

# ***Who Was That Lady I Saw You With?***

***By Lynda Carraher©***

"The thing that really fooled me," Jose Tyler said, "was that the guy was black."

"So?" Kirk asked, dipping another tortilla chip into the hot sauce.

"So, Michael Kilroy isn't. He's a white Terran. We know that. That's about all we know, but we *do* know that."

"Then it wasn't him."

"Had to be him. Who else swipes souvenirs from starship captains and draws that goofy face on the wall?"

"Then how do you explain his being black?"

"My chief surgeon told me there's a chemical they used to use in treating skin disorders. I forget the name of it, but it kicks up the melanin production and darkens the skin. The FIA still uses it sometimes for covert operations, so a guy with Kilroy's skill at being where he's not supposed to be wouldn't have much trouble laying his hands on a supply."

Tyler sipped at his beer and winked at the waitress as she put a plate of enchiladas in front of him. The fact that she was Canopian and therefore had no eyelids with which to wink back disturbed neither of them. Of all the Terran imports to the Canopus system, Mexican food was the most popular. It had also had the most impact on the economy of the largest moon of Canopus III, which was home to Starbase 9. The service community which had sprung up around the starbase boasted more Mexican restaurants than Ciudad Juarez.

That was fortunate, because Tyler had recently lost a bet with Kirk as to which of them could successfully penetrate the icy demeanor of a certain female psychologist assigned to said starbase. The forfeit, in Tyler's case, was a Mexican dinner, even though the loser had argued that the winning of the bet should itself have been enough of a reward. But Kirk had stood his ground.

Normally, the meal would have been prepared and served on board Tyler's own *Cortez*, drawing on his private stock of authentic Terran-Mexican foods, but that stock had been wiped out by a midnight raid of one Michael Kilroy, super-sneak.

Kirk chewed thoughtfully at his first bite of enchilada.

"Your mother's are better," he pronounced.

"It's the sauce. See, she puts in--"

"But how did you know it was Kilroy?" Kirk interrupted. "Anybody can swipe something and draw a face on a wall."

"When we started tracking down Ensign Okara, we found out the real one was in sickbay on the *Excalibur*, with some kind of bug. And Captain Harris was hopping mad when we got in touch with them. You know that damned avocado tree he used to cart around from ship to ship?"

"Do I? I was on board one time when it was about six inches tall. I accidentally knocked the pot over, and I thought he'd have apoplexy."

"That's the one. Only now it's six *feet* tall. *Was* six feet tall," Tyler amended.

"You don't mean--"

"Yup. Kilroy swiped it. Leaf, stalk and pot."

"But how? And why?"

"Now, I couldn't tell you. As for why -- they say he's got a place somewhere -- some say on Gamma Hydra IV, some say on Io, or Earth -- depends on who you talk to. Anyway, he's supposedly got a whole house full of stuff he's swiped from starship captains. Including Harris' avocado tree. And my chili peppers."

Kirk dabbed at a spot of melting cheese that nestled on his cuff. "I still say he's a myth. Every time some guy gets a mad on at his captain, he pulls a Kilroy. That's all."

Tyler shrugged. "Every case I've hard of involved the guy disappearing as soon as he'd got his prize. And when they checked, it always turned out he was on the ship with phony papers." He drained his glass and signaled for another beer. "Now," he said, hunching forward with his elbows comfortably on the table, "tell me about that psychologist. Just how did you managed to beat me out?"

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Kirk sighed and stretched back in his chair. The pile of data chips in his "out" basket represented a solid six hours of utterly boring busy-work. Piled on top of a standard bridge watch, it had made a long day. Happened every time they took on supplies and crew replacements, as they had just had at Starbase 9. Everything ultimately wound up crossing his desk, much to his intense dislike.

But now it was done, and he'd earned his reward. The Saurian brandy was warm in his stomach, and the filigreed

decanter from which it had come was equally warm to his eyes. He reached out and touched the fragile web of drawn silver that cradled the delicate crystal. A gift from his brother on the occasion of his getting his captain's stripe, the decanter was as close to a talisman as anything Kirk owned.

He was thinking of Sam and grinning at the memory of the party that celebrated his captaincy, when his intercom buzzed. The annoyance at the interruption was clear in his voice as he answered, and the clerical yeoman was suitably apologetic.

"Commander Dramein is still waiting to see you, sir," the young man reminded him.

*Oh, damn.* He'd forgotten about The Snoop. "All right. Send him in."

Dramein was tall and lanky, with a mop of unruly red hair and a toe-scuffing country-boy manner that contrasted sharply with the brain on his sleeve and the Internal Investigations Bureau insignia on the breast of his shirt. IIB men tended to be spit-and-polish types, and Kirk

wondered fleetingly how the devil Dramein had ever managed to rise to the rank of Commander.

He casually handed over his identification chit and Kirk glanced at it without real interest. He'd seen enough of them before and they always meant interruption of routine, interference with missions, and general bad news.

"Thanks for seeing me, Captain. I know you're busy, but we feel this is kind of important."

"No problem, Commander. What's on your mind?"

Dramein hooked an index finger inside the collar of his shirt and scratched reflectively. "IIB asked me to come along on this run because we think there may be somebody on board we'd like to talk to."

"I wish your office had contacted me earlier. We probably could have saved you the trip. You could have had your interview while we were docked."

"Well, you see, sir, we're not sure just who it is. I mean, we think we know who it is, but that won't be who he seems to be."

"I beg your pardon?"

"We have reason to believe, Captain, that one of your replacements is Michael Kilroy. Are you familiar with the gentleman's background?"

In spite of his tiredness, Kirk grinned. "Okay, Dramein -- or whoever you are -- tell Jose it was a nice try, but I didn't bite." He shook his head and took another sip of the brandy.

Dramein's country-boy attitude vanished suddenly. "Captain Kirk, this is a most serious matter. IIB has been trying to nail this imposter for three standard years. I was assured by Admiral Sugawa that I'd have your full cooperation in the matter. In fact, I have in my briefcase an IIB/SF29 detailing my authority in the matter. Of course, if you wish to contact the Admiral to confirm it, I have no objection. I believe she can be reached--"

"Never mind. I would like to see our orders, though." Kirk had been on the receiving end of Sugawa's barbed-wire tongue in the past and he had no desire to repeat the experience.

He took the data chip Dramein offered and fed it into the reader. The matching captain's copy, identified by its bright magenta color and pulled from the "out" basket, slipped neatly into the comparison slot. On the screen, they were identical in detail, marked with Sugawa's tiny, cramped signature, and sealed with IIB's insignia.

He handed Dramein's chip back to him. "I'm sorry, Commander. Jose Tyler sometimes has a rather warped sense of humor and it's not beyond him to pull something like this. He told me a wild story about Kilroy last night and I thought maybe he was setting me up for another one of his practical jokes."

Dramein's military manner melted away as soon as Kirk voiced his apology. "I can see how you might think that," he grinned. "But Captain Tyler was really upset about the theft and he's not the first c.c. to have Kilroy pull the wool

over his eyes. We're hoping he'll be the last." He nodded at the decanter standing on the desk. "If I were you, I'd keep that doodad locked up. It's just the kind of thing Kilroy would love to get his hands on."

"Not much chance of that." But Kirk removed the decanter and locked it in the cabinet behind his desk. "And, anyway, there aren't any black men in the latest group of replacements. I went over the records just a few hours ago."

"It's been over six weeks since Kilroy disappeared from the *Cortez*," Dramein pointed out. "Plenty of time for the trisoralen to work its way out of his system. The man's hell on wheels with disguises, Captain. Anyone who's come on board since Kilroy left the *Cortez* has to be considered a prime suspect. *Anybody*," he repeated, looking at Kirk suspiciously.

"Well, it wasn't me," he said. "Though I'll admit, I wish I'd thought of it. Damn, I wish I'd seen Jose's face when that stuff turned up missing!" He chuckled softly.

Dramein returned the grin. "Yeah." He unfolded his long-

legged frame from the chair. "We'll get him this time, Captain, or I'm not Flora Dramein's baby boy." He hitched the briefcase up under one bony arm, waved a sloppy salute in Kirk's general direction, and slouched out of the office.

Kirk sat drumming his fingers on the desktop after the visitor left. Michael Kilroy, real? And on *his* ship?

Preposterous.

Still, his hand reached out and sifted through the stack of chips.

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Lt. Commander Maggie Chen, personnel officer, sat back comfortably in the chair and crossed her legs.

"I think Dramein is barking up the wrong starship," she announced.

"Everybody checked out?" Kirk asked.

"Yes and no. Canopus had a major flare 36 hours ago, and subspace radio is about as useful to Starbase 9 right now as two tin cans with a string run between them. They're not going to be talking to anybody for a while."

"So you couldn't check back on the replacements?"

"Not through channels. But I've come up with bona fides on most of them. Two were classmates of Chekov's. Three are engineers that Mr. Scott specifically requested -- he's worked with all of them before." She flipped through the pages on a clipboard in her lap. "Let's see... There's a med tech from Lt. Kyle's home town, a supply officer I used to date, a distant cousin of Christine Chapel's ... and two Edoans. I don't think even Kilroy could handle an extra arm and leg. That's it."

Kirk was adding up figures in his mind. "That's only ten -- there were fifteen replacements and that geologist for the mining colony on JS44."

"Those five -- and the geologist -- are women, Captain."

Kirk made a face. "So we're stuck with an investigator and nothing to investigate."

"Afraid so, sir,"

"Well, we can dump him on JS44, and he can go home on a freighter." He glanced at the chronometer on the bulkhead. "Thanks, Maggie. Do I get to buy you dinner now?"

"That's the best idea I've heard all day."

The mess hall was, at that particular time of evening, a noisy oasis of humanity. Kirk really preferred to wait until later, when the din was subdued, or to eat in his quarters, and he nearly decided to do so when Maggie Chen spotted her friend the supply officer and ducked out on the captain with a grin. He was, in fact, headed for the door, when Dramein hailed him from a table in the corner.

"I've been talking to this pretty lady," he said with a nod at Uhura, "and she tells me we're out of touch with Starbase 9. I guess that means you still don't know which one of your new men is Kilroy."

Kirk settled himself in a chair. "According to my personnel officer, none of them are."

Dramein did not look like a man who'd just discovered himself on a wild goose chase. He looked more like a large red-haired rabbit, due partially to the fact that he was munching contentedly on a carrot stick. "Oh, yeah? How'd he figure that out without contacting the base?"

"She. And she used an old time-honored method known as the grapevine." He explained Maggie Chen's conclusions. "So, unless he's masquerading as a woman, somebody steered you wrong, Commander."

Dramein looked suddenly thoughtful. He put the carrot stick down. "Masquerading ... as a woman?" Kirk could see the wheels going around inside the investigator's brain. "That's ... very interesting."

"Also very impossible," Uhura put in. "All replacements get a routine physical before their assignment is confirmed. And I think Dr. McCoy can tell the difference."

"Who's banding my name around?" McCoy plopped his tray on the table and made himself comfortable. "And what difference can I tell?"

"Between men and women, Bones."

"Oh. *That* difference." He nodded knowingly. "Let's see ... woman are the soft ones, right?"

Uhura rolled her dark eyes in mock annoyance. "Another triumph for medical science," she quipped.

"Actually, we were talking about the possibility that the elusive Kilroy might be trying out a new disguise," Kirk explained.

"I've been thinking about that one, myself," McCoy admitted. "Commander Dramein, I believe you told the Captain six weeks was long enough to throw off the effects of a dose of trisoralen. I wonder if IIB knows something we don't. All the literature I've read says three months is more like it -- even with the new synthetics and counter-applications of amelanese."

"Just telling you what the boys in the lab told me, Doc."

"Triso-what?" Uhura asks and was duly acquainted with the facts of Kilroy's latest caper. Once she had digested the information, she asked, "But wouldn't the length of the effect depend on how much his skin had to be darkened in the first place?"

"I never thought of that," McCoy admitted.

"Sure. Look -- there are probably twice as many distinct skin tones among Negroid peoples as there are among Caucasians. Ask any black woman who's ever bought make-up. And besides, he could have stopped taking the whatsis before he left Tyler's ship."

"Hey," Dramein put in. "Did I tell you about the scam he pulled on Captain Harris, before he got to Tyler?"

McCoy ignored him. "Yes, he could have, Uhura, but the change in his skin tone--"

"Would have gone unnoticed."

"Come on, Lieutenant, are you telling us a black man could turn white and nobody would notice?" Kirk shook his head.

"No!" Mock annoyance was beginning to be replaced by the real thing in Uhura's voice. "But he wouldn't have 'turned white'. He'd have ... faded, I guess, like a suntan. Look, what I'm telling you is that we see with our brains, not our eyes. We look at a person a couple of times, and we form a mental image of what he's supposed to look like. And a gradual change -- like a suntan fading, or a change in weight -- just doesn't register for a long time.:

"I think--" McCoy began.

"I'll prove it to you. Shut your eyes."

"What?" two voices chimed.

"Just shut your eyes." When they had complied, she went on. "Okay. What kind of earrings am I wearing?"

"Those big bangly hoop ones," McCoy said firmly.

"Right. They're gold," Kirk agreed.

"Wrong. Open up and look."

"You took them off," Kirk accused.

"Darn right. Three days ago. I picked up a little skin infection somewhere and my earlobes have been mother-naked ever since, till it clears up."

"But that's not fair. You didn't ask us 'Am I wearing earrings?'. If I'd thought about it--" the Captain began.

"But you didn't think about it. And neither did Tyler. Do you suppose Kilroy went up to him and said, 'Say, there, Captain, am I fading?'"

"I think she's right, Jim. Commander--" McCoy broke off, looking around. "Dramein? Where'd he go?"

"Must have skipped out while you were playing peek-a-boo, Bones. Maybe he thought we were ignoring him."

McCoy grinned. "I guess we do tend to carry on a bit."

"Speaking of carrying on, gentlemen ... This has been great fun, but I have a date. Bye."

Kirk watched her go, still faintly chagrined at the slick way she'd suckered them into admitting the unthinkable – that both he and McCoy could categorize people in neat mental boxes.

"Not eating tonight?" McCoy asked him.

"Might as well, as long as I'm here."

He threaded his way through the jumble of tables and pulled-out chairs, turning in mid-stride as someone called out his name. He never did find out who.

Attention diverted, he caught one foot on a wayward chair leg and stumbled gracelessly into the plastene embrace of a second chair. The solitary figure sitting at the table looked up in surprise and Kirk found himself staring into the dark brown eyes of a woman he'd never seen before.

Her gaunt, raw-boned face wore a startled expression, and one broad hand came up in a sudden gesture of protection.

"Excuse me. I seem to have tripped." He noted the stripe on the blue sleeve. "Lieutenant... ah, I don't believe I know you."

"Kilgallen. Mary Kilgallen, Captain." She put out the defensive hand for a brusque handshake.

"Kilgallen? I don't remember seeing our assignment."

"Geologist for JS44."

"That's a pretty tough post, Lieutenant."

"I'm a pretty tough lady, Captain." Kilgallen stacked her used utensils on the tray and stood up. And up. With a short nod to Kirk, she marked to the disposal chute and then out of the door, over six feet of gangling, animated scarecrow, all bony knees and elbows and sharp angles.

Kirk sat open-mouthed as it hit him. He forgot his original destination, crossing instead to the table where McCoy still sat, grinning.

"Did you see that?"

"I did. I'm not sure I believe it, but I saw it."

"Bones, if that's a woman, I'll eat my dress uniform. And he couldn't even come up with a decent alias. 'Mary Kilgallen', my foot."

"Now, wait a minute, Jim. I'll agree, the lady is no beauty queen, but--"

"The lady is no lady, either."

"Aren't you forgetting about little matters like physicals and shared quarters, and--"

"She's -- he's -- deadheading to JS44 as their geologist. Not as part of our crew. That means guest quarters, private bath ... and no physical from you. It's a perfect setup. He does have nerve, though – I'll hand him that."

"Jim, sit down a minute, will you?" McCoy pushed his tray aside and concentrated on Kirk. "Suppose you're right – what are you going to do about it? Charge into Kilgallen's

quarters and demand a skin inspection? And suppose you're wrong? Then what? You've laid yourself wide open for a harassment charge. Tell Dramein what you think. He's the investigator; let him handle it."

He couldn't.

Dramein had nodded wisely when he received the news and agreed it was not beyond Kilroy to try such a stunt. "Just leave it to me, Captain," he's said.

But he couldn't.

It had little to do with dread of losing something of value, or fear of being the butt of a prank. It had to do with a high sense of moral outrage that someone -- anyone -- should invade his ship -- *his* ship! -- for the express purpose of violating territory Kirk claimed as his own.

They were three days away from JS44. Three days in which he added up the discrepancies of "Mary Kilgallen" -- from the fact that no woman had even been assigned to the isolated and rowdy mining colony, to the fact that the

gangly lieutenant had a voice like pea gravel sliding down a metal flume, a definite Adam's apple, and the biggest feet he'd ever seen on anyone -- man or woman.

He found himself distracted on the bridge and disturbed in his off-duty hours as he haunted the rec room, the gym, and the mess hall for glimpses of their solitary and taciturn passenger, watching for something, waiting for something. He didn't know what -- just something that would reveal Kilgallen to be Kilroy.

It didn't come. And Commander Dramein, other than giving him a conspiratorial grin every time their paths cross, didn't seem to be doing *anything*.

The closer they came to JS44, the more the whole thing bothered him. Even if Kilroy wasn't planning a theft from Kirk, he was using him, and using the *Enterprise*, to cover his trail. By the time they made orbit and were ready to beam down the consignment -- including the geologist -- Kirk had decided he'd had enough. He made a final check of his quarters -- nothing wrong there -- and then made his way to the transporter room, where the angular figure waited on the pad.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Lieutenant."

"I didn't expect you to accompany me, Captain."

"Oh, I haven't been down on '44 in a long time. Friend of mind has a bar there -- maybe you'd like to join me for a drink?"

"I don't drink."

*I'll bet you don't*, he thought, stepping onto an empty pad.  
"Energize."

The transporter operator at the other end looked up in surprise as the two materialized.

"Captain? We weren't expecting--"

"I'm sure you weren't. Lt. Kilgallen needs to report to your geology section. Who's in charge?"

"I don't -- I'll have to look it up."

Kirk looked with satisfaction at the concern on his co-transportee's face. Concern, and something else. Nervousness ... maybe fear, now that the masquerade was ending?

"I was supposed to be met. Captain, I'd like to transport back up, until--"

"Oh, no you don't. There's something very odd going on here and I'm not letting you out of my sight until I get to the bottom of it." He clamped his hand down on the bony wrist. It only went halfway around.

The transporter operator forgot he was supposed to be checking for the name and location of the chief geologist. He was too fascinated by what appeared to be a tug-of-war between the broad-shouldered starship captain and the raw-boned, gawky woman. He wasn't really sure just who he'd bet on, all things being equal.

"Captain, please!"

"Now, look, Kilroy, this has gone on long enough."

"What's gone on? Any why are you--"

The query was interrupted as a mountainous mass of man came charging through the door of the transport office. The corrugated tin roof rumbled at his shout.

"May, love, they just told me--" He roared to a stop, like an avalanche running out of steam, as he took in the whole scene.

"Get your mitts off my wife, buster! You damn officers are all alike!"

"Your *what?*" Kirk dropped his hold on the lieutenant's wrist. He had an instant's realization that he was in very big trouble, and then approximately fifteen pounds of knuckles caught him square between the eyes.

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It was very quiet in sickbay. Quiet enough to hear a pin drop. Or someone's dignity.

Kirk sat up slowly, still holding the cold compress against his face.

"If you say 'I told you so', Bones, I'll break your neck."

McCoy blinked at him innocently. "Would I do a thing like that?" He moved to support Kirk's elbow as the captain swung off the table. "I wish you wouldn't get up yet. You're lucky that ape didn't break *your* neck."

"Yeah. Well, the least I can do is keep Commander Dramein from walking into the same punch. He still thinks Kilgallen is Kilroy."

"Dramein? He left right after you did. Said he had a

freighter to catch."

"Then he never even planned to check it out. Some investigator he turned out to be! I've got half a mind to complain to Admiral Sugawa."

"That reminds me – Uhura called down here while you were still out. Starbase 9 is back in touch and she had a message for you from the Admiral."

"Probably wants a progress report." Kirk, with McCoy hovering about like a butterfly hunter without a net, wobbled his way to the desk-mounted intercom.

"Kirk here. What's the word from Sugawa?"

Uhura cleared her throat with a delicate sound that managed to convey both amusement and disapproval.

"I don't think I can quote the lady directly, sir. But she's ... um ... quite upset that we left the base without Commander Dramein."

"*Without Dramein?* What's that supposed to mean?"

"According to Admiral Sugawa, somebody swiped the Commander's briefcase and he was waiting for duplicate orders to be cut. IIB signaled us to wait, but apparently the message was garbled by that solar flare. Or maybe it wasn't ever sent. At any rate, it was never received."

An unholy thought was beginning to percolate in the back of Kirk's mind.

"But if Dramein is still on Starbase 9, then who..." He trailed off as McCoy's eyes met his own over the top of the intercom.

"He didn't," Kirk said flatly.

"Wanna bet?"

"He couldn't have. I checked my quarter just before I

beamed down."

"How about your office?"

Kirk was halfway out the door before McCoy caught up with him. The air in the turbolift was thoroughly blue by the time they reached the stop opposite the captain's office.

"When I get my hands on that little creep--"

"Don't jump to conclusions, Jim."

"Conclusions?" Kirk punched up the security lock. "I'll jump. I'll just right down his throat. I'll ... oh, *shit!*"

The door slid open. It was a perfectly normal, perfectly respectable starship captain's office. Except for two things.

One was the open cabinet behind the desk, conspicuously empty of one particular brandy decanter.

And the other was the bright green scrawl across the bulkhead -- a long-nosed face, peering over the top of a board fence, and the words Kirk had known he was going to see --

**KILROY WAS HERE!**

**THE END**