



Star Trek: Strange New Worlds III

By Dean Wesley Smith, Paula M. Block, John J. Ordover

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Editorial Review

From the Back Cover

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About the Author

Paula M. Block (with Terry J. Erdmann) is a co-author of the ebook novella *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine—Lust's Latinum Lost (And Found)*. She has also written the non-fiction books: *Star Trek Costumes: Five Decades of Fashion from the Final Frontier*; *Star Trek Pop-Ups*; *Star Trek The Original Topps Trading Card Series*; *Star Trek The Next Generation 365*; *Star Trek The Original Series 365*; *Star Trek 101*; *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine Companion*; *The Secrets of Star Trek: Insurrection*; *The Magic of Tribbles*; and *Star Trek: Action!* Her additional titles include *Monk: The Official Episode Guide* and *The 4400 Companion*. As a licensing director for Paramount Pictures, Paula was co-editor of Pocket Books' short story series *Star Trek: Strange New Worlds*.

John J. Ordovery previously edited and oversaw the Star Trek franchise licensed novels. He is also the co-creator of many Star Trek spin-off series.

Considered one of the most prolific writers working in modern fiction, *USA TODAY* bestselling writer, Dean Wesley Smith published far over a hundred novels in forty years, and hundreds of short stories across many genres. He currently produces novels in four major series, including the time travel Thunder Mountain novels set in the old west, the galaxy-spanning Seeders Universe series, the urban fantasy Ghost of a Chance series, and the superhero series starring Poker Boy. During his career he also wrote a couple dozen Star Trek novels, the only two original Men in Black novels, Spider-Man and X-Men novels, plus novels set in gaming and television worlds.

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Chapter One: [First Prize] If I Lose Thee...

Sarah A. Hoyt and Rebecca Lickiss

A bleak, gray, ancient plain stretched out to the horizon, scattered ruins punctuating the distance. Uhura turned away from the steady dust-laden wind to face the gauntlet of historians and officers leading up to the flickering arch of the Guardian.

"Now, don't forget," one of the historians, a tense man with a thin face, said. "The halfpenny is the silver coin you use to pay for a quart of ale, but a loaf of bread is worth a penny, and a twopenny half-groat will buy you dinner at an inn. Be careful how much you pay. You could change history by making someone rich accidentally." He fixed Uhura with an earnest, pleading gaze.

The coins' names made Uhura dizzy. Half crown, quarter angel, angelet, and the other gold coins, added to a confusion of silver coins. She nodded sagely to the anxious, thin-faced man.

"Have you got all that?"

Quite sure of already having forgotten it, Uhura nodded reassuringly and patted the hidden purse of coins near the top of her dress, where her red bodice squashed her breasts uncomfortably, so that they protruded above, much exposed and unnecessarily enhanced. "Got them right here."

If she didn't find that idiotic boy, William Harrod, and actually had to buy food or, worse, lodging, she would have to find a local and -- using age-old techniques of promising without delivering -- part him from his money, which he knew how to spend. As for her own money, she'd keep it where it belonged. Hidden.

"Now, remember not to go into a tavern or a public place, unless you find a man to accompany you, or they might think..." another of the historians said.

Uhura nodded with a confidence she didn't feel and walked by. She hoped they were right about the costume she was wearing. It had no underwear, just a sort of smock beneath the stiff gown, and the skirts were slashed, the puke-green one showing the sickly yellow one showing the bloodred one. She trusted the red hadn't been slashed to show her backside.

"Don't go into a plague house. You can't do anything for the victims without changing history."

She adjusted the red and gold turban on her head, wondering if real Moorish princesses had to tolerate this sort of coaching. If so, she was doubly thankful to be a Federation officer.

"Remember, anything you do could potentially endanger the present. Just find William Harrod and come back, quickly."

Unfortunately no one was yet sure how to come back, but they didn't dwell on that trivial detail. Just as no one was willing to explain precisely how historian William Harrod had accidentally fallen into the Guardian's time portal and become lost, either.

Uhura walked on, trying to escape the thronging mass of anxious, twittering scientists, hampered by the dress's layers of skirts, ridiculously tight waist which prohibited breathing, and flat bodice hardened by several layers of stuffing.

One of the historians kept following her, twitching at the ties that attached her slashed puke-green and sickly yellow sleeves, and rearranging their dangling, ground-dragging tassels. In a pinch she supposed she might be able to use the sleeves to strangle someone. Maybe one of the scientist-historians.

Mr. Spock melted the confusion of scientists around her merely by raising one eyebrow. She smiled at him gratefully.

"If only we could send you with a tricorder, a phaser, something..." McCoy looked at her sadly.

"A tricorder will do me no good, sir," Uhura said. "And it might cause a temporal disruption." She nodded, and did her best to look competent and calm. "I'll be fine."

"Good luck, lass," Scotty said. "Do you remember what William Harrod looks like?"

"Yes, sir." Uhura nodded. The memory of the image taken from the Guardian was burned into her brain. A blank-faced, blandly blond young man, with a weak chin and watery-blue eyes, wearing a woman's costume similar to this one, holding her hand, preparing to kiss it. The sight of herself in that ancient picture was one she'd never forget. One she feared would come back to haunt her nightmares. She'd also heard enough of William Harrod to suspect he, too, would be a nightmare.

In front of the arch, Captain Kirk waited and looked at Uhura, head to toe, with an amused gaze. "Good job of period dressing, Lieutenant," he said, and smiled. "Very becoming."

"Thank you, sir." Uhura felt her cheeks heat, but kept her expression rigidly professional. She had to admit that, having looked at herself in the mirror before leaving her quarters, this uncomfortable combination of straitjacket and ball gown was very flattering indeed. Which didn't alter her impression that she was sauntering breathless, bare-breasted, and bare-assed into Elizabethan England.

"I still think one of us should go with her," McCoy said, stubbornly holding to his earlier objections.

"The Guardian shows only her and William Harrod." Kirk's frown indicated he agreed with McCoy whatever his words might be. "And the Guardian says only she can enter without changing the shape of time." He glared accusingly at the arch next to him.

"I'll be fine." She would be, too, because she had no intention of dying in Elizabethan England, of all the rat-infested plague-holes in the universe. If she got lucky, she would find that the reason William Harrod hadn't caused any disruption was that he died right after he kissed her hand. Though she feared that strangling him for his stupidity in accidentally falling into the portal would look bad when reported in her log, she must, therefore, rule it out as an option.

Half-smiling at the thought, she saluted her captain and stepped into the portal.

Uhura stood in what she decided must be a back alley. It didn't look at all as she imagined London would. She'd been to London, once, and she'd found it a charming, if boring, place with an atrocious cuisine and very good tea.

But the London in which she found herself looked much like a village. Well, at least, from where she stood she could see three pigs, and four...no, make that five scrawny chickens, scavenging their way amid piles of refuse. Rotten vegetables, human waste, and things she truly didn't want to identify, mixed in with the mud into which her brand-new ankle boots sank.

All right, the buildings were probably too tall for a village. They towered up three or four stories, and the alley -- she hoped it was an alley, she would hate for it to be a main street -- that separated them was no

wider than her arm span. Which meant that precious little light filtered through.

From somewhere nearby came a deafening roar, like thousands of people speaking, screaming, and screeching at the same time. It sounded like a disturbance of some sort, but this was where William had arrived, and Uhura reasoned that her chances of finding William were better if she went toward the noise.

"Will, Will, Will." The shriek came from above her. Looking up, Uhura saw, in the half-light above, a disheveled female head sticking out of a window.

"Will, Will. Where has that boy got to?"

"Coming, Mum," sounded from the end of the alley farthest away from the noise. From the dim distance, a small boy came running, splashing mud everywhere, and stepping on who knew what without caring. The chickens ran squawking ahead of him, as he plunged past Uhura -- barely pausing for a curious look -- and into a darkened doorway.

Well...Maybe a Will, but definitely not William Harrod.

Gingerly, she walked toward the noise, trying not to step on anything that looked too obviously rank. She grabbed her skirts on either side, but, unfortunately, as she reached down to pull them up, the golden tassels at the end of her sleeves dragged in the mud.

The historians and the computer must have gotten the idea for the tassels from some picture of an Elizabethan court lady. Uhura, mincing her way through Elizabethan muck, wished very much that she could grab one of the historians and make him try to keep each portion of this sumptuous wardrobe clean.

The alley turned in a tight, blind curve, and suddenly opened up onto a street at least five times as wide. Wide enough, Uhura judged, for a cart, or maybe for five people to walk side by side. Before she could see much of it, though, a grizzled, scarred face pushed itself in front of her.

"Alms, milady. Alms for poor one-leg Will, a veteran of the Spanish wars, by your kind mercy." The man leered at her, a dubious leer that showed a near-toothless mouth, and breathed a reek of alcohol in her direction. His right leg, below the knee, ended in the proverbial peg-leg.

She turned away from him, not sure what to do. She'd never met a beggar before. She wanted to reach between her breasts and give him the whole leather purse, but in her mind she heard the thin-faced historian telling her that she could change history by giving anyone too much money.

As she turned away, she heard the beggar behind her calling out names that she was sure were obscene -- "bawd" and "painted Jezebel" being the only ones she recognized.

Feeling a little better about not helping him, she looked at the other people on the street. There were a lot of them to look at -- hundreds in her vicinity, many more than should fit the street. And they weren't, unlike Uhura had first surmised, engaged in anything half so rational as mayhem or disturbance. Instead, all scrambled everywhere, like a disturbed ant hill, each speaking or yelling at the top of his or her voice to other people who were speaking or screaming at someone else.

She dismissed her first fear, that her clothes might be too gaudy. Men and women alike wore clothes so bright as to make the eyes hurt. And they smelled. Not of sweat or unwashed flesh, as she'd expected, not

even of the stuff that every one of them must be carrying around on their soles, since this street looked as filthy as the alley. No, they stank of perfume. The odors of all sorts of spices, the smells of most trees, and every flower known to botany, clashed in the air, and each wide-skirted lady, each tight-garbed gentleman who pranced past wafted a different one to add to the mix. Uhura decided that if she escaped going deaf, or blind, or both, she would surely lose all sense of smell before this mission was over.

Holding up her skirts she sauntered into the multitude, accepting inevitable jostling, and elbowing people out of the way when she must. Uhura looked around at the first hint of blond hair, or at the sound of the name "Will." The problem seemed to be that all these men had only three names at their disposal: William, Richard, or Henry. The occasional wild individualist would be named Christopher or Kit. The women, too, all seemed to be either Anne, or Margaret, or Mary. She guessed this must be well before the time of creative naming.

"Ah, well met, Will. You'll have a pint with me," a male voice to her right side.

Uhura looked, but both gentlemen were too portly for either of them to be the boyish William Harrod.

"Dost thou bite thy thumb at me, Will?" a voice screamed from her right, in the tone of fighting words.

"I bite my thumb, Richard. But not at thee."

Neither of these two, both young men and about the right age, had blond hair. They stood facing each other on the street, and people gave them a wide berth, as each of them pulled out long swords. Uhura, with the others, made haste to get away from them, only to be thrown against a throng of people rushing toward the disturbance to gawk.

Quietly but forcefully, she elbowed her way toward the edge of the street. She'd thought there had been law and order under Elizabeth, and that people were arrested for public brawling. She distinctly remembered reading...

A scream sounded behind her, and Uhura looked over her shoulder to see one of the young men, either William or Richard, run his opponent through with his long sword. The wounded man screamed as he fell onto the street in a gush of blood.

The circle that had gathered to watch the fight moved away, and Uhura found herself shaking. Someone had just been killed, or at least seriously injured. She took a deep breath. Wasn't anyone going to do something? Call the guard? The medics? Shaking, she walked away, not certain that the chill she felt was from the coolness of dusk settling over the city.

A woman ahead of her fell into a man's arms, calling him her sweet Will. Uhura glared at both of them, thinking that William Harrod might have done better to have an original name, if he was planning to get lost in Elizabethan England. Any name would have done -- John, or Bob, or Mike. Anything but Will. But no, he had to be William, didn't he? Right at that moment, had she come across Harrod, she would gladly have killed him...She stopped, remembering the duel and the young man falling into the muck, bleeding. All right, she would gladly have dressed William Harrod down for the capital crime of his unfortunate name.

"Pardon me, Lady," a man said, as he squeezed past her. He smelled heavily of pine, and had warm-brown curls, and caramel colored eyes. And she'd bet his name was Will.

Frustrated, Uhura followed him with her gaze, more to have something to fix on than because she wanted to know where this presumable Will went. Unlike most of his contemporaries, he wore a sensible, if ugly color -- a reddish brown. His jacket had much the same tailoring as Uhura's bodice, and his pants stopped just below the knee, where his black stocking showed, molding a straight, muscular leg. He walked with the elastic assurance of a self-confident man on an errand. Uhura envied him heartily.

Suddenly, he broke into a run, and yelled something. Almost without meaning to, she followed, and saw him plunge into a crowd. As Uhura plunged in, after him, she saw him dive into a group of men, and snatch a small boy by his ragged collar. His son?

The man pushed the boy behind him, and turned to the other four men, fists ready. "Varlets, villains, traitors, verminous excrescences, putrid meat. Wouldst thou pick on a child?"

His words showed more spirit than wisdom, unless the boy did happen to be his son, because the men he faced all looked burlier than he, taller and twice as wide, and with fists like hams.

Uhura told herself that she wouldn't intervene. It was none of her business if they fought, fair or not. For all she knew this man was the sort that went around getting into fights with all his neighbors. For all she knew, he got beat up every day. For all she knew...

She tried to walk away from the scene, in search of the elusive Harrod, but she couldn't, because of the inevitable circle of spectators forming around the beginning brawl.

The presumed Will, defending himself from all the other Wills -- or maybe one of them had the originality of being a Richard or a Henry -- threw an awkward punch at one of the four giants surrounding him. The giant jeered, and threw a punch in his turn, hitting the smaller man in the face.

The smaller man remained standing. The urchin behind him made a keening noise, and -- Uhura's eyes widened -- plunged a hand into the pocket of his defender's jacket.

One of the attacking giants saw it, too, and grabbed the child's scrawny wrist, and twisted it, and took something from his hand. This brute, a creature whose features might have been carved with an ax, stepped out of the shadows, away from the fray where his buddies continued punching the smaller guy, who nevertheless remained standing. He held his hand up, grinning at the small glittering metal jewelry in his hand.

Before Uhura could think, she yanked her skirts up higher and, rushing forward, applied a well-placed kick to the man's knee. He screeched and dropped the jewel. She grabbed it midair. Dropping it into the only secure place available -- the tight space between her half-bare breasts -- she turned to the other savages beating up the man.

A well-placed blow to the back of the head dropped the man nearest her. His companions turned on her. The next one wasn't as easy, but Uhura doubled him over with a kick to his solar plexus. The young man with the dark curls punched the last one.

The man who'd nicked the jewelry had recovered, and tried to wade in. Uhura had time to knock him to the ground, and still see the presumed Will chase off his last assailant. The urchin had disappeared in the confusion, probably with his protector's cash, if he'd carried any.

The man looked at Uhura. As the circle of spectators dissolved around them, Uhura thought she caught references to her, in scattered sentences.

"Magnificent shrew," someone said.

"Those moorish women have fire," another man commented. "Wouldn't want one in my bed, though."

The man with the dark curls fished for a handkerchief from within the sleeve of his jacket, and pressed it to his nose to stanch the blood. "Milady." He gasped deeply, and grinned, stowing the handkerchief back in his sleeve. "Why now, milady, rarely is such strength seen as the ally of so much beauty."

"Beauty is only skin deep, but a good punch'll break the underlying bone." Uhura twisted her dress back to its usual uncomfortability. Mud splattered her skirts, and her boots were unrecognizable, smelly, muddy blobs. She fished in the narrow space just below her décolletage for the man's jewel.

His caramel eyes opened wide, and he followed the search most attentively. "You must be a great lady." His voice squeaked, and he cleared his throat. "From your apparel. Are you lost? Have your servants deserted you?"

Servants? Lost? Well, he could say that. She gave him a wary look, just as her fingers found the jewelry, stuck by some sharp point into the fabric of her bodice. She tugged it out. "I believe this belongs to you."

He looked at it. "It's not mine, but I am holding it for its owner. And how did you happen to get it?" He extended his hand to her, palm up. He wore dingy elbow length white gloves, stained here and there with inky black. He returned the jewel to his pocket.

"The boy took it from your pocket as you fought. One of those savages took it from him, and I took it from the savage." She grabbed the top of her dress, and wrenched it back into place. "I tried to put it somewhere safe. It got stuck."

Looking both stunned and pleased, the man said, "I do not have the pleasure of knowing your name."

"Lieu -- " Uhura stopped herself. "Uhura."

Grinning, he displayed a full set of amazingly even teeth. "A beautiful name for a beautiful lady."

Ah, yes, certainly. Was that the local equivalent of *your quarters or mine*? "What's your name?"

"I'm called Will." He bowed.

He and a million of his friends and neighbors. "All right, Will, I'm searching for William Harrod...my...uh...my retainer."

"Your...retainer?" Will bowed again. "Would milady take ale, and bide the time safely with me until she finds him?" He extended his arm to her, gallantly.

She thought of warning him that she was in no mood for funny business, but thought that he had seen her fight and, surely, he couldn't think that he'd be able to subdue her easily. No, he must be what he seemed: a Good Samaritan. And having him for an ally had certain undeniable advantages. Certainly, he would know

how money worked here. And what a plague house looked like. And he could protect her -- well, appear to protect her -- in taverns.

"My word, I'll give you no harm, and return you to your attendants." He patted the pocket with the jewelry. "As recompense for your timely assistance."

Cautiously, she rested her arm in his, and he led her through the streets, casting occasional molten-caramel looks at her. His very dark lashes made his eyes look all the lighter. "How came someone as beautiful as you to wander about without guardians?"

She smiled at him, despite herself. He had such an engaging manner, and such a nice voice. "Do I look like I need guardians?"

He shook his head, and smiled.

Who was this Will who acted so differently from the other Wills around him? Could he, too, somehow, be a displaced time traveler? "Are you a Londoner?"

He shook his head. "No. I come from Warwick," he said. "My people, the Ardens, used to be nobles, and own all that region."

The Ardens. So, he would be William Arden. She smiled up at him. "And what do you do?" Seeing his uncomprehending look, she added, "Your profession."

He laughed. "Not a profession. A trade, milady. A humble one. I'm an actor. I strut my moment on the stage, and then I am gone." Will smiled down at her. "And where do you belong?"

"Far from here."

He nodded. "In another kingdom?" He looked at her from head to toe. "From your garments, I thought so."

From her garments and her dark skin and hair, no doubt, but, his not mentioning it in an age when lead-induced pallor was the height of fashion, must be gallantry. She swallowed her annoyance, and smiled. "Yes, another kingdom, far away."

"Well, I am honored to show you my land." Will led her assuredly amid the crowd. "I hope it will please you."

Weirdly enough, it did. Once she got used to the smell, the noise, and the seeming randomness of behavior, Uhura began feeling exhilarated. Her pulse quickened. Here was a young, brash country, the adolescent stage of Western civilization.

Just a few miles from her, past all these tenements and hovels, Elizabeth I engaged in an experiment that would show the world that a woman could rule. Her example would, ultimately, open all professions to women. And in London, somewhere, William Shakespeare must be living in a garret, while he wrote his deathless plays. Halfway around the globe, Raleigh explored the New World, and Drake brought back the treasures of Spanish galleons to lay at his queen's feet.

With quickened interest, Uhura forgot the smell of the muck beneath her feet, and ignored duels starting just

ahead of her.

The tavern Will took her to, The Queen's Head, had long pine tables, at which sat a fascinating array of characters, from masons to weavers, carpenters to swordsmen, all of them talking of their pursuits. And they all spoke warmly, excitedly, as though they too knew, deep in their hearts, that they were laying the foundation of a better future, and building the knowledge that eventually would take humans to the stars. By the time they left, Uhura's head reeled, no thanks to the weak ale.

"May I take milady to her lodgings?" Will asked.

"I...I don't have lodgings," Uhura answered, breathless, excited. "I have money."

Will looked worried. "You can't rent a room alone. You're a woman." He flinched and smiled, perhaps remembering the mayhem this woman could cause. "Someone might think you're easy pickings, and try to cut your throat in your sleep." He shook his head. "You must come with me. I lodge at Bishopsgate, in the house of some good French refugees. We'll tell them you're my wife. All will be well."

His lodgings? She smiled tightly. All would be well. She could take care of herself. They walked what seemed like a mile, in the darkness, while he asked her what she thought of London and swelled with pride at her favorable opinion.

Finally, he unlocked the door of a tall building with a key he pulled from his sleeve, leading her past a tiny hall and up a rickety set of stairs. They never saw his landlord.

Upstairs, in the privacy of Will's two narrow rooms -- one big enough for a single bed, and one big enough for a small table and a stool -- Will offered her his own bed, while he, with his cloak, retired to sleep on his table.

The next morning, Uhura woke when Will knocked and came into the small room. "Here, milady," he said. "Since I think you'll wish to search for your retainer in the city, I thought you might want to dress in these." He handed her a jacket and pants made of blue velvet. "It is my good suit. Dressed as a man you won't be so conspicuous, and people will assume you can defend yourself, so you need not...I need not fear for you. I'll be busy elsewhere, about my own concerns." He handed her a large iron key. "Take this key and, if you haven't found your retainer by tonight, you may make free of my bed again."

"But, the key...?" Uhura said. "How will you...?"

He smiled. "The landlord will let me in. He'll assume I got drunk and lost my key." He looked her up and down, and smiled, and blushed. "You might want to wear my cloak, too. The air is chill and, besides, a cloak will hide your...charms."

He didn't belong in this flea-infested, plague-ridden time. He walked through it as a beacon of civilization and goodwill. Uhura sighed as she buttoned herself into his jacket, which proved just as tight and uncomfortable as her bodice. She would trade the simpering William Harrod for Will, if she could. But she'd been given a mission.

Dressed as a man, she plunged into the maelstrom of Elizabethan London, to return, at sundown, sore-footed and tired, to Will's lodgings.

Will had arrived just before her, and spread a feast of roasted capon and boiled vegetables on his tiny table. When he saw her, his eyes lit up. "You didn't find your retainer, then," he said. "I'm heartily sorry." But he didn't look sorry at all.

They talked. He told her stories, and recited poems, and -- unearthing a stringed instrument from under his bed -- played music for her. He definitely didn't belong in this time.

For three more days, he fed her and gave her lodging, and seemed rather more grateful for her company than imposed upon.

She realized that Will had been very lonely, a man ahead of his time, who obviously hadn't ever found any woman he could talk to as he talked to her. Sometimes his caramel eyes softened when looking at her, and she wondered if the foolish man was falling in love with her. If he was, how could she prevent it? If seeing her kick the living daylight out of three thugs hadn't been enough to scare him, he might be beyond the reach of intimidation.

Fortunately, the male clothes did prevent her from becoming the victim of foolish assaults as she searched in vain for the other William. Over the days, she became more and more uncomfortable about his fate. Why had he been wearing a dress, anyway? Was it because his features looked too soft for the time, just as she had to dress as a man for protection?

Sitting at dinner with Will -- both of them squeezed together on the tiny stool -- Uhura wondered about the ramifications of taking him back with her. He seemed so out of place in this era. Could it be that she was meant to return with both him and William Harrod? Perhaps she was supposed to leave William Harrod behind, and bring this Will back with her. Uhura wished the Guardian had been more specific in its images and speech, and sighed.

"You look worried," Will said. "Is it your servant you worry about? What's his name, again?"

"William Harrod."

Will nodded. "What would he look like?"

"He has blond hair," Uhura said. Frankly, though she remembered Harrod's face, there wasn't anything about it that she could describe precisely. She wished she had a picture. "And he would be about your height, and he has blue eyes." And a pretty golden dress. "Is there somewhere...I mean, don't misunderstand me, but...he might be wearing a woman's dress. Is there somewhere where this happens?"

Will grinned. "Oh. That Will. A woman's face, with nature's own hand painted, that men's eyes and women's souls amazeth."

"Uh...something like that." Uhura gave him a hard glare, wondering if he'd gone batty. The line sounded vaguely familiar. Was he quoting something?

He'd gone all serious and nodded to her, a little restrained nod. "Yes, perhaps, I may know your Will. If so, I'm glad. I'm glad you've found him. When I first saw him, he was lost like that boy, and I had to defend him from a passel of cutpurses."

"Ah, yes. Will would get lost," Uhura said. "He does that."

His caramel-colored eyes regarded her with something that might be amusement. "How long have you searched? For all these long months, Will has worked with me, and he has said that his people would come for him, but he has despaired, and he...Well, his habits are expensive. He likes good inns, and a clean shirt every day. He ran into debt. He stole that brooch you so kindly returned to me. I returned it, and to keep him from the gaol."

Uhura sighed. The kind of fool that would "accidentally" fall into the Guardian, would be just as clumsy at theft, or any other job he might attempt. "Do you know where he is?"

Will nodded again. "I know not where he lodges. He has moved about, now because his street reeks too badly or because bawds gather there, and the last time, if you would believe it, because from his room he could see the heads of traitors affixed on pikes at London gate." Will shook his head. He chuckled, then sighed. "But I do know that tomorrow, just after noon, you will find him at the Rose, where I work. If you wish to come with me, to the theater, I'd be honored. And maybe you'll find your friend there. Even if he is not whom I think, a great company gathers at the Rose and, who knows, maybe you can spy him within."

"Yes. Thank you." Uhura smiled. "I'd like that."

Will nodded. "Then I'll come and get you at the noon hour...only...if you would be so kind..." He blushed. "If you'd wear your gown, as you had when I first met you, I would be honored to be seen in the company of such a beautiful lady."

She felt herself blush, and nodded. "Yes, yes, of course."

The theater was nothing like any she'd attended at home. Disorderly and crammed with people, it teemed with life, like everything in this time. Will led Uhura to a seat in the upper galleries, above the mass of standing spectators below.

As the play started, Uhura prepared to be bored, but she wasn't. The play was *A Midsummer's Night Dream* and Will, playing Bottom, made the audience laugh with his lines. And though the wings of the fairies were ill-sewn and the crown of the fairy queen too obviously tinsel, yet the immortal words of the Bard spun their enchantment, even in this setting.

The crowd laughed and applauded and threw their greasy cloaks in the air in appreciation, not knowing that their children and their grandchildren and their descendants would all enjoy these same words, feel these same emotions. They couldn't guess that plays by this same author would thrill alien spectators.

In Uhura's mind, these words stretched like a golden thread, linking generations, from their cradle on Earth well into space.

And, as she watched, she found herself hoping that someone would introduce her to Shakespeare. That would be something to tell her shipmates. Maybe Will knew the Bard.

Her mission intervened, and even her charmed eyes couldn't miss noticing that William Harrod acted as the fairy queen.

After the play, Uhura waited until the press of people had dispersed, then went backstage to search for William Harrod. Backstage was as exciting as up front, a huge room crammed with props, filled with actors busy taking off costumes and cleaning paint from their faces. She saw Will. Behind Will, William Harrod

removed a long wig to show his own short blond hair.

Following her gaze, Will said quietly, "You've found your friend."

Uhura nodded. She stepped in front of Harrod, who scratched at his scalp with both hands.

"Your performance was enchanting, Master Harrod."

He stared at her, uncomprehending, then bowed stiffly, and, taking her hand, kissed it, just as stiffly.

Uhura smiled at him. "I've been searching for you across time. Hoping to return with you to where we belong."

His eyes lit with understanding. His face relaxed into a real smile. "Come to rescue me from these dire circumstances?" He kissed her hand again, more passionately. "I cannot thank you enough for returning for me. For taking me back." His eyes glistened with emotion. "I'll never desert you again."

It sounded like the accident wasn't so accidental. Looking around the theater, Uhura could understand the lure that had driven the young historian. While a hard era, there was much to be said for it, many opportunities. She'd just witnessed, and he'd participated in, an original performance of one of Shakespeare's plays. "Did you truly doubt that you would be searched for and restored, or were you only hoping that all would be forgotten?"

Hanging his head in shame, William Harrod said, "Actually I feared I had made an irreparable mistake, and that no amount of affection could restore me."

Will looked dismayed at their apparent intimacy.

Uhura smiled at Will. She had to take him back with her. He didn't belong to this time. How much difference could one less Will make to Elizabeth's England? After all, these people dropped dead all the time from a myriad of things, and there were hundreds, thousands, of Wills in the streets.

His caramel eyes caught her gaze and held it. His cheeks glowed red as he asked, "What did you think...of the play?"

"Wonderful! Absolutely the most memorable performance I've ever seen. I can't thank you enough."

Every word seemed to build Will up. He stood taller and smiled wider. He bowed to her. "Thank you. It is the favored heir of my invention."

It seemed too good an opportunity to waste, so Uhura asked, "I don't suppose you could introduce me to the playwright?"

Will grinned, his eyes shone. "Your most humble servant."

It took a moment for that to sink in. Uhura realized that *her* Will, out of all the Wills in London, was William Shakespeare.

He didn't look like the only accepted portrait, with its domed, bald forehead. His portraits, with pitch black

hair and, more often than not, blue eyes, looked nothing like him. His fine, animated features, combined with the unusual color of his eyes, gave him a look none of those portraits had ever captured.

Her heart sank as she thought back over all the clues she hadn't noticed. Arden. Of course, his mother was an Arden, was she not? And he was from Warwick, and called himself an actor. Had she really not noticed, or had she deliberately ignored it? She didn't know what to say, what to do. Part of her wanted to howl in frustration, part to weep on his shoulder, but mostly she wanted to return to blissful ignorance. And take him back with her. "Oh. You."

He searched her face, looking uncertain of her thoughts.

Taking his hands in hers, Uhura held them up to examine them, touch them. "These hands wrote those words." She reached up, brushing the tips of her fingers against his temples. "This mind conceived these masterpieces." Her hands rested lightly on his shoulders. "You are someone I never thought to meet."

"Lady, you flatter me. I'm no Kyd, no Marlowe. I'm nobody." Leaning down, he touched her lips with his.

"Yes, yes, he's very talented, but we have business elsewhere," William Harrod said.

"Will!" a bearded actor called, nearby. "Will!"

Will squeezed her once, before being pulled away. Her heart clutched to watch him go. She couldn't take him with her.

"Ma'am? How do we get home?"

Uhura shrugged, looking at Harrod, allowing her feelings to melt away as she stepped into the role of a Federation officer once again. Yet, she followed Will with her gaze -- his dark curls, the shapely body delineated by his tight jacket and formfitting breeches. "I don't know. As I understand it, once everything is as it should be, the Guardian pulls us back."

"I tried not to do anything, not to change anything." William started pacing. "I didn't save anyone's life. I didn't tell anyone anything. I didn't *do* anything." He looked down at his costume in dismay. "Except put this dress on, and act in that play. But I had to eat!"

Irritant! And she had to bring him back while leaving Will here. Uhura shook her head, and swallowed to keep her eyes dry.

He started ripping his costume off. "I've got to get out of here." He started for the alley door, shedding bits of gown.

Reflecting that some people never seem to realize what they have when they've got it, Uhura followed, catching him just outside the door. "Stop it. That's an order, mister." Unfortunately, he was a civilian, unaccustomed to taking orders.

"Do you remember where you were when you arrived?" he asked, clutching her arm. "I've never been able to get back there. Maybe all we have to do is return."

She pointed down the alley. "It's just..."

Pulling her along with him, he started for the alley mouth. "Come on, hurry."

Grabbing his arms, Uhura swiftly spun him around, so that she held him tight and blocked his path to the alley. "Stop. I have some business to finish here, and then I'll take you there."

His arm reached out to grab her waist, pulling her back to him. "Please, now. I can't stand it one more minute. Please."

Glaring up at him, she opened her mouth to give him a sharp rebuke, and heard the stage door creak.

Will stood in the doorway, looking out at them. The expression on his face was bleak and desolate. "Would you leave thus, without even a good-bye?"

Harrod tugged at Uhura. "Good-bye."

Will turned to go back into the theater. Uhura wrenched herself out of Harrod's grasp, and Harrod disappeared. In that split second she knew she could call out to Will, stay with him, take him with her, change time to suit herself. But she couldn't. He belonged not to her, but to humanity.

Uhura felt tears roll down her cheeks. "Farewell, my friend. Forever and forever, farewell."

She found herself stepping out of the portal onto a vast barren plain, and into a crowd of excited Federation officials.

Debriefing was particularly difficult. Uhura had no wish to speak of William Shakespeare, no wish to satisfy the envious looks, the prurient curiosity of the historians. Will had been alive and warm in her arms, his lips soft against hers, and now, a few moments of her subjective time later, he was dead, had been dead for uncounted centuries before her birth.

She was happy when the questioning moved on to William Harrod. As a civilian he had the luxury of being difficult and uninformative, but this escapade would follow him all his life, and he'd never be allowed near the Guardian again.

She slunk out of the conference room, after they finished interrogating Harrod, trying to ignore the fact that she still had to compose her mission log, and not mention the way Will's long fingers had strummed the chords, and not dwell on the gallant words he'd bestowed on her, or on his soft heart that made him the pawn of every creature in need.

One of the historians, the thin older man, stepped into her path, dragging an unwilling Harrod along. As the historian dug an elbow in his back, Harrod said, "Lieutenant Uhura, I wanted to personally thank you. There is a vast difference between knowing something historically, and experiencing it. I am truly grateful for what you did to find me, and bring me back."

She didn't want to talk to him, but she managed a polite nod and a diplomatic, "Just doing my job, but you're welcome."

Harrod relaxed. "And along with setting the timeline straight, we solved a centuries old mystery."

"What would that be?"

He smiled smugly. "Who the dark lady was, in Shakespeare's poems. Don't you see, that's why we had to go back, why the Guardian caused me to fall in. You, at this time in your life, had to meet Shakespeare. It was fate."

The thin older man frowned at him, and rested a hand on his shoulder to stop Harrod's exuberance.

"I don't believe in fate." Another wrinkle occurred to Uhura. "You realize, that makes you Mr. W. H., the fair boy."

Looking taken aback, Harrod scuffed his boots on the floor, shaking his head. "No. Not necessarily. For all we know they were both figments of Shakespeare's imaginative mind, as much as the characters in his plays."

"Most of which were commonly known stories." Uhura smiled at him. "I think Will knew what he was writing."

"Well, I just wanted to thank you." Harrod scrambled away.

In her quarters, after officially entering her mission log, Uhura called up Will's sonnets, to review what she remembered of them. Her eyes misted with tears, as she read,

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;

Coral is far more red than her lips' red;

If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;

If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.

I have seen roses damask'd, red and white,

But no such roses see I in her cheeks,

And in some perfumes is there more delight

Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.

I love to hear her speak, yet well I know

That music hath a far more pleasing sound;

I grant I never saw a goddess go,

My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground.

And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare

As any she belied with false compare.

In a way, Uhura thought, as long as someone, somewhere, read these words, they'd be together. In her mind, she saw Will smile.

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Users Review

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