

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

By Judith Waidlich

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The lithe young ensign ran down the longest corridor in this space station. Missing the shuttle to her first posting would not be the first impression she'd hope to make.

Tawny Taylor was just out of the Academy and looked forward to her assignment on the *U.S.S. Avenger*. She swiftly rounded a corner and had a short sprint to the shuttlebay. She halted before she could crash through the doors. The doors opened and she looked for the shuttle to transport her and the other crewmen to the *Avenger*.

The pilot caught her out of the corner of his eye and turned to watch her jog the rest of the way.

"Thought you weren't going to make it."

"Me <pant, pant> neither. Thanks for waiting." She slowed down to a fast walk, finally having a moment to catch her breath.

"For you, any time." Mick Kellor looked appraisingly over the young ensign with a body to stop traffic. He escorted her through the shuttle door, which closed behind them.

Tawny took a seat among the few passengers, who seemed to not notice her as they were absorbed in a conversation...about physics, she thought. Then they looked up briefly and introduced themselves as Ernst Ecks and Wie, new transfers to the *Avenger*.

The shuttle gracefully lifted off and left the space station on a course to the starship. The *Avenger* had been detoured from the space station to deliver medical supplies to a planet in a nearby star system. The planet, though not a member of the Federation, hoped to attain that goal someday. Sending the starship with the supplies was Star Fleet's way of showing the planet's inhabitants how important they were.

Taylor gazed out the window, her mind racing all over the place. She was full of excitement and trepidation for what was to come. What would her crewmates be like? Her roommate? Would they take her seriously or would they treat her as a "dumb blond"? She could not help the way she looked. Other women were jealous of the attention she got from men. She did not seek them out, but Tawny attracted them like flies to honey. Except for those two scientists next to her. Well, maybe things would be different on the starship.

Tawny had had her share of relationships, but most men usually didn't see past her looks. Taylor would prove to be the best xenobiologist on the ship, if not in all of Star Fleet. She was not just a pretty face; she'd earned her high marks.

Nearly an hour later, Mick guided the shuttle to a perfect landing in the *Avenger's* shuttlebay. The door opened and everyone exited the craft.

Standing near the doorway, waiting to greet the new crewmembers, was a very tall Efrosian. The officer introduced himself as T'HoD, the XO of the *U.S.S. Avenger*. "Welcome aboard. Follow me to your quarters." He turned sharply and led the trio

out of the shuttle area, down a corridor, and to the turbo-lift. As they all entered the lift, T'HoD requested Deck 6. As the turbo-lift came to a stop, he told the trio that Taylor and Ecks had quarters on this deck. He would take them first to their quarters, and then Wie to Deck 4. And they made their way down the corridor.

Back in the shuttlebay, Mick Kellor finished up the post-flight check. He turned and found the captain glaring at him from across the shuttlebay. He straightened up as she made her way toward him; he must be in trouble now. Then her countenance changed from the stern look to an actual smile. Wow, what a difference! He struggled to push inappropriate thoughts out of his mind.

"What can I do for you, sir?" Kellor said formally.

"Just decided to cut out all the middlemen and get the lowdown on the new crew. So tell me your impressions, and remember who you're talking to." She gave him another stern look and then smiled again.

"Well, the two physicists, Ensign Ecks and Lieutenant Wie, talked shop the whole time. Gave me a headache."

Waidlich gave him a "poor you" look, with a gleam of amusement in her eye. Then her brow furrowed. "Did you say X and Y?"

"That's Ecks and Wie."

"Great, wait until Zee hears about that. Any more letters of the alphabet?"

Not knowing whether to laugh at the captain's joke, and to keep those strange thoughts at bay, he collected himself. "No, just Taylor."

"Impressions... besides the obvious."

Feeling all of a sudden nervous and self-conscious, Mick swallowed. "Typical newbie, ready to prove her worth. Excited to be out here."

"That's it?"

"Well, besides the obvious."

The two headed out of the shuttlebay toward the turbo-lift. Mick was wondering what was behind the captain's sudden interest in him. Waidlich, lost in thought, was startled by the turbo-lift doors opening and nearly walking into her XO.

"Just who I was looking for," said Waidlich. "We need to talk. Please excuse us, Mick."

Mick entered the turbo-lift, which quickly cut him off from view.

Waidlich and T'HoD headed farther down the corridor. "New arrivals all settled?"

"Yep. Did I interrupt something?" inquired T'HoD.

"Just getting an informal impression of the new arrivals," responded Waidlich.

"Permission to talk freely?"

"Go ahead," replied Waidlich, somewhat curiously.

"Seems to be something between you and Kellor. Not that anyone else has noticed."

"Please! I'm old enough to be his..."

"Big sister," T'HoD quipped.

"I was going to say older cousin. But you're closer to the truth than you know." She sighed. "He obviously doesn't recognize me."

T'HoD gave his CO a puzzled look.

Waidlich continued. "I used to date his older brother, Jon. It was quite serious."

"Oh," replied T'HoD. "I do remember something about a brother dying when Mick was young."

"It doesn't help that he looks exactly like him. Brings up a lot of feelings and memories." After a brief pause, Judy continued, "Mick was the kid brother that followed his big brother everywhere. Or at least tried to."

"Surprised he doesn't recognize you," commented T'HoD.

"I'm sure he does on some level, but hasn't put two and two together. Besides, I was young, a typical teenager, about to embark on her future at Star Fleet Academy." There was another longer pause. "Then it all went wrong. It changed me."

"Can see that it would be difficult to bring up the subject. Need me to help?"

"No, not necessary. It's something I need to do myself," added Waidlich.

"You're doing a bang-up job, there, Captain."

Waidlich sighed as she shook her head. They came to another turbo-lift. Waidlich entered, followed by her XO. The doors whooshed shut. "Deck five," commanded Waidlich. Moments later, the doors whooshed open and Waidlich preceded T'HoD out of the turbo-lift.

Waidlich turned. "I'm going to walk around a bit."

"See you at the poker game later?" asked D'HamYu.

"Sure," she said as she continued walking away from T'HoD.

As Tawny unpacked, the doors whooshed open. She turned and saw another young woman.

"You must be my new roommate. 'm Erin McGwynn," said the young woman. "I'm in A&A."

Tawny introduced herself, "Tawny Taylor, Xenobiology."

"Wanna get something to eat? I'll only take a sec to change and be ready."

About fifteen minutes later, the two women headed off to the mess hall. Erin was talking incessantly about her family in Ireland, her interests in art, music, and hiking. They arrived at the mess hall, entered, and got something to eat. They found a secluded table near one corner. Erin continued on about life on a starship.

Tawny told Erin about her father, a famous composer, and her author mother. She was not sure how that made for a xenobiologist daughter. She continued on about her home in Kentucky and her hobbies of riding and outdoor activities.

The conversation turned to gossip and who to watch out for. "What about that pilot, Mick?" inquired Taylor.

"Got to watch out for that one." Erin giggled. "Can you keep a secret? He has a crush on the captain."

"Really?" Tawny's eyebrows went up.

"But the captain doesn't know he exists," continued Erin. Taylor's face had a puzzled look. "I mean besides as a pilot," Erin finished.

Tawny finished her meal in silence, trying to absorb it all.

Suddenly, a familiar male form leaned over and asked, "How about that tour of the ship I promised you? Oh, hi, Erin," he added as an afterthought.

"I'll take a rain check for now," responded Taylor.

"Mind if I join you, then?" asked Mick.

"Take a seat," replied Taylor.

"The first day can be exhausting. Remember, if you need anything, just let me know. If you need someone to show you the ropes, I mean if Erin is not around, just ask," continued Mick. Erin scowled while Tawny nodded.

The three noticed a hush that came over the room, then noticed the shadow of another person cast across the table. The captain.

"As you were," said Waidlich, as she placed a quite ugly-looking rock on the table.

Mick looked at the rock, then glanced up at the captain, who flashed a lopsided smile, then gazed back at the rock.

"We'll talk later, Mr. Kellor. I have some holograms you might enjoy. Now, I have a poker game to get to."

"Captain, what about this?" he questioned as he pointed to the rock on the table.

"Just a gift from a young admirer, a long time ago."

"A gift is to be treasured always," said Mick.

"Right you are," she said as Mick handed the ugly item back to her. She took it, turned, and exited the mess hall. The room noise level slowly rose back to its former buzz.

"That was odd," said Erin.

"Which part?" asked Tawny.

"All of it, coming in here, the rock, just all of it." Erin turned to Mick. "Do you know what it means?"

Mick turned and said, with all seriousness, "Not a clue. Got to see some buddies for drinks. See you later." He rose from the table and exited the room, hoping the girls had believed that lie.

The girls turned to each other and continued with their previous conversation.

Erin whispered conspiratorially, "Oh yeah, another guy you have to watch out for is..."

THE END

ACTUALLY THE BEGINNING...