

# *Not For Me*

A Story By  
**L.K. Campbell**



Copyright February, 2008  
By Lucinda K. Campbell  
All rights reserved. No part  
of this work may be reproduced in  
any fashion without the express,  
written consent of the copyright holder.

Not For Me is a work of fiction.  
All characters and events portrayed herein are fictitious  
and are not based on any real persons living or dead.

The song "But Not For Me" is from the 1930 musical  
*Girl Crazy* by George and Ira Gershwin.  
*Star Trek* is a registered trademark of Paramount Studios.  
All characters from *Star Trek* are the property of Paramount Studios.

“I’m sorry,” Nicole said. “It has nothing to do with you.”

Dejection painted the young man’s face like the blue makeup he wore. One of the antennae that were glued to his head drooped.

“Honestly,” she continued. “I’m just not interested in dating anyone right now.”

“But *she* said that you were available,” he said.

“Who is she?”

“Brenda. She said that you’d be working late tonight, and I should come by and meet you,” he answered.

Her face felt hot, and she could imagine it turning beet red. *This was the last straw.* The next time she saw Brenda; she was going to let her have it with both barrels.

“Look,” she said. “I feel bad about this, so go back to the Sci-Fi section, pick out a DVD, and I’ll let you have it for free.”

His demeanor perked up, and she could’ve sworn that his drooping antenna stood up straight. “Gee,” he said. “I hope you have the complete first season of *Stargate Atlantis*.”

“I don’t feel *that* bad,” she said. “Keep it under \$20, please.”



The next morning, Brenda strolled into the store with a huge grin on her face. “Hi, Nicole. Did you have a nice evening?” she asked.

Nicole nodded and continued keying the new merchandise into the store computer. Brenda walked behind the counter and stuffed her oversized purse into a small cubbyhole.

“Did anything unusual happen last night?” Brenda asked.

Nicole filled her lungs with a large intake of air and turned toward her. “If you’re asking whether or not I hit it off with the Andorian, the answer is no.”

“Andorian? What in the world is that?”

Nicole was at the end of her rope and had about one inch of patience left. “A character from *Star Trek*. Your *little friend* came over here dressed as one.”

Brenda laughed. “Sometimes, that boy acts so foolish.”

“And yet you sent him over here to ask me for a date?” Nicole’s cheeks blazed hot.

The surprised look on Brenda’s face reminded Nicole of her

mother's when she told her that she was voting for a Republican.

"Well, I...I...I just don't know what to say," Brenda stammered. "You're a *Star Trek* fan, so I thought you and Billy would make a good couple."

Nicole felt sick. *Literally*. At any moment, she was going to throw up on Brenda's burgundy slacks and matching pumps.

"First of all," Nicole said. "Not everyone who likes *Star Trek* dresses up like characters from the show—especially not if they're going to ask someone for a date."

Brenda started to speak, but Nicole held up a hand. "And second of all, he was *way* too young. When did he graduate from high school? Last year?"

Brenda's red lips twisted to one side, and she walked around to the other side of the counter.

"If that's the thanks I get for trying to help you, I won't do it again," she said.

"Help me? You think you're trying to help me?"

Brenda held out her left hand and gazed at the three-diamond anniversary band her husband had given her for Valentine's Day the previous year. Nicole wouldn't dispute the fact that it was a beautiful ring, but she was a little tired of the way Brenda flaunted it.

"Honey," she said.

*Oh, God. I hate it when she calls me 'honey,'* Nicole thought.

"How old are you, now?"

"Thirty-three." *As if she didn't know.*

"You're going to have to stop being so picky," Brenda said. "Or you'll never get one of these."

Brenda waved her diamond-clad finger in front of Nicole's face, and anger boiled in the middle of Nicole's chest. She spun back around to the computer and laid her trembling hands on the keyboard before she said something she'd regret later.

As if on cue, the mall PA system blasted out the Linda Ronstadt version of the old pop standard, *But Not for Me*. Not having a boyfriend on Valentine's Day *was* the pits. How many years in a row was this? Four? She couldn't help being a little jealous when the florist came by and delivered roses to Brenda. Sometimes, she received balloons, too. Last year, it was a stuffed

teddy bear that said, “I love you” when Brenda pressed its paw. *If she’d pressed that bear’s paw one more time, I think I would’ve ripped it to shreds and tossed it in the dumpster behind the store,* Nicole thought. *Oh, well, at least Brenda’s husband remembered Valentine’s Day.*

During Nicole’s brief marriage, she was lucky to get a card. Her ex-husband’s idea of romance was going inside Burger King to eat rather than picking something up at the drive-thru window. His idea of love was to smack her around when he’d had too much to drink. *They’re writing songs of love but not for me,* Linda Ronstadt sang.

“I promise that I won’t send another man over here if you’re not interested,” Brenda said.

Nicole turned to her and flattened her palms on the counter. “I’m only going to say this once. You’re embarrassing me. How do you think it made me feel last night when I had to hurt that little boy’s feelings? I thought he was going to cry until I gave him a DVD.” She turned back to the computer screen. “You just don’t use good judgment, Brenda.”

She hated having to talk to her that way. Brenda was a good employee who had been with her ever since the opening day of *Nicole’s Multimedia Emporium*. Out of the corner of her left eye, she could see Brenda straighten up and back away from the counter.

“Fine, then,” she said. “But next week, when Valentine’s Day rolls around, and you don’t have a date, you only have yourself to blame.”

That sucked the wind out of her triumphant sails. Brenda was right. She only had herself to blame. Nicole’s reflection stared back at her from the computer screen, and she didn’t like what she saw. Since her divorce, she’d gained a little weight—not too much but enough to make me feel dowdy. She’d stopped doing anything to make herself look attractive. She was only wearing a tiny bit of makeup on her pale face. Her blonde hair was limp and loose, and her clothes were anything but sexy.

It wasn’t that she didn’t want to be involved again. *I might as well admit it. I’m afraid of getting hurt,* she thought. *Every man isn’t like Rob, but how can I be sure? After all, I thought he was*

*the perfect man when I married him.*



As soon as Nicole saw Brenda walking across the mall courtyard, she knew something was wrong. Her usual cheery disposition was missing. In its place was the face of a woman who looked as if she'd spent the night crying.

Nicole left the box of books she was unpacking and pushed the door open for her. "Brenda, what's wrong?"

"I would've called in sick," she said. "But I knew that you'd need me today for the..." She broke off and started sobbing. She wiped her eyes with the worn Kleenex she clutched in one hand. "For the Valentine's Day sale."

Nicole laced an arm through Brenda's and led her over the sofa in the reading nook. "Would you like a cup of coffee?"

She nodded, and Nicole drew a cup of coffee from the Espresso machine.

"Here," she said while handing her the cup. "Now, tell me what's wrong."

"I don't know where to start," Brenda said and another torrent of tears poured from her eyes.

Nicole pulled a handful of paper napkins from the dispenser on the counter, and Brenda patted her face dry before taking some sips of her coffee.

"Albert left me," she whispered.

Nicole dropped into a nearby chair. She wanted to say something but couldn't find any words.

"He came home from work last night and told me that he wasn't happy. Then he packed a bag and left. I don't even know where he went."

"Are you sure he's gone for good?" Nicole managed to ask, even though she was still shocked.

Brenda nodded and pressed the napkin against her eyes. "How could he do this after twenty-seven years? We just had our first grandchild."

"He turned fifty a few weeks ago. Maybe it's a midlife crisis," Nicole said.

"That's what mother said, too. She told me not to worry. They

always come back.” She lifted her head and looked into Nicole’s eyes. “But they don’t always come back. Do they, Nicole?”

She slid over onto the sofa and put an arm around Brenda’s shoulders. “Oh, now Brenda, there’s no comparison between your marriage and mine. Rob was an abusive alcoholic. I thought I could love him enough to change him. I was wrong. Our marriage was a mistake from the beginning.”

Brenda’s tears must have been contagious, because she felt moisture dampen her eyelids. It was the first time that she’d said those things aloud. It felt better than she thought it would.

“I’ll bet that Albert comes back in a few days,” Nicole said.

Brenda gulped down a few more sips of coffee and stood up. “Well, I guess we’d better get to work,” she said. “Today is going to be a busy day.”

Before she turned to walk away, Nicole reached out and caught her by the hand.

“Brenda, are you sure you can handle being here today? I can call my sister and ask her to come help out...”

“No. I wouldn’t dream of it,” she said. “Albert can act like an ass, but I’m not going to let it keep me from doing my job.”

*Poor Brenda. She’d married her college sweetheart and settled down to what she thought was happily ever after,* Nicole thought. *Was this proof that no marriage was perfect?*

She walked back to the sales counter where Brenda was counting out change for the cash drawer. “What do you think about getting dressed up and going out on the town tonight?” Nicole asked.

Brenda smiled and shrugged her shoulders. “Thank you for trying to make me feel better, but it’s Valentine’s Day. I’m afraid I wouldn’t have any fun.”

“I can guarantee you’ll have a good time at The Adonis Factory.”

Her face turned as red as her hair. “Oh, Nicole! I couldn’t go there. What would people say if someone saw me at a place like that?”

“If they know that Albert walked out on you, they’ll probably say, ‘Good for Brenda’.”

She fidgeted with some items on the counter, and Nicole could

see that she still had a pink blush on her cheeks. “My friend Debbie said that the men at The Adonis Factory take it *all* off,” Brenda whispered.

Nicole had never actually been to the male strip club, but the idea intrigued her, and it was for a good cause. “So,” she said. “We’ll never know if that’s true until we check it out for ourselves.”

The corners of Brenda’s mouth tilted up into a smile. “Okay,” she said. “But I’m wearing a hat and sunglasses.”

“Good enough,” Nicole said. “I might have to do the same.”



Nicole looked at the clock. It was five minutes until closing, and it couldn’t come soon enough. A steady stream of customers had made it a good day money-wise. Sales of romance novels and chick flicks had been high on the list. Nothing more was said about their girls’ night out, and Nicole wondered if Brenda would back out. Maybe it was a bad idea to suggest the strip club. Brenda might be too straight-laced for a place like The Adonis Factory.

While straightening the magazine rack in the reading area, Nicole turned toward the window that faced out into the mall and saw Albert walking toward the store. He was holding a single, red rose.

“Brenda,” she called out. “I believe someone is coming to see you.”

“Who?” Brenda asked.

Brenda started walking toward the front of the store and then stopped in her tracks. “What are you doing here?”

He raked a hand through dark hair that was streaked with gray. He held out the rose toward her.

“I came to apologize,” he said. “For the way I walked out last night.”

Brenda hesitated for a moment before closing the distance between them and taking the flower from his hand. “I don’t think you could’ve hurt me any worse, Albert.”

At once, Nicole felt as if she was eavesdropping on a private moment. “Excuse me,” she said. “I have things that I need to take care of in the office.”

A few moments later, Brenda stood in the doorway. “Nicole, if you don’t mind, I think I need to cancel our girls’ night out.”

Nicole nodded. “Sure. I understand.”

Brenda stepped closer to the desk. “He’s not coming home tonight, but he and I are going out to eat, so we can talk about what’s going on with him. Don’t you think that’s a good idea?”

She felt humbled that Brenda was asking her advice. The woman was almost old enough to be her mother. “I do,” Nicole said. “And Brenda, I hope Albert will realize what a good wife he has.”

A tear dropped from her eye, and she patted Nicole’s hand before leaving the office.

Nicole looked at the clock again. It was time to close up and go home to her back massager and a glass of wine. She locked the door behind Brenda and Albert and then turned the lights off in the front of the store.

“Hey,” a masculine voice called out.

Her heart skipped a beat, and she turned the lights back on.

“Who’s there?” she asked.

A head popped up over a shelf in the DVD section. His thick, black hair was neatly cropped, and a grin spread from one dimpled cheek to the other. “I guess I let the time get away from me,” he said, and his hazel eyes twinkled.

*What a cutie*, she thought. With her luck, though, he was probably married or in a serious relationship.

“Can I help you find something?” she asked.

“Yeah,” he said. “I was looking for a DVD of the last season of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.”

She strolled over to the DVD section to get a better look at him. He was built like an athlete. His faded jeans hugged a nicely shaped butt. She glanced down at his hands. No ring. That was promising. Her mood shifted into high gear.

“Are you a *Star Trek* fan?” she asked.

He nodded, and his eyes traveled from her shoes to her head and back again. He stepped closer and her heartbeat took off at a jackrabbit’s pace. “By the way,” he said. “My name is Jeff.”

She slipped her hand into his and held her breath while a warm tingle of pleasure worked it’s way up her arm. “I’m Nicole, and I

hate to tell you this, but I don't have that DVD in stock."

She felt flirtatious, which took her by surprise. It'd been a long time since she'd allowed herself the luxury of being playful with a handsome stranger. "However, I happen to own the set you're looking for."

He grinned, and his eyes softened. "So what are my chances of borrowing them?" he asked.

"Would you like to discuss it over dinner?" she asked. "That is if you don't have any plans."

He straightened up, looked down and shoved his hands into his pockets. Not a good sign. Her heart sank.

"It would have to be a quick bite," he said. "I have to be at work at eight."

The wheels in Nicole's suspicious mind started spinning. Was he telling the truth? Maybe he had to be home to his wife by eight p.m.

"I'd like to see you when we could spend more time together," he said. "I don't work on Sundays or Mondays. Could we go out one of those two nights?"

She smiled and said, "Give me a call here at the store." She might have been crazy enough to flirt with a stranger, but she wasn't trusting enough to give him her home number.



While Nicole counted up the cash drawer and filled out her deposit slip, she thought about the plans she'd made with Brenda. She hadn't wanted to go solo her first time at a male strip club but maybe it was better that way. If things got a little too hot for her taste, she could slip out.

She dropped the day's take into the night deposit box at the bank and then swung by her apartment to eat a sandwich and change clothes. She searched her closet for something special to wear. Most of her "night on the town" clothes were a size too small, but she found a pair of black, velvet pants that still fit. She added to it a v-neck, white sweater with pearl buttons down the front.

Since the booze was half price for Ladies' Night at The Adonis Factory, the crowd was loud and loaded. She nudged her way up to

the bar and was greeted by a young man, who was wearing a red, satin bowtie, matching thong and a smile.

“What’s your pleasure?” he asked.

She glanced down as his large thighs and other parts. “Holy cow,” she said.

“Pardon me?” he asked.

Her hand shot up to cover her mouth. “I’m sorry. I meant to say strawberry daiquiri.”

She retrieved her drink and found a small table off to the side of the stage near a convenient exit door. More young men, dressed in the same fashion as the bartender, danced on platforms at either end of the stage. Women ran up to them and stuffed dollar bills into the strings that held their thongs in place.

A middle-aged woman wearing a red, lacy tank top and leather mini-skirt stood next one platform. She mimicked the dancer’s moves. “Oh, baby,” she said. “I’d like to unwrap your package.”

Nicole took a huge gulp of her drink and fanned herself with her hand. *It’s so hot in here*, she thought while she shimmied out of her coat.

“Bring on the show!” a heavysset lady in the front row shouted.

She surveyed the crowd and didn’t see anyone that she knew. *Thank goodness*, she thought. The house lights dimmed and the stage was flooded with beams from multi-colored lights overhead. Familiar music started to play, and men dressed in uniforms from the original *Star Trek* series strutted across the stage. One by one, they ripped off their red shirts as their names were called out by the M.C.

The gold lamé curtains parted, and the M.C. shouted, “And here he is ladies. The one you’ve been waiting for.” The crowd went wild. Bras and panties flew onto the stage. “Captain...on...the...bridge.”

*This had to be good*, she thought. She leaned over to her left in order to see around the woman who was jumping up and down in front of her.

“Take it off,” the woman was yelling.

A tall guy with thick, black hair emerged from the slit in the curtains. He was gyrating his hips to a jazzed up version of *The Next Generation* theme song. Her pulse quickened when the

spotlight hit him, and she could see his face. Her breath caught somewhere between her lungs and throat. She dropped back and slunk down into the seat. It was the guy she'd met at the store.

He yanked off the green shirt that he wore and revealed the well-toned muscles of his chest and abdomen. Part of her wanted to stay and see the rest of him, but her conscience won out. She *had* to get out of there before he spotted her.

She crouched down and headed for the exit while covering the side of her face with her coat. She heard a woman yell out, "Beam me up, Scotty!" Whistles and screams went up from others in the audience.

Nicole breathed a sigh of relief when she made her way back out into the lobby. She stopped to compose herself and came face-to-face with a life-size poster of the man she'd almost taken to dinner that night. In the picture, he was clad in a tiny, black Speedo and nothing else. She strained to keep her eyes from settling on the ample bulge at the apex of his muscular thighs.

*I need a breath of cool air*, she thought and stepped out into the crisp, February breeze. When she felt cool enough to tug on her coat, a chuckle worked its way up into her throat. She laughed at her luck where men were concerned and at what Brenda would say when she told her the story. She laughed until tears streaked down her face. A woman who was entering the club stopped and gave her a strange look.

"Happy Valentine's Day," she said, and the woman nodded in return.

Nicole looked down at the purple, day-glo stamp on the back of her hand. *Oh, what the heck*, she thought. *It's about time I sought out some new life and explored new worlds*. With that, she did an about face and marched back into the bar.

THE END