

THE GOOD WEDDING

By
John P. Seiler

Copyright 9/2004, THE GOOD WEDDING, All Rights Reserved

-1-

Emperor Leopaldo XVI of the House Lineas was sitting in his study enjoying a bowl of wexel-virginia pseudo-tobacco in his von Erck freehand pipe. The rather large non-classical shaped pipe was carved by and Old Earth craftsman named Lee Erck. Little did he know when the pipe was carved during the First Age that it would survive all these years and still be enjoyed fifty centuries after it was made.

The invitation had come with the morning dispatches. Varteten von Eckman's daughter Lynda was going to be married to Robert Kostik of the House of Hanover. Varten had been Leo's weapons master/chief of security for many years. Of course he would attend the wedding of his dearest old friend's daughter, even if it meant traveling to Capella II in the Regular star cluster. The wedding would be one of the social events of the Empire this year. Representatives of all the Houses of the Reichstagen would be invited and attend, well they better attend, he thought.

Leo had known Lynda from childhood. She almost considered him to be her grandfather. He smiled as he recollected that "Grandfather" was what she called him as a child. Being Varten's only child, he knew she was the apple of her father's eye. His too, come to think of it. He also socially knew Robert Kostik who came from a good family. He had graduated from the Empire Military Academy at the top of his class and would appear to have a very promising career in the service of the Empire.

As he thought about attending the wedding, he remarked to himself how well the wexel-virginia smoked in the von Erck pipe. He knew the history of von Erck pipes. They were carved by Lee Erck who had developed a secret oil curing process for his briar. Unfortunately, his mixture went with him to his grave. It was never again quite duplicated. Some pipe connoisseurs believed that the taste of oil curing disappeared after 30 or so smokes, however Leo did not agree. He could always tell an oil-cured pipe, no matter how old.

He went to his computer and typed in for information on Capella II. The capitol of Capella II was the town of New Pittsburgh. Whenever he visited a new world, he tried to check out pipe/tobacco shops and bookshops. He found the "yellow pages" for New Pittsburgh and enquired about bookshops and tobacconists. The amount of information returned was not promising, however there were a couple of bookshops and one very promising tobacco merchant. He made a mental note to visit them both.

As his pipe full of tobacco was approaching an end, he placed the pipe into the ornate ash tray on his desk. He decided that he would travel to Capella II with Nick Reardon, one of his Empire Intelligence Service best operatives, and a fellow brother of the briar. They would travel on a ring-drive space liner taking about four days to get to Capella II. The trip would give him a chance to relax and catch up on his pleasure reading. Recently, he had been reading some original Old Earth books dealing with Sherlock Holmes. His agents had unearthed four books for his collection including two copies of "The Sherlock Holmes Adventure" by Regis MaCafferty, and two books about Sherlock's brother Mycroft by Quinn Fawcett entitled "Against the Brotherhood", and "The Flying Scotsman". He received great enjoyment by reading stories from original books, a thing few people did in his time period. A genuine hardback book was difficult to find. Imitations were made, but could easily be detected. Books had long ago been replaced with visiscreen, personal electronic readers, and hypno-learning.

He placed the RSVP reply in the outgoing mail slot. His immediate problem was what to give the new couple for a wedding present. He had two weeks until departure. The gift would be something that he would have to ponder on his trip.

-2-

Emperor Leopaldo's and Nick's trip to Capella II via the space liner "Corithian" was uneventful, as far as these trips went. They spent four days relaxing, smoking pipes, reading, and whatever they felt like doing. You would be surprised how little it took to run an Empire from day-to-day, and most of that was done by his functionaries at Castle Pesaro. As a result, he only had one or two communications a day that required his direct attention.

The space liner landed at the Capella II spaceport. They took ground transportation to the capital city, New Pittsburgh. Prior to departing the ship, he dispatched messages to Varten von Eckman alerting him to his arrival. He also communicated with Castle Pesario and left contact information.

As Emperor, even though he was visiting Capella II on a social basis, his presence still had political overtones. He had been met by local security people. He, Nick, and the security people had a scheduled meeting with Leopaldo's appointed governor, Herman Heissmann. The governor had done an excellent job in administering the Emperor's will, collecting taxes, and keeping the planet secure. Leopaldo was quite happy with his selection. He and Nick met with Governor Heissmann in his private study.

"Good day to you Herman. I am very glad to see you. You have done an excellent job governing your home planet. I am quite pleased!"

"Thanks, your majesty. I am very glad to be of service."

“You probably do not remember Nick Reardon from your last visit to Castle Pesaro. I believe he was away on a mission. He is one of my best EIS operatives. You may both address me as Leo here in private. Do you mind if we smoke?”

“No, I do not remember meeting Mr. Reardon and of course you may smoke. As you know, I also like to smoke my pipes! I have some tobacco here from Old Earth. It is called ‘Ten Russians’ and was tinned by the Hermit Tobacco Company”. The governor offered Leo and Nick a tin of tobacco after he had popped the lid.

Leo filled up and lit his von Erck pipe. Nick lit up his Larenzetti pipe. Herman lit up a GBD Unique.

As Leo puffed on his pipe he said, “I can give you some information about Hermit Tobacco. I recently gifted a special friend with a pipe that belonged to one of the principals of the company. Hermit Tobacco operated in the late 20th and early 21st century on Old Earth. They were one of the largest dealers in new and estate pipes and smoking paraphernalia in the political subdivision known as the United States. They heavily supported the pipe and tobacco scene in the United States through attending all the pipe and tobacco collector shows each year. The company was operated by Jay and Louise Jones. They were both very knowledgeable people. Both had extensive collections of ultra high grade pipes. Hermit Tobacco also marketed a Hermit line of tobaccos which were primary of the English Style. Their tobaccos are becoming very difficult to obtain. I thank you very much for allowing us to sample this blend.”

“I am not quite the connoisseur of pipes and tobacco that you are. I appreciate the information. In return, I will tell you that Simeon Tanner, at the Capella Tobacconist Shop, supplied me with the tobacco. He found a small cache and a couple Captain Earle pipes. You may wish to visit him while you are here, time permitting of course.”

“You can be sure that I will make time for a visit. I also would like to visit some bookshops, if possible. I am always looking for old books to fill holes in my collection. Books are getting harder to find every day, especially since everything went electronic many centuries ago.”

“We don’t have any bookshops; however there is a flea market that you may wish to check out. It is about six blocks from your hotel. I will send directions over to you at the New Pittsburgh Hilton Hotel.”

“Thanks, Nick and I will definitely check out these items. How is security here on Capella II?”

“You should not have any problem. The streets are secure both day and night. I am sure that Nick will be ever at your side. I will have a couple security people shadow you in an unobtrusive way. You won’t even know they are there.”

“Again, thanks for your hospitality. Nick, are you still with us?”

“Yes sir, Yours truly is just sitting here, listening to the conversation, and enjoying this fine tobacco. I saw no need to intrude”

They discussed Empire matters for about a half-hour until their pipes were finished. When the meeting was ended, Leo and Nick bid the governor a fond farewell and were taken to the New Pittsburgh Hilton Hotel where they checked into the Emperor Suite.

-3-

After unpacking, Leo and Nick decided to take a short walk to the Capella Tobacconist Shop, a short distance from the hotel. They walked up to a very nice shop that was reminiscent of a tobacco shop from the 1890's, First Age. The architecture of the shop and the design of the store front made it look like it had been located in London, England. The glass panel in the front door was lettered in gold leaf and told them they were at the Capella Tobacconist Shop and the proprietor was Mr. Simeon Tanner. They opened the door and went inside. To the left and right were large windows. Every other place in the shop was covered in a dark walnut finished wood. On the left was a sitting/smoking area with a large visiscreen on the wall. In the middle of the store was a large display case. On the right parallel to the wall and along the back was a large counter with a glass display case. Behind the counter on the back wall was display after display of pipes. The wall on the right held shelves with probably 200 different varieties of Empire pseudo-tobacco and neer-tobacco tins plus about two dozen jars holding loose tobacco of all types. In the middle of the back wall was a curtained door that led to the back room. The aroma of tobacco pervaded the shop.

A small wizened man came out of the back room and addressed his visitors. “Are you Emperor Leopaldo?” he asked.

“Yes I am and this is my good friend Nick Reardon. I take it that you are Simeon Tanner, the proprietor, whom I have heard many good things from the governor.”

“Yes, I am he. Governor Heissmann called and told me you might be by. I am much honored to have you visit my humble shop. How may I serve you?”

“From what I see, you must have one of the finest establishments in the Empire. I understand from the governor that you may have some Old Earth Tins of tobacco available, and I would certainly like to see your pipes. Nick and I would like to share a pipe with you, if you don't mind.”

“I would be honored.” He said as he went and placed the CLOSED sign on the door. “I don't think we want to be disturbed. Your majesty, I do have a couple of tins of Hermit Tobacco that I have recently received from one of my contacts. Before I bring it out, I would like you to try this tobacco.” He said as he reached under the counter and took out a jar. “This is a mature Virginia like neer-tobacco that was grown locally. It has been

aged for over twenty-five years. It is very similar to the Old Earth McClelland's 5100 bulk tobacco."

They all took out pipes. The Emperor had an Old Earth pipe made by an American carver named Sam Learned that had stag horn on the shank. Nick took out his Dunhill RTDA 2000 black shell briar pipe. Simeon Tanner showed Leo and Nick his pipe which had been carved by an Old Earth carver named Tim Wiener, a carved black bent pipe with a white ring insert in the stem. They all admired the pipes that they each were smoking. They filled their pipes and lit them. Smoke rings lifted towards the ceiling of the shop.

"You may not be aware, your majesty, that this is one of the few shops left that makes custom blends. I don't mean to brag, but I can blend almost anything using either new neer- or pseudo-tobacco or I can add a small amount of Old Earth tobacco from bulks that I have."

"I am quite impressed. I have read about an Old Earth Blend called Matt's Red and Black from the J.C. Nays tobacco Co. Would you be able to produce it?"

He consulted an old ragged notebook that he took out of one of the drawers. "I have heard that the blend is a very nice one with a mature Virginia and a Black Virginia tobacco. An approximation was 60% McClelland #5100 and 40% McClelland 5105, all of which are difficult to find. I can make a close version out of wexel-virginias. The two parts made up from different blends of wexel-virginias. How much do you want?"

"I would like a pound of this mixture. I also would like two tins each of the Vintage Flake and the Brown Flake. Give me three tins of the Cut Virginia Plug, if you have enough. That looks to me to be similar to the Old Earth Fribourg & Treyer flakes. I have some of the original Old Earth tins in my tobacco collection. Look, the manufacturer has even used tins that match the Old Earth tins. What Old Earth pipes do you have?"

"One pound to be sure, your majesty. Yes, the new F&T tobacco company is doing a good job in re-creating the blends from the Old Earth firm of many years ago. I do have plenty of stock to fill your order. I only have six Old Earth pipes at the present time. I have one by Clarence Mickles, one Ser Jacopo Double Maxima, One Dunhill, One Comoy, one Charatan, and one Tim Wiener. I hope you will find something here to suit your taste."

The pipes were estate and reconditioned very carefully. After Leo examined the six pipes, he decided to purchase two; a Ser Jacopo Double Maxima large 1/8 bent apple and a Clarence Mickles blasted prince. How much do you want for the pipes?"

"One-hundred solaris each." He replied.

"Reasonable" Leo responded "I'll take them both."

Nick picked up a tin of McNay's "Red Ribbon Flake. "A fine selection Mr. Reardon", Simeon said.

Leo charged the entire order, 220 solaris, to his Empire Express Card, drawn on the Empire Treasury. "A justifiable expense when on Empire business", he said.

After praising Simeon Tanner's shop, they left and continued walking down the street to the flea market.

The building in which the flea market was held was an old converted warehouse. There were two floors. Each floor held around fifty stalls or booths. He and Nick made a quick walk-through then decided to stop at a stall filled with old books and videos. He was reading through a bunch of titles he found in an old crate when he spied an interesting title. He took out the book and showed it to Nick.

"Nick, this book was written by a Frenchman named Georges Herment. The book is entitled "The Pipe" Look what it says on the cover 'A serious yet diverting treatise on the history of the pipe and all its appurtenances, as well as a factual withal philosophical discussion on the pleasurable art of selecting pipes, smoking, and caring for them. With special illustrations.'" Let's see, it was originally published by Simon and Schuster in 1954, First Age. This book is one of the first books I ever read when I took up pipes and tobacco. It is a fantastic book. I wonder what the dealer wants for it.

The found the flea market dealer for the stall who had been having a lite lunch. The dealer asked them if he could be of assistance. "What is the price on this book?" Leo asked.

"Oh that one, well, you know that books on pipes and tobacco are very rare. Books are rare, period! The newfangled computers, electronics, and psyco-teaching systems make them more of a thing of the past. I would like 20 solaris for the book."

"Books may be rare, but not that rare! I can just call up the book on my visiscreen if all I wanted to do was read it. I'll give you 10 solaris for it and you can consider yourself lucky." Leo replied.

"Ten solaris", he mumbled, "Can you make it twelve?"

"Done!" Leo said " You drive a hard bargain, Mr..."

"Arthur Bernat and do I know you?" he asked

"Fine Arthur, and I don't think you do."

He paid the dealer. Nick and Leo left the flea market making only one other purchase. Nick purchased an Old Earth pocket book entitled "Secret Agent Girl". He paid less than

a quarter-solaris for the book. He told Leo that he was going to send it to Lu Jo who was at the EIS Academy undergoing new agent training.

“You know, Nick, Lu Jo is going to kill you when she gets this book from you. You should send it inside a Puzzle box. She would have to discover the secret code to open the box. Then she would find a most appropriate present.” Leo exclaimed.”

Nick just laughed.

They headed back to the New Pittsburgh Hilton Hotel, enjoying the very fine Capella II day.

-4-

Nick was sitting in the study of the Emperor Suite when Leo burst in. “Oh Satan’s Fanny” he yelled “I must have left my bag with the two new pipes at the flea market. I have the tobacco, but must have set the other bag down. How about you taking a jaunt back and see if the bag is in Mr. Bernat’s stall.”

Nick immediately left but came back empty handed about 30 minutes later. While he was explaining to Leo that the stall had closed for the day, the communicator rang. Leo picked up the communicator “This is the front desk, sir. There is a Mr. Arthur Bernat here who says that he has some urgent business with you.” “Send him up.” Leo replied.

The door chimes rang. Nick opened the door and let Mr. Bernat into the room. He addressed Leo and Nick. “Sir, you know I mentioned I thought I knew you, well it came to me after I found the bag with the two pipes you left in my stall. I finally realized that you are Emperor Leopaldo. It should have come to me sooner. Well, anyways, I am here with the pipes you left. I came to return them and ask a favor.”

“Thanks Arthur, it is always nice to meet an honest man. These pipes could have gotten you several hundred solaris, probably a large sum to you.”

“Yes sir, they could have. I do know the value of genuine Old Earth pipes, but, I would have had to live with my conscience. As I said, I do have a favor to ask of you.”

“Please, sit down. We have plenty of time. Would you like to smoke? Do you mind if we do?” Leo stated.

“No, I don’t mind”, Arthur took out a rather large imitation GBD Unique. “Not real Old Earth, but a nice pipe, none the less.

Leo opened a tin of the new Fribourg & Treyer “Cut Virginia Plug” and said “fill up your pipe and take your time with the story. I am going to try this new Ser Jacopo Double

Maxima pipe.” As he filled up his pipe, Nick did likewise. “Nick, please take notes”, Leo asked.

Arthur Began “Forty years ago, when I was a young man, I enlisted and served in the Empire Navy. This was during the rule of your father. I was trained as a medic and served on the space navy cruiser, Jerry Ford. We had been assigned to the fleet charged with ending the revolt in the star system Venus IX. It had to do with group of insurgents that had taken over the government and were trying to spread their doctrine of running a planet by computer and achieving a utopia. I thought that mankind had gotten rid of utopia thinking at the end of the Second Age. Well I was wrong.

I had been detached from the Jerry Ford in a small, medical ambulance ship, (MAS) no. 41. The ship had a pilot, a co-pilot, a navigator, a space marine, me, and a nurse. The mission was commanded by Lt. Jones, the pilot. We were traveling through the space between the 2nd moon and the third planet of the Venus IX system. The battle was over. The fleet was rounding up stragglers and we were out trying to find any medical cases. We found a drifting hulk of what had once been a Venus IX battle cruiser. It appeared quite dead. We picked up a weak signal from a distress beacon located on the underside of the hulk. The co-pilot took us in close. We stood off an airlock. Lt. Jones and Sgt. Wilson, the space marine, suited up. They left the ambulance through the air lock and jetted over to the hulk’s air lock through free space. When they got to the air lock, they opened it and went inside. At that time we lost communications.

A half an hour went by and we heard nothing. We were ready to leave, fearing that something bad had happened to the boarding crew, when we saw the air lock open. It was Jones and Wilson. They were followed by ten other men in old space suites. Lt. Jones jetted over to the ambulance with a line which he attached to a mooring ring. Sgt. Wilson and the ten men came over pulling on the line. They carefully came on board two at a time through the ambulance’s small air lock. As they came in, I examined the men that were on the hulk. They were in average to poor shape with mostly minor injuries. Lt. Jones was the last one to come on board and told us to get the Hades out of there. We immediately left. About two minutes after we left, the hulk blew up in a tremendous explosion.

It seems that the ten men had been held captive. When the crew of the hulk had left several hours earlier, they had set the atomic pile on the ship to blow. The trigger was when the beacon’s batteries finally died. They had hoped that a large Empire ship would be docked with the hulk. The ten men, all Empire soldiers had been left on the hulk as bait. It was a bit of luck, and the skill and determination of Jones and Wilson that saved the Empire soldiers, themselves, and us on the ambulance.

The reason I am telling you this story is that there were never any mention, medals, or honors, for at least Jones and Wilson. Not that any was expected, since we all felt that we were just doing our jobs. However, Wilson and Jones are now up in years, and I don’t expect either to be around much longer. I would like to see them get some recognition. I think that the effort they showed went well and above the norm.”

They had long finished their pipes which were sitting in the ash trays. Leo took his pipe and started to empty out the ash with his Pipester Tamper. “Arthur, I notice that you do not ask anything for yourself?”

“I, I did not do anything. All the credit belongs to Lt. Jones and Sgt. Wilson.” He replied.

“OK, I can’t promise you anything, but I will look into it. Will you please give Nick the necessary information to contact all of the crew of MAS 41. I assume that you all keep in contact.”

“Yes we do, although I am not sure I have all the addresses. I will provide what I can.”

“It has been a pleasure talking with you today, Arthur. I do want to thank you for returning my new pipes to me and in having a most enjoyable smoke with us.”

Nick and Arthur left Leo.

Leo thought to himself “I like honest men, they are so hard to find among the people I deal with in the upper end of the Empire. I wonder how I can help him. I must be cautious in that I to verify Arthur’s story. I don’t doubt that the story is true, but I cannot afford haste.”

A short while later Nick rejoined Leo. “A most remarkable man is Mr. Arthur Bernat.” Nick said.

“Yes he is. Honest to the core. I want you to contact Vice-Admiral Hanie in the Space Navy Archives to see if he has any information. I want you to have some Empire Intelligence Service people trace down the crew of MAS 41 and interview them. Tell them it is for a documentary on the Space Navy and obtain their stories. Get hold of the officer who was the commander of the Jerry Ford and get his story. Find out why these men were not put into for awards. Try to have all the information funneled to us within 24 hours. If we are to do anything, it will have to be right after the wedding”

“Anything else you want me to do?” Nick asked.

“No, but you may find it interesting to know that Jerry Ford, or President Gerald Ford was a President of the Old Earth political subdivision United States of America. He also was a pipe smoker at one point in his lifetime. Supposedly, he smoked in the oval office inside the White House which was their equivalent to Castle Pesaro. I guess he gave it up when it became politically incorrect to smoke.”

-5-

The morning of the wedding came. Emperor Leopaldo was decked out in his Imperial finest. Nick joined him in the uniform of an Empire Captain. They traveled to the old

Capella II Cathedral. They arrived two hours before the wedding was to start. Upon arriving, they were ushered into a private room where they were met by their old friend Varten von Eckman. "Sire, I am glad you could make it." he said "Any problems with the trip?"

"No, Varten. It was a very smooth trip. We ran into a couple of small problems in New Pittsburgh. Are you ready for the wedding? It seems like only yesterday that Lynda was a young girl sitting on my lap. It appears that she has grown into a fine young lady. You should be very proud"

"She most certainly has grown into a fine young lady, and I am proud. She reminds me of her mother. Good thing she does not take after her father!" Varten said.

"I am looking forward to seeing her again, Varten. If possible, I would like a couple of minutes with her and her new husband after the ceremony, before the formal reception. Please also alert your staff that I am expecting a couple messages and have them brought to me as soon as possible." Leo asked.

The Majordomo entered the room and escorted Emperor Leopoldo and Nick into the main sanctuary of the cathedral. There they found that many nobles from the top Houses of the Empire had gathered for the event. Leo and Nick found themselves right behind the immediate families, on the bride's side of the altar. Leo turned to Nick and whispered "Boy could I go for a pipe now. Guess I will have to wait until the reception. I feel so tight in this royal monkey suit."

Nick responded "It should not be too long a ceremony. You know, Leo, I find that it is easier to be in a wedding than to watch one."

"Well Nick, it has been a long time since I was married. You did not know my wife, Princess Karina. She passed away while giving birth to Prince Kyle. She had a very difficult pregnancy. It has been a long time getting over her passing. This is the first wedding I have attended in many years. I understand that Lynda and Robert have prepared an Old Earth style wedding. It should be very nice."

As he concluded his remarks, the musical prelude began. Leo looked around the Cathedral from the ornate altar, to the vaulted ceilings, and the beautiful stained glass windows. "Nick, did you know that the stained glass windows were made to be a duplicate of those found in the Cathedral de Notre Dame in Paris, France during the First Age of Old Earth. They are very beautiful. Some of the statuary was designed from other pieces from that era."

"The windows are most beautiful, indeed. The colors are very vivid. They have reproduced a very beautiful cathedral from Old Earth here on Capella II." Nick responded.

The Majordomo escorted Martha von Eckman down the main aisle and to her seat. A few seconds later the entrance march began. The groom and groomsmen entered and stood parallel to the altar on the right, perpendicular to the main aisle. The bridesmaids, wearing a long flowing white gown with a pink sash carrying a small bouquet of roses, entered one-at-a-time they walked down the long aisle, made a left turn at the altar and stopped at their designated position. Suddenly the carillon became very loud. Everyone turned around and looked down the aisle. At the far end stood Varten von Eckman and on his arm was his daughter Lynda. They started to process down the aisle. When they reached Emperor Leopold, they turned towards him and bowed. They then continued to the altar. Varten said a few words to Robert, kissed his daughter, and gave her hand to Robert. Varten joined his wife in the pew. Robert and Lynda turned and faced the celebrant of the wedding service. As they knelt at the altar, there was a slight ripple of laughter in the audience. On the bottom of Robert's shoes, someone had written the word "HELP" on the sole of his left boot, and "ME!" on the bottom of the sole on his right boot!

The wedding service continued for about an hour and a half. At the end, the celebrant stood in front of the couple and said "Ladies and gentlemen. Please let me be the first to introduce to you Mr. and Mrs. Robert Kostik of the House of Hanover!" The audience all arose as one and clapped this announcement. The wedding party processed down the aisle, after stopping to acknowledge the presence of their Emperor.

After the wedding party got past them, Leo and Nick were led back to the private room. Leo said "I guess we can light up now, Nick." They lit their pipes. One of Varten's assistants brought a couple of dispatches to Leo. He read them with great interest. He scribbled a few short lines on one of them and told the assistant to send the reply. "Nick, shortly Varten and his wife, daughter, and new son-in-law will be meeting with us as soon as they finish dealing with the rather long reception line in the Cathedral. After we meet with them we will be returning to the New Pittsburgh Hilton for some important business. We are not going to attend the wedding reception which will allow the bride and groom to have a good time without our presence being a distraction. However, I think the little job we have yet to perform will be of interest to you."

Shortly thereafter, there was a knock on the door. Varten and Martha von Eckman entered with Lynda and Robert Kostik. Robert addressed Leo "My Lord, my wife and I greatly appreciate the honor you have bestowed upon us by attending the wedding. We are very pleased that you could attend."

"Attend" he laughed "I could not possibly have missed the social event of the season, and to see my favorite young lady on this most propitious occasion. Please call me Leo, here in private." He turned to Lynda and said "You know, young lady, that you have always been one of my favorites since you were a little girl. You were always a joy to me and never were overawed in my presence. Nick and I have to get back to the Capital and we will be leaving the planet tomorrow on a military ship that is arriving tonight. We have some unfinished business in New Pittsburgh tonight, so we will be unable to attend the reception."

“Grandfather, oops, I mean Leo, I am thrilled that you could be with us today. Robert, I should explain, that as a child I always called Leo ‘Grandfather’, but as you can see, I am a child no longer.”

“A child, you are no longer, Lynda. I am happy for all of you. Lynda, you have made a fine choice, and I am very happy. I have some gifts for you.” He said. He gave a package to Lynda. “Here is your wedding gift Lynda. I am going to spill the beans to you regarding the gifts. I was quite taken when I found out that you enjoyed pipes and tobacco. In your package is a fine Old Earth pipe. It is a very nice smooth bent pipe that is almost in a hawkbill shape. It was made by a carver named Michael Parks from the Old Earth political subdivision of Canada. According to the research I have done, I have found that this pipe was the first hawkbill shape he carved and was commissioned by a pipe collector named John Seiler. Michael Parks went on to have a fine career carving many a nice pipes. I know that you have a taste for latakia based blends, so there is also two tins of a Hermit Tobacco named ‘Midnight Lace’.”

“Robert, I know that you are not a pipe collector or smoker, but do collect books. In your package is a rare volume from Old Earth entitled ‘The Sherlock Holmes Adventure’ by Regis McCafferty. Mr. McCafferty was a well known author and pipe smoker. I am going to try to convert you, Robert, and keep harmony in the family, so I also have included a rare Old Earth book entitled “The Pipe” by Georges Herment. This book is one that had a real impact on me when I took up the pipe. I hope you will enjoy the book and add it to your collection. I also have included an Il Ceppo horn pipe, manufactured in the Old Earth political subdivision called Italy, and a tin of fine wexel-virginia which is a good tobacco for a new pipe smoker.”

“Very fine gifts, indeed!” said Varten who knew the values of the gifts.”

The bride and groom profusely thanked Leo. “Please give my regards to your guests, but we do have to leave. When you get to Castle Pesaro, please plan to be my guest for an extended stay.”

A short time later, they left to return to the wedding festivities. Leo and Nick departed to the New Pittsburgh Hilton Hotel.

During the ride back to New Pittsburgh, Leo unbuttoned his jacket and lit his pipe. “Nick, I received some interesting information. It turns out that the story told to us by Arthur Bernat was accurate. It seems that his commander had put the crew of the ambulance ship in for awards, but that the paperwork somehow got lost in the bureaucratic mess following the revolt. Tonight we are going to make amends to a group of very brave men!”

They arrived back at the hotel and changed into less formal attire. A short time later, there was a knock at the door. Nick admitted Arthur Bernat into the room.

“Your majesty, I did not expect to see you again so soon. I must admit that I was quite surprised to receive your summons.” he said.

“You were not the only one amazed.” He said. “I want you to dine with Nick and me tonight. I am very pleased to find an honest man, one who expects little in return. You would be surprised at some of the people that I meet.”

Leo, Nick and Arthur left the room and walked to a private room in the hotel. They opened a closed door and entered a private dining room. Inside the room was a group of approximately one hundred military officers in navy and marine uniforms. At the head table was the Governor, and senior officers representing the Empire military services stationed on Capella II. At a table in the center of the room were about ten people in civilian clothes.

Arthur was stunned. Sitting at the table in the middle of the room were the men from medical ambulance ship no. 41, Captain Thomas Jones (ret.), Lt. Winston Newberry the navigator (ret.), Master Sergeant George Wilson (ret.), and Nurse Jim Lamet. He recognized the others at the table as being the men that had been rescued from the drifting hulk.

Leo approached the dais and asked that Thomas Jones and George Wilson join Arthur and him at the head table. Leo addressed the assembled group “Several days ago, I came to your lovely planet to attend the wedding of a dear friend of mine. During the course of my stay, I met a most remarkable man, Mr. Arthur Bernat, who is here at the head table. He proceeded to tell me the story about a daring rescue mission. One exhibiting heroism and daring that has been shamefully overlooked for over forty years.” He then related the story of the rescue mission to the audience. “Six of the men ten men that were rescued are with us tonight. The other four are no longer with us. I would ask that you all give a hand to both the crew of Medical Ambulance Ship No. 41 and the valiant men they rescued that fateful day.”

The audience gave them a standing ovation. The crew and rescued men were awed and began to blush.

He continued “I have come today to honor you men and your accomplishment. This was a true act of courage by all of you. In recognition of your bravery, I am bestowing on you all the Empire Order of the Silver Star.”

Another standing ovation was given.

“With the Empire Order of the Silver Star goes a small lifetime pension, which will be backdated to the day of the rescue. This is a small token of my thanks. Let’s all enjoy the fine repast which has been prepared.”

Leo took his seat at the head table sitting between Arthur Bernat and Captain Jones. He could see that Arthur Bernat was quite emotional over the event and speechless. Finally he addressed Leo “Your majesty, I am quite overwhelmed. In my wildest fantasies I never expected this result from my story to you yesterday. I just never thought that with all you worry about, my little tale would have such an impact on you. I honestly thought it would have been forgotten once I left you.”

“Arthur, as I said, your pure honesty impressed me very much. When needed, I can get the Empire administration to move. Sometimes it moves very slowly, sometimes when I kick it very fast. Let me assure you, I gave it one heck of a swift kick in its behind! All of you performed a valiant act of service to the Empire, one that should be rewarded and not forgotten. A message that will go out tonight regarding my concept of loyalty and bravery to all of the people on which I depend.”

Arthur said “This is all way beyond me, but thanks just the same.”

After dinner there was an open bar, cigars and pipe tobacco was placed out for those that wanted it. There was many a war stories told which sometimes get a little larger than life the older one get. The celebration went well into the night. Leo and Nick retired to the Emperor Suite about midnight.

-7-

Leo and Nick were ending the night with cognac and pipes while lounging in two large comfortable chairs. “Tomorrow we embark for our return to Castle Pesaro” Leo remarked. “A very good trip we had indeed. We attended a remarkable wedding of the daughter of a good friend and had the opportunity to correct a wrong. We met a scarcity in our age, an honest man.”

“Not only that.” Nick responded. “We actually picked up some new pipes and tobacco and met one remarkable tobacconist. Too bad that a good tobacconist is a rare thing these days. I wonder if we could talk him into moving to Castle Pesaro?”

“I doubt it Nick, but we can always have him ship some of his blends to us. By the way, Nick, did you finally decide what to do with the “Secret Agent Girl” paperback you were going to send to Lu Jo up?”

“You did suggest that I send it to Lu Jo. I think it is a good idea, but who said it was coming from me? I am going to send it to her as a gift from you!” Nick said with a grin.

-END-