

HOW TO KEEP A SECRET ON A STARSHIP

By Judith Waidlich

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How does one keep a secret on a starship? You can't unless only one person knows, which doesn't make sense. Case in point, the CO's sex life or lack thereof. If the CO has a sex life – and at this point it is neither being confirmed or denied – then more than one person would likely know.

The captain is down in sickbay, sitting on the edge of the biobed, waiting impatiently for the CMO to finish up her examination. Hopefully, this will be the last follow-up to the bite she got from that creature on some unknown planet in Kenosian territory. Doctor Aurora Parker-MacKenzie finishes up her final scan of one of her most difficult patients, any starship CMO's most difficult patient, the Commanding Officer. Aurora turns to put her instrument away and turns back to face her patient, the only patient in sickbay, and says, "Okay, let's head over to my office to discuss the results."

The captain hops down from the biobed and follows the doctor into her office. Captain Judith Waidlich glances at the doctor's pet guinea pigs scampering around in their elaborate enclosure behind the CMO's desk. Waidlich takes the seat indicated by the wave of Aurora's arm.

"Something wrong?" asks Judy.

"No, you're fine. In perfect health," says Aurora, smiling sort of like the cat which just got the canary.

"Then why did you want to see me?" queries the puzzled-looking Waidlich.

"Just wanted to ask about that nice young pilot you're seeing," replies the CMO.

"I'm not seeing anyone," retorts a slightly irritated Judy.

"Well, you should. You two look so cute together," Doctor Parker-MacKenzie continues.

"Cute?!?" replies Judy with a scowl on her visage.

"It'll be good for you. You'll be less irritable," says Aurora.

Waidlich rolls her eyes. "You're a hopeless romantic." Judy rises out of her seat and starts to leave. She turns and says, "See you." And she continues out of the office and out of sickbay into the corridor.

Once in the corridor she hurries to the nearest turbo-lift. The doors whoosh open and Waidlich enters the lift and takes it to the deck where her office is situated. She enters the office and circles to her chair behind the desk. No sooner does she sit, then the doors whoosh open and in walks her Erosian Executive Officer, D'HamYu T'HoD. Waidlich looks up. "Yes?" she inquires.

"Just checking up on things," says the XO.

"As far as I know, things are fine," replies Judy, a bit surly.

"Permission to speak freely," states D'HamYu. Judy nods. "Have you been able to spend any time with Kellor, in a personal way?" asks T'HoD.

Waidlich rubs her temples. "Do you want to know or does the Doc want to know?"

"You know Aurora," replies T'HoD.

"Well, we jetted off to Paris this weekend and next week we'll be in Italy," says Judy.

The Erosian glares at his superior officer's flippant remark. "That is what you Humans refer to as snarky, isn't it?"

"Yes. I'm the CO of a starship. Who has the time?" Waidlich states matter-of-factly.

"You should make the time. Doctor's orders," responds T'HoD.

Waidlich shakes her head. "I just went through all this with the doctor not more than five minutes ago. So what's the buzz from the crew; any rumors?"

"No rumors," answers T'HoD.

"Good," Judy replies.

"So have you slept with him?" asks T'HoD. Waidlich glares daggers at her First Officer. "Okay, subject dropped for now. I'll be going." And before Waidlich can say another word, he turns and exits her office.

Judy works on routine tasks in the privacy of her office for about half an hour. She then leaves for the bridge. Upon arrival, she takes the center seat.

A short time later, the XO comes up and clears his throat. Waidlich replies, "Yes?"

He responds, "Forgetting something?"

Judy answers, "Oh yeah. On my way. You have the conn." She rises and exits the bridge via turbo-lift.

She makes her way to sickbay and the office of the Doctor of Mental Health, Dr. Camille Farber. Dr. Farber is in her office, enjoying a cup of tea. There is another cup awaiting Judy. She enters and takes a seat across from the doctor.

Camille asks, "How are things?"

Judy replies, "Fine. Aurora gave me a clean bill of health. Ship and crew are fine."

Camille takes a sip and puts down the porcelain tea cup and asks almost innocently, "Seeing someone?"

Waidlich sighs, since this seems to be a day that everyone is prying into her private life, and replies, "No."

Dr. Farber responds, "You should. It would be good for you. It would ease some of the tension."

Waidlich sighs again. "I don't know. I need time to consider it. Besides, I would want to keep something like that as private as possible."

Dr. Farber says, "That would be a neat trick. How could you do that?"

"I could beam to his quarters, or have him beam to mine," Judy replies matter-of-factly as she takes a sip of her tea.

The doctor asks, "That isn't entirely safe, is it? And wouldn't it leave a signature or something to be traced or noticed? Someone would notice."

"Ah, I wouldn't do it within the ship." Judy takes another sip. "I would use one of the shuttles. Of course, you would have to time it right, when the ship's transporters are in use, to mask the signatures."

Dr. Farber replies, "You've given this much thought. I didn't know our shuttles could do that. Sounds like you've tried this out."

Judy takes another sip of her tea and replies, "Okay, you caught me. There are no transporters on the shuttles. I just can't seem to get anything by you."

"So you are involved with someone. I can keep a secret," replies an eager and insistent Dr. Farber.

"I'm the CO. I'm very involved with many members of the crew," says Judy, rather matter-of-factly.

The doctor presses on, "You know what I mean, an intimate relationship."

Waidlich says with a shrug, "You would know, wouldn't you, being so in touch with the crew?"

"But you do think about it?" continues the doctor in her line of inquiry.

Waidlich replies, "I'm only human." She finishes her tea. "If there is nothing further, I have work to get back to."

"We're done," Farber replies. "We should schedule another appointment."

"If there is nothing wrong with me, I'd rather not," replies Judy.

"Okay. Everything checks out, more or less. Nothing with regard to the episode on that planet you crashed on."

Waidlich gets up, leaves the office, and heads back to the bridge.

Waidlich is sitting alone at a table in the mess hall, sipping tea, and reading info from a padd. Mick Kellor walks up to the table with a tray of food and asks, "Mind if I have a seat?"

"Be my guest," replies Judy.

"Everyone is looking at us," notes Kellor.

Waidlich takes a quick glance around. "Oh, you've noticed."

"Why is everyone interested in this?" queries Mick.

"Not totally sure. Will ask T'HoD at tonight's poker game," answers Judy. She takes a sip of her tea, still intently studying the info on the padd.

Mick is curious about what she is studying and asks, "Reports?"

"Nope," she replies. She takes another sip.

"Top Secret?" he asks.

"Nope," she replies with a small smile.

Mick, with a worried look, asks, "Not another simulator program?"

Waidlich looks up with an amused expression and answers, "No."

"So do I keep guessing or are you going to tell me what's on the padd?" says Mick. Waidlich slides the padd over to Kellor and takes a sip. Kellor picks up the padd and after a moment notes, "What a load of drivel."

"Doctor Parker-MacKenzie swears by the author," replies Waidlich.

"And you?" asks Kellor.

"It's drivel," she says with a smile. She reaches over to retrieve the padd. "Are you going to keep questioning my reading material or are you going to eat?"

"Eat," Mick replies and starts digging into his meal with gusto. Waidlich allows herself a quick glance around. The room seems to have lost interest in their conversation, although a few

furtive glances are directed their way. Waidlich reads her padd while Mick finishes his meal.

"So what's with the poker game?" asks Mick.

"Senior staff only," replies Waidlich.

"So who's the best player?" queries Kellor.

"That's classified," she replies with a twinkle in her eyes and a small smile. She rises from the table, and Kellor quickly rises. "At ease. I have to go and get ready for the game." Waidlich makes her way out to the corridor. Kellor sits, but watches her go. He turns away as he observes too many people taking notice. He thinks to himself that she has to be a hell of a player and he'll have to ask her later.

The regulars from the senior staff are gathering in the XO's quarters for tonight's game. Waidlich walks in and nods to T'HoD, the CMO, and the Security Chief, Lt. Commander Sexton. She still has her padd. She takes a seat. The doors to the quarters whoosh open and in walks Matt Rielly, the Chief Engineer.

"Something weird is going on," he says to no one in particular. As all eyes turn to the chief, he continues, "I had a strange conversation with Doc Farber. I ran into her in the corridor and she had a strange interest in the transporter system, about beaming intraship and how dangerous it really is. Who put that in her head?"

Everyone looks puzzled while Waidlich is trying to keep from busting out laughing and fortunately succeeding. She replies, "That would be me."

"Must have something to do with the betting pool," says T'HoD.

"What betting pool?" asks the CO. Rielly sits at the table and T'HoD starts to deal the cards.

"The one about you and Kellor," says the XO innocently.

"What is everyone betting on?" asks Judy.

T'HoD gets a bit self-conscious. "The usual. Betting on first kiss and stuff like that."

"We talking public behavior?" asks Waidlich, as T'HoD finishes his deal.

"No, not necessarily," replies the XO.

"How does one know what goes on behind closed doors?" asks Judy.

"That is probably why not too many people are involved in the pool. I'll split the winnings with you if you give me a heads-up." Judy glares at her XO. "Just kidding."

"This obsession with my sex life is not affecting ship's functions, is it?" asks Waidlich of her XO.

"No. As I said, most of the crew are not involved in the betting. Most feel that it is an invasion of your privacy. Others figure they'll be busted to ensign or transferred to a garbage scow. Only about a half-dozen are brave enough to enter the pool," he says. "I saw no immediate need to shut it down."

"Well, a lot of the crew seem to be paying too much attention whenever Kellor and I chat," notes Judy. The XO shrugs. "Shut the pool down and see to it that that subject concerning the senior staff is not something to bet on." Without looking at her cards, Judy flips them over. "I'm out." She gets up from the table, moves her chair near the wall, sits again, and begins reading her padd.

T'HoD says, "Who's going to open?"

Finally the others are done playing. The CMO, Chief Engineer, and Security Chief take their leave.

"Must be fascinating reading," says T'HoD to Waidlich. "You seem to always be absorbed in those stories."

Waidlich hands the padd to D'HamYu. He pages down and his eyes go wide. "Okay, now I see why you want the pool shut. Should have known after all these poker nights. I'll try to keep Aurora from prying. After all, if she knows, the ship will know. Are you done having fun at all our expense?"

"Mostly at Dr. Farber's expense," Judy says mischievously. Waidlich takes the padd back. "Actually, I would be rather surprised if no one knew. Mick and I are trying to kept things quiet and private. Some of the crew respects those wishes." Waidlich takes her leave and goes to her quarters.

As Judy enters her quarters, Mick asks, "Poker always go this long?"

"No, tonight was a short night," replies Waidlich. Kellor walks over to Judy, embraces her, and they kiss. As they come up for air, Waidlich asks, "Did you know about the betting pool?" Mick's eyes go wide and he shakes his head no. "Well, T'HoD is going to shut it down."

"When did it start?" asks Mick.

"After our adventure in Kenosian space," replies Waidlich.

"So our secret is safe," says Mick.

"No, I showed the padd to T'HoD," answers Judy.

"Oh," says Mick. "Now what?"

"Bed," says Waidlich with a grin. They kiss again and Mick starts toward her bedroom. Waidlich tosses the padd onto a small table and follows Kellor.

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