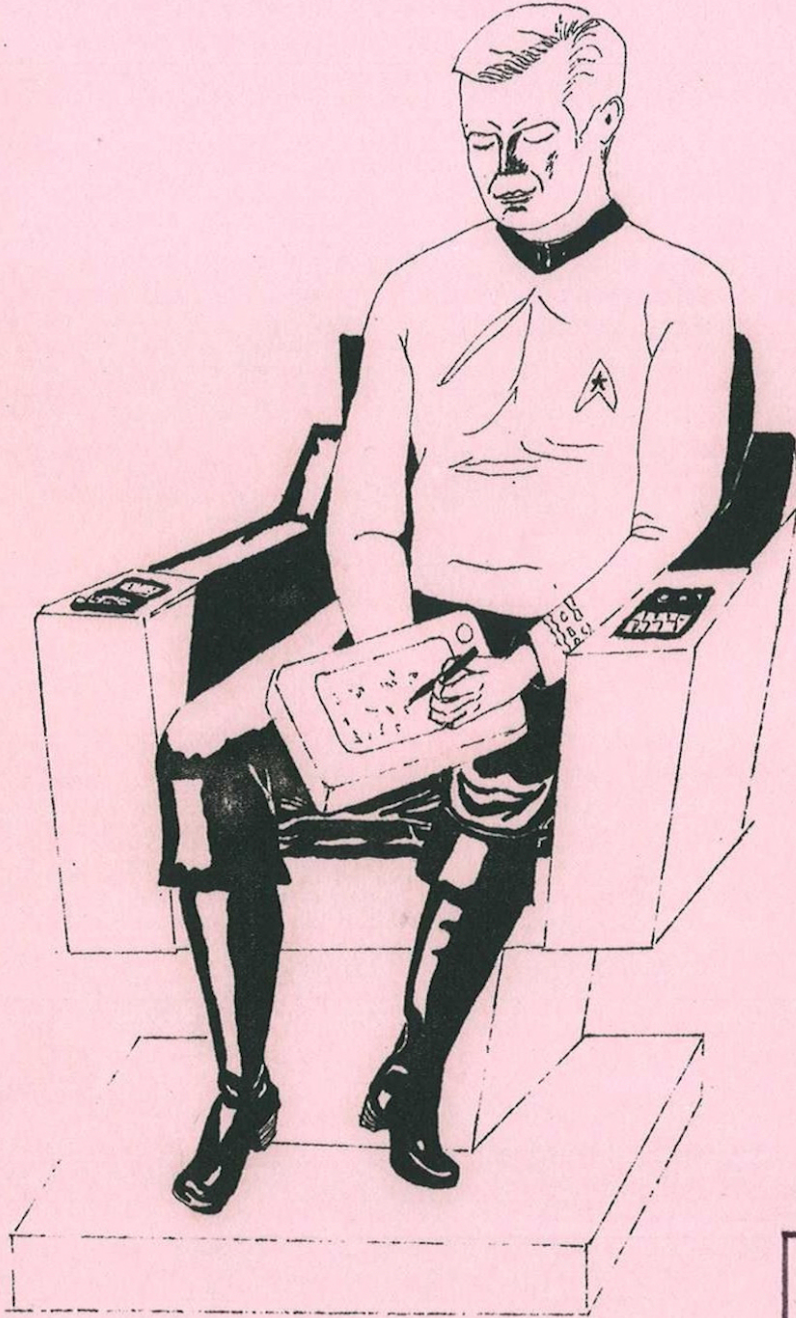


# LOG ENTRIES



12



# LOG ENTRIES CONTENTS

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Gloria Mitchell	P3
Paul Dakeyne	P13
Ivy Wilkins	P46, 51, 54

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Hello again, and welcome to Log Entries 12.

This editorial signals the end of a most chaotic month - I'm now going to have a rest from cutting stencils for a few weeks. (The next two or three weeks will be spent collating... with the help of anyone I can coerce into doing it with me... )

I hoped to have more poetry this time. It didn't work out like that, I'm afraid; the stories took up more space than I expected. However, perhaps next time?

We also have a mystery picture. The illustration on P31 was forwarded to me by Helen McCarthy some time ago, and while I think it's by Sharon Packham, I'm not sure; the style is rather different from the rest of Sharon's that were with it. If anyone can positively identify the artist for me, I'll give it the proper acknowledgement next time.

Also I still need more artwork, line drawings without too much solid black, which provides problems in the duplicating, and I'd welcome more story submissions, from non-members as well as members of STAG.

Thanks to all the people who have helped me put out this zine and also the one-offs we have produced for the con, The Web of Selagor and The Price of Friendship, both by Simone Mason, and Variations on a Theme, by Valerie Piacentini and myself. I can name Janet and her mother, both of whom have done a great deal of proof-reading in the last couple of weeks despite illness in the family, as well as all the work Janet has done running off the stencils. I can't name the collators yet because I don't know who all they will be, but thanks, anyway - I do appreciate it.

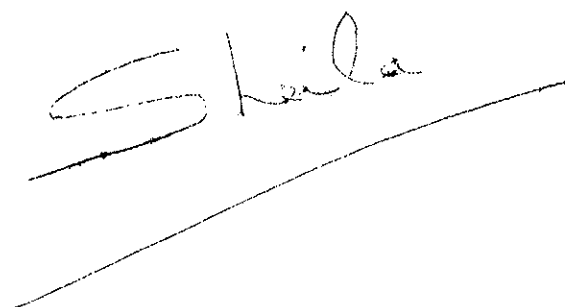
For LE 13 I have T.W. Francis' winning entry in the competition in N/L 23, a story by Christine Hall and a Baillie story by Valerie Piacentini. I'm planning on having it out sometime around November/December.

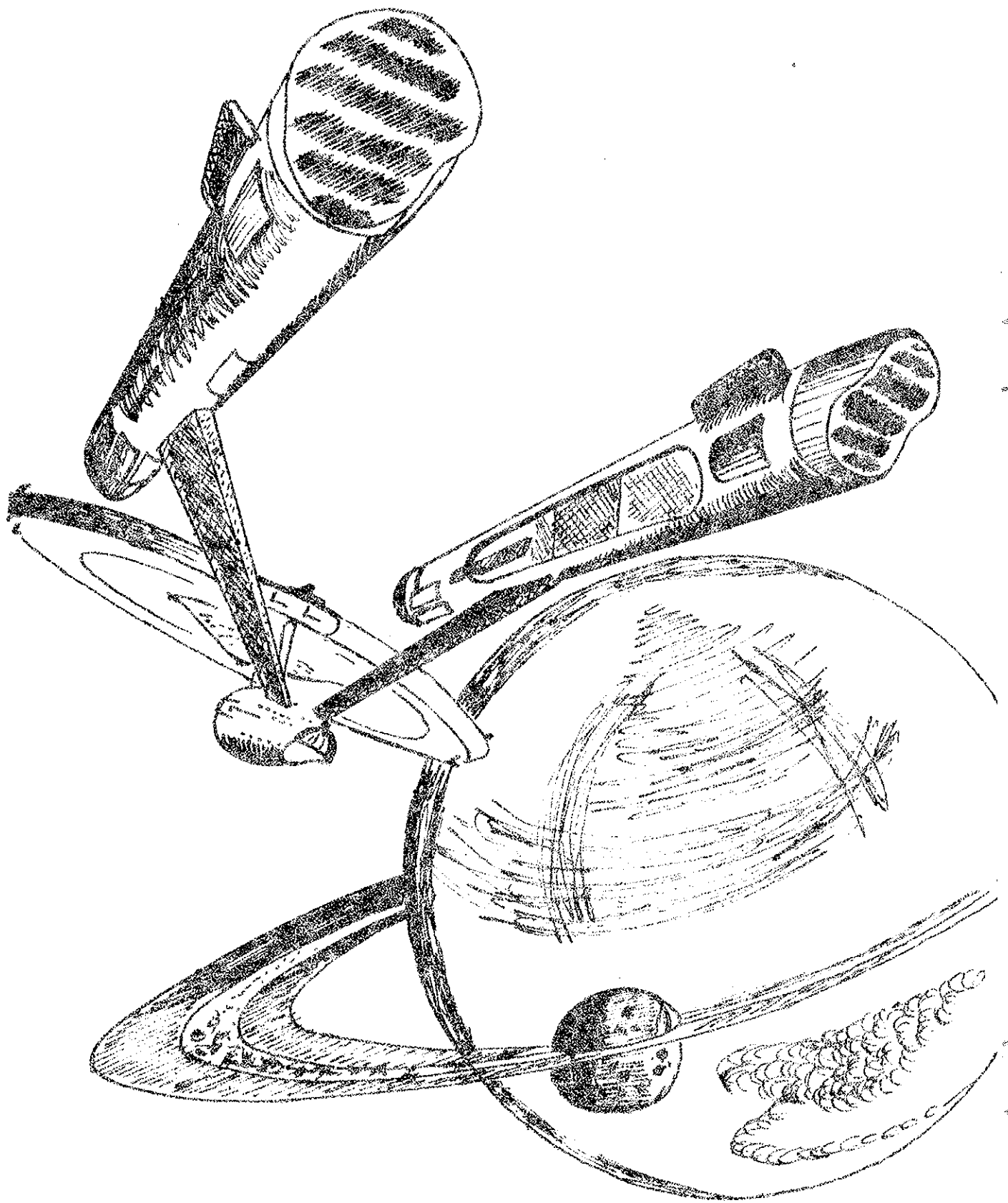
Non-members of STAG can get information on forthcoming zines by sending a SAE or addressed envelope and IRC to

Sheila Clark  
6 Craigmill Cottages  
Strathmartine  
by Dundee  
Scotland.

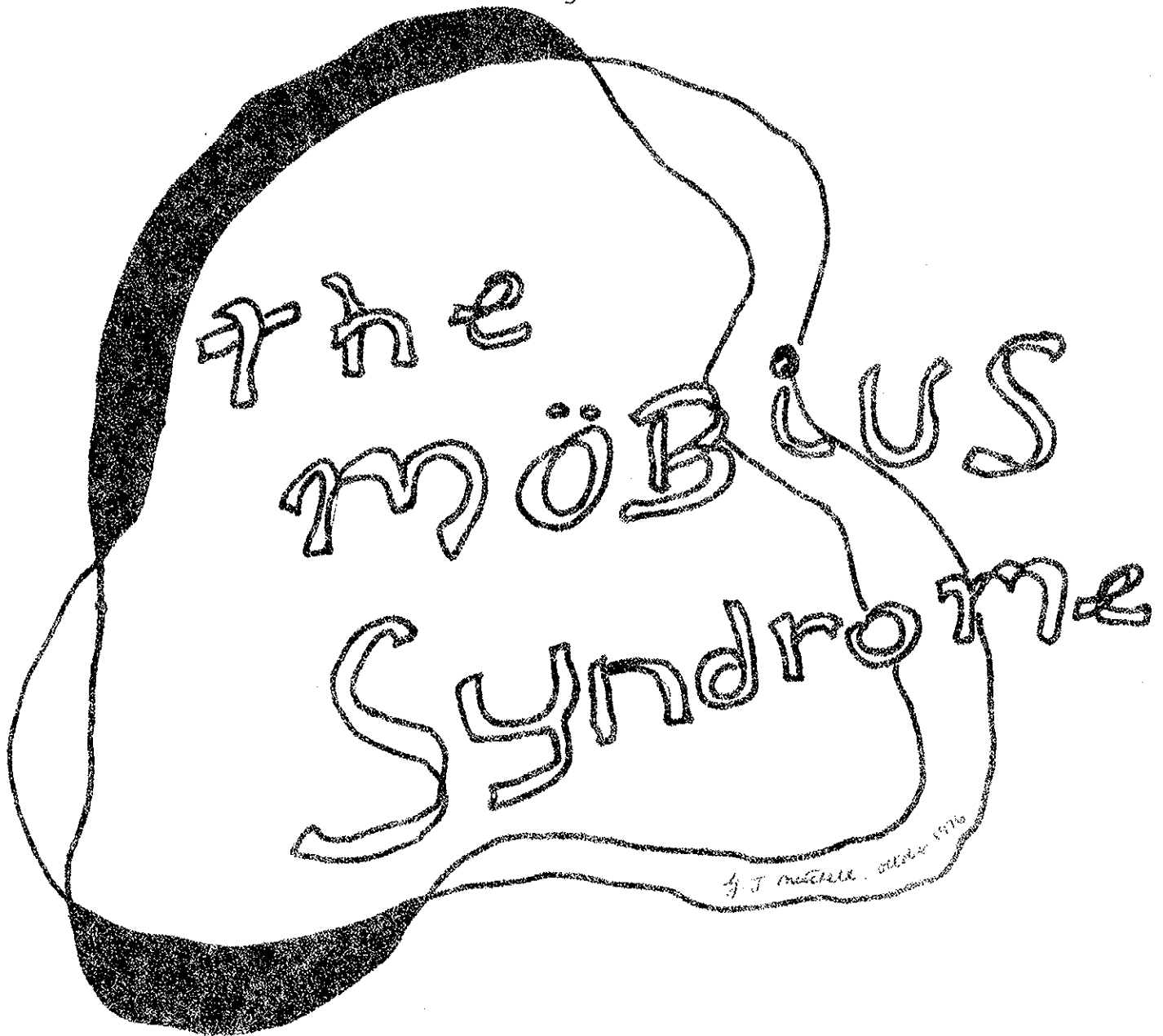
I would also welcome letters of comment if only to help me put out the sort of story that you want.

I hope you enjoy these stories as much as I do.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sheila". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above a long, thin horizontal line that extends across the width of the signature.







Kirk's heart pounded in time to the roaring wind, and the earth trembled beneath his feet as the darkening sky reached down with billowing fingers and threatened to hold him fast. He ran on, just as he had done so many times in his dreams, but this time was different. This time James T. Kirk knew the secret of the Obelisk; he could set right the faulty deflector mechanism which the Preservers had installed to protect the planet, and, this time - Miramanee would live!

\* \* \* \*

It was Spock who had said so, and a very angry Dr. McCoy who disagreed with him.

"What in blazes has gotten into you, Spock?"

A smile touched the corner of Kirk's lips as he remembered the conversation, was it yesterday? No matter - time had no meaning for him, at least not for a little while more.

"Isn't one bad experience enough for both of you? Or do I have to spell it out? - It just isn't natural playing around with the Past like that." McCoy paused for a moment to observe the Captain as if to summon up further inspiration for a new attack.

James T. Kirk was tired and he knew it showed. The break in the argument gave him the necessary incentive to regain command of the situation before it degenerated into another barrage of insults, and left the issue unanswered - and he must have an answer!

"Gentlemen!" He stood up to pace the distance between Spock and McCoy. "Bones" - the tone subsided. "I've got to have more to go on. I appreciate your concern in this but..."

"And I'd appreciate it if the Captain would hear me out!" McCoy's eyes blazed in fury and Kirk fought hard to control the flare of colour to his own cheeks. "My job is the welfare of this crew, not least of all the Captain, and anything which threatens to endanger that welfare either physically or psychologically becomes my concern. The risk is too great, Jim; if anything goes wrong..."

"The decision is mine, Doctor!" It was an order.

Kirk's mind accelerated, there could be no delay; he must decide, and now! "All right, Spock - your evaluation?"

The First Officer had remained his usual impassive self throughout the exchange, and as Kirk turned to face him now, he could not help but envy the cool, composed nerve of the man, whose only reaction was that raised eyebrow.

"The facts have already been stated, Captain."

"I'm well aware of that, Mr. Spock - continue."

Aware though he was of the Captain's impatience, Spock took the time to catalogue his thoughts. Hidden from view his hands clenched with concealed tension, but his face revealed nothing.

"Closer analysis indicates that the ripples in time initiated by the existence of the Guardian of Forever may be distorted, and the resulting power rechannelled to motivate changes in events which could have no historical significance. With the Guardian's assistance and use of the ship's computers, it may be possible to re-arrange events as they occurred in order to achieve a desired effect."

"Are you saying that you could re-time what happened? That we could reach the Obelisk and re-set the controls before..." Kirk left the sentence unfinished.

"Correct - in part, Captain. However, as events are, in effect, being 'manufactured', it will be necessary for both Dr. McCoy and myself to be present, as the original pattern dictates."

"Something's wrong, Captain!" It was a more subdued McCoy who made the statement, and Kirk felt a pang of regret. "It's just as easy as that? Press a button, walk through a door, and all your troubles are over - forever and a day?"

"On the contrary, Doctor." Spock paused. "It will not be easy at all!"

"That's what this whole thing sounds like to me - one big chance - and what's the price for this new-found happiness, Jim? There's got to be one, hasn't there? And what do we tell Starfleet Command? 'So sorry the Captain can't speak to you right now - he's just popped back in time to see his wife for a minute'."

"THAT'LL BE ENOUGH, McCOY!"

The intercom beeped and Uhura's melodic voice broke the sharp silence. "Bridge to Captain."

Kirk angrily thumbed acknowledgement. "Kirk here."

"Request you come up, sir - we have a problem."

"Specify." Kirk allowed himself a moment to reflect how much like Spock the question was.

"Well..."

"What is it, Lieutenant?"

Uhura saw the danger in delaying further. "There are a number of urgent Section reports for your attention, and - " she paused " - you have been away for over three hours now, sir?..." The tone was anxious, and Kirk mellowed.

"Very well - I'm on my way." He headed for the door.

"Before you leave - Captain!"

Kirk paused in the doorway. "Not now, Bones." It was a plea, but McCoy continued.

"Regulations require I inform you that I intend to record my disagreement with the Captain's probable decision to proceed with this mission. My medical opinion is that the Captain is psychologically unfit, therefore his decision may be emotionally biased to the detriment of himself - and the crew of the Enterprise."

Kirk remained where he was. He felt... empty. There was nothing to say, but McCoy hadn't finished yet. "My medical report will be communicated to the appropriate authorities in the morning, and that decision - Captain - is mine!" Kirk rested an arm against the door for an instant and then turned quickly into the corridor as the doors hissed closed on Spock and McCoy.

\* \* \* \*

"Well?" McCoy cleared his throat and then vented his frustration on the chief cause. "I hope you're satisfied, Spock? It was your analysed, computerised, Vulcan, hair-brained scheme that started all this; and where has it got us?"

Spock crossed over to the viewer console and flicked a switch to observe the Captain's arrival on the bridge. McCoy joined him and paused for a long moment to watch Kirk retrieve the con from Mr. Scott.

"We knew it would take a long time for him. Maybe not one year - or two, but this has opened the wounds all over again."

Spock's attention was still on the viewscreen as he addressed McCoy. "Have you observed the Captain lately, Doctor?" It was not really a question. "The wounds have not healed, rather they have festered. Are you aware that for some time now the Captain has taken only minimal rest periods, and eats alone - if at all. Furthermore - it is several months since our last chess game." The last sentence sounded almost amusing but McCoy knew that to Spock it was no joke.

"Well... he is under a strain - I've already said that." Realisation dawned as McCoy thought hard. "Come to think of it - he doesn't have time to talk much of late, and... he did defer a check-up recently - about the time we had that scrap with the Klingons at Vega II - naturally I assumed... "

"The Captain knew he could not fool your equipment, Doctor, and that there was no antidote - until now. May I ask if you intend to file that report?"

"Blast it, Spock - this is all the more reason for Jim to take things easy. Why, a long rest and... "

"Time to think, Doctor? That is precisely what he is trying to avoid!" A long moment passed, and then, a decision made, Spock continued, "There have been occasions when you have not hesitated to debate my 'Human' failings. I ask you now, Doctor - " Spock lifted his head from the viewscreen to look directly at McCoy " - how much of the Vulcan is there in you?"

\* \* \* \*



Kirk spent an hour clearing the backlog of reports and queries, and then spent ten minutes or so staring at the main viewscreen. It didn't help, and he was suddenly aware of the odd questioning glances in his direction.

"Mr. Scott!"

"Aye, Captain?" The Engineer was obviously relieved to receive a communication of some sort.

"Scotty - I'll be in my quarters, if... "

"I'll see you're not disturbed, sir." With a grateful nod, Kirk escaped the bridge.

Everyone looked at everyone else as the doors closed.

"There's something wrong with that laddie - and Ah don't like it."

Sulu relaxed, glad that the tension had eased. "If he puts us through any more emergency drills this week, there'll be something wrong with all of us."

"I don't understand..." Chekov joined in. "It isn't anything he does, but..." there was a pause, a silent agreement.

"What do you suppose is the matter, Mr. Scott?" Uhura's concern was apparent and touched them all. Scotty drummed his fingers on the arm rest of the command chair.

"Ah don't know, Lieutenant, but if all this to-in and fro-in is anything to go by, I'll wager it won't be a mite longer before we find out!"

Almost at that moment Spock entered the bridge, and was met by an embarrassed silence. Scotty relinquished the chair. "The Captain doesn't wish to be disturbed, Mr. Spock." The information relayed, he attempted to adjourn to his station, but Spock was too quick.

"Thank you, Mr. Scott." He had their attention, and they waited, but not long. Spock punched a button on the chair console. "Bridge to Engineering - prepare for computer check of all auxiliary by-pass systems. Mr. Scott, Mr. Chekov - your attention please."

Sulu grinned in commiseration as Chekov got to his feet. "Here we go again." He kept the remark low, but Spock had heard - and chosen to ignore.

\* \* \* \*

Kirk lay contemplating the emptiness of the space above him.

Bones was right, of course. Who was he to risk the Enterprise for this - oh, it was all very well Spock declaring the scheme to be of 'considerable scientific importance', and very convenient it was too, but was that the real reason the Captain gave his approval, or was he - as Bones had said - 'emotionally biased'. That was a damn silly question - of course he was. A sharp pain gripped his heart as he remembered the fate which had condemned him to a lifetime of memories... of orange blossom and pine trees - and Miramane...

Kirk's arm lashed out in anger at the nearest object - a curio in finest opalayne. It shattered into a thousand pieces which launched themselves across the room. He idly watched as a trickle of blood ran down the back of his hand, and then spread out in several directions.

Well- now it was finished. There was no decision to make - McCoy had seen to that, and he was not even sure he disagreed with him any more. Kirk lay back and closed his eyes. He was tired... so very... tired...

\* \* \* \*

Leonard McCoy was... embarrassed and angry and worried, not necessarily in that order. He reached over to switch on a library tape, only to switch it off a moment later in disgust. The choice WAS his to make and both the Captain and Spock knew it, but dammit! He was a Doctor, not the Commander of a

Starship! McCoy felt an uncontrollable urge to kick something, and made a mental note to provide just such an object, next shore leave. He attempted to review the situation 'logically', and smiled to himself. There was that word again, perhaps Spock was right; he had been insensitive to the Captain's condition, yet Jim had taken care to bluster through their conversations lately, nearly always ending with 'I'm a busy man, Bones'. Yes - the act had been good, and he had been fooled, but Spock hadn't. Perhaps that was what hurt most; that, and the fact that Jim hadn't confided in him. Why? What was it he feared? Rebuke? Criticism? Well, he'd certainly taken a fair share of that today. And then McCoy remembered the expression on Kirk's face as he had delivered his threat, and he had his answer. Defeat - utter and complete, and it was his power, his decision that had brought it about.

And if I'm wrong? McCoy thought about that for a long time - in fact, he was still thinking about it as, armed with a bottle of 'Chateau Scotty '76', then quit the elevator, and headed resolutely towards Kirk's cabin.

\* \* \* \*

Spock had similar ideas and McCoy felt a surge of delight to see the glimmer of confusion which passed over his face, as he sought to disguise and produce a logical explanation for his presence - and that of the portable chess game under his arm.

As they stood in the corridor, a few feet from Kirk's cabin, Spock glanced meaningfully at the bottle in McCoy's hand, and he saw his escape.

"A peace offering, Doctor?"

McCoy coloured slightly but changed his mind about full scale war. "Well Spock, it kinda looks as though you had the same idea, doesn't it? Now - are we gonna stand here all night discussing it, or are we gonna go in there?"

Kirk's voice called a tired "Come!" in answer to their buzz, and as he greeted them with an inquiring "Spock? Bones?" he moved to get up, and then apparently thinking better of it, sat on the edge of his couch instead. "Is there something...?" And then he saw why they had come and his heart warmed at the thought behind it.

McCoy broke the silence as he looked for glasses and found them from a nearby unit. "Well, Jim - there's an old Earth proverb - something about spilling milk..." He paused, glad Kirk couldn't see him struggling for the right words. "And - well - I guess it's all right to mop up a little?"

Kirk smiled. "Forget it, Bones."

Spock had relinquished the chess game and was looking with curiosity at the shattered ornament. Kirk saw the raised eyebrow, and by way of explanation he offered, "It... fell."

Thankfully the moment was over as McCoy handed drinks to himself and Spock. "To the Enterprise - and her Captain," McCoy toasted, and judged it wise not to say more. He had seen Kirk's injury almost at once and guessed how the ornament had 'fallen'. He only hoped Spock would put two and two together also. He did.

Time passed quickly and pleasantly, as Kirk relaxed in the company of the two men he trusted more than anyone in the universe.

"Let's take a look at that hand, Jim." McCoy took the chance as Spock checkmated the Captain for the third time. Kirk shrugged at Spock.

"I'm... out of practice," and to McCoy, "what, this, Bones? It's nothing to worry about."

"I'll take a look anyway."

Kirk surrendered, and as McCoy cleaned and sprayed the cuts, Kirk fought down a wave of nausea, as lack of food and sleep caught up with him. McCoy

noticed, and when he had finished, poured another drink; his back to Kirk, he added two drops of a clear liquid to the glass.

"One for the road, Jim - Doctor's orders!"

"Kirk sipped the drink gratefully, and then, "I don't know... what to do... "

"Captain - " Spock made to say something but a glance from McCoy brought him up.

Kirk hesitated. "I can't be sure... I could be risking the ship, and... when you make your report, I'll lose comm - "

"There won't be any report, Jim," McCoy cut in quickly.

Kirk couldn't be sure, but McCoy's words sounded very far away. He shook his head to clear it. McCoy was talking again. "Spock's the Science Officer, and I presume he's done his homework. If he thinks this thing'll work - then it'll work. Go ahead, and... I'll abide by the Captain's decision, decision, decis, dec... "

Strange - the words echoed in Kirk's ears, and then the room turned over. Through blurred eyes he watched as the glass slipped from his fingers to the floor and McCoy and Spock moved quickly to him before he fell. As they lifted him gently on to the couch, he struggled feebly against the enforced sleep. "Bones... no... must - think... "

"You'll think better after a good night's rest, now!" McCoy's arm was on his shoulder, comforting, yet restraining. "Just relax, Jim - don't fight it."

He had no choice, and they stayed until he was asleep.

\* \* \* \*

"What's the matter, Spock? Unethical?"

They were standing near the elevator on Deck Five. Spock, arms folded, studied McCoy. "On the contrary, Doctor, the success of this plan depends upon clear and precise attention to detail. In order to comply with full efficiency, the Captain required rest, which you have provided. Your action was, therefore - quite logical."

"Good! Now - I require your co-operation on another matter."

"Indeed?" Spock was curious.

"I want you to take it easy yourself."

"Really, Doctor? Your concern is unnecessary - I am quite... "

McCoy interrupted. "You're not fooling me, Spock; get some sleep - and don't give me any of that 'We Vulcans can go on forever' bull! If you haven't thought for yourself, just remember, Jim will need to rely on you now, more than ever."

Spock reflected on the words as he ran through some computer tapes later in his cabin. He studied the data intently for only a few moments before discovering, in surprise, that his mind was absorbing little. Switching off, he followed McCoy's advice, and fell quickly into a troubled sleep.

\* \* \* \*

McCoy entered the bridge as Kirk shouted "COMPENSATE!" and the Enterprise lurched violently in her struggle against the phenomenon which Spock called 'ripples in time'. Momentarily off balance, McCoy clung to the bridge rail until she stabilised.

"Damage report?" Kirk waited anxiously until the breathless reporter confirmed that the Enterprise was undamaged. "Spock?"



"Affirmative, Captain - it is beginning."

Even the hurried smile of greeting which Kirk shot him could not quell the cold fear which gripped McCoy as Spock said the words. He waited, always uneasy amongst the panels and flashing lights, more so on this occasion. Spock nodded briefly, and returned to his viewer. They went to yellow alert; the alarms quietened and, as the Captain joined him, McCoy was suddenly hesitant, unsure what the reaction would be. He looked away, but there was no need, for Kirk's eyes held no reprimand, only warm amusement.

"No hard feelings, Doctor, but..." he paused as McCoy's expression changed. "Next time... the drinks are on me!" They laughed, and so did the others, and Spock, whilst missing the joke, understood the need for it. As he looked around at the smiling faces, he knew that these people would follow James T. Kirk to the end of the universe, and beyond - as would he. It wasn't logical - but it was true.

Sulu interrupted. "Standard orbit procedure, Captain?"

Kirk was brought back to reality; "Carry on, Mr. Sulu. Steady as she goes."

"Aye, sir."

As the laughter faded, Kirk, attempting a confidence which his heart didn't feel, surveyed the bridge one last time. "Well, gentlemen - " he tugged at his shirt to hide a moment of panic " - let's go test your theory, Mr. Spock - Bones, I need you too."

As they headed for the turbo-lift, Uhura caught the Captain's arm, hesitantly, and then released him just as suddenly. "Sir, I..."

Kirk saw the filled eyes, and as Spock and McCoy tactfully moved on past him, he lifted her face gently, and brushed away a glistening tear. "No...no," he chastised softly. Her dark eyes met his in a million shared hopes - and fears. "It'll be... all right," he said resolutely. "It'll be all right."

He left her then and headed towards whatever game Destiny had in mind for him.

\* \* \* \*

They stood once again on the cold surface of the dead world. The same fascination held Kirk as, flanked by Spock and McCoy, he stood before the device which was neither being nor machine, which was its own beginning and its own end. He remembered its discovery. When McCoy had fled the ship in blind paranoia after an accidental cordrazine overdose, they had followed him here, and through the portal into a past where they did not belong, in order to restore a present in which they did. He looked at Spock, busy with last minute calculations, and a memory returned to haunt him.

('At his side - as if he's always been there, and always will be...')

"A moment longer..." Spock twiddled some dials.

('Captain - even when he doesn't say it, he does.')

"Penny for them, Jim?" McCoy broke into his thoughts. "Edith?" Kirk nodded. "She kinda got to me too, you know..."

And then, the familiar resonant throbbing voice of the Guardian stirred the air in response to Spock's question.

"Guardian - do you know why we are here?"

"YOU SEEK THE PAST. MANY SUCH JOURNEYS ARE POSSIBLE. LET ME BE YOUR GATEWAY."

"We seek to... reconstruct a past, and in so doing, remake a future."

The humming continued, and then "IT IS POSSIBLE. THE BALANCE MUST BE

MAINTAINED. DO YOU UNDERSTAND?"

Spock answered. "It is understood."

McCoy whispered to Kirk, "What's all that about a balance?"

Kirk shrugged, and McCoy's uneasiness grew. The Guardian spoke once more. "GO THEN - TO YOUR OTHER WORLD. IF YOU ARE SUCCESSFUL, YOU WILL BE RETURNED. IT WILL BE AS THOUGH YOU HAD NOT GONE."

The centuries began to roll past before them, and Spock moved closer. "Captain, Dr. McCoy - please be ready, on my signal."

"Now, hold on just a minute! I want to kn - "

"NOW!" Kirk grabbed McCoy's arm, and the three men disappeared into the cloudy, octagonal vortex.

\* \* \* \*

Kirk ran on towards the two familiar figures who stood waiting at the foot of the Obelisk. Spock HAD done his homework well, the approximation to jump could not have been better. He reached them, and together they moved to the platform where Kirk spoke into his communicator, repeating the pattern of consonants and vowels; the secret key which gained them admittance to the control room.

Once inside Spock wasted no time setting to rights the malfunction. "Just push the right buttons," Kirk had said, and as he did just that, the pencil-thin blue beam reached out to push away the asteroid which threatened to smash this world apart.

McCoy breathed a sigh of relief. "Well - that wasn't so bad. Now can we go home?"

"Not so fast, Bones. I have a wife out there, remember?" He started for the door, only to hesitate as something in Spock's attitude drew his attention.

"What is it, Mr. Spock? Something wrong?"

There was a sadness in Spock's face, and curious, Kirk moved to him.

"There is something which must be done, Captain - I regret... "

Kirk gripped the Vulcan's shoulder in growing alarm. "Spock?" and suddenly he was pushed, gently but firmly, as Spock twisted, throwing the Captain off balance and into the path of the memory beam which, once before, had robbed him of his identity.

"WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?" A frenzied cry escaped McCoy as he saw Kirk crumple to the floor before Spock could catch him. Instantly at his side, McCoy gave Kirk a shot, and watched as he stirred momentarily but could not respond. "I asked you a question, Spock!"

"It was necessary, Doctor."

"Is that all you can say? What purpose...?"

"Soon you will understand, Doctor. For the moment, I ask that you employ patience."

"That's a laugh!" McCoy was bitter. "Perhaps I'm next, eh, Spock? Is that your plan? I just can't believe... "

"Dr. McCoy! Please - not now." Something in Spock's voice made McCoy stop, and then he watched and followed as Spock lifted Kirk effortlessly and carried him out of the Temple.

As the trio appeared, the crowd drew back. They had watched in awe as the Gods had saved their world, just as legend had predicted, but they had doubted and tried to kill the one whom the Gods had sent to raise the Temple spirit and make the sky grow quiet. Now, the Powerful Ones must surely punish

them. In sheer blind terror, they turned and fled. All but one - Miramanee ran to them, unafraid but anxious. Spock laid Kirk on the platform and she fell sobbing at their feet. Kneeling, she cradled Kirk, her hands touching, caressing; her shining black hair tumbling in waves about her shoulders. The Captain stirred again, and McCoy said gently, "He'll be all right now - and so will your people."

She cried and laughed together as she spoke to the man she loved, the father of her unborn child. "I knew you would save them, my Chief."

Feeling unneeded, McCoy joined Spock who stood a little distance off, quietly watching the scene. "You don't intend to take Jim back with us - do you, Spock? You never have!" There was no reply. "How are we gonna ex... "

His question went unanswered as a cry rent the air behind them. They whirled as, crazed with the courageous obsession which jealousy alone can bring, the former Medicine Chief prepared his revenge.

"Liars! False Gods! Use your powers to strike me down, if you can, for I will prove to the people that you are no Gods!"

"Salish! No!" Miramanee ran to join McCoy and Spock. "What can be gained from this? Our world is safe now - forget this madness!"

But this was the anger of murderous hatred which reason could not reach. "You are bewitched by these deceivers and must die like them - now!"

The air suddenly grew cold, as the knife hurtled towards her and McCoy with deadly accuracy, and then, with a lightning movement, Spock interposed his body between them, and Miramanee screamed in terror as the cruel blade buried itself in his back. McCoy used his phaser and Salish dropped where he stood.

Miramanee was unconscious but unharmed. McCoy turned Spock onto his side, supporting him with one knee. A glance told him...

He used a stimulant, and as the Vulcan responded, "Pig-headed, stubborn..." and then, brokenly, "Spock - why?"

"Do not be concerned - Doctor. There is... no pain."

"Liar!" But there was no anger in McCoy, only remorse and a large feeling of helplessness. He shook his head, incredulous, disbelieving. "It wasn't supposed to be this way - I should have known - should have prevented..."

"No... Doctor. Necessary... the balance... "

McCoy had begun to understand. "A life - for a life?" Spock's silence answered him. "Oh, my God!"

Spock was fighting, controlling, but as McCoy reached for a hypo, he caught the Doctor's arm in refusal. "The Captain?"

"He'll be all right - they both will."

Satisfied, Spock tried to reach for the tricorder which lay beside him, and suddenly, quietly, it was all over; as the grip on the Doctor's arm relaxed, McCoy held it fast in numb disbelief.

Seconds, minutes, or maybe hours later, McCoy pressed the button which Spock had indicated, and listened to Kirk's recorded voice say, "So peaceful... uncomplicated, no problems, no command decisions. Just - living... "

And he would never know... never know that Spock had bought him Paradise - with his life. An anguished cry broke from McCoy as he hurled the tricorder at the stone metal.

\* \* \* \*

And then - he was on the bridge, not making sense and looking at two ghosts.

"Jin! Spock! Wh- what happened?"



"What's the matter, Bones? You look terrible." Kirk came to him, smiling.

"I... you're... not supposed to - be here... where's Miramancee?" At Kirk's perplexed look, he added, "Your wife."

Incredulous, Kirk said, "What!?"

Spock said "Fascinating!" and it was all too much for McCoy. As he reeled, Kirk banged a button on his chair panel. "Medical team to the bridge - emergency!"

Some time later an anxious James T. Kirk watched as McCoy regained consciousness in sickbay. Suitably reassured, Christine Chapel smiled in relief and then left them.

"That was some nightmare, Bones - how do you feel?"

McCoy tried to sit up, but nothing seemed to work just yet.

"Take it easy." At McCoy's look, Kirk added hastily, "I know, I know, you're the Doctor, but... get some rest... we'll talk later."

As the Captain left, McCoy looked at Spock and beheld in those dark eyes the answer to his questions. For Jim there was no planet, no asteroid, no Miramancee - yet. But there would be one day, and suddenly McCoy knew what the price would be when that time came. That is - until a touch from Spock removed the secret of a tomorrow, and the memory of a yesterday.

\*\*\*\*\*

MA POOR WEE BAIRNS

Ah dinna ken the man's request  
He's jist a ravin' madman,  
He disna' understand them  
That I know.

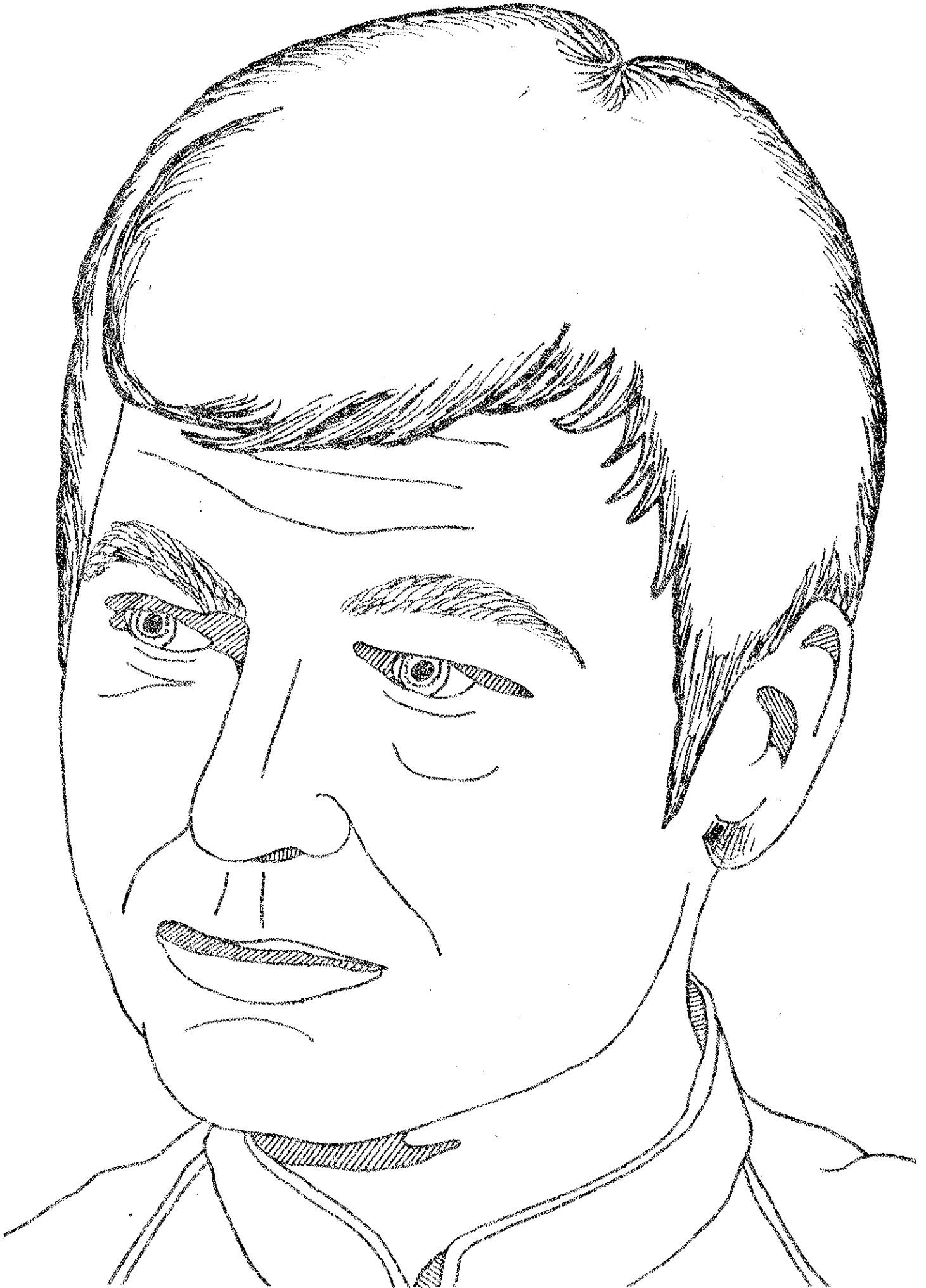
He calls himself the Captain  
But he disna' really love them.  
I'll give them two more hours  
Before they blow.

He had this crazy chase in mind  
He wouldna' be prevented,  
I wish I were the Captain  
Of this ship.  
I'd make them take it easy  
But it isna' really my place,  
So I push the engines hard  
And bite my lip.

I canna' really hate the man,  
He only does his duty,  
The same as I do mine  
With no complaints,  
But it's hard to hear them screaming,  
I just wish that he could hear them  
And spare a thought for me  
And ma wee bairns.

Ann Wignore

\*\*\*\*\*



EVIL IS... by Jennifer Guttridge

The slanted vividly green eyes of the woman flashed. She tossed her head high, shaking out her mane of midnight dark hair. "You will regret this," she said in a voice that shook with scarcely controlled fury. "You will all regret this!"

"I'm sorry, Ma'am," Kirk told her. "But there is really nothing further I can do. I've pleaded your case before the Federation council, and they've decided irrevocably to deny you even associate membership."

"Very well!" she snarled. "Go on! Get back to your space ship and your precious Federation! But where ever you travel, my curse will travel with you." Her eyes switched in turn to each of their faces. For each of them there was a momentary nausea as his mind was penetrated by a blunt sensory probe, and then her eyes returned angrily to Kirk's face. "Get out!" she hissed.

Kirk inclined his head. "Very well, Ma'am." He turned on his heel and walked from the smoky hall without looking back. Outside he waited for Spock and McCoy to catch up with him.

McCoy looked back as the door was slammed shut behind them.

"I can't say that I'm exactly grief stricken over taking my leave of that lady," he said feelingly.

"Nor I," Kirk agreed. "Let's get back to the Enterprise before things turn even more unpleasant, and put a considerable amount of space between us and this backwater. Kirk to Enterprise."

"Enterprise. Scott here, sir."

"Mr. Scott, prepare to beam three aboard," Kirk said. "Lock on. Energize."

\* \* \*

Kirk watched the murky green planet recede to a speck on the screen and vanish. "Switch to forward scanners," he ordered and leaned back in the command seat, stretching. "Lt. Uhura, inform Starfleet Command that we're underway to our next assignment."

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Maintain your course, Mr. Sulu, warp factor two."

"Warp two, sir," Sulu acknowledged.

Kirk swivelled in the command seat and then got up and walked lazily across the bridge to the computer station. He looked up at the Vulcan and grinned. "Two and a half weeks to the next port of call, Mr. Spock," he said. "No rush, no worry, an enjoyable little pleasure cruise."

Spock gazed down at him with an air of innocent puzzlement.

"Pleasure cruise, Captain?" he inquired doubtfully.

"Yes. A little relaxation. All the amenities. All the comforts of a home from home. The only thing I can't offer is a sun tan."

"Sun tan?" Spock asked.

Kirk spread his hands. "No beach," he explained.

"Beach?" Spock repeated, giving up the attempt to follow the reasoning of Kirk's brain.

Kirk smiled kindly and shook his head. "Forget it, Mr. Spock. Just forget it," he advised. "You take care of things up here and I'll go and tell it to McCoy."



"As you wish, Captain," Spock murmured, watching Kirk's back retreat toward the turbo lift doors.

He watched the red doors slide together behind the captain and then he raised a hand to his head, pressing the first two fingers against his temple. There was a tenderness there, a soreness that went deep. He frowned at it and with the typical Vulcan attitude set the thought of physical discomfort aside and bent his head once more over the computer console.

\* \* \*

Kirk and McCoy raised their glasses and grinned at each other through the amber liquid. "Here's to it, Bones," Kirk said. "Two and a half weeks of perfect peace."

"Huh!" McCoy scoffed. "I seem to remember the last time you said something like that - the entire ship's complement came down with a mutation of Tiavian worm, and we spent three weeks clearing up the resultant mess!"

Kirk held up his hands. "Don't remind me," he begged. "What do you intend to do with the time?"

"Me?" McCoy grinned. "Apart from eating, drinking and sleeping, I'm going to make a concerted effort to classify those - " He jerked a thumb in the direction of the cabinets that lined his walls, and their contents, rank upon rank of anthropoid skulls whose origins ranged from one rim of the galaxy to the other.

"Back to the book." Kirk grinned and raised his glass. "Here's to it."

McCoy swallowed a mouthful and then doubled up, coughing, as a tremble ran through the superstructure of the ship and made the fluid ripple in his glass.

Kirk hammered him hard on the back. "That was trouble if ever I felt it," he said. The intercom bleeped even as he reached for the switch. "Kirk here."

"Spock here, Captain. There has been a minor explosion in the engineering section. Mr. Scott reports superficial structural and circuitry damage. One subsidiary bulkhead has buckled. There is one crewman requiring medical attention."

"Understood, Mr. Spock," Kirk said, frowning. "Assemble a damage control party. Give Mr. Scott all the assistance he requires. Dr. McCoy and I are on our way."

McCoy, his medical kit in his hand, was already on his way to the turbo lift.

\* \* \*

It was in the early hours of the following morning that Kirk stirred with a dull ache in his stomach. He rolled onto his side and drew his knees up to his belly. The pain stayed with him. He came fully awake and, thinking he had cramp, stretched his body out. The pain increased noticeably with the movement. Kirk felt sweat break out on his body. The sheets became cold and clammy and uncomfortable. He threw them off and tried to sit up on the edge of the bed. A wave of sharp agony swept through the lower half of his body. He wrapped his arms round his body and groaned. The sweat ran down his face in cold beads; his legs were numb and refused to respond, it was impossible for him to walk.

Holding himself tightly he rolled off the bed and dropped onto the floor. The impact made him gasp. Inch by painful inch he dragged himself across the floor into his office and over to the desk. He reached up, feeling for the intercom switch. The muscles of his abdomen twisted themselves into knots and jerked the knots tight. Kirk cried out as lights burst in his head. His

distant disconnected fingers tipped the rocker switch. "Kirk... Kirk to bridge," he gasped, his voice sounding little more than a croak, even to his own ears. "Kirk to bridge." No voice responded from the intercom. Kirk became aware of a dead hollow hum coming from the machine. His fingers fumbled to the next switch. "Kirk to sickbay. Kirk to..." Still there was only the warning sound of a disconnected channel. He collapsed, panting, onto the floor. Dizzying nausea washed over him, he retched and vomited. A black gulf yawned before him and he felt himself slipping over its edge. Resolutely, he dragged himself back.

Using one elbow as a lever he set out to pull himself across the miles of floor that separated him from the door and the corridor beyond.. Interminably he crawled until the door towered above him. He raised his hand towards it. With a light hiss of hydraulics it slid back into the wall casing. Kirk dragged himself through it.

The night dimmed corridor curved away in both directions, humming with the warm competent silence of the ship. There was no distant sound, no sight of anyone. Kirk got his head and shoulders through the door and then laid his cheek on the cool metal of the deck. The jagged fangs and sharp nailed fingers of pain reached up and dragged him down beneath the level of consciousness.

When he awoke, he still had the pain, but it was not the crippling wrenching pain of the night. It was a penetrating soreness and an ache of bruised muscles deep inside his body. He breathed in and his throat felt as if it had been skinned raw. He lay flat on his back on the sickbay examination table, dressed in clean hospital issue pyjamas and covered with a light sheet. He blinked up at the light above his head and tried to lift a hand to his face. His fingers and wrist felt a long way off, as if they belonged to someone else. He guessed from the heaviness of his arm and the slowness of his brain that he was drugged.

There was movement somewhere out of his range of vision. He heard someone get up out of a chair and walk quietly across the floor to his side. His eyes rolled in their sockets and he blinked. McCoy towered over him, looking down from a great distance. Kirk swallowed and tried to speak. His throat burned. McCoy leaned down to his level, his face swimming into focus. "Don't try to talk, Jim," he advised. "You've had quite a nasty time of it." He laid a reassuring hand on Kirk's shoulder.

Kirk looked at the hand curiously, noticing the carefully scrubbed nails and the neat way all the little light brown hairs lay the same way, all the way from the back of the doctor's hand to where they vanished beneath the short sleeve of his tunic. He realised his mind was wandering and fought back the fogginess.

"Drink," he croaked hoarsely.

McCoy straightened and vanished but he was back in a moment holding a glass of water. He supported Kirk's shoulders with one arm and allowed him to take three small sips before taking the glass firmly away and lowering him back onto the bed. The drink, scant though it was, eased Kirk's throat.

"Bones, what hit me?" he gasped.

"Sssh," McCoy hushed him. "You were in quite a mess when they brought you in last night. I had to clean your stomach out for you. That's why your throat hurts so much."

"What... what...?"

"We don't know what caused it yet. Some form of enteritis, or perhaps it was just something you ate. I sent some samples down to the labs. Results should be back in a couple of hours."

"Spock?" Kirk asked weakly.

"Oh, he came in and looked at you and grunted a few times and then went out again. He's on the bridge now, so I guess he's taking care of things, you can just lie quiet and take it easy for a while."

Kirk managed a frail grin and nodded. "What about... the damage in engineering?"

"Scotty's fixing it up. The man who was injured has two burned arms and concussion. He'll be all right in a week or two. Ah..." McCoy looked up. "Here's Nurse Chapel come to give you a wash and brush up, and then we'll see if you can stomach a little liquid nourishment."

As it happened Kirk proved able to take nourishment, indeed the thick white fluid did almost nothing to alleviate a growing hunger. Afterwards he had a short deep sleep and by the time Spock reappeared in the sickbay at about midmorning, Kirk was sitting up in bed and looking decidedly more cheerful. The Vulcan walked to the end of the bed and looked along its length at him.

"You are recovering from your indisposition, Captain?"

"Thank you, yes, Mr. Spock," Kirk whispered and gestured to his throat. "I'm afraid I don't have very much voice this morning. McCoy took the skin off my gizzard."

"I quite understand, Captain. I have come to assure you that there is no need to concern yourself over the welfare of the ship or of the crew."

"No, I'm sure there isn't, Mr. Spock," Kirk agreed. "But there is one thing you can do for me."

Spock raised an eyebrow. "Captain?"

"The intercom unit in my quarters is malfunctioning. Last night, when I needed help, I couldn't make anyone hear."

"I'll see to it that the fault is rectified immediately."

McCoy came out of his office and looked up from the report pad he was reading. "Oh, hello, Spock."

"Good morning, Doctor. I came to inquire after the Captain's health."

"Well - " McCoy looked at Kirk. "You can see for yourself, he looks a darn sight better than he did first thing this morning. A day's rest and he'll be back on his feet."

"Less than a day if I have anything to say about it," Kirk grunted. "I'm getting bed sores already."

McCoy chuckled, but knowing him as he did, Kirk noticed that the laughter did not quite extend to his eyes.

"Doctor." Spock turned from the bed as if he had had an afterthought to his visit. "I would trouble you for one of your headache tablets before I leave."

"Oh?" McCoy looked up at him, his face taking on an immediate expression of concern. He knew how rarely the Vulcan desired or admitted the need for medication. "Are you sickening?" he asked. "Let me look at you."

Spock shook his head and backed away. "There's no need of that, Doctor, it's merely a headache."

"I'm the Doctor around here," McCoy said, putting the report pad down. "I'll judge what's wrong with you and what I give you for it. Sit down in a chair."

Spock looked unhappily towards his Captain, his face pleading.

"Do as the man says, Spock," Kirk told him. "As he says, he is the doctor."

Spock sank, stiff backed and wary, into a chair, eyeing McCoy's approach with a medical scanner from beneath his eyebrows. The doctor set the small device spinning and passed it over the Vulcan's head and neck.

"There doesn't seem to be anything wrong," he admitted. "I'll give you your tablets."

With a bad grace Spock accepted the two small yellow pills into the palm of his hand and beat a rapid if dignified retreat. Kirk shook his head reproachfully. "That wasn't really necessary. You know how he hates to be examined."

"Oh, I know all right," McCoy agreed, grinning. "But it doesn't do him any harm to submit that pride of his once in a while."

"You just enjoy tormenting him."

McCoy chuckled wickedly and then sobered as his eyes fell once more on the report pad. He picked it up and scowled at what was written there.

"Jim," he said. "This stomach trouble of yours, from the lab. reports it looks like something you ate caused it."

Kirk frowned deeply. "I don't see how that can be. I only had a steak. The kitchens are... "

"No. No, I don't mean that." McCoy broke his own rule and sat on the side of the bed. "According to this analysis report, the samples from your stomach contained traces of Atusic acid."

"That's a poison, isn't it?"

"It's used for a lot of things. Some forms of plant life thrive on it, and it kills those nasty white grubs that live under your skin, the ones that originated in the Orion system. But taken internally it is a poison. Small doses over a long period accumulate with much the same result as lead poisoning. Larger doses bring on the experiences you went through last night. Extreme pain, numbness in the limbs, sickness. If it's not treated in time it can lead to coma and death."

"In that case," Kirk said, "I have to thank you for your prompt action."

"All part of the service. The thing that worries me is, how did Atusic acid get into your stomach."

"Where's it kept?"

"Well, there's some in the labs. It's stored as dry crystals, quite inert until dissolved in an activating agent. Once in a concentrated fluid form you could have eaten it with your food or drunk it in your coffee. It's quite tasteless. The question is, how did it get there?"

Kirk thought for a long moment and then slowly shook his head. "I don't know, Bones. I just don't know. Some sort of... accident?"

"Hm!" McCoy snorted. "Another of the great unsolved mysteries, I expect, but I'll ask a few questions round and about."

"Do that," Kirk agreed. "And you'd better get those food dispensers checked, just in case."

Kirk ate a very light lunch of what McCoy chose to call solid food, although Kirk, looking at the slop, could think of several far more apt descriptions. However, to please the doctor, and expedite his release from sickbay, he swallowed it down. It gave him a pain in the belly for a while but then that went away and he felt comfortably replete. He dozed for half the afternoon, and then boredom set in. Sickbay, when no-one but yourself was sick, was not the most interesting place to spend one's time!

He tackled McCoy about it and after much argument and objection persuaded him that he was well enough to make his way to the bridge.



He found that the ship was operating with the usual standard of efficiency despite his absence. He sat down in the command seat and Spock came down from the computer and stood beside him.

"Maintaining course and speed, Captain. Damage control party estimates nine hours for the completion of repairs to the engineering section."

"Very good, Mr. Spock. Is there any indication of what caused the damage?"

"A faulty fail safe circuit. Mr. Scott is in the process of rectifying it."

"Good." Kirk leaned back. "I'll take over here for a while. You go below decks and take a break."

Spock looked at him doubtfully. "If you're sure... "

"I'm sure," Kirk said with a grin. "Go ahead."

Spock nodded and turned, heading not ungratefully for the turbo lift.

As the doors slid closed behind him the pain in his head that had been troubling him all day increased abruptly. Alone as he was he was able, momentarily, to allow his defences to drop. He closed his eyes and leaned his burning forehead against the cool metal of the wall.

Kirk looked at the steadily marching stars on the screen in front of him. They never failed to cast their spell of fascination over him. Their differences in size, colour and configuration were endless in their variety. They appeared from the nothing in the central vortex of the screen, swelled steadily as the Starship approached and then passed off the edge of the screen and fell behind as they passed out of the range of the forward scanner.

After a while Kirk got up and walked around the bridge balcony, looking over the shoulders of the crew at the multitude of lights on the consoles. He stopped beside Uhura. "Any word from Starfleet, Lieutenant?"

"Negative, Captain. Nothing since the routine acknowledgement of our last message."

Kirk nodded and moved on. He found that the boredom had travelled up from sickbay with him. He was a man of action and inactivity proved infinitely wearying.

"Mr. Sulu, increase speed to warp factor four," he ordered. "Ly. Uhura, if I'm needed, I'll be in engineering."

"Yes, sir."

The turbo lift doors closed behind him. He took hold of the metal lever and twisted it until the light glowed.

"Engineering level," he ordered.

The lift generator responded with a mounting whine and he experienced a slight lightening of the stomach as the cage dropped into the descent shaft. He sensed immediately that there was something wrong. He could hear the discordance in the sound of the motor. Before he could do anything the cage gave a violent jerk that knocked him off his feet and sent him sprawling across the floor. He felt light-headed, nauseated, disorientated. He was dropping with tremendous speed towards the bottom of the shaft. He struggled on to his feet and pulled himself round the walls, using the levers as hand-holds. With the heel of his hand he rammed in the manual control circuit. The cage shuddered as the brakes came on, wobbled violently in its own slipstream. Kirk felt it slowing down and took a deep breath, becoming aware of the sweat that was growing cold on his skin.

The lift cage lurched again, shunting suddenly sideways before it had actually come to a halt. Kirk grabbed once more for the lever and missed. He

staggered and landed once more, with bruising force, on the floor. He could hear the generator racing wildly beyond the walls and the cage began smoothly to pick up speed again. Kirk clambered onto his hands and knees. The air was screaming past outside. Kirk crawled forward, struggling against the speed that drove him back. The flesh rippled across his cheeks and his lips drew back from his teeth in an involuntary snarl. It was becoming difficult to breathe. He reached up with sweating fingers to the manual control. He pressed and once more the cage began to slow down. This time he kept a firm hold until it had slid to a complete halt and the doors opened.

He staggered out, his legs numb jelly beneath him, and drove himself to the nearest intercom. "Kirk to bridge," he gasped. "Sulu, go to the environmental control unit and turn off the entire turbo lift system. It's not to be used until it's been entirely checked out."

"Yes, Captain," Sulu said, sounding surprised.

Kirk took a deep breath to steady himself and pressed another button. "Kirk to engineering."

There was a pause. "Engineering, Scott here."

"Scotty, detail some men to check the turbo lift system."

"Whatever's the matter with it, sir?"

"I don't know. But it just nearly killed me."

"I'll get some men on it right away."

Still shaken, Kirk made his way by means of the companionway ladders to deck seven and sickbay. McCoy took one look at his pale face, pushed him promptly down in a chair and poured a stiff drink.

"Medicinal purposes," he said, holding out the glass. "What happened?"

Kirk swallowed the brandy in a gulp. It made him feel better. "Turbo lift," he said. "Nearly made pulp of me."

McCoy frowned. "Have you done something about it?"

"It's out of action. Scotty's seeing to it."

"Hm," McCoy grumbled. "You seem to be making a habit of narrow squeaks."

Kirk managed a weak grin. "Some vacation," he agreed.

\* \* \*

Kirk scowled at the report pad. "I don't understand," he said. "What... can it mean?"

"I wouldn't like to say about the implications of it, sir," Scott said, "but the facts are what they are. The turbo lift control was programmed to disassociate itself on the receipt of your voice pattern."

Kirk shook his head. "But that's impossible. What... Who could have done that?"

"I don't know, sir. But whoever it was was highly skilled and had a complete knowledge of the computer system. It was a beautiful job." Scott sighed with grudging admiration.

"Captain, the same can be said for the intercom in your quarters," Spock said. "That too was sabotaged, and by an expert."

Kirk looked at him and then stared down at the report pad again with bewilderment and dismay.

"You've got to face it, Jim," McCoy said gravely, "someone aboard this ship is out for your life. That Atusic acid didn't get into your food by accident, somebody put it there. That much is obvious now, and then fixed the intercom so that you couldn't call for help. And then this business with the

turbo lift. That's two determined attempts to kill you."

Kirk looked at each of his friends. "But who? And why?"

"If correctly evaluated, we should have sufficient data to establish who," Spock said. "Perhaps then we should discover the reason why."

"Very good, Mr. Spock," Kirk agreed, handing the report pad back to Scott and making a concerted effort to pull himself together. "Gather all the information you can, from Scotty, McCoy, the labs, the damaged equipment, and run it through the computer for analysis. I want to get to the bottom of this, and as soon as possible."

Spock inclined his head. "Acknowledged, Captain."

\* \* \*

For Spock sleep was impossible. All through the long night he lay on the top of his bed, his hands at his sides, clenched and twisted in the covers, and he suffered. Pain lanced through his temples with fine needles of fire, piercing deep into his brain. He stared up unseeingly at the ceiling, and unbeknown to himself, he uttered little whimperings of agony.

\* \* \*

Kirk pressed the button of the wall intercom and spoke to the bridge.

"Kirk here. Give me the First Officer."

"He's not here, sir. He went down to the physics lab. Shall I call him for you?"

"Er, no, Lieutenant. I'll go along there. Kirk out."

Kirk made his way along the curving corridor to the door of the laboratory. The room was large, brightly lit and humming quietly with the sounds of idling equipment. It was also empty. There was no sign of the Vulcan anywhere. The door closed quietly behind him. "Spock," he called. "Mr. Spock?" There was no reply. Kirk started across to the door on the far side, picking his way between the work benches.

There was a soft clicking sound from the side of the room. "Spock?" Kirk turned. There was no-one there, only the yawning black opening of the pressure chamber door. Kirk went over and peered inside. "Mr. Spock?" he inquired.

There was no response from the Vulcan but again he heard the clicking sound coming from the back of the chamber. Kirk ducked inside and went to find out what was making the noise.

He never did actually discover the cause of that illusive sound. The pressure chamber also doubled as a wind tunnel and was frequently used as a combination of both. Consequently it was both solidly constructed and long. Kirk was two thirds of the way along it when the circular door behind him slid across the opening and dogged tight. Immediately Kirk heard the sound of pumps starting up and the hiss of air being sucked out through the valves. He started to run back towards the entrance, already feeling the pressure drop on his skin and cursing himself for a fool. Now that the trap was sprung it was only too obvious.

There was a thick crystalline port in the door, necessary for direct visual observation of the experiments. Kirk's ears were tingling as he reached it. He sucked at the rarifying air and peered through it at the same time pounding on the unyielding metal with his fists. Through the port he could see the Vulcan, sprawled on the deck, either unconscious or dead, Kirk couldn't determine which.

There was a singing in his head and his ears were hurting. Something warm ran down his neck, tickling. He put up a hand and his fingers came away wet and red. He hammered on the door, shouting at the top of his voice for

help. He tried to draw a deep breath and found that there was almost no air left. Sirens sang maddeningly in his head, the blood ran freely from his ears and nose, his eyes felt as though they were being dragged from their sockets. His pounding on the door became weaker, his shouting mere gasping. Through a grey haze he saw the door slide open and a white coated lab assistant came through it. The man saw Spock laid out on the floor and started towards him. Then he caught sight of Kirk's bug-eyed bloodstained face in the pressure chamber port and veered off, running for the control console.

Kirk's lungs snatched at the air as it rushed back into the chamber. He sank to his knees as the door slid open and concentrated on breathing. Just breathing.

The lab seemed suddenly to be full of people. Willing hands helped him from the chamber and a chair was found for him. Someone was calling urgently over the intercom for a doctor. Kirk accepted a tissue with shaking hands and wiped some of the blood from his face.

"Spock?" he asked.

One of the men looked up from the Vulcan's side. "He's breathing, sir."

McCoy came through the door and looked round rapidly, assessing the situation. His eyes swept over Kirk and he knelt down at Spock's side, feeling for a pulse. A medical team arrived with a trolley. McCoy waved them over.

"Get this man to sickbay," he ordered. "And be careful with him. Jim, you come with me."

Kirk stood up, and was glad of McCoy's arm to steady him.

\* \* \*

McCoy spent a considerable amount of time with Spock while Christine Chapel bathed the blood from Kirk's face and neck. Then he came and very thoroughly examined the Captain's ears.

"You can thank your lucky star for your resilience," he said with an agitation that Kirk knew meant that he was rattled. "Another few seconds and you'd have had burst eardrums and collapsed lungs."

"And no future," Kirk added honestly. "How's Spock?"

McCoy looked towards the examination table where the Vulcan lay. "He's deeply unconscious," he said, frowning. "That's about all I can say at the moment."

"Whoever locked me in that pressure chamber must have hit him."

McCoy looked at him oddly. "I don't know about that," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"There was no sign of a struggle in the lab," McCoy said. "Spock's strong as a bull buffalo. He wouldn't have gone down without a fight."

Kirk accepted a cup of coffee with a grateful grin and sipped at it. "He must have been taken from behind."

"It would take one hell of a crack to fell Spock with a single blow," McCoy remarked.

"Agreed. I don't see... "

"Jim." McCoy looked at him squarely. "There isn't a mark on him."

Kirk put his cup down on the table. "Bones," he said. "What are you saying?"

"I don't know what I'm saying!" McCoy shook his head, genuinely bewildered. "I just don't know!"

"Well, what's the matter with him? You're saying he's unconscious. Is he... shamming it, somehow?" The words stuck in Kirk's throat.

"No." McCoy shook his head. "He's in a coma, but I can't for the life of me find out why! There's not a bruise or a cut or a lump anywhere. A blow hard enough to put him out like that would have opened his skull!"

"Have you considered... other causes?" Kirk asked. "What about drugs? Gas?"

"There's no trace of gas in his system. As for drugs, well, I've sent samples of blood and urine to the labs, but somehow... I doubt it."

The door slid open and Scott came in, his face lined with worry.

"Captain Kirk, are ye all right, man?" he asked, his concern making him forget all formality and his accent burring.

"I'm fine, Scotty," Kirk assured him. "Our unfriendly friend tried again. This time he almost made a double hit."

Scott looked puzzled and then turned his head with McCoy's nod and saw the Vulcan. "We've got to do something about this," he said decisively. "Or it'll not stop until one or the both of you are dead!"

"Agreed," Kirk said. "Spock had that data almost ready to run through the computers. It looks as if you'll have to do it."

"Doctor," Christine called from the Vulcan's side. "I think he's..."

Spock stirred and a low shuddering groan came from him. He raised both hands to his head and tried at once to sit up. McCoy planted a hand firmly on each shoulder and pushed him back onto the bed. "Lie still!" he ordered. Spock fought him momentarily and then relaxed. His head rolled feverishly. His lips parted, panting for breath. "You're in pain," McCoy said gently. "Where is it? Tell me where it hurts."

Spock looked at him, his eyes bright. "My head," he said in a tight carefully controlled voice. "Pain!..." He closed his eyes and pressed his lips hard together.

"Sedative, nurse," McCoy ordered. He passed a medical scanner over the Vulcan's skull and his frown deepened at the result. Christine returned with a filled hypo. "Just relax," McCoy said, applying the nozzle to the Vulcan's shoulder. "This'll ease it." Spock tried to flinch away, but McCoy, knowing his phobia, held him firm. "It's all right. It won't put you to sleep." He pushed the plunger and there was a sharp hiss.

Spock's eyes closed and for a full minute he lay still, his hands twisted in the sheet. Then he took a deep breath and relaxed. He looked at McCoy.

"Thank you, Doctor. For once your medication is welcome."

McCoy nodded guardedly. "You're welcome. Do you feel up to answering a few questions?"

Spock's eyes switched from his face to Kirk and Scott, standing behind him. "I'm all right," he said.

McCoy stepped aside and Kirk took his place at the bedside. "Spock, can you remember what happened to you?"

There was a troubled look in Spock's eyes as he shook his head. "Pain... in my head," he said. "I was working in the lab, and there was pain. I... don't remember."

"Were you alone in the lab? Was there anyone there with you?"

"No. Nobody there."

Kirk frowned. There was something inconsistent here. "The pressure chamber - did you see me in the pressure chamber?"

Spock gazed at him, his almost black eyes confused.

"He doesn't know what you're talking about, Jim," McCoy said. "The drugs are getting to him and making him dopey and he's still in pain. Let him rest a while and he might remember more clearly."

"All right," Kirk agreed and laid a reassuring hand on the Vulcan's shoulder. "You let McCoy take care of you for a while. You hear?"

Spock nodded his head against the pillow. "I hear, Captain."

Kirk, Scott and McCoy withdrew to the far side of the room.

"Keep a close eye on him, Bones," Kirk said slowly.

"Jim, you don't think that Spock has anything to do with... "

"I just want him kept a close eye on," Kirk repeated. "He's a friend of mine."

McCoy shrugged. "All right," he agreed.

Kirk nodded and left with Scott. They walked side by side to the turbo lift.

"The First Officer'd give his life before he'd let anything happen to you, sir," the engineer said. "I'm sure he's got nothing to do with all of this."

"I know all about his loyalty, Scotty. I don't question it for a minute. But there's something going on here that none of us understand. I want you to run that data through the computer first chance you get. That might provide us with some answers."

"I'll have it processed for you by morning, sir."

Kirk nodded and took the turbo lift to the bridge while Scott made his own way to engineering.

\* \* \*

Kirk spent the afternoon and evening not exactly in fear, but he was aware of a sort of tension within himself. He had supper with McCoy in the officer's ward room and afterwards, with a glass of brandy warming in his hands he felt his spine, aching from being stiffened against an expected blow, begin to relax.

"How's Spock?" he asked.

"He was sleeping when I left. The pain in his head seemed to be easing."

"That's good. Has he said anything?"

"No. Any concerted attempt to question him upsets him. The pain increases again. But I'll be quite honest, Jim. I don't believe he knows anything. Spock wouldn't try to murder anyone. Least of all you!"

Kirk stared unhappily into his glass. "I know that, Bones. We all... know that. But it doesn't bring us any closer to a solution. Scotty's going to run everything we've got through the computer. We should have an answer by morning. I intend to try and get a good night's sleep before then."

McCoy yawned in sympathy. "That sounds like a good idea. I'll be heading for the sack myself before long. I've got to go back to sickbay and make a final check on Spock and change the dressings on Chamberlaine's arm. He's not as comfortable as I'd hoped."

Kirk emptied his glass and pulled a grim face. "The way things have turned out I keep wondering if that blast wasn't meant for me in some way."

"You're getting morbid in your old age," McCoy said with a grin. "Good night, Jim."



"Good night, Bones."

McCoy took the turbo lift to sickbay and after disposing of their glasses Kirk started for his quarters. The sickbay lights were dimmed. McCoy looked round and his eyes fell at once on the rumpled sheets and empty examination table.

"Nurse!" he shouted. "Nurse Chapel!"

"Doctor?" Christine's voice came from the office. They met in the doorway.

"Where's Mr. Spock?"

"But he's..." Christine looked beyond him to the empty bed. "He was there," she breathed. "Just a few minutes ago he was there!"

McCoy gazed at her one second and then walked quickly to the intercom. "McCoy to security. The First Officer is missing from the sickbay. He's got to be found and returned. He may be dangerous, so be warned!"

"Acknowledged, Doctor," a voice said determinedly.

McCoy flicked the switch off and then on again. "McCoy to Captain Kirk." He waited. There was no response from Kirk's quarters. "McCoy to Captain Kirk! Jim!" Still there was no reply. McCoy ran for the door. "I've got to get to him before Spock does!" he shouted back.

\* \* \*

Kirk glanced behind him at the empty corridor. That was becoming a habit. Reassured he made the last part of the journey to his quarters. The door opened for him and he was already half way through it when he heard the distant sound of men's voices, shouting. He turned, his mouth opening to voice a query. A tall lean shadow loomed out of the dark room behind him. Kirk sensed the movement and half turned, his mind registering alarm. Something heavy and solid smashed down on the side of his head.

The blow was deflected by the turning motion of his body. Had it not been his skull would have burst open. The object glanced off bone and the momentum carried his assailant on past him. Kirk fell to his knees, leaning forward on braced arms. Blood dripped from his head onto his hands. He couldn't see anything, but he could hear voices, men's voices, coming closer. His attacker heard them also. He had turned to come at Kirk again but now he hesitated, listening. Kirk heard his rapid breathing but was unable to do anything. There was a swift decisive movement and footsteps sounded in the corridor, walking rapidly away. Someone shouted. The footsteps began to run. There was more shouting and the shrill whine of a phaser beam. Kirk folded on to the floor and lay still.

McCoy ran to the open door and threw himself onto his knees beside Kirk's body. He pulled a pad from his medical kit and laid it on the wound behind Kirk's ear, leaning on it, trying to stem the bleeding with pressure. "Get that damned Vulcan," he hissed. "Get him!"

\* \* \*

Kirk came to very slowly. It was dark and warm and there was a soft warm bed under him. He felt drowsy and comfortable. His head was completely numb and tightly bandaged. His eyes, when he tried to open them, were very, very heavy. He blinked and his surroundings swam into focus. He was in bed in the hospital ward in sickbay. He drew a deep breath and rolled his head on the pillow. Someone moved close at hand. A cool cloth dabbed at his face.

"Lie very still, Captain," Christine Chapel's voice said from a pale oval that floated above his face. The oval moved away and Kirk relapsed into a fitful doze. When he opened his eyes again there were two hazy out of focus faces above him. One of them leaned close and he recognized McCoy.

"Bones?" he mumbled from lips that were numb and senseless.

"Stay quiet, Jim."

Kirk gripped his wrist. "I'm all right." He tried to pull himself up, using McCoy's arm as a lever. He felt abruptly sick and lay down again.

"That'll teach you," McCoy growled. "Now do as I tell you and with a little luck and a great deal of my skill you'll be all right."

Kirk raised a tentative hand to his head. "Someone hit me," he said, remembering. "In my quarters, someone..."

"Our Vulcan friend," McCoy nodded. "He's turned bad on us, Jim. He laid your head open to the bone. Another minute and he'd have brained you."

Unaccountably Kirk felt something stinging his eyes. "No!" he said fervently. "Not Spock! He wouldn't..."

"He was seen, Jim," McCoy said gently. "Seen and shot at. There's no doubt."

Kirk closed his eyes and drew a long deep breath, struggling hard with a concept that was utterly impossible by anything he knew and believed, and yet was a proven fact. He let the breath out with a sigh and looked at McCoy. "Where is he?" he asked.

"We don't know. He moved too fast for us and got away. The security details are searching the ship."

"I don't want him hurt."

"He won't be," McCoy assured him gently. "I want you to lie as still as you can, there are a lot of stitches in your head. Do you want a drug to help you sleep?"

"No, I don't want to sleep."

McCoy nodded and straightened up. "All right," he agreed, knowing that now was not the time to push his medical authority. "But don't move around too much. There'll be someone within calling distance all night." He moved away from the bed, gesturing to the nurse to go with him. He paused briefly to look at the man sleeping restlessly in the opposite bed and then vanished through the door.

Left alone Kirk closed his eyes and rolled his head away despite the soreness of the stitched wound. Suddenly he felt very small and vulnerable and alone. His mind drifted back over the years. He and Spock had met on a dark shore on a dark distant planet, two young men at the very outset of their careers, each full, in his own way, of his own enthusiasm and ambitions. They had talked and walked beside that tideless sea together, and looked at the stars and discussed the future. They had not liked each other, not then, not at once, but they had both been aware of a rare attraction.

After that long evening they had met several times, on a variety of Federation planets and bases. They had had a nodding acquaintance, the odd exchanged word, two ships passing in the depths of eternal night.

When Kirk had come aboard the Enterprise, his first independent Starship command, the Vulcan had been there, firmly established as ship's First Officer. For a while they had fenced each other warily, and then settled down to a working relationship that had matured and developed most satisfactorily to a point where the powers at Starfleet Command were loath to part them. They had become two men, thinking and acting as one. Both had given and both had received and their friendship and loyalty had grown slowly, naturally, or so Kirk had thought until this night.

Now something had snapped. No. No, he couldn't believe that, even now. It was more as if a wedge had been driven between them. Kirk hoped fervently

that the fissure was not irreversible. At last, exhausted by his trials, he fell into a fitful sleep.

\* \* \*

The sickbay door opened and a long dark shadow fell across the entrance. Christine Chapel looked up, and then laid down her stylus and stood up slowly. Spock looked at her from the doorway, his face lost in the darkness. Only the high ridges of his cheekbones were highlighted, two bright stars in his eyes, a blue sheen across his hair. He moved very slightly, only as if breathing. Something glinted in his hand, low down by his hip, the long smoothly curved blade of a Vulcan war sword.

Christine stood quite still and watched him, and for a long moment he stood in the doorway and watched her. Then his eyes shifted, the gleam in them moving with them. He began to walk slowly and silently towards the door of the ward as if stalking some wary creature. Christine backed away, using only her legs and keeping her body quite still. Spock didn't seem to notice. The door to McCoy's office opened behind her. "Doctor," she said tightly. "Come quickly!"

McCoy left his desk and came at once. At the sound of her voice Spock had stopped and turned. His eyes met McCoy's. His face was harsh lines and gaunt angles, his eyes deeply shrunken into shaded hollows. He wore the Vulcan mask of expressionlessness, but there was something tortured in his countenance, something to be pitied.

"Spock," McCoy said softly. "Come into the office. Let's talk this over."

Spock turned away, not understanding, not hearing, and continued his slow advance on the ward door, the sword held loosely at his side.

"Stay here and don't move," McCoy told Christine and went back into his office. She heard him speaking quickly into his intercom. "Security, get some men up here at the double. The Vulcan's here and he's bent on blood!" Moments later he reappeared, his face grim and a phaser in his hand. Christine gasped and wrung her hands as he strode determinedly across sickbay.

Spock stopped at the end of Kirk's bed, hesitated momentarily as if undecided or... resisting? Then with both hands on the haft, he swung the sword up.

Across the ward Chamberlaine stirred, put a hand to his forehead, opened his eyes. He stared a moment of frozen horror at the unbelievable tableau and then he moved, throwing himself the length of the bed. He leaped from the end of it, his bandaged arms flailing. He hit the Vulcan full in the back and they went down together in the space between the beds. Chamberlaine felt Spock wriggle lithely beneath him, felt the powerful surge of muscles throwing him easily aside. He lashed out at the black head with his forearms, gasping and gritting his teeth at the pain of the impact on his burns. Surprisingly, Spock cried out. He got his legs under him and straightened in a single movement and shook himself, breaking Chamberlaine's grip and tossing him away. The crewman landed on his arms, whimpering with pain.

Spock ignored him. In a smooth swooping gesture he retrieved the sword from the floor and turned once more to Kirk, the razor sharp blade poised to swoop down. Their eyes met, and the sword stopped for a moment at the zenith of its upward sweep. Kirk saw two things in the depths of the dark brown eyes. One he recognized, an evil raging hatred, the other was the gentleness of the friend he knew, struggling with the overwhelming insanity in a battle it could not hope to win.

McCoy fired from the doorway, a short but stunning burst of green energy. Spock's body became ridged as the cold green fire flowed over him and then, as it faded, he folded slowly onto the deck. The sword clattered from his hand.

McCoy walked round the beds and knelt down on one knee beside him, feeling for a pulse. Having found it and satisfied himself that it was regular and strong he picked the sword up gingerly by the hilt. The thin lethal blade glinted.

Boots pounded across the sickbay floor and three red-shirted security guards appeared in the doorway, phasers drawn. McCoy gestured to the inert body of the Vulcan. "Take him out," he said softly.

\* \* \*

"He's insane, Jim," McCoy said. "Murderously, and as far as I can tell, incurably insane. The only place for him is an institution."

"No, Bones." Kirk shook his still sore and heavy head. "He's not mad. She's the one that's mad. She's the one that's determined to kill me. To get what she considers her just revenge."

"She?"

"The woman. Do you remember what she said? 'Where ever you travel, my curse will travel with you.' She meant what she said. Don't you see? Where ever I go, Spock goes too. She did... something to his mind. She has control of his body. I saw... her, in his eyes, and he was fighting her with every ounce of strength he had."

"I don't know if that's possible," McCoy said doubtfully. "Spock's not susceptible to hypnosis, that mind of his won't submit. And he has a very high pain threshold."

"And yet those headaches he's been having have put him in agony," Kirk reminded him. "She must be able to exercise immense power over him to induce pain like that. She must use pain to control him."

"More likely the headaches are produced by Spock's own efforts to fight her influence. As I said, his mind doesn't submit."

Kirk looked at him. "I don't believe he's aware of what she's been making him do. It must be something that goes deeper than hypnotism. Something fundamental."

McCoy frowned deeply. "If that's true," he said, "there's nothing we can do for him. We're just not advanced enough, medically or scientifically, to interfere with those deeper levels of a man's mind. And the Vulcan mind is one of the most complex known to man."

The intercom bleeped and Scott's face appeared on the screen, the lights of the computer glowing behind his head.

"I've just run the computer analysis, sir, but I don't suppose you'll be needin' the result now."

"It's what we expected, Scotty?"

"Aye. Thinkin' back on it, it was as clear as day. The First Officer was the only one with the technical skill to rig the turbo lift control that way."

"We often fail to see the obvious, Scotty, especially if it's something we don't want to recognise. Don't worry about it."

"Aye, sir." Scott's unhappy face faded and the screen became blank once more.

"The woman, using Spock's own skills and knowledge to make him destroy me," Kirk said.

"And after you, what else?" McCoy asked. "The Enterprise? The Federation?"

"There's a good deal of damage he could do."

"The only thing we can do is get him to a Starbase. Hand him over to a proper psychiatric hospital. I can't help him. I don't know how."

"No. We can't do anything for him, but maybe he can do something for himself."

They stopped side by side in the doorway. The Vulcan lay unresisting now, his arms and body secured to a hard mattress with tight unyielding black straps. The pain-driven fury with which he had fought for his freedom when his senses first returned was gone, drained out of him. His face was turned away from them and the tension in his neck made the tendons protrude like thick cords.

"Can I talk to him?" Kirk asked.

"You can try but I don't guarantee the response. He's in a great deal of pain. Nothing I can do seems to ease it."

Kirk nodded and walked softly over to the bed. "Spock," he said gently. "Spock, do you hear me?"

The black head of hair rolled against the pillowless mattress. Spock's slanted eyes were bright with pain but lucid. He recognised Kirk.

"Captain?" he inquired. "What's wrong with me? Why am I under restraint? No-one will tell me." There was trust and honesty in his face and Kirk knew that he truthfully didn't understand what was happening to him.

"You tried to kill me," he said frankly. "Several times."

The change of expression that came over Spock's face was terrible to behold. His lips parted and then closed again. His eyes filled with utter bewilderment, fixed on Kirk's face. Then, gradually, another expression replaced it, one of distress. "No, Jim." Spock shook his head slightly. "No, I... "

"It's not your fault," Kirk told him gently. "Your mind is being taken out of your control. You're being made to do it against your will. Do you remember what the woman said about her curse?"

Spock nodded. "I remember," he said and then his whole body jerked against the straps. His face twisted and a sharp breath screamed in through clenched teeth. Kirk and McCoy winced in sympathy. Spock muttered something in Vulcan, tossed his head and then repeated it more forcefully.

"What did he say?" McCoy asked.

Kirk rubbed the back of his hand across his mouth. "The pain, the pain," he translated.

Spock turned his head to look at him. There was a trace of sweat glistening on his upper lip. "The woman... has my mind?"

"In some way we don't understand, yes," Kirk explained. "McCoy says there's nothing we can do to free you of her. But there might be something you can do."

Very slightly Spock nodded. "I understand you, Jim," he said and closed his eyes with a gasp. His breathing rasped a moment, in and out, and then steadied. He released a long pent breath and for a long time remained quite still. The minutes dragged by in silence and his eyes remained closed. Then he sighed and looked at Kirk. "Yes," he breathed in almost a whisper. "She's there, I can feel her."

"Can you... drive her out?"

"I don't know. I can try."

Kirk touched his arm reassuringly. "We'll be here."

Spock fixed his eyes trustingly on Kirk's face and then closed them as if

going gently to sleep. His body relaxed. McCoy produced a tissue and carefully began to dab away the beads of sweat that formed on the Vulcan's brow.

\* \* \*

Deliberately Spock utilized the inherited abilities of his ancestors and sank his awareness beyond the conscious level of mind. These were the regions he knew and consciously ordered and cared for. Here was stored his knowledge and experience, ranked ready for reference and use. He could have likened it to a well-stocked library, each shelf and each section neatly labelled and cross-referenced. This was his domain where no-one dared intrude. There was no danger to him here.

He moved deeper into an area he was less sure of, but one he rarely questioned. Here was implanted the strict training of Vulcan childhood, the blocks and prohibitions of his youth. He knew better than to tamper with these. They were the very foundations upon which his existence was based, the bulwarks without which the conflict of his mixed heritage would flood in on him in an overwhelming tide, bringing with them the irreconcilable insanity. Here he dared do nothing but observe in awe and wonder at the strength of his own mind.

He descended still further, entering the limbo where instinct ruled. Here he preferred not to examine himself too closely. Here was a place where there was no control, little reason or order, and the confusion and senselessness dismayed him and made him ashamed. Fear ruled here, the natural drive to retreat from danger, to defend one's life above all else, to hide from unpleasantness and embarrassment. Spock passed by here with uncomfortable haste, on into the region he most despised, and most feared.

Superstition. A thing that Spock would not admit existed even to himself. It lurked here in the very well of the depths of his mind. All the primaevial terrors of his people, buried out of sight, ignored, denied, but in Spock brought to awareness by the blood of his mother. Unlike his Vulcan forefathers he found it impossible to crush them into oblivion beneath the iron clad heel of logic. Always there was that tiny lingering doubt that sustained their existence.

He walked tentatively here, tiptoeing in the vaulting chambers. Empty they were, there was nothing to see or hear to confirm or disprove the ancient ancestral fears.

Something stirred in the blackest corner like a sleepy cat.

"Come out," Spock ordered. For a moment there was no response. "Come out!"

There was a stretching movement and she emerged from the shadows. He saw the essence of her, with her slit green eyes and the flowing dark curtain of her hair.

"So you have come to find me," she said. "I doubted if you would."

"I know you now. I do not fear you. I have come to cast you out. You will leave now."

She smiled a thin mirthless smile that lit her eyes from within.

"I shall remain with you until your Captain is dead by your hand. Until your ship is destroyed and your Federation set at odds. You are a tool. I will use you. You cannot resist."

"No. I am not your puppet and I refuse to do your bidding. You will leave."

"Then it seems there must be a victor between you and me," she said. "When that is decided, then so shall Kirk's fate be."

"Yes," he agreed uncompromisingly.





*[Handwritten signature]*

"However," she went on, "if we are to fight it will be on my ground and in my manner."

Spock experienced a very odd sensation. It was as if he was falling a long long way without any actual passage through space or time. He descended into and through a dimension which was incomprehensible to him.

\* \* \*

McCoy wiped the freely flowing sweat from the Vulcan's face and dropped the saturated swab into the already filled basin. Kirk looked across the bed at him.

"It's been three hours," he said. "How much longer can he stand up to this?"

McCoy laid his hand low down on the left side of Spock's chest, feeling for the rapid throb of the Vulcan's heart. "He's under terrific strain. His heart's racing away. The pain must be unimaginable."

Kirk looked at the wet pale face of his officer. "What's going on?" he grated. "What's happening?"

"They're fighting each other for their existence," McCoy said. "Only one of them can survive. The sanity of the other will be irretrievably lost. neither of them can suffer defeat and exist in the rational universe merely at the tolerance of the other."

Kirk himself swabbed the sweat from the Vulcan's face. "We don't know her strength," he said fretfully.

"No," McCoy agreed. "But neither do we truly know his."

A cry wrenched itself from Spock's lips. His body arched upwards, bruising against the straps. His fists clenched, his nails digging through the skin of his palms.

Kirk leaned close to him. "We're here, Spock," he said softly. "The Doctor, and I, we're here."

If the Vulcan heard he was incapable of giving any sign. He twisted, as if trying to free himself physically from the pain inside his skull. The straps strained, and held.

\* \* \*

It seemed that he stood in a vast chamber carved out of the living rock. Light sifted in from an unseeable source, dimly illuminating the rough brown facets. There was coarse sand beneath him and high above the walls leaned together to form a ceiling.

"This is your battlefield?" he asked. "With what do we fight?"

The woman's voice chuckled from nowhere, and everywhere, and that was his only response.

There was nothing else for him to do but proceed. It was as if he floated. He moved whichever way he wished merely by willing it to be so. All his senses were functioning, all his faculties present, and yet he knew that this place with all its sights and sounds and feelings was merely a production of the imagination. His or hers, he was not sure which. Anything that he experienced here would only actually happen in as much as he was aware of its occurrence.

The walls of the chamber became indistinct. There was a blue mist rising up out of the ground around him. He stopped moving and remained quite still, waiting. The mist thickened. Swirling tendrils twisted and knotted, obliterating all perception of distance.

He was expecting attack, but not in the form or from the direction from

which it came. He realised abruptly how alone he was. His existence, his former life aboard the Enterprise seemed infinitely far away and unimaginably long ago. There was no-one here, or anywhere, who cared where he was or what was happening to him. An ache formed itself in his gut. Loneliness descended upon him wrapping him in deep folds of despair. He remembered how once, a long time ago, there had been a man named... Kirk? Yes, that had been his name. They had been close in a masculine sort of way. They had had a good relationship. He recalled the way Kirk had looked at him sometimes with a tolerant half smile that had understood the way his own mixed heritage could tear him apart. But Kirk was gone now, he could see his face only dimly. And there was another too, a woman, even further back in time, who had held him so close against her and spoken soft words and even sung the sighing lullabies of her home world wistfully to an alien child who could not understand and had only come to appreciate what she had done so long afterwards that he wanted to weep. He struggled to fight back the tears, all the while cursing himself for an emotional fool, but the faces of his mother and Jim Kirk floated before him, haunting spectres from a time he could barely remember.

And then he felt pain, and with it fear, the terror of physical injury to add to mental torment. He lifted his hands before his face. They had been dipped in acid. The skin peeled back, the flesh melting and dissolving away to leave exposed bones. He stared with terror and frozen horror, too numbed to feel the pain.

Part of his mind screamed out a warning. He teetered on the edge of insanity. His body was rotting, falling away before his eyes... a single cold clear thought cut through the panic like a knife. He had no body. His physical form lay on an examination table in the care of his friends. His friends! Abruptly it became clear to him. He remembered his earlier assessment. Everything that occurred was no more or less than pure mental experience. In the physical sense it was unreal. He had no hands. He just didn't believe it. He knew it! The melting stumps vanished. Nor could there be any pain. The agony ceased.

Spock began to understand the environment. He wondered about the blue mist. The mist remained. It seemed that positive thought was the essence of control. He decided that there was no mist. There was a powerful resistance fighting against him, and then the air cleared. He was once more in the vast rock chamber.

He became thoughtful, considering what he had learned. The environment was not static. It could be altered to meet the demands of whoever's will was the stronger. Spock decreed that it would be darker, much darker. Despite the furious resistance of the woman, the light dimmed. Satisfied of his ability Spock set to work in the darkness.

When it was finished he moved back into the deepest shadows and waited patiently for her to come. He was confident, but not careless - that he could not afford. This was a place that she had created and he was here at her bidding, she might have more resources yet with which to surprise him. She had driven him once, mentally, to his knees by using his inherited emotions against him. Had she not made that one mistake in her impatience to conquer him, he would have been at her mercy. And she had none.

She came at last, Moving softly in the darkness along the path that he had created for her. He observed her with a detached clinical interest for he knew that she would go to the very edge of the pit, and then he would have her. She appeared as he had first seen her, a long pale high-cheekboned face, straight smoothly draped black hair and the boring, slightly glowing emerald eyes. She hesitated, as if she sensed that he was nearby, and then she moved forward once more, drawn compulsively to look down into the heart of the sickening monstrosity that lay in the bottom of the pit. She recoiled and turned to flee in horror and revulsion, but he was there behind her, cutting off her retreat.

"Now you will leave," he said for the third time.

Passionately insane fury argued with her fear for a moment, won. "I will not," she said defiantly.

He shrugged. "Your alternative lies down there."

"You are not stronger than I!" It was an accusation.

"No. I cannot do what you have achieved. I merely have superior control over this environment which you have created."

"You have created that thing! Now you must exist with it! If it ever escaped from there it would destroy your sanity utterly!"

"I know," he agreed. "But it cannot escape. And no more could you."

"You would imprison me with... that?!" she asked.

"You have another choice. Leave."

"That would cost me my own sanity!"

"Yes. But is that not a preferable alternative?"

She stared behind her into the pit, and then she lashed at him with vicious desperation. Almost nonchalantly he retaliated, hurling her back to the very lip of the pit.

"Choose," he said.

The woman drew herself up very tall. "Very well," she said. "I will go. But I pity you, existing with the creation of that!" Her image shimmered and diminished to a single speck, the colour and brightness of her eyes, and then winked out. He heard the echo of her first insane shriek echoing back, and then he was alone. He looked at the thing in the pit almost with indifference, and it regarded him in much the same way. They were well used to each other. Then he turned and wearily began to make his way back.

\* \* \*

McCoy came out of the ward and returned the empty hypo to the dish on the table. "Another nightmare," he said. "I've quietened him now. We'd best leave him in peace."

Kirk nodded. "Will he be all right?"

McCoy didn't look at him. He stared down at the table top frowning deeply.

"He will be all right, Bones?"

McCoy sighed. "I think he'll be all right," he said. "It'll take time. A man's mind heals only slowly. But eventually... with care... he'll be back to his usual cheerful light-hearted self."

Kirk met his eyes gravely. "You're sure about that?"

"Damn it, I have to be sure! Otherwise he'd have to be put ashore. But I'm not saying he'll not carry a scar. A lot went on in the deeper levels of his mind that you and I'll never know about, and wouldn't understand even if we did. I don't think he'll ever get completely over it. He'll... remember."

And that was what Kirk had to accept. "All right, Bones," he said. "We've got ten days left of our so called vacation. I can't think of anything better to do with the time than help a friend forget a bad memory. Can you?"

McCoy gazed a wistful moment at the ranks of skulls on his shelf. "No," he agreed. "I can't."

\*\*\*\*\*

OF LIFE AND DEATH by Janet Hall

Thoughts of life and death,  
 In a world grown strangely silent,  
 Away from the bustle of ship's day.  
 Anxious monitoring of readings,  
 Hasty medical consultations,  
 "How is he, Bones? Will he live?"

There was a time when this seemed  
 So very remote,  
 An undiscovered future;  
 I would not say 'glamorous'  
 (What do Vulcans know of that?)  
 But fascinating, certainly;  
 Imagining the interest value would  
 Far outweigh the risk.

And it did,  
 And always will.

And the anxious relatives,  
 Left far behind on distant worlds,  
 Need never know  
 Till all is past  
 And can be glossed over,  
 Reduced to trivia  
 ("It was nothing.  
 I am quite recovered now.")

But what of present friends?  
 Worried eyes,  
 Questioning, afraid.  
 Anxious hovering at sickbay's door  
 ("You ought to rest, Jim;  
 There's nothing you can do.")  
 And a cool, soft hand  
 Gently taking my own,  
 Dimly realised through the Vulcan healing trance  
 ("He's probably aware, Nurse Chapel,  
 That you're holding his hand.")  
 Meant only to comfort, a reassurance,  
 To say, "You're not alone."

From the twilight of sickness  
 To the daytime of recovery;  
 And back into uniform,  
 Back to my post.

I will die at the foreordained time,  
 Which is the right time,  
 In keeping with the harmony of the universe.  
 Until then,  
 My life will always be safe.  
 So what need of fear?  
 What must be, will be.  
 Of life and death I need not worry for myself,  
 But only for my friends.

\*\*\*\*\*

Sign seen on spaceship in Harry Mudd's second-hand yard: For sale. One  
 owner. Only 50,000,000,000 miles on the clock.

\*\*\*\*\*

SHEER STUBBORNNESS by L.M.Coles

The shimmering transporter effect stabilised into four distinct shapes. McCoy ran forward, arms outstretched, offering anxious support.

"What in Hell's name's been going on down there? - " He faltered as his eyes took in the scene before him. "Jim... JIM!"

"Let me GO, Sulu!" Kirk was struggling frantically with the helmsman, his face a contortion of pain and anger. "I must go back! I must..."

"No, Captain! You can't... Your leg needs attention!"

McCoy's eyes fell to the limb in question, his hands immediately reaching for his medical scanner. Kirk's left thigh was drenched with blood, and already a tell-tale pool of red was spreading across the transporter area as the Captain continued to struggle.

"I tell you I'm going back... Leave me alone!... Spock... Spock's down there!" With one terrific wrench, Kirk pulled himself free of Sulu's grip and lunged for the control console, stumbling badly as his weight shifted suddenly to his injured leg. Sulu recovered his balance and made to restrain the Captain further, but McCoy held him back, indicating the hypo he had poised.

"I'll see to him. You get up to the bridge. Scotty's the one who needs your help now." Sulu nodded acknowledgement and was gone. Bones turned his attention to his friend, who was by now wrestling with Lt. Kyle, trying desperately to reach the controls.

"You MUST let me go back... I'm your Captain! I order you! PLEASE..." The last word came pleadingly from his drawn features, and for one fleeting moment, Kyle appeared hesitant, almost relinquishing his position. But Kirk's supposed victory was short-lived; the gentle hiss and pressure of the hypo brought a fear of realisation to his face.

"NO! No, Bones... you mustn't! Spock's still there... He needs me... I must... I muuss..." The words faded as the drug swept relentlessly through his system, bringing with it the silky black of unconsciousness.

"I know, Jim." McCoy gently supported the falling figure. "I know..."

\* \* \*

Two hours passed rapidly, during which time Bones surgically repaired Kirk's leg, and checked him thoroughly for any other injuries. His report was concise; left thigh - severe tissue damage, probable cause, cell disruptor or similar weapon. Blood loss - substantial, leading to shock and collapse. Other injuries - minor cuts and bruises, with the possibility of local bacterial infection. Treatment - rest, intra-venous therapy and broad spectrum antibiotics.

He rose from behind the desk, stretching his tired muscles, and headed towards the bridge. He knew none of the details of the fateful 'beamdown', and was eager to hear the whole story. But something else was bothering him more than he cared to admit. In his mind, Kirk's look of desperation reappeared, sending a cold shiver down his spine. He hoped to God Spock was all right!

\* \* \*

"And that's about it, sir." Sulu sounded strained and tired as he related the past events. "Mr. Spock told me to take care of the Captain, while he created a diversion. But they're barbarians, Dr. McCoy... barbarians."

"Aye, they are that." Scotty sat in the command chair, scanning the swirling planet beneath them. "We knew they were unstable. But to transport down just when a World War was breaking out..." He shook his head in disgust. "And those weapons... If Mr. Spock is captured or injured..." There was no need to finish - everyone knew what he meant. Trying to instil an air of





confidence, he turned to Spock's science station, now dutifully manned by young Chekov.

"Well, laddie? What have you found out for us? Mr. Spock canna ha'e got far."

"I'm sorry, sir. It's very difficult to distinguish individuals. All the readings are mixed up... and the natives have a similar read-out to Vulcans. If Mr. Spock is already dead..." He stopped in mid-sentence as the turbo-lift door opened to reveal an ashen Captain Kirk leaning somewhat strangely against the wall.

"Jim! For God's sake, are you mad?" McCoy was beside him in a flash, his face revealing anger and concern all in one expression. Kirk raised a hand to calm him, and managed a weak smile.

"Don't fuss, Bones. I'm all right - really."

"Like Hell you are! Sit here while I call a stretcher." Scotty vacated the command chair, and helped McCoy settle the Captain into it.

"You shouldna' be here at all, Captain; how did you manage tae walk so far?"

But Kirk was not interested in describing the ordeal of his journey to the bridge. He had other things on his mind.

"Spock? Have you found Spock?"

The silence was almost unbearable, pressing in on Kirk like a physical force. Finally Scott answered.

"No, sir. Not yet. We have the sensors searching every square metre of that planet; but with that war, it's almost impossible to pin-point one Vulcan..." He paused, watching closely as Kirk dropped his head into trembling hands and sighed deeply. "But we'll find him, sir. If it's the last thing we do, we'll find him!"

"Thank you, Scotty." Kirk's voice was almost a whisper as he fought for control, but his eyes expressed his gratitude ten times over. McCoy reached for the intercom; time to get Kirk back to sickbay.

"No! Wait. Please, Bones, let me stay for a short while. Please."

McCoy's decision was never reached, as a shrill cry from Sulu interrupted everything.

"Captain! Two Klingon battle cruisers! They must have been hiding around the opposite side of the planet."

Kirk's conditioned reflexes came into play.

"Sound red alert, Mr. Sulu! Mr. Chekov, plot courses, speeds..." The words tumbled freely as his mind engaged the crisis. He glanced back at McCoy. "I can't leave now, Bones. Just give me one of your magic potions... I'll make out O.K."

Reluctantly the Doctor gave way. "Oh, all right. But you're a very stubborn man, James Kirk, and one of those days I'm not going to give in to you!" The last words drifted over the bridge as McCoy entered the turbo-lift on his way to sickbay to prepare a hypo.

Kirk smiled to himself and relaxed slightly. He had won one battle, but now he must win a war, and that might not be so easy!

\* \* \*

Time seemed to be dragging. The Enterprise was engaged in a game of cat and mouse. The Klingons' intentions had been apparent from very early on. All they were interested in was keeping the Federation away from the war raging on the planet's surface. These tactics revealed to the Enterprise crew

what should have been obvious to them earlier, if they hadn't had other things on their minds. A typical Klingon trick - treacherously, they had taken advantage of the inhabitants' warlike tendencies, set them at each other's throats, and were now preparing to take over the pathetic remains and impose their ruthless dictatorship.

Kirk sat in the command chair, trying to control the gnawing pain seeping into his leg. It was becoming warmer, and he could feel his shirt sticking to his back. McCoy's stimulant was beginning to wear off, and with its withdrawal from his system, he knew that the moment of collapse was approaching fast. His left trouser leg gripped painfully at his thigh, aggravating the injury. He shifted cautiously, extending his leg in an attempt to relieve the agony, but he was unable to suppress an audible gasp as the pain reached a new level. Anxious faces turned at the cry, but he was fighting hard, and at the moment was just in the lead with the battle against oblivion.

"Touch of cramp... that's all."

McCoy's professional eye was not convinced, however.

"Come off it, Jim! You can't stay here much longer. Scotty's quite capable of taking care of a few Klingons. Come back down to sickbay, and as soon as I hear anything, I'll let you know. I promise!"

"NO!" Kirk gripped the arms of his chair, fearing physical removal. "No, Bones. I'm staying here as long as I can. Right here!"

A small eternity passed as the two men stared each other out. Finally, McCoy stepped down and with an exasperated wave of his hand shouted his annoyance. "To Hell with you then! Go ahead and kill yourself! What do I care - I'm only the Chief Medical Officer. Nobody important!"

He stormed across the bridge, making for the turbo-lift. As the doors swooshed shut he slammed his fist against the wall, venting his anger. "Damn you, James Kirk!"

Kirk watched as Bones departed, his mind a jumble of loyalties. Suddenly the bridge ceiling reeled towards him, together with a wave of nausea; his tenuous thread to consciousness was threatened. The verbal explosion must have drained his reserves considerably. He MUST remain in control!...

"Mr. Sulu - any change in the enemy's tactics?"

"No, sir. They continue to play hide and seek with us, refusing to attack but ready if we venture nearer the planet."

"Captain!" Chekov turned away from Spock's console. "The Klingons appear to be moving away."

"Are you sure, Ensign?"

"Yes, sir. Most definitely. Instruments indicate a new course which will take them out of this system." The young Russian looked puzzled as he reeled off new speeds and plottings. Was this another trick, or had the Klingons finally decided to call it a day?

"Outside range, Captain... all instruments read clear."

"Very good, Chekov. Secure from red alert, but keep long range sensors operational..." He paused as another wave of giddiness passed over him. The pain in his leg moved up a few more degrees, causing beads of sweat to emerge on his forehead. He must keep going! Spock was still down there; maybe fighting for his life; or even dead!

"Resume the search for Mr. Spock. Find out what's going on down there... the Klingons... they... they wouldn't go...so...suddenly..." Talking was becoming an effort, every thought incomplete. But he was determined. Spock was his friend... more than that... they were like brothers, closer if that was possible. If Spock died, part of Kirk would die also. Words and fantasies

whirled around his mind. Round and round... and round...

"Jim?" A firm hand was gently squeezing his shoulder. "Jim, drink this. It'll make you feel better."

He recognised Bones' voice but couldn't remember him coming back. He was here though, and wanted him to drink something.

"What is it?" He focused weary eyes on the cup held out to him.

"Only a glucose drink. Come on now, drink it down." McCoy eased the cup towards the pale lips, sensing Kirk's suspicion. "I'm not lying to you, Jim, it's only glucose. Now drink it and we'll find Spock together."

Kirk drank down the cool refreshing liquid, gagging slightly as the first mouthful reached his parched throat. His hands shook violently as he held out the empty cup. He opened his mouth to speak, but no sound came out... he was losing...

"Captain! I've found him!"

It was no good, his strength was gone. In the distance he could hear Bones talking rapidly to Scotty and Chekov. Everything was slowing down, drifting. His Chief Engineer glided past, ignoring him as if he didn't exist. What was happening? Why didn't someone tell him? Tell him about Spock? Where was he? Spock!... Spock!...

\* \* \*

"Spock?" The image wavered. Kirk closed his eyes, not daring to open them again for fear of being tricked again. But then a voice entered his darkness.

"Jim? Can you hear me, Jim?"

The image wavered again, but this time he forced his eyes to remain open until they focused.

"Spock?... Is it really you?"

"Yes, Jim. How are you feeling?"

"...tired. A little tired... But you? Are you all right? What happened? ... The war..."

Spock held up his hand. "Please, Jim, do not talk too much. Dr. McCoy has left explicit orders; you are to rest. Suffice it to say I am well, and the war is over. It is a long story, and when you are better there will be much to discuss."

"That's right, Jim!" Bones came up and joined Spock at the foot of the couch, a broad smile spreading across his face. "Your First Officer has made quite a name for himself as a diplomat, but right now, the only stories you are going to hear or see are in your dreams." He produced a hypo and pressed it lightly against Kirk's shoulder.

Once more the wavering returned as sleep drifted slowly over him; but this time, he knew Spock would be there when he awoke, and he accepted it gladly.

\*\*\*\*\*

Mrs. Kirk: How was school today, Jim?

Jim Kirk: Oh, boring!

Mrs. Kirk: Why was that, dear?

Jim Kirk: Well, Billy and I were busy talking about spaceships going at twice the speed of light, and Teacher made us go and count all her coloured beads again!

\*\*\*\*\*

THE ENTERPRISE AFFAIR by Simone Mason

The Enterprise was establishing orbit around Starbase 1 and mixed feelings could be sensed aboard, while Kirk himself was both excited and apprehensive.

"Jim," said McCoy, offering him a glass in his surgery, "to your promotion."

"We don't know, Bones."

"A call to Starbase 1 usually means that and you know it. But why do you look so glum?"

"I don't particularly want to be a Commodore yet, Bones."

"Why not? You would keep the Enterprise... "

"Maybe! Once you get to Commodore grade, you have to be ready to take a desk job if Starfleet wishes it. I don't wish it at all!"

"They wouldn't ground you at your age... "

"Precisely, Bones, that is why I feel something is odd... I don't think I'm old enough to qualify as Commodore. I'd rather stay Captain, it's safer!"

"They might promise not to ground you; don't worry, Jim, best of luck for your interview with Commodore Rozzi, whoever he is. Do you know him?"

"No, not at all. He has recently been promoted head of Starfleet personnel."

\* \* \*

When Kirk was announced back, McCoy ran to the transporter room where Mr. Scott beamed the Captain up. Both officers were taken aback by Kirk's coldly grim features. Something was wrong!

Making no comment, Kirk operated the small viewing screen and called the bridge.

"Mr. Spock, full dress uniform, report to Commodore Rozzi at once."

"Sir?" said a visibly startled Vulcan.

"You heard me, Spock."

"Yes, Captain."

The Captain left the transporter room without any explanation and McCoy, after the initial surprise, ran after him and Kirk invited him into his quarters in an angry tone clearly not directed at the doctor.

"What is it, Jim? A court martial? Neither you nor Spock have done anything... "

"No, no, Bones. It is, as we thought, a promotion."

"Come on, out with it."

Kirk had sat down and leaned back with a sigh. "They want to take Spock away, Bones."

"Away where? Who are they? Whoever they are, we won't let them!" exclaimed the doctor with his usual belligerence.

"I wish it was that simple! Spock is wanted by two parties, actually."

"Oh! And are they going to split him in two like Solomon's judgement... "

"Don't joke, please! You know that Spock has published several scientific papers while he's been aboard the Enterprise, the last one recently."

"Yes, so what?"

"His latest paper was so brilliant that the Galactic Science Research Centre wants him to join their research team."

"Is that all? Starfleet can refuse... "

"Yes, but they must have a good reason. Spock's dossier has been studied at high level as a result of all this, and the promotion board, in conjunction with Commodore Rozzi and his staff, have decided that my First Officer was overdue for promotion, and must either become Starship Captain or join the Galactic Science Centre."

"I see!" said McCoy, looking upset in turn. "An ultimatum! So whatever happens, we lose Spock."

"Exactly, Bones. I was informed first, as a matter of courtesy, and there is nothing I can do!"

"I have to agree," muttered the doctor somberly. "Against such heavy brass... "

"I'd fight top brass, no matter how heavy, on Spock's behalf, but how? I have no idea."

"Let's see what Spock decides first, Jim. He might come up with the logical solution."

"I just can't see any," sighed Kirk, his tone indicating sadness and frustration.

McCoy could only agree and left the Captain to his dejection, only to feel dejected in his surgery. In the privacy of his office, the doctor had to admit to himself that he was just as upset at Spock leaving as he would be if Jim was leaving, illogical as it might be! He had come to understand and appreciate the Vulcan more and more while they maintained their argumentative attitudes; both knew they enjoyed the arguments. Who on earth shall I argue with now? thought McCoy gloomily. Spock is at home here, why does Starfleet have to interfere?

After McCoy had left, Kirk let his head fall on his arms. To think of the bridge without Spock... He just could not! No more chess games with the Vulcan's quizzical smile when he was beaten; no more relaxing evenings listening to music and sharing the enjoyment without a single word being said; words were not often needed between Spock and himself, they knew what the other was thinking, and after so many mind melds, it wasn't surprising! No more mind melds, the gentle and delicate touch of warm friendship no longer hidden, the thrill of affinity and care between two minds...

Kirk shuddered. He had known loneliness once, the loneliness of command. It was nothing compared to the loneliness he would know if Spock left. Of course he would be better off than the Vulcan, he would have McCoy, but fond as he was of the doctor, it was not the same, and it was true to say that one friend just could not replace another! Spock's absence would bring in its wake a mental loneliness the likes of which was enough to give him nightmares, and he realised fully for the first time how terribly lonely Spock himself had been before their friendship. Surely such a nightmare would not become reality?

When Spock beamed back aboard, McCoy ran to Kirk's quarters to have news, knowing that the First Officer would report to his Captain.

As usual, Vulcan impassivity revealed nothing, but the very coldness of Spock's expression was an indication of all he kept hidden.

"Well, Spock?" asked Kirk. "Sorry I didn't warn you, I couldn't... "

"I understand, Captain. I chose to resign."

Kirk stared as McCoy exclaimed, "Trust you to think of a third solution! But it's an illogical one, Spock."

"Is it, Doctor? If I must leave the Enterprise, I shall leave her on my terms."

"I can understand, Spock," said Kirk softly. "It doesn't help though,

nothing helps! Look, I know you don't want command, but you can command, so why not accept it and be a Starship Captain?"

"Illogical, Jim. I could not function as efficiently as I should."

"Why not?"

"I am a scientist, and for me science is the essential work at present. A Captain should have other priorities."

"When you replace me, you're a good Captain, Spock."

"Temporarily, maybe. I can forego scientific studies for a while, and the crew accepts me for what I am. But on a permanent basis, no. I have to function as I am best suited, Jim, I discovered this under your command. I may at some time in the future become able to assume Captain's duties, which is irrelevant now, but I cannot accept a post knowing I would not be able to fulfil its duties to my own satisfaction."

"I think you underestimate yourself, Spock, and your honesty is perhaps too extreme... The fact that you would not be a Captain similar to myself isn't important."

"It is, Jim. You have shown me what a Captain should be like, and there were things I had to learn from you still, not to become an identical officer, but to fulfil my duties as I would wish. At the moment I serve Starfleet best as First Officer under your command, no more and no less, and it would be illogical and wasteful to attempt other duties. Commodore Rozzi would not accept my arguments, and I do not want to join the Galactic Science Centre and work to specific orders on subjects I might not be suited to study, so I had no choice but to resign."

"Logical from your point of view," Kirk had to agree, "but it doesn't help!"

"I know, Jim, but it is my decision and I would appreciate no attempt on your part to make me change it."

"I respect your decision, Spock, I know I'll have to accept... "

"How long before... " asked McCoy, unable to hide the shaking of his voice.

"My resignation is effective as of now, but I'll await the arrival of the new Science Officer before leaving. Commodore Rozzi assured me it would not be long."

"What will you do?"

"Go to Vulcan, Doctor. My parents might have me home for a longer period than my usual leaves while I decide about the future. My father may have his wish after all; I may join the Vulcan Science Academy."

"Rather ludicrous when he has accepted your choice of a career at last!" remarked Kirk. "I hope you enjoy your next post, Spock."

McCoy nodded wearily in agreement, upset and at a loss for words for once. He went to the door and murmured, "We'll miss you, Spock."

"Bones," called Kirk as the doctor opened the door, "not a word to anyone yet. It's up to me to announce... "

"Yes, Jim, of course," agreed McCoy, his face reflecting his dispirited state of mind as he left the room.

"Sit down, Spock, try to relax... Sorry, this applies to me more than you! What can I say?"

"There is no need to say anything, Jim, is there?"

"No," agreed Kirk. "We both know how we feel about this nightmare."



Isn't there anything I can do to stop this, Spock?"

"I can't think of anything, Jim... Strange how fate is rarely what you expect. I always assumed death would separate us, not beaurocrats."

"May I never become one!" said Kirk fervently. "I felt the same, Spock, only death... I'm so tense and strung up I can't face the crew calmly now. I need relaxation, music perhaps? Will you stay, Spock?"

"Yes, Jim, it might help both of us."

Kirk chose a soft and melodious tape and managed to relax a little, letting himself relive the past years he had shared with Spock and aware that the First Officer was doing the same, both enjoying the silent affinity of thought they were used to but always appreciated as the true mark of their friendship.

\* \* \*

The Captain felt that the bridge crew was entitled to know first and announced the coming change and its reasons simply and directly. All eyes turned to Spock standing at Kirk's side with stunned disbelief and the First Officer faced his colleagues with his usual Vulcan dignity.

"I would have preferred a more logical solution, but as there was none... I wish to emphasise that my resignation was caused by external circumstances and I take this opportunity of thanking you for your loyalty and assistance at all times."

The Vulcan went to his station and everyone turned back to theirs in silence, what could they say? Each of them was individually aware of the shock and upset the news caused them, the more intense because they had come to take Spock for granted and never imagined that one day he might no longer be there.

"Fiendish Sassenachs!" muttered Scotty to himself at his station. "Why can't they leave well alone?" Whoever they sent as Science Officer could never take Spock's place, of that the Scotsman had no doubt. He remembered the numerous times he had collaborated with the First Officer, and always the Vulcan had appreciated his work, not by words, but by mentioning the Chief Engineer's efficiency in his reports. Scotty had come to realise, as most of them had, that words counted little with Spock, but the First Officer found a way of thanking them just the same. Of course there were times when his logic was rather too much, Scotty thought, ruefully, but it was a small price to pay for the loyalty and trust I felt for Spock. After the Captain, the First Officer was next on Scotty's list for respect and esteem.

Mr. Sulu was checking his navigation console absently. It did not seem possible not to see Spock on the bridge, he belonged there! The helmsman could remember the few times he had crossed words with Spock and learned his lesson! He smiled at the stupidity of his belief that he would be able to pull one over the Vulcan. He soon stopped trying, not through fear, but through the acquired knowledge that his superior officer, with the quiet voice everyone listened to, was worthy of his respect and esteem. The times he had collaborated with Spock, he had always appreciated the direct orders and the Vulcan calm which stopped any possible panic. Now these wretched beaurocrats would give them a nincompoop instead, no doubt! Spock was not replacable, how could they even hope to replace him?

Chekov at his side did not even pretend to work, but stared absently into space and the word 'Cossacks' could just be heard from time to time, indicating without any possibility of doubt the low opinion the Ensign had of Starfleet Commanding Officers.

A mere Ensign was not that close to Spock, but the Russian could remember the patience with which Spock would explain something to him when he was new aboard and still 'wet behind the ears'. Now that he knew Spock better,

Chekov realised how boring it must have been for the First Officer to spend time explaining elementary notions to him, and yet he had never suspected this then! Whenever he had gone on a mission with Spock, he had always felt secure and protected somehow by the Vulcan's mere presence, so calm and reassuring at all times. Crises aboard had been many, with Kirk in danger somewhere, and Spock in command, and any private worry had never stopped the First Officer from noticing and appreciating any help given by the bridge crew, not often verbally, but in his reports, which was far more important. Now they had to have a new face among them when they all knew and trusted each other and worked as a very efficient team. Chekov guessed that this was due as much to Spock as to the Captain. The loyalty and trust he felt he owed the Vulcan could not be transferred easily, if at all. He would rather have logic to contend with than many of the Human traits he had had to put up with at the Academy! Commodores were such Cossacks, he nearly said aloud, that I don't wish to become one!

Uhura at her station was trying desperately to look at Spock to show her distress, but could not, afraid she would cry. God knew she was not the crying type! But her throat felt so tight she could not speak and one word or glance from Spock could be enough to open the gates. It did not seem possible to come on duty one day and not see the dark Vulcan eyes turn to her with a silent welcome. Uhura was a dedicated officer and did not allow herself time for love or any of those feminine emotions, she was a career woman and enjoyed it; maybe later there would be time... So she was not in love with Spock, unlike so many women aboard. She had come however to like the feeling of his presence nearby, his assurance and calm transmitted themselves to her in time of crisis. How could she panic when he was so calm? She had long discovered that his Vulcan nature did not stop him from seeing and appreciating the merits of others and she fully returned the esteem he had for her professional abilities. The fact that from him she had no fear of any emotional entanglement made her relationship with Spock easy and friendly in spite of the formal terms. Each knew or guessed much about the other, but respected privacy. His mere presence nearby she had taken for granted, as well as the security and assurance it gave her, and she was genuinely distressed at the idea of losing someone the importance of whom she had not realised up to now, when about to lose it. Stupid men always messed things up! There was the best Starship in the fleet and some tinpot dictator wanted to put an end to it! The value of a vessel was not due to the Captain only or to the crew only, but a combination of the two, and Spock was a very important part of the combination, so important she shuddered at what could be the result of his departure, with Kirk miserable and everyone upset.

The atmosphere on the bridge had become so heavy with sadness and depression that it was tangible, and McCoy noticed it when he walked in, and asked Kirk to his quarters.

"Jim," asked the doctor, "haven't you told the Commodore that Starfleet may be ruining the best Starship in the fleet? The officers are very upset."

"I know! I told him, Bones, begged him to reconsider, not only for our sake, but for Spock's. How can they throw him back into loneliness when he had found a home?"

"We're only names on paper to most pen-pushers, Jim."

"You say my officers are very upset, Bones, but some hardly know Spock..."

"Some are more upset than others, of course. But Spock has become part of us, even been taken for granted, proof that he belongs here. The shock of losing him has made us realise how important he is, to various degrees. In other words, it is like losing a member of your own family."

"Yes, I see that. I'm surprised you're not pleased at losing a computer." added Kirk teasingly, trying to lighten the conversation.

"Don't, Jim, please... I don't think I'll be able to talk about logic again!"

"That'll make a change," smiled Kirk, a wan smile which made McCoy look away. Together their depression became worse, a cumulative effect?

Their dark thoughts were interrupted by Uhura. "Captain, Commodore Rozzi wishes to speak to you."

"On my way, Lieutenant."

\* \* \*

The large screen on the bridge showed the officer's heavy features.

"Captain Kirk, your new Science Officer will come aboard soon, Lt. Kurt Klaus. Lieutenant Commander Scott is promoted to First Officer."

"Stuff it!" was the Chief Engineer's answer, which was not heard clearly by the Commodore.

"Did you say something, Mr. Scott?"

"He only coughed, sir," answered Kirk hurriedly.

"Oh! A pleasant shock, I imagine!"

The Captain was glad the officer was no longer looking at Scotty whose furious gaze clearly indicated murderous intentions towards Commodore Rozzi.

"Specific orders for the Enterprise are not yet ready, Captain," Rozzi added, "so you will remain in orbit for the moment. It will give time to your Science Officer to settle in."

"Very good, sir."

The screen went dark and no-one could look at Spock, whose quiet voice asked, "Shall I look up Lt. Klaus' record for you, Captain?"

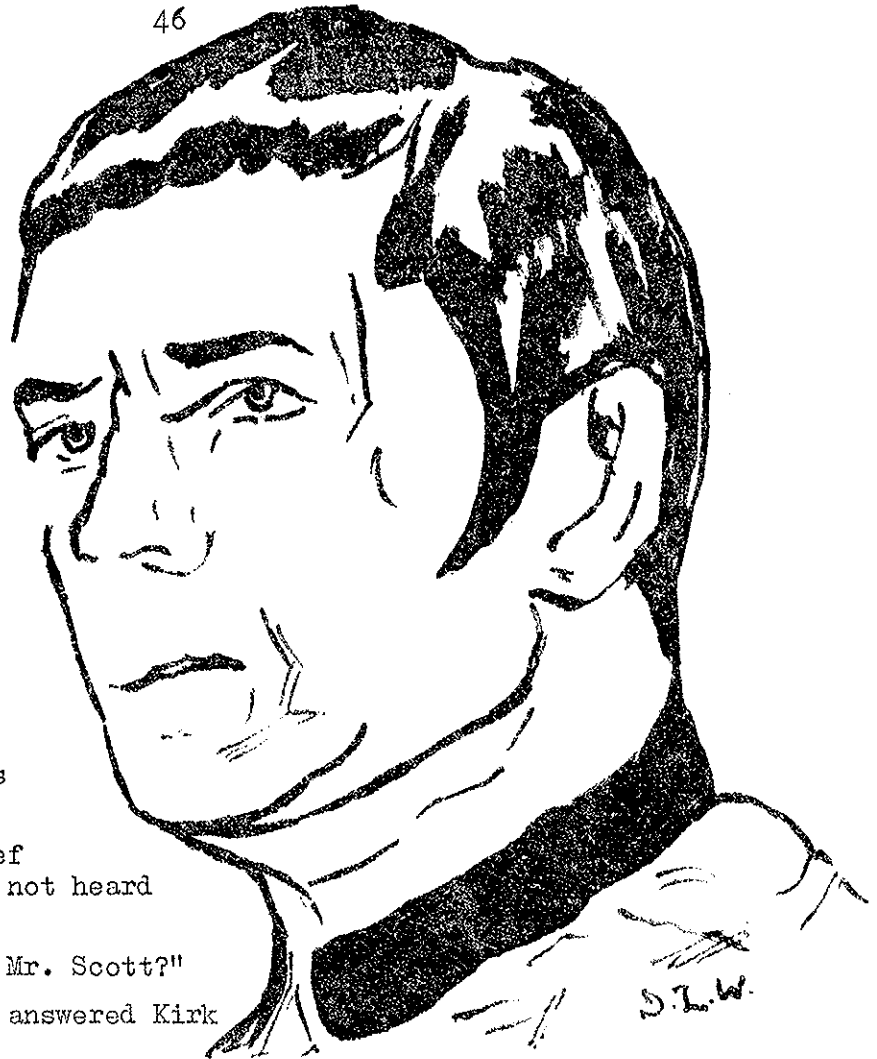
"No, Spock, I don't think anyone could care less! You're relieved from duty as from now, not because I want to... I won't inflict the sight of your replacement on you. Come, I'll help you pack, if you'll let me."

"You are welcome, Captain." The Vulcan got up and walked to Scotty. "Congratulations on your promotion, Mr. Scott, it is well deserved."

"Thank you, Mr. Spock," replied the Scotsman dully. "I'd give it back like a shot if I could..."

"Illogical!" said Spock with one of his rare smiles.

As though moved by a single spring, the bridge crew got up and stood at attention while Spock left with Kirk, then sat back and avoided looking at each other's gloom. Uhura had given up self control and was crying quietly. An eerie silence reigned, a silence full of emotion, loss and sorrow as though someone had died, and not a single officer could yet face the fact that they had heard the famous word 'illogical' for the last time from Spock's lips. In a way, it was worse than if he had died; death was final



and had to be accepted; Human intervention was more difficult to tolerate because it could have been avoided.

\* \* \*

At Spock's door, Kirk hesitated.

"I don't want to pry, Spock, and will leave you to it if you prefer."

"No, Jim, come in and help. Why waste what little time we have left?"

"Logical," agreed Kirk in a low voice, without smiling.

Spock had already packed and transferred the bulk of his things to the Vulcan Embassy on Starbase 1, so it did not take long to assemble the few personal effects remaining. Afterwards, the Vulcan led Kirk to a chair and sat on the desk facing him.

"Don't be sad, Jim," he said softly. "No-one and nothing can take away what we shared in the past."

Kirk nodded, unable to speak, and Spock continued, "A last mind meld, Jim? It might help you."

Kirk relaxed at the gentle touch of Spock's hands, a reaction which now came automatically, after so many mind melds. The linkage lasted a while and he was moved beyond words at seeing how Spock would always remember his Captain and the Enterprise and would always remember what the experiences shared with Kirk had taught him.

"I'll always remember too, Spock," he murmured as the Vulcan released him gently after soothing the pain of separation in him. Both knew that at whatever time they met again in the future, they would be able to take up their friendship again at the precise moment of separation, as though no lapse of time had occurred.

They were going to leave the room when McCoy knocked and came in. "Want any help?"

"We have finished, Doctor."

"Fine mess you're leaving behind, Spock."

"I beg your pardon?" queried the Vulcan, both eyebrows raised.

"By the look of everybody, I'll have a ward full of maniac depressives soon."

"Your skill will no doubt cure them quickly, Doctor."

"I doubt it, Spock, I'll be one of the first victims of the epidemic!"

Kirk tried to smile as Spock, to McCoy's surprise, touched his shoulder lightly. "May I say goodbye as I wish to, Doctor, with a mind touch?"

McCoy hesitated, aware that the few mind melds he had had with the Vulcan had upset him. There had been a barrier between them he had been unable to cross. But he did not hesitate for long. "Yes, of course, whatever you say, Spock."

He sat down and felt the hands on his face while he gazed into the dark eyes under slanting eyebrows; why he had ever thought of them as cold he could not imagine! But the barrier was still there.

"Are you afraid of me, Doctor?"

"No, Spock, why... "

"Then relax, don't resist."

"Go on, Bones, trust Spock," urged Kirk.

McCoy was too full of sadness and emotion at Spock's departure not to

respond to him and the barrier dissolved. It had been of his own making, he suddenly realised, and the Vulcan had respected it.

The meld was brief. McCoy was not used to them as Kirk was, but he knew he would not have missed it for the world.

"Thanks, Spock," he whispered shakily, moved and enriched by the glimpse of the Vulcan mind he had been privileged to see. What a fool he had been not to accept this before!

"It did not matter, Bones," said Spock with his half-smile. "We both knew, didn't we?"

McCoy nodded and each took one of Spock's bags and left for the transporter room in companionable silence.

Scotty was there waiting and asked Kirk, "Shall I sabotage the transporter, Captain?"

"You would, too!" Kirk managed to smile. "Unfortunately it would achieve little."

He turned to his First Officer. "Where will you be, Spock, in case we have to contact you about anything?"

"I believe everything is in order, Jim, but I'll be a guest of the Vulcan Attache for a few days. My discharge papers are not finalised yet..."

"What? Then you shouldn't leave... "

"It makes no difference, Jim. The promotion board's recommendations are usually approved by the Grand Admiral and his HQ staff. I believe my file is due to be considered by them soon, after which there should be a ship for Vulcan I can get a passage on."

"Yes," agreed Kirk, "HQ usually ratifies the promotion board's recommendations automatically. I don't even know if the Grand Admiral has a say ... Spock, Admiral Derval is a friend of your father's... "

"Does it matter? My father made him promise he would never consider me, if the case arose, as the son of Ambassador Sarek, but as an ordinary officer. In any case, the Grand Admiral does not know me well at all, so why should he interfere?"

"No hope anywhere!" sighed Kirk. "So this is goodbye, Spock. I wish I knew how... "

"We said goodbye already in my quarters, Jim. Bones, we said goodbye too."

Kirk and McCoy nodded in agreement and Spock made the Vulcan salute. "Live long and prosper, Jim, Bones."

Kirk returned the salute and touched palms lightly with Spock, Vulcan fashion, welcoming the last brief mind contact with bitter-sweet pleasure. McCoy was trying to make the Vulcan salute, cursing himself for not having practiced it.

"I can't!" he raged finally, angry at himself.

"It does not matter, touch palms with your fingers closed."

The doctor complied with undisguised emotion, then the Vulcan stepped on to the pad. "Live long and prosper, Mr. Scott."

"Goodbye, sir, my very best wishes," the Scotsman replied in a trembling voice.

Kirk signalled him to energise and the Chief Engineer obeyed numbly. This was not happening, it was a bad dream!

They returned to the bridge in a silence sharing their common loss and

settled back at their posts among a general silence they did not try to break. Chekov was the one who broke it.

"Captain," he shouted suddenly, looking upset. "You should know this - I can't be seeing things!"

"What are you talking about, Mr. Chekov?"

"The record on Lt. Klaus, sir. I just looked it up, not that I care but it was part of my duty... "

"Yes, yes, go on."

"He's anti-Vulcan, Captain."

"What!" shouted Kirk, nearly falling out of his command chair.

"I don't believe it!" exclaimed Scotty.

Kirk had run to Spock's station, where Chekov was, and saw for himself. "It's true!" he gasped.

"Commodore Rozzi is insane, Jim," stated McCoy. "Klaus will be murdered if he steps aboard... "

"That's for sure, by me!" said Sulu darkly.

"If you need help, let me know, Mr. Sulu," added Uhura in her sweetest voice.

"Enough!" interrupted Kirk sharply, now recovered from the shock. "As there are no Vulcans aboard, his phobia is not likely to be an impediment. Just don't mention Vulcans to him, that's all."

"It's not a phobia, Jim," said McCoy, who had been looking at the record. "There's nothing medical about it. The man just hates Vulcans, and doesn't get on well with Humans either. Vulcans may not be his only phobia! On top of it, he's Grand Admiral Derval's nephew."

"No wonder Spock did not think it worth waiting for his final discharge!" said Kirk with disgust. "What's his service record like, Bones?"

"Rather odd. He's 28, qualified two years ago as Lieutenant due to his Science degree. He has already served aboard three Starships... "

"Three?!!!"

"He only stayed about six months on each, Jim."

"So he's either incompetent or wants a wide experience under different Captains. We'll have to see."

"His science degree is good, and... "

As though on cue, Uhura interrupted the doctor. "I have Lt. Klaus, Captain. He's asking to be beamed up."

Mr. Scott transmitted the order to the transporter room. He was not going to put himself out for the newcomer!

"Scotty, you or I should have gone to welcome him you know," said Kirk mildly.

"Shall we draw lots to find out who loses and has to meet him, Captain? I warn you, I'll cheat."

"Never mind," Kirk smiled. "He can find his own way. He's only a lieutenant, after all. We must remember that he's not responsible for Spock's departure, and hide our private feelings, whatever they may be."

The new Science Officer arrived on the bridge with a very assured step. He was of medium height and medium build - in fact everything about him was medium except the obvious high opinion he had of himself.

"Lt. Kurt Klaus reporting for duty, sir," he said importantly to Kirk, "as Science Officer."

"Welcome, Lieutenant," Kirk replied in a neutral voice, carefully hiding the fact that what he really wanted to say was 'Go to hell!' "May I give you a word of advice?" he added aloud.

"If you must, Captain. I am not still wet behind the ears, you know."

May I have patience, thought Kirk inwardly. But he won't see my dislike, Spock would never let it show and I can be as controlled if I want to be! "I am sure you are experienced, Lieutenant. What I wanted to say is that you'll have to be patient with us. Our previous Science Officer had to resign, and we all miss him, but you are in no way responsible..."

"He was a Vulcan, wasn't he?" interrupted Klaus.

"Yes, he was," replied Kirk in a warning tone which fell on deaf ears.

"You'll soon see the difference, Captain, I am sure."

"I have no doubt that I shall!" agreed Kirk with an irony lost on the new officer.

"Then you'll wonder why you ever put up with a pointed-eared freak!"

The frozen silence did not affect Klaus, who did not even seem to notice; but McCoy nearly choked. He had called Spock that, but no-one else had the right...

"Listen, Lieutenant," he snapped, "the quickest way to my surgery is to go on as..."

"Don't, Bones, let it pass this time," ordered Kirk softly. "I'll try to explain..."

The newcomer was now observing Spock's station and the Captain's fists tightened. How was he going to bear that man there?

"Doctor," called Klaus. "Has all this been sterilised?"

"Sterilised? Are you mad?..."

"Doctor, please, it's easy enough to understand that I don't want to catch any Vulcan diseases! There must be many germs everywhere..."

"I'm sure there are," assured McCoy with a sly smile. "If you sit on that chair you'll get green plague caused by green bugs from Vulcan blood, and you will erupt in green spots all over. I have no cure for that," he added delightedly, among approving smiles.

"So if I was you, I would ask for another ship," continued Scotty, joining in, "these bugs can't be sterilised, we tried, but we are all infected."

"And it is highly contagious," added Uhura smilingly.

"Keep away from me!" shouted such a terrified Klaus that Kirk intervened.

"That's enough! Lieutenant, it is only a joke, there are no green bugs to my knowledge and none of us ever caught a Vulcan disease from Commander Spock."

"Then I assume all the officers concerned are on a charge, Captain."

"You assume wrong. It was a joke and if you could not see it... Please come to the briefing room, I want to talk to you."

\* \* \*

The Captain sat down and faced Klaus severely. "Lieutenant, your stay aboard my ship can be pleasant or unpleasant, the choice is yours."

"I don't understand..."



"I am aware of the fact that you hate Vulcans. It so happens that after having a Vulcan First Officer aboard for many years, we have come to appreciate, respect and like Vulcans. I instructed my officers not to mention Vulcans to you to avoid friction. In return, you will have the courtesy of not mentioning Vulcans either. Only on this basis is there some hope for you aboard my ship."

"You can't have liked a Vulcan!" exclaimed Klaus, appalled.

"I said, 'don't mention Vulcans'," repeated Kirk in a dangerous tone. "Must I make it an order?"

"Sir, should you enforce... "

"Once and for all, I will not have discipline disrupted by brawls between pro and anti Vulcans. If you want to rave at them, ask for a transfer."

"I will obey your order, Captain," assured Klaus. "I can obey orders, you know."

"Glad to hear it! Your quarters have been assigned on deck... "

"Do I have a single cabin, sir?" asked the Science Officer eagerly.

"Yes. Why?"

"Thank you, Captain. I like that. Aboard my last vessel, I had to share."

Klaus took the tag indicating his quarters and left. It was with an effort that the Captain refrained from telling him that he had single quarters because no-one had wanted to share with Spock's replacement.

Kirk, on his way back to the bridge, passed Spock's cabin with the name still on the door. I'll leave it, thought Kirk, why not? No-one needs his quarters, unless Scotty...

The Captain called the Chief Engineer over to the command chair as he settled in. "Do you want to move into Spock's cabin, Mr. Scott? You are entitled to... "

"No, sir, I am perfectly happy in my present quarters."

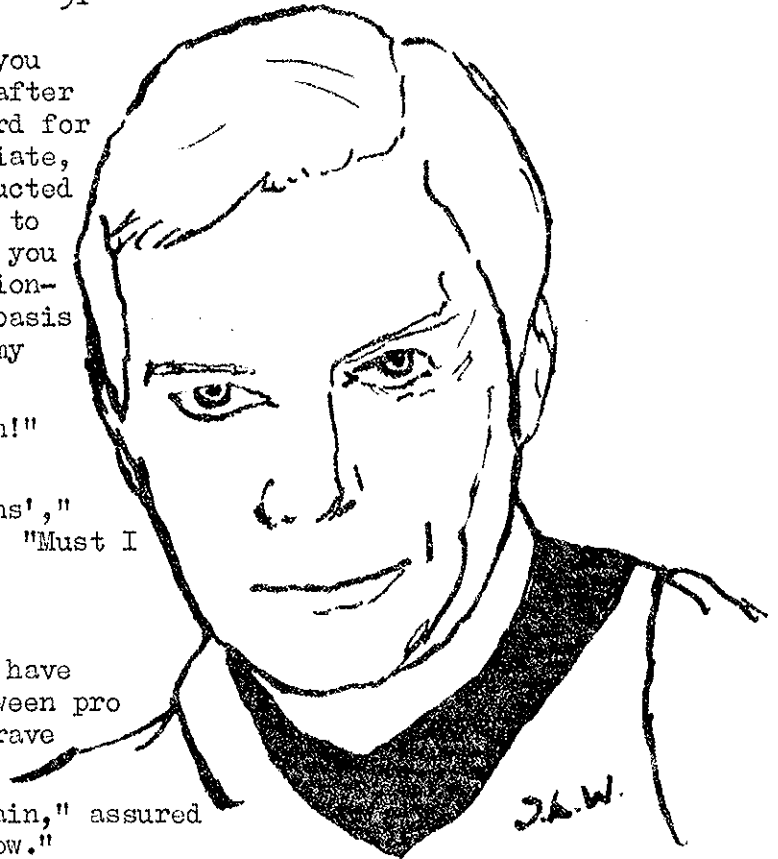
"Then I'll leave Spock's name on the door."

"As a memento," approved Scotty. "Aye, sir, that's a good idea."

"We'll think of him as we go past," added Uhura.

Naturally, the first thing Klaus did before reporting for duty was to take the name down and hand it over to Kirk, saying he assumed it had been forgotten. The Captain could not make out if it was deliberate and told him to mind his own business in no uncertain terms, after which he gave the name plate to Scotty to put up again, and the new First Officer swore he would give that twerp a good hiding if he tried that again!

Klaus sprayed Spock's station to sterilise it, uncaring of the upset around him, and settled to his post. He obeyed Kirk's order not to mention Vulcans to the letter, but mentioned Spock instead, which was worse. When the Captain told him not to mention Spock, for his own safety, Klaus talked of his predecessor in derogatory terms and set about reforming the science department, as a result of which mass resignation was threatened by the scientists.



"I can't stand it!" moaned Kirk to McCoy in the privacy of the doctor's surgery. "That man is a menace, a maniac who should be in a place where he can do no harm, not aboard a Starship!"

"I know, Jim," agreed the doctor. "He no longer mentions Vulcans or Spock, mind you, but he is an insufferable prig, an egomaniac who sees only himself and can talk of little else, unless it is in relation to his ego."

"And they let Spock go for such a man! It's monstrous!"

"I'm starting to wonder if it is a case of nepotism, Jim."

"I shouldn't have thought Admiral Derval was that type... I don't know! I am going to see Commodore Rozzi and ask for a replacement, or for Spock back, which would be better of course! Surely even a Human could see the logic of this!"

\* \* \*

Kirk's interview with the Commodore was not pleasant, and the Captain had to make a huge effort to maintain a respectful attitude.

"There is no question of getting your ex-First Officer back," stated the officer coldly. "There is a general revision of Starfleet policy being done, and many of us want to enforce a stronger sense of discipline and respect for orders, whatever they are. Commander Spock had the gall to imply that I was not a logical man!"

"I'm sure he meant no disrespect, sir, it's the Vulcan way of talking."

"Being a Vulcan does not set him apart from rules and regulations, or discipline and respect for his superiors. I will never let my decisions be changed by a resignation. It was his choice. So be it."

Spock put his back up, thought Kirk in dismay, and he also had the feeling that Rozzi did not understand Vulcans and had misunderstood many of Spock's words or attitudes, but he could not explain or argue without being disrespectful!

"Then may we have another Science Officer, sir??"

"Certainly not! There are none available at the moment in any case. Lt. Klaus is Admiral Derval's nephew and will no doubt have a brilliant career."

Not aboard my ship he won't, thought Kirk inwardly, but he had the distinct impression that Rozzi believed Derval's nephew could do no wrong! He probably never met him!

After another try at obtaining satisfaction, Kirk gave up. Rozzi did not want to know and thought it was sour grapes on the Captain's part, so it was hopeless.

\* \* \*

Back aboard the Enterprise, he paced his quarters back and forth letting off steam to a sympathetic McCoy.

"I can't make Rozzi see sense! Klaus in a crisis would be useless - not only that, he would probably create panic!"

"You certainly couldn't take him along on dangerous missions, Jim. That type looks after their own skins first and foremost."

"And most missions need a Science Officer, or how am I supposed to get the necessary data? It's ludicrous."

"No wonder he didn't stay long aboard any ship! I wonder how they got rid of him? Probably told Klaus he was too good for their vessel and should move on. It's about the only argument that would work."

"But the Enterprise is the best, so... I'm seriously thinking of resigning too, Bones."

"I know, Jim, I miss Spock too. The Enterprise is no longer home. If he had died, we would face the fact. If he'd accepted a Captain's posting we would console ourselves with the thought that he deserved promotion and be happy for him. But it's infuriating to think he's there on Starbase 1, and we can't have him."

"It's so unfair, Bones. It's only two days since Spock left, and it feels like ages. After two days, Klaus is already unbearable!"

"I think he resents the fact that we liked a Vulcan, Jim, so he is trying to efface his image and reorganise the department on new lines. It has to be his department, not Spock's. The man is an egomaniac, as I said, and I don't know how he ever got through Starfleet's psychological tests!"

"And he has nowhere near Spock's ability as a scientist, let alone anything else, Bones. If Spock had left us of his own free will, for promotion, then I would feel more inclined to bear Klaus temporarily, while going on asking for a replacement from Starfleet until they became so tired of my demands that they would give in! It would only be a matter of time. But with Spock available... Let's see how the third day goes."

It was no better. Uhura warned Kirk that the newcomer would finish in sickbay if he didn't stop pestering her. The Captain called Klaus and told him in no uncertain terms that he would be on a charge if he said one word to Uhura outside duty hours. The whole bridge crew was in a perpetual state of tension now and Kirk could see no immediate solution, unless...

On an impulse, he assembled his senior officers in the briefing room and asked bluntly, "How do any of you feel about resigning?"

"To get Mr. Spock back, Captain?" asked Scotty eagerly.

"I don't know, Scotty, I can't make any promises."

He outlined the ridiculous situation where they were stuck with the horrible Klaus while Spock was idle on Starbase 1.

"Completely illogical," agreed McCoy. "Spock would see it all right!"

"If you see it, he certainly would," smiled Kirk. "My feeling is that the whole affair is grossly unfair to Spock, to us and to my ship. How can anyone function properly with a Klaus around?"

"Even Spock couldn't," assured McCoy. "I'm glad he didn't meet him. To see his post filled by that specimen would have been an insult!"

"I agree, Bones. What I'm getting at is this; if we all resign as a protest against the situation, we might force Starfleet's hand and be all reinstated, including Spock. But I stress the 'might'. We could also find ourselves out of a job we like."

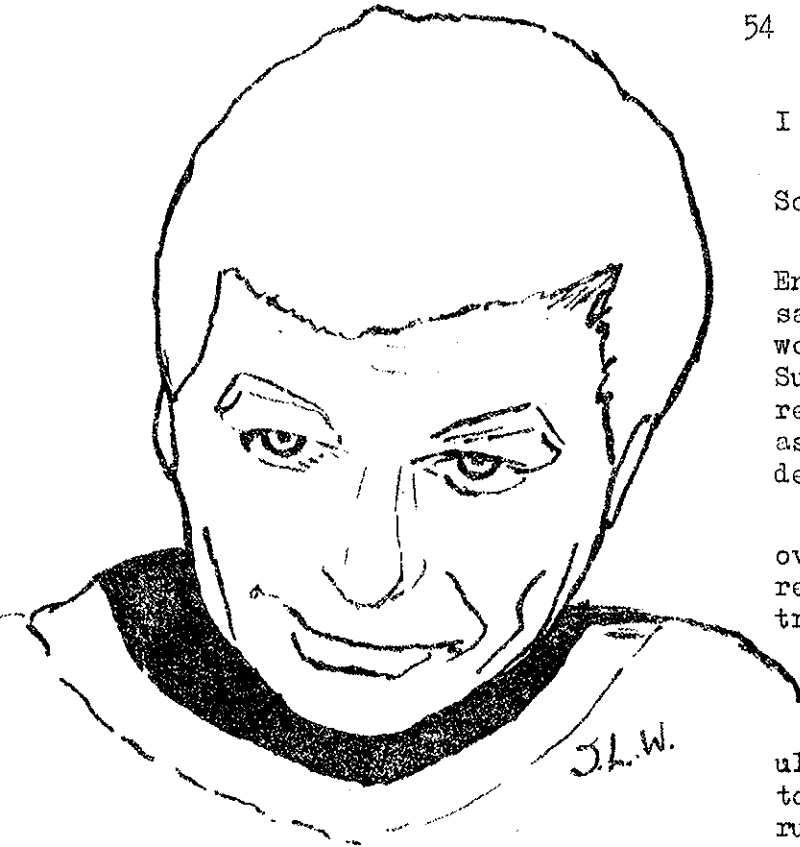
"If Mr. Spock was here, he would stress that aspect," said Scotty. "Should we resign, we have to be ready to stick it out no matter what and say goodbye to the Enterprise."

"Exactly, Scotty," agreed Kirk. "Consider this among yourselves, be honest. I will respect your decisions, then make mine accordingly. Personally, I want to resign, I have wanted to ever since Spock told us he was leaving, because I think Starfleet treated him unjustly. But never mind, I tried to adjust to the new situation, without success."

"Hear, hear," said McCoy in a bleak voice.

"If the worst comes to the worst," continued Kirk, "I could always join a large commercial company with Spock and any other officer who wanted to stay with us. Commercial companies welcome Starfleet personnel with open arms, and have interesting routes - we would even be allowed to pick which route we wanted."

"That's a good idea, Jim," agreed McCoy. "No pen-pusher could tell us to get rid of Spock then."



"Of course not, Bones, as Captain I would choose my own crew."

"I'm with you, Captain," said Scotty. "No need to think further."

The audience looked at the Chief Engineer with open admiration. The sacrifice would be worst for him - he would have to leave his beloved engines! Sulu, Chekov and Uhura also agreed to resign. They knew Lt. Kyle would follow as well as Desalle and most of Spock's department. They would ask others.

Within an hour, Kirk had a list of over half the officers aboard ready to resign to get Spock back or join a transport company, and with that number, Kirk had most of his own crew ready for a transport vessel.

"Right," smiled Kirk, "now for an ultimatum to Commodore Rozzi. I'll have to remember to inform Spock before he rushes off to Vulcan, that we might have a job for him, one way or the other."

"He'll be with us again!" beamed McCoy.

"Whatever ship we have next will be home, doctor. Shame if it's not this one though," sighed the Chief Engineer.

"Scotty," said Kirk. "You will lose your promotion to First Officer if Spock comes back... "

"Who cares? I didn't want it in the first place!"

They laughed with genuine mirth for the first time since arriving at Starbase 1 and Kirk dictated their collective resignations on tape, stating that they would withdraw these if Klaus was taken off and Spock reinstated. He then sent it to Commodore Rozzi with his compliments.

All they could do now was sit back and await the explosive repercussions. The Captain started planning which company he would join and which routes he would ask for. Some of them were tricky because of Klingon interference and should be of interest. Others were exploratory, to find new markets or discover inhabitable planets... He hadn't called Spock! He did so hurriedly and was relieved the Vulcan was still at the Embassy.

"Spock, I won't say much or you'll try to interfere to save us from ourselves! On no account leave for Vulcan yet. Await possible news."

"I don't understand... "

"The less you know the better, Spock, or you might be accused... Trust me! Will you do as I ask?"

"Yes, Jim, but all this sounds very much like one of those poker game moves you showed me. Are you trying a bluff?"

"You could put it that way, but I believe we said goodbye prematurely."

"It would be gratifying if this proved true, Jim."

"It'd solve everyone's problems," agreed Kirk.

\* \* \*

Kirk received the expected order to report to Commodore Rozzi and the glacial expression on the officer's features was not reassuring.

"I presume Commander Spock is responsible for this ultimatum, Captain?"

"No, sir, he knows nothing about it."

"Then that makes it worse! I told you before that it is not my policy to allow intimidation, and the promotion board is also shocked by your attitude, while Admiral Derval is unlikely to appreciate your opinion of his nephew."

"It is the truth, sir, and three other Starship Captains would undoubtedly confirm my statements."

"Silence! I refuse to discuss anything with mutineers. Think yourself lucky that I don't insist on a court martial for insubordination, Captain. Ultimatums cannot be tolerated and your collective resignations are accepted. Discipline will prevail. Starship Captains have had too much freedom and too much power in the past. It is starting to go to their heads, obviously, but it will be stopped!"

Instructions regarding the Enterprise followed and Kirk left numbly, shocked in spite of half expecting this.

When he returned aboard the Enterprise, he called his senior officers to the briefing room and said simply, "This is it, I'm afraid, packing time."

"You mean they accepted all our resignations?" asked McCoy in disbelief.

"Yes, Bones. I was told in no uncertain terms that this was mutiny and ultimatums could not be tolerated. So the Enterprise is to go into dock until replacements are found. Klaus - as senior officer remaining aboard - is temporary acting captain."

"Whoever heard of someone so inept in charge of a Starship?" gasped Scotty.

"I agree, Mr. Scott, but at least in dock Klaus can't do any damage."

"Aye, sir, fortunately."

The Science Officer, far from being taken aback, was delighted at being acting captain. The wretched man obviously thought it was due to him!

The Enterprise officers packed up and scattered among hotels on Starbase 1, Kirk having told them to have a couple of days leave to reconsider if they wished. They all regretted leaving the Enterprise, Scotty particularly, but they had prepared themselves for the possibility and none wavered. A few more even joined them because they just could not stand Klaus any longer. As a compensation for their regret, all looked forward to having Spock back.

Kirk and McCoy had hardly settled in their hotel room when Spock knocked and walked in, looking faintly upset. "Jim, Doctor, this is not logical, even insane... "

"Please, Spock," interrupted McCoy, "no verdict on medical matters. I am the doctor."

Kirk laughed and outlined their plans to the Vulcan. "Are you with us, Spock? It will be a poor substitute for Starfleet, but better than nothing."

"I agree, Jim, and I am with you." And so, their future decided, they settled to enjoy each other's company after the short separation which had seemed so long to all of them.

\* \* \*

Grand Admiral Derval had just returned from a meeting with the Federation Council for the annual report on Starfleet activities. He was tired, and he did not welcome the knock on his door, for he had given orders that he was not to be disturbed while he went over some matters arising from the meeting.

"Sir," said his aide, coming in, "I'm sorry to bother you so late. I've taken it upon myself to bring this file to your attention in spite of your order. The whole of HQ staff is upset by it."

"What happened? A mutiny?"

"It could be called that, sir."

"What? Impossible; I was joking!"

"It concerns Commander Spock mainly, sir."

"That's insane, Lieutenant. I'll never believe that Commander Spock mutinied."

"He didn't, sir, his Captain did."

"Are you out of your mind? How can a Captain mutiny? This is so weird, I'm intrigued. It concerns Captain Kirk, then, not his First Officer, I'm happy to hear. I can't intervene on behalf of that particular Vulcan; his father would never speak to me again if I did!"

"On this occasion, sir, I think it is advisable that you should make an exception. First he resigned, then so did his Captain and most of the crew."

"What kind of insanity has been going on in my absence?" asked Derval, appalled.

"There is the full file, sir. Er... I'm afraid Lt. Klaus is involved."

The Grand Admiral reacted as though struck by a sharp needle and nearly jumped into the air. "I might have known! That explains everything! If there's ever a war with anyone, Lieutenant, remind me to send Kurt to our enemies as a gift. It'll be enough to stop hostilities - they'll beg for peace provided we take him back!"

"Yes, sir," smiled his aide. "Did I do the right thing by disregarding your order and bringing you the file?"

"You certainly did! Congratulations! You may leave now. I'll go through it and try to make some sense out of this collective madness."

\* \* \*

The next day Kirk and Spock received the unexpected summons to report to Grand Admiral Derval, and it worried McCoy.

"He can't touch us, Bones, we've resigned," Kirk pointed out.

"Our discharge isn't final yet, Jim, so we must show proper respect," said Spock.

The stern and sombre features of Guy Derval were not reassuring! "Sit down, Captain, Commander. I don't make a habit of interfering with Starship personnel, but this affair appears illogical - as your father would say, Commander. So I have taken it upon myself to interview the main parties concerned to achieve some understanding as to why... I can understand your refusal to join the Galactic Science Research Centre, but why refuse promotion to Starship Captain? Your record indicates that you have the ability to command."

"Sir," replied Spock, "as I explained to my Captain, it is logical that I should function in a capacity best related to my ability. As First Officer of the Enterprise, I achieved this."

"You are however able to assume command, your record proves it."

"Not on a permanent basis, sir."

"I don't understand, Commander. Sooner or later Captain Kirk will be promoted, and you will then be the logical choice as his successor. Would you refuse?"

"I might at some time in the future consider myself ready to assume such a responsibility, sir. I would be more mature then and perhaps able to perform the command to my own satisfaction."

"More mature?... but your age... Of course, you are a Vulcan!"

And I bet the promotion board and Rozzi overlooked that fact, thought Derval to himself, as well as the Vulcan sense of responsibility and integrity. "I believe I understand your choice of resignation now, Commander. Captain Kirk, I would like to hear a concise account of what happened aboard your ship after your First Officer left."

Kirk looked embarrassed and Derval added, "Speak your mind, Captain, honesty is often the best policy."

Encouraged, the Captain related events aboard the Enterprise and the Admiral listened grimly, playing with his command baton as though he wanted to hit out!

"Thank you, Captain," said Derval, making no comments. "Now that I have talked to you both, I will hear the other side of the fence, so to speak, then try to sort this out. Please do not leave Starbase 1 yet; that includes your other officers."

"Yes, sir."

"There is however Mr. Scott's promotion to consider... "

"He didn't want it, sir, not at the expense of Spock's resignation. My Chief Engineer is more interested in his engines than in being First Officer."

"Thank you for telling me, Captain. My mind is not made up yet, and I promise nothing. Commander Spock, should you all be reinstated, will you please assure your father that I had to look into this affair at HQ's request, not because you were his son?"

"I'll mention it to him, sir."

"Thank you. You may both leave now. You will hear from Starfleet soon one way or the other."

\* \* \*

"Well, Jim, Spock, what happened?" asked McCoy eagerly.

"We answered question, Bones, that's all," replied Kirk. "Admiral Derval is looking into the affair and has to see other parties. We'll have to wait and see, but I have the feeling he is on our side in spite of his nephew."

"On what grounds do you base your assumption, Jim?" asked Spock.

"Nothing logical," smiled Kirk, "purely Human intuition."

"Yes, I think I understand what you mean, Jim."

"You do?" exclaimed Kirk. "You sensed it too?"

"I believe I did, because it is logical... "

"Never mind the logic, Spock, you're making progress," approved McCoy. "Keep it up."

The Vulcan's raised eyebrows made them smile and did not deter them from optimism, however cautious.

\* \* \*

Admiral Derval next called the promotion board, consisting of four officers under the chairmanship of Vice-admiral Laviro. "Gentlemen, I would like to know why Commander Spock was faced with an ultimatum."

"It was not an ultimatum, sir, it was a choice!" protested Laviro.

"Depends on the way you look at it! But explain your reasons."

"It is simple, sir. The Galactic Science Centre wanted him, but they can't insist on a Starship Captain being released by us. Commander Spock's record proves that he has reached the age and ability to be a Captain - his promotion is even overdue. So we offered him the choice, in order to be fair to him should he prefer a scientific career."



"Reasonable, I suppose," reflected Derval aloud, "but Commander Spock wishes to remain First Officer for the time being. Why not accept this?"

"It is not up to him to decide, sir. We have never heard of anyone refusing promotion before. It smacks of insubordination."

"He is a Vulcan, so he is not as old as he seems, and if he does not feel able to fulfil the post, why not accept his reasons? The Vulcan sense of integrity would not let him accept a responsibility he can't fulfil, contrary to us Humans!"

"I see what you mean, sir," replied Laviron thoughtfully. "I'm afraid we overlooked his racial characteristics, he is after all half-Human, but if the Vulcan side is predominant... We discussed subsequent events with Commodore Rozzi, who is all for tougher discipline, and followed his advice, perhaps too hastily."

"Glad to see you are reasonable men. Thank you for your time."

Commodore Rozzi was next and Derval asked him for the tapes of his interviews with Spock and Kirk, then listened to them. "Well, Commodore," he asked afterwards, "why didn't you accept Commander Spock's arguments and let him remain First Officer?"

"Out of the question, sir, it was not part of his choice. There is no place in Starfleet for officers afraid of responsibility and for officers who think they know better than their superiors. Commander Spock was rude to me."

"He is a Vulcan and speaks his mind according to his belief, logic. There are times when I wish we had more Vulcans... But I digress. Why did you disregard Kirk's pleas and later his ultimatum?"

"That was crass insubordination, sir, even intimidation, and could not be tolerated."

"Didn't it occur to you that such measures adopted by a man of Captain Kirk's outstanding record and ability showed how strongly he and his officers felt? Since when is it a crime to want your ship to have highly efficient crewmen?"

"Not to the point of overlooking discipline, sir. You know we are considering a strengthening of it mainly in regard of senior officers on ships..."

"If that is the result, I am against, Commodore. Your desire for toughness has nearly lost Starfleet the services of its most outstanding officers. Where is the logic in that?"

"It would have made an example to other Starship, sir."

"Too costly an example, Commodore. We can't afford it. This is a case where the remedy is far worse than the sickness. You have to accept that Starship Captains must have some freedom from our interference, or how can they function out on the rim of charted space?"

"You may be right, sir, the question of tougher discipline is scheduled to be discussed further, but there is still the matter of your nephew. Captain Kirk gave a very harsh and severe report I feel to be unjustified..."

"Commodore, you are new here, so you are not aware that the last time I met Lt. Klaus I nearly wrung his neck, not that it would have done him any good!"

"What!" gasped the Commodore.

"Whatever Kirk said of him is true, I am sure of that. The question of my nephew no longer arises."

"Sir?"

"After reading this file, the first thing I did was go aboard the Enterprise, seize him by the scruff of the neck and drag him all the way here, where

he handed in his resignation. I can't take any more... Never mind the family matters, they are my concern. We can't afford a Starship out of action when an excellent crew is idle, Commodore. Let's have a general meeting of staff and thrash this question out."

Grand Admiral Guy Derval was not too tough during the discussions, making allowances for many newcomers unused to their work and a nasty incident which had engineered the wish for tougher discipline. Officers like Commodore Rozzi for instance had never been Captain of a Starship, so they did not realise how exacting the rank was. But the Grand Admiral did give the whole of Starbase 1 a good shaking up to ensure that no such dictatorial attitude was ever taken again and enforced regardless of men's wishes, emphasising that the Starship crews were doing extremely difficult and demanding tasks and should be treated accordingly. All personnel not familiar with Starship work were to have a crash course on the subject. Finally, his staff supported him in asking for the whole of the Enterprise crew to be reinstated, and agreement was reached, mainly when the Admiral pointed out that the attachment the officers had shown for Spock clearly indicated that he would make an excellent Captain to succeed Kirk when the latter was promoted.

Guy Derval called Kirk himself to give the good news and the Captain thanked him with true gratitude, after which a jubilant group of officers joined the ship and took her out of dock and back into orbit to await orders for the next mission.

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The Chief Engineer was teased when it was discovered that he slept beside his beloved engines the first few days in sheer joy. On the bridge, Sulu and Chekov kept turning to look at Spock from time to time, to Kirk's amusement, until the Vulcan finally asked, "Mr. Sulu, Mr. Chekov, is there something wrong with my appearance?"

"No, sir," replied Sulu hastily.

"Then why... "

"We were making sure you were there, sir," answered Chekov with some hesitation, wondering how the First Officer would take it.

Spock's eyebrows went up and the word 'illogical' clearly hovered on his lips. Kirk smiled when the word never came out and Sulu and Chekov hid their own smiles carefully. A Vulcan was supposed to have no feelings, but they did not want to embarrass the First Officer, just in case...

When Kirk and Spock went off duty, the Captain asked his second-in-command to join him in his quarters.

"I know it's our first evening back together on board, Spock, but I asked Bones to come along too. After all, out of the whole crew, he would have missed you most!"

"Would he, Jim?" asked Spock with one of his rare smiles.

Kirk smiled back and did not answer. There was no need. Spock knew who would have missed him most of all.

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