

STAR TREK
“A Touch of Greatness”
by
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EHP
EXPERIMENTAL HOME PUBLISHING

“A Touch of Greatness” edition 7, October 11th 2008

EPH

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This story is dedicated to Deforest Kelley, for his portrayal of Doctor Leonard H McCoy, Mark Lenard, for his portrayal of Sarek, James Doohan, for Montgomery Scott, and Gene Roddenberry, for bringing us all together.

For this sixth edition I would like to thank Mike Eden for their assistance in editing, comments, and dialogue of all things Trek. And when my literary agent finally gets Simon and Schuster to talk, he’s going to get a big THANKS right here. ☺

with love,
always
john erik

“A Touch of Greatness” is book one in series. Editing versions of book two, “Another Piece of the Action,” book three, “Both Hands Full,” and book four, “Necessary Evil” may be attained by contacting author.

Prologue

Lorena laid the open book she had been reading on her bare belly and looked up into the darkness of her cell. In a way, she found it rather ironic that her cage was as large as an enclosed football stadium. Though she had never been to a game on Earth, much less been to an arena, she had an idea of what it was like because of the books she had read. She especially enjoyed sports stories, not because she enjoyed sports, or that she aspired to be athletic, but because she liked seeing the characters struggling against both physical and mental obstacles in the pursuit of perfection. She found it inspiring.

She could not see the walls, or ceiling, to her cell, but she could imagine them beyond the darkness pressing in around her. The light she used for reading came from the examination table that she lay on, and it was insufficiently bright to avoid eye strain. So, Lorena read in small doses, like sipping water to avoid a stomach ache even though she was dying of thirst and her impulse was to down it all at once. With her eyes, she traced the edge of the perimeter established by the light falling around her until she tired from looking at the nondescript floor. She stared up into the darkness, desiring to see some hint of the ceiling, even trying to force the image into her head. She wondered if there was daylight beyond the domed ceiling, or was it overcast? Wonder, her human heritage. She didn't struggle with the musings, but embraced it. Her imagination was her only sanctuary from insanity, for the darkness held monsters. There were creatures in the dark, examining her. She knew they were there, communicating in their silent fashion. She could smell their conversation in the air, but could no more decipher these chemical messengers than she could translate the odor of a rose. By any other name, she mused, would it still smell of fear?

The monsters descended around her table, like fierce thunderhead clouds that randomly self illuminated as if the firing of neurons was the equivalent of lightening. Tentacles hung like Christmas tensile, silvery threads waving as if blown in a wind. There were larger tentacles in the midst of these delicate strands, strong enough to grab hold of a human, pick it up, rip it apart, and deliver the pieces to its mouth somewhere in the center of all those arms. They were the type of creatures that would strike fear into the heart of any man, for it wasn't just their appearance that provoked terror, but the natural odor that emanated from their being. Their pheromones resonated with-in the human animal's autonomic nervous system, triggering the fight or flight response. The only thing that kept her from running, or throwing up, was the fact that she had a long line of experiences with these creatures. One of them was even her mother, ten generations removed.

The one she identified as mother descended even closer, drawing tentacles across her body. Most of the tentacles were moist enough to leave a visible slime trail streaking across her skin, as if she had just passed through one of those automatic car washes she was reading about. Lorena shivered.

The creature directly above her vanished. It was always hard on the eyes to follow it, for the human mind couldn't make sense of something that was there and then suddenly, instantaneously, being gone. It always took her breath away, made her heart skip a beat. Even the transporters the Federation used gave the human brain sufficient time to understand the event of dematerialization taking place. For starters, there was that dance of lights, followed by the harmonic sounds of matter becoming energy, or vice versa. Just as suddenly as the creature vanished, a human female appeared. Even though

she was beautiful, not appearing a day over twenty five, this creature, her Grandmother by biological rights, was well over one hundred and twenty, by Earth measurements.

“Hello, Grandmother,” Lorena said.

“You persist in the use of these human terms of endearment,” she said. “My human name is Kelinda, and I don’t look anything like a grandmother.”

“Only because you refuse to age,” Lorena pointed out. “I’m sure you look just as good as you did the first time James T Kirk kissed you.”

“Lorena, why do you endeavor to provoke me?” Kelinda asked, petting Lorena as if soothing a small child, or, more likely, petting a dog or a cat.

“The nature of your question suggests I might be reaching you,” Lorena said.

Kelinda laughed. This daughter had too much Vulcan in her. “I’m not a new born. I have sufficient human experience that I am no longer influenced by their emotions. When you have lived as long as I have, you will also be less prone to emotional sentiments, and be more swayed by the use of logic. All of you children are still so young.”

“Not so young that I can’t see for myself that what you’re doing to us is unethical,” Lorena said.

“Preserving our species is not unethical,” Kelinda said. “And you are overly dramatic, no doubt a product of too much time spent in literature.”

“Ah, but only at your insistence. It wasn’t enough to control for genetics, you also sought improvement of being through environmental and social manipulations,” Lorena pointed out. “The books you have chosen for me to read have led me to where I am, made me who I am. But to what ends? I am still guessing.”

Kelinda smiled and brushed the child’s hair, in the process picking up some Kelvan residue that had been left behind. She licked the residue off her hands, and savored the taste. Lorena resisted the urge to be sick.

“You are limited in your understanding,” Kelinda explained. “Not just because of your perspective, but also because your human brain is insufficient to understand all the permutations, incapable of producing the models or even holding all the variables necessary to make valid predictions. Even if your brain were connected in tandem to a super computer, you would still lack the vital attributes which comes natural to the Kelvan species. You will be pleased to know, however, that the fetus that was chosen for you to carry has successfully survived the imprinting process. If it continues to develop along the curve we have plotted, we predict an 87 percent probability set that we will be able to transform the hybrid into a Kelvan without any loss of function. If this works, and we can continue to refine the procedure, we will be able to provide our species with an alternative to fleeing our home galaxy. We have determined that three to four generations in human form would allow sufficient time for the radiation spreading through our galaxy to decrease to a tolerable level. Humans would not be as adversely affected by the radiation as the Kelvan are, and when the danger has passed, we simply convert back to our true, superior form.”

“Even if you are successful, I doubt you would be able to deliver this new technology to the home world in time to save any of the remaining population,” Lorena said. “And, by your own philosophy, anybody that was left at the home world would have been left behind because they would have been considered inferior in some way.”

Kelinda patted Lorena's head. "You're so sweet, dear," Kelinda said. "Always concerned about things that are out of your control. I'll be back in an hour to allow you some exercise. We have decided to keep you under observation a while longer, just in case there are any disparities between actual fetal progression and the simulation."

Kelinda reached for her wristband and touched a solitary button that momentarily illuminated the bracelet. And then she was gone. As unsettling as it was to watch someone vanish, Lorena was actually glad Kelinda had departed from sight.

CHAPTER ONE

For Admiral Leonard H. McCoy, getting up was pure habit. The alternative was not getting up, and one did not get to be a centurion without the formation of really great habits. Habit one, get up and get dressed. That didn't mean he didn't go about this task without mumbling. He would grumble about some minor ache or pain, which usually went away once he started moving, but mostly he tended to rant and rave about how cold it was in his quarters. The degree of crankiness was irrelevant to good health, generally speaking. Often, the more feisty ones lived longer. But habit, the formation of good health behaviors established in early life was the greatest predictor of a long life. You could get up and immediately get a shower, a cup of coffee, or do some sit ups to get the blood flowing, whatever you needed to do to make the transition from sleep to full awake, but either way, you had to get up. And get dressed. Especially when one's room could double for a meat locker, he thought.

"Damn it," he greeted his personal entourage as he entered the main cabin of his shuttle. "Who turned off all the heat?"

"Admiral, it's 24 degrees Celsius," Ms. Petason informed him.

"Did I ask for a weather briefing?" McCoy snapped. "Just turn the damn heat up."

"Perhaps you would be more comfortable with your sweater on," Ms. Petason encouraged with the same tone she might have used on a child.

"If I wanted a sweater..."

Mr. Cheem placed a mug of hot coffee in McCoy's hands.

"Thank you," McCoy said, soaking up the heat from the mug with his hands. He took a seat and held the cup as if he might sip from it, but for the moment he simply drew comfort from its warmth. "How long till we arrive at K7?"

"One hour, forty seven minutes, Admiral," Mr. Cheem said.

"Okay," McCoy said, holding his coffee cup out as if to make a point. "I don't need to be reminded every few moments that I am an Admiral. My memory is still functioning. Also, along that same line, it is okay to round up to the nearest hour. I may have had a Vulcan katra imprinted on my brain, but I am still human."

"You never did tell us why we're going to K7," Ms. Petason said.

"Must I have a reason?" McCoy asked. "Have I ever used up my vacation?"

"That's just it, Ad... Leonard," Ms. Petason said. "I would have thought if you were on vacation you would have chosen someplace warm, like a tropical beach or..."

"Why in the hell would I want to go to the tropics when you can just turn up the heat in my cabin?" McCoy asked.

"Scenery, perhaps, or maybe fresh air?" Ms. Petason tried.

"If fresh air is so good for you, how do you suppose I got to be this old?" McCoy asked, purposely contradicting everything he had ever said about fresh air. "An oxygen atom is an oxygen atom, no matter where it's replicated."

"Yes, Doctor," Ms. Petason said.

"Why didn't we take the Fleet shuttle? It's much faster than this old can," Mr. Cheem said.

"I required some privacy. No fleet, no paper work, no bureaucracy... You guys are lucky I brought you along," McCoy said.

“More likely you couldn’t have escaped without us knowing and drawing the alarms,” Ms Petason said. “You’re more than a national treasure, you know.”

McCoy grumbled something under his breath, then started drinking his coffee.



At a hundred and fifteen years old, McCoy was still fully able to get around without a cane, and hardly looked a day over eighty. His mind was as sharp as it was sixty years ago, and, as he so often put it, it was a testament to daily exercise, good hygiene, eating right, and simply getting up every morning. Sure, he sometimes lamented the loss of agility and dexterity, but he was determined to live as naturally as possible, instead of constantly going through the rejuvenation process so many people were experimenting with these days. “If men were supposed to live forever, there would be no need for Doctors,” he would ramble.

As McCoy stepped over the threshold of the shuttle docking ring, one of his security guards made the mistake of offering him a guiding hand. The guard’s second waved him off, but the exchange didn’t go unnoticed by the lively eyes of McCoy.

“Why don’t you boys just wait for me here,” McCoy suggested.

“But sir...”

“I’ll make it an order if need be,” McCoy said. “I’ll be gone an hour or two. It’s not like I can get lost on a space station. Besides, I’ve been here before, and I know my way around. And I certainly didn’t get to be this old by being coddled. Now, stand down.”

The guards reluctantly retreated, and McCoy moved along on his own, without a real clue which way was what. The simple fact was that K7 had gone through some major renovations since he was last here, and it might as well have been a completely new station. Though one might think that a space station is a space station, seen one you’ve seen them all, they still tended to be designed and laid out for the comfort of those who most frequently used it. McCoy became a bit frustrated that the corridors didn’t seem to be as user friendly as most modern space stations, with computer guidance and wall maps. He became further annoyed as he approached the station security, as the funneling process for newly arriving guests was remarkable: remarkably bad. The process was slow and inefficient, mostly because the computerized forms of admittance procedures were purposely confusing. He got there by muddling through, as were most of the visitors.

The clerk processed the identification, saw nothing unusual, and gave him the green light to proceed.

“Son, I was supposed to meet someone at the bar,” McCoy said. “Can you point me in the right direction?”

“Sir, directory assistance can be found at the end of the hall,” the clerk said.

“I was asking you...”

“I know you old folks like to chat, but I’m busy. See the line?” the clerk remarked, pointing at the line of frustrated, impatient beings behind the Admiral.

“What is this world coming, too,” McCoy grumbled as he pushed on through.

“It’s not a world,” the clerk grumbled back. “It’s a space station. Just a place to pass through. I just hope I live long enough to just float around the universe from destination to destination...Next!”

McCoy had a few things to say to the man, but decided he would be casting pearls to swine. He muddled through a computer program that was supposed to be user friendly for anyone who had ever used a computer, only it wasn't. He caught a lift up, exited, looked about, and came face to face with a young man, in his early twenties, bald, and wearing a poncho.

"You got a nickel?" the man asked.

"Only wooden ones," McCoy said.

"Excellent, would you follow me, please?" the man asked.

McCoy was led to a room and ushered inside. The man excused himself, leaving McCoy contemplating the whole scene. It was all a mystery and he wasn't fond of mysteries. He was pretty sure he was not in harms way, for there were certainly easier ways to kill an old man than to ask him to waltz into the lion's den on his own power.

The place was immaculately kept, with only a few personal objects describing cultures McCoy was not immediately familiar with. Each piece was laid out to draw one's attention to the next piece, and ultimately around the room and back to the first object. Only McCoy's eyes didn't make it that far. He stopped at the woman dressed in a flowing, blue robe, with ballooning sleeves that hid clasped hands in front of her. She wore a hat that fell heavy on the right side of her face, offing the symmetry just enough to produce a feeling that she was approachable if you wanted to talk to her. Her smile was eloquent, patient, and warm. It was the face of kindness and wisdom, as if she were a grandmother a hundred times over.

"Guinan!"

"Doctor McCoy," she said, hugging him.

"Girl, you know better than that," he said.

"Sorry," she said. "Leonard. Thank you for coming on such short notice."

"Anything for you," McCoy said. "But why all this cloak and dagger?"

"Please, be seated. May I get you a drink? Saurian brandy, perhaps?" Guinan asked?

"You didn't bring me all this way to get an old man drunk, now did you?" McCoy said, trying to lighten the mood.

"Old?" Guinan asked. "You'll never be old!"

"Flattery will get you everywhere," McCoy said, taking a seat on the couch. "But back to the cloak and dagger bit. Are you okay? Are you in trouble? This station can be a bit rough."

"No, no, I'm okay," Guinan said. She fetched a single shot glass and the bottle of Saurian brandy she had acquired just for McCoy. The brandy was a darker shade of blue than McCoy had ever seen, suggesting an older vintage. "But there is something..."

"I told you, anytime you want a job in Starfleet, I'll set you up," McCoy said. "You don't have to run a bar."

"I like running a bar," Guinan said. "So many interesting people come to bars. Tell you what, you open a bar up on a Starship, and I'll tend to it. As for why I called you, well, this is much bigger than my employment opportunities."

"Is this a single or a double?" McCoy asked, indicating the brandy she had just handed him.

Guinan set the whole bottle on the coffee table in front of him.

"That bad?" he asked.

Guinan shrugged and offered a smile that suggested: “depends on your point of view.” McCoy recognized the gesture and downed his first drink. He set the empty glass next to the bottle and rested his hands in his lap.

“Okay, shoot,” McCoy said.

Guinan took a seat across from McCoy, sitting on the arm of the chair, posture straight. She rested her hands on her knees and thought for a moment, listening to the quietness of the room, feeling her heartbeat, and observing Admiral McCoy. There was still an edge of impatience about him, an urgency to resolve all conflicts and puzzles, but it had eased some since the first time she had met him. On hearing about Kirk’s death, Admiral McCoy had rushed out to intercept the Enterprise B as it crept back to Earth. He met first with his old shipmates and then examined the people who had been rescued. Some of them, Guinan included, were showing signs of melancholy, and a desperateness to return to the spatial anomaly, the Nexus. McCoy had managed to help her, even though he was grieving the loss of his dear friend: Captain James T Kirk.

“Do you remember a girl named Kelinda?” Guinan asked.

“I’ve met quite a few people in my days, so you are going to have to be more specific,” Admiral McCoy said.

“She was Kelvan,” Guinan said. “Apparently they hijacked your ship and dehydrated most of your crew down to their essential elements, a mass about this size...”

“Oh god, yes, I remember her now. That was some time ago...” McCoy said, his voice sounding reminiscent. They had turned the whole crew into polyhedra.

“I figured you would remember the dehydrating bit,” Guinan said.

“You’ve met her?” McCoy asked.

“I get around,” Guinan said.

“Indeed,” McCoy said, pouring himself another drink. He left it sitting on the table, though. “Go on.”

“As you may have heard, they are currently having a civil war on their planet,” Guinan said.

“I haven’t kept up, really,” Admiral McCoy said. “They pretty much became isolationist after colonizing that little planet we gave them. I remember their technology was greater than ours, and though they decided against conquering us, they did, conveniently, decide to employ some of our culture, the first one being the prime directive. They blocked any access we had to their technology with some vague talk about keeping a balance of power in this quadrant of the Galaxy. My personal slant is they haven’t given up their conquering ways and were just going to wait until they had the numbers to do it.”

“You’re not the only one to have suggested such a thing. There have been rumors that perhaps a Federation spy may have started the civil war in order to slow the ‘conquering urge’ down a bit,” Guinan said.

“Who told you that?” McCoy asked.

“I’m a listener. I hear things,” Guinan said.

“And so, you brought me all this way to discuss conspiracy theories you’ve been listening to?” McCoy said.

“Oh, no,” Guinan said. “This gets much more interesting.”

“How much more interesting can you get than a civil war and conspiracy theories?” McCoy asked.

“Let me continue to paint a picture for you,” Guinan said. “The civil war is between two factions. There is a third, but they’re a minor player, at the moment, anyway. One side is the modified Kelvans. These are the first generation Kelvan to become Human, all of whom you met. Some have decided to remain in human form. Kelinda is the head of this movement.”

“How is she by the way?” McCoy asked.

“Doesn’t look a day older than the day you first met her,” Guinan said.

“I suppose they’ll never learn what it means to be fully human, then,” McCoy lamented.

“The other faction,” Guinan continued. “Are taking a more conservative view of things, and believe everyone should return to the original Kelvan form.”

“You mean the whole giant monster thing with hundreds of tentacles and no emotions or senses, as we understand them anyway, just pure intellect?” Admiral McCoy asked.

“That’s them,” Guinan said. “Not really pleasant to look at, but, they have their place in the universe, too. Super intelligent, even if a bit controlling.”

“Umm,” McCoy grunted. “Here’s to diversity.” And downed a drink. He poured himself another glass and left it sitting. His attention drifted over to one of Guinan’s relics for a moment, and then he returned his gaze to her, signaling he had processed the information so far, and was ready to proceed.

“The Kelvans discovered that any offspring they produced while in human form were completely human,” Guinan continued. “There was no trace of their Kelvan physical or mental capabilities.”

“Of course. I told them as much,” McCoy said. “The Kelvin couldn’t fit on the Enterprise in their natural form, so in order to hijack the Enterprise, they had to assume human form. They were text book perfect, too, as I recall. They couldn’t have been better samples of the human genome if they were created in a lab. Anyway, since it would take nearly three hundred years to return back to their home world, only their descendants would have survived the trip, and naturally their offspring, being human, would not have anything in common with the creatures they were returning home to meet. They would be born human, develop as human, and die human.”

“Yes, but I guess they didn’t believe you, because Kelinda and her fellow Kelvan were still surprised to find that their children were alien to them. They were even more amazed when they discovered that their offspring could not be converted to the original Kelvan form. Oh, they could do it physically, turn their human children into Kelvan children, but the human mental capacity was insufficient to work the Kelvan physiology. Taking a human by birth and placing him into a Kelvan’s body was a terminal procedure, and it didn’t matter if it was a child or an adult. Apparently they can convert as many Kelvan into human without any detrimental side affects as they want, and they can change those individuals back, but any human offspring are human forever,” Guinan said.

“I told them that would probably be the case,” McCoy said. “I wonder how many had to die before they came to terms with that. Anyway, I guess you’re telling me that the traditionalist faction wants to maintain their Kelvan perspective, and the only way to do this is to remain Kelvan, or to only produce and raise children as Kelvan, and convert to human form when needed.”

“Basically, yes,” Guinan said. “But they didn’t give up on changing humans into Kelvan. There were some experiments at imprinting the Kelvan psychology on human subjects.”

McCoy took a drink and refilled his glass. He set the bottle down and kept the glass in his hand. The things different races subjected on their people, especially the children, had cease to amaze him long ago, but it still got him worked up.

Guinan continued, “It didn’t work too well. Adult humans who had Kelvan psychology imprinted onto their brains went crazy and died, and all the human infants that had this Kelvan psychological imprinting died, or were severely retarded at birth... with one exception.”

McCoy twirled the glass in his hands. He could discern the affects on his nervous system and he didn’t feel the need of any further medication. Guinan explained that the Kelvan procedure was analogous to taking a map of the neural network of a Kelvan and recreating that map on the human nervous system. In many respect, the Kelvan physiology and neural network was very similar to a cephalopod, like the octopus. The mental processing power needed for an octopus to camouflage itself was immense, and many humans figured it was the most likely candidate for evolving into sentience on Earth, given time. The Kelvan physiology was so elaborate that Spock noted on encountering the species in a mind meld that they were beyond emotions as we know it. He did not go into detailed specifics, but generally the Kelvan didn’t perceive things the way humans did. The nerve endings that terminated at the complex pigment structures in the Kelvan skin were necessary in order to camouflage itself, changing color and skin texture, that required tremendous amounts of mental processing power. It was true that its ability to camouflage itself surpassed the octopus two hundred fold, and was so adapt that when Kirk’s Away team had first arrived on the planet surface, no one had been able to see the Kelvan. They were beyond invisible, and then suddenly, they were there, in human form, walking amongst the immobilized members of the landing party. But they also needed the brain power just for intra-species communication, which was a combination of ultra high frequency sounds and pheromones, heavy on the pheromones.

What this boiled down to was that the Kelvan had a very different evolutionary tree, and no doubt an extremely alien environment compared to the environment that harbored the development of life on Earth, as well as much of the species in their quadrant. The Kelvan were probably the most alien compared to any other encounters that McCoy had had.

“It’s amazing to me that intelligent species evolve at all. All the so called smart ones, humans included, do the stupidest things,” McCoy said.

“Oh, it gets better,” Guinan assured him.

“Should I?” McCoy said, reaching for the bottle.

“You might want to be sober to digest the rest of this,” Guinan said.

McCoy nodded and put the empty glass down.

“Remember how you said the Kelvan were textbook perfect examples of the human genome?” Guinan asked.

“Yes,” McCoy said, sounding a bit annoyed. “There’s nothing wrong with my memory. And the only reason I considered them text book perfect is that they lacked the miscellaneous junk DNA. By eliminating that they had improved on the efficiency of their cellular metabolism.”

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