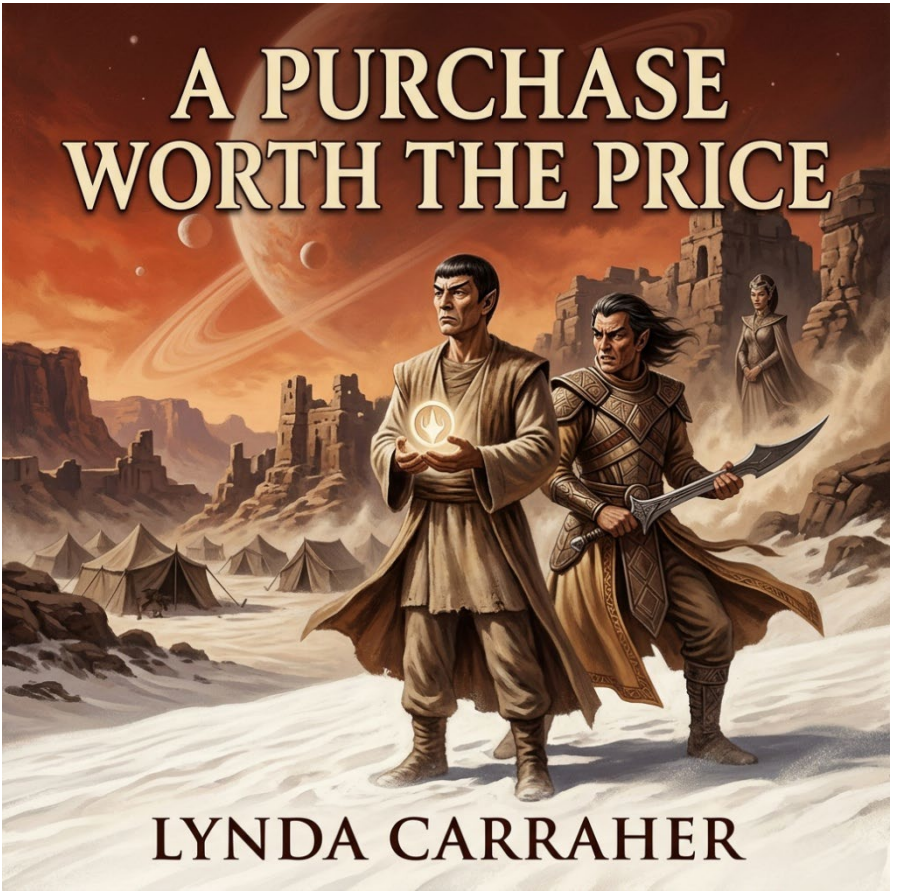

A PURCHASE
WORTH THE PRICE
LYNDA CARRAHER

A Purchase Worth the Price

by Lynda Carraher©

Removed without authorization from a UFP Archaeological Society dig at Kahn-T-Sheer on the planet Vulcan, this *dje-kalla* ballad has joined the growing collection of apocrypha regarding the early life of the Vulcan philosopher, Surak.

Denounced by the majority of Vulcan historians as a slanderous forgery, and defended by many UFP archaeologists as genuine, "A Purchase Worth the Price" was for several years the subject of bitter litigation regarding both its legitimacy and its release for publication.

This contemporary translation is credited to T'Riell, a Vulcan historian noted both for her command of the language of ancient Vulcan and for her frequent clashes with the rigid viewpoints of her colleagues.

For the edification of those readers not familiar with the Vulcan of the Surakian era, the *dje-kalla* were wandering troubadours who traveled about the planet carrying news and gossip, and maintaining a tradition of oral history in a society whose members were then rarely literate. It is assumed that a local scholar transcribed "A Purchase Worth the Price", along with several other ballads recovered from the Kahn-T-Sheer dig.

The line "we eyeless singers", in the last stanza, refers to the ritual blinding of young men in training for the craft, "that their vision of the present might not interfere with their visions of the past".*

*"The Dje-Kalla Tradition", T'Riell, UFPAS Holotapes, Memory Alpha, Stardate 3515.06.

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THE PURCHASE WORTH THE PRICE

Empty fields -- desolate, the wind blowing over them.
Empty tents -- *kredah* hides drying in the wind.
Empty wombs -- women, weeping in their barrenness.
Vulcan wars, and, young men go laughing to battle.
Vulcan wars, and young men spill lifeblood on white sand.
And the sand glows emerald,
But not with bearing.

Selim sees, and his heart is torn for his people.
Selim mourns, and seeks the crown which will be his.
Selim weeps, and his spirit haunts the barren lands.
Stripped of the richness of harvests planned,
Stripped of the strength of the young men's arms
To win a woman's smile
Or a shorter route to the inland sea.

Surak speaks, touching the soul of his friend.
Surak comforts, and Selim's heart grows smooth.
Surak sees, looking beyond tomorrow

To the time when Selim rules,
To the time when madness dies
And a wise man's reign breaks the *lirpa's* back.
And lets the *ahn woon* flake to dust.

"Consider the stars, turning in their peaceful permanence.
Consider the patience of the pale *plomeek* vine.
Consider the logic of the passionless intellect.
Vulcan's strength must be her mind.
Vulcan's mind must be her strength.
And the war games put away
Like the toys of thoughtless children."

Selim hears, and knows the wisdom.
Selim plans, with Surak's vision.
Selim vows; the dream is planted
With the arrogance of youth,
With the confidence of youth,
That the land will grow fat under his hand
And his people will have peace.

Surak dreams, and knows the dream is not enough.
Surak plans, and-knows his sojourn will be long.
Surak leaves, and turns to lone high places.
The mountains of solitude await him,
The mountains in his soul are there to climb.

He bids farewell to the friend of his youth
And vows he will return.

The years turn, and Selim gains the crown he sought.
The years turn, and promises of youth are lost.
The years turn, and Selim gazes on T'Paal--
The woman T'Paal, chosen by his brother,
The woman T'Paal, who sets his blood aflame,
And he thinks of the challenge grounds
At *Koon-ut-kal-if-fee*.

No rest in the arms of concubines,
No rest in nights of haunted dreams,
No rest in a mind of one desire.
His eyes are flame.
His mind is flame.
And he heeds not the words of his sages
Who seek to turn his lust.

"Challenge your brother, and your crown is surely lost,
Challenge your brother, and the people rise as one.
Challenge your brother, and you throw it all away.
For a woman's smile?
For a woman's breasts
To pillow the crownless head
Of a man who tramples tradition?"

"Find another," the sages counsel.
"Find another for *kal-if-fee*.
Find another to slay Sta'aj
And give the woman over,
And give you what you seek
Without the rashness of this act
Which can only lead to ruin."

And the runners went forth gladly,
And the runners spread the word,
And the, runners chose with caution,
Whispering, in the tents of warriors,
Whispering, where the wine is poured.
"A little deed, to gain the ear of the king
And line your pockets with *kamarr* when it is done."

Consider Sta'aj, whose arms are stone.
Consider Sta'aj, whose blow is death.
Consider Sta'aj, whose chosen mate
Flames the heart of Selim,
Flames the sands of Vulcan
If you take up arms in his cause
To win this woman's smile.

"My *lirpa's* blade wants honing," comes the word.

"My eyes grow dim with age," some say.
"My wounds from battle pain me," they respond.
Denial comes to Selim's ear.
Denial sets his anger free
That in all the country of his rule
Not one arm will raise for him.

Surak comes, down from far lone mountains.
Surak comes, with his mind at strength.
Surak comes to the court of his friend,
Calling forth a long-forgotten vow,
Calling forth the promise of a prince
Whose heart wept emerald tears
For the empty cradles and the barren fields.

Selim listens, but his eyes are flame.,
Selim listens, but his mind is fire.
Selim listens, but he does not hear.
And he asks one deed of Surak's strength,
And he asks one challenge, one woman.
That done, he says, and Surak's dream will be fulfilled
With the power of the throne behind it.

They say Surak had seen T'Paal.
They say that he, too, was bewitched.
They say perhaps he weighed one life

Against the millions yet to come,
Against the dream that would not die,
And found the purchase worth the price.

Challenge, then, in wine-red dawn.
Challenge, then, on burning sand.
Challenge, then, with *lirpa's* bite
And Sta'aj, falling, falling, falling.
And Sta'aj, whose stone arms turn to dust
While his bold warriors, his bold friends
Raise a cry for Surak's blood.

Surak, fleeing, back to the mountains.
Surak, fleeing, along with T'Paal.
Surak, fleeing, to rebuild his dream,
Shattered at the challenge ground,
Shattered by the dying sighs
Of Sta'aj,
And by a woman's smile.

Did he grow to love T'Paal?
Did he put his dream away?
Did be spend the nights alone,
Waiting for a further sign,
Waiting for his soul to mend
On those stark crags

Above the sandy plain?

T'Paal, enchantress, sees his lonely vigil.
T'Paal considers the dream Surak has shared.
T'Paal remembers a promise to the crown,
Standing between one man and his dream,
Standing between the blood on the sand
And the fields of green,
Growing .

Enchantment in her graceful moves,
Enchantment in her night-black eyes,
Enchantment in her star-soft voice,
Reminding Surak of his vow,
Reminding Surak of his dream
And the price he paid to gain it,
Forfeit now, if she should stay.

Convincing him to keep that vow,
Convincing him to pay the price.
Convincing him to take her back
To Selim's court and the bridal bed;
To Selim's court, where a promise made
Will be honored,
And a future born.

Into Selim's court, before the watching eyes,
Into Selim's court come Surak and T'Paal.
Into Selim's court, the man who made a vow,
To call the promise of a king,
To call the dream back from the dust,
Forfeiting the woman's smile
For a future yet unformed.

Selim smiles, and takes her hand.
Selim smiles, and *kamarr* flows.
Selim smiles, and builds the school,
Born of the patience of the stones,
Born of the logic of the stars,
For one man to call the future's turn
By the power of his dream.

"One month," she begs, "before the promised joining.
One month," she pleads, "to purify my soul.
One month," she says, "will make the moment sweeter."
And so prettily does she-beg
And so winningly does she weep
That Selim's heart is softened
Toward the woman bought in blood.

And when that month was over, one more begged for.
And when that second ended, one more coaxed.

And, when that third one ended, one more wheedled.
Enchantress, buying time for Surak's teaching.
Enchantress, buying time to build a dream.
And Selim, seeing only her bright vision,
Feels not a mountain building 'neath his feet.

"No more!" he cries when thrice the time is ended.
"No more this woman's begging will I hear!
No more the goblet passing by, untasted!
Tomorrow is the joining.
Tomorrow is the day
I sip the vintage rare, so long awaited --
The treasure bought in brother's blood for me."

In wine-red dawn, the women set forth, calling.
In wing-red dawn, to fetch T'Paal to him.
In wine-red dawn they find a woman's promise
Empty as her wedding garment, waiting;
Empty, as her veins, with lifeblood gone.
Bright sand she fed with emerald-flawing sweetness
To thwart a king she could not overcome.

Selim's rage now chills the stones of Vulcan,
Selim's rage at woman's honeyed lies;
Selim's rage, that calls Surak's life forfeit.
But he is gone, returning to his mountain.

But he is gone, with many young ones bold
Who know a mind will be the strength of Vulcan
When Selim's palace falls back into dust.

Held safe by mountain wildness,
Held safe by mountain strength,
Held safe by mountain patience,
Surak teaches, and young ones learn.
Surak counsels, and minds grow strong
With a dream for their foundation
Rising, rising, to the stars.

The way was hard, and many young ones faltered.
The way was hard, and many lives were lost.
The way was hard, but those who learned were strengthened.
And Surak's dream was honored.
And Surak's name was legion
While Selim's palace crumbled
And T'Paal's worth denied.

"She never lived," the elders say.
"She never was," the records read.
She never died in wine-red dawn
That a people might be born,
That a dream be given life.
"You foul great Surak's memory

For a mythic woman's smile."

We know, we eyeless singers.
We know the truth they hide.
We know that Surak's vision
Of Vulcan strength,
Of Vulcan pride,
Was bought On craggy mountain
By a purchase worth the price,