



# Khimairal Ink



Volume 1 Number 2

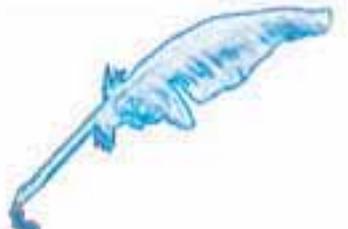
October 2005



Stories by  
Tyree Campbell \* T.K Galarneau  
Maritza Smith-Romero \* T.J. Mindancer



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Volume 1 Number 2

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**Publisher**  
Claudia Wilde

**Managing Editor**  
Carrie Tierney

**Assistant Editor**  
C.A. Casey

**Story Illustrations**  
Trish Ellis

**Cover Art/Layout**  
T.J. Mindancer  
C. Stout

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**W**elcome to the second e-zine issue of Khimairal Ink. We have another great selection of intriguing, original stories accompanied by the marvelous artwork of Trish Ellis.

I'm still in awe of the astounding response to the premiere issue. Getting the word out was one of our initial worries. A magazine on the Internet doesn't have the same publicity network a paper one has. For starters, one has to know where to look for it. A woman's e-zine, a lesbian one at that, has even a smaller niche in the online market. "Word of mouth" seems to be the most consistent way of getting the information.

So, special thanks go to Lori Lake, the Academy of the Bards readers, and the Merwolf Pups for their wonderful support. With their help, we had more than 50,000 hits in less than 10 days! The positive reaction to the e-zine indicates that a forum for well-written short stories has an enthusiastic and appreciative audience.

We hadn't intended to have a theme for each issue, but common threads in the submitted stories just seem to appear. The premiere issue had a "new found" love strand and this one brought to mind songs by the Indigo Girls. We matched stories to lyrics, found a cover photo by C. Stout to fit, and needless to say, are very pleased with the results.

So staying with the theme, I chose this passage from "Galileo."

*How long till my soul gets it right? Can any human being ever reach that kind of light?*

*...But she'll say, look what I had to overcome from my last life. I think I'll write a book.*

....or at least a short story! Enjoy!

See you next issue!

*Claudia*

Join us for the January 2006 issue featuring . . .

*The Krestyanova Genes by Barbara Davies*

*Sandra Dee's Lips by Sias Bryant*

*The Broken Teddy Bear by Nann Dunne*



I love serendipity. I love it when time comes to put stories into issues, themes just naturally fall into place. It's like finding gems hidden in plain sight. We're so focused on other things, we don't see an obvious connection between the stories at first.

By lucky coincidence we accepted two stories that had connections to Indigo Girl songs and that was enough for us to find the same kind of connection in two other stories. Like the songs of the Indigo Girls, the stories in this issue aren't necessarily predicatable or easy to read but we hope that they are entertaining and thought-provoking. And like a good Indigo Girls song, we hope these stories stay with you longer than it takes to read them.

The first story, "Vapors," is a science fiction tale written in part while the author listened to "Trouble." The second story "It Is the Right Thing to Do" flows between the world of a modern-day college professor and Native American myth. The lyrics from "Closer to Fine" fit this story very well. The story "Watershed" is about a modern day tangle of attractions and shares a title with an Indigo Girls song.

We felt we needed a lighter story to conclude the issue. Mindancer obliged us with "Gift of the Buccaneer." She swears she was listening to "Cold Beer and Remote Control" when she

wrote it but we suspect she was actually drinking cold beer and using the remote control to flip between the scifi station and the cartoon network. All joking aside, the song "1 2 3" best matches this science fiction tale about a space pirate.

I hope you enjoy this issue as much as we enjoyed putting it together.

*Carrie*

*We're looking for entertaining well-written fiction featuring lesbians.*

*Check out our guidelines at*  
<http://www.bedazzledink.com/khimairal-ink>

*We look forward to your submissions.*

The XWPVS in the spirit of The Greater Good, is conducting an auction to assist the victims, both human and animal, of hurricane Katrina that destroyed 90,000 square miles along the Gulf Coast on August 19th, 2005.

The artwork and autographed photos have been donated by our own illustrators and our fans with the hopes of raising funds. More information is available on the auction page

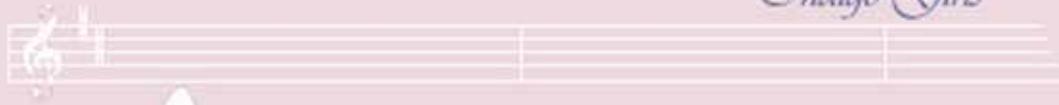
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for more information*

*Trouble**words and music**Indigo Girls*

Vapors

Tyree Campbell



Originally published in  
*The Fifth Di* in August  
2002.

**E**arth had changed so much in the 144 years and some clockticks since the departure of the Eridania colonists from whom I descended that I wondered whether Einstein had indeed been right about time dilation as it related to the velocity of light. Around me the State of New Hudson sparkled, gleamed, shone forth. Where, then, the pollution and crime the historical texts complained of? And where the noise?



Private polychrome conveyances passed along the street as if on rails and connected to one another, the hum of their power sources no more annoying than the song of a distant insect. Street vendors scouted for potential customers, their hawking muted to a courteous

“May I help you find something?” People smiled, and made way when I inadvertently drifted into the oncoming flow of pedestrians. If this was truly New Hudson, what had happened to the slums and the ghettos and the “Psst! Step in here and gimme your money”? And

everyone wore white surgical masks like the ones we had received without explanation and were instructed to don upon clearing Quarantine at Hudson External Port. Boys in drab uniforms had then aimed us and a group of schoolchildren on tour from the State of Bruxelles toward the lobby and the city immediately beyond, and we passed from one domed environment to the next. Directions were non-existent. Apparently we were to proceed to DOOPHUS along a pathway of trial-and-error.

Krysza, walking beside me, shrugged ignorance when I cocked an eyebrow at her.

Rarely did conditions Out There match expectations. That's what made it so interesting. But here? On Earth? This world of human genesis laid the foundation for our very existence Out There. We'd studied the videos and the documents and the photos in preparation for the inquiry we'd volunteered to make on behalf of Eridania. We knew Earth . . . didn't we? We were her children . . .

If Krysza and I were not who we thought we were, who the hell were we?

Krysza tucked a long stray lock of ochre hair over her ear. Under the mask, her nose twitched. "Air tastes funny," she said.

It had that desiccated, sanctified flavor of the air in our 'skip, between stars. Ever eat a bread crust while your mouth is dry? The memory of the flakes sticking to your gullet lingers long after you've swallowed. This was like that, only swallowing failed to ameliorate the condition. Krysza coughed, then sneezed. The sounds brought me back to the street. She was not alone in her distress. Tiny puffs from behind the masks of passers-by indicated a contagion of respiratory discomfort. But what in this surgery-room atmosphere could cause it?

At the first intersection we paused for the traffic flow indicators to change color, and garnered speculative appraisals from several young men--and from a young woman, who averted her eyes quickly when hers met mine. Krysza elbowed me sharply in the ribs, a playful reminder that, while I might be permitted the occasional dalliance, it would be with someone of her choice. Several paces away, a woman clad in faux tweed and puce leggings that

revealed an attractive bit of knee and nothing else tugged at a leash. The dog, if dog it was [cross a chihuahua with a cocker spaniel and dye the result electric pink], sniffed at a waypost, turned around, and lifted its right rear leg.

A ray of sunshine flashed from the waypost diagonally across the intersection from us, choking off the woman's "No!" I heard a sound not unlike that which you cause by inadvertently laying the screwdriver across the battery poles. The dog vanished. The leash fell limp to the walkway.

Krysza gasped, and clutched at my hand.

A passing conveyance, its operator temporarily distracted by the incident, intruded into the intersection just as the indicators changed color from amber to crimson. Another ray of sunshine gleamed, and this time the pop! assaulted our ears.

The conveyance vanished, and its occupant.

"Order," said a young man--not one of the oglers. His was a hatchet face, the blade the nose and chin, tanned as old hide.

I nodded, eyes still on the waypost. About twenty meters high it stood, topped with a slotted bulb. I'd seen photos of bad weather sirens rather like this.

"I'm Laird," he said. He did not offer his hand.

My heart settled back into a decent rhythm. "Charlene Nash. This is my wife, Krysza."

He eased back a pace. Furtive eyes flicked from side to side. "Your . . . wife."

His tone alerted me to unknown dangers. "Is there a problem?"

Laird licked his lips. Something was awry . . . but what? "Have you two, uh . . . you know. Here. In this block, I mean."

"Have we two uh what here in this block?" Beside me Krysza stifled a giggle. "Oh! No." Not that it was any concern of his.

Visibly relieved, Laird looked at me again. Dark eyes absorbed my attire--a green jersey, a pair of old but still serviceable black jeans, and field boots--and Krysza's--similar, except her jersey was pale violet, like her eyes. With his inspection I became aware of our conspicuousness. His was what we call an outsuit, relatively form-fitting and quite utile. Underneath his body looked functional, though I was not

inclined to test the theory.

"You are Externals," he said, as if that explained a question he had not asked.

Krysza sniffled, and cleared her throat. "We're from---"

". . . outside New Hudson," I broke in. "We're looking for DOOPHUS." He frowned ignorance, and I added, "It will be an office of some sort, probably a large one. We are to report in person. We have an inquiry to make." Such were our orders.

His eyes--they were almost chocolate in the sunlight--betrayed his puzzlement. Still, he ticked a fingertip at a keyboard implant in his left palm, then keened his head, as if listening. Belatedly I spotted the nodule in the dark hair just above his right ear.

Finally he said, pointing to his left, "Two blocks from here. It is one of the older buildings, perhaps one of the Originals. You seek the second level below ground."

I remained uncertain. "Perhaps you might be kind enough to escort us?"

Laird shifted his weight from one leg to the other, and looked away. His countenance suggested he regretted having offered conversation.

"Krysza and I won't do any uh-what in your presence." I tucked a note of plea into my tone. I was unaccustomed to requesting assistance. On Eridania it was offered in advance of need. "Is that satisfactory?"

His voice grew sullen. "This way, then."

We followed him. He stayed just far enough ahead of us to make the casual observer doubt Krysza and I were in his company. After half a block I'd had enough, and snagged him by the shoulder, spinning him around. "Are we doing something wrong?"

Laird almost laughed. "No, of course not. How can you?" He made a face at us, inconvenienced by the need to explain the [to him] obvious. "There is no wrong. There is only Order . . . here, as it is in your State. What did you think, that we were different? Externals! You think everything is a new wonder. I assure you it is not. We are quite like you."

Already I'd begun to doubt that, but I let his delusion survive. "Order" meant . . . what did it mean? Who made the rules here?

Krysza's lovely brow furrowed. "You mean, if we cross against the light, we will be killed?"

Laird bade us onward. "Don't cross against the light," he said, as if it were that simple. Well, perhaps it was. But not on Eridania.

At the corner we crossed with the light. And with the next. Pedestrians and small shops formed a defilade through which we passed without hindrance. From the row of eateries athwart the middle of the block there should have emanated aromas to inspire appetites. Instead, to the accompaniment of the whirr of tiny fans embedded in the walls above the shop windows, we scented only sterility. Even Krysza's alluring lilac perfume had dulled, diluted to parts per trillion. Absent the touch of her hand, if I closed my eyes, I could not sense her . . . which seemed a waste of friendly proximity. Our reflections in a window recalled to me just how much we stood out in our attire . . . and made me aware of the eyes on us. Truly we were Externals.

But another pair of eyes, somewhere beyond the range of the reflection, weighed on me. I doubted the waypost had keened to Krysza and me, wary of potential infraction. This surveillance felt, not technological, but personal. Someone was interested in us.

Krysza felt it, too. Her lilac eyes swept around us as we drifted onward, but failed to light upon any particular person. For a moment we were back on Eridania, in the Thronx Forest, playing Hide-and-Seek. But that had been a game. Again I wondered who made the rules here.

The structure toward which Laird led us was indeed venerable, its pale brown blocks fragmented and pitted with age and by ancient skirmishes. A battle had once been fought near here, perhaps the Intifada of New York that I had read about, the uprising of immigrants uneasy with the ways of their adopted land. It was none of my concern. My eyes, and Krysza's, swept toward the future. Whatever was past, had already happened.

Doors slid open when we ascended the brief set of gray plastic steps, shallow depressions in them hinting that the interior of the building was at one time frequented. Under our masks Krysza and I coughed as the rush of freshly-

dried air reached us. We stepped into the foyer, but Laird remained at the entrance, his duties completed. I beckoned him onward.

He turned and fled.

"This does not bode well," Krysza whispered.

Her soft voice echoed through the chamber and down dimly-lit corridors long abandoned. Around us tiny fans hummed, inhaling dust and odors, replacing them with unhydrated air. My throat clogged, and I coughed. The atmosphere of Eridania was similar to that of Earth . . . or was supposed to be. There is a constant newness, standing on the front patio of the cottage in the sunlight, beside your wife, taking in the morning's first breaths. For unfathomable reasons, New Hudson had chosen to befoul its air with dry molecules, and Krysza and I could only share spasms racked with coughs.

Which rather took the romance out of it. And the newness.

Krysza pointed.

A directory was affixed to the wall, its black field age-faded to grays, the white plastic letters stained as if by an explosion of coffee. Names of people and offices, numbers of rooms. Some of the letters were missing. Our destination was indeed on the second subterranean level. Another wall sign indicated the location of elevators. We followed the arrow and reached two sets of sliding doors. I pushed the button for Down, without effect.

"Stairs," said Krysza.

The excitement of impending completion spurred me onward. In that way, I suppose, accomplishing a task is rather like love-making. Krysza felt it, too. Her field boots tocked the plastic steps ahead of me, and echoes thrummed me as I passed through her vacated space. Two flights of stairs we took, and arrived at B Level. Here the air seemed moister, or perhaps it was my imagination. But the emptiness remained.

The building was unoccupied.

We'd reached a long corridor lined on either side with doors at regular intervals. Some had signs or placards indicating the purposes within. A length of luminous tiles divided the ceiling as far as we could see. The first door we came to bore a three-digit number, the next two units

higher. We turned and headed in the other direction.

Krysza removed her mask and drank deeply of the air, the inhalation singing past the glob of mucus that had formed in the back of her throat. She coughed once to clear it and breathed again, quieter. Under the jersey her breasts trembled with the effort. "I don't understand this at all," she sighed.

Aboard our 'skip *Eclair de Lune* [I like Debussy, Krysza loves pastries, as we've explained on too many occasions] we'd received our ANTIs, standard prophylactics against all manner of organisms and proteins. We were as immune to disease as the human body could be made. Whence then our distress?

An echo reached us, faint as old starlight.

We'd brought no weapons, despite the possibility of being accosted in an alley as the videos suggested--ours was a peaceful mission. But Krysza was trained in aikido, and she was tenacious. Eyes and ears keened to stealthy approaches, we continued down the corridor, counting off the room numbers. The echo remained unrepeatable. I recalled the line from Poe: Only this and nothing more.

Krysza tugged me to halt. I'd glanced at the door and been about to move on. Belatedly the number registered. Black block letters on the door just below the fogged window read: Domestic Organization for Off-Earth Population/Habitation, U.S.

We'd arrived.

And no one was home. I turned the door handle, anticipating resistance, and it yielded readily enough. Inside the room was dark and unoccupied. I felt for the wall switch and toggled it. In the ceiling, three of the ten tiles began to glow faintly. A fourth flickered and died, like a final hope. Had we come for nothing, then?

The room contained a desk of some dark hardwood that the little fans kept free of dust, and a captain's chair on casters behind it, and a sofa by the left wall, its wine upholstery faded now to blush rose in spots. There were no windows, of course, but set into the right wall was an aquarium scene, in three-dimension colors that shifted as the viewer moved through the

room, so that the fish seemed lifelike. The movement was, perhaps, as illusory as our mission. Life had been here, and departed.

Krysza gave a little cry of dismay. She'd reached the same conclusion.

"All this way . . ." Her eyes were dry. The tears were in her voice.

A door in the far wall might open to answers. I tested it, but the lock was proof against unsolicited entry. The drawers of the desk were equally as secure. We might pry them open and rummage around inside, but to what end? We'd expected artstate technology, know-it-all computers, opulent resources. We'd found an abandoned room free of dust and of spirit. Fourteen light-years we had come, yet were no closer to making the inquiry. We might as well have remained on Eridania.

Krysza drifted to the sofa and flopped down, I beside her, to the hiss of cushions yielding. Bashing our heads against a blank wall had left us dazed. What now? Whither now? If a successor had been authorized to DOOPHUS, it lay beyond our ken. We might seek it out, if we knew whom to ask. The room was empty. The building was empty.

Presently I grew aware of Krysza, leaning against me. In desperate straits, love finds a way to expression. In a settlement of millions, we had stumbled into a spot of privacy. We required no encouragement to take advantage of it.

**T**here's panic, and there's resignation. One evening some years ago, when Melanie Carlson and I, both just turned nine, were getting to know one another quite well in the living room, my parents returned early from work. In the panic that followed, I wound up wearing Mel's denims and one of her boots. Our faces were flushed and hot, bodies wet. My parents said not a word, but smiled at us stumbling and bumbling around the sofa, and headed to their room and the shower they needed.

I doubted Krysza and I could dress ourselves in the one point four seconds it took for the office door to open. We didn't try.

The man who entered was rotund and

genial, his expression almost on the verge of befuddlement. He paused just inside the doorway, laced his fingers across his ample chest, and said, under his mask, "My my my."

He had the eyes of one who had seen the body of a woman and took pleasure in the viewing, but did not regard her nakedness as a forthright invitation to couple. After a moment, he turned away, without blushing. "Dear me. I'll only be a moment. Please forgive me for interrupting."

Krysza's jaw dropped. "Who are you?"

From somewhere in his tent of a shirt he fished a key, which he began inserting into one drawer after another in the desk. "My my my," he said, oblivious to the question. He had a coarse, rather high voice that addressed his surroundings but no one in particular. "I'll only be a moment. Yes yes yes. Now where did I put those . . . ?"

Gingerly Krysza and I finished untangling, and got dressed to the rhythm of his my-my-mys. Presently he uncovered the object of his search--a box of databalls--and eased himself around the corner of the desk and made for the door. Befuddled he might be, but he had remembered to secure each drawer.

"Wait," I said.

"Hmm? Oh, dear me. No no no. Please, indulge yourself. I can review these files in another office, you know. Yes yes yes. Well, of course you don't know. My my my. Of course not." Chuckling at some private mirth, he opened the door and started to step through.

"Please wait. I think we came to see you."

"To see me? Oh, my dears, no no no. I assure you I have absolutely no interest in your--"

"About Eridania," said Krysza.

"Oh. Oh?" Relief washed over his face and sparkled his eyes. "Eridania, you say. My my my." He held aloft the box. Under the mask his bulbous nose quivered as he gave a tiny cough. "These are the referent project histories. A message was forwarded to me from an STS, after passing through so many offices, so many offices, yes yes yes. They're coming back, you know. Well, of course you don't know. No no no. How could you know? I must study--"

"We're here," said Krysza, on focus as always.

". . . them to refresh my . . . my dear, what did you say? You're here? Oh, my my my. That is precious, that is. Yes yes yes."

"We're come from Eridania," she went on. "We're to make an inquiry."

He slumped against the wall, to the accompaniment of a minor vibration. "Oh, my." His hand lowered, the box slipped from his fingers and fell to the floor, breaking to send six crimson databalls clacking across the floor. Krysza gave a little cry and scurried after them. One struck my ankle, and I rescued it.

"You're here," he repeated. "From Eridania. To make an inquiry? My my my." He accepted the five from Krysza. I got up and dumped the sixth into his massive palm. Large he was, and quite overweight, but I got the impression he was also immensely strong. And immensely gentle.

He filled the box and closed it, and set it on top of the desk, then removed his mask as if to honor his guests. "I am Doctor Flavian," he announced, in a tone that said we might direct our inquiry to him. He looked at us, one and then the other, expectantly.

Proper formal address on Eridania required that Lady Charlene Nash and her Mistress Krystyna be introduced by a third party, but we were no longer on the planet, and in any case no one has used formal address for a century or so, except on rare and special occasions at the onset of lovemaking. I presented us as I had to Laird.

"Oh, dear me," he said. "My my my."

"You are in charge of DOOPHUS?" I pressed.

"Yes yes yes. Yes yes yes. That is, there is no one else. I am my own staff, you know. Well, of course you don't--"

"Doctor Flavian," said Krysza, her tone a knock of authority on his door. "Where are the colonists Earth promised to send? Why has Earth failed to maintain communications with Eridania? Why haven't people followed us out into the stars? Why have you forsaken us?"

"Oh, my dears," breathed Flavian. "Oh, my very dears."

I wanted to growl. "What!"

"You don't know? Well, of course you don't know, why would you? No no no. Oh, my dears, Earth no longer needs to found colonies elsewhere. We have Order now. Our population is stable and obedient. There is no longer any impetus for space exploration and settlement. No no no. This very office exists now only because it was established. What was established, must remain established, thus preserving Order. Someone must therefore staff it. Yes yes yes. That has been my privilege for . . . my my my, has it been that long? And my predecessor staffed alone as well." Flavian glanced over his shoulder. "They found him deceased in that same chair."

I was about to ask why anyone would bother to look for his predecessor if nobody cared about the office anymore.

"His personal wealth had accumulated in his account," Flavian went on, "and someone made an inquiry. Just as you are making now. Yes yes yes. They found Doctor Ashlon . . . rather mummified, so they said. My my my. He was almost completely desiccated."

"Like the air," I muttered.

"What's that, my dear? Oh, yes." He put a hand to his mouth and coughed behind it. "My my my. Quite."

I had to ask. "What is Order?"

An echo of footsteps in the corridor dopplered in. Someone was approaching at a run. One person, by the sound of it. Flavian's expression said he, too, was genuinely puzzled. As the sound grew nearer, Krysza tried to thrust me behind her, the better to protect me, but the Unknown is always best faced together, side by side. In the frosted door window a shadow loomed, with a pale face. Belatedly I thought of securing the door.

Into the office burst an unmasked woman who somewhat resembled Krysza. Flaxen hair swirled like an umbrella as she spun about. Wide blue eyes sought us and found us. "You're here," she breathed, and coughed. "Oh, you're here."

It was the young woman whose eyes briefly had met mine at the intersection.

"Did you two make love in here?" she cried. "Please tell me you haven't made love in here."

On Eridania there is considerable preamble

before one asks such a personal question. Sometimes years of preamble. Krysza and I exchanged glances. "We have, in fact," I said.

She whimpered, and put her fists to her head. "Oh, no. Oh, no."

And then she screamed.

**T**he door I'd been unable to open led to, among other things, a wash basin. While Doctor Flavian fetched a glass of water, Krysza and I sat the young woman on the sofa [her name, she'd mumbled, between sobs, was Hypasha] and took turns trying to calm and console her, with minimal success. Alternately she sipped and coughed, the sounds punctuated by Flavian's my-mys and oh-dears as he trudged around the room. From time to time he fluttered his fingers on his chest, a bureaucrat out of his bureau. I understood something of what he felt. A creature of routine, he'd encountered a development beyond his expectations. Krysza and I felt the same way toward Earth. So very little matched the information in our briefings.

At last Hypasha gasped, and nudged the glass away. Vacant blue eyes gaped around the room. "All gone now. I can't go. You can't take me with you."

I caught her chin and tilted her face toward mine. "Let's start at the beginning. I'm Char--"

"I know who you are," she snapped, and wrenched her chin from my grip. "I overheard you introduce yourselves to that boy. And I know exactly what you are. That's why I followed you. I thought . . . I thought . . ." She put her fists to her head, and for a moment I expected her to scream again. But she regained control of that primal urge, swallowed, and forced her words out. Focus returned to her eyes, and with it a clarity cold as space. "I couldn't figure how you stayed alive this long. But when I looked up DOOPHUS in my PC, I knew. I knew. I was going to ask you . . . I came here to find you, to ask you . . . to beg you . . ." And then she broke down again. Tortuous sobs wracked her body, tears matted her hair.

PC, mouthed Krysza, to me.

My fingers went to Hypasha's right ear, and found the lump. "Palm computer," I said softly,

to my wife. "They're wired here. Maybe linked to some central network. It must have something to do with Order."

"It has everything to do with Order," said Flavian, leaning now against the front of his desk. "Yes yes yes. Everything you say and do is recorded and evaluated." He jabbed a thick finger at the ceiling. What I had supposed to be air vents were apertures for sensors. The room was under constant surveillance. Audio and visual, probably even nosmic. "Should you perform an act that warrants your deletion," Flavian went on, as if from behind a podium in a lecture hall, "you will be deleted at the nearest intersection. This was explained to you at the beginning of your sixteenth year. There is a list of proscribed acts. Yes yes yes."

"I'm fourteen," protested Krysza. "Milady is fifteen."

"Earth years," I whispered.

Krysza rolled her eyes, chagrined.

"It doesn't matter," said Hypasha, despondent now. Her voice was a wood rasp on old knots. "You made love here. It was recorded. When you reach the next intersection, you will be deleted."

"That is insane," said Krysza.

"That is Order," said Flavian. "Yes yes yes. Order keeps us secure. As we comport ourselves, so shall we live."

"Are you telling me that what Krysza and I did in here was wrong?"

Hypasha swung her head from side to side, slowly, sadly. "There is no wrong. There is no right. There is only Order. You may do what you wish. You are free to do so. But if you perform a proscribed act, you will be deleted."

Krysza repeated herself, a clear signal of her utter astonishment. "This is insane."

"Who makes up this list?" I asked. I wanted to have a word or two with him.

Flavian gave me a blank look. Hypasha said, "I don't think anyone remembers. It's been this way all my life. If I hadn't begun to realize what I was, I might never have given the matter anymore thought than anyone else does."

Flavian was still drawing a blank, but his mouth worked. "And what is it that you are, my dear?"

And almost immediately, he added, "Oh, I see. Yes yes yes. My my my."

Krysha hugged herself at the same time I felt a stone form in my stomach. "We can't leave this block?" she said. "We can't even approach an intersection?"

Hypasha looked away, her answer transparent. Krysha coughed again, and I'd had enough. "What the hell is wrong with the air here?" I yelled, to no one in particular.

Flavian's slate remained empty. "Nothing is wrong with the air. No no no. It's purified to ensure that nothing is wrong with it. No impurities allowed. No no no. We are quite healthy here, my dears, I assure you. On Eridania you might experience respiratory difficulties, but not here, not on Earth."

"They pass ordinary air through an intersection," Krysha whispered bitterly. "And it comes out breathable."

The stone in my belly became a boulder. I rushed from the sofa and grabbed Flavian by the throat. "What have you people done?"

The Universe's gentlest hands tugged at my arm. A damp cheek nuzzled my shoulder--Krysha was weeping. "Let it go, beloved," she said. A sweep of her nose across my sleeve removed a couple teardrops. "It's too late. There will come no more. Eridania must survive on its own, as it has these years."

Flavian, for all his bulk, seemed to cower before me, and I released him. He'd done me no harm . . . probably his bureaucratic ancestors had meant no harm, either. They'd sought only Order, and they'd gotten what they wished for.

We had to tell Eridania: Make no more inquiries.

As for those who had other, divergent wishes--

Krysha knew my mind before I'd reached the decision. She gave me a little nod and a kiss, before I returned my attention to the sofa and to Hypasha, still despondent.

"You have to tell them," I said, and gave her the operating instructions for the Eclair de Lune. These were in fact quite simple. An order of "Return to Eridania" was required, nothing more. Hypasha's face radiated lambent joy, then sorrow, as the full implications of my

instructions sank in. I shook my head once, firmly, to end her lament before she made it. Krysha was right: we had no choice.

I glanced at Flavian. "Take him with you," I said. "His function here is at an end. Let him breathe some air."

"My my my," said Flavian.

Hypasha hesitated. Now that the moment of decision was upon her, she was experiencing the perfectly normal momentary faintness of heart.

"You said yourself it was what you wanted," I reminded her. "Take it. Explore, live, fall in love. And remember us to Eridania."

Hypasha stood up, her expression sufficiently eloquent. "Yes, of course."

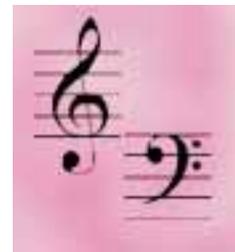
They left. No tearful goodbyes, no my-dears, for which Krysha and I were grateful. Flavian continued to appear numbed by sudden events. But he was a Doctor of something, and that would prove useful on Eridania. Perhaps, in time, he could explain to the colony why they were now, and of right ought to be, independent.

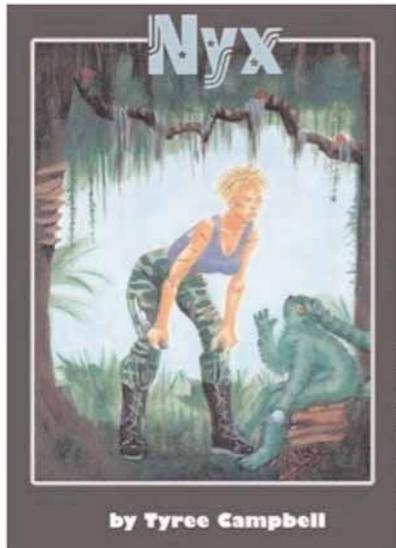
"What now?" whispered my wife.

"We can't live here, beloved. Not our way."

She looked at the sofa, and then at me . . .

The Unknown is always best faced together, side by side. In the morning, we decided to cross against the light.





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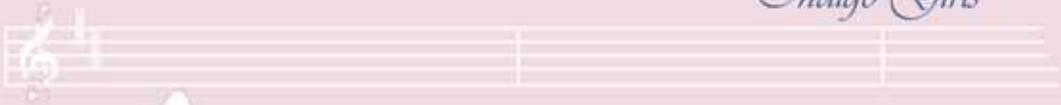
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## It Is the Right Thing To Do

T. K. Galarneau



**H**ave you ever wondered why the world is the way it is? I do, all the time. My grandfather tried to explain the ancient beliefs of our people to me, without, I'm sorry to say, very much success . . .

"Look at the circle," Grandfather would say, "can you tell where it begins or ends?"

"No," I would reply, only half listening.

"The circle is sacred to our people. Do you know why?" he asked.

Another noncommittal "no" was my reply.

"It represents Mother Earth, who provides us with everything we need to live." Grandfather was nothing if not extremely patient. "We must treat the Earth, and everything living on it, with respect. The animals, plants, and even the rocks are our brothers and sisters,"

he would say.

Great, I thought, my brother is a rock.

"It is our responsibility to care for Mother Earth the way she cares for us," Grandfather said sternly, "we do this because it is the right thing to do . . ."



That was my grandfather; he always did the right thing. And, as I got older, I began to understand what he was trying to teach me. Even after he was gone, I could still hear his voice speaking to me. ". . . it is the right thing to do."

Still, it was very difficult for me to do the right

thing when it seemed everyone else around me wasn't . . . and getting away with it, too. Case in point: my refusal to publish an academic paper for the oldest reason in the world--principle.

"Look, if you want to teach at a major university, you need to publish," Gayle advised.

"I don't know why," I argued, "it's ludicrous to think my job depends on some boring academic article published in some innocuous magazine no one but scholars ever reads. I don't need a bunch of academicians yammering about something I wrote to validate my knowledge base! I've got degrees up the gazoos, isn't that enough?"

"Bret," Gayle lectured, "I know you are incredibly knowledgeable, but the stuffed shirts with the big degrees, who sign the paychecks, don't care about that. In addition to those degrees, doctor, they want you to have an article published in that innocuous scholarly report--or you don't stay employed, get it?"

"Yeah," I groaned, "but I still don't think its right."

"Maybe so," Gayle agreed, "but that's the way it is, and you have to abide by the rules if you want to play the game. Try looking at it this way: your paper reflects well on them. When it comes down to it, they need you to publish more than you realize. They can brag to their cronies that they have the best minds in all of academia, and your paper is proof."

Gayle was right; I knew it. After all, I had been told often enough . . . every time I'd been pushed aside or overlooked for something I wanted.

"Bret," my mother tried to comfort me, "just prove to them you can do whatever you set your mind to do. Learn to play by their rules."

"Mom," I cried, "how am I supposed to do that if no one will give me a chance?"

That scenario had played itself out time and time again. I had to continually prove myself, initially, because I was Native American from the "rez," or because I was an unsophisticated "red-neck." Finally, the most infuriating reason was I was a woman who had the misfortune to live in a world run by men.

But Gayle never had lived out that scenario. She came from a wealthy family, with all the perks, and besides that--she caved, and wrote

that academic article for the scholars to drool over.

Not me! I was going to stick by my guns, and as a result, once again, I was forced to prove myself. My strategy was to go on a fact finding mission. Just what was it that made one particular college professor, Dr. Jason Proctor, better than me?

Ms. Gayle Hanson, PhD, my best friend, confidant, and sometimes lover had a suggestion for my problem. I failed to see what made him such a big hit with the dean of the history department. We were both just as intelligent; although I didn't flaunt what I knew as he did. We both had tenure at the university. We both taught graduate courses, which were always filled first. I just didn't get it. Gayle and I discussed my situation at length one Saturday evening, at which time, she came up with this ridiculous notion.

"Bret," I have an idea," Gayle said slowly, as though she was having trouble forming the words, "why don't you observe one of Proctor's U.S. History classes?"

This idea came after a couple bottles of wine; so naturally, my reaction wasn't too out of line.

"Why would I do that?" I joked. "I don't want to be a proctologist."

I thought that was a very clever response, considering the amount of wine I had consumed. Gayle didn't.

"I'm serious, Bret," she replied indignantly.

I always wondered how one could successfully portray indignation while one was drunk.

"Since alcohol obviously interferes with your ability to think clearly," I slurred, "you shouldn't drink. Therefore, because your thought processes have been compromised by the fruit of the vine, I will disregard that absurd idea."

"Okay," Gayle retorted, "then if you are not interested in taking my advice, there can be no more whining when Proctor beats you out of the plumb assignments."

I had to admit, everything else I tried to get the dean's attention had failed, so why not take one more shot, like Henry V . . .

*... once more into the breach, dear friends  
...*

Ergo, today I was enduring the most boring hour in my life! I should have been teaching this class! However, all but one--me--of the 100 students in this class was literally hanging on every word this asshole was telling them. Why you ask? It was very simple--the professor was a man, who coincidentally, had been published. If this moron explained the plight of women in the 1700 and 1800's one more time, I thought I was going to puke . . .

"Of course you have to understand, Ms. Bryant," Proctor intoned, "women, from the dawn of time until the middle of the twentieth century, were chattel. As a result, women were relegated to roles that were subservient to men. Women were thought to be the weaker sex, and as such were considered to be incapable of competing with men on equal footing. Therefore, only traditional occupations were open for women. You know: a housewife, a cook, a teacher, a housekeeper . . ."

If he said what I thought he was going to, I swear . . .

". . .and, of course the oldest occupation in the world . . ."

A smattering of laughter ensued.

"In other words, Dr. Proctor," I interrupted angrily, "you think the only thing women can do well is spread their legs for a man?"

Even before the words were out of my mouth, I knew I screwed up big time.

"Dr. Yearout," Proctor said condescendingly, "Certainly, you must know, my intention was never to infer that women were . . ."

I cut him off angrily.

"Oh please, don't patronize me, Proctor! I'm not one of your groupies hanging on your every word, and need your class to graduate. Your whole existence is testimony to your attitude toward women. You think all you have to do is wine and dine a woman, throw in a little coercion, and you can get anything you want. Wouldn't you agree with that assessment, Ms. Bryant? After all, you are passing U. S. History on your academic efforts alone, are you not?"

No doubt this was the first time all semester everyone was truly engaged in what was taking place in this classroom. There were 100 pairs of eyes and ears focused intently on Ms. Bryant in anticipation of how she would respond to my

question. To say the least, everyone's interest was peaked. It was no secret Proctor had a case of "hot pants" for young co-eds. Fortunately or unfortunately, depending on your point of view, no one ever found proof of impropriety with any of his students on his part.

"Dr. Yearout, I find your insinuation insulting to both myself and the professor," the young woman stated flatly. "I have nothing but the highest respect for Jason . . . uh . . . I mean Dr. Proctor, both as an educator and human being."

Oh my God, I thought. Nearby, I heard another student whisper to his friend. "Shelly better be careful, her blonde is showing."

I thought the young man was going to implode to keep from laughing out loud.

"Just as I thought," I remarked coldly.

I slammed the door on my way out. Proctor was trying to put a good face on Shelly's verbal blunder. "I must apologize for what just happened. Sometimes, Dr. Yearout is her own worst enemy. She has yet to learn to control her emotional outbursts, and I'm afraid they will ultimately be her undoing."

Undoing? As much as I hated to agree with Proctor about anything, he was right. This time, I had gone too far. Gayle was always warning me?

"Bret, remember to engage your brain before you engage your mouth. You'll find yourself in less uncomfortable situations."

Grandfather would agree with Gayle.

"Some people wander through life aimlessly with no purpose, while others learn from the experiences in life, and grow stronger from the knowledge," he would say.

Not me, I had a purpose all right. It seemed I was hell bent to destroy myself, professionally, and this could be my crowning glory. A tenured professor impugning a colleague's ethics in private was risky at best, but doing so in his classroom, in front of his students, was more than risky, it was insane. I walked slowly toward my office, and once there, I flopped down into the old recliner and snapped on the stereo. It wasn't long before the soft melodious sounds of Native flute music filled the room. Native music provided a soothing balm for my tormented soul more than once. It was just as mind numbing as drugs without the harmful side effects, namely

addiction.

Before long, a calm almost tranquil feeling replaced agitation. The feeling was not unlike the sensation one got seconds before sleep overtook the conscious mind. In that moment, from someplace far away, my grandfather's voice spoke to me. ". . . it is the right thing to do."

**L**isten my little ones and I will tell you a story from the time of your grandfather's grandfather. A time just after Coyote created the people."

One boy, Small Beaver, spoke up. "Is the trickster, Coyote, in this story, Grandfather? My favorite stories involve Coyote." He laughed.

"No!" another boy said, "I like Fox best."

"Calm yourselves, my little ones," Grandfather said affectionately, "both Coyote and Fox are in this story."

The old Indian's eyes sparkled when he remembered a time long since passed in the people's history. The old man was nearing his ninetieth year, and was the Shaman, or wise man, of his village. The people called him He Who Sees the Past. He alone carried the memories [the history] of the people. To the children, he was Grandfather.

"Do you see those two rock formations on the west side of the river?" he continued.

One child spoke up. "Grandfather, everyone knows those rocks mark the entrance to our valley. They can be seen for miles, and my father said Coyote put them there so the people could find this place."

The young man was very proud of himself for remembering the story his father had taught him.

"That is true, Little Fox, but do you know how they came to be there?" Grandfather asked sternly. "If you do not, you know only part of the story."

Little Fox's pride turned to humiliation in an instant as the other children laughed at his discomfort. He Who Sees the Past put a stop to the jeering at once. He merely raised his hand for silence; then he began the tale once again.

"Coyote created the people, the Nimipu, long ago, but before he did this, he searched the

world looking for just the right place. It was then . . ."

Another child spoke up interrupting He Who Sees the Past again. "Yes, Grandfather, Coyote defeated the Monster of the Clearwater and created our people from its heart."

Little Fox moved uncomfortably on his buffalo robe, an angry expression showed clearly on his face.

"Very good, little one," Grandfather praised. "But, once again you are ahead of my story. All of you be still, and let me go on with my story."

The children were all quiet now, anxious to hear the legend the old man had to tell.

"The rocks are more than a marker for the people. Look closely; do you see what form the rocks make?"

The children studied the rock formations closely, but no one dared speak up after Grandfather's stern admonition for silence. Well, all but one.

"Grandfather," Little Fox said matter-of-factly, "anyone can see they are people. One is a strong warrior riding a great spotted horse. He has an eagle perched on his arm."

The boys in the circle all laughed at Little Fox's assumption, the girls just sat in stony silence. The old man sat quietly; a slight smile creased his face.

"What makes you think the rider is a warrior? Perhaps the figure is a hunter or a girl? Do not jump to conclusions, Little Fox," He Who Sees the Past warned, "many times the hunter loses his prey because he shows himself too quickly. Now, I will tell the story."

The old man began his story; the children listened respectfully with rapt fascination . . .

**C**oyote and his brother Fox were discussing where the people should live. The Clearwater Valley was a beautiful place and had everything the people would need; the Creator saw to that. Still Coyote felt that the Nimipu would need another place to live as well, a place where they would be safe if ever there was danger. Fox wasn't sure that was necessary, and they argued about what to do.

While they were arguing, a brother and sister approached cautiously. The boy was called

Gold Eagle, and the girl was Bright Eyes. Coyote and Fox noticed the two hiding behind a small tree, and stopped their discussion.

Fox said to Coyote, "We have company my brother."

"Where?" Coyote asked quickly.

"There, behind that berry bush," Fox replied.

"Ah yes, I see," Coyote said slyly, already a plan forming in his clever brain. He spoke harshly to the brother and sister. "Why are you listening? Do you not know it is not polite to eavesdrop? Come here," Coyote demanded.

Bright Eyes, the elder of the two spoke first. "My brother, Gold Eagle, and I did not mean to eavesdrop. We did not mean any disrespect--"

Encouraged by his sister's speech, the boy interrupted her. This rude behavior did not go unnoticed by Coyote and Fox.

Golden Eagle spoke boldly. "My keen hearing and sharp eyes caught your voices and movements from that hill over there." Gold Eagle pointed to a hill far down the valley. "I said we should go see what was here, but my sister, naturally, was frightened and said we should be cautious. But I said there was nothing to fear, I would protect her. You should be more careful to hide your trail. It was easy to track you to this place."

Once again, Bright Eyes was embarrassed by her younger brother's brash behavior, and seethed with anger. This too did not go unnoticed by Fox and Coyote. It was obvious there was friction between the two, and Coyote was clever enough to use this animosity to his advantage.

"We could use these two to settle our argument. Let us trick them into finding the best place for the people to live," he whispered to Fox.

"You may have a good idea, brother," Fox agreed. "These two are very competitive, that is clear. If we make the reward great enough, they will be eager to do our work for us."

"Then this is what we will do," Coyote said. "Listen carefully to my words, and follow what I say." Fox nodded eager to see what Coyote had in mind for the two foolish children. The siblings had not heard Fox and Coyote's conversation, so did not know Coyote was setting a trap for them.

"Very well," Coyote continued, "since you are here, Fox and I would like your opinion on a matter we have been discussing."

"Yes, that's true," agreed Fox, "my brother and I were talking about where the Nimipu should live that provides protection, but we can't agree. What do you think?"

"That is not such a problem; I know a place that has good water and shelter. There is plenty of buffalo for the people," Gold Eagle proclaimed. "I can take you to this place, but it is far. Maybe it is too much work for the two of you."

Fox wanted to punish the young boy for his brashness, but Coyote stopped him.

"Wait," he whispered to Fox, "let the girl talk first. See how angry she is with her brother."

It was true Bright Eyes was indeed angry.

"What my brother says is true," the girl stated, "but what he didn't say was it is Crow land, and they are friends of the Nimipu, taking their land would be wrong. My brother's words show he has no honor."

"My sister is a foolish girl!" Gold Eagle shouted. "She knows nothing of such things. The Crow are weak; we could easily take their land for our own. They know this; that is why they are friendly to us. It is they who have no honor!"

"A man who will kill a friend for their land has no honor!" Bright Eyes screamed. "Our Grandfather told us of a place that is safe and has everything we need to live. It belongs to no one but the Creator. Grandfather said only a people with honor may live in this place."

"You are childish indeed, Bright Eyes, if you believe the stories of a foolish old man," her brother declared.

Fox could only shake his head at the younger sibling's deplorable behavior.

"Coyote," Fox said, "these two argue worse than we do. Shouldn't we stop this?"

"Yes, my brother, it is time." Coyote nodded, then added, "The two of you have strong ideas, and cannot agree, so this is what we will do. Fox will get horses while I instruct you."

With that said, Fox went off to find horses for the brother and sister.

"This is what you must do," Coyote told them. "Since each of you think your location is the best, you will have a competition. You must jour-

ney to your valleys, and make a map as you go marking the rivers and game trails. Note also good places that provide shelter to make camps for the people. Finally, you must bring back what you think is most important for the people to live. You have one moon to complete your quest, and the one who returns first will be the winner. Do you understand all that I have said to you?"

Both children nodded, and Fox had returned with the horses. They were both beautiful spotted horses Coyote provided for the Nimipu, who were good horse breeders. These spotted horses were prized by all the tribes and were fiercely guarded by the Nimipu.

"Each of you will take one of these horses; they will carry you on your journey," Coyote said, "but be careful, these are the most valuable in my herd, so do not lose them, or bring them to any harm."

"Yes, Coyote," Bright Eyes said earnestly, "I will do as you ask and be the first to return."

"Ha!" Gold Eagle laughed. "I will not be defeated by a mere girl. Coyote, I will win this race, and the Grandfathers will tell stories of my great victory."

"We shall see," Bright Eyes shouted, "we shall see!" Her words echoed down the valley as she disappeared around the bend.

Gold Eagle glared off to the west, the direction his sister had gone. Coyote and Fox were aware of his evil thoughts. Coyote warned Gold Eagle saying, "Remember Gold Eagle, victory without honor is one not worth winning."

"I do not need to cheat to win a race against my sister, for I am bigger and stronger," the boy replied contemptuously. Then, he turned his horse and spurred him off to the east.

**F**ox had been thinking about Coyote's plan, and he wondered whether it was such a good idea after all. Coyote often made up such plans involving people when he was bored and needed entertainment. He said to his brother, "My brother, are you sure we have done a wise thing?"

"What do you mean, Fox?" Coyote asked.

"Should we not bring these two together? This race will only cause trouble, I think," Fox observed.

"You think that way because you are not as wise as I am," Coyote admonished. "My plan will bring this brother and sister together for all time."

Both brother and sister traveled without event the first day, and each made camp for the night. But Gold Eagle was worried that his sister might beat him back to Coyote, so he began to devise a plan to delay her, and ensure his victory. In the morning, he would seek out Brother Rattlesnake to help him.

Bright Eyes had made camp too, but unlike her brother she had no reason to be concerned. She knew in her heart she would win this race. After she set up her camp, she made the sacred prayer circle and asked the Creator for strength and courage to succeed on her quest.

**T**he next morning, the two siblings began again on their respective journeys. Gold Eagle traveled along without incident, but when the sun was high, Bright Eyes encountered danger. She was traveling along a rocky trail, when from under a rock, a rattlesnake crawled. His rattles made such a terrible sound, Bright Eyes horse spooked, reared, and ran away. The girl was thrown to the ground, and was momentarily unable to move. Rattlesnake crawled to where she was, and Bright Eyes was afraid she would be bitten. She was surprised when the snake spoke to her.

"Are you injured?" Rattlesnake asked.

"No," the girl replied fearfully. "Do you intend to bite me?"

"I have no intention of harming you," said the snake, "Gold Eagle asked me only to delay you."

"Why are you helping my brother win this race?" Bright Eyes asked.

"Because I want to get back at Coyote for flattening my head," the snake answered spitefully. "I think Coyote and Fox made a bet. Coyote wants you to win, and Fox wants Gold Eagle to win. If I delay you, your brother will win, and Coyote will lose, then I will be happy. You may continue on your journey. No harm will come to you."

Bright Eyes remembered the story of how the people came to be in the country of the

Clearwater. Coyote became angry with Bear and Rattlesnake for not protecting the people from the monster. He hit Grizzly Bear in the nose causing his snout to be short, and he stepped on Rattlesnake's head causing it to be flat.

"So, Bright Eyes thought, "this is just a game for Coyote and Fox. They were using us for their entertainment. I will still win this race, for I know a shortcut."

Just as Rattlesnake had said, Bright Eyes encountered no more trouble, and she reached her valley safely. Once there, she thanked the Creator for His protection, then she made a medicine bag to take back to Coyote. In the bag, she placed the following: soil, kous kous, rabbit fur, deer and buffalo skin, as well as dried fish. Also she added small sticks to represent lodge poles. Finally, she sprinkled water over them. All of the items she collected represented the things the people would need to live. When she was finished, she again thanked the Creator for providing these items and set out on her journey back to the place where Fox and Coyote waited.

Gold Eagle too, collected the items he felt would be pleasing to Coyote and Fox. He killed an antelope and made pemmican (a kind of jerky), he dug camas bulbs, and killed an elk for his hide, meat, and sinew. All of these things the people used to live. He packed these things on his horse and led him back to Coyote and Fox.

While the brother and sister were gone, Coyote and Fox amused themselves with gambling games and races. But soon they became bored with these activities. It was a good thing Gold Eagle returned because Coyote was about to form a new plan to cure his boredom.

"Aha," Coyote laughed, "Gold Eagle has returned first; that means you lose our bet, Fox."

"Do not be so sure," Fox replied. "Look there, brother; up the valley; Bright Eyes has returned as well."

"Very well," Coyote said, "we will call the race a tie."

It was true, the young people returned at the same time. But Gold Eagle was not satisfied with a tie.

"Coyote," the boy said angrily, "a tie is not

right. You said the winner would be the one who brought back the most important things the people need to live. Look at the valuable things I have brought. My sister brought back nothing."

"That is not true," Bright Eyes retorted, "I have filled my medicine bag with everything the people need. What is more, the Creator blessed these things. That makes me the winner."

"She is right," Coyote admitted, "the Creator told me so, when He instructed me to create the people."

"I agree," said Fox. "But look at the things Gold Eagle has brought. The Creator knows the people need these things as well. I think both children have succeeded in their quest. I think they outsmarted us both."

"You are correct," Coyote agreed. "I declare the race to be a tie."

Gold Eagle was enraged, and he shouted, "No! I will not accept this decision! Bright Eyes has not won. Remember, Coyote, you said we must not lose your horses or we would be punished. Ask my sister where your horse is!"

It was true; Bright Eyes had lost Coyote's horse. It was up to him to punish the girl.

"Wait!" the girl called. "It was Gold Eagle who caused me to lose your horse, Coyote. Ask Rattlesnake what happened; he will tell you the truth."

Rattlesnake had journeyed back to the valley where Coyote and Fox were waiting and had hidden under a bush to watch.

"She is telling the truth. Gold Eagle persuaded me to delay Bright Eyes so he would win the race," the snake admitted.

"I see," Coyote mused. "It seems since you have been dishonest Gold Eagle, so I will declare your sister the winner."

Instead of being grateful, Bright Eyes teased her brother. "My brother, it is apparent you are not as good at tracking and hunting as me. It will be my great pleasure to hear the elders tell of my victory around the camp fires." The girl laughed.

Fox and Coyote were both angered by the girl's boasting. They had a conversation and decided what they would do.

"Fox and I have had a discussion. It is true you both succeeded on your quest, but your victories were not honorable. This is my decision.

The people will live in the valley you found Bright Eyes, and both of you will show them the way, Gold Eagle. It is true the people will tell stories of your race, but it will be a sad story of a brother who cheated and a girl who became arrogant because of her success," Coyote said.

**H**e Who Sees the Past stopped speaking. The children gathered around him looked at each other; their confusion was apparent. As usual, Little Fox spoke up.

"Grandfather, I do not understand. What is the meaning of this story?"

The old man looked around the circle; then he explained.

"By the use of magic, Coyote transported them all to the entrance of the beautiful valley Bright Eyes had found. On the high hill overlooking the valley on the west side of the river, he told both Bright Eyes and Gold Eagle to mount his prized spotted horse. With a wave of his hand Coyote transformed them to stone. Gold Eagle was transformed into a beautiful golden eagle perched on his sister's outstretched arm. The two would remain there forever, mounted on a strong Appaloosa horse, as a reminder to the people to always live as the Creator wished. Now do you understand?" the old man asked.

"Yes, I see," said Little Fox, "Coyote made them into stone because Bright Eyes and Gold Eagle had forgotten what the Creator wanted. He wanted people to be good to each other and work together for the welfare of all the people, not for personal gain."

Small Beaver added, "Coyote turned Bright Eyes and Gold Eagle into stone to remind us that greed is a bad thing."

"Yes," Grandfather warned, "remember to always do good deeds because it is the right thing to do . . ."

**I**'m not sure what brought me back to a state of consciousness, but my eyes opened to find Gayle standing over me.

"A bomb could drop next door and you'd never hear it," my friend complained.

"That's because if a bomb dropped next door,

I'd probably be dead," I replied. "What are you doing here?"

"Bret, are you kidding?" Gayle answered. "Do you mean you haven't heard?"

"Heard what? Damn it, Gayle, get to the point," I demanded.

"Proctor resigned less than an hour ago. Whatever you said in his class turned the History department upside down."

"Oh my God," I breathed. "That's not right."

"Excuse me, but wasn't it you who said he had no business teaching a cockroach, let alone impressionable young minds?" Gayle asked incredulously.

"Yeah, I did," I admitted, "but I was wrong. What I said, what I did was wrong. I had no right to call him out in his own class, and if that is what prompted his resignation . . ."

I stopped in mid-sentence and pick up my keys and headed for the door.

"Where are you going?" Gayle asked.

"I'm going to see if I can straighten out the mess I made," I said.

"I don't understand," Gayle responded. "Why would you do anything to help Proctor?"

"Gayle . . . it's the right thing to do."

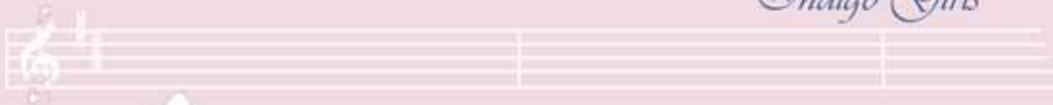


# Christie and the Hellcat

Barbara Davies' Hellcat stories brought together in an exciting new novel



Coming in March 2006  
from Bedazzled Ink  
Publishing Co.

*Watershed**words and music**Indigo Girls*

## Watershed

Maritza Smith-Romero

**Elsa**

**S**he woke up alone, the other side of the bed rumpled but cold. She was relieved yet disappointed. When she slept alone, which happened more often than not, she was unnaturally still. It was a trick she taught herself to save time making the bed when she got up. She woke up alone but she had not gone to bed alone. The evening had taken several unexpected



turns. All of which led to the unexpected rumpling of Richard's side of the bed.

She lay there a moment longer, unsure of how it all happened, unsure of what her next move should be. She got up and started making the bed. When she reached Richard's side, her hands slowed, almost of their own volition. She picked up the pillow to fluff it up, and brought it to her nose. The light scent of amber and sandalwood that was Jaime lingered there. She made herself put the pillow down and finish the task at hand, thus avoiding the thoughts that scent would arouse.

She changed out of her nightgown into running shorts and a sweatshirt and proceeded to the master bath. She brushed her teeth, washed her face and studied her reflection in the mirror. Outwardly she was unchanged. No matter what, she would always need the minor waxing between and around her eyebrows. Inwardly she was permanently, irrevocably altered. She ran a comb through her hair and headed downstairs.

Waiting at the kitchen door was Walter, an anxious, wiggling, extremely excited dog. She grabbed his leash out of the closet then bent

down to hook it to his collar. As she did so, she ruffled his ears, looked deeply into his eyes and mused that this was the only uncomplicated love she had. They walked out of the house into the dimly lit world of the early autumn morning. She did a little pre-run stretching and allowed Walter his sniff and pee at the end of the driveway then got to the business of running.

Her feet beat out one rhythm, her heart another, and her mind tried sorting through the events of her recent past. Her only goal had been to stop Richard this one time in his pursuit of this one affair. Richard wasn't a bad husband he just wasn't faithful; never had been, never will. She had spent their entire marriage reacting to his affairs, crying, begging, and demanding fidelity all to no avail. This time she had been proactive. She thought subtle yet direct intervention might help her save her marriage.

Her pace slowed as she approached Highland Hill Road. Her body knew what to do; she didn't have to think about it so her mind continued down its own rough path.

The moment Elsa met Jaime she knew this would be Richard's next attempt at another affair. Rather than wait for it to happen, Elsa decided to pursue a friendship with Jaime. She strongly believed that no woman would enter into an affair with her new friend's husband.

Elsa courted Jaime as enthusiastically as Richard did and was experiencing greater success. They had coffee together, shared lunches, dinners, and brunches on Sundays. On days they didn't see each other, they either spoke on the phone or communicated via email. Before she knew it, the very thought of Jaime made Elsa smile. Before she knew it she stopped concerning herself with Richard and his extramarital affairs. Elsa had fallen into an emotional affair with Jaime without knowing it.

Highland Hill Road marked the beginning of the end of her run. She picked up her pace a little and rounded the corner into a park near her house like a woman being chased. Then she slowed first to a jog, then to a walk. This part of the run was for Walter. This was his opportunity to sniff and pee almost at will. Elsa allowed him this for about ten minutes before heading home. Her body responded to the run in its usual fashion. The release of endorphins left

her feeling loose and relaxed. Her mind remained lost in the past.

Home again, in the master bath she fine tuned the shower, removed her sweaty clothes and stepped in. She stood completely under the running water, allowing her hair to get thoroughly soaked. She stood there a long moment wishing the water could wash away her confusion. The only thing running down the drain with the sweat and grime from her run was any sense of who she really was. Last night her emotional affair very nearly became something else. She wanted it to become something else, at least her body did. Her mind didn't know what she wanted.

She stepped out of the shower, dried off and dressed for work. After gathering her briefcase, papers, car keys, she paused in the doorway of her bedroom and stared at her bed. Last night in that very bed she and Jaime laughed and giggled like schoolgirls at a slumber party. They talked and played and wound up entangled in each other's arms. It was then that she realized what she wanted. It was then that Jaime kissed her forehead, her cheeks, her lips before getting up and walking away.

What was this pull Jaime had on her? What was this feeling, desire, love, both? Was this love she felt for Jaime, or was she so desperately lonely that she would latch onto anyone who paid her the slightest bit of attention? She didn't know, wasn't sure she wanted to know.

She turned away from her bedroom, ready to confront the work world but not ready to confront either Richard or Jaime but knowing ready or not she would have to.

## **Richard**

**H**e woke up and opened his eyes to a dimly lit room he didn't recognize. The light came through a curtained window whose filtering effect combined with his astigmatism left him unable to determine whether the light came from the early morning sunrise or a not too distant streetlight. He rolled over onto his back, turned his head and discovered the back of a naked woman, who was not his wife laying

by his side. He turned his head back, fixed his gaze on the ceiling, and fumbled for the memory that was this woman's name.

It wasn't that he didn't know the woman, he just couldn't quite remember, which woman she was, or what her name might be. He rubbed his eyes with the heels of his hands then eased his way out of the bed. He stood there a moment to orient himself in the room. To his right, in a corner by the window, sat a chair in which lay his neatly folded clothes and his glasses. To his left, on the other side of the bed, a sliver of light shone through a crack in a doorway. He gathered his things and quietly walked to that shining doorway, hoping that behind that door lay a bathroom and not a closet. He pushed the door open just wide enough to peep into, then wide enough to squeeze his body through. He discovered a bathroom painted in a yellow so bright he felt like he was being yelled at. He turned the water on in the sink washed his hands and splashed his face a few times. He looked up into the mirror and studied his reflection.

"Oh fella, what . . . no, who have you gotten yourself into now?" He thought. Serial infidelity had its consequences; forgetting a bed partner's name was one of them. He considered his reflection a moment longer then pushed the mirror aside to view the contents of the medicine cabinet. There he found a prescription bottle with the name Alice Kennedy on it. "Kennedy?" he thought. "The only Kennedy I know is Elizabeth Kennedy. Oh well this is the price you pay for drinking too much and leaving the bar with beer goggles on." He slid the mirror back into place and looked down at his wristwatch. It was rather early in the morning and, depending upon what part of town he was in, he could get into his house, change clothes, and be out again in that twenty to thirty minute window he had while Elsa was out on her run.

He turned the water off, reached out for his clothes and felt a twinge of guilt. It didn't seem right to go home with the sweat and scent of another woman on his body. He looked at his watch again and concluded that he had time for a quick shower. He turned the shower on, stepped into the tub and looked around for the soap. The only thing available to him was a bot-

tle of peach scented body wash, which he used from head to toe. He washed quickly and dried himself off with a towel he found hanging on a rack above a radiator. The very thought of putting on the clothes he wore the day before made him feel grimy but he had no choice. The smell of stale cigarettes and beer, the clothes exuded made him feel worse.

He dressed, then walked back out into the bedroom in search of his shoes. He found them beneath the chair his clothes had been in. He slipped them on and tied the laces loosely. He didn't want to leave without saying something to his night companion so he whispered softly, from the doorway that led to the hall, "Alice . . . Alice?"

The figure buried under the covers moved around a bit until a tousled blond head appeared and a soft, rusty voice croaked, "why are you calling the cat?"

Richard, momentarily silenced by embarrassment, recognized both the tousled head and the scratchy voice as that of Elizabeth Kennedy. He thought quickly and said, "I thought I tripped over her, I just wanted to make sure she was okay."

"Oh, that's sweet of you," Elizabeth said.

Richard turned to leave, looked over his shoulder, and said, "see you in the office later, right?"

"You bet," Elizabeth answered with the casual assurance of a confident friend.

Richard took a couple of steps into the hallway, paused then called out again. "Elizabeth?"

"Ummm," she answered.

"How do I get home from here?" Richard asked.

"Make a left out of the driveway, go down two blocks then make a right on Beaumont. You'll recognize the way from there," she answered.

"Thanks," he called out to her as he walked down the hall.

**B**y the time Richard got to Beaumont Boulevard he had been in his car less than two minutes. That was, surprisingly, more than enough time for the scent of peaches, combined with the smell of stale cigarettes to assault and overwhelm his sense of smell.

Once on Beaumont Boulevard he realized that he was less than five minutes away from his own house. Not only would he have time to change clothes, he would have enough time to shower off the smell of peaches and the gritty feeling of yesterdays clothes. In fact, he would have to be careful not to get home before Elsa left the house for her run.

He drove around aimlessly for a few minutes, and allowed his mind to go into freefall. Elizabeth Kennedy; she was a blast from the past. They had been intimate before, many times before, in many different places. This was the first time the place had been her house. Theirs had been an on and off tryst for years. No strings, no promises, no expectations beyond that of a good time on the occasional evening. Last night just happened to be one of those evenings.

It was getting close to the time Elsa usually left the house for her run. He parked his car a few houses away from his own and waited. It wasn't long before he saw Elsa and Walter come out of the front door. He watched as she stretched, and he felt another momentary stab of guilt. He had done it again; cheated on her again. With a woman she had begged him never to sleep with again. He closed his eyes and pushed the feeling away. He had a lot to do and no time for guilt. When he opened his eyes she was gone. He started the car, pulled out of his parking space, and drove into his own driveway.

He walked into the house, focused on the task at hand and the things he would need for the day. He and Jaime had a meeting with a client later that morning and he had to be prepared. The very thought of Jaime made his heart beat faster and his skin tingle. She was the one he wanted to have an affair with not Elizabeth. The first time he saw her he wanted her. Her dark beauty intrigued him and she began to figure prominently in his fantasy life. He pursued her as he did his other extramarital affairs; he fed her compliments about her intellect, her work, her office, and her overall appearance. He bought her little gifts to welcome her into the office. He took her out to lunch so he could really turn on the charm. By the time he was ready to make his move she

and Elsa had become friends. Though that made matters awkward it didn't stop him from making his desires known. She never really acknowledged his advances yet she remained friendly, and as far as he could tell she hadn't said a word about it to Elsa. But it wasn't a complete loss; that friendship, his desire, and the availability of women like Elizabeth provided more than enough material for his fantasy life.

He went into the guest bedroom and made a beeline for the guest bath, kicking off his shoes and unbuttoning his shirt and trousers as he walked along. He wasn't ready to face Elsa. He didn't want her to know he came home to wash up. He didn't know what lie he would tell her about his being out all night but he would deal with that later when he had time to think about it.

His second shower was just as quick and as ineffective as the first in washing away his resurfacing guilt. At least he came out of it smelling more like himself rather than peaches. He dried himself off, wrapped the towel around his waist and made his way into the master bedroom and the walk-in closet he shared with Elsa. He gathered what clothes he needed and started dressing right there. As he did so he gazed around the room he ostensibly shared with Elsa and his guilt intensified. He pushed it away with the resolve to do something nice for Elsa. If his meeting with Jaime and the client ended early enough, he would take her to lunch and buy her something pretty. That eased him a bit and he returned to the guest bedroom, put his shoes back on and checked his watch. He had at least five minutes before Elsa came home. He collected his dirty clothes, tidied up the bathroom he used and headed out for work.

### *Jaime*

**S**he lay in her bed quietly and watched the darkness in her room fade with the coming dawn. Her sleep had vacillated from fitful to elusive, as did her thoughts and dreams, all night long. She was in love, foolishly, helplessly, hopelessly in love. It was a condition she had not actively pursued in years. She had suf-

ferred too many back-to-back disappointments in the world of romance and dating. It wasn't the ordinary lesbian drama, the gossip, lies, and infidelity that made her give up. It was the weird, psychotic, fantasy driven bullshit that did her in. She lay there and thought about her last three adventures in dating.

She'd spent almost a year involved with Karen, who unbeknownst to Jaime was involved with a man who she married after giving Jaime a full seven days notice of the upcoming nuptials. Then there was Alice, the girlfriend turn "born again Christian" turn stalker who insisted, to the point of harassment, that Jaime join her in the cult of celibacy and self-hate. (It took a restraining order, an arrest, and mandatory counseling to convince Alice to leave her alone.) Finally, Jennifer, who had been a friend for more than two years before they ventured on their first and last date. They had been in the middle of a passionate embrace; clothes half on half off, hands and lips everywhere, when Jennifer whispered fiercely into Jaime's ear, "I have always had the fantasy of being with a black woman." That sentence drained Jaime of all her passion and desire. She couldn't remember how she got out of Jennifer's apartment but she did. She left that apartment full of doubt; she didn't know if Jennifer's interest in her was because she was Jaime or because she was black and could fulfill whatever fantasy Jennifer had in mind. That date had cost her a friendship that she valued and had opened her eyes to an aspect of her friend she wished she had never seen. So, she gave up, no more dating, no more disappointments.

She looked at the clock on the nightstand and decided to get up. There was no point in waiting for sleep that wouldn't come, or if it did, came too late. She got out of bed and went into the bathroom. She attended to those "first thing in the morning" needs then changed out of her nightclothes into a comfortable pair of sweat pants, a T-shirt, and her sneakers.

Near the foot of her bed was what appeared to be an untidy pile of clothes. Jaime methodically transferred the pile to her bed and uncovered the shiny chrome plated surface of a rowing machine. She had rowed crew in her col-

lege days and she missed the workout it gave her body and the peace it gave her mind. She wanted to recapture the feeling gliding on the waters surface gave her so she invested in this beautiful machine that she rarely made the time to use.

She sat down on the sliding seat, slipped her feet under the straps on the footboards, and grabbed the oar. She started rowing slowly, reminding her body of the sequence of events that maximized the power of each stroke: push with the legs, pull with the arms, shoulders, and lean back. Recoil, and start again. She rowed slowly for the first few minutes, then picked up the pace to approximate a racing speed. She closed her eyes and focused on the memory of rowing on sun kissed water. But like a VCR possessed, her mind clicked and replayed what she had named "scenes from last night."

It started with the movie, *Sylvia Scarlet*, and a broken VCR.

**W**here did you find it?" Elsa asked as she pushed the videotape into the VCR.

"There's a little video place on Morrissey Boulevard that has a great Katharine Hepburn collection and there it was," Jaime answered. "What's taking so long?"

"I don't know, I keep pushing the tape in and the machine keeps spitting it back out at me. Richard said it was fix but . . ."

"Don't worry about it, I'll rent it again and we can watch it some other time."

"No, no I really want to see it. I think it must be the only Katharine Hepburn movie I haven't seen. Grab the popcorn, we'll just watch the movie upstairs in the bedroom." Elsa caught the tape as the VCR spat it out at her for what had to be the fourth or fifth time, turned, and headed up the stairs.

Jaime did as she was told; she grabbed the popcorn and followed Elsa upstairs. In the bedroom Elsa went directly to the television and Jaime sat down on the floor, leaned back against the foot of the bed and started nibbling on the popcorn. Elsa turned, walked toward the bed, and said, "that's no way to watch a Hepburn movie. Take your shoes off and get

comfortable on the bed.” Elsa handed her a pillow and they both stretched out, feet at the head of the bed, heads at the foot.

It was the worst Katharine Hepburn movie Jaime had ever seen. When the movie ended Elsa commented, “I never thought I’d see a movie in which I hated the sound of Cary Grant’s voice. His fake accent is horrendous. But I must admit Kate does make a lovely boy.”

“Or a lovely baby dyke,” Jaime returned.

“I thought that was considered an offensive word.”

Jamie laughed, sat up, and said, “It is if you’re not one.”

Elsa smiled, rolled off the bed, and said, “Oh, I’ll have to keep that in mind. I’ll be right back.”

The VCR gave an audible click and whirr as the tape reached its end and the machine started the rewind. Left alone, Jaime’s eyes wandered around the room. On the nightstand near the head of the bed she saw two photographs in separate frames. The larger frame held the picture of a small boy, smiling and missing one of his two front teeth. The smaller frame held the picture of what appeared to be the same child missing both teeth and having longer, slightly darker hair. The VCR clicked again just as Elsa came back into the room. Jaime looked up while reaching for the smaller photograph and said, “Is this . . . ?”

Before her hands could close upon the picture she heard Elsa squeak, “No!” Half a heartbeat later she found herself tackled, pinned down, and barely able to move. Elsa had grabbed the picture and was holding it out of reach.

Laughing, Jaime said, “hey, wait a minute, I just--”

“No, no don’t look at that picture! It’s too awful . . .” Elsa laughed while trying to get off of Jaime.

Jaime wrapped her arms around Elsa’s body and rolled her over onto her back to prevent her from escaping with the picture. Rather than risk Jaime seeing the picture, Elsa rolled back. They tussled and giggled until tears flowed from their eyes and their faces ached. They stopped wrestling yet remained entangled in each other’s arms. Jaime found herself looking at the picture clenched in Elsa’s hand then

looking directly at Elsa and into her eyes. “It is you,” she said quietly. “You make quite a lovely boy yourself.”

She kissed Elsa’s forehead, each cheek, and finally her lips, which tasted like the popcorn they’d shared during the movie.

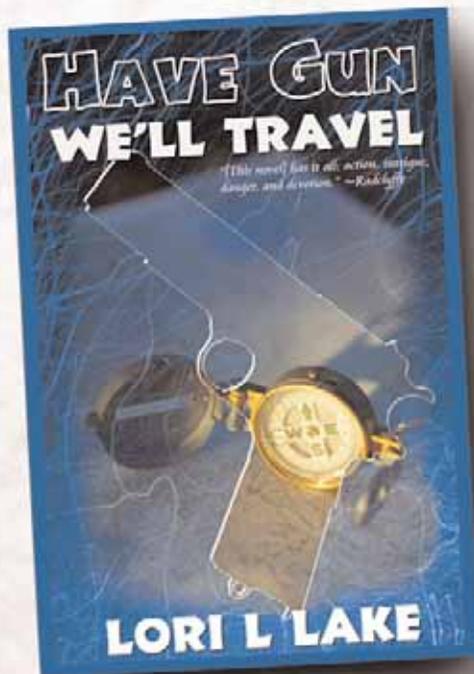
The high-pitched squeak and squeal of someone’s car alarm yanked Jaime abruptly out of her reverie. She looked up at the clock radio and realized she had been rowing for almost ten minutes. She was so out of shape her legs, back, and arms burned. She slowed her pace and rowed another two minutes to cool down. She stopped and tried to focus on the discomfort of her body. She stood and stretched, and chided herself, “Stop it! Stop romanticizing this thing with Elsa. She is a friend. A straight, unavailable friend, married to your co-worker.” She went into the kitchen and set up the coffeemaker, then into the bathroom where she showered off her well earned sweat.

Freshly showered and dressed for work, Jaime sipped her coffee and wondered what she should do. She loved Elsa as a friend and she may have really screwed things up. She may have lost Elsa’s friendship by acting like the mythological predatory bull dyke out seducing lonely, innocent heterosexual women. Plus she liked Richard despite his flirting, and the rumors regarding his extramarital activities. He was a nice enough guy, a generous and supportive co-worker. There was nothing like a little kiss to really screw up a life. She would call Elsa, she decided. She would call, apologize, and make this right. She didn’t know how she could make this right but she would think of something.



**"BE WARNED: AFTER THE INITIAL SET-UP, I COULD NOT PUT THIS NOVEL DOWN."**

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*"Have Gun We'll Travel is one kick-ass debut thriller. Set in the woods of Northern Minnesota, the story is riveting, the writing lean, tough and tense. I'd met Dez Reilly and Jaylynne Savage before, but in this book, author Lori L. Lake doesn't pull any punches. She puts her cop heroines in danger that doesn't let up, pushing them to the very edge of their physical and emotional limits. Lake's north wood's tale is full of passion and terror, twists and heartbreak, but in the end, the message is all about friendship. If you miss this one, you'll miss one of the year's best."*

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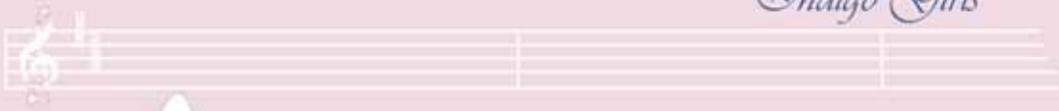
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***Have Gun We'll Travel***  
by Lori L. Lake

Quest Books ISBN:1932300333

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*words and music*  
*Indigo Girls*

## Gift of the Buccaneer

T.J. Mindancer



**D**ene always had problems bargaining with the inhabitants of Inir-ta. The second eyelids made them hard to read. She also didn't have the patience for their methodical approach to finding an agreeable price.

For many reasons, not the least was some unpleasant business with the local constabulary, if she could have bought the Magalo Orb anywhere else in the universe, she would have. But Inir-ta had the market cornered on the coveted objects.

Dene sighed. Such was how fate always played with her luck.

She counted out ten more ding-ti pieces and pushed them next to the sizable pile already on the merchant's bench. They'd been negotiating for much of the evening and the three moons in their crescent phase peeked through the transparent ceiling of the shop.

Dene held her breath as the merchant put a pale orange claw to what she supposed was its chin. Or what would have been a chin if Inir-tas had mouths and necks. Interesting how the gesture of contemplation seemed to transcend physical characteristics.



The merchant studied the coins then spread its massive scaled arms around the pile and pulled them into a container below the edge of the bench. The several moments of clattering from the coins hitting coins were the sounds of

a sealed bargain for the inhabitants of Inir-ta.

Dene straightened, relieved that her purpose for being there was about over and she could escape that infernal planet.

The merchant slipped off a wide cushioned stool and waddled--using its thick tail for leverage--through an opening in the back wall. It reappeared with a sizable bag of soft weave and carefully put it on the bench.

Dene loosened the ties at the top of the bag and let it fall around the object she risked visiting this planet for.

She sucked in her breath as she gazed at the Magalo's Orb. It was more impressive than she had imagined. The Orb was a flawless globe made of smokey transparent material about two hand spans in diameter. It was mounted on a base that was synthesized to have the look and feel of earth wood--polished and intricately carved with symbols important to what was found inside the orb. Even the track pads looked like smooth pieces of wood, reflecting the exquisite craftsmanship of the object.

She touched a pad and a patch of the smoke cleared. Her breath stole away as she peered for the first time into a Magalo's Orb. She gazed in wonder at a miniature galaxy floating in its own universe.

She re-covered the Orb and took the sack from the bench. "Thank you."

The merchant nodded and waved a claw as Dene quickly rushed out of the shop.

**O**f all the idiotic stunts."  
"Don't start." Dene pulled herself out of her space scooter and threatened to jump onto Tenlo if she didn't back away.

Tenlo took a step back.

Dene balanced on her arms, swung her legs out of the scooter, and landed with a graceful impact. She took off her helmet and put it back into the scooter, then carefully liberated her purchase from a compartment. She was thankful she padded the compartment because the ride back to her ship had been a little more eventful than she had anticipated.

"Of all the planets to do a job on." Tenlo followed Dene across the small bay to the door.

"It wasn't a job," Dene mumbled as she hit the door panel a second time to get it to open. "We've got to get this door fixed."

"If we went to a planet with the right parts for it . . ."

Dene shook her head and walked up a steep incline to the crew quarters. She touched a door panel and it obediently slipped open.

She put the Orb on the bed, and the ship shook and pitched. When she could keep her footing she touched a panel on the wall. "Was that a stunner?"

"Right, first time," came the helm's aggravating amiable voice. "No worries. Just the local constabulary. They're eating our dust as we speak."

Dene glared at Tenlo. "I thought you were working on its language program."

"It's better," Tenlo said. "You could understand what it said."

Dene relaxed and beckoned Tenlo over to the bed. "I wish for once my work or my past didn't get in the way."

Dene removed the Orb from its sack and put it on a small work table.

"Is that what I think it is?" Tenlo stared in awe at the smoky Orb.

"The limited silver edition." Dene touched a pad and a large smoky patch cleared. "This is one of the most sophisticated self-sustaining orbs ever made. It took me five cycles to track it down."

She touched a second pad. The military space port on the second moon of Asro floated in a darkness as deep as space. Wenderfar fighter ships darted in and out of the port like pesky insects.

Tenlo leaned in to study the scene. "It looks so real."

"It's the highest quality imagery," Dene said.

"I never knew you had a keen interest in such things," Tenlo said.

Dene touched the pad and smoke seeped over the clear patch. "It's not for me."

Tenlo raised an eyebrow. "And it's not a job?"

Dene pulled the sack up over the orb. "No."  
"If--"

Dene gave Tenlo her best "I don't want to talk about it" look.

Tenlo held up her hands. "All right." She grinned like a Rualian imp. "For now."

I thought we lost them." Dene bounded onto the ship's helm and stared at the view screen.

"We did." The helm's voice was indignant.

Dene scowled and reminded herself to fix the language program first chance she got. She could tolerate the mixed historic and cultural references but mimicked emotions sounded ridiculous from an insentient entity.

"If we lost them, why are we pushing the speed of my ship?" Dene put her hands on her hips and frowned at the fast moving objects on the hover screen. "What am I looking at?"

"Four Neppers, three Kits, and a Cop Rocket."

"Why are they trying to occupy the same space as us?"

"As far as I can tell from intercepting transmissions," the helm said, "they're chasing you for an indiscretion you were involved in on Ewquar."

Dene frowned. "That was a long time ago."

"You made quite an impression."

"I should have never flirted with that daughter . . . son . . . whatever that cute thing was of that Ilatian merchant," Dene muttered.

Tenlo pulled herself out from beneath a shelf of panels. "You always did like silky little gills."

"Can we get any more speed out of this thing?" Dene asked.

"A bit more." Tenlo stood and stretched out her back.

"Whatever possessed me to trade in the Old Clunker for this flashy but useless piece of junk?" Dene kicked a freestanding display pedestal.

"Much like your taste in potential bed companions, your senses get blinded by good looks sometimes," Tenlo said.

Dene threw up her hands. "Thank you for the insight into why my life has been rife with disappointment."

Tenlo laughed and twirled her power driver. "I'll go see what I can do about that door while I'm at it."

Ouch." Dene rubbed her head as she tried to get up. The ship rocked from another impact and her bed crashed into her before stuttering away. "Helm!"

Of course, the helm couldn't hear her. She had rigged the Old Clunker to have an open communications system. Why hadn't she thought it was necessary when she bought this worthless excuse for a ship? Tenlo was right. She was shallow sometimes.

She lunged to the wall and smacked her palm against the panel. "Could you cut into your busy schedule and get us out of the way of those stunners? Please."

She tumbled away from the wall as the ship shook. Her side table occupied the space she'd just been in.

Her door slid open. Tenlo stumbled in as the ship rocked from another impact.

"Do you want your afternoon tea in here or should I serve it in the garden?" Tenlo dove onto the bed as it came her way.

"Doesn't anyone on this ship have a hint of sanity?" Dene rolled on the floor to catch the container holding the orb before it crashed into the wall.

"You're a fine one to talk about sanity," Tenlo said as she sat cross-legged on the bed. "You who risked everything for that orb."

"There are times when logic or sanity are not allowed." Dene hugged the orb close as the ship rocked and shuddered.

"If not for money, it must be for love," Tenlo said.

Dene scowled.

Tenlo grinned. "She must be someone special."

Dene ignored Tenlo, got to her feet, and hit the wall panel. "Have we escaped them?"

"Of course," came the helm's annoying and cheerful voice. "We gave them a fine chase and then showed them what The Galaxy Cruiser could do."

Dene turned to Tenlo. "I thought we fixed the boasting lies module."

Tenlo shrugged. "It's tied into some basic functions for running the ship."

Dene shook her head and hit the door, which slid open. "Come on. I need to put this in the

zero gravity chamber."

"Why didn't you do that in the first place?" Tenlo followed Dene down the short corridor to the storage chamber.

"I didn't know I had a helm that liked to play chicken," Dene said.

Tenlo laughed.

I still don't get this." Tenlo fidgeted with her power driver.

"Do you have anything illegal on board?" Dene gave her a sidelong look before returning her attention to--she had to admit--the odd sight of a customs vessel nose-docking to her ship.

"No." Tenlo straightened. "But I still feel guilty. We always seem to have something illegal on board."

"The ship's clean and it's important for me to enter Maketa space as a legal visitor."

"I always thought it interesting you never took a job here." Tenlo gave Dene a speculative look. "Like that one involving those rare beasts--can't remember what they were called but they sure were ugly."

Dene sighed. "I made a promise to someone I'd never do a job in this sector."

Tenlo crossed her arms. "Anyone I know?"

Dene shook her head and studied the activity outside her ship.

"Is it someone I'm going to meet?" Tenlo wrinkled her brow in concentration. "Is it someone I know? I bet it's that woman with the blonde hair we met on Branis 9 Station. She couldn't keep her eyes off of you."

Dene stuffed her hands into the pockets of her loose coveralls and took an aimless tour of the bridge.

"What's this?" Tenlo said. "The great Dene, known throughout the universe as The Buccaneer, can't even find the words for a snappy retort?"

"The customs officers are boarding." Dene detoured to the door and strode into the corridor.

Tenlo looked over Dene's shoulder. "Coordinates for Cean. Is that where the mystery person lives?"

Dene glanced at her. "That's where we're going."

"That's a nice evasive answer," Tenlo said.

Dene shrugged. "It's true."

"Come on." Tenlo playfully drummed her fists on Dene's back. "If it's not the blonde, who is she?"

Dene couldn't help a small smile. "Who said anything about a she?"

"Ah, come on." Tenlo stalked to the view screen as they closed in on the planet. "You can tell me."

Dene ran her fingers over the control panel and adjusted the coordinates.

"I promise not to tease you too much," Tenlo said. "I want to know what kind of woman you'd risk getting arrested for. Who you'd buy such a gift for."

"It'll be good for you to wait and see," Dene said.

Tenlo grinned. "You're actually going to introduce me? Aren't you afraid I'll try to steal her away?"

Dene threw her head back and laughed.

Why are we parking here?" Tenlo stared at the shops that lined the square of the tiny village nestled between a river and a large hill.

"You don't even know where we're going." Dene popped the hatch of the scooter and lifted herself out. Tenlo climbed out of the back seat.

Dene retrieved the Orb from the padded compartment, then pulled down the sack and inspected it for damage.

"Safe and sound?" Tenlo asked.

"Yeah." Dene re-covered the Orb and closed the hatch. "It's such a nice day, I thought we could manage walking a bit."

"Or you want your visit with the gift to be a surprise." Tenlo fell into step next to Dene. "What I don't understand is how you know this place so well, considering you've avoided this sector for the three years I've known you."

Dene answered with a grin.

"Keep your secrets for now," Tenlo said. "I'll just torture it out of this mystery woman."

Dene turned off the main road onto a narrow

lane. They walked past cottages that were multicolored splashes drowning in flowers and flowing vegetation.

Tenlo cocked her head at Dene. "This village is very quaint. Not the kind of place your infatuations usually inhabit."

Dene stopped in front of a pale yellow cottage. Beds of flowers lined the path to the porch. She unlatched the low white gate and stepped through.

Tenlo shrugged and followed Dene to the porch.

Dene lifted the knocker and dropped it. It stuttered to an expectant silence.

She started at the turn of the knob and the scrape of the door. A woman, tall like her, with a strong face and thick white hair stared at her in shock.

"Dene?"

"It's me." Dene couldn't keep away a smile. "Hello, Mother."

Dene grunted as her mother pulled her into a rib-cracking hug. She glanced at Tenlo, who looked too delighted for this to be fodder for endless teasing.

"Tenlo, meet my mother, Dernia," Dene said.

"Pleasure to meet you," Tenlo said.

"Come in, come in." Dernia backed into the cottage and waved to the small sitting room that glowed in the afternoon sun.

Dene sat on the sofa and Tenlo took a chair opposite it. Dernia sat next to Dene and pulled her into another hug, then sat back and studied her.

"I was wondering if you'd remember," Dernia said.

Dene grinned. "I'd never forget."

Dernia turned to Tenlo. "Did she tell you about this?"

"No," Tenlo said. "I couldn't pry anything from her. I've been planet hopping with her for three years and she never let on she had a mother. I always thought she was the spawn of some impish space pirate."

Dernia laughed. "Close. She's the daughter of a warrior who spent four long years fighting on the Wenderfar Frontier."

Dene saw all the pieces come together in Tenlo's expression. She ghosted a wink at her.

"This is the anniversary of the day I returned

home from the wars." Dernia grabbed Dene's hand and squeezed it. "It became our little celebration every year. Even when Dene went off to play in the universe, we held our celebrations through the comlink."

Tenlo raised an eyebrow. "But this year?"

"This is the twentieth anniversary of that day," Dernia said. "I don't know why I was surprised to see you on my doorstep. This is something you'd do."

Dene pulled the sack up off the floor and put it in Dernia's lap.

Dernia gave Dene a puzzled look.

"Open it," Dene said.

Dernia pulled on the ties and the sack fell open. "A Magalo's Orb?"

Dene pointed to a pad. "Touch here."

Dernia put a strong finger on the pad and a patch cleared on the Orb. She peered in and caught her breath.

"What do you see?" Dene asked.

"I see Asro," Dernia said, her voice full of wonder.

"You can roam the whole galaxy and get as close up as you want," Dene said. "The holopeople may not be your old comrades and friends but they're authentic, true to life."

"This is the most wonderful gift I've ever received." Dernia brushed away the tears on her cheeks. "Except seeing you, of course."

Dene rolled her eyes. "I guess I'll be visiting more often."

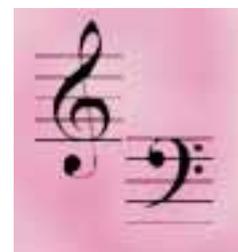
Tenlo sat up. "And why is that?"

"The authorities in this sector offered me a job," Dene said. "A real job."

Tenlo looked intrigued. "Oh, really?"

"They seem to be interested in retaining a person with my, uh, special skills," Dene said.

"I hope to don't mind." Dernia took Dene's hand. "That was my gift to you."



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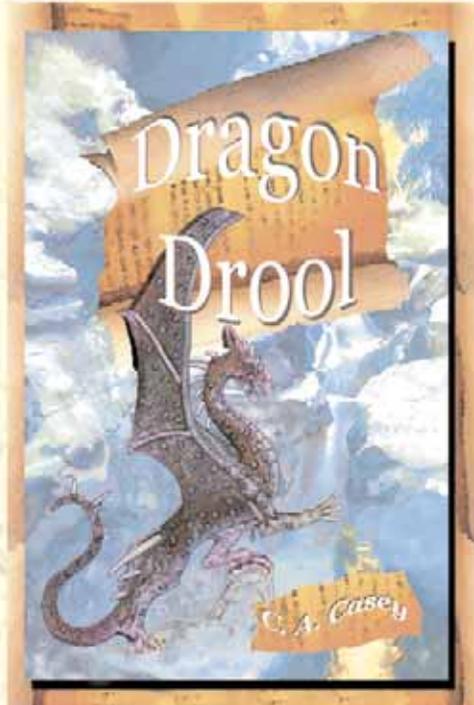
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## Contributors

### Artists

#### **Tyree Campbell**

Tyree Campbell is a retired U.S. Army translator [Russian, Spanish, Thai] with some 80 stories and two dozen poems [including a 2003 Rhysling finalist] published to date. His first novel, “Nyx,” about an assassin who rediscovers her emotions while on assignment on a strange world, is currently available from Project Pulp at [www.projectpulp.com](http://www.projectpulp.com). Just do a simple search, you’ll find it. His second novel is currently under a second reading with a publisher. He is also the Managing Editor of Sam’s Dot Publishing, and invites you to [www.samsdotpublishing.com](http://www.samsdotpublishing.com).

#### **T.K. Galarneau**

Roots—a farming/ranching community in Idaho. Transplanted redneck to California in 2001. Teaches High School American Lit./Advanced Composition. Hobbies—anything you can do with a horse. Likes the sea and the mountains.

#### **Maritza Smith-Romero**

Maritza works as a Laboratory Technician and writes in an attempt to answer/address the multitude of questions that pop into her mind. “Watershed” is her second submission for publication and her second acceptance. She is hopeful that there will be more in the future.

#### **T.J. Mindancer**

As fictional as her fantasy stories, T.J. Mindancer is a figment of C.A. Casey’s imagination and Casey takes no responsibility for what Mindancer forces her to write. Mindancer roams the World of Emoria. Casey’s writings include articles in library journals and in *Strange Horizons*, and stories in *Aoife’s Kiss* and *Beyond Centauri*. She also penned *Dragon Drool*, a fantasy novel for kids.

#### **Trish Ellis**

Trish Ellis is a Canadian girl who has lots of passion for her art. She started drawing at a very young age, learning new tips and techniques throughout the years making her a stronger artist today. Her stubbornness not to accept failure helps her strive to be the best that she can be.

