

"AELWYD"

A STAR TREK: PATHFINDER TALE



Story and Art
by Jerriecan

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Dedicated to Alei
without whom I likely
would never have
revisited this tale. "*Huna
blentyn ar fy mynwes,
Clyd a chynnes ydyw hon;
Breichiau mam sy'n dynn amdanat, Cariad
mam sy dan fy mron.*"

(Sleep my darling, on my bosom,
Harm will never come to you;
Mother's arms enfold you safely, Mother's
heart is ever true.)

traditional Welsh lullaby "Suo Gân"
written by Morfydd Llwyn Owen

Author's note: *This story takes place early during the second season of **Star Trek: Enterprise**.*

"Easy there, love. Mind the momentum."

She bristles at his words. Of course she'll mind the momentum, at half a million tonnes the old T-class freighter is nothing *but* momentum. One miscalculation and they could miss the docking port and collide with the sleek vessel they are docking with.

It is just the two of them now – the rest of the crew have their own stations to manage during the docking. She checks the readouts on the darkened bridge – ten meters separate the ships, seven, four.

She holds her breath for an instant and touches the thruster control, releasing just enough gas to let the ships barely touch before the docking clamps grab hold and secure the vessels together. There is barely even a tremor as the connection seals and oxygen begins to flow into the short tunnel between the ships. She looks up at him and says, "Good contact. Pressure is holding."

"Looking good, Aelwyd," says a woman's voice over the speakers. *"Nice flying – didn't feel a thing over here."*

"That's my girl," he says, and looks down at his daughter – all of twelve years old, her long, dark hair falling straight down her back – with her hands still gripping the controls. He grins wide and winks. "Permission to board?"

"We'll greet you at the airlock," the voice replies.

"Very good. *Aelwyd*, out," her father says. He pats her shoulder as she finally lets go of the controls and moves

to follow him down the central corridor of the ship, bouncing along in the half-gravity. She is dressed in a miniature version of the crew's coveralls, complete with worn tool belt and matching grease stains. His clothing is different – a colorful knit scarf is wrapped loosely around his neck, free of the grime covering the rest of his garments.

A memory – the crew sitting around a tiny plastic tree, a small pile of handmade gifts beneath it. She is five years old, and it is her first real memory. She watches as her father carefully opens his gift and holds it up for all to see - a carefully knit, brightly striped scarf. She smiles as she watches her father and mother kiss, draping the scarf around their necks to bring them closer -

"Nice flying, love," he says, ruffling her hair, knocking her out of the memory.

She pushes his hand away - she hates it when he does that. "Stop it, Da! I'm not a little girl."

"Of course not!" He fishes around in his jacket pocket for a moment. "This is a big day. First solo docking. That's something to be proud of."

"Not quite solo," she says. Of course he had been there on the bridge, not five feet away, ready to step in just in case she needed the help.

He stops and kneels down, brushing a strand of hair out of her eyes. "Hey, don't be like that," he says. "You did the work, so you've earned the reward." He raises his hand, shakes it, and as if by magic a shiny seven-sided coin appears between his index and middle fingers. "You're

officially part of the crew now, and as such you're more than earned a proper share."

He tosses the coin up, and in the half-gravity it takes what seems like forever to arc down into the girl's waiting hands. It's heavy - gold, maybe some alloy - and covered in familiar symbols. "Twenty-one dulacs," she reads, translating the Rigelian, and her eyes go wide. This was half a year's allowance! "Is - is this really mine?"

"Why not? You earned it, love. This little side trip is going to make us a fair bit of coin, and might just get us some more Fleeter business in the future. Can't have too many friends out here in the black." He kisses her forehead gently. "And that docking was as smooth as I've ever seen in all my years."

"Thanks, Da," she says, then pauses. "I just..."

"You just what?" he says after a moment, already knowing the answer.

"Never mind," she finally says. He wraps an arm around her shoulders and holds her close until they reach the airlock. Most of the crew is already there, standing with lifters at the ready to move the dozen pallets of supplies over to the Fleeter ship. Even Rhys is there, complete with his knit cap (which has seen better days - long-uncleaned stains have rendered the fabric a dingy gray-brown, and it has taken on the distinct whiff of drive coolant). He only wears it on special occasions, usually when they are dealing with Fleeters -

Another memory. The hat is new. She is six years old, sitting in the galley with her ancient hand-me-down

PADD, working through her daily lessons. On the other side of the room, her father and Rhys are fighting in whispers, like they think she won't notice their anger. Rhys is angry about dealing with the Fleeters, the ones who work for Earth instead of for themselves. He wants nothing to do with them. Her father says they have to or they'll never get enough cargo jobs to keep running.

She hates it when they fight. Rhys is never happy about anything, and her father smiles less and less when he's around. But soon enough here comes her mother, who pokes a finger in Rhys' chest and tells him that if he doesn't like it, he can always go his own way. Nothing is stopping him, after all. He looks down and after a moment mumbles an apology to his sister and her husband. But from that moment on, the unwashed hat is always what the Fleeters take away from their meetings with them -

The airlock doors part, revealing a trio of blue-clad Fleeters with nary a stain marring their uniforms. At a glance the girl can see the man in front has four pips on his shoulder – a captain! He steps forward, his right hand extended. "Captain Webb? I'm Jonathan Archer, captain of the Starship *Enterprise*."

Her father offers a hand in return, giving a quick squeeze and the barely perceptible nod he gives whenever he sizes someone up as 'good people'. "A pleasure, captain," he replied. "Andrew Webb of the freighter *Aelwyd*."

The other Fleeters begin moving the pallets through the airlock and over to the *Enterprise*. "We're fortunate to

run into you out here," Archer says. "Our supplies of fresh food didn't hold out quite as long as we'd hoped."

"They never do," Rhys says sourly, and her father shoots him a knowing glance she's seen many times. *Shut it, Rhys.*

"No bother," her father says. "Although it won't quite be what you're used to. Some of the vegetables had to be engineered to grow in local conditions. Changes the flavor a bit - and I bet you've never seen day-glo orange cauliflower before."

Archer smiles warmly. "Can't say that I have. But I expect it might bring back a few good memories for Ensign Mayweather. My helmsman grew up on a long-haul ship."

"Did he now?" her father says, and looks down at her. "Listen to the man, love. A boomer for a helmsman aboard a Fleet ship. Something to aspire to, eh?" He looks back at Archer. "Forgive my manners, captain. This is my daughter, Tegan - our pilot for today's little docking maneuver."

Archer kneels down. "That was you at the controls? You're quite the pilot," he says in that voice most adults use whenever talking to children - not uncomfortable, exactly, but too polite, like they aren't sure what to say. "Maybe we can give you a tour of the bridge while you're here, let you sit at the helm controls."

He looks back at her father. "You and your crew are more than welcome to stretch your legs. My engineer has some maintenance to finish up on the warp engines that

should take about a day. Enough time to give you and your people a break."

Her father glances again at Rhys, who just rolls his eyes. "That's kind of you, captain, but we've already burned a little more fuel mass than we'd planned on for this rendezvous. We'd best be on our way if we're to reach Draylax with anything left to spare."

"Maybe we can help you with that," Archer says. "Tell you what – let the *Enterprise* get you up to your cruising speed. We can do it faster, and spare you burning any more fuel of your own."

Her father grins – he knows a good deal when he hears one. "You drive a hard bargain, Captain. Must be nice having the antimatter to spare." He turns to his crew. "You heard him, lads. We're guests of the Fleet for the next day or so. Please - " he once again gives Rhys the look " - be on your best behavior." He turns back to Archer. "Just lead the way."

The girl pauses for a moment as the others make their way into the *Enterprise*. She stands by the inner hatch of the *Aelwyd*, staring at the transparent aluminum set into the metal. Slowly she raises one hand, spreading her fingers as wide as they will go, pressing her fingers to the viewport. It is almost large enough to cover the whole thing now -

One last memory. She is seven years old, her birthday three weeks away. She sits on the bridge as the ship prepares to dock with another, watching a video feed of the airlock doors. Everybody shouts as a siren wails. Something has gone wrong with the airlock – the hatch is seized.

Through the transparent aluminum viewport, she sees her mother struggling to breathe. She sees her father and Uncle Rhys prying at the doors with a long metal bar, but they refuse to separate as the oxygen quickly drains from the airlock. She watches as her mother presses her hand to the viewport, spreading her fingers, a gesture which is mirrored by her father on the other side. A long moment passes. And then her mother slides away, her strength gone along with her breath -

"Tegan?" her father calls. "Come along now. Wouldn't want you getting lost."

"Never happen, Da," she says. "I know right where home is."

He smiles, and for the moment her world is complete once again. "That's my girl."

End