

Traditions (With Apologies to Tevye)

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Traditions (With Apologies to Tevye)

by [B_Radley](#)

Summary

Two young women discuss the past and future.

Notes

Author's Note: This was born out of something someone said on a discussion thread on the Discord server. The fact that there are more than just Earth naval traditions and cultures to choose from in Starfleet.

My look at ranks, traditions, and the likes might be a bit different from even canon, but I was trying to look at it from the standpoint of a futuristic, even more diverse culture, but with Earth having a great deal of outsized influence.

I think I'm walking that fine line between discarding canon and tradition, while hopefully giving a different take on this. I don't think that I'm necessarily going against canon (hell, sometimes canon goes against canon), but creating something hopefully canon-adjacent, as I always strive to.

In addition to showing new insight into a couple of my characters as well.

Hope y'all enjoy.

Decker Sinclair walks into the large living room of the house. She sets down her backpack and pulls off her service dress coat. She breathes in the warm air that the small plasma fire gives off, along with the woodsmoke smell—if not the carcinogens—built into the mechanism. Her eyes fall on the young half-Deltan seated on the couch in front of the warmth.

Her brow is furrowed under the mop of pewter-colored hair combed up off of the sides of her head. Decker grins as she sees a tooth worrying her full bottom lip. Her eyebrows rise as she realizes that even in the slight chill in the air of early fall in Napa Valley, Kitana is clad only in the bottom portion of the standard Deltan loungewear.

Which is to say, not much. Kit's Threads—what some would call pheromones—seem to be in 'standby' mode, running at a low burble. Just enough to warm Decker, along with the fireplace.

Decker removes her tunic, leaving her in the command-white turtleneck and trousers. She gently toes off her boots and pads around the couch.

"Don't even think about it, Princess," Kitana says, not even looking up from her PADD. "I can feel where your mind is a light-year away." A smile does quirk one side of those lips up, the side that Decker can see.

"I think your high-speed Deltan horny-sensor is malfunctioning," Decker says, looking away. She sits next to the younger woman on the couch. Kitana gazes at her for a moment, something in her eyes. She turns back to her PADD.

"I just know you Starfleet types. Especially you Border Dogs." The quirk of the lips becomes a full-blown smirk. "A girl or boy or whatever gender strikes your fancy in every port."

"You must be thinking about your mom-to-be," Decker snarks. She drops her hand and runs her fingers back and forth over a specific spot on Kit's ribcage.

Kit yelps, then tries to stifle the unbridled giggles. She reaches for Decker's feet, the only familiar spot on her that she has discovered that isn't covered except for socks. Decker easily wards her off.

"I really don't have time for this," Kit says when Decker has shown mercy on her. She pulls over a thicker shawl and drops it over her head, draping it on her shoulders. "There. That'll take all of the distraction away from you, twit."

"Not hardly," Decker says dryly. She picks up the PADD from the floor.

Her eyebrows rise as she sees the subject matter.

STARFLEET ACADEMY ENTRANCE EXAM STUDY GUIDE.

Decker smiles as Kit looks away, a sheepish look on her slightly elfin features.

She hands the PADD back. "How long have you got?"

"I'm taking it in December," Kit replies. "I want to make sure I ace it."

Decker smiles. "You'll do great. You've already got two years of college under your belt. That's more than a lot of cadets—even those on the officer track—have." She looks away. "More than I had."

She feels Kit's sculpted eyebrows rise. "You come from a Starfleet family, right?"

"Yep. From even before the Federation. There was a Decker with Jonathan Archer on the old NX-01 of Earth's Starfleet." She looks down. "He died in the Delphic Expanse. A great-many times removed-uncle."

Kit takes her hand and squeezes it. "You must be proud of the tradition," she says.

Decker nods. "A lot to live up to. Especially when you've got a mom who has sort of broken with the tradition."

Out of the corner of her eye, she sees Kit's brows now knit together. "How so? I met both of them. They're both in Starfleet."

Decker grins. "Yeah. My birth mother and her ex-wife, an MD. Everybody else in the line has been a pilot and a starship commander. Mom is an engineer, though." She stops, then gets up and moves over to where she'd discarded her own PADD. She comes back and sits, pulling up a particular holo.

Kit leans over and looks at the screen. An old-fashioned two-d photo is there, of a human male standing next what looks like an old atmospheric craft—a very fast one, it looks like. The man is of medium height, with curly graying-black hair and a thick black mustache. Decker touches his face, smiling at the devil-may-care-grin on his face. He is clad in a flight suit, holding a helmet with an oxygen mask attached.

"Who is this?"

"My great-great-a shitload of times removed-grandfather," Decker says. "Harry Decker. A test pilot and an early astronaut at NASA—the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. One of the grandparent organizations of Starfleet. The furthest connection back in my family to space."

Kit gazes at the photo. "He's a handsome devil," she says. "Probably broke a lot of hearts."

"A few. Including his dad's."

Kit's eyebrow gets a workout again. "How so?"

"His dad was a fighter pilot in World War II, in the European theater, in the US Air Force. Harry rebelled and joined the US Navy as a pilot. Flew F-8 Crusaders in the Vietnam conflict. The last of the gunfighters."

Kit rolls her eyes, not fully understanding. "Sometimes it's good to have just one organization."

"Yeah," Decker agrees, laughing softly. "Don't even get me started on the family stories about the marines in the woodpile. It was almost as bad as the 'engineers vs. jet-jockeys talk.'"

Kit wisely decides not to ask. Decker touches the grinning face. "He kind of looks a lot like my mom's cousin Harry. He broke tradition, too. He's a security specialist, a Warrant Officer- Investigator. Never became an officer."

She notices that Kit looks away at that. Decker wonders whether she should ask, as she sees that Kit wants to say something. She has a sneaking suspicion of what it might be.

It is her turn to worry her lip with her tooth as she tries to figure out whether she should broach it herself.

She dives in.

"You're studying the traditions that have helped formed Starfleet's ranks," she starts. "You're wondering if you should go for the officer track."

Kit looks up at her, startled. Her hazel-blue eyes narrow at Decker. Decker smiles what she hopes is a reassuring smile, then takes Kit's right hand between both of hers. She starts to massage the hand gently. Kit relaxes, her eyes losing the fire that she was projecting from her eyes.

“Yeah,” she says simply. Decker waits, letting her talk in her own time, now that Decker has dropped the turd in the punchbowl.

An expression she had heard from her older cousin.

Kit reaches over and takes a sip from the mug on the table in front of her, making a face at its temperature or its taste; Decker can't tell.

“I can't decide if I want the responsibility of being an officer,” she says. “I'd be comfortable just being told what to do, focusing on the technical training given to enlisted crew members.” She looks Decker in the eye. “I know. I'm using the wrong terminology.”

Decker smiles. “A little bit. We're much more egalitarian than those grandparent organizations, and with a slightly different overall mission than strictly military, though that is a significant part of it. I think it comes from a recognition that even those who aren't officers today—the technicians, who don't necessarily have as broad of knowledge of the philosophy behind a discipline as a specialist or an officer—probably have as much training and skill as those early astronauts, who as pilots, were all officers if they came from a military organization.”

Kit settles in, putting the PADD down. She rests her head on Decker's shoulder, her eyes focused on her. Decker sincerely hopes that what she tells her doesn't go against what's in that damned study guide.

“Everybody starts in Starfleet Academy. Whether they're an officer-track or a crewmember-track, or they haven't decided, they go through the same basic training the first summer term, learning how to be in Starfleet. For the first year, it's almost identical training, learning about serving and surviving in space, though officer candidates also start their academic degrees then, some of their core classes. Everybody has to pass the same practical proficiency tests, either to advance to the next class, or graduate and move out to the fleet, to figure out what their technical specialty might be. Or they can stay in and complete more technical training, to the third year as higher-ranking technicians, or even the fourth to become instant warrant officers, or non-degreed specialists.”

Kit nods. “The ones that come out after that first year. Those are yeomen,” she says, touching the discarded PADD.

“Yeah. They have double-duty. They do a lot of administrative work, as well as some, well, basic work, as they decide what tech specialty they might want. They rotate among the departments, to see what might interest them. They're constantly being tested for the aptitude. If they decide on one, they start on-the-job-training for that. Once they've demonstrated the skill level, they become technicians. Though certain technical fields might call them something else. Like security ‘operators’.”

“Are they non-commissioned officers, yet?” Kit asks.

“They are, but at a low-level. They may have some supervision over the non-rated, but they're concentrating on their skill level.” She smiles. “Some people still call them by the title ‘petty officer’, the old naval term. The actual descriptive title is ‘Advanced Crewmember,’ but that's a mouthful.”

Kit is thoughtful for a moment.

“As they move through the grades, they do take on more and more responsibility as leaders. A first-class is usually the leading technician; the three grades of Chief have even more supervisory and leadership duties.” Decker smiles sheepishly. “They're known as the backbone of the service. Woe to any officer who doesn't listen to a chief. It usually won't go well for them because things tend to go tits-up when you don't.”

“You've learned from experience?”

“No. Just had that shoved into my brain from various Deckers. Especially the one who isn't an officer and spent a great deal of time as a chief.” She looks down. “I've come close though. With an engineering warrant on the *Comstock*. He usually finds a way to put me and Shiv in our places. Mostly respectfully.”

“Shiv?”

“My captain for a brief time, when I was on the *Comstock*, our group Leader corvette. Lieutenant Siobhan Lincolnton.”

“So, the term ‘yeoman’ is a bit different from tradition,” Kit observes.

Decker smiles tightly. “Depends on what tradition you're talking about.” She grows thoughtful for a moment. “I'm about to demonstrate to you how much of a military history and traditions nerd I am.”

Kit laughs. “I love nerds.”

Decker feels her stomach twist and other parts of her give a jolt at those words. Not just the one centered in her chest.

She notices that Kit is watching her like she is hanging onto every word. She takes a deep breath, hoping she can earn that scrutiny of her words. “Early on in Starfleet's history, even as near as Kirk's time, there was an acknowledgement that too much of Starfleet's heraldry and history—especially in ship names—was human-and Earth-centric. Hell, even the all-Vulcan starship was called the *Intrepid*, after an Earth aircraft-carrier, a warship, as well as the concept of intrepidity. That might have been because the Vulcan word for that concept was nigh unto unpronounceable to non-Vulcans. But still, it was an issue. We're doing better. We've got more ship names from other worlds, and we did adopt an Andorian word for that rank of apprentice.”

Kit smiles. “Yeah. I've looked up the etymology of the English word. The original title was for anyone who owned land, but wasn't quite the ‘landed gentry,’” she says.

Decker matches her smile, surprise flowing through her. “I didn't know that. I just know the old-time naval uses for it. In the British navy, a yeoman was a petty officer responsible for various parts or systems of the ship. The ‘yeoman of the powder room’, the ‘yeoman of the sheets’ and such. Later, ‘the yeoman of signals’ oversaw all of the signaling capabilities, and later added oversight of even electronic communications,

not just flags and lamps.”

“And the Andorian?” Kit asks.

“That’s where it becomes what it is for us today, in Starfleet. It comes from a junior title in the old Imperial Guard. A yeömetza is the Andorian word for ‘one who hasn’t found their path’.”

“An apprentice,” Kit says.

“Exactly. That’s why yeoman is the Federation Standard word for an apprentice in Starfleet. The Andorians acknowledge and accept the homage to their contributions.”

“And what about the old usage? The US Navy one of an administrative assistant?”

“With so much automation, we don’t often need the administrative function as much. It gives the yeoman experience in things other than a technical specialty—of course they learn a bit about custodial duties, as well—but most departments have the administrative functions as collateral duties.” She grins. “Sometimes those with those collateral duties, are called ‘Senior Yeomen, 1st, 2nd, or 3rd class’, unless they’re chiefs or above, then they’re referred to as Chief Yeomen and such. Those are also the terms for anyone who prefers the administrative to the technical aspects of their apprenticeships and ‘strike’ for those jobs.”

Kit is silent for a moment, absorbing what Decker has said. Finally, she says, “There’s a lot of upward mobility in Starfleet. Even if you don’t choose to be an officer.”

Decker nods with some enthusiasm. “Yep. Even if you might not succeed initially in graduating as a Midshipman or an Ensign, if you’re in the top 1% of the officer-candidate graduating class, you can still work your way up to it. Distance learning for the degree work, as well as advancing in the technical specialty, can get people there. Or you can change track in the Academy itself.”

“What does an academic degree give an officer?” Kit asks.

“It’s harder to quantify, since educational standards in the Federation are so high. But an academic degree does concentrate more on critical thinking skills. Something that technical training may not give you, at least initially. In addition to the academic part, officer candidates also focus on leadership. The ranking in the class is an average of the academic grade-point-average, the technical skill rating, and the leadership rating. Everyone is constantly being tested and rated, whatever program you’re in.”

“And what about those who didn’t attend the Academy, but have professional degrees already?”

“They can be direct commissioned, but they still have to pass the basic year and some technical training. But I’ve also met many a technician or yeoman who have postgraduate degrees, who wanted new experiences or are starting over, not wanting to be officers, just to serve the Federation while learning something new, or experiencing something different. There’s room in Starfleet for them, too.”

She stops and looks away, suddenly not wanting to talk about this much more, especially after her own mention of class rankings.

She looks up and sees nothing but understanding in Kit’s eyes. “We don’t have to go any further. I can feel a little bit of what you’re feeling. I will just remind you that you’re twenty years old and in command of a Federation light scout, if you doubt your abilities because of a fucking class ranking.”

Decker nods after a moment of absorbing Kit’s vehemence. “I was just outside the top one percent of my class, Kit,” she says quietly. “I rated 5.0 on leadership. The highest you can get. I was cadet captain, in charge of the entire Brigade—both of the Officer Candidate Regiment and the Crew Regiment. But I was only a 3.3 out of 4.0 for my degree work—Physics with a minor in Psychology—and 2.7 out of 3 for the technical skill rating. My perfectly respectable 3.7 average—3.66 without rounding up—still wasn’t enough for the one percent. The lowest of the one percent was a 3.75 average. I guess we had a bunch of fucking geniuses that year, who could walk and chew gum at the same time.”

Kit doesn’t exactly show any sign of knowing that ancient earth idiom, but doesn’t ask for clarification. “So you have to spend a year as a Midshipman. Being guided a bit more to an officer’s rank.”

“Yeah. Still will probably have to, if and when they find someone other than a brevet to be the captain of *Aerfen*,” she says. She looks at Kit. “But I don’t regret anything. Lot of Midshipman go to assignments like the Border Patrol or Rescue Service. Sometimes even to independent Security Detachments.” She exhales. “I’m learning a helluva lot more than I would on a starship, exploring the galaxy or patrolling. I’m getting so many experiences, because in the Border Dogs, there’s a helluva lot of challenging, *different* experiences to be had, for someone of my rank.”

Like being XO in a battle an hour after you report to your first posting, or commanding a scout a few weeks after that first posting, Decker thinks.

“So will you stay in the Border Dogs?” Kit asks.

Decker exhales. “I know what I eventually want to do,” she finally replies. “But I’m not thinking too much on that. The future will unfold as it does.” She stops and gazes into Kit’s eyes. “Have I helped you at all?”

“I think so. I’m still not sure if I want to make Starfleet my life’s career. I have family in service to *dafGon tu Omri*. I have to decide what I want to do.”

Decker smiles at the *Deltos* words. Words that translated as ‘the Known World of Joy.’

Her captain’s and Kit’s homeworld, known as Delta IV to most of the Federation.

“Nobody says that even if you choose the officer’s route, that you have to spend the rest of your life in Starfleet. Only five years, really, after the Academy.” She reaches over and kisses Kit’s cheek. “There are also so many examples of current leadership in Starfleet who started as yeomen, after either choosing a different path, or not initially succeeding on the officer track. We call them ‘mustangs.’ The woman who may someday be the head Border Dog, who is our current division commander, started out like that. She rose to chief pretty quickly, then got a field commission and finished the academic course work. You met her at the ceremony. Rear Admiral Hunter.”

Decker’s eyes glance away. “My friend Shiv. She didn’t start out on the officer’s track. Was just going to learn a skill, serve a bit, then get out. A senior cadet convinced her to try the academic track after her first couple of years of technical training. Took her an extra year, but she graduated with academic honors and a commission.”

Kit smiles at her. “Can I contact you if I have any questions?”

Decker moves over and kisses her again, this time on the lips. “Anytime,” she says.

Chandra walks into the living room. The fire has been lowered in the darkness. Her eyes fall on the two figures lying on the couch.

Kit lies flat on the couch, with Decker’s back against her front. She notices that both are mostly fully dressed—Decker is in her uniform, except for her tunic and boots and Kit wears a shawl.

Both of their faces are peaceful in their sleep. Kit snores lightly against Decker’s ear.

Chandra lets a few tears form in her eyes, but is careful to keep her Threads in check. She doesn’t want to overwhelm the entire household, even with these emotions that she feels as she looks tenderly at the two young women.

Both appearing comfortable with their lives, even with the unknowns of the future.

She turns and moves towards the room assigned to Decker, leaving them both to their dreams.

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