

Nights in White Satin

By Sean O'Keefe© 2016

Warm. Silky and warm. So soft she didn't want to get up. She just wanted to wrap herself in the delight of just being at that very moment. She pressed her lips to her husband's and lingered there for a moment. There was something slightly odd about what was happening, but right then, she did not care one whit. Her blue eyes looked deeply into his brown with their tiny flecks of gold and she saw only the adoration she had for him returned. She didn't even want to blink her eyes, for at that moment she didn't want to miss a second.

Yet, the inevitable happened and she did. When her eyes came open she found herself at a dinner table surrounded by guests. This was all right also as this was her wedding day. She was glad that Brian had insisted on a large, family wedding. She had always been more the perfunctory, a "let's only do what we have to to get it done" type. However, she had bowed to his insistence and allowed this lavish, noisy wedding. The music was delightful, the family members attending loving every minute of it and showering her with well wishes, including

the odd reference to having babies. That was one thing Piper was never sure would happen. She just didn't feel the maternal pull. Her vision was full of stars.

That night, she danced and danced, her arms around Brian's neck, but sometimes around her brother's, and Dad's. And it was always the same song. A one-time hit from long ago she had once heard and fallen in love with. For some reason, she just couldn't quite hear the lyrics. She remembered something about beauty she'd always ... something.

As she danced there were times it all seemed like a blur, but that was OK, too. The faces all blended together, but the love she felt was almost tangible. A thing she could clutch and hold on to. She reached out expecting to grasp it. She could almost see it. Right there.

She blinked – and found herself on the bridge of the *USS Hood*. Funny, she didn't remember serving on that ship. She was looking down into the eyes of the Captain – Smillie was his name. That's right. He was saying something about doing a good job down on the planet. She glanced at the viewscreen and recognised the planet Vulcan. That was wrong, too. Vulcan had been destroyed by the renegade Romulan, Nero.

There was a name that resonated with her for some reason, but she wasn't certain why. All the same, thinking of his name brought to surface an anger she wanted to vent, but she was much too professional to do it in front of the Captain.

She must have blinked again because her perception shifted again. She was sitting in front of a monitor, talking to Brian. He looked shocked and sad. The crinkles around his eyes always did that when he was about to cry. Why? She was just glad to see him. It had been so long since.....

Since what? She didn't know. It was important, that she knew. She just couldn't put her finger on it.

Her face was wet. She put her right hand on her cheek and it felt odd. Metallic. Nothing strange there. Hang on, it was soft a minute ago.

She blinked. A flash. Searing pain. The almost instantaneous sensation of her eyeball bursting before it was gone. She should have seen the shooter, but didn't.

She wanted to thank God that Merete had been there to save her, but she wasn't certain she was glad she survived. She had once been beautiful. Now....

She glanced at the mirror in her room and saw the soft, green glow from her artificial right eye and knew that

things could never be the same again. She was no longer even a human being in her mind. Just some kind of monster.

A solitary tear rolled down her left cheek as she shut down the comlink to Brian. It had never been the same. The old, familiar emptiness opened up within her once more as she felt everything she had once loved move further and further away from her. She felt like she was stuck in a Mobius loop, endlessly chasing something that was never getting any closer. In fact, was she chasing it, or was it chasing her?

The dedication day of the *U.S.S. Ingram* should have been a joyous day. Piper was getting the newest ship in the fleet to command that had been designed to deal with the increasing Klingon threat. Her lips pulled upward a little in a brutal smile. She was looking forward to killing more Klingons. Turnabout was fair play, after all.

In the collection of the *Ingram's* new senior staff she caught Merete's eye and saw only concern. Why did the Doctor look worried? They were both going to get their wish. Revenge on their tormentors was always sweet.

She remembered the Doctor wasn't like that, though. She had forgiven the Orions that had robbed her of her family so many years ago.

Why couldn't she be more like the Doctor? No! There were some things that were impossible to forgive. Involuntarily, in a move that would become habitual and noticed by everybody but herself, Piper's right hand touched her now metal cheek as she once again remembered the pain and her own self-consciousness.

She had managed to pull the wool over the eyes of the shrinks who had come to see her. Doctor McKennah, the fiery red-head psychologist, had come close to figuring it out, but Piper had managed to keep up the façade long enough to convince her she was OK.

There was red in the small group of senior staff members. Funny, she didn't remember having any red-heads in her crew. Ignoring protocol, Piper stepped forward and crossed the floor impossibly fast, brushing past Merete and finding herself looking down at Dr Elise McKennah who was simply returning her gaze with those big, hazel eyes and wide, toothy grin.

"You know, you never had me fooled," she said in that sappy, friendly tone she always used that always

infuriated Piper. She always pretended to be her friend, but she knew the “good Doctor” was just trying to bring her down and keep her from the stars that were now her only real reason for living. After all, if she didn’t have her revenge against the Klingons, what else did she have?

She would have stuck the shrink, but instead she blinked.

Was this the Mirror Universe that she had heard about in the briefings at Starfleet Academy? It would explain much. However, the Guardian of Forever was only supposed to be able to move people through time, not universes.

It had to be the Mirror Universe. It was the only explanation for the vision of a whole Piper that looked back at her from the other side. It wasn’t an illusion, either, as a Vulcan stood next to the other woman and there were hardly any Vulcans left where she came from. Not to mention the strange uniforms and the other’s odd hair and eye colour.

She had been rude to the other Piper for some reason. She had no idea why. They were such good friends, like sisters. They had been through so much.

Why was she so angry? Why was she always so alone? It hurt, like a vice in her chest slowly tightening and tightening that threatened to squash her heart and stop it beating! She just wished it would stop.

In the cold, metallic dimness of the aging freighter *Pterodactyl*, Piper padded silently across the floor of her alternate, Piper Silayna's room. From down the hall she had felt the pain, loneliness and misery. It had touched her very soul, knowing that Suzette, as the affectionately thought of her, was in such torment. She had left behind her a life, husband, career, in fact, an entire universe that she was actively trying to dismantle to save all of time and causality and it was taking its toll.

She noted her sister was facing the bulkhead as she slept so she gently lifted the edge of the doona and slid under it, wrapping her arms around her and gently spooning the other Piper, feeling her body warming her own. The slumbering Piper's whimpering started to diminish and settle, giving Piper cause to smile slightly.

Most nights were like this and she was beginning to wonder why she bothered sleeping in her own cabin. It would have been easier to simply share a bunk with her

alternate. She suspected it was the waiting that was causing her melancholy. Scanner had yet to finish work on the bomb they were preparing for their coming encounter with Nero and, since everything else was prepared, all they could do was wait.

It gave them all time to think. It was not always a good thing.

Piper settled her head on the pillow that smelled so much like her own and closed her eyes. Through her psychic link with her alternate which was amplified by their touch, she gently caressed her other's mind and settled her dream. She filled her thoughts with loving memories from her youth. It didn't matter that they weren't Suzette's own. Dreams could go anywhere, couldn't they?

At least she didn't have to continue her own recollection of that mission when she served on the *Hood*.

She focussed her memories on a particularly joyous Christmas dinner with her parents as she drifted off to sleep, content that they were both good once more. She danced in her mind with her other self, cheek to cheek, holding one another tight, as they moved to Nights in

White Satin by The Moody Blues. She had always loved that song.