



*a collection of short tales*

# MERCURY SILVER

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A collection of shortstories for P'kaboo, by  
various authors



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The stories are all works of fiction. Any resemblance to actual people, situations or happenstances is purely coincidental.

# A Tale of Heroes

*by Douglas Pearce*

This is a tale of heroes. Not modern day heroes. You know? Ones that wear pink or yellow shirts and tight pants and cry “Cooooee!” as they arrive at your front door, TV camera crew in tow and a bottle of the most powerful bog cleaner in the world, right at the *exact* moment you were going to throw a wobbly because the toilet is blocked.

‘Oh, my heroes!’ you squeal.

No. Not this type.

Neither are they the type to scale mountains, cross the seven seas, merely to leave a double-decker box of dark chocolates on your bedside table.

If they *were* this type of hero it would be a safe bet they

would have already opened the box and scoffed the second layer.

So, alas once again, no.

And these heroes are not the type to wear their underpants over their trousers, either.

Although, to be truthful one of them wore his underpants on his head for a while. These days, he is much more circumspect when around strong liquor. Or at least liquor he cannot pronounce the name of.

These heroes go way back. Back along the mists of time. Before bog-cleaners, pink shirts, and boxes of chocolates. Back before the Days of Yore, Our day, My day and Them Were The Days. In fact, back before Days of Our Lives. Yes, this tale is *that* old.

So, dear reader, envisage the scene I am about to unfold.

In a clearing in a forest a short distance from what appears to be a rocky outcrop, lies a huge boulder. Pale morning sunlight has just begun to penetrate the canopy. Birds are a-twitter; small noses are poking out of burrows or from behind thickets. Flowers are flowering, buds are budding and leaves are... staying where they are.

Somewhere in the distance can be heard the faint sounds of singing. You catch a snatch of tune. To your untrained ear it sounds like, 'Hi Ho, something or other.' Was that a scream? Did you hear a cry of "Aaaargh"? Could it be that a Hi Ho-er missed their footing and fell down a mineshaft? Alas, we will never know.

There is a crunch of leaves as one of our heroes steps from

***The pages between these two sections  
are not included in the book preview.***

is that you Kirsty?"

Kirsty ran into the hall and returned to the kitchen with a tall red-haired woman wrapped in a large, hooded coat. She introduced herself as Helen Petrie, Kirsty's next-door neighbour.

"Why don't you two go through to the sitting room, I'll make us all a nice cup of coffee. You know where it is, Helen, you take Simon."

Simon found himself in a room which didn't quite equate with the rest of the house, or at least with the part he'd seen. On entering they descended a small staircase, as the main part was on a lower level. The ceiling was beamed and a substantial inglenook fireplace filled one wall. The letters "1745" were inscribed in a stone above the main arch. Simon walked over to it to get a closer look.

"Aye, ye cannie help noticing the fireplace – original that is. The modern hoose was built 'in the footsteps' as we say here, although there wasn't much of the original place left, burned down a few hundred years ago or so I'm told. This is a nice room, although I'm nae sae keen on some of the antiques myself, mind, they're a tad creepy. Collected all sorts, her grannie did," Helen said with enthusiasm.

Simon had noticed the antiques and, truth be told, had been tallying the current values in his head. There were some rather tasty if slightly macabre Art Nouveau pieces dotted about, and a whole collection of Moorcroft on a dresser. Then he noticed the framed embroideries. There were two of them, one either side of the fireplace. Whilst his companion chattered on about having known Kirsty since she was "a wee lassie", he took a closer look. He couldn't make out the one on the right, it was

some sort of hunting scene, only a fragment remaining from some larger work, and very faded, though judging from the intricate needlework, very old too.

“Och, I mind that you’re an antique dealer too, Kirsty told me that’s how you’d met. What dae ye think of yon picture on the left side of the fire?”

Simon crossed over to the other side of the fireplace, studied the second embroidery and slowly felt the hairs rise on the back of his neck. He stepped back and turned to Helen who had plonked herself down on a large Chesterfield sofa.

“Medieval French I think, and yes, it is a bit creepy,” he commented.

The subject was at first glance a bucolic country scene, set in the autumn perhaps, complete with hayricks and trees heavy with fruit. There was a colourful procession of what appeared to be peasants, carrying sickles, pitchforks and other farming implements. Bringing up the rear were three distinct figures - a buxom young woman leading a young dark-haired man by a rope around his neck. His hands were tied at the wrist. The final figure appeared to be the village priest, for he was clad all in black and he was wielding a particularly large scythe.

“I dinnae ken what they have planned for yon laddie but I dinnae think it’s a haircut,” Helen remarked.

Kirsty entered the room at that moment, laden with a tray of coffee and biscuits. Simon leapt to his feet and insisted on taking it from her. Helen stayed too long for Simon’s comfort and he was mildly annoyed when Kirsty left him alone with her while she unpacked their cases. He smiled and nodded politely at Helen’s persistent chatter, managing to give at least the appearance of listening, whilst he continued to make a mental



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# **Memoirs of a Chief Replicator Technician**

**A tribute to the late Gene Roddenberry**

*by Marie Marshall*

“Pass me the number seven molecular wrench, honey,” I said without looking up from my work. I needed to keep an eye on what I was doing because I had three micro-clamps and a positron patch in place, and the neutron flow was temporarily in reverse across two junctions in the common matter circuit. Tricky stuff.

Consuela (my Tejana subordinate) rummaged in the tool kit and handed me the wrench. Then she sat back against the bulkhead with her long, Latina legs stuck out across the corridor and blew through her lips.

"I'm bored, Skip," she announced.

I made a tiny adjustment with the molecular wrench, returned the neutron flow to its proper direction – there, that should hold for now – and relaxed.

"I know, I know. It is boring sitting there while someone else does the work, but shipboard regulations state that each job on the replicator system has to be attended by at least two specialists, even if one of them has to stand around and scratch her bahookie while the other one grafts."

"Hey!" Consuela objected, and I laughed.

"Anyhow," I went on. "I just have a couple more tweaks to make and this wee fella will be replicating anything from the Works of Shakespeare to a planet!"

I could make a replicator sing the Marseillaise, and Consuela knew it! I was just removing the last micro-clamp and was about to pull my head out of the hatch and secure the cover, when there were footsteps along the narrow corridor.

"You there! Technicians! You're in the way," snapped a young voice. Consuela and I stood up to look at whomever it was in whose way we were. I rolled up the sleeves of my overalls just enough to reveal the skull tattoo with the words "Freedom or Death" in Romulan. We were, it appeared, in the way of four Starfleet Academy types. To us they seemed to be little more than teenagers. Two young men, two young women.

"Is this what they teach at the academy these days?" I said. "How to disrupt the most vital work on the ship? How to throw your insignificant weight around?"

The tallest of the group stepped forward, his face reddening.

"Is that how you address superior officers? Stand to attention! You'll be on a charge for this!"

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He left again two days later. A long trip, this time to Japan, and he hung Mr Fugu in her window as a reminder he'd be home. Jack spent a lot of time in far off places; arc welding underwater with 185amp electrodes. He missed his little girl. But only three weeks passed before this trip was cut short.

And only Aunt Katie met this unexpected return.

Because this time just his left arm had come back. The rest of him was still out there.

With only one arm.

One big arm, like a fiddler crab.

Aunt Katie didn't tell her that bit. Cynthia had come round. Jenny took her into the garden, they climbed her favourite tree. Waxy magnolia petals hung around them like impatient earlobes.

Cynthia read. As if reading a famous five mystery. From the newspaper she'd stolen from her Mum's sewing table.

'...I wonder if he'll wash up on a desert island? ...Robinson Crusoe did!' she said.

'Robinson Crusoe crashed his boat.' Jenny replied, quickly. Without thinking.

'Maybe he's inside a whale...'

All at once it seemed an artist spilled her rinse-pot over the sky. Jenny saw nothing but abandonment from the sea, from her cradle in the tree. She dropped down and landed with a shot of pain through her legs, and left Cynthia there.

Cynthia sat for a few minutes to see if she would return, then went home.

Aunt Katie grew succulents. The plants spread from the conservatory right through the house; their replica pebbles appeared between shoes in the porch and they slipped pokey fingers into the bath.

‘Watch the plants,’ hissed Aunt Katie, that night. As Jenny took a book in the living room, their lip-smacking tongues reached out from the wobbling bookcase. Jack’s library held so many books about the ocean. She settled down with Australian reefs and Aunt Katie brought out her stitching. Jenny occasionally glanced over at her quick hands; their skin resembled the minutest pink patchwork of the softest leather. Wrinkles, but soft, feminine ones.

Fish never get wrinkles, she thought. The ocean never turns to ashes. Never really dies. Its adventures always continue.

She’d watched those documentaries, with Daddy explaining all the words. One of them that talked about ‘sediment... remains... carcasses... waves of detritus...’

Death.

But not like horror movies. The creatures that stopped swimming became delicate wet tissues... laying across the sea-bone and forming rugged paper mache creations... chalky clay panpipes, playing ancient harmonies for a beautiful parasitic city. Where worms sprouted. Worms with tassels on the end like the cord of Daddy’s stuff-sack. ‘Sea Enemies’ seeking food... tickling the current. Then the fairies flutter by in their magically absurd little bodies... pulsing with muscular elegance. They’d suck themselves in, like soldiers in the trenches. Only awakening again once they passed by; fields of silken fibres again, flowing together with no farmer to tend them.

The sea gave death life.

*~ End of Book Preview ~*