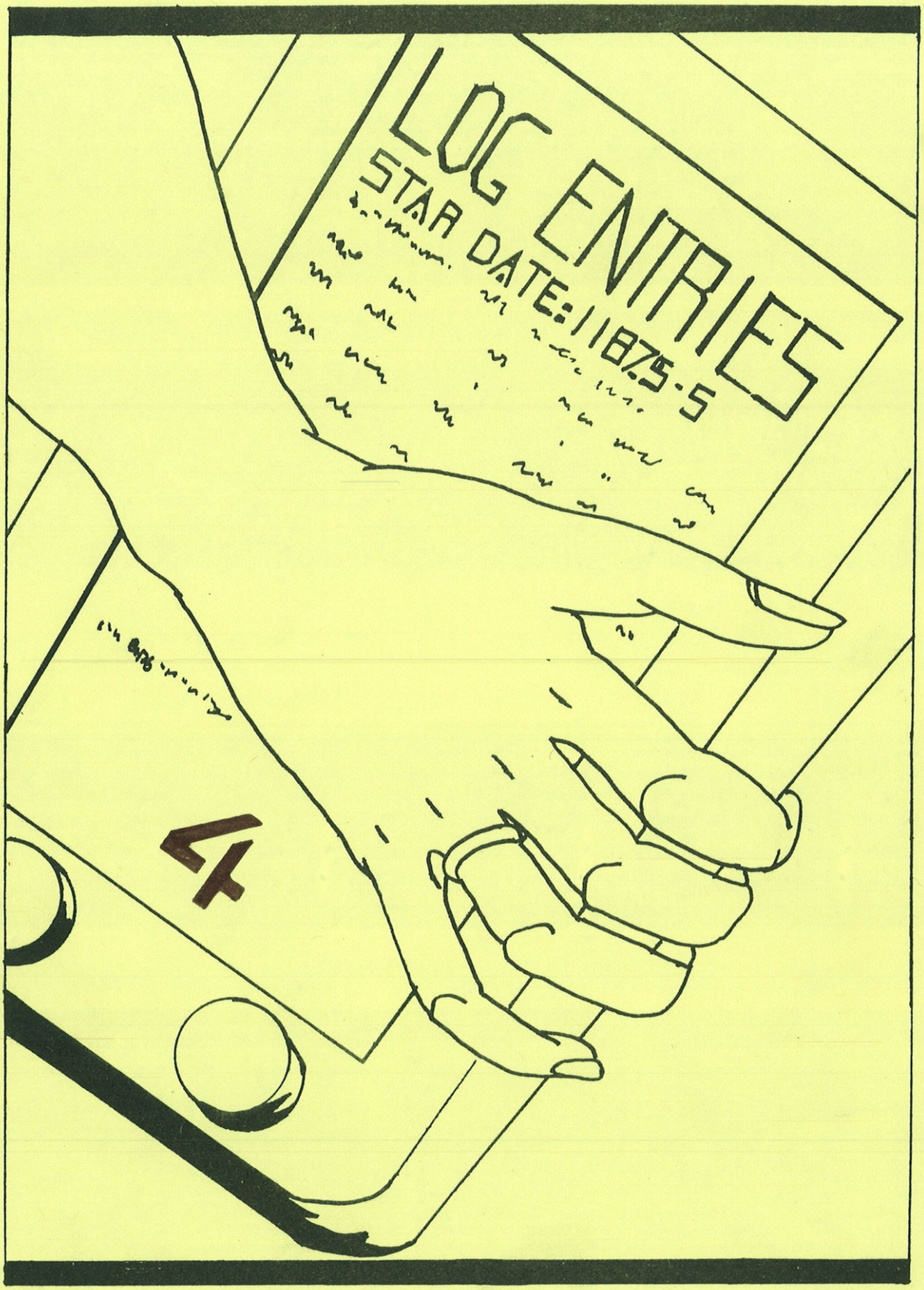
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Illustration on P.33 given by John Mansfield, artist unspecified.

A STAG publication

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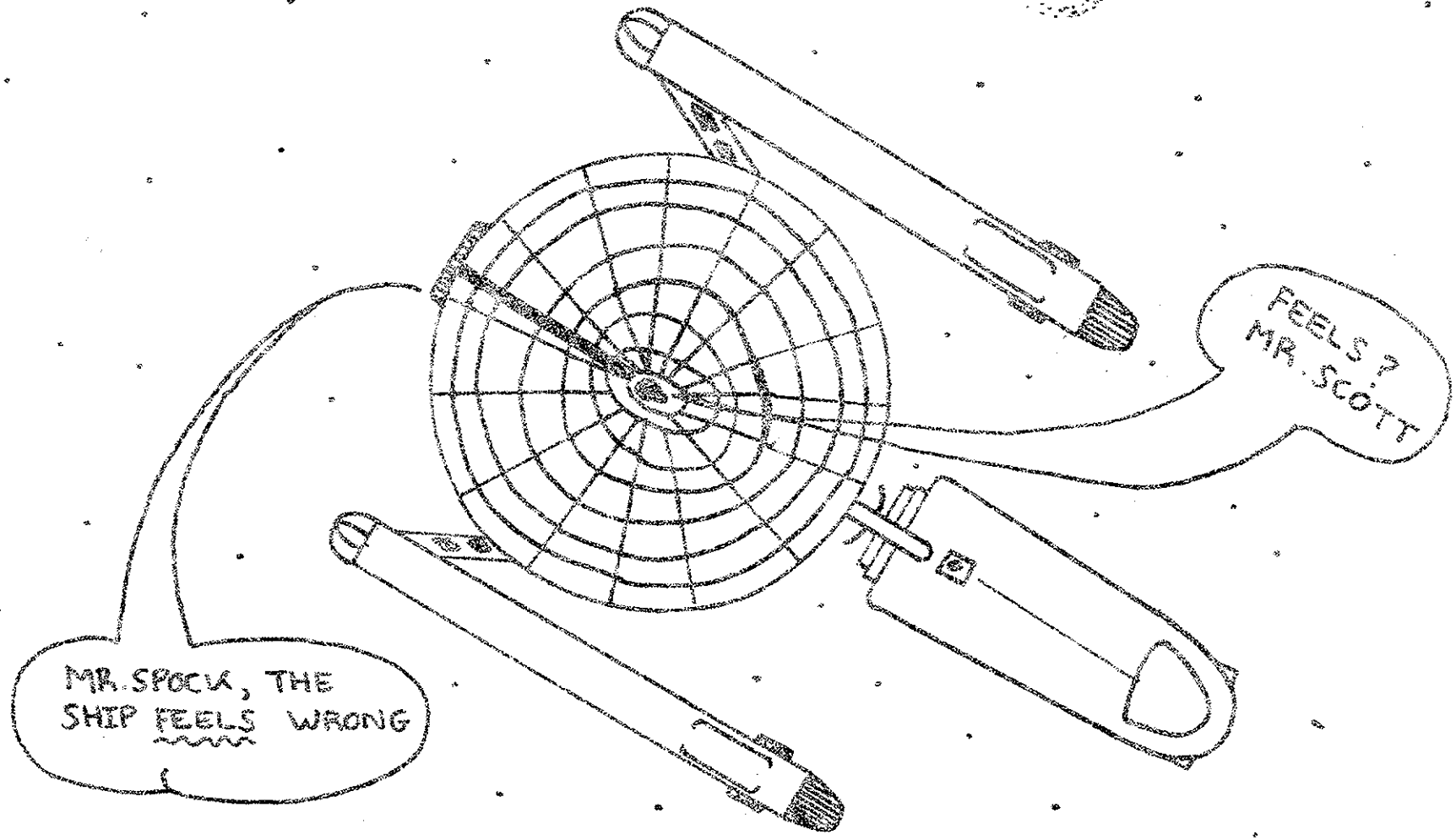


FROM:
"THAT WHICH SURVIVES"

COMPETENCE by Sheila Clark

The new crewmen had come aboard; they had been assigned quarters, and left to get to know their new crewmates.

Frank Ransome soon left his quarters and went to look for Bill Reynolds who, he knew, had been assigned to the ship some months previously. A few questions quickly led him to Reynold's cabin; he buzzed at the door.

"Come."

Reynolds was alone, his roommate absent on duty. He looked up as Ransome entered, and his face froze. He waited in stony silence for his visitor to speak.

"Bill..."

Ransome hesitated as he received no encouragement, no answer.

"I came to apologise, Bill."

"I accept your apology, Mr. Ransome," Reynolds said formally. "However, I would be obliged if you would restrict your contact with me to necessary duty situations." He turned to the desk viewscreen, ignoring his visitor.

Ransome looked pleadingly at him for a moment, but Reynolds kept his head resolutely turned towards the screen. Ransome bit his lip, and left.

As the door slid shut again, Reynolds raised his head, to look at the closed door. There was a deep unhappiness in his eyes.

Because of sheer alphabetical coincidence, both men ended up on the same section of the duty roster.

Almost immediately, the ship's First Officer noticed that Ransome's work was badly performed. He kept making mistakes; careless slips, none of them major, but the cumulative effect was very noticeable. Spock had a quiet word with him, pointing out what he already knew, that careless mistakes in space could cost lives - and that his own could well be one of them. He accepted the rebuke passively, and was dismissed.

Spock considered the matter once Ransome had left to return to duty. Presumably Starfleet considered the man competent, or they wouldn't have assigned him to a Starship; but...

The Vulcan's fears were justified; Ransome did not improve. He continued to make mistakes, mostly minor ones, but in Spock's opinion it would be only a matter of time before Ransome made a serious error and men died. Much as he disliked the prospect, he decided, reluctantly, that he must report Ransome to Kirk.

The new crewman stood before the Captain, his eyes lowered, waiting. But Kirk was good at waiting, too. Ransome was forced to look up. When he did, Kirk saw what Spock had not - had not because he had never seen Ransome's eyes clearly. The man's face was set in an enforced calm; but his eyes were tortured.

"What's wrong?" Kirk asked gently.

The gentleness came near to breaking Ransome. His lip quivered slightly; but still he said nothing.

"Mr. Ransome; I assume you know what the results of carelessness could be. Yet, according to Mr. Spock, you have been consistently careless since you came on board. The reports on you from the Academy indicate that you are of considerable potential. Since you have not achieved anything near that potential, I can only assume that there is something worrying you. What is it?"

Ransome hesitated a moment longer; but the need to confide in someone was very great; and Kirk seemed sympathetic, more sympathetic than he had expected the Captain to be at such an interview. He had fully expected to be torn off a strip...

"It's... a personal worry," he managed.

"It must be a pretty serious one."

With an effort, Ransome managed to control his voice. "My cousin has been on board the Enterprise for some time," he said. "Bill Reynolds. We were brought up together; we were like brothers. One day we quarrelled. It was my fault; I said something... I didn't mean it as anything but a joke, but he thought I did. I didn't realise he had taken it seriously, and when he replied, I tried to keep the joke going... before I knew it, we were quarrelling seriously. Because I'd meant the whole thing as a joke, I refused to apologise... by the time I realised just how serious the whole thing had got, it had gone too far...

Bill left home. Soon after, so did I, and joined Starfleet. That was when I discovered that he had, too. My reports were good; I was able to get myself assigned to the Enterprise when I heard he was on board her. The first thing I did when I came on board was find him and apologise. He accepted the apology... but he still refuses to have anything to do with me. I realise I'm being childish, letting it worry me so much, but..."

Kirk sat silent after Ransome's voice trailed away, thinking over the man's problem. He could appreciate how Ransome felt... he had only to remember the one occasion when he and Spock had had a serious misunderstanding... and nothing had really mattered until the misunderstanding had been cleared up.

He sent Ransome away; the crewman left, grateful for the Captain's understanding and silent sympathy, determined to try to inprove, to keep his mind on his work.

After Ransome had gone, Kirk sat for a long time trying to decide what he could do to help the man. He could not approach the cousin direct; that would solve nothing, and might indeed make matters worse. One thing he could do, however. He could transfer Ransome from general duties to another department, like Security, where his current preoccupation with his problem would have a minimal effect, and that would also serve the purpose of separating the two men. Away from the immediate presence of his cousin, Ransome might find it easier to concentrate on his work.

Their first planetfall on this trip involved a check of an automatic research station, a routine chore normally preformed by the Science Officer. On this occasion, Kirk decided to go himself, and take Ransome with him, both to give the man the experience and to form his own estimate of Ransome's potential.

Spock protested as soon as he learned what was in Kirk's mind.

"You can't take Ransome, Jim," he objected. "The man's not competent. How he was ever passed as fit for Starship duty I can't understand. The best thing to do with him is give him entirely routine duties and request his transfer to another class of ship at the earliest opportunity."

"I think he's got possibilities, Spock," Kirk said. "He had good reports. He just needs to settle down."

"Jim, he's had plenty of time to settle down. All the other new men have."

"Put it this way, then, Spock. I want to see for myself how he performs on duty. This is such a routine trip that he can't possibly do any damage, even if he's as incompetent as you think."

Spock glanced round as McCoy came in.

"Doctor, the Captain wants to take Mr. Ransome as crewman on his check of the Station. I think he is inadvised to do so. Mr. Ransome is incompetent."

McCoy scratched his head. "I'm not so sure of that, Spock. According to his profile, he is - or should be - a pretty good crewman. I get the impression there's something on his mind... something worrying him."

"Have you considered the possibility that he has discovered he's afraid of being in space?" Spock asked.

"That attitude's well-tested," McCoy retorted. "It's unlikely."

"I think I should give him a chance," Kirk cut in. "If I am to recommend him for transfer, as Spock suggests, I have to have some concrete reason to offer. I can't just say, "Mr. Spock doesn't think he's any use," I have to give <u>my</u> reasons." He looked from one to the other. "This is so routine, he can't go wrong."

"How about taking one of the more experienced men too?" McCoy suggested.

Kirk hesitated. "No," he said at last. "If I'm going to test him, I'd rather do it alone."

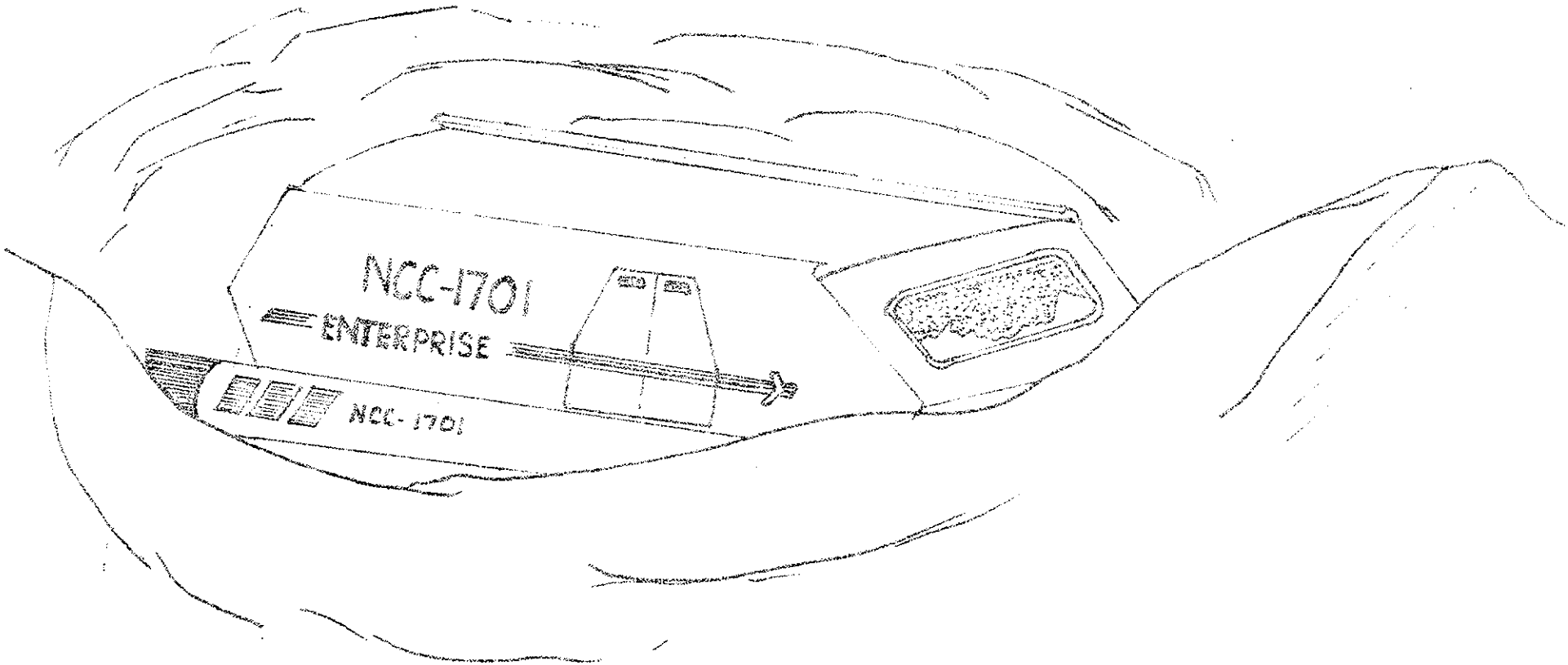
Kirk left Ransome to pilot the shuttle, while he sat back and watched, but said nothing. They could of course have beamed down, but Kirk had decided that if they took the shuttlecraft, it would give him a better opportunity of judging Ransome.

The take-off was smooth - as smooth as any Kirk had ever experienced, and the shuttle began to drop down gently towards the planet.

Ransome was good as a shuttlecraft pilot, Kirk decided. It was the smoothest ride he had had for a while. The only shuttle pilot Kirk knew that he felt was better was Spock... and Ransome came close to being as good.

They dropped lower... lower, and touched down so gently that for a moment Kirk didn't realise they were down.

"Well done, Mr. Ransome," he said. "Now - tell me what we do next."



Competence

Ransome began to go over the drill. He certainly knew the theory, Kirk thought. If the problem of the cousin could only be resolved, Ransome would be an excellent crewman...

"Right, Mr. Ransome," Kirk said when the man had run over all the landing procedure. "Now; we have pre-recorded data to collect. What is the drill for that?"

"We take the recorded tapes," Ransome replied. "Check that all moving parts of the automatic recorders are moving freely and are clean; put in fresh tapes."

"Good, Mr. Ransome. Let's go and do it."

Ransome pressed the button to open the door; nothing happened. He pressed it again; still nothing. He glanced at Kirk, puzzled.

"Try over-ride, Mr. Ransome," Kirk suggested.

Ransome obeyed; the door began reluctantly to open. As soon as it was open a fraction, sand began to spill in through the crack.

"Shut it again!" Kirk snapped.

Ransome obeyed and looked back at Kirk. "What's happened, sir?"

Kirk's lips set grimly. "There are a lot of quicksands on this planet, Mr. Ransome. We've landed in one - no, it probably wasn't your fault, don't go thinking you've made another mistake. But we've sunk under the surface by now; and there's no way a signal can get through to the ship... and no way the ship's sensors can find us."

Spock, sitting in the command chair, fretted as he thought of Kirk, going down with an incompetent green hand. Academically, he decided, Kirk was right; he did have to make a personal judgement on Ransome before making any recommendations on his future. But he should have taken someone experienced as well! No indication of his thoughts showed on his face... but he was aware of a growing tenseness inside him. Kirk's routine report, indicating planetfall, was overdue... by at least half a minute...

The half minute dragged into a full minute... two... three...

Spock glanced at Uhura. "Lieutenant, contact the Captain. His call-in is somewhat overdue."

"Aye, sir... Mr. Spock! I can't raise the shuttlecraft!"

Spock was on his feet instantly. "Take over, Mr. Sulu. Lieutenant, have Dr. McCoy meet me in the transporter room immediately." His departure left the bridge crew feeling as if a hurricane had just whirled through the place - even though he had not seemed to hurry.

Spock and McCoy beamed down to beside the automatic station. There was no sign of the shuttlecraft... no sign of any living being other than themselves. Even the station buildings were semi-buried in drifted sand, looking as if they were part of the natural surroundings.

Spock swung his tricorder round.

"Nothing," he said simply.

"But... Spock, where can they be?"

Spock's mouth set in a grim line. "Captain Kirk planned to allow Mr. Ransome pilot and navigate," he said. "In theory, nothing could have gone wrong. In practise, I believe that Mr. Ransome was not able to do something as simple as that... and has made a mistake in navigation, and landed somewhere else... and this is the most stable part of the planet's surface. If the shuttle has landed somewhere else, it would inevitably land in a quicksand... sink in... out of sight... out of reach of our sensors..."

"How could that happen?" McCoy asked.

"All Ransome would need to do would be to transpose two numbers in his landing co-ordinates," Spock said grimly. "And that is a very easy mistake to make. Even I have occasionally done so in a first check."

"If that did happen... how long would they have?"

"Not very long," Spock replied. "Life support in a shuttle is limited in time; but even more important is the heat. A shuttle is equipped with heaters, but not with refrigeration units. And it will get very hot, buried under the sand."

In the shuttlecraft, Kirk would have seconded Spock's comment enthusiastically. It was already getting hot; and a quick check showed that someone on the Enterprise had been careless when he last checked the shuttle's supplies. There was almost no water aboard.

He looked again at Ransome's guilty face. "Don't blame yourself," he said again.

"Mr. Spock was right," Ransome muttered inconsolably. "I am incompetent. If it wasn't for my carelessness, you wouldn't be here now."

Kirk moved over, and checked over Ransome's calculations.

"No, Mr. Ransome. There's no error. If I had been piloting, we would have landed in virtually the same place. There are quicksands near the station; we are in one of them, within a couple of hundred yards of the station. There is nothing wrong with either your navigation or your piloting."

Ransome looked gratefully at him as they settled back in their seats.

"Better take things easy, Mr. Ransome... it's going to get hotter, and we don't have enough water... the man I am going to haul over the coals for this is the one who should have made sure the water container was full, and didn't..."

"You think we'll get back, sir?"

"If we don't, it won't be for lack of the desire to find us," Kirk replied confidently.

The desire to find them was overwhelming... but knowledge of where to look was woefully lacking. Spock returned to the ship with McCoy, and initiated a sensor scan; a search, both for the shuttle, and for any sign of recent disturbance to the surface of any of the quicksands;

a search that was to be concentrated on areas with co-ordinates similar to those of the landing site, or with the same co-ordinate numbers arranged differently.

"Do you really think the surface will show any sign of disturbance?" McCoy asked.

Spock shook his head. "No," he said quietly. "But we must try any possibility, no matter how slight."

In the shuttlecraft, it was getting hotter. Sweat poured off both men; but Kirk still insisted on saving the meagre few drops of water that were on board.

"We'll need it more yet," he said.

There was a hissing sound from the negine compartment. Both men looked up sharply.

"It shouldn't do that, sir - should it?"

"No. It shouldn't," Kirk said. He got up to go across to the panel to examine it; half way there, he was stopped by the force of the explosion that ripped the panel apart. He was flung back against Ransome, whose body broke his fall and who was protected from serious injury by Kirk's body. A piece of burning hot metal ripped into Kirk's shoulder; another pierced his leg. The heat in the enclosed space suddenly increased, becoming almost unbearable.

Ransome bent over Kirk anxiously, hardly feeling the pain where a third piece of metal had gashed his arm. Kirk tried to smile at him.

"Not too bad, Mr. Ransome," he said. "Are you hurt?"

"No," Ransome replied.

Kirk's gaze was fixed on Ransome's arm. "What about that?" he gasped.

"It's nothing," Ransome assured him. He reached for the metal protruding from Kirk's leg, and pulled it free with a sharp tug. Kirk caught his breath at the pain.

Ransome left Kirk's side, went to where the shuttle's first-aid kit should have been - and discovered that it was missing too. He was aware of anger. He had been accused of carelessness and incompetence for much less than this... but this really was carelessness. Someone had left the shuttle very badly underequipped.

He moved over to get some water. The Captain would need it badly...

But there was none. Yet another scrap of shattered metal had punctured the container, and the minimal supply of water they had had was lost irretrievably...

Spock was beginning to feel irritated. McCoy was haunting the bridge, pacing round and round restlessly in a way he would have criticised in anyone else as being pointless; and McCoy's worry and restlessness was beginning to communicate itself to Spock. But he felt it would be cruel to banish McCoy to sickbay. Although there was nothing he could do here, on the bridge, he was at least seeing

all that was being done... no matter how unsettling his behaviour was to the Vulcan. There were occasionally disadvantages to having such a close relationship as he had with McCoy - and Kirk - when you were telepathic...

If only it were possible to have a permanent telepathic link with Jim... so that circumstances like this could never arise... He forced his mind away from the impossible temptation of the thought and back to the sensors.

It must be getting very hot in the shuttlecraft now... could that be used to help them find it? He initiated a heat scan.

It didn't help. There were too many places that were hotter than they should have been. He looked blindly past McCoy, who moved to him, stood silently at his side. He looked at the doctor. The near-telepathic awareness of their friendship worked both ways, he realised. McCoy knew full well how worried he was getting.

In the shuttle, Ransome returned to Kirk, who had by now pulled himself on to one of the seats, and was making an effort to stop the bleeding of his leg and shoulder.

"There's no medical kit," Ransome reported. "And all the water's gone too, sir." He stripped off his shirt and ripped it into strips, using them to bind Kirk's wounds as best he could. The leg injury wasn't too serious, he decided, but the shoulder one was nasty, if only because the scrap of metal was still embedded in the flesh, and Ransome's limited medical knowledge did not include the treatment of serious injuries, or the removal of foreign bodies from wounds. And Kirk had lost more blood than Ransome liked to think of; which would have been serious anyway, but with the lack of water, was aggravated.

They were no longer sweating. There was no longer moisture enough in their bodies to permit them to sweat... All they could do now was sit back and wait in the increasing heat for rescue - or death. Privately, Ransome was sure that it would be death... and he determined that when they were found, he would be seen to have died as bravely as the Captain... if their bodies were ever found... He was beginning to understand just what it was that made the crew of the Enterprise so fond of Kirk, work so hard for him... even the self-possessed Vulcan adored Kirk, according to mess gossip. It would have been so easy for Kirk to have lost his temper, blamed Ransome for landing them in this mess... instead, he had reassured him, assured him that they <u>had</u> landed in the right place... <u>Had</u> they really come to the right place? Had Kirk just been being kind? He might never know... but of one thing he was certain. If they did get out of this alive, he was Kirk's man till death...

He checked the Captain's condition again. Kirk's eyes were shut; there was a flushed look about him, but Ransome couldn't be sure how much of that was due to the heat in the shuttle and how much was due to the effects of his injuries. Then Kirk moaned, and muttered something, and Ransome realised that Kirk <u>was</u> suffering from the effects of his wounds and also probably from shock. But there was nothing he could do...

He went back to the punctured water container to see if by any outside chance a few drops had survived the holing; but he had been right the first time. There was no water left.

He returned to Kirk's side. The Captain was moving restlessly now; Ransome tried to hold him still, pillowing his head on his shoulder, murmuring soothingly to him...

It didn't take long for word to get all round the Enterprise about the loss of the shuttlecraft with Kirk and Ransome. Reynolds heard about it fairly quickly, and was surprised at the feeling of shock the news gave him; greater even than on the day he still hated to be reminded of, when he and Frank had first quarrelled. He felt guilty now. He could have been more generous to his cousin when he apologised... it wasn't as if the original cause of their quarrel had even been all that serious, really... and just what was happening? His informant could give him no news other than that the shuttle was missing...

He was currently off duty. He headed for the bridge, a lettle nervously as he considered his temerity, but he had to get more information...

He found Spock strangely sympathetic - more so than he had ever thought a Vulcan could be... once he had explained the reason for his interest. Spock told him exactly what they had done, what they were doing, and why. And that nothing they had thought of was producing any results.

A faint memory stirred deep in the recesses of Reynold's mind. A craft buried in quicksand... Where had he heard something like that before? Of course - in that old story!

"Mr. Spock - years ago, I came across an old story... written in the early days when space travel was still experimental. In it, a small ship was buried in sand on the Moon. The searchers found the ship because the heat from it caused the sand above it to move."

Spock stared at him. "That is worth considering, Mr. Reynolds," he admitted. He glanced at Chekov, still scanning the surface.

"Check for movement of the surface of the sand, Mr. Chekov."

"Aye, sir."

They waited in silence that seemed to echo threateningly in their ears while Chekov continued his scan. At last, Chekov exclaimed, "There is some movement, Mr. Spock. In a quicksand just beside the station."

Spock moved quickly to the scanner, checked for himself.

"There is definitely something there," he agreed.

"But... how can we get down to it?" Chekov asked.

Spock frowned, punched the intercom button on the command chair.

"Spock to transporter room. Can you pick up anything at these co-ordinates?" He gave them.

A short silence. "Negative, sir."

In the shuttle, Ransome was getting desperately worried. The Captain was unconscious now, definitely unconscious even although he was muttering hoarsely in delirium, The only words Ransome could make out clearly were, "Spock... Bones, help Spock..." What was

Kirk dreaming about in his fever? His own arm was getting painful and beginning to look swollen. Of course, he thought, the metal must have been dirty, and while the heat in it would help to kill off a lot of bacteria, some, the toughest strains, would have survived to infect them both. Kirk must have been affected first because the shoulder wound was deep and the infection would have got into his blood stream quickly. His own arm injury was superficial at best, compared to Kirk's two hurts, but from the angry inflammation it now showed, it wouldn't remain superficial much longer.

If only it wasn't so hot...

Spock looked at Reynolds. "In that story you read, how were the crew of the ship rescued? Or weren't they?"

"Oh, they were rescued. The rescuers... I'm not sure... they lowered planks of some sort into the sand to hold it back, then dug out the sand in the bit they had enclosed."

"That would take much longer than the time we have available," Spock commented.

McCoy nodded. "According to my calculations, they have not more than forty minutes before the heat reaches the point where it will kill them."

"I estimate thirty eight point nine minutes," Spock agreed. He glanced round the bridge. The crew were watching him... this was the burden of command, the crew's dependance on their Captain - or their acting Captain - to solve their problems... but this was his problem, not theirs. Jim... he had to find some way of getting Jim out of there... for his own sake, for Jim's sake... he felt McCoy's hand on his shoulder, comforting and strengthening him.

"Tractor beams!" he said sharply. He glanced at Scotty, currently occupying the engineering station - a duty he normally delegated to an underling. The fact that he had felt it incumbent on him to remain on the bridge was eloquent... "Mr. Scott. Lock a tractor beam onto the area where there is the turbulence in the sand; try to lift the sand away long enough for us to attempt to reach the shuttle with the transporter beams."

"Aye, sir."

An observer on the surface would have been startled - and possible impressed - by the fountain of sand that rose from the surface a few seconds later. It rose... and rose... and rose...

Loose sand flowed from around it into the space it left.

"It's not working, Mr. Spock!" Scotty exclaimed. "The sand's too soft; it's flowing like water, replacing itself as fast as I can get it away. And teh quicksand beds are so big that it'll take years to get it all away."

"We do not have years, Mr. Scott. We now have thirty five point three minutes."

"That's what I'm trying to say, Mr. Spock. We just don't have long enough."

"I cannot accept that, Mr. Scott."

McCoy said desperately, "If we can't lift the stuff away, could we blow it away with deflector beams?"

Spock glanced at Scotty.

"I'll try it," Scotty said. He flicked switches.

The imaginary observer would, this time, have seen a spreading fountain with a raised circle of sand round it, a raised circle that rapidly tried to resume the natural level of the ground around it, flowing back into its hole as fast as it could...

It was getting increasingly difficult to breathe; Ransome found himself envying Kirk his uncon ciousness. He no longer considered rescue... he didn't even think that they would ever be found. The shuttle was probably still sinking deeper and deeper into the sandy bog... He closed his eyes. He wanted to sleep... if this was dying, it w as strangely pleasant... and very peaceful... just like sleep...

Uhura turned from her station. "Mr. Spock! Transporter room reports... they've got the Captain and Mr. Ransome... they're hurt, sir."

Spock glanced at McCoy, but the surgeon was already half-way to the elevator, with Reynolds just behind him.

Spock, though just as anxious as the Humans, controlled it better, and moved down to sickbay at a more leisurely pace.

Ransome was barely conscious; Reynolds stood at his side. But Spock wasn't particularly interested in Ransome at this moment. He headed for the bed where McCoy was working over Kirk.

McCoy didn't even glance up as Spock joined him. He was busily probing the injured shoulder for the minute scraps of metal that the scanner told him were still embedded there. Spock watched silently.

At last McCoy looked up. "All we can do now is wait," he said. "I don't know what happened, but I reckon there must have been an explosion - "

"There was," Ransome said from the other bed. "The Captain was nearer it than I was. I couldn't do anything because there wasn't any medical kit on board - there wasn't much water either, and the container got holed anyway and we lost what there was."

Spock moved over to him. "What exactly happened when you landed, Mr. Ransome?"

"The Captain went over landing procedures with me. All the screens were down - he was checking that I knew what I was doing. When we tried to open the door we discovered that we were in the quicksand. The Captain checked my calculations, and said that he would probably have landed us in the same place... then the engine started hissing, and exploded."

Spock nodded. "Thank you, Mr. Ransome." McCoy left Kirk and came over to tend Ransome's arm; Spock silently resumed his position

at Kirk's side.

"You can go," McCoy told Ransome at last. "Take it easy for the next twenty-four hours."

"Yes, Doctor." Ransome sat up; Reynolds reached to help him.

"Come on, Frank."

They went out together. Before they were out the door, McCoy had forgotten them.

The sedative that McCoy had given Kirk while he operated had worn off now; Kirk was muttering again. Spock bent over him.

"Jim... You're a ll right, Jim..." McCoy shook his head slightly as he listened. Jim was not all right. He had lost be far too much blood and sweat to be all right.

He and Spock had shared several uneasy watches at Kirk's side in the past, but to McCoy this was to remain in his memory as one of the worst. He felt completely helpless... not a new sensation, every doctor experienced it frequently, the moment when he had done all he could and the rest was dependant on the patient's strength and will to live. The will to live was there, but - on this occasion - was the strength?

The slow hours passed... Spock remained with McCoy at Kirk's side apart from a few brief moments when he ordered his immediate subordinate in the science department to beam down to get the results from the station, and then ordered the ship on to her next planetfall.

Kirk's muttering became more and more incoherent. McCoy glanced at Spock.

"No, Doctor," Spock said quietly, guessing what McCoy's request would be. "I could reach his mind, but there is little point when his delirium is caused by his fever."

McCoy nodded. "I know, Spock. I wasn't going to ask you that. I w as just thinking... Ransome wasn't responsible for what happened, w as he?"

"Apparently not.. and he most certainly wasn't responsible for the lack of medical kit and water in the shuttle. Who checks the shuttle medikits?"

"Usually one of the junior nurses - not always the same one." McCoy's lips tightened. "And when I find out which one took a kit out without bothering to log the fact, I'll - "

"Why would a kit be taken out, Doctor?"

"If there were a fair number of missing items to be replaced, the kit would be taken out for a thorough check. But I should be given a note of which kits these are. I thought my staff had got that well into their heads."

Beside them, Kirk moaned. Both swung back to him. His eyes were open, but there was no recognition in the look he gave them.

"Ransome?" he muttered.

"He's O.K., Jim," McCoy said reassuringly.

Kirk looked straight at him. "Bones?"

"We're both here, Jim."

Kirk's glance moved past McCoy and stopped. "Spock."

"Yes. You were right, Jim. Ransome wasn't at fault this time."

Kirk seemed to be struggling with a memory. "Did anyone on the ship ask about Ransome?"

Spock nodded. "His cousin."

"Good," Kirk said. "I don't think Ransome will make any more mistakes now..." His eyes drooped shut.

McCoy glanced at Spock. "He'll be all right," he said. "He's sleeping naturally now."

"Then I will return to duty," Spock said. He paused at the door to look back at the sleeping Kirk. Who would want a command of his own when he could serve under this man? he wondered. It was all he wanted... to remain with Kirk.

It was with a lighter heart that he left sickbay to make his way back to the bridge.

****

There are Spacemen at the bottom of my garden
As sure as the Enterprise flies,
I'm certain it's that very famous crew
All decked out in disguise!

Now the Captain he sits on a swing -
well everyone to their own thing,
As Sulu pushes busily by -
with a wheelbarrow of flowers piled high.
Chekov spends hours fishing for loot -
but still catches the same old boot,
And with a long handle broom, Doc McCoy can be seen -
permanently sweeping, keeping everything clean.
Then there's Scotty who's having a bit of a dig -
(he's forgot where the whisky is hid)
And there's a Klingon you won't recognise on a log -
for they've turned him into a frog!
Surveying this busy domain -
Uhura stands as an elegant crane,
But Spock's the one who most fits into place -
I wonder why - there's something about his face,
And he really looks quite at home
as a mushroom gathering gnome!

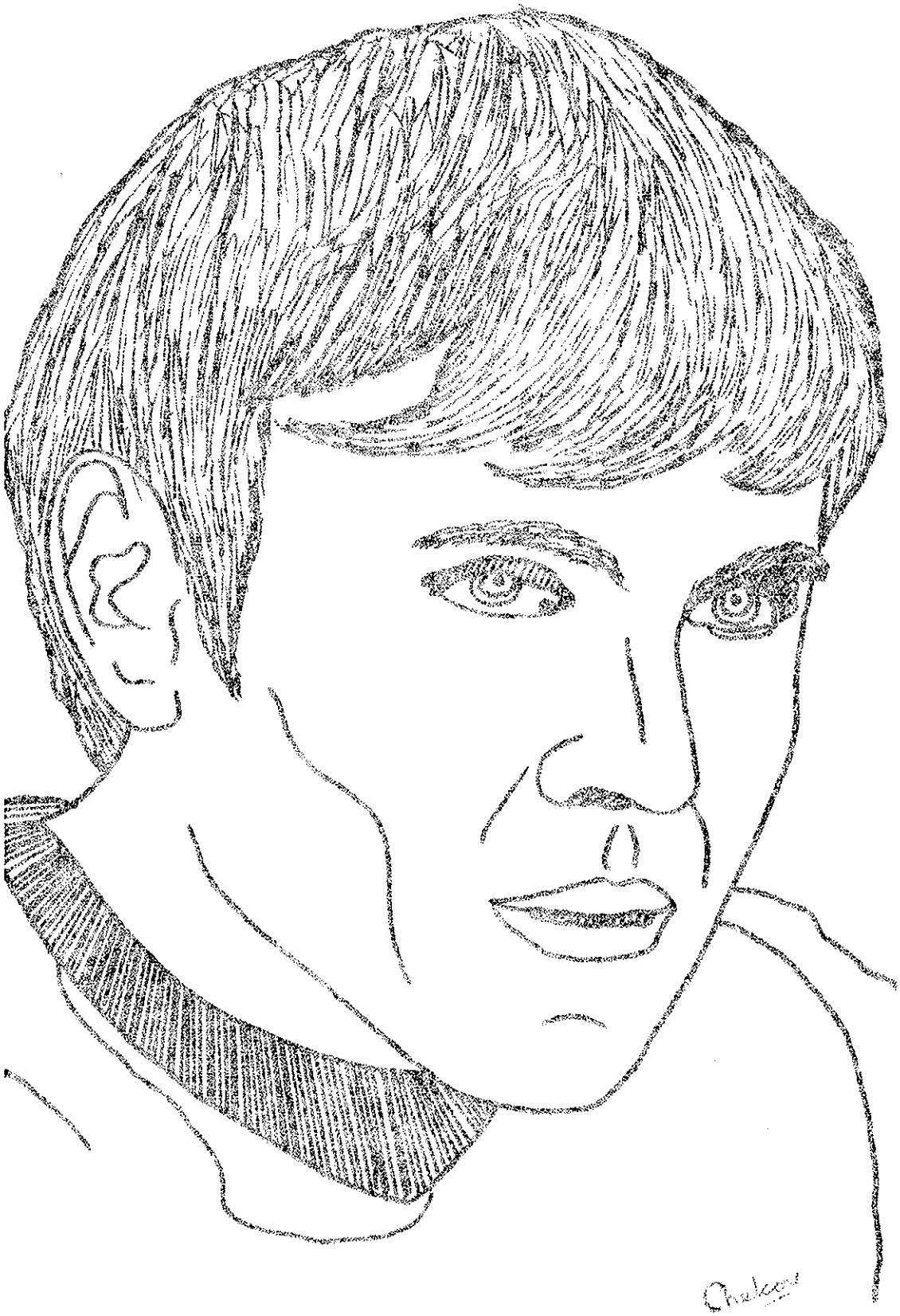
There now I've given the secret away
Of the little men in cute suits and disguise.
They may look like gnomes on a rockery to you -
To me it's the crew of the Enterprise!

Sheila Cornall.

****

What do Kirk and Spock play in their leisure time?
Astronaughts and crosses...

****



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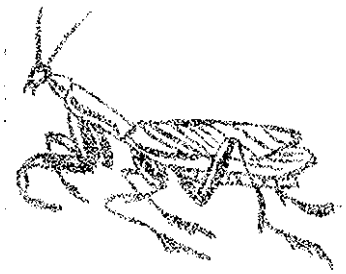


by Audrey Baker

"I hate these jobs," Kirk grumbled to Spock as they headed for the transporter room. "Go and investigate the crash of the Argos! The blasted ship came down three years ago and there can't be much left of her or her crew by now, especially on a god-forsaken hole like Tychos 50!"

"The Argos crashed two years, eight months and two days ago," Spock said precisely, following on his Captain's heels as usual.

Kirk waved one hand dismissingly. "So what? Do you think we're likely to find much of any use down there?"

"I do not know, Captain, although I think it unlikely. However, we have undoubtedly located the remains of the ship - " Spock began, getting set for a lecture, but Kirk cut him short.

"All right, all right, I know!"

"Is Dr. McCoy not accompanying us?" Spock inquired when they entered the transporter room and saw young Dr. Spencer, one of McCoy's assistants, waiting for them with two crewmen and an engineer.

"No. He's got a cold in the head and he's staying on board to try to find a cure!" said Kirk with a touch of sarcasm.

"If the good Doctor can accomplish such a miracle he will become a miracle in himself," Spock observed, and Kirk couldn't restrain a smile.

A short while later Kirk, Spock, Dr. Spencer, Engineer Ralston and the two crewmen materialised on the surface of Tychos 50. It was a planet of caves and holes, hills and rocks, with little vegetation apart from a moss-like growth. It was bleak and hot. A few hundred yards from where the party stood lay the wreckage of a small space freighter, a type built to land on planets. It had come in to land here and crashed, for what reason no-one as yet knew.

"There she is!" said Kirk briskly and led the way over to the shattered metal.

The others followed him but the next instant one of the crewmen let out a startled yell.

"What is it?" Kirk snapped, swinging round.

"Come and look, sir," said the man unsteadily, looking down at the ground by his feet.

The others crossed to where he was standing. Spock's brows soared skywards.

"What do you think did - <u>that</u>, sir?" the man asked in a hushed voice.

"I'm sure I don't know," said Kirk. "Any theories, Mr. Spock?"

Spock touched the dry hide with the toe of one boot. "It reminds me of something I have seen on Earth," he said, considering. "What was it? Oh yes, I remember. Insects, Captain."

"Insects?"

"Certain species of insect feed by liquefying the interior of their prey," Spock said. "They inject an acid and - "

"Then suck out the insides, leaving a husk like this," Kirk finished. "Yes, I get the point, Mr. Spock."

"But these must be giants," the crewman said, awed.

"Very possibly," said Spock indefferently.

Dr. Spencer began to use his tricorder on the gruesome relic at their feet and Kirk, watching him, said reflectively, "I wonder which member of the crew he was?"

"That, I doubt you will find out," Said Spock. "And I expect the others are nearby, in a similar concition."

Investigation proved him correct - they found the rest of the crew, as Spock had anticipated, a collection of dried leathery husks like the first.

"Let's get back to the ship," said Kirk with some distaste after ascertaining there was nothing to be learned from the wreckage.

Spock was, however, looking at the mouth of a large cave nearby, set in a hillside riddled with holes like a giant honeycomb. He said, "With your permission, Captain, I should like to investigate a little. If this planet is indeed dominated by a giant insect race - and sensors have indicated there is life here - I should like to find out something about it. It would be - interesting."

Kirk sighed. "Oh, very well then. You can stay a while longer and I might as well remain with you. Where were you thinking of searching?"

"In that cave there. It looks as if it might hold some information."

"I'll come with you then. The rest of you can beam up to the ship," and Kirk reached for his communicator. He was checked by Dr. Spencer, who requested permission to remain also and carry out some experiments on the bodies. Kirk granted permission and had the rest of the party beamed back aboard. This done, he and Spock walked across to the low entrance of the cave and went inside. There was barely room for Spock to stand upright, but Kirk, who was shorter, could do so in comfort. They had expected to find it rather dark inside and were at first puzzled to discover that they were able to see quite well, even away from the entrance. Spock immediately began to search for the source of the light and traced it to a kind of algae growing on the walls and roof, that gave off a faint glow. It was hardly more than a twilight, but it enabled them to see around them, although there was little enough to see. The cave appeared unoccupied except for themselves, but Spock, who knew something of botany - as he did of most sciences - started to examine the algae curiously and Kirk amused himself looking for some traces of life. He was just going to tell Spock they must go when they were both jerked upright by a shriek from outside.

"What the -!" exclaimed Kirk, rushing to the entrance. Spock followed and grabbed him by the arm just as he was about to run outside.

"No, Captain!"

Kitk stopped and peered cautiously out. Spock's face appeared slightly above his and they stared at the scene that met their eyes. Two enormous insects stood outside the cave, by the wrecked freighter. They were about eighteen feet high and twice as long, a dull greyish green in colour like the moss, and one of them held Dr. Spencer in its long clasping front legs. The other insect was twittering with jealous annoyance and waving its feelers. The unfortunate young doctor hung limply in the insect's hold and was obviously either dead or unconscious. Even as Kirk and Spock watched,the insect's triangular head moved forward and its jaws closed on its victim. Kirk clawed for his phaser, set it on 'kill' and fired. The insect never so much as rocked.

"It is impervious to phaser fire," Spock said,rather unnecessarily.

The creature was sucking Dr. Spencer dry, just as it or its fellow had done with the crew of the freighter. Kirk ignored Spock's remark and fired again, desperately. This time, although he had no more effect on his target than at first, the insect without a dinner saw the flash of the phaser and turned its head towards them. Then it began to advance swiftly, its long thin legs coveringthe ground in giant strides. Spock dragged Kirk bodily back into the depths of the cave just in time.

"There is nothing to be done for Dr. Spencer, Captain," he said. "He is already dead."

A moment later long clawed forelegs groped into the cave and the creature's chirping filled the place with echoes. The light from the entrance was blotted out, and Kirk stared almost hypnotised at the legs that were reaching for him, noticing the gleaming hooks along the edges of them. Frantically he scrabbled in his belt for his communicator, flipped the top and called the ship. There was no reply. He was still trying to contact her when the legs withdrew and a spray of liquid squirted into the cave, followed by a strange astringent reek. The two men began to cough and retch, their eyes streaming, then Kirk gasped, "Run for it! Gas!" and they headed for the back of the cave, hands over their mouths and noses. They finally stopped far back where the cave branched off into a myriad tunnels leading deep into the hill. They could still smell the gas, but only faintly now, and Kirk tried again to contact the ship.

"It's no good," he said finally in despair, shaking the communicator as it that would somehow do the trick. "Find out why, can you, Spock?"

Spock got to work with his tricorder and in a few minutes announced that the algae were the reason. Its composition was such that it effectively blocked off all radio transmissions and of course would also do the same for the transporter. They were trapped in the cave.

Spock was, as usual, too interested in their predicament to be frightened by it. He observed, "Those insects must be of the order Dictyoptera, suborder Mantodea, of the variety known as Mantis Religiosa. I believe you would call them Praying Mantises, Captain."

"I wouldn't call them anything but devils!" Kirk told him tartly. "And have you any idea on how to get us out of this, or do we just stay here and discuss insect life?"

Spock said, "The place is riddled with tunnels. There is probably another entrance somewhere."

"Then let's go and find it!" snapped Kirk.

They set off together into the maze of passages, their boots ringing eerily on the rocky floor.

They walked a long way, stopping to listen at intervals but hearing nothing but themselves. Once or twice they had to get down and crawl when the roof got low, and except that they were marking the walls every few yards they might have been going round in circles for all the good their walking did them.

Kirk led the way when the path was narrow. He took the lead automatically and Spock followed close behind him. Presently they came to a low arch leading into a larger cave. Kirk made to step inside, peering through the twilight and suddenly there was a noise like a whip cracking behind him. He whirled round to see what looked like a length of rope flinging itself at Spock. Without hesitation Kirk drew his phaser and fired, and the creature subsided with a scaley rattle onto the ground. The next instant there was an ominous rumble in the roof of the tunnel and the two men flung themselves aside just in time to avoid an avalanche of rocks that clattered down, blocking off the tunnel completely. Kirk got up and ruefully surveyed the damage, spitting dust out of his mouth. "That's done it!" he said. "Now we can't go back even if we want to!" Then he noticed Spock was holding his shoulder and said sharply, "Are you hurt?"

"I have been bitten, I conjecture..." Spock said with difficulty.

Kirk lifted his hand away from his shoulder and saw the sleeve of his shirt was soaked with blood.

"Some kind of snake..." Spock continued, breathing quickly and obviously in pain.

Kirk hesitated and looked at the Vulcan's unmoving face. Then he said, "I'll have to get your shirt off."

Spock said nothing but his jaw muscles hardened as he set his teeth. Kirk carefully helped him to remove his shirt. There were two punctures on the upper arm and they were already swelling and turning black. Kirk wished that Bones hadn't chosen that particular time to get a cold.

"It looks as if it's poisoned," he said dubiously. "I'll try to tie it off with a tourniquet to stop the stuff spreading."

He used Spock's shirt and his belt, and as he worked he could see Spock opening and closing his eyes and setting his teeth, but he made no sound.

"Yell if it hurts too much," Kirk said sympathetically.

"And fetch down the remainder of the roof onto us?" Spock gasped.

When Kirk had finished his first-aid and made a slong for the wounded arm they sat down a while to rest. Spock seemed a little better after a bit - his Vulcan constitution was stronger than a Human's. Presently he struggled to his feet and stood, a strange

wavering shadow against the rock behind him, all legs and arms. Kirk got up to help him but was shrugged off.

"Leave me. I can manage."

"Can you walk?"

"I think so. Give me a minute or two." Spock leaned against the wall, breathing hard. After a moment he cautiously levered himself upright and took a few steps. He looked dangerously shaky to Kirk, but he kept moving.

It was like a nightmare. Kirk felt he would always remember it - if he lived. Again he took the lead, but anxiously glancing back now. Spock wavered after him on long unsteady legs like a newborn foal, looking as if he was going headlong any minute and as if only the momentum of his walking kept him upright. He said nothing and Kirk didn't speak either. There seemed nothing to say.

Their footsteps still rang out, but now there was only one set of firm decisive ones. The other set stumbled and halted like a toddler's.

If I stop he'll go down, Kirk thought. He's only still going because we haven't checked. How an I going to get him out? How long can he keep on?

After about twenty minutes he turned to look again and was shocked. Spock looked unconscious on his feet; his eyes were glazed and his face shone chalk white in the gloom. He looked near complete collapse, but he still struggled on, putting one foot in front of the other somehow, following.

They tunnel they had been following forked now, and Kirk stopped. The minute he had done so Spock nearly fell and only the wall prevented it. He leaned there, gasping for breath.

"You can't go any further right now," Kirk said. "We'll stop here for a rest."

"I can keep going - as long as you can..." Spock said dully.

"Don't be a fool! Sit down!" Kirk said sharply and then added, "Come to that, I need a rest myself."

Pride satisfied, Spock sat - or rather slid - down.

They sat together on the rocky floor in silence for a while and then Spock spoke again.

"There is... no use in taking me further. I will only hinder you."

"I told you not to use that kind of talk!" Kirk snapped.

"It is... only logical," Spock persisted. "I am of... no assistance to you now... Go on without me. I... will follow."

"And for how long?" Kirk retorted.

"Until I die," said Spock simply.

And you would, too, Kirk thought, moved. And if I left you to die alone I'd deserve to die myself!

"You'll feel a little stronger after a rest," he said aloud, trying to speak encouragingly.

"Not strong enough," Spock said. "We do... not know... how far there is to go... yet. Go without me. I... brought you here. It is justice that... I should pay the price. Why should YOU?"

"If you have to pay for it with your life, then the price is too high," said Kirk. "And I didn't think you believed in divine retribution."

"I believe in... justice, though," Spock said.

"What justice leaves me without a First Officer? You come with me, Spock, or we both stay."

"No, Captain. The ship needs you."

"And she needs you too!"

Spock closed his eyes. "Why let a dying man hold... you back?" he asked.

"Woyld you have left me, Spock?"

"An officer does not desert his Captain. It is... unethical."

"And a Captain doesn't desert his men. That's unethical too."

"I am only one man... you have a full crew in the ship."

"Sometimes the claim of friendship transcends duty," Kirk said. "Would it just have been your loyalty to your Captain that kept you with me?"

Spock's eyes opened and he looked at Kirk. "You are my friend, Jim," he said. And closed his eyes again.

Kirk was silent a moment. Then he said, "And because you're MY friend I'm not going on without you!"

Spock said nothing. Kirk continued. "I'll go along a little way amd have a look. It might save us time. I'll try the right fork here."

Spock, his head lolling back against the rock, said, "If you have ... any sense... you will not return."

"In that case I haven't an iota!" Kirk retorted briskly and got up. He hesitated, not quite liking to leave the Vulcan and after a moment Spock's eyes opened a slit and looked up at him.

"I'll be back," Kitk promised, not knowing what else to say, still hesitating.

"If you do not go you never will be," Spock said drily and Kirk gave a half-hearted laugh and went.

He looked back once before the bend of the tunnel cut him off from view. Spock was sitting where he'd left him, propped against the wall, and he was watching him go, his head turned towards him. When he saw Kirk looking back he half raised one hand in a gesture of farewell. Kirk went on, grimly.

What shall I do if I lose you? he thought to himself as he went. You've been so much more to me than a First Officer for years now. What'll I do without your courage and devotion and loyalty? His mind back with the man he'd left, Kirk trudged on down the tunnel.

His mind kept bringing up pictures of the Vulcan in happier times. Spock in his dress uniform, his eyes glinting above the shimmering material of ice blue, half-smiling at his Captain. Spock

looking outraged, his eyebrows like a moth's antennae, vertical. Spock: on his dignity, "I'm not standing here to be insulted!", rigid and bolt upright as if he'd swallowed a broomstick. Spock formal and precise - "Very well, Captain," "The time is twenty-two hours, five minutes and three-fifths of a second,"... Spock informal, calling him "Jim", allowing some warmth to creep into his rather deep gruff voice. So many different pictures and all Spock.

"You are my friend, Jim," he'd said a few minutes ago. And Vulcans didn't often make friends - or acknowledge it if they did.

"I'll get you out of this if it's the last thing I do! Kirk vowed.

Suddenly he stopped. Surely it was daylight ahead of him? Could it be? He inched forward cautiously. Yes, it was daylight and it was coming from a crack in the rock face. He crept along the tunnel towards it, unbelieving. He reached it and warily peered out, then bit back a curse.

The opening led outside all right, but it faced directly onto a gathering of the mantis insects, evidently, by the look of it, one of their nests. They had built themselves a kind of fort out of rocks, rather ingeniously, and several of them were rolling boulders about with their forelegs. Some young ones - if size was anything to go by - were romping about, all stilt legs and necks. Scattered around were the husks of what looked like small animals, but at that distance Kirk couldn't identify them very well. Anyway, one thing was certain. There was no escape this way. One of the mantises was sitting right by the crack, turning its head this way and that as if it sensed Kirk's presence. He didn't want another discharge of poisonous gas.

For some minutes he stood there, watching the insects with unseeing eyes, deep in despair. Could they ever hope to find another unguarded exit further on? And how long would it take them? And how much longer could Spock hope to live, with the poison seeping through his system?

I could have got him out <u>here</u>, Kirk thought savagely. Just about, even if I had to carry him. But I can't carry him far, and how much further have we got to go now?

He leaned his head against the rock, feeling so bitter he almost gave up. They must have walked for miles, only to march into another trap! Was the whole area riddles with these monsters? Would they <u>ever</u> get out?

He thought then of Spock waiting for him and straightened up. He must go on until the end. There was nothing else to do. Not with any honour.

And if I find him dead? he thought, turning away from the crack in the rock. Wouldn't it be easier just to walk out there and let those things do their worst? How could I go back to the ship without him and tell them I'd left him to die alone underground?

No, he thought then. Think positively, Jim! No more defeatism. You're going to get BOTH of you out of this somehow, and you'll find a way.

He was about to round one of the bends in the tunnel when he heard footsteps coming on the other side of it. He stopped dead, almost frightened for a moment. Then he controlled himself and walked on. Spock was coming towards him, still unsteady and weaving

but walking, following along the way he'd gone. Kirk felt suddenly almost faint with relief.

"It would have... wasted your time coming... all the way back," the Vulc an gasped when they met.

"I WAS coming, though," Kirk said.

"I know," Spock answered.

Kirk described his find. Spock listened in silence, leaning against the wall. Then he said, "I should like to see them."

"That's be just a waste of energy on your part!" Kirk told him curtly. "There's no way out there. Come on, we'd better go back and take the other fork."

Spock slowly straightened up, trying not to wince. His arm was throbbing and felt three times its natural size and he was also feeling dizzy as the venom increasingly affected him. He said wearily, "Captain... you must listen... to reason..."

"And what might that be?" Kirk demanded suspiciously.

Spock looked at him levelly. He might have been talking of some absent third party that neither of them knew, or even of the giant mantises themselves.

"Time is... running short. We have neither... food nor water. It is... essential that we escape... as soon as possible... and I am wounded and... and disabled. If one of us... goes outside and... acts as a decoy... the other can perhaps... escape unnoticed."

Kirk's eyes blazed.

"And you mean that you're proposing YOU act as that decoy, so that I can get away," he said. "And what happens to you when they catch you? You can't even run, the way you are right now."

"We know... what will happen to me," said Spock unemotionally.

"And I'm supposed to go off and leave you to be sucked dry, is that it?" Kirk spoke with dangerous calm, holding himself tightly under control.

"Captain, you are... being utterly illogical about... this..." Spock protested. "You are very... necessary to the ship... If it comes to a choice between us... you are the one who must be...saved. Even <u>you</u> must see that."

"So?" said Kirk quietly.

"So if... we both go out together... we will both be captured... If I go out... first and attract... their attention... you can escape while... they are occupied with... me."

"And leave you as a meal for those lousy devils out there?"

"They are... hardly lousy devils, Captain," Spock remonstrated. "They live... according to their... natures. You and... I do no more. And as for me... what difference will it ultimately... make to me whether I am... sucked dry or die here... in the tunnels... of the poison I have been... infected with? Death is death, Captain... and there are... no terrors... afterwards.

Kirk thought briefly of the horror of seeing Dr. Spencer die.

"No!" he said violently. "I've already told you, I refuse to consider it!"

Spock sighed, like a patient adult explaining some obvious point to a stubborn and wilful child. He closed his eyes and then said, "You Humans are... so impossibly emotional."

"I refuse to save my life at the expense of yours!" Kirk told him. "Stop getting these lunatic ideas! A fine Captain I'd be if I accepted your sacrifice - and an even finer friend!"

The slanting dark eyes opened again and surveyed him calmly.

"About friendship I will say nothing," Spock said. "But when it ... comes to your Captaincy... your duty lies... with the greater number. I am only one man... on your crew of four hundred... and thirty. Four hundred and twenty nine... now that Dr. Spencer... is dead. My life counts... little against... such a number."

"They're safe," Kirk retorted. "You're not. My duty's to get you back alive."

"It is your... duty to get yourself... back."

"With you, yes. Spock, would you do it if you were in my place and I was in yours? Would you let myself sacrifice myself for you?"

The level gaze never faltered. "Yes, Captain. If it was... the only way... as this is."

"I see. Well, I'm not a Vulcan."

"It would save... a lot of trouble... if you were... but the question is... entirely irrelevant. You are NOT in my place... nor am I in yours."

"Never mind that," said Kirk. "I'm afraid that, as a Human, I haven't the detachment that your race has. I can't divorce my personal feelings so completely from my duty as you apparently can. And I'm not sorry that I can't. If I left you here, or let you carry out this suicidal plan of yours, I'd remember it for the rest of my days."

"And do you imagine... that I would not also... Captain, in your place?" Spock said quietly.

There was a brief pause.

"Perhaps I... phrased it tactlessly," Spock said after a moment. "You seem to be... under the impression that I... would have let you die... without compunction. Believe me, that... would not have... been so."

"No," said Kirk. "You would have done your duty, as you saw it, no matterwhat your inclinations. I know that."

"The carrying out... of what is right... can sometimes be... difficult," Spock said, not looking at Kirk but past him, as if at something only he could see.

"But you'dstill carry it out, regardless," Kirk said.

"Captain... what does <u>that</u> weigh against... four hundred and twenty nine crew members?" Spock said simply.

Kirk touched his First Officer's unwounded arm. "Thanks for that, and for your offer," he said. "If I was as upright as you are, I don't doubt that I'd have accepted it. But I'm not a Vulcan, I'm only an ordinary fallible Human man, and to do this would be beyond my strength. Believe me, Spock, you're asking the impossible of me

now. You can dismiss me as emotional and illogical if you like. I can't help that, it's the hallmark of my race. But I'm not allowing you to go to your death, whether it's to save me or the crew. And that's an order."

"Very well, Captain."

"Then stop talking about it - or even thinking about it! We're both going to get out of here, somehow."

"I wish I could be as optimistic as you are," Spock said.

"Well, optimism is another trait of the Human race!" Kirk said and smiled. "Come on, if you've rested long enough. We've got to find another way out."

"You seem very sure of finding one," Spock observed rather drily.

"I have to be!" Kirk said briskly. "It's no use giving up hope or we might as well lie down here and die."

"It might in the long run... be the most sensible thing... to do," Spock said, levering himself painfully off the wall to follow once more.

"That's right, look on the bright side!" said Kirk as he moved off.

Spock almost smiled. "At any rate you deserve... to find the way out... Jim, after such incredibly... irrational optimism!"

"Shut up and walk!" was his only answer.

It became more and more of a nightmare. They were thirsty now, but there was no sign of water. Kirk led doggedly on, refusing to even consider failure again. The Vulcan followed gamely, but it was only too apparent to his friend that he was suffering a great deal and it was taking all his strength to keep going.

"If I had been an animal... you would probably have... put me out of my pain... before now," he said once when they had halted for a short rest.

"You're not an animal," Kirk retorted.

"We are all animals," Spock said. He was leaning against the wall as he sat, his head tilted back a little, his face gleaming with unhealthy sweat. He nursed his wounded arm like a baby and his breathing was short and fast. "Scientifically speaking," he added.

"I'm not talking about science and you know it!" Kirk said. He felt tired, hot, thirsty and worried. How much longer could they last? And wasn't perhaps dragging Spock all this way, wounded and in pain as he was, more cruel than letting him die?

No, Kirk thought. I won't believe that! Life is precious to everything that lives.

"I'll carry you if I have to!" he vowed between clenched teeth.

"When it comes to that... we will both be finished," said Spock and Kirk knew he was right.

"You could have escaped," Spock said much later, when they had stopped again. He was looking even more drawn and agonised now, but he had said nothing of what he was suffering. "You could... have been back... in the ship by now."

"And YOU could have been a sucked-out husk!" snapped Kirk.

Spock said nothing and after a moment Kirk leaned forward to put one hand on his shoulder. "Keep going just a little longer," he said. "We'll make it."

"Will we?" said Spock wearily. "I am afraid I... lack your conviction."

"Never mind. Just trust me,"

The dark eyes were very level and steady. "I have always... trusted you, Jim. With... my life."

I can't fail him now! Kirk thought as they went on. Not after THAT!

But there was no more sign of daylight.

When they stopped the next time Spock lay down full length, too exhausted to sit. Kirk moved forward and lifted the Vulcan's head onto his lap. From this point, slightly softer than the rocky floor, Spock surveyed him gravely for a moment and then closed his eyes. Kirk, hunched over, sat still, wondering again - how long? Spock drew a deep breath, winced and turning his head to one side was still. For a moment Kirk was afraid, then the sharp pained breathing recommenced and he relaxed.

A few minutes passed in silence and then Spock said, "Jim - leave me."

"Never!" said Kirk emphatically.

"On your own... you might succeed in... escaping. With me to hold you back... you never will. Leave me."

"No!"

"Jim, leave me." The words were hardly above a murmur now. "How can I... die in peace knowing that I... have condemned you to death... with me?"

"Life's not as precious as all that!" Kirk said obstinately, dismissing what he's thought a short while before.

Spock wasn't deceived. "It is the... most precious thing there is."

"No, you're wrong," Kirk said. "There's something more precious, and that's sacrifice."

Spock didn't answer this. A moment later he said again, "Leave me, Jim. Before it is... too late."

And Kirk said, once more, "Never!"

They struggled on. The tunnels seemed endless, but then they were moving so slowly, for Spock couldn't manage more than a hobble now. Even so, he had to keep stopping to rest. At each rest period he reiterated the same words - "Leave me, Jim." And always Kirk made the same reply - "Never!"

The spring, when they found it, saved their lives. Kirk bathed Spock's face as if he was the Vulcan's mother and Spock allowed it, as a child would. They both drank, after ascertaining that the water was safe. Then they lay there for some time, unable to move further. Kirk unbound Spock's wound and bathed that too in the icy

water. It was still swollen and discoloured and red-hot to touch. The water refreshed Spock a little, however, and he was able to move on after a rest.

It was the second day, as far as they could judge, since they'd entered the cave. Kirk walked almost blindly and Spock limped as blindly after him. When they rested they lay together and Kirk took his friend's head on his shoulder. Spock lay against him like an oversized child and in the weary despair of those hours the bond between them was forged doubly strong.

"Forgive me... for bringing you to your death, Jim," Spock said once during those hours.

"There's nothing to forgive," Kirk said - and meant it.

"You would not... leave me," Spock murmured.

"No, and I never will!"

They went on.

He's going to die, Kirk thought later on that day, when Spock could hardly stand. Somehow, though, he dragged himself along, almost clinging to the wall. Kirk tried to support him but Spock wouldn't have it.

"No. You have enough to contend with... without me."

By that time Spock only knew one thing clearly, and that was that he must follow. His love for Kirk led him blindly, like a dog, to struggle on while he was racked with pain and weariness, to keep going because he knew Kirk wished it and that if he stopped and lay down to die, then Kirk would die with him. To save Kirk he must keep going. And Kirk kept going for a similar reason, to save Spock, each motivated by the other.

Passing the love of women... thought Kirk fuzzily as he plodded on, Spock staggering behind. We'd both have given up long ago without each other.

Sometimes, watching the Vulcan struggle to get to his feet, Kirk almost wept. Spock refused help. It took him time, but always in the end he managed it and would stand, swaying and exhausted, but upright. Soon he'll go down for good, Kirk thought. He won't get up again. And what do I do then? I carry him - if I can.

They had both long gone past the wish for food. What would kill them first, Kirk wondered gloomily, starvation, thirst or sheer exhaustion? Or, in Spock's case, the spreading poison from his wound?

It was on the third day that Spock didn't get up.

Kirk watched him try, with his heart aching almost more than he would bear. In the end he stepped forward and helped, but it was no good. Even when he got to his feet Spock couldn't remain there. His body had resisted the poison for a long time, but it had given in at last. Not even the flogging of his merciless will could make it obey further. Torm with anguish himself, Kirk watched tears of rage and weakness flooding Spock's eyes and streaming down his face, glistening in the faint light. With one oddly detached part of himself he reflected that Bones would like to have seen that - he'd always wondered if Spock was Human enough to weep. Well, it seemed he was - if he was sufficiently weak.

"Leave me..." Spock gasped finally, on the ground again. "It is no good..."

Kirk hesitated above him. wondering what to do now. Spock hid his face for a second to wipe away the shameful tears and then looked up again and caught Kirk's knees.

"Jim - go on. You have GOT to go now... I cannot go any further ... it is senseless your remaining... here also. Leave me!"

"I CAN'T leave you," Kirk said. "Not until - "

"Until I am dead? That will not... be long. Why waste the time? Jim - " and Spock paused for a moment. "Jim... for the sake of what ... we shared... leave me."

It really IS the end this time, Kirk thought. Can I deny him his last wish?

Spock looked up at him still, intent, urgent, and Kirk couldn't meet his eyes.

"Jim - go without me. It is no use... I tell you! I should know! Lea ve me!"

I never had to do anything so hard in my life, Kirk thought. He would have given his own life for me, and now I've got to leave him to die.

"Don't ask me to go!" he said harshly.

Spock shook his knees urgently. "You must! Every minute... counts now... Do not waste your time... on a dying man! I told you before... but you would n ot listen... You have GOT to listen now!" And as Kirk still hesitated, heartsick, he went on with difficulty. "Jim... I... I... beg you. I have never begged anything in my life ... from anyone... until now."

Kirk knew he must go. Unable to speak, he put his hand on his friend's head for a moment.

"Live long and prosper, Jim," Spock said softly.

Kirk swallowed, then forced his voice past the obstacle in his throat. "Goodbye, my dear friend," he said. He turned away and went like a blind man, not looking back. Spock lay down but turned his head so that he could watch his Captain as he went until a curve of the tunnel hid him from sight. Then he shut his eyes and sighed.

Kirk went on alone, in agony, feeling that what had happened would be branded on his mind for life, no matter how long he lived. He hardly saw where he was going and had in fact half crossed the big cavern before he saw the light streaming in through an opening ahead of him.

There'll be more insects there! he thought dully. And if there are, then I'll go back to him. There are worse ways to die.

But when he got to the opening there was nothing in sight except rocks, hills and moss. Not a sign of an insect. Hardly daring to believe it, Kirk tottered out into the open and reached at once for his communicator.

A few minutes later two orderlies and McCoy, red-nosed and snuffling but determined, had materialised beside him.

"Jim!" McCoy exclaimed. "Where in all hell have you been? We've

been trying to trace you - and where's Spock?"

"Never mind that now!" Kirk said, cutting him short. "Come with me at once - and I hope to God we're not too late!"

As they entered the cavern McCoy was busy firing questions, to which Kirk answered wearily, "I'll tell you all about it later on. Just now all that matters is Spock. He's dying - might be dead for all I know. Hurry, Bones!"

"You're in no fit state yourself to be here," McCoy growled.

"To hell with that! I'm getting Spock out first!" Kirk retorted.

They entered the tunnel to find Spock still lying where Kirk had left him, watching them come as silent and unmoving as he'd watched Kirk go.

"Is he alive?" Kirk asked anxiously as McCoy bent over the motionless form sprawled on the ground.

The slanting eyes shifted slightly and a weak but familiar voice said, "Of course I am alive, Captain. And I see that your optimism ... was for once justified."

Kirk tried to smile.

"Nasty," McCoy observed, peeling the covering off the wound and looking at it. "Don't know how you came far like this, Spock. By rights you should be dead."

"By Human rights, no doubt," Spock agreed, frail but indomitable.

"Will he recover?" Kirk asked the doctor.

"Oh, sure," said McCoy. looking up. "Being a Vulcan and having a cast iron constitution. A Human would have been dead long ago, but he'll be all right. A few days should see him back on duty again, unchanged. Still, whatever it was that bit him sure landed him a lulu."

He turned away to give some instructions to the orderlies and Spock looked at Kirk, a look full of meaning.

"It is not only to my Vulcan constitution that I owe my survival," he said. Then his face lightened in his curious half-smile. "Thank you, Jim."

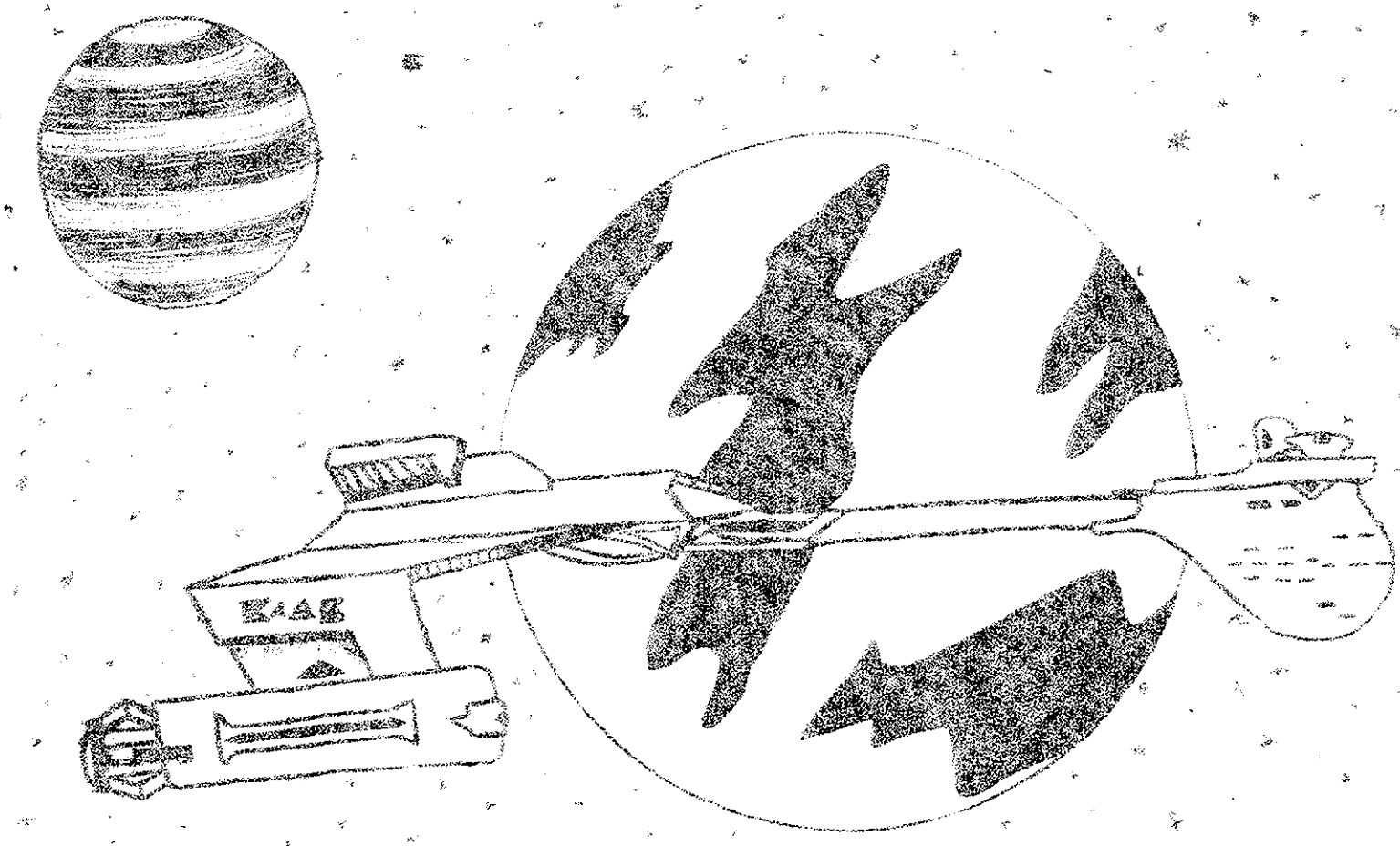
****

One day Kirk and McCoy went down beaming
To a planet where life-forms were teeming
And who should they meet there
But a lady so fair
That they both of them thought they were dreaming.

So Kirk said to McCoy, 'This I fancy'
But McCoy thought a spot of romance he
Would quite fancy also
And, since neither would go
Well, the whole situation was chancy.

So they asked the girl 'Which?' and she sang 'Oh
My dear boys, neither one of you can go
For though Human you deem
Me, I'm not what I seem -
On this planet it takes <u>three</u> to tango.'

Kathleen Glancy


KASB

THE VULCAN EXPERIENCE by Elizabeth Sharp

For a long time, Spock sat still in his chair as though afraid to move. It almost seemed possible to the Vulcan that if he did move he would be burned by McCoy's words which still hung suspended in the darkness between floor and ceiling. In front of him the tiny screen showed the changing star patterns as the Enterprsie moved steadily through that part of space that the half-breed First Officer called home. This journey to Vulcan was always a pleasant one for Spock, for like most men he liked to see home occasionally. But this time it was different, for he was going home having just lost his best friend. Yet Spock did not understand why he had lost James Kirk. If the Captain had been dead, the reason would have been obvious and easily understood. But Kirk was still there, very much alive, and in perfect health. Kirk just simply refused to speak to him. The Captain had turned his back, not even wishing to see him, and McCoy had come here, to his room, eager to learn what the trouble was, and blaming him. And still his words burned the darkness.

- Something's upset Jim. I don't know what - but you're the cause of it. What the hell have you done? -

What had he done? The Vulcan was at a complete and total loss to understand it. All he had done was to tell Kirk the truth - and surely you don't despise someone for that?

Spock suddenly felt very cold. Kirk despised him. It was an awful thought, but one he could not escape from. Feeling somehow unable to maintain his usual iron control, Spock slowly lowered his mental defences. The mind block which kept him apart from the thoughts and violent emotions around him vanished for an instant, only to be quickly re-established as he realised his mistake. In that brief second a torrent of emotions had invaded his telepathic mind, sending waves of pain through his entire body. Only in the company of other Vulcans coulda Vulcan dare to relax, which was why few of his race ever left their home planet.

But then, even as he sat, he became aware that he was not alone. From far away there came the sound of grief and in the night silence Spock's mind found unity with the grief-stricken woman as she cried. This one emotion, stronger than all the others, had lingered with the Vulcan as it was bound to after he had permitted it entry to his mind. He did not know who the woman was, but the reason for her grief came stronger and stronger. She had received news from home that her mother had died. Guilt mingled freely with her grief - guilt because she had not seen her mother or family for five years. There was not much Spock could do. His own misery seemed as bad to him. But he projected quiet thoughts all the same.

After a few moments the Vulcan stood and left his room. In the darkness of the artificial night he walked barefoot through the empty passageways of the Starship. For the first time in years, he was totally alone. Yet perhaps not quite alone, for with him went the woman's grief - her tortured crying - and her guilt. Softly he followed her, a brief ride in the elevator, a slow, steady walk along a darkened corridor brought him to her door. Knowing her identity at last, he sank to his knees, resting his head against the wall. Gently, he found her guilt, and waiting till he thought she was ready, he wrenched it from her mind.

Inside the room, Uhura sat up, thinking she had heard a whisper. She listened hard for a few minutes, but heard nothing except the silence. Quietly she lay back on the pillow, and for the first time

that night, went peacefully to sleep. After a few moments the salty tears had dried on her face.

Outside the door, Spock stood up. Slowly, he walked on, going anywhere except back to his room. He would walk all night if he had to, but he would not go back there. For in all the Universe that was the Stagship Enterprise, and among a humanity that placed such pride in their emotion of love, there was not one person who would remove Spock's misery from him.

He walked on.

Everyone on the bridge was silent. Kirk sat regarding the planet as it turned slowly beneath them, vaguely aware that the silence was his fault. He didn't even respond when Sulu announced, "Achieved standard orbit around Vulcan, Captain." - he just sat there, eyes fixed on the golden red hue of a planet called Vulcan. Suddenly Kirk realised what a beautiful planet it was. Once, he had known a man who had been born on that planet, a man he had worked with for five years - a man he had called friend. And then he had found that he didn't really know him at all.

McCoy moved uneasily beside him. "If the shipment goes to schedule we can leave quite soon. I know only the Vulcans can prepare these drugs, but Micron 3 needs them quickly. We don't have to stay here long, do we, Jim?"

Kirk replied without taking his eyes from the screen. "Why, doctor - are you in a desperate hurry to be somewhere else?"

McCoy stared in open amazement at Kirk. He had thought that Vulcan was the last place the Captain would have wanted to linger. Shrugging his shoulders, all he said was, "Please yourself." He turned to go. Halfway to the door he stood still as Spock came onto the bridge. Neither man spoke, but as soon as the First Officer had passed him, the doctor continued across the floor. He had soon left them several decks behind.

In the well of the bridge, Kirk and Spock faced each other. The Captain looked quickly away, and after the briefest of hesitations Spock moved to his library computer station. Still no-one spoke. The only sound was the ever-present chatter of the computers and the whine of the life support system. Everyone stared at the Captain and First Officer in turn, waiting for some inevitable disaster.

It never came. Instead, Kirk stood and turned to his Chief Engineer. "Mr. Scott. Continue with the shipment. Call me as soon as it's finished. You have the con."

"Aye, sir." Scott looked uneasily at Spock. He couldn't legally run the ship over Spock's authority. But he needn't have worried. The Captain had moved towards Spock and was speaking quietly to the Vulcan so no-one else could hear.

"Mr. Spock. Come with me, please. I want to speak to you."

He walked into the elevator and stood waiting. Although he had not smiled, his eyes told their own story. As they looked towards Spock they were pleading, hopeful that the Vulcan would come. He sighed with relief when the First Officer stood and followed him into the elevator. As the doors closed they were alone with their separate hurt, but there was relief. Now, neither of them was subject

to the ever watchful, curious stares of the bridge crew. But they were both silent. Even when they got to Kirk's quarters the silence had not been broken.

Spock stood, waiting patiently. Finally, after a few moments of indecision, Kirk turned to face him. He looked confused and anxious, the way he had looked when he met his First Officer for the first time. Then -

"Please sit down, Spock."

The Vulcan sat. Kirk continued. "I would like to apologise. What I said to you was unforgivable. It was just such a shock, that's all."

Kirk had remained standing. Spock decided it was time to break his own silence. "Why don't you sit down, Jim?" The quiet dignity in his voice seemed to calm the Captain. He sat in the chair opposite Sopck, but he couldn't bring himself to look at the Vulcan. Spock spoke quietly, but with such force that Kirk felt compelled to listen.

"Jim, I did not ask to be born - I did not ask for my family. But I have been given both life and my heritage and nothing you say, or anything I do, can possibly alter the fact that I am supreme ruler of Vulcan."

Kirk raised his head and looked directly at him. "You are their King."

Spock considered for a while. "Well... you may call it that, but the title 'King' means nothing on my world. But your statement is essentially correct. My grandmother T'Pau died over three Earth months ago. Since my father married against her wishes, he is not permitted to succeed her. I am therefore next in line." Spock's voice had quietened slightly, and held perhaps a tinge of regret. "This is the scar my grandmother left me."

Kirk looked up, startled out of his averted gaze. "Scar?" he repeated, incredulous.

"Yes, that's right. A scar that has always had me marked since the day of my birth and will mark me till my death."

Kirk's anger was rising again. His voice began to quiver with a mixture of rage and sorrow. "I've known you for five years. We've worked together, faced danger together. You've saved my life countless times, and I yours. Suddenly, you turn round and tell me you're King of your people and you must go to Vulcan to be accepted by the Government. Why didn't you tell me who you were when we first met?" Kirk's fury rose. "Damn it, Spock, you were my friend..."

"I still am."

The three words calmed theCaptain, and when he answered, his voice was even. "Whenever I entered a room you have stood, because I am your commanding officer. All this time, it is I who should have stood for you."

"Jim, please..."

"All this time, Spock! I am not subject to Vulcan laws, but nothing will alter the fact that you are a King and I am an ordinary man. These past years I've been treating you as my equal! How can a King be equal?"

Spock had shuddered at Kirk's use of the word 'King'. It was obvious that he didn't like it. But when he answered, his voice was firm. "Just because a man is called 'King', it doesn't make him any more of a man. He may indeed be the most common being in the Universe!"

There was no response from Kirk. The Vulcan stood and turned to go, but he stopped before he got to the door. Slowly, he turned to face the Human.

"How do you know what it is like - to live a double life? Equality is what I have always wanted! When I met you, you were the first person to treat me as an equal. On Earth, people would stare at me because all they could see was my Vulcan half - I was an alien to them. Sometimes it was as if I had crawled up from under a stone. At least on Vulcan you might think that I would find peace. But it will never be. Even when I was a child people used to stand when I entered a room. They still do - the respectful, distant tone in their voice is still there. I have never known any of them. But what was even more difficult, they knew me as the half-breed that I am. On Earth I am a Vulcan, on Vulcan I am Human. I am at home nowhere except here, because in this place, on this Starship, there was once a man who treated me as his equal."

There was a long silence. Spock had no more to say and Kirk couldn't speak. He felt too ashamed. Then, somewhere distant, Kirk's soul moved. "I'm sorry." His voice broke.

The Vulcan approached him. "Would you like to know what it is like? Would you come into my mind and walk with me among these Humans, and come and stand with me on the surface of my home planet?"

Kirk nodded slowly. The Vulcan mind meld did not frighten him - he had experienced it before and he trusted this man. There was no need to be afraid.

"Your body will remain here, asleep. No-one will know that you are within my body."

The intercom bleeped. Kirk pushed a button. "Kirk here."

"Scott here, Captain. We've unloaded the shipment. Shall we leave orbit?"

"No, Mr. Scott. Spock is beaming down to Vulcan for a while. Inform the transporter room."

"Yes, sir." Scott was surprised. The screen blanked out.

Spock approached Kirk, fingertips spreading as they touched the Captain's face ever so lightly. His right hand supported the back of Kirk's head. "Your mind to my mind. Your thoughts to my thoughts," the familiar chant came. Kirk felt a slight heat on his forehead - then everything vanished in a curtain of darkness.

"Are you ready?" It was Spock's voice, very near, almost absorbing him.

"Yes, I'm ready."

Light flooded into his eyes. Kirk suddenly realised that his viewpoint had altered. He was no longer sitting, he was standing! What was more, he was looking down at his own body - apparently asleep! His view altered again as Spock walked out of the Captain's quarters and into the corridor. A few faces glanced in his direction, curiously. Kirk could feel their eyes burning on his alien form, and he cringed inwardly. He was looking at life through the eyes of a Vulcan half-breed.

The walk to the transporter room seemed longer than usual. Kirk could only look where Spock was looking, but that was enough. He could still see the looks in the eyes of his fellow Humans as they glanced sideways at him. As Spock, he was getting a practical demonstration of what it was to be different.

The doors to the transporter sensed the Vulcan's presence, and opened. Chief Engineer Scott was at the controls.

"Have you got the co-ordinates, Mr. Scott?"

"Aye, sir. You'll beam down exactly three miles from the city you specified."

"Very well, Engineer." Spock stood on a disc. "Energise."

The sparkle of the transporter effect began around him, and slowly Spock shimmered out of existence. A few hours later, Scott was to state absolutely and with complete confidence that only Spock had beamed down to the planet Vulcan. How was he to know that he had beamed down not one man but two - one a Vulcan, the other a Human, and they had both stood as one within the body ofthe Vulcan.

They materialised in open country. It was a wilderness, but it was beautiful. After Spock had acknowledged his safe arrival, Kirk was able to take in the view more carefully. It wasn'twhat he had expected. It was green, and the trees were red, brown, yellow and golden. The sky was still dark from the night, but the light was gradually extinguishing the stars. Silver birds soared and spread their wings in the light of the rising sun. Suddenly, the gigantic sun seemed toignité and the last few stars vanished for the remainder of the long day ahead. Golden strands swished across the sky, [illegible] entwining with the white clouds. The entire sky had a faint reddish hue. Kirk became aware of something near him - a feeling - surrounding him, which was strange because he knew it wasn't his. It was a feeling of loneliness, sadness - of great loss. There was only one other being in Kirk's universe. It had to be Spock. Kirk felt a desperate need to help, but the voice came back before he had consciously made the effort to communicate.

"No. You cannot help. It is impossible." There was a terrible emptiness.

Then, through Spock's eyes, Kirk saw the distant sparkling jewel. It was getting gradually dimmer. Spock's voice - The lights in the city are going out. Come, you shall see the place of mine and my

father's birth -

Spock started to walk in the direction of the distant city. It would not take the Vulcan long. Thirty four Earth minutes later, Spock arrived at the city. The journey had been without incident, but twice they had met a passer-by. There would have been nothing surprising or eventful in this, but both Vulcans had bowed to Spock - ever so slightly - but to Kirk, who had never had anyone bow to him as a matter of course, the effect was quite strange, anmost electric, especially as Spock failed to return the gesture.

The city was fully awake now. Kirk took advantage of this unique opportunity to absorb every detail he could. He could only look where Spock chose to look, Then Kirk, who was sharing all the forms and shadows of Spock's feelings, felt a rising panic in his companion. The realisation shocked Kirk, but he also knew that no hint of the Vulcan's state of mind showed on his face. Everywhere they went, Spock's eyes took in everything. It had, after all, been many years since he had last been here. Everyone who saw him would bow, occasionally some would stop and watch him, others would even stop and touch his arm. Spock always permitted the contact. Kirk would find himself staring into the eyes of a complete stranger - an alien - and he felt the stranger was gazing at his very soul. Then would come the respectful nod, the Vulcan would step back, and Spock would move forward.

They walked on for some distance. The buildings were beautiful. Every visitor who came to Vulcan expected the buildings to be purely functional, coldly logical; and it was always a constant source of amazement to everyone to find out the true beauty of the planet and its culture. -And its people too - thought the Captain of the Enterprise. Once again a great shame rose in him for the way he had treated his friend. Far away, in some distant place, and yet so very near to him, Spock felt that shame. The feelings of the Human who was sharing his mind were becoming more real to him. Once again, Spock projected his thoughts. - Do not be upset. Relax and experience the instant - for it will not come again -

Slowly, the Vulcan turned to face the building he had known was there but had not let his eyes look upon. And Kirk almost cried out at the feeling he sensed in his friend's mind. The building was the most beautiful design he he had seen anywhere. Why then was the feeling in his friend's mind one of pure and utter horror? Kirk did not expect the reality of what happened next. Had he, a Human, experienced a feeling of such intensity, he would have turned and run. Spock stood for a few moments, then, slowly and deliberately, he bent down and removed his boots. Spock, First Officer of the U.S.S. Enterprise, heir to the throne of Vulcan, stood barefoot on the soil of his home planet. Crowds had gathered around the building and at the entrance. It seemed to Kirk that they numbered thousands. The silence was absolute.

Slowly, but with great dignity, Spock walked through the massive entrance.

A brilliant light was ahead of him, as beautiful as the centre of the Universe might be. Within the entrance it was revealed that the building was the largest hall any Human had ever seen. There was a large, vast empty feeling which would have been as great if

the place had been in utter darkness. Pillars of white marble stood erect along the walls. Down the centre of the gigantic hall there was a walkway which finally led to a group of Vulcans standing on a small platform of white crystal. But the most startling feature of the hall was the people it held within it. It was more than just a gathering - there were thousands of them, all sitting on either side of the central walkway. Spock stood outside the inner entrance - a solitary figure. He felt the tremor of the Human man within him, like an indrawn breath, and he understood. The sight of so many people was breathtaking. But he had become numb to it. As a little child he had walked down this hall several times, once to accept the betrothal of the Vulcan throne when he was five years old, and several other times walking behind T'Pau his grandmother. Now, he had to walk this way again.

The impressions came flooding into Kirk's mind. He was five years old and thousands of pairs of eyes were looking at him, penetrating his mind. He could hear their thoughts - he doesn't look half Human... different, not the same...

Although Kirk was receiving Spock's memory, it was as real as if the experience was Kirk's alone. And then he knew Spock would have to go through it again, and he would have to go with him.

Spock stepped one pace forward. The effect was electric. Everyone stood. The echo of movement reverberated again and again, round the assembly till it had gone. Spock placed one naked foot in front of the other and walked forward. Every row of people sank to their knees as he passed - and rose again once their King-to-be was a respectful distance away. On and on, row upon row lowering their heads as he passed. The silence thundered - it suffocated until it almost became a visible being. Steadily forward the half breed alien walked until he stood before the crystal platform and everyone behind him was upright again, respectful duty done.

The four people he now confronted had no such duty to perform. It was Spock's turn. Before these four Vulcans, three men and a woman, Spock sank to his knees. He rested his arms on a low rail before him and bowed his head on his arms. No-one moved. Then the oldest of the three men spoke. Kirk was not surprised when he understood every word of the difficult Vulcan language.

"Spock, son of Sarek, born of the Royal line of our last leader T'Pau, you have come to this place of the common man. We have shown you respect, as you have shown respect to us by coming barefoot into our domain. Do you come to claim the Vulcan throne?"

Kirk felt Spock hold his breath. It was let go in his surrender to the inevitable. Raising his head to look at the man he said, "I have come for that purpose."

The old man nodded. "So be it. Do you accept the duty and responsibility of this office, always to come to this place at the invitation of this gathering only, and with your feet unshod, to refute all rights of property and ownership, to own nothing, to be a servant of your people and serve our planet with all your loyalty and devotion?"

The reply came at once. "I do so accept."

The woman spoke, not to him but to the multitude of people gathered in the hall. "We have heard our brother Spock. Do you wish him for our leader?"

There was a noise like thunder from behind Spock. Kirk had heard it before and he guessed rightly what Spock knew for certain. Every Vulcan present in the assembly had knelt, and they remained on their knees. Noting this, the four Vulcans on the platform also knelt. As they did so, Spock got to his feet. He spoke to the four before him.

"My allegience is to the planet Vulcan and its people. What is your allegience?"

The old man looked into Spock's eyes. "Our allegience is to you, my Lord."

Spock - My duty is to respect the sanctuary and honour of this house. What is your duty?

- To respect and honour you, my Lord.

Spock - I ha e pledged my loyalty and in so doing I have become destitute. What is your pledge?

- We pledge our lives, my Lord. We pledge our loyalty and service to you for the rest of our lives, till the end of your life and until the end of Vulcan itself. My Lord, we are your servants.

The youngest of the men on the platform had been holding something in his hand. He stepped forward and extended his hand towards Spock. Kirk could now see that it was a ring he held.

"My Lord, when you wear this symbol of the throne, you will be our King."

While Kirk was wondering what in the universe that meant, Spock had accepted the ring and had slipped it on the third finger of his right hand. He then faced the assembly, bowed once, and walked towards the entrance of the hall. All this time the people remained on their knees. Only when the doors closed behind him did they stand. They had been in the presence of their King. Little did they realise they had also been in the presence of the Captain of the Starship Enterprise.

Outside, still more crowds waited for the Vulcan/Human. But as Spock saw them, he removed the ring. It was then Kirk realised the meaning of the young Vulcan's words. Only when he had the ring on would Spock be treated as King. Instantly, the crowd converged on him. "So you did it, Spock... quite an ordeal... glad it's over..."

Spock responded to the questions and spoke at great length with several of the crowd. He walked off in the company of three of them - obviously he knew them well. Then they, too, left Spock in peace. It was a n ordeal for any man. He would be left to recover in peace - alone.

Well, not quite alone.

Spock did not stop walking till he was outside the city limits, in that strange compelling wilderness. He sat on the grass, turning his face to the wind, letting it cool him. Then he lay down and closed his eyes, his body absorbing the warmth of the new day's sun. His eyes were parted slightly and he saw white clouds floating across a red sky. The clouds were flimsy, translucent, like shadows of white satin. A voice spoke to him. "How do you feel?"

He considered the question, but offered no answer. He didn't know how he felt. The voice came again. "No. Neither do I - except that I don't want to experience anything like that again. I am very, very sorry, Spock. I hope we are still friends."

The Vulcan's answer was immediate and definite. "We are friends, Jim."

Something engulfed Spock's mind. It was an emotion - relief. Kirk's feeling came like a physical blow.

Spock closed his eyes again and began to think of the times he had felt that emotion before. Into his mind came childhood memories. He was a small boy stealing apples from a neighbour's garden. The man had come out to work in his garden and he had hidden for hours in the tree till the man left, but the feeling of relief had been tremendous. Then there was the time his dog had nearly drowned, but luckily...

Spock sat up, horrified. These were not his memories, but they were rapidly becoming his. So real was his alarm that he spoke aloud to Kirk.

"Jim, we've got to get back. You must return to your body. The mind link is becoming permanent. It may already be too late."

The other's voice came softly. "Must we?" There was sadness in the voice.

"Yes, we must." Spock took out his communicator. "Spock to Enterprise." His voice had been calm, but after Scott replied, the Vulcan made his one mistake. "Beam us up, Mr. Scott."

Scott blinked. "How many of you are there, sir?"

Spock spoke quietly and evenly, rebuking himself for his mistake. "There is only one of me. Beam me up."

Kirk's last sight of Vulcan winked out, then once again he was in the transporter room. Scott started to speak but Spock ignored him and hurried out. On his way to Kirk's quarters, new images and sensations crept into the Vulcan's mind. They didn't belong to him at all. As for Kirk, his last conscious image was as Spock ran into the Captain's cabin. He had sensation again! He could move! Amazingly, his head was clear as he swung his legs round and sat on the edge of the bed. He stood and walked over to his mirror. Jim Kirk's face stared back at him. He grinned at himself. Then he remembered Spock. The Vulcan was not there. He must have gone to his own room. Kirk ran out into the corridor. When he got to Spock's room the door was unlocked. He went in.

His friend was lying very still on the bed. Kirk took Spock's wrist and felt for a pulse. He got it. This time the relief flooded his own mind. Kirk reflected that the strain of maintaining the mind link would have been very exhausting for Spock, especially since he was half Human.

The Captain's touch must have penetrated Spock's mind, for just then his eyes opened. Kirk smiled down at him, but for some silly reason his voice failed him. It was the Vulcan who spoke.

"Are you all right?"

Strange, Kirk thought. I should be asking him that. He found his voice. "I'm O.K., thanks."

"Good." Spock sat up. "But no disrespect, Jim, I wouldn't want to go through it again," Spock went on gravely. "The flood of illogic I discovered was amazing." He glanced over to his Captain, but the Human seemed rather withdrawn. "What is wrong, Jim?"

The answer was not what Spock had expected. "You'll have to stay on Vulcan, won't you."

There was a brief silence. The First Officer glanced down at the ring he was holding in his hand. He looked back towards the Captain. "Is that what annoyed you when I told you who I am?"

Kirk couldn't find it in him to reply. The Vulcan continued, "They don't need me,Jim. My title means less than nothing. They only ask for me to be present when they install a new Government, once every ten years, or on the rare occasions when they want to frighten some visiting ambassador. The title 'King' actually seems to impress some people." He seemed surprised as he said it.

Kirk smiled again, and relaxed. "Well, that's all right then. Me anwhile, I think our presence is required on the bridge - my Lord."

Spock frowned at him, and placed the ring in his desk, well out of sight. As they rode the elevator back to the bridge, Kirk thought over the day's events, and tried to evaluate them. He gave up, but he was never to forget what it had been like to walk among the people of the two races that were the forebears of his Vulcan friend, and be trated as an alien by both. He never forgot his Vulcan experience, when he had stood within the body of a Vulcan and for one day, had lived his life with him. 'Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combination' - how right the Vulcans were. To be different is the most beautiful thing in the Universe.

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