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THE T'VARON CHRONICLES 1



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fanzine

by
Gloria Fry

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Gloria Fry

Cover by Raymond D Sless

Part One

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Editor - Sheila Clark

Typing - Maggie Symon

Proofreading - Sheila Clark, Gloria Fry, Valerie Piacentini, Janet Quarton

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Sheila Clark

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'A TOUCH OF COMPASSION'

PROLOGUE

As I travelled to Vulcan, I wondered what awaited me on my new assignment aboard the USS T'Varon, a Starship where I would be a lone Human amongst 430 Vulcans.

I could not believe my luck on being selected from the many thousands of applicants to be the first non-Vulcan to serve on an all-Vulcan ship, although friends had warned me that it would be impossible for me to live and work amongst those cold emotionless beings.

Starfleet has its Vulcan wing, a requirement insisted upon by the Vulcan council, and one of the earliest and most stringently kept of Federation regulations. Vulcan had never allowed anyone other than their own people to serve on any of their ships; a fact which had gained increasing disapproval amongst other members of the Federation.

In a heated debate of the Federation Council, Vulcans were accused of prejudice because of their strict exclusion of other races from their ships. Sarek, the Vulcan ambassador, argued the point that Vulcans did not understand prejudice, nor did they practise it; all peoples were equal in their eyes. However, the indisputable fact of superior Vulcan physical and mental capabilities put other species at a disadvantage, and it was against all their principles to cause distress to others.

The Terran ambassador had replied that many races worked together on other ships, each giving his own skills to the well-being of the whole, their diversity a strengthening force. Ambassadors from other species had agreed, and Sarek, bowing to their demands, had agreed to express their arguments to the Vulcan Council.

No-one knew what happened in the privacy of those meetings or what margin of agreement there was to allow a non-Vulcan into their fleet, but Sarek reported to the Federation that Vulcan would allow an experiment. One specially picked person would be permitted to serve aboard the USS T'Varon for a solar year.

I do not know why I was chosen, what special reasons they had for picking me over the many better qualified applicants. My abilities are not particularly outstanding, although I have risen quickly since my graduation from Starfleet Academy. At twenty-seven I am already a Lt. Commander, and was First Officer on my last ship, the USS Claudette, a survey ship of excellent repute.

I am reasonably skilled in diplomacy, and have received commendations for my work in this area. I have been awarded medals for bravery but place little value upon them. What are they, when men and women died around me in pointless battles? I was lucky - I survived.

More meaningful to me are the modest achievements of encouraging new races into the Federation in peace and friendship. The importance of all races and species living in harmony cannot be overstressed. It is the only way our galaxy will survive.

One of my more useful skills is a natural command ability, and I have Admiral Nogura's promise that if I am successful in this mission I will have my dream, my ambition in life, the command of the most powerful of all vessels, a Constellation Class Starship.

Gary Mitchell, who is my closest friend, told me that I was plain stupid to want to serve

with a species who have the reputation of being the most cold-blooded in the known galaxy; but I have never believed that those remote, beautiful people are totally without feeling, and I want to breach the gap between us.

All alien life holds an interest to me, but Vulcans are special. They more than any others have helped Humans towards a better way. They are a private and modest people; I have studied all there is to know about them in the Federation Central Library, and I am most impressed. Their logic and dedication to peace and rational thought is a wondrous lesson to us all. I admire their achievements in the sciences and mathematics, but the one thing which bothers me is their lack of emotions. How can one have interpersonal relationships - essential to shipboard life - with beings who cannot or will not accept emotions?

My final interview was before a panel of distinguished Vulcan Starfleet Officers and Ambassador Sarek. I will not forget their precise inflectionless voices, their relentless probing questions. I felt like a schoolboy before them, a child before his elders, hopelessly inadequate and insecure.

Something must have impressed them, however, for I was informed the following day by Sarek himself, the legendary ambassador who had singlehandedly resolved so many conflicts during his years as a diplomat, that I had been successful. I tried not to be intimidated by him; I am not easily intimidated, but even I felt the aura of power around him.

"You will serve aboard the USS T'Varon," he said in his gentle, educated voice. "Much responsibility lies upon you, Kirk. You represent all Humanity."

I stood firmly, trying not to tremble. The T'Varon was the legendary ship which had opened out the Castalian Star System two years previously, encountering and defeating the immense, malevolent power of the telepathic Rynami. The Captain and Science Officer had received the highest honours Starfleet could award. If a Human ship had attempted such a feat, it would have been hopelessly outmanoeuvred and destroyed.

"I am determined to succeed, Ambassador," I replied. I thought I saw a glimpse of sympathy and understanding on his face. "I believe that integrated ships are vital to the Federation."

"Indeed," he responded, but I was unsure if he agreed with me or not.

Speed-teaching is not the best way to learn a language, but there was not time to learn Vulcan in any other way. It will be enough to help me understand them and they me, but only with time will I be able to use and understand the nuances of the language. It is a complex tongue - the phrasing and inflection can change the meanings of certain words. I can only hope that I do not make a complete fool of myself before I learn how to avoid such pitfalls.

SCIENCE OFFICER

Vulcans have travelled space for many more centuries than Humans, so Vulcan Space Central was a magical place to me. Ships arrived and departed here before Earthmen first crossed the Atlantic Ocean. What a humbling thought for a Human!

The station itself was fascinating, full of the latest technology, much of it not available on any other Federation world. It was here I was to await the guide who would escort me to the T'Varon.

Unfortunately, reporters from the Federation news services were also here. My appointment was of much interest to them, and although I disliked all this publicity, Admiral Nogura had assured me that it was necessary and important that I made a good impression. The civilised galaxy was watching me, and my conduct would reflect on all Humans in Starfleet; the future of integrated starships depended on me. I did not care to think very much about that; it was too terrifying. My mistakes could cause great harm to interspecies co-operation.

"Lt. Commander Kirk," called the voice over the loudspeaker system. "Please report to Transporter Room Five."

THAT WAS IT! My call to make history, my chance to change the status of non-Vulcans in the eyes of this most advanced of species. All my doubts returned. Would I be able to? Was I the right person for the job? Me - with my often impetuous behaviour, my sense of humour and irreverent manner, my need for companionship... I stood up. Too late to back out now.

I clasped my hands behind me, and followed by the robot 'eyes' and their Human reporters, I made my way to the transporter room, trying to ignore the anti-grav robot cameras floating all around me. I do not know how media stars can bear the constant scrutiny of such machines.

I walked as quickly as I could without appearing to hurry; my family, my friends, my commanding officers would all be watching my every move. I comforted myself with the thought that soon I would be away from these prying cameras, aboard the famous Vulcan Starship, taking up my assignment as her Helmsman.

I entered the transporter room in time to see my escort materialise on the platform. He was a Vulcan male, tall, lean, dark-haired, with elegant pointed ears and aristocratic bearing, the perfect example of Vulcanoid breeding. His face was expressionless as he stopped before me. He did not meet my eyes.

"Greetings, Mr Kirk," he said in a rich baritone. "I am Lt. Commander Spock, Science Officer of the T'Varon."

I was being honoured! The Science Officer of a Starship is a high ranking position. On a Vulcan ship it is the most admired and coveted post for a world of scientists, and the most difficult to attain. This particular Science Officer was exceptional. He had been instrumental in the defeat of the Rynami. He had invented the technique which had been able to subdue and control their horrifying, deadly power.

He inclined his head slightly to me, and I returned the gesture as courteously as I was able.

"Greetings, Mr Spock," I replied.

He raised his hand in the salute of his people, and I matched it as best I could. It was not an easy thing to do. I know; I had been practising for weeks to perfect it.

His features did not alter; in fact, gazing at him closely, I noted that he was the most austere Vulcan I had ever come across. A shiver of apprehension ran down my spine.

He clasped his hands behind him. "Captain T'Zen requests that you report immediately for duty, Commander Kirk."

"I come to serve," I replied, hoping I had given the correct response.

He gave no sign nor hint that I had said the right thing. In fact he did not look at me at all, but stared at some point over my head, for he was several inches taller than I. I tried not to lose heart; he was probably as nervous as I was. Trying to be friendly, I smiled at him, but he ignored me, turned towards the dais and motioned me over.

I braced myself, walked over to stand by him, and awaited the order to energise. My eyes rested upon the reporters who were covering my departure, people from many species who had an interest in the mission, and for a moment I felt a flash of doubt. I was going into the unknown, perhaps even out of my depth on this Vulcan ship. I caught myself - too late now for doubt.

As I felt the familiar sensation of transporter travel, I thought affectionately of my old friend Bones, who hated - as he put it - 'having his molecules scrambled about in this fashion'. How I would miss him - and Gary and all my other friends...

The slight feeling of disorientation passed quickly as we rematerialised on the T'Varon. I did not know what to expect, but was determined to accept whatever awaited me with as much dignity as I could muster.

"I will escort you to your quarters, Mr Kirk," Commander Spock said. "Your possessions are already there."

I turned to him. "Thank you."

Apart from the two of us and the transporter technicians, the room was empty. At least I could slip in quietly without the media circus which had surrounded me since my appointment. I had hated every minute of that.

Following Mr Spock through the corridors to the turbo-lift, I noted that all the people we passed nodded graciously to us - or perhaps it was to the Science Officer; I could not tell, but I returned their greetings as if I was included.

Beads of sweat began to form above my lips, my tunic stuck uncomfortably to my back, and I soon realised that the temperature on this ship was higher than I was used to. I should have prepared myself for Vulcan normal temperature; it would take me days to become acclimatised to it.

We entered the turbo-lift and Spock ordered it to deck five. After that he was silent, and as it looked as if he would not be initiating any conversation; I decided to attempt it.

"How long have you served aboard the T'Varon, Mr Spock?"

"Six point two five years," he replied immediately.

Well, he certainly was precise! "How long have you been her Science Officer?"

"Six point two five years," he said tonelessly.

I was amazed. He was so young! It can be difficult to tell a Vulcan's age, but Spock - I was almost positive - was near my own age. I don't know how I knew that, but my gut instincts are usually accurate.

"You became the Science Officer of a Starship over six years ago, Mr Spock!" I exclaimed. "You must indeed be a brilliant scientist."

He did not reply; his eyes remained fixed on the lift doors, but I pressed on, even though I was unsure how he would respond - if he would respond.

"What other ships have you served on?"

He was silent for a long moment, then answered, "The USS T'Mar."

"As a Science Officer?" I asked.

"Yes," his answer came, clipped and precise.

It was with relief that I saw the lift doors opening. I followed him to my quarters in silence. The rooms were sparsely furnished, but I would be able to liven them up with my books and mementos; once I had lived here for a few days, it would not seem so empty and characterless.

"Are these quarters satisfactory, Mr Kirk?" he asked.

"Yes, thank you, Mr Spock."

"Very well. You will report to the Captain's quarters in two hours. We leave Vulcan in precisely five point six hours."

He turned to go, and suddenly I felt nervous. Lonely. He was the only one I had conversed with on this ship, and although he was remote - unfriendly even - at least he had spoken to me.

"Mr Spock..." I said, unable to suppress the plea for help in my voice.

He stopped, swivelled around to face me, and fixed his gaze upon the wall.

"Mr Spock - I do not know how I will adapt to living on a Vulcan ship. My knowledge of your language is basic, as I was speed-taught." Why would he not meet my eyes? How could I reason with one who would not permit eye contact? I forced myself to continue. "I know the inadequacies of such teaching; there is much I have to learn. Will there be someone who can assist me in such matters?"

"I have been assigned to give you the assistance you require."

I was shocked. The *Science Officer* assigned to help me? Not some yeoman whose duty it normally would be? I could not understand the reason for assigning such a high-ranking officer to the task, and one of the heroes of the Rynami encounter to boot. I stared at him and wondered again why he avoided my gaze. Did he consider this assignment to be demeaning? It was highly possible, and if that were so, then how should I treat him? How to approach him? He was the same rank as I, but as Science Officer he was the senior officer, and Vulcan discipline was legend in Starfleet. I had been warned that the easygoing camaraderie of Human ships would be unknown here, and strict military rules would apply.

A few weeks before I left for Vulcan, I had spoken with Admiral Zaminsky, one of the few Humans who had worked with Vulcans. For a time, he and a small team of Starfleet personnel had been involved with the building of this very ship. He warned me that Vulcans

were totally insular beings who did not understand friendship. They were formal, emotionless, aloof but generous in their assistance to others. They moved gracefully among all beings like some type of remote, aristocratic royalty, giving nothing of themselves. I found this difficult to believe; all species knew friendship of one kind or another. No-one could survive alone.

Faced with Vulcan coldness, I wondered if Zaminsky had been correct in his observations, but I tried again. "Mr Spock, I would appreciate all the help you can give me. I am unsure of my position here." I hesitated, not knowing how to express my feelings in the Vulcan language. "I am truly alone," I said in English.

I stared down at the desk, dejected and at a loss. What would a Vulcan amongst other Vulcans know of loneliness? It is my greatest fear - to be alone. I have always surrounded myself with relatives and friends, but even then at times I have felt the well of loneliness within me, and have wondered who would be able to ease this void. Perhaps no-one could.

Suddenly feeling foolish I threw out the negative thoughts. Why had I wanted this appointment so much? I had known it would be difficult; Gary had told me bluntly that it would be impossible for me, but I had assured him that I would be able to deal with this year on a Vulcan ship. Now I was not so sure. A pang of homesickness flashed through me as I remembered his cheerful, laughing company...

I felt a strange prickling sensation on the back of my neck like a small electric shock. Quickly I raised my head, and to my startlement found dark, piercing eyes upon me. I caught my breath. He seemed to see straight into me as if he could read my very thoughts, and a shudder ran through me as I remembered that Vulcans were telepaths. Perhaps he *could* read my thoughts! But I held my ground, forced myself to relax and accept his penetrating gaze.

Now I knew why Zaminsky had said that no-one could withstand the power of a Vulcan's gaze; they seemed to see into your very soul. Humans - knowing well their own inadequacies and faults - felt themselves being opened up and all their hidden flaws exposed.

I swallowed hard; if he could read me, well - so be it. On a shipful of telepaths I would have to get used to that. Yet his almost hypnotic stare was not aggressive or demanding or dominating; it seemed only... curious. That was something I could understand, for curiosity is also a Human trait. I called on all the courage I could muster and bore his scrutiny.

After a few moments the intensity in his eyes diminished, and although he still watched me it was not so difficult to bear.

"We are all ultimately alone, Mr Kirk," he said in English.

I gave a start - but, of course he would know many Terran languages; all Vulcans are multi-lingual.

"You are correct, Mr Spock," I replied, "but one can be alone in many different ways."

"Indeed," he agreed, to my surprise.

I studied him closely, and now confirmed what I had suspected. He *was* very young. Was that why he had been chosen to assist me in settling into Vulcan life? I did not know; perhaps I would find out one day, but I put it aside for the moment. I glanced around the room, spied the food selector, then turned back to Spock. I must attempt to be friendly.

"Will you join me for coffee?" I asked.

He blinked several times, and I had the awful thought that I had said the incorrect thing. He confirmed my suspicion.

"I do not drink coffee. However the selector can supply it for you."

"What will you have?" I asked, trying again.

He hesitated, and for a second I saw the uncertainty in his eyes. Had I made yet another mistake? Should I have invited him to share a drink with me? It was the Human thing to do, but was it a Vulcan custom as well? There was so much I yet had to learn about Vulcan ways.

"Simbia," he said finally, and I sighed with relief at his acceptance. I had tasted Simbia before. It is a fruit drink, very delicious, highly nutritious, but *I* needed coffee.

"Please sit down," I said, and he did so.

To my relief, I did not make any mistakes with the selector. It was more or less standard Starfleet design. I handed him the glass of Simbia, then sat down opposite him and sipped at my coffee. It was hot and sweet enough to make me feel a little better.

He watched me closely and I smiled at him. He *was* curious about me. Somehow, I could tell; but I wondered if he was half as curious about me as I was of him.

"It's strange to be here at last," I said. "After I was picked, I had to learn everything available about your world, its history and people. The details are annoyingly brief."

I leaned forward and he gave a slight start, then edged back into his chair. Had he thought I was about to touch him? I had more sense than that, but I reasoned with myself that he would not know that. I sat back again. It had been carefully instilled in me - *do not touch a Vulcan. They dislike being touched; they are telepathic. It is a severe intrusion into their privacy if you touch them.* I knew that I might have difficulty with that one.

"If you wish further details," he said, "the library computer is at your disposal. If you need anything else, you may ask me."

"Thank you," I said gratefully.

Suddenly realising that we were still talking in English, I said in Vulcan. "I wish to talk in your language at all times, if possible. It is the only way I will be able to learn it properly. If I can speak it half as well as you speak English, I will be satisfied."

"As you will," he said, totally ignoring my compliment.

I had meant it. He spoke English perfectly. His diction was clear, although his voice was inflectionless.

"Tell me about the Captain. What kind of commander is she?"

"An able, experienced commander."

"How long has she been a Starship Captain?"

"Fifteen point three five years."

I could scarcely believe it. This Vulcan woman had been a Captain before I had even joined the Academy! The only women who commanded Starships were Vulcan - no woman of any other species had as yet risen that far. Women in command do not bother me as it still does some males. There were female instructors at the Academy, and during my career there have been women who have outranked me, but a female Captain would be a new experience for me.

"Do you like her?" I asked.

He raised his eyebrow in a gesture which could have meant anything, but at least he had responded to my question.

"Your question is illogical. Vulcans do not like or dislike. She is the Captain, she commands respect and loyalty."

I was taken aback by the sharpness of his tone, and I realised afresh how much I had to learn about Vulcans.

I changed the subject. "Who is First Officer?"

"Commander Selek."

I groaned silently in frustration, still none the wiser. "And you, Mr Spock. Where are you in the chain of command?"

"I am Second Officer."

Curiouser and curiouser. He certainly did outrank me as Science Officer and Second Officer. Why had they given him the task of looking after me? It was most unusual.

His answers to my questions were so concise; I wished he would open up a little, but I began to fear that all Vulcans talked this way. The ones who had interviewed me had also been economical with words.

"Am I keeping you from your duties?"

"I am performing my duties, Mr Kirk," he said, his voice cold.

"What of your duties as Science Officer?" I persisted, wanting to know the situation more clearly.

He avoided my eyes. "My schedule has been re-arranged."

I laughed a little, but it was not with humour. "To help me settle in. Does that annoy you, Mr Spock?"

"Vulcans have no emotions," he reprimanded me in a harsh tone. "Annoyance is an emotional response. I do not understand Human emotions - they are illogical; you must learn to control them. They are unwelcome on this ship."

It was the longest thing he had said to me, and cold and forbidding as he was, I waited with held breath to see if he would continue. But he fell silent, and I was most disappointed, as

for a moment I thought I had seen a flicker of something in his expressionless eyes.

Abruptly he stood up. "I will return in time to escort you to the Captain."

I quickly rose to my feet. I had offended him in some way and did not know how to reach him to find out my error. How was I to live with Vulcans? This officer before me was alien to all I knew; his responses were not Human and I did not understand him. Well, at least I could be polite. "Thank you for your help, Mr Spock."

"I believe the proper response is 'You are welcome'," he intoned. "If you will excuse me?"

He left, and I stared at the closed doors for a long, bitter moment. If they were all as cold as he, then my life here would be truly impossible. I shrugged. Somehow I must learn to accustom myself to these different standards of behaviour. Self pity was counter-productive.

The first thing I had to do was reduce the temperature in my quarters to a more tolerable level, then gradually increase it until I became acclimatised to Vulcan normal; it would take several days, but I would eventually learn to tolerate it.

As it became cooler, I breathed a deep sigh of relief. I unpacked my few belongings. That did not take long, and I was soon reclining on my bed and opening one of my prized antiquarian books, 'A Tale of Two Cities' by Charles Dickens. 'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times,' I read. I hoped my life aboard the T'Varon would not be the worst of times.

CAPTAIN

Captain T'Zen looked up from her computer console as Spock and I entered. I gave a start - I had not expected her to be so beautiful. Her Vulcanoid features seemed to enhance her alien loveliness; her hair, sleek and dark as Spock's, lay loose upon her shoulders, while her eyes were black and fathomless like pools of night. *Watch yourself*, I reminded myself. This Vulcan woman was my Captain, and although she appeared to be perhaps... thirty, she was much, much older. I wondered at her true age. She had been a Captain for fifteen years. She had to be similar in age to my mother! I could scarcely believe it.

Respectfully, I stood at attention with Spock close by. Somehow, his presence there seemed right. Now that was an illogical thought!

"Captain," he said, "may I present Lt. Commander James T. Kirk."

"Commander Kirk," she said, in a surprisingly soft voice. "Welcome aboard."

Her almost-friendly welcome heartened me, and I bowed my head slightly as I had seen other crewmembers do. It seemed their custom; they are an extremely courteous people.

She studied me with careful consideration, her eyes as penetrating as Spock's had been earlier. I held myself still, only too aware that my behaviour was of the utmost importance. I had to show them that a Human was willing and able to work with them, that a non-Vulcan could fit into their ways. Her gaze was easier to take than the Science Officer's, and I wondered why. She even seemed less severe than he, and I believe there was interest on her face.

"I am deeply honoured to have been chosen to serve aboard your ship, Captain," I said.

"You were carefully screened, Mr Kirk. However, it is an open question whether you are the correct person for the appointment."

She was blunt as Spock was; I tried not to take it personally.

"I will do my utmost, Captain; my very best."

"Indeed," she replied. "That is something Vulcans do at all times."

That put me in my place. I had been told that my best efforts were expected, as that was the Vulcan norm. I should have known they would not be fallible as Humans so often were.

"Commander Spock, you may leave us," she said.

That made me nervous. He was the one constant since my arrival and I did not wish him to leave, despite my lack of communication with him. I glanced over at him, searching for some kind of reassurance, and for a moment our eyes met. Quickly he looked away, bowed to the Captain and said, "Yes, Captain."

After he had left, Captain T'Zen stared at me for long moments before she invited me to sit down. I thanked her, sat on the chair facing her and watched as she leaned back and clasped her hands together.

"You have an excellent reputation as a Helmsman. You will be on Bridge duty for a trial period of one standard month. If you cannot work as part of the Bridge team, you will be assigned elsewhere on the ship. I expect discipline and obedience from my crew, but I welcome valid suggestions. Remember though that the decisions are mine. I will not tolerate insubordination."

She was making herself perfectly clear, and I did agree with her. A Captain's decision should be final, once all the details and suggestions had been submitted to him...her.

"This ship is unlike a Human ship," she continued. "You will find that out very quickly. You, Mr Kirk, were chosen above all the other candidates because you have displayed a mature outlook on species other than your own. You have shown respect for all life-forms regardless of how bizarre or strange they might appear, and you are one of the few Terrans not prejudiced against non-humanoid species." I began to protest, but thought better of it. She had all my records; she had paid me a compliment - I think - and she was my Captain. "You will learn that respect for all life is one of the most powerful beliefs of Vulcans. You have that in common with us; it is a starting point. Have you any questions?"

I had hundreds of questions, most of which escaped me at that moment except the one uppermost in my mind.

"Captain, why is Mr Spock, the Science Officer, performing the duty of a yeomen?"

Her answer rocked me to the core. "Mr Spock is half-Human. I believe he will be better able to understand you than a full Vulcan."

"Half-Human!" I exclaimed. I could not believe it. The Captain - a full Vulcan - was warmer than he!

"You did not notice?" she asked.

"I certainly did not, Captain," I replied.

I swear she almost smiled. "Spock is an excellent Vulcan, and the best Science Officer in the Fleet. He has overcome the considerable handicaps of his Human heritage, yet I believe it will be instructive for him to be in close contact with one of his mother's people. He is very young, as you are. Perhaps you will learn from one another."

Learn from that cold, stiff, half-Vulcan? I tried to control my feelings. I could still barely believe it. Spock, the son of a Human woman and a Vulcan male! I had not known it was possible for the two species to interbreed.

"Spock will guide you in all matters until you are familiar with the running of the ship. I am confident you will learn quickly."

I was not so confident, but I tried not to let it show. "May I ask Captain, how you feel having a Human aboard your ship?"

"Vulcans do not feel, Mr Kirk. I accept what is. You are here at the command of Starfleet and the Federation. Much depends on your success here. I wish you well. Dismissed."

I stood, bowed to her and left her quarters. She was correct; the future of integrated ships depended on my year here. I felt she was sympathetic towards me and I was encouraged, for much depended on her having a positive attitude to me. Surely her crew would follow her lead and at least give me a fair trial? Spock was the enigma. Would *he* treat me fairly? If he resented his duties as guide to me through this minefield of alien life, I did not know how I would cope.

FIRST OFFICER

My first shift on the Bridge was uneventful. I worked at the Helm, confident there as I always am, but aware of the subtle difference between this Bridge and any other I had been on before. The atmosphere was coolly efficient, but there was no banter as there would have been on a Human ship. The crew obviously knew one another well, but spoke only about subjects pertaining to their duty, and little was said to me at all. I tried to converse with the Navigator, Lt T'Sal, one of the most stunning women I have ever had the pleasure to meet. I suppose I spoke to her in the flirting way I would to any attractive woman, but she cut me dead with a look, and I quickly returned my attention to my console, my male ego much deflated.

The rules here *were* different, more so than I had realised. I wondered if all the women would show the contempt for me she did. If so, what a frustrating and dull time I would have here. A horrible premonition of my future on the T'Varon loomed before me; a lone Human amongst Vulcans, with no friends, no love, no sexual interest... I shuddered at such thoughts, and hoped I was completely wrong.

If I had thought Mr Spock was cold, I was mistaken. The First Officer, Commander SeleK, was the coldest fish I had ever met. He was the ship's Chief Navigator and when he relieved Lt. T'Sal, he totally ignored me. Captain T'Zen introduced me to him, but his gaze

swept over me as if I was dust under his feet. Later, though, I caught his eyes upon me, and the hatred there sliced through me like a knife. I did not know why he should feel this way, and right then I did not care, I only knew that I had an enemy here.

After my shift was over I left, a sick feeling inside me. I was alone amongst these alien beings with no friend and at least one enemy, one who was my senior officer and could make my life hell if he wanted to. Vulcans are renowned for being the gentlest of civilised people, but it was not true of Selek. There was an inner violence about him which I could sense all too clearly.

The first weeks on the T'Varon I lived in almost total isolation. Except on duty I was rarely spoken to, and then for the minimum time. Vulcans - I found out - do not engage in the art of general conversation, and I sorely missed the friends I had left behind. Many times I listened in on the complex scientific discussions between various crewmembers; they always courteously included me amongst them, inviting me to sit with them, but I barely understood their theories - I am not a scientist - and my newness to the Vulcan language added to the difficulty.

At mealtimes there was always empty space around me until I realised that I was a meat eater - even though it was syntho-meat - on a ship full of vegetarians. I vowed at that moment to stop eating meat, difficult as that would be for me, for I liked the taste and scent of meat dishes. My status on this ship was too precarious; I could not have them turn from me because of my diet.

I had seen little of Spock since foolishly mentioning to him that I knew of his half-Human heritage. The moment I had seen the flash of anger cross his features I knew I had made a terrible mistake in bringing up his 'bad blood', as he obviously considered it. I cursed myself for my stupidity, but the damage was done and I did not know how to rectify it.

He talked to me only about matters concerning my integration into the life of the ship. He was coolly polite and efficient, but I knew that a further barrier separated us. My misery and loneliness increased; I who had never lacked friends was now completely alone, a stranger amongst Vulcans. I tried, I know I did, but they would ever so politely ignore my friendly advances, stare down at me from their usually greater height, and I would be left thoroughly demoralised.

The worst times were the hours spent alone in my cabin. For a time I would sit and study all I could on Vulcan and its people, but after a while I would yearn for some companionship and would make my way to the Rec. Room just to be with others, even if they were uninterested in me.

One evening I saw Spock there, sitting alone playing at three-dimensional chess. We had barely spoken for days now, and I was unsure of his feelings - if he had any - towards me. This could not go on. I had to find a way through to him.

"Mr Spock, may I join you?" I asked.

He looked up at me. "If you wish," he said non-committally. I breathed a sigh of relief. At least he had not refused me. I sat and studied his game. He played both Black and White and I found it impossible to follow his moves at the speed he was playing. Once he had

finished, I jumped in impulsively. "Would you care for a game, Mr Spock? I'm not an expert, but I've been known to win on occasion."

His eyebrow climbed in that hesitant way of his. Was he surprised? I think perhaps that he was.

"Very well," he agreed.

I am a moderately good chess player, but I was a novice before this Vulcan, who had me outmanoeuvred in less than five minutes. I did not know how to feel about it. Humiliated? Angry? I felt none of those. Perhaps I was shocked, I am not certain.

"Truly, Humans are of a lesser intelligence," said a disdainful voice behind me.

I gave a start and turned around to see Selek standing there looking down at me, contempt plainly showing in his eyes.

I stood up, trying to contain my anger at his tone. "Commander Selek," I said with an insolence I could not restrain. "I was not aware you were interested in anything I was doing."

He stared at me in open dislike - perhaps hatred is a better word - but I did not flinch from him. I would not allow him to intimidate me. He obviously wanted to do just that.

"I am uninterested in anything a Human might do," he replied.

The iciness of his hate shot through me, leaving me chilled and angered. What had I done to make such an enemy? Was it only the fact of my Humanness? How could Vulcans, who were meant to be the most tolerant of all races, harbour such a bigot? If others felt this way, then my mission here was bound to fail. With a deep feeling of doubt, I wondered about the legendary integrity of the Vulcan people.

"Commander Selek," Spock said rising to his feet, "to insult one of another species is unseemly."

I glanced at him in startlement. Was he defending me? He, who had been forced to take on a yeoman's duties! He, the Science Officer!

"He is Human, inferior to Vulcans in every way," Selek said.

He *was* prejudiced; I had been correct. So there *were* Vulcans who harboured resentment towards others. I was furious, but saddened. Vulcans, whom I had idealistically thought of as far too civilised to know prejudice, still had that weakness. It dawned on me then that Selek would probably be more resentful of Spock, the living proof of a union between Vulcan and Human. Bigots always hated people of mixed blood.

"He is different," Spock said. "He has his own abilities; they must not be scorned. All life must be respected. So it is written in the Tenets of Surak. Each individual is unique unto himself."

I glanced from one to the other. This was the closest thing to an argument I had seen on the T'Varon. The differences between the two Vulcans were apparent. Spock, so young, leanly built, slight compared to the more powerful mature frame of the First Officer; yet *he* was controlled as a Vulcan should be, while aggression, barely suppressed, exuded from Selek.

"It has been said," I pitched in, "that the reason Vulcans do not serve on all-worlds ships is that they are prejudiced against other species. I did not believe it until now." I smiled at Selek with all the contempt I felt for him. "You are the worst kind of bigot; even we Humans have outgrown such intolerance."

Selek's eyes flashed, and I thought he would strike me. I braced myself for the blow, ready to defend myself, but a moment later I felt Spock at my shoulder as his arm grazed against mine. It was the first physical contact I had known for so long, and it was like a soothing balm to my frazzled nerves. I almost laughed at myself. Starved of a simple Human touch, the momentary accidental contact had been like a welcome embrace. Spock glanced at me sharply, and as I met his eyes, I wondered at the expression I saw there. If he had not been a Vulcan I would not have hesitated to call it confusion.

"Is this Human insolence?" Selek asked in a harsh tone.

"No, not insolence, *sir*," I replied, turning to him. "Observation."

"Indeed," Spock agreed, to my delight. "I have also observed signs of bigotry which are most un-Vulcan."

Selek's eyes blazed at him and I, only catching the edge of his gaze, flinched from the power emanating from him. Spock, however, stood his ground, returning it with his own piercing look. The silent battle of wills lasted for what appeared to be an eternity. I could only shift uncomfortably, unsure of what to do; I could not disturb them, nor could I assist Mr Spock. I felt completely out of my depth, faced with the power of these Vulcans.

To my great satisfaction, it was Selek who broke the contact. "You show your true colours, Mr Spock," he said vindictively. "You side with this Human. You are no Vulcan. I have always argued this. You have proved me correct."

Spock raised his eyebrows slowly. I could sense his growing anger. "This Human shows more respect for Vulcan custom than certain Vulcans." His voice was icy, and I now knew definitely that he *had* suffered at Selek's hands. I wondered why he was defending me. He had no reason to; he owed me nothing. I was a nuisance to him - I had taken him away from his primary duties as Science Officer...

As I looked up at him, standing by my shoulder, close to me, a strange warmth enveloped me. Somehow, I felt secure with him; it felt right for him to be there, despite the fact he had never been exactly friendly with me.

Who said that Vulcans have no emotions? Selek's eyes were full of anger, his thin lips pressed together tightly for a moment and his nostrils flared. "One day you will learn your place. Perhaps that day will be soon."

"Do not threaten me," Spock replied calmly. "I am considered the best Science Officer in the Fleet. Anyone can become a Navigator. Few can become Science Officer. I trust you will remember that."

I was delighted with his answer. He had countered Selek's threat beautifully and I saw how Selek was at a loss for words. Yet I knew that hatred for Spock had deepened in the twisted mind of the First Officer.

Another voice intruded. "Commander Selek."

We all turned to face the Captain. "Attend me," she ordered.

Without a word, Selek obeyed her, and they left the Rec. Room immediately. The others present kept their eyes averted and I realised that such scenes must be considered bad taste amongst these 'non-emotional' Vulcans.

EMOTIONS

I felt angered by Selek's attitude, but also I had a glimmer of hope. Spock had not been bound to defend me, but he had gone out of his way to do so, incurring the wrath of a senior officer in the process. I wondered why he had done it.

I faced him. "Mr Spock - " I began.

"Do you wish another game of chess, Mr Kirk?" he interrupted me.

I grinned a little. For him to interrupt, something no polite Vulcan had done before, showed me that his humanity was still a factor in his behaviour. I began to like him.

"I certainly would, Mr Spock," I quickly accepted; but his next words surprised me.

"Your game is illogical, but interesting. I wish to analyse it."

I did not care what he wanted to do with my game; he wanted my company and that was enough. With a lighter heart than I had experienced for many weeks, I sat down opposite him.

"I have never been so easily defeated, Mr Spock. I am a child playing a Grand master."

His eyebrows rose, but he made the first move before he commented. "All children must grow and learn."

I studied him carefully. What was he offering me? Was he offering me anything at all? Was I reading meaning into his words which was not intended?

"If they have an understanding teacher," I said carefully, in reply.

He stared at me for a very long moment. "I do not understand your meaning."

I held his gaze, wanting to get through to him, somehow knowing that it was vital that we understood one another.

"I know it has been degrading for you to have been given the task of teaching me how to fit in to this ship. It is not my fault you have been given such a duty. You have not made it difficult for me. You have given me consideration and patience and have defended me before Commander Selek." I learned forward, earnestly seeking the benevolence I felt he possessed. "I thank you for all of that." I sat back on seeing his discomfort at my closeness to him. "Mr Spock, I have the greatest respect for you. I have worked with you on the Bridge and I believe I have never seen a Science Officer to equal you."

It was the honest truth. The way his hands sped over his console was amazing. How he

correlated data and computed odds was a mystery to me, and I am rated on the Science station. Compared to him, other Science Officers I had known were novices. "I ask your forgiveness if I have offended you in any way," I added, referring to my indiscreet mention of his mixed heritage. "I have much to learn of Vulcan courtesy. I am willing to learn." He still watched me, but I could not tell if my words had made any impression at all. "I am truly sorry if your responsibility to me brings you the scorn of your fellow officers."

"Commander Selek is one of the very few Vulcans who holds those opinions, Mr Kirk. We *do* respect and honour all life-forms."

"He has made your life difficult, then?" I asked, wondering if he would open up to me at all.

His expression changed slightly and I thought I saw pain there. "He is of the opinion that intermarriage between Vulcan and Human is offensive and obscene."

"All races have bigots like him," I said. "No doubt he thinks of you as Human."

"He does. He has opposed my rise in Starfleet most vigorously."

My sympathy for him made me forget my own loneliness and unhappiness. "You are too talented, Mr Spock. No-one can stop the advancement of such an exceptional officer. You are a constant reminder to him that the progeny of an interplanetary marriage does not conform to his own prejudiced ideas."

His head lifted in what appeared to me to be a certain pride. "Indeed," he said.

I sighed deeply, happy that I was beginning to reach him at last. I had found some common ground with him; perhaps I would gain a friend here after all. I had been drawn to him from the very start, even though he had kept a wide distance from me. Hope sprung within me.

"It is not degrading to assist one who requires help," he said, after a few moments. "Perhaps at first I believed this..." I could see the struggle going on in him, and held my breath awaiting his next words. "I ask your pardon. I should have known better." I smiled at him, feeling real warmth for him now. He was honest with himself, not afraid to reconsider his own attitudes and change them. I was impressed.

"Mr Spock, there is nothing to forgive. You have made my life here tolerable. I hope... I sincerely hope we can be friends."

His eyes blazed with such power, I recoiled from him in fear. "You know not what you say, it is impossible," he said harshly.

I could not control the churning in my stomach. "I only meant - " I began, but broke off, *unable to say more*. Damn him, I had upset him again, just when I was beginning to get somewhere. I had mentioned friendship, obviously another subject which was taboo. I stood up, angry with myself, with him, with *Starfleet* for putting me into a situation I could not control.

"I will remove myself from your presence so as not to offend you further, Mr Spock. Perhaps in my quarters, out of sight, I will cease to be an embarrassment to you. Excuse me."

Turning on my heel, I stormed out in a rage. What was I doing here, barely tolerated,

almost an outcast? I felt so alone, more so than I had ever been in my life before. Obviously no Vulcan would deign to become the friend of a Human. I was beneath their consideration, some lesser species as Selek believed. I hardly noticed the crewmembers quickly moving out of my way as I sped through the corridors of the ship.

Once I reached the welcome solitude of my cabin I flung myself upon the bed, and pressed my face into the pillow. I almost wept with frustration. I had been on the verge of reaching Spock, but had ruined it all by my ignorance of Vulcan custom. How had I offended him? How? Surely *he* was not prejudiced? Of course he was not. Then what did friendship mean to a Vulcan? Did it mean anything at all? In all my studies of the Vulcan people, I had not come across any references to friendship.

As I slowly calmed down I realised that I had behaved like a spoilt child. What must Spock think of me? I felt so ashamed. He had tried to help me, he had asked me to play chess with him, he had asked my pardon, and I had returned his courtesy in a petty display of temper.

I curled up tightly in despair. I had known that life on a Vulcan ship would be difficult and had prepared myself for the differences as I understood them, I had even prepared for a certain loneliness; but I had not reckoned on this culture where I was totally out of place. It was not the lack of sexual activity, although to be honest celibacy is not easy for me. More than anything it was the absence of a touch on the shoulder, a handshake, a hug; I am affectionate by nature and this complete avoidance of touch was causing me severe frustration and pain.

In my research, I had discovered that all Vulcan children were bonded at seven years of age. When the appropriate time came they were married; in fact there are often married couples serving aboard Vulcan ships. I had seen no evidence of this and I did not have the authority to read personal files, but I had never seen anyone touch or show any loving feeling for another. How did they survive? Had they no need for physical comfort? Did Vulcans have no need for anyone? Were they truly insular beings?

The sound of the door chime startled me from my reflections. I quickly stood, straightened my uniform and pushed my hair back from my forehead.

"Enter," I said as evenly as I could manage.

To my surprise it was Spock. He walked over, then stopped a few paces from me and clasped his hands behind him. "Mr Kirk," he said slowly as if to a child, "your emotions are disturbing the harmony on this ship. You must learn to restrain them."

"How can I do that," I shot back angrily, "when I don't know the rules? I cannot tell what is offensive, what is not, what is right, what is wrong; I am treated as an outcast, an inferior, no-one is friendly .. No-one touches..."

He appeared puzzled by my outburst. "Do *I* treat you as an outcast?"

I stared at him, and felt even more ashamed; he had no idea what I was talking about! I remembered his defence of me. I had no right to speak to him in such a manner.

"No, you have not. I am sorry, Mr Spock. I am very Human and I have a quick temper. I did not mean to unleash it at you." He seemed to relax a little at my words and encouraged by that, I continued. "I just don't understand. I have been on this ship for more than a month and still feel like a stranger. Perhaps my assignment here was a mistake. It will never work

out - there are too many differences between our species."

"I do not agree," he answered, to my astonishment. "I believe your behaviour is most interesting to the crew."

The white heat of rage swept through me at his words. "That makes me feel like a specimen to be studied," I said in a raised voice. "Well, I am not a specimen. I am a Human being and have my own kind of dignity." I turned my back on him. I know it was the height of bad manners, but I was hurting inside and could not bear to look upon his cold features. "Please leave my quarters." Vaguely, I was aware that I had slipped into English, but I did not care. All my knowledge of the Vulcan language seemed to have left me. What did it matter any more?

"Mr Kirk," Spock said, his tone gentler than I had ever heard it. Damn! I was torn between liking him and disliking him. Sometimes he appeared almost friendly - almost reachable; other times he was so alien and unapproachable. He confused me. "You must learn control. Without it you will be unable to survive on this ship. If you continue in this emotional manner, you will become ill."

"What do you care?" I asked, spinning around to face him. He was silent, and I laughed softly, mockingly. "Exactly. No-one cares a damn bit!"

His intense gaze bored into me, stilling my tirade, compelling me to listen to him. "You do the cause of non-Vulcans a disservice by this behaviour. You give victory into the hands of SeleK. Is that what you wish? Will you allow that to happen?"

I flushed and lowered my eyes. He was correct. I was too volatile for my own good. I was giving SeleK more evidence he could twist to show Human inferiority and unfitness. I clasped my hands behind me in an attempt to find some dignity, and bit back my disappointment in myself.

"I have made things more difficult for you, Mr Spock," I stated. "I am in your charge and I am not a credit to you. Perhaps I am too much of an individualist, maybe I have a too Human need for love and companionship. I *am* sorry; I will try harder - I swear I will."

I raised my eyes to his, and for a moment I fancied I saw a touch of compassion there. I recalled how the momentary contact with him had brought me a soothing calm; in fact I now realised that his very presence here had calmed me. I wondered why.

"Mr Kirk - " he began.

"Please call me Jim," I said impulsively. I had not heard that name since I had left Starbase Nine, and was desperate to hear someone call me by it; the formality of the constant use of my surname was another nail in the coffin of my isolation.

He blinked, raised an eyebrow, and I could plainly see that my request had startled him. A slight frown settled upon his face, as he digested my words.

"Jim... I will not allow you to fail," he said after an endless moment.

I grinned widely, my earlier despair suddenly dissolving and turning into joy as he spoke my name. I could have hugged him. He stepped back a pace. "I will assist you in any way I can. I understand your situation more than you realise, and would advise you to keep your temper and emotions under tighter restraint. Vulcans are touch-telepaths, but some of us

can receive intense emotions without touch. It is painful for us."

I was horrified. "You mean you can *sense* my emotions?"

"I can. Yes."

I was shaken. I remembered how all those Vulcans had stepped out of my way as I had rushed here. They had been assaulted by the waves of angry feelings I had broadcast. Now I knew why they avoided me. I felt terrible, naked and exposed for all to see.

"Mr Spock," I began in an attempt at another apology.

"Please call me Spock," he said softly.

Absurdly, tears stung my eyelids at his kindness to me. I blinked them away, knowing that he would not welcome such a display. I had to get a grip on myself.

"Spock," I said gratefully, "thank you."

Our eyes held and I had the strongest feeling that somehow we had reached a kind of understanding. A sense of ease filled me and I smiled at him with increased warmth, seeing now beyond the cold Vulcan front to one who knew compassion. He bowed his head slightly. I believe he was uncomfortable at my smile and my very powerful feelings of friendship towards him.

"Do you wish to continue our chess game, Jim?" he asked.

My delight in his request caused puzzlement to appear on his features. I was beginning to be able to read the small signs he showed; I was beginning to get somewhere.

"Yes I would, Spock," I answered him.

We returned to our abandoned game in the Rec. Room and although I was beaten as easily as the first time, I did not care. I was not totally alone any more; I had made a breakthrough with this enigmatic half-Vulcan. His support gave me strength and the hope of a future here.

CRISIS

Selek was in command when the crisis hit us.

The ship literally popped out of hyperspace, setting all our sensors and alarms buzzing. It was approximately the size of a shuttlecraft, but was certainly not a Federation vessel. Its shape was hexagonal and it sparkled all over as if studded with diamonds. Spock's analysis came quickly, confirming my suspicion that it was totally alien.

It swung round, heading directly for us. The sparkling on its surface increased until it became blinding and I kept my eyes on my helm control, studying the energy patterns which were now radiating from it in a widely increasing arc. I began to worry. Why was Selek not calling a yellow alert? He just sat there as Spock gave him the sensor readout, but he did not

acknowledge the Science Officer's evaluations in any way.

Spock continued as if unaware of Selek's disinterest. "No life forms aboard. This is a fully automated craft; however there are anomalies in its behaviour. The energy has increased by eighty six point three percent in one solar minute.

I watched my sensor readings. We were in a highly dangerous position. What was Selek doing?

Spock relayed more data and my admiration for his skills increased. I could not understand how he made his analysis; as I studied the readings I could only perceive a fraction of it, but as I continued to scan them I noted that the pattern of the sparkling energy from the alien ship was vaguely familiar.

I glanced towards Lt. T'Sal on Navigation and for a moment saw worry cross her exquisite features. So even she was concerned. I did not have to scan the other members of the Bridge crew, for I now began to feel the unnatural tension which pervaded the usually calm Vulcans. My attention returned to my console; the field of energy was getting too close.

"Shields up," Selek ordered at last.

With a sigh of relief I complied. "Shields up, sir," I said.

The brightness increased as the vessel gained on us, but Selek sat again in silence, not even calling the Captain to the Bridge. The fool! What kind of First Officer was he?

"Commander," Spock said, his voice so sharp that I felt the hairs rise on the back of my neck, "that energy is highly concentrated Berthold radiation. At that level of power it will penetrate our shields and destroy all life aboard. We must destroy the alien ship. It is malfunctioning. It is a menace to any vessel it encounters. I respectfully suggest you take action."

Of course! I recognized it now. Berthold rays, deadly to all life forms if exposed for long enough at ordinary intensity from a sun; that is, if you were protected by the atmosphere of a planet. At this level, and unprotected as we were, we would be killed almost instantly. I checked the phaser controls, and computed the co-ordinates of the target as I awaited the order to fire.

"Nonsense," Selek said. "Berthold radiation is a natural phenomenon. It cannot be harnessed."

Shock hit me. Was he blind? There was a deathly silence on the Bridge as we all turned around and watched Spock leave his console and move quickly to stand by the command chair.

"We have fifteen seconds to destroy that ship, sir."

Fifteen seconds could be an eternity. I wanted to yell, 'Fire the phasers or we will die!' but I could not speak, for the battle was between the two Vulcans, Spock's will against Selek's. However, I knew that if Selek did not give that order I would fire the phasers myself, regardless of the consequences.

"Return to your station," Selek said disdainfully. "You are in error."

I returned to my controls determined to carry out my plan, but a moment later I felt a

hard grip on the back of my chair.

"Fire phasers, Mr Kirk," Spock ordered urgently.

"Phaser one locked on," I replied immediately as my hands released the control. "Engaged."

He leaned over me and together we watched the accuracy of the hit.

The ship exploded, and on Spock's further orders I took evasive action to lead us out of the danger zone. My skills as a helmsman had never been tested so severely, but I was aware at all times of Spock at my back, almost touching me. I could feel his breath stir my hair.

Once out of range I grinned with relief, for we had only been three seconds from certain death. It had been very close. I leaned back, looked up at Spock and we exchanged a message of mutual satisfaction. His eyes seemed to soften for a second.

"Thank you, Mr Kirk," he said. "Well done."

I accepted his praise gladly, but I knew I did not deserve it. His had been the analysis. I would not have recognized the radiation pattern. I was about to say so when Selek's angry voice intruded. "Insubordination! This is what happens when Humans are allowed to serve on our ships. They do not understand discipline. Security, take Mr Spock and Mr Kirk to the Brig."

I could not believe that the bigoted fool would be stupid enough to press charges against us, but I saw now that I had underestimated the extent of his prejudice. I rose to my feet and stood at Spock's side. I would back the Science Officer completely, for he had done the only possible thing to save the ship. But there was more to it than that. Spock had shown me his compassion; he had called me Jim, he was my one and only contact here, my almost- friend. I could not bear to lose him.

"On what grounds do you base your charge?" Spock asked as coolly as if requesting the time.

"You gave the order to fire without my permission. You have overstepped your authority," Selek spat out in fury.

"Commander," T'Sal said. "Berthold radiation is fatal to all Vulcanoid and Humanoid life."

I looked at her and for a moment her enormous ebony eyes met mine. I smiled at her in gratitude. She had the courage to speak the truth; she also had recognized the danger.

"Silence," Selek said.

She bowed her head, but I saw her exchange a glance with the Security Officer who now stood beside me.

"Very well, sir," Spock said. "I will prepare my defence. Mr Kirk, however, is blameless."

"He fired the phasers," Selek said, his voice almost shaking with the force of his fury.

"On my order," Spock replied, the very picture of the efficient, emotionless Vulcan.

"He did not verify it with me."

"I am his superior officer," Spock replied. "It is his duty to obey me."

He was defending me again, this half-Vulcan for whom I was rapidly gaining a real affection, who was in his own way trying to help me. I did not fear Selek, nor my future here, if Spock was with me. We would beat the bastard - together.

"You will both go to the Brig immediately," Selek ordered.

Spock indicated that I should follow him, and I did so. In passing, I smiled at Selek with all the contempt I felt for him. His rage increased, and I was pleased. I intended to goad him and had succeeded.

The Security Officer followed us into the turbo-lift, but said nothing to us. I looked up at him. Even amongst the tall people of Vulcan, he was a giant. I sighed; I am not exactly small, but on the T'Varon I sometimes felt dwarfed.

Once in the Brig, I sat down on the bed while Spock seated himself at the computer console and immediately made use of it. I wondered what information he was searching for.

"He overreacted," I said after I saw Spock sit back and switch off the screen.

He turned around to face me. "Technically, he is correct. I did give the order to fire without his permission."

"Yes, and if you had not done so we would all be dead. If it hadn't been for his blind prejudice we would not be in this position. The Captain would have accepted your findings - any Captain would have. Anyone can see your worth, Spock." I wanted him to know how I felt; I needed him to understand my admiration for him. "If I had been Captain, I would have acted instantly upon your words; I would have destroyed the damn ship. I would have trusted your judgement."

He stared at me for a very long time, and I was unable to bear the intensity of it. I looked down at my clasped hands, found some courage, then met his eyes again. I don't know what he was thinking, but I only knew that I must face him, show him that I was not afraid of commitment to him.

"You speak with passion. Humans are highly emotional and illogical, but you understand loyalty."

"Yes, I do understand loyalty, Spock," I said with a smile to him. "I willingly give that to you. I would give you - " I broke off, too unsure to mention friendship to him, for I remembered only too clearly his reaction the last time I had tried that. Yet from that we had reached a sort of agreement, and were on first name terms. Once again I was confused by his enigmatic alienness and his almost-Human compassion. He was so clever, a genius by any standard, but there was a vulnerability about him which I had not noticed in any other Vulcan. Was it his Human element? I could not pinpoint it. If only he would confide in me; if only he would consider me a friend. If... A short word which stretched out into infinity.

Abruptly, he turned away to the computer again. I sighed, lay down on the bed and stared at the ceiling. What a success my mission here had been!!! In the Brig, already!

We were there for almost an hour before Lt. Storon, the Security Officer, entered. It dawned on me at that moment that the force-field on the door had never been activated and we could have left at any time. I marvelled at these people. No doubt they rarely used the Brig, for Vulcans would never commit anything like an offence. Even *our* 'offence' had only warranted confinement to quarters. Selek had put us here to try to humiliate us. He had not succeeded. I studied Lt. Storon and wondered if he had deliberately left the force-field off in some kind of protest at the injustice of our imprisonment.

"The Captain requires your presence in the Briefing Room," he said.

Spock inclined his head in that courteous way of his, and I jumped to my feet, straightened my shirt, and also bowed slightly. I am not as graceful as a Vulcan, but at least I can try.

The Briefing Room was crowded. The whole Bridge crew was present. Was this going to be a formal hearing? As Captain, T'Zen had the authority to bring to trial and convict any of her crew.

"Be seated," she said, indicating two empty chairs opposite her. Selek sat by her side, his face completely expressionless. So he had regained his composure after his outburst. I wondered if he would crack under Human scorn. I would give it my best shot.

"Commander Selek has charged you both with insubordination. This is a very serious charge. I will take your statements in this informal hearing, then I will decide if a formal trial is necessary." She stared imperiously at Spock. "Commander Spock, why did you order Mr Kirk to fire phasers?"

I let out the breath I had been holding. She would be fair; she would listen to our point of view. No doubt she had already heard Selek's.

Spock did not hesitate. "Mr Selek did not accept my analysis of the energy pattern coming from the alien vessel. I knew I was correct. If I had not ordered the destruction of the craft, the radiation would have pierced our shields and killed us all in twelve point three seconds. There was no more time to argue with Mr Selek. We barely made it. Only the expert helm skills of Mr Kirk removed us from the danger zone in time." I flushed with pleasure at his praise. I wanted his approval more than anything. "I will show you the sensor readings and we will confirm the pattern of Berthold radiation."

"Very well," she said.

The computer comparisons were watertight. I smiled mockingly at Selek as his eyes flicked across me. *Just hold on, you cold bastard, I thought. Spock may be too polite to provoke you, but I'm not.*

"As you can now verify, Captain," Spock continued, "the situation was critical. I could delay no further. I freely admit to disobeying Commander Selek's order to return to my station and in ordering Mr Kirk to fire the phasers."

I admired his coolness. What an asset to the ship such an officer was. I hoped the

Captain thought so too.

"Mr Kirk," she said turning her piercing attention on me. "Why did you not seek confirmation of Mr Spock's order from Commander Selek?"

Now was my chance. "Captain, when Commander Spock informed Mr Selek that the alien ship was emitting Berthold radiation I immediately recognized his analysis to be correct. Assuming that the order to fire would be forthcoming, I checked all systems and prepared the co-ordinates. It was the logical thing to do, Captain, as time was of the essence. However, Mr Selek did not deign to take the expert judgement of the Science Officer, a judgement I knew to be accurate." I threw a contemptuous look at Selek. "So I was quite prepared to take Mr Spock's order, for it was the correct order." I was in full flow now, and did not let up. "If that ship had not been destroyed we would all be dead. We would have been killed, not by radiation but by the prejudice of the First Officer who would not listen to the best Science Officer in the fleet, dismissing him as if he and his advice were of no consequence. Such lack of respect for such a being is beneath contempt. No Human would act in such a fashion; I had not suspected that Vulcans could."

I found out then that Vulcans can be shocked, as they all stared at me wide-eyed. Non-emotional beings? Poppycock!

"That will suffice," Captain T'Zen said. She turned to Selek. "Speak."

I stared at him and saw that my scornful look was getting to him. I was pleased about that.

"I did not accept the Science Officer's evaluations. I did not believe that Berthold Radiation was other than a natural phenomenon."

"Mr Spock is the expert in such matters. Why did you not accept his evaluations? You were in charge of my ship. Its safety comes before all else."

"I wished to study the alien ship."

"You did not go through standard procedures. You did not call an alert. You did not call the Captain to the Bridge. You did not protect my ship and crew."

If a Vulcan could squirm, Selek did. The baleful glare of the Captain impaled him, and with a sudden movement, he bent his head very low. I glanced around the room, seeing the disapproving stares of the others present. Justice would be done, of that I was now sure.

"You have been remiss in your duty to me," T'Zen continued. Her tone became increasingly icy and I shivered, glad it was not directed at me.

"I ask your pardon," Selek said in a subdued and contrite voice.

She did not reply to him; instead she turned to us. "Commander Spock, Mr Kirk. You are both guilty of insubordination to a senior officer."

I was completely startled. Was she as prejudiced as Selek? Had I been wrong about her? I glanced at Spock, but his face was unreadable. I took a deep breath and tried to match his serenity.

"However, because of mitigating circumstances, no charges will be pressed against you,

nor will your actions be held against you in any way. You have saved the ship and for that you have my thanks. The hearing is over. Dismissed."

I followed Spock from the room; behind me came the other bridge officers, all except Selek. I guessed he was due for a further reprimand, and I was pleased. He deserved all that was coming to him. If he had done that on a ship of mine, I would have demoted him, but I did not know the rules of Vulcan discipline. On a Human ship the decision of the Captain was final on such matters. T'Zen was very angry in a controlled Vulcan way, but I felt sure that Selek's punishment would hurt.

"Mr Spock, would you join me for a meal?" I asked impulsively.

He stopped, turned around and gazed at me in his curious intent way.

"I would be honoured," he replied.

I grinned at him then turned to the others. "Will you also join us?"

Lt. T'Sal was the first to reply and to my delight she agreed. After that the others all accepted and as we made our way to the Rec. Room I suddenly felt for the first time as if I had been accepted as one of them.

During our meal they became involved in a discussion about the space-time continuum which I barely understood, but my occasional comment seemed to interest them and I began to feel a little more at ease amongst them.

It was only after we had finished eating that any reference was made to the incident on the Bridge.

"We are fortunate in having such a Science Officer," T'Sal said. "I do not know of another who could have interpreted the data so quickly and accurately."

Spock acknowledged her praise with a slight nod.

"The skill of the helmsman is impressive," she added, looking at me with her magnificent ebony eyes. The others at the table agreed with her and I smiled with sheer delight.

"Why do you smile?" T'Sal asked.

That wiped the smile from my face. How was I to explain such a response to one who knew nothing of emotion?

"I was pleased at your praise, your support. Forgive me if I have offended you, Lt. T'Sal, but I am not Vulcan and it is natural for Humans to smile if they feel happy about something."

She raised her exquisite eyebrows. "It is most... charming."

I felt the chills run up and down my spine at that remark. What was she saying to me? That she approved of me? That she liked me?

"I would agree it is most intriguing," Lt. Storon said.

"Indeed, my husband," T'Sal said.

I sighed with disappointment. Vulcans are completely monogamous. The marriage bond is for life, unlike the many forms of Human marriage. I envied Storon; T'Sal was intelligent and beautiful... and a fine Navigator.

"I had not considered Humans to be physically attractive," she continued, "but you, Mr Kirk, although different, have a masculine beauty which is most apparent."

I blushed to the roots of my hair like a child. She had just complimented me on my appearance, and it was most embarrassing!

Storon gave her a look of almost-affection. "You are an excellent judge of such matters, my wife."

She looked at him demurely. "Indeed."

Who said that Vulcans do not love? It was obvious to me now that, low key and unobtrusive as it was, Storon and T'Sal loved one another deeply. I realised then what a unique position I was in to study Vulcans as no other had ever done. Gradually, I was learning about them. The ice had a chip in it now; I must work on that.

Eventually Spock and I were left alone. He had said nothing about the hearing and I could not help but wonder what he thought of it.

"Spock, what will happen to Selek?"

"It is the Captain's decision."

I wanted to tell him how I felt about his support of me; I wanted him to know how much I liked his company. I wished him to understand what it would mean to me if we could be friends. But before I could speak he had risen to his feet. "If you will excuse me, Mr Kirk, I have matters to attend to."

I swallowed my disappointment; he would only accept so much familiarity. There was always a barrier between us, one I wanted to cross and he did not. I looked up at him, trying to cover my feeling of rejection.

"Thank you, Spock," I said as politely as I could. I held his eyes and he hesitated. For one brief moment I thought he would resume his seat and I leaned forward in anticipation, but he only bowed in that elegant way of his and left the Rec. Room.

Depressed and fatigued, I leaned my elbows on the table and bent my head down. Would I ever break the ice between us? Was I deluding myself by thinking that my position here had improved? I rubbed my eyes. Who could understand Vulcans? I certainly could not.

I stood up, and suddenly became aware that I was being watched. Well, the Human specimen was giving them a good show with his emotional behaviour. They were the perfect audience, raptly watching my performance. With that touch of irreverence which has on occasion brought me trouble, I opened my arms and bowed theatrically to them. I had not spent four years in the Academy drama group and learned nothing! Eyebrows were raised all around the room. I had surprised, perhaps scandalised them, and I was pleased.

My exit was made in complete silence.

BRIEFING

Captain T'Zen summoned me to her quarters the following day. I wondered if she was going to speak about the incident with Selek. I stood before her silently and awaited her attention.

"Mr Kirk, you will continue on Helm. You have proved your ability to run the station; your skill is impressive."

Praise from the Captain! Well, that was something to be prized. I tried to restrain my pleasure at her words; she would not welcome such an emotional response. She watched me intently. Why did all Vulcans have such a piercing gaze? It was most disconcerting.

"Do you have any problems you wish to relate?" she asked.

"No, Captain," I replied, unwilling to confide in her about my personal difficulties. She would not understand, and anyway my private life is my own.

She was silent for a time then she nodded. "Very well. You will join the landing party for Ariadnus. You will assist Mr Spock and Mr Selek in the negotiations with the Humans living there." My startlement must have shown for she added, "Can you deal with that, Mr Kirk?"

I swallowed hard. Why was she putting me and Spock on a landing party with Selek? Surely she realised how explosive that could be? Why was Selek being allowed to go?

"I can deal with it, Captain. But can Mr Selek?"

Her eyes shone with a brittleness I had not seen there before. "Each one of us must face his deepest fear, wrestle with his particular demon. Mr Selek is a fine officer in every respect apart from his illogical outlook on Humans. He must learn that he is incorrect. He must change his attitudes."

"Attitudes which almost killed us all," I reminded her.

"I am aware of that. He has been reprimanded and punished. He has been reduced in rank. Mr Spock is now First Officer."

Spock would make a fine First Officer; I was pleased for him, but I remembered the fury in Selek and wondered if he was capable of taking his revenge. I did not trust Selek, for there was a violence in him that I feared.

"Captain, I will try to show him that Humans are worthy of respect."

Her expression changed slightly. "Humans *are* worthy of respect, Mr Kirk. You are a fine officer, I wish you to be content here. I am not unaware that you have certain problems. There is a wide gap in the ways of our peoples, but we have much in common."

Her sympathetic and understanding words eased me somewhat and I smiled a little. "Thank you," I said. "It is a privilege to serve under such a Captain."

"I believe you are in line for a ship of your own?"

"If I succeed here, Captain."

"You will succeed, Mr Kirk. I have every confidence in you."

I relaxed under her approving gaze.

Spock and Selek arrived together. I searched their faces for any signs of their feelings - if they had any - on the reversal of their roles. I saw nothing. Spock acknowledged me with a slight nod. Selek ignored me.

The Captain briefed us on the mission. I was simply to act as liaison between the Humans on Ariadnus and the Vulcans, whom this isolated group of third generation colonists had never seen before. Spock as Science Officer was to determine, with a team of medical specialists, why tens of thousands of people had been reduced to a few thousand. I wondered what ability Selek had that he should accompany us.

"I question sending a Human to this planet," Selek objected.

I did not like the way he said 'Human'. He made it sound like an obscenity.

T'Zen glanced at him sharply. "These people have never seen a Vulcan. We must have Mr Kirk as Liaison Officer. There must be no mistakes on this mission due to misunderstandings."

"Then they should have sent a Human ship," he argued.

"We have been given this mission," she said. "We will determine the problem and endeavour to solve it. Mr Spock, are the environmental field suits operational?"

"Yes, Captain. I have adapted one to Mr Kirk's requirements."

Environmental field suits... I had read of them; a new system invented by Vulcan engineers which did away with the bulky and sometimes unusable environmental suits which were standard Starfleet issue. Controlled by sensors on a wristband, this energy field protected the individual from all viruses and bacteria. It had been successfully used by doctors at the Vulcan Science Academy when treating patients with contagious diseases.

"Mr Selek, you will instruct Mr Kirk in the use of the field-suits," T'Zen ordered.

Selek impaled me with a look of such hatred that I felt the colour drain from my face. I swallowed and looked at the Captain, about to protest, but she stared at me calmly and I bit back my words. She was so beautiful in her regal serenity. I looked down at my boots in embarrassment. Was I so sex-starved that a woman probably older than my mother was desirable to me?

"Mr Kirk?" she said.

I straightened my shoulders, glanced at Spock for support, and received it in his calm countenance as he locked his gaze on mine. I took a deep breath.

"I would prefer another instructor. Commander Selek has made it known publicly that he resents my presence on the T'Varon and considers me an inferior being."

Her eyes flashed at him, and he lowered his head before her. She returned her attention

to me. "Perhaps you are correct. Mr Spock will instruct you. Mr Selek has not yet learned tolerance."

"I will instruct Mr Kirk," Spock said. "He is my responsibility."

The Captain nodded. "Yes, Spock, but I hoped that my husband might learn from his mistakes." She clasped her hands upon the desk and her shoulders drooped slightly. "I see he has not."

I was astonished. How could this tolerant woman be wife to such a bigot? I had not suspected in any way that they were married. How could a Starship Captain be married to one of her crew? It was unheard of in Starfleet! The Vulcan wing of Starfleet, without a doubt, worked by different rules.

"I oppose Selek's ideas," T'Zen continued. "I believe Mr Kirk has a place here. He has proved himself to be an excellent helmsman; now he must prove himself on landing party duty. I wish to see unity of purpose. I wish to see co-operation." She stared at her husband with all the authority of her position as Captain. "Mr Selek, you are relieved of landing party duty."

His eyes blazed as he was dismissed from the briefing.

SPOCK

As I returned to my quarters to prepare, my thoughts were full of the latest revelation. The access corridor was empty of all personnel as everyone on this shipful of scientists studied the unique trinary system we were approaching.

I did not hear my attacker.

A searing pain swept through my chest as hard fingers pinched the vulnerable area between neck and shoulder. Blackness began to descend upon me and I struggled violently in a powerful grip. I fought to control my own body; it would not obey me. I was helpless and unable to protect myself as a booted heel smashed into my knee. My leg gave way under me, and my ankle twisted in a sickening wrench. I cried out with the pain, and crashed onto the deck, unable to stop myself. Before I passed out, the last thing I remembered was the face of my assailant leaning over me, his face twisted in a grimace of hate and revulsion.

SELEK...

The constant excruciating pain was my first awareness as I regained consciousness in Sickbay. It spread through my foot and ankle along my leg to my knee, throbbing in wave after wave of agony. A doctor stood by my bed checking the diagnostic scanners above me. I recognized her; she had given me my medical when I had first arrived here. Dr T'Renna, cold as ice, a female Selek. She did not approve of me and had made that perfectly clear. Spock - a welcome face - stood next to her; he was as grim as I have ever seen him. I glanced down at myself, vaguely noting that I had been stripped of my clothing.

My whole body now ached. How could such pain result from a damaged knee and twisted ankle? And what had he done to my shoulder? It was numb. I tried to speak. Why had they not given me a painkiller?

T'Renna stared down at me and there was no sympathy or concern in her eyes, just cool clinical detachment. She turned as the Captain came in, and for a moment I envisioned my old friend and Doctor, 'Bones'. How I yearned for that acerbic tongue and crusty behaviour behind which he hid his deep Human compassion. I would have given anything for his reassuring touch, his gentle concern. I would have allowed him to shout at me all he wanted for putting on too much weight, although with my diet on this ship there was not much chance of that...

"Report!" T'Zen snapped.

The doctor moved away from me. In my haze of pain I could barely make out her diagnosis. All I could catch was that the cartilage in my knee was badly damaged and my ankle bone chipped. My concentration wavered and unconsciousness threatened me. The intensity of the pain increased and I bit my lip until it bled. *"Help me!"* I tried to say. *"The pain..."*

I was going to lose consciousness if they did not help me... Nausea swept uncontrollably through my body; my ears buzzed, deafening me, and my eyes grew dim. Sickbay was fading and I was descending... falling... into a bottomless black void. *"Please..."* I entreated. *"Please... Help me... Spock..."*

Why did I call for him in my desperate plea? I do not know. His name sprang to my lips as if it were natural for me. His face swam into view and I held onto the sight of him as I struggled to stay conscious.

"Jim," he said.

I could barely hear him, the humming in my ears was so loud. I put every bit of effort and will power left to me into concentrating on him.

"Jim..." I heard again faintly; so very faintly.

His eyes bored into mine. I felt his determination and will forcing me to rise above the pain-filled nightmare I was trapped in. A warmth penetrated my senses and the intensity of the agony decreased slightly.

"Jim." His voice was softer than usual. "Breathe deeply, do not panic, be calm. I am with you."

I cannot describe the comfort his words gave me; all I knew was that he was there and he would not leave me. Slowly my tension began to ebb.

"He is in severe pain, Doctor," Spock said. "Humans cannot control pain."

T'Renna's voice was mocking. "I thought that even Humans had some control. I see now you are correct. How can you bear to touch him, Spock? Your telepathy is powerful."

I was startled. I had been totally unaware of what he had been doing. Now I realised that the warmth I was feeling, the lessening of pain and stress, was due to the touch of his hand upon my arm. I watched him in awe. He had healing power! I had read of this most magical of Vulcan gifts. It was rare and highly prized; most who possessed it entered the

medical profession.

"Give him an analgesic, Doctor," T'Zen ordered. "How can you, a Healer, allow anyone to suffer?"

T'Renna left and T'Zen leaned over me. "Forgive the attitudes of some of my crew, Mr Kirk. I will not tolerate it. They will be reprimanded. Did you see your attacker?"

What was I to say? How was I to tell her that her husband had done this to me? I was in a quandary. Vulcans do not lie. They would not respect one who did.

"Selek," I said finally.

The shock hit her and she could not hide it. Her black eyes darkened and the expression there did not bode well for Selek. She composed herself quickly and drew herself straight. My admiration for her strength of character increased.

"Indeed," she said, looking across at Spock.

T'Renna returned and with disapproval showing in her every move, she finally gave me the painkilling shot. I sighed as it immediately began to take effect, but as I lay there looking up at Spock, I knew that the drug - however effective - was only a temporary release. I would need Regen treatment to repair the damaged knee and ankle. That could mean days away from my work; the landing party detail would be out.

I smiled a little at Spock as I heard the Captain order Security to lock Selek in the Brig. She had believed me. He nodded fractionally in satisfaction.

"T'Renna, how long will it take for Mr Kirk's injuries to heal?" the Captain asked.

"Twenty-nine hours in Regen," the Doctor replied immediately. "The damage to delicate Human tissues is extensive."

"I need him to be on the landing party in three hours."

"Impossible," the Doctor argued.

"I cannot afford the time," T'Zen said. "You must heal him in the Vulcan way."

T'Renna was brave, I'll grant her that. She defied her Captain. "I will not submit myself to a Human's lack of emotional control. See how he broadcasts. Do you wish me to suffer the indignity of exposing myself to his emotions? His feelings?"

"You are a Healer. Heal."

"No. I will not heal a Human."

"You have shields," T'Zen argued.

"A Healer must lower the shields. I cannot protect myself from one who cannot control. Am I a Veterinary Healer? I am not trained for this."

T'Zen was furious. Even Vulcan calm had deserted her; but it was nothing compared to my feelings. I had just been compared to an animal! I seethed with rage; it was only the

pressure of Spock's hold on my shoulder which kept me silent.

"This Human is essential to the landing party. You will heal him," T'Zen ordered.

"The Captain may not order the ship's Chief Medical Officer to do anything against her judgement," T'Renna said obstinately.

"There are other Doctors," T'Zen retaliated.

"They will not heal a Human."

"What good is a medical staff who put personal requirements before the health of their patients?" T'Zen said, bitterness in her voice. "Where is your oath to heal and respect all life?"

A great sadness overcame me as I watched them argue. Why had I ever come aboard this ship? I had caused nothing but trouble. The great experiment of integration on a Vulcan ship was a failure; I was totally unsuitable, my temperament was all wrong. As soon as possible I would request a transfer back to a Human ship. My dreams of being the youngest ever Starship Captain would be gone forever, but at least I would be amongst people I could relate to.

But I did not reckon on Spock...

"Captain," he said. "Allow me to heal Mr Kirk."

We all stared at him.

"You are not a doctor," T'Zen stated.

"That is correct, Captain," he replied. "However, I come from a family of Healers. I have the Gift." He shot a searing look at T'Renna. "If the medical staff will not heal Mr Kirk, then they cannot object if I do. He is my responsibility."

I saw the Captain's face soften; even the Doctor appeared to relax. Spock had solved their problem.

"I will monitor you, Spock," T'Renna said.

Spock shook his head slightly, then fixed his gaze upon her. "That will not be necessary." The Doctor stepped back a pace at his severe tone. "I do not require your assistance."

T'Zen glanced at them both. "Spock is within his rights. He may enter into the healing meld without supervision, for you have disclaimed any responsibility for this patient's welfare."

T'Renna bowed, then followed the Captain to stand by the foot of my bed. I did not understand what was going on but I curbed my impatience. Spock would explain. Spock would help me.

He looked down at me. "If you will permit it, I will attempt to heal your injuries. I am not a Doctor, but I have been trained in Vulcan healing by one of the foremost Healers on my world."

"Spock, " I murmured, suddenly realising just how much of a friend he was being to me. His sympathy washed over my unhappiness, lifting my spirits and bringing me hope. "I do not understand Vulcan healing but I will permit you to try it. I place myself in your hands. I trust you."

As I spoke those words, my eyes locked with his. There was a strange, almost eerie silence around us, and I felt as if some kind of communication had passed between us.

"If you trust me, Jim," he said, "then I am confident that the healing will be successful."

"I trust you," I repeated. "Tell me what I must do."

"Do not resist me. Relax and accept the healing power into you. I will do the rest."

"But my emotions, my feelings... The Doctor said..." I trailed off unsurely.

"If you can restrain them, it will ease the burden on me. If you are unable to, then do not be concerned. I am prepared."

I studied his face, noting his impassive expression, but his eyes told a different story. There was understanding and sympathy there, and there was concern for me. I felt no fear of the unknown territory of Vulcan healing, for I knew that the one who had offered to heal me was the gentlest being I had ever known; I trusted him.

"I will do as you say, Spock," I said.

As he released me and moved to stand by my injured leg, I felt a sudden shakiness sweep through my body which I could not control. I knew then that his touch had kept me calm, but had also held the shock at bay. I tried to relax by concentrating on watching him as he stood, his hands lightly pressed together, as if in preparation.

Little is known of Vulcan healing, except that Vulcan Doctors use it frequently, scorning the use of conventional medicines unless unavoidable.

I glanced at T'Zen and T'Renna, seeing how they watched Spock. T'Zen had a look of pride. I wondered if she was related in some way to Spock; certainly there was a passing resemblance between them. The expression on the Doctor's face was harder to define, but I had no time to spend in analysing it, for Spock had roused himself from the trancelike state he was in.

He knelt by the bed and placed his hands upon my ankle and knee; his eyes closed and he grew very still. I held my breath .. waiting... for what? I did not know, but I too closed my eyes and tried to hold my shock in check.

My leg was so swollen, I did not feel his touch; gradually though I began to sense an itchiness spreading through the injured area which soon became agonising in its extreme discomfort. I took deep breaths and fought to find control over it. After a time, to my great relief, it was replaced by a gentle warmth which spread from my foot to my knee. I could almost feel the torn and damaged ligaments and bones knit together; I could sense the power which initiated that healing. I marvelled at such a Gift and the generosity of the one who used it.

As all the discomfort dissolved, I sighed deeply. Deep relaxation permeated my body and I drifted in a peaceful languor. Contentment such as I had never known before filled my

soul.

Slowly I became aware of his hands; I who had been starved of touch had now been touched more deeply than any Human had ever been before. His touch had penetrated my skin to reach through blood vessels, muscle and bone, to heal me...

I caught a sense of him as his Healing Gift filtered through me. Deep within me I reached for him, trying to show my gratitude, give him my thanks; surprise - his surprise - swept me, as I captured him. Shock - his - as we connected. For a moment time was suspended and I felt a comfortable togetherness of some type, not alone as I had been before. It is difficult to explain. It is a very personal thing. All I know is that we shared in an uncanny unison of being; things would never be the same for us again. We were bound up together in a way inexplicable to me. I did not question it, but accepted it wholeheartedly, for it felt right.

Suddenly, the contact between us was lost. The wrench of parting tore at me. Aloneness hit me again. "Spock!" I cried, sitting up so quickly my head spun in sudden vertigo.

"Lie down," the Doctor said. "It will pass."

I obeyed her, but kept my eyes on Spock. He still knelt there, staring blindly at my now normal knee and ankle. All the bruising and swelling had disappeared; there was no more pain or discomfort. "Spock." I repeated urgently. "Spock."

He looked over at me impassively.

"Thank you," I said, my voice threatening to break with the powerful emotions I could no longer deny.

He bowed his head in acknowledgement, then stood, placed his hands behind him, and watched as the Doctor ran her mediscanner over the once damaged leg.

"He is completely healed, Captain. He will be fit for duty within the hour," T'Renna said. She stared across at Spock. "You should have been a Healer, Spock. You have a rare Gift. Truly, the attributes of your illustrious family are within you."

Spock did not respond. He showed no signs of being pleased about the compliment he had just received.

"You can still become a Healer, Spock," she added.

He shook his head. "I have no wish to be a Healer. I prefer my duties as Science Officer."

If a Vulcan can be enthusiastic, T'Renna was then. "But you healed this Human with extraordinary skill. It was fascinating to observe how he opened himself to you."

Is that what I had done? Opened myself? How was that possible? I was not aware of having done such a thing.

"I healed him because he needed my help, because he trusted me."

"Yes, I know. An unusual commitment from one who should have been afraid. He conquered his fear of the unknown because of that trust. His emotional reaction to you is most interesting." T'Renna was becoming increasingly animated as she spoke about me. "How did

you acquire his trust? Why does he feel...?"

"Why don't you ask me?" I interrupted angrily. Did she still consider me a dumb animal unable to voice my own opinions? She glanced in my direction but did not deign to speak to me. "Rest now, Spock," she said.

"I will accompany Mr Kirk to his quarters, then I will rest," he replied.

"You will both retire to your quarters and rest," the Captain ordered. "Report to the Shuutle Bay in four hours."

She was giving us a little more time. What a generous woman she was. A fine Captain...

Spock bowed formally to her, then turned to me. "Mr Kirk, when you are ready."

I looked down at my nakedness, then at the two women who watched me with interest. I felt the flush of embarrassment on my face, but with as much dignity as I could muster, I got out of bed and quickly pulled on my clothes.

Spock and I walked silently to the turbolift. I did not know what to say to his now extreme reserve. He was as austere as he had been when first we had met, but something about him worried me - his pallor, the touch of strain on his face. The doctor had told him to rest as well. Did the Healing take a toll on the Healer?

I felt fine now. My ankle showed no signs of weakness, my knee felt strong, the numbness in my shoulder had disappeared. Nothing hurt me, I only felt a little tired.

His quarters were next to mine. I stopped at his door, looking up into his set features. "You need rest more than I," I finally said.

He kept his eyes averted. "I will meet you in three point seven five hours."

"Spock - may I come in?" I asked impulsively.

He blinked several times but after a few moments, nodded in agreement. He was probably too polite to think of refusing me. I followed him in and glanced around at his sparsely furnished rooms. There were certain artifacts spread around, and the walls were decorated in a deep red shade. A chess set and a stringed musical instrument lay on his desk, but there was little else.

"May I bring you some Simbia?" I asked, now seeing the weariness in him.

He sat down heavily on his chair, as if he could no longer stay on his feet. He looked up at me and for a second I thought I saw a touch of apprehension in his eyes.

"Thank you," he replied after a moment of consideration.

I brought the drink to him, but his eyes were closed and I wondered if he had fallen asleep while I had been ordering the Simbia from the food selector. I knew now that the Healing had drained him physically and mentally and I stood before him, contemplating what he had done for me; something the Doctor would not attempt, even after a direct order from the Captain. Why had he done it? Was it only his responsibility, as he had said? Or was it something more deeply personal which had prompted him to take on my injuries, my pain,

my feelings, to heal me?

As I recalled the sensations of the Healing, I felt a numbness and awe at such power. I wondered at my own willingness to trust in Spock, someone I did not understand, who had rejected my friendship, yet had shown me great patience and even kindness.

I knelt in front of him. "Spock..." I said quietly.

His eyes snapped open and there was alarm in them.

"Spock - your Simbia," I murmured.

He relaxed fractionally and took the glass from me. "Thank you," he said. He took a few sips, then placed it down on the desk.

"It is I who should be thanking you," I said. "You healed me. You did something truly remarkable."

He did not meet my eyes. "It was necessary."

"Then why did the Doctor not do it?" I argued.

"Her reasons were based on her own logic."

"Yes, her own selfish logic," I said bitterly. "She considers me an animal."

"I regret such prejudice exists amongst my people," he said, looking at me.

My bitterness dissolved as I recognized his inner pain. It shone from his eyes with an intensity so sharp it made me flinch.

"*You* are not selfish, you are generous and giving and..." I was afraid to continue. The last time I had mentioned friendship, he had been furious with me. I tried to swallow the lump which had formed in my throat. "Spock... I felt... During the Healing, I felt..." I did not know how to express what I had sensed during the Healing; the profound experience of unity with another! I glanced down, embarrassed now, and unsure. Had I been in a dream state? Had he put me under hypnosis?

"Jim," he said. Quickly I raised my head. "You were receptive to my healing. I could not have initiated such a complete cure if you had not had faith in me."

"I had total faith in you, Spock," I said. "But..." I had to ask. I had to know what had happened between us. "I felt something happen; I could sense your strength, your healing power and I reached out to you, and..." I could not articulate something I did not begin to understand. "Tell me what it was, Spock - please," I stammered in uncertainty and confusion, pleading with him to enlighten me.

He frowned slightly. "You should not have felt anything other than the normal healing process. I do not understand why it happened." I heard his puzzling words and his equally puzzled tone.

"What happened, Spock? Tell me."

He was silent, and I groaned in despair. If only he would consider me his friend. If only

he would consider himself my friend. It struck me with sudden force how much respect and admiration I had for him; how much I liked him. I wished - I *desperately* wished for his friendship. With complete surety I knew how vitally important it was to me.

I have never in my life pleaded for anyone's regard, but I did not hesitate with him. "Spock - please. Why do you keep me at a distance? It is wrong, I know it is. Why do you deny me your friendship?" Startlement showed in his eyes; he had the look of one who is trapped. "You have helped me so much. I know it was your duty at first, but am I so wrong in believing that it is more than that now? You have supported me when I needed it, you healed me, when the Doctor would not. Allow me the privilege of calling you friend. I have the warmest of feelings for you. Surely, you - a telepath - must know that."

He stared at me, his eyes wide. I searched him for any sign of acceptance of my words, but found none. I wondered if I had gone too far. I bent my head.

"Forgive me," I murmured, wondering what had happened to my Human pride, unable to stop myself pleading with him. "I am only Human, perhaps I am not worthy of your regard, but I cannot help how I feel." I braved his penetrating gaze. "You have acted like a friend to me. I thank you for that." He remained silent so I pressed on. "What passed between us during the Healing? Please tell me."

"I do not know," he finally said. "I have never experienced anything like it before."

I did not know what to say. So it *had* been unusual, different from normal healing. I had *not* imagined it! Concentrating deeply, I recalled the way I had felt. The greatest relaxation I had ever known; a warmth which had spread through my injuries leaving me afloat in a sea of contentment. Had my overwrought Human mind been imagining it all? Had I really caught an essence of him in the meld? Had it all been an euphoric dream? I was making a fool of myself. Here I was, begging him for a friendship he did not feel for me. Vulcans did not know friendship. All he had been doing was his duty, taking care of a fragile Human on a Vulcan ship. I laughed at my foolishness. What must he think of me? Where was my self-respect?

I have always prided myself that I could survive under any conditions, but on this ship, amongst beings who did not - perhaps could not - reach out to another, it was impossible. Perhaps Vulcans were totally self-sufficient, but I was not. I needed other people. My earlier thoughts had been correct; I would transfer off the T'Varon as soon as possible. Nothing had happened between us in the meld, except for the pure healing itself. I had imagined things in my relief and gratitude. I had been seeing emotions in Vulcan eyes and countenance that I wished to see. I had been deluding myself by humanizing a Vulcan.

I rose to my feet, my unhappiness weighing heavily upon me. "I will leave you to rest. Please forgive my emotional outburst."

What more could I say? I walked to the door, my thoughts full of self-recrimination. How could I have subjected him to more of my emotions after he had braved them to heal me?

"Jim." His voice stopped me in my tracks. I swivelled around. He still sat on his chair, and now I could plainly see that his exhaustion was finally overcoming him. "Jim - you must not plead with me for what is already yours."

The sweetest joy I had ever known encompassed me at that admission. Impulsively I dived over to him, knelt, and gripped his arms tightly, speechless with emotion.

"Jim. I did not understand. I have never had a friend before. I have always been alone."

My eyes stung with pity for him. "My instincts knew, but my intellect, my Vulcan intellect, would not recognize it. I have been fighting it for many weeks now. I have been unforgivably cruel to you. It is I who should ask forgiveness."

"No, Spock. No." I tried to reassure him. Scientific genius that he was, he was like a child in this. "There is nothing to forgive."

He swallowed hard, and I could see his utter confusion. I had reached him; he did feel something for me. He did care! I grinned with happiness, released his arms, then grabbed his hand and shook it vigorously. He gripped me tightly - too tightly; I groaned as pain shot up my wrist and arm. Quickly, he released me, alarm written all over his face.

"No, Spock. It is all right," I said. "Just remember my Human bones."

I gripped his hand again and this time he returned the pressure more gently. How had he survived all these years with no-one he could turn to with his loneliness and fears, no-one to help him with the burden of his mixed-heritage? Always having to be so Vulcan and denying Human warmth.

My feelings of friendship for him had increased dramatically during the last days, and the Healing had set the final seal upon it. Deep down, Spock and I had accepted one another in a mysterious Vulcan way. One day he would tell me what had occurred in the meld; I hoped that day would be soon, but I would be patient for a while.

He watched me for a time and it was not difficult now to bear his keen gaze. I smiled at him and I think I saw a tiny flicker of a smile upon his lips.

"Your emotions have great intensity," he said finally.

I laughed with embarrassment. "I know. It is the way I am." I stopped in the sudden realisation that Spock - a touch telepath - could read my feelings and possibly my thoughts through physical contact. I looked down at our still joined hands and carefully released him. He dropped his hand to his lap but did not remove his eyes from his study of me. I felt a slight sweat break out on me.

"My friend," he said slowly, accentuating the possessive pronoun, "your privacy is your own; I would not invade it. However, you are impulsive and highly emotional. The most powerful feelings you emit penetrate my telepathic shields. I do not understand why this should be so. Nothing has done so before. It is most peculiar."

I was deeply touched. He in his Vulcan innocence could not comprehend yet the emotional involvement of true friendship of the rarest kind; but I knew we had found that unique bond which makes two strangers closer than brothers. That was putting it in Human terms. As for the Vulcan ramifications, that I could not understand yet.

"My friend," I said to him. "I will try to restrain myself." His eyebrows *climbed*, and his expression showed disbelief. I chuckled, glanced down, then back to him.

"No-one has ever brought me to my knees before, Spock," I remarked, half-jokingly.

"Is that significant?" he asked curiously.

"Possibly," I replied, "but I might just be testing your repair work." Why did I have this sudden urge to tease him?

"Indeed!" he exclaimed, trying to mask his confusion at my words.

I laughed with delight, savouring the closeness I felt between us. It would grow into something very special, of that I was sure; and it made the prospect of serving on the T'Varon no longer a grim one. Now I could look forward to an intriguing and rewarding time here. I had the Captain's confidence, the acceptance of others such as T'Sal and Storon, and the friendship of Spock.

"Rest now, Spock," I said firmly on seeing his extreme exhaustion. "I will return for you in three hours."

"Very well." He paused, swallowed, then stared at me with a slight frown. "Jim," he added eventually.

I stood, picked up the Simbia and handed it to him. "Drink all of this. You will need energy for the landing party." I watched as he obediently drank it down. "Good. Now remember, you are to rest."

He bowed his head to me in acknowledgement.

As I left his quarters I pondered on our last little exchange. I had more or less ordered him to rest, and I would swear that he almost called me Captain. I laughed at my vivid imagination. My dream to become a Starship Captain and to command all manner of beings... did that include Vulcans? Could I - a Human - command Spock?

I lay down on my bed with the thought turning around in my mind. If I was successful here and was given my own command, I would somehow bring Spock with me as my First Officer, my Science Officer. What an asset he would be to my ship! What a coup it would be to have a Vulcan serve on my ship! But it was more than that; now that I had his friendship, I had the strangest feeling that I would want him by my side always; we balanced one another...

Starship Captains need someone they can trust above all others, to help them in the running of the ship. The ones who did not have that special person aboard sooner or later made the inevitable fatal mistake. I would not fall into that particular trap if Spock was with me.

My Starship command. It was still a dream...

I drifted into a pleasant sleep and dreamed I sat in the centre seat. Spock stood behind me and called me Captain. It felt comfortable, it felt right...

I woke up with a start at the sound of my name. Spock stood over me. I sat up in alarm.

"When you did not return for me - " he began.

I looked at the chronometer. I had slept for three hours. Some Captain! I had overslept.

"Forgive me for entering your quarters without permission but you did not answer the door chime... "

I sighed and lay down again. "I'm sorry, Spock. I must have been more tired than I realised." I looked up at him. "You do not need permission to enter my quarters. You are welcome here."

He did not reply, but he looked at me in puzzlement. He did not understand the easygoing informality of Humans.

"I had a most satisfying dream," I said.

"Indeed," he replied.

"Yes - I was... "

"Jim," he interrupted, "we have landing party duty. Perhaps you should prepare yourself."

I gave a start, grinned, then jumped to my feet.

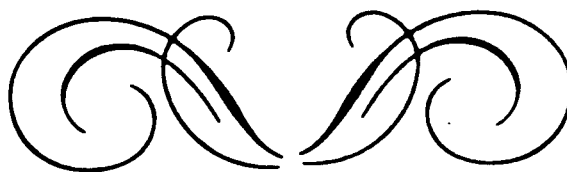
"Vulcans do not dream," Spock said suddenly.

"You may share mine," I offered.

I dived into my bathroom for a quick shower, leaving him standing there in bewilderment. In a sudden flash of realisation, it dawned on me what I had just offered him. I had meant to tell him of my dreams, but to a telepath it would mean a completely different thing.

I would cross that bridge when I came to it, but I wondered at this unusual friendship with Spock, and to what strange pathways it would lead.

I braced myself to rejoin him. This would be our first mission together. I knew for certain that it would not be the last.



'THE FIRST RULE'

ATTACK

The shuttlecraft rocked wildly when hit by the Klingon torpedoes. I could not regain control over the helm, nor could Spock navigate her. I bit back my fear. We were hopelessly out-gunned by the superior vessel which had attacked us without provocation. Death stared at us with hopeless finality.

We were returning to the T'Varon from a successful mission on Ariadnus, after discovering the cause of the affliction which had devastated the population there. We had stayed on the planet for several weeks - myself, Spock and a team of medical specialists, whilst the T'Varon was called away on a sudden emergency. It had been an exhilarating experience for me, working with those Vulcan scientists, helping them understand the Human colonists, showing the Humans what concerned and exceptionally gifted people the Vulcans were.

Spock co-ordinated us all, and I found myself happy to be under his command. He was not heavy handed with his authority. He accepted input from everyone, based his own decisions on that, then just quietly gave directions. Once the infection causing the illness had been isolated, it only took a matter of hours to develop a vaccine, using the vast medical knowledge of Dr Starn and his team, and the unbelievable deductive reasoning of the Science Officer who commanded us.

Once the immediate crisis was over, we had all been roped in to produce enough vaccine to inoculate the remaining population. I learned much in those weeks. We worked until even Vulcan stamina flagged, but Spock always, aware of my Humanity, insisted that I take proper rest.

The T'Varon, diverted again to Starbase 25, communicated with us and ordered us to meet them at the Riva Deep Space Station in two solar days; from there we were to head for the Neutral Zone for a mission to investigate Klingon activity there.

Our two shuttles had left Ariadnus amidst much gratitude from the colonists. The leader of these Humans had confided in me that they considered my Vulcan shipmates as their saviours, and would always revere them.

Now Spock issued orders to his crew of six in a calm and steady voice, but I knew he had been horrified when the other shuttle had exploded under Klingon fire. All of us had -

"Switch to manual control, Mr Kirk," he said. "Evasive action."

I struggled with my damaged controls; she moved sluggishly, but she responded. I swept her out of the way of a phaser beam, but it caught our aft section and we tumbled around out of control, thrown out of our seats by the force of the blast.

Spock gave a stream of orders to the medical personnel, and they expertly fell into emergency procedures, a better trained crew than any I had ever seen. I forced myself to find the strength to return to my helm. I had to right her somehow. We, in the front compartment of the craft, could still survive if we could land somewhere. The two officers who had been in

the rear of our ship were already dead in the cold vacuum of space.

"Planet ahead, Mr Kirk. We will attempt to land there," Spock said tensely. "It is our only chance."

"Aye, sir," I said. "I will try."

"I have faith in you, Jim," he said.

I turned to lock my eyes with his for a moment, seeing his supportive, reassuring expression. I smiled at him with all the affection I had come to feel for him. I was not afraid to die, but there was so much still to do, so much to say. So much... Returning my full attention to flying this damaged craft, I was only aware that the Klingons had departed when Spock informed us of it, saying that they no doubt thought that we had no chance of survival. They were probably correct.

We hurtled towards a barren world at a speed I could not reduce. Flying the ship by will power and determination, I somehow managed to right her and head her down towards a soft landing. Spock guided me, feeding me course changes and directions. I tried to comply, but it was becoming increasingly difficult to control her. I have never used such concentration before. I tried to remain calm as the others were doing; to react as a Vulcan. I do not know if I succeeded, as the ground rose up to meet us...

The crash jarred my whole body. I was flung forward violently, hitting my head against the control panel. Blackness overtook me in a sudden terrifying grasp and I knew nothing more.

SURVIVAL

I awoke with a splitting headache. Forcing the pain away, I wiped the blood from my face and looked around me. I had been thrown clear and had escaped serious injury by landing on the thick shrubbery. The shuttlecraft lay in pieces nearby.

Three people lay amidst the debris. I crawled over to each one of them, checking their condition.

Dead. They were all dead. Dr Starn, his neck broken... Dr T'Sir, her head crushed... Dr T'Mira, also crushed... I tried to overcome my shock and horror. I had to assess my situation. The craft was smoking with the heat of entering the planetary atmosphere, the electrical power of the secondary batteries was crackling dangerously. There could be an explosion, and soon... Spock! Where was Spock?

I scabbled around the wreckage, frantically calling his name, throwing everything aside in my desperation to find him. I spied a booted foot. "Spock!" I cried, pulling debris from him. The soft padded seat lay across him. I yanked it away and gently turned him over. *Let him be alive!* I silently prayed. *Please let him be alive!*

He was unconscious, but still breathing. I let out a sob of relief as I pushed his hair away from his forehead and probed for injury. My fingers found a large bump on the back of his head, but I immediately cast aside my fears of the possible damage to him. He was alive. The cushioning of the seat had probably saved his life; perhaps it had prevented him from serious injury. My first priority was to get him to safety before this craft blew up.

He was easy enough to lift. Although tall, he was very thin, and he weighed less than a Human of a similar height. I carried him to the patch of shrubbery which had broken my fall, and gently placed him down. I forced my own shakiness aside. No time for that. Later perhaps, if we lived.

Quickly I returned to the broken ship, searching for emergency survival gear. This place was bitterly cold. We would have to find shelter before nightfall. In one way we had been lucky; the atmosphere was breathable. I don't know if Spock had been able to ascertain that with the damaged sensors in the short time we had after the attack, but he would not have been able to classify this world. It could be completely unknown to us, unexplored, totally hostile... or perhaps there could be friendly inhabitants only a few miles away.

There was little to find in the remains of the shuttle. Most of the kits had been destroyed or lost, perhaps scattered who knew how far away. I found one intact kit, some food and water packs, one thermal blanket, two working phasers, and an emergency beacon.

As I searched, heavy flakes of snow began to fall. I shivered as the cold of this place began to seep into me. Staring around at my surroundings, I saw that this world was a barren place. We had crashed in a small valley. Stark cliffs loomed up all around us. They seemed to crowd in on me. I am not claustrophobic, but the sensation of being enclosed by them was very real and ominous. I had to find us some kind of protection soon.

Vulcans are susceptible to cold climates, and Spock, already injured, perhaps concussed, would be open to hypothermia, even frostbite, under these conditions.

I hurried back to him and wrapped the blanket around him. He was already very chilled, and I realised with a sudden pang of fear that he urgently needed warmth.

I scanned the cliffs. Perhaps there would be a cave we could shelter in. My eyesight is perfect, but the flakes of snow made it difficult to see properly. Was that a dark shadow on the cliff face? Or was I imagining it? I could not tell, but it was our only hope. We could not stay here, for we would freeze to death - or the alternative, go up with the shuttle when it blew. Neither was a pleasant prospect.

I heard a soft moan.

"Spock," I murmured, lifting his head carefully in my arms. "Are you all right?"

His eyes opened and stared at me in confusion. "Jim?" he whispered. He struggled to sit up, and I helped him, supporting him against me in a sitting position. "What...?"

"We crashed. The others are dead. I'm sorry, there was nothing I could do." I could not make it any easier for him, and as Commander, he had to know. "We have to find shelter. Can you stand?"

He seemed to be having difficulty in understanding me. The cold and that head wound were affecting his reasoning faculties. His body shivered violently as the howling wind struck us in a freezing blast, and a flurry of snowflakes bombarded us like knives of ice.

"Spock," I urged him with a gentle shake. "Come on. We'll freeze here."

The snow was becoming heavier as I spoke. We would soon be in blizzard conditions; the urgency of our plight hastened my decision. I gathered up all the gear I had salvaged, then returned my attention to my companion, almost lifting him to his feet. He swayed unsteadily

and I could see that he was in no condition to walk unaided. Grabbing him around his back, I placed his arm across my shoulder, supporting him. In this difficult and cumbersome manner, we staggered forward to the cliff face.

Spock was dazed, probably in shock. He was certainly in no fit state to command, so I took over responsibility for us. He allowed me to lead him, but I had no idea of where we were going; the snow blew into my eyes, the stinging wind relentlessly stabbed through my body. I did not dare think what it was doing to Spock.

He slumped in my grasp, knocking me off-balance with the sudden dead weight. He fell to the ground, pulling me with him. I groaned with despair and frustration, but struggled to my feet. I had to get us to safety, or we would both die here in this spot. Sheer terror gave me the strength to hoist him over my shoulder, drape the blanket over him as best I could, and continue onward. After a few minutes, it felt as if his weight had doubled, but I stolidly walked on. My Starfleet training came to my aid, and the indisputable fact that my friend was still alive. I felt the beating of his heart against my shoulder.

It was terror, however, that kept me going in my quest for shelter, the fear, the nightmare that Spock would die of hypothermia. *Live!* I willed him desperately. *Please live...*

I touched the cliff face and followed it along a narrow, weather-beaten path. The journey seemed endless, but I remained optimistic. I had seen a shadow on the cliff; it had to be a cave. It *had* to be! What else could it be? One part of my mind told me that it could be any number of things, but the other refused to believe it to be anything else but a haven for us. I would not give up my search. I could not!

My hand touched... emptiness. My heart skipped a beat. I had found a lee in the rock face, perhaps a cavern. Turning into the sheltered area and out of the blizzard, I found a narrow passageway. Quickly I slipped through and into a dry open space. It was very dark and still; it was almost as freezing in here as outside, but at least we did not have to contend with the biting wind.

Carefully lowering Spock to the ground, I wrapped the blanket more tightly around him. We needed warmth. I could heat rocks with phaser power and that would also supply some light. It was only a temporary solution, but it would do for a time.

Within moments, several large rocks were giving out some heat. I looked around the small cavern; stark, bare walls were lit in an eerie glow from the phasered rocks, but we were reasonably safe for the moment. We were both wet, our boots were soaked from the fall we had taken, and the trudge through the blizzard.

I knelt beside Spock and touched his face. He was very cold. I felt his hands and took fright at the chill in them. Hypothermia is highly dangerous to Vulcans, a people who are used to higher temperatures than Humans. But like Human victims of the condition, the hands and feet were the first to be affected. I had to warm them up.

Briskly, I rubbed at his hands, trying to instil some warmth into them, but his body temperature was so low that I barely made an impression. He needed more warmth. The heat from the rocks was inadequate in this draughty, chilled cavern.

I broke open the emergency kit, and to my relief saw a thermal cold-weather sleeping bag. I touched the controls, praying that it would work. These things were meant to be indestructible, but I had heard rumours that they had on occasion failed.

As the sleeping bag expanded from its compact shape into a size comfortably large for one, but could do for two if necessary, I pulled off Spock's wet boots and started to rub at his feet. The long socks he wore were still dry, and I hope had protected him from the worse of the cold, but I could feel the chill of his skin, even through the material. I rubbed as hard as I could until I felt some warmth from him, then returned my attentions to his hands again.

Body warmth was still the best emergency treatment for hypothermia. I did not know what my reticent, reserved friend would think of such an arrangement, but he had little choice in the matter. He would have to accept my unsophisticated, rough and ready treatment, for it was the only one I knew. If he lived, he could reprimand, censure, chastise me all he wanted - if only he would live.

Gathering him in my arms, I slid him inside the sleeping bag. The blanket was wet, so I spread it near the heated rocks to dry. It had protected Spock from becoming soaked through, and he had protected me a little. However, my hair was wet, my shirt damp through in places; I was chilled myself, and also in danger from the extreme cold. Quickly, I pulled off my own boots, placed them near Spock's, then with a deep breath wriggled into the sleeping bag beside my friend, and sealed us in.

It was a tight squeeze. Luckily, I had lost weight during my time on the T'Varon, and Spock was thin. I shifted around until reasonably comfortable, then held him against me, hoping, praying that I was not too late in my attempt to save him.

"Spock," I murmured as some warmth began to spread into my cold body. Slipping us both further down into the bag, I rubbed at his back, chafed his hands - they were still icy to the touch - and massaged his arms. "Spock," I pleaded. "Wake up! Don't die on me... "

He had become my friend in the strange, alien Vulcan society I now lived in. He had shown me much consideration and kindness. I could not bear to lose such a friend; I scarcely knew him, and I wanted to get to know him; there was so much to learn, so much to tell him. We had never had the time...

I held him tightly, something he had never permitted me to do, nor would I have dared to ask him. He had only ever reached for me once, in a handshake, the day he had acknowledged me as his friend. My Human emotions were painful to him. He could feel them all through contact with me; sometimes he could even sense them without touch.

There was real comfort in holding him, but fear of losing him was uppermost in my mind. He had taken a nasty blow to the head, and had only regained consciousness for a very short time. I dared not give him any medication - it was too dangerous for I did not know the extent of his injuries. I could kill him. All I could do was keep him warm, and perhaps - *perhaps* he would begin to recover naturally.

How long till the rendezvous with the T'Varon? I was unsure how long I had been unconscious; my head still ached from my own injury, and I could feel the bruise throbbing dully. Later I would set the emergency beacon, for once we missed the rendezvous the ship would begin a search for us. How would they find us? We had been thrown off-course by the Klingon attack, but I had confidence in Captain T'Zen. If anyone could find us, it would be a shipload of painstaking, methodical, logical Vulcan scientists. They would search for our signal; they would not give up. I only hoped that the Klingons would not find us first...

I do not know how long I lay there, but eventually I must have dozed off, for I came to with a start at the movement from Spock. "Spock!" I exclaimed, in the semi-darkness, seeing his face only inches from mine.

"Jim," he whispered, his voice hoarse, shaky. "What... Where are we?"

The joy of seeing him alive, coherent, recognising me was exhilarating. I pressed his face against mine. "You're alive... You *are* alive!"

He struggled weakly in my grasp and I eased my hold on him. He moved back, his body recoiling from my touch, but there was nowhere for him to go. He stared at me in embarrassment and consternation as he realised his confined surroundings.

"Jim!" he exclaimed, his uncertainty plain.

"Lie still," I ordered him, "You must stay as warm as possible. You are suffering from exposure to the extreme cold. Some kind of hypothermia. I found this cave. We must stay here out of the blizzard."

"I remember. The crash... the shuttle... "

"Yes, I salvaged what I could. You were unconscious."

"How did I get here?" he asked.

"I carried you most of the way," I replied.

"The others?" he asked, tentatively.

"All dead," I answered gently. "They did not survive the crash."

He was silent as he digested that, but he could not hide his shivering from me in the confines of the sleeping bag. A commander's nightmare - to lose his crew, helpless to save them, to live with the knowledge that he survived and they did not.

"There was nothing you could have done, Spock," I tried to reassure him. I had lost men and women under my command also; I knew the doubts, the self-recrimination he would be feeling. "I'll get you food and a hot drink."

It was the last thing I wanted to do, venture out into the coldness of the cave, but Spock needed nourishment. The icy air hit me like a phaser blast, but I forced myself to leave the warmth behind. I renewed the heat to the rock, then took stock of our rations, close to the glowing light. There were twelve self-heating drinks, some nutritional concentrate bars, and vitaliser pills. Not gourmet fare, but enough to survive on for a few days, if carefully rationed.

Spock waved away my offer of food, but accepted a heated drink. However, his weakness overtook him as he tried to hold the container and he almost spilled it. Quickly I grabbed it from him, lifted his head up and held it to his lips. He sipped at it for a short time, then pushed my hand away, unable to swallow any more. I eased him down, ate half a bar of the *sweet concentrate* and finished the remains of the drink. Not as good as coffee, but it warmed me just the same.

I set the emergency beacon by the entrance, but did not dare leave the protection of the cave. I shivered violently as a gust of wind whistled through the narrow passageway, catching me unaware. Chilled through, I hurried back, pulled the cold but now almost dry blanket over my shoulders and sat by the already cooling rocks, and wrapped my arms around myself in a bid to conserve some warmth.

I knew Spock needed privacy. The shock of awakening to find himself enclosed in the arms of a Human must have been devastating. My teeth were chattering, but I exerted as much will power as possible to control it. How could we stay confined in such a small space? Spock, with that Vulcan reserve, would never be able to tolerate it. I remembered the recoil of his body as he had realised his situation. Vulcans avoided touch, even the touch of a friend; however I reasoned that even two Humans would find it impossible to deal with such cramped conditions.

How long would our phasers last if I continually heated the rocks with them? I could not tell. I had to save some power though; what if there were wild animals about? Once again I charged the rocks, but something in them seemed to absorb phaser power; the warmth should have lasted much longer than it did.

ACCEPTANCE

"Jim." Spock's voice reached my shivery vigil a few minutes later. "This cold is dangerous for you also."

"I'll be all right for a while. I'm getting heat here," I lied to him. I would give him as much time alone as was possible, I owed him that. "I'm sorry there is only one emergency kit, it was all that I could find. The rest must have been scattered and destroyed." I rubbed at my hands, and blew on them. It was so damn cold; it seemed to permeate everything.

"Jim, please return," he said.

"No, I'm all right."

"Do I have to make it an order?" he replied sharply.

I grinned just a little, shook my head sheepishly - he had seen through my lie - and wriggled back into the sleeping bag. I draped the blanket on top of us for extra warmth, then huddled down into the soft, comfortable material. I sighed as it surrounded me, but stayed as far from Spock as possible, only a fraction away from touching him as I lay on my side and he on his. What a ridiculous situation to be in with a Vulcan! I knew there had to be some humour to be found in it, but could not quite see it...

"You saved my life, Jim," he said. "I thank you."

His voice shook as he trembled uncontrollably. To hell with Vulcan restraint and avoidance of touch! I found his chilled hands and rubbed them vigorously. "No protests, Spock," I said, before he could object. "The first rule is survival."

Lifting his hands to my mouth, I blew my warm breath upon them, concentrating all my efforts into restoring his circulation. He bore my ministrations stoically until at last I felt some warmth return to him; not his usual body heat, but a semblance of it at least.

As I continued to rub his fingers more gently he cleared his throat and said, "Jim, your methods are unusual but effective."

I chuckled a little. "Unusual methods for an unusual situation." I felt warmer myself now; the hard work of these last minutes had also restored some of my own heat. I knew though that I would have to monitor Spock very carefully. Hypothermia is a tricky thing; he

was far from well and needed continual warmth, then there was that head injury. It worried me.

"Are your feet warm?" I asked.

I heard the gulp from him. "Yes, they are quite warm."

"You're sure?" I asked. Vulcans do not lie, but I was unsure if he was telling me the whole truth.

"You need not touch my feet," he replied curtly.

I almost laughed out loud. He was afraid of me, uncertain of what I might do to him. Poor Spock, unused to Human behaviour, scared of losing his dignity, stuck here in a sleeping bag with me...

"I will do what is necessary to keep you warm," I said firmly. "If your feet are cold, you must tell me."

"I will tell you if they become cold," he said.

"Spock..." I warned

The tension came from him in waves as he replied, "I promise you, Jim."

"Very well," I answered him. "How do you feel now?"

I decided not to pursue the matter for the moment, but how much was he leaving unspoken? I hoped that his extreme reserve and embarrassment would not make him foolish.

"I have been attempting to check my internal functions, but it has been difficult."

I grinned. "I distracted you."

"Indeed. One cannot ignore such concentrated attention."

He shivered again, and without a thought for Vulcan sensibilities - I had coped with enough of them - I wrapped my arms around him. His startlement jolted me as if it were my very own. "Survival, Spock," I tried to reason with him. "Forget Vulcan pride; you are still shivering. Your body is chilled. Hold onto me, let me warm you, allow yourself to lean on me. I'm only Human, and governed by impulses and feelings which are, I know, distasteful to you, but I am your friend. Your welfare is very important to me. Please think. Where is the logic in refusing my help?"

For a few moments, he remained tense. Finally, though, he relaxed a little within my hold and I breathed a sigh of relief. I felt him withdraw inwards for a time, and realised that he was using his Vulcan abilities to check his own injuries and functions. I lay there quietly, trying to still my thoughts in order not to distract him.

Eventually he spoke to me. "My head injury is slowly beginning to heal. It is not severe, but I am suffering from concussion. My bodily heat-sense functions have however been severely inhibited due to exposure to the extreme cold." He hesitated and I could feel his powerful embarrassment. How was it that I was sensing his personal feelings? Was it the close physical contact? Or was the head injury he had sustained causing mental leakage from

him? "If you had not warmed me, I would have died very quickly. Vulcans have the ability - the heat sense - to endure such extreme cold when in a conscious state. We can raise our bodily temperature to compensate. Mine was damaged due to my unconsciousness. It will take some time to repair it and..." He paused again and frowned. "I am experiencing some difficulty in explaining myself. I believe it is a symptom of the head injury."

I was extremely worried. "You're still in danger then. Tell me how to help you." He had to allow me to give him all the aid I could.

"My body temperature must not go below the safety level again. This time it will kill me. I am sorry to be a burden to you, Jim. I wish I did not have to be dependent on you... I ask your pardon for..."

"Spock," I interrupted, "it's my duty and also my privilege as your friend to help you. There's no need to be apologetic. I will keep you warm; I will not let you die. Just... don't let it bother you that you have to be confined here with me. Relax. We're friends and there is nothing - I stress, *nothing* - to be embarrassed about. I'm not saying that it will not be difficult for you, and for me also; but we must survive this."

"Vulcan training in denial of feeling and strict personal privacy is difficult to break, Jim. We are taught to rely on ourselves, to be independent, self-sufficient and detached."

I touched his ear; the skin was taut and cold. Absently I rubbed at it gently, until some warmth returned. "Survival, my friend. Surely you have also been taught that if the time comes when you cannot, through no fault of your own, be self-sufficient, it is no disgrace to rely on others, especially on one who is your friend." I drew his head onto my shoulder, feeling the resistance in the back of his neck. "Allow me to help you. Use my warmth, Spock. All I have is yours."

I meant it. I had suddenly realised the extent of Spock's vulnerability to the cold. His still precarious health had brought home to me just how much I valued him. I would give anything to help him, anything at all. I would give my life, if it could save his.

He suddenly surrendered to my deeply felt words, perhaps even my thoughts, and burrowed into me like a child. I sighed with happiness at his trust in me and tightened my hold on him in fierce protectiveness. To my great joy he returned the embrace, causing a strong feeling of contentment through me as he relaxed totally upon me. I, too, slid into deep relaxation, drifting in a strange trance-like state. I had never felt so close to anyone before; not even to any member of my family. A glowing warmth enveloped us, which came not only from our combined body-warmth within the thermal sleeping-bag, but beyond that from an inner warmth of unity of a kind I had only tasted briefly once before, in that confusing time when Spock had healed me after Selek's attack.

Spock's reassuring presence was somehow within me... or was I within him? I could not tell. I tried to speak, but the words were unable to pass my lips. I only had to think his name though, and he answered me in thought.

What is happening? I asked silently.

We have slipped into mind-link, he replied. Please forgive me, I will withdraw.'

NO! I cried. *No...* I did not wish to lose this wonderful, warm togetherness. *Please stay.*

Jim, you are unique. You are not afraid. You are content here.

There is nothing to be afraid of, Spock. I am with you. We are together.

His mind-voice was full of puzzlement. *Such intimacy does not upset you?*

My amusement startled him. *Such intimacy with you is a wondrous experience. Here we are in a closeness totally unimaginable to Humans, and all I can feel is warm, both inside and out.*

I too, Jim. You are healing me.

I felt so happy. I was helping him; healing him, he said. Never had I known such deep satisfaction and fulfilment; I could almost forget the danger of our situation, trapped on a barren wasteland of an unknown planet, with little hope of rescue for days, perhaps weeks, possibly never.

I do not know how long we stayed there wrapped together in body and mind, but we floated in the essence of one another in soothing harmony, and at peace. We had made a major breakthrough in our relationship with one another, one which I could not understand, but we could never deny the bond which now united us.

It is the bond of brotherhood, Spock informed me.

My interest was intense. *Brotherhood?* I exclaimed. *Tell me of it.*

Two who join spontaneously in a spiritual meeting of mind and soul, Spock said. Those who are telepaths can understand and take an active and enjoyable part in such a relationship. He paused, then added, Even if only one has telepathic ability, he can assist the other to participate, if that other is willing.

I am willing, I assured him. Very willing.

I know, he replied, but you do not need much assistance. You are the catalyst. You forced it from me, you reached me by some method of your own which I do not begin to comprehend. You asked me once what happened when I healed you from the damage of Selek's attack. I did not dare then to believe it - I could not; but you reached inwards during the healing-meld and caught me. I could not escape from your deep emotional responses, or your intensity of purpose. You knew not what you were doing, Jim, but you instinctively recognised in me the one who is your balance - your other self - your brother in spirit.

I listened with growing awe and delight. *You knew it too, Spock.* I remembered all his kindnesses to me, his consideration to the Human outsider on a Vulcan ship, then his puzzling and hurtful rejection of me as he feared to get too close to me.

Yes, he said, catching my thoughts. *I was afraid of you. I still am,* he added with an honesty which left me startled.

My powerful Human emotions and impulses, Spock. I cannot blame you. I'm sorry if I disturb you, I'm sorry I'm not a Vulcan.

Do not apologise, Jim. It is fated. I must learn to accept you as you are and not fear you. You have done that with me.

I was deeply moved by his bravery. He was willing to expose himself to my unrestrained, emotional Humanity in a friendship closer than Human, closer than any other.

I would not cause you distress, Spock. Teach me Vulcan restraint. I can't bombard you with my emotions. It's unfair.

His reassurance swept through me, calming my fears. If you will teach me to be more Human... at least with you.

A great joy encompassed me and flowed into him, for he gasped inwardly. I don't know how to teach you that, Spock. I can only give you the love of a friend - a brother.

I have never known this, he said. Is it pleasant?

I felt like weeping, but from happiness or pity, I could not tell. Very pleasant, I replied. Are you unaware of it? I have felt it for you, almost from the very beginning.

The open concern you feel for me - the wish for my approval - the need for physical contact - the wish for my company.

Yes, Spock, yes, I laughed. He had sensed them all. All of those things and more.

It is most illogical, he replied, in total bemusement.

I felt so content with him, barely able to comprehend the depth of the friendship he offered me, but very willing to enter into it, accept it without any reservations, even with the telepathic intimacy unknown to Humans. There was nothing to fear in such a relationship with him - I had reached for contact with him from the start, somehow knowing instinctively that it was right. I had been clumsy about it, not understanding Vulcan custom and reserve; I had only been able to show it in my own Human way. Until, of course the healing-meld. Was it only three weeks ago that had happened? He shifted a little, withdrawing from me.

"Spock!" I exclaimed aloud, opening my eyes in alarm.

BASICS

The cave was pitch black, and as I stuck my head out of the sleeping-bag the temperature seemed colder than ever. My hands found the emergency kit and I rummaged around until I located the lighting panel. I turned it on and its cheerful glow kept the darkness at a distance, making me feel just a little more secure. Once again I phasered the rocks, then picked up a concentrate bar and burrowed down again into the warmth, beside my companion.

I broke the bar in half and offered him a piece. "Eat. You must take nourishment."

He obeyed me without protest, but I watched him in the shadowy light to make sure that he finished it all. I wondered at the fate which had brought us here, two survivors out of fourteen. Life was so unfair. Those dedicated Vulcan scientists had saved thousands of lives on Ariadnus, only to die in an unprovoked Klingon attack. What a waste of so many exceptional people.

Everyone in Starfleet knew the risks of their chosen profession, but I would never get used to death. I would never submit easily to it, and would fight tooth and nail to protect my friend from its icy grasp.

The howling of the storm outside penetrated to our quiet cavern. I sighed with relief at being in here, inhospitable and chilly as it was. Forcing myself to sit up, I opened another drink and handed it to Spock. This time he was able to take more of it, something I was very pleased about.

"It is most unhygienic," he commented as I finished off the drink.

I shrugged. "You don't have anything contagious, do you?"

He raised an eyebrow. "I am unaware of any contagious diseases, but there are always germs present in a person's mouth, and a small but possible risk of transmitting them."

"I'll take the risk, Spock," I said with a small grin. He was beginning to talk more like himself now. That was an excellent sign. "We must ration our supplies anyhow. Hell - I'm going to lose more weight. Bones will be delighted."

"Who is 'Bones'?" he asked.

"Oh, a friend. He's a doctor."

"What a peculiar name! Dr Bones...!"

I hooted with laughter. In his innocence he did not realise it was my own affectionate nickname for my old friend and doctor, Leonard McCoy. It was the best laugh I had had for months; I pressed my hands to my sides, then stopped suddenly as another problem presented itself with an urgency I would not be able to deny for too long.

I certainly did not want to go outside. I did not dare to think what the cold would do to such a vulnerable part of me. There had to be an alternative. I moved the light panel around, taking a close look at my surroundings. Yes, I thought I had caught a glimpse before of a narrow entrance, perhaps to another cave. Maybe that could be utilised.

There was Spock to consider, I suddenly realised. Did Vulcans have better bladder control than Humans? I could not risk him being out of the sleeping-bag, but how could I approach the subject?

I slid down beside him again, trying not to poke him with my elbows. Taking a deep breath, I began. "Spock... Do you...? I must... I mean... Uh... Do you?" Why was I finding it so very difficult? I would not with any other man, nor woman for that matter. Such normal functions were a part of life.

"Jim?" he asked curiously.

"I need to..." I faltered, coughed. "Do you wish to...?"

"Jim, you are not making sense. Please explain the problem."

"I need to pass urine," I finally blurted out, hopelessly embarrassed. "Do you wish to? There are sanitary facilities in the kit."

He stared at me for a very long moment, and I almost squirmed under his gaze; such mundane and basic matters did not seem to be the correct topic of conversation to be having with him.

During our training at the Academy, we had all been taught survival skills. Each one of us had taken a turn at being the casualty for the others to practise first aid and nursing skills upon. The use of these sanitary units had caused much amusement when we had practised with them. Well, we were only teenagers at the time, and it was the only way to hide our embarrassment. Gary's demonstration on other uses for the unit had reduced us all to hysterical laughter. Now, in reality, with a Vulcan patient, it was no laughing matter.

"You dare not leave the sleeping bag," I tried to reason with him. "It is bitterly cold."

After an interminable moment, he nodded slightly. "You are correct, Jim," he said, looking down.

I could not help but smile a fraction at the greenish tinge upon his face. My poor Vulcan friend, so helpless, so dependent on me, embarrassed in a way no Human would ever be.

Suffice to say, he managed the whole procedure, maintaining complete silence, composure and dignity throughout. I had to admire his control. As for myself, I remained calm and detached during this potentially most awkward of situations, like any good nurse. I was quite proud of myself.

My hands and face were becoming chilled, so I was glad to return to the warmth of the sleeping bag. Nothing seemed able to heat this cave; I had tried to charge the wall with my phaser, but like the rocks, it had quickly cooled down. It was a waste of power packs which I might yet need for protection.

I snuggled down, to find Spock tense with me again. The interlude with the sanitary unit *had* bothered him then, his embarrassment was plainly felt by me. I sighed. How were we going to survive here? I could not get comfortable; every way I stretched out, brought me into contact with him. He would give a slight start then try to edge away from me. It was an impossible situation.

"Spock," I complained. "What's wrong with you? Why are you so tense? Why are you afraid of physical contact, when we've been in such close telepathic communion?"

"I do not know," he answered me after long silent moments. "It is illogical."

"You're exhausted and you're hurt. You must sleep," I said. "You aren't thinking straight. Are you warm enough?"

"Affirmative," he replied tightly.

"If we ever get out of this, Spock, you'll never want to be near me again. 'Familiarity breeds contempt' is a Human saying. It is a true one." I sighed deeply with unhappiness and worry. Deep in the mind-meld we had been truly close to one another, but it was impossible for two people to exist in such proximity for long. It was a recipe for disaster in any relationship. "I'm sorry you are forced to endure this."

I tried to bite back my sudden depression, endeavouring to find some kind of relief in sleep. It evaded me despite my tiredness and I lay there, tense, stiff, afraid to move in case I touched him again. He did not want to be touched, and I could not blame him, for he had endured enough of my emotional Human behaviour.

He shifted a little and I edged back further. I could not move; I was totally confined, trapped here with someone who found my presence repugnant... His fingers closed around

my arm. Startled, I opened my eyes and looked at him.

"Jim, you have saved my life, you have done everything possible to provide me with warmth and comfort. I am deeply ashamed that I am causing you such unhappiness. I do not deserve your friendship; I am unworthy of it. I humbly ask your pardon."

My heart lifted at his words. He was never afraid to reconsider his thoughts and ideas and declare himself to be wrong. His honesty with himself was admirable. Everything about my Vulcan friend was to be admired.

"It's all right, Spock. No need to ask my pardon. I do respect your need for privacy, I only wish that I could give you that - but it's so damn cold!"

"To cause such pain in another is unforgivably cruel. I wish I could make amends in some way, Jim."

"Spock," I murmured, "enough. If you need to be forgiven, I forgive you; now let us forget it."

His next words caught me by surprise. "Will you come into the mind-meld with me again, Jim?"

I could scarcely believe his request. He was asking me for the mental closeness which, unlike the physical, could be avoided. "I... thought you needed privacy," I objected lamely.

"I do not require privacy at this time. Perhaps we could play chess."

"Chess!" I exclaimed in amazement. "In the mind-meld?"

"Indeed."

"I don't believe it... "

I had to accept it. He maintained the image of the chess board with all its pieces and every move. He still had me defeated in minutes. My chagrin, then my amusement, swept us both, but I felt much better now, relaxed in a pleasant fashion, but exhausted. I wanted to converse with him, even have another game, but my mind refused to obey me, and I crashed into welcome sleep.

TRAPPED

When I awoke there was a strange stillness around us. Spock still slept so trying not to disturb him, I carefully slipped out, pulled on my boots and headed for the entrance. The temperature in the cave seemed a little higher and I soon found out the reason. Instead of the opening, there was a wall of solid, hard packed snow. We were completely trapped now, but at least some warmth could be retained in our shelter.

I returned to Spock, who now sat leaning up on his elbow. I told him of my discovery, and he raised his eyebrow in interest. "If the T'Varon does not rescue us, we will have to phaser our way out, or find another exit. We cannot stay here indefinitely."

"You're not going anywhere, Spock. I will not allow you to become cold again. You're

too weak."

"I believe *I* am commanding officer," he said.

I was delighted to hear him respond in a command tone; it was another good sign.

"You are temporarily relieved of command, sir," I said formally.

"On what grounds?" he asked curtly.

Better and better. "Due to injury, sir. Now lie down and keep warm."

"You have an unfortunate tendency towards issuing orders to me," he said, with a glint of something - perhaps humour - in his eyes.

I chuckled. "Indulge me."

He sighed in resignation, lay down and closed his eyes. "Yes, Captain," he murmured.

I gave a start; was he being sarcastic? No - that was impossible. Vulcans never used sarcasm. He opened his eyes, gave a slight shake of his head, then looked up at me with a puzzled expression upon his face.

I knelt by him. "You're still a little confused. Let me check your head." He allowed me to probe the back of his head, and I traced the bump carefully. "It doesn't seem as swollen. Does it hurt?"

"I am able to control the pain," he said, "but am unable to achieve healing trance to repair it properly. I cannot lower my body temperature to the correct level under these circumstances. I could easily slip below the safety margin into hypothermia again."

"Spock," I said, my sympathy for his predicament choking me, "I wish I were a Vulcan, I wish I could heal you."

Amazingly his lips parted in a smile. "You do heal me, Jim, in your own special way."

I returned the smile. How could I not? He had given me what he would give no other. That smile was a gift to me, and I would always remember it.

"Yes, you said in the meld that I was healing you. How?" I asked.

"I am not sure, Jim. I can only speculate that somehow, with your indomitable will and determination, you bolstered my weakened condition and passed a part of yourself to me."

"I wasn't aware of doing that!" I exclaimed.

"No. It is a totally spontaneous thing, for the bond of brotherhood operates on a deep level. It is a truly fascinating phenomenon and one only known before between Vulcans."

I could scarcely believe it. Life in our galaxy was very strange, but this inner world between Spock and me was even stranger.

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As the day progressed, the temperature dropped again. I exercised in an attempt to loosen up my cramped muscles, and to keep myself warm; also Spock needed some room to breathe - he needed to be by himself for a time.

I did a little exploring to find the extent of the cave system, but dared not go far; I was too afraid to leave Spock alone for very long in case his condition deteriorated.

The roar of the animal caused me to start with fright. I swivelled sharply to find fierce, gleaming feral eyes staring at me out of a dark feline face. I scrambled out of its way just before it jumped, its sharp claws raking for my face. I grabbed the phaser from my belt, but I was slow - too slow; its animal reactions were far superior to my own, and it instinctively seemed to know that I was weakened. It let out a shrill scream and began to toy with me as a cat does with its prey.

With one large paw it knocked the weapon from my hand, its claws scratching into my arm, drawing blood. I yelped with pain, stumbled and fell to the ground. My wound seeped with blood, but I scarcely noticed it; all I was aware of was the animal hissing and spitting at me, baring its large menacing teeth, backing away then returning to paw at me again.

Slowly I edged away. All I could think of was my sick, helpless, Vulcan friend. How would he survive, if this animal killed me? I had to get to him, protect him. He would not stand a chance if this beast reached him! I felt the cold rock at my back and a chill of fear permeated my whole body. I was cornered here, the prey of this vicious alien wild cat...

My hand found a small hard stone. I threw it at the cat. It screamed as it was struck, and I scabbled around for more, throwing them as hard as I could, for it was my only defence. The wound in my arm began to throb painfully, and it was difficult for me to concentrate; I forced myself to continue, my fear for Spock encouraging me. I would not give up - his life was at stake. He was my responsibility, and I had to protect him.

My heart pounded in fear and horror as the animal screeched in pain and rage and reared up on its hind legs, ready to spring at me.

A phaser beam sliced through the cave. The animal disintegrated, still screaming, until only a faint echoing sound remained; then that too disappeared and only the familiar silence was left. Fighting to control my ragged breathing, I looked up to see Spock standing at the entrance. Letting out a groan, I bent my head down and sobbed a little with complete relief. Pulling myself together with rigid control, I staggered to my feet, retrieved my phaser, and held it tightly in my uninjured hand.

"Spock," I suddenly yelled, in an explosive release of emotion. "What the hell are you doing out of the sleeping bag?"

I lurched over to him and he caught me. We supported one another back to our cavern, where we both fell down in a tangled heap on top of the sleeping bag.

"Let me see your arm, Jim," he said.

"I'm all right. You get inside, keep warm."

He disentangled himself from me and sat up. "Not until I see your arm," he insisted.

He lifted my bleeding arm very carefully, checked the extent of the injury, then quickly set to work on cleaning and treating it with items from the medikit. I think I must have been in

a state of shock, for all I could think of was Spock becoming hypothermic again. The place was so chilled, despite being blocked in, despite the heated rocks. I was totally fixated in my worry over him, I was not concerned about myself; only him.

"Spock," I ordered him. "Keep yourself warm. Get in the sleeping bag." His hands were so cold as they treated my wound. "Spock - do as I tell you." His body temperature was going to drop again, he would be unable to survive it this time. "Spock," I pleaded, "you're frozen, get into the warmth - " Why was he not listening to me? "Spock!" I begged him. "Please... "

"Be quiet," he ordered. "Your arm must be attended to. I am all right for the moment."

His quiet authority reached through my near hysteria, silencing me. I allowed him to spray-bandage my arm, and give me a shot against infection, but I watched him earnestly, sick with worry. Finally, he looked at me, smiled just a fraction, then wiped my hands and face with an antiseptic medical cleanser. I searched him for signs of illness. How could I live with myself, knowing that his intervention could cause his death?

He closed the kit. "I will return to my bed now."

Quickly, I opened the sleeping bag for him and to my great relief he slid inside. I believe he was thankful to return; the exhaustion on his face was plain.

I looked towards the passageway to the other cave, wondering if there were other wild animals around. Most cats were solitary creatures, but I decided to block up the opening anyway, just in case. At least I could stop anything large getting in here. It was difficult work, but I managed it. I was panting with the effort of lifting heavy rocks with one arm, but at least I was warm now. Exhausted, I returned to my companion, kneeled by him, and looked at my dirty hands. He looked at them too, then shook his head slightly. I grinned, reached for the cleanser and tried to remove all the dirt.

"Are you all right?" I asked.

"Yes," he said, then watched me for a few moments silently. "I am however, a trifle chilled," he added. "Will you give me some of your warmth?"

Waves of happiness at his request encompassed me. "Gladly," I said. "I have plenty to spare."

I kicked off my boots, and within seconds was enclosed within the welcome confinement of the sleeping bag. I settled into a comfortable hold with my bond-brother and it was only a short time before the ache in my arm diminished, and the inner pain and shock of the encounter with the animal, my brush with death from those fangs, dissolved. His healing touch filtered through me as our thoughts merged.

You took a terrible risk, I chastised him.

Could I not have come to your rescue? he replied.

I relaxed deeply into the mind-link, content and gratified to be here with him. I could have died there in that other cave; only his intervention had saved me. He had braved death to rescue me; he had known the risk to himself only too well. I tried to give him all the warmth I could, imagining the heat flowing from me to him, totally enveloping his chilled body.

I'm sorry I yelled at you, I said. *I feared for your life.*

It is my life, Jim, he replied. If I wish to offer it for yours, then I will do so.

A shudder ran through me at his words, and I think I wept then, as all the horror and fears since the crash finally caught up with me. His familiar presence surrounded me, soothing me, until my tears were spent. They were unnecessary now, as all my tensions eased; never before have I known such deep contentment of soul. I drifted in the meld with him and we conversed silently for a long time.

I told him of my home, my childhood, my family, and he told me of his, so different from mine. The son of Sarek, the Vulcan ambassador - he who had informed me of my assignment to the T'Varon - and a Human woman, Amanda Grayson, his had been a strict, rigorous and lonely childhood. His mother, in adapting to Vulcan ways, had agreed to raise her son in the tradition of non-emotion and logic. She had shown him very little Human affection, and he only remembered her touch, her kiss, when he had been a very young child. I wondered what kind of Human could so deny her own heritage.

He had suppressed his Humanity all his life, becoming more stringently austere than most Vulcans. He had excelled in all scientific and mathematical studies and had always been top student of his year. Joining Starfleet's Vulcan Academy had been a personal decision. His father had opposed it at first, but after persuasion by Vulcan's most respected Fleet Admirals, Sarek had finally consented to his son's choice of career.

Spock's rise in Starfleet had been meteoric. His brilliance was acknowledged by his commanders, and he was made Science Officer of the T'Varon at an age when most officers were still junior lieutenants. There had been some, such as Selek, who had opposed him, due to his half-Human heritage; but Selek was in a small minority of Vulcans who knew prejudice. The decision makers - the Admirals - only saw an exceptionally gifted officer, and had promoted Spock accordingly.

In his young life Spock had known great loneliness of a type I could not begin to comprehend. He had never found anyone who could breach his isolation until I had arrived on the T'Varon. He had resisted me, not understanding, afraid to respond to the bond slowly forming between us. In the end he had been forced to accept it, reluctantly and unsurely.

Here, trapped in this cave with me, he had succumbed totally to it. Through his weakened state perhaps? Or by his own free will? I was still unsure and full of self-doubt, but right now I did not much care. As long as he allowed me to help him, that was all that mattered.

I had come to care for him in a way I had only ever felt before for my brother Sam, but the rapidity with which my feelings had grown, and the intensity of them, were frightening. Was this the bond of brotherhood? This strange melding of mind and soul between two people with its intense intimacy? Why did I not fear it? Why was I reaching for it? Why did I welcome it so eagerly?

It has never been scientifically explained, Spock told me. The ancient poets of Vulcan described it as the most mysterious of Vulcan interpersonal bonds. It happens; that is a fact. So it is accepted. One must accept facts, Jim.

It truly is mysterious, I agreed as a pleasant drowsiness pervaded my senses.

I drifted into a deep sleep, and dreamed my favourite dream. I sat in the centre seat, Spock stood at my side; he called me Captain. That felt so right; it was so secure; it seemed so natural.

INTRUSION

The sound of phaser fire awoke me. My body's trained reflexes screamed out for release, for action, but the constrictions of the sleeping bag held me back. I struggled out too late; a booted foot kicked the phasers out of reach. Klingons! I attempted to jump to my feet, but was roughly kicked in the small of my back and went sprawling on my face.

The Klingons had heard our beacon. They had used their disruptors to melt the ice at the cavern entrance; perhaps it was the same bastards who had destroyed the other shuttle and had disabled ours, coming to finish off the last remaining survivors of their aggression.

I would not make it easy for them. Twisting around sharply, I dived for the ankles of the nearest Klingon. To my great satisfaction, I brought him down. Although still weak from the ordeal of the crash and the attack of the cat-beast, the melds with Spock had given me some kind of inner peace and strength I had never known before. Using that, and every scrap of skill, technique and gutter fighting instinct I possessed, I fought him.

It was a dirty, vicious fight, but I had to defeat him. Our lives were at stake here.

Spock battled the other Klingon. He was too weak - I had to help him. How could he defeat a fully trained Klingon warrior in his precarious state of health? With a desperate, explosive burst of power, I finished my enemy off with a forceful knee into his crotch and a hard chop to the side of his neck. Spinning around, I saw Spock apply his fingers to the base of his Klingon's neck. Amazingly, the large, powerful warrior crashed heavily to the ground. So that was the famous Vulcan nerve pinch.

"Against the wall," a harsh voice rang out.

Spock and I glanced at one another in disappointment. So more had beamed down, or perhaps had only been outside. I searched for our phasers, but they were at the feet of the two who now threatened us with disruptors. I worked out the odds; it was impossible. We would be dead before I could move an inch. Then I checked our felled opponents. Their weapons were still attached to their belts and were closer to us.

I held out my hands in appeal. "My companion is ill. We crashed here and he was seriously injured." I hoped Spock would take the hint. Glancing over at him, I noted his unhealthy pallor. "He is near collapse," I added.

Feign it, I tried to send my thoughts. *Try to get a weapon*. He glanced at me sharply.

"A Vulcan and a Human," the leader said. He was the tallest one here and had an air of command about him. I did not like the vicious smile on his face. "Well, well. What is happening to Starfleet? So... you are the one. Kirk. The whole galaxy has heard of you, the one chosen to serve in the Vulcan fleet."

I slowly edged over to Spock. He knew of me and was interested in me. I wondered how to play this. Perhaps the weak, terrified Human might work. It might appeal to his superiority as a Klingon warrior, contemptuous as all his people were of Humans.

I drew on my acting skills. "Please," I said in a pleading tone. "Allow me to help my companion. I appeal to you to assist us."

Spock raised an eyebrow, but did not speak. I took hold of his arm. "Spock, lean on me," I said aloud. *Collapse, Spock*, I ordered him silently. *Now*.

He doubled over, and I put my arms around him as he fell to his knees, trying to cover his surreptitious attempt to reach the disruptor on the prone Klingon's belt.

There was loud laughter from the leader. "Such weakness from a Vulcan! I expect it from a Human, but not a 'superior' being such as a Vulcan!"

The leader strode over and dragged me to my feet. His weapon pressed menacingly at my forehead, but I stared up at him defiantly for a moment, then looked down. I was not afraid of him, but I could not arouse his anger; he might take it out on Spock. He laughed again at my 'meekness', and threw me roughly against the wall.

"Drop it, Vulcan," he said, harshly, "or the Human dies."

The disruptor did not waver as it covered me. Damn! He had known what we were attempting to do. Spock raised his head, looked at me for a moment, then handed the disruptor over to the outstretched hand of the second Klingon. He was viciously kicked in the ribs. I started towards him, but the leader moved forward, his fingers set to fire the weapon.

I swallowed convulsively. I needed to get to Spock. I had to defend him, protect him. "Please, do not harm him," I said. "He is unwell."

The leader only smiled, muttered something in the guttural tongue of his people, and his second covered me. "One wrong move, Human, and he dies," he said to me in Vulcan. "It is obvious that he is ill; he would not withstand much torture. His life is in your hands."

He looked around, then picked up our sleeping bag. "What is this? Comfort for soft Humans and Vulcans? Klingons do not need such luxury."

With little effort, he tore it into several pieces and flung it away. I groaned inwardly; it had been our refuge, our warm place, it had probably saved Spock from hypothermia. If we survived this, how would he endure the cold now?

The Klingon picked up our food, opened a bar and ate it. "Very nice," he commented. He ate several more, handed the others to his companion, then started on the drinks, draining them with satisfaction in several large gulps. "Delicious," he said.

The two Klingons conversed in their own language as they consumed our meagre supplies. I stared at them bitterly for a time, then turned my attention to Spock, who lay on the ground, breathing harshly. What had that kick to his ribs done to him? He seemed a little nearer to me than he was before, then I saw him - inch by painful inch - move across the ground to the second felled Klingon. Quickly, I looked away, lest I bring the attention of our captors upon him.

"So, Human," the leader said, approaching me. "You crashed here. How unfortunate for you." He hardly sounded sympathetic. "Allow me to introduce myself. I am Commander Kiron."

"I cannot say I am pleased to see you, Commander," I said, with a certain insolence in my tone, which I could not avoid. Well, that was probably lost on a Klingon anyway. "You already know my name, I believe."

He bowed curtly. "Lt Commander James Kirk, the Human bridge between the races of the Federation and the Vulcan people. The 'superior' Vulcans!" He glanced down at Spock, who now lay completely still. "Hah!" he jeered, and with a humorless laugh, he kicked Spock

in the side. Spock groaned, and I could not stop my fearful shudder. "So... " Kiron added, "it bothers you if this Vulcan is hurt."

I took real fright then. "Why should it?" I denied as carelessly as I could. "I owe him nothing. Vulcans are cold, unemotional beings. He is a shipmate, nothing more."

Kiron stared at me, disbelief on his face. He laughed again. "You amuse me, Kirk. Perhaps I will let you live. However, this Vulcan is poor company." He pointed his weapon at Spock. "He will die .."

"NO!" I yelled.

He could not kill my friend, the one closer to me than a brother. Throwing myself at him, I wrestled with him for control of the disruptor. He was bigger and stronger than me, but I was fighting for Spock's life and that would give me the edge. The other Klingon stood back, watching his commander, no doubt expecting him to toss aside such a weak Human easily.

Kiron knocked me over with a heavy backhand swipe; I half fell to my knees, regained my balance almost immediately, then with the full force of my body behind it, butted him hard in the groin. He let out a loud yell and fell backwards.

"Stop!" cried the other Klingon.

I froze. There was no chance now. I was going to die. I heard the whine of the disruptor; I braced myself for its impact. *Spock*, I cried out to him silently. *My brother*. Seconds passed. I still stood, still lived.. With a happy cry, I scooped up Kiron's weapon. Spock had reached his target and had saved my life.

Backing away from the furious and pained Klingon commander, I hastened to Spock's side. My friend knelt on the ground, his weakness apparent, his face more ashen than ever. He gazed up at me, then nodded slightly. I returned the gesture, knowing his wishes. He had turned command over to me.

Not daring to think of how ill he must be for him to do such a thing, I waved my disruptor at the leader. "All right Kiron, get up."

The big Klingon staggered to his feet. He impaled me with a look of hatred that should have shrivelled me where I stood, but I only laughed at him. I had the upper hand now.

The beep of a communicator sounded at Kiron's belt, startling us all. I wondered what to do. How could I stop more Klingons from beaming down here? There might be an armed group ready to transport if Kiron did not answer.

"I understand Klingonese," Spock said, in a painful whisper.

My worry for him increased; I could almost sense his inner pain. "All right, Kiron, answer it, but be very careful. I know how to fire this thing, and have no qualms about doing so."

"I do not doubt it," he replied.

He opened his communicator. Spock translated for me.

"Commander Kiron. Report."

"Orders from High Command, sir. We are to return at once to base. A Federation ship has been sighted near the Neutral Zone."

Maybe it was the T'Varon. Surely it was on its way to find us. Perhaps we would be rescued from this icy hell. Kiron looked at us.

"Tell them to hold," I said. He did so, then closed his communicator. "Now, Commander, I could kill you and these sleeping beauties here, or I could allow you to leave. Which would you prefer?"

He stood straight. "Life and death are as nothing to a Klingon warrior."

I shook my head. Did he take me for a fool? "I think your life is precious to you."

He almost smiled. "You are clever, Kirk. Very well. What is the price for my life?"

"You will order supplies; food, water, blankets, heating units, to be beamed down here. Then you will leave this place, never to return."

His eyes widened, then he bared his large yellow teeth in an ugly grimace. "Very well, Kirk."

His speedy compliance was suspicious, and only a moment later I heard Spock's ragged gasp. I whirled around and was confronted with the Klingon I had felled earlier. He had attacked Spock and now he hit me across the face, knocking me to the ground. Kiron pounced upon me, wrenching the weapon from my hand before I could stop him. He stood back laughing.

"I could kill you and the Vulcan now," he said, his tone full of menace. "But that would be too easy for you. I will leave you to starve or to freeze. Either will do, they are both painful deaths. But I will return to make sure you are dead once I have destroyed the Federation vessel. If you still live," he grinned, "I will take much pleasure in killing you."

I lay there winded amidst the ruins of our once secure haven, watching as the Klingons sparkled into nothingness. Perhaps it would have been better if he had killed us... I dismissed the negative thought - there was no time for that - and turned my attention to Spock; he was lying on the ground breathing in harsh painful gasps. Ignoring my own pain, I gathered up all the bits of the sleeping bag that Kiron had scattered and the thermal blanket, which thankfully he had not noticed. I covered Spock with them as best I could, trying to make him a little comfortable. Luckily the medikit was almost intact and I gave Spock a pain-killing shot and cleaned up his face. Those kicks must have hurt him badly; I did not know what damage he had sustained, but I doubted if he would be able to summon his own pain control methods now.

My touch seemed to relax him but he did not speak to me; perhaps he could not. Working as quickly as possible, I settled him down. He watched me with eyes full of trust, and in some strange way, I was content.

Our phasers were still lying where they had been kicked. One was undamaged and still working, so once again I heated the rocks, then checked our supplies. One drink left, two concentrate bars; we would not survive here much longer.

"Jim." His whisper was almost inaudible. Quickly I moved to his side. "You almost did it. He would have left us supplies. I regret being unable to stop myself from being

overpowered."

I smiled reassuringly at him. "You did much more than I could have, Spock. Well, at least we are alone again. Worse off, even more injured, very little food, and no proper source of warmth."

"We are together," he said. "It is enough."

I sighed deeply at his words, touched by them and warmed by his complete acceptance of our friendship. I leaned back against the rock, but groaned as the bruise caused by the Klingon's boot sent a shooting stab through my back. My whole body now ached, I suddenly realised, so I gave myself a painkiller, then shared a nutri-bar and the last hot drink with Spock.

Trying to mask my despair, I lay down beside him on the hard cold floor. He lifted up his meagre covers, inviting me to share them. I needed no persuasion; there was warmth and consolation if we huddled together and a lessening of both our pain. Neither of us felt any embarrassment at our situation any more - we had gone beyond that now. I opened myself to the mind-link with ease, relief spreading through me as our thoughts merged. The warmth encompassed us within and without, until I felt pleasantly euphoric and relaxed.

I have been calculating the time factor, Jim, his mind-voice said suddenly. I believe it is possible for the T Varon to find us within the next twelve hours.

I was instantly alert. *But how?*

They will be searching for us now. They will compute our course from Ariadnus, find the debris of the destroyed shuttlecraft, determine that one craft was blown up, assume we have attempted to land, then will scan on all frequencies for our emergency beacon. It is a logical progression.

But if they encounter the Klingons... I began.

I do not believe the Klingon report referred to the T Varon. She was on course from the Riva station. As you must know, Riva deep space station is nowhere near the Neutral Zone, in fact it is exactly...

You are an optimist, Spock, I said wearily, but affectionately. Perhaps you - the best Science Officer in the fleet - would be able to find two lost survivors on this planet, but not everyone is as skilled or intuitive as you are.

The T Varon has excellent officers; they will find us if at all possible.

Well, if they don't, Spock, we die of hunger and cold.

There was a long silence from him, then he spoke, his mind-voice gentle and reassuring. *Jim, it will not be painful if we die like this, together. When the time comes and we both agree that there is no hope... there is a way...* He trailed off into the quietness feeling, no doubt, my startlement.

I considered it for a brief time and could find no fault in it. Better to die with dignity - together - than face the horror of slow starvation.

Very well, my friend. I do not fear death if you are with me.

We talked silently for many hours, keeping ourselves alert. I told him of many incidents in my life, but he was most interested in my friendships, having known none himself. The one

type of relationship he could not understand was the sexual kind. Young Vulcans were totally celibate and knew no sexual experience until marriage. Spock was bonded, but not yet married. Vulcans, due to their longer life-span, matured later than Humans, and although Spock's age in Human terms was equivalent to my own, that, for a Vulcan, was considered very young. He did not tell me more, but it brought home to me how different he was.

It was understandable, though. How could a telepath have a casual sexual relationship? It would be impossible to be exposed to the mind of another who was not mentally compatible. If joined with a person unsuited to him or her, a Vulcan would know severe pain and disharmony. Only two with a special attunement could be lovers; two who had been betrothed as children and had been tested for compatibility.

The time passed as we communicated, the dreamlike quality of our world enhanced by the complete and utter silence within it. Several times I roused myself to heat the cavern, but I could not force myself to leave Spock's side even for a moment. He was very ill; only the mind-meld bolstered him now. He had told me that without my constant physical and mental touch he would have lapsed into a coma, which he would not have survived.

There is always hope, I tried to reassure him.

I told him of the time my mother, father, Sam and myself had visited the British Museum. He was extremely interested in that for he had never been there and had always wanted to see it. I dredged up my childish memories of the place. I had been eleven, fascinated by ancient history, and had been captivated by the exhibits there. Somehow, Spock helped me unlock my subconscious impressions, allowing me to live my trip there in every detail.

We will go there together, I told him. We will spend days there if you like. I would like to see it with adult eyes and in your company.

Yes, he agreed. One day, Jim. One day.

He was slipping; I could clearly sense it. *SPOCK!* I called urgently. *SPOCK...* I sent all the force of my concern to him, trying to pass my strength to him.

Jim... Keep talking to me.

I told him of the summer Sam and I had spent travelling through the Canadian Rockies, the lazy days spent camping by the lakes and rivers. I recalled every day of that idyllic time spent in my brother's easygoing company - the happiest summer of my teen-age years, before our lives had changed; Sam to his new post on Deneva, me to Starfleet Academy.

An unknown mind entered our world. It was a female presence; cool, efficient, persistent in her efforts to make us acknowledge her.

Spock, she said. Lean on me. Kirk, you will withdraw.

No, I protested. I will not leave him.

Spock, she continued, ignoring me, release him from the meld.

Dr T'Renna, Spock replied, his mind-voice stronger than I had heard it for a long time. I will release him, but you will care for him as you would a Vulcan. He is my bond-brother.

He will be cared for.

Rescue. I suddenly realised we were being rescued. Spock and I, caught up in the meld, had been oblivious of anything happening about us.

Spock, I reassured him, you will recover now.

Yes, Jim. All will be well. Be prepared, I must withdraw from your thoughts now. Farewell, my t'hy'la.

Farewell, my t'hy'la, I replied, copying the unfamiliar inflection Spock had used, sensing its profound meaning.

Aloneness hit me. I shivered violently with the loss of his familiar mind-touch. Two Vulcan medics were lifting me onto an anti-grav stretcher, others were attending Spock. I allowed myself a moment of complete relief as the transporter beam took us. It was a welcome sensation.

Safety. The T'Varon appeared around us and I sighed deeply. At last we were away from the bitter conditions of that worthless planet, in the hot Vulcan temperature of the starship.

TREATMENT

The medics attending me were efficient, even compassionate. Their attitude had changed towards me, from the once barely tolerating fashion they had used towards me. Their hands were gentle and their eyes were full of interest and concern. Still, though, I wished for Bones. His bedside manner was natural to him; he was the finest doctor I had ever met, and my friend.

"Spock?" I asked Dr Staven. "Is he all right?"

The young Vulcan's eyes regarded me for a long moment.

"Please, I must know," I said. The drugs they had administered were taking effect; I knew that sleep would soon overtake me. Finally he told me he would inquire, and left. With all the determination I possessed, I fought my drowsiness until his return.

"He has suffered internal injuries and is very weak due to the problems caused by hypothermia and related problems. He has received treatment and now has been able to achieve healing trance."

I looked up at him. "He will recover, won't he?"

His face softened slightly. "There is a thirty-two point five percent chance of complete recovery."

Alarm spread through me in sickening waves. Those odds were not nearly good enough. "Doctor! He must recover... He must..."

"Dr T'Renna is attending him. She is Chief Medical Officer. Her healing abilities are excellent. Please inform me - how did Spock survive under such harsh conditions? Perhaps

you can tell us, Mr Kirk."

I tried to fight the heaviness in my eyes, but the sleep urge was too powerful. Helpless, I succumbed into the darkness, Spock's odds for survival turning around in my head.

I sat up. "Spock!" I cried, looking around the empty sickbay, panic gripping me in a fearful hold. "Spock!" My stomach knotted and twisted inside me.

A medic rushed in, grabbed my arms and gently but firmly pushed me down.

"Spock - where is he?" I asked, struggling in her hold.

"He is in a privacy chamber. Dr T'Renna attends him as he lies in healing trance."

I relaxed slightly. He was still alive. "I must see him."

"No one is permitted to see him except medical staff. However you may observe him on the viewer."

She brought the viewscreen over to me, studying me as I eagerly pulled it from her grasp. Spock lay in an enclosed unit, some kind of life-support equipment I had never seen before. He breathed slowly, but evenly. He appeared asleep... I studied his face, so thin and drawn, but his skin colour seemed nearer normal.

"Is he out of danger?" I asked.

"Not yet, Mr Kirk," she said. "We will know within twenty hours."

I lay back against the pillows as the medic attended me, but my thoughts were not of myself and my already healing minor injuries, but of my friend lying there alone, battling for his life.

Dr T'Renna stayed constantly by Spock's side watching over him. Many hours passed. I watched them, noting the intensity of her care and the many times she would reach inside the unit and enter into mind-contact with him. Despite T'Renna's less than sympathetic manner to me, she certainly did not extend any anti-Human feelings to Spock. He seemed to trust her as a doctor, yet he had warned her to care for me. Spock - close to death yet still concerned for me. Tears filled my eyes as I watched his still form.

After more tests, treatment and another eight hours rest, I was discharged from Sickbay. As I dressed, I was informed that Captain T'Zen and Dr T'Renna awaited me in the office. Quickly, I made my way there, hoping for news of Spock.

The Captain immediately motioned me to a seat. "How are you *feeling*, Mr Kirk?" Her genuine concern and sympathy were obvious in her dark, alien eyes.

"Much better, thank you, Captain."

I still felt weak and stiff, but my wound - thanks to Spock's prompt first aid - was almost healed. Although there was still a dull ache from my bruises, I knew that would clear soon enough.

"How is Spock?" I asked T'Renna.

She stared at me for a long moment before she replied. "His condition is unchanged."

I was horrified. "Why can't you heal him?" I demanded.

"There has been much damage to his circulatory system," she replied coolly as if she had diagnosed a minor headache.

Had she no heart? I rubbed my hands over my eyes. I could not lose him. He had to live. I would not lose him!

"I wish to be with him," I said.

"Impossible. He is in isolation. Only a medic may attend him."

"Why is he in isolation?" I demanded to know. "He does not have a contagious disease."

"It is our way in such circumstances. He needs total peace to concentrate on inner healing. Only a trained medic understands how to avoid causing him distress."

Damn Vulcan rules! I was not going to allow them to stop me.

"Mr Kirk," the soft voice of the Captain penetrated my anger. "Report."

I stared over at her, about to reply, but her calm eyes stayed my tongue. She was sympathetic to me, she had been from the start; a display of temper would not do any good at all. I had to behave as a Vulcan would - calm - efficient - logical. Taking a deep breath, I began my account of all that had befallen us.

The two Vulcan women listened in silence until I had finished. They seemed startled, even astonished at my story. I fell into silence and looked down at my clasped hands, worried about Spock - worried sick about him.

"You warmed him with your body heat," T'Renna stated. "How very... basic."

I wanted to yell at her, shock her Vulcan insensibility, her superiority, but instead replied calmly. "It is a standard emergency Human technique for hypothermia. Perhaps it is too personal for Vulcans - beings who do not touch - but Humans are not so fussy."

"It was not my intention to denigrate your methods, Mr Kirk. They worked. Spock would have died without the warmth you provided. However, when we found you, it was not only body-warmth you were sharing, but you were deep in a mind-meld, sharing thoughts."

I nodded. "Somehow we slipped into a mind-link when first Spock permitted me to warm him. It helped him... me also..." I hesitated. It was such a personal thing; should I tell them? Yet Spock had told T'Renna, so perhaps I should mention it to the Captain, for it might be significant to my report. "We merged in what Spock called the bond of brotherhood. I..." My throat constricted, I could barely swallow as I recalled how close we had been. I had to be with Spock. They had to allow me to be at his side. "I beg you, Dr T'Renna. Allow me to be with him. I helped him before, perhaps I can do so again."

The Captain stood up. "Doctor, did you know of this?"

T'Renna also stood. "The bond of t'hy'la is a Vulcan mystery, impossible for Humans."

T'Zen was as outraged as I have ever seen her. "Who are you to say? Spock is half-Human, yet his Vulcan gifts run true. You observed what happened when he healed Mr Kirk in Sickbay, only hours before the mission to Ariadnus. They touched briefly in the ancient way. Now it is obvious that they have truly joined in brotherhood. See - he speaks the truth. Can you not sense his sincerity? T'hy'la may not be barred from one another. Allow him access to Spock at once."

T'Renna bowed her proud head in obedience. "Yes, Captain."

"Thank you, Captain," I said gratefully.

She nodded slightly. "We will talk again another time, Mr Kirk. Tend to Spock; your duty to him takes precedence above all others."

TOUCH

When I entered the isolation room, I saw that the life-support unit had been removed. I hoped that was a good sign. Spock lay on an ordinary diagnostic bed, covered up to his waist by a red blanket. He looked so young and vulnerable, lying there like a sick child.

T'Renna stood by the bed studying the scanners, but I ignored her as I pulled a stool over and sat by my friend's side. I studied his face. He looked so strained, I could almost perceive his inner battle with his damaged organs. How could I help him? How could I reach him? There had to be a way.

His long-fingered hand lay against the bed covers, and on impulse I picked it up and held it between my own. I did not know if he would be aware of my touch, but if he was he would know me - perhaps he would be comforted by my presence.

The Doctor's eyes bored into me, but I did not look at her. She did not approve, but I did not give a damn. She could not stop me; the Captain's words had been clear. No one could keep me from Spock's side; it was my right and his as bond-brothers.

Spock, I tried to send silently. Live, my friend. Live.

As a sudden weariness and despair crept over me, I bent my head down and pressed my forehead against his hand, pleading with him to hear me, to fight for his life for the sake of our now deep and powerful friendship and the future we could share. I do not know how long I sat there trying to communicate my thoughts to him, nor if he heard me. But I kept trying. There was a strange comfort in talking to him in thought; I had become so used to it during those days we had been stranded together, it had become second nature to me.

"He is stabilising," T'Renna's voice intruded. "There is a slow but steady improvement."

I stared up at her. She returned my gaze and there was resignation in her eyes, perhaps even a little admiration. No - not from her. I was imagining it. "In what way?" I asked.

"Your touch *is* helping him," she replied. "Thus it is written of the ancient bond of t'hy'la."

I was curious about her attitude. "Why does it bother you that a Human may aspire to Vulcan ways? Why have you always been so hostile to me? What did I ever do to you?"

She lowered her eyes at my blunt approach. "The theory of Vulcan superiority is difficult to overturn if one has believed in it."

I shook my head in disbelief, then returned my attention to Spock. He was the important one; T'Renna's beliefs were of little interest to me. "Is he aware of me?" I asked.

"I believe so. He has improved from the moment you touched him. It is most significant."

"If I were a telepath - a Vulcan - I could reach into his mind, and really help him..." I tried to swallow the hard lump which had formed in my throat. I felt so inadequate, so helpless. "Spock," I murmured painfully. "Please, you cannot abandon me."

The vision of losing him was too horrifying to bear. We had shared a kind of closeness which I could scarcely understand, that had given me such contentment and joy of spirit. I stroked his hand as one would do with a close family member, trying to give him encouragement to fight his illness. Driven by instinct rather than ability or knowledge, I continued in my attempts to give him support. I spoke to him in thought and speech, not caring what anyone watching would think. In this manner many hours passed.

T'Renna attempted to make me leave to rest and take nourishment, but I refused, afraid that if I left Spock's side he might die. Finally someone brought me Simbia - Spock's favourite drink, I remembered with a pang of nostalgia. I had brought him that after he had healed me, when he sat, drained, exhausted, almost asleep after the ordeal of using his healing power upon me. That had been the time I had begged him for his friendship and he had finally admitted to me that he was my friend.

I sipped at the Simbia, knowing that I needed the energy it would provide, for I was still weak from all I had endured, and the worry and fear over Spock added to my exhaustion.

Closing my eyes, I rested my face against his hand - still cold despite the warmth of the room. I pressed my lips upon his skin. In an attempt to warm him? In supplication? To express my love for him? I did not know, nor did I care. Vulcans denied the emotions they possessed. I could not deny my feelings for the one who had become a brother to me, nor would I try.

I kissed the hand of my friend, my bond-brother, in helpless desperation; I knew of no way to reach him and strengthen him, for I was trapped in Human inadequacy. Weeping now with frustration and pain, I asked myself why I could not reach him. Why did I have to be Human, totally useless to him?

A sudden silence surrounded me. Somewhere deep within it a presence beckoned to me with the promise of peace and security. I leaped towards it with one giant effort, descending into its encompassing arms. *Spock!* I cried silently into the void. *Spock!*

Jim, his welcome mind-voice replied weakly.

We met and merged for a moment in joyful reunion, but I knew sadly that we could not remain here, for he was still in grave danger. The contact with me seemed to energise him, causing his life-force to flare with sudden power. I took heart at this sign and not knowing exactly how I did it, I led him towards awareness, instinctively knowing the correct pathway.

He followed me blindly, trustingly, and I could sense his growing strength as we neared the outside world.

TRANSCENDENCE

My eyes opened to see his hand, only millimetres away, my lips still touching his skin, and I groaned with disappointment, bitter tears falling from my eyes as I realised that I had been dreaming. Somehow I had fallen asleep and had dreamed out a fantasy of reaching into him and bringing him out to safety. But it had felt so real, so vivid. I chastised myself. How could I - a non-telepath - possibly accomplish such a feat? Dreamer that I was! Fool!

Fingers touched my head - some Vulcan Doctor, actually trying to give me sympathy. They slid through my hair, pulling in an affectionate and almost painful tug. My heart skipped a beat... then pounded uncontrollably. I knew that touch!

"SPOCK!!!" I exclaimed, lifting up my head as thrills of happiness and delight vibrated through my whole being.

He was staring at me, his eyes full of warmth and alertness. I caught his other hand as it slipped from its hold upon my hair. "You are all right!" I cried, squeezing both of his hands tightly.

His eyebrow climbed in the puzzled, familiar way and my joy in his recovery threatened to overcome me. I wanted to hug everyone in sight; I could even have hugged the cold, forbidding T'Renna. I could have kissed her thin disapproving lips...

Spock held me in a tight grip. "NO," he ordered in a voice which attempted, but did not quite reach, authority.

I laughed as I realised he had caught my thoughts and emotions clearly, and had taken fright that I might actually kiss the old curmudgeon. "It was only an impulsive thought," I said, "I wouldn't - I couldn't - " I glanced over at the Doctor, standing there tall and austere as she looked down upon us; never - definitely never. Not in a million years!

"Fascinating," T'Renna said. "A Human transcending the ability of his species. You are remarkable, Mr Kirk."

I had no idea of what she was talking about, but I did not care. Spock was over the danger and would recover fully now, of that I was certain. I slumped forward as exhaustion hit me like a tidal wave - but I jerked myself back; I would not give in to it. Spock's reassuring hold on my hands steadied me.

"You must rest," T'Renna said. "Spock is safe now. He must rest also. Go to your quarters."

"No," I protested. "I will stay."

"Jim," Spock said. "The Doctor is correct. The energy you have expended in recalling me, the build up of stress, cold and injury is causing you extreme exhaustion. Please go to your quarters and rest."

I sighed. Spock - logical as always - was correct, but I did not wish to leave him, and

anyway, I was unsure of my ability even to reach my quarters.

"Spock, let me stay..." I asked.

He touched his right hand to my forehead. *Do as I tell you*, he ordered in telepathic command.

I am sure he meant it half in jest, but I was glad to obey him all the same. If he was using his authority over me as my senior officer, then he had definitely improved. I bowed my head, yielding to him, then glanced up to see a very slight smile upon his lips. I grinned at him, and not caring what anyone thought, pressed a quick but intensely joyous kiss upon his hand. He was probably too shocked to move, for he stayed perfectly still. I don't think he even breathed.

Not daring to look at anyone, I made my way to the door, shadowed by one of the medics, who hovered over me as if afraid I would fall.

"Truly a remarkable Human." I heard T'Renna's voice as I left. "Most disturbing."

BROTHERHOOD

I slept for twelve hours in peaceful and refreshing sleep. When I awakened, I immediately called Sickbay. Dr T'Renna informed me that Spock was in a meeting with the Captain and was not to be disturbed. I sighed with disappointment - for I was hoping to speak with him - but cheered a little when she asked me how I was feeling, and volunteered the information that Spock was almost fully recovered. Perhaps the old battle-axe was softening at last. I would work on her... My ability to charm the female of any species had always been one of my more useful talents. She was quite a challenge though!

After drinking a hot sweet cup of coffee, I went into my bathroom for a long luxurious shower. My body relaxed and refreshed, my skin tingling with the stinging force of the water, I did not use the drying jet, preferring the traditional, old-fashioned method of a thick, soft towel. I rubbed at my hair, enough to stop it from dripping, then flung the towel into the disposal chute for recycling. I ran my fingers through my unruly hair, and studied myself in the mirror. I was so thin! I had not been this slim for many years. Bones would be pleased... Knowing Bones though, he would probably say that I was *too* thin and would have to increase my weight!

Strolling out into my bedroom, I stretched out my arms, luxuriating in the warmth of the Vulcan temperature against my bare skin. All the bitter cold of the planet now seemed like a terrible nightmare; that struggle through the blizzard, the icy cavern, the attack by the wild cat, the Klingons...

There was a sudden sense of not being alone. I blinked several times and with a cry of joy I turned around. Spock sat on a chair regarding me with obvious amusement. He stood up and clasped his hands behind his back; in the twelve hours or so since I had last seen him, he had made a remarkable recovery. He looked totally fit and well.

"SPOCK!" I exclaimed.

Running forward to meet him, I threw my arms about him in a tight hug, overjoyed to see him here, recovered after his ordeal. For long moments I held his tense body without

realising that he had not responded at all to my hug. When it hit me I swallowed my disappointment, trying not to be hurt, attempting to understand that now, after such intense intimacy with me, he would have to withdraw into his own privacy again.

I stepped back, embarrassed by my physical nakedness before him, but even more embarrassed by the outpouring of affection I had assaulted him with during that hug; a mental nakedness which I could not hide and which I knew he had received.

"Forgive me," I murmured, looking down, unable to meet his eyes. "I was so pleased to see you."

"Indeed," he replied. "I am pleased to see you."

I looked up at him. He was not angry with me then, but bemused - perhaps amused. I took heart at that.

"Are all Humans so immodest?" he asked in a sly reference to my lack of clothing.

I could not stop myself from flushing, but I replied, "I have no modesty at all, Spock. One of my many faults."

He raised an eyebrow, but made no comment. I reached for my uniform and quickly dressed, while he studied the wall with deliberate intensity. It was a ludicrous situation. How could we possibly be embarrassed with one another after such closeness? Yet we were.

I came over to him, took a deep breath and asked. "How are you feeling, Spock?"

"Much improved. I have been discharged from Sickbay. However, we are both excused from duty for two solar days. Captain's orders."

"Then you will rest. I don't care if T'Renna *has* pronounced you fit. Even a Vulcan cannot recover from near death so quickly."

There was a slight, but noticeable twinkle in his eyes. "You are giving me orders again, Jim."

I flushed again. Why did I always want to give him orders? I could not help myself. "I'm sorry. It's just that I am so concerned for you."

He was silent for several seconds. "Thank you for your concern. I am unused to someone having such deep and open feelings for me."

I nodded. I had to learn restraint. We were not alone, fighting for survival, anymore. We were back on the T'Varon, and he was First Officer and senior to me in rank. He did not need to lean on me now, he was not dependent on me. I had to allow him his own space.

"Have you eaten yet?" he asked me. I shook my head. "You have lost weight. You ate very little when we were stranded."

"In some ways, Spock," I said, needing to tell him how I felt, "it was the best time of my life. I know that is illogical - but... we were so close, we understood one another so well, we communicated so deeply... I am afraid of losing that."

It was my greatest fear now, of returning to the way things were when I first joined this

ship. If Spock turned from me I would be isolated, a Human amongst Vulcans. I had tasted the bond of brotherhood and knew that without it I would be totally devastated. It had become a part of me, and was more important than anything else.

His face showed puzzlement. "Lose it, Jim? No - our friendship will grow and mature. Once committed to brotherhood, there is no going back. You gave me my life. You gave me your innermost strength with a willingness and courage which defies all description..." He looked down for a moment then back to me, and I could sense his struggle to find the correct words to say. "It was wrong of me to refuse your embrace. I ask you to have patience with me, for despite the intimacy we have shared it is difficult for me to accept and return... such physical contact. I know it is illogical, Jim... but..." He trailed off in complete confusion.

"It's all right," I reassured him. "Don't be concerned, I understand."

"But I must know," he said, "why can I not give you such a simple thing?"

"Necessity drew us together. There were no barriers between us. Now we are back to normal and must adjust to that."

I had to show him that I did not expect him to behave towards me in a manner he did not want to; all I wanted was his continuing friendship on any terms.

"You are correct, Jim; but I will not allow my Vulcan reserve to mar our friendship. Help me overcome my inhibitions with you. I owe you much. You are my t'hy'la - I do not wish to hurt you by rejecting your touch."

I tried to calm his fears. "Humans hug one another as a gesture of affection. It is the closest we can get to one another without telepathic abilities. You are my friend, Spock. I will respect your reserve as much as I possibly can. I do not wish you to force yourself to give me anything you are uncomfortable with. I have felt the merging of our being. I will always remember those times with awe and happiness. I will always be grateful to you for showing me what it was like to know complete unity with another."

He was frowning. He clasped my shoulder tightly. "Jim - I do not understand."

"I know you cannot bear my emotions," I said. "I understand that the situation we were thrown into was purely survival. I know you were dependent on me and I was only too glad to be able to help you in any way I could. I do not expect you to enter into mind-link with me under normal circumstances. I will not be hurt if you cannot return a hug. I should not expect it of you."

He grabbed my other shoulder and shook me so hard I felt a wave of dizziness, and would have lost my balance but for his grip. "You are not listening to me, Jim," he said. "I asked for your help in overcoming my reserve with you. I *wish* to overcome it. You have ended my isolation, my loneliness, and I will not return to such emptiness."

Tears of happiness stung my eyelids as I realised what he was saying to me. I had underestimated the impact of my friendship on him. He wanted to be more Human with me, to give me the affection of a Human friend; but I knew that he could never give me the ordinary friendship of my species. His would be extraordinary in every way. How had I reached such a unique being? What strange twist of fate had brought us together?

With a sudden move he pulled me to him, almost knocking the breath from my body with the force of his Vulcan strength. He wrapped his arms around me and I laughed as I

surrendered to that hold, trying to balance it with my own grip. The mind-contact flared between us and the familiar warmth of togetherness encompassed me in its special way.

Physical contact is most interesting, he commented in warm mind-voice.

If you can breathe, I countered.

He eased the pressure a little. *You trust me.*

Your mind is completely open to me, your body is relaxed in a hold which can totally restrain you.

I trust you as I trust no other. I do not fully understand the bond of Brotherhood, I only know it is right. My instincts tell me that, and I accept them.

I thank thee, he said in the formal mode of the Vulcan tongue.

Anyhow, I added teasingly, *I could free myself if I resorted to dirty tactics.*

Indeed? came his disbelieving reply.

I leaned back a little and looked up at him. "But I don't think I'll try," I said aloud. "I feel too safe here."

His eyebrow climbed in astonishment, then he quickly released me. "Jim - I do not understand you. We will eat now. I can feel your hunger pangs."

I grinned with embarrassment. "I'm sorry, I can't hide much from you, can I? I hope you will teach me restraint."

"I will attempt it, Jim. I fear it will be most difficult."

Was he teasing me? I stared at him open-mouthed for a moment. Or was he just stating a fact? His expression gave nothing away. He was probably correct. It would be difficult, but I would try.

"For example," he continued, "In sickbay when you - " he cleared his throat - "kissed my hand... Dr T'Renna has not yet recovered from the shock."

I spluttered and laughed. It would do the old battle-axe good to be shaken up, but it would not endear me to her, of that I was sure.

"I must admit that it was most interesting to see her respond to your actions with such emotion."

"You enjoyed it too," I stated.

"I do not understand enjoyment, but it was... fascinating."

"And you, Spock? Did I startle you? It was purely an impulsive gesture, I was just so happy to see you recovering, to know that I had reached you... "

"I do not believe that anything you could do now would shock me." He stared at me questioningly. "Perhaps am I incorrect."

I wondered. He had put up with my Human idiosyncrasies in the most tolerant of ways, accepting me as his friend and brother. He had opened himself to me, allowing me to help him survive; he had given me trust and companionship, something he would give no other. I did not understand what had happened between us, nor did that bother me. I accepted it with open arms and would willingly learn how to live with such a close relationship. I shrugged, unable to answer his question.

"Perhaps we should eat," he said.

"Good idea. I am so *hungry*..."

We walked to the Rec Room in a relaxed camaraderie, at ease with one another. The people we passed acknowledged us with a respect which appeared to me to be most profound. For the first time, I really felt like an equal member of the T'Varon crew; before, I had been tolerated by some, perhaps accepted by others, but not fully one of them. Now it was different. In the Rec Room, people who had never spoken to me before bowed in greeting. All were courteous to me, even warm, and I felt a happy glow of contentment within me.

These Vulcans were *not* cold, unemotional beings as was believed by all the other races of the Federation. They lived by a strict code of behaviour which emphasised control of the emotions, courtesy and respect to all life-forms, and restraint of their powerful physical and mental capabilities. I was privileged to be one of the very few Outworlders to be a part of their society. It had been difficult for me to adjust to their life-style, but I had tried my utmost. If Spock had not given me the hand of friendship, I do not think even that would have been enough. He had satisfied my deep need for companionship in a way no Human could match, and I had given him the friendship he had never known.

My future here looked bright. My saving of Spock's life and the bond between us were the reasons for the acceptance, the true acceptance of my shipmates. Vulcans do not gossip, but on Starships little could be hidden, even amongst the intensely private people of the T'Varon crew.

Spock watched me with interest, obviously picking up some, if not all, of my feelings. I grinned at him and was answered by one of his almost-smiles. Closer than a brother, closer than anyone else could ever be. I was not alone any more, nor was he. I thought of my life before I had joined the Vulcan fleet and did not miss it any more. This was my home now and I was content.

"I must teach you to refrain from broadcasting your thoughts," Spock commented.

Feeling a flush beginning to form on my face again, I stared at him in consternation. "I... I..." What could I say?

"You are, however, correct," he said. I laughed a little. Why should I bother if he knew my every thought and feeling... I should bother, shouldn't I? Never had I been more hopelessly confused. "Your first lesson will commence after this meal."

"Yes, sir," I said with mock obedience.

His eyebrow climbed almost into his hair, but I saw the slight smile at the edge of his mouth. What a trial I was for him! But he accepted me with understanding, patience, resignation and a touch of a humour which was, I suspected, most unVulcan.

A shadow fell across the table, and I looked up, a little startled to see Selek there. I had

not seen him since that day in the corridor when he had attacked me, and he was the last person I wished to see at this moment. He had been demoted several grades in rank, but I could not tell from his features, nor his manner, if his hatred for me had brought him here to try and spoil my happiness.

Spock rose to his feet. "What do you wish?" he asked curtly.

Quickly, I jumped up to stand by Spock's shoulder, for I had sensed his anger and was afraid he might do something rash. Silence descended upon the room as all there turned to watch.

Selek stared at Spock for only a moment before he lowered his eyes in submission. "I stand before thee and thy t'hy'la in humility and shame, guilty of bigotry towards you. I will accept any punishment you deem fit for such a crime and will make reparation in the manner of your choice."

This was the last thing I had expected. What had happened to cause such a turnabout? Was he even genuine about it? Spock was the telepath, he would know; I would have to leave it to his judgement.

Selek turned his attention to me. His eyes met mine for a second, and I could see the difficulty he was having in speaking these words. "I beg thy forgiveness for my attack on thee. I will accept any punishment you deem fit and will make reparation in the manner of your choice."

I swallowed, looked at Spock for help and saw my own unsureness reflected in his eyes. What was the correct response to such a gesture? I knew so little about Vulcan tradition.

Finally Spock took a deep breath. "Will you allow me to answer for us both, Jim?"

I nodded in agreement. He knew my thoughts well enough; he was aware that I held no grudge against the former First Officer - it was not in my nature to hold grudges.

"We accept your apology and forgive you. There will be no punishment, but we charge you to make reparation by ridding yourself of the doctrines you have believed in and embracing I.D.I.C. as a Vulcan should."

Selek was shocked. I could plainly see it. Perhaps he had expected something quite different; perhaps Spock and I could have punished him in the severest of ways. Vulcan law was still strangely barbaric, for such a civilised people.

"I accept your decision," Selek said finally, "and will do as you charge me."

He bowed before Spock; straightened, then bowed before me.

"You may leave us," Spock said, once Selek faced us again. He sounded so formal, but there was a trace of compassion in his tone. Selek knew it too and his tense, rigid muscles seemed to relax a little. He bowed again to both of us, then turned and left the room.

I faced my Vulcan friend. "Your compassion is never-ending," I said. "I am very proud and privileged to be your bond-brother."

The force of my emotions reached him and he gave a slight start. The greenish tinge upon his cheeks deepened.

"It is time for your lesson," he said.

"But... I've not finished eating," I protested.

"Come," he ordered.

"Spock!" I exclaimed. "I'm still hungry. You said I had lost weight, didn't you?"

He beat down his impatience to leave, and his embarrassment at my open and unashamed emotions. "Very well," he said.

Trying to suppress my grin, I sat down and continued with my breakfast, while he sat opposite me, awaiting me with barely concealed restlessness. Deliberately, I took my time and he knew it. I chuckled silently as I wondered just how he would make me pay for teasing him in this manner.

I felt so good, ready now for whatever the future would bring. Spock and I would face it together, and we would survive.

"Jim." Spock's voice interrupted my musing. "Do you wish me to use force?"

"Try it," I challenged in my best bluffing manner.

He frowned in complete bewilderment, and I felt a wave of compassion for him, Vulcan innocent that he was, trying to control such an illogical Human.

I sat back and stared him out, wondering what he would do. He could probably pick me up and carry me out, but his dignity would never permit him to do such a thing. His eyes flashed at me in silent command and it took much control on my part to disobey him. "You are impossible," he said, rising to his feet. He turned on his heel and left me sitting there, startled by his anger. What had started as a joke - at least for me - had become deadly serious.

Fool that I was to not realise that I had gone too far, that he would not understand my Human game of bluff. "Spock!" I called as the doors closed behind him.

I dived after him, but he was too swift for me. He was nowhere to be seen. I searched for him in his cabin, the Rec Deck, the Observation Deck, anywhere I could think of that he might be; but it is a big ship and I could not find him.

Dispirited and full of self-recrimination, I returned to his cabin to await him. I had embarrassed and insulted him in front of his shipmates by my stupid and unthinking attitude. I had forgotten that he was not Human, and despite our closeness, his ideas and beliefs were totally alien.

It was several hours before he arrived; time enough for me to think deeply about my foolishness, and vow never to humiliate him like that again.

I rose to my feet, and stood, contritely, before him.

"Well, Mr Kirk," he said. "Are you here for your lesson?"

I swallowed, glanced up at him, then stared at his shoulder, unable to face his gaze. "Yes, Mr Spock," I said, my voice hoarse.

There was a long silence; as I shifted about under his telepathic senses, I could almost feel his thoughts touching the edges of mine. Gathering my courage together, I met his eyes. To my relief, there was no anger in them. "I ask your forgiveness," I said. "I did not mean any disrespect."

"I know," he replied. "There is still much we have to learn about one another. It is time to begin."

I breathed a deep sigh at his words.

"May I?" he asked, holding his hand towards my forehead.

I immediately agreed and opened myself to his thoughts. I found no anger, only regret at such a silly misunderstanding. We relaxed in the mind-link and my first lesson in the control of broadcasting my emotions began. It was the hardest thing I had ever attempted and I failed miserably. Eventually, Spock called a halt. *It will be even more difficult than I first believed*, he said. I sent him my firm determination that I would work at it and would succeed, but I felt his scepticism, and could not restrain my humour.

He stepped back and looked at me. "Jim, you are incorrigible."

I grinned. "You are not the first to tell me that."

The tension between us was completely gone now, and we had both learned that there was still much to understand about the other. The willingness was there. The bond of our brotherhood would sustain us through all the trials ahead.

"Were you tempted to pick me up and carry me out of the Rec Room?" I asked him.

"Indeed," he replied. "Like this..."

With a sudden movement he grabbed me around the chest and legs and lifted me from the ground with amazing ease. I let out a yell and struggled wildly in his hold, but in moments his superior strength had me helplessly bound. I gave up the struggle, not in the least bothered by the fact that he could have broken my back if he had wanted to. He would never harm me; he was only giving me a little demonstration to pay me for my earlier behaviour. It was one of the most Human things he had ever done, and I was pleased.

He wanted to be more Human with me, and he was learning...



