

The Unusual Visitor

a short story by

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"Hey, Steve, what's that on the scope?" Steve turned to look. "Don't know Tess," came his reply. He began to fiddle with the controls, trying to make the image clearer. "Ah, that's better," Tess said, leaning over his shoulder. "Looks like a ship," Steve said half heartedly. "It's a bit small for a ship isn't it?" She replied, squinting at the screen trying to bring it more into focus. Steve smiled at the face she was pulling. Tess caught sight of him looking out of the corner of her eye and burst out laughing. "Stop it!" She said through the giggles. Steve began to laugh with her, she had an infectious laugh so he couldn't help it. It took several seconds for composure to return, but when it did, the screen was much clearer, and the object was in focus. "Wow!" Steve exclaimed, "it's an escape pod... We'd better bring it in." Tess just nodded and set about firing up the tractor beam. "It's moving quite fast Steve, we might miss it." Tess worked the controls feverishly until the beam was armed. "Firing." She said, hitting the button. The familiar hum hit their ears as the beam fired and locked onto the pod. "Got a lock." Tess reported. "Good," Steve said, "pull it in to bay 5." Tess carried out her orders and soon the pod was safely aboard.

It took them five minutes to walk from the bridge to bay 5, so when they arrived, the bay was already pressurised. "Ready?" Steve asked with his hand poised near the palm mechanism. "Yes." She nodded. Steve placed his hand on the pad and the door opened.

On entering the bay, it struck them just how small the pod was. Barely ten feet by four. Tess went one way round it and Steve the other. They met at the far end looking puzzled. "No door," Tess said. Steve shrugged his shoulders. Tess gave the pod a tap with a metal canister from the pile nearby. They listened, straining their ears for any sound. "Nothing." Steve said after a few seconds. "Must be empty," Tess said turning to leave the bay. Steve hung back till she reached the door incase there was some delay. But nothing happened. "Guess your right Tess," he said starting after her. She waited for him to catch up and then left the bay. Steve was a step behind passing through the door behind her. The crack was so loud that they both jumped. Steve spun round on his heels to see what had happened. The pod had moved, and was now facing the opposite way. Steve looked at Tess with a very puzzled expression. Slowly they made their way back into the bay, their eyes fixed on the pod.

"How could it have moved?" Tess asked, still staring at it. "Beats me," Steve replied, "I can't see any propulsion ports anywhere." "Perhaps it's magnetic?" Tess ventured. "Could be, but it would have to be some magnet to move it through 90 degrees." Just then the pod moved again. Slowly at first, but with bigger movements following. "It's rocking," Tess said with fear in her voice. She was right, the pod was now rocking back and forth on its axis. The pair watched as the movements got bigger. "Well give me a hand then!" The voice said. Tess jumped half out of her skin. Steve peered around the other side of the pod and saw a hatch on the lower side, slightly open against the floor.

A white arm was pushing against it causing the rocking motion. Steve motioned Tess to come and give him a hand. She came to him and he put both his hands on the pod and began to push in the opposite direction so that the hatch could open. Tess joined in and together they managed to turn the pod just enough for the occupant to fall out onto the bay floor. Once he was clear, they let go and the pod slammed back down closing the hatch again.

"Now that's what I call close." The stranger said. "Thought I was in there for good!" Steve and Tess were dumbstruck at the sight of the stranger. He was about three feet tall with an overly large head, big ears and nose, and with short arms. "Well, what are you staring at?" The stranger said angrily. "Haven't you seen a leprechaun before?" Steve and Tess towered over him in his little jacket and green tights. His shoes turned up at the toe, and he had a pointed hat on his head. "Sorry, no, we haven't. What's your name?" The little man gave a splendid low bow and said, "My name is Ned, so it is." A great smile came across his face as he rose from his bow. "I'm Steve, and this is Tess." Steve replied. Ned eyed Tess with a grin. "And it's glad to meet you I am, erm, have you got anything to eat, only I've been cooped up in that thing for nigh on a century." "A century!" Steve blurted out and then went silent. Tess grabbed Steve's arm and said, "I'm sure Ned will tell us all about it over dinner." Ned's grin broadened. "That I will." He confirmed, looking up at them in anticipation.

Within the hour, Tess had dinner served. Ned's eyes fair popped out of his head when he sat down to eat. Without waiting, he launched into grace. "Dear Father, for sure You've brought me to heaven, well, an approximation of it at any rate. Thank You for this food. Amen." Tess and Steve said Amen more out of shock than belief, but Ned didn't seem to notice, he was busy tucking in to the mound of mashed potato. "Gravy Ned?" Steve asked passing the gravy boat regardless of the answer. "Well that'll do nicely," Ned answered with a beaming smile. Tess couldn't help staring. Ned's plate was piled high and he was diving in. "Enjoy," She said smiling. Suddenly, Ned stopped and put his fork down. Steve and Tess waited with baited breath. "I'm sorry Tess," he said sincerely. "It's just that it's been such a long time since..." He paused, "well, since anyone has been so kind to me." Again he stopped. "Do eat Ned, you can tell us as you go." Ned smiled, and gladly obeyed.

It was fully five minutes later when he began his narrative. "You see," he began, "most people think the we leprechauns come from Ireland, and are mythical creatures with hidden gold." Tess and Steve both smiled as he said this. "It's not true at all, we come from the planet Lepp, a long way from here." "So you are explores," Tess jumped in. "Exactly," Ned answered, "we travelled here aeons ago to study planet earth and the somewhat tall people who live on it." They all chuckled, and Ned took the opportunity to eat some more. "Just how long ago was this Ned?" Steve asked. "It's hard to remember now, but I reckon two thousand years, give or take a bit." Tess and Steve looked a little incredulous. "I know, I don't look that old," Ned laughed. "Truth is, I'm very much older than that. The trip from Lepp took over a thousand years, even at the speed of light, and I was getting on a bit before we left." They laughed again.

"You said 'we' Ned." Ned's head dropped a little. "Yes, there were five of us, but I'm the only one left now. The others didn't make it." He paused again and Tess and Steve

waited for him. "There was a terrible accident you see, our ship was in proportion to our size, so hitting an asteroid was not a good idea. And the one we hit was not that big, a ship this size would have not even noticed it, but our little ship was destroyed. I was lucky, I was working right by the escape pod, so I was able to jump into it before all the air escaped. I only just made it, so the others had no chance. I watched them all float away into space, there was nothing I could do..."

The following silence was almost tangible. "So, what now Ned?" Tess asked. Ned looked up at her and said, "Well, I don't really know. We were on our way home when it happened. I don't suppose I'll ever see my home planet again..." Tess looked at Steve, and something passed between them. "We'll take you," Steve said. Ned looked up at him with delight on his face. "You mean it?" "Yes, we mean it. This is a big ship with nowhere to go, so why not, and Lepp sounds like a nice place." "Oh it is, it is." Ned replied with a tear forming in his eye. He looked at them both, then it hit him. "But, you are human, you will never survive the journey." "We know Ned, but you will, and we can keep you company for part of the way." "One thing though Ned, bury us somewhere nice when you get there." Ned was now in tears. "O I will, never fear, I know the very spot." "That's settled then," Steve said, "we leave immediately." With that, he rose from the table and went to the bridge to set the ship in motion. "Ready?" He asked his companions standing behind him. "Always." Tess answered. Steve hit the button, and the huge ship sped off on its thousand year journey to Lepp.

"That's that," Steve said turning to his companions. They walked back out of the control room to show Ned his quarters. "So tell me Ned," Tess asked, "whatever did you find to do in that pod for a hundred years?"