

Introduction:

This is the fictional epilog I wrote for the last newsletter/publication when we shut down the directed writing club I had managed for about 7 years. It was fairly personal so I wrote it in first person instead of third person.

The fiction was aboard a starship in the Trek genre with a continuous fictional storyline, but authors were not limited to the main theme. After the equivalent of about seven novels, I was pretty burned out. The fiction was intermixed fragments by multiple authors who retain copyright. It cannot be published.



"Fading Like A Rose"

SciFiOne, 1998

The ship feels dead.

I can hear the soft swish of my feet on the carpet as I walk down the corridor. Only the dim maintenance lighting illuminates my way, showing me the dark empty quarters and offices. As I pass through one of the many the small lounges that dot the intersections, I can hear my footfalls echo lightly from the walls. None of this would have been heard when the ship was alive.

When it was alive, the small sound of the air circulation would have been enough to cover the noises. And usually, the air could not be heard over the noise of the engines. Now the anti-matter chambers are empty, and the reaction chambers silent. The warp engines and impulse engines are off. Even the fusion reactors have been shut down. They may not have been loud, but they were always there in the background masking the many other small sounds. But the sound that is most lacking is the voices.

As I enter the silent tomb-like central promenade, I stop and look around. The once vibrant holographic ceiling and walls are a silent, dark, dead gray. The shops and clubs are empty, doors gaping open on black caverns. A few overturned chairs litter the open areas and the garden is dead. I can remember when it was full of people and voices - the voices of the crew talking, crying, lecturing, singing, laughing, and occasionally - screaming.

There used to be a lot of talking and laughing, it was a happy ship. The screaming only came in the worst battles, and those were rare. But even after the worst damage, the ship was still alive. Now it has been done in by something far more dangerous than war - time.

Time, with its ally, people, who use time to make new discoveries, better machines, and easier ways to do things. Time, which makes old machines obsolete and not worth using. Some ships are lucky and become the yachts of private individuals or the workhorses of commercial traders. But not this one. It is too big for a yacht and its design too specific for commercial use. It might still become a museum, but there are a lot of old ships around and this one is no better than any of the others.

I start walking again, across the big circular floor of the promenade, past the dry reflecting pool with an abandoned toy duck resting crookedly on the bottom. My heels click on the plaza floor, echoing loudly in the large open space - multiple echoes, scary echoes. Maybe the ship is haunted with ghosts of crew-members that did not want to leave. Maybe they can keep the ship company while it sits here in space awaiting an unknown future.

I set the duck upright and pat it on its head telling it to float proudly if water comes again. On the far side of the big circle, I enter the aft port corridor. Walking quickly now I reach another small lounge on the edge of the saucer and stop - stunned again. I can see the silent warp nacelle - the heart of the ship.

The nacelles were never totally silent and dark when the ship was alive. Now there is nothing emanating from

them at all. The ruby red nose of the Bussard collector is so dark it looks like a gaping black mouth. The blue glow of the warp field generators is gone leaving only the gray grid. I can't even see the running lights from this position. If there was no light coming from the nearby planet and station, the scorched off-white hull of the ship might not be visible.

I check the self-contained 100-year generator in the corner of the lounge out of habit. It and others are silently making just enough power to keep the maintenance lights, radio beacon, running lights, and a few other less essential items going. The captain insisted on them even though he knew it was over. But it's not quite over for me. I have one last thing to do.

I take the small box out of my pocket and savor it for a minute. The metal is old and the paint has been worn off. Only the raised detailing survives. I pop open the lid, revealing the old key nestled in the rich burgundy velvet I lined the box with. The key is very old. Its almost worn lettering is supposed to be the name of an old ground car manufacturer. I don't know. I do know it is centuries old and it was for a vehicle - which is why I chose it.

On the wall between two of the windows is the keyhole - the only keyhole on the ship. All of my ships have one somewhere, never the same place twice. I can see that this one has been touched by many of the crew, wondering what it does. It doesn't do anything physical, but it is important to me. I take one last slow look around and then quickly insert the key. With a wink at the stars, I turn the key from ON to OFF.

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