

The Empty Vessel

A B Potts



A Jenny Terran
Adventure

The Empty Vessel

by A B Potts

Copyright © Anni B Potts, 2012

The right of A B Potts to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988.

Artwork courtesy of Ingus Perkons (lorency, <http://lorency.deviantart.com/>)

Jenny Terran is the creation of science-fiction author, A B Potts. No profits are made from the blogs, but the right of A B Potts to be identified as the author of these logs has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988. Star Trek, Star Trek: The Next Generation, Star Trek: Deep Space 9, and Star Trek: Voyager are registered trademarks of Paramount Pictures and their respective owners; no copyright violation is intended.

This piece was written in response to an exam question set by the SFI Starfleet Academy on Andorian culture.

The Andorians are a four-gamete race requiring input from all four 'sexes' to produce a child. Bonded in childhood, their closeness is beyond our understanding. As the Andorians say, "One alone cannot be Whole - nor two, nor three. What one chooses, is chosen for all. What befalls one, befalls all. Their lives are yours. My life is theirs."

With such a demanding reproductive cycle, further complicated by short fertility periods, the Andorian race is in danger of extinction. To this end, Andorian scientists have been investigating ways to alter Andorians at conception, perhaps changing the four sexes into just two. However, this gender-changing research has produced outrage in most Andorians. To change the four-gender paradigm would change the very nature of the species. All Andorian society and its customs and traditions are based upon the four-gender paradigm.

LOG ENTRY BY CULTURAL OFFICER, JENNY TERRAN USS EARHART, NCC-7766

As I held Tia's hand, I could feel the coolness of her skin. It was far cooler than it should be for an Andorian, but then, she wasn't really an Andorian.

Her grip suddenly tightened and I looked down into those liquid blue eyes. She was anxious so I smiled reassuringly at her. She was so tiny, even for a child. In Human terms, she would have been about eight years old, but she had existed for a much shorter period of time.

"It'll be okay," I said, even though I knew it was probably a lie. I just hoped that there were no Andorians on the board, but as the doors shushed open, my heart fell.

In front of us stood a long table, more like a judge's bench than a table. It bore a single ornament: an ornate ancient Egyptian ceremonial dagger. Forged from gold with a cloisonné encrusted handle, its double-sided blade was embellished by a simple engraving: a lotus flower. That its top pointed outwards indicated that the dagger was created to be used only in the protection of life, light and love. It seemed apt and yet, in this instance, insulting.

Behind the desk, the board was made up of three members: a Human, a Vulcan and an Andorian. They sat quite closely together so that the long table stretched out to either side of the group like an impenetrable barrier.

The Human was Admiral Burrows: a starchy man with peppered hair. He was sitting in the middle and was serving as the Judge Advocat. His reputation proceeded him; he had chaired many a disciplinary in his time and was known to be a stickler for detail, but a fair man.

The Vulcan was Ambassador Sival, which was reassuring. I had met him about a year earlier under some very testing circumstances that had resulted in an unusual bond being formed between us. From that bond, I knew Sival would not be swayed by emotion or our friendship. He would be true and just.

As for the Andorian, it was Federation Councillor Shingar. A hardened advocate of many of the traditional Andorian ways, he would be championing their cause, no matter the cost. At the trial of Dr Talia, the Andorian scientist who had manipulated the DNA of his race and created the two-gamete

Andorian, Shingar was the one who had led the prosecution ... not that there was much of a defence.

Talia had defied his superiors and committed the most cardinal of sins. He had created a two-gamete Andorian: Tia; and for his sins, he had been stripped of his rank and station. Worse still, he had suffered the Whole Vessel Law. He had been cast out from his Whole and banished to wander alone in the barren lands of the Northern Wastes.

Tia also knew who Shingar was. Her tension resonated through her and I could feel her fingers flexing in anguish against my own.

She had witnessed Dr Talia's trial and knew Shingar would hold little mercy for her either. She was an abomination in the Andorians' eyes, but she had asked for none of this. She was just a little girl caught up in something that was not of her making.

"Come in, Ensign. Please put the child—"

I flushed with anger so quickly it caught me off guard.

"Tia!" I snapped.

The abashed look from the board members' faces told me I had not started this well.

"I'm sorry, but her name is Tia." Someone must stand on her side, I thought.

"It has a name?" stated Shingar in the cool tones of an Andorian.

"Yes, her name is Tia. Whatever else you decide here, at least remember that she is a living, sentient being with a heart and feelings—and an intelligent one at that."

The Andorian's antennae twitched in annoyance and then flexed backwards broadcasting his anger. I knew he was the one to win over here so I turned directly to him.

"Sir, I'm sorry," and I tipped my head, bowing as the Andorian's do from the shoulders, "but I would ask nothing more from you than you remember that she did not ask to be what she is. She had no choice in this matter."

"Few of us truly have choices."

I wanted to shout 'poppycock' at him but bit my tongue.

"Then hear her words," I challenged.

"I have no desire to listen—"

"For fear that her words may sway you?"

It was a bold outburst, I knew, especially for an ensign, but Tia's life was on the line.

"I have spent nineteen days in the company of this child. I have come to know her well, and I believe that if you are going to sentence her, you should at least have listened to her. You have heard everybody else: Dr Talia, his staff, his bondmates, but not her ... and of all of those involved, she was the only one without ... any ... choices."

"And nothing has changed. My instructions are clear. I am to secure the subject and take it back to Andoria for destruction along with the rest of Dr Talia's experimental material."

"Assuming the Federation agrees," added Admiral Burrows. "Let us not forget that we must be in agreement over this."

"It was agreed—"

"Yes," the Admiral said firmly. "We agreed that any experimental material would be destroyed. There was no mention of the subject as you call her."

"She is experimental material."

"She is a sentient being."

"That threatens the very nature of the Andorian race. It must be destroyed."

"You would kill a mere child?"

"It is not a child. It is an insult to every Andorian there is and ever has been."

"Then you should at least hear her words before you pass sentence over her."

"This is NOT a court martial," hissed Shingar, anger bubbling quietly beneath the surface.

Admiral Burrows shuffled in his seat, well aware of the Andorians' predisposition to violence, but the Vulcan retained his cool composure. Both of them knew what this meeting meant for the child, what the Andorians wanted; but would Starfleet allow Andoria to execute a child just for being what she was?

My eyes sought out my old friend, Ambassador Sival. His eyes blinked slowly at me and the corners of his mouth twitched, and in that moment, I knew.

It was not an involuntary smile. He was intentionally mimicking a Human characteristic to send me a message. It was his seal of approval for me to speak my mind because Starfleet had a diplomatic conundrum on their hands. They wanted to keep the peace with Andoria. Heck! Even the Vulcans wanted to keep the peace with Andoria these days, but this problem was one the Andorians would fight to the bitter end over. It threatened the fabric of their civilisation, their very way of life. If Starfleet did not sacrifice this abomination, it could spell war.

But if it was a mere ensign that spoke out of turn, that argued for the child's life, if that attempt failed, it would likely mean my dismissal with a dishonourable discharge, but not war. I was ... expendable, so Sival was relying upon me, as a diplomat and the Cultural Officer of the USS Earhart, with my "bold and unruly mouth", to sway the Andorian.

'The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few' echoed through her mind.

"No, it's not a court martial, but it could be her execution. Everybody keeps telling me what this little girl is—telling her what she is, but no one has asked her what she is. I beg you, let her speak just once. If you are telling me that her words cannot sway you, hearing them will do you no damage."

Sival leaned forwards in his chair circumventing the Admiral to reach Shingar. The Admiral leaned back in his chair to accommodate him and allow the Andorian to do the same. He listened while the Vulcan whispered in his ear.

Shingar's antennae tilted forward and swayed towards Sival in interest. It made me wonder at their relationship. The long and tumultuous past between Vulcans and Andorians would normally mean a strained one, but there was no animosity there. Indeed, his antennae then twisted towards each other, a trait that betrayed amusement. I wondered what history lay between them.

The Andorian looked up and studied me with interest.

"Ambassador Sival, has begged my indulgence ... so I shall indulge," and he leaned back in his chair with a confrontational air, his antennae leaning slightly backwards.

I turned to Tia. Her antennae were standing upright but somewhat limp. They quivered in trepidation.

"Go on," I urged.

"But what do I say?" she asked in a soft Andorian voice.

"Tell them what you are. Tell them, just as you told me. Ask him what you asked me earlier."

She gulped, pulled her hand free from mine and stepped forward. Her cold eyes gazed upon her judges and came to settle upon Shingar. He shuffled a little in his seat and I instantly recalled a similar feeling of discomfort the first time I had looked into Tia's eyes. There was something about them—no, not about her eyes. She had very ordinary Andorian eyes, but the way that she used them, the expression that manifested there was remarkable.

"Are you Whole?" she asked.

Shingar's body stiffened. His antennae twitched and lashed about. That was the last thing he had expected from this little girl.

"Yes, I am bonded," he remarked sharply. "Why? What does it matter to you?"

"Because I can never be Whole," and her little voice faltered, she was so close to tears.

"And what do you know of Wholeness?" he demanded.

"I am neither Thaan nor Chan, Shen nor Zhen. I can never be bonded. I will never be wanted. I will never be loved. I will never have children. I will never know the joy and companionship of bondmates. Nor have I ever had parents or siblings or family. I am clanless. Whatever it is that you do with me, it cannot compare to the aloneness that I endure, have always endured. I will always be incomplete ... and alone. I was cursed with my creation. I have been cursed with solitude throughout my life and now I am to be cursed with solitude in death, so I ask but one thing. When you take me back to Andoria, can Jenny come with me so that she can hold my hand when I die."

I shock, my hands covered my mouth and I felt tears welling in my eyes. I had expected her to say many things, but not that. Was her misery so complete that she wanted to die, wanted an end to it all!

Silence dropped onto the room like deadweight and held it for what seemed like hours.

Admiral Burrow's mouth dropped open in shock, the Vulcan's eyebrow lifted in surprise and Shingar's antennae writhed furiously on his head, drooped and then lifted and writhed again.

"You seemed resolved to your death," commented Ambassador Sival.

"It is inevitable. All things die. The only question is when."

"Do you wish to die?" exclaimed Burrows. His years of training could not contain the horror in his voice, and I remembered that he had a granddaughter about her age.

"I have no choice in the matter. All things die."

"Yes. Eventually ... but you are a child! Do you want to die now?" He asked, perplexed.

Tia's antennae began to lash about, mirroring Shingar's.

"I do not wish to live. I have nothing. I am nothing."

I gasped loudly.

"But Tia—"

"Enough!" shouted Shingar. "It seems we are in agreement."

He grinned. You could see the triumph in his eyes and his antennae stood erect too. "BUT ..." he added slowly. "Ensign Terran will not be permitted to attend the termination. It will be carried out discretely ... and without fuss."

"Hang on a minute!" bellowed Admiral Burrows.

Sival leaned over and placed a calming hand on his arm, but he could not soothe the Admiral. He yanked his arm away angrily and began to talk very loudly, desperately trying to keep the calm demeanour that his training had instilled into him and that his rank demanded.

My eyes though, were fixed upon Tia, and what happened next will remain with me for the rest of my days. I should have seen the signs, but I was so paralysed by the shock of what she had said that I didn't. Everything happened so fast, and yet I can recall it in intimate detail like a slow motion replay.

Tia looked uncomfortably at her feet, her antennae drooping.

Shingar's antennae, meanwhile, were flexed with annoyance and pressing themselves against his skull, but then they flicked forward quickly and dropped, pointing straight ahead. He was staring at Tia. His antennae took to twiddling in circles, an odd mannerism for an Andorian that illustrated just how perplexed he was. It was so peculiar that I turned to see what he was looking at. It was Tia, of course, with her eyes fixed on a point in front of the Admiral—the knife!

Suddenly, she shot forward, grabbed the ceremonial dagger from the table, grasping it firmly in both hands and raised it high.

I remember screaming in horror.

I leapt forward to stop her, but too late. She thrust the blade into her belly and sank to the floor, the knife still embedded in her stomach.

I was screaming hysterically as I dropped to the floor beside her and pulled her into my arms. Her life's blood pooled around us in vivid blue and I wept so hard.

She gasped shattered breaths. Her hand searched out mine and she rasped, "No longer ... alone."

A single tear ran down her cheek and I remember wondering if it was one of her tears or one of mine. Could Andorians even cry?

She smiled lovingly at me ... and exhaled her last breath.



For more Jenny Terran, follow the logs at
<http://jennyterran.blogspot.co.uk/>