

Star Trek: Sutherland The Masks we Wear

By David Falkayn

"Come in Commander Shelby!" Admiral J.P. Hanson smiled as his petite blonde aide entered bearing two cups of steaming hot coffee. "Ah!" The admiral exclaimed as he gratefully took one of the cups from his aide's hands and took a sip, "That hits the spot."

"Yes, sir." Lieutenant Commander Elizabeth Shelby replied, taking a sip of her own coffee as she sat down at her usual chair on the opposite side of the admiral's desk. Setting her cup down, the youthful aide presented a padd, "Here's the latest on our preparations against the Borg."

Waving his hand at the proffered padd, Admiral Hanson instead requested, "I've already read it. I want to know your take on the situation."

"We're just not ready, sir." The young aide answered honestly. "We're having teething problems with the *Defiant*..."

"What sort of problems?" The admiral asked, leaning forward as he took another sip of coffee.

"To be brutally frank..." Shelby replied, "...it's too much of a hot-rod. One of the people on the design bureau..." Liz chuckled, "...is into late 20th century 'muscle-cars.' He said that the *Defiant* was like a taking a 455 cubic inch V8 engine from an Olds 442 engine and dropping it into a Pontiac Firebird. While I didn't understand what he was talking about—I did pick up on his meaning. Too much power in too small a frame."

"I see..." the admiral nodded his head as he digested the information he had just received. "What about offensive and defensive counters to the Borg?"

Shaking her head, Liz glumly responded, "We're at least eighteen months away from anything useful."

"Well..." Admiral Hanson commented as he brushed back his unruly hair,

"When the *Enterprise* encountered the Borg, they were seven thousand light years away. That should give us enough time."

"Assuming the Borg travel through warp at or just slightly faster than we do..." Lieutenant Commander Shelby observed, "...then we should have everything ready. But...if they are able to travel at a significantly faster speed than we are capable of..."

"Then we're screwed." The admiral agreed, nodding his head. His lips turning up into a smile as he regarded his attractive aide, Admiral Hanson announced in a slightly teasing voice, "I have a little surprise for you, Commander." Leaning forward, the admiral declared in a conspiratorial voice, "Commander Riker has been offered command of the *Melbourne*."

Her heart skipping a beat as the admiral spoke, Liz hung on to every word, "That means that Captain Picard will be looking for a new first officer and I'll be putting your name up for consideration. Now..." the admiral admonished in a fatherly voice, "...I can't guarantee you'll get the position, but I think it's safe to say that you have the inside track, so I think it'd be all right for you to go out and celebrate this weekend."

"Thank you, sir." Liz replied as she rose from her seat, "I really appreciate this."

Waving off his aide's thanks, Hanson declared, "You've more than earned it, Liz. So..." the admiral said as he eyed the padds on his desk, "...after we get done with all this work, how do you intend to wind down?"

Flashing a wicked grin, the youthful lieutenant commander replied, "I was thinking about inviting a few friends over for some poker."

"Bid's to you Liz, darling." An attractive dark haired man stripped down to all but his briefs remarked as Elizabeth Shelby, wearing only a bra and panties glanced first at her cards and then at the others in various states of dishabille seated at the table with her. "Hmmm..." the almost naked blonde leered as she considered her options. I'll bet my bra and call—what you got, Hector?"

Laughing as Hector revealed three jacks, taking the pot, Liz, after turning over her hole card to reveal a pair of queens, slipped out of her bra as the other man and woman at the table removed the last bits of their clothing, leaving them completely naked. "All right, Hector, it's just the two of us. The name of

the game is five-card draw.” She announced as she dealt out the cards, nothing wild and the bet is our bottoms.” Dealing out the last cards, Liz looked at her hand, a blank look on her face as she saw the two kings, ace of clubs, five of hearts, and two of diamonds in her hand. “How many cards?” She asked sweetly.

“One.” Hector responded with a grin.

“Okay.” Liz replied as she dealt out a single card for her opponent, “And dealer will take two.” Maintaining her stone face as she saw that she had drawn another king and the ace of diamonds, Liz remarked in a teasing voice, “Let’s see what you’ve got.”

“Ten high straight.” Hector replied triumphantly only to fall silent at the sight of Liz’s smug grin.

“Good, but not quite good enough.” Liz declared triumphantly as she laid her cards on the table. “Full house.”

Licking her lips as Hector stripped off his briefs, Liz’s eyes fell to the plush living room carpet. Standing up, the petite blonde shimmied out of her panties as she leered at her fellow card players. “Time to collect my winnings. Now...” she said in a sultry voice as she gazed lasciviously on the forms of the two men and one woman in the room with her, “...who gets to do me first? Eeeny..meeny...miney...mo...”

Chuckling as his aide walked into his office, still bleary eyed from the night before, Admiral Hanson remarked in a grim tone, “Must have been some card game last night, Commander. Have a seat—you look like you could use it. This time, I’ll get the coffee.” Walking over to the replicator, the admiral placed an order for two cups of coffee, black for him and with cream for the blonde sitting in her usual place on the other side of his desk. Returning with the coffee, J. P. handed Shelby’s cup to her and then walked around to his seat. Sitting down, he announced, the grim voice now accentuated by a strong note of worry and concern, “Get packed, you and I are taking a trip on the *Melbourne*. We leave as soon as possible.”

“What’s wrong, sir?” Shelby asked in a soft voice, her senses now suddenly alert as she saw the fretful look on the admiral’s face.

“We’re rendezvousing with the *Enterprise*. Picard received a distress call from Jouret IV.”

Whistling softly, Liz remarked, "That's a long way away."

Nodding his head, Hanson continued, "Yeah...we have a colony there—New Providence. Or rather..." he continued, his voice taking on a decidedly more somber timber, "...we did have a colony there."

"The Borg?" Shelby asked as a cold chill ran down her spine.

"The Borg." Hanson dourly responded. "The entire colony of New Providence was destroyed. There was nothing left but a giant crater. It was like they came in and scooped it out."

"Just like the *Enterprise's* report on what happened with J-25." Shelby replied as her mind at once began to analyze the situation. "If it is the Borg...then there should be magnetic residue traces..."

"That's one of the reasons why we're going." J. P. declared, "I want you there to provide any help and assistance you can give."

"And the other reason?" Liz asked as she sipped her coffee.

"I want Picard to get to know you and I want you to get to know Picard and the *Enterprise*." The Admiral said, explaining, "If you're going to be Jean-Luc's new first officer—assuming we can get Riker to move on and sit in the big seat, that is, then you'll each need to know each other's strengths and weaknesses and you'll need to know the people you'll be serving with."

"Understood, Sir." Commander Shelby replied as she rose from her chair, "Then I better get going."

"Ah...Commander Shelby!" Admiral Hanson exclaimed, greeting his aide with a wide grin, "I'm just about to return to the *Melbourne*. Care to walk to the transporter room with me?"

"Love to, sir." The lovely blonde agreed as she fell in beside the admiral.

"So, Commander...what do you think of your new assignment?"

"It's everything I hoped it would be." Liz enthusiastically replied. "It's an honor to serve under Captain Picard and I just finished meeting with Mr. La

Forge, Mr. Worf, Commander Data, and Ensign Crusher and they all impress me as being most capable.”

“And Commander Riker?” J. P. inquired leadingly.

“I’ll be stepping into some very big shoes, sir.” Shelby diplomatically replied as the pair drew nearer the transporter room.

Nodding his head in approval at his aide’s tactful answer as they entered the transporter room to be greeted by Chief O’Brien, Admiral Hanson declared, “I know you’re up to the task, Commander. Good luck and I’ll see you later.” Stepping up on the transporter pad, Hanson ordered, “One to beam back to the *Melbourne*.”

Suppressing a grin as Lieutenant Commander Data made his bid, Liz’s mind briefly flashed back to her last poker game before leaving Earth. Unfortunately—or rather fortunately—Liz amended as her eyes took in the other players at the table, all the participants in this game would be playing for tonight was chips. No clothes would be taken off this time and there would be no post-game orgy. In a way, Liz thought idly to herself, the game and its house rules perfectly represented the personality and attitude of the first officer who was sitting across from her at the table with what appeared to be a confident smirk on his face. They were playing for chips, but there was nothing to risk to the players losing those chips—no latinum on the line, no favors—sexual or otherwise, not even the risk of possible humiliation at having to take off a piece of clothing in front of the other players. The game was perfectly safe—no real winners—no real losers. Comfortable, gentle, and in the end, harmless, even if you lost all your chips, you weren’t out of the game—you could always replicate more. Life, unfortunately, rarely gives you second chances, Liz thought to herself as Data chided Ensign Crusher very much as a schoolmarm would a misbehaving student when the young Acting Ensign had the temerity to ask the android whether he had another king in the hole.

As the bidding went around, Liz, her face still a stony mask, noted how quickly the others folded before Riker’s smug facade of self-assuredness and his cocky hundred raise, until finally even young Wesley, holding three kings, turned down his cards before the first officer’s apparent straight flush, conceding the hand. Eyeing the two pair in her hand, Liz glanced up to once again see a self-satisfied smirk on Riker’s face. That was when the petite

blonde knew that he didn't have anything. The first officer was too confident—too cocksure. Well, Shelby thought, since there's no real risk anyway, let's see if I can knock that stupid grin off his face. Looking up from her cards and smiling sweetly, Liz declared, "Well, I only have two pair, but I've just got to see your hole card. Call."

Her lips turning up into a triumphant grin as Riker turned his hole card over to reveal a deuce of spades, Shelby raking in her chips, felt confirmed in her initial appraisal of the *Enterprise* first officer. *Just as I thought, all hat and no cattle.*

Arriving at the transporter room early, Liz found that the only one there other than Chief O'Brien was Lieutenant Commander Data. Not wanting to waste any time and anxious both to get started and to see whether her theory about a possible Borg footprint would hold up or not, Shelby made her decision. "Good morning, Mr. Data. Why don't we beam on down and get started?"

"Should we not wait for Commander Riker and Lieutenant La Forge?" The android inquired, partly curious as to why the new officer did not want to wait for the rest of the team.

"If we start now, we would save a great deal of valuable time." Liz explained, "We should be able to wrap up a great deal of the work so that when Commander Riker joins us we can provide him at least a preliminary report."

Nodding his head, Data replied, "I see the logic of your statement."

Turning her attention to the transporter chief as the pair took their places on the transporter pads, Liz commanded, "Two to beam down, Chief."

"Aye, sir." Chief O'Brien acknowledged, a raised eyebrow the only outward clue given by the chief as to what he felt would be the *Enterprise's* first officer's likely reaction to Shelby's early departure.

Still steaming after Riker's rebuke on the surface of Jouret IV, Liz Shelby strode down the corridor towards engineering and her anticipated meeting with the others assigned by Captain Picard to assist her in developing countermeasures to the Borg. "Lead-bottomed paper pushing bureaucrat!" Liz muttered under her breath, "Fat-headed and fat-assed!" Plastering a smile on her face as the door slid open to reveal her coworkers, Liz announced in as confident a voice as she could muster, "I hope everyone who needs to has gone to the bathroom because we've got a long day ahead of us. All right...let's get started. Mr. La Forge? Why don't you start things off. You mentioned something about adjusting the *Enterprise's* shield frequencies?"

"Yes, Commander." The chief engineer replied as he laid out his theories.

The hours flew as everyone in the group bounced ideas off each other only to have someone else shoot them down until Commander Riker finally put a halt to their work, ordering everyone, including Liz and Lieutenant Commander Data, back to their quarters for rest. Again muttering curses and insults aimed at the first officer under her breath as she stalked down the corridor following Riker's refusal to let her continue working with just Data, Lieutenant Commander Shelby happened on the Ten-Forward lounge. "Just what I need." The hedonistic blonde whispered to herself, "A quick drink or three—that is if Nanny Riker doesn't catch me in there. Oh well...what can he do? Ground me?"

Soon after she took her seat at one of the stools lining the bar, Liz was met by a dark-skinned woman wearing a flowing red dress and matching outlandishly high red hat. "Hello." The woman said in a pleasant voice, "What can I get you."

"Mimosa, please." Liz answered back. Moments later, the woman returned with her drink. Taking a sip, the blonde lieutenant commander made a face as she commented, "Synthecol."

"Oh." The bartender responded with a smile, "I think I see what you need." Stooping down, the bartender rose again with a bottle of champagne in her hands. A few seconds later, she had mixed the champagne in a champagne flute with what looked like fresh squeezed orange juice. "Here. Try this."

Taking a sip of the new drink, Liz's lips turned up into a wide grin. "Thanks. I needed that."

"It must be difficult." The bartender observed, "Coming to a new ship and

having to adjust to everything...and everyone.”

“You have no idea.” Liz sighed.

“You might be surprised.” The bartender smiled back.

“He doesn’t have a clue...” Shelby, just happy to have someone to talk to, complained, “...he doesn’t realize that we don’t have the time to waste. The Borg are going to catch us with our panties down if we don’t move and move quickly. And all he wants me to do is get some sleep!”

“Hmmm...” The bartender responded, “I know you probably don’t want to hear this now, but, Commander Riker just might have a point. You’re geared up and tense, that can make it harder to think creatively, and I have a feeling that’s what you do best.”

Sighing, Liz finished her drink. “Maybe you’re right.” The headstrong blonde reluctantly conceded. “All right, I’ll hit the sack right after I finish this.”

“Great.” The bartender exclaimed with a warm smile, adding encouragingly, “If you ever need to talk—or to have a drink in peace...you know where to come.”

“That arrogant, pompous, fat-assed, lead-bottomed poor excuse for a first officer...” Liz grumbled as Guinan quietly handed Shelby a mimosa with real champagne. “It’s bad enough having to take on the Borg...but to take on your own first officer too? All the moron wants to do is ‘play it safe’. Well...there is no playing it safe where the Borg are concerned. With them you only get one chance.”

Guinan, listened quietly as Liz poured out her disdain and irritation towards the *Enterprise’s* first officer, finally speaking once the topic of conversation turned to the Borg. “You will survive.” The bartender said confidently, her faith in humanity sure. “You will find a way—just as my people did long ago.”

“Your people? Oh!” Liz then thought back to her time on the *Shran* where she worked under an El-Aurian, Pava Lar’ragos. Pava had told her once over several drinks about how the Borg had devastated his homeworld, turning his people into scattered refugees. “You must be an El-Aurian?”

"You know of my people?" The bartender asked, slightly surprised.

"I worked with an El-Aurian a few years ago." Liz responded with a chuckle, her mood improved somewhat as memories of some of her more unforgettable capers with Pava flashed through her mind. "Let's just say that it was an unique experience."

"I see." The bartender responded with a knowing grin, "So...what sort of advice would he have given you if he were talking to you instead of me?"

"He'd have told me to get laid." Liz quipped with a laugh.

Joining in the laughter, the bartender rejoined, "Well...I wouldn't put it quite so bluntly, but perhaps you should do something to release some of the tension..."

Finishing her drink, Liz set her glass down on the table, "Maybe you're right. Thank you..."

"Guinan." The bartender responded with a smile. "Just call me Guinan."

Returning to her quarters, Liz quickly replicated a leather mini-dress. "Guinan's right." Shelby said to herself as she quickly applied some makeup to her face. "I need this. I've been celibate since I left Earth." Slipping the dress into a small carry bag, Shelby strode down the corridor as she considered and rejected possible partners. *Counselor Troi? No...I'm not in the mood for a woman tonight—assuming she'd even be interested. I want a man. Like the old saying goes, 'It don't mean a think if it ain't got that schwing!'* Chuckling under her breath, she continued her reverie as she walked quickly towards her destination. Rejecting both La Forge and Data as not being her type, her thoughts then came to Lieutenant Worf. *No...he looks like the type that has to control the situation and I feel like being on top tonight.* Liz then quickly dismissed her final candidate, the young Ensign Crusher. *No. I don't feel like breaking in a virgin. Besides, his mother would probably have kittens if she ever found out.* "Oh well..." An increasingly horny Shelby sighed as she approached the holodeck door. "Looks like I'm going to have to settle for photonic masturbation tonight. Well..." she quipped as the holodeck door opened, "It's better than nothing."

The disco program was everything her friend Raul said it would be. Liz drank, smoked, and danced a storm until she finally settled on a well-built blonde Viking of a man with a well trimmed beard. After taking the man to a secluded area, Liz almost literally yanked the hologram's pants down as she pushed him down on to the floor. Climbing on top of him, she soon began rocking, her motions matching the beat of the music. "That's it..." she cooed softly as the pressure inside built, her movements became more passionate as the strobe light from the disco ball hanging from the ceiling flashed, creating multiple images and mirages. "That's it!" Her cooing now a whimper as both her motions and the blinking from the strobe grew even more intense. "That's it!!" She moaned as the images from the strobe light flashed and then disappeared as she rocked, the pressure inside her now almost at the breaking point. Just as the dam broke, Liz's eyes looked up at the strobe light. "That's it! That's it!! THAT'S IT!!!" Liz screamed as her body quivered in spasms.

Her breath coming out as shallow gasps, Liz whispered as her body recovered, "That's it. That's the solution. It'll work. The Borg will be so preoccupied that they won't have time to adapt and then we hit them." Picking herself up off the floor, Shelby commanded, "Computer...end program." After changing back into her uniform, a now relaxed Liz Shelby returned to her quarters. Taking off her clothes and slipping into her bed, Liz made a promise to herself to find a nice gift for the *Enterprise's* bartender in return for her good advice.

Unfortunately, the gift to Guinan would have to wait as events quickly cascaded. The battle in the nebula with the Borg cube...the taking of Captain Picard and his transformation into Locutus...the battle of Wolf 359 and the destruction of the fleet...the failure of the deflector dish weapon due to the Borg absorbing Picard's knowledge...Riker and Shelby working together as he reluctantly made her his first officer. Then, Riker took Liz's plan and after modifying it and even...Liz reluctantly admitted to herself...improving upon it. This permitted Data and Worf to board the Borg cube and rescue Picard/Locutus. And then, the denouement as Data implants a command to the cube ordering it to '*Sleep*'.

"Admiral Hanson..." Liz sighed with relief as she saw the balding admiral on her monitor screen, convalescing on a biobed. "I'm glad you survived, sir."

"I almost didn't." The admiral admitted through clenched teeth. "The

Melbourne's science officer and a young ensign literally shoved me into the last escape pod before joining me. The three of us drifted for days hoping that the Borg wouldn't recognize us until a Klingon ship picked us up and brought us back."

"Well, it's good to see you back, sir." Liz said sincerely. "We've got a lot of work ahead of us."

"I know." Hanson replied. Then, his face taking on an apologetic look, the admiral continued, "That's why I have bad news for you. I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask you to wait a while on that first officer's position. I need someone who is a hard charger and who's not afraid to piss people off to get things done. I also need someone who knows the Borg and has ideas on how to deal with them. That someone is you."

"I understand, sir." Shelby replied, nodding her head. "Don't worry, we'll get the fleet up and going again soon."

"I know we will." J. P. smiled, "And don't think I've forgotten you, either, Liz. I'll need you to stay on at Starfleet Tactical for about a year or so—long enough to get us going. After that, I promise you that we'll get you a berth on a good ship—if not a *Galaxy* or a *Nebula*, then perhaps a *Niagara*. After about a year of that, I figure you ought to be ready for your fourth pip."

Surprised and somewhat taken aback at the balding admiral's candid remarks, Shelby remained in stunned silence as Hanson chuckled. "I believe that's the first time I've ever seen you at a loss for words, Commander." His laughter fading away, J. P. declared, "Liz...you showed us all what you could do out there..."

"It wasn't just me, sir." Shelby protested, "Captain Picard...Commander Riker...Mr. Data...Mr. Worf...Ensign Crusher...Mr. La Forge...really everyone on the *Enterprise*...they did everything. I was just along for the ride."

"False modesty doesn't suit you, Liz." Hanson chuckled, clutching his side in pain as he laughed. "I happen to know that while it was your plan..."

"Heavily modified and improved on by Commander Riker..." Liz quickly interjected.

Laughing, the admiral continued, "I was about to say before being interrupted, "I happen to know that while it was your plan, along with

Commander Riker's additions, that rescued Picard, I also happen to know that it was your continued pressure on Riker that pushed him—that motivated him and got him going. You got under his skin like nothing or no one else could. You gave him something that he hasn't had in a long time and that he desperately needed—competition and a good swift kick in his complacency. I'm afraid that it didn't do any good though..." Hanson shook his head dejectedly, "Riker still refuses a command of his own. I don't think we'll be pulling out the big chair for him any time in the near future. Let that be a warning to you, Commander. Remember, who dares wins. Also, I've been reading about how good a job you did with the others in your group. You kept them focused and directed and got the job done. You've got what it takes to be a good captain someday and, Liz, that someday is going to come sooner rather than later. Better be ready for it when it comes.

The End