had portable phones, but they were few in number and very expensive.

“A what? No. It’s in our commbadges. The silver and gold emblem we wear on the uniform, right here.” Deanna tapped where her commbadge had been. “It acts as a two way communications and locator. The ships sensors can pick it up from great distances. If your Dr. Beckett could leave it in my quarters, then go to another place and turn off the sensors, it would look like the sensors were shut off in a location away from me. They would try to locate me and find I am still in my quarters. Then, as long as they don’t get suspicious and begin scanning for life forms, he should be undisturbed.”

“OK. That sounds like a plan. But where should he go? Are there any secluded places, like in the engine room or someplace like that?”

“Seeing me in Engineering would only raise their suspicions. And seeing me in medical or science would be less suspicious, but those areas are well used. We’re preparing for a survey cruise, in fact.” Deanna thought a moment, then realized she had the only reasonable answer. “My office. I’m the only one who goes there, except for my patients. It would not seem out of the ordinary for me to go in there alone. If Dr. Beckett takes his commbadge off and leaves it in my quarters, then goes to my office, he may be able to turn off the sensors there without arousing too much suspicion.”

AI was getting excited. They had a plan, which was very reassuring to an Admiral. “I will need to get back into your quarters long enough to give Sam the message, then we give him, what, fifteen or twenty minutes to make it there?”

“Better make it twenty. If he gets caught in the corridor on the way, it may become a problem.”

“All right. Then what?”

“Then we have to start figuring out what is going on here. I have no intention of staying in this time.” What an absurd question, thought Deanna. It seemed perfectly obvious to her.

“If this is like the rest of his ‘leaps’, once he completes whatever he was sent there to do, he’ll automatically leap out and you will return to normal. You probably won’t even remember anything unusual happened.”

Which meant that Deanna had to get word to Barclay or Will or somebody about what was going on in the old laboratory, while she still could remember. She just might be able to prevent this from happening to anyone else. “What kinds of things might he have been sent there to do? And who sent him?”

“The who part, we really don’t know. Sam thinks God is guiding his leaps.”

Oddly enough, the thought didn’t really surprise Deanna. After all, Starfleet had met enough ‘god-like’ beings in its history. The Organians, Apollo, the Q, just to name a few. She supposed any of them may have the power to control Dr. Beckett’s leaps through time. Certainly, Q did, and he had meddled in human affairs often enough.

“But the what part, that may or may not be clear, but Ziggy’s usually able to track it down and tell us what should happen. Then Sam just does his best to make it happen. And when he succeeds, it isn’t long before he leaps again. Then we start all over again. He has been a white lawyer defending a black woman accused of murder in the old South, a DJ who saved a radio station from collapse, a woman who had to save her roommate from committing suicide. Could be anything. We never see it coming.”

“Sounds as if Dr. Beckett has been on quite a unusual mission. And he must be quite a person to be able to do all those good deeds.”

“It’s never boring.”

“So what is it he could be sent there to do?”

“Well, whoever it involves obviously has some relationship to you, or you wouldn’t be here. What do you do on this ship?”

“I’m the Ship’s Counselor.” That drew a blank look from Al. “I suppose from your perspective, I’m kind of like the ship’s psychiatrist. Though, it is a lot more than that. I council the Captain on ship matters, use my talents to assist the Captain in diplomacy and negotiations.” It dawned on her. “You said it had to be someone that had a relationship with me? Well, I’m married to the Captain.”

“I’d definitely call that a relationship. Is there anything coming up that could be dangerous to him?”

“Not that we know of. As I said, we are preparing for a survey and exploration mission. It’s the nature of the job that circumstances could change at any moment. Theoretically, we all are always in danger. Right now though, we are in Earth orbit, taking on crew and supplies. It should be as safe as can be expected.”

“Considering your traveling through space. By my standards, that’s pretty risky by itself.”

“It still is, but science and technology have come a long way.” Deanna realized that these people were from a time much earlier than even the Enterprise-E’s visit to the Earth’s history a few years previous to stop the last Borg invasion. These people probably did not know about alien species like the Vulcans or Borg and would not even know of Earth’s Third World War. Certainly, they were already under observation by the Vulcans, and several other space faring races, already, but first contact was still seventy or more years in the future. They definitely would not have heard of Betazed, and the fact that she was a Human/Betazoid hybrid may be too much for them to handle. These older humans could be highly xenophobic. She would have to be very careful about how much she revealed.

“Is there anyone you work with, as a patient, who may be in danger? Being the ship’s psychiatrist, you must have to keep track of the crew’s psychological and emotional state. Anyone considering suicide or maybe upset enough to hurt someone else?”

“Ensign Weaver is undergoing a bit of depression. She’s about to be separated from her family for a long duration because this is her first deep space mission. But it’s not anything dangerous.”

“Are you sure that’s all?”

How could she reassure this fellow without revealing her empathic abilities and hence her heritage? But some humans did have psychic abilities. “I’m psychic.”

“Oh.” Al wondered what she had been reading from him. “You can read my mind?”

“Not in that way. I don’t read it, per say, it’s more like I feel it. It isn’t precise, but I can say that if someone was wanting to kill themselves or someone else, I would feel it.”

“Really?” Geez , Al hoped she hadn’t sensed what went through his...mind when she turned away from him and started to walk toward the other side of the room. Oh, this one looked nice coming or going.

“Admiral, it would be more helpful, and very much appreciated by me, if you could keep your ‘observations’ to a professional nature. Not to mention the fact that I am a married woman.”

“Wow. Uh, yeah sure. Sorry. I mean, hey, I am a guy and you are... well.”

“Attractive? I’ll take that part as a compliment, and thank you, but it doesn’t help get this situation corrected.”

“You’re right. It was quite ungentlemanly of me. Now, you said you would know if suicide or homicide or something was a possibility?”

“Suicide especially. It is always preceded by strong feelings of depression and hopelessness. I would be able to sense that. Homicide, that may be a lot trickier, but I could possibly sense the feelings motivating it. I don’t think that is the case, not onboard the *Titan*, anyway. No, this is a Starfleet crew you are talking about. Starfleet does a better job of screening it’s people than they did in your day.” ‘I hope,’ thought Deanna.

Sam was continuing to garner as much information from the computer as he could. So far, he knew he was supposed to be a ship's counselor, half alien and married. Add to that the fact that he was talking to a computer and he began to feel like he needed the counselor.

Though they generally avoided much contact with the 'subject', he hoped that AI was doing what he could to get information from her. With Ziggy useless, they would have to rely on this person for most of their knowledge. He just didn't see any other way.

"Sam?"

"AI! What is going on?"

"Just listen. Take that silver and gold looking thingy off your shirt, leave it here and then go to the Counselor's office. Once you're there, turn off the sensors there and wait. Got it?"

Sam stood up and tugged the commbadge off his uniform. "Loose this, get to the Counselor's office, and turn off sensors. Got it!"

"I'll meet you there in twenty minutes." Then AI disappeared again.

"Counselor's office. Great. Where's that at?" He had to work fast. "Computer, show me how to get to the Counselor's office."

The computer showed him the route, which he memorized this time. It wouldn't do to have the Counselor being shown the way to his...pardon...her office by arrows displayed on the corridor walls. That might look a little suspicious.

And his...her commbadge just laying around might look odd to, so Sam went into the bedroom. There was a dresser there so he tried to pull out a drawer, but it appeared stuck tight. "All this technology and they haven't figured out how to make a drawer not get stuck." He reached around the edges, looking for a better grip when the drawer suddenly opened on its own. He dropped the commbadge in and waited. Nothing happened.

"Well, having a drawer just hanging open might be obvious too." He tried nudging it, to no avail. Finally, he grasped the corners and tried to push, but felt the drawer glide in under its own power. "What the?" He really had no time for this, so he departed for the Counselor's office.

The only thing about this that bothered him was: what if a patient came in? He had taken basic psychology in college, but it certainly didn't qualify him to be the ship shrink. Come to think of it, it concerned him that these people needed a person with a psychiatric background on board. But then again, they were probably out here on long voyages for possibly years at a time. No one, well, at least, no human, went through years without suffering some occasional ups and downs that a psychiatrist might be able to help with. So he guessed it made sense, it just concerned him that he didn't feel qualified to fill the role. Then again, how many times had that occurred in the last couple of years?

Arriving, he went inside, hoping he had the right room. He found what he took to be his answer. The furniture closest to the door was a large and very comfortable looking couch, accompanied by a table with a plant on it and an easy chair. The quintessential shrink's couch! He had to chuckle. "Some things never change it seems. Computer, turn off all sensors monitoring this room."

THE TWISTED TALES: VOLUME 1
TO THEN AND BACK AGAIN

"Internal sensors monitoring for Counselor's Office are now offline."

He hoped the computer was telling the truth. Now, he had to just...

"Sam? All clear?"

"For now, I think."

Al came out of the corner, looking around. "Not bad. Between that couch and the Counselor, I think I could get into being counseled."

"Al! We have some real problems here. Have you been able to come up with any kind of an idea of why I'm here?"

"Well, as you may expect, Ziggy is useless."

"Yeah, I guessed."

"So I have been conferring with our subject."

Sam wasn't sure he thought that was a good thing, but he had to admit, it was the only option he could think of too. And he guessed it wasn't as risky as all their previous leaps. This person was from the future, not the past. Unless they had time travel too, they couldn't effect anything in his past. But as advanced as they were, did they have time travel? "That is probably our best bet, but we also need to know: Do they have time travel? If so, I have to wonder what they will do with any information we give them"

"I'm trying to be careful, Sam, but if we can't get information about this time, we may never get this thing figured out. We need to know what they can do and who they are so we can figure out the reason for you being here."

"I've been wondering how this happened. Theoretically, I shouldn't be able to be here, yet..." Sam reached out and tapped the wall. "I've seen where we are. We're on a spaceship over the Earth. And apparently, this spaceship has visited many planets, some lightyears away."

"Yeah, she told me that."

"And I am supposed to be alien. Well, half alien."

Al's eyes bulged in disbelief. "Half alien! As in half human, half little green guy?"

"According to the research I did on the computer, there are a lot of 'little green men', but not nearly all are little or green. Many look just like us. That's like Betazed, which is where her mother is from. A pretty influential person there, I take it. Her father was from Earth."

"You mean that beautiful lady in our holding area is an alien?"

"Yeah. Couldn't tell it, could you?"

"Not at all. Hell I was admiring her...well."

"Biologically, she is nearly as human as you and I, but there are subtle differences physiologically. And she has these empathic abilities."

"She did tell me she was psychic, so she says she can rule out the idea that you are here to stop a homicide or suicide. She says she would 'feel' it."

"That would make sense if she's an empath, but I apparently didn't get that part of her. Or I don't know how to use it. I have no idea which it is."

"Darn. That might have helped."

"What is really nagging at me is: am I going to start leaping into the future as well, how are we supposed to deal with it?"

"I guess the first question should be: Will this happen again?"

“Yeah, good point. Does anyone, even Ziggy have any theories as to how this suddenly happened?”

“Everyone at the lab is baffled, but then again, you always were the genius behind the project. But, the subject did tell me that someone ‘found’ our lab. Apparently as some part of an archeological expedition. And that they had no idea what it did. Apparently, all the old records are lost.”

“Then that sounds like something catastrophic happens. But, wait, Al. We need to be careful. I just realized, we are the ones that will be going back into history to stay, theoretically. So we have to be careful that we don’t take knowledge that could contaminate the time line from our end. The roles are kind of reversed now.”

Al tried to think that out, but decided that this explained why Sam had the PhD’s. “Okay. So once this is over, we erase all knowledge of it from our database. Would that work?”

“It’s a start. But who knows, we may already be too late and have picked up some bit of information that we will change history with. Just remember, no information that we don’t absolutely need.”

“I can do that. Okay, but the other thing she did say was that there was an engineer named Reg, quite brilliant in his own right, who was trying to get the equipment working again, so they could find out what it did.”

This new information was useful. “I remember when I got here, someone came in the room and was very excited about the equipment having been made to work. They had expected that it would not function at all after sitting for so long.” It was time for a leap in logic. “So, let’s theorize they did make it work, that even for a brief moment, the quantum accelerator even functioned.”

“Let’s here it for American Quality.”

Sam ignored it. “If this happened at the same point that I was leaping along the temporal plane, that, in essence, the leap that I was making intersected the leap that the accelerator was initiating, that may have caused me to arrive here.”

“Are you trying to say that you took a temporal ‘wrong turn’?”

“I know, it’s just an idea, and at the stage we were at in the project, I had not even considered the idea of such an occurrence. “Heck, I can’t even verify the theory, but it seems plausible.”

“How can we find out?”

“Right now, I don’t know. This ‘Reg’, is he supposed to be good?”

“Quote: certifiable genius: unquote.”

“Sounds like he is the one I need to be talking to.”

Riker entered his quarters and tiptoed to the bedroom, expecting to find Deanna fast asleep. What he found was a pristinely made bed and no sign of his wife.

“Computer, locate Counselor Troi.”

“Counselor Troi is in her quarters.”

“How...” He looked around again, but he couldn’t see her. “Computer, what is the exact location of Counselor Troi, in relation to myself.”

“Counselor Troi is approximately 3 meters aft of your location.”

Aft. Riker turned in the appropriate direction. That would put her inside the dresser. Unless she was a shapeshifter... that thought didn't ease his mind. There had been rumors of shapeshifters surviving as moles inside the Federation, but given the biological weapon that had wiped out the Founders, was it really possible?

Moving to the dresser he opened each drawer till he discovered Deanna's commbadge laying on one of the piles of clothes. Only the commbadge. Well, it didn't rule out a shapeshifter, but why was this here. What the hell was going on and how was Deanna involved?

“Captain to Bridge. Conduct a life form scan for Counselor Troi. She's not in our quarters.” He began looking around, trying to find other clues. The only other thing he could discern might be out of place was the computer screen extended from the desktop. “Computer, what information has been accessed through this terminal recently?”

The computer returned a lengthy list of background information on Deanna, himself, the ship, the Federation in general. Like someone was searching for information on them. Some kind of a spy? But the information had been mostly general knowledge, nothing secure, or even really important.

“Bridge to Captain, we have located the Counselor, but I believe you should come to the bridge immediately.”

That sounded like they had found something else suspicious. “On my way.”

Arriving on the bridge, Riker proceeded directly to the tactical station. “What do you have, Tuvok?”

“Something, which you may find even more distressing. When you requested the life form scan, I first ran a check of the internal sensors. I found that the internal sensors covering the Counselor's Office had been turned off. That would not be unusual for Counselor Troi, considering issues of doctor/patient confidentiality. However, I also knew that she was not seeing patients today. I, therefore, turned on the sensors to check the office and discovered that she was, indeed, in the office, along with this.” Tuvok brought up the room scans and noted to the Captain a particular reading.

“That same EM signature.”

“Correct. And this time, it did not disappear. I have been monitoring it for 2 minutes, 24.13 seconds. It has not wavered, except to move around the room a little.”

“Any indication that it's ‘doing’ anything?”

“Not from the unknown. However, Counselor Troi appears to be having a conversation with it.”

“What?”

Tuvok turned up the volume from the audio sensors.

Deanna's voice came through clearly. “This ‘Reg’, did she say that they were friends or something?” There was a long pause. “It could be. We've experienced it before. The Captain doesn't have to be the focus of why I'm here.” Another brief pause. “OK, so this engineer at the lab is really good. Now I have to figure out how to get down there. I'm being watched, closely.” Deanna

paused again. "I...am not sure. All I know was that I was in the lab one minute and then I was on this ship. They called it 'beaming.' It must be some kind of mass-energy-mass conversion system. All I know for sure is that it made me nauseated and disoriented." Another pause. "They seemed unaffected. Maybe you just 'get used to it. And the Doctor. I am supposed to be half alien, but not like him. It was weird talking to a lizard."

"I have recorded more, if you would like to hear those as well."

Riker was incredulous. "It sounds like Deanna isn't really Deanna. Wouldn't that be your theory on it?"

"The implications of some of the statements would seem to bare that out. I would consider it a logical theory."

"Then who is she?"

"I do not have that answer at this time. Do you intend to continue monitoring the situation or..."

"No, I've heard enough."

"A lizard?" Al thought something must be wrong. He couldn't have heard that right.

"Oh yes. He's about 7 feet tall, looks like one of those raptor type dinosaurs that have been all over in the paleontology journals of late. And talks."

"You can really understand him?"

"He's got a pretty bad lisp, but otherwise, it's as plain as day." Sam was racking his brain to figure out how he was going to get down to Earth again to talk to this Reg fellow. "If the Captain does what I would expect, he certainly won't allow me to go down there, not until he has all these bizarre things explained. I wonder if I could get Reg to come up here?"

"You mean, have him beam up like you were brought up. That's not bad, Sam. Then maybe you can get him alone and talk this thing through."

"If we're friends, they may not be suspicious at first, but if I start asking questions, Reg may begin to wonder what is going on. I need to have a way..."

Quite suddenly, Sam had become enveloped in a sparkling effect, then disappeared.

"Sam! Sam!" Al's hologram looked around the now empty room. "I guess that's how that 'beamer' works." He shook his head as he started to open his portal. "This is not good."

Sam suddenly felt that nauseating feeling again as the Counselor's Office seemed to dissolve around him, to be replaced by a small, featureless room. One wall had a seat built into it, while another had a wide-open doorway.

Obviously, they were onto him. Which meant he had to get out of here, quickly. Turning to the door, he started off, only to be thrown back by a flash of shimmering light. He tingled all over from the residual effects. "Force field. Great." It had to be some kind of jail cell. A brig if he recalled the nautical term correctly. It seemed he was going nowhere. He had very little ideas about how to get out of a jail in the 20th Century, he had to imagine that these were a lot more secure.

Which meant he was in serious trouble.

Through another door into an open room outside his cell, three persons entered and approached. All humanoid and appeared to be carrying what looked like it could be a weapon. The tallest of the group, which Sam realized had the pointed ears he had seen on the woman in the corridor earlier, stepped up to the force field and appeared to observe him for a moment.

"I have been sent to determine your identity."

Sam did not know what to do, so he decided to play along with the illusion, for now. "I am Commander Deanna Troi, Ship's Counselor on the U.S.S. Titan. And I must protest this. What am I in here for?"

"An excellent attempt at maintaining your cover, however, we have already determined that you are not the real Deanna Troi. Would you like to provide us with an alternate 'plea'?"

Sam was really in trouble now. "Perhaps it would be best to simply plead the fifth."

Tuvok was perplexed. He did not understand the reference. "The fifth? What precisely is 'the fifth'?"

"The fifth amendment to the constitution. I need not say anything that would incriminate me."

Tuvok had to dig deep in his memory to figure it out. "Are you referring to the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America? If so, I must inform you that that document is no longer in use."

That should have been obvious to Sam. He really had to think what was going on.

"However, there is no incrimination to be concerned with, at this point. You do, however, seem to be at the center of unusual circumstances." Tuvok stepped closer to the force field. "I have been instructed to inform you that if you will cooperate, you will be taken to the Captain where you can make a full statement, peacefully."

"All right."

A few minutes later, they were in the Captain's Ready Room. Riker looked across the table at a being that was certainly the spitting image of his wife. But that didn't agree with other facts.

"First off, we know you are not the real Deanna Troi. I want to know what you have done with her?"

"She is safe. That I can assure you."

Riker took that as a confirmation that they were right. Something was up. It wasn't just a case of being 'a little off'. "Then tell me what is going on here."

Sam looked around the room. The other security guards had left, but the pointy-eared one was still there, standing smartly at attention, but obviously intent on what was being said.

A big decision had to be made. He was basically caught. Given the technology level these people possessed, he doubted he could 'dazzle them with brilliance or baffle them with bull'.

"Captain, I would like to tell you, but I have two requests."

“You are not in a position to be setting terms.” Riker was getting short on patience with this.

“I understand that. I only ask that we talk in private...” a thought suddenly occurred to him. “And that the engineer from the lab, Reg, be present.”

“What does he have to do with this?”

“I am hoping he can back me up, though he may not realize it yet.”

Riker pondered. “Mr. Tuvok, your opinion?”

Tuvok looked over at Sam, then back to the Captain. “The ‘Counselor’ has given me no struggle or difficulty since her apprehension.” He seemed to consider the situation. “I would be more inclined to support a assessment by the real Counselor, but since we cannot expect that to be available, I will recommend that the Captain proceed with the requests, until which time we can determine the validity of information we obtain.”

‘Thank God!’ thought Sam. In an odd sort of way, he felt he might like this ‘elf’ man. He seemed quite logical.

Riker was not amused by his subordinates report, but he was willing to cooperate, if it would get to the bottom of this. “Very well. Have Mr. Barclay beam up from the surface. When he arrives, I will expect the complete truth.” To punctuate his point, Riker got up from his chair and left with Tuvok.

Sam was at a total loss how he was going to get out of this, but he felt more and more like he was being cornered into telling the truth. Problem was, would they believe him? It was a pretty farfetched story.

“Sam?”

“Al. Thank God, you found me.”

“We got caught, didn’t we?”

“Oh, yeah.”

“Great. Now what?”

“I don’t know, but I may have helped our cause, I hope.”

“How’s that?”

“Well, you said she told you we needed to talk to that engineer named Reg, so I told them I’d tell them everything if they brought him up here.”

“Sam, you can’t tell them the truth! What happens if they use that knowledge?”

“Al, for all we know, they have time travel capability. Maybe a different method, but they may have already done it.”

Tuvok looked at the indicator on his security panel. “Our EM signature has returned, in your ready room as we speak.”

Riker was not surprised. “Is there any indication that it’s harmful?”

“None as yet.”

“Then let’s wait till Mr. Barclay arrives, but call Dr. Ree up here as well.

“Al, these people are so advanced, they may have already figured out how our labs work.” Sam was even holding out one hope. “Heck, they may be able to help me get home, for good.”

“She said they had no idea how that stuff in the lab worked or what it did. I’m not sure I like the idea of them nosing around in it or not.”

“What are you worried about? Think they’ll find your little black book. It’ll be outdated.”

“Sam, what about what they will do with it? They may start changing the past too, and not necessarily for the better.”

“I don’t think so. I don’t think they have any malevolent intentions. The Captain is obviously upset, but his wife appears to be involved in something and won’t tell him what. I guess it would be understandable.”

The door opened and in came the Captain, followed by Reginald Barclay and Dr. Ree.

Barclay came over to Sam. “Counselor, is everything alright?” He had been told nothing, simply summoned to the *Titan*.

“Ah, well, I think so, but we’ll know in a few minutes.”

The Captain seated himself. “Deanna, Mr. Barclay, please have a seat.” Riker realized he had nothing in his office in the way of a proper seat for the Doctor. “Please, make yourself as comfortable as possible, Doctor.”

“Thththank you, Captain.” Ree came to the corner of the desk and turned himself to face Sam. “Ifff I may, Captain?”

“Certainly.” Riker moved slightly to the left, giving the Doctor room to lean his hip over onto the desk, relaxing just a bit. It was the closest he could come to being comfortable in humanoid normal surroundings.

“Alright, I have filled my end of the bargain, Mr. Barclay is here. Now, I expect some explanations, including for the EM signature that we are monitoring in the room.”

Sam glanced toward AI’s hologram. They would be able to detect him. How was he going to explain this?

AI was staring dumbfounded at the Doctor. “Sam, that’s a dinosaur. A talking dinosaur.”

Sam was unsure what to do. Should he acknowledge AI? The others already knew something was up. They knew something else was in the room with them, just not what it was.

“Well, AI, I don’t think he’s truly a dinosaur.”

The Captain and Doctor glanced at each other with surprised expressions.

“Are you speaking to us?”

“No. Actually, to my associate.”

“Sam. What are you doing?”

Sam just motioned for AI to let him work.

“Then you acknowledge that that EM signature is associated with you?”

“Yes. But things are a little more complicated than that.” Feeling his way, Sam tried to proceed. “How much do you all know about time travel?”

“We’ve done it, but it doesn’t involve people acting strangely.”

“Then you’ve found a better way than I did.”

“I don’t remember Deanna Troi looking for time travel.” Riker looked around at the others. “In fact, it made her cringe after...” He shouldn’t let that out just now.

“That’s what she said” interjected Al.

“Al...” Sam didn’t need the interruptions. He needed to concentrate.

“Are you referring to the time travel experiments that Dr. Beckett was performing in the lab?” questioned Barclay.

Riker wished he had not blurted that out, but there was no stopping it now.

“Yes. I am. What do you know about those?”

“Only a little. He was apparently trying to use quantum physics to modify a person’s place in time.”

“In a nutshell. But it worked a little differently. And you know who Dr. Beckett was?”

“We were able to recover a small portion of a recording in which he was proposing his plan.”

Sam remembered that recording. Geez, his suit had looked awful. “Well, they went ahead with that project and the results weren’t exactly what they had expected.”

“How so?” asked the Captain.

“Well, I...he thought that he would simply change times as a person, leaving one time frame to enter another. It didn’t quite work that way.”

“I believe I noticccecd a slip ththere.” noted the Doctor.

“Me too. You said ‘I’” Riker noted.

“I did, didn’t I,” chuckled Sam, scratching his head, trying to figure out how to talk his way out of this hole. “Okay. This is really hard to explain. The jumps through time don’t work quite as Dr. Beckett had expected. The person, as a whole, does not leap through time. Leaping is what he called it. In fact, you could say that only a portion of the person leaps through time.”

“What part?”

“That is even harder to explain.”

Riker was growing more concerned for Deanna with every minute. “I think you had better find a way. My wife’s...existence is starting to sound like it is in jeopardy.”

“No, I can vouch for her safety. In fact, she is the one who suggested that Reg needed to be involved.”

“Where is she?”

“Not here. But she is fine.”

“I want to talk to her.”

“That’s not exactly possible, right now, but ...” Sam glanced toward Al.

“What? You’ve already spilled the beans.”

“We can get messages to her and receive messages from her. Sort of.”

“That is what the EM signature is, a means of communication?”

“Yes, actually. It’s not harmful to any of you, is it?”

“No, but it’s presence was causing concern. Can I send a message to her now?”

“Yeah, I guess so.” Sam glanced at Al again.

“Sure, why not?” Al was feeling exasperated right now. “I’m just a messenger boy anyway.”

“Alright. Please reassure her that Bill is trying his hardest to get her back. To just hang on and we’ll take care of it.”

“Got that, AI?”

“Yeah sure. Bill say’s just hang in there. Geez, you would think they could come up with better names in the future.” AI then closed his portal.

“Bridge to Captain. The EM signature has vanished again.”

“Yes, we know. We now know it is a communication device.”

“I see. Shall I continue to monitor it?”

“Yes, but we will not need for you to advise us of the changes in it’s status.”

“Very well, Bridge out.”

Momentarily, AI returned. “The Counselor would like to assure her Imzaadi that she is well and has been treated well.”

“Her what?” asked Sam.

“Her IMZAADI. Don’t look at me. Sounds like some kind of code to me.”

The others watched the exchange expectantly.

“Okay, well, the Counselor wishes to assure her ‘Imzaadi’ that she is well and is being treated well. Right AI?”

“Almost a quote.”

Riker looked at the other two Starfleet officers. “That’s Deanna alright. That word would not have been in anything they could have read about us.”

“Exxccellent!” concurred Dr. Ree.

“Yes, excellent. Now, how do we get her back?” asked Barclay.

“Actually, if I succeed, she’ll come back automatically.”

Riker was seeing a light at the end of the tunnel. “Oh. That is even better news. What do you need to succeed at? Maybe we can help?”

“I... don’t... know. That’s always the problem.”

“You don’t know?” Riker could see that light fading again. “You were apparently sent here with a purpose, but you don’t know what it is?”

“Never do.” Sam tried to sound like the whole thing was a very amusing situation, but the look on the Captain’s face showed that it was not going to work. “Well, the way it works is, I would go somewhere in the past, my past, where something was about to go wrong in historical terms. Once there, Ziggy, that’s what we call our computer, could trace what history was against his database for what history should be and then track down where things went wrong. It didn’t have to be anything major. Could be something very small, actually, but when I get things straightened out, then I leap to another person. Automatically.”

“Wait a minute. You said you ‘leap’ to another person. I don’t understand.”

“When I leap, I leap into the role or position of another person. I, in essence, replace them until what I have come to do is completed. Then it reverses.”

“Then they come back, like nothing ever happened? Do they understand that anything has happened?”

“While they are ‘away’, yes, but, after that, I really don’t know.”

“This is insane, and a bit too convenient. A person who leaps through time, replacing other people in moments in history, who remembers it all, but the person he replaced remembers nothing. It just seems too convenient.”

"Sir, if I may?" Barclay interrupted. When Riker approved, he went on. "What happens to the other person when you 'leap' into them?"

"They are sent to a holding area in the ... place where I started, until I accomplish my task and then they return to normal."

"Is that where Deanna is right now? Where is that? Or, when is that?" Or both, Riker guessed, was the reality of it.

"Actually, yes. But I can't say where or when. If you are having thoughts about rescuing her, you would need time travel to do it."

"Which we have. The Federation has had many time travelers over the years. Some intentional, some accidental. But we choose not to use it. We have laws and regulations to prevent its misuse. Time travel is a very powerful thing, and we have wisely decided that it is too volatile to just be 'leaped' around in. And this sounds a little too much like abducting someone and holding them against their will." Riker leaned back in his chair. He was not sure he was buying into all this. It seemed a little too convenient, too well thought out. He found it difficult to believe that Deanna was out there and he just couldn't go get her. And if this had involved anything other than time travel, he would.

"Mr. Barclay, can you see any shred of truth in what we have heard?"

"Well, ah, yes, yes, I believe I can. Actually, the concept sounds similar to a principle of temporal substitution proposed by a Vulcan scientist around three hundred years ago. Before the Federation even. He proposed that people could trade places through time, in essence, living each others lives."

"Did they try it?" asked Ree.

"No. Actually, the prevailing opinion in the Vulcan Science Academy at the time was that time travel was impossible. He was kicked out of the Academy for his theory. To the best of my knowledge, he never pursued the theory."

"Sso, the theory behind the story does exist."

"But that still doesn't make it fact" commented Riker.

"But if the theory can exist in one civilization, it can exist in another, and the other might decide to try and make it fact."

"That's right." Barclay was up and moving around as he thought. A few things were coming together. "The ensign has made more progress on the computer data and discovered logs that indicated they had proceeded with the experiment. A test subject, Dr. Becket himself, had 'leaped' into various subjects in history. All in the latter part of the 20th century."

"Why wasn't I informed about this?"

"I only found out a few minutes before you summoned me. We have made great progress. We have managed to energize the old power grid. Systems appear to be functioning normally. Based on what I had seen and the state of our progress, I was going to ask my superiors if we could try to duplicate the experiment."

"Geez, Sam. Maybe the Counselor was right. This guy is pretty sharp."

"Yeah. He may hold a key to getting me home."

"What was that?" asked Riker.

"Nothing. It sounds like Mr. Barclay is making progress. That's good news."

"The white room, with only a chair in it. Was that your 'holding room'?"

“Not originally. But we made it work. We never realized that there would be a trading of persons.”

“Of course. Dr. Beckett was dealing with quantum physics. In the quantum universe, energy must remain equal. When he went back in time, something had to come forward, to balance the equation.”

“We wish we had known that.”

“It was not fully understood for perhaps a hundred years after the experiment. But...” Barclay had a sudden realization. “You are the time traveler from that experiment. You must be Dr. Samuel Beckett.”

Sam was unsure what to say.

“Looks like the cat’s out of the bag” commented Al.

A bit sheepishly, Sam acknowledged the situation.

Riker noted the change in the situation. “So, your experiment continues. How long has it been, how many leaps?”

“To tell you the truth, I don’t really know.”

“We’ve been at this for almost three years, Sam.”

“Three years. Thanks Al. I had kind of lost my time perspective.”

“Three years, for him.” Riker was curious. “This ‘Al’, is a live person back in your ‘home’ time?”

“Yeah. Through a special hologram, he is able to follow and interact with me, but he is the only one from back home who can. He acts as an observer and reports on my ‘adventures’ and is my only contact, other than the people I meet in each of my leaps.”

“How does your family feel about what you’re doing.”

“If you mean, wife and kids, I don’t have any. My family , well, I don’t know.”

“Why not?”

Sam was hesitant to say.

“You might as well tell them the rest, Sam” urged Al.

“I don’t know because I haven’t been home since this little joyride started.

“What! You don’t return home yourself?”

“No. And I don’t know why. My calculations indicated that when I returned, I should leap back to my starting point, but, instead, I simply leap into a new situation. So, in a way, I’m as much a prisoner on this trip as the subjects I leap into.”

Everyone was quiet as they digested that. Barclay finally broke the silence.

“Well, you were working with the quantum physics of the 20th century. We have a little bit more to go on. Perhaps Dr. Beckett is here for our help, to get him off this crazy ride.”

“I thought I had succeeded, when I first appeared in the lab, but, then I looked down.” Sam did a little all-encompassing motion with his hand. “No insult intended to you wife, but this is definitely not the body of Samuel Beckett.

Riker’s eyes widened as he realized what a shock that must be, to materialize in a different body. “I hope not.” He had to ask. “Dr. Beckett, I am curious. Have you ‘leaped’ into women often?”

“More times than I want to remember. And those 20th century women’s undergarments are just as uncomfortable as they say they are.” Sam started to

laugh, saw that the others looked puzzled, and decided that comment would have worked much better in the 20th century. Here, they may have no reference for such a thing. He had to admit, this had been his most comfortable leap as a woman.

Clearing his throat, Riker decided they needed to change the subject. “Yes, well, I think that Mr. Barclay may need to refocus his attention. With your help, he may be able to find a solution to your situation. What do you think, Reg?”

“I think I need to get to work. It is possible, though there can be no guarantees, of course. It’s an intriguing problem though. May I use the physics lab, here, on the *Titan*.”

“Of course. Anything and anyone you think may be of assistance.”

“Thank You, Sir. Doctor, shall we get started. I am eager to here your theories.”

“Sure. Well, Reg...Is it okay to call you Reg?”

“Just fine.”

Barclay and Sam were headed for the door when Riker stopped them. “Doctor?”

“Yeah?”

Riker was unsure what to say. “Is your ‘assistant’ still here?”

“You mean AI? Yeah, he’s right over there.” Sam pointed toward an empty corner of the room.

“Oh. Can he hear us?”

“He can see and hear everything, just like he was here in the room. And he has a nasty habit of walking through walls when you least expect it.”

“That would be spooky.” commented Barclay.

AI crossed to stand in front of the engineer. “Boo!” When Reg didn’t respond, AI looked disappointed. “Not nearly as spooky as it could be, pal.”

“Tell me about it,” commented Riker to Barclay. Turning toward the corner that Sam had indicated, Riker ‘addressed AI. “AI, could you please let Deanna know we’re working on the situation, Reg in particular.”

“Now this is hilarious” said AI, stepping through the desk and standing beside the Captain. “He has no idea where I am.”

“AI!”

“You really do take the fun out of this sometimes, Sam.”

“Excuse me?” Riker was confused.

Sheepishly, Sam pointed out that AI had moved.

“Be that as it may, can I expect him to pass on the message?”

“Don’t worry, Sam. I’ll be happy to carry a message to the young lady.”

“Just do it.”

“Okay, okay. Sheesh. I’m on my way.” With that, Sam closed his portal.

“Counselor?”

“Yes, AI. And I thought we had a discussion about those kinds of thoughts.”

“I...you could ‘feel’ that from that far away?”

“Yes. Although it helps that there are very few others in the area to help confuse my abilities. Were you able to make contact with my husband?”

“Yes. He recognized your statement immediately. I take it that word, what was it?”

“Imzaadi.”

“Yes, it seemed to do exactly what you wanted. He recognized it immediately, like he’d been hit by a brick.”

“I hope it was not that painful.”

“No, but he wanted you to know that he and that Reg guy are on it. They are working on a way to get you back and, maybe, Sam home.”

“If anyone can, Reg can.”

Several hours later, Reg had not made any progress. Dr. Beckett had been invaluable in the beginning, but his knowledge was just plain outdated. He had finally retired, having been given some quarters to rest in.

Everything Barclay tried resulted in the same thing. The leaps through time were uncontrollable.

A pity too, as even Reg had to admit. When he had found out what the lab was intended for, he had become very engrossed in the idea of trying it out himself. It was hard to tell if he ever would have gotten the chance, but it would have been exciting.

But the computer models confirmed his worst fears. Once a ‘leaper’ had begun, there was no way to control his leaps. He would continue to leap, from one time and person to another, possibly for eternity.

That may sound fun at first, but Barclay could not imagine having to continue in such a life. It was just too...what? The leaper was essentially trapped in eternity, as best he could tell.

Either way, he felt very strongly about one thing. And he was on his way to tell the Captain and Admiral Paris about it.

“So, in conclusion, I feel it is best that we discontinue our research at the Quantum Leap Laboratory, render the equipment inoperable, and do our best to guarantee that it will not be used in the future. The outcome of its use is just too controversial for the ‘leaper’.”

Reg ended his speech and turned to see the Captain at one end of the table and the viewscreen with Admiral Paris on the other end.

“Thank You, Mr. Barclay.” The Admiral looked down, picking up a P.A.D.D., reading an item on it, and then tossing it down. “Your opinion, Captain Riker?”

Riker cleared his throat, glanced toward Barclay, and then began, “Based on what I have seen, including Mr. Barclay’s report, I would say I have to agree. The information from the Quantum Leap facility is really nothing that we don’t already know, created to do something that we already know how to do, in a safer method that doesn’t leave an individual trapped in a temporal limbo. I’m not sure exactly what steps should be taken, but I feel that sending anyone into that machine is equivalent to a death sentence, of sorts.”

The Admiral contemplated that for a moment. “What about Beckett?”

Riker looked at Barclay, who could only stare back. What could they do?

“For the moment, Admiral, I think we need to tell him our findings. He’s a professional scientist, he’ll at least be interested in that. Since we have discovered that we cannot help send him back, I guess we have to...let nature take its course.” And pray that Beckett could accomplish his mission, whatever that was, so that Deanna could return as well.

Looking forlorn, the Admiral thought it over just a bit more. “I hate to say it, but I think the two of you may have the right idea. Mr. Barclay, set everything back the way it was, then seal it. I will issue orders for that facility to be off limits to anyone. Make sure the power systems are inoperable, just in case some enterprising adventurer stumbles across it.”

“Aye, Sir. I’ll see to it personally.”

“Captain, I am sorry about Deanna. She appears to have been a completely innocent bystander in this.”

Riker was trying not to think about it. “Actually, Sir, I had not given up hope that perhaps Dr. Beckett will complete his mission here and leap. That should, theoretically, return Deanna.”

“I hope your right. Good Luck, gentlemen. Paris out.”

“Well, that finishes that. Now there is just telling Dr. Beckett and sealing the lab.” Riker didn’t mention what else was on his mind.

“I can take care of the lab. When do you want to tell Dr. Beckett?”

Riker sighed deeply. He hated these kinds of duties. “Now is as good of a time as any.” Getting up from his seat, he headed out onto the bridge with Barclay close behind.

In the corridor near the guest quarters, Barclay continued to relate some of what he had finally been able to dig up out of historical archives on the Quantum Leap Project. “The Project was funded by the government of the United States. A few years after Dr. Beckett began his ‘leaping’, the government became anxious, feeling that it was getting nothing for it’s money since Dr Beckett was never able to come to inquiries to report his progress. Eventually, they stopped funding and the project was closed. Even Al was prevented from continuing to support him. Dr. Beckett was never seen or heard from again.”

“Until now.” Riker stopped outside the assigned quarters. “They abandoned him.”

“Essentially. Or you could say he was trapped.”

“You may not want to include that in your report. Let’s at least leave him with some hope.”

Riker began to ring before entering when the door opened and the Counselor stepped out. “Will, what am I doing sleeping in the guest quarters?”

“Dr. Beckett. Mr. Barclay and I were just coming to see you.”

“Dr. Beckett? Who is that? And you still haven’t answered my question.”

The manner in which the Counselor had addressed him finally caught Riker’s attention. “Your not Dr. Beckett?”

The Counselor looked very confused. “Who is Dr. Beckett?”

Riker glanced at Barclay with an amazed look, one that Barclay was returning. “Do you remember anything from the last two days?”

Deanna now looked perplexed. "What day is it?"
Riker rattled off the stardate and Deanna seemed to become even more bewildered.

"As a matter of fact, I don't."

"What is the last thing you do remember?"

Deanna thought for a moment. "I was with Reg, on some kind of a tour. I remember something unexpected happened."

"Captain, I think she's back." Reg was looking relieved and pleased.

Riker wanted to be sure. "Is this my Imzaadi?"

"Will! Of course it's me!" When a large grin began to cross Will's face, Deanna could not help wondering. "What is going on?"

Overjoyed to have her back, but mindful of Barclay's presence, Riker gave her a light kiss, not anything like he wanted to just now, but... "Welcome back."

"Yes Counselor, Welcome back!" Reg was positively beaming.

"Okay, you two, what did I miss?" She grinned back at both of them. It was actually quite sweet to see how relieved they were.

Riker put his arm around her shoulder and they all started back up the corridor "Well, it's a long story."

"Really?" Deanna was only getting more curious.

"About four hundred years in the making" commented Barclay, still grinning from ear to ear.

"Alright. Is it going to take you both that long to tell me?"

"Yes, indeed. God must have a sense of humor. Sometimes, I apparently succeed and I never even know I have done so. And then there are the types of situations he puts me into..."

Someone pushed Sam out of the way as something else whisked past him. Something big. He hit the dirt and realized he had come very close to landing in a cow patty.

There was cheering all around him and not far away, a man dressed as a cowboy was scrambling to his feet and brushing off his clothes. Farther to his left, another man, this one dressed as a clown. And beyond him, a very large bull. A very, VERY large bull!

He realized he was in the ring at a rodeo.

The clown turned quickly and looked at him. "Chuck! You ok?" Move if you can, cause he's really pissed."

Sam decided it was best to take the man's advice, so he pushed himself up off the ground. As he did so, he noticed the sleeves of his own shirt. First, they were two different colors, with a wide fringe on the cuffs. His pants had colorful patches sewn all over them and even his boots were all different colors.

"I'm a ...rodeo clown?" Oh, this was just great! After his ordeal as the vet courting the cowgirl, he had quietly vowed off this kind of stuff. The saddle broke horses had been bad enough.

From his left, he heard the other clown yelling at the bull, trying to distract it, then saw him jump out of the way to save his own neck, but now the bull was headed Sam's direction, and building up a full head of steam.

THE TWISTED TALES: VOLUME 1
TO THEN AND BACK AGAIN

Now was a lousy time to try and remember what his sprinting coach had tried to teach him, but Sam did what he could remember. Taking off as fast as his much-older-now legs would carry him, he ran toward the perimeter of the ring, only to find it was a solid wall. And the bull was right behind him.

Skirting the outside of the ring, he tried to find the exit, but could only find a closed gate farther down the way. He made for it and leaped onto it, trying to get over. He landed on the far side as the bull impacted against it and the second rail from the bottom cracked and bent in almost six inches. Then the other clown got the bull's attention and it was off on another chase.

As various cowboys gave him a pat on the back, Sam stared at the broken rail in the gate. An impression from the bull's horn was visible, completely through the wood.

Recognizing his narrow escape, Sam looked around at the Stetson capped grins all around him.

"Oh boy."