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fanzine

Scotpress



ENTERPRISE

LOG ENTRIES 76

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ScoTpress - Sheila Clark, Valerie Piacentini, Janet Quarton & Shona

Hello, and welcome to Log Entries 76.

Once again I'm sitting looking at a sheet of blank paper, and wondering what on earth I can find to say in the editorial. I'm reminded of a piece in one of the American zines some years ago when the editors, faced with the same problem, wondered whether anyone actually reads the editorial anyway. One of them suggested putting in something really outrageous, then waiting to see if anyone reacted. I'll resist the temptation this time, but since Sheila will want the editorial for LE 77 any day now, I just might be reduced to desperate measures...

Sheila's cat Whiskers now has a new companion - a two year old collie cross named Cindy. She's a sweet, affectionate animal, with a great desire to climb onto laps. So far she seems to be showing little interest in the computer. Fortunately.

Cindy's arrival means that with Janet's and my sister's pets, I am surrounded by six dogs and two cats. (Definition of a dog - a digestive system with an insatiable appetite at one end and no sense of responsibility at the other.) In sheer self-defense I may have to invest in a guinea-pig...

...on second thoughts, I'll stick to teddy bears.

Anne Lloyd from England and Rosa Caccioppo from Italy make their first Log Entries appearance in this issue. We thank them both for their stories, and also thank Manuela Rietano, who has done such a good job of helping Rosa with the translation. It is not at all easy writing in a foreign language.

I hope you enjoy this issue of Log Entries. Now - about that editorial for LE 77.....

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading 'Valerie'.

We are soliciting submissions for inclusion in E-Log Entries. These can be sent to either -

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H.M.S. ENTERPRISE

by

David Gomm

Ship's Log 10/10/04.

Today word has been received that a medical board has declared Captain Pike's grievous wounds as having rendered him unfit for further duty. He is to be invalided from the Service on half pay.

A new captain has been appointed and will join the ship within the hour.

The Enterprise rode at her anchor off Spithead.

It was one of those murky October mornings on which the weather, unable to make up its mind between light rain and heavy fog, turns into that fine penetrating drizzle which combines the damp misery of the former with the atrocious visibility of the latter. The gloom of the day perfectly matched the mood of the ship's company.

There was a knock on the door of the Sailing Master's cabin. The grizzled old Scots sea-dog laid down his quill with a sigh. "Come in." He looked up and saw the newcomer. "What is it, Mr. Chekov?"

Mr. Midshipman Chekov opened the door a little wider and stepped through, stooping slightly in order to avoid contact with the deck above. The young Russian emigre made no attempt to close the door behind him, but stood in the opening, shifting nervously from one foot to the other and twisting his hat in his hands.

"Beg pardon, Meester Scott, but I... that is, we... I mean..."

"Och, spit it oot, laddie," the Sailing Master said testily. "and either come in or stay outside. We'll be cold and wet enough before the day's through. Nae sense in starting afore we must."

"I just wanted to say... I heard about the Keptin. Eet's a sad day."

"Aye, Mr. Chekov, that it is. He was a fine man. *Is* a fine man," Scott corrected himself hastily.

"Dr. McCoy was saying that he was lucky not to be blown to pieces, like poor Mr. Tyler."

"Lucky? Aye, weel, I suppose you could call it lucky." Scott's expression took on a haunted look. Never would he forget that last sight of his captain, being carried ashore more dead than alive after the explosion in the ammunition lighter had blown away half his face.

Chekov came to the real point of his visit. "Thees Keptin Kirk, Mr. Scott. What's he like?" In a service in which a captain held

the literal power of life and death, a sadistic tyrant could turn one of His Majesty's ships into a floating hell. As senior midshipman, Chekov had taken it upon himself to voice the question the entire ship was asking.

"We'll know soon enough, Mr. Chekov," Scott said grimly. "In fact - "

There was a clatter of feet on the deck outside, so loud that it could only have been made by the smallest member of the gunroom. The door opened a few inches and in popped the tousled head of Midshipman Kinshaw.

Scott began to enquire, "Did your mother never teach you to knock, Mr. Kinshaw?" but the child, unabashed, piped up, "Rowlocks, Mr. Scott."

The Master did his best to summon up an explosion of ungovernable wrath, but Kinshaw forestalled it by saying, "Mr. Stiles' compliments, Mr. Scott, and he believes he heard a boat approaching."

Hats were hastily crammed onto heads, and there was a rush for the deck. Just as Scott reached it the lookout shouted the challenge, "Boat ahoy?"

There was a second's utter stillness, and anticipation. If the approaching boat responded with the ship's name, it would signify that it contained her captain, the unknown Kirk. Sure enough, from out of the gloom there came the single word, "Enterprise."

Dozens of pairs of eyes scanned the grey water. The first glimpse anyone had of the new Captain was of a cloaked figure sitting in the stern of a small boat, being rowed by a single oarsman. Once sighted, the boat seemed to accelerate, so that in no time at all it was alongside. The figure in the stern stood up, rather unsteadily, divested himself of his cloak, and handed it to the boatman to be swung aboard along with his sea-chest.

"He's quite young," whispered Midshipman Kinshaw to Ensign Potato of the ship's small Marine detachment.

"Silence!" Scott, when he put his mind to it, could whisper quite thunderously. But the midshipman was quite right. The new captain did indeed cut a youthful figure, a youthfulness emphasised by the conspicuously new single epaulette of a junior Post Captain.

The figure in the boat looked up. *God!* he thought. *Can it really be that they are even more nervous than I?* The Enterprise, at 24 guns, was barely large enough to merit a full captain - only the Atropos, 22, was smaller - but the climb up her side was still long enough, and slippery enough, to threaten her new captain with a ridicule from which he would never recover. He brushed these thoughts aside, ran up the ladder like a powder-monkey, and with a nonchalance he did not feel stepped through the entry port, arm already lifting in salute.

So, in a twittering of bosun's pipes, Captain James T. Kirk joined H.M.S. Enterprise.

The moment the pipes were stilled Lt. Stiles stepped forward and saluted stiffly. "Stiles, sir. Second Lieutenant. Acting First."

It was left to Mr. Scott to say, "Welcome aboard, sir."

"Thank you, Mr...?"

"Scott, sir. Montgomery Scott. Sailing Master."

"Very well. Mr. Stiles, call all hands, if you please. I shall read myself in at once."

Until the Admiralty Orders addressed to Captain James T. Kirk - the title was still somehow unreal - had been read aloud to the ship's company, Christopher Pike and not he remained legally Captain of the Enterprise. But it was soon done. In less than a minute the ghost of a well-loved former captain was laid. The Enterprise had a new master.

There was an expectant hush as, the legal formalities over, Kirk stepped forward to address the ship's company. They knew well that this was the moment which traditionally gave the first clue as to the new captain's character. But Kirk knew it too. He had heard too many captains seek to inspire but achieve only pomposity. He changed his mind abruptly.

"Mr. Stiles."

"Sir."

"I have sealed orders to read. I shall do so in my cabin. Kindly see to it that I am not disturbed for fifteen minutes. Then I will meet the ship's officers."

"Aye aye, sir." Stiles was about to summon Midshipman Kinshaw to show the captain to his quarters, but he was too late; Kirk was already on his way.

In the privacy of the tiny cabin he sat down at the simple wooden desk. Forcing himself to act deliberately, he removed the bulky package from his uniform coat, unwrapped the layers of protective oilskins, and broke the seal.

"Captain, may I present Mr. Midshipman Chekov. Mr. Riley. Mr. Kinshaw."

"Gentlemen," Kirk acknowledged gravely, as Stiles concluded, "and this is our surgeon, Dr. Horatio McCoy."

Kirk recognised a kindred spirit. "Glad to know you, Sawbones." Realising that he had allowed his carefully cultivated mask of impassivity to slip, he covered it up by frowning sternly. "Ha h'm!" he said, a habit acquired from another naval commander of his acquaintance. He smiled inwardly at the thought of Hornblower, languishing as Master and Commander of a sloop blockading Brest, still waiting to achieve Post rank. Whatever happened, he, Kirk, would now remain the senior for as long as they both lived.

McCoy, discovering that they had a mutual acquaintance, said anxiously, "Do you perchance play whist, Captain?"

"I do not, Doctor," said Kirk firmly.

"Thank god for that!"

"Ha h'm!" said Kirk again, louder and more sternly. There was a laugh, among those who knew of the celebrated sloop commander's abiding passion. "Only one watchkeeping officer, excluding myself. And we should carry three."

"But Keptin. Mr. Barrett was transferred shortly before the accident. And Mr. Tyler..." Chekov waved his hands expressively "... pouf!"

"Thank you, Mr. Chekov," Kirk said grimly. "I am well aware of the sad fate of Lt. Tyler. But we must address ourselves to the situation as it now stands. A senior Lieutenant will be joining us at sea."

This disclosure brought a buzz of interest from his hearers, but no explanation was forthcoming.

"Which will still leave us short. Mr. Chekov, the duties of a Lieutenant in His Majesty's Navy are responsible and arduous. Do you feel yourself ready to assume them?"

Chekov gulped. "Yes, Keptin."

"Very well. You are promoted Acting Lieutenant from this moment. Whether an examining board will confirm you in that rank will be a test of your continued diligence in your studies. Let me see, that will create a vacancy in the gunroom. Mr. Stiles, be so good as to pass the word for Leading Seaman Sulu."

"Sulu, sir?" Incredulously.

"I believe you heard me, Mr. Stiles."

"But he's a Chink, sir."

"Not in fact, Mr. Stiles. But be that as it may. From Captain Pike's annotations in the ship's muster book I gather him to be an intelligent and cultured individual; one moreover who has the reputation of being the best helmsman in the fleet. It may interest you to know that my predecessor had decided to rate him Master's Mate. A decision which it is my intention to honour. That will be all, gentlemen." And as Stiles turned to leave, his expression thunderous, "Oh, Mr. Stiles. I should be delighted if you and Mr. Scott would join me at dinner this evening. You too, Doctor." A laugh hovered around his eyes, although his face remained solemn. "I will gladly undertake not to propose a rubber of whist."

'Mr. Midshipman' Kinshaw wriggled uncomfortably in her chair at the gunroom table, and suppressed a desire to giggle. Putting on boys' clothes and running away to sea had seemed a great lark at the age of fourteen. At sixteen going on seventeen those same clothes were distressingly tight in all the wrong places. There were times when she longed to unbutton the blue uniform coat and flop gratefully outwards into her own natural shape, but such a revelation would be likely to raise eyebrows among her brother Warrant Officers; as to the effect on the lower deck, the mind boggled.

"Doesn't it just!" she said out loud, then realising that she was not alone, "Oh, hello, Pavel. Slumming?"

Chekov would dearly have liked to say pompously, "Lieutenant

Chekov to you, *Mister* Kinshaw," but his news was too good to waste, so he said in a conspiratorial whisper, "Have you heard our orders?"

"Only that we have to rendezvous with the *Celestine*, brig, and take on board our new First Lieutenant."

Chekov waved a hand airily. "Ancient heestory."

"There's more?"

"Much more." He lowered his voice still further. "We are also taking aboard a scientific gentleman, of noble rank. The Keptin has been 'requested and required' to give him every assistance in the pursuance of his experiments."

His companion's face lit up. Ships and science had been her twin passions as a child, but both had been dismissed as unsuitable occupations for a young lady. She had run away to sea in the hope of accumulating enough prize money in the former to finance a career in the latter. "What kind of science?"

"I don't exactly know," Chekov admitted. "He's supposed to be testing some new kind of signalling device."

Kinshaw's face fell again. As signal midshipman she knew all there was to know about signals, which consisted of flags, more flags, and still more flags, every combination of which had to be learned by heart. "That's not science. Not proper science, anyway. I wonder what he'll be like."

To Chekov, all scientists were the same. "Probably an eccentric old gentleman with a long grey beard."

He couldn't have been more wrong.

"Sail ho!"

Captain Kirk cupped his hands and responded to the lookout's cry. "What sail?" Without waiting for a reply he grabbed a telescope. "Take the con, if you please, Mr. Sulu. Mr. Riley, you know the *Celestine*, I believe?"

"Aye, sir."

"Then come with me."

The two ran up the rigging, the older man easily outdistancing the younger.

"She's the *Celestine*, all right, sir," Riley confirmed. "I'd know her anywhere. But... she's running away from us."

It was true. The brig, all sail set, was abeam of the *Enterprise*, on a divergent course, and inching ahead.

Kirk descended to the deck the quickest way, spurning the rigging and coming straight down a rope, hand over hand. "Make more sail, if you please, Mr. Scott."

A worried frown crossed the Sailing Master's face. "Cap'n, she's carrying all she can. Any more, and she'll shake herself to

pieces." And, resignedly, as his Captain kept looking, "Aye aye, sir."

Under the combined skills of Scott and Sulu the Enterprise gathered speed and more speed, flying over the water like a bird. Soon the Celestine was clearly visible again, still running before the wind as if oblivious of the other's existence.

"Mr. Kinshaw. Make to Celestine: 'Heave to.' And, as the brig continued to ignore them, 'Make that 'Heave to or I shall open fire'."

Scott peered again through the telescope. "But where are her crew?"

Now that he mentioned it, there was no sign of life anywhere on the brig, from masthead to quarterdeck.

"I don't like it, Keptin."

"No more do I, Mr. Chekov. Mr. Stiles, I'll have the guns run out, if you please."

And then, suddenly, the chase was over. There was a loud crack, clearly audible across the remaining expanse of water. Her mainmast teetered and fell; within seconds the Celestine was transformed from a graceful and noble ship into a dismantled wreck.

"Mr. Chekov, detail a boarding party. Hands to draw cutlasses. No, Mr. Stiles," as the Second lieutenant prepared to buckle on his sword belt, "you will remain with the ship. I shall lead the boarding party myself. Bosun, make ready with those grapples."

Kirk held his sword aloft as the two ships closed. "Prepare to board!" Then, although none of the ship's company understood his meaning - least of all himself -

"Phasers on stun."

"Captain Kirk to the bridge."

Jim Kirk's eyes were red, from disturbed sleep rather than any simple lack of it. He pulled on a shirt and trousers, shaking his head to clear it; then he opened his cabin door and marched briskly along the corridor towards the turbolift. There he found Dr. McCoy barring his way.

"Jim, I have to talk to you."

"Later, Bones."

"It's been happening again, hasn't it?"

Kirk's eyes blazed. "I said not now, Doctor. 'Kay?" Then as his natural good manners reasserted themselves, "Yes, it has been happening again, but that problem can wait. I'm worried about Spock and Uhura. They're twenty-four hours overdue."

"Twenty-three point seven two five - approximately," McCoy said in an effort to lessen the tension between them. But if Kirk recognised the parody of Spock he ignored it. The two rode the lift in silence up to the bridge.

The doors were still opening as Kirk demanded, "Any sign of that shuttlecraft yet, Mr. Sulu?"

"Negative, Captain. Wait -" Sulu studied his monitor more closely. "I'm getting something now. A faint echo. Bearing two seven two mark nine."

"Sensors, Miss Kinshaw?"

The Deputy Science Officer bent to her task. "It's the shuttlecraft all right, sir. But... it can't be!"

"Explain."

"They're accelerating away from us. And we're doing..."

"Warp five," confirmed Sulu."

Not for the first time on that trip Kirk was overwhelmed with a sense of *deja vu*.

"Bridge to Engineering."

"Scott here, Captain."

"Increase speed, Mr. Scott. Warp eight. Mr. Sulu, set a course to intercept shuttlecraft. For your information, Miss Kinshaw, it can be. Don't ask me how."

"Still gaining on us, sir," reported Sulu. "Almost beyond scanner range."

"Keep station on her, Mr. Sulu. Mr. Scott - warp nine. No she won't," he added, forestalling Scott's gloomy prognostications concerning the effect on the ship's structure.

Slowly the Enterprise clawed back the lost ground.

"Put her on visual, Mr. Sulu." Kirk studied the picture intently, mentally computing the distance and angle between them. "She'll stop just about... now."

The shuttlecraft had no masts to lose, but if she had she would most certainly have lost them. She stopped dead. If by any mischance her gravity cushions had been less than one hundred percent operational everyone and everything aboard her would have been instantly mashed.

"Hailing frequency open, sir," confirmed Ensign Pawson, standing in for Uhura.

"Kirk to shuttlecraft. This is Enterprise calling shuttlecraft. Do you read me?"

"They're not answering, Keptin."

"Thank you, Mr. Chekov," said Kirk neutrally. A sarcastic reply would have been wasted on the Russian. And in any case, they were

answering; Spock's voice came through loud and clear.

"Spock to Enterprise."

"Spock! Is that you? Are you both all right?"

"Your first question is illogical, Captain, since it was posed in response to its own reply. As to the second, both Lt. Uhura and I are in excellent shape."

"One more so than the other!" muttered Sulu to Chekov with a wink.

Luckily Kirk did not hear him; he was concentrating on the shuttlecraft, which was under way again, edging towards the hangar bay. Something was wrong, he could feel it. But what?

Spock's voice broke into his thoughts again. "Mr. Chekov, since we are about to enter the hangar bay it would be logical to open the doors."

"Yes, Mr. Spock. Hangar doors opening."

Kirk made up his mind. "Belay that!" he said sharply.

Chekov looked up, startled by the unusual phraseology. Kirk himself stabbed at the button, setting the doors closing again. Then he glanced across to Ensign Pawson, drawing a finger across his throat to signify that she should cut the hailing link. When she had done so,

"The shuttlecraft is hostile, Mr. Chekov." And, as Chekov looked doubtful, "Don't ask, Mr. Chekov. Just believe. I know."

The craft's own hailer opened up. "Is there a problem, Captain?"

"We're working on it, Mr. Spock. Miss Pawson, have Potato and three strong men report to the hangar deck. Mr. Chekov, come with me. Mr. Sulu, you have the con."

When the Security Ensign and his men reached the hangar they were greeted by the Duty Controller. "Message from the Captain. You're to meet him in the transporter room. On the double."

"Sorry about the detour, Mr. Potato," Kirk said when the Security detachment arrived, puffing slightly. "We are beaming aboard the shuttlecraft, and I didn't want to advertise the fact." He indicated the transporter pads. "Take your places, gentlemen. Phasers on heavy stun." He took his own place and nodded to Kyle at the console. "Energise."

The main cabin of the shuttlecraft was empty. It was otherwise completely normal except for two things: the on-board computer had a voice synthesiser attached to it, and there was a lead-walled cubicle where the airlock should have been.

Back on the Enterprise, Transporter Chief Kyle handed Ensign Pawson a note, written in the Captain's hand. The Communications

Ensign studied it, then reopened the hailing frequency. "Enterprise to shuttlecraft."

Potato, who was nearest to the computer, jumped violently as the synthesiser spoke in Uhura's voice. "Uhura here."

"Captain's compliments, Lieutenant. He's sorry to keep you, but they're doing everything they can."

The synthesiser sounded plaintive. "Tell him to hurry. We want our tea."

A second voice, Spock's, issued from the same speaker. "If you mean you are hungry, Lieutenant, it would be more logical to say so. Tea is a beverage."

"It's a figure of speech, Mr. Spock. Something you wouldn't understand."

"Mr. Potato!"

Lost in the fascinating spectacle of a machine arguing with itself, Potato had momentarily allowed himself to be distracted. Discovering his Captain wrestling with the door of the lead cabinet he bounded over to help, sending Chekov flying in the process. The door swung open, revealing Spock and Uhura bound back to back. Between them was a tall red metal structure, whose top was shaped like an old-fashioned beehive.

Spock did not need to waste time with speech. His voice materialised inside all six heads, not in that mixture of words and images symptomatic of Vulcan telepathy, but in crisp, perfect sentences, the entire message heard and comprehended many times faster than would have been possible vocally.

/Jim. There is no time to lose. You must get the Enterprise away from here. The shuttlecraft's engines have been replaced with power units of an alien design, which melds the principles of the warp drive and the phaser. That is how we were able to travel at warp speed. Now the phaser has been set to overload. Detonation will be in sixty seconds from - now./

No further elaboration was necessary. A simple hand-phaser, critically overloaded, possessed enough destructive power to destroy a Starship. A phaser on this scale, coupled with a massive matter/anti-matter imbalance, could easily add a new small star to the firmament.

In one minute's time.

The Voiceless Instantaneous Synchronous Communications Orator had been developed by an obscure scientist living as a near-hermit on the planet Fidlas III. On the grounds that it might be misused in the wrong hands, its inventor had offered the Orator to the Federation, stipulating only that in order to preserve his privacy it must be collected by a party of no more than two. It had been Spock's and Uhura's mission to take delivery of the Orator and transport it to the Enterprise for conveyance to Starfleet HQ.

"Fascinating!" Spock had exclaimed, when the principle of the device was explained to him. "So simple, and yet so... elegant."

Tuned to its user's voice pattern, the Orator intercepted speech at source and converted it to a form of radio wave, so that it would travel at the speed of light rather than that of sound. This wave impinged directly on the recipient's cerebral cortex, there to be converted back into speech. The prototype still had its teething troubles, not the least of which was its sheer bulk; its range was limited, and within that range its audibility was indiscriminate, but once refined and miniaturised it would revolutionise the communications of a galaxy.

In the event, the very imperfection of the Orator proved to be the Enterprise's salvation. Spock's warning crossed the few kilometres from shuttlecraft to Enterprise, where it was picked up simultaneously by everyone aboard.

The whole crew reacted as one person. In ten seconds Scott was replying, "Aye, lassie, I heard," to D.S.O. Kinshaw's frantic yelp down the intercom.

In twenty Kyle had locked on to all the shuttlecraft's occupants and was ready to beam them across.

In thirty the matter/anti-matter reaction was being accelerated in anticipation of an urgent call for warp speed.

In forty, Kirk and the landing party were safely materialised on board ship.

In fifty Spock and Uhura had followed, with the Orator still lashed between them.

In fifty-five Sulu had fired a salvo of photon torpedoes to vaporise the shuttlecraft, thereby pre-empting its own much deadlier explosion.

And in fifty-nine seconds, warp factor one already comfortably exceeded, the Enterprise was well out of harm's way.

"And you had no idea that the engines had been changed?"

Kirk, Spock and McCoy were walking together towards the senior officers' living quarters.

"None at all, Captain. The shuttlecraft handled precisely as it always does. If Lt. Uhura had not drawn my attention to the hum of a phaser beginning to overload, the consequences would have been quite... serious."

"That was when you investigated the engines?"

"Affirmative. Although there was barely time to make my assessment before we blacked out. When we came to we were as you discovered us."

Dr. McCoy frowned. "But who could possibly have changed the engines? And how?"

"Guvnar?" suggested Kirk, referring to the Orator's inventor.

"Negative, Jim. Guvnar did not leave our company for the entire duration of our time on Fidlas III. And my sensors showed no other

life forms within a half light-year of the planet. In any case, so comprehensive an engine change should have been impossible in that time-frame, even for a team of men."

McCoy seized eagerly on the opportunity. "Nevertheless, it did happen."

"I believe I said *should* have been impossible, Doctor. It was manifestly not so since, as you say, it did happen. I have to confess I find it... interesting."

The trio stopped in front of Kirk's cabin. Kirk made to open it, but McCoy laid a restraining hand on his arm.

"There is that other matter, Jim."

"It'll have to wait until morning, Bones. I've simply got to get some sleep. Now."

McCoy did not budge. "In your cabin, Jim. Just the three of us. Now. Or before a full medical board in the morning. It's your choice."

"If I might venture a prescription, Doctor?" McCoy looked thunderstruck, but Spock went on, "I still have a little of Admiral Sumbio's Romulan Lekhar."

McCoy grinned. "I thought you didn't drink, Spock."

"If you are suggesting that I have no requirement for fluid intake, Doctor, then your knowledge of Vulcan physiology is even more superficial than you claim. My suggestion was based upon personal experience of Lekhar's relaxing qualities. If they do not cure the Captain's problem, they may at least assist him in sharing it with us."

McCoy took a second sip of the magnificent blood-red liquid and smiled, broadly and appreciatively. "These dreams, Jim?"

Kirk shook his head. "Not dreams, Bones. At least, not in the conventional sense. These... experiences... occur when I am asleep, but there the resemblance begins and ends. I *am* this man. I have his feelings, his memories, even his senses. When I climbed up the side of that ship I could smell the salt tang of the sea. And I have never been to sea. What's more, although I have his memories - a whole lifetime of them - I have none of my own."

"This ship. The Enterprise. She would be a - I forget the phrase."

"A ship of the line? Nothing so grand, Bones. She is what is called a Fifth Rate. The smallest ship to rate a Post Captain - that's a full Captain, not just a Commander. Before my promotion I was commanding a sloop of war - the Wizard - off Brest."

"Don't tell Chekov that!"

Kirk laughed. "I wasn't going to." He became serious again, absent-mindedly knocking the dry biscuit which traditionally accompanied Lekhar on the hard surface of his table to remove the weevils. "I was appointed to the Enterprise after her previous

Captain was seriously injured in an explosion."

"The parallels are indeed close."

"But not exact, Mr. Spock. Stiles is still Second Lieutenant, although our own Mr. Stiles was transferred after the Romulan encounter. But many of our people are on board in some guise or other. Scotty, you yourself Bones, Potato, Chekov, Sulu. Even young Kinshaw is there, disguised as a boy. That only leaves you, Mr. Spock. And Uhura, of course."

"My knowledge of your ancient history is somewhat patchy," admitted Spock, "but from what I do know, it is hard to visualise a place for someone with Uhura's... attributes."

"Or with yours, Spock?"

"I was about to say that, Doctor."

"That really is all there is to it," Kirk concluded. "I seem to be living two lives, and we both of us work very hard." He yawned prodigiously. "And now I *am* going to bed. Medical board or no medical board."

And added, although neither of his hearers had heard the term before,

"It's my watch below."

The trouble with being promoted Acting Lieutenant, Chekov decided, was that you were neither one thing nor t'other. You didn't know whether you belonged in the wardroom or the gunroom. Not that it made a whole lot of difference in the tiny Enterprise, because the two were really one and the same, divided only by a canvas partition.

'Mr. Midshipman' Kinshaw was listening avidly to her friend's excited description of the boarding of the Celestine. It wasn't easy to follow, because when he got excited the Russian's English tended to desert him. And from the moment when the new First Lieutenant and the civilian scientist had been discovered in the main cabin, stark naked and bound together back to back, things had got very exciting indeed.

Chekov warmed to his story. "The lootenant was quite nekked," he assured his audience, "except for his huge hatted cock." (The Lieutenant's only garment had been an exceptionally large cocked hat, pulled down at the sides so that it hid the tops of his ears.) "And as for your dried-up old greybeard of a scientist - he's a black lady."

This piece of information, fascinating though it was, had to be filed away for later, because it was at this point in the narrative that Captain Kirk had suddenly stood bolt upright, stock still like a stag scenting danger. He held the pose for several seconds, eyes shut, as though communicating with another plane of consciousness. Then, at a bound, he was at the captives' side, releasing them with a single accurate slash of his cutlass.

"It is my belief that this ship is mined," he said tersely. "No, it is to my certain knowledge. Lieutenant Grayson, I presume?" The cocked-hatted prisoner nodded. "Are you fit for duty?"

"At once, Captain."

"Then pray be so good as to search the forrad magazine. Mr. Potato, you and your marines will assist the Lieutenant. Mr. Sulu - " The newly-promoted Master's Mate stood to attention. "You will find clothing for the lady and conduct her and her equipment to safety aboard the Enterprise. EYES FRONT, MR. CHEKOV!" (Chekov's eyes were repeatedly straying towards the magnificent equipment of the dusky female scientist, although not to the particular equipment to which his Captain had referred.) "We must put your keen eyesight to more urgent use. Take half the seamen and search the after magazine. The rest of you men, come with me. Smartly now, lads, ere we are blown to Kingdom Come. A golden guinea for the man who finds that fuse."

It was dark in the after hold. The party's single lantern had to be carefully shielded, because of the terrible risk of fire and ensuing explosion. At first all seemed clear. If there was a fuse, it was well hidden.

Chekov covered the lantern completely, plunging the hold into pitch blackness. "Keep still, men. And werry quiet. Look and listen."

"Wot we lis'nin for, sir?" came the voice of one of the hands out of the darkness.

"A glow and a nissin', yer fool," said another.

"Quiet!" ordered Chekov. "A dozen lashes for the next man who makes a sound."

But the sound, when it came, put all thought of lashes out of his mind: not the tell-tale hissing of a burning fuse, but a soft crunching underfoot, as one of the sailors shuffled in the darkness. Even the inexperienced Chekov instantly grasped its significance.

"Every man take off his shoes. Werry carefully. One spark and we're done for."

The lantern, cautiously uncovered, confirmed that the decking had been liberally carpeted with loose gunpowder. The surrounding bags were all sound, leaving no doubt that this powder had been spread deliberately.

But why? mused Chekov. He looked up, seeking inspiration, and in doing so saved all their lives.

The deck overhead had been sawn almost clean through. Four flintlock mechanisms had been fixed to the sound portion, with their triggers pointing inwards, and their muzzles downwards. Anyone entering the orlop immediately above would bring the whole lot crashing down, discharging the flintlocks in the process. Hot shot and sparks would descend into the hold. And then...

There was a clatter of footsteps, coming rapidly closer. Captain Kirk and his party, searching the deck above, were about to spring the trap.

Chekov gave a desperate shout. "KEPTIN - KEEP CLEAR OF THE ORLOP!"

But the footsteps kept coming.

Acting Lieutenant Chekov paused in his narrative and took a deep draught of the double rum ration which the Captain had authorised for every member of the boarding party.

"If only it were wodka," he said wistfully. The wistfulness did not prevent him from taking another long swig.

Midshipman Kinshaw, eyes saucer-wide, almost screamed, "You can't stop there, Pavel. What happened next?"

Chekov drained his mug before replying. "That," he said dramatically, "was when we heard the scream."

"Hark!" Kirk had stopped in his tracks. "What was that?"

'That' had been Ensign Potato, losing his footing in the forrad hatch and tumbling back into the hold, doing no good to Lieutenant Grayson's cocked hat and even less to Marine Dobson, upon whom he landed. The unfortunate Dobson was the only casualty of the engagement.

Now that they had stopped running, the Captain's party could clearly hear Chekov's warning shouts.

"Most ingenious," commented Kirk, when the four flintlocks had been made safe.

"Ingenious indeed, Captain," agreed Lieutenant Grayson quietly. "We now know how the Celestine trap was set. Also, since it was her crew who overpowered us before taking to the boats, there is a logical answer to the question 'by whom?' The puzzle to which I should now like to apply myself is - 'why?'"

Further investigation showed one thing clearly: the Celestine's renegade crew had included an explosives expert. All sail had been set, to carry the brig within sight of the Enterprise. Then a small well-timed charge had carried away the topmast, setting off a chain reaction which had reduced the brig to her present sorry condition.

"I have been thinking, Captain," said Lieutenant Grayson, now dressed in seaman's kit from the Celestine's slop-chest, and a threadbare uniform coat which had belonged to the late Lieutenant Tyler. "An explosion of this magnitude would have been audible at some considerable distance. The perpetrators of this outrage will doubtless be expecting the concussion as confirmation of their success."

"Her crew will be waiting for the bang."

"I believe I said that, Captain."

"Then let us not disappoint them."

Fuses were laid and, when the grapples had been removed ready

for the Enterprise to make her escape, ignited. Twelve minutes later news of the death of the Celestine was being borne on the winds, to whomsoever was waiting to hear it.

Lieutenant Sir Speak Grayson, RN, Bart., was tall and thin, with a satanic cast of features. His black hair was brushed forwards and his eyebrows slanted slightly upwards, as if to meet it. He seldom smiled. He did not have pointed ears, but in such a visage they would not have looked out of place. Conventionally shaped, they were nevertheless rather large, which explained his preference for over-sized hats. At the moment only one of them was visible, the other being totally encased in a bell-shaped object from which a wire ran up the mast, all the way to the crow's nest.

High above Uhura, Countess of Bandon, was completing her preparations.

Her late husband, the Earl, had been a distant cousin of an ancient Anglo-Irish family, with no prospects of inheriting the title. His hopes were so very non-existent that in his early twenties he had stolen a boat and gone into the slave trade. His family disowned him. By the time he was thirty he owned a fleet of slavers, operating the lucrative Caribbean run. In his early forties he realised his vast fortune; turning his back on the sea he settled in the Carolinas and devoted his life to science. By his late sixties he was one of the world's leading authorities on electrical phenomena. Two days before his seventy-first birthday he received the news that the earl and both his surviving sons had died in a smallpox epidemic, and that consequently he was now Earl of Bandon.

Partly as an act of atonement for the way his fortune had been made, and partly to revenge himself on the family who had shunned him, he married the beautiful and brilliant former slave girl who had become his assistant, and took ship for Ireland to claim the title.

Her husband had lived only five more years, but in that time the Countess absorbed all of his knowledge; in the further five years following his death she had added to it, very considerably. Which was why she had been the obvious choice for this most secret of missions.

Lady Uhura picked up a similar bell-like instrument and spoke into it. "Can you hear me, Sir Speak?"

"Fascinating!" observed the First Lieutenant, to nobody in particular. Transferring his end of the apparatus from his ear to his mouth he replied, "I hear you, Countess. Loud and clear."

Captain James T. Kirk was holding another dinner party. This time his guests were Lieutenant Grayson, Dr. McCoy and Lady Uhura.

"May I help you to a little more of this excellent duff, Lady Uhura? Sir Speak? No? Then this would seem an opportune moment to discuss the contents of my report to Their Lordships. Lady Uhura, Sir Speak tells me that the device really does function."

Uhura flashed him a brilliant smile. "I never doubted it would, Captain."

"Lady Uhura assures me that she never even raised her voice," Sir Speak confirmed. "Yet through the communication bell she was as clear as a..."

Kirk finished the sentence for him. "As a bell?"

"Quite so, Captain."

The ship's surgeon, who was the only one still eating, entered the discussion for the first time. "That's all very fine, Speak, but I can't see any practical use for it. Except to save us poor surgeons a few cases of Lookout's Larynx."

"That is because of your surgeon's tendency to amputate first and apply logic afterwards."

"Gentlemen." Kirk stepped in hastily as McCoy choked on a mouthful of duff. "Let us not quarrel. I'm sorry, Sawbones, but in this instance I have to agree with Sir Speak. The instrument has only a limited range at present, but we are entering into an age of great scientific marvels. Who knows but that one day it may be possible to communicate instantaneously over great distances, even as far as - say - Portsmouth to Plymouth."

"Preposterous!" snorted McCoy, but only to the plate in front of him.

"The potential of this invention is quite without limit," Kirk went on. "Which is why I have given orders for us to put about and return to England without delay. It was rumoured at Portsmouth that three units of the French Channel Fleet, two ships of the line and a frigate, have eluded the blockade and escaped from Brest. It would fare ill with us to fall in with them, for we would needs destroy the ship and the device with it, to prevent it from falling into enemy hands."

Uhura raised her glass of Captain Pike's Madeira. "Then let us drink to a swift and uninterrupted journey."

"Amen to that," agreed McCoy piously.

Any such hopes were to be short-lived. At first light the following morning the lookout reported, "Two sail on the starboard bow."

"Send the hands to breakfast, Mr. Stiles," ordered Kirk when told the news. The men would fight all the better on full stomachs. *Aye, and die all the better, too,* he thought grimly.

"Don't fuss man," he snapped at Rand, his steward. Rand, a somewhat effeminate-looking fellow, whose blond hair was plaited into an ornate pigtail, was doing his best to make sure that his Captain ate his own breakfast. Despite the Enterprise's evasive action, taken under the experienced direction of Master's Mate Sulu, there was little doubt that the two French men o' war would be upon her within the hour. Then there would likely be no time for eating. Then or ever.

A distinctive clatter halted outside the cabin door. "Come in, Mr. Kinshaw," Kirk called hurriedly, saving himself the trouble of having to reprimand the Midshipman for failing to knock.

"Mr. Scott's respects, sir, and we've sighted the frigate," Kinshaw gulped. "She's cutting off our retreat."

Kirk crammed his cocked hat on his head. "I'll come directly."

"Twenty minutes at most, Captain," the grizzled Scots Sailing Master reported when Kirk reached the quarterdeck. "We're carrying every stitch she'll take and a guid few she won't, and yon frigate's still overhauling us."

"Take heart, Mr. Scott. We're more than a match for one froggy frigate."

"Illogical, Captain." The tall figure of Lieutenant Grayson appeared at his elbow. "Her thirty-two guns pitted against our twenty-four makes odds of one point three three to one against us. Approximately."

"Odds which Their Lordships would regard as being heavily in our favour, Sir Speak."

"Indeed they would, Captain. I was speaking purely... mathematically."

It was perfectly true: the Admiralty would expect the tiny Enterprise to defeat a 36-gun frigate in a single-ship action, if only because she would be better officered. Good officers tended to be scarce in the French Navy, the guillotine having, so to speak, cut off the supply.

Kirk took hold of his telescope and started to ascend the rigging. "I shall assess the situation for myself." Six feet above the deck he turned. "Fear not, men. In half an hour that frigate will be at the bottom of the ocean." *Thereafter*, he thought dispassionately, *the two First Rates will blow us out of the water.*

Kirk looked up at the crow's nest high above him. Then called out one last injunction, totally baffling the Sailing Master.

"Beam me up, Scotty."

"I regret having to wake you, Captain, but Miss Kinshaw and I have discovered something most... disturbing."

Kirk, yawning, caught sight of the Deputy Science Officer hovering uncertainly outside the cabin door. "Come in, Miss Kinshaw. I'm quite decent. And Mr. Spock makes an excellent chaperone."

The D.S.O. was unusually reticent, even after Yeoman Rand had delivered three mugs of steaming black coffee.

"I was running the housekeep programme on the ship's log," she finally admitted, "and I accidentally got into Dr. McCoy's medical log. I couldn't help seeing..."

"And now you think I'm a candidate for one of his restraint couches?"

"No sir, of course not. I wish I did. Oh gosh... I mean..." She broke off in confusion.

"Never mind, Miss Kinshaw. Worse things happen at sea."

"That's just it, sir. Out of curiosity I got the computer to search the historical database. There was an H.M.S. Enterprise. She sailed from Portsmouth in 1804. And she never came back."

"It may be even worse than you think, Miss Kinshaw," Kirk said gravely. "In the brief rest period I was allowed, I visited the Royal Navy again." He went on to tell of the primitive telephone, the booby trap beneath the orlop, and all the other disturbing parallels with their present mission. "Which is why," he concluded, "I'm expecting a report of three hostile Starships in our vicinity at any moment..."

The telegraph shrilled on the word 'now'.

"Kirk here."

"I've got Starfleet, sir. Priority one."

"Put them on."

"Jim." Admiral Jackson Riley's agitation was plain for all to hear. "We have a distress signal from the U.S.S. Salamander, in your sector. She reported being under attack from two hostiles, origin unknown. All contact with her is now lost."

"We're on our way, Admiral." Kirk was on the point of adding, "Kirk out," but the Admiral cut in quickly.

"No, Jim. Your orders are to high-tail it out of there. According to Salamander, one of these marauders is at least twice the size of anything in Starfleet. We can't risk the Orator falling into the hands of an enemy. That must be prevented at any cost. Do you read me, Jim? *At any cost.*"

Kirk's smile was wintry. "Don't worry, Admiral. I've heard it all before."

"But that's impossible, Keptin. Everyone knows that the telephone was invented by..."

D.S.O. Kinshaw laughed. "A little old lady from Leningrad? Yes, Pavel, but you've missed the point. Your Alexandra Grahamova Bellinska may have invented - invented - the telephone, but she didn't do it in 1804."

"Illogical, Miss Kinshaw. As usual."

Kirk turned sharply to his Science Officer. "Explain, Spock."

"It is quite simple, Jim. A lone inventor, working in isolation, might easily have improved on the crude electric cells of the time and used one to power a rudimentary telephone. It would have been no greater a leap than that achieved in our time by Guvnar with the orator."

"But there's no record of any such invention," Dr. McCoy

objected.

"Nor would there be, Doctor. Obviously."

"Gentlemen." Kirk corrected himself. "*Ladies* and gentlemen. We have very little time. As I have explained, there is a well-defined link between events on our ancestors' Enterprise - if indeed they *are* our ancestors - and on our own. At the moment they are ahead of us in relative time. If they fail to escape the three warships, then so will we. We need to find a way to help them. Fast."

"I regret, Captain, but that would be inadvisable."

"Explain."

"I was about to point out to Dr. McCoy that since there is no record of the telephone having been invented in 1804, then it must have been destroyed along with the Enterprise herself. Any interference with that event would adversely affect your history. Something which we have previously been at pains to prevent."

Kirk was silent for a moment, remembering Edith Keeler.

"My apologies, Jim. I was forgetting Human emotional vulnerability."

"Well, there's something else you're forgetting, Mr. Spock," growled McCoy. "If Jim's right and the people on the other Enterprise *are* our ancestors, they *have* to survive. If they don't, it may not do much harm to history in general, but it'll have a hell of an effect on ours in particular!"

Uhura gulped. "It's Mobius all over again!"

Everybody remembered all too well the obscene mouth-in-space, whose perpetrator had offered Captain Kirk a straight choice between the death of his First Officer and the destruction of his ship.*

D.S.O. Kinshaw, who until that moment had been looking gloomier and gloomier, suddenly brightened. "Now there's a thought."

Spock knew that his young subordinate's thoughts, though deplorably lacking in logic, were nevertheless often worth listening to. "With your permission, Captain?"

"Of course."

The D.S.O. took a deep breath. "If we learned one lesson from the Mobius incident, it was that when faced with two equally unacceptable alternatives, the only logical choice is - neither."

"You're not suggesting that this is a hoax, too?"

"Oh no, sir. Far from it. But I don't think we should take everything at face value, all the same."

"Go on."

The D.S.O. turned to her chief. "What's that saying you have, Mr. Spock?"

*Footnote - Mobius Time by David Gomm, Log Entries 65.

"Be more precise, Miss Kinshaw. Dr. McCoy repeatedly informs me that I have several."

"About coincidence."

"Coincidence is a pointer to certainty?"

"That's it. And aren't there an awful lot of coincidences here?"

"Too many," Spock agreed. "Regrettably, although I had, of course, seen the pointer, I have as yet failed to find the certainty."

Kirk mused, "Surely it is not impossible for our ancestors to coincide in another time and place?"

The D.S.O. shook her head emphatically. "No, sir. It won't do. Chekov - yes, all right, you did find the occasional foreign aristocrat in the Navy. Uhura - hardly likely. Sulu - impossible. Japan was a completely closed society in those days. But the dead giveaway is 'Kinshaw'. A girl disguised as a boy? In those cramped conditions? She might keep it up for a day or two, but for months on end - it's just not on."

"What are you suggesting?"

"She must have had outside help, even if she didn't realise it. A secret compartment, perhaps, built into the ship, where she could get some privacy. And if an outside agency could do that, what's to stop it setting up the whole thing? Even planting the 'invented' telephone?"

"But who?"

"And how can we find out?" added Dr. McCoy.

"There is a way, Doctor." Spock hesitated. The procedure he was about to propose was distasteful to his Vulcan reserve, but Vulcan logic demanded it. "Captain, please place your hand in mine."

Kirk grinned. "Mr. Spock! I didn't know you cared." But he did as he was bidden.

"Now the rest of you. Lieutenant Uhura, please lower the lights."

"A seance, Mr. Spock?" (Incredulously.)

"A scientific experiment, Doctor. Where there is a strong common race memory, the Vulcan mind meld can sometimes traverse the centuries."

Once again Kirk experienced the smell of the sea, and the rise and fall of the deck beneath his feet. His sensations, and his memories, flowed round the circuit like an electric current, stimulating and awakening similar memories in the others. Spock, his face lined with strain, began a skilful, probing questioning. Uhura told of her marriage and voyage to Ireland. Sulu spoke graphically of how the fishing boat of which he had been master and owner had been taken by Portugese pirates; of how they in turn had fallen foul of the Royal Navy, and of how the prisoners in the hold had been pressed into service. Kinshaw confirmed the existence of a secret

compartment in the cable-tier, complete with its own private 'head'.

Then Spock began to 'Speak'. "Captain, I cannot question myself."

Kirk picked up the cue. "I'll take your report, Mister, if you please."

Spock-Speak related how the Governor of a tiny volcanic island in the Canaries had sent word to the Admiralty of a marvellous electrical speaking-machine which would revolutionise signals; and of how he and Lady Uhura had been ordered to sail in the Governor's private brig to bring the device to England.

Bells began to ring in Kirk's mind. "This Governor - what was his name?"

"I have no idea, Captain. He desired to be addressed simply as - Governor."

"Describe him."

"A man like any other. Save that his nose was somewhat porcine. As were those of the Celestine's crew."

McCoy broke the mood, thumping the table with his free hand. "Tellarites, by god. Mr. Spock, just tell me if that isn't fascinating."

"Doubly fascinating, Doctor. You see, Guvnar - that is to say our Guvnar - is a Tellarite also."

"One and the same, Mr. Spock?"

"Highly probable, Captain. It would appear that the Tellarites have found a way of manipulating time."

"With what object?"

"Presumably to pave the way for a war of secession from the Federation."

"Then if the Tellarites have already tampered with history, there is nothing to stop us un-tampering it. Right, Mr. Spock?"

"Affirmative, Captain."

"CAPTAIN!" Sulu broke in suddenly. "There's no time. Two unknown warships. Extreme range, but closing fast."

Kirk swung into action. "Evasive action, Mr. Sulu. Scotty, give me maximum warp. Make that maximum plus. Bones, find me something to knock me out. For an hour at most. Take the con, Mr. Spock. And when I return..."

Spock was startled to see his Captain staring straight through him. "Yes, Captain?"

"I'll have the guns run out if you please, Mr. Spock."

When Captain Kirk descended from the masthead, his plan of action was clear in his mind.

"Clear for action, Mr. Stiles, if you please. But ensure that the galley fires are not extinguished."

"The fires, sir?"

"You heard me, I believe."

"But sir..."

Regulations concerning the dowsing of fires when going into action were most explicit, due to the danger of their spreading out of control during battle.

"Are you questioning my orders, Mister?"

"No, sir."

"Then see to it. And pass the word for the purser."

Mr. Scott, the Sailing Master, shook his head sorrowfully when the plan was explained to him. "It'll never work, Cap'n."

"I think it will, Mr. Scott. At any rate it needs must work, for it is all that we have."

Scotty, as he was affectionately known to the hands (but only when he was out of earshot) had listened with growing amazement as the ship's purser was instructed to comb his stores for tallow, oil, wood shavings, pork fat, damp rags, anything that would burn with a smoky flame.

No sooner had the purser and his working party gone about their business than the ship's sailmaker was detailed to raid the ship's slop-chest. A second party was set to work cutting up brand new calico into crude face-masks, one of which was issued to each member of the ship's company, with orders to keep it wet. Meanwhile the carpenter and his mates, sweating and cursing, laboured to rig catapults in the bows and along the starboard side. These consisted only of stout planks rigged across gun carriages, motive power being supplied by netted bags of cannon shot hauled high with block and tackle. They were crude affairs - but they would serve.

No sooner had these preparations advanced to maturity than a twin concussion announced that the Enterprise was within range of the frigate's bow guns. It was followed by the scream of cannon balls. One shot passed harmlessly through the mizzen topsail, but the other neatly removed the head of the Master-at-Arms. (Security Officers, it seemed, were not safe on *this* Enterprise either.)

"Frigate's opened fire, Keptin."

"So I perceive, Mr. Chekov. Mr. Scott, prepare to shorten sail." A second pair of cannon balls crashed into the ship's hull. "Two points to starboard, Mr. Sulu."

"She's not answering to the helm, sir."

"Then we'll proceed as we are. Sir Speak, are your men ready?"

"Affirmative, Captain."

"Very well. Mr. Stiles, run out the starboard broadside." Kirk glared at the Second Lieutenant, as if daring him to comment - it was the port battery which would first cross the enemy's bows - but Stiles just said stoically, "Aye aye, sir."

Kirk became aware of a squeaking at his left hand. "If you please, sir. If you please, sir."

"What is it, Mr. Kinshaw?"

"That last shot carried away one of the rudder cables. But the rudder itself is undamaged."

"Can you rig a jury line?"

"I think so, sir." She saw Grayson's right eyebrow beginning to lift in annoyance at the inconclusive answer. "Yes, sir."

"See to it, then. Lady Uhura, may I trouble you for the loud hailer?" Uhura handed him the metal cone. "All hands don face masks." He put on his own, holding it clear of his mouth, so that his commands would not be muffled until absolutely necessary. "FIRE!"

The starboard broadside belched flame and much smoke, but very little else, having been loaded with double charges but no shot. Swiftly the guns were swabbed out, and reloaded, and fired and fired again, while up forward the catapults began launching their projectiles. The blazing barrels, packed with every noisomely combustible material the ship could muster, burst in clouds of thick, choking smoke. Those which did not explode of their own accord were given a helping hand by the bow guns; popguns by comparison with what the frigate had to offer, but loaded with heated shot from the galley fires and handled with deadly accuracy by Lieutenant Stiles. *For all his faults*, Kirk reflected, *the man is a fine gunner.*

Would the frigate captain see the danger? To bring his deadly broadside to bear on the little Enterprise he would have to turn to starboard and enter the growing pall of smoke. But if he did not, if he hesitated too long, he would present his vulnerable stern to be raked by the Enterprise's eager guns, the one certain way a small vessel could inflict crippling damage on a larger one. All depended on him deciding that this was his adversary's plan and taking steps to foil it.

"Frigate's turning, sir," reported Sulu. "And our helm's responding."

Kirk allowed himself a small smile. "Make all sail, Mr. Scott."

Scotty rubbed his hands gleefully. "Aye aye, SIR!"

And the Enterprise plunged forward into the fog of her own making.

By the time the French captain saw what was happening, it was too late. The Enterprise was upon him, and hordes of boarders were

pouring up over the stern of his ship. By then he was in no position to think clearly anyway; indeed, for the most part he and his crew were in no fit state to do anything, save cough, and splutter, and dash the tears from their eyes. The boarders, though heavily outnumbered, were in no such dire straits, being protected by the thick wet masks. Three waves, led respectively by a Post Captain in a new uniform, a massive cocked hat bobbing in and out of the murk, and a wild-eyed Irish Ensign-of-Marines, laid mercilessly into the beleaguered Frenchmen. In no time at all, it was over.

"Shall I strike the colours, sir?"

"No, Mr. Kinshaw. Let them fly."

The giant cocked hat loomed out of the swirling fog. "The smoke is clearing, Captain. Time is short."

Short though it was, time was sufficient. The frigate's guns were primed and ready, waiting for an enemy her captain had never dreamed would try to board.

"Cast off the grapples."

The Enterprise, deserted now, drifted away. Those of her company who could be spared from guarding the prisoners manned the frigate, working frantically to manoeuvre the unfamiliar vessel into the right position.

"Fire as your guns bear, Mr. Stiles."

The port broadside, ragged but effective, belched destruction as Stiles and his best crews ran from gun to gun. By the time it was done, the Enterprise lay a blazing wreck, adding fresh smoke to that which had been clearing.

"The other Frenchmen are almost within reach, Jim."

"Don't worry, Sawbones, I haven't forgotten them. By the time they realise they've been duped we will be beyond their reach. This demoiselle will show those two fat old harridans a clean pair of heels."

He saw Scott and Sulu grinning delightedly at each other, like a couple of schoolboys. "Mr. Scott. Mr. Sulu. Take us out of here. Warp factor one."

"Red alert. All decks go to red alert."

Captain Kirk had already been back in his command chair for ten minutes. Now that it was inevitable that the two Tellarite warships would overhaul her, it was time to send the Enterprise to battle stations.

"Captain!" Sulu exclaimed suddenly. "Object bearing three six eight mark five. Range five hundred thousand kilometers and closing."

"Thank you, Mr. Sulu. That will be a cruiser or some such. I

was expecting it."

"Negative, Captain." Spock looked up from his scanner. "Sensors indicate no life forms of any kind."

"Can you get a visual, Mr. Sulu?"

"Coming up now, sir."

The planetoid, if it could be called that, was grey and formless, as if only lack of cosmic disturbances was keeping it in shape.

"Analysis is in progress, Captain," affirmed Spock, in response to Kirk's query. He examined the readout. "Interesting. A most unusual phenomenon."

"Specify."

"The planetoid appears to be composed entirely of dust, Jim. Loosely packed, but held together by the gravity of the whole. And..." he looked again, more closely, "...there is a power source. Dilithium based."

"From the planetoid? Or could there be another object behind it?"

"It is... possible," Spock admitted. "Dilithium emanations might penetrate a non-solid object, even one of so great a size."

"Then we've found our cruiser." Kirk pressed a button on the arm of his chair. "Kirk to engineering."

"Scott here, sir."

"Do we have such a thing as a fusion bomb aboard?"

"Say that again, Cap'n. I didnae quite hear you." The Chief Engineer had heard him perfectly well, but the Captain might as well have requested bows and arrows. "I've nae doubt we could cobble one together," he admitted when Kirk repeated the question.

Sulu, who had been taking measurements and doing calculations, said, "A straddle pattern of photon torpedoes would obliterate the planetoid, sir."

"No doubt they would, Mr. Sulu. But that's not what I have in mind. Focus all phasers into a single beam. Low intensity. I want to punch a hole in the middle and drop the bomb into it."

"I do not wish to hurry you, Captain, but the major enemy vessels will be in range in twelve minutes and... thirty seconds."

"Noted, Mr. Spock. Scotty, is that bomb ready for launching yet?"

"Three minutes, Cap'n. But I canna guarantee it'll work. We've had tae cut some awfu' corners."

The three minutes passed.

"Planetoid in phaser range, sir."

"Hold your fire, Mr. Sulu. Ready, Scotty?"

"Aye, sir. Ready as we'll ever be."

"Stand by. Fire phasers. Launch missile - now."

The heart of the planetoid glowed briefly orange, then darkened again. Its surface swelled, wobbled jelly-like, contracted, and finally exploded into what looked for all space like clouds of billowing smoke.

Kirk's stream of orders was not yet finished. "Close down all phasers. Mr. Scott, divert all power to shields. Lieutenant Uhura, darken ship. Slow ahead, Mr. Sulu."

"Into the smoke, sir?"

"You've got it. Keep your eyes peeled on the sensors, Mr. Spock. There's another warship in there somewhere. We don't want a collision."

Spock bent to his task, sparing no more than a passing thought as to why his eyes might require painful minor surgery.

The Enterprise plunged forward into the billowing dust cloud, the pathway carved by her forward shields closing instantly behind her, swallowing her up.

On the bridge of the larger war-vessel the Tellarite Commodore stared intently at his main screen, waiting for the first signs that the dust-smoke was clearing.

"I see him. I see him," suddenly cried his subordinate, the vessel's pugnacious and excitable commander.

Ghostly in the churning clouds the Enterprise lay, drifting helplessly away from her former adversary. Blast after blast from the cruiser's phaser-like weapons crashed into her dying shields.

The Tellarite Commodore's snout spread wide above his snarl of triumph. "Very clever, Captain Kirk. But you don't get away with it twice!" His hoarse exultation echoed round his own bridge, and also that of the consort vessel, to which he was linked by hailing frequency. "Down shields. FIRE!"

Simultaneous blasts of concentrated fire power converged on the Tellarite cruiser, smashing it to atoms.

Once the pattern of time manipulation had been broken, the threads of true time began reasserting themselves.

Captain James Kirk was acquitted by court-martial of the culpable loss of his ship. Thereafter, a navy prize board awarded the Enterprise's former crew prize money to the value of the captured frigate, less, of course, (the Navy being notoriously parsimonious in such matters), the value of the smaller Enterprise.

Lieutenant Sir Speak Grayson and Lady Uhura were married in July 1805. Their two children, born, curiously enough, exactly seven years apart, each took after one parent in sex and colouring. The boy, when grown, emigrated to the New World, where he founded one of New England's noblest dynasties. His dark-skinned sister was presumed lost when the ship in which she was travelling to visit him foundered in an Atlantic storm. She was washed ashore on the island of Bermuda, suffering from an amnesia from which she never recovered. The wealthy slave-owner who purchased her took ship to the Carolinas and settled not five miles from her mother's old home.

In recognition of the injustice whereby he had been impressed into the Navy, Master's Mate Sulu was allowed to leave the service. He took passage on an Indiaman to the Dutch Indies; thence, after many adventures, he succeeded in reaching Japan.

Dr. Horatio McCoy used his share of the prize money to buy a partnership in a lucrative and fashionable London practice. He fell out of Royal favour as a result of his reply to the Prince of Wales, when that stout and august personage demanded a rejuvenating physic for his increasingly raddled visage: "I'm a doctor, not a magician."

Mr. Scott retired from the Navy and invested in a little distillery in the Highlands, from which in due time there came the finest single malt whisky the world has ever seen.

Pavel Chekov passed his examinations for Lieutenant before news reached him that his family was back in favour with the Tsar. He returned home and enjoyed a distinguished career in the Imperial Navy.

Denied her privacy - the French frigate had no Tellarite-built Ladies Boudoir, Midshipman Kinshaw's secret was swiftly discovered. She was packed off home to her angry but forgiving father, with enough prize money to pursue her scientific studies. In due course she married her first cousin, Septimus Kinshaw.

Ensign (later Captain) of Marines Michael Potato eventually returned to his native Ireland. There he changed his name from Potato to Murphy because he objected to the nickname Spud.

And the Admiralty clerk whose duty it was to chronicle these events for historical record neglected to cross-reference the capture of the frigate with the departure from Plymouth, and subsequent total loss, of H.M.S. Enterprise.

Even Spock could not restrain himself from raising his voice, such was the urgency of the moment. "NOW, Mr. Sulu."

All had depended on the Tellarite leader having prior knowledge of the stratagem used by the other Enterprise; depended too on Tellar having not yet mastered the technique of firing phasers through raised shields. But all was well. Confident that his enemies had followed their own precedent and were now aboard the cruiser, the Commodore dropped his shields without a qualm and blasted the cruiser out of space.

Obligingly, the instant that Spock reported the enemy's shields

lowered, Sulu did the same for him.

It was not until three days later that word was received from Starfleet. It seemed that Tellar had tendered a formal apology for the actions of 'three renegade vessels of the Imperial Tellarite Navy'.

"It remains to be seen," Admiral Riley concluded, "what would have happened had the so-called 'renegades' succeeded in beating the best that Starfleet had to offer."

Kirk broke the communications link. "So all's well that ends well." Seeing a quizzical expression on his First Officer's face he enquired, "Is something the matter, Mr. Spock?"

"Nothing, Captain. Except that ever since your direct contact with our primitive ancestors I have detected in you a regrettable tendency to speak in archaic literary allusions."

Kirk swivelled in his chair, smiled, not without mischief, and announced to himself and the bridge in general, and Sulu in particular,

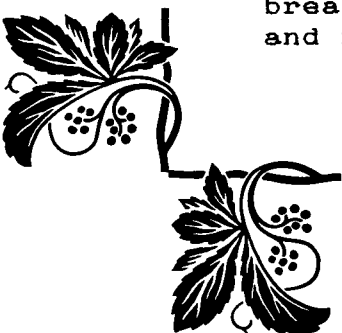
"Home, James. And don't spare the horses."



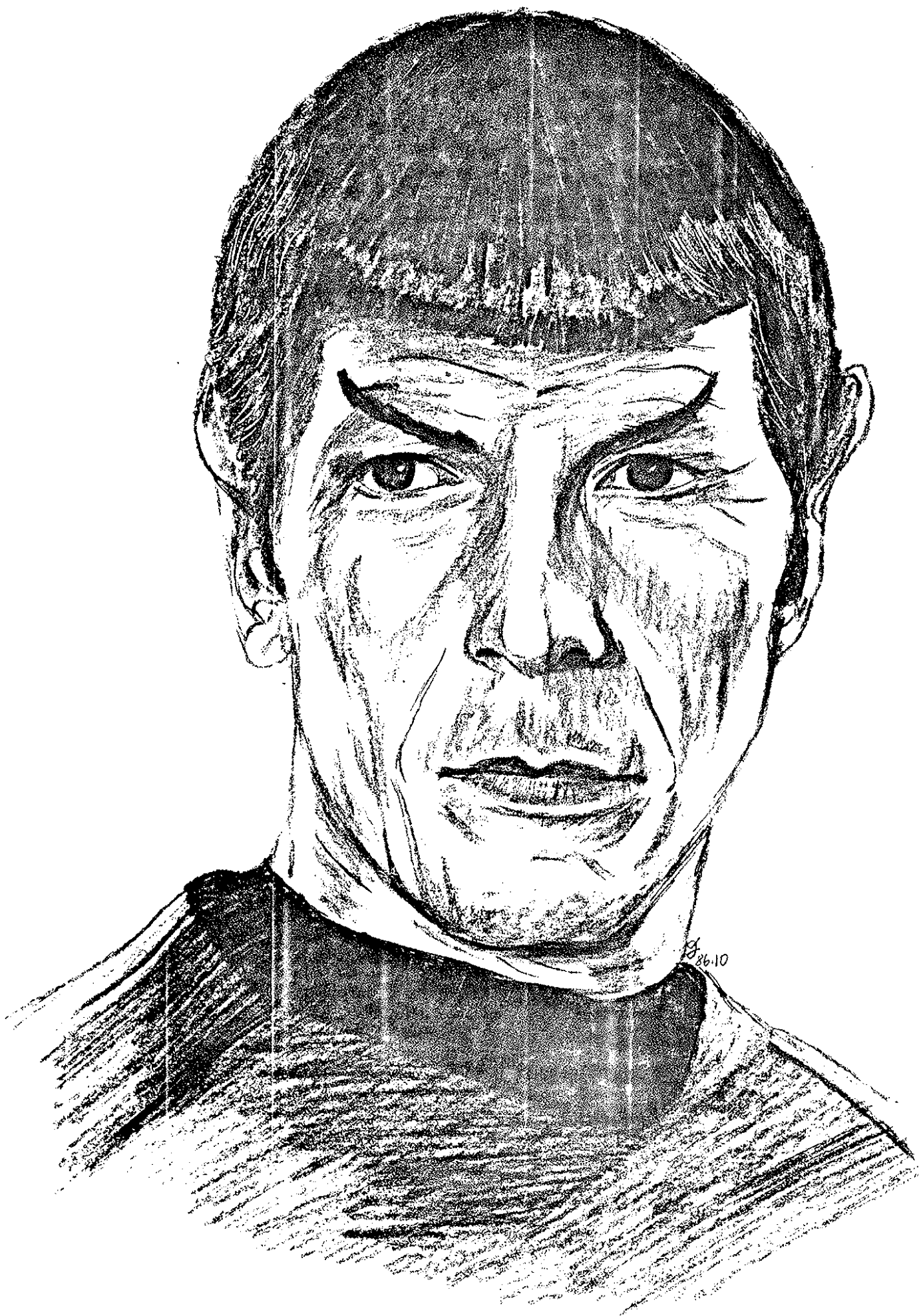
GIVE ME



Give me your peace, Jim, that I might share it;
Give me your joy, that I might understand.
Help me reach out, to meet you half way.
Help me to pass my Vulcan genes,
to meet you as one.
Jim, help me to give, to be all
you hope me to be;
for I know with your help
I can achieve these things,
break my inner bonds,
and rejoice in our friendship.



Susan Keighley



CONTACT

by

Anne Lloyd

Stardate 3029.4 - "...and, under the circumstances, I cannot sanction a search party. Too many have already died and I will not risk further violation of the Prime Directive. Besides, you know as well as I, that the chance of any of the original landing party still being alive is vanishingly remote. Your duty now is to your ship and your crew. Return to Starbase 6 for immediate debriefing. The Vulcan delegation will want a full report on how and why this mission failed. You will assume temporary command, Mr. Spock, as Captain Kirk must be listed as missing, presumed dead. Nogura out."

I stare at my communications panel in disbelief. Nogura's message echoes endlessly round the silent bridge, where action is frozen by the horror of unspoken fear realised.

It can't end like this. Not like this, Jim Kirk. "Routine mission," they said, "would score points with the Vulcans," they said - especially with T'Pol's faction, which believes Starfleet incapable of handling force and the Prime Directive in anything but a gratuitous manner. So they send Sarek to observe - and you, unarmed, into hell.

Presumed dead...

I feel that I am hearing, but not understanding. The words are becoming hollow and meaningless in my head. I turn to Spock for reassurance, but my voice is lost in a rising babble of questions, protestations and demands.

It is Spock's total immobility which restores a disquiet order. We settle to wait - but for what? A miracle? Heaven knows we have experienced many from our commanding duo. But now? My Human logic is telling me there is no chance - but my Human heart is demanding of Spock a reason to continue hoping.

My head and throat are aching with suppressed tears. Oh, no, please, not here. Let me leave the bridge with dignity, to grieve privately...

"James Kirk is not dead."

Spock's words. Inflectionless and almost whispered, they are devastating in their simplicity and implication. My heart beats painfully fast. Am I, even now, being offered hope - or should I concern myself for the sanity of a dear, grieving companion?

I can see the same indecision in Leonard's eyes. His fear and hope causes him to hesitate as he searches for personal understanding.

"Spock? I don't... I mean... How? Has the sensor interference been resolved? A message received at last? How do you know? Tell

us - Spock? Please?"

His voice trails away. It is like addressing an inanimate object.

"Spock! Answer McCoy's questions."

Sarek's resonant voice elicits the first noticeable reaction from Spock and causes me to start. I had forgotten his stoic presence.

Spock turns almost imperceptibly away from his father and fixes his gaze on the maddeningly inert viewscreen.

"We are T'hy'la." The words are almost inaudible, but cause Sarek's usually stolid features to freeze to granite.

"Over this distance that means nothing. T'hy'la bonding between two Vulcan males is dependent primarily on touch. Kirk is Human and 2000 kilometres away!"

"James Kirk is not dead." Again those words, quietly and confidently spoken. If it were possible I would say Sarek looks irritated, frustrated.

"Spock! *That* you cannot know! Where is the logic of your Vulcan heritage? You shame your forefathers with this assertion, for it needs must be made solely from emotional, not rational, considerations."

Spock looks through, not at, his father and then sits down, suddenly, heavily, in the command chair. Leonard hovers protectively beside him. But protective of what? Of Spock from his father? Of the hope Spock has raised in us? Or of Spock, from the crushing realities of grief which must, surely, come?

Suddenly -

"Mr. Scott - report immediately to the transporter room. Lt. Uhura - open a channel to Mr. Scott. I intend to... contact... the Captain. If he can give us any geographical reference points it might help us analyse some of the distorted sensor readouts. With a few clues - and luck - " (here Spock glances deliberately at his father) - "we may be able to locate the Captain."

Scotty, Leonard and I exchange worried glances. Communication with the planet surface has been impossible for over fifteen hours. It is Scotty who finally, gently, questions the Vulcan.

"Contact Captain Kirk, sir? But how? Communication blackout is the very root of our problem, and I can't - "

"Telepathy, Mr. Scott."

The bridge is suddenly very quiet. No-one can debate the issue, for it is beyond our understanding - except Sarek's, and he has withdrawn to the side of my console in seeming disgust.

Scotty leaves for the transporter room without another word. His face is a mixture of hope, sorrow and disbelief.

It is the hope which motivates him.

Leonard consolidates his position beside the Command Chair, offering support by his presence. Spock is to attempt the impossible, but for his sake - for all our sakes - he must try.

Minutes pass. It seems like hours. The silence on the bridge is tangible now - oppressive, suffocating.

I want to move, to shout, to scream, to - anything; *anything* to break this awful, awful tension.

I can only assume the instruments are still functioning. Lights and displays are blinking, flashing - so why does there seem to be no sound, save that low hiss? And is that the blood in my ears or his measured, sibilant breathing?

I want to see more of his face, but that would mean moving and I am convinced that if I do, the whole universe will shatter into tiny, bloody shards. Besides, Chekov and Sulu turned to watch, and I am sure that the look on their faces, white and drawn, is but a pale reflection of the hell they can see.

No. No - I am better off here. If necessary I can pretend to recheck my communications panel. Again. Technology has failed and we are left with - what? Vulcan stubbornness? Nothing more, for Sarek, damn him, has almost taken away our hope - but not Spock's. Spock is determined to try out of love, not logic.

Suddenly I want to go to him, to tell him I understand what he is trying to do, and why. I want to stand between him and that cold, disdainful, condescending look on his father's face.

Sarek - I hate you! You and your government which requested Kirk for this mission. Sarek - see the tears on my face and show some compassion! See the desperate hope in McCoy's eyes and hear the unsaid prayers of those who care...

My head feels as though it will split apart. Am I receiving echoes of Spock's mammoth effort - or am I, like all Humans present, making a futile attempt to project my own mental energy, to help?

It must be coming to an end. Nobody, surely, can keep this up for long. I am beginning to fear for Spock, sitting like granite, but growing paler and paler. The section of face I can see is beaded with sweat. Neck muscles are corded, taut; limbs rigid. The only signs that he lives are a heavy pulse at the temple and a tiny, tiny trickle of blood where the nails of his clenched fist must have broken the skin of his palm.

A low moan shatters the silence; Spock suddenly shudders and slumps to one side. Like dreamers, sleep-walkers, we try to gather ourselves to go to him, but time and motion have slowed and Sarek reaches Spock first.

With one smooth action he steadies his son and moves his hands into the stylised position of mind-meld.

"Let me help."

"The risk..." Spock's voice is brittle with exhaustion.

"Is justifiable."

The bridge freezes into silent immobility once more. Only

static from the open channel to the transporter is audible.

The Enterprise, like us, holds her breath.

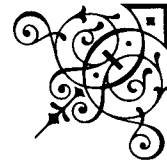
Sarek breaks contact with his son and looks at him momentarily with something akin to amazement. Then he moves to the science console, checks some readouts and feeds Spock a list of data.

For a long time Spock does not move nor speak. Then -

"Mr. Scott, I am feeding co-ordinates through to your console. There will be three to beam up. Please proceed on my order."

Spock nods curtly to McCoy to follow and then heads a little shakily for the elevator. For a moment he pauses in front of his father, who briefly inclines his head.

Father, son and Doctor go to welcome the Captain of the Enterprise home.



LINKED

Your mind to my mind,
Your thoughts to mine
As I reach within to find
The strength to give to you.

My heart to your heart,
My soul I've given you.
Does death come now to part,
And take all hope from me?

Take my strength, Spock,
Fight the darkness now.
Join with me, let our minds lock,
And we will fight this fear together.

I am here by your side.
Let your tortured mind accept
The love from which you hide,
And let it bring you back to me.

Unshielded eyes awaken,
Unspoken words a question asked.
Yes, my friend, you were almost taken,
But you live - and I am whole again.



Maureen Frost

CHESS TOURNAMENT

by

Rosa Caccioppo

The sun was high in the sky, but it wasn't able to warm that cold day. In winter San Francisco maintained its typical beauty, and the clear and too-harsh air gave it a special charm. The freezing wind swept along deserted streets. There were no pedestrians; all preferred to use the air trams or the hondoveries, a type of flying car.

For offices and shops it was opening time. San Francisco maintained almost intact the characteristics of the twentieth century, but on the outskirts stood a futuristic building. This was an enormous architectural complex which contained the very heart of an equally enormous institution, Starfleet. An institution to which Kirk had sworn loyalty, to which he was ready to sacrifice his life. Someone had called him 'The Knight of the Stars', born to have a glorious destiny.

The Enterprise had returned to Earth for a general overhaul and - he had hoped - a leave; on the contrary he was obliged to attend a refresher course, from which he came out very exhausted.

At the end of the course he received the order to present himself to the Chief of Staff, Admiral Fyod Sturges.

At that moment Kirk was prepared to pay anything to sleep a little; he was very tired, having scarcely slept for an entire week. He had been waiting for over two hours in Sturges' office. His muscles aching, he lay down on the couch, resting his head on the arm rest and closing his eyes. Oh, that was so good! At last, a little rest. He relaxed, and after some minutes he was soundly asleep.

Sturges entered his office. "Jim!" he called, but as soon as he saw Kirk lying on the couch his face calmed, and he smiled. Kirk could have been his son. He had known him for thirty years, since he was a boy, and had followed him during his career, rejoiced for his success, and grieved for his defeats, and for his losses, which were quite a few.

The Admiral sat down at his desk and switched on the intercom, calling his secretary. "Miss Weber, please bring me some strong hot coffee."

"Yes, sir," an agreeable female voice answered.

Some minutes later a middle-aged woman entered the office; she was slim, with brown hair and a well-bred, gentle expression, and she wore the uniform of the Administrative Department.

"Admiral, here's the coffee," she said in a low voice, putting the tray on the desk.

Surges smiled, and pointed to Kirk. "Look at him. He seems a child," he said in a fatherly tone.

"But he's the Captain of the Enterprise," replied the woman, returning his smile.

"Yes, of course."

The secretary left the office, closing the door behind her. Sturges poured coffee into a cup and approached Kirk, who continued to sleep. He put the cup close to Kirk's nose, and the smell of coffee woke him up.

"Jim!" Sturges called. "Jim, wake up."

Kirk took a deep breath and opened his eyes. "What time is it?" he asked in a sleepy voice.

"It's time to wake up," replied Sturges, giving him the cup.

Kirk couldn't refuse the inviting black liquid. He tasted it slowly. "I think I'm not able yet to remember what I'm doing here," he said, sipping the coffee.

Sturges sat down on the opposite chair. "You're here because I called you," he replied in a serious tone.

Kirk was now fully awake, and he sat up. "Yes, now I remember. But how long have I slept?"

"Only a few minutes."

"Oh. That's why I'm still tired," Kirk sighed.

"Well, try not to be tired. You have a new mission."

"But I've just finished..." Kirk objected.

Sturges took a file from his desk and gave it to him. "Rakol 6 has to renew its membership in the Federation. There will be a ceremony on the planet. The Enterprise will transport Mr. Aron Tykoner and Judge R. Sheldon Reed. They'll represent the Federation Council, and you'll represent Starfleet," he said with severity.

Kirk glanced through the file. "Rakol is in Quadrant 75.25. More than forty days travel from Earth, using warp 3."

The Admiral folded his arms. "Didn't you ask for rest?" he said, keeping up a serious voice. "You'll have all the time to do so, and even the time for studying the ceremony."

Kirk poured another coffee. "Have you transmitted the order to my officers?"

Sturges nodded affirmatively. "The Enterprise is ready to leave. You must only await the two distinguished passengers. They will arrive in about one hour," he answered, looking at the clock.

Captain Kirk found the bridge in turmoil. All the officers were around Mr. Spock, who was reading the duty roster. As they saw Kirk, everyone fell silent.

"Oh, Captain. We all believed that the Chief Admiral had given you a leave," Spock said, still near his console.

"Instead he's given us another new mission," replied Kirk, looking at the paper the Vulcan was holding.

The turbolift doors opened and McCoy entered. "Welcome, Jim!" he greeted Kirk heartily. "I heard Uhura reading the new orders. Now we have to leave again."

"Yes, and at once, heading for Rakol."

The doctor made a grimace. "But it's more than 200 parsecs from here. Forty days of travel."

"Exactly 211.3 parsecs, forty one days and thirteen hours at warp 3," Spock corrected him.

"The auxiliary computer spoke!" commented McCoy ironically.

The Vulcan crushed him with a look, and Kirk couldn't help laughing.

"Gentlemen, please!" he exclaimed. "Not now."

"Captain!" Uhura called him. "A call from Earth. They inform us that Mr. Tykoner and his wife, and Judge Reed, are ready to beam on board."

"Who are they?" asked McCoy with curiosity.

"They represent the Federation Council. Mr. Tykoner is President of the Foreign Board, and Judge Reed is a judge in the Supreme Court," replied Kirk. "I'd better go and welcome them. Do you want to be in our party, Doctor?" His tone was faintly mocking.

"By no means. That's enough. Am I to welcome two venerable old men, Jim?" the doctor shrugged.

Spock fixed him with his eye, unmoved. "Paragraph seven, subsection four. All the senior officers have to..."

"Stop it. Good heavens," McCoy interrupted him. "Okay. I do not want to hear that all the journey long. I'll welcome even Moses personally," he sighed.

Spock restrained a smile and stepped aside, bowing slightly to make room for McCoy. Such scenes were common practice on the Enterprise; the deep friendship and the respect among the three officers allowed them to use a little farcical behaviour, but they were ready to be efficient in case of an emergency. It was just that witticism, sometimes naive or funny, that made their mission in deep space less monotonous and more bearable.

The three reached the transporter room, where Engineer Scott was ready to beam up Mr. Tykoner and his wife.

McCoy adjusted his uniform. "Lucky we don't have to wear dress uniform," he commented, clearing his throat.

"It would be too heavy an order to carry out?" Kirk answered.

"You can say so!"

Two figures appeared on the transporter platform. Mr. Tykoner was of Rhodan extraction, like his wife. His skin was golden, and

his hair very light, with blueish reflections. He looked about sixty, and was dressed according to the fashion of his home planet in a long tunic covered by a rich cloak. His wife was younger than he, and her arrogant expression diminished her beauty.

Mr Tykoner offered his hand to his wife, who stepped down with the air of an old-time movie star.

"I'm pleased to meet you, Mr. Tykoner." Kirk stepped forward and shook his hand.

The politician bowed his head and returned the greeting; the Captain had the feeling he was a weakling.

"Let me introduce you to my wife, Milja."

The woman made a step forward, keeping her arrogant and icy expression.

Kirk bowed, then introduced his officers. "Mr. Spock and Dr. McCoy."

"Your exploits are known in all the galaxy," said the old politician in a calm voice.

The transporter was working again. A female figure formed slowly on the platform. She was a very beautiful woman; her mahogany coloured hair was plaited with iridescent thread, her green eyes seemed to reflect the colour of vast prairies. Her body was banded by a suit that put in evidence all her perfection.

"Good heaven!" McCoy commented in a low voice.

Kirk restrained a whistle. He swiftly recovered his self control and, a perfect gentleman, gave her his hand, helping her to step down.

"And you are the famous Captain Kirk." Her voice was melodious, but harsh.

"Yes, and they are..."

"I know. Mr. Spock and Dr. McCoy." The woman shook their hands.

"I'm proud to have on board so young a judge, and..." Kirk did his best to look detached.

"And?" Rhavel Sheldom Reed smiled. "Beautiful? Did you want to say that? Do not be embarrassed, Captain. Now I'm accustomed to it."

This was the first time that Kirk remained speechless.

They all left the transporter room, Spock and McCoy following the rest of the group.

"Any comment, Spock?" the doctor's cracked voice asked.

The Vulcan shook his head. "No, Doctor." His face was inexpressive.

"Well I do. Damn it!" McCoy exclaimed, low voiced.

Some minutes later the Enterprise left Earth orbit, heading slowly towards Jupiter at sub-light speed, then she jumped into hyper-space at warp 3. A long and monotonous journey was beginning.

Kirk had given orders to prepare quarters for the distinguished guests on Deck 4, and the same evening an official dinner was organised. This time McCoy was compelled to wear dress uniform, to his great disappointment.

For Kirk and his Chief Medical Officer, dinner was a sort of torment. Only vegetarian and fish-based dishes were served to honour Mr. Tykoner according to the diet of his home planet. On the other hand Spock and the beautiful judge appreciated the dishes very much, and also that the 'disgusting' yellowish liquid served was a delicious Italian wine.

"Excuse my impudence, madam, but how did so young a woman become a judge of the Supreme Court?" asked Kirk.

She grinned at him and responded, "With a lot of study and an equal amount of tenacity."

McCoy picked up his courage. "Sheldom doesn't sound like a female name."

"My first name is Rhavel."

"But that's a Vulcan name," Kirk commented.

"Yes, it is true. I was born on Vulcan."

All present were amazed, except for Spock, who kept an impassive face.

"My father was Terran Ambassador on Vulcan for ten years. My parents and Spock's are close friends," Rhavel continued, gazing at the Vulcan.

So they know each other, McCoy frowned.

"I knew Mr. Spock even before he enlisted in Starfleet, but I was only a child." Her tone was sad. "I remember he said I was the only Human child to be very logical."

The First Officer nodded, but his expression was icy.

"Did you live for a long time on Vulcan?" Kirk could read the tension in his friend's eyes.

"Unfortunately, no. I left when I was seven years old," was her regretful answer.

During the dinner Mr. Tykoner and his wife kept silent, without participating in the conversation. Kirk got the impression they were not sociable persons. The doctor found them most disagreeable; they did nothing to prove the contrary, so the beautiful judge attracted the general interest.

"What have you planned to do for the next forty days?" asked Kirk, putting his glass on the table.

"I've brought a lot of work with me."

"Do you want to work for all of the time?" exclaimed McCoy in a tone of kindly reprimand.

"No. In any case, I hope Captain Kirk will accompany me on a tour of the ship," she responded, returning Kirk's smile.

"I'll be honoured." He cast a look at McCoy which mean, 'I made it.'

"And I'll spend all my free time in the library, or playing chess."

"Oh, wonderful!" exclaimed the doctor, seizing the opportunity. "Here, we can all play that."

McCoy's thoughts were clear. The Vulcan raised an eyebrow, and Kirk gave him a sidelong glance.

"Well, we could organise a chess tournament," suggested the woman.

"It could be a good idea," assented Kirk.

"Logical and possible," commented Spock, betraying a kindly tone, and Kirk was amazed.

"Mr. Spock, can you organise it?" It was half an order and half a request.

The Vulcan nodded. "Yes, sir. There is no problem. I'll select the players."

"Ah ha!" McCoy grinned. "Attention - Spock is unbeatable," he said, turning to Rhavel.

"And so am I," the woman answered with a charming expression.

Spock showed an extraordinary capacity in organising the chess tournament. There were 72 matches in the opening round; from that only those with a certain number of points would proceed. Of those, ten winners would be selected for the final, and the two winners would compete for the championship.

Kirk was reading the Vulcan's report. "You would be a perfect manager," he said, turning the page.

"Yes, I know." The First officer's tone was cold, but his reply amazed Kirk. In Spock's eyes was the certainty that he would win.

"You're sure you're going to win, aren't you?" Kirk asked in a mocking tone.

"Yes, I am, even if Judge Reed will give me a lot of trouble..." he paused, "and Dr. McCoy won't participate in the tournament."

The Captain signed the paper and gave it back to Spock. The Vulcan stared at him, unmoved, and Kirk smiled. He thought that McCoy was right, his friend was beginning to be more Human. A few years before Spock wouldn't have used a 'so coarse' language.

The intercom beeped, and Kirk stretched out his hand to switch it on.

"Captain, this is Judge Reed."

"Yes?"

"Please, I must speak to you and Mr. Spock. It is very important. I'm waiting in my quarters."

They looked at each other - the woman's voice was serious.

Kirk and his First Officer listened attentively to Judge Reed. At the end Kirk stood up from the chair where he was sitting.

"So Tykoner has been ordered to bring the Starfleet defence plans for Rakol. Obviously, they are top secret."

Spock's eyes narrowed. Kirk looked at him. It was an unusual procedure. To organise planetary defences was the exclusive task of Starfleet officers.

"That's right. There's another thing..." She paused. "I must escort him. It seems easy, but this is a political question. Starfleet knows there are some Romulan spies among its officers."

"What?" Kirk widened his eyes. "Sturges didn't tell me anything."

"Certainly not, for the moment. These are only suspicions, but I believe they are well founded."

"If it were so, Starfleet would be in danger." Spock's voice was hollow.

"You can say the whole Federation," replied Judge Reed. "I need your help. Rakol's system is near the bounds of the Romulan Empire, and it does need our defence."

"Do you think there *is* a spy on board?" Kirk asked, worried.

The woman opened her arms and said in a desolate tone, "I don't know."

"Impossible. All crew members have been checked out," Spock replied harshly.

Kirk well knew how rigid his First Officer was about it, and he couldn't think of a possible Romulan among his crew, and not even among the three guests. He could not exclude an attack from outside, for the Enterprise would have crossed all Federation space and be near the Neutral Zone - and the Romulans had violated the frontier before. Prudence was never enough, especially after Rhavel's words.

It was late in the night when Tykoner left his quarters. The corridors on Deck 4 were deserted, the crewmen on duty were few, and all was silent. He walked rapidly, making no noise, passing near Rec Room 2, which was empty, finally reaching the turbolift.

Some moments later he stepped out on Deck 8. Two officers were passing by, and he just had time to hide himself behind the corner; the two passed without realising his presence. He looked round, finally deciding he could continue on his way, quickened his pace, and reached Rec Room 1, which he entered.

It was a spacious room, where Mr. Spock had prepared the tables for the chess tournament. Tykoner wandered about the chessboards, searching for something; then he saw it, and turned back. There on a table was Mr. Spock's personal chessboard, made with the iridescent Vulcan crystal, similar to quartz, the Vrhra'th.

He lightly touched the pawns, took one in his hand, and tried to unscrew it, with no success. He tried with another piece, and another, until finally the queen opened. He laid the two pieces down on the table, and took from his pocket a little red box. Inside was a tiny metallic disc, which he took out carefully and inserted into the queen; then he screwed the piece back together and put it back on the chessboard.

Looking round, he put the little box back in his pocket and went out, making his way through the corridor to the turbolift, making sure no-one noticed him. Then, rapidly and silently, he reached his quarters.

Nobody saw him. Nobody... except Mr. Spock, who had just ended his shift. He wondered what Tykoner was doing at so late an hour, and why the man was behaving so warily.

It is said that 'Fortune favours the foolish', and even, 'Unlucky at play, lucky at love', and this saying quite suited Kirk. Rhavel Sheldom Reed beat him resoundingly, eliminating him from the tournament.

That evening Kirk saw the beautiful judge entering the ship's garden, and followed her. The woman was gazing at a very beautiful flower; it was red, with an intense scent, and looked like a sunflower. She approached and sniffed it, and was on the verge of touching it when Kirk stopped her.

"Be careful!"

Rhavel turned suddenly and found herself in Kirk's arms; he did not seem unhappy at that.

"Is there any other dangerous flower?" she asked, looking deep into Kirk's wonderful hazel eyes.

"Yes, and that's you."

The Captain's voice was as soft as velvet, and he kissed her in his special way that no-one was able to imitate. Rhavel returned the kiss with equal passion.

"I don't know if you're acting like a playboy, or like a gentleman," she said softly, caressing his face.

"Perhaps both of them," answered Kirk equally softly; then suddenly she pulled away from him.

"I'm worried for Tykoner," she said in a low voice.

Kirk smiled at her. "You've asked for my help, and I'm here helping you," he whispered reassuringly.

Rhavel again took refuge in his arms.

Thirty days later...

The long journey was ending. All Kirk's fears seemed to disappear, and even the chess tournament was almost over. Spock and Rhavel had collected a lot of points, and everybody considered both of them unbeatable. The great match was fixed for the next day.

Kirk was tired, and had a headache. During the voyage he couldn't relax, not even for a minute. His mind was almost obsessed with the idea of a Romulan attack, because the Enterprise passed very near the Neutral Zone. He decided to go to sickbay, where he found McCoy seated at his desk absorbed in medical research as no-one had seemed to be in need of his skills in all those days.

"Bones, help me. I've got a terrible headache," said Kirk in a hoarse voice, without greeting him, and sat down with a sigh.

The doctor looked up. "Caused by duty, or by the beautiful judge?" he asked in a mocking tone. He stood up and took a bottle from his cabinet.

"Both of them!" Kirk answered, swallowing the pills that McCoy had given him.

"You don't like it that Starfleet gave those plans to Tykoner, do you? You were the most logical choice," continued McCoy, leaning on his desk. "Rakol is the richest planet of the Federation..."

"... and the only one capable of laying down the law all the way to the Federation Council," said Spock, who had just entered sickbay.

"Yes, it is," Kirk agreed, rubbing his forehead.

"In any case, we've gone beyond the Neutral Zone. Now we are in Federation space. Why don't you try to rest a little?" suggested Spock, reading the tiredness in Kirk's eyes. "I don't believe we have to fear an attack - it would be an invasion."

"Romulans are always dangerous," replied McCoy.

"I'll follow your advice, Spock," said the Captain, "at the end of this shift. Now I must return to the bridge."

Kirk left the bridge at 24.00 hours, after having checked all the stations and signed the daily report written by Spock. He reached Deck 5, where the officer's quarters were located. There he saw Tykoner's wife coming out of their room. She was behaving very warily, making sure no-one was watching her.

Kirk crouched against the wall, then he saw her catching the turbolift. Cautiously he followed her up to Deck 7, wondering what was so urgent as to cause the diplomat's wife to leave her quarters at that late hour.

The woman reached the Emergency Bridge, and tried to open the door, but in vain - when no officer was on duty the room was locked from the bridge. She tried again, then she heard people coming, and hid around the corner. When they had passed she returned to the turbolift and went back to her quarters in a hurry.

Kirk followed all her manoeuvres, unable to find an explanation and beginning to suspect something. The behaviour of the arrogant Milja was undoubtedly anomalous.

Then came the day of the big challenge. Kirk exempted Spock from duty, and allowed the off-duty officers to watch the match through the intraship video system. All forecast an encounter between real champions. Spock and the judge competed on the precious Vulcan chessboard for the whole day. The Captain watched them from the bridge on Uhura's screen.

"Whose side are you on, Jim?" asked McCoy, who had reached him on the bridge.

"Neither of them. I'm neutral!" answered Kirk, but his tone proved he lied. The doctor laughed up his sleeve.

On the screen they saw Rhavel bump into a pawn and knock it onto the floor. The horse shaped piece broke, and the Vulcan gazed at the pieces of crystal.

"Don't worry, but according to the rules we must change the whole chessboard," he said, unmoved.

"Okay. Let's say that this has been a way to stop the game." Rhavel's tone was embarrassed.

The First Officer nodded. "We'll resume the game tomorrow," he replied, standing up. He picked up the broken horse.

"I'll be having dinner in a short while," she smiled. "I could invite you... and ask for forgiveness."

"Thanks, but it's impossible. I must go to the bridge."

The contest judges announced the news, and Lt. Uhura switched off the communication.

In his quarters Mr. Tykoner, who was watching the game, suddenly turned pale.

"What... what means this? Why change the chessboard?" he mumbled.

His wife stared fixedly at him; her eyes had become two slits, and on her face was painted a clear scorn.

"I have to do something," Tykoner muttered, and left the room.

Some hours later Kirk and Spock left the bridge.

"Do you still think you'll win?" the Captain asked, catching the turbolift.

"I believe there will be a draw." The Vulcan's tone was inscrutable.

"Spock, you begin to worry me!" exclaimed Kirk, smiling slightly.

Spock looked at him with curiosity.

"You're behaving like a gentleman," continued Kirk.

They went down to Deck 5, where their quarters were located.

"I am doing my best, sir," replied Spock, without inflexion.

"Goodnight, Spock," said Kirk, turning to the right.

"Goodnight, Captain." The First Officer went straight on.

Spock reached his stateroom and turned on the central light. The room had been adapted according to the Vulcan style; the night room was separated from the working area by heavy red curtains. Very typical Vulcan craft pieces adorned the walls and the furniture. A Human would have considered it oppressive, but to Spock it gave the feeling of being at home, on Vulcan.

In any case, the needs of a Vulcan are often similar to the needs of a Human. Mr. Spock took off his uniform and put on a sort of dressing gown, fawn coloured with gold embroidered borders. He moved to the bathroom where he stripped and entered the shower.

In the corridor Tykoner stood in front of Spock's quarters. He looked around; all was deserted. He knew Vulcans never locked their rooms, and Spock was no different, so he pushed the door open and entered. The light was on, but he couldn't hear the sound of the shower because the walls were soundproofed; he thought he had been lucky.

Damn Vulcan! Where did he put it? Tykoner moved to the bookcase and fumbled among the books. Nothing! Then he opened the wardrobe. At that point he made a sudden move, hitting a bronze statue near the wardrobe.

Spock's sensitive ears picked up the noise. Someone was in his room. The First Officer shut off the water, and putting on his bath robe came out of the bathroom. The central light was off, the wardrobe light was on; he hid behind the curtains and saw - Tykoner.

The man was breathlessly searching his wardrobe. The drawers had been opened and underwear thrown out; even his loved, ancient books had been moved and put back in great disorder. Whatever Tykoner was seeking he didn't find it, and he left Spock's stateroom. The Vulcan remained hidden, but he could see Tykoner's face; he was very upset.

Spock switched on the intercom on his desk. "Captain, this is Spock," he called.

"Kirk here," replied Kirk from his quarters.

"Jim, please come here at once."

Kirk was worried; Spock's tone was very icy. "I'm on my way." He wondered what was happening.

Kirk was puzzled. His friend's whole stateroom was upside down, a real mess.

"... he hasn't bothered to put back!" concluded the Vulcan.

"Some nights ago I surprised Milja trying to enter the emergency bridge," Kirk said, lost in thought.

"Interesting. There's another thing," replied Spock. "I saw Tykoner coming out of Rec Room 1 at 01.00 hours."

"Why? I don't understand what's happening." Kirk began to be seriously worried.

While Kirk was speaking with his First officer, Judge Reed had decided to go to see Tykoner, but to her great surprise she found the door of the diplomat's quarters open.

"Sir?" she called. "Sir!"

Nobody responded.

The woman stiffened. She had the feeling someone was watching her. She turned around slowly and saw Tykoner's hand. The man was lying on the floor in a pool of blood; a sort of mincing knife was stuck into his chest. She recognised the k'labh, a typical Romulan weapon.

Hearing a noise, she sprang up. Milja seized another k'labh, and a horrible realisation crossed her mind - Tykoner's wife was the Romulan spy.

She pressed the intercom button. "Jim!" she cried. "Jim, help me! Milja is..."

The words died in her throat as the spy gave a powerful blow.

Lt. Uhura at once informed Kirk and Spock of the dramatic communication. They grasped the implications right away.

"Inform Security. Red alert. Stop Milja Tykoner - she's the spy. Call McCoy to Tykoner's quarters. Come on, hurry up!" shouted the Captain in a sharp tone.

Meanwhile the klaxon was blaring. They hurried to the diplomat's room, where McCoy was running his scanner over the body of Judge Reed.

"She'll live," he said, seeing the worried expression on Kirk's face.

"And Tykoner?"

"He's dead," answered Spock, who was near the body.

Sulu's voice called through the intercom. "Bridge to Captain

Kirk. Security have located the spy - she has reached the hangar deck, and taken one of the shuttles," informed the helmsman.

"Block the outside portal!" Kirk ordered sharply.

"Negative. Opening manoeuvres have begun."

"I'm on my way," answered Kirk.

The Captain and First Officer rushed to the bridge. When they arrived the shuttle stolen by Milja was framed on the big screen.

"Columbus has not enough fuel to escape," Spock reported from his station.

"Scott, tractor beams," ordered Kirk.

"She's trying to fire!" Chekov shouted. "Deflectors working."

"Scott!"

The Engineer fixed two powerful tractor beams on the shuttle.

"Well done, Scotty. Let's beam that woman aboard," Kirk ordered through the intercom.

The Enterprise, majestic as always, was in orbit around Rakol. Before beaming down Kirk went to sickbay. Rhavel S. Reed was still confined to bed, though she was on her way to recovery. When he entered he found Spock, McCoy and the woman speaking animatedly; as they noticed his presence all fell silent.

"I want to continue the match, but these two won't allow me to do it," she protested, and smiled.

"Now, you must get better," said Kirk in a kind but firm tone. "Then you'll beat Spock."

"But I'm feeling well. I'm able to..." replied Rhavel, but as she drew herself up she grimaced in pain.

"No," McCoy said. "Lie down again, or I'll be compelled to tie you," he reproached her.

"We'll beam down in a few minutes," Kirk said to Spock.

"I'm ready," the Vulcan replied.

They both went out, and on the way to the transporter room, Spock asked,

"How will you explain to the Council of Rakol that Tykoner's wife is a Romulan spy? And that Tykoner concealed Starfleet plans in my chessboard? And..."

Kirk stopped and looked at him. "I'll find a way." He paused. "After all, this story will teach the Federation Council to have more trust in a Starship Captain," he said, and his eyes flashed with pride.

"Logical," Spock commented.

For her help in translating, the author thanks Miss Manuela Reitano.



SHARIED NIGHTMARE

"Spock! Spock!"

Silently I call your name,
Without hope of answer.
The pain in my heart tells me you are gone,
But I cannot believe it's forever.

"Spock! Spock!"

My mind calls out your name,
Though you cannot hear.
The darkness drags me downwards, but
I cannot go, I cannot leave.

"Spock! Spock!"

The emptiness echoes your name,
Though you do not know.
The pain is too much, it hurts to go on,
But to let go means I've lost you.

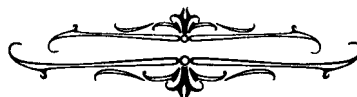
"Spock! Spock!"

A voice answers your name,
But you cannot be there.
Was my heart right not to accept
That my eyes had seen you die?

"Spock! Spock!"

Did you really answer your name?
Is it really your voice I hear?
I look into your eyes and see that this nightmare
So nearly came true for you.

Maureen Frost



WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN!

by

Brenda Kelsey

The newly appointed Captain of the Enterprise sat in his seat at the centre of the bridge, marvellously relaxed and exuding an aura of total confidence as he discussed some minutiae of engineering data with his Chief Engineer. His Chief Medical Officer watched him narrowly, sure now that his suspicions were correct.

Oh, but he'd have to be careful. His new Captain was exceedingly good, and he'd almost fooled him.

As Scott moved away, a broad grin plastered across his face, he stepped up to the centre seat.

"Captain," he said formally.

"Dr. McCoy," acknowledged the Captain. A twinkle in his bright eyes laughed at the irate medic, inviting him to share in the fun happening around him.

"If you have time I'd like to complete the medical examinations for the crew."

"I am a trifle busy right now," responded the Captain.

McCoy leaned closer and whispered, "May I respectfully remind the Captain that until *all* the examinations are complete we can't officially leave orbit. It is clearly stated in regulations... sir."

The two considered each other; rebellion and perhaps a touch of fear in the Captain's eyes were met by calm blue, the colour of the seas on the planet that rolled serenely by beneath them. The Captain capitulated gracefully, knowing that McCoy would be quite capable of carrying out his threat.

He'd chosen his senior crew with deliberate care, poaching away from other irate captains the people he felt would blend together to make the best possible senior team for his ship. McCoy was the sole exception, lured from a research laboratory by the prospect of being the discoverer rather than being the ground-bound follow-up researcher. That particular piece of bravado had irritated the Chiefs of Staff and drawn some unwelcome attention to his activities. Now it seemed that his C.M.O. was going to fulfil his promising potential a trifle earlier than he had anticipated.

"We are due to leave orbit in just under three hours, Doctor." He attempted to bluff his way out of the corner he found himself in.

"My examinations don't usually take that long, unless I discover some reason to prolong them.

"I trust you will have no reason to prolong mine, Doctor."

"That all depends, Captain, suh; and the sooner we get started...?" He gestured an invitation towards the lift.

The Captain looked around the bridge, seeking some reason to avoid the threatened physical, but his staff were paying scrupulous attention to their duties. From the corner of his eye he saw a pair of slender red-clad shoulders shake with suppressed laughter.

"Lt. Uhura."

The woman turned, the smile a trifle too broad, her chin quivering with the effort not to giggle. "Sir?"

"You have the Con. If I am needed for *any* reason, I will be in sickbay."

"Yes, Captain," she said demurely and accepted the vacant seat, perching daintily on its wide cushion, her feet not quite reaching the floor.

The laughter was contained until the lift doors were nearly closed, then the senior crew surrendered to hilarity.

The two-tone whistle of the ship's communications channel disturbed McCoy's enraptured contemplation of the results produced by the Captain's medical.

"Sickbay. McCoy here," he responded absently.

"Bridge. Scott. Is the Captain there?"

McCoy looked across his office and realised with a feeling close to horror that the Captain of the Enterprise was slowly falling apart before his eyes. The tension in the back and shoulders was echoed by the tendons in his neck and the tight muscles of clenched jaws.

"He's here, Scotty."

"It's just that there are only 27 minutes left before we are due to break orbit, and the whole world will be watching. He should be up here, if you've finished the medical?" Scott sounded very worried.

McCoy forced himself to laugh. "Medical? What medical? I just wanted to make sure he had a couple of hours sleep before we left orbit. We'd really be popular with Starfleet if we crashed into the Space Dock, or turned the wrong way at Jupiter, wouldn't we?"

"Aye, that we would." Scott sounded relieved.

"So tell everyone to stop worrying. We'll be up shortly. McCoy out."

"No, McCoy."

"No what?"

"I cannot let you do this. You were correct. I was being selfish. I have cheated in all the tests, given responses that doctors could only interpret in one way. It works adequately in the laboratory, but not in real life. I would be risking the lives of everyone aboard if I took this ship out. Make your report, Doctor. I will resign. You will be assigned a new captain; the delay will be minimal. I am sorry." He rose to leave.

"There is no way that I'm going to let you resign, Captain."

"McCoy, you have the proof you wished for. I have faked every test that Starfleet has ever given me."

"Sure you did," agreed McCoy. "Now sit down, calm down, and listen to me. Please?"

The Captain sat.

"When you were persuading me to sign on for this mission you said that you picked me to be in your crew because I was the best that you could find. Well, accept the truth of that and listen to the considered opinion of *your* choice of C.M.O. You are entirely capable of being the Captain of this ship. Oh, you faked the tests, got the results that you wanted, but based on both sets that I've just run on you, there is only one possible conclusion that I can make. There's a very basic fact that you may not be aware of. If you were not inherently capable of being a Starship Captain, then no amount of faking in the universe could have got you through the Starfleet tests. The doctors who put these tests together knew that people could modify their responses if they were clever enough, so they designed the tests to accommodate that. You are capable of being Captain. Stop shaking your head, it's true. I admit that some of those results are rather startling. This shows that your rating is somewhere in the genius plus range."

At the awed tone in McCoy's voice the Captain turned away.

"No, don't shut me out. We've got barely 22 minutes left to salvage something from this pile of garbage." He indicated the two innocent squares of plastic that contained the conflicting results of the two medical examinations that he had performed on the Captain, the first using the standard Starfleet method, the second using his own crudely designed filters. He knew that neither was entirely accurate. "Do you know what your true readings are?"

"Of course. I had to know them in order to establish the degree of modification necessary to obtain the desired results."

"Are they stored in the computer?"

"Yes."

"Get them. Now."

McCoy breathed a sigh of heartfelt relief when he was handed the tape a few minutes later. Getting his hands on the correct readings could have waited, but he had needed to test just how far the Captain was prepared to trust him.

"These are correct?"

"Complete in every detail," confirmed the Captain.

"Good, then we can use these to establish your baseline readings and do a proper check - *A full medical* - once we get clear of Starfleet's nosey influence. Drink this."

"What is it?"

"Something to soothe your stomach so that you won't throw up on the bridge from sheer nerves."

"But you cannot mean to let me carry on. My whole career has been one long masquerade."

"And from now on there won't be any need for you to hide, will there? You can devote your full attention to running this ship, and work openly on whatever it was that you did in your spare time to keep yourself from getting bored."

Colour flooded pale cheeks. The Captain was still in shock.

"You did have to work hard to stop being bored, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"What did you work on?"

"The sciences, mathematics, physics, ship design, computer design."

"Just think of the fun you're going to have arguing with your senior staff when they find out that you know more than they do about their specialities. Drink up!"

"You cannot mean to let me do this."

"Watch me!" invited the doctor. "You are a genius. You've absorbed more information about what makes a good Starfleet officer than any dozen Admirals. You have that knowledge now at such an instinctive level that you make decisions based on it without being aware that you are doing so. You've developed that talent until it's become part of your natural behaviour. You've picked the best people, the right people for the job. You spotted me doing research in a ground laboratory and you offered me the job of C.M.O. despite the fact that my deep space experience is very limited. Why?"

"I read the papers that you produced. They are filled with original ideas and interpretations. You were wasted in the restricted environment of the laboratory."

"And I'm the only person to have ever spotted your game with the tests. Because I am *the best*. Just the same way that Scotty is the best Engineer in the 'Fleet - and how you got him away from the Bonhomme Richard I would love to hear, but later, when we have time to appreciate the tale and the telling. You've done the same thing for every position on this ship, from senior officers down to the most junior rating. This ship is balanced, tuned. Why did you pick DeSalle instead of Gary Mitchell?"

The Captain frowned slightly. That had been a problem which had bothered him. He tried to express his total mistrust of the man in the most unemotional terms that he could, as he had done when challenged on the same point by members of the Admiralty board. "Mitchell is flawed. He lacks ability."

"Not according to his service record," challenged McCoy.

"He is too selfish, too convinced of his own self-worth. He will always put his own safety, his own interests, before the ship and crew. It is not safe to have such a one as Navigator."

"It's rumoured that he's been assigned to the Excalibur."

"Understandable. He and the Captain of the Excalibur have been

friends for many years."

"See what I mean? He wouldn't have fitted *here*. You've made that sort of decision all the way through this ship. Uhura, Kyle, Baillie, Chapel. Every one of us. You have brought together what is potentially the best crew that has ever been assembled on any ship. And we have, potentially, the best Captain. If you think I'm going to lessen my chances, and the chances of every being aboard this ship, of surviving this five year mission just because you found it necessary to conceal a few facts from Starfleet, you are wrong! I have no doubt that you had excellent reasons for doing so, and I'll require you to tell me all about them. But now you have other things to do. Drink!"

The Captain did so.

"Now let's go to the bridge and get this ship moving."

The Captain stood, straightening his uniform. "Are you sure?"

"I'm the best, remember, and I'm sure. Let's go, Captain, suh."

They walked together onto the bridge and found that a festive air had gripped the Enterprise. Well in control of himself again, the Captain gravely accepted the Con back from Uhura, who winked at him and practically skipped back to her station. She joined her number two and helped to cope with the constant stream of good wishes which were being received. The Captain contrived to ignore them while he completed the final checks on the state of his ship.

Uhura interrupted apologetically. "Sir, there's a personal message for you. I've tried to block it, but they are very insistent... and they are using the Diplomatic channel."

"I'll take it at the Science Station. If I may, Number One?"

"Of course, Captain."

McCoy slid tentatively into earshot as the tall, dark woman gave up her seat to her Captain.

"Piping it through now," said Uhura.

The small screen cleared and a Vulcan gazed impassively at the Captain of the Enterprise.

"I give you greetings, my son."

"Ambassador Sarek. What can I do for you?"

"You could return my greetings in the customary manner."

"You denied me that right when you sent me into exile. I have very little time available to me now. We break orbit in four minutes and twenty-two seconds. Please be brief."

"I wished you to know that I am proud of what you have accomplished."

"If you had let me remain I could, perhaps, have achieved much more. This is something that will never be known to us. Was there anything else?"

"Your citizenship of Vulcan has been restored."

"Unnecessary. The citizenship of Earth is ample to my needs."

"I wish to talk to you of many things."

"I do not have the time to talk to you now. I must end this communication. My greetings to your wife. Goodbye."

He nodded his thanks to Number One and Uhura, and resumed occupancy of the centre seat. The voice which gave the order to leave orbit was slightly deeper and more resonant than normal, but those that noticed believed the cause to be the emotions of a proud and happy man. Envious eyes watched the sleek, beautiful ship begin her five year mission.

Two hours later, when they were safely clear of the solar system and heading out on warp drive to their first appointed patrol area, the Captain handed the Con to Sulu and left the bridge, accompanied like a shadow by McCoy.

"Do you intend to spend much time on the bridge, Doctor?"

"Some," replied McCoy.

"Watching me?"

"The health and well-being of the captain of the ship is my primary concern, and the best place to watch you is on the bridge."

"You listened to my private message."

"Yeah," said McCoy, leading the way into sickbay. "Do you object?"

The Captain had considered that, and had arrived at a conclusion that had surprised him. "No."

"I didn't know that you were exiled from Vulcan. I assumed that you'd left of your own choice."

"I was exiled soon after my seventh birthday. There is a rite of passage, the Kahs-wan. All male children must survive it. I did; but the Ruling Council decreed that..." His voice failed but he gathered himself again, knowing that he had to tell McCoy the facts about his background, things that he had never spoken of before. "They said that my behaviour before and during the Kahs-wan made it clear that I could never become a 'proper' Vulcan. They directed my father, Ambassador Sarek, to send me to Earth to be raised by my mother's family there." He slumped down into a chair.

"She stayed with him?"

"Of course."

"I guess it wasn't easy for you on Earth?" said McCoy gently.

"My grandfather ensured that I lacked nothing, in the material sense. It took me some while to appreciate the irony of my situation. On Vulcan, I was regarded as being a Human. On Earth, I was treated as a Vulcan."

"So you learned to fake Human. The behaviour, mannerisms, everything."

"Self-defence. If you blend into the population, people forget that you are different, eventually."

"Yet you kept the ears."

The Captain touched them shyly. The points were just visible through the slightly longer than regulation hair. "Perverse of me, wasn't it?" There was the hint of a smile.

McCoy noted the reaction and said shrewdly, "No. You just kept on hoping that they would let you go home."

The Captain swung away from the doctor. McCoy simply walked round him and stood watching the helpless tears that trickled down from the deep brown eyes.

"Silly of me, really. I always knew that I could never go back. It was just that I..." He shrugged, unwilling to explain.

"You just wanted what every child wants. A home. A family. People to love who in their turn love you. There's nothing so unusual about that. You just had to wait a lot longer than most for your dream to come true."

There was a long silence, then, "I do not understand?"

"Take a look around you. This ship is your home. The crew is your family. Think about the way the bridge crew reacted today. When he called down here, Scotty was concerned about you. Not his Captain; you personally."

McCoy watched as the idea eased its way into the Captain's mind. It was certainly true that the Captain did have some problems dating well back into his childhood, but he could see no reason why, with therapy, they could not be cleared up. He cursed the insensitive, inflexible rulers of Vulcan, damning them for the callous damage that they had caused to a lonely little boy.

When the tears had finally ceased McCoy handed over a glass of Saurian brandy. "Purely medicinal," he commented.

"When you run out, try asking Scott for some of his 'Home Brewed'. I am assured that the product of his still is excellent."

McCoy choked slightly. "I know it is. I do the safety tests on every batch that he produces. Shall we get started?"

"The sooner that we do, the sooner we will be finished. But I want a promise from you."

"Name it."

"If you do find the smallest reason, even the slightest hint, that I shouldn't be Captain, you will have me removed from duty immediately."

"You have my word, sir," said McCoy, confident that the promise would be unnecessary.

They worked for several hours updating all the data on the

Captain's personal profile before McCoy pronounced himself ready to complete his statutory medical examination, and as he had expected the results were well inside the required parameters.

With the tension eased between them they finally left sickbay to get some sleep. As they parted outside McCoy's quarters the Captain said suddenly,

"The worst thing wasn't the loneliness. I was lonely on Vulcan. It was the constant wondering. What could I have been, achieved, if they had let me stay." Embarrassed by his sudden openness he said quietly, "Goodnight, Leonard. Thank you."

"Goodnight, Captain. If you need them, don't forget - one little red bomb only."

"I'll behave."

McCoy watched sadly as the thin figure of his Captain entered his quarters. Simon Grayson was a very lonely man, but maybe - just maybe - he'd finally got lucky. He had the best crew and the best ship in the 'Fleet. Perhaps they would be enough to fill the gaps left in his life by the Vulcan Council's rejection of a seven year old hybrid. They would be if Leonard McCoy had anything to do with it.

Commanding Admiral Heihachiro Nogura considered his breakfast and the coming interview with Captain Kirk of the Excalibur with almost equal interest. He'd started out opposing the idea of appointing the young man to a captaincy and had delayed the appointment for long enough to prevent him walking away with the Enterprise. Grayson (damn and blast his impudence) had responded to this signal favour by filching an impressive list of officers from all over the 'Fleet to serve on the Enterprise.

Now Kirk, confirmed in his rank at last, was doing the same thing for the Excalibur. He'd even gone so far as to tempt an Andorian into the Science Officer post. The unconcealed fury of the Chief of Science, who had first lost McCoy to the Enterprise and who discovered that he had now lost his own aide, Thelin, to Kirk, had rocked the Chiefs of Staff meeting for seven unparalleled minutes as he displayed a previously unsuspected talent for inventive cursing.

Nogura automatically reviewed the rest of the list submitted by the youngest captain in starfleet and forgot about his breakfast. There was a real surprise in it. Kirk had been as entertainingly successful in his recruitment campaign as Grayson had been; but had chosen the freshly qualified Ensign Chekov from the Academy as his Navigator instead of Gary Mitchell, who had experience and was, in addition, a personal friend.

He wondered at it for a while, then slowly smiled. Perhaps he had misjudged Kirk. Perhaps the young, brash Human did have what it took to be a good Captain. He finished his breakfast and got dressed, sparing a quick, almost absent thought on the fate of a senior navigator who was about to be grounded. Once the word that both Grayson and Kirk had rejected him got around there wouldn't be a Captain in the 'Fleet who'd want him aboard their ship. Making a mental note to increase the number of security guards assigned to Kirk - Mitchell was, after all, a hot-head with a bad temper - he left for his office.

The sun was just rising and Nogura spent the journey day-dreaming. In a way it was a pity that Kirk had been promoted. If he'd still been available when Grayson had been making up his crew Nogura had no doubt that Kirk would have been on the list as Executive Officer.

Now *there* was a fantasy to weave dreams about! Grayson and his crew, and Kirk there too, as a bonus. What a team they would have made! Pity. Nogura shrugged. At least this way they had two excellent Captains for the two newest ships in the 'Fleet.

Ah, but think what might have been!



ILLOGICAL HOPE

Standing apart we await the call to tell us we can board the shuttle that waits to take us to the Enterprise.

My feelings are in turmoil, and have been ever since that moment Sarek told me we were going to Babel, and that the journey there would be aboard the Starship Enterprise, Spock's ship, and a chance at last to see him in the flesh after eighteen years of only tapes and letters.

At last the day has come, and I feel strangely divided; part of me would rather not be here as I fear things may be made worse; but no, I will not, *cannot* let that happen.

So now the time has come, and I am eager to be gone, eager to face what must be faced, eager to take this chance to end the bitter years and put the past behind us.

Sarek stands beside me now the call has come, his feelings he hides from me; we join hands in the Vulcan fashion and board the vessel that is to take us to our fate.

I cannot think that all his thoughts are on the talks ahead and his duties as Ambassador.

Surely some small part of him has hope, even though it is illogical; I am consumed with this emotion, and as the door from the shuttle bay opens and we cross the threshold his hand seeks mine.

My other hand I hide, and cross my fingers in the very Human hope that Lady Luck is watching; illogical this may be, but being Human I can but trust my silent plea is answered, and eighteen years of separation can end here aboard this ship our son calls home.

Maureen Frost



IN THE DOGHOUSE

by

Joyce Devlin

It shouldn't happen to a doctor, but somehow it always does. Well, take the time when we all beamed down to Earth for shore leave. The transporter went wonky AGAIN - I always said that damn thing would be the death of me - and this time I wasn't far wrong, for the bloody thing reassembled our molecules in a kennel, and one full of big dogs, German Shepherds, at that.

So there were we three, Jim, Spock and yours truly, backed into a corner, terrified to move, and these two great big hairy monsters standing with their ruffs up snarling and baring their teeth. Well, who could blame them? After all, it was their home we had just invaded, even though it was only a kennel to us.

Well, dogs I don't mind - in fact you could say I have quite a way with them. Had it been snakes, well... that's a different story I may just get round to telling you some day. Slowly I bent down half an inch at a time and started to talk to the dogs.

"Where's a good doggie? There's a good boy. Come on, then, let's see you."

Much to my surprise they both came over and started to lick me to death. I had heard that these dogs were really ferocious and vicious, but these two were just two great big softies - big lumps of fluff, in fact. There I was, sitting on my rump with these two great big lumps sitting on top of me washing my face with their tongues, licking me to death. Okay, so letting a dog lick one's face is not hygienic, and being Chief Medical Officer of the USS Enterprise I should know better, but believe you me there's not much you can do about it when you're trapped under around nine stones of animal flesh - and anyway, those teeth were too close to my throat for comfort.

Jim in the meantime was trying to call the Enterprise, at the same time keeping a wary eye on the dogs. But he was having no luck - the communicator just spat static back at him. Our problem was, where the hell were we, and how could we get back? With the communicator out we had no way of calling for help.

However, our problem was solved when the door of the kennel was opened and two figures in Starfleet Security uniform appeared. We were obviously in the Security kennels, and these animals were highly trained security dogs.

Jim took command of the situation like the expert Captain he is. "I am Captain James T. Kirk of the USS Enterprise. This is my First Officer, Mr. Spock, and that gentleman," pointing to me on the floor as I disentangled myself, "is my C.M.O."

"That is all very well, Captain, but how did you get in here?" the senior of the two asked.

"Our transporter malfunctioned, and we materialised here

instead of at Starfleet Command."

"Ah, so that's what set the dogs off. Gentlemen, I am Commander Musk and this is Lt. Davis." He pointed to the handler, who had slipped two leads onto the dogs. "You were lucky these two didn't go for you. Are they secure, Lieutenant?"

"Yes, sir."

"Right, let's get you lot out of here. Follow me, please." With that the Commander led the way out.

"Those two dogs are just big softies," I piped up as the Commander shut the kennel door behind us.

"Big softies? Yes, well... Would you like to see them in action?"

"I would," I said, turning to Jim and Spock.

"Yes, Commander, we would if it's not too much trouble," Jim replied, drawing me a dirty look. I just shrugged my shoulders.

The dogs came into the display area with their handlers, walking beautifully to heel, and the display got under way. The dogs moved at command, not one out of order, over the jumps and obstacles with grace and ease. We learned from the instructor that it was part of a larger course that was used to train the dogs not to fear anything that might come up in their day-to-day duty. We also learned that the dogs were used in areas that the sensors found hard to penetrate.

The display went on to include what we were told was called 'man work'. We listened with interest as the instructor explained to us what was about to happen. This exercise involved tackling a man who was armed, and who came out from behind a screen at the bottom of the arena.

"Do they bite?" I heard myself ask like a fool.

"Yes, but your skills won't be needed as the trainer is fully protected with a lot of padding, and believe you me, he needs it, as you are about to see."

The dogs they used were the same two animals we had been in beside, and it was impossible to believe they were the same dogs. Gone were the gentleness and playfulness; in their place was a terrifying ferocity.

At the far end of the arena was the man in the padded suit. The dogs reached him in seconds, and had him down. The handlers called their dogs off, but they waited until the 'criminal' had been 'arrested' before they stopped growling at him.

"It's impossible to believe that those are the same dogs," I said.

"Fascinating," Spock commented.

"It is, isn't it?" Jim smiled. It was good to see him relax at last.

"Yes, gentlemen, it is quite hard to believe. Throughout the centuries these dogs have been used for this work and for other

things by people who had little or no training at all. It's one thing to be able to make a dog do things, but it's another to really understand them. But as the doctor pointed out, they are in fact just big softies."

The dogs and their handlers came over to where we were standing. The one they called Max came right up to me with his tail wagging, awaiting the expected petting.

"Let me demonstrate," the Commander said. As he made a gesture with his hand the dog turned, his hackles went up, and he was once again snarling. I took my hand away fast, I can tell you!

"You see? A German Shepherd is a highly intelligent animal. It's a pity they've never learned to talk," he informed us, making another gesture with his hands.

The dog fell silent, and once again became passive. Then Max's ears pricked up as if he had heard something coming.

"Ah, your aircar is coming," the Commander told us.

"How did you know that?" I questioned, then I heard it drawing nearer.

"The dogs have perfect hearing - in fact, they have a more highly tuned ear than we Humans."

We all started to walk over to the aircar. As it landed the Commander was still talking.

"I hope we have been able to show you something of interest, gentlemen. Perhaps one day a dog and handler will be standard Starship staff, and not just confined to bases. And doctor..."

"Yes?"

"If you ever wish to change your profession, we could do with more people like you. You seem to have a natural gift for handling dogs which is rare these days."

"Er... thanks, but no thanks. I'm happy where I am. Being in the doghouse once is quite enough," I replied. "However, when I retire I might just buy one of them - they are lovely animals."

"Well, Doctor, before you do I would suggest you go on a training course and learn all about the German Shepherd. As a matter of fact, I run such a course if you are interested."

I was interested, but Jim was halfway into the aircar and looking rather fed up, so I quickly replied,

"I am interested, but it won't be until I retire."

"Right, gentlemen, shall we get on? And hopefully with no mishaps this time," Jim was saying.

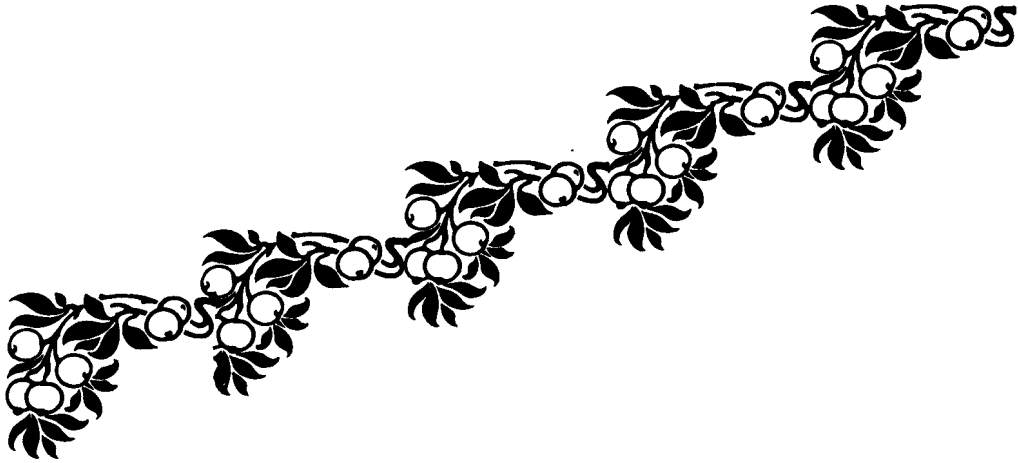
"I always said that this and the shuttlecraft are the safest ways to travel, and to hell with the transporter - after all, if we were meant to have our molecules scrambled, we'd have been made to come apart." I was grumbling again.

"Bones," Jim said with a warning in his voice.

"What?"

"Shut up!" Jim Kirk said as the door closed behind us.

Well, I guess I'm in the doghouse with Jim as well, and that won't be anything unusual, now will it?



FRIEND IN NEED

A movement off to my left brings a smile to my face.
 No, my friend, I have not forgotten you are there.
 How could I, when
 your quiet supportive presence lets me know
 you understand my needs.
 I know I need the Enterprise, and
 the life she means to me, but there are times,
 my friend, when
 I need other things.
 I need to feel the ground beneath my feet;
 I need fresh air to breathe;
 I need the quiet solitude of just watching
 the clouds float by; and
 to know you are willing to be here with me,
 in this place I knew as home
 for all my childhood and beyond,
 makes it all the more precious for me.
 You felt my need when
 I asked you to join me for this first visit home
 after my mother's death;
 my need not to be alone;
 my need of your soothing quiet presence
 to help ease the strains this first visit might bring.
 So don't think I have forgotten you are there
 as I sit here watching the world go by.
 As much as I may seem to be lost in my memories,
 I know you are there, my friend.

Maureen Frost

WHITHER THOU GOEST...

by

Synda Surgenor

Blackness.

Only I exist.

But what am I? Where am I? Who am I?

The blackness pales into greyness.

I have a body, lying on something hard and uncomfortable.

I open my eyes and there is light. And sudden agony, lancing through my brain like a knife.

I close my eyes again, tightly, and the light goes, but the pain remains. After an indeterminate time it eases, and I reopen my eyes slowly, carefully.

I am lying on my left side on a smooth, hard floor. I sit up cautiously, wary that the pain in my head will return, but there is only swiftly dying dizziness.

I am in a room that I do not recognise, surrounded by humming, pulsing machines that I do not understand.

Where am I?

Who am I?

I force myself to my feet, holding onto the rough stone wall. Sudden fear knots my stomach, pushing cold perspiration out through my skin.

I am afraid, not only because I do not know myself but also because danger threatens, a terrible danger - I know it is coming, but I do not know from where, nor what it is. I know I must stop it - but I do not know how.

I stumble unsteadily across the room to a central console covered in a complex pattern of lights and switches, and as the vertigo returns drop to my knees beside it. Two small objects on the floor before me claim my attention. I pick them up, examine them, lay them down again.

They seem strangely familiar to me, but I do not know... I do not know...

I push myself upright again, clutching my head, fighting off another sharp stab of agony.

"What is this place? How did I get here? Who am I?"

My voice sounds hollow and echoes in my ears. Dazed by the pain, confused by the lack of memory, I stagger a few steps to one

side and come up against the surrounding wall. As I touch it there is a grating sound and a shaft of brilliant sunshine spills down a flight of stone steps from an opening at the top.

I climb the steps and emerge into the open air, and my breath catches in my throat.

As far as my eyes can see, paradise lies spread out before me.

I am standing on a raised platform. At my back the obelisk out of which I have climbed soars towards the sky. In front of me, steps lead down to a smooth, grassy area which slopes gently down to a lake, just visible between the trunks of the encircling trees. The air is warm and sweet as wine, scented by the trees and the grass and innumerable wild flowers. Overhead the sky is a deep, cerulean blue, unmarred by a single cloud.

It draws me, that sky. I lean my head back, and let my eyes climb into it... high... higher...

Out there! That is where the danger is coming from! I know it! That is where - I - should - be...

Who am I?

For a moment I feel I am on the verge of discovery, then the pain pierces my head again sharply and once more I close my eyes against it. When I reopen them there is only that frightening inner blankness - and the sound of approaching voices.

Two women are walking across the grass towards me, talking and laughing together. When at last they see me they come to an abrupt halt, staring up at me in shock, then they fall to their knees, bowing their heads and covering their faces with their hands.

In their short, figure-hugging, soft buckskin dresses trimmed with fringes, their long black hair bound with beaded bands, they remind me of something, of pictures I have seen somewhere - somewhere...

Once more knowledge seems to tremble on the brink of consciousness, then tumbles away into the darkness within.

The woman on the left raises her head and peers at me shyly between her fingers. Slowly she lowers her hands and rises to her feet.

Her eyes meet mine, and something happens inside me.

There is a meeting, a sudden warmth which flows out and enfolds my whole body, my whole soul. My heart turns over, stops, and - aeons later - begins again. Her eyes are deep, dark pools into which I fall - and go on falling, it seems until eternity.

Hesitantly, she ascends the steps to my side and taking my hand raises it to her forehead. Her touch is electric; it sears me to my very soul, yet her skin is cool and smooth and soft, like velvet.

"Who are you?" I ask, in a voice that seems not to belong to me.

"We are your people, Lord," she answers. "We have been waiting for you to come to us."

My people? Waiting for me? Sudden hope rises; does she - can she - know me?

"Who am I?" I whisper.

"You are the God, who will save us when the sky darkens."

Her reply is useless to me!

I am a mystery to myself, but I do know that I do not feel like a god! And what do they mean, those words of hers, *When the sky darkens*? Instinctively I glance upwards, past fear returning, but the cloudless blue remains. Yet the sense of impending danger is real to me, and appears to be shared in some way by this woman. But what *is* it? How can I be expected to save anyone when I do not know how, nor from what?

For just a split second the world goes away, and I stand in another place that is achingly familiar to me. The face of the woman before me is replaced by two other faces, one smiling, blue eyes twinkling, the other expressionless yet saying much, eyebrows upswept above fathomless dark eyes - and almost - *almost* - I remember...

Then, as before, behind my forehead the pain erupts again viciously, blindingly, worse even than it was at the time of my first awakening.

This time, as it begins to ebb, there is a difference. This time it gathers up and carries from me not only the almost memories but also all the fear, the intimations of danger, the confusion - even the need and the desire to remember what has gone before. This time, like smoke in the wind, everything drifts away, leaving not the slightest trace behind; leaving only emptiness waiting to be filled.

I open eyes I do not remember closing and find the woman gazing at me in deep concern.

"Lord, are you ill? Let me help."

"It's nothing, only a pain in my head. It's gone now. It doesn't matter."

It is true; nothing matters. Only I, and the woman, and this place, remain.

"Who are you?" I ask again.

"We are your people - " she begins.

"No - I mean, who are *you*?"

She smiles at me, and the bright day suddenly becomes golden.

"I? I am Miramanee, Lord."

The name entwines itself around my heart and soul. It is as though I have always known it, and always will know it. It fills my ears with music and for a long moment stops the breath in my throat.

She takes my hand again, and smiles that incandescent smile once more.

"Come, Lord, let me take you to our lodges."

I am led down the steps and across the open, grassy slope and I follow, drawn not by the clasp of her hand but by that invisible chain which has bound me to her from the moment our eyes first met.

As we pass into the shade under the leafy canopy of the trees something indefinable makes me hesitate and look back. The obelisk reaches for the sky, gleaming in the sunlight. But even as I look, the gleam fades and the shadow which has engulfed it stretches out across the grass like a finger pursuing us. Once again I raise my eyes to the sky. From out of nowhere a small dark cloud has appeared and hides the face of the sun. It hangs there, oddly menacing, the sole blemish in that vast expanse of blue.

For the space of a heartbeat my mind wavers, seeking - something - but I cannot recall what, not why it should be so. It is all part of my forgotten past, and no longer disturbs me. It seems I was born in that moment of awakening in the obelisk, and nothing before then is important any more.

My hand is tugged gently.

"Come, Lord!" Miramanee's voice sings in my ears.

I turn back to her, and once more her smile warms me. With just one look this woman has captured me, all of me, and at this moment only she and I exist.

From somewhere deep in my subconscious, words well up. I know not where or when I have heard or read them, I know only that they engrave themselves upon my soul, never to be erased.

Whither thou goest, I will go - whither thou liest, I will lie - thy people shall be my people - and the gods, my gods...

Miramanee!

She is the light I am drawn to in my darkness, the custodian of my being, and willingly, joyfully, I tighten my grasp on her hand and, leaving the unremembered, unimportant past behind, follow her into whatever future fate holds in store for us...





THE VULCAN INHERITANCE

by

Gail Williams

THE BEGINNING

A group of children was playing hide and seek among the rocks. It seemed like any other normal childish game, except that there was a marked lack of any indication that the children were enjoying it - but then that was hardly surprising, for these were Vulcan children, taught at an early age to repress all emotion.

Two small girls, one slightly older than the other, sat on a flat boulder watching the game. The younger child - perhaps some four Earth years of age - sat with an elbow resting on one knee, chin cupped in hand, her face obscured slightly by the hood she wore to protect her fair skin from the burning Vulcan sun. She longed to join in their games, but was always excluded, constantly the outsider. In the past this exclusion had resulted in tears of frustration, spawning cruel taunts and jibes from the Vulcan children; lately, though, the child had learned to check her emotional reactions, preferring indifference to revulsion. She sighed softly, and shuffled her sandalled feet in the hot sand.

The elder child, T'Chan, by Terran standards three years her senior, sensed her 'sister's' distress and slipped a hand into the little girl's. To a point she understood what her companion was feeling, as T'Chan too longed to join in the game, but her loyalty to her 'sister' kept her by her side.

There was a lull in the game, and a boy of T'Chan's age approached the boulder on which the girls sat. The arid desert wind playfully ruffled his longish dark hair, revealing the characteristic pointed ears of the Vulcan race.

"T'Chan, why do you not join us at recreation?"

T'Chan's gaze was steady. The boy was Saron - he to whom she would soon be formally bonded and psychically linked in the promise of marriage.

"I made a promise that I would watch over my sister," she said softly.

Saron scowled. "Do you not mean protect her? She is not even your true sister - she is not even a Vulcan!"

He leaned forwards and yanked the hood away from the younger child's face. A pair of startled blue eyes blinked up at him in the brightness of the sun, and as the breeze blew back the long brownish-auburn hair from her face it became perfectly plain that Saron's statement was true. T'Chan's sister's ears bore no trace of a point, they were delicately-rounded Human ears - but then Alex Jefferson Kirk had been born of Human parents.

She now released T'Chan's hand and pulled her hood back into place. "T'Chan, it would seem that Saron has issued you with an

invitation which it would be a breach of etiquette to refuse."

T'Chan leaned forward and tugging at the hood whispered, "Are you sure?"

Alex nodded vehemently, and watched as the two Vulcans walked over to join the silent throng of children, then she left her perch and headed out for the open plains and the mountains, to her own private place, her secret cave where she would be able to rid herself of her humiliation, anger, and the sorrow at having once again been openly insulted. These insults hurt her deeply, for the Vulcans were a race she admired and respected. How long would it be before they accepted her as one of them? For despite the obvious physical differences Alex was technically a Vulcan, carrying full Vulcan citizenship.

At the cave, Alex knew, she would be able to indulge in the luxury of weeping alone, something she now never allowed herself to do before other Vulcans, not even her adopted family, for to Vulcans emotion was something to be ashamed of; and not only that, to display emotion openly was considered an extreme breach of good taste. Alex was gallantly trying to imitate the Vulcan way of life, but it was not easy... The tears began to fall long before the child reached the cave, and she began to run faster, as though the physical exertion would overcome her mental distress.

Sendak, who had been observing the children at play, now watched the receding figure of his Human foster child. The tall distinguished Vulcan knew that while Alex continued to display emotion of any kind she would always be treated as an outcast by the other children. At four years of age she was old enough to begin learning the Vulcan discipline of emotional repression. Sendak did not want her to suffer any further and, skirting the group of children, followed the path which Alex had taken.

T'Chan watched her father go, and hoped that his wisdom and teaching would help Alex learn how to deal with the agony of her Human heritage.

Sendak heard the sound of soft weeping long before he found the child. He had suspected for some time that Alex had some private sanctuary to which she fled when the need to release her pent-up feelings overcame her.

As dedicated a scientist as William Kirk, Alex's natural father, Sendak had worked closely with his Human counterpart almost from the moment he and his wife had arrived on the planet. Kirk's wife had been pregnant then, and it was expected that his research would be completed before the birth of their child. Sendak and Kirk held each other in high regard, and in the latter's case frank admiration. Each was brilliant in his particular field of science, and had friendships with Outworlders been permitted on Vulcan, Sendak and Kirk could indeed have become very close friends. The Vulcan became fascinated by Bill Kirk's profound anthropological knowledge, and in the subject of logistics Sendak was considered to be one of the best. His practical approach to life influenced Kirk to such an extent that he felt more than honoured to have his daughter become part of Sendak's family.

Sendak, however, did not fail to notice that in his thirst for knowledge Kirk tended to neglect his pregnant wife, devoted though he

was to her. Right from the start the Vulcan climate had not agreed with the dark-haired but fair-skinned Maura, and as the pregnancy progressed it became apparent that she was experiencing extreme discomfort, despite all efforts to prepare her for the ordeal of childbirth. Towards the middle of the eighth month of her confinement Maura went into a long and difficult labour, from which she never really recovered. Ridden with guilt at remorse at her death, Kirk was in no state to take care of the infant alone, therefore his daughter had become part of Sendak's family as naturally as if T'Nea, Sendak's wife, had herself borne her.

Having buried himself in his work, and his self-pity, Kirk hardly interfered with the rearing of his daughter. Somehow just seeing the child brought back memories of his neglect of the woman who had saved him from professional suicide through her love, and her belief in his ability to put all past mistakes behind him, although sadly her devotion did not prevent the inevitable falling-out and subsequent banishment by his own father, who was devastated by the revelation that his own family had been harbouring a political traitor.

Consequently, Kirk rarely visited Sendak's home after Maura had gone. It was hardly surprising, therefore, that on the rare occasions when he did see Alex she regarded him with some curiosity. As soon as she was old enough to understand Sendak told her of her true parentage, as Alex had come to regard him as her natural father, dismissing entirely the physical differences between them. Sendak wanted the Human father and child to become reconciled, but this was going to be difficult, since Kirk spent all his waking hours in research, and Alex did not even comprehend her relationship to him.

Slowly, however, Alex became painfully aware of the physical differences between herself and the Vulcans, and with this realisation came a change within herself. She was going through an identity crisis, belonging neither to the Vulcans who had raised her, nor the Human world from whence she had been bred. Vulcans never showed any signs of being happy or sad, which puzzled her; why did they never smile or cry? Alex always smiled when she was happy and cried when she was grieved or vexed, but lately she had got the impression that it was not quite the done thing in Vulcan company. Whenever she gave way to her emotions she was quietly and very pointedly shunned. Life was so confusing.

It was at this point that her relationship with her foster parents changed too. Previously she had openly shown them affection, and Sendak had permitted this, showing tolerance towards Alex's Human frailties while at the same time being condemned by the Vulcan hierarchy for doing so. Once the child began to identify with Bill Kirk Sendak hoped that all her childish love would be channelled to him, but it was not to be. As she grew older Alex became introverted and independent, as if trying to prove that she could exist on her own against all the odds.

An extremely intelligent and sensitive child, in some respects she put the Vulcan children to shame in her eagerness to learn and her powers of deduction. She could totter unaided at the age of ten months, and could read and solve simple arithmetical problems by the age of two years. Even before she could speak properly she could scribble short sentences, and Sendak had been as proud as though she were his own flesh and blood.

Alex regarded herself as Vulcan, and at times Sendak found himself almost amused by the child's complicated makeup of Vulcan

dignity and Human emotion, although he knew that as time went by she would find life increasingly difficult if she did not learn to repress her natural Human behaviour. It was this latest slight to his Terran daughter that had prompted him to act, though he half suspected that Alex had guessed why the Vulcan children shunned and ridiculed her. To his shame Sendak remembered a certain half-Human, half-Vulcan boy, the son of the then Vulcan ambassador to Earth, whom he had once taunted mercilessly; now, seeing Alex's distress, he realised what pain that boy must have gone through. This child must not endure the same.

T'Chan was her staunch and most loyal defender, sometimes risking scorn herself to protect her Human 'sister'; the love between the two was quite apparent, and neither Sendak nor T'Nea objected to their daughter becoming familiar with Human ways. Both were firm believers in the concept of Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations.

However, the time had now come to discipline his Terran daughter rigidly, with or without Bill Kirk's permission, though had he asked, Sendak knew that the reply would have been,

"Do what you think is best."

It was always the same.

Alex had much to learn, so her training could not begin too early. Later on she would have the power to choose which heritage she wished to adopt, be it her Vulcan teaching or her Human birthright. Whether she decided to stay on Vulcan or not would be entirely her decision, and Sendak would not even try and influence her.

As for Bill Kirk, he was unsure of his feelings towards his daughter. This scrap of humanity was part of him, yet was being brought up in another culture amongst the unfeeling and the unemotional, though he had to admit that was his doing. What security could he offer the child? He had no home of his own, and slept in a small, cramped room at the Natural History Museum. He had no time for her, being immersed in studying the writings of Surak in detail, as he wanted to understand exactly how the Vulcans had evolved from being a warrior race into a people motivated by pure logic. In truth, Kirk knew that his work on Vulcan was almost complete, but was reluctant to make any change in his lifestyle. After Maura's death he had sunk into a sort of lethargy from which he could not rouse himself. Alex had a stable home with Sendak and T'Nea, and that was much more than he could offer her. So Kirk settled back into the rut he had created for himself, content to let life pass him by as he buried himself in the past.

Sendak now approached the cave, and peering inside saw the sleeping form of the Human child curled up just inside the entrance. The Vulcan squatted down beside her and brushed the dark hair away from the flushed face. Alex shot up into a sitting position, blue eyes wide in alarm, but relaxed when she saw who it was that had awakened her.

"Be at peace, my child."

"How did you know where to find me?"

"I followed you. Forgive me, I did not intend to intrude upon your privacy, but Alex, you know why I had to come, do you not?"

The child nodded gravely. "The time has come for that of which you spoke some time ago."

Sendak sat down beside her. Already long shadows were creeping slowly up the walls of the cave, revealing that the sun was sinking slowly in the sky, and the breeze which had been warm as he tracked across the desert now had a slight chill which told him that darkness would soon follow.

"Alex, as your father has as yet made no definite plans for leaving our planet, it would indicate that you may both be here for some time to come. Consequently, to spare you any further distress, it has been decided that I endeavour to teach you by means of the Vulcan discipline. You know what this entails - you have seen the way in which Vulcan children conduct themselves."

Alex was drawing patterns in the sand with her fingers. "Yes. It means that I have to conquer my feelings by applying logic. Logic is all important."

Sendak nodded. "If you are to be fully accepted into Vulcan society you must learn to repress your emotions. It will not be easy - the paths we choose to follow very seldom are. When you come to study the history of this planet in detail you will understand why we Vulcans chose to be logical rather than emotional. I will help you all I can. Will you allow me to do that?"

"No-one has any idea of the desire I have to belong."

"I think perhaps I do."

A ghost of a smile hovered briefly on Sendak's lips, and with the first two fingers of his right hand he stroked Alex's face from temple to chin; it was a family embrace, and one she had seen used in the privacy of his home, but had never experienced until now. She reached up and imitated the gesture. It seemed a much more intimate form of embrace even than the Human custom of hugging, because Vulcans very seldom, if at all, allowed Outworlders to learn of their private habits and customs.

"So, we begin," Sendak said. "Soon you will experience the mind-touch, and you must be taught how to probe the thoughts of others. But never forget your Human heritage, as sometimes you may feel the overwhelming need to express the emotional tendencies you have inherited, for they can never be truly suppressed." He glanced around the cave. "Does anyone else know that you come here?"

"No, not even T'Chan."

"Good. Then at least you have one place where you can be yourself. I am teaching you an actor's craft, for which you may or may not have a talent. I hope that for your sake the former proves to be true. And now it grows dark, and we must go home." The Vulcan got to his feet and helped the child to hers. "Can you walk all that way unaided?"

"The time has come for me to put childish things behind me - I will manage."

Sendak inclined his head, understanding that Alex was now

prepared to walk along a new road, and he had no doubt that she would find what she was seeking when she got to the end of it - she already showed the Vulcan traits of stubbornness and determination.

CASTAWAY

Night had fallen on Pandos. The streets of Silvania, the largest of Pandos' inhabited sectors, were deserted. No-one dared venture out after curfew for fear of being shot by one of the many patrols which prowled the dwelling areas under cover of darkness. No-one, that is, except the Pandosian Resistance and the starving. And while the Underground movement dwindled rapidly, the hungry mobs grew in number, so that there was as much to fear from them as from the Militia.

Since the overthrow of the government six months previously life for the inhabitants of the planet had become a nightmarish existence. Only a few days before a proclamation had been nailed on the information board at the sector boundary informing all 'undesirable aliens' that unless they removed themselves from the planet's surface within two weeks they would be rounded up and herded into displaced persons camps -or at worst, eliminated.

William Alexander Kirk gazed through a crack in the shutters covering the windows of the house he shared with his nine-year-old daughter Alex. The street outside seemed quiet - too quiet. The patrol was late tonight. He sighed, ran a hand through his prematurely greying hair and cast a worried glance at the small figure methodically laying the table for supper. They had only been on the planet for six months, and Kirk berated himself for his bad choice of location connected with his work. It was another mistake in what seemed to have been a life filled with poor judgement and unintentional error. He had been unable to secure a passage on any space vessel leaving Pandos, so for the moment both he and his daughter were trapped.

Kirk was a nomad, and not since his early twenties had he known a permanent home which he could call his own, even after his marriage. He was an anthropologist, as his wife Maura had been, and together they had travelled from planet to planet, devoting their lives to the study and development of alien life forms and civilizations.

The longest Kirk had ever spent in one place had been Vulcan, that curiously logical planet where he and Maura had arrived to carry out research into the Vulcan race prior to the Surak era, at the discretion of the Vulcan High Council. Maura had been six months pregnant upon their arrival, and only six weeks after Alex's birth she had died without ever really recovering from the traumatic ordeal of the confinement, nor with any desire to see her daughter.

Kirk could have continued on his travels then, and left the child in the care of her Vulcan foster family, but his ties to Alex had prevented him from doing so; and as Sendak, Alex's foster father, had pointed out, space travel would have been quite out of the question with an infant to care for. Therefore the stay on Vulcan, which was to have been quite brief, lengthened into seven years, by which time Kirk had learned all he could about the once-passionate warrior race now devoted to the process of total logic.

He watched his daughter grow up among Vulcan children, being

given the same benefits as they were and being taught to suppress her natural Human emotion. Kirk observed Alex at play with T'Chan, Sendak's own child, and realised that apart from not bearing the pointed Vulcan ears, and though her eyebrows arched high in an intriguing arc which made a curious contrast to T'Chan's slanted brows, which gave the small Vulcan a slightly quizzical if not somewhat superior expression, Alex could easily have been mistaken for one of them. This realisation had shaken off Kirk's lethargy and strengthening his resolve that his daughter be raised in a more orthodox Human orientated environment, the child and the scientist left Vulcan, though Kirk had no definite destination in mind.

Alex and T'Chan's goodbyes had somewhat shaken Kirk. The two small girls had neither touched nor spoken, and yet their grief at being parted seemed to be communicated telepathically, Alex's misery mirrored in T'Chan's eyes, and Kirk almost hated himself for wrenching his daughter from the people she had come to know and trust. He had to keep reminding himself that it was for her own good.

Sendak had secured a Vulcan craft for their departure, and once Space central had cleared the An-Chata for take-off and they had left Vulcan orbit, Alex never again referred to the family left behind. It was as if she sensed Kirk's reason for wanting to be on his travels; she never questioned it, but she would never forget her first home - after all, she was a Vulcan citizen, a fact that her father had overlooked, and that meant she was free to return whenever she chose.

Kirk glanced at his daughter again, marvelling that she looked like neither her auburn-haired mother nor himself. Maura's eyes had been blue - strange, he could barely remember them, nor the son they had lost before Alex came - but though unlike her mother in looks the young girl had inherited her mysterious dark-blue eyes which saw things that no ordinary Human could; and Alex's hair was dark, with only the occasional auburn streak to remind him of the wife who had stood up for him so determinedly.

Alex without doubt took after her maternal grandmother, a lady of dubious parentage - the rumour that she was descended from the inhabitants of Rigel V could not be denied - but who shared the same strange eyes, the sheet of dark hair, highly arched alien brows and the gift of telepathy.

He smiled as he let his thoughts wander to the younger generation of his family, who had become scattered about the universe, each pursuing his or her own dream or ambition; and although he no longer kept in touch with the family that had disowned him, Kirk made a point of trying to follow the progress of those close to him in age, for the severing of his relationship with his father had been a bitter blow, and the wounds of separation cut deeply.

There was his cousin, James Tiberius, an officer in Starfleet Command and a starship captain with an unshakeable reputation, and Jim's brother George Samuel - Sam - an extremely talented research biologist who had died along with his wife Aurelan during some alien infestation on the planet Deneva, although their son Peter had survived. News of Sam's death had reached Kirk on Vulcan, and he sympathised with his uncle and the agony he must be going through. His own father had never grieved over William's defection from the fold, for he had brought shame on the family name. To James Kirk Senior his son had died when the United Federation security forces

branded him as being politically and socially unstable.

An authoritative pounding on the door brought him back to the present. Kirk knew he had no choice but to open it, and as he did so a bright light was shone into his face as he was hauled out into the street. The patrol had come.

A heavily uniformed figure pushed past him into the house and returned seconds later propelling a startled Alex roughly before him.

There were only two guards, but they were fully armed, and Bill Kirk knew that once he and Alex had been interrogated they would either be interned in the displaced persons camp, or most probably shot just as so many before them had been.

Suddenly making up his mind, Kirk lunged at the patrol guard who had collared Alex and knocked his weapon to the ground.

"Run, Alex!" he shouted.

The child hesitated, confused.

"For God's sake, go!" Kirk cried as he began to grapple with the other guard, who had aimed his firearm at the child.

Alex began to run. She knew she could not help her father, but that he would try to give her all the time she needed to get away. She was halfway down the street when she heard the short, sharp burst of phaser fire. In mid flight she turned and saw the body of her father - or rather, what was left of him - sprawled at the feet of one of the patrol guards; the other was already heading for her.

Half blinded by tears of fear and anger, the child ran down a side street with the footsteps of the guard echoing in her ears. She kept on running, turning down this street and that alleyway until she could run no more; then, crawling into an open drain she fell almost immediately into an exhausted sleep, too numb and tired even to think of her father, or what her future might be.

Alex tried to move very little during the day, and if she did she moved only in the shadows, for sometimes hunger drove her to forage in the ruined city. The day after Bill Kirk was killed the Militia returned to Silvania with a vengeance, and after hours of burning, killing and destruction, the population of the city had decreased alarmingly. Huddled in her hiding place the child had tried to close her ears to the sound of screams and falling masonry, but the acrid smell of smoke and charred embers had hung on the air for days, as had the eerie silence which followed the holocaust, and Alex began to think that she was the only one left.

She had contemplated leaving Silvania and heading for the open countryside as the food supplies became almost non-existent in the city. As a vegetarian Alex was finding it increasingly difficult to find the food she needed to survive; it never occurred to her that now she was no longer on Vulcan she need not adhere to their dietary laws, and to search the abandoned shops for packaged or dehydrated meat and food products. She had simply never tasted meat, though it had often been part of the fare in Bill Kirk's house, and he had been amused at his daughter's disgusted face whenever she caught him gnawing on a bone with obvious enjoyment. 'Like a starved le-matya,' she had said once, and immediately regretted it; the look on her

father's face told her that he knew she would prefer to be back with the Vulcans who had reared her rather than tramping round the universe with him. She had often berated herself then and since for her lack of tact, but as far as Alex was concerned she was forbidden to eat flesh, and that was that, though she strongly suspected that her Pandosian compatriots were none too fussy as to whose flesh they consumed.

She had often been woken by cries at various times during the day and night, and had once come across the remains of what appeared to be a male - flesh and bones torn from the mutilated body and the blood flowing freely like a silent, deadly snake from the carcass into a grille in the street which led into the city's underground sanitary system. It had been a fresh kill, and Alex knew she must get away quickly, otherwise she might be the next victim.

So, it had come to this. It was now a case of dog eat dog - or even man eat man - in order to survive. That same day Alex had been fortunate in finding half a loaf of bread, stale and turning mouldy but edible nevertheless. That night she had shared her supper with the rats who also shared her home; they were the only friends she had, and she shuddered to think that they might end up as a tasty meal for some vagrant like herself.

As the light finally faded Alex scrambled out of the drain and crept stealthily down the alley which led into one of the main thoroughfares. She was returning to her father's house for the first time since his death, to search for food and the Vulcan keepsakes which she held so dear, as well as her identification papers, which were priceless in that they were the means by which she could return to the planet where she had been happy and secure.

Once she reached the main street Alex stayed in the shadows, straining her ears for the unmistakable rumble of the night patrol's armoured vehicle. She stiffened visibly as she heard the sound of phaser fire in the distance, and shivered at the memory of Bill Kirk's charred and blackened body. The patrol was not too far away.

At first the child was reluctant to enter the house that held so many painful memories. The shutters still remained closed against the windows, the door half open. Silently she crossed the street and stood on the threshold, glancing briefly at the spot where her father had fallen, then cautiously she pushed the door open wider and peered into the gloom within.

Only when she was satisfied that the building was deserted did Alex venture inside. Broken furniture and stacks of Bill's precious work lay scattered about the room together with articles of clothing and one or two of Alex's beloved books, real books with pages she could touch and feel the texture, and hear the rustle of the pages as she read.

She bent down and picked up the nearest volume; its cover was badly crushed and the pages crumpled and torn. Alex turned the book over in her hands and read the title on the spine - 'The Shape of Things to Come' by H.G. Wells. She put it to one side and reached for the other book, also torn and mutilated. It had once been beautifully bound, and the pages were covered with an alien script which reminded the child of the home left behind and of the family she would most likely never see again. Smoothing the page with her grubby fingers, Alex turned to the title page, and could just make out the title - 'Surak, His Life and Works' - before the moon retreated behind a cloud, and what little light there had been was

extinguished.

In the kitchen the same chaos reigned. Flour, rice and pulses dusted the floor, together with a mixture of broken crockery and cooking utensils. Pulling a cracked china mixing bowl towards her, Alex managed to rescue some of the ingredients that were left in the torn packets, and grabbing the nearest piece of cloth, which turned out to be a grey robe once belonging to her father, the child spread it on the table and placed the bowl with her precious hoard on it. Then she made for the bedroom she had shared with him.

Alex searched for what seemed like hours, but could not find her Vulcan citizenship papers or Bill Kirk's I.D. It seemed likely that these were now in the hands of the planet's military regime. She sat on the edge of the bed feeling tired and hungry. The feverish hunting had exhausted her.

A wild scrabbling sound and muted grunts coming from the direction of the living room woke the child some five hours later. Eyes fixed to the door, pupils dilated with terror, Alex pushed it open slowly - three filthy humanoid creatures were crawling about on the floor, examining the assortment of spilled clothing. Alex's gaze flickered to the table. The bowl containing the food she had gathered was still there; they had not noticed it, which indicated that they had not been in the house long. How could she have been so stupid as to have fallen asleep when she was surrounded by danger of all kinds? Yet here she was, about to do battle for her life, were she but to know it.

She must have made a noise of some kind, how or what she never knew, but one of the creatures looked up in surprise and saw her, at the same time emitting a long, high-pitched howl from his cavernous, slaverling mouth. Alex, heart pounding painfully, backed away in fear and slammed the bedroom door shut; she squatted down behind a chest and closed her eyes, her breathing coming in quick, uneven, terrified pants. Waiting.

The door was flung open so violently that it sagged on its hinges, and Alex watched as the three - two males and a female - advanced cautiously into the room. She stopped breathing altogether, hoping they would find some distraction and miss her, but her hopes were dashed only moments later. It was the woman who found her, and with a triumphant scream dragged Alex out of her hiding place.

The child lay on the floor too scared to move while bony fingers tore at her tattered clothing and hair. A broken fingernail raked across her temple, and she felt the hot gush of blood against her clammy skin. At the sight of it her three captors let out howls of ecstasy, and Alex remembered the corpse in the alley.

Letting out a scream of pain, fear and anger, Alex got to her knees and scrambled for the door; she almost made it, but was caught from behind and dragged protesting back into the room. A dirty hand was clamped over her mouth and nose, effectively cutting off the noise - and her breathing. In desperation Alex bit down hard until she tasted blood, and was flung back onto the floor as the man cried out in pain and surprise. This time she made it into the living room, and knew for certain from the growls behind her that if she was caught, they would surely kill her.

Searching frantically around her, she spied the broken leg of a

chair, and grabbed it. Only two had followed her, the woman and a half-grown boy who made a grab for her. She side-stepped and hit him in the back with her makeshift club. He was too angry to look where he was going, and the boy's feet became entangled in some garment strewn upon the floor; as he came at her a second time, he tripped. Alex did not hesitate, but brought her weapon down on his head with a dull, sickening thud. The boy lay very still, and when he made no attempt to get up Alex knew that he was dead. The woman dropped to her knees beside him, moaning, then began to scream curses at the child, who could only surmise that the boy had been her son.

Seeing her opportunity, Alex flung the club to one side, made a lunge for the bowl and the garment it was resting on, and concealing the bowl in its folds ran out into the street. She could still hear the woman's sobs and curses as she ran, and she could feel the blood drying and congealing on the side of her face. Tonight she had killed for her own self-preservation, but that did not seem to matter, as Alex knew she might have to do so again in order to survive on this planet. She knew she would probably never leave Pandos; there was no-one who would possibly want to rescue her, no family, no cavalry over the hill in the nick of time.

Safe in her drain once more, Alex examined her cuts and bruises with the knowledge that she could not survive like this much longer. Gazing out onto the silent street she shivered with the realisation that she was entirely alone.

"Please," she whispered, not knowing why she did so, "please somebody find me soon."

There was no-one to hear, and no-one to answer, except the rustling of the rats in dark corners and the occasional breeze which tossed and tumbled old cartons and newspapers in its wake to litter the street outside.

FLIGHT TO FREEDOM

Captain James T. Kirk of the USS Enterprise mulled over his latest orders from Starfleet Command, not entirely happy with having to interfere with the goings-on of a planet which was not part of the United Federation. There had been rumours of civil war on Pandos circulating on the subspace channels for months, and since Pandos was not a member of the Federation, no-one could be quite clear as to how accurate the rumours were. They had evidently caused enough of a rumpus at Starfleet Headquarters for the Enterprise - as it happened the only ship in the quadrant - to be sent to investigate.

The starship was now executing a standard orbit around the planet, and Kirk pushed a button on the arm of his command chair.

"Bridge to sickbay. Bones, meet me in the transporter room in five minutes. Kirk out."

The Captain rose out of his chair and moved over to the library computer station, where his half-Vulcan First Officer sat studying data on the planet which had been supplied to him at his request.

"Spock, I want you to stay here. If things get rough I may need a quick decision." *Not to mention a cool head in a crisis*, he thought. Spock was renowned for his logical thinking.

"Understood, Captain." The Vulcan vacated his station and sat in the command chair as Kirk headed for the turbolift.

"Mr. Chekov, you will accompany me to the transporter room."

"Yes, sir!" the young Russian officer replied eagerly. It was not often that he was given the opportunity to be part of a landing party.

In the transporter room Dr. Leonard McCoy was already prepared for the sojourn to the planet's surface. Armed with tricorder and medikit, he was not really looking forward to the process of beaming down; he distrusted the transporter apparatus, and objected to having his molecules disturbed in transit. He often aired his opinion on the subject, but everyone took his complaining as being part of the doctor's somewhat taciturn nature. As soon as he was joined by Kirk and Chekov, the three stepped up onto the transporter platform, and in a matter of seconds found themselves on the deserted boundary of Silvania.

As the landing party got closer to the centre of the dwelling area it became apparent that some sort of conflict had taken place quite recently. Most of the houses were derelict, and here and there a body lay among the ruins. McCoy knelt down beside the corpse of a woman and pointed his tricorder at the lifeless form.

"What killed her, Bones?"

McCoy looked up. "Strangely enough, Jim, starvation. Look at the dryness of the skin, the skeletal appearance."

"Rumours were right for once." Kirk scanned the street for signs of life, but there appeared to be none.

Suddenly, out of the corner of his eye, he caught sight of a small figure darting from the doorway of one of the less gutted houses. At the sight of the Enterprise crewmen the figure took flight, followed by Kirk, who was determined to find out what had been going on.

The figure darted down an alleyway. It was wearing a tattered hood and robe far too big for its slender frame, and this proved to be the small fugitive's undoing; it tripped and fell, sprawling headlong into the dust.

Kirk increased his speed and threw himself at the figure as it struggled to its feet ready to take flight once again. He and the figure hit the ground hard, and both lay winded for a moment, though Kirk, breathing hard, kept a tight hold on his captive's clothing lest it should elude him again.

Hauling himself to his knees, Kirk pulled the dirty, trembling bundle towards him and roughly tore back the hood, then gazed open-mouthed at the figure before him. Filthy, with matted hair and tear-streaked cheeks, the terrified face of a female humanoid child stared back at him.

Recovering slightly from the shock, Jim Kirk loosened his grip a little on the child's robe, and sat back on his heels. "Are you all right?" he asked. "Did I hurt you?"

The child flinched at the sound of his voice and cowered into the folds of her robe, averting her face. Kirk groped for, found, and flipped open his communicator.

"Bones, any sign of life where you are?"

"None, Jim. Did you catch your prize?"

Kirk eyed the pitiful specimen before him. "Yes. It's a child, Bones - a little girl. She's too scared to answer any questions."

"A child? Is she okay?"

"Apart from being frightened out of her wits. She's thin and filthy, but she ran a pretty good race."

"Where are you? I'll come to you."

"No, stay where you are, we'll come to you. Kirk out."

He got to his feet and gently helped the child to hers. She flinched every time he touched her, and Kirk felt like some kind of monster. He was just about to call Spock on the Enterprise, when round a corner came a small group of people, ragged and dirty like the child, but carrying a variety of makeshift clubs and other equally crude weapons. The child wriggled and fought Kirk's grasp.

"I think it's time we got out of here," he informed her, picking her up, tucking her under one arm, and running down the alleyway to the main street.

"McCoy. Chekov!" he shouted as the two familiar figures came within hailing distance. "Get Scotty to beam us out of here!"

The mob was getting closer, and Kirk was running out of breath and losing ground. The child, so thin, seemed to weigh a ton. He reached his companions with their pursuers at his heels, and immediately felt the shimmer of the transporter beam close around him. The mob dropped their weapons and screamed, partly in frustration at losing their quarry and partly out of fear, but the landing party had vanished.

McCoy watched the indicators on the instrument panel above the examination couch on which lay the slight body of the Pandosian child. She had been unconscious upon the landing party's return to the Enterprise, and the doctor had rushed her to sickbay for a full assessment of her physical condition, so shallow was her breathing, so pale her skin colour. He was surprised to learn that despite being so thin and undernourished there was nothing seriously wrong with her - at least, nothing that a few good meals, some vitamins, and plenty of sleep would not put right.

The small figure stirred and her eyelids flew open to reveal large, frightened, startlingly blue eyes; when they registered McCoy's presence the child sat bolt upright, breathing quickly, and the doctor watched as the heart indicator rose alarmingly. Terrified, the child hugged her knees to her chest, and began to tremble violently.

"Hey, that's okay," McCoy assured her. "I'm not going to hurt you."

The child's head whipped round at the sound of his voice, but he could not tell whether it was because she understood what he was saying to her, or because she was frightened of him.

"Can you talk?" McCoy asked, sitting on the edge of the examination couch. Nurse Christine Chapel had endeavoured to rid the girl's face of the worst of the grime while she was asleep, but most of it remained, giving her a waif-like appearance. "What's your name?" McCoy tried again, but the child did not answer - or could not.

He was about to give in when Jim Kirk entered sickbay. He had just returned from his second visit to Pandos, leaving Spock and a Security team on the planet to tie up the loose ends for his report to Starfleet. On his entrance the child moved closer to McCoy - at least she had stopped regarding him as an enemy.

"How is she, Bones?" Kirk smiled at the child's grave expression, but received nothing in return.

"Well, I wouldn't say she's in A1 condition. She's undernourished, of course, which is only to be expected under the circumstances. She has plenty of old bruises, and some new ones, but she's a tough little character and she'll make it. There's one other thing; she can't or won't talk - it's probably a temporary loss of speech due to the traumatic experiences she's gone through. First priority, though, is a bath, then we can see what we're dealing with."

McCoy was just about to summon Nurse Chapel to deal with the matter in hand when he was interrupted by the buzzing of the wall intercom. The girl watched from beneath her lashes as Kirk crossed to answer it.

"Kirk here."

"Captain Kirk." It was the voice of Communications Officer Uhura. "Mr. Spock has just beamed up from the planet's surface."

"Ask him to join me in sickbay, Uhura. Kirk out."

Dr. McCoy noticed that when the captain had spoken his name into the intercom the child's body had stiffened as if in recognition, and she was now gazing wonderingly at him. There was so much mystery surrounding her that it was a pity they could not get her to respond to their questioning. To know her name at least would be something. Did the name Kirk somehow have some significance for her? And if so, why?

At that moment Spock entered and placed his tricorder on a nearby table. The child gasped aloud at the sight of him, and to Kirk and McCoy's astonishment she kicked back the bedcover, scrambled down from the couch, and approached the Vulcan confidently and deliberately. She stopped within a few feet of him, and Spock regarded her curiously, one eyebrow slightly raised questioningly. Slowly, and with a dignity that deeply touched the few present, the small, dirty waif lifted her right hand in the Vulcan salute.

Kirk had to admire Spock's restraint, though the First Officer's face registered more shock than the Captain could remember.

Seemingly rather dazed, Spock returned the salute, and for the first time since coming aboard the child looked almost happy. Here,

evidently, was someone she felt at home with. Why the Vulcan, though, and how had she known the formal Vulcan mode of greeting? That was another mystery yet to be solved.

Intrigued, Spock knelt before the child so that his face was level with hers. Her eyes never left him, and taking a step closer to him she raised her hand again and caressed the side of his face from temple to jaw with the index and second fingers. Spock returned the gesture solemnly, then gently scooped the child into his arms, got to his feet, and carried her back to the examination couch where Nurse Chapel was waiting to bathe her. She seemed very reluctant to leave Spock and clung to his hand, gazing imploringly at him.

"Go with Nurse Chapel," he said kindly, a tone of voice Spock hadn't known he possessed. "I will be here when you return," and the child obediently trotted after the startled nurse, casting a backward glance at Spock as she left.

The Vulcan had not spoken in his own language but in Standard, the recognised language of the Federation, and with Pandos not being a member it was highly unlikely that the child was Pandosian - at least, that was the conclusion McCoy was fast coming to. He folded his arms.

"Spock, why is it that you're always such a hit with the ladies?"

Spock ignored the remark. "Fascinating," he said. "That embrace is very private, and only known among Vulcan families. The child is clearly Human, and yet is familiar with Vulcan customs. Most intriguing."

"Another thing, Jim," McCoy chipped in. "When you mentioned the name Kirk, she kind of started, as if she recognised it."

For a moment all three officers were silent, each formulating his own thoughts on their silent and enigmatic guest.

"Spock," Kirk said, "any theories on who she is, and how she knew that Vulcan embrace you mentioned?"

Spock shrugged. "I can only surmise, Captain, that she has had close contact with Vulcans in the past. As to how or why, I have not yet determined, and cannot do so until I question her. Most fascinating!"

"Yeah, so you said," McCoy drawled, "but it's no good asking her any questions, Spock - she either can't or won't talk. My guess is, she's suffering from some kind of shock, and could take any amount of time to come out of it."

"I wonder what happened to her parents?" Kirk mused.

"Probably dead, Captain," Spock replied. "There are not many of Pandos' inhabitants actually left alive, so bad has been the carnage and subsequent looting and starvation. The child is extremely fortunate to have survived."

"I've got to find out who she is, and what's been happening down there."

"I was about to suggest, Captain, that I attempt to mind-meld with her. She could then answer your questions through me. I make

this suggestion because she seemed curiously pleased to see me, and I should also like to know what part Vulcans have played in her history."

"Couldn't that be dangerous?" McCoy intervened. "Adult Humans find the Vulcan mind-meld an uncomfortable experience at the best of times, so how will it affect a ten-year-old emotionally damaged child?"

"Doctor," Spock said patiently, "should the child show signs of distress I will of course discontinue probing her thoughts. I was merely offering a solution to all the questions to which you require answers."

"Gentlemen," Kirk cut in as Spock rather huffily sat on the edge of the examination couch, arms folded, "we won't learn anything by arguing. On the whole, Spock's suggestion sounds quite reasonable."

"It is the most logical, Captain," Spock said without a hint of arrogance, though to many who did not know the Vulcan the statement would have sounded grossly immodest.

"Well, I don't like it," McCoy retorted. "I've got to go along with it because I've been overruled - but be damned careful, Spock, or you'll have me to answer to." And with that the doctor stumped away to fetch the child from Christine Chapel's ministrations.

"Bones thinks he's the only one qualified to interfere with people's minds." Kirk tried to diffuse the situation.

"I have only ever attempted the mind-meld where absolutely necessary, Captain," Spock said stiffly.

"I know, Spock. It's just that she's so young. Could it be harmful in any way?"

"Her mind can only reject the fusion of our thoughts. I have never attempted to meld with a Human child before, but if you want answers to your questions, Jim, then you must let me try."

"Okay, Spock." Kirk yielded to the inevitable. "You're the expert."

"Thank you, Captain."

Just at that moment McCoy, nurse and charge appeared. Kirk and Spock could hardly believe the change in the child. Christine Chapel's patience with a comb and the addition of a hot bath and clean clothing had transformed the waif into a normal looking little girl. Her hair, which Kirk had assumed to be a dark brown colour, was in fact shot through with auburn highlights, which glittered and shone with Chapel's efforts.

Letting go of the nurse's hand, which she had been clutching rather reluctantly, the child moved to stand beside Spock, and Kirk noted that had it not been for her obvious Human appearance, in stance and expression she could have been mistaken for Spock's daughter, for the stance was very Vulcan - erect and expressionless as she stared unblinkingly at the trio in front of her.

"May I proceed, Captain?" Spock broke the uneasy silence.

Kirk nodded, and the Vulcan touched the girl gently on the

shoulder. She turned to him enquiringly, one eyebrow slightly raised, a gesture Kirk had seen Spock use a thousand times. An uneasy feeling stirred in the pit of his stomach, though he did not know why; perhaps it was the anticipation of the event about to take place, or perhaps it was fear of the unknown. Certain aspects of Spock's Vulcan heritage had the habit of making Kirk feel decidedly uncomfortable, and being able to probe another's thoughts simply by placing his fingers against that person's temple was one of them. He dragged his attention back to Spock and the child.

"I should like to share your thoughts," the Vulcan said. "Will you permit me to do this?"

For a second the child hesitated, frowning slightly, then seemingly making up her mind she clambered up onto one of the examination couches and reaching out to Spock, touched his temple with her small fingers, indicating that she understood what he asked. She inclined her head in an almost imperceptible movement, granting his request.

Spock nodded, and turning to Kirk said, "I am ready. Once we are in mind-lock, please direct your questions to me. I shall do my best to obtain the answers you require."

Spock sat on the couch next to the kneeling child, and for a fleeting instant felt total confusion at the absolute trust he saw shining in the blue eyes. Startled by the drifting of his own thoughts, Spock took a couple of deep breaths to regain his concentration, then placed his fingers to the child's temple.

"We are one," he intoned, "absolute and together, touching and touched."

For what seemed like an age there was silence as Spock's lips moved wordlessly, then his face took on the innocence and naivety of a child, and Kirk guessed that the thought merging was complete. The girl's face, in contrast, was blank, her very being it seemed was now part of Spock.

Kirk approached the couch and fired his first question. "What is your name?"

Spock frowned, and his throat worked as if remembering was an effort. When he spoke the voice was quiet, hesitant, and the words were stilted, as though the owner of the voice had not used it for a long time. Kirk had to lean forward to catch the answer.

"My name? My... my name... is... is Alex."

"Where are your parents, Alex?"

"I... I have... no parents."

Kirk tried again. "Were you born on Pandos? Are you a Pandosian?"

"Pandosian? No... I was born on... on Vulcan."

"Vulcan! But you are Human."

"My parents were... Human."

"What happened to them?"

"NO! Please... I cannot..." Spock's voice broke, and his face began to crumple. It took him a few moments to pull himself together.

Kirk repeated the question. "What happened to your parents, Alex?"

Spock shook his head. "My mother died on Vulcan, shortly after I was born. Her name was Maura." His speech was becoming more fluid now, as if a door to Alex's memory had been opened.

"Maura?" A warning bell sounded in Kirk's head. "Maura?" he repeated. "What were your parents doing on Vulcan?"

"They were... anthropologists, engaged in research."

Kirk moved closer; he could have touched the child had he so wished. "And your father's name?"

"William Alexander Kirk. I am named for him; my grandfather was an admirer of Alexander the Great." The voice broke, and the throat worked again. "He was killed by the Militia on Pandos. He died so that I might live..."

"Bill!" Kirk gasped. "Bill and Maura's daughter!"

"Jim?" It was McCoy's puzzled voice.

Kirk whirled round to face him. "William Kirk was my first cousin. He married a scientist called Maura Jefferson, and they went off galloping around the cosmos gathering as much information as they could about the evolution of the universe. Last I heard, they were on Delta IV. I lost track of them afterwards - they must have gone to Vulcan."

McCoy frowned. "I thought you only studied on Vulcan with the recommendation of the Federation Council."

Kirk shrugged. "Bill may have made an application, though in his case I doubt whether it would have been granted. He must have pleaded a good case to the Vulcan High Council." And leaving McCoy no wiser to the situation, he turned back to Spock, who was calm and composed once more.

"How long did you stay on Vulcan, and who took care of you?"

"I lived on Vulcan for seven years, and was raised by Sendak and T'Nea as their own daughter. My father was able to do extensive research into the Vulcans as a warrior race, and I was given the same benefits as other Vulcan children. Are you taking me home now? I... want so much... to go... home..." The child began to sway with exhaustion.

"Jim, I think that's enough," McCoy cut in sharply.

Kirk reached out and gently shook Spock by the arm. "Spock? Spock!"

Slowly the glazed look left Spock's face as he fought to break his bond with Alex. Free from the strain of thought transference, the child toppled sideways into his arms.

Kirk briefly touched the girl's hair. "Bill's daughter," he

whispered, then, "Spock, are you all right?"

"A little fatigued, Captain, but none the worse for the experience." He gently touched Alex's face. "Human born, Vulcan bred," he muttered, and his face was full of compassion for the child torn between two worlds, just as he had been - as he was.

McCoy took the child from him and laid the limp body back on the couch, then swiftly examined her. "She's asleep," he announced, "and I'm going to see she stays that way for at least twelve hours. Nurse Chapel, get me a sedative hypo."

When he had given Jim Kirk's new-found relation the shot, he herded both the Captain and Spock into the corridor. "I'm sure you've both got work to do on the bridge," he said pointedly as the door hissed shut in their faces.

"He's right, Spock. Come on - I want that report on your Pandosian findings." And Kirk headed for a nearby turbolift.

"Yes, Captain," Spock answered in a preoccupied fashion. His thoughts were still in sickbay with the child who had touched his Human half and placed her trust in him so completely.

Once Jim Kirk had got over the initial shock of finding out who Alex was, he had the problem of what he was going to do with her - a Starship was no place for a child. The only solution was to head for the nearest Starbase and leave her there. The idea did not particularly appeal to him, but he had no choice; the poor kid had had enough of a raw deal already, and the thought of abandoning her among strangers did not make him feel all that great.

In the meantime Alex, to the amusement of the crew, was quite content to follow Spock around whenever she could. Thinking that the Vulcan would find the child's attentions irritating, Kirk had ordered Christine Chapel to keep her occupied with trivial tasks in sickbay, but Spock had surprised him by requesting that Alex be left alone to go her own way with few restrictions. He wanted to assess her level of intelligence, he wanted to know more about her life on Vulcan, and more than anything he wanted her to talk to him. Spock was sure that McCoy's original diagnosis about Alex's lack of speech was not correct. She seemed to be testing each of them, deciding whom she could and could not trust. Kirk had tried to coax her into saying something - anything - about Bill, but without success. Spock could feel the Captain's discomfort under the scrutiny of those clear ocean-blue eyes. Kirk felt awkward with children at the best of times, and Alex sensed it. She had shown no desire to explore her relationship as far as James Kirk was concerned, but then, why should she? Alex had never known her Kirk relatives.

McCoy had already put her through some IQ and psychology tests, and the results had shown that Alex possessed a much higher level of intelligence than a child brought up in a totally Human environment. Spock himself had endeavoured to introduce her to his favourite form of recreation, three dimensional chess, and had been inwardly surprised at how quickly she picked up the rudiments of the game, although outwardly of course he suppressed his enthusiasm that he may have found someone - apart from the Captain - who might actually beat him at his own game.

He had dismissed Kirk's notion of the child being a nuisance because he did not see her as such. Alex was seldom if at all allowed on the bridge, so Spock only saw her in his off-duty hours,

and while he meditated or practised on his Vulcan harp in his quarters, Alex would sit quietly and unobtrusively out of sight. Although Spock was aware of her presence, she did not irritate him. On the contrary, unknowingly he was drawing as much comfort from her presence as she was from his. Had Alex but known it, she was the only person on the Enterprise, other than the Captain, who had spent any great length of time in the First Officer's quarters.

The ship was still in Pandos' orbit, awaiting further orders from Starfleet, so with extra time on his hands Spock set about resolving the mystery surrounding this child once and for all. He had learned a little about her during the merging of their thoughts, but the information had only succeeded in arousing his curiosity, and Spock wanted to know more.

He doubted that the Vulcans had adopted Alex out of kindness or compassion - that suggested emotion. It was more likely that the chance to observe a Human pregnancy - so very different after all from the Vulcan gestation period - at close quarters would have been a great source of interest; and even further, the exposure of a Human child to the Vulcan way of life, its disciplines and mysticisms, would have been fascinating for the scientists to observe.

Had Alex proved or disproved their theories that a child from a completely different culture could, with training, adopt the Vulcan way of life? Spock could not be sure. Outwardly Alex seemed composed and as reserved as he, but that was perhaps the result of spending so much time with him. She had, after all, been away from Vulcan for some time, and had lived amongst others, so perhaps the Vulcan training had been partially discarded; but then Spock himself had lived among Humans for the greater part of his life, and his Vulcan ways were still predominant.

Emotionless Alex might seem, but she could not deny her Human heritage - the blood ties were too strong. Sometimes in Spock too his Human blood burned, but he had learned to master it, had chosen the Vulcan way. Alex, as yet, had that choice to make.

Spock studied her behaviour patterns closely. Alex was a vegetarian, and refused meat of any kind; and she had the habit of withdrawing deep within herself when asked about her past. Once or twice the Vulcan had felt the tentative telepathic probing of his thoughts, and wondered whether Alex possessed the ability to mind-meld. Spock positively blazed with curiosity.

Most of his questions were answered one afternoon on the observation deck where Spock had taken Alex for a last view of Pandos, the planet which for the last few months had been her living hell. He knew of Kirk's dilemma, and he also knew that once all the data they had collected was processed the Enterprise would warp out of orbit. Once back on normal duties, Spock would not be able to spend so much time with the child.

Alex now wore the tunic and pants of a cadet, altered to fit her, and the long dark hair had been neatly and deftly braided by the efficient Nurse Chapel. She gazed solemnly at the greenish-yellow sphere of Pandos, then turned away as if dismissing what she saw, divorcing herself from the view, and sat on a chair. She guessed that Spock had brought her here for a reason, and that reason had to be a logical one - no Vulcan even acted illogically except at the time of pon farr. Alex wondered whether Spock had ever experienced it, or whether his Human half rendered him immune. She thought too of her sister T'Chan, who would soon be summoned to koon-ut

kal-if-fee; at least that was something she would never experience.

Noticing the far-away look in Alex's blue eyes, Spock sat on a chair facing her and touched her arm to gain her attention.

"Is Alex your full and proper name?"

No answer. Just that steady gaze and faintly quizzical look. Spock feigned deep thought.

"Perhaps your name is not really Alex at all. Perhaps you are, as Humans put it, leading me up the garden path."

A frown now, and a slightly indignant look. Spock rose to his feet.

"Perhaps you are a charlatan - an impostor. Perhaps you stole another's identity."

A flashing of eyes and clenching of fists told him that his ruse was working. The gestures also said that Alex did not like being called a liar, and yet despite the slight emotional display she was still in strict control. Spock had to admire her, and her Vulcan teachers. She was much more controlled than he had been at that age.

"Well, Alex Kirk, are you an impostor or not? If you are, the Captain is well within his rights to confine you to quarters until we find out exactly who you are." Spock faced her, arms folded.

"Ai'Naah!"

That one Vulcan word, a cry to be left alone, reverberated around the observation deck until it faded, to be engulfed by the hum of the Enterprise's impulse drive engines. Alex too was now on her feet, dark braid swinging, anger outlined in every feature, even in her posture, and in cold, precise, accentless Vulcan she said,

"Why do you persist in goading me, Mr. Spock? You know I am incapable of telling an untruth."

Spock allowed himself a slight smile of triumph, and Alex immediately knew he had done it to get a reaction from her. She really had to admire his cunning, and smiled back stiffly.

"It is a relief to hear your voice," Spock said. "If I had not... er... baited you, how long would it have taken you to speak?"

Alex turned to look through the observation window and gestured to the planet. "Down there my silence and my stealth kept me alive, and even though your Captain... my cousin... saved my life, I still could not be sure you did not mean me harm. I have been studying you all intently, and have learned which of you I can trust, and those I cannot." Alex was as fluent in Standard as she was in Vulcan.

"And?" Spock queried.

"The good Doctor McCoy has tried hard to be my friend; this I value. Nurse Chapel has tended to my needs, and I am grateful. You have shown me patience and understanding - a familiar face among strangers. I will never forget the first sight of you. I knew at once I could trust you, and that you would be the intellectual stimulant which I crave. When I learned that you are half Human, I was convinced that I had found someone who would be tolerant of my

somewhat unusual heritage."

For a moment Spock was silent. He had always been the odd man out among the Enterprise crew, just because of a few physical differences, but to this child those differences meant nothing. He had actually been a welcome sight to her, and for this innocent truth Spock would be forever grateful.

He bit his lip, feeling strangely moved, hoping that wherever Alex's destiny lay she would never experience prejudice towards others different in appearance to herself, as Humans often did; he also hoped that she would remember the Vulcan teaching of Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combination. For the moment Spock was glad that Alex had not observed his own display of emotion; she still had her back to him.

"And the Captain?" he asked slowly.

Alex swung round to face him. "I do not trust him an inch. I am an encumbrance to him. His only desire is to be rid of me as soon as possible."

Spock decided to avoid that delicate subject, and taking the child by the arm drew her to sit down beside him. "Tell me about your life on Vulcan."

"I should imagine it was very much like yours when you were a child."

"Not quite. You had a foster sister, a companion, someone to share things with."

"Yes, T'Chan. In Earth terms, a little older than I."

"I had only a pet, a sehlat I called I-Chaya." Spock recalled it was the only thing that had shown him loyalty and love on that totally logical planet.

Alex, sensing his loneliness, slipped an arm shyly through his. "Sometimes even total logic seems illogical. It is not everything. Everyone needs friendship... and love."

Spock nodded agreement. "Perhaps you are right. Logic is *not* everything, but it is the way my...our people have chosen to live. The way I have chosen to live." This last was said on a sigh.

"Spock, when one finds a friend, one is no longer lonely."

Spock could not argue with the logic in that statement, and silently cursed the child's shrewdness in assessing the one thing he had craved, and had found with Kirk - a sense of belonging. He frowned.

"To a Vulcan, friendship is an emotion. It is not logical."

"Ah, but Spock, we both have Human blood - neither of us is totally Vulcan. You are but by one half, and I am by citizenship only. We are both misfits, and therefore it is logical that we should share our common bond."

Spock looked down at the small face. "I congratulate you on the methodical order of your mind, Alex Kirk."

"Alexandra Jefferson Kirk, actually," she corrected. "As you have surmised, I am no impostor. Mr. Spock, will you consider being my friend, for if you do not need one, I certainly do?"

The Vulcan felt strangely proud at this request. "Miss Kirk, I shall be honoured to be your friend as long as you consent to be mine also."

Alex nodded, glad not to have given offence. Spock might prove a worthy ally against Jim Kirk when the time came.

The Enterprise was still in Pandos' orbit when Captain Kirk called McCoy and Spock to a meeting in the briefing room. Alex had been suitably detained by Christine Chapel, as Kirk did not want her to overhear them discussing her future until everything had been decided and he could talk to her himself.

"Gentlemen. I need your advice." Kirk sat back in his chair, awaiting comments.

McCoy leaned forward and rested his arms on the table. "You mentioned leaving Alex on a Starbase, Jim."

Kirk remained silent.

"Who's going to take care of her? Are you just going to forget about her?"

"Of course not, Bones," Kirk cut in sharply, "but there's no other option. Starbase 12 has excellent educational facilities."

"So you're thinking in terms of a residential school."

"I suppose you could say that, yes."

"And she would be out of your hair!" McCoy concluded.

Kirk glared at the doctor. It was true that he had found Alex's presence something of an encumbrance, though he had not admitted it to himself until now. He felt guilty because he felt no affection towards this alien child - for that was what she was to him - and had been very grateful to Spock for taking her off his hands. The two were so alike, though sometimes Alex seemed even more Vulcan than Spock. He now turned to the First Officer, who had been quietly listening to the exchange with McCoy a troubled look on his normally expressionless face.

"Spock?" Kirk prompted.

"With respect, Jim," Spock said, "I have examined your problem from all angles, and I do not agree with your plan of leaving Alex on Starbase 12. It is not the best solution for her..." The Vulcan paused, as if trying to choose his words carefully.

"Go on, Spock," Kirk urged.

"I believe," he continued, "that to return her to Vulcan would be the logical answer, as it is the one place she connects with the word 'home'. I am convinced that the family of Sendak would be quite prepared to have her amongst them once more."

Kirk rose to pace the room. "I see your point, but since I am now her legal guardian I'd like her to be brought among her own kind. She is, after all, Human, and all this emotional repression can't be healthy. I'm sorry, Spock - no offence meant."

"None taken, Captain, but you did ask for my opinion, and I believe I gave it to the best of my abilities, even if it was not the one you wished to hear."

"Quite. It seems that the final decision rests with me." *As it always does*, Kirk thought. *I am not only responsible for myself and my actions, but for this ship and the 430-odd people aboard her.* Sometimes he wished that being a Starship Captain was not such a bind, but he would have it no other way. Starfleet was his life, and responsibility and decisions were just part of the job.

"No, I've decided," he announced. "We'll set course for Starbase 12."

During the heated debate the soft hiss of an opening door had gone unnoticed, and the Captain had automatically turned towards the exit on his last statement. His words trailed off as he caught sight of Alex standing staring at him with hostile, accusing eyes.

Spock and McCoy, catching Kirk's expression, followed his gaze, and the Vulcan raised an eyebrow when he saw the child, fists clenched, eyes burning, looking at Kirk with something akin to deep disapproval on her face. Abruptly she turned on her heel and disappeared down the corridor. Spock made as if to follow her, but Kirk motioned him to remain where he was.

"No, let me, Spock. Let me try and explain to her." And with that Kirk followed the furious little figure.

McCoy glanced at Spock. "You know something, Spock?"

"Doctor?" Spock queried absently.

"For once I agree with you, though I hate myself for saying it. Vulcan's the best place for Alex - it's clear she has happy memories of the place. It's a pity we can't make Jim see that."

Spock clasped his hands behind his back. "He is suffering from guilt, Doctor, and besides, Alex is quite stubborn, and may yet change the Captain's mind."

"Stubbornness is a Human trait, Spock."

"It is also a Vulcan one, Doctor." And with that Spock strode off down the corridor, leaving McCoy alone with his thoughts.

"Everyone's trying to be an amateur psychologist round here," he muttered. "Are they figuring on putting me out of business?"

But there was no-one to answer him.

Alex's reaction to Kirk's explanation had only been what he'd expected - accusing, hostile silence. He'd tracked her down to the quarters she shared with Christine Chapel, and for one solid hour he had tried to make her understand that what he was doing was for her own good. Alex had merely turned her face to the wall, shutting out

the sound of his voice, the image of his face.

Kirk had lost patience then, and his temper. The child's cold composure irritated him so much that he itched to spank her. He felt that a good old-fashioned dose of muscular Christianity would do her far more good than Spock and McCoy's soft-soaping.

Finally, goaded beyond endurance, he roared, "You're confined to quarters!" and stormed out.

He marched to the bridge, ordered Sulu to warp out of Pandos' orbit and set course for Starbase 12. His orders were carried out quickly and efficiently; every man and woman on the bridge made sure they were on their toes when the Captain was in this mood.

Alex had been confined to quarters for 24 hours when Chapel first reported that she refused to eat, and when McCoy mentioned it to Kirk, his only reply was, "Let her go without."

No ten-year-old kid was going to manipulate him.

As for Spock, he found himself missing Alex's presence greatly. For perhaps the first time in his life he disagreed with a decision made by his commanding officer, but there was nothing he could do or say to change Jim Kirk's mind. When he heard that Alex was refusing to eat he knew that a battle of wills was taking place, and Spock was not altogether sure who would win. The child was not fully fit enough to survive without nourishment, and Kirk was determined not to let her sway his decision to leave her on Starbase 12, so at the moment it was stalemate.

Though Spock would never admit it he had become fondly attached to Alex. The romantic side of his nature had recognised a lot of himself as a child in her - the loneliness and confusion of being caught between two cultures, aching to be comforted, to find a sense of belonging, and yet at the same time striving to live up to his Vulcan upbringing.

On the second day of Alex's fast Spock made his way to Nurse Chapel's quarters, where Alex lay asleep on the small cot which had been placed there for her. The Vulcan noticed that she already seemed thinner, and that her skin had a transparent look about it.

As if sensing his presence Alex's eyes fluttered open, focused on him for a moment, then she turned her face away from him and gave a small sigh.

Spock sat carefully on the edge of the cot. "The Captain is only doing what he thinks is right," he said gently. "His decision proves that he has your best interests at heart. In short, he cares about what happens to you."

Alex kept her face averted. So, Spock had come to plead Jim Kirk's case. She should have known that the Vulcan's loyalty to his Captain would be stronger than his proffered friendship to her.

The only emotion Alex had felt for a long time was fear, but now she was being assaulted by a thousand conflicting emotions. Adoration and childish love for this Vulcan; distrust of Kirk - something that had been unconsciously planted by her father whenever he had spoken of his family, which was a rare event; and a deep

respect for Leonard McCoy. But the fear was still there, the fear of being left alone again. Her family was on Vulcan, and she longed to return there, to the arid days and long, cold desert nights.

Spock, seeing her distress, touched her arm, and Alex turned to face him. He knew this child needed comfort, but had no idea how to go about it. He felt his presence alone was not enough, so he gently brushed away the tears that now fell unheeded down Alex's pale cheeks. Their wetness felt strange on his skin; though he had lived among Humans long enough to know that to weep indicated great sadness it was a luxury which had never been allowed him, nor which he permitted himself to give way to.

Spock touched Alex's wet face again, and the gesture seemed to release a spring within her. She threw her arms around the Vulcan's neck while her small body shook with hard, racking sobs.

Momentarily floored, Spock sat helplessly, then instinctively enfolded the child in his arms and began to rock back and forth, not speaking, just reassuring her with his touch.

After a while Alex pulled away and dragged the sleeve of her tunic roughly across her eyes as if despising her outburst of feeling. She composed her features and said, coldly but haltingly,

"Did... he... send you?"

Spock raised both eyebrows. He could feel the dampness of his tunic where Alex's tears had been absorbed by the material, and it gave him a curiously protective feeling. It was quite fascinating.

"If you are referring to the Captain, no, he did not."

"I don't want to be left alone again. I couldn't bear it. I want to go home."

"To Vulcan?"

Alex nodded, her eyes shining now. "It might seem illogical to say such a thing of Vulcan, but I was happy there. I learned so much, became conversant with their ways - I was accepted as one of them. Technically I am a Vulcan, I behave like a Vulcan - most of the time." She smiled ruefully. "I am no Outworlder. Tell me, Spock - is it logical to leave me on a planet where I know no-one, when I can go home to Vulcan and live among the people who raised me for the first seven years of my life?"

"Perhaps the Captain feels it would be more beneficial for you to live among your own kind, learn Human ways."

Alex slipped her hand into Spock's. It was a totally Human action, but a gesture full of trust, and again he felt curiously moved. This child had an annoying habit of allowing him to let loose his Human side.

"Humans are complicated beings, I know." Alex smiled, then asked, "Is my happiness important to James Kirk, Spock?"

Spock did not hesitate. "Of course."

"Then it would make me happy to return to Vulcan."

Spock felt that somehow Alex was depending on him to make

everything all right for her.

"I shall endeavour to explain to the Captain why you wish to return, though he may feel..." Spock searched for the right word "...hurt, and not totally comprehend your reason."

"I would not willingly offend your friend the Captain, Spock."

"I hope the Captain will be persuaded to be inclined your way." He rose from the cot, and made as if to leave.

"Thank you, Mr. Spock." Alex's face was illuminated by a brilliant smile, which when it met her eyes, threatened to reach out and engulf Spock in its iridescent glow. She positively shone with love and gratitude - it was written all over her face. Then suddenly the smile faded and the Vulcan veneer slid into place.

Slightly shocked, Spock stepped into the corridor. The openness of Alex's love for him had made him admit to himself the affection he felt for her in return, but he felt that Alex's Jekyll and Hyde character was more than he could deal with. True, it was a child's love, and he had not felt repelled by it, or by his own admission. In a way, he felt honoured.

Kirk, however, sticking to his guns, refused to reach a compromise with Alex despite Spock's intervention.

Finally, on the fourth day of her fast, Leonard McCoy decided that it was time he had a quiet word with the Captain in order to make Jim see the agony he was putting both himself and Alex through. The doctor had moved the child to sickbay without much resistance so that the medical staff could keep an eye on her, though whenever possible Spock took over the vigil, as Alex had developed a fear of being left alone. Time and again she had been awakened by horrific nightmares of her experiences on Pandos, and McCoy was worried about her state of mind. Spock was the only one who could quieten her during her night terrors, and McCoy wondered how the Vulcan had received the Captain's permission to spend so much time in sickbay. Secretly he knew that Kirk felt guilty about his decision to abandon the child, and he wished that the two would take the time to get to know one another. It was not Alex's Vulcan upbringing that was the bone of contention between them, McCoy felt sure of that; no, something had happened between Jim Kirk and his cousin, Alex's father, in the past, and the doctor wished he knew what it was.

He cornered Kirk in his quarters after trying and failing to persuade Alex to take some liquid nourishment. Kirk glanced up in astonishment as McCoy barged in unannounced - the doctor was someone who normally respected another's privacy.

"Jim, this crazy battle of wills has got to stop."

Kirk closed his eyes and wearily leaned back in his chair. He had already had one tough interview with Spock, and did not think his patience could survive a similar grilling from McCoy, especially as the doctor's argument would be from a purely emotional point of view, whereas Spock's was faultlessly logical.

Kirk had his doubts about the Vulcan as far as the child was concerned. Her presence on board the Enterprise had undoubtedly brought out paternal feelings in Spock, even if he did not realise it

- paternal feelings that Kirk himself wished he could feel for his dead cousin's daughter. Spock had said something about loneliness and a sense of belonging. Kirk thought it strange that his First Officer should fight the cause for Alex when he himself had never felt a sense of belonging on Vulcan. The only place Spock really felt at home was in Starfleet.

Kirk now turned to the doctor. It was not so easy to define his own feelings towards Alex. He felt pity and sympathy, but he had to admit that was about all. He felt ashamed that he could experience no affection for a child who was, after all, part of his blood, but then she was a stranger to him.

What would Bill have wanted? For his daughter to be happy and secure, of that much Kirk was sure, but as a Starship Captain security and a permanent home were things he could not offer her.

He turned over Spock's suggestion in his mind, and once again it seemed that his trustworthy First Officer had come up with the only logical solution to Kirk's problem. On Vulcan were people with whom Alex was familiar, whereas on Starbase 12 she would be among strangers, and alone.

Kirk himself knew intense loneliness at times; it was the price he paid for being a leader of men. In later years, perhaps, he and this extraordinary child would grow to know and like one another. He would never willingly inflict suffering on her, so why make her resent him for the rest of her life, when to grant her request would give her all the security she needed, and would partly rid Kirk himself of his sense of guilt?

"Jim?" McCoy was becoming impatient. "About Alex's not eating - I may have to hook up an IV."

"It's okay, Bones, I'm sure that won't be necessary. I was just on my way to sickbay to tell Alex that we're on course for Vulcan, and... that I was wrong."

"Thank heaven for small mercies!" McCoy ejaculated.

Kirk pressed the intercom button. "Kirk to bridge."

"Bridge here." It was Sulu's voice.

"Helm, alter course for Vulcan. Kirk out."

He did not feel like explaining his actions at the moment, but could imagine the knowing looks and smiles on the bridge on hearing his instructions. For a moment the old irritation returned.

"Thanks, Jim." McCoy's anxious features had relaxed into a warm smile. "Are you going to accompany me to sickbay?"

Kirk forced a smile. "Yes, why not?" He should be feeling happy that his problem would soon be virtually non-existent, but it was relief mixed with guilt.

The Enterprise was approximately two hours from Vulcan. Alex and Spock sat in the officers' recreation lounge playing 3-D chess. On the surface the child was calm and composed, but inside she was consumed by excitement, a fact that Spock had not failed to sense.

"Checkmate." Spock sat back from the table and folded his arms.

Alex forced herself to concentrate. "The best man won," she shrugged, and began to reset the pieces.

"Normally, I would agree with you," there was the slightest hint of teasing in the Vulcan's voice, "but I conclude that this time your mind was not on the game."

Alex leaned her elbows on the table and cupped her chin in her hands, the blue eyes discreetly veiling whatever she was feeling deep inside. She surveyed Spock steadily.

"You are right in surmising that I am in no mood to concentrate." She got up from the table and stood in front of Spock. "Do you still agree that Vulcan is the best place for me? At times I feel guilty because my sense of loyalty tells me I should have complied with the Captain's... with Jim's wishes."

Spock was thoughtful for a moment. "As you grow up, Alex, you will find that you are the controller of your own destiny. You are unique, and though you will find that in some situations you will have to conform to the wishes of others, nine times out of ten the decision will be yours and yours alone."

Alex placed a small hand on Spock's arm. "You are so wise," she said softly, "but child though I may be, I am shrewd enough to know that the Captain will be glad to get rid of me."

If Spock had been wholly Human he would have blushed, for he knew that deep down Alex was right. "You do not know that," he chided gently.

"Oh yes I do, and so do you, though you're far too loyal to Jim Kirk to admit it."

Spock did not comment. This Vulcan-bred Human child had the uncanny knack of being able to see right through him. The Vulcan/Human mixture was quite fascinating, as Alex's Human qualities did not seem to hinder her Vulcan conditioning in any way. He sincerely hoped that she would find the sense of belonging she craved - the one thing he was still searching for.

Uhura's voice broke into his reverie. "Mr. Spock, we are in Vulcan hailing frequency."

"I will be up on the bridge directly."

"Very good, sir."

Spock looked at Alex, who nodded, eyes shining now, and the normally unflappable First Officer felt the pang of loss as he realised he might not see her again for a very long time - perhaps never. He put his hands behind his back and adopted his best Vulcan expression.

"Shall we go?"

Alex nodded again, her face likewise an expressionless mask, understanding Spock's pain and concealing her own to minimise his.

On the bridge Kirk was speaking to Vulcan Space Central, asking for and receiving permission to execute a standard orbital approach. The child stood quietly beside Spock as the Vulcan voice asked,

"Is the Terran child present?"

Spock had to nudge the 'Terran child's' arm.

"I am," she replied somewhat shakily.

The Vulcan voice, which had been speaking Standard, now switched to its own language. "Earth child of Sendak, Vulcan welcomes you."

Alex took a step forward and clasped the back of the command chair, then replied in a clear voice, "Tell Sendak that I am honoured to be allowed back into the midst of his family."

The Vulcan Space Controller seemed satisfied with her reply, and Sulu's status report broke the long silence that followed.

"We will be approaching Vulcan in exactly fifty five minutes, sir."

"Thank you, Helm."

Kirk, who had been standing by the communications console, now crossed over to where Alex was standing staring at the viewscreen, seemingly fascinated by the infinity of space.

"How would you like to help manoeuvre the Enterprise into orbit?"

Alex looked at the stranger whose blood she shared, and realised that this was his way of offering to make the best of things. Gingerly she sat in the Captain's chair and returned her gaze to the viewscreen and the ever-changing star patterns - and suddenly she knew where her future lay.

Kirk put a hand on her shoulder. "It wouldn't surprise me if you turn out to be the best student at the Vulcan Science Academy."

Alex stared at Kirk's smiling face absently. "The Vulcan Science Academy? Oh, I won't be going there."

"You won't?" Kirk was suddenly assailed by a sense of déjà-vu.

Alex turned in her seat and exchanged a glance with Spock, who stood quietly at the library computer station. When she spoke again, Kirk felt that his troubles were just beginning.

"I'm going to be the best officer in Starfleet."

Spock raised an eyebrow and busied himself with computer readouts, for the moment avoiding eye contact with the Captain. He felt sure that at least James Kirk would guarantee Alex's entry into Starfleet Academy because he felt he owed it to her, but that would not be for a long time, if at all. For now he fervently hoped that Alex would, in the meantime, learn to forget her Pandosian nightmare, and despite everything always remember with gratitude the distant relative who had given her a second chance at life.

PATHWAYS -

A CALL TO SPOCK

Will this wandering serve a purpose?
 Will I see before I fall?
 Can the path stretch out before me
 before I fall?
 Can I call if I find problems?
 If I do will you come forth?
 Why do you send me forward all alone?

Susan Keighley



SPOCK - ONWARD BOUND

Having considered all avenues
 I now realise that my path
 lies with him.
 Once logic accepts this fact
 I am free - and in this freedom
 may enjoy those facets of life
 so dear to me, his smile, his words,
 in whole his nearness that brings
 light to an otherwise darkened path.

Susan Keighley



LEGEND

Is there any fact in that well-worn legend,
 that elegant ears led only to stone?
 Do those eyes contain no soul?
 And Spock, if I cried out for you,
 would you even hear me?
 And if I cried again would you come?
 Is 'alien' really double meaning for 'unreachable'?
 Is it I who's doomed to want alone?
 Or, Spock, when your eyes turn pale
 and softness in them grows -
 is that softness in my brain alone?
 Or is it that you're finally returning
 My growing care and need of you?

Susan Keighley

