

My Daughter Is a Klingon

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I've been a Star Trek fan since the original series premiered in 1966. I was 14 years old at the time and spent many nights imagining myself on distant worlds, negotiating with hostile aliens, and pushing the *Enterprise* to the limit—"Scotty, I need more power!" "Captain, I'm givin' you all she's got." But in my wildest dreams, I never imagined that someday I would share my home with a Klingon.

Things began innocently at first. My daughter weighed in at a respectable 8½ pounds. She was cute and lovable, and despite a football-shaped head that in retrospect was somewhat prescient, she did all the things a new dad would expect from his baby girl. Over the next few months, Molly developed pretty much on course. She cooed, she smiled, she spit up on my jackets and ties. So, despite having to adjust to a resident's portion of sleep, life was great.

Nothing unusual happened until 10 months of age. Molly was saying her *ah-goos* at the time and, like most babies, made the transition to consonant sounds such as *ga-ga*, *ba-ba*, and *da-da*. Then, about a week ago, it happened. Molly woke up at 6 AM, which is her custom. However, instead of talking quietly to her stuffed animals, she began shouting in some foreign tongue. Quickly, I ran to her room to investigate.

"Ak-Ba," she said looking intently at her brown bear. The bear did not respond.

"AK-BA, AK-BA," she bellowed. Again, the bear did not respond.

Molly grew impatient with the bear and turned her attention to the white lamb that was sitting in the corner of her crib. I may have been reading into the situation, but the lamb looked worried.

"GA-BAT," she yelled. "GA-BAT."

The lamb didn't have a clue, and before she could get away, Molly grabbed her by the tail and threw her out of the crib.

At this point, I moved closer to get a better view of

the action. Unfortunately, the floor creaked and Molly turned to see who was there. When she saw it was me, she stood up and smiled.

"Dssh, dssh," she said. Then, in quick succession, "Bakta, aa'ee Tu."

Although I wasn't sure of myself, I reached down and picked her up. But who was this being who awoke in my daughter's crib?

Over the next few days, the only familiar thing that came out of Molly's mouth was the food that landed on her stomach during mealtime. At first, I thought I was the only one who knew what was going on. I soon found out that Chekov, our cat, also realized that something was up. Whenever he got close to Molly, she lunged at him shouting things like "Gikk Da" and "Ta' Dahk Shuu." Since Chekov is a smart cat, he avoided Molly like a bad case of fleas.

I worried in silence for almost a week. Finally, I had to discuss this transformation with my wife.

"Have you noticed anything unusual about Molly?" I asked.

"Did you notice it, too?" she said. "I thought I was the only one. Boy, is her belly getting big."

"Her belly? Is that the only thing you've noticed? How about the strange way that Molly's been acting?"

"Oh, that," she said. "It's just a stage. She'll be fine, and so will Chekov."

"A stage???" I said incredulously. "Haven't you noticed that Molly sounds like a Klingon?"

"A what?"

"A Klingon. You know, those aggressive, guttural beings we see every night at 10 PM."

"Honey, you're watching too much TV. All babies do this at her age. And besides, if she is a Klingon, she's certainly a cute one."

"Jan, I'm being serious."

"I'm sorry, sweetheart. If it's bothering you that much, why don't you discuss it with Jim?"

Although one of the reasons I married my wife is that she is so level-headed, I hate it when I'm being testy and she's reasonable. The *Jim* she was referring to is Jim Kirkland, my old residency buddy and Molly's pediatri-

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cian. Since her checkup was only a few days away, it made sense to let him stick his nose into all of this.

The following week, I explained my concerns to Jim, who listened like a good doc. After he examined Molly, he reassured me that everything was okay.

"It sounds to me like Molly is moving into her next speech stage," he said. "The racket she's making is called variegated babbling."

"Variegated what? Blast it, Jim, I'm a doctor, not a linguist."

"Look, forget about the details," he said. "She's okay, and she's not a Klingon. I should mention one thing, however, so you don't freak out and call me at 2 o'clock in the morning. Molly's metopic suture closed prematurely, which is causing a slight ridge at the top of her forehead. It's nothing to worry about, and I promise her hair will cover it in the next few months."

"Oh great, now she'll not only sound like a Klingon, but she'll look like one, too."

Although he tried to hide it, I saw Jim roll his eyes

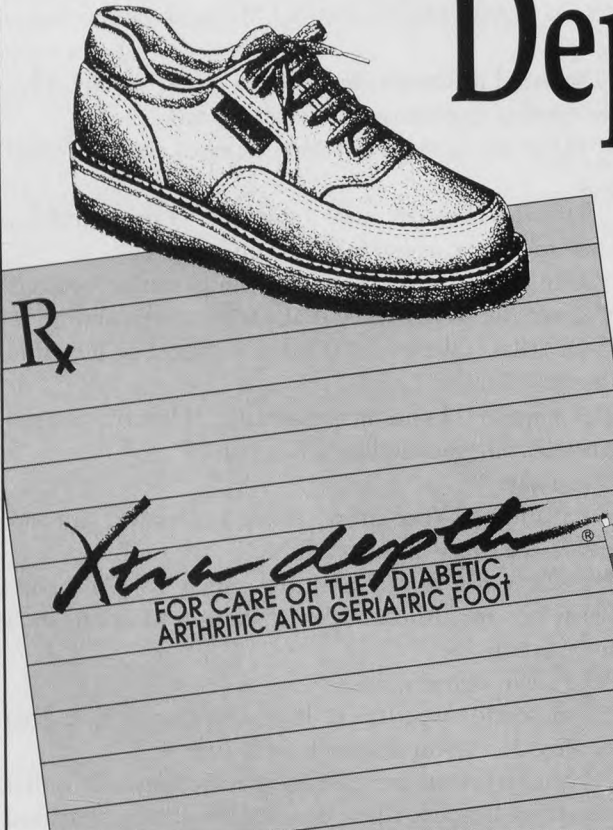
when I said this. I'm sure he never imagined that his best friend would end up being his craziest patient. After another hour of talking, he finally convinced me that Molly is human.

Over the last few weeks, Molly's language has improved tremendously, and I no longer need a dictionary to understand her.¹ Instead of "Issh" and "Kucch-da," her speech is finally more rhythmic. Her metopic suture is still prominent, of course, but she now has about five English words.

When I went to sleep last night, I thought about all the adjustments parents have to make as their children grow up. At least our daughter is healthy, I said to myself. So Molly was almost a Klingon. Things could have been worse. She might have been a Romulan.

References

1. Okrand M. The Klingon dictionary. New York, NY: Pocket Books, 1992.



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