

The Same Old Story



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by Sean O'Keefe 2013©

Cover by Edelweiss O'Keefe

Demora had to wonder why on earth she was sitting there. Sure, the Captain had asked her to come along, but, in the end, she decided that life was too short.

“You call this a classic?” she asked, incredulous.

Captain John Harriman looked at her with a hurt expression. He had invited her to help her expand her knowledge of their people's history and sometimes he found it useful to draw on movies from the 20th Century to achieve his goal. That they were sometimes cheesy, well, you couldn't win them all. “What do you mean?”

His First Officer, Commander Demora Sulu, gestured at the screen. “The characters are ridiculous. The plot is wafer thin and I'm pretty sure that nobody ever actually talked like that. ‘Here's looking at you’? Seriously?”

John gave her a half smile. He was reminded of an old saying about leading horses to water. “Philistine,” he said good naturedly. They were compatriots of long standing and here, in his private viewing room, they could get away with friendly insults.

Demora popped another piece of popcorn in her mouth. John had said the buttery substance added to the sense of nostalgia. All she could think of was how much extra time she would have to spend on the treadmill to work it off tomorrow. Inwardly, she shrugged. Some things were worth it. As the movie drew to a close the lights in the room automatically came up. “So, what was I supposed to learn from ... *that*?” she asked, a tad confused.

Harriman shrugged. “I don't know. I suppose you already know there are bad guys out there. I just thought you might enjoy the diversion from our usual duties with some good, old-fashioned cinema.”

“So, people used to *pay* to see things like this?” Demora rolled her eyes. “I’m glad I’m not living back then. I think my brain would have left me for a more interesting person.”

“I guess it’s not for everyone,” he conceded. He glanced in her direction and had to give it one more try. “It is rated as one of history’s greatest romances.”

“Love and romance are not for career Starfleet officers.”

“That’s not what your father thinks.”

Demora shot him a look. “Dad is one of the exceptions,” she said a little tightly.

John looked in the popcorn box and considered eating some of the burnt pieces in the bottom. He liked the way they crunched. “Yep. Serving on the original *Enterprise* then Captain of the *Excelsior* for ten years before giving up Starfleet and running for President. And winning!” He crunched for a moment before adding: “And still he finds time for his little girl.”

“Sexism aside, John, Dad hasn’t always been there for me.” She looked back in time and remembered the young lady sent off to the faceless boarding schools. “There were long periods where I wondered where he was and what he was doing. Sometimes even uncertain whether he would return at all. Back then I remember reading about their exploits in the news feeds and wondering whether it was even true.”

Harriman knew what was coming next.

“Now I’m out here I know that it *was*,” she said, a little awed and yet sullen. She had heard the stories from their fellow Starfleet officers who had been there as well and shared in those adventures.

By unspoken agreement, neither of them mentioned Captain Kirk. Both of them had been there when he died and the shame of being a part of his demise was still felt even now, over ten years later.

Harriman was a little confused. “You turned out all right.”

Demora sighed. “While I have to admit the chance of being a mother does have its attractions, the fact is that I wouldn’t want to

be a part time parent who was never around because I was too busy saving the galaxy.”

Ever the laid-back Captain, John offered: “Then resign, find a good man, settle down and make babies.”

Demora slapped him on the shoulder for his impertinence. “It's not for me, Captain Harriman.” She looked back on her past and a flicker of pain passed through her eyes.

Her observant friend didn't miss it. “What is it?”

Sulu's chest ached for a long-repressed memory had surfaced. She wondered whether she should share it with John, but he had proven himself to be not only a good friend but a powerful ally. “It was something that happened when I was just seventeen.

It was my first year at the academy....”

“Come on Demora! You can climb faster!”

I looked up at Devlin and scowled. I was doing just fine without his childish goading. We were only a few metres from the summit, but I had not only climbed the rock face in record time, I had taken the moment to enjoy the view.

The cliff face on Rigel Seven reminded me a lot of El Capitan in Yosemite, a place that my father had taken me before on a holiday. We had climbed it together, Dad showing me the ropes.

One of the nice things about this cliff was it wasn't as severe or as high, and it had a nice pool of clear, fresh water on top to cool off in. Most people never got the chance as the students were only ever given six hours to climb it and it usually took all of that time to make the ascent.

I did it in three. With Devlin.

The two of us had been pals since we joined Starfleet. We shared a lot of the same classes and often studied together. We often trolled the bars together in our off times, coming back to the base propping one another up as we walked. He was a great friend.

To keep fit, both of us would challenge each other on the climbing wall at the Academy and it wasn't long before we stopped considering it much of a challenge.

Naturally, when this survival course started, we knew we were well and truly up to the task.

Now, only a few metres from the summit, I looked up and saw Devlin smiling back down at me. He had this wicked grin that showed he didn't have a care in the world.

To shut him up, I turned my attention back to the rock face and quickly finished my ascent. He reached down and gave me his hand and drew me over the edge, where I sat for a moment to rest.

Devlin touched me on the shoulder. "Come with me. I've got a much better idea."

I thought nothing of following him and we soon found ourselves at the pond. It was about the size of an Olympic swimming pool, however I had never seen water so clear before. It was coming in by a little spring to one side, the overflow of which created a small waterfall over the cliff. It was surrounded by lush, green foliage with a tiny, sandy beach on our side. It was quite simply breathtaking.

Devlin was running towards the water. "Come on! We've got plenty of time!"

I thought for a moment that he was going to jump in the water fully clothed when he surprised me by starting to strip. Both of us were wearing tight fitting outfits with utility belts. It took him all of about ten seconds to divest himself of them and his shoes. By the time he hit the water he was naked as a jay bird, laughing.

Caught up in the moment, I thought: What the heck! and did the same. I padded out onto a small rock overlooking the pond, that I could see was fairly deep as Devlin was treading water, and dove in.

It wasn't ice cold, but I came to the surface shivering. After the exertion of climbing, I suppose my body needed a bit of

refreshing, but this chilly water was a bit too much! As I started to swim to the bank to get out, Devlin splashed me.

“Don't tell me the great Demora Sulu can't take a little cold water!” His goading was all I needed to turn and splash him back.

“I am a Sulu! We don't run from anything!” I said. I turned around and duck dived under the water and tugged him under by his feet.

We played in the water for at least half an hour of mucking around and splashing. Eventually, it was enough for both of us. We had climbed a two hundred metre cliff and swum for a while. I know I was pooped, so I swam to the beach and lay down in the sand, letting the warm sunlight dry me off.

Devlin joined me a moment later and did the same.

I must have drifted off to sleep. I don't know for how long. When I woke up he was on top of me.

“Are you telling me...” John Harriman said, shocked.

Demora gave him a tight non-smile. “He raped me. By the time I knew what was going on it was already too late. It took him only a few more seconds to finish.”

John was appalled. His friend had been violated in the worst way possible – by someone she had considered a friend. The chivalrous part of him – a part of every true man – immediately leapt to her defence. He personally wanted to avenge her. “What did you do?” he said, his voice rough.

“Exactly the wrong thing. Devlin rolled off and I was so mortified and afraid he had impregnated me that I jumped back in the water and used it to wash myself.” She sighed wistfully. “I accidentally got rid of the evidence.”

“Did you have him charged?” John asked, already knowing the answer. He knew his First Officer too well.

Demora looked at him sadly. “I didn't know what to do. A good part of me loved him, but what he did I could never forgive.

The logical part of me knew that I could never prove what he had done. Never mind that he was an Ambassador's son." She looked her friend in the eye as if daring him to disagree with her. "I decided to let it go, but I never spoke to him again."

John sat back in his chair, reflecting on what she had told him. It was a tragic tale, a chapter in his friend's life he had never guessed existed. He ached for her and wished to himself there was still something he could do for her. "I wonder what happened to him? Karma can be a bitch."

Sulu chuckled. It was an odd sound, full of irony and hidden bitterness. "He graduated and was assigned to the *Excelsior* under my father. He died in his first tour on an away mission." She looked at the wall as if it were window to the past. "He drowned when his shuttle malfunctioned and fell into the sea. It sprang a leak and sank to the bottom of the ocean."

The suspicious streak that ran through all good Starship Captains rang a bell. "Did your father know?"

"No!" Demora said, not quite certain. "I didn't tell him and I'm not certain there wasn't any other way he could have found out." She took another piece of popcorn and popped it into her mouth. "At least I don't think so." She couldn't tell him that she quietly harboured a doubt.

Harriman considered the tale in light of their earlier conversation. "You don't blame your father for what happened, do you?"

Sulu sighed. "No, I don't. It's just the little girl inside of me wished my father could have been there to save his princess." She chewed on some more of the confection before adding: "But, after it happened, I determined that, if I ever was to become a parent, I wouldn't let my children out of my sight. I would always want to be there to protect them."

The Captain nodded but interjected a piece of sage advice. It was his wish that she would one day take his place on this ship,

and she wouldn't be able to do so if she was over protective. "It's not practical, though. As ship's Captain I have to send people into dangerous situations all the time. I have to trust that they've been trained well enough to make it through on their own."

"Agreed, John. That's one of the reasons why I'm not sure I'd *want* to become a parent. I can send the people under me on dangerous missions, but I'm not sure I'd ever want to send my own children to school unsupervised. I just can't do it. So, I'm resigned to not having any. Besides, I've got other ambitions."

Her comment broke the ice in the room. "Like becoming the first female Captain of the *U.S.S. Enterprise*," John said with a grin.

She nodded to herself and looked him in the eye. "I'd love to be, but first I'd have to get past you, and I know you're not ready for retirement, either."

"No, I'm not. There are too many frontiers yet to be explored."

Sulu wasn't entirely sure he was being honest. Recently John had been looking a little restless as if he was itching for a change.

At least he no longer lived in the shadow of the *Enterprise-B's* spectacular maiden voyage. While they had saved forty-seven souls from the doomed *Lakul*, all anyone seemed to remember was that it was the mission where James T. Kirk was killed. It had happened on Harriman's watch. That's all anyone ever remembered.

Not to mention the personal angst of knowing John had been the first to volunteer to go below but that Kirk had insisted and that he had relented. When they had finally limped back to Starbase One with their damaged ship without the missing Kirk it had taken more than just Tuesday to get her ready to fly again and even longer for her Captain. He had nearly been court-martialled but for the interference of Captain Scott and Commander Chekov. The two knew Kirk well enough that this was the way he had wanted to go and nothing would have stopped him from having his way.

John checked his watch, another of his favourite anachronistic affectations, and noted they still had some time before they had to crash for the night. "How about some cartoons?" Demora shook her head, no. "I need some sleep."

"Besides," she shook her popcorn cup, "I have to work this stuff off in the morning."

Harriman decided he didn't want to do it alone, so he stood and offered his friend a hand up. "I'll tell you what. Next time, you choose the movie."

Demora didn't even *know* any, but she wasn't about to admit that to the Captain. "All right."

Any further conversation was cut off by the chirp of a communicator. "Captain Harriman," the Communications officer hailed. "You have a priority message from Starfleet Command."

John flipped open his communicator and answered. "I'll take it in my office." As he turned to go he muttered: "It's still the same old story."

Demora smiled. "The fight for love and glory."

Harriman laughed. "So, you *were* paying attention. I thought you'd nodded off."

At that, his First Officer chuckled. "Not a chance, Captain. I just want to make sure you never have to play it again."