

A Day in the Life of a Maquis

by Beverly Lightheart

"Status report!"

"Heavy damage to the port thrusters. We're losing altitude fast. We're going to crash. I repeat, we're going to crash!"

Thick billows of smoke wafted through the sky, indicating either a forest fire, or some ship's having crashed in the foliage below. Birds and animals scattered as poisonous fumes billowed out from the damaged three-seat fighter, with a few of them staggering and falling dead where they lay. A hiss and a snap followed as the ship's hatch was pushed open, and a greasy burned uniform attached to an equally greasy man rolled out of the ship. With a heavy thud he hit the ground, cushioned only by the thin grass which dotted the ground. The grass was dying too.

At least nature was kind in leaving the man to wallow in his misery, the only comfort he had due to a cracked rib and a bleeding hand. He knew he needed to get out of there, to get medical attention, and to find some sort of shelter before the sky rained down on him. But what was there to expect on a world that held no civilization of any kind? There had to be hope, he thought, some sort of hope to survive this situation. At least he was lucky. Many of his comrades blowing up in the sky were not. Neither were the two still in the fighter, being nothing more than burned corpses. As he hauled himself to his feet, he took a last look inside the fighter, and regretted it instantly. They were his closest friends, and had fought with him the past two years. He paid homage to them with a few silent words, before he trekked away from the wreckage.

Attached to his makeshift uniform was a belt, carrying emergency devices in case he was captured or stranded. But he could use none of them, for up in orbit a Cardassian warship loomed overhead. No doubt they'd be storming the planet looking for survivors, if they even cared. They were probably still busy shooting his comrades. A sour expression crossed his face as he thought of the death count that day, and he vowed to seek revenge for his brothers--if he ever got off the planet.

He blundered along a while, having cleared the wreckage of the downed fighter by half a mile, before it occurred to him that he had absolutely no idea where he was headed. The sun was high in the sky, peeking through the dense foliage of the trees, but it wouldn't stay there forever. He had a few hours at best before night fell and animals prowled their domain. No doubt he was leaving a tasty scent in the air as he walked, and he didn't fancy being some misshapen bear's dinner. And yet what could he do but walk? The forest was no different in either direction, and he had just as much chance reaching civilization one way as he did another--which was none at all, but that was a minor detail.

By the time he cleared the forest, he was exhausted. His injuries had taken their toll on him and he collapsed near a tree trunk to rest, quite possibly never to get up again. The sun was still visible in the sky, but it was much lower, and within minutes it would dip beyond the horizon. Already he could hear strange sounds in the nearby bushes and trees, and didn't dare turn his head lest he see some horrible creature. His hand went to the beacon at his belt, and he fumbled with the switch as he debated whether to activate it. But he instantly decided against it. Even being eaten by a creature was better than being tortured to death by the Cardassians.

Just as he was settling back for the night, his eyes caught a glimpse of a thin wisp of smoke in the sky. For a moment he was unsure of himself. Had he gone in circles and come right back to where his ship had crashed? Had he done all that walking for nothing? Then another thought entered his mind: perhaps there was someone living on the planet after all! The smoke wasn't coming from between the trees; it was coming from beyond a hill. He quickly hauled himself to his feet, wincing as a sharp pain moved through his side, and began staggering in that direction. The sky dimmed as the sun began its quick descent, and he hurried up the hill as fast as his body

could handle. Already his vision was beginning to blur, and he found himself stumbling and leaping awkwardly to keep himself from falling. He felt like his body would give out at any moment, and he told himself to take another step. Just one more step, and he'd soon find help.

His last step took him to a stone and he tripped, falling onto the pebble-studded incline and rolling down. Down, down, down he rolled, until he had smacked into the side of a tree. He was rewarded with a bonk on the head by an apple, and as he stared at it, he wondered what apples were doing here this far from Earth. Torn between taking the apple and getting back up, he decided to do both, and used the poor fruit as leverage to get to his hands and knees. His body shook as he looked up, spotting a small cottage between waves of fog and dizziness. He could see movement through the window and he opened his mouth to call out. But no words came; not even a whisper left his lips as he pitched forward. The apple rolled from his hand as he hit the ground, an uneasy darkness filling his head. Then there was nothing.

He had not expected to ever wake up again, but the warm smells of apple pie and meaty chili brought him to. His eyes flickered open to regard a homey-looking living room furnished with rich brown tables and decorated with paintings. Confusion filled him as he wondered whether he was in heaven, but he recalled no memory of arriving at the gates. It had been a long time since he'd blacked out near the house though, that part he was sure of. He idly wondered if he had reached the house before he passed out, as he studied one of the hanging pictures. It looked to be some child's drawing, almost stick-like in fashion with crazy brush strokes. Did a child live here?

His question was soon answered by running footsteps, and a small olive-skinned girl of about six appeared in the doorway. She looked warily at him, then ran back into the room he guessed to be the kitchen. "Mom, the strange man is awake!" he heard her say, followed by mumbling as another voice answered, presumably the mother.

While they conversed, he took the time to look over his appearance. He still wore his brown uniform, but his hand had been carefully wrapped in a bandage. Spotting a hand mirror on a nearby end table, he studied his face, noting the lack of grease and a small strip of cloth taped to his forehead, covering a wound he hadn't realized he'd had. It seemed the mysterious woman in the kitchen and her daughter had taken care of him while he had been unconscious. How long had he been out? An hour? A day? A week?

Then the mysterious woman came in and his eyebrows lifted in surprise. His blue eyes met her calm brown ones as they studied each other, neither of them saying a word as they took in each other's appearance. "Maria," he finally spoke, his voice coming out a little hoarse. "I didn't know you lived here. I didn't know anyone lived here." Maria looked barely a few years older than when he had last seen her, and still was incredibly young and pretty, with her dark hair framing her almost-as-dark face.

"And I didn't know you were with the Maquis." Her voice was cold as she tossed his pocket book to him. He glanced at the ID that displayed his name, Dack Hardeen, and his picture which showed him in his late twenties while, in reality, he was in his early thirties with short black hair and blue eyes. He was just a fighter pilot fighting the good cause. That was no reason to be mad at him.

"Yes, I am," Dack answered evenly, before clearing his throat. "In fact I was just shot down by the Cardassians...could you get me some water please?"

Despite her cold attitude and obvious annoyance with him, Maria did as he asked and brought him a glass of water that was cool and soothing on his parched throat. Setting it down against his chest, he took a slow and labored breath before he spoke again. "It's been a long time since the Academy...where did you go after that?"

"I married a lieutenant, we left Starfleet, and with a group of others we looked for a suitable place

where nobody would bother us. Brought some seeds from home to raise fruits and vegetables. That's where this comes from," she said, holding up an apple that had been sitting on the table. "That and Super Grow." She set the apple down and looked square at him, her cold demeanor slipping back in. "You should eat something before you go back to your *'friends'*." She turned on her heel and went back into the kitchen, and Dack could hear the clinking of all manner of plates and silverware.

"Hey, I left Starfleet too!" he hollered after, then winced as his rib throbbed with pain. "You don't see me scorning you!"

"I didn't join the Maquis!" she hollered back, followed by more clinking as she reappeared with a plate of food. "Nothing but a group of terrorists! Here, eat." She set the plate down on the coffee table in front of him, and he begrudgingly rolled forward so he could sit up and eat. The food on the plate looked delicious and he couldn't wait to dig in to the chili and apple pie.

"That's not true," he retorted once he'd caught his breath. "We're fighting for our freedom, fighting the Cardassians that have invaded our home worlds."

"They didn't invade, the Federation gave them those worlds in exchange for theirs."

"The Federation had no right to give them those worlds!" he shouted, then winced as a surge of pain went through his side. "The Federation signed us over in a so-called peace treaty," he continued in a lower voice. "But do the Cardassians observe it? No. They arm their citizens in the demilitarized zone with military-grade weapons, and build secret warships in hiding. All that happened in this *'treaty'* is that the Cardassians got a few more planets."

"If all that were true, then you should be giving your proof to the Federation. Not taking matters into your own hands and blowing up stuff."

"The Federation abandoned us. They turn a blind eye to what's going on and chase after us because our presence threatens their peace treaty. Never mind what the Cardassians are up to. They're afraid of another war; never mind what happens to their citizens."

She sighed as she turned towards the kitchen. "I'm not going to get into this," she said as she disappeared into the kitchen. Dack sighed in frustration as well, stabbing at his food and chewing it forcefully. It was good, even excellent. She had always been a good cook, and he regretted not having asked her to marry him. But as they could never agree on politics, it would only lead to a marriage full of fighting...like they were doing now.

"Where's your husband?" he hollered through a mouthful of food.

"He died," came the solemn response. She appeared again through the doorway, this time with her daughter as she carried plates of food into an adjoining dining room. "He was out hunting for food and a cat-like creature got him for dinner instead." Silence filled the air as she served out their food, and the two said grace. "But we manage," she continued with a deep breath. "I have friends who come over here and help any time we need it."

Dack nodded just as solemnly, though his mind went back to their academy days. Now that her husband was dead, he would have a shot at her again...if they weren't busy arguing over the Federation and Cardassians. In her mind she thought him a traitor and that bugged him. Never mind that, he thought as he stuck his spoon upright in the chili. "So hang on, you and your husband, and others came to settle this world. This world is in Cardassian space."

"It wasn't at the time. Then they redrew the borders, but we weren't about to move. Given the harsh atmosphere for Cardassians, they probably never thought it worth much to properly colonize. They have a small compound over there," she indicated toward the west window with a

nod of her head and a point of her finger. "But they never bother us."

"That sounds dangerous," Dack remarked. "At any time they could storm through here and kill you and your..." he paused as he looked at Maria's daughter, and cleared his throat. "Anyway...you seem to be in the same boat as we are."

She snorted. "We don't go killing Cardassians for breakfast. We have a device that scatters our life signs so we don't exist to them on a tricorder scan. They don't know we exist; they don't bother us; we don't bother them, and we're both happy."

"That could change," he said slowly. "My ship crashed in the forest over there. No doubt they'll come looking for me if they think one Maquis escaped."

She stiffened at his words. "If that is the case, then we'll hide out. We have places where they won't find us."

He nodded, though he felt bad for endangering her with his presence. At the same time he was bothered that their colony was hiding from the Cardassians instead of standing up and fighting them. If there was a Cardassian base on this world, he would fight them. It'd be one more victory for the Maquis, and their attack on the Cardassians wouldn't be for nothing. There would probably be a Cardassian ship he could leave the planet in as well. Maybe he'd take their replicators with him when he escaped. Already he was planning his method of attack, as he glanced out the window, noting it was night.

"Where is the Cardassian base again?"

"It's through that mountain pass and..." Maria stopped and stared straight at him. "No. You aren't going after them. I'll have no fighting here. We've lived here in peace all these years, and I won't have it threatened by one Maquis soldier looking for revenge."

He sighed as he leaned back against the couch. "I was just wondering where they were so I wouldn't accidentally run into them," he lied. "Besides, I need to find a way off this planet. You don't happen to have a ship handy, do you?"

"No."

"See? I'll need to find some transportation." Very slowly he stood up, and noted that his dizziness of past hours had faded. He was still a little tired, but he felt rejuvenated by the chili and warm apple pie. "I should go anyway. It's dark outside, perfect time to go looking for a ship. If they do come knocking at your door, we wouldn't want them accusing you of housing a terrorist, huh?"

Maria stared silently at him, and even though she hated his impulsive tendencies, she knew he was right. "I would suggest you rest...but it looks like you're going to go anyway. You always were impulsive," she said, hinting back at their academy days together. "Be careful."

"Aren't I always?" He smiled, before he picked up his phaser and other items, and moved out of the house. As he cleared the doorway and moved into the dark, his smile dropped. Chances were he would not be seeing Maria again, and chances were slim he'd be getting off the planet alive. Pulling out his phaser, he began moving westward as Maria had indicated, then along the mountain pass. The moon was full overhead, showing his path clearly and making his trek a little easier. Noises came from random bushes and trees, but nothing jumped out, so he ignored them. By the time he had made it through the pass and to the other side, the moon was already beginning to set. But he had found his target. A medium-sized building, capable of housing half a hundred Cardassians, stood in the open, with a few soldiers patrolling back and forth. And there beside the building, on a landing pad out in the open, was a small Cardassian shuttle.

He gave himself a moment to breathe and watch the Cardassians' patrol paths, before he slid down the mountain and moved behind cover of a few trees. The moon was disappearing behind the clouds and it would be easier for him to sneak in undetected. As the nearest Cardassian soldier turned to walk the other way, he ran from his hiding place toward the compound, ducking behind rocks, trees, and bushes until he had reached the wall. And after a quick glance over his shoulder, he slipped inside the building. So far so good, he thought as he adjusted the settings on his phaser. Now he just needed to figure out a way to blow up the compound with what little he had. As he moved down the dimly lit hall he could hear the loud raucous laughter of several Cardassians playing a card game. With all of them half drunk and more concerned with whether the other was cheating or not, he slipped by that room without so much as a holler in his direction.

He passed by several rooms in much the same manner, until he arrived at the armory. Just from peeking inside, he could see the grenades and charges on the shelf, perfect for blowing up a compound of this size. However a guard patrolled back and forth, disappearing behind one shelf and appearing beside another. Dack ducked his head back and forth every time he thought the soldier would look, and breathed as quietly as he could manage. He just needed to sneak in and shoot the guard, without attracting the attention of every Cardassian in the building. Then again, with all that laughter in the other rooms, it would probably be easy to get off one phaser shot without being noticed. He moved from his position against the door frame and crept inside, his hand moving to his ribcage as the other steadied the phaser for a clean shot. The Cardassian was standing behind a shelf of grenades, his back turned to him as he crept down the aisle. Just as he reached the end and had the Cardassian in sight, the soldier turned around, his eyes settling on Dack's form. For a long second, both of them stared at each other in stunned silence. Then as the Cardassian brought his rifle to bear, Dack fired his phaser, the whining beam hitting the Cardassian in the chest. With a heavy thud the guard hit the ground, and Dack looked around nervously in case anyone had heard. All was silent, so he began to drag the Cardassian over to one of the racks to hide him.

Just as he was shoving him under one of the multi-layered racks, he heard the heavy footfalls of approaching boots. Quickly he moved toward a stack of crates in the room, and barely made it behind them as a group of Cardassians entered the room. They were laughing and talking in their native language as they moved about the room. Several times Dack thought they were going to move in his direction, and he cringed as he brought his eyes below the edge of the crate. However, they were uninterested in whatever he was behind, instead grabbing rifles and grenades off the shelves. It didn't take a genius to know what they were up to. "They know," he whispered quietly to himself, his voice unheard even by himself as they continued their foreign chatter. Within a few minutes they had left, leaving Dack to collect his thoughts in the sheer silence that remained.

It was obvious that they were going out to hunt something, and he doubted it was animals roaming in the wild. If they wanted to go hunting for food, they'd do it in the daytime when the nighttime predators were asleep. No, they had discovered humans living on one of their planets and they intended to eradicate them. He didn't need a universal translator to tell him that. Now he had another objective: besides blowing up the compound and escaping in their shuttle, he had to kill the Cardassians headed for Maria's and the other scattered houses in the valley. But he was one man, and they were at least twelve. As tempted as he was to go charging after the group, he knew he'd be killed almost instantly, and the civilians in the valley would still be in danger. A frown crossed his face as he appeared from his hiding place and began gathering all the supplies he'd need: an assault rifle, a whole strap full of grenades, and several charges.

No one bothered him as he moved about the compound; it seemed that most of the Cardassians had left the building, save one or two guards he encountered in various hallways and rooms. Perhaps they were too confident of the fact that no one would be sneaking into their compound from the settlements, and didn't see fit to pay attention. All they had to watch out for was the occasional brave animal that attacked. And so he was free to place charges all around the compound, while killing the guards who crossed his path. Afterward, he moved outside to the

single shuttle on the landing pad. From his view of the compound, he could see that only a few guards remained outside. He was free to climb in the shuttle and activate its systems.

The Hideki-class shuttle he found himself sitting in proved to have very different controls from what he was accustomed to. However, he was used to scavenging and figuring out the workings of small alien craft, and he tested different buttons to determine their capabilities. By accident, he fired the disruptors, knocking down the Cardassian guards at the perimeter. Shouts of alarm sounded from the guards, and he fumbled with the controls. One of these had to fire the engines, right? Instead he managed to activate a general alarm which, in a way, suited his purpose. The party headed out to kill the settlers appeared from the pass, then joined the guards to converse about the attack. A point in his direction from one of the guards indicated to Dack he needed to get out of there right then. But not before he fired the disruptors again. The ship shuddered as the blasts flew out, hitting the ground where the Cardassians stood and killing many of them. They spread out, firing their weapons at the shuttle, which dented the craft and burned holes in various parts of the ship.

Finally he found the controls to start the engines, and with a screeching whine he flew off the pad. Their shots were useless once he found the shields, and he flew back and forth as he adjusted to the fighter shuttle and attempted to maneuver into firing range. The Cardassians themselves realized the futility of their attacks and ran back into the compound, which he promptly exploded with a remote control device. As he watched the blazing fireball diminish into flying debris and burning timbers, he felt a surge of triumph. Twenty or so men against him, and he had defeated them all. All his objectives were complete. Now what remained was getting off the planet. And with that thought he turned the ship towards the night sky, and relaxed in the chair as best as he could...after all, Cardassians weren't known for comfortable furnishings.

Just when he thought he was in the clear, the sky turned into the vastness of space with a Cardassian warship looming overhead. He gulped as he navigated his ship past the behemoth, and silently prayed they'd ignore him as just a small cargo ship on a routine delivery trip. Just as he was almost clear of the atmosphere, and as he was priming the engines for warp speed, he felt the ship shudder and shake as if a tractor beam had locked on. He sighed as he leaned back, and watched as the image of a Cardassian officer appeared on his screen, demanding his surrender. "Here we go again," Dack murmured. "The life of a Maquis soldier. Just wait til you see what I've got up my sleeve this time." And with that, he pressed a button.