

RECEIVED
AUG 15 1990
STAR TREK

Star Trek: The Next Generation

"Honors Pending"

An Original Teleplay
by Randy Cassingham

**PREFERRED
ARTISTS**
Talent Agency

16633 Ventura Blvd, Suite #4421 Encino, CA 91436 (818) 990-0305

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FIRST DRAFT TELEPLAY

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Star Trek: The Next Generation

Honors Pending

TEASER

FADE IN:

1. INT. -- RECREATION ROOM

Several of the off-duty crew are there, pursuing various entertainment activities, including ENSIGN HERRERA, who is at a table, talking with another crewman, ENSIGN BROWN, a friend from the academy. They are playing some sort of game while they talk. Herrera is a lively, warm, personable man.

BROWN

I still can't believe all of us got to stay together after graduation.

HERRERA

And on the Enterprise, too. I can't wait to start putting all this training to work. And did you hear that Mark is on an Away Team right now?

BROWN

Already? How did he swing that?

HERRERA

Luck. He's assigned to sensor mapping, and since this planet has such a weird electrical field around it, they have to go down to the planet to do their surveys.

BROWN

I thought you were in sensor mapping too.

HERRERA

Yeah, but I wasn't on duty. I told you: luck!

BROWN

You and Mark both seem always to be in the right place at the right time. Don't worry, you'll get your turn.

HERRERA

Oh, I'm not worried -- that's one thing I have over Mark: I'm patient.

The crewman chuckles and nods knowingly.

2. INT. -- BRIDGE

All is calm and quiet. PICARD is at his station attending to routine matters. LA FORGE is at the Engineering Station, DATA is at Ops, WESLEY CRUSHER is at Conn. Riker, Troi and Worf are not present. Other ND crewmembers fill as necessary. We close in on Picard as he reviews orders and performs various routine functions.

PICARD

(voice over)

Captain's Log, Stardate 44xxx.3. While on a routine mapping survey of the unexplored Semarian solar system, electrical storms on the surface of the third planet are interfering with sensors. The First Officer is leading an Away Team to investigate, perform on-scene mapping, and gather samples.

An ND crewman brings Picard something to sign. He starts to look at it, but he is interrupted by an ALARM at the Ops console, followed almost immediately by ENSIGN CURTIS' slightly DISTORTED VOICE from the planet's surface. Data and Crusher instantly snap their attention to their consoles.

ENSIGN CURTIS' INTERCOM VOICE

Enterprise! Emergency! Beam us up now!

The crew is now in full action, checking sensors and supporting as needed. Picard, knowing his crew is trained to respond, monitors and coordinates.

PICARD

Transporter Room!

TRANSPORTER CHIEF'S INTERCOM VOICE

Transporter room; energizing.

3. INT. -- TRANSPORTER ROOM

The Chief is beaming up the Team, but something is wrong; the beam isn't forming. An ALARM sounds on his console too.

TRANSPORTER CHIEF
(to intercom)
Bridge! Transporter
synchronization failure; I don't
have them! Engineering -- give me
a hand!

4. INT. BRIDGE -- CLOSE ON LA FORGE

At the Engineering Station. He rapidly manipulates circuits to support the beam-up.

LA FORGE
(to intercom)
Stabilized! Try again now!

TRANSPORTER CHIEF'S INTERCOM VOICE
Repolarizing... energizing....

5. INT. BRIDGE -- BACK TO MASTER

A beat or two while we wait for final word from the transporter room, then

TRANSPORTER CHIEF'S INTERCOM VOICE
Bridge: I've got them!

All are quite obviously relieved. Picard rises and heads for his Ready Room.

PICARD
Mr Data: you have the Conn. I'll
be in my Ready Room. Ask Commander
Riker to join me when he arrives.

Data acknowledges as Picard leaves the Bridge.

TRANSPORTER CHIEF'S INTERCOM VOICE
Dr Crusher to Transporter Room 3.

Wesley looks to Data at hearing this. We hold on his reaction as we

FADE OUT

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

6. INT. -- READY ROOM

Picard is at his desk, tending to routine duties. A cup of steaming tea sits near his hand. The bell rings; Riker enters. In closeups, we can see some red marks on Riker's neck from his encounter on the planet.

RIKER
Reporting as ordered, sir.

Picard finishes his task, then looks up at his next-in-command.

PICARD
Have a seat.

While Riker moves toward the chair, Picard takes a sip of his tea.

PICARD
(continuing)
I'd like a preview of your report.

Riker pauses; noting Picard's tea, he gives Picard a questioning look. Picard catches it immediately, and is accommodating.

PICARD
By all means.

Riker moves to the panel.

RIKER
(to panel)
Coffee: Riker's Blend.

A mug appears. Riker takes it and sits. He takes a long drag from his coffee, gives a satisfied look, and starts his report.

RIKER

It was quite routine, actually. Geologist Coles was taking his samples, I was surveying the area, Ensign Curtis was with me, Worf was checking the perimeter. I noticed some interesting sand formations, and they were moving -- or at least I thought I saw some movement, but there was no wind. When I stepped closer to investigate, a tentacle reached out of the sand and grabbed me.

PICARD

(reacting)

I thought sensors showed no sign of life forms on this planet.

RIKER

That's what I thought, too. Apparently, the unusual mineral content of the sand shields it from sensors. Even tricorders showed no sign of it. Whatever it is, it doesn't live on the surface -- it lives under it.

Picard takes another sip of tea.

PICARD

Hm. Go on.

RIKER

I was completely entwined by several tentacles. I had absolutely no chance to fight; I was being dragged into the sand.

Picard is now almost leaning forward in his chair, but Riker pauses to take another long drag from his coffee.

RIKER

I was as good as dead, but Ensign Curtis dove right in, Captain; he was there in an instant. (beat) One tentacle was around my neck -- I didn't even have the chance to call for help.

Riker pulls at his tunic a little to more clearly show the marks, which Picard notices for the first time.

RIKER
(continuing)

He got me untangled and pulled me to safety. There is no question that he saved my life, and he did it at extreme risk to himself.

Picard settles back into his chair again and considers this over another sip of tea.

PICARD
It sounds like his action is worthy of a Red Cluster.

RIKER
No, sir, better than that: if you had been there and saw what he did... he nearly went down too. I believe the conditions for a Blue Cluster have been met. I will formally request it in my report.

Picard gives a nod -- he agrees. He finishes his tea.

PICARD
I understand there was an injury.

RIKER
Yes sir -- Curtis was slightly hurt in the incident. He's in sick bay now.

7. INT. -- SICK BAY

ENSIGN CURTIS is on a treatment bed. His uniform is filthy and torn, his face dirty. DR CRUSHER is tending to his ankle. At one point, he gasps in pain, but she doesn't stop.

CRUSHER
Sorry.

Picard and Riker enter. Crusher looks up briefly, but continues her work.

PICARD
How is he doing, doctor?

DR CRUSHER

He broke his ankle in two places;
fairly painful, but there won't be
any permanent disability.

PICARD

Fine.

(beat; to Curtis)

Commander Riker tells me you saved
his life.

CURTIS

I didn't do anything anyone else
wouldn't have done, sir.

RIKER

Captain, it was his first Away
mission.

PICARD

Indeed. You were trained well,
Ensign. (beat) Commander Riker
has put you in for a Blue Cluster.
I have concurred, and Starfleet has
approved. A ceremony will be
scheduled shortly after our arrival
at Starbase 83 tomorrow.

CURTIS

Thank you, sir...

(he nods to Riker)

And thank you, Commander...

(back to Picard)

But that is not necessary. I just
did what had to be done.

PICARD

Yes; that's what these awards are
for, Ensign: doing your job, but
getting extraordinary results.

Picard turns to look at Riker, and gently pushes him toward
Crusher.

PICARD

(to Crusher)

And here's your next patient,
doctor.

Riker starts to protest, but Picard doesn't let him.

RIKER
I don't --

PICARD
(to Crusher, with a wink)
He's been necking with the aliens.

Riker gives him a look; Crusher and Curtis try to hide their smiles. Picard turns to leave. Dr Crusher finishes up her work on Curtis' ankle.

DR CRUSHER
(ordering)
There. Now you keep off this for a couple of hours.
(she turns to Riker)
Let's have a look at this.

She turns him around and tugs at the neck of his tunic.

8. INT. -- TRANSPORTER ROOM

The Transporter Chief and La Forge are tearing into the equipment, trying to figure out what went wrong earlier. Picard enters.

PICARD
Have you found the problem, Commander?

LA FORGE
Not yet. Diagnostics report no anomalies. It just lost synchronization, then polarity, during the last transport. I can't see what would have caused it. Everything checks out fine so far.

A beat while Picard thinks about this.

PICARD
I noticed that Curtis had a lot of dust on his uniform. There are some unusual mineral combinations on the planet.

LA FORGE
I've already ruled that out.

PICARD
Keep on it.

Picard turns to leave. He turns back when La Forge speaks.

LA FORGE

Captain: Ensign Curtis has offered to assist. His specialty in the Academy was transporter engineering. Another hand would be helpful.

PICARD

Where is he assigned now?

LA FORGE

Sensor mapping section.

PICARD

Arrange a temporary transfer.

Picard continues out the door; La Forge goes back to work on the console.

9. INT. -- TEN FORWARD LOUNGE

A typical setup; nothing special happening. A number of crewmembers are at tables eating or drinking, having conversations. Ensign Curtis enters. Someone notices him and starts to applaud. Soon, the entire room is giving him an ovation -- part in admiration, and part in jest. A crewwoman wraps her arms around him, giving "our hero" (ad lib) a kiss on the cheek -- to cat calls and cheers; Curtis is extremely embarrassed. Several people call out:

A CREWMAN

Buy you a drink, hero?

CURTIS

Hey... I'm still just Mark Curtis, Starfleet Ensign --

ANOTHER CREWMAN

(interrupting)

-- who can take his choice of duty assignments!

General good-natured laughter, and more ad lib "hero" declarations from the crowd. Curtis steps up to the bar, still embarrassed, and things begin to quiet down. Curtis is bewildered by the attention he is getting. GUINAN steps up.

GUINAN

Sounds like you've had a busy day.

CURTIS

I don't know what they expect from me.

GUINAN

They expect you to be the person that they want to be. Being a hero can be pretty heady.

CURTIS

I don't think I'm a hero.

GUINAN

Maybe, but they think you are. Let them have their fun. You should have fun with this too, but don't get too caught up in it.

CURTIS

It feels pretty strange.

GUINAN

There are worse ways to attract attention.

Curtis smiles -- this is true.

CURTIS

Thanks. I'll see if I can live up to their image of me.

GUINAN

(a beat)

Can I get you something to fit this new image of yours?

CURTIS

Something to eat. I haven't had a chance yet....

He looks around the room; many are looking at him.

CURTIS

(continuing, to himself)

Well, what do heroes eat, anyway?

Curtis considers this while Guinan waits for a decision.

CURTIS

How about something I've never had before.

GUINAN

One repast of new heros, coming up.

Guinan steps back and starts to get something for him. Curtis' communicator beeps.

RIKER'S COMMUNICATOR VOICE

Lt Worf, Geologist Coles, Ensign
Herrera: report to Transporter Room
3 for Away Team duty. Ensign
Curtis: report to Transporter Room
3 for transporter duty.

CURTIS

(to communicator)

Curtis, acknowledged.

(to Guinan)

uh... can I have that to go?

Guinan hands him an interesting looking hand-held blue-colored meal. He heads for the door, interrupted here and there by handshakes and more greetings to the "hero". He is starting to like it a bit.

10. INT. -- TRANSPORTER ROOM

Curtis arrives and relieves the Chief on duty. La Forge is closing the panel, finished with his inspection. The Chief sees what Curtis has in his hand.

TRANSPORTER CHIEF

Hey, is that fresh delft?

Curtis looks down at what is in his hand -- he hasn't even taken a bite yet. Riker, Worf, GEOLOGIST COLES and Ensign Herrera arrive; Curtis decides he won't have a chance at eating, and hands the "delft" to the appreciative Chief, who leaves for his break.

RIKER

Is the Transporter working, or do we go down on a shuttlecraft?

LA FORGE

I'm not sure what the problem was. At first, I thought it was the electrical field on the planet, but everything is working fine now -- several test transports of cargo went without a hitch. Whatever it was, it's gone now.

RIKER

That's reassuring, but I'd like the system analyzed thoroughly. Keep working on it until you figure out what the glitch was.

LA FORGE

There are a few things I'll be checking up on.

11. SCENE -- CLOSE ON CURTIS AND HERRERA

Riker and La Forge continue to talk in the BG as we come close on Curtis and Herrera, who approaches Curtis at the console. Herrera unholsters his tricorder and smiles.

HERRERA

Hey, Mark: I finally get to use one of these for real!

CURTIS

Your first Away Team mission.
(grinning)
Break a leg!

HERRERA

Yeah. Let's see if I can come back with a Blue Cluster!

They laugh for a moment. Curtis touches Herrera's shoulder, getting serious for a moment.

CURTIS

Be careful down there buddy; it's weird.

Herrera appreciates this, but he is still in a jovial, trusting mood.

HERRERA

I'll do my best. But hey: I have a certified hero up here watching over me.

Curtis looks at him reassuringly, then smiles.

CURTIS

Don't you worry about a thing.

12. SCENE -- BACK TO MASTER

Riker finishes with La Forge in the BG, and turns to the Away Team as a whole.

RIKER

Ok. Let's head out. Let's get what we need, and get out of there. Mr Curtis: keep an eye on us.

Curtis is now thoroughly enjoying this extra attention.

CURTIS

Yes sir.

The Team steps to the pads.

RIKER

Energize.

Curtis beams them to the surface.

13. SCENE -- CLOSE ON CURTIS

Curtis monitors the Away Team with sensors. We look over his shoulder to see the tactical display. It is a simple two-dimensional topographic map. A blip marks each Team member -- they are reasonably close together, but are starting to move away from each other. Things are quiet for a moment, but suddenly a red blip (with accompanying WARNING SOUNDS) appears, marked "Unknown/Hostile", near one of the Away Team blips. Curtis sees this immediately, and reacts with horror -- it is the sand creature. Without hesitation, he immediately begins a beam-up of the Team member near the hostile. He glances toward the intercom.

CURTIS

Bridge! Trouble on the planet!
Beaming up now!

14. SCENE -- REVERSE ANGLE

With the pad behind us, we watch Curtis as he works. He taps commands into the panel furiously to initiate the beam-up, but something is wrong. The ALARM SOUNDS.

CURTIS

Damn!

15. INT. -- BRIDGE

Picard, Wesley and Data are at their usual stations; all are very busy, trying to figure out what the problem is.

CURTIS' INTERCOM VOICE

Bridge, transporter room!
Synchronization failure -- I've
lost polarization!

PICARD

(to intercom)

Commander La Forge, report to
transporter room 3.

(to Data)

Mr Data --

Picard motions toward the Engineering Station; Data, understanding what Picard wants, immediately steps up to the Station to support the beam-up.

DATA

The field is unstable.

16. INT. -- TRANSPORTER ROOM

Reverse angle, as before. Curtis works frantically to recapture the beam. Finally, he does, and he smiles -- he did it! We hear the materialization, but Curtis' face drops to a blank -- he can't believe his eyes. La Forge comes running in to assist; seeing the pad, he stops short.

LA FORGE

(quietly)

Oh, god...

FADE OUT

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

17. INT. -- BRIDGE

Picard has been monitoring the situation. No one is yet sure what is happening. Data steps away from the Engineering Station.

DATA
Materialization is complete.
However, --

RIKER'S COMMUNICATOR VOICE
(interrupting)
Enterprise, this is Riker. There's no problem down here, we're well out of reach of the sand creature. Send Herrera back down.

PICARD
(to intercom)
On his way, Number One.
(he punches a button on his console)
Transporter Room: send Ensign Herrera back to the planet, Riker's coordinates.

A beat; Picard is about to repeat.

LA FORGE'S INTERCOM VOICE
(sober)
Captain, I think you better come down here... Herrera is dead.

Picard reacts. He stands.

PICARD
Mr Data: with me please.

Data follows him into the turbo lift.

18. INT. -- TRANSPORTER ROOM

A medical crew is removing a covered, shapeless mass from the pad. La Forge is working the panel; Curtis is sitting nearby -- on the floor or other handy spot -- staring out blankly. Picard and Data arrive.

PICARD
Lieutenant: what happened?

LA FORGE
Diagnostics still check clear,
Captain. I'm downloading all
computer logs; I'll do my best to
track this down.

PICARD
I still don't trust it; take the
transporters off line until you
figure this out.

(he turns to Data)
Mr Data: take a shuttlecraft and
pick up the Away Team -- I don't
want them down there without a
quick way out.

DATA
Aye sir.

Data leaves. Picard steps over to Curtis, who is obviously
crushed.

PICARD
Mr Curtis. Why don't you... get
started on your report. We'll need
to know what happened here.

Curtis looks up, as if realizing for the first time the
Captain is there. Despite events, he is well trained; he
stands, grateful for his orders to do something.

CURTIS
(quietly)
Yes, sir. Right away.

Curtis stands, looks at the now-empty pad for a moment, and
heads for the door.

19. INT. -- HALLWAY

Outside the Transporter Room. Curtis comes through the
door. Ensign Brown, walking down the corridor, sees him and
swings close, putting his arm on Curtis' shoulder.

BROWN
Hey! How's the Ship Hero?

Curtis stops short, a look of horror comes on his face as he slowly comes to understand the meaning of the words. He shoves Brown's arm off his own and runs off, leaving his perplexed friend behind.

20. EXT. -- PLANET SURFACE

It is rocky and sandy. Riker is standing alone, on top of a large group of rocks, he finishes his communications with the ship.

RIKER
(to communicator)
Understand. We'll scout out a
landing area. Riker out.
(calling out)
Worf! Coles!

Worf and Coles, who had been scouting the near vicinity, scramble up to him.

RIKER
The transporter is down. Herrera didn't make it. We'll be stuck here for a good 15 minutes until a shuttlecraft arrives. In the meantime, we need to find a clear spot where it can land to pick us up. We'll have to be careful to stay out of reach of the sand creature.

Worf has his tricorder out. He scans the area, and finds what he is looking for.

WORF
There's a clearing about 200 meters in this direction.

Coles also has his tricorder out.

COLES
I did get a reading on the creature during its last appearance. I can set up an alert system so the tricorder will warn us if the creature appears.

RIKER
Do it.

He makes the necessary adjustments. The team sets out. They hike over the landscape, avoiding sandy areas. At one point, while high on a rock, Riker points.

RIKER
Over there!

They look at the sand, which is moving -- something underneath. Worf pulls out his phaser. At the moment a tentacle reaches out, Coles' tricorder SOUNDS AN ALERT. The tentacle reaches up, but the Team is far enough away. Worf holsters his phaser and looks at his tricorder.

WORF
80 meters, around these rocks.

The Team moves on. At one point, they must drop down close to the sand. As before, Coles' tricorder starts its ALERT BEEPING. The Team takes defensive postures toward all sandy positions near them -- where is it? They look around, but see nothing. They start to move on to get further from the sand. Suddenly, whipping up from below, a tentacle lashes around Coles' ankle, jerks him off his feet and starts to drag him toward the sand. His tricorder goes flying and lands in the sand. In a flash, Worf has his phaser out, fires and neatly severs the tentacle half a meter below Coles' foot. The tentacle goes limp and falls off his ankle. Riker grabs Coles' arm and quickly pulls him to his feet, and up toward a safer position. Worf keeps his phaser at the ready, watching for more tentacles. They look out to the tricorder, lying in the sand. It gets pulled under, the BEEPING STOPS as it goes down.

COLES
That was a close one.

RIKER
Let's keep moving, it can't be much farther.

They come around the rock, look up and see a flat area of rock. They step to the middle; Riker touches his communicator.

RIKER
Riker to shuttlecraft: we have found a good landing area.

DATA'S COMMUNICATOR VOICE
I have you on sensors, Commander.

21. EXT. -- ENTERPRISE

Orbiting the planet.

22. STOCK SHOT

The shuttlecraft comes in to dock.

PICARD

Captain's log, supplemental. Our earlier troubles with the transporter continue, leaving one of my new officers dead. The rest of the Away Team has returned safely.

23. INT. -- READY ROOM

Close on Picard at his desk. As we widen, we see Riker standing before the desk. He is angry, but is not sure who to take it out on. Picard motions for Riker to sit, and gives him a moment to cool off.

RIKER

I don't like coming back from an Away Team mission without my full crew!

PICARD

Ensign Curtis took it upon himself to initiate action. While the result was obviously a disaster, I will not judge his actions until I hear what he has to say in the matter. I sent him to write his report; he clearly needed something to do besides watching them remove the body.

This calms Riker more; he hadn't expected this. He obviously is filled with mixed emotions.

RIKER

Curtis? (a beat) damn.

24. INT. -- CURTIS' QUARTERS

Curtis is at his desk, looking at photos of his academy days on his viewer. Curtis, Herrera, and Brown are pictured, along with some others. He is not working on his report. He is clearly despondent. His bell rings. He doesn't hear it. It rings again. He turns off the viewer and looks up.

CURTIS

Come.

Troi enters. Curtis is not happy to see her.

TROI

Hello, Mark. I --

CURTIS

(sharply, interrupting)

Thanks all the same, Counselor: I don't think I need any of your sensitive psychological help right now.

Troi stiffens.

TROI

Perhaps; perhaps not, but that's not why I'm here, Ensign. Others have duties in this matter also. I have a report to write on Ensign Herrera. I thought you, as his best friend, could provide some information.

Curtis is taken aback. He sinks back into his chair.

CURTIS

(quietly)

His best friend, the hero....

25. INT. -- READY ROOM

As before. Picard and Riker still discussing things.

RIKER

What about his Blue Cluster?

Troi enters, but holds back for an opening.

PICARD

Unless his later actions prove to be negligent, he will still get his decoration. What happened in the transporter room does not change earlier events on the planet.

RIKER

Agreed. However, even if it is found that his actions were completely proper, he won't be able to help feeling extreme guilt. The ceremonious award presentation won't help that any.

PICARD

True, but that is part of being a Starfleet officer; he must take the experience and learning and go on, no matter how difficult a teacher the experience was.

Troi steps in to join the conversation.

TROI

I must agree with Commander Riker. I just saw Curtis; I sensed great turmoil and guilt. I believe some psychological counseling is in order.

PICARD

Counselor, as an officer, Ensign Curtis is entitled to the benefit of the doubt; if he does not request counseling, nor show outward signs of mental distress, it would be improper for you to intrude on him during this crisis.

RIKER

It would be an insult to his honor as an officer to have his abilities and decisions questioned by a psychologist. (beat) He would naturally assume that I ordered the counseling. I hope you didn't say anything when you saw him.

TROI

(defensive)

No! I understand this... tradition. But you must understand my position: I have a responsibility to Starfleet, its protocols and mission, and I have a duty to the command and crew of this ship to ensure that the personnel operate at their highest efficiency. In this situation, these two duties are in conflict!

Riker clearly does not agree.

RIKER

You also have a duty to use your empathic abilities to assist you in your responsibilities, and a duty to not let these abilities allow you to pry into what would normally be the private concerns of a crewmember. Are these two duties also in conflict?

TROI

(exasperated)

This situation is different!

RIKER

(firmly)

It is not different! Unless you have positive evidence that Curtis is not fit for duty, you must allow him to ask for help if he needs it.

Troi knows he is right; she says nothing. A beat.

INTERCOM VOICE

Commander Riker, please report to the bridge.

RIKER

Acknowledged.

He leaves for the bridge without waiting for an answer from Troi. Picard looks up at her with a "what is your decision?" look.

TROI

I'll... be in my quarters.

She turns to leave.

PICARD

Deanna. If you have any concrete concerns about Ensign Curtis' ability to function, I will listen to them. Otherwise, I am inclined to let him come to grips with his actions by himself. If he is successful, he will be a much better officer for it.

TROI

And if he fails, what kind of person will he be? (beat) Thank you, Captain.

She exits while this sinks in.

RIKER'S INTERCOM VOICE

Captain: we have all the planetary information we need; we're ready to leave orbit.

PICARD

Very good, Number One. Set course for Starbase 83.

RIKER

Aye sir.

Picard stands to look at the planet a moment as they break orbit and we

FADE OUT

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

26. EXT. -- ENTERPRISE

In warp, to establish.

27. INT. -- CURTIS' QUARTERS

Curtis is at his desk, reading intently from his communications console. His bell rings. He keeps reading, not looking up.

CURTIS

Come.

Picard enters, waits for Curtis to look up. When he doesn't, Picard speaks.

PICARD

Ensign Curtis.

Curtis, startled, jumps to his feet and stands at attention.

CURTIS

I'm sorry, sir. I decided to look over these reports again.

PICARD

At ease. Sit down.

Curtis cautiously sits at the edge of his chair; Picard sits, leaning back comfortably.

PICARD

We will arrive at Starbase 83 in 18 hours.

Curtis looks surprised; he had assumed that the ceremony was off.

PICARD

(continuing)

The award ceremony for your Blue Cluster is scheduled for 16:00 hours tomorrow. Do you have any questions, such as to protocol or to the formalities of the ceremony? It can be daunting.

CURTIS

(quite flustered)

I... assumed that... after what happened... I... they...

PICARD

The reports on this incident show that there was no gross negligence on your part. What happened was an accident. I believe that you should have followed procedure by waiting for the Away Team to call for help or for Bridge personnel to order a beam-up. But I won't question your action; you have been on the planet and saw how dangerous the creature down there is -- you had to use your judgement and experience to make a decision. What normally would have been a minor error turned out to have tragic consequences.

Curtis considers this for a moment.

CURTIS

"Doing my job, but getting extraordinary results."

The irony of this statement is not lost on Picard.

PICARD

No one is faulting you for what happened. And unless you were guilty of a court-marshalleable offense of negligence -- and you are not -- then your actions do not reflect on your earlier deeds. Therefore, the award ceremony will proceed as planned.

Curtis sees that he must bow to the formality of the situation; to refuse the honor would be defiant. He stiffens.

CURTIS

Thank you, sir. I have no questions of protocol. It's just --

PICARD

(interrupting)

An award such as this reflects not only on the individual, but also on the rest of the crew... and the ship's command. As a Starfleet officer, you do have responsibilities in this matter.

CURTIS

(even more stiffly)

Yes sir. I'll be there.

Picard nods his acknowledgement, and stands to go.

CURTIS

Sir? Request permission to return to the sensor mapping section.

PICARD

No. Finish out this rotation in the transporter room. I'm sure Mr La Forge can use the help.

CURTIS

Yes sir.

28. INT. -- TRANSPORTER ROOM

The Transporter Chief is working on the console. Curtis enters. He is not terribly enthusiastic with his orders.

CURTIS

I'm here to relieve you.

The Chief nods and exits. Curtis is about ready to get to work, but he is a bit warm. He wipes some perspiration from his brow. Before starting to dig in, he decides to get a drink. He steps to the food panel.

CURTIS

(to panel)

Ice water.

The panel beeps and delivers the water. Curtis picks it up and starts to take a drink, but a thought strikes him. He looks at the glass intently. The thought becomes clear -- he smiles excitedly.

CURTIS
(to himself)
Of course!

He steps over to the transporter panel and starts to program the settings.

CURTIS
Computer: retrieve transport image
files for Ensign Herrera.

The computer BEEPS as it pulls up the files. Herrera punches several buttons on the console as he works on the program for the new setup.

COMPUTER VOICE
Warning: check interface.

CURTIS
Computer: maintenance override
alpha.

The computer beeps its acknowledgement; he punches a few more buttons, then energizes the beam. After a long moment, Herrera materializes on the pad.

29. INT. -- READY ROOM

Close on Picard at his desk. He sits bolt upright in his chair, shocked and angry.

PICARD
He what?

30. SCENE -- WIDER

To show Riker and Troi standing in front of Picard's desk.

RIKER
Herrera was one of the last to
successfully transport. Curtis
used the transporter's image files
to recreate and reanimate Herrera.

Picard looks to Troi.

PICARD

I would have considered this a "concrete concern" for you to bring to my attention. I'd have certainly agreed to your intervening with Ensign Curtis if I had known he was this desperate.

TROI

There was no indication he was planning something like this. It seems to have been a spur-of-the-moment notion.

PICARD

(sarcastic)

He seems filled with wonderful off-the-cuff ideas.

RIKER

His Academy profile mentions that he is an independent thinker.

Picard gives him a look.

PICARD

And the "reanimated" Herrera?

RIKER

In Sick Bay.

PICARD

He's not alive?

TROI

We're not sure exactly what the result was, sir, but Curtis did walk him down there.

Picard sighs with frustration and settles back into his chair again.

PICARD

Has anything like this ever been done before?

TROI

Not exactly, sir. As you know, transporters have been used to restore an altered live person back to their original states, but it has never been done with a dead person. It was considered unethical to try, although there have been experiments with animals. (a beat) None came through the process alive.

Picard takes this in. It's time to see for himself.

PICARD

You have the Bridge, Number One. Counselor, will you please accompany me.

31. INT. -- SICK BAY

A concerned Dr Crusher is examining Herrera, who is still in his uniform (including his tricorder), on a diagnostic table. He is restless, sometimes in pain. Picard and Troi arrive; Troi goes to Herrera, bending over him for a close look. Crusher steps over to brief the Captain.

CRUSHER

This man should not be here. Just because we can do something like this doesn't mean we should.

PICARD

I'm the first to agree, doctor, but we do have him. Now what?

CRUSHER

I wouldn't exactly say that we do have him. His body is complete, but his neurological systems are not completely functional.

Troi rejoins Picard and Crusher; she looks deeply troubled after her encounter with Herrera.

PICARD

Counselor, are you all right?

TROI

That was... most disturbing.

CRUSHER

What's wrong?

TROI

He... well, he isn't all there. Much of what I sense as a being is missing in him. If I were to encounter him without knowing his background, I would insist that he isn't human.

PICARD

Do you think this is an alien?

TROI

No. Nothing like that. But he's not fully human, either.

(to Crusher)

I would think your instruments could detect much of what I feel.

CRUSHER

They do. Many of his higher brain functions are simply missing, though the physical structures are intact.

PICARD

Will he live?

CRUSHER

I don't think he'll last long. I can keep the body alive with machines, but for what? His mind will deteriorate to nothing in a few hours.

PICARD

How is he now?

CRUSHER

Not good. His memories are spotty; only the most intense recollections seem to be unimpaired. He knows he is on the Enterprise -- which clearly was a source of pride for him -- but he does not remember most of the people around him.

PICARD

Damn. (a beat) Do what you can to keep him comfortable.

Picard looks around.

PICARD
(continuing)
Where's Curtis?

CRUSHER
I don't know. He left before I had
a chance to ask him any questions.

PICARD
Counselor, perhaps you better find
him. Maybe now he'll welcome your
visit.

Troi acknowledges and exits.

32. INT. -- CURTIS' CABIN

Curtis is sitting slumped at his desk, staring out, doing nothing. His bell rings, but he ignores it. The door slides open; Troi stands in the doorway.

TROI
May I come in?

Curtis looks over, then sits up straighter.

CURTIS
Yes. Please. (beat) I'm glad
it's you.

TROI
The captain is concerned about you.

CURTIS
He should be concerned about
Herrera.

TROI
He is. He's in Sick Bay with him
now.

CURTIS
Is he going to be all right?

TROI
I don't know. Mark, I...

CURTIS

I know. It was stupid. I... I thought I could make up for what happened, but I guess I should have left things well enough alone.

TROI

You can only go so far in cheating death. Certainly this has been thought of before, but it is clearly over the line.

CURTIS

I thought I had done it.

A beat; he brightens, then sinks again as he thinks about what happened:

CURTIS

(continuing)

He was standing there, looking at me. He didn't say anything. He was so confused. (beat) But he could hear me. I told him a few things, and he obviously understood me. I didn't know what was wrong, so I took him to Sick Bay.

Curtis sits back again, lost in thought for a moment. Troi remains silent -- she knows he is still working this out.

CURTIS

(continuing)

All I could think about is, What would a hero do?

Troi reacts to this -- what kind of pressure must he have been under?

TROI

And you thought this is how a hero would handle the situation?

CURTIS

I don't know... I just thought I should do something. I'm not sure how a hero should act.

TROI

I don't know much about how heros
should act either, but I know who
does.

She punches a button on his console.

TROI

(to console)

Computer: locate Mr Worf.

Curtis looks at her with a curious expression and we

FADE OUT

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

33. EXT. -- ENTERPRISE

Still at warp.

34. INT. -- SICK BAY

Close on Herrera as he contracts in pain. Crusher comes to him and applies a neural block to his temple to help ease it. Herrera looks up at Crusher. He is perplexed, but without real emotion. The lively and warm personality evidenced earlier is not evident. He can think, but emotionless; he seems to be a man without a soul.

HERRERA

What's wrong with me? The last thing I remember, I was beaming down to the planet surface with... someone. I --

He catches sight of Picard, who steps into the scene.

HERRERA

(continuing)

Sir! Please tell me. What's going on? Commander... uh... Captain... uh... I'm sorry sir. I can't remember your name. I...

Picard and Crusher look at each other at this; then Herrera remembers something. He is now looking intently at Picard.

PICARD

That's all right, Ensign. Do you --

HERRERA

(interrupting)

The sand creature! Was I attacked? What happened?

CRUSHER

Calm down. We need to run some tests.

He ignores Crusher -- he is locked on Picard. He grabs Picard's arm. He is in control. He stares with emotionless eyes at Picard. It is quite disturbing.

HERRERA

I have a right to know. What happened?

PICARD

You do have a right to know, Ensign. (a beat) You beamed down to the planet with the rest of the Away Team. When the sand creature attacked, you were beamed away before it got to you, but you... (beat) You died in a transporter accident; we were not able to save you.

This sinks in for a moment; Herrera actually calms down a little.

HERRERA

But... I'm not dead. I don't understand. I'm not dead, am I?

PICARD

Well... no. Ensign Curtis was assigned to the Transporter Room later, and got the idea to recreate you from your stored transport image.

Shocked, Herrera lets go of Picard's arm. He sinks back onto the table.

HERRERA

Then this isn't really me! I'm dead! (a beat) Why am I here?

35. INT. -- TEN FORWARD

Wide shot. In the BG, we see Worf and Data at a table near the window, talking. Curtis comes in. He is somewhat disoriented, not sure what he is doing. Many see him, but no one greets him. He looks toward Worf, who noticed him enter and noticed that the crewmen are ignoring him. Worf motions Curtis over to his table. Curtis comes closer.

WORF
(inviting)
Sit down, Ensign Curtis.

Worf signals for a drink for him. He sits on the edge of the chair.

CURTIS
You're sure you want to be seen with me?

WORF
Friends don't abandon each other in time of need or sorrow.

Curtis looks awkward for a moment; the tension is broken when a drink arrives for him. He doesn't touch it.

DATA
Counselor Troi told us to expect you. Can we help you? You appear to be troubled.

Data's bluntness brings Curtis around. He looks to Worf.

CURTIS
I know other crewman have died before. Have you known any of them very well?

WORF
The others who died? Of course.
(a beat) One was a very good friend.

CURTIS
Aren't you bitter over their deaths?

WORF
Bitter? No. They died with honor.

CURTIS
It seems so... senseless.

WORF

The exploration of space is a calling for the bold; the bold are willing to take the risk because the rewards are enormous. Those who die were doing what they wanted to do. To suggest now that they would have chosen a different path because of the risk is to dishonor their memories.

Curtis is silent.

DATA

You did save Commander Riker's life. You should be proud of this action.

CURTIS

(self pitying)

And for that, I'm called a hero. Being a hero didn't help Herrera.

Worf is angry.

WORF

You are not a hero!

Curtis is shocked.

WORF

(continuing)

You can't live up to being a hero because there is no such thing. No one wants to be in a situation where they have to be heroic -- you must simply do what you must do.

DATA

If Starfleet wants to recognize your actions, it is an honor for both you and your shipmates, and you must accept their tribute. But do not make the mistake that so many others do: such honors are a reflection of your training and your character, not a demand that you change yourself to live up to a new standard. If you try to live a life that you didn't want, you will fail.

Worf gives Data an irritated look.

WORF
You should always try to raise your standards, always be on your guard, always be ready to act with honor without expecting reward -- and always be ready to accept honors when they are given to you.

Curtis looks confused for a moment, then makes up his mind and accepts Worf's words.

WORF
(continuing)
We must return to duty. And you: you should be with your shipmate.

CURTIS
(finally decisive)
Yes. I should. Thank you.

They all stand and head out of the lounge.

36. INT. -- SICK BAY

Picard, Troi and Crusher are present. Herrera is still on the bed, still in uniform. He is a little more comfortable. Troi speaks to him.

TROI
How are you feeling?

HERRERA
I don't know. I don't know why I'm here.

TROI
You are ill; you're here for us to help you.

HERRERA
No. I mean why I'm here. I don't know why I should exist. When Captain... uh, ...the Captain, said I was dead, that made sense. Some people say that death is nothingness; others say it's paradise. The nothingness is winning so far.

TROI

We all sometimes wonder why we exist.

HERRERA

I remember. Everyone wants to know the meaning of life. (beat) So now, what's the meaning of death?

Troi has no answer for this, but no matter: Herrera is washed with another wave of pain. Troi steps aside for Crusher, who tries to comfort him with another neural block; it is not very effective. The diagnostic panel starts to fluctuate. Crusher looks up to Picard and Troi.

CRUSHER

He's starting to fade.

Crusher works on him some more, injecting him, trying to stabilize and comfort him with various instruments. Curtis enters Sick Bay and approaches Picard and Troi.

37. SCENE

Close on Picard and Troi -- Curtis joins them and, standing at attention, addresses Picard.

CURTIS

Sir: I present myself for disciplinary action.

Troi is impressed with his thoughtful resolve. Picard raises an eyebrow.

PICARD

Your actions in this matter are covered by ethics and common sense, Ensign, not regulations.

CURTIS

I... suppose that is true, in a strict sense, sir.

PICARD

Do you understand what the problem is?

CURTIS

I shouldn't have acted without orders, sir.

PICARD

The problem is that there is a time for independent thought based on experience, and a time to be part of a team, working in coordination with your superiors. Sometimes it is a fine line, but the line is there, and you better learn where it is.

CURTIS

Yes sir. I understand. I'll do my best not to disappoint you again.

Herrera cries out again in pain.

CRUSHER

(out of scene)

Captain: there's not much time.

Picard indicates to Curtis that he should be the one to be with his friend.

38. SCENE -- CLOSE ON HERRERA AND CURTIS

Curtis steps up and puts a calming hand on Herrera's shoulder.

CURTIS

I'm sorry. I just hoped...

The waves of pain subside. Herrera recognizes Curtis' voice and motions him to lean in closer. Herrera looks at him for a moment, then recalls something. He reaches down and unholsters his tricorder, bringing it up so both can see it. He looks at it, then looks up at Curtis.

HERRERA

Mark? ...I never got... to use... this.

He collapses; the diagnostic panel's indicators drop toward zero. The tricorder falls from his hand and clatters to the floor. After a beat, Picard steps over and picks it up, looking at it while we

FADE OUT

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

FADE IN:

39. INT. -- HALLWAY

Outside Sick Bay. Riker is just arriving when Picard, Troi and Curtis exit Sick Bay.

RIKER
How is it going in there?

TROI
He didn't make it.

PICARD
The real Herrera was never here.

RIKER
Mr La Forge is on his way to the Conference Room: he's ready with the results of his investigation.

PICARD
Good. Why don't we all go.

CURTIS
You're including me, sir?

PICARD
I'm especially including you, Ensign.

40. INT. -- CONFERENCE ROOM

La Forge and Data are already present; a damaged and strangely twisted tricorder is on the table. Picard, Riker, Troi and Curtis arrive and sit.

PICARD
Well, Mr La Forge: what have you found?

LA FORGE

Sir, I have analyzed all computer logs, sensor reports, and transporter systems. Together, they point inescapably to one conclusion: the sand creature is what caused the transporter to malfunction on Semarius-3. The creature has a high-intensity electromagnetic field around it that disrupts all wave patterns in its vicinity -- including transporter beams.

CURTIS

So that's why the transporter worked all the other times when we tested it with cargo!

LA FORGE

Exactly. The creature wasn't around the areas we sent the test transports to. It's the only variable factor.

PICARD

Well done, Mr La Forge.

RIKER

And that?

Riker indicates the damaged tricorder. La Forge picks it up.

LA FORGE

Herrera's tricorder.

RIKER

It wasn't destroyed?

LA FORGE

No. It was severely damaged, as you can see, but I was able to recover most of its data. First: Ensign Herrera was using it almost the entire time he was on the planet surface.

PICARD

Common, on a first Away Team assignment.

LA FORGE

Yes, but it was quite helpful: the readings clearly show that the sand creature was moving in on him from behind -- he didn't see it coming. If Curtis hadn't beamed him away, there is no question that the creature would have gotten him.

Reactions.

CURTIS

He was dead either way....

LA FORGE

There's more. The thing that so caught Herrera's attention was an unusual finding on the planet surface, something that the electrical disturbances shielded from the ship's sensors: large deposits of Trillium 3-2-3.

Data looks at the figures.

DATA

Enormous deposits, and very fine quality. A very valuable find.

Picard and Riker look at each other with amused surprise.

PICARD

Do you think there are any miners who might want to hazard the risks on that planet for high grade Trillium 3-2-3?

RIKER

I should certainly think so!

DATA

We have also found a way to make transports safe with an electromagnetic shield. Computer simulations show that it would be effective even if the creature is within several inches of the beam.

PICARD

Excellent. I look forward to your complete report.

In the Conference Room windows in the BG, we see the ship come out of warp. The intercom beeps.

WESLEY'S INTERCOM VOICE
Sir, we are arriving at Starbase 83.

PICARD
Very good, Mr Crusher. Standard orbit.

41. EXT. -- ENTERPRISE

Orbiting Starbase 83; to establish.

PICARD
Captain's log, supplemental. As incident reports indicate no gross negligence on Ensign Curtis' part in the death of Ensign Herrera, the ceremony to award him the Blue Cluster for his actions in saving the life of the First Officer will proceed as scheduled at 16:00 hours.

42. INT. -- STARBASE RECEPTION AREA

The reception area is small and very formal. The award ceremony is about to begin. Picard and Riker are alone on a small dais. Data, La Forge, Troi, Worf and several ND crewmember extras are sitting in a small audience. All are in their dress uniforms.

RIKER
Are you sure he's going to show up?

PICARD
I did speak with him. He understands the importance of this; he'll be here.

RIKER
I'm sure this will be difficult for him. He saw his best friend die twice.

Picard raises an eyebrow.

PICARD

It's always difficult when someone close dies. Ah -- here he is.

The doors slide open and Curtis enters and takes his place on the podium. The Starbase's ADMIRAL enters, signaling the start of the ceremony -- Curtis and Riker snap to attention. The Admiral steps onto the dais. He is holding a small presentation case which is inscribed on the lid.

ADMIRAL

Welcome to Starbase 83. It is not often that I have the honor of presenting such an award. The Blue Cluster was first given more than 200 years ago. It recognizes the heroic actions of Starfleet personnel in saving the lives of their comrades. Today, Ensign Markus Lawrence Curtis joins an elite group of exceptional men and women.

The admiral hands the presentation case to Picard.

PICARD

Thank you, admiral.

Picard takes the presentation case and reads the inscription to the assembled audience.

PICARD

(continuing)

"While on a survey mission on the planet Semarius-3 on Stardate 44xxx.37, Markus Lawrence Curtis, a commissioned Starfleet ensign, at great risk to himself, saved the life of Commander William Riker."

The audience rises as one and comes to attention. Picard opens the presentation case -- we see the Blue Cluster inside -- and hands it to Curtis. Per protocol, Curtis says nothing; he takes the award and continues to stand at attention.

PICARD
(continuing)
Ensign Curtis, you have brought
honor upon yourself, your rank, and
your shipmates.
(he turns back to the audience)
We thank you for witnessing this
honor. Dismissed.

The audience breaks up; most leave the reception area. The officers on the dais stand at ease. The admiral shakes Curtis' hand.

ADMIRAL
Congratulations, son.

The Admiral turns to Picard, and shakes his hand.

ADMIRAL
(continuing)
It was good to see you again, Jean
Luc. Keep up the good work.

PICARD
Thank you, Admiral. Until next
time.

The admiral steps from the dais and leaves. It is Curtis' first chance to look at his award. He gazes at it for a moment, then closes the presentation case.

RIKER
I have a table reserved in Ten
Forward. May I buy you both a
drink?

43. INT. -- TEN FORWARD

Data, Troi, and Worf already have a table near the window. Several people greet Curtis as he, Picard and Riker make their way to the table. Drinks are being set down.

RIKER
Captain, may I have the privilege
of making the first toast?

PICARD
As the primary beneficiary of
Ensign Curtis' actions, I think it
is your duty as well as your right.

Riker stands and lifts his glass.

RIKER
To Ensign Curtis; may your career
be long and rewarding.

All except Curtis stand; all drink. Curtis stands to
deliver his own toast.

CURTIS
To Ensign Herrera; may he never be
forgotten.

Enthusiastic ad hoc agreement all around; they all drink
again. At another table, we see Ensign Brown waving at
Curtis. There are several other friendly faces.

PICARD
Would you like to join your
friends, Ensign?

CURTIS
Yes; thank you sir.

Curtis steps over to the other table, where he is greeted
warmly.

RIKER
You would think, with all our
technology, that we could bring
someone back to life.

PICARD
I think it's just as well that we
can't. Where would it end? Life
would end up with little meaning.

DATA
I am not sure that I agree.

All suddenly stop and turn to look at him.

DATA
I am not explicitly alive, but my
existence has meaning to me.

TROI
Philosophers have debated the
meaning of life for centuries. It
doesn't look like the questions
will get any less complicated
anytime soon.

WORF

(indicating Curtis)

In looks like Ensign Curtis' life
is getting less complicated. He is
not so troubled now.

RIKER

No, I think he's come out of this
one all right.

Picard takes a sideward glance at Troi.

PICARD

And he's a better officer for it.

Troi smiles.

44. EXT. -- TEN FORWARD'S WINDOWS

We look in through the picture windows as Picard leaves the
table. The ship pulls away from us as we

FADE OUT

THE END

