

LOG ENTRIES

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A SETAG ZINE

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THE WORD MERCHANT by Helen McCarthy

The tall man walked alone through the streets of the city. He walked alone because that was his way, and he did not have any other. The rain fell, and slicked his hair and puddled in his eyebrows, clung on his clothes and slid away down the gutters. The light of the lamps glided blue over the wet hair and glanced in his eyes, and his eyes were remote on the surface and wild in the depths, like an ancient stoppered bottle filled with lightnings. The gilded girls of the streets watched him go by from rain-darkened doorways, but they did not approach him, for the silence he carried like armour made them uncertain and afraid.

Concepts were his soul and numbers his expression, which was why he walked in the night alone while the others stayed with red wine and gilded girls in the tavern. Numbers and concepts are not the language of everyday or companionship. He was aware of his aloneness, and something in him was occasionally troubled by it. Tonight, like a half-remembered nightmare tottering on the brink of wakefulness, the trouble could not quite be shaken off.

So, deep in his trouble, he was not aware of the other man until his body's long conditioning alerted nerves and brain and checked him on the verge of collision.

"I beg your pardon - I was not looking where I was going."

"You have arrived, I think."

"Arrived?"

Under the deep down-pulled hat brim a smile gleamed. He felt curiosity stir in him. The man replied,

"Your need determined your destination. It is I. It always happens so."

"Who are you?"

"I am - a merchant."

Flaring black brows contracted in distaste at thought of the gaudy girls that were the quarter's chief merchandise. The man shook his head as if he read the thought.

"They are more in demand than what I have to offer. Only a few even guess their need for it, only a few of the few have need enough to meet me."

"And what is this merchandise?"

"Words."

The syllable hung on the density of night for a second before the tall man replied,

"Words are free to all."

"Are they? I think they do not come freely to you."

The tall man bowed his head, then looked closer into the seller of words. He was midtall, thin, shabbily inconspicuous; your eyes would slide over him as over a trout in weedy shallows; but if you look again - see - the fragmentary sparkle of a magical creature in the thicket?

"That of which I speak," said the word merchant, "is not mere knowing of definition and derivation, but power over them and their usages. All men know that a flute is a notched reed, but how many have magic to make a notched reed sing?"

Spock looked at him, hard. The rain was dripping from the brim of his hat.

"They are birds that in their own forest make music all day long; but who can force them to make music in a cage? In the cage of your mind, a flock, a flight, is waiting, a phoenix with a tail of fire; I can sell you the power to send it singing

through the worlds at your desire, where-ever you wish it to go."

Spock thought of things unsaid, or said in bare words with no meaning other than that of the dictionary, and saw richness of giving he had never dared imagine.

"How much?" he said.

"You must tell me what for. I sell words for poetry, words for passion, words for power; words for true love and for

flattery, for command and for persuasion, to charm the old from the dread of death or soothe the fears of a young child's heart; stories and speeches, teaching and beseeching, music and magic; choose!"

"I would have words for kindness, for friendship, and the understanding humans have one for the other."

"So." The merchant's head tilted to one side. "That is a kind not greatly in demand, and hard to come by in such a place as this. It will not be cheap."

Spock gave him the sum he named, almost the whole of his shore-leave pay.

"It is cheap," he said, as a new awareness flooded him.

"That is enough for four hours. Use it well."

He was gone, but Spock did not look back for him. Spock was walking down a street sparkling and shining with rainwetness, as understanding went to his brain like raw liquor. The glowing girls did not ignore him now as he passed, and he returned their invitations with a smile and a few of his new, enormous treasury of words, but he could not stop. He was hurrying in search of those to whom he had a lifetime's friendship to say.

He rummaged from tavern to tavern on their heels, never quite catching up, and where-ever he went his kindness met an answering kindness, for few men can resist an invitation to display their better qualities. Ostlers and innkeepers and drunks, serving-girls in skimpy dresses and expensive women chiming with filigree, all brought their best humours out of rustling tissues of time from their deep safekeeping-places, and he revelled in them all like a gull in a heady August updraft of warm air.

In the seventh tavern, or maybe it was the ninth, a girl came up to the counter where he was talking with a drunken ex-pirate, and laid one slim scarlet-nailed hand on his arm.

"You're alone," she said, "and looking for someone."

"Do you know where they are?"

"I'm here."

He smiled.

Her name was Nadjya, and she had brown eyes. She had followed him to the last three taverns. When he asked her why, she blushed and lowered her eyes, and said, looking at the counter,

"It's not only that you are...good to look at. You are warm, like the sun, or a good log fire on a winter's night. If I could be with you, it would make me feel like that...good and warm, and safe."

"Is this what you call being happy?" Spock asked.

He went home with Nadjya soon after, not knowing if the stars were dancing or he was crying for you. Heedless of friends and debts and intentions, he squandered all the power and glory of his understanding on Nadjya, and discovered the whole power of words, and when they ceased to have power, too.

He woke in a small room cluttered with discarded garments, and beside him was a darkhaired girl with chipped scarlet finger-nails and traces of last night's paint still clinging to her mouth and eyelids.

He got up, dressed quietly and left. It would have been pointless to wake Nadjya. It would not have been kind now, either, but that no longer occurred to him.

Outside, the narrow, grubby street was deserted, but for one old woman turning over garbage in a doorway. The dawn was a dusky smudge of burnt orange along the very edge of the sky, fading into phosphoral-yellow and blue. Heading back for the spaceport he turned into a street that seemed familiar, a dry clear echo of memory. For a few seconds he hesitated; then he walked on.

The word merchant might be on the next corner, or the next planet, or out in some distant shimmer in the Horsehead Nebula, peddling words uncoined by any tongue we know to a race whose needs and uses for them we cannot begin to imagine. But in any case, Spock did not think that he would find him again.

Humanity, even at best, is a limited glory. With power to express all he had never been able to formulate, he had recorded nothing, expressed nothing, done nothing, but squandered the whole on nothing, nothing at all but a parcel of drunks and a brown-eyed street girl named Nadjya.

To someone else, to them, the very squandering might have counted for something. To Mr. Spock, himself again, back within the limitations he knew, it meant nothing at all.

FUN AND GAMES by Margaret Draper.

The bridge of the Enterprise was in semi-darkness; only the glowpups of the emergency bridge lighting and a few tell-tales still gleamed faintly. In the command chair, Kirk sat, huddled in a thermo-blanket borrowed from sickbay; a primitive 'candle' burned on the board at his side, its flame steady, for the heating and air-conditioning were reduced to minimum survival levels. Leaning forward, he tapped the ship's intercom button.

"You've made your point, Spock. Engineer Hallam tells me we can't rig up a satisfactory generating system within five hours. We have six dead, ten disabled."

"Indeed, Captain? I had anticipated heavier casualties."

"One of them is Dr. McCoy."

"Excellent!"

"I heard that," snarled a voice from sickbay. "Are you asking for a punch in the mouth, Spock?"

"No offence intended; Doctor," answered Spock from the sealed-off lower decks. "I was merely considering the drastic blow your loss would be to the Captain's team."

"Oh. That's different," said Dr. McCoy, somewhat mollified. "Well, since I'm a corpse now, can I get back to my work?"

"Sure, Bones. If Spock's left you any power to work with!"

"Essential supplies are of course being maintained, Captain," replied Spock stiffly. "Our orders specified that neither team should endanger any personnel in their attempts to capture the ship. Our emergency generators are also supplying sickbay for the simulation period; we have no casualties, real or imaginary, in our sector."

In rec room 5, Chekov, another 'corpse', stared gloomily at the useless food-dispensers. "Worse than Siberia," he muttered. Picking up a disposable cup, he stumped across to the coffee machine and held it under the spout. Nothing happened. With a muffled remark about Starfleet Command, long-eared Science Officers and field exercises in general, he kicked the machine. A lump of ice plopped into the empty cup.

"All this realism is going to be the death of me! I'm going to go and warm up in Dr. McCoy's morgue. What's the use of being a corpse if you can't live it up a little?"

Back on the brigde, Kirk was thinking furiously. How could he strike back? Technically, Spock had the strength on his side; he and Scotty both knew the ship inside out, and an alphabetical coincidence had put them both in the same team. Maybe he could smoke them out with simulated neoroges in the ventilation ducts. No, that might endanger his own team - and no doubt Spock would

have taken precautions against that sort of attack. Could something be done with the electrical circuits or the engines? No, that wouldn't work; they had the auxiliary control room in their territory, and could override or counter almost anything but the destruct sequence itself. Whatever he came up with would have to be more subtle, based on the psychology of his opponent; Spock was sometimes vulnerable to an illogical approach. Perhaps...

Ten minutes later, the emergency sirens were blasting through the ship; these of course were not affected by Spock's 'power-cut'. The intercom in auxiliary control beeped frantically.

"Spock? Kirk here. There's a fire in sickbay; Bones and Chekov are trapped inside. They haven't answered our call but there's a chance they may only be overcome by smoke and are still alive. The door mechanism's fused; we're trying to cut our way in but we daren't hurry in case they're lying close to the wall. But there's an emergency exit on your side..."

"And half a dozen of your men on the other," said Scott's voice. "Captain, you're surely not expecting us to fall for that old trick?"

"Spock," said Kirk desperately, "you've got to believe me. I can't order you to risk your life, but I'm asking you - please..."

But there was no answer.

The fire had been out for almost five minutes by the time the first phaser cut through to the gutted sickbay, and Chekov and McCoy were well on their way to recovery. Kirk could hardly recognise in the dishevelled, smoke-stained figures his normally impeccable senior officers, and McCoy, on regaining consciousness, gave one look at Spock's blackened features and closed his eyes again with a hollow groan.

"Well, I'm certainly glad to see you, Mr. Spock, even if Bones doesn't seem to be. I was afraid you didn't believe me. What made you decide I was telling the truth?"

Spock appeared slightly embarrassed. "My knowledge of your thought patterns, Captain. You realised that there was no logical way to penetrate our defences, so, from my experience of your tactics at chess, I expected an illogical approach would follow. But nothing, surely, could be more unreasonable than to ask me to risk my life rescuing two enemy 'corpses' from an imaginary fire."

"I - don't understand. Surely, if you were expecting - "

"Ach, it wasn't like that at all," said Scotty in disgust.

"He just looked at me and said - 'Illogical - but I believe him', and the next thing I knew we were headed for here at warp speed! Just plain intuition..."

"Mr. Scott," Spock cut in. "I suggest we take the Doctor and Mr. Chekov along to rec room 7 for recuperation. Some hot coffee, perhaps..."

"Aye, with just a drop of something in it - to revive them," agreed Scott enthusiastically.

Hot coffee! Kirk could almost smell it. Even if he had to admit defeat -

"Er - Mr. Spock - you wouldn't care to take a 'prisoner' along, would you?"

"Delighted, Captain!"

Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
Why are you so bright?
Do you burn petroleum
Or is it electric light?

Amanda was radiantly happy.

She was pregnant again, though she had not yet told Sarek; and this time, she wanted a daughter. She loved Spock; she was glad her first child was a boy; but she had learned that on Vulcan a son was very much his father's child. A daughter would be hers. She had been unable to shield Spock from the scorn and the disparaging remarks of his Vulcan classmates - and there was more of that, she was sure, than he had ever let her see; he had only once come near to breaking down, a little over a year before. But a daughter she could shield.

When she did tell Sarek, she found it difficult to act in true Vulcan fashion, controlling her joy; but she succeeded reasonably well. Sarek's facial muscles gave the slight contraction that she had come to recognise as a smile as he touched her fingertips in a ritual embrace, and she knew that he also was pleased.

They did not, at first, tell Spock. Amanda knew that to a six-year-old, even a Vulcan one, nine months in an incredibly long time, and advised Sarek against telling Spock right away. She was beginning to show her pregnancy before they told him.

It was very hard for Spock, at this tender age, to control his emotions. He had never yet betrayed himself in front of his father, whom he admired and respected, but this knowledge was especially difficult for him to accept impassively. However, he controlled himself reasonably well until he found himself alone with Ee-Chiya, the great teddy-bear-like sehlat that was devoted to him - his only confidante.

He hugged the sehlat.

"I'm going to have a brother, Ee-Chiya," he whispered happily. "Someone like me. I won't have to be alone any more. I know it'll be a year or two before he'll be big enough to talk or run about, but it'll be worth waiting, Ee-Chiya. Then I won't have to bother about the full-blooded Vulcan boys...or even if it's a sister, I still won't be alone. There'll be two of us..."

Alone with his mother, he tried to tell her how glad he was, but even at six habit was beginning to paralyse his tongue. All he could say was,

"I hope the baby's a boy, Mother, I would like a brother."

Amanda smiled ruefully. Of course Spock wanted a brother; of course Sarek wanted another son. Only she wanted a daughter.

Some days later, she woke feeling ill. Sarek sent for their doctor. Slann examined Amanda carefully, then motioned Sarek to accompany him out of the room.

"There are complications," he said, quietly. "I suspected that this might happen, but your wife kept so well in the early days of pregnancy that I dared to think it might go well. Ambassador Sarek, there are considerable genetic differences between Vulcans and Humans - in the composition of the blood in particular. And your blood is T-negative, itself liable to give rise to ill effects when combined with other types of Vulcan blood, let alone Human. Antibodies have been formed in Amanda's blood as a result of her first pregnancy. She may lose this child. I will do what I can. Your wife should remain in bed. Have you a matriarch who can come and care for her?"

So Sarek sent for T'Pau.

He said nothing to Amanda of Slann's fears. He had lived long enough on Earth to realise how Amanda would worry if she knew - and worry would not help her.

With T'Pau running the house, Amanda could relax, and for a few

days, indeed, it seemed that her condition improved. The only "work" she did was to supervise Spock's preparation for the next day's schooling.

Spock was in her room while she listened to his reading, when she gasped with a sudden agonising pain. She tried desperately to retain a decent Vulcan self-control; Spock, his attention drawn by her gasp, took one look at her face and ran for the door.

"T'Pau!" he cried. "T'Pau!"

The matriarch came running. One look at Amanda was enough.

"Spock - go for the doctor. Tell Slann it is an emergency. Then fetch your father. He is visiting Suval. Run!"

Startled, not knowing what was wrong, Spock ran.

Slann wasted no time. By the time Sarek reached home, Slann had finished his examination of Amanda. He drew Sarek aside, leaving T'Pau tending the sick woman.

"The pregnancy must be terminated," Slann said quietly. "If it is not, your wife will also die. May I proceed?"

Almost numbly, although it was not wholly unexpected, Sarek nodded.

T'Pau told Spock. He stared at her, tears gathering in his eyes.

"Why?" he managed.

"Vulcans and Humans are very different," T'Pau said gently.

"It is not easy for a Vulcan-Human blend to be successfully born. Your parents were fortunate that you lived."

"Does that mean -" he choked on the words, swallowed, "- does it mean that I can never have a brother?"

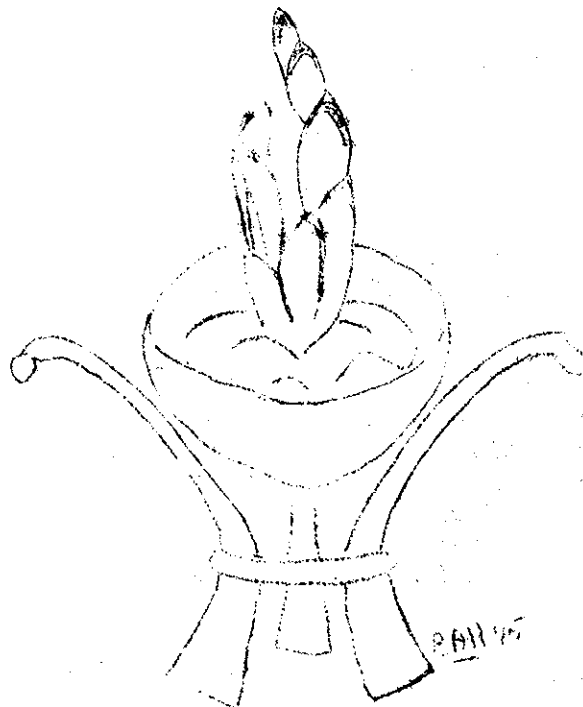
"Yes, Spock."

Alone. He would always be alone after all. The thought defeated his childish control. He buried his face in his hands, sobbing bitterly.

T'Pau put an arm gently round him, remembering his youth. He clung to her, seeking momentary respite from his eternal loneliness.

With the wisdom of her years, T'Pau let him cry. When the first paroxysms of Spock's grief passed, she gripped his arms, held him away from her.

"Spock," she said. "Remember who you are. Your father will



expect you to show proper restraint. And remember also - it will not be easy for him, either. Will you make it more difficult for him?"

Spock gulped. "I'll try to behave properly," he said.

T'Pau took him back to Amanda's room. Amanda was still only half awake after the operation, knowing what had happened and grieving, but too drugged for it to have any real impact. For her, the shock had still to come. Sarek sat by her side.

"I'm - I'm sorry, Father," Spock said. "Is Mother all right?"

"Yes," Sarek said. "She is still weak, but she will be all right."

Spock looked at Amanda. She smiled weakly.

"I still have you, Spock."

"Mother," he said. He took a deep breath. "Never mind, Mother. I will try to be as good as two sons to you."

"Thank you, Spock." Her eyes closed; for a while she forgot her grief in sleep.

Sarek looked approvingly at his son.

"You have behaved well, Spock. I am proud of you."

Spock went into the garden. He found Ee-Chiya, and, burying his face in the thick fur, sobbed out his desolate grief.

Alone.

Would he ever be anything but alone?

A VULCAN'S LAMENT FOR HIS HOMELAND by T'Peth

Come close, come close,

And steal into my mind.

In its deep recesses, you might find

The vision-chains, that bind
Me, to my home.

Stay here, stay near,

That, through the open portals of my sight,
You'll walk into the dark, dark womb of night,

Unlit, save by those distant pricks of light.
This is my home.

Hold still, hold still!

Lest by moving, you should jar
These fleeting visions, errant thoughts that are

My only way across the star-filled voids, that bar
Me, from my home.

KIRK - Well, Mr. Chekov, this is your first experience of navigating - starship. How do you worked out our present position?

CHEKOV - (Whispering) I think we should all be standing to attention, sir.

KIRK - Why? And why are you whispering?

CHEKOV - According to my calculations, we are just passing through the Kremlin...

McCOY - Which sea do Starships sail on?

KIRK - The Galaxy!

THE FINEST SHIP IN THE FLEET by Jinx

Kirk paced McCoy's office as he waited for his report. Spock's sudden collapse hadn't been a surprise, after all, he had been more drained of energy than any of them, so close to the strange creature that had nearly destroyed them, as well as the Intrepid and Gamma Seven A.

He looked up as Nurse Christine Chapel came in, her hands full of tapes, which she put on McCoy's desk.

Mr. Spock's records from the shuttlecraft, sir," she explained. "Doctor McCoy wants them analysed as soon as possible."

Each was coded. She sorted them efficiently into order, one eye obviously on the door to the examination room. Kirk saw this; he said gently, "Don't worry, Christine, he's pulled through worse than this, you and Bones together have pulled him through a lot worse."

"Yes, sir," she said, smiling a little. She looked down at the last tape in her hand; it was uncoded.

"Oh, yes, this must have been the tape I pulled out of the recorder, he didn't finish it. It must be one of the minor tests."

She put it into the screen; it cleared, to show an unfamiliar Spock, weary to the point of total relaxation, resigned, almost human. The words came slowly.

"Personal log, Commander Spock, U.S.S. Enterprise."

Christine put out a hand to switch it off, looking up at Kirk. He nodded, and she gave it to him, and went out. Kirk held it in his hand, hesitating, as McCoy came in.

"Just exhaustion, Jim. I'll keep him in bed today, maybe tomorrow. He's conscious, if you want to see him, but don't excite him. What's that?"

Kirk was torn between curiosity, affection, and his long knowledge of Spock's love of personal privacy.

"Spock left a message in the shuttlecraft, Bones, a personal log."

"What does it say?"

"I don't know."

"Aren't you going to play it?"

Kirk considered the question, then shook his head.

"It's not ours to play, Bones, and you know it. I'll give it back to him."

He crossed to the door, and went to Spock's bedside. McCoy, curious as ever, followed him to the door, then was ashamed of himself, and stood openly at the foot of the bed, as Spock's eyes opened, and he saw what Kirk had. Both men saw a flicker of something in his eyes. Kirk held out the tape to him.

"We found it in the shuttlecraft, with the rest of the reports. We haven't played it."

Spock took it, then gave it back

"Erase it for me, if you will, please, Captain."

Kirk took it, and went back to the office. McCoy followed him, disgruntled.

"So he doesn't trust us enough to let us read it?"

Kirk smiled, as he firmly erased it.

"Isn't it enough that he trusts us to erase it without reading it?"

McCoy turned away without answering, but Kirk put a hand on his shoulder, spun him round to face him.

"Isn't it?" he insisted.

McCoy nodded reluctantly, then grinned.

"Go on, if you want to see him before I put him to sleep."

It is with sincere apologies that we print the following story. Not because I wrote it, well that too, but because we're not printing the promised 'Suspense Story' by Ann Looker. Beyond Antares beat us with that. So instead we are giving you two for the price of one. Ann Looker's 'Doubt' and

A VULCAN ODYSSEY by Beth Hallan.

PART THE FIRST

Causa

James T. Kirk looked up as his first officer entered his day-cabin, he indicated the other chair.

"You have the duty roster, and the leave due list, Mr. Spock?" he asked unnecessarily, it was unthinkable that the Vulcan would come without them.

Yes Sir. 'B' watch is on standby, so 'A' and 'C' watches can go on immediate leave, and 'D' can follow 'B' on duty. Is that compatible with your plans, Captain?"

"That will do fine. Mr. Spock, there are just one or two changes across watches, that McCoy recommends for compatibility, now seems an advantageous....." They went on planning the arrangements for the upcoming 'R & R' on Rigel III, and updating the personnel arrangements of watches. Leave time was always useful for cross-watch swapping. The arrangements all made, Kirk asked to see the 'special-leave' requests. There were four. Ensign Pavlov had been born on the main moon of Rigel IV, and according to the custom of that scientific colony, had been bond-fostered by a native Rigellian family. He wanted permission to spend his leave with his foster-mother. Kirk granted his request. He refused permission to Lieutenants Riley and Mitchum to climb 'Adnabba', Rigel III's highest peak, which was very inaccessible. The fourth name on the list gave Kirk a shock. He looked quizzically at his first officer.

"Commander Spock, requesting permission to spend leave off-world?" He looked at Spock questioningly, "Where?"

"Vulcan." Came the taciturn reply.

"VULCAN?!" Kirk was incredulous, "that's half-way across the sector, how could you get there and back in ten days? No, Spock, I'm sorry. I can't grant that, it's impossible!"

Kirk thought about his first officer's request. Spock, in true military style, had risen respectfully to his feet, while his own case was being considered, he made no attempt to argue his cause.

"Sit down, Spock," Kirk muttered, testily, "You're not a recruit asking for a twenty-four hour pass." The Vulcan sat, and regarded his commander. "now, tell me why you want to go home? Knowing you, there's some pressing reason."

"I have home-leave due, sir, and I can make the journey in the time. I have worked out a route." He handed Kirk his electronic clipboard, it showed a time-table of inter-connecting space transports that would get Spock to Vulcan in three and a half days. The return journey was also planned, the trip there and back took seven days, leaving Spock three days at home.

"Agreed, but you haven't answered my question," Kirk insisted, "Why?"

Spock looked away from Kirk's eyes, then back, he did not answer. It was obvious he was not over-anxious to give his reasons. Kirk knew Spock by now, he ought to, they'd served together almost seven years. The Vulcan's expression was no longer a uniform blank to his eyes, but a subtle indication of reactions and intentions. Now, he was showing embarrassment, although to the casual Human observer he appeared to be completely unmoved.

A sudden idea struck Kirk, he had known Spock ask for home-leave once before. But it seemed unlikely, the time was too short, and the Vulcan did not appear nervous or tense in any way, merely embarrassed.

"Spock," Kirk sounded fatherly, rather to his surprise, "You're

not.....?" He left the question unfinished, unwilling to offend against Vulcan etiquette.

"No, sir, I am not," Spock's voice held a hint of amusement, whether at the question or at Kirk's paternal manner was not clear. "It's Aranda - my mother!"

"Yes?" Kirk urged.

"She is sixty-five years old next week, and she expressed a wish to see me." It all came in a rush, "I know it is not logical, but....."

"But you want to go home," Kirk finished.

"Yes, sir, and as you see, it can be done."

"It can be, Mr. Spock, but at what cost, physical and financial? It's a long, complicated journey." Kirk didn't want to say a downright 'No', it was obvious Spock wanted to go, and his reason, though not logical, was one Kirk could understand.

"Sir, I do not need shore-leave as you do. My needs are different from yours. And you know well enough how little opportunity we have to spend our pay." This was true, Vulcan and Human needs were different, but both valid. Starfleet paid its command officers well, and Spock had no vices on which to spend his salary.

"Very well, Mr. Spock, permission granted." Kirk paused, then grinned, "But, if you're late back, I'll!!!!" He couldn't think of a thing he could do. "Just don't be late, that's all; do you want to leave to-night, get a start on those connections," he finished kindly.

"No, sir." Spock was adamant. "That would not seem fair to the to the rest of the crew."

"Fine, Mr. Spock, you can leave first thing in the morning. Good-night." As Spock left Kirk wondered into his bathroom, musing. So, Spock wasn't as unfeeling as he liked to make out.

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Transporter Chief Kyle was somewhat taken aback to discover that the first person awaiting bean-down for leave was Mr. Spock. As he said to De Salle, over coffee, "Spock never goes on leave!"

A harassed Captain, entering the Rec-room for a hasty mid-morning drink overheard the tail-end of this conversation, and grinned to himself as he selected an empty table. One of the advantages of being Captain was that someone always brought you your coffee, he thought, as Dr. McCoy dumped his cup in front of him and sat down.

"Well, Jim," he boomed cheerfully. "Which leave party are we joining?"

"You can work out your leave with your own staff, Doctor." Kirk sighed, "But you can count me out."

"What?" McCoy was horrified. "But you must have some leave. You need it."

"I will, Bones, I will. Scotty'll spell me for a while, but I don't know quite when yet." Kirk hadn't had time to discuss this with the engineer.

"Scotty? What about Spock? He usually does half a duty for you and half for Scott." McCoy pointed out, regulations only allowed half-substitutions for command staff, except under emergency conditions.

"Well, this time I'm doing half a duty for him, and Scotty is doing the other half. Isn't that right? Kirk asked Scott as he joined them.

"Oh aye. Ah agreed, couldn't do much else, he's done it for me in the past. Though I dinna ken why he wants off." Scott grinned at McCoy, a sly twinkle in his eye. "he's no in an interestin' condition is he?"

"No," McCoy was indignant. "At least he's not been near me if he is. Where is he anyway?"

"Gone," Kirk took a bite of the sticky bun he was having in lieu of breakfast. "Left at 0600 hours this morning. And it's none of

your business - why. So you'll just have to contain your natural curiosity, Gentlemen."

"Do you know, Jim?" McCoy asked, casually. But Kirk knew that trick and ignored the question, licking sugar off his fingers studiously.

"Oh aye, he knows," Scott agreed, "Stands to sense he'd no give permission to go spacinf off to Vulcan wi'out bein' given a good reason."

Kirk grinned at the two faces regarding him with rampant nosiness, "Command Privilege!" He said, enigmatically, and getting up, left the room.

"Vulcan?" McCoy asked speculatively, "I didn't notice any signs, did you?"

"No," Scott shook his head, "I was only joking, Leonard, Spock's no in 'Pop farr'. He was fine, when he asked me to do half a his duty. He even said 'thanks'."

"I should think so too," McCoy said indignantly. "It's a bit much, leaving you and Jim in the cart, after boasting that he doesn't need a rest."

Scotty laughed, "He'll no get a rest if he's goin' ta Vulcan and back in ten days. It's a four day journey, each way."

"Um," McCoy was not going to be put off, "Well I think it's very inconsiderate, going off like that, without a word to anyone." Scott grinned, if Spock had refused leave, McCoy would have grumbled, the Vulcan just couldn't do anything right in the doctor's eyes.

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The object of their conversation was indeed trying to get some rest, as he lay in the rocket-shuttle between Rigel III and VI. He had spent half the previous night programming the computer to deal with the shore-leave arrangements, to ease the Captains work while he was without a first officer. Another two hours packing and re-packing a kit-bag for the journey, abandoning half his luggage in favour of travelling light. At 0300 hours ship-time, he had snatched an hours sleep, leaving his cabin at 04.30 to check the bridge. Sulu was dozing in the command chair, having spent the evening celebrating his leave. He required waking and reprimanding. By 0600 when it was time to beam down to the space-port, Spock was tired.

Rocket-shuttle was not Spock's favourite form of transport, he considered it expensive, inefficient and slow, but it was the only facility available to get him to Rigel VI in time to catch the express passenger liner to the edge of the Eridani system.

"Acceleration-sleep sir? Sorry, Commander." The steward added as he noted the sleeve-rings on the Starfleet uniform. Spock nodded acknowledgement of the apology, fastened his safety-harness; and decided to use the two hours he must waste tied to the couch, in catching up his last sleep. His internal timing mechanism must have been confused by the disturbed night, for he was still asleep when the stewards checked the couches for non-wakers.

"Hey Mike," one shouted across. "There's one here. Good gracious! It's a Vulcan!"

"Oh, that must be the Starfleet Commander, well would you believe it?" Mike chuckled. "I know these fellows have a reputation for being tough, but to sleep through acceleration, without a hypo! Hey, Commander! Commander! Wake up, you're here!" He shook the Vulcan gently, Spock was awake immediately, and aware of the circumstances, his mind registering the fact that he was late. With a bound he was out of the harness and off the couch, grabbing his hand luggage he made for the gangway at top-speed, leaving behind two astonished humans, mouths agape.

The unusual sight of a Vulcan - running, caused quite a disturbance in the space-port, several human tourists were severely surprised,

and a Tellurite matron came over quite giddy !

Spock made it - just. The liner had been held up, due to twin difficulties, but they were expecting him. The ship was crowded, filled to capacity. Being a short haul vessel, that is one that hopped from system to system, it was much smaller than a star-ship, but capable of carrying twice the number of passengers plus crew. Passengers were allowed to wander about once open-space was achieved, but were expected to stay in their seats through planet atmosphere.

Being the last passenger aboard Spock had no choice where he sat, there was only one seat left. He lowered himself into it, still breathless, and fastened the safety belt. Leaning back he employed 'K'tan ias-moatu' to control heart-beat and breathing, within a few moments his respiration was normal.

He opened his eyes just as lift-off started. Space-liners strange craft, capable of landing on a planet, but only equipped with warp engines, they were towed out of planet atmosphere by small, impulse-driven tugs, they were then sent straight into warp-drive. The sensation of being towed through atmosphere was an odd one, many people were sick, or at least felt sick.

Spock looked around him, his attention was caught by a moan issuing from the seat next to his, on the left. It was occupied by a very pretty blonde, not that Spock noticed that. He was just in time to push her back as she fainted heavily against the safety-harness when the ship went into warp-drive. It seemed strange to Spock, who was passing in and out of warp-drive every day of his life, without even noticing, that the simple process could have such a disastrous effect on his fellow-passengers.

"The ship is in warp-drive, you'll be all right, now," he assured his reviving neighbour.

"Oh, I do hope so." She whispered, her eyes closed, she was obviously feeling most unwell. "Oh !" She screwed her eyes up tight, and grabbed for his hand, he let her take it and did not complain when she squeezed it painfully. Gradually the effect died down and she allowed the fear to drain out of her. Slowly she opened her eyes, and found herself staring closely into a pair of Vulcan eyes.

Deb Salter was completely speechless, she had not seen many Vulcans in her life, and had been introduced to only one. She knew little about them, as a species, but what she did know led her to suspect that they didn't encourage strange women to hold their hands.

"Are you recovering?" he asked gently, reclaiming his hand.

She found her voice, but it sounded breathless, she hoped he would put this down to her recent travel-sickness. "Yes, thank you. I shall be quite all right now. I'm always ill in space-ships." She added, by way of explanation.

"That I can understand." He said, remembering a certain incident when he had felt quite nauseous travelling in a land vehicle.

"Oh," she was willing to be diverted. "Are you space-sick, too?" He did not answer, but glanced down at his Starfleet uniform, she followed the direction of his eyes. "Oh, no, of course, you wouldn't be?" She looked down and counted his sleeve rings, attempting to discover his rank. "Commander?"

"Spock," he said, whether he deliberately misunderstood her question she never did work out, but just for a moment his answer puzzled her.

"Oh, I see," she smiled as realization came to her, "Deb Deb Salter." She held out her hand to him, then remembered, belatedly, that Vulcans were the ones you didn't touch; one eye-brow raised slowly as he put up his hand in salute, Vulcan fashion. She thought, fleetingly, that he was amused, but Vulcans were also reputed to have no sense of humour. She returned the salute, hoping she got it right, it wasn't easy.

"Why are you travelling in a space-liner, Commander, instead of aboard a ship of the line?" She asked, for something to say, the conversation was keeping her mind off her stomach.

"I'm going home." Was the simple reply.

"Vulcan?" she asked, curiously.

"Yes."

"Are you on leave?" She felt she was being a little intrusive, but he didn't appear to object.

"For ten days, my ship is in orbit around Rigel III." He told her attempting to keep her mind off her stomach. She looked decidedly green, which wasn't healthy for a human.

"The starship..... 'ENTERPRISE'?" She smiled again, pleased at recalling the information. "Rigel to Vulcan and back in ten days, that's a long way, Commander!"

"You sound like my Captain!"

They chatted in this fashion for some time, each discovering an interest in the other's life and culture. She was intrigued by the matter of fact way he answered her questions, or turned aside those he did not wish to answer. It did not take her long to realize that the Vulcans had been slandered, he certainly did have a sense of humour, if you acknowledged that there is no necessity to smile when amused. He found her air of sophisticated innocence fascinating, and somewhat unusual in a human female. After some time Spock became aware that he was hungry, very hungry. He politely asked her to join him for a meal, a thing he had never done before in his life. Asking a woman to dine is a very human ritual, any Vulcan naturally assumes that if a woman wants to eat, she will.

"Do you think I ought to?" she asked him. "I'm hungry, but I don't want to be sick again."

"I believe," he answered solemnly, "that it is simply a matter of eating the right things!"

"Oh, all right, but if I'm sick, it's your fault," she stated hotly.

"But, of course." He stood and indicated the direction of the restaurant, she rose to walk beside him, tucking her hand, unselfconsciously, into his arm. He was surprised, and at first a little alarmed, but discovered that the sensation of warm flesh gripping his sleeve, and even the tiny tickle at the back of his mind, were not too unpleasant.

Spock also rather enjoyed buying a meal for her, it made him feel protective. As the meal progressed their conversation became less restrained, more intimate. She told him of her job, her ambitions, her dreams that were speeding her across the Galaxy. He found himself talking of home, of his parents, of the reason for his visit. She was instantly interested, with a woman's curiosity about family celebrations.

"What have you bought her?" she asked.

"Bought her?" He was puzzled, the idea had just not struck him.

"Oh, Spock!" His name sounded strange, yet right, when she said it. "You sit there telling me that you want to behave as a human son would. And you have." She laughed, "You've forgotten to buy her a present!" She sat thinking for a moment. "When we change, you for the Vulcan shuttle, I for the connection with the 'Benecia Queen', have we any time to spare?"

"I have one hour, thirteen point ninety-seven minutes, allowing time for boarding procedures, you have considerably more time, I'm not sure of the exact amount."

She suppressed the desire to giggle. "Then," she said, "that being an Earth colony, there is something that can be done!"

So it was that Commander Spock of the Starship 'Enterprise' was seen off on the last stage of his journey to Vulcan. He was clutching the largest bouquet of Terran-type flora he had ever seen in his life, all packaged in freeze-sealed transparent cover, and decorated with a large knot of Gold ribbon!

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Surprisingly enough, Captain James T. Kirk did not find that leave period as hectic as he had expected. Certainly the discovery that Spock had programmed the computer to cope with duty and leave rotas eased his burden considerably. He was momentarily confused by Lieutenant Sulu's surprise at being granted leave. Why should Sulu expect to have his leave cancelled? He was not senior enough to be left in sole charge of the ship.

In fact, even Kirk himself actually got four days and two nights off. He found the most irritating thing about the ten days was the actual physical absence of his first Officer. This he knew was irrational, but he had grown so used to Spock's being there, to comment to, or to agree with, or disagree with, as the case may be. Even McCoy had been heard to comment, that coming aboard the 'Enterprise' didn't 'feel right' with no pointed ears about.

Kirk's irritation turned to apprehension, then to worry, as the time for Spock's return came and went. Kirk had given his first officer the full ten days leave, but he had expected his return in the late afternoon of the ninth day, planet time. The next day was the last full day of leave, all leave parties were due aboard by 10.00 hours the following morning. The 'Enterprise' was to leave planet orbit at 12.00 hours, bound for Deneva and a medical mission. By 09.55 every one was aboard, except Spock. At 10.30, the 'Enterprise' still had no first officer and the Captain was fuming, he vent his worry and anger on the Chief Surgeon. When at 11.30 Kirk had to face a call from Base Commander Peterson, asking if he had all personnel aboard, and if he were ready to break orbit, the Captain's temper was not improved by Peterson's obvious disbelief of his excuse for delaying leaving orbit, by an hour or so.

"How the hell can I tell him my first officer's not reported back yet?" Kirk demanded of an amused McCoy.

At 11.50, when Kirk was preparing to beam over to the base, and explain personally and confidentially to Peterson, Uhura received a signal from a vessel approaching at warp-speed. A few moments later Chekov had a sensor report of a small deep-space scout, coming up on the 'Enterprise' - fast. The unknown vessel was calling Kirk, personally, asking for a visual contact. Kirk delayed his departure until he had dealt with the matter.

Soon it was possible for the on-rushing vessel to be shown on the starship's screen, she came racing toward the 'Enterprise', her approach trajectory much too close. Kirk felt fear rise inside him, the starship was not yet under power, he could not manoeuvre her out of the path, he had to rely on the ability of the scout-ships pilot, his already seething temper boiled over.

"Slow down! You bloody stupid!!!!" He shouted into the inter-ship comm-unit. His order was answered by a fruity laugh, as the small ship banked into a racing turn and matched orbits with the 'Enterprise' a very impressive piece of clever piloting. Kirk was furious, that anyone should dare to endanger his ship and crew, just in order to show off.

"Who the hell do you think you are?" He demanded of the 'fancy flier'. As he said it the screen lit up with a face, and he answered his own question, "Harry Mudd!"

"Why Captain, how flattering that you remember me," said James T. Kirk's favourite bete noire.

"Remember you? How can I ever forget you? But I've got you this time, Harry. I'll arrest you for dangerous manoeuvring close to an inhabited planet. And I'll impound your ship!" Kirk threatened, his anger overcoming his usual caution.

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, Captain, but I was not controlling this vessel's approach!" Mudd was surprisingly cool, if Kirk had not been so angry he would have noticed, and been wary because of it, but his temper was already out of control.

"If you weren't, I'd like to see the idiot who was."

"Certainly, Captain." Mudd adjusted a button on the console in front of him, and the camera aboard his vessel swung around in an arc, finally coming to rest on Spock's impassive face. Kirk was stuck dumb, his breath completely taken away.

"Request permission to come aboard, Sir." Spock said formally. Kirk didn't answer him, but turned to his intercom.

"Transporter room, beam the first officer aboard, and keep him there until I come." He turned to face the screen and watched Spock sparkle out of existence. "Thank you, Mr. Mudd, do not let us detain you." He was up and on his way to the transporter room, before even Harry Mudd could think of a reply.

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The Captain entered the transporter room at a clipping stride, without pausing for breath he said ;

"Thank you, Chief," and indicated the door. Kyle threw a sympathetic glance at Spock and left, hurriedly. Kirk strode over to the console and checked the chronometer, then turned to his first officer, who was standing stiffly at attention.

"Commander Spock," he said, "you are absent without leave two hours fifteen minutes, and you are fifteen minutes late reporting for duty. Have you any defence to put forward for this behaviour ?" His tone indicated that there could be no defence.

"No, sir."

"Therefore you will have no objections to my taking summary action ?" He demanded harshly.

"No, sir."

"Then after you have completed this duty period, you will be confined to quarters, except when actually on duty, until further notice, is that clear ?"

"Perfectly, sir." Came the calm reply.

"Good, dismissed !"

As Kirk watched his delinquent first officer march out of the transporter room, most of the anger drained from him.

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The atmosphere on the bridge had been building for some time. It was not to improve until Kirk, who had been silent all watch except for orders, rose to his feet with a curt ;

"You have the con, Mr. Spock." And left without waiting for the customary acknowledgement. As he went the whole bridge crew heaved a sigh of relief. Spock did not take the Command chair, but continued working at his own console. After a few moments Sulu screwed up his courage to say what he had to say, he was helped by the information, just imparted to him, in whispers by Uhura, that the first officer was confined to quarters.

"Sir ?"

"Yes, Mr. Sulu ?"

"May I have a word with you, sir ?"

"Of course, Mr. Sulu." Spock swung his chair around to face the navigator.

"Privately, please, sir." Sulu was aware that the bridge had gone quiet, they were all agog with curiosity.

"Miss Uhura, please cover the Navigation console." Spock said quietly, he rose and headed for the elevator, followed by Sulu, who was replaced at his console by Uhura.

It had become a custom aboard the 'Enterprise' that any private transactions, anything from a tete a tete to a telling off, took place in a stopped elevator.

Sulu hopped nervously from foot to foot as the lift settled, by Spock's order, between the bridge and deck one. The Vulcan turned to face

the navigator, a look of polite enquiry on his face.

"Sir," Sulu began resolutely, "Falling asleep on duty is a court martial offence."

"Yes, Mr. Sulu."

"The Captain has not taken any action over mymy....mistake the other night."

Spock raised his eyebrows in mild surprise. "Perhaps, Mr. Sulu, that is because he does not know about it."

"Doesn't know about it, Sir? You didn't tell him?" Sulu was incredulous, Spock was always so correct in his application of regulations.

"No Lieutenant, I did not see the Captain following your mistake? - before leaving the ship, neither did I record a log. I do not think the present would be an auspicious time to tell him, do you?" Spock's voice howed just a hint of amusement.

"No, Sir," Sulu breathed, trying to picture Kirk's reaction in his present mood.

"As I do not anticipate a recurrence of the event, I suggest that we forget the matter, Mr. Sulu."

"There will be no recurrence, Sir," Sulu assured him, "And thank you, Mr. Spock."

"There is no need to thank me, Lieutenant," Spock raised an eyebrow in the manner which indicated he was about to make a rare confidence. "Vulcans are well-known to have a logical and healthy regard for the preservation of their own skins, Mr. Sulu."

The navigator grinned, he felt strangely honoured, it was the first time Spock had ever treated him to a glimpse of his inner self.

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The Captain looked up from his viewer as the buzzer on his cabin door sounded

"Come," he called, he could not concentrate on his paper-work anyway. "Hello, Bones." He sighed as McCoy entered, what would he have to say The Doctor stood before Kirk's desk, waiting. The Captain indicated the chair opposite. "What can I do for you, Bones?" he enquired, wanting to get it over with.

"I hear you've confined Spock to quarters, Jim." McCoy ventured, his voice carefully neutral.

"How the hell do you know that?" The Captain demanded. "I've told no-one, and I don't suppose Spock has."

McCoy chuckled. "You can't keep a secret on a starship, probably it's just conjecture, but it's obviously true. Can I go visit him, Jim?"

"No, Bones you may not," Kirk snapped. "he's there for punishment. Not to receive visitors."

McCoy waited a moment, then re-opened the conversation. "Have you had lunch, Jim?"

Kirk looked at him, suspicious of the sudden change of subject. "Yes, but I don't"

"Spock hasn't." McCoy interrupted him. "And arriving from a long journey, in a hurry like that, he probably hasn't had a meal for hours." The words hung in the air for a second.

"Hell ! Bones," Kirk expostulated, "I'm not trying to starve him into submission. You know that !"

"Yeah, I know that." McCoy agreed, "Look, why don't you let me take him some lunch. I can over-ride you on that anyway, I thought any crew member's health might suffer from inflicted punishment."

Kirk sighed, he'd been outmanoevered again. "Okay, Bones, but you just take him a meal and leave. No stopping for a quick game of chess !"

"Jim, you know I never play chess with Spock," McCoy protested, "I hate being beaten !"

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McCoy buzzed the first officer's quarters and immediately received the answer, "Come". He entered through the open door, balancing a tray on one hand. There was no sign of Spock, though a strange humming sound seemed to be issuing from the open bathroom door, across the sleeping area from McCoy.

"Spock?" He asked. The Vulcan appeared in the doorway, dressed in trowsers and vest only, his hair was wet, and he was drying his hands on a towel. McCoy was surprised, Spock never allowed anyone to see him dishabille, but he seemed curiously unconcerned now.

"I've brought you some lunch," McCoy said, placing the tray on the desk. "I thought you might be hungry."

"I am a Doctor," McCoy was even more surprised, never before had he heard the first officer admit to any bodily need. "Does the Captain know you're here?" Spock turned to throw the towel carelessly into the bathroom and closed the door behind him.

"He gave me permission," McCoy assured him, all the time keeping him under careful scrutiny. Spock nodded and came towards the Doctor, pausing in front of the mirror to straighten his black hair to its usual, smooth perfection; it was the first time McCoy had even suspected Spock owned a comb, let alone seen him use one. Spock sauntered over to the desk. McCoy noticed there was a strange kind of swing to his gait, making it appear that each step jarred slightly. As he passed from night to day cabin he seemed to sway a little, as if drunk, grabbing hold of the partitioning to steady himself. McCoy was truly puzzled, had Spock been human he would have suspected an over indulgence in alcohol to drown his sorrows; but the Doctor couldn't see a Vulcan even thinking of turning to the bottle.

Spock had regained his balance, and was now standing looking down at the meal on his desk. His eyes wandered to the seat, and he hesitated, seemingly reluctant to sit down. Then he took a deep breath and a firm hold of the leading edge of the desk and lowered himself carefully into the chair. McCoy, intrigued, sat down uninvited, opposite him, completely forgetting the Captain's admonition. Spock pulled the tray toward him and began to eat hungrily. McCoy had shared many meals with the Vulcan, never before had he known him to show more than a passing interest in his food, even after several hours fast.

"When did you last eat, Spock?" He asked, curiously.

Spock paused for a moment, then answered, "It must have been the day before yesterday, no, the day before that, at home. But they did give me a drink at the" He stopped abruptly, suddenly realizing he should not say, whatever it was he had been about to say. McCoy looked closely at him, seeing that under the elaborately relaxed air, there was underlying weariness. He drew out his medi-scanner, adjusted it to Vulcan frequencies, then held it out, Spock's hand shot out to enfold it, McCoy removed the hand, and looked at the readings, his eyes opened wide in disbelief at what he saw.

"Right, Spock," he ordered, "Finish your meal, and then I want you to lie down on the bed, I'm going to examine you. You're in a bad way!"

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After McCoy had left him, Kirk returned to the bridge. It was very quiet when he got there. Scott was occupying the Command Chair, and rose to his feet immediately the Captain entered. Kirk seated himself in the chair, and turned to the Chief Engineer, hovering beside him. "Yes, Scotty?" he asked.

"Sir, I'm havin' a wee bit a trouble wi' computer circuit Seven A, I was wondering"

"No, Mr. Scott!" Kirk said firmly, amused despite his anger.

"You may not go down to ask Mr. Spock about it."

"Oh!" Scott replied, surprised that his ruse had been penetrated.

"Thank you, sir." He continued stiffly, then marched to take up the engineering station, studiously checking computer circuits, as soon as he settled

in his seat. Kirk watched unsure whether to laugh or vent his exasperation. Uhura's voice brought him out of his quandary. "Communications, sir. It's the Superintendent, Base Hospital, Sector Three - asking to speak to the Captain or first officer."

"Put him on the screen, Lieutenant."

"Yes, sir," The screen lit up to show a fatherly man with a beaming smile.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, Captain. But I have a patient here who won't rest until she has spoken to someone in authority aboard the 'Enterprise'."

"Oh! What can I do for her?" Kirk asked, intrigued.

"Well, I'll let her speak for herself. Miss Deb Salter this is Captain? I'm sorry I wasn't told your name, Captain."

"James Kirk," said the pretty blonde whose face replaced the Superintendent's on the screen.

"How do you do Miss Salter," Kirk smiled pleasantly, she was certainly a very attractive girl, in spite of the black eye. "I'm afraid you have the advantage of me."

"Oh, we've never met, Captain." She flashed him a dazzling smile. "It's really your first officer I want to speak to."

Kirk stiffened. It was beginning to get on his nerves, normally no-body ever went out of their way to socialize with Spock, now, suddenly he seemed the popular person on board. "I'm afraid Mr. Spock isn't available at the moment," he said non-comittally.

"Oh," she looked very distressed. "He isn't that badly hurt is he? When I heard that he'd walked out of the hospital, I was so worried."

"Out of the hospital?" Kirk questioned, wondering if he were hearing things.

The screen flashed back to the Superintendent. "The Commander was admitted here this morning, Captain, a casualty of the rescue party - the crash of the 'Benecia Queen' - but he discharged himself soon after arrival. As soon as he regained consciousness in fact. We were quite worried about him, he was still under treatment."

"I understand that," Kirk spoke carefully, aware of his bridge crew's eyes upon him, he felt very hot under the collar. "I can assure you that Commander Spock arrived back here safely, and is under the care of my Chief Surgeon. Is there any message I can give him?"

"Yes, please," It was the girl again. "Tell him I hope he gets better quickly, and say 'thank you' to him - for rescuing me, and dinner and everything."

Kirk swallowed, "Thank you for rescuing you and dinner?" He questioned, unsure he had heard, what he thought he had heard.

"And everything. Yes, and tell him I'll see him, next time you put in at Benecia." Kirk nodded, not trusting his voice to speak. "Thank you, Captain, good-bye."

"Good-bye Miss Salter, Superintendent. Enterprise out." Kirk sat in his chair for a moment, as the screen blanked, he felt stunned, drained of reaction. What had Spock been doing these last ten days? Why the hell hadn't Spock told him? But deep down he knew why, remembering his own anger, and Spock's almost pathological pride. Oh, God! What had he done? What was he going to say to Spock? He'd better call McCoy, have Spock medically examined, the Superintendent seemed to think the Vulcan was badly hurt. He turned and rose, heading for the elevator, but stopped to address Uhura.

"Lieutenant, call Dr. McCoy!" But he never finished the order, for following the direction of the Communications Officer's eyes, he saw McCoy. The Doctor stood on the gallery above him, Kirk had never seen him in such a towering rage. McCoy's temper was always short, irascible, but now he was angry, justifiably so, Kirk acknowledged.

"I am formally requesting permission to remove Commander Spock from his quarters to sick-bay, Captain. Furthermore," he continued without a pause. "I am informing you, that should you refuse permission, I will exercise my right as Chief Surgeon to over-ride you."

"Bones....." The Captain couldn't think of a suitable reply, not in front of an avid, watching bridge-crew.

"Well?" McCoy demanded, his eyes blazing.

"Permission granted," Kirk said, sweeping the furious Doctor into the elevator. "What's more, I'm coming to help you." Once the lift doors had closed and they were on their way, Kirk turned to his angry friend. "I know, Bones, I'm wrong, now that we're out of ear-shot, for goodness sake shout at me, and make us both feel better."

McCoy opened his mouth to speak, but suddenly, like a pricked balloon, the anger was gone from him. "I'm sorry, Jim, I shouldn't have spoken to you like that in front of the crew. But I was damned angry. I've just been examining Spock!"

"Is he bad?" There was a whole world of concern and guilt in the Captains voice.

"Two cracked ribs and a broken collar-bone. That's not the problem. He's had some treatment, the collar-bone has been set, but whoever did it stuffed him full of Bio-considine E - I ask you, a Vulcan - he's as euphoric as hell, that's what's kept him going all this time. He'd have collapsed hours ago without it. But it makes him damned hard to constrain."

"That explains the fancy-flying," Kirk exclaimed as enlightenment dawned. The elevator doors opened to deck 5, and cries of;

"Mr. Spock, No! You'll hurt yourself!" Kirk and McCoy ran for the first officer's quarters. Spock was standing up on his bed, weaving about precariously, he seemed to be trying to catch an imaginary insect above his head. Nurse Chapel sighed her relief at the arrival of her boss and the Captain.

He's terrible, sir," she said, "He won't do a thing I say."

McCoy took one look at the situation and ordered sharply, "Get down, Spock!"

Spock looked at him, one eyebrow raised. "No!" was the only reply he gave.

"Cadet! Stand by your bed!" Kirk's imitation of the Company Drill Sargeant at the Academy was Galaxy famous. He didn't know if Spock had been scared of 'Sarge', but if not he was the only Cadet who hadn't been.

"Yes, sir!" The 'Enterprise's' first officer stood firmly at attention beside his bed; then he began to sway from side to side; finally he turned to his Captain and said plaintively, in Vulcan, "I feel very ill, sir!" Before collapsing quietly into Kirk's arms.

They laid Spock gently on the bed, and McCoy leant over him, trying to assess how much damage his recent behaviour had caused.

"Does it always make them act like this?" Kirk asked grinning.

"No," McCoy was deadly serious. "Usually it sends them into acute depression and they die. Spock's lucky, his human-half will save him. But I'd like to get my hands on the product of an Earth medical school, that gave it to him. Why do they let these people out in space so bloody ill-equipped. Basic non-human biology, that's all they need!"

Kirk could see the real anger in McCoy, anger at the stupidity of letting ignorance have authority, at the self-importance of a Humanity that allowed it's doctors to treat other races without adequate training. He understood how McCoy felt, both the professional rage at incompetence, and the personal rage because it was Spock's life that had been endangered. There was nothing Kirk could say, his own burden of guilt was too great at the moment.

"There," McCoy stood up, "He's gone into a 'healing trance', he'll be all right, if we watch him carefully enough." He glanced over at Christine, who nodded and pulled up a chair to sit beside the bed.

The two men strolled out of Spock's cabin and along the corridor towards the Captains. McCoy was still venting his annoyance. "That's probably all he was doing when they pumped him full of B.C.E. - but the medic didn't even know enough to recognise the trance. Paniced when the life in-

dicato s fell, thinking Spock was dying, and used the wrong stimulant; easy enough I suppose. But, hell, Jim it's one of the basic tenets of space medicine, 'Never give the green-blooded races any of the 'sidinate drugs!'" He sighed as Kirk touched his sleeve; "Hey, Bones, how about my giving these two red-blooded Humans a dose of the drug 'ethol alcohol? I could do with it!" The Captain suggested, the evnts of the last hour had made him feel dizzy.

They sat down in the Command cabin, a bottle of brandy and two glasses on the desk between them. After he had drunk half a glass, Kirk asked;

"He is going to recover, isn't he Bones?"

"Sure, It took him the right way," McCoy answered cheerfully, "He'll be fine as soon as we bring him out of the trance. A bit tired, but fine!"

"Good, because I'd hate to have to tell that girl the truth," Kirk was filling up their empty glasses.

"What girl?" McCoy queried.

"Didn't you know? The one he got hurt saving." Kirk grinned and leant forward, in a gossipy mood. "I don't know much, of course, but - she's real pretty, Bones, I mean it, even with a black eye"

"A black eye?" McCoy protested.

"Yeah, even with a black eye she was quite an eye-ful!" Kirk drew a shapely female figure in the air before him. "Blonde - blue eyes, and Spock took her out to dinner!"

"Never!" McCoy was incredulous.

"That's what she said, 'tell him thanks for dinner and everything' and, " the Captain paused for dramatic effect, " He's made a date to see her again."

"When?"

"Next time we call in at 'Benecia', " Kirk nodded sagely. "So there!" He finished triumphantly.

"When are we next calling at 'Benecia, Jim?" McCoy asked expectantly. Kirk's face fell;

"Year after next, routine colony census check."

"Oh!" McCoy's face was disappointed, then a thought struck him, and he did some rapid calculations on his fingers. "Jim, do you realize that would coincide with the next time Spock's.....?"

"Yeah!" interrupted the Captain, a look of sheer delight on his face. The intercom beeped. It was a routine call from.....
.....Crastinus!

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LATIN VOCABULARY (for non-classicists)

- Casus - chance, accident, calamity;
- Cause - cause;
- Crastinus - that which belongs to tomorrow.

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Spock tore at his restraints in a frenzy. McCoy watched him calmly. It was working. Soon they would all be themselves again. Moving the breakables from sickbay had been an unnecessary precaution; Spock had himself suggested that it would be safer to restrain him while the drug took effect and had submitted meekly to the treatment.

It had been a harrowing time for all of them, McCoy reflected. The radiation disease which had caused such incredible aging was now under control but it had left them all with grim memories. In fact, the experience would have been traumatic for most humans but Starfleet personnel were selected for above average resistance to shock. Spock, of course, would in any case be immune from any emotional disturbance.

The Vulcan finally stopped thrashing around and lay back quietly on the bed, eyes closed. The change in him was not as dramatic as in the others but it was still very noticeable. He looked a good twenty years younger.

McCoy undid the straps and Spock opened his eyes and sat up, rubbing his wrists.

"My compliments, Doctor. I may have been mistaken about your medical skill."

It was quite an admission. McCoy was taken aback.

"Don't overdo it, Spock. You'll be thanking me next!"

The Vulcan was at the door. He turned and said seriously,

"Surely you understand my gratitude? Do you really need it verbalised?"

McCoy nodded. "We are human. Remember?"

Spock looked gravely at him. "In that case...thank you."

McCoy grinned. "You're welcome."

"Will that be sufficient, Doctor?"

McCoy resisted the familiar impulse to throw something at the First Officer. Spock raised an eyebrow and left.

Obviously completely back to normal, thought McCoy wryly - too completely back to normal. A Spock actually chastened by his brush with senility would have been something to see. It had been infuriating that he, Kirk and Scott had been reduced to a trio of bumbling dotards while Spock had merely looked elegantly middle-aged. Although Spock himself had claimed that his mental processes had been reduced, it was obvious that, right up to the end, he could still think rings round the rest of them. The competency hearing had shown that - Spock's searing and merciless logic had made them, Kirk especially, look ridiculous. McCoy had felt painfully sorry for Kirk. The Captain had reminded him of a butterfly he had once seen, pinned squirming to a board. At the time he had cursed Spock's efficient cruelty but now he could see quite clearly that the Vulcan had had no alternative. For Spock the whole thing had been a grim duty which he had been forced to perform against his personal inclination. Thinking back, McCoy could remember the weariness in Spock's voice as he had relentlessly backed Kirk into a position where the Captain had convicted himself out of his own mouth. Yes, McCoy reflected again, it had been a most distressing affair all round - thank God it was all over and they were back to normal! It took him over a week to realise that they weren't back to normal. Something had changed. There was a distinctly strained atmosphere on the bridge whenever he had occasion to go up there. They finally located its cause in Spock. The Vulcan was not his usual self. He spoke only when spoken to and was completely aloof

and withdrawn. McCoy realised he had been mistaken in ever thinking of the old Spock as taciturn and cold. This was the real thing. The Vulcan had his defences gathered round him like an impermeable shield. After several tries at breaking through to him the bridge crew had given up. Kirk had persisted but had been rebuffed so coldly that even he had retreated, bemused and not a little hurt.

Kirk finally talked it over with McCoy and confessed his bewilderment.

"It's just been happening slowly over the last few days, Bones. I don't know what's wrong but the atmosphere on the bridge is electric! I think the crew have become really frightened of him. Chekov made a minor error today and Spock reprimanded him in a way that made me cringe - it almost reduced Chekov to tears. It's not like Spock to deliberately hurt like that. He was within his rights, of course, but... Do you think he's sick?"

McCoy looked dubious. "He had a check-up when I gave him our miracle youth drug. He was perfectly all right then - physically and temperamentally. I'd swear the drug worked completely and he left me looking and sounding quite his usual self. I thought at the time that he was quiet, but in retrospect, and comparing his behaviour of the last few days I'd say now that he was positively garrulous." He looked serious. "Tell you what, though, he has been off his food - Christine always keeps tabs on him and she noticed straight away."

Kirk added miserably, "He's also been avoiding us. He's kept to his quarters all his off-duty time. It can't be pon-farr. He knows us too well to get uptight over that any more. He'd naturally tell us."

"Worries from home, maybe?"

"There's been no personal messages from him - and again, he would never let that sort of thing affect his attitude to us. Many years ago he might have hidden a private worry from us - but now?... No, Bones. It must be something that involves us - otherwise he would confide in us." He looked suspiciously at McCoy. "Have you said anything to him that might have given offence?"

McCoy snorted. "I always say things to him that might give offence. How the hell can I isolate one insult from all the others? I haven't dared insult him since he's gone all broody, though. I don't fancy myself as a candidate for tal-shaye - merciful though it may be! I'm even afraid to suggest that he has another check-up. It's almost like an invasion of privacy to talk to him at all these days!"

Kirk shrugged helplessly. "Let's leave it for a while and hope the situation improves of its own accord."

Far from improving, the situation took a dramatic turn for the worst. Kirk received a visitation from a stony-faced Spock who, using a few brief, formal phrases presented him with a transfer request, already filled out - with meticulous accuracy, as might have been expected.

Kirk was thunderstruck. He knew there was some problem but had never thought it would come to this. He stood there, blindly holding the transfer form and trying to shake off the air of unreality. What had happened to Spock? Why did he want to leave? He tried to formulate the questions but the look on the Vulcan's face gave him no encouragement. It was as if everything they had shared, the dangers, the responsibilities, the moments of understanding and affection had ceased to exist. Instinct moved him

to beg Spock to stay but one look at that face and the pleading words died on his lips. What was the point of appealing to memories of friendship, of telling Spock how important he was to them. The Vulcan would not be moved by emotional appeals of that nature. Kirk swallowed and kept his voice carefully steady and neutral.

"I'm sorry you wish to leave us, Mr. Spock - also curious as to your motives."

Spock's voice was mechanical and he answered with rote-like precision.

"My reasons are personal ones. Not to be discussed."

"Very well. I will consider this."

"You have no valid reason for refusing to pass my request on to Starfleet, Captain. I wish to leave as soon as possible."

Kirk was beginning to get angry. He slapped the form down on the desk.

"Nevertheless, I will consider this for a while. I may remind you that you are still under my command. You are ordered to report to sickbay immediately for a full medical examination."

It was all Kirk could do to prevent himself from breaking down in front of the Vulcan - but he knew the scene had to be played out with some dignity. He realised that his voice and words were unaccustomedly harsh, both because he was himself hurt and angry and also because the harshness made it easier to cover up the turmoil and pain inside him.

Spock said nothing - just looked at Kirk with implacable eyes.

"That will be all, Mr. Spock." Kirk didn't recognise the voice as his own. Could this really be him, curtly dismissing from his life the best friend he had ever had - and was ever likely to have?

Spock hesitated slightly. For a moment Kirk thought he was going to say something. Then the moment passed and the Vulcan wheeled and left the room.

For a long time Kirk seemed to sit there, mesmerised by the sight of the form on his desk. Numbly he reached for the intercom and told McCoy what had happened.

"Give him a thorough going over, Bones. If there is a medical reason for all this I want it pinpointed."

"Jim...I...I can't believe it." He paused, choked. "What did you say to him?"

"Not much. What could I say? I was stunned. I just took the form."

"Did you try to get through to him?"

"No. I could tell it would have been no good. You should have seen his face."

"You should have tried, Jim."

Kirk sighed audibly. "I know. I was afraid of becoming over-emotional. I don't know what's wrong with him but I don't want him to despise us any more than he already does....My damnable pride...I could weep..." he finished ruefully.

Kirk switched out and McCoy began to calibrate his equipment to Vulcan settings. The dazed feeling persisted and he had to keep reminding himself that this was for real. He had known that some day they would probably break up but had never thought beyond promotion or death. To voluntarily sever a deep and rewarding relationship such as theirs had been was unthinkable and yet Spock was doing just that - and without a word of explanation.

He heard the door open and turned as the Vulcan entered. Without a word, Spock marched to the examination table and lay down - none of the familiar cracks about McCoy's medical skill or the over-frequency of his checkups. McCoy conducted the examination

in silence. There was, as he had suspected, nothing wrong with Spock. It was McCoy himself who ended up feeling sick. His stomach wouldn't straighten itself out and there was a lump in his throat that threatened to choke him. But he could see why Kirk had not attempted to get through to the Vulcan. Spock's deflector shields were fully up and he obviously had himself under icy control. McCoy tried in vain to match his air of indifference.

"You've lost too much weight, Mr. Spock. But apart from that you're perfectly fit."

Spock made no comment and started to rise. McCoy looked at him and quailed inwardly, but he knew something had to be said. Besides there was this nagging doubt inside him that would haunt him for the rest of his life unless he spoke now.

"Spock...I..." He saw Spock's face get even colder but steeled himself to go on. "Look...I've said things to you in the past. I thought you knew I didn't mean them. I'm sorry if I've offended you. I never dreamed...I don't want you to leave this ship because of me. I'd prefer to leave myself. It would be easier for me to adapt to another ship than it's going to be for you."

Spock still said nothing but moved to sit up. Something snapped inside McCoy and he found himself shaking - actually shaking - the Vulcan. He couldn't remember ever feeling so hurt and angry. He half expected to be smashed against the bulkhead at any minute... Even that would be better than no reaction at all. Still with his hands on Spock's shoulders McCoy went on implacably. "Have you thought about what it's going to be like for you? Do you remember those early years with us? The loneliness! The distrust! Remember Stiles? Even me, Scotty and the others. Remember the Tholian affair? The things I said to you then. And the other time when we lost Jim for months and you failed to deflect that asteroid. Remember how we blamed you then? How we allowed you to blame yourself?" McCoy realised he was shouting and still shaking Spock. He lowered his voice and his hands and looked away helplessly. It was no good. He heard himself muttering brokenly, "How can you bear to go through all that again? I can't...we can't...let you. And us...how can we bear it if you go? How can you leave Jim like this? It will break him. He has trusted you and tried to understand you from the start...even in the bad old days when the rest of us couldn't see past..." He broke off in horror. Spock's face had twisted at his last words and he seemed to be fighting real distress. McCoy impulsively put his arm round the Vulcan's shoulders and found himself murmuring soothing words. "Try to tell me, Spock. We'll sort something out. It's just got to be a misunderstanding... I've said I'm sorry. It's years since I've deliberately tried to hurt you."

He felt Spock tremble convulsively and a wave of compassion swept through him as he realised the depth of the distress which the Vulcan had been bottling up for the past weeks. Very gently, he laid Spock back on the couch.

"I'll leave you for a few moments. Don't try to get up. Just rest and relax. You want to tell me, don't you?"

Spock nodded wordlessly. McCoy tactfully left him. When the doctor returned some minutes later he was bearing a large bottle of brandy and two glasses. Spock had not moved, but he had himself under control again - but, McCoy noted with relief, it was not the brittle control of the past weeks. The Vulcan just looked weary and curiously defenceless.

"Better?" McCoy said softly.

Spock's voice seemed to have temporarily deserted him. He nodded again and sat up. McCoy poured two very large brandies and passed one along to the First Officer who, to his amazement, downed it in one and passed the glass back for a refill.

"The trouble with you, Spock," McCoy murmured easily as he poured out the drink, "is that you constantly forget you're half-human. All this repression will be the death of you! Problems are better shared. Even if I can't help you, you'll be happier after you've told me."

Spock found his voice at last.

"I know. But I find it...difficult to talk about personal matters."

McCoy passed him another enormous drink. "I understand. Take your time."

They drank in companionable silence for a while. McCoy could feel the brandy warming him and his own stomach unknottling. He wondered what it was doing to Spock. Spock was halfway through his fourth drink before he spoke - very softly, almost as if to himself.

"You were quite wrong, you know, Doctor. You are not to blame for all this... Your apology was unnecessary. I do not take offence where none is meant - and it's years since you and I actually meant any of the things we say to each other. I never take you seriously these days."

"Thanks a lot," McCoy put in drily.

"I also say things to you that I do not mean," Spock went on smoothly. "Vulcans always mean what they say, but you seem to bring out the human in me."

McCoy grinned in spite of himself. Spock drained his glass and reached again for the bottle. Dutch courage, McCoy thought warily - screwing himself up to the sticking point.

"It's the Captain," he continued at last, almost inaudibly. "He doesn't trust my motives. He...he thinks I do the right things for the wrong reasons."

McCoy almost laughed aloud with relief. - A tragic misunderstanding but one that Kirk himself should be able to correct. Where on earth had Spock got the ridiculous idea that Kirk didn't trust him?

"Spock," he said gently, "You are mistaken, you know. I just don't understand how you came to believe such a thing."

"I am not mistaken." Spock's voice was raw. "I only wish I were. He told me so himself."

"When? And what exactly did he say?"

It was obviously painful for Spock to talk about the incident. He spoke haltingly and with an unaccustomed blurr in his voice that McCoy recognised as the effects of the brandy.

"After the...competency hearing...when I went to tell him the... decision. He was not...himself. He accused me of betraying him...to get command...said I've always wanted...command...told me he never wanted to have to see me again."

"You've admitted he was not himself, Spock. We none of us were. He didn't mean a word of that."

"So I thought...at the time. I expected an apology after...when we were cured. I waited, but..."

McCoy began to see clearly exactly what Spock had been going through. No wonder he had retreated behind a barrier of icy reserve and indifference. In the past Spock had given more of himself than they had the right to ask any Vulcan to give. As well as his loyalty to duty he had offered them his personal trust and devotion. It was as if he had made a gift of his most cherished possession and had it thrown back in his face.

"Spock, has it occurred to you that Jim may not remember what he said at that time."

"Yes, Doctor. But I believe that's wishful thinking. I remember everything that happened to me while I was infected and I'm sure that you and Mr. Scott do as well. It is most unlikely that the

Captain has really forgotten."

"Spock, how can you definitely say that you have not forgotten anything? If you had forgotten, you could not logically remember forgetting - if you see what I mean. Besides, even if he has remembered, he probably attached no importance to it - I'll bet he reckoned you wouldn't take it seriously. It was such a ridiculous thing for him to say. He's probably assumed that you realised how nonsensical it was."

"Doctor, unlike you, the Captain has always meant the things he said to me. Besides, if he didn't mean it he could have said so with a simple apology."

McCoy flet as if he were wading through treacle. He knew Kirk cared, but...how to explain it to a Spock who refused to be reassured?

"Spock," he went on at last. "Only the other day you accused me of wanting thanks. You said I should have taken your gratitude for granted." He paused. "Admittedly, we humans need the reassurance of words, but I thought Vulcans were self-sufficient. I think Jim expects you to know that he didn't mean those things and to take his apology for granted. Perhaps he's a bit embarrassed at the whole affair and is subconsciously trying to forget what he said." He watched Spock pour himself another drink and went on. "We've talked about your recent behaviour and he's been concerned and upset. I'll swear he has no idea that he himself is the cause. He was almost weeping when he told me you had put in for transfer."

Spock had been gazing thoughtfully into his sixth treble brandy - but at McCoy's last words he suddenly looked up.

"But...he didn't even ask me to stay, Bones. One word and I would have torn up that form."

"Spock, you just don't understand humans. He was afraid of breaking down and embarrassing you. He thought an emotional appeal would just drive you further into your shell. You know," he added softly, "you've been very unapproachable these last weeks. We'd begun to be almost afraid of you."

Spock's Vulcan half must have been almost submerged in the brandy. He looked at McCoy and the doctor saw the naked misery in his eyes. He was a ll human now - and somewhat the worse for drink. "I'm sorry," he said raggedly. "I've been so wretched myself...I've been taking it out on the crew. Trying to deny that I...cared just seemed to make it worse."

He suddenly dropped his head into his hands. The sight of Spock's all too human despair moved McCoy as nothing else could have done. All this anguish for a simple misunderstanding!

"Spock...don't...I'll see Jim. Let him tell you himself."

Spock's voice was husky and his words slurred. "No, I do not want him to feel obliged to apologise just to make me feel better. His pity is not what I need... I don't want him to see me like... this."

He raised his head and McCoy saw him compose his face with an effort.

"Doctor, I seem to be slightly drunk. I would appreciate it if you were to forget this interview." He rose unsteadily and leaned against McCoy. "If you would be so kind as to assist me to my..."

McCoy saw his eyes glaze over and just managed to steer him towards a bed before he collapsed.

"My paralytic Vulcan friend," thought McCoy kindly, as he bent to remove Spock's boots, "if Scotty could see you now...He'd never believe it!"

In deference to Spock's wishes McCoy said nothing to Kirk beyond admitting that he was keeping the Vulcan in sickbay overnight. He had said, quite truthfully, that although there was nothing organically wrong, Spock's sudden loss of appetite and signs of strain warranted further investigation.

In the morning Kirk had wanted to come down and see his First Officer but McCoy had advised against it. Anyway, he had said, Spock was asleep and under mild sedation. Which, he reflected to himself, was also true in a way! He had always wondered if Vulcans got drunk, and if so, whether they suffered from hangovers. He already knew half the answer and was about to discover the answer to the rest!

Spock stirred, opened his eyes, groaned and promptly shut his eyes again.

"Another refreshing sign of humanity, Mr. Spock," said McCoy brightly, "known, in the vernacular, as a hangover."

"I am well aware of the terminology, Doctor." The Vulcan sat up and shuddered. "It is only the experience itself that is new to me." He shut his eyes again. "I knew there was a logical reason for abstention."

"Well, Spock, what's it to be? Vulcan pain control or human headache pills?"

Spock grimaced. "I've had enough of being human for the moment, Doctor. If you will be patient..." He lay back for a few minutes then opened his eyes again. "I'm all right now."

He was already out of bed and pulling on his boots. He seemed very much his usual self.

"Spock...?" McCoy began but Spock himself broke in.

"Doctor...I made a fool of myself last night. My apologies." He hesitated. "I cannot remember exactly what I said towards the end of the evening but I know I was not in control. You will not repeat what I said?"

"Of course not. Anyway, you said nothing to be ashamed of, Spock."

"Thank you. Doctor, there is something I need to ask you."

McCoy hid his surprise. "Go on."

"When I made the decision to seek a transfer I thought I was being logical. If the Captain really does mistrust my motives then it is logical that I should go, for the good of us all - and the ship. I was convinced in my own mind that it was so." He hesitated and looked somewhat shamefacedly at McCoy. "Now I'm not so sure. My own behaviour last night made me realise just how deeply I had let emotional considerations rule me. Besides, your arguments cast some doubts in my mind." He looked closely at McCoy and spoke very steadily. "Doctor, I no longer think I am capable of making a rational decision whether to go or stay. My natural inclination to stay may be a purely emotional one. You must be completely honest with me - no white lies, please. Do you really believe that I have misjudged the Captain?"

McCoy met Spock's eyes squarely.

"Yes, I do. Without any doubt."

Spock relaxed visibly. "In that case I shall withdraw my request for a transfer. I am sorry to have taken up so much of your time unnecessarily, Doctor."

"My job, Spock. And it was not unnecessary. Anyway, it was an interesting case-study. I was not aware that Vulcans could get so uptight."

"Neither was I, Doctor," was the devastating reply.

Kirk had had a ghastly night. When he awoke from a feverish and disturbed sleep he was quite prepared to dismiss the whole business as a product of nightmare. But the transfer form, still lying where he had thrown it on the desk, brought him down to reality with a lurch. He knew that if Spock really wanted out he would have to send the request to Starfleet. All he could hope for lay in delaying tactics. Once the message was sent the whole matter was out of his hands - and irrevocable. He carefully filed away the document, wishing it was a case of out of sight, out of mind. He was still staring blankly at the wall when the buzzer sounded and, in answer to Kirk's summons, Spock entered.

The Vulcan's eyes went immediately to the desk.

"Captain," he began without preamble, "have you taken any action regarding my request for transfer?"

Kirk looked at him, hoping to see a chink in the armour - some way of getting through to him. Spock still looked tense and tight-lipped but some of the icy coldness had gone from his face. Perhaps there was hope...

"Spock, I..."

"Captain, please give me a straight answer. Have you or have you not contacted Starfleet?"

The worries of the past weeks and the last night exploded inside Kirk

"NO I HAVE NOT! And I'm not going to either until I know the reason for this crazy, damnfool behaviour of yours...Of all the ridiculous, pig-headed, lunatic notions I've ever heard of. You've been driving us near mad with worry for a fortnight... then this..."

He tore open the file, grabbed the transfer form and ripped it into fragments. The pieces fluttered to the desk.

Kirk, hot with a mixture of anger and shame turned away from the Vulcan's gaze.

The icy retort he expected never came.

"Thank you, Captain," Spock said coolly. "You've saved me the trouble of doing that myself. I came to withdraw my request. Please forget the whole matter." He saw Kirk's mouth open in amazement and quickly interposed, "No questions, Jim - please."

Kirk nodded, speechless. He swallowed. "Spock, will you at least allow me to say I'm glad?"

"I can see that, Captain." He paused, obviously searching for words. "I...I made a mistake. That's all."

"That's all!" The tensions and worry that had been building up inside Kirk for the past weeks could be denied no longer. "Spock - just in case you ever make another mistake - I couldn't go through this again... Last night was horrific. I know you hate emotional scenes and I will probably embarrass you, but there are some things I must say. I thought I would never have to say them; I thought you knew how much I value you. Then it struck me last night that I do tend to take you a lot for granted, that I sometimes use you unmercifully."

Spock made as if to stop him but Kirk was in full spate now and babbled on regardless.

"For example, the things I said to you the other week, after the competency hearing." Kirk had averted his face as he dug into the shameful memory so he didn't see Spock flinch as if stung nor note the involuntary tightening of his jaw muscles. He went on distractedly. "I used you then. I was hurt myself and I wanted to hurt someone in turn. It didn't matter who. You were just...there. I'm not sure whether you even remember the incident...you wouldn't have taken me seriously anyway - we were both ill at the time. I'd almost forgotten it myself. But last night, when I thought you were leaving, I went over everything in

my mind - thought of all the things I'd left unsaid...I've never told you that you are as close to me as a brother - closer than my real brother ever was. I trust you more than I trust myself, sometimes...I..."

He trailed off in embarrassment, realising how much he had said and wondering if Spock could ever forgive him for such an unseemly display of emotion. The silence was ominous. He could imagine the contempt with which Spock would view his outburst, and dreaded what he would see in the Vulcan's face if he turned round.

"I'm sorry," he mumbled. "I shouldn't have gone on like that, but last night I promised myself that if you should, by a miracle, change your mind, I would say those things - once and for all."

The silence stretched to screaming point. Kirk knew he had gone too far. He had only made matters worse by gabbling on so inanelly. He forced himself to turn to face his First Officer.

Spock's face was a rigid mask, his expression unreadable. He knew Kirk had not found it easy to speak such words to him. His doubts seemed so foolish now. But what could he say? He had managed to tell McCoy...but had been three parts drunk at the time. To speak now...in cold blood! Yet if he did not speak, Kirk would imagine that his protestations of affection had fallen on stony ground. The Captain was obviously ashamed and embarrassed at his outburst and would never know how much his words had meant to Spock. Besides, Kirk had asked for reassurance that Spock would never again alienate himself from them. Spock did not see how he could give such reassurance without a full explanation of his recent behaviour.

Kirk was looking at him now. Spock knew his own face gave no indication of the indecision he felt, of the conflict within him; to match confidence with confidence - or to silently accept Kirk's friendship and hope that the Captain would understand his own feelings. Noone could have been more aware than Spock himself of the basic illogic of his position. To reject facts was always illogical. His affection for Jim Kirk was a fact that he had long since admitted to himself even while he continued to cloak his feelings in rationalisations. It was illogical to pretend that by shutting one's eyes to an unpalatable fact one could make that fact go away. It was with him now...inescapable...a burden of affection that he was so used to denying that such denial had become automatic.

But Kirk deserved better.

At last the Vulcan spoke, hesitantly and with none of his usual precision. "Forgive my silence. It is just that I don't know what to say. Noone has ever before spoken such words to me." He sat down facing Kirk.

"You are not...offended?" Kirk hardly dared hope.

"No - on the contrary - I am honoured."

Kirk let out the breath he had not been aware he had been holding.

Spock went on more firmly. "Captain, I think you should know the reasons for my recent behaviour, but..."

"Spock. If you do not wish to talk about it I will understand and accept the fact. I just hope it will never happen again - whatever it was."

"No. You have been honest with me. I must..." There was an awkward pause. When he began to speak again his voice was perfectly steady and emotionless. "Captain. I had come to believe that you no longer trusted me. The things you said after the competency hearing sowed the seeds of doubt in my mind. Hence my transfer request. I thought you meant what you said...I know better now," he concluded simply.

Kirk stared at him in open amazement.

"It mattered that much?"

Spock nodded dumbly. He clasped his hands together to steady himself. In a sudden, impulsive gesture Kirk leaned forward and grasped his First Officer's hands between his own.

"Spock. I...I'm so sorry. Please forgive."

"I already have, Jim."

The silence between them was different this time. Everything had been said. Finally Spock stood up to go. Kirk accompanied him to the door. He laid a detaining hand on the Vulcan's sleeve.

"Mr. Spock, one thing still puzzles me. Why did you withdraw your transfer request? It couldn't have been anything I said to you. You had obviously decided to stay before you came to see me this morning."

"Call it sorcery, Captain. I consulted Dr. McCoy."

"Your friendly neighbourhood witch-doctor...eh, Spock? I'd be interested to know what spells and potions he employed."

"I don't know about the spells, Captain, but from the state of my head, I would judge the potion to be at least ninety percent proof!"

Kirk raised an eyebrow. Spock smiled. Then the door between them hissed shut.

ENCOUNTER by T'Pol

The two children stood and stared at each other, for both it was a first time. Neither had met a representative of the other's race before. Slowly the hand of the Vulcan child rose in salute. "Vulcan is honoured by your presence." He said carefully in experimental English. The Human child was unsure of his reply, he decided on the most neutral he could think of;

"Hi! A long silence followed, while each considered the strange appearance of the other, and weighed what further communication etiquette demanded of him. Finally young Charles Greyson decided to initiate a conversation, "I'm Charlie, who're you?"

"I am Sarek." Another pause ensued, then that most persistent of Vulcan vices overcame all Sarek's inhibitions. "Why's your hair like that?"

"Like what?" demanded Charlie, beligerantly.

"All crinkly, and ...yellow?" Sarek's English was bearing up well, his teacher would be proud of it, if not of his manners.

"I dunno." Charlie put his hand to his mess of golden curls, he had never been aware of his hair before. Certainly the smooth, satin, blackness of the Vulcans's head was entirely different. He reached out to stroke the ordered silk. Instinctively Sarek pulled away. "Ow go on," urged Charlie, "Let me - here you can feel mine!"

He lowered his head and thrust the luxuriant curls to-wards Sarek, who backed away, apalled, and yet fascinated by the gleaming, tumbled mass. Finally overcome by the desire to know what it would feel like to push his palm against the resilient, golden hair. Sarek reached forward with both hands and gently touched Charlies head. It was wonderful. Like catching hold of the high scudding clouds of Vulcan's storms, or capturing, solidified, the foam of her shallow, turbulent streams. He was aware of Charlies thoughts and fears, of the differences and similarities, and of the exciting, colourful chaos that is a Human child's mind. For Charlie the sensation was different, yet equally pleasant. He felt for the first time, an awareness of someone else within him. Sarek was just reaching the point of true telepathic awareness. He was as yet untrained, his ability unformed, untouted. To Charlie unexpectantly aware of the Vulcan's measured, ordered brain pattern, it was like entering a maze, or a formal hedged garden where all is harmony and peace. Slowly Charlies hand came up to caress the dark head bowed close to his. For a brief moment two cultures, two worlds, two minds, met mingled and took delight in each other, with perfect harmony and mutual satisfaction. Then t they drew apart and went their separate ways, no need for them to talk again, no need to keep in touch, for that short closeness was to join them and theirs inseperably until the end of Sarek's long life and beyond.