

# **The Starship Astrov**

by

Duncan Pflaster

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# THE STARSHIP ASTROV

## THE STARSHIP ASTROV

*THE STARSHIP ASTROV* was originally produced by Oberon Theatre Ensemble in July 2010 as part of the 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Midtown International Theatre Festival (MITF), at Theatre Row in New York City, with the following cast (in order of appearance):

<u>Captain Jonas January:</u>	Walter Brandes*
<u>Professor Jason Cole:</u>	Ariel Estrada*
<u>Celaria:</u>	Elizabeth A. Davis*
<u>Doctor Michael Rosy:</u>	Philip Emeott
<u>Ally January:</u>	Jennifer Gawlik*
<u>Jenny “Sparky” Camilo:</u>	Christine Verleny
<u>Marcus Washington:</u>	Rafael Jordan*

\* Indicates member of Actors’ Equity Association, An Equity Approved Showcase.

It was directed by Eric Parness  
Stage Manager Jenna Lazar  
Costume Design was by Mark Richard Caswell  
Sound Design by Nick Moore  
Lighting Design by Isabella F. Byrd  
Scenic Design by Darby Cire

In the MITF Awards, Jennifer Gawlik won **Outstanding Supporting Actress**.

The production was also nominated for Outstanding Production of a Play, Outstanding Playwriting for a New Script (Duncan Pflaster), Outstanding Direction (Eric Parness), Outstanding Costume Design (Mark Richard Caswell), Outstanding Sound Design (Nick Moore), Outstanding Scenic Design (Darby Cire), Outstanding Lighting Design (Isabella F. Byrd), Outstanding Lead Actor in a Play - Walter Brandes, Outstanding Lead Actress in a Play - Elizabeth A. Davis, and Outstanding Ensemble Performance - Walter Brandes, Elizabeth A. Davis, Philip Emeott, Ariel Estrada, Jennifer Gawlik, Rafael Jordan, and Christine Verleny.

# THE STARSHIP ASTROV

## Dramatis Personæ

<u>Captain Jonas January:</u>	Early 40s. Captain of The Starship Astrov. Widowed father to Ally January.
<u>Professor Jason Cole:</u>	Late 30s. A noted professor. A genius, but rather pretentious. Very ill with a mysterious disease.
<u>Celaria:</u>	Age indeterminate. The professor's wife. A beautiful green-skinned woman from the planet Solaramifar in the Alisdair system.
<u>Doctor Michael Rosy:</u>	Mid-20s. Professor Cole's personal doctor. Handsome, but doesn't know it.
<u>Ally January:</u>	Very early 20s. The Captain's Daughter, ensign and communications officer on Her Majesty's Starship the Astrov.
<u>Jenny "Sparky" Camilo:</u>	Late 30s. Lieutenant Commander and Chief engineer on the Astrov.
<u>Marcus Washington:</u>	Mid-30s. Lieutenant and Astrogator on the Astrov.
<u>Voices:</u>	The voices of Space Traffic Controllers, on Earth and on Space Station Gemini Seven. May easily be pre-recorded.

*The cast should be multi-ethnic, in the progressive future spirit of Star Trek.*

# THE STARSHIP ASTROV

## Setting

Act I: The Bridge of the Starship Astrov

Act II: The Dining Room of the Starship Astrov

Act III: A common room of the Starship Astrov

Act IV: The Bridge of the Starship Astrov

(this is stylized as 4 acts for the Chekhov theme, but they're just 4 scenes, an intermission can go between II and III, if desired.)

## Time

The year 3047.

*Star Trek: The Next Generation* was the original impetus, but feel free to envision any future you like. A retro Zeerust style might be fun as well.

**TUZENBACH.** Well, after we've gone people'll be flying in balloons. The cut of their jackets will be different, they might even discover a sixth sense and develop that, but I don't imagine life will have changed that much. Life will still be hard: half enigmatic, half wonderful. Even a thousand years from now people'll still be complaining that it's a tough life. But they'll be just as terrified and reluctant to let go of it as we are.

**VERSHININ.** (*after some thought*) How do I want to say this? I think that everything changes, imperceptibly; and even though we can't see it, it's changing now, right in front of our eyes. After two hundred or three hundred years, or a thousand - how long it takes is immaterial - there'll be a life where people are happy. We won't see it, of course, but we have to strive toward that goal, sacrifice for it. That's the purpose of our lives, and the only happiness we can expect is in the satisfaction of knowing we had a hand in creating that new life.

- *Three Sisters*, Anton Chekhov (Lanford Wilson translation)

# THE STARSHIP ASTROV

## A Chekhovian Space Comedy

### ACT I

*The Bridge of the Starship Astrov. Captain's chair center. Down in front, facing the audience, are seats for the Astrogator and Chief Engineer. Upstage is an entrance with sliding doors, and a seat for the Communications officer. AT RISE: SPARKY and WASHINGTON are sitting at their posts, monitoring the ship's processes. ALLY is fretting at her post. They are all in Space Command uniforms. SPARKY and WASHINGTON have blasters (ray guns) on their belts.*

**ALLY.** I can't believe he's really coming. I'll see him soon again at last. Does my hair look all right?

**SPARKY.** Yes, Ensign January, you look terrific. Don't fret.

**ALLY.** Thank you,

**SPARKY.** He'll be so surprised to see me in my uniform; the last time we saw each other was years ago, I was just a little girl. I don't suppose I can change into something more flattering, not while I'm on duty.

**WASHINGTON.** No, you can't.

**ALLY.** No. Of course not.

**SPARKY.** But there's always dinner time and so forth. You can wear whatever you like, then.

**WASHINGTON.** Perhaps a muzzle.

**ALLY.** Oh, but then should I dress up? Oh, I would die if he thought I was dressing up to impress him!

**WASHINGTON.** Then don't.

**ALLY.** Well, I must do something!

**WASHINGTON.** You could just go to dinner naked, like the lithium girls of Balthazar seven...

**ALLY.** Lieutenant Washington, I don't even know why I asked you— one might think you were making suggestions only to vex me!

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**WASHINGTON.** One might be right in that summation. But just think: our guests might get torn apart in the transporter and never even make it onto the ship. They'd just be a huge mass of jelly, their body parts all mixed and...

**ALLY.** Oh, oh! You're horrid!

**WASHINGTON.** I'm just saying: a transporter malfunction happens one out of every three gazillion times. This could be it.

**SPARKY.** Washington, why do you have to be so crude?

**WASHINGTON.** I'm just trying to liven things up. You must be as bored as I am, a stupid diplomatic mission, bringing the Professor to Gemini Seven? We're a damn courier service now! I signed up for Star Command hoping for some excitement. I haven't had a chance to use my blaster for anything but target practice since I left basic training.

**ALLY.** Surely that's for the best.

**WASHINGTON.** I suppose; it's just not exciting. I wish I could just vaporize you right here. *(He takes out his blaster and points it at Ally.)*

**ALLY.** That isn't funny!

**SPARKY.** Oh Marcus, put that away. There's no need to take your career disappointments out on the girl.

**WASHINGTON.** *(Putting his blaster back in its holster)* I was just playing. You're too sensitive, Ally. And you're only standing up for her because you're got the hot rabbits for her father.

**SPARKY.** Oh I do NOT. Jonas— I mean, Captain January and I have a purely professional relationship.

**WASHINGTON.** Yeah, professional like a Hartonian sex-beast is professional.

**SPARKY.** Jealous?

**WASHINGTON.** You wish.

**SPARKY.** Oh, zip it, Washington. You don't know what you're talking about. I just asked you politely not to mess with the girl.

**ALLY.** Yeah, and anyway, I'm not a girl, I'm a woman.

**WASHINGTON.** Then try acting like one. *(The doors open, and Captain JANUARY enters, followed by Professor COLE, his sexy, green-skinned wife CELARIA, and DOCTOR ROSY.)*

## THE STARSHIP ASTROV

**JANUARY.** Attention! Guests on the Bridge! (*Washington, Sparky, and Ally stand at attention*) At ease. (*Washington and Sparky go back to their places. Ally pretends to work*) You see, Professor, here's the bridge—

**COLE.** Yes, of course; I have been on a starship before, you know.

**JANUARY.** Of course, of course you have, sir. You practically invented Star Travel. I'm sorry, I'm just a little nervous.

**CELARIA.** What do all these peoples do?

**JANUARY.** Well, you see, Mrs. Cole—

**CELARIA.** Please no. Am not Mrs. Cole. I am just Celaria.

**JANUARY.** Oh. All right, fine. Well, Celaria, a Starship is like a body: with all the people inside it as its separate parts, like feet and eyes and ears, you see? This, the bridge, is the nerve center of the starship, from where everything is controlled. If the *Astrov* could be considered a body, then this is the brain. This is Lieutenant Commander Camilo, our Chief Engineer, Lieutenant Washington, our Astrogator, and Ensign January, our Communications Officer, who also happens to be my daughter.

**ROSY.** No! Little Ally? It can't be! My goodness, how you've grown!

**ALLY.** Oh, Doctor Rosy, I wondered if you'd remember me.

**ROSY.** Please, Ally; it's Michael. How could I forget you? Those little vacations in Arizona were joyous for me. Remember you came to me once with that frog you'd found and it hopped down your jumper?

**COLE.** So, Rosy, you know this girl of old, then?

**ROSY.** Oh yes, Professor— When I studied medicine at Star Command Academy, I was in the same class as Captain January's son Jasper, and I spent some of my shore leave with his family.

**JANUARY.** Before my wife died, we were most hospitable at our little ranch.

**ROSY.** Yes, I was sad to hear of Rashmi's passing. But it is good to see you all again.

**ALLY.** Perhaps you can play your guitar for us, sometime on the trip? I have such fond memories of your music.

**ROSY.** Well, certainly, if it's all right with the captain...?

**JANUARY.** I'm sure an impromptu concert could be arranged. Maybe we could convince some others to perform.

**ALLY.** I could read some poetry!

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**ROSY.** Well then, I'd be glad to. I feel quite at home here, I...

**COLE.** OUCH! Oh GOD!

**JANUARY.** What is it? What's wrong?

**COLE.** OH, IT'S KILLING ME!

**JANUARY.** What can we do?

**ROSY.** Please, allow me. (*Rosy applies some medicine to Cole*)

**COLE.** Oh thank you— that's much better. O Michael, what would I ever do without you?

**ROSY.** I don't know, sir.

**ALLY.** Is everything all right with the Professor?

**JANUARY.** Ally, shush.

**COLE.** Yes, thank you, child. I have a mysterious ailment that, so far, no doctor has been able to diagnose. We believe I picked it up years ago in the cinnamon jungles on the planet of Cartoa, when I was building the interplanetary elucidation ray that made light speed communication possible for Star Command. I experience constant pain, which occasionally becomes blindly sharp and debilitating- I haven't known real sleep or rest in years now. No one seems to know what it is I have, and here I am, wasting away.

**ALLY.** Oh, that must be awful!

**COLE.** Now, now; I don't want pity. Michael is able to ease my pain, even though no one seems to be able to cure it. Pity instead these poor creatures who accompany me- I am sure that I am a burden on poor Michael, and my wife Celaria.

**CELARIA.** It makes not a matter.

**COLE.** I am able to continue on with my research, for the nonce- I still plan to deliver my speech at the conference.

**JANUARY.** I should hope so, or we wouldn't be bringing you all the way to the Gemini Seven Space Station for it. May I ask what your speech is about? I'm quite interested in your work, you know, and when I'd heard you'd asked to have all the Admirals of Star Command to attend your conference, I must confess to a certain...

**ROSY.** Actually, Captain, I don't mean to interrupt, but Professor Cole should lie down- the palliative I just administered should kick in any moment, and he'll become woozy.

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**COLE.** I'd be glad to speak to you about my work later during the trip; we'll have plenty of travel time to discuss it.

**JANUARY.** Oh certainly, certainly. Foolish of me. Out in the hallway, just ask the ship's computer to show you to your rooms, and follow the color-coded lights on the walls.

**COLE.** I thank you for your hospitality, Captain January; I shall see you later. *(Cole leaves, supported by Rosy. Celaria looks around politely, then follows them.)*

**ALLY.** He's so noble, isn't he? So fine.

**JANUARY.** Yes, Professor Cole is an eminent scholar.

**ALLY.** I—

**JANUARY.** His work on the study of granular accumulation is incredible—we wouldn't have star power as we know it if not for his pioneering work. Or light speed communication without his elucidati—

**WASHINGTON.** Yeah yeah, but what about that wife of his?! She's the eminent one, if you ask me.

**JANUARY.** Oh, really? You think so? I... didn't notice.

**WASHINGTON.** What? How could you not notice? She's got green skin! You know what they say about green-skinned babes...

**SPARKY.** Green thumbs?

**WASHINGTON.** No, Sparky: they say that they're wild in the sack. She's from the Alisdair system. There's some kind of psychic link between Alisdairians and humans that makes them just...understand how to please men.

**ALLY.** Oh Lieutenant Washington, I think you're awful.

**JANUARY.** Astrogator, Ensign January is quite right - this sort of talk is inappropriate for when you're on duty. Please try to save the personal remarks for your private time.

**WASHINGTON.** Yes, Captain.

**JANUARY.** Thank you. Course report?

**WASHINGTON.** I've set the course for Gemini Seven: I don't expect any trouble except for the asteroids in the Giraudoux Nebula.

**JANUARY.** Excellent. Chief Engineer, report.

**SPARKY.** She's running smooth as syntho-butter, Captain. Just gave the sliders a tune-up, and we should be good to go.

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**JANUARY.** Glad to hear it. Communications, are we clear?

**ALLY.** (*speaking into her microphone*) Earth control, this is the Astrov, are we cleared to leave geosynchronous orbit?

**VOICE.** All clear, Astrov, you are free to go.

**ALLY.** All clear, Captain.

**JANUARY.** Excellent. Engage thrusters.

**SPARKY.** Thrusters engaged.

**JANUARY.** Engage autopilot.

**WASHINGTON.** Autopilot engaged.

**JANUARY.** And... go. (*Sparky and Washington make one final gesture on the controls, and the ship is in movement. Pause.*)

**JANUARY.** Astrogator, do you think you'll need to be at the helm for the asteroids, just for safety's sake?

**WASHINGTON.** I doubt we'll need it.

**JANUARY.** Chief Engineer?

**SPARKY.** I concur; the damping compensators should see us through without a glitch.

**WASHINGTON.** ...but I'd be glad to come back up here once we reach the nebula, just to be sure.

**JANUARY.** Great, then crew dismissed until we reach the Giraudoux Nebula. (*Washington and Sparky get up from their seats and stretch*)

**WASHINGTON.** Well, now we have a week to kill.

**SPARKY.** Wanna go play some ultra-golf in the holocubes?

**WASHINGTON.** Oh god, ultra-golf? Shoot me now. (*Washington and Sparky exit.*)

**ALLY.** Thanks for shutting Washington down, Dad. His constant jibes at me are rude.

**JANUARY.** He's just a truculent fellow. I don't think they're jibes at you, darling.

**ALLY.** I'm sure they are, he picks on me especially all the time! He seems to hate me, and I don't know why!

**JANUARY.** Oh darling, who could hate you? I'm sure this animosity you speak of is purely imaginary. (*Dr. Rosy enters*)

**ALLY.** Michael! I mean, Dr. Rosy...

**ROSY.** Ah, hello, Ally.

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**JANUARY.** Is everything all right with the Professor?

**ROSY.** Yes, he's fine; I left him and his wife to settle in their quarters. If he should have another serious attack, he has my tweeker to get my attention.

**ALLY.** Well, that's wonderful! ...so you won't have to be confined to his quarters all the time- you can roam the ship freely, as you choose.

**ROSY.** Yes, it's lucky for me. Captain January, I wanted to speak to you alone, if I might.

**JANUARY.** Oh, of course. Ally, you're dismissed: I'll see you at dinner.

**ALLY.** Yes dad, I mean Captain. (*Ally exits with a longing look at Rosy, who doesn't notice.*)

**ROSY.** It's good to see you again, Jonas. (*Rosy hugs January tightly*)

**JANUARY.** Oh, you too, of course, Michael.

**ROSY.** As I said, I was extremely sorry to hear about Rashmi. I hope you received my note of condolence.

**JANUARY.** I did, thank you.

**ROSY.** And Jasper, he is well, I hope?

**JANUARY.** Oh yes, moving up in Star Command – he's out on a five-year mission, exploring the Gamma Quadrant. Ally and I do get to talk to him through the viewscreen once a week, though it's not the same as having him here. It can be hard.

**ROSY.** At least you have Ally here to comfort you.

**JANUARY.** Yes, I got her assigned to the *Astrov* by pulling some strings. Perhaps you remember a Captain Zetts who stayed with us that one weekend?

**ROSY.** The actor? He recited some of Bukowski's poetry for us before dinner.

**JANUARY.** Yes, that's the man. He's risen very fast in the ranks, you know, and is now an Admiral.

**ROSY.** Good heavens, I had no idea.

**JANUARY.** Well, it's a desk job, poor fellow; he'd much rather be captain of a ship, he says. I think he even envies me this little tug.

**ROSY.** Oh come, the *Astrov* is a fine ship.

**JANUARY.** Yes; yes, she is very fine. We just don't seem to get assigned any interesting missions.

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**ROSY.** Oh, it's so good to talk to a person, to you, like this, normally, without having to be a doctor for once, you know?

**JANUARY.** I thought you enjoyed doctoring- Why do you do it, if you don't like it?

**ROSY.** It's not that I don't like it, I do, it's merely difficult sometimes. I've always felt that medicine, being a doctor, is the last really important thing one can do in our society. I mean, it's real work; I think that's what we crave. It's what I crave, anyway: to be useful.

**JANUARY.** Whereas I'm useless.

**ROSY.** No no— God, I didn't mean to insult you, Jonas. You know the admiration I have for you.

**JANUARY.** Yes.

**ROSY.** I meant that life sometimes feels useless. Don't get me wrong, I'm not one of those undiagnosed aberrants who wants to take his own life, it's just I don't know what is the point of everything? Sometimes I think I'd just like to chuck it all and go live on a primitive humanoid planet that hasn't made First Contact yet, and just be a quiet simple country doctor. Work. Be useful. I mean, what is there here for us? For any of us? We can have virtually anything we want, and still we yearn for more.

**JANUARY.** More? More what?

**ROSY.** Well, you know— Do I have to say it to you? — love.

**JANUARY.** Oh, that.

**ROSY.** Yes, that. Surely since Rashmi's death, you'll understand.

**JANUARY.** Well, I have my duty to Star Command.

**ROSY.** Sure, but you've had a love like that, a true partnership, and I never have.

**JANUARY.** There's still time. You're still a young handsome man...

**ROSY.** Oh come, where I am to meet anyone, saddled as I am with caring for this ungrateful prig of a professor?

**JANUARY.** What's wrong with Professor Cole?

**ROSY.** Oh, you don't know. He's insane. I mean, certainly a genius, yes, but... well, don't go spreading this around to anyone, but he's not actually physically sick. I was studying in the records- back on Earth, before the Hippocrates Revolution, there used to be this condition called "hypochondria".

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**JANUARY.** Well let's see, if I remember my Latin: "hypo": that's "below", "chondri" ... "granules"?

**ROSY.** No, it's... well, maybe "under the skin"? ...it means that a patient's malady is imaginary.

**JANUARY.** You don't mean? Professor Cole is making it up?

**ROSY.** No no, it's worse than that- he thinks the pain is real, but there is no cause. I've been giving him no medicine but sugar for months, and it has the same effect as anything else I try. I fear the sickness is in his mind.

**JANUARY.** Good heavens! But I thought, certainly, in this day and age, that mental illnesses could be taken care of quickly and easily by Neurotherapy.

**ROSY.** Ordinarily, they can. But that's the thing about this case- Professor Cole refuses to believe that the illness is all in his mind, so he won't go to see a Neurotherapist. And so he keeps me on staff as his personal physician, merely to feed him candy and tell him that it's medicine.

**JANUARY.** And that works?

**ROSY.** False cures for a nonexistent disease- why shouldn't it work? He gets a sugar rush, then lies down and feels better. I have my little sinecure, but I'm as bored as you.

**JANUARY.** I hate to say this, it sounds so callous, but— it's rather fascinating isn't it?

**ROSY.** A bit, yes. But we must keep up his strength and keep him on track. The research he does continues, and may benefit all of Star Command, and even all of humankind. And some other species as well, no doubt.

**JANUARY.** No doubt.

**ROSY.** His case is fascinating, as you say; I plan to publish a monograph on the subject, once my time with the Professor is ended, either with his cure or his death.

**JANUARY.** Hopefully the former.

**ROSY.** The worst part of it all is that wife of his.

**JANUARY.** Celerya?

**ROSY.** Celaria.

**JANUARY.** What's wrong with her? She seemed nice. A little quiet, perhaps, but nice.

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**ROSY.** Oh, nice doesn't begin to describe her. Now you know me, Jonas; you've known me for years. I have nothing against non-human people, right?

**JANUARY.** Right...

**ROSY.** I mean, three eyes, purple skin, funny nose ridges, whatever, I don't judge.

**JANUARY.** Well, you do make jokes...

**ROSY.** That's not the point, that's jokes; that's funny, that's comedy, right? But these girls from the Alisdair System: they can sense your feelings. It's scary. She knows just what you like and how to give it to you. I can't... I just can't take it much longer. It's so hard.

**JANUARY.** Take what? A woman who understands what you want? That's not so bad.

**ROSY.** It is if she's married to your employer.

**JANUARY.** Oh, I see.

**ROSY.** She knows me, Jonas. The first woman in the universe who understands me fully, who can give me what I need, and I can't have her. God, I want her so. And she's so beautiful. And she wants to be helpful: she lives for it. She always wears practically nothing, lounging about the house, always appealing, always alluring...

**JANUARY.** And you know you can't have her.

**ROSY.** No, I know that I can. That's the thing – Alisdairians have no concept of “marriage” as we know it. They see no problem with giving pleasure to whomever they choose. I could have Celaria any time I want to. But I won't. I mustn't- It wouldn't be real. She doesn't really love me, she'd just want to serve. And besides, It would break Professor Cole's heart. I shall remain strong. But oh, if I thought she loved me, really loved me... Anything. Anything.

**JANUARY.** I see.

**ROSY.** Thank you, Jonas, for listening; this has been most helpful, just to get this confession off my chest.

**JANUARY.** You're welcome, of course. (*There is a strange twittering NOISE.*)

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**ROSY.** Oh, that's my tweeker. (*He touches his pants pocket.*) On my way. (*He touches it again to turn it off.*) I've got to go. I'll see you at dinner. (*Rosy exits.*)

**JANUARY.** God, he's a doctor. I remember when he was just a child. He and Jasper such good friends. And Rashmi building a bookshelf with them, in the living room, as Ally and I cooked in the kitchen. Where does the time go? (*Sparky enters*)

**SPARKY.** Hi, Captain.

**JANUARY.** Weren't you playing Ultra-golf?

**SPARKY.** Oh, you know Washington- if he's not winning, he pouts. He was 12 over par on the first hole, then he just threw down his club and ran out of the holocube. So I find myself at something of a loose end. Care to have Dinner with me?

**JANUARY.** I told Ally I'd have dinner with her, but you're welcome to join us in my cabin. I thought we might replicate some *nasi goreng*- I always feel a sense of achievement with food I have to assemble myself.

**SPARKY.** Oh, I'm afraid Indonesian-style food is too spicy for my stomach. And I wouldn't want you to think I was currying favor.

**JANUARY.** Oh Sparky, you're a delight. I'll see you at dinner, then.

**SPARKY.** Yes, all right. (*Exit January. Sparky sits in her chair.*) I'm a moron.

**END OF ACT I**

# THE STARSHIP ASTROV

## ACT II

*The Dining Hall of the Starship Astrov. A large table, with food replicator in back. At Rise, Celaria and Ally are sitting at the table, eating strawberries.*

**CELARIA.** These Earth berries are pleasing to my palate, friend Ally. I find it hard to believe that they're made of straws, as you say.

**ALLY.** No, Celaria, they're not made of straws, they're just called "strawberries".

**CELARIA.** If not straws, then why the nomenclature? There's nothing about them that looks like straws as I have known them.

**ALLY.** I don't know why they're called that. It's a mystery.

**CELARIA.** I do not like them anymore. This confusion is bad for the jeen-ha.

**ALLY.** What is jeen-ha?

**CELARIA.** It is the innermost part of self, the equilibrium that keeps us balanced.

**ALLY.** You mean, the soul?

**CELARIA.** I think that is your equivalent human word. The elders of my people tell a story: Once a young woman was walking in the woods and she came to a frielig.

**ALLY.** What's a frielig?

**CELARIA.** What you would call a kind of tree. It grows on Solaramifar and is very beautiful to look at. The young woman came to the tree and asked of it "why is love so painful?", and the tree did not reply in words, for it could not, but it dropped a beautiful leaf at the young woman's feet. The young woman took the leaf and went away. Some years later she came back, as an older woman, and asked of the tree "why is love so beautiful?", and in answer, the tree dropped another leaf, exactly the same as the first. The woman took the leaf, and went away. She came back some years later, an old woman, and she asked of the tree, "Why is love so important?" And the tree dropped all of its leaves and died. *(Pause)*

**ALLY.** I don't understand.

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**CELARIA.** They do say that meaning can be lost in translation. I say: if we think of too many contradictions and fluff, it wounds our jeen-ha, and we cannot continue our lives; we become distract, and can't communicate effectively.

**ALLY.** I didn't know that about Alisdairians.

**CELARIA.** And did you know it about yourself? Is not just the peoples of the Alisdair System who can be so afflicted. Your "soul" is wounded by too many irrelevancies. I can see it- I understand humans and what they need. Come to me. I am here to serve.

**ALLY.** No, I'm fine, really. (*Celaria gets up and begins to massage Ally's shoulders*)

**CELARIA.** Refusing help is not logical. Refusing pleasure is nonsensical.

**ALLY.** I don't need a mass... Oooh. Oh, that feels amazing, Celaria.

**CELARIA.** I give pleasure where it is needed. You have simple needs.

**ALLY.** I do?

**CELARIA.** You love the doctor, the Michael Rosy, do you not?

**ALLY.** Oh! How did you know? Has he said something to you!?

**CELARIA.** He has said many things to me, but he does not speak of you.

**ALLY.** Oh, that's as I feared. I'm sure he never notices me, or only thinks of me as Jasper's little sister, the child who used to fall down and scrape my knees, who followed him like a puppy. But now I am a woman, and he doesn't notice.

**CELARIA.** Would you like me to speak to him about this?

**ALLY.** Oh no, Celaria, please don't— I'd be mortified!

**CELARIA.** "Mortified"? I don't know this human word. It means "to be made dead", yes?

**ALLY.** To be so embarrassed that you wish you were dead.

**CELARIA.** This human idea of embarrassed, I do not understand. As long as I have lived with Professor Cole, he is still a puzzle to me. Humans are still a puzzle; yes?

**ALLY.** Humans are a puzzle to me, too.

**CELARIA.** This is what I say; You are a human, and you do not understand your own people. Because you are all wounded in the jeen-ha. Here. (*Celaria stops the massage and goes to the replicator.*)

**ALLY.** What are you...

## THE STARSHIP ASTROV

**CELARIA.** *(to the replicator)* Frielig berries. *(The replicator glows for a moment, then Celaria takes from it a plate of strangely colored berries).*

**ALLY.** You didn't mention the Frielig grew berries.

**CELARIA.** There was no need to say so. Until now. You will understand, these are berries from the Frielig. So they are called Frielig berries. Your straw berries do not come from straw, your blue berries do not come from the blues, your rasp berries do not rasp. A people's language is an extrusion of how they think. And your people are fractured, wounded. Here, have a Frielig berry.

**ALLY.** They look strange.

**CELARIA.** They are what they are. Eat. *(Ally takes a berry and eats it)*

**ALLY.** Oh! Oh, it's bitter!

**CELARIA.** Yes. Very bitter. Do you understand? Without a sweetener, they stay the same. So too will you stay to the Doctor unless you take action.

**ALLY.** Yes. Yes, please talk to him for me, Celaria. But don't- if he doesn't... Don't let him know I was asking.

**CELARIA.** I shall tell him obliquely: in a parable. And if he do understand it, perhaps his eyes shall then turn to you.

**ALLY.** Thank you, Celaria. You are a true friend. *(Washington enters.)*

**WASHINGTON.** Well look, it's the greenie, isn't it?

**CELARIA.** Mister Washington, I've asked you not to refer to me as "the greenie". My name is Celaria.

**WASHINGTON.** Yeah, and a Rodanthian might want to be called a savvy businessman, but when it comes to the replicator's functioning, he's still steak.

**ALLY.** Are you drunk?

**WASHINGTON.** IF it were any of your business, little girl, I still wouldn't tell you. What are you doing here alone with the alien, anyway? She's got nothing that you might be interested in. She's made for pleasure.

**CELARIA.** We are as we are.

**ALLY.** I'm going to tell dadd— I mean the captain, that you're drunk and obstreperous on duty.

## THE STARSHIP ASTROV

**WASHINGTON.** Go ahead, go and whine to your daddy. I'm on leave till we hit the asteroid field and that's not for a couple of star days. Till then I'll be as obstrep- ostrep- trostep— ...I'll be as rowdy as I choose.

**ALLY.** Fine, I will! *(Ally leaves)*

**WASHINGTON.** Like what you see, greenie?

**CELARIA.** I do not.

**WASHINGTON.** Wanna go hit the sack? They say Alisdairians can tell just what pleases a human the most; you know just what we need. Is that true?

**CELARIA.** It is true. *(Washington takes off his uniform shirt)*

**WASHINGTON.** Then maybe you can show me a little of what you know about me. Give me what I need.

**CELARIA.** Perhaps I can. Come to me, Marcus Washington.

**WASHINGTON.** All right... *(Washington comes to her, unbuckling his belt.)*

**CELARIA.** Here, have some Frielig berries; they are a delicacy from my planet.

**WASHINGTON.** They look funny.

**CELARIA.** Eat them.

**WASHINGTON.** Oh, I get it: They're an aphrodisiac, right? *(He shoves some in his mouth)* UGH, oh! Those are disgusting! *(He spits them out. Celaria suddenly grabs him and, with inhuman strength, slams his head down onto the table, bending him over it; she holds him down)*

**CELARIA.** You will eat all of them and be grateful for my hospitality!

**WASHINGTON.** I'm sorry!

**CELARIA.** You are not. Eat the berries! *(Celaria shoves more berries in his mouth. Washington, shocked and crying, eats the berries, grimacing as he does so.)*

**WASHINGTON.** Augh, ick, I, I... *(January and Ally enter, followed by Sparky.)*

**JANUARY.** Just what in blazes is going on here? Celaria! Let Mr. Washington go!

**CELARIA.** Very well. *(Celaria calmly lets Washington up. He stands, breathing heavily.)*

## THE STARSHIP ASTROV

**WASHINGTON.** Captain, you've got to do something about this, this... fiend! She attacked me!

**ALLY.** Nonsense! You were drunk, Mister Washington! More likely you attacked her, made improper—

**JANUARY.** That's enough, Ally; I'll take care of this.

**SPARKY.** Hey Washington, nice nipples!

**WASHINGTON.** Shut up, Sparky. (*Washington grabs his shirt from the floor, and puts it on, and buckles his belt over the following*).

**JANUARY.** Yes, Lieutenant Commander Camilo: that was uncalled for.

**SPARKY.** I'm sorry, Captain. I only meant—

**JANUARY.** In fact, Jenny, Ally: leave us.

**SPARKY.** Yes sir.

**ALLY.** Yes, daddy. (*Sparky and Ally leave.*)

**JANUARY.** Now. What goes on here?

**WASHINGTON.** This green bitch attacked me, and forced me to eat some disgusting Alisdairian food- it could have been toxic, she might have killed me!

**JANUARY.** And she forced you to remove your uniform top? Or did she take your shirt off herself?

**WASHINGTON.** ...no, I did that.

**JANUARY.** And for what purpose were you disrobing?

**WASHINGTON.** Well,... I mean, you know.

**JANUARY.** I don't know.

**WASHINGTON.** These Alisdairians: they know what a man needs. I was going to... going to—

**JANUARY.** You were making improper advances to a guest on our ship; to the wife of another guest. And while in uniform; at least, mostly in uniform. And when the lady defended her honor by fighting back, you attempted to blame it all on her. Is that how it went?

**WASHINGTON.** But Captain! Alisdairian women have no honor. They sleep with anyone who wants; I don't see why I should be any different.

**CELARIA.** That is untrue. We do not sleep with simply anyone, as you have been suggesting. And your intent was not to sleep. We also do not have sexual intercourse with just anyone. Although we know what it is that people need, we give it only where deserved.

## THE STARSHIP ASTROV

**WASHINGTON.** But you know what people want: why deny me?

**CELARIA.** We know what people need. And what you most of all needed was to be taught a lesson.

**JANUARY.** I'm afraid, Lieutenant Washington, that I'll have to confine you to quarters without holocube privileges for the remainder of the week's voyage, and you shall be disciplined when we get to Star Dock.

**WASHINGTON.** Oh MAN, this is terrible.

**CELARIA.** Captain, I'd prefer the lieutenant not be penalized for his transgression. It was a simple mistake on his part, and I believe he has been chastised enough already.

**JANUARY.** I don't think you understand, Celaria; he tried—

**CELARIA.** I am aware of his intentions. I was here. But the fellow has suffered the humiliation of being beaten by me and his colleagues and superior seeing his nipples; surely he has had comeuppance. And in any case, you will need an astrogator for the rest of the trip- I understand there is an asteroid field?

**JANUARY.** Lieutenant Commander Camilo could handle that alone.

**CELARIA.** Please, for my sake, let him be.

**JANUARY.** Very well. Lieutenant Washington, you are dismissed.

**WASHINGTON.** Thank you, sir. (*Washington looks for a moment as if he'll say something to Celaria, but then just leaves.*)

**JANUARY.** You have a very forgiving nature.

**CELARIA.** I forgive nothing. But Lieutenant Washington was not interested in what he assumed he was. His excitement for me was not sexual; he was frightened of me, of all nonhuman species; he wished somehow to dominate me. Instead I gave him reason to be frightened indeed, but for an actual reason, not an invented one. I should rather be feared for what I have done than despised for what is presupposed. I think it is a human saying: "butter the enemy you know".

**JANUARY.** Better. "Better the enemy you know".

**CELARIA.** Ah, yes; that makes more sense. I thank you, Captain, for the rescue.

**JANUARY.** Well, I was glad to be able to help you.

## THE STARSHIP ASTROV

**CELARIA.** No, I meant your rescue of Mister Washington. Had I been allowed to continue my rebuke of Lieutenant Washington, perhaps I would not have continued to be as welcome on your ship as I have been.

**JANUARY.** Ah, yes. Quite so.

**CELARIA.** And I have felt welcome here; your daughter is very kind.

**JANUARY.** Ally? Yes, I'm glad to have her here.

**CELARIA.** You are tense, Captain; I think that you are under some stress, owning a ship like this.

**JANUARY.** Oh, I don't own the ship, Celaria. It's owned by Star Command. Their fortunes are mine. I merely run the ship as they instruct me.

**CELARIA.** And still you are full of tension. Is something amiss?

**JANUARY.** Oh, no. Nothing you need to concern yourself with,

**CELARIA.** I'm only worried about your husband.

**CELARIA.** Who? Professor Cole?

**JANUARY.** Do you have more than one husband?

**CELARIA.** I have no husband as your people know the word. I am not bound by Earth ceremonies. I am Jason's wife, but he is not my husband.

**JANUARY.** That's part of what worries me; I fear that Lieutenant Washington's advances may be part of a larger morale problem, having to do with you being on my ship.

**CELARIA.** Surely I am not responsible for human desire.

**JANUARY.** Is anyone?

**CELARIA.** I would think that humans should be.

**JANUARY.** Though we can control our actions, we can't rein in our desires.

**CELARIA.** Nor should you. Your desires should be free to express themselves; denial of needs is a terrible thing.

**JANUARY.** Is it? And if I should decide only to eat candy from now on, would that be a good thing?

**CELARIA.** That is a want, not a need. That would be a foolish choice.

**JANUARY.** I see. (*January sits at the table and puts his head in his hands, frustrated.*)

**CELARIA.** You are sad. Come here, come.

## THE STARSHIP ASTROV

**JANUARY.** Where? (*Celaria stands by the window, looking out at the stars. January comes to join her.*)

**CELARIA.** What do you see?

**JANUARY.** Nothing. Only the stars.

**CELARIA.** The stars are not only; they are the stars.

**JANUARY.** Yes, I see the stars.

**CELARIA.** But they are not only the stars, you see. They are planets and suns and moons and satellites and other spaceships and colonies and space stations.

**JANUARY.** Yes.

**CELARIA.** Yes, each one is something. Every little point of light is a separate place, a space of its own. And we who ride the night in ships fly between them, looking for our own space. The place we know, the place we remember. The place that is home, yes? The place that is home to us.

**JANUARY.** Home.

**CELARIA.** But when you look at them here: you see them twinkle, and they are very pretty.

**JANUARY.** Sure.

**CELARIA.** They would not be so pretty if you didn't know that somewhere out there was the place you want to be. (*They stand and look at the stars. Celaria reaches out, without looking at him, and takes January's hand. He jumps at her touch, then takes her hand. They hold hands for a moment. January starts to laugh.*) What is funny?

**JANUARY.** Nothing. My wife and I used to hold hands like this and we would look up at the stars. (*He laughs some more, his body shaking. Celaria kisses him, sweetly. The kiss goes on for a long time, getting more heated. Cole's voice can be heard outside, but it does not register to them. Enter Cole and Rosy, talking.*)

**COLE.** ...and so I told the Admiral, “*ski hornis ad foonci*, as they say- a Lampernian Waffled Bat will never mate with an Earth Bat”, and I was right— Oh dear. (*January breaks away from Celaria.*)

**ROSY.** What’s going on here?

**COLE.** Well, that’s obvious.

**ROSY.** Jonas— what’s going on?

**JANUARY.** I didn’t want to— she kissed me.

## THE STARSHIP ASTROV

**ROSY.** Jonas, I can't believe- you know how I... I mean, you know Celaria is Professor Cole's wife!

**COLE.** Seriously, this is a terrible thing.

**ROSY.** Celaria, what were you doing?

**CELARIA.** I was kissing Captain January. He needed it.

**COLE.** Celaria, we've talked about this, you know. You're my wife. You can't just go kissing everyone you see, no matter how much they may "need" your osculation. And frankly, Captain January, I am appalled at your conduct.

**JANUARY.** I'm sorry, I'm sorry— I should go.

**COLE.** I thought it was dinner time? isn't it dinner time?

**JANUARY.** I'm... I'll be eating in my office tonight. I— I have to go.  
(*Exit January*)

**COLE.** Well, if we're not eating yet, I'll be in my room; I still have some equations that demand my attention. As the Lycortians of the Chiroides Nebula say, "*Meenchana set oon reekay monmoo*", you know? Michael, make sure that Celaria gets back to my room safely- I know I can count on you! (*Exit Cole. Long pause.*)

**ROSY.** It makes him sad, you know: when he sees you with other men. It makes him sad. Your betrayal causes him pain.

**CELARIA.** I have never betrayed him; I have only been faithful to myself. I don't know why he or anyone would expect otherwise. And The Professor is not made sad by what you see as my betrayal.

**ROSY.** He's not?

**CELARIA.** It pleases him to have a wife who is desired. It makes it seem as if I have some worth.

**ROSY.** Oh.

**CELARIA.** It is you who is made sad by this. It is you who feels betrayed.

**ROSY.** Don't be ridiculous, I—

**CELARIA.** Can you deny this to me? I do feel your passion- for ages, all the time we've been near each other. Even from across the room, on Earth, on the ship; when we eat, when we sleep: your skin calls out for a touch- your blood, your heartbeat, all declare that you need a woman, you hunger for love.

**ROSY.** But you do not love me.

## THE STARSHIP ASTROV

**CELARIA.** I must consider your needs. I have a story. There was a young woman once, and she was in love with a doctor she had known for many years. She loved him, but she was frightened to approach him. She feared that her real and lasting love might be denied her.

**ROSY.** But why? Who am I to spurn her?

**CELARIA.** I did not say the Doctor in my story was you; this is merely a parable. The girl pined for the man; she thought that he would not notice her. For though she knew him, they were very different- she feared he thought her simple and childish.

**ROSY.** That's nonsense.

**CELARIA.** No, it was not: for indeed he did not take note of her burgeoning womanhood, despite all her love, and they did part for good, never knowing, each to each, what might have been.

**ROSY.** Do you think I should...?

**CELARIA.** I do not presume to instruct you. But it might have done the Doctor in my story good to look about him once in a while and to see how he was loved. Sometimes the things one needs are right below one's nose.

**ROSY.** Yes. Yes, Celaria— you're right. *(Rosy kisses Celaria.)*

**CELARIA.** No, Doctor, I—

**ROSY.** Shush, Celaria. I understand your parable now. *(He pulls her down to lie, face up, on the table, and leans over her, beginning to unbuckle his belt)*

**CELARIA.** I think you do not.

**ROSY.** Don't you see, Celaria? We don't need to be afraid anymore! I don't think of you as a child! I only denied you because I thought you didn't return my affection! But you do, you do, and now I'm the happiest man in the universe! *(Rosy lets his pants drop, and lifts Celaria's skirt.)*

**CELARIA.** A man can need many things.

**ROSY.** Oh god, you know how I've longed— how I've loved you! *(He starts to cry)*

**CELARIA.** Then why does this give you sadness?

**ROSY.** I'm crying because I'm so happy.

**CELARIA.** Humans make not the sense. *(Sparky enters.)*

## THE STARSHIP ASTROV

**SPARKY.** Oh good god. There's a lot of this going around today. Look, you folks have your own guest quarters, don't you? (*Rosy scrambles to pull up his pants.*)

**CELARIA.** We do.

**ROSY.** This isn't what it looks like.

**SPARKY.** Really? What do you think it looks like?

**ROSY.** I should—I should go. Celaria? Will I see you later?

**CELARIA.** I think so.

**ROSY.** Good, good. (*Rosy leaves*)

**SPARKY.** Men, huh?

**CELARIA.** Humans.

**SPARKY.** It seems that you're the goal of every man on this starship.

**CELARIA.** Their goals do differ in substantial ways, but you are correct; I am saddened that they seem to think so many of their goals are contained in me. I help them as I can, but they do not listen. No one listens to me.

**SPARKY.** I will listen to you, Celaria; I will listen, but you must tell me how you do it.

**CELARIA.** Oh! It is very simple: you only do not speak, and then you hear what another is saying.

**SPARKY.** No, not listening, I know how to listen. I want you to tell me how you generate such desire in the men on this ship.

**CELARIA.** I do not try. (*pause*) Perhaps that is the answer. I merely exist, and speak my mind, and go about my day. But it is true I don't understand humans as well as I might like. I have been told by a wise human that "You catch more bees with honey than with vinegar"; it may-

**SPARKY.** "Flies".

**CELARIA.** What?

**SPARKY.** It's "flies". "Catch more flies with honey".

**CELARIA.** Surely not. On Earth, it is the bees that are attracted by the sweetness of the honey, or so I understood to be the case.

**SPARKY.** I think the allusion is to the stickiness, not the sweetness.

**CELARIA.** Then why vinegar as an alternative? Although the stickiness of honey will keep flies or bees from escape, surely it is the sweetness that attracts them. The analogy is to the sweet words.

**SPARKY.** Perhaps you're right.

THE STARSHIP ASTROV

**CELARIA.** I do not understand humanity.

**SPARKY.** You and me both, sister.

**END OF ACT II**

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