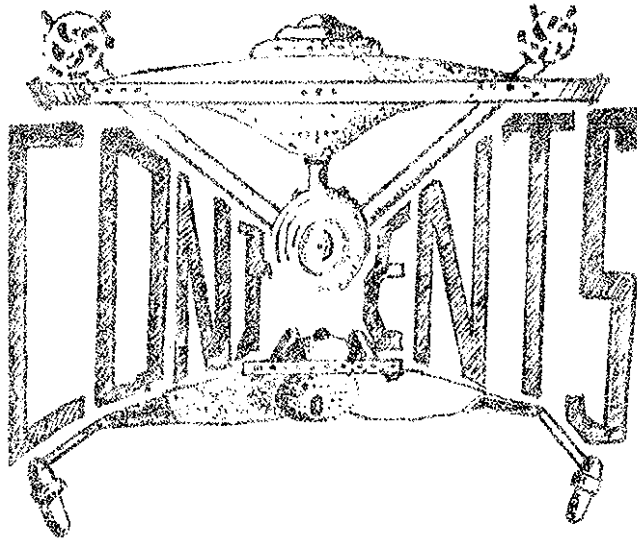


# LOG ENTRIES

14





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The Cause of it All first appeared in the JDIFC Journal for April 1976.

Competition winners An Investment in Time by Nancy Kippax  
Artwork, Valerie Henwood

A STAG Publication

January 1978

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I wish I could think up another way of saying hello apart from

'Hello again, and welcome to Log Entries... ' whatever-number-it-is.

I've had very little response to my plea for letters of comment from British readers - a total of two, so far... from which I can only assume that most of you are quite happy with what is going into Log Entries. T.W.Francis commented on the preponderance of 'get-em' stories, adding 'Stories of this nature will always seem the same. What makes them interesting is the way in which Kirk/Spock overcome, solve or circumvent their problems'. He also commented on the tendency of female writers to have Kirk and Spock touching each other. I suppose that's true; female writers do tend to put that in. I find there's something very satisfying in physical contact that expresses affection without any possibility of the contact becoming sexual. Perhaps we're trying to get something out of our systems - I don't know.

As for the preponderance of 'get-em' stories - well, fan fiction - indeed, virtually any kind of fiction! - comes into five categories;

Get-em  
Lay-em  
Mary Sue  
Parodies  
Others.

For several reasons, I won't print 'lay-em' stories or the more blatant kind of Mary Sue (which is virtually the same thing). My decision on that point is academic, I must admit - I haven't been sent any hot, steamy sex stories, and the stories I've been sent that I'd classify as Mary Sues have been only marginally so. I haven't been sent any parodies... that only leaves 'get-em's' and 'others'. So all I can do is try to vary the contents within the framework of stories that mostly come into the one category, for 'others' is a very small one.

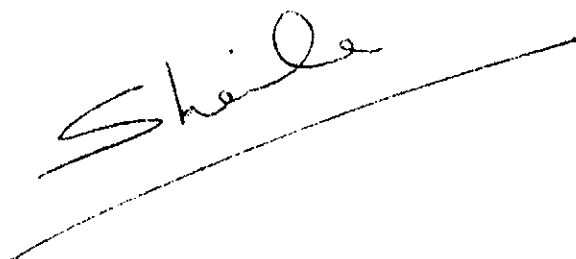
However, we do have a story in the 'others' category this time. Indeed, we have two. Unfortunately, that practically exhausts my stock of 'other' stories... I didn't mean to put 'The Cause of it All' in this time... but it followed on so naturally from the poem in front of it that I couldn't resist.

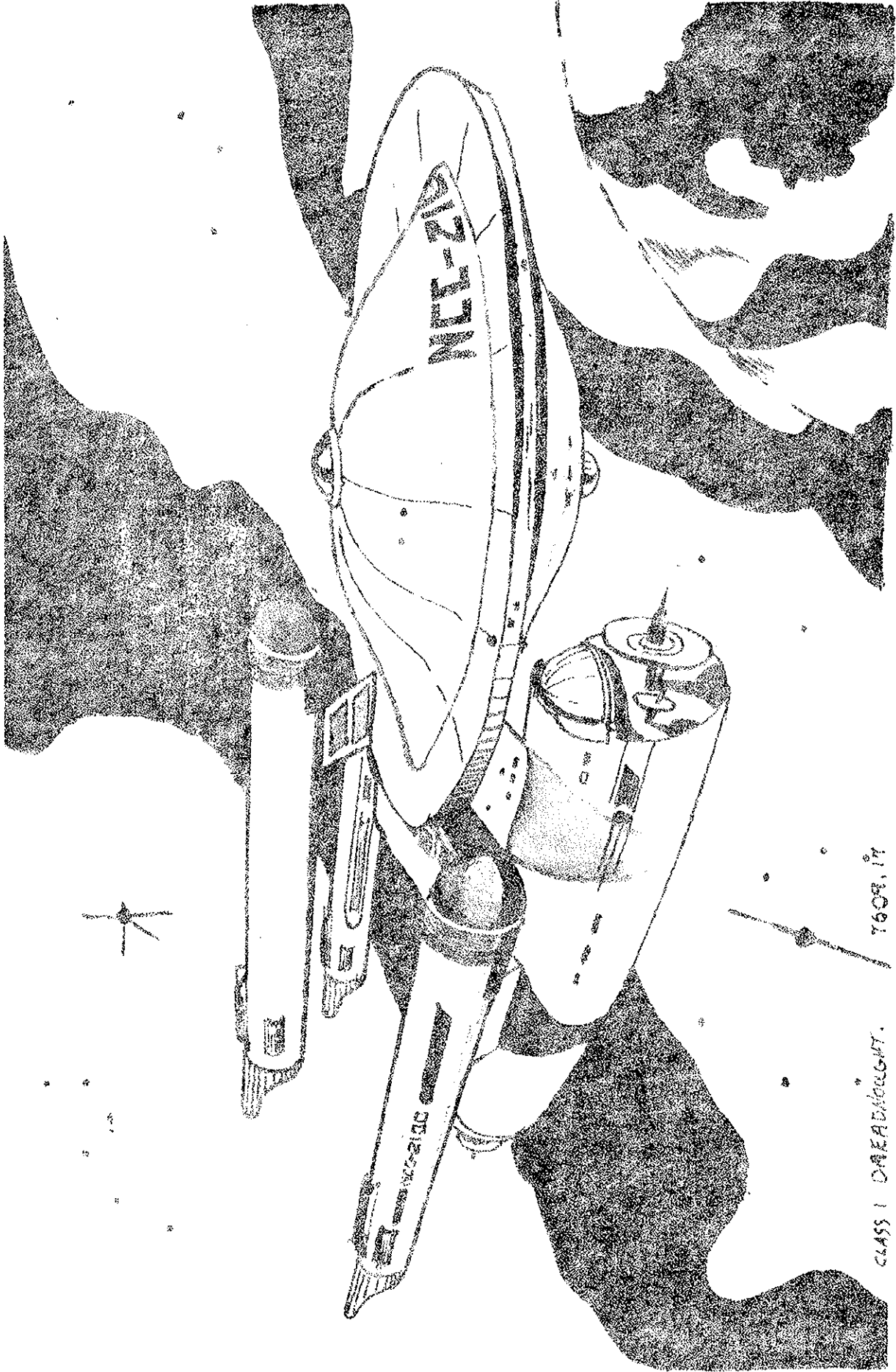
For next time there are stories by Simone Mason, Beth Hallam and Valerie Piacentini; and also one by Jenny Elson, who is coming back into active fandom after a two-year absence. For those of you who are fairly new members of STAG, Jenny brought the club into being and organised the first two British cons; she was forced to give up through ill-health after the 1975 con, and we're delighted that she's feeling well enough again to take an active part once more. LE 15 should be ready by March/April.

My thanks this time go to Valerie Piacentini for proof-reading - she came all the way through to Dundee from Saltcoats to do it, and for some reason she seems to think it was worth the trip... Also to Janet for doing the running off, and to the ~~Adopt~~ assistants who were ~~pressganged~~ persuaded to help with the collating.

Non-members of STAG can get information on new zines by sending a SAE or addressed envelope and IRC to  
Sheila Clark  
6 Craigmill Cottages  
Strathmartine  
by Dundee  
Scotland.

Enjoy yourselves!





NCC-21A

NCC-21A

CLASS I DREADNOUGHT.

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THE KATON II INCIDENT by Jean Barron

Captain James T. Kirk, dangerously close to losing his temper, glared at his First Officer. "Are you trying to tell me that all survey data on Katon II has vanished from the computer banks?"

The Vulcan inclined his dark head fractionally. "Affirmative, Captain, that is the information I am endeavouring to impart."

Kirk's eyes narrowed suspiciously but there was no trace of sarcasm in Spock's voice. "How do you account for it, Mr. Spock?"

"I cannot, Captain. Long range sensor probes were launched as we approached Katon II and all readings were fed directly into the main computer."

"I'm aware of that," snapped Kirk.

The First Officer continued without expression. "Further sensor probes were initiated immediately upon our entry into orbit around the planet three days ago. All indications were that no apparent life forms exist on Katon II."

"Apparent life forms?"

Spock hesitated imperceptibly before going smoothly on. "Secondary sweeps confirmed no energy sources and we commenced transportation of survey teams to the planet's surface."

Kirk slammed his fist down on the arm of his command chair. "But what happened to the information they obtained?"

"A malfunction on the computer intake system, perhaps?" suggested Spock.

Kirk turned a withering glance upon him but refrained from comment since the rest of the bridge personnel were beginning to show signs of interest in the conversation.

"I will make a further check, Captain."

"Do that, Mr. Spock," muttered Kirk, momentarily diverted by Uhura, his communications officer, who was looking very oddly at Spock. "Is there anything wrong, Lieutenant?"

Uhura jumped visibly. "No, sir."

"I'm very glad to hear it."

Chekov and Sulu exchanged sidelong glances before bending studiously over their respective consoles once more.

Presently, Spock raised his head from the library computer viewer. "Captain, I have re-checked all memory banks. The Katon II data is conspicuous by its absence."

"Very well, Mr. Spock," sighed Kirk, making an effort to conceal his irritation which he knew was due to hours of unrelieved duty and several sleepless nights. "You will re-programme sensor probes and personally ensure that all readings are fed to the computer - and double checked!"

\* \* \*

Some hours later, considerably refreshed after a lengthy nap, Kirk lay on his bunk pondering over the mysterious disappearance of the Katon survey information. He reached up and flipped the wall intercom switch. "Kirk to bridge. Mr. Spock?"

Sulu's voice answered apologetically. "Sulu here, Captain. Mr. Spock has been called to sickbay."

"Very well, Mr. Sulu. How's the new programme going?"

"Satisfactorily, Captain. Secondary scans now being implemented."

"Carry on, Mr. Sulu. Kirk out."

Still deep in thought, Kirk strode into sickbay and into the middle of a stormy scene between Spock and McCoy. Nurse Chapel was a white-faced bystander.

"It may have escaped your notice, Mr. Spock, but I am Chief Medical Officer aboard this ship and, as such, I have the authority to carry out medical examinations as and when I see fit. May I quote Starfleet Command Regulation .....

"I am well aware of the pertinent regulation, Dr. McCoy, but I do not propose submitting at this time." The Vulcan officer's composure was belied by the tenseness of his slim, hard-muscled body.

"YOU do not propose... ?"

Kirk stepped hastily between the combatants and placed a restraining hand on McCoy's shoulder. "Bones," he said soothingly, "if Spock isn't ready for a check-up right now, it can wait a day or two, can't it?"

McCoy opened his mouth to speak, then subsided with an angry gesture.

"Thank you, Captain, but I can assure you that your intervention is not required."

Spock's level tones brought Kirk spinning round to face him, his eyes flashing. "Are you telling me to mind my own business, Mr. Spock?"

His First Officer's embarrassment was so acute that Kirk had difficulty in hiding a smile. "Never mind, Spock. I know what you mean."

"I am grateful for your perception, Captain.

Kirk grinned and bowed slightly in acknowledgement.

"With your permission, Captain, I am due on the bridge at this time."

Kirk nodded and, as soon as the hatch closed behind the Vulcan, turned to McCoy. In the background, Christine Chapel was studying a report which appeared to be trembling slightly in her hands.

"What's going on here, Bones?"

"I can't put my finger on it, Jim, but I know there's something wrong with Spock. For one thing, he hasn't eaten for two days, and for another, he spends more time than ever alone in his own quarters."

The colour drained from Kirk's face. "Bones, it's not... ?"

The rest of the sentence hung in mid-air while McCoy stared at him in bewilderment. Then light dawned. "No! It's not that. He's got a few years to go before the Vulcan mating cycle grabs him again."

Kirk expelled a massive sigh of relief. "You had me worried, Bones."

"I am worried, Jim. Spock's not himself - and I can't help him because he won't let me. Uhura tells me he was downright rude to her this morning, all because she hit the wrong button and he got an earful of static."

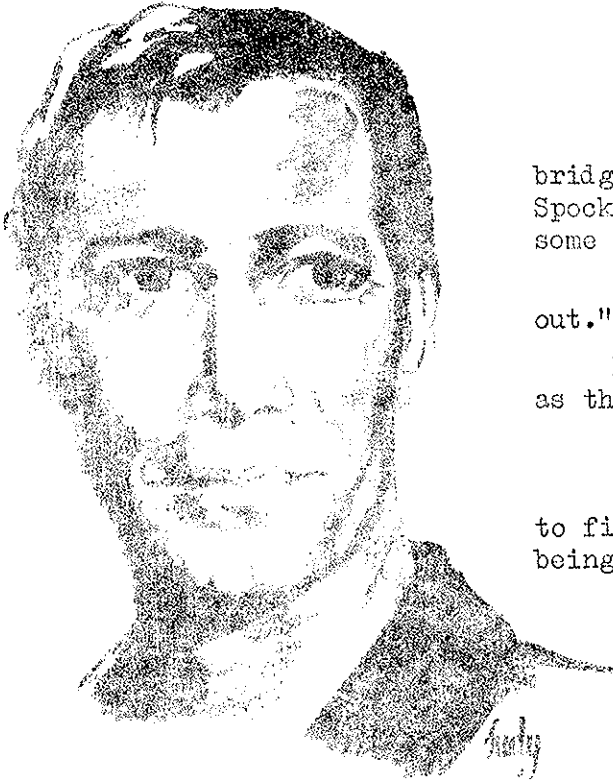
The Captain grinned. "What did he say?"

"She didn't care to repeat it. And he duplicated a request for a status report on the impulse engine maintenance programme. Scotty nearly had his head bitten off for daring to point it out."

"That's definitely not our cool, precise Science Officer. What could be getting at him, Bones?"

McCoy's eyes were bleak. "I wish I knew. Perhaps you can persuade him to report to sickbay. He'll take an order from you even if he rides roughshod over me."

The intercom bleeped suddenly.



"Sickbay - Kirk here."

"Captain! This is Lt. Uhura on the bridge. Sir, I've had a report that Mr. Spock has collapsed on Deck 9, apparently in some pain."

"We'll take care of it, Lieutenant. Kirk out."

McCoy had already snatched up his medikit as they both ran for the elevator.

\* \* \*

They emerged into the corridor on Deck 9 to find it almost deserted, the only occupant being a young ensign who was slumped semi-conscious against the wall. Under McCoy's ministrations, he came to rubbing his neck.

"Ensign! Where's Mr. Spock?"

At the sight of the Captain, the boy tried to struggle to his feet but

Kirk held him down with a hand on his shoulder. "Steady! Just tell me what happened."

"Well, sir, I was just coming off duty when I saw Mr. Spock step out of the elevator. We were about level when he suddenly doubled up and grabbed his head with both hands - and he started screaming. It was terrible, sir! I tried to help him but he threw me off, then he just went limp and collapsed. I thought he was unconscious but I'd just finished reporting to the bridge when he got me with that damned Vulcan neck grip... sorry, sir."

Kirk smiled faintly but his inward concern for Spock was like a heavy weight in his chest. "Forget it, Ensign. That was fair comment under the circumstances."

He stood up and spoke into the nearest intercom. "Security, this is the Captain. I want the ship searched for Commander Spock. Locate but do not attempt to apprehend. Kirk out."

Having dispatched McCoy back to sickbay with the still-dazed ensign, Kirk stepped back into the bridge elevator. He was somewhat startled when the frantic figure of his Chief Engineer hurtled through the doors at bridge level.

"Captain! I have to get back to engineering... Mr. Spock's gone mad down there! He's already injured three of my men and done God knows what damage to my engine room!"

\* \* \*

The scene that met their eyes in engineering was like the aftermath of a primitive battle. Bare cables lay hissing and sparking on the deck amongst broken instrument casings, red tell-tales flickered across every bulkhead and smoke poured from a dozen sources. Crimson with rage, Scotty tore himself free from Kirk's grip and darted out into the centre of the chaos.

"Where is he? Where's the madman that did this?"

"Scotty, look out!" Kirk's shouted warning spun Scotty around in his tracks to find Spock, a strange menacing figure, coming towards him. Rooted to the spot with shock, Scotty was totally unprepared for the attack but a third figure suddenly leaped between them and thrust Scotty to one side. Kirk's reactions were lightning-swift but even his tremendous skill in hand to hand combat was no match for Spock's maniacal strength. Without apparent effort, Spock struck two terrible blows which slammed the Captain into a bank

of instruments where he lay crumpled to the deck and lay still.

Stunned, no-one moved to prevent Spock's escape although a security man reached belatedly for his hand phaser and fired at the retreating figure before it rounded a corner.

Finding his efforts to revive Kirk unsuccessful, Scotty straightened up and crossed to the intercom. "Engineering to sickbay. Dr. McCoy, you'd better get down here. The Captain's hurt bad! Damage control, report to engineering. Security, renew your search for Mr. Spock. Scott out."

He had scarcely turned away to survey the damage once more when a cool detached voice spoke. "Bridge to engineering. Mr. Scott!"

Scotty stared speechlessly at the intercom grille.

"Mr. Scott?"

Forcing himself into action, Scotty flipped the switch. "Is that you, Mr. Spock?"

"Mr. Scott, you have seen fit to leave the bridge without advising me. Do you have an explanation?"

"Do I.... ?"

"I would be obliged if you would report to the bridge immediately, Mr. Scott. Spock out."

Scotty arrived on the bridge to find the Vulcan First Officer calmly studying the main screen from his position in the command chair. He did not turn his head as Scotty approached warily. "Well, Mr. Scott, do you have a report to make?"

"Mr. Spock, you have... er... apparently been unaware of... er... certain events... ?"

Spock swung round abruptly, one eyebrow lifting very slightly. "Are you quite well, Mr. Scott? You sound extremely indecisive."

"That could be because I'm worried about the Captain, sir."

The eyebrow rose a little higher. "The Captain? Where is he?"

"In the sickbay, sir." A picture of the devastation in engineering suddenly flashed in front of Scotty's eyes and he added angrily, "Where you put him!" The expression in Spock's eyes made him blanch.

"Explain!"

"Certainly, Mr. Spock." Scotty proceeded to describe the events of the past hour, at least as far as he knew them, but before he had finished, Spock was on his feet and heading for the elevator.

\* \* \*

Seconds later, Spock entered sickbay where McCoy, who had been putting the finishing touches to the strapping around Kirk's broad chest, quickly interposed himself between Spock and the bed. The Captain's eyes were closed. Spock raised his hands in a gesture of appeasement. "Is the Captain... recovering?"

"No thanks to you," growled McCoy. "What in hell's name got into you, Spock?"

Ignoring the question, Spock walked past him and stared down at Kirk. "What are his injuries?" he asked quietly.

McCoy glared at him across the bed. "He's suffering from a serious concussion and three cracked ribs - and if he hadn't got the constitution of an ox, he'd be dead right now!"

Neither man was aware of Nurse Chapel silently making notes as she



checked the Captain's vital signs on the panel above his head. Without warning, Kirk opened his eyes, surprising a look of concern on Spock's face before it was hidden beneath his usual impassive mask.

"Spock! Are you all right?"

"Yes, Captain."

Kirk's face twisted with pain as he struggled to rise, but, with the support of Spock's muscular arm, he was able to pull himself up into a sitting position on the edge of the bed, despite McCoy's protests. "Well, Spock, are you ready to tell me what's been going on here?"

"Quite ready, Captain, although you may find the explanation difficult to assimilate."

There was a sound suspiciously like a snort from McCoy's direction but Spock gave no sign of having heard it. "You know, of course, that I led the first survey team transported to the planet's surface. It was there - out of sight of the others - that I was... visited... by an alien force which attempted to take control of my mind. I was able to suppress this force with comparative ease but considered it circumspect to transport back to the ship immediately. The other members of the team were reluctant to curtail their survey but I overcame their objections."

"I'll just bet you did." McCoy's tone was dry but there was a look of incredulity in his intensely blue eyes.

"Why didn't you report the whole thing to me?" demanded Kirk. "Why keep it to yourself?"

"The force returned - somewhat stronger - but I felt I could control its effects until I was able to learn the purpose of the intelligence behind it. However, its strength continued to grow and I found it increasingly difficult to retain control. I realise now that, at times, my consciousness must have been taken over."

"Where is it now, Spock?" asked Kirk, trying hard to make sense of his First Officer's fantastic story.

"It has left me - but I have no doubt it will return and, this time, I fear I will be unable to offer any resistance at all." He paused. "I believe I have reached the limit of my endurance... the last attack was... uncomfortable."

Recalling the ensign's description of Spock's collapse, Kirk had to swallow hard to maintain his objectivity. Averting his eyes for a second, he encountered the parchment-white features of Christine Chapel who had abandoned all pretence of professional detachment and was gazing in anguish at the Vulcan officer. Fortunately, Spock was quite oblivious of her presence as he went stoically on with his story.

"I must have been responsible for deleting all Katon II data from the computer - I do not recall doing so but it almost certainly happened during a lapse of consciousness."

"Did you learn anything about it?" persisted Kirk.

"Negative, Captain, but its purpose is apparently not friendly. Each time I attempted a mind touch, extreme pressure was applied to my neural centres until I was obliged to cease my efforts in that direction." There was a faint note of apology in Spock's voice.

"Don't blame yourself, Spock. You did all you could."

"Agreed, Captain, but it is obvious that my efforts were singularly ineffectual." Almost as an afterthought, he said, "I must request that I be placed under arrest."

"For what reason?"

"I struck you, Captain."

"But you said yourself you weren't responsible for your own actions!"

"Nevertheless, it was my hand that dealt the blows."

Kirk winced. "Don't remind me, Spock. Bones, let me have my shirt." As he dressed with McCoy's assistance, he stared thoughtfully at Spock. "Have you drawn any conclusions at all about this alien? Forget facts for the moment."

Spock looked pained at this order. "I have made certain... assumptions, Captain. I believe the intelligence manipulating this force is elsewhere - perhaps beneath the planet's surface. I am led to this conclusion by its behavioural patterns - it withdraws at intervals and, when it returns, it is invariably stronger as though my powers of resistance were being gauged and the force strengthened accordingly. Captain, I must be placed under restraint before it returns!"

"But if it returns and can't force you to do what it wants, it could kill you trying!" exploded McCoy.

"Perhaps, Doctor, but I am not at all convinced that its prime objective is to destroy - although it has disabled the warp engine drive..." Spock faltered and stopped, his eyebrows raised in surprise at his own words.

"It's done what? Why hasn't Scotty reported it? And why haven't you told me before now?"

"I did not know until this moment, Captain. The information appears to have filtered from my subconscious."

The intercom bleeped as if on cue. "Bridge to sickbay. Mr. Scott here."

"Kirk here. What is it, Scotty?"

"Captain! You're all right!" Scotty's obvious agitation lessened considerably. "Captain, we have a malfunction on the warp engines. It hasn't showed up until now because of the damage to the engineering computer, but it's bad."

"Give the con to Sulu, Scotty, and get down to engineering. Let me have a full report. Kirk out."

As he turned back to Spock and McCoy, Kirk's stern expression changed abruptly to one of astonishment as he stared over their heads and they whirled round to see what was already holding Christine Chapel spellbound.

A shimmering column of light, gently pulsating and filling the room with a crimson glow, hovered in front of them and, even as they watched, began to extend glittering tentacles toward Spock who unconsciously braced himself. But the tentacles never reached him. A slim, blonde figure ran forward and froze as the pillar of light touched her and was instantly absorbed into her body. Without hesitation, Spock drew his phaser and fired at point blank range.

"Spock!" McCoy yelled in shocked disbelief as his assistant collapsed into his arms.

Spock was unperturbed. "I took a calculated risk, Doctor. The phaser was on stun."

McCoy lifted Christine and placed her carefully on a couch. In a voice shaking with barely concealed fury, he said, "Perhaps you'd care to explain, Mr. Spock. I'm sure we'd both like to know why you risked killing my chief assistant."

"Certainly, Doctor. Before doing so, however, I would suggest you place Nurse Chapel under restraint."

Forestalling McCoy's outraged reply, Kirk said firmly, "Do as he says, Bones. Spock knows more about this 'thing' than either of us."

"I would also recommend a strong sedative," Spock added, as soon as the straps had been securely fastened.

"Anything else?" grumbled McCoy, but he reached for a hypo and began the necessary preparation.

"Well, Spock?"

"I omitted to tell you, Captain, that on leaving engineering, I was struck by a phaser blast and, although the alien had sufficient strength to prevent my succumbing, it was subsequently obliged to retreat. That is when I found myself on the bridge. I had hoped that a second phaser blast would release Nurse Chapel but the Katonian intelligence seems to have compensated for the phaser's effects. If Nurse Chapel is to survive this invasion - which she has unaccountably drawn upon herself - she must be kept sedated until the alien is forced to seek another host."

Kirk's misgivings over Spock's extraordinary behaviour were quickly overcome. "Spock, can you do anything in the way of a mind meld to get through to this intelligence?"

Spock hesitated. "I am reluctant to do so, Captain, since I cannot obtain Miss Chapel's consent. However, under the circumstances, I shall put aside ethics. What I cannot do is guarantee that the results will not be disastrous for Miss Chapel. My own experience of this force has been anything but pleasant. Do you wish me to make the attempt?"

"I believe we have no choice, Spock."

The intercom signal interrupted once more. "Engineering to sickbay."

"Kirk here. Go ahead, Scotty."

"Captain, we've got serious problems down here. There's every indication of a terrific build-up of power in the warp engine sector. It's threatening to overload the engineering circuits - and there isn't a thing I can do about it!"

"Why not?"

"Because there's a dirty great force field round the whole sector and nothing can get through it!"

"How long have we got?"

"I calculate 30 minutes at the outside, Captain."

"Do what you can, Scotty. We may have the answer here. Kirk out."

Outwardly calm but seething inside, Kirk turned to Spock, who seemed to be going into a light trance. "Carry on, Spock. It looks like you're our only hope."

Spock moved forward and leaned over Christine, a proximity that would have disturbed her considerably had she been conscious. As it was, she did not stir as he placed his fingertips on either side of her head and closed his eyes. Immediately, his face paled, beads of perspiration broke out on his forehead and his hands trembled with the effort of maintaining the tenuous contact.

McCoy took an involuntary step forward but Kirk, grim-faced, held him back. Slowly, Spock gained control of the situation and began to speak in a harsh whisper. "Intruders... bringing death... must be driven... from this place." After a long pause, Spock's voice assumed its normal tones. "Captain, it would appear that we have trespassed in an area of space which was allocated many centuries ago solely to the inhabitants of Katon II."

"But there are no inhabitants!"

"None visible to our sensor probes, Captain." Spock became silent and appeared to be listening with head bent, his lean jaw almost brushing the marble smooth skin of the woman lying acquiescent beneath his touch. He spoke again. "They are an ancient race with the ability to shield themselves from even the most advanced technological instruments. They developed this ability when they became aware that their race had no natural immunity from micro-organisms to be found in all other parts of this galaxy. Our continued presence here will mean their extinction."

Kirk reacted angrily. "But they're going to kill us! Don't they know that? Tell them we had no idea how vulnerable they are - how could we when we didn't even know they were there? Explain that we need to get into the warp engine section if we are to leave at all. The Federation will respect their quarantine - and protect them."

"They do not mean to harm us, Captain. The energy force, a remarkable demonstration of the power of their combined thought waves, was an attempt to frighten us off. They had hoped to avoid making themselves known but had not expected such a violent resistance. However, it would appear that they are prepared to accept your guarantees. I have been instructed in the correct method of disengaging the forcefield."

Kirk moved to the intercom as Spock prepared to break the mind meld. "Wait, Captain, there is something else coming through!"

Under the curious eyes of his colleagues, Spock hesitated, then his eyes snapped open, one eyebrow shot up alarmingly and he snatched his hands away from Christine's face.

"What is it, Spock?"

Recovering his Vulcan composure, Spock met Kirk's enquiring look with a blank stare. "Nothing at all, Captain. I was mistaken. Now, if you will excuse me, gentlemen, I must report to engineering." He left abruptly.

Kirk moved to follow but his face suddenly became ashen and he grabbed McCoy's shoulder as the room began to sway sickeningly.

"Jim, you're in no condition to go charging about the ship. In case you don't know it, you're suffering from concussion!"

"I know it, Bones, believe me I know it."

"Then lie down and try to behave like a patient!" Having watched the Captain follow his orders, McCoy returned to Christine and removed the restraints before checking her vital signs, frowning when he found them strangely lethargic.

An eternity passed before Spock's vastly reassuring voice came over the intercom. "Captain, the forcefield has been removed. Mr. Scott has investigated and corrected the malfunction on the warp engine circuits. What are your orders?"

Flat on his back, Kirk was obliged to resort to his personal communicator. "Prepare to leave orbit, Mr. Spock - warp factor three." As he spoke, he was aware of a glow emanating from Christine's unconscious form. Assured of the Enterprise's imminent departure, the inhabitants of Katon II were recalling their servant, the crimson cloud growing in volume until it became once more a tall column which vanished silently through the bulkhead to return to its source.

McCoy watched it depart, his expression one of pleasure and considerable relief. "Now perhaps we can get back to normal."

The crisis past, Kirk's remaining strength began to drain away and he had to struggle to keep awake, but he refused to allow McCoy to administer a sedative.

"No, I'll wait till Spock gets back. There may be something that needs my attention."

McCoy shrugged helplessly, knowing it was useless to argue. Only Spock's personal reassurance would ease the lingering doubts in the Captain's mind. "All right, Jim, I'll try to get him off the bridge but I can't see him leaving his precious computer."

An ice-cool voice corrected him politely. "You overestimate my affinity for machines, Doctor."

"My apologies, Mr. Spock. Who's on the bridge?"

"Mr. Scott has the con. Since he is suffering from a temporary lack of confidence in my abilities, I have allowed him to take charge." Spock stared reprovingly at Kirk and McCoy who were making no attempt to hide broad grins. His gaze slid across to Christine's still features, then moved quickly away but not before McCoy's sharp eyes had noted his concern.

"She'll be all right, Spock."

"I do not doubt that, Doctor," he replied stiffly. "I merely question the wisdom of allowing her to remain unconscious for this length of time."

Kirk flinched, waiting for the explosion, but McCoy walked calmly over to the door of his laboratory. "If you're so worried, Spock, you stay and watch her - and Jim too. Christine should be coming to quite naturally in an hour or so. When she does, you can call me. In the meantime, I've got some research to catch up on." With this, he switched off the main lighting system, leaving the sickbay only faintly illuminated, and retired to his workbench.

Spock watched him go and turned back to the two patients left so arbitrarily in his care.

"Is everything back to normal, Spock?" asked Kirk sleepily, his eyes already closing.

"There is no further cause for concern, Captain."

Kirk sighed deeply, then grunted in pain as his cracked ribs protested. He was vaguely aware of fingers lightly touching his face; soon his ribs no longer ached and a feeling of lassitude began to wash over him. As sleep rose to engulf him, a hand rested fleetingly on his shoulder and a voice said softly, "Goodnight, Jim."

During the next hour, Spock paced back and forth with uncharacteristic restlessness, listening to Kirk's even breathing and increasingly aware of a change in Christine's respiration. Presently, she spoke. "Dr. McCoy?"

He stopped by her bed. "Spock. I will call the doctor."

"No - I'm all right. Tell me what happened, please."

At first, she listened in silence to his matter-of-fact explanation, relieved that he found it unnecessary to comment on her own actions, but at the first mention of a mind meld, she reacted at once.

"You did what?"

Sensitive to her intense embarrassment, Spock kept his voice carefully neutral. "I wished to tell you myself before the Captain or Dr. McCoy mentioned it to you. It was imperative that we contacted the Katonians and I regret that a mind meld was the only answer. I regret that I was obliged to proceed without your co-operation."

"You read my mind?" said Christine slowly, trying to absorb the enormity of the thought.

"My intention was to touch only the minds of the Katonians through the force occupying your body and I therefore made the probe as shallow as possible. I did not wish to intrude upon your own thoughts."

"But it happened anyway, is that it?" She spoke sharply but her eyes showed her distress.

"Nothing has changed, Christine," he said gently. "You have spoken to me before of your... feelings. It was inevitable that the strength of your thoughts in this area should become known to me when my mind touched yours."

"The Captain?... Dr. McCoy?"

"Know nothing. Your thoughts are locked in my mind. Should you find this distasteful, I can - if you wish - help you forget."

Moved by his obvious concern, Christine smiled and shook her head. "I can bear the knowledge, Mr. Spock, but I know how you feel about Human emotions. It's a pity there isn't someone to help you forget."

"I do not believe your thoughts will cause me any undue discomfort. They will, in fact, be a welcome change from many emotions I have encountered since leaving Vulcan."

"Thank you, Mr. Spock."

Spock nodded. "Now, I must call Dr. McCoy before I am accused of attempting to override his orders."

With a final searching look which appeared to satisfy him, he turned and crossed to the laboratory door.

\*\*\*\*\*

SHE MORE THAN ANY OTHER by Gillian Catchpole

Outside the door a woman stands,  
A woman with power,  
More than any other.  
Only she can so perfectly breach the logic  
And appeal to the emotions hidden,  
That she more than any knows,  
Are guarded deep within.

From tight-lipped, hurting child,  
Refusing comfort,  
So many times she'd had to turn,  
To hide the tears  
She could not let him see.  
To a man struggling with choices  
That burned her heart,  
She had to come,  
To ask that he should choose and think again,  
That he should choose Sarek  
And let someone else command.

\*\*\*\*\*

ALL I NEED TO KNOW by Gillian Catchpole

When feelings are withheld from view,  
How can we know another's heart?  
A flicker in the eyes,  
An eyebrow raised,  
A hand held out, protecting those who fall,  
Tells me all I need to know.

\*\*\*\*\*

Space traveller: How long will the next spaceship be?  
Vulcan spaceport controller: About two hundred foot, sir.

\*\*\*\*\*

THE GREATEST GIFT by Valerie Piacentini

It has been said that the greatest gift a man can show is to give his life for his friends. That is not so - there is a greater gift. I know; once, it was given to me.

\* \* \*

It was the President's reception on Cornel V. There were Ambassadors from a dozen planets, Cornelian dignitaries, elegant men, beautiful women. Jim and I represented Starfleet - Spock, engrossed as usual in some research, had elected to remain on the Enterprise.

I was talking to the wife of the Terran Ambassador when the bomb was thrown. Why? I never knew. Rebels, freedom-fighters, terrorists - take your pick. Whatever the motive, the result was horrifying.

Over the bodies of the dead and dying I somehow scrambled towards the yellow-clad figure; Jim had been nearer the blast than I - could he still be alive? I could hear the rescue parties already at work, but they would take some time yet to reach him; fire had taken hold, and trapped by a fallen beam he lay perilously close to the flames. Even as I reached him his clothes caught alight, and I had to smother the flames with my bare hands before I could raise the beam and move him clear.

With Jim in my arms I staggered towards the door; shocked faces turned to me, and someone gently took him from me. He was alive - I registered that fact as for the first time I became aware of the pain from my badly-burned hands. I remember trying to say something about the Enterprise just as a hypo hissed against my shoulder, and oblivion claimed me.

\* \* \*

I recovered consciousness in my quarters on board the Enterprise; I was alone. It was only when I tried to sit up in bed that I realised that my hands were heavily bandaged, and I remembered what had happened. Jim! I must get to him - he would need me. With some difficulty I got to my feet; after a few moments the dizziness passed, and I began to dress, my movements unusually clumsy. As I pulled on my boots Nurse Chapel came in; she would have protested but my glare silenced her.

"How is the Captain?" I enquired.

She looked away. "He's in sickbay, sir. You should be resting; Dr. M'Benga said..."

"I'm the Chief Medical Officer on this ship, not M'Benga," I growled, brushing past her; she followed as I headed for sickbay.

M'Benga was leaning over Jim; Spock stood at his shoulder, as he had so often stood at mine. From my vantage point I could see his face clearly - so that was how he looked at such times; usually I was too occupied to notice. As he became aware of my presence, the cold Vulcan mask closed again over his face.

M'Benga straightened, and I saw the readings over the bed.

"Your report, Doctor?" I asked crisply. Like Nurse Chapel, he knew better than to argue, and handed me his notes. It was... very bad. The burns were superficial, but several bomb splinters had penetrated Jim's body. One lay very close to his heart - if it moved even a fraction, and it easily could, it would kill him.

"Prepare for immediate surgery," I ordered.

M'Benga shook his head. "I can't risk it, Dr. McCoy; I don't have the experience. I could kill him."

I glanced at Spock. "How long to the nearest Starbase?"

"Four days." His eyes didn't move from Jim's face.

Four days! To wait four hours would be a risk. "We've got to try," I told M'Benga. "He doesn't have much time - you'll have to operate. I'll supervise, guide you as best I can."

He nodded slightly. "If you think it essential, Doctor, but the chance of success is slight."

"A slight chance is better than no chance at all. I'll be in my office - call me when you're ready."

\* \* \*

Seated at my desk, I stared down at my useless hands, knowing with bitterness that I had the skill to save my friend's life, yet could not do so. The door to my office opened and closed. Gradually I became aware of someone standing patiently, waiting; I raised my head to meet Spock's dark eyes.

"I must speak with you, Doctor."

I motioned him to a chair. "Well?"

"I must... make a decision; there are... several questions I must ask."

"Go on."

"Without an operation, the Captain will die?"

"Yes, and soon. The splinter could move at any time."

"Dr. M'Benga has little chance of success?"

I sighed wearily; he always had to have things explained in precise detail. Then I relented - after all, he had allowed Jim to come closer to understanding him than anyone else, and if he thought of him as a friend, he would naturally be concerned.

"That's true," I answered. "He has insufficient experience, and the surgery involved is extremely delicate. It's not much of a choice, Spock; the operation will probably kill him, but he'll certainly die without it."

"You could perform the operation successfully?"

"I believe so - I've done similar before. He'd have a better chance, certainly... but I can't operate like this."

"I see."

He sat in silence for what seemed like a long time, then raised his head and met my eyes steadily. "Suppose... " Uncharacteristically, he hesitated, then went on, "Suppose it were possible for you to operate?"

"Don't be a fool, Spock!" I said sharply. "You must know I'd give... "

"There is a way," he said slowly, "if you can trust me completely."

"How do you mean?"

"There is a form of the mind meld, a total fusion of personalities. I can suppress my own mind, and allow you to control my body. With your skill directing my hands, you can operate on the Captain. You may find the closeness of the fusion... disturbing, but it will work."

I stared at him in disbelief. Jim and Spock had often linked in the past, but I knew the Vulcan disliked doing so with anyone else; and not even with Jim had he attempted to do as he now proposed, allowing me total control.

"Do you trust me so much?" I asked huskily.

The dark eyes held mine unswervingly. "I do," he said quietly. "We have said... many things in the past, Doctor... but you must know... not even for Jim's sake could I allow this link to anyone else."



I could not speak, only reached out to him; he took my hand gently.

"There is no time to waste," he reminded me.

"What must I do?"

"I will establish the initial link first. Lie down on the couch, please."

I obeyed, and he sat beside me, his fingers touching my face. Despite my utter confidence in him, for a moment an instinctive fear overwhelmed me, and I drew back. He waited patiently.

"I'm sorry," I whispered.

"I understand. Relax, and trust me... trust me..."

This time I remained unmoving as his thoughts touched my mind; I would never have Jim's easy familiarity with the meld, but I knew I could trust Spock's integrity completely. As the link formed and strengthened, I was aware only of his eyes, holding mine so that I could not look away. His thought reached me clearly.

"The link is formed, Doctor; are you prepared for the fusion?"

"Yes. What happens now?"

"I must submerge my personality, and allow you to take over. I would suggest that you give yourself a little time to become used to controlling my body before you begin the operation - you will find that my reactions are faster than yours, and it may confuse you at first. When you have finished, return here; you will have to initiate the separation, as I will be unable to. Reach for the mind link as you have seen me do, and call me with all your concentration. Do not be afraid, Doctor. Trust me, and all will be well."

"I do trust you, Spock. I'm... ready now."

His mind moved again, and darkness descended on me; when sight returned, I was looking down at my own body, lying on the couch as though asleep.

It was a... very strange sensation. My eyesight seemed much sharper than normal, and there was a subtle... difference in my perception of colour. I stood up rather shakily, and moved around the room. As the minutes passed, I grew more comfortable in this unfamiliar body; co-ordination improved, and I became more accustomed to my heightened senses. I remember - curiously - thinking how cold it seemed, and realising that this was how the normal temperature of the ship must feel to Spock.

When I was sure of my control I entered sickbay, where M'Benga and Nurse Chapel were preparing for surgery; they stared at me in surprise.

"Mr. Spock!" exclaimed M'Benga. "I think you'd better wait outside, sir."



"It's not Spock," I told them, conscious of a momentary amusement at their puzzled expressions. "It's McCoy. I've linked with Mr. Spock - I'll operate on the Captain myself. Finish the preparations, please - we have no time to waste."

I passed the next few minutes examining the instruments I intended to use; to my relief, my - Spock's - hands manipulated the delicate equipment with the deftness I had acquired through long familiarity.

When all was ready I approached the bed. Now I must forget that the man who lay there was my friend; for the next few hours he could only be an anonymous patient whose life depended on my skill - to think of him as Jim would only impair my concentration. At the same time I must try to forget that I stood within an alien body; I must have confidence in myself, in my abilities - yet surely no surgeon had ever operated under such strange circumstances. I drew a deep breath, and signalled to M'Benga.

"Ready, Doctor."

\* \* \*

Some remote corner of my mind registered the passing of time as I worked steadily on. It was incredibly delicate surgery I must perform - the splinter lay very close to the main artery, and there was no room for error. Yet I must also work swiftly - Jim weakened rapidly under the strain of the long hours of surgery; indeed, at one point his heart stopped beating, but life-support sustained him until I could continue. Spock's physical strength kept me on my feet, with none of the fatigue I would normally have expected, and his keen sight and quick reflexes were invaluable. The mental strain was intense, however; I could not quite forget the curious circumstances under which I worked.

At last I closed the incision in Jim's chest, and stepped back; all that my skill could do for him had been done. Now everything depended on his own will to live. I could safely leave him to M'Benga now, and went to clean up, becoming aware of a numbing exhaustion that always seems to overtake me at such times - perhaps it's only the relaxation of tension.

It was while I was washing that I caught sight of myself in the mirror, and paused to peer closely at my reflection. Staring into the dark eyes that looked back at me, I wondered then how it must be to wear this face, to walk among Humans so clearly marked as an alien. How did he meet so calmly the sidelong glances, the whispered comments that were meant to be overheard? I had teased him often in the past, but we both knew how little substance there was in my barbed comments - others, I knew, judged him more harshly.

I felt a sudden surge of anger on Spock's behalf. To save Jim he had been willing to violate his deepest instincts, reveal his carefully hidden heart. My presence in his mind must have hurt him unspeakably, yet he had been prepared to suffer even this for his friend's sake. He had courage - I had always known that; but I had dared to call him cold, unfeeling - now I knew the extent of the injustice I had done him. Few men, even if they possessed his abilities, would have had the grace, the courage, to make such a sacrifice.

Only then did I remember that, linked as we were, he would be able to sense my thoughts and emotions. Once I would have been embarrassed, now I was only grateful that he would be aware of the change in my attitude.

Deep within my mind I felt him move in warning - it was time to break the link. So total a meld, if sustained too long, could be dangerous to both of us. Responding to that warning, I returned to my office, sitting, as he had done, on the couch. As he had said, Spock's personality was so deeply submerged in mine that I must open the way for his return. Awkwardly, I copied the gesture I had so often seen him make, placing my hands on the sleeping face; I strove to make my mind a blank, then called to him with all the

mental force I could summon. Gradually, I became more aware of his presence - he was responding, taking control. Then, for one brief moment, our minds touched, totally open to each other, and I saw Spock as he was, his dreams, hopes, fears, all clearly revealed to me; and I knew that he saw my mind and heart with the same clarity.

We would never speak of it; nor, I think, would either of us have wished to. I am, in my own way, almost as reticent as Spock - for many reasons, I often hesitate to display my true feelings openly - and he, of course, rarely drops that Vulcan mask; but in that moment, we both experienced a true understanding of ourselves and each other.

Not even with Jim could we share that discovery, but he would know that our relationship had changed - he was so sensitive to Spock's moods that it could not be otherwise - and it would please him.

Slowly my eyes opened, and I looked up into dark Vulcan eyes that would never again seem alien to me. There was anxiety in the gaze that held mine, and I smiled reassuringly, seeing in response the familiar raised eyebrow.

"Are you all right, Doctor?"

"Yes - just let me get my breath. All this dashing about from one body to another - it's worse than the transporter!" I complained, knowing that I must not refer, even obliquely, to what had just passed between us, and taking refuge in my usual sarcasm. As I expected, his other eyebrow rose as I went on. "Well, I suppose I'd better go and see what sort of job you've done on Jim."

He seized the opportunity I had given him, and replied in his usual cool tones, "The hands may have been mine, Doctor, but the skill - or lack of it - was yours."

I grunted, and levered myself to my feet; he paced soundlessly behind me as I returned to sickbay. M'Benga straightened from the bed as we entered.

"The Captain should come round soon, sir; the readings appear to be satisfactory." He left at my nod of dismissal, and Spock moved to take his place at Jim's side. How often in the past we had shared such a vigil, but never with such a complete understanding as now. As the minutes passed, and Jim did not awake, I began to grow concerned.

Glancing up, I caught Spock's gaze again; the dark eyes were glowing with confidence and trust. Heartened, I turned back to Jim, just as his eyes flickered and opened. He looked at me steadily for a moment, half-smiling, then his eyes turned to Spock, knowing that the Vulcan would be there. They exchanged a long, silent gaze, and for the first time I did not feel shut out by their complete acceptance of each other, for now I understood; then he sighed wearily, and relaxed against the pillows.

When I moved to run the scanner over him, he focused on my bandaged hands, and a frown of concern creased his forehead. "Bones, you're hurt! What happened?"

"Oh, it's nothing much - just a few burns."

"Then how... I suppose M'Benga operated on me?"

"No, I did - but I had some help."

He glanced from me to Spock, sensing, as I knew he would, that something important had happened between us.

"Spock?" he questioned.

"Yes, Captain. Dr. McCoy and I used a meld to achieve total fusion of our minds. I am... pleased... that we succeeded."

"Right!" I said firmly. "That's enough chatter for now. Jim, you've

just undergone major surgery - you need rest. And you, Spock. You've just performed a long and taxing operation - or rather, your body has; fatigue is going to catch up with you soon. You might as well spend the night here, where I can keep an eye on you - but no talking."

For once, he obeyed me meekly; soon they were both asleep. Leaving instructions with M'Benga, I returned to my quarters, yielding at last to my own weariness.

The last few hours had taught me much, and I felt... humbled. Spock had given me the greatest gift I could ever have imagined. It is comparatively easy to give a life for a friend if one cares enough; he had given me much more - he had trusted me enough to show me his heart. Pride, which had been our strongest shield, our greatest curse, had finally been overcome, and I had gained a friend, a friend whose worth, I suspected, I had only just begun to learn.

In that moment, the last lingering regrets for the life I had once known vanished for ever. I had come home.

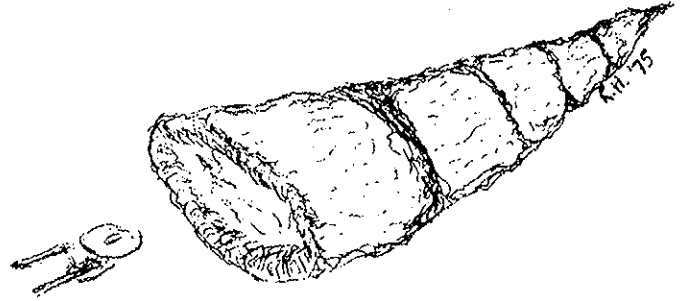
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I STILL THINK OF YOU, LEILA by Janet Hall

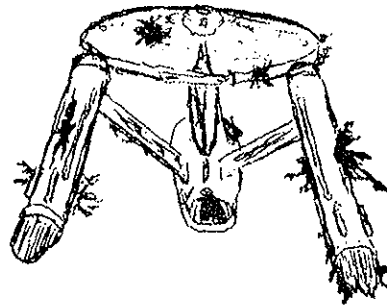
I still think of you.  
 Although many lonely days,  
 Many long and silent nights  
 Have since elapsed  
 Between that time  
 When I held you  
 And you held me,  
 And you were mine,  
 And empty, aching now.  
 I still remember  
 Your laughter, your caress,  
 Your kisses and your smile;  
 All are as fresh as  
 Yesterday in my mind.  
 My life is interspersed  
 With transitory others,  
 Never you.  
 Where are you?  
 No doubt you are happy in  
 The arms of someone else;  
 I hope you are.  
 I had my chance  
 And failed. I could never  
 Begrudge you someone else.  
 I only know  
 What my self-made purgatory  
 Will not permit me to forget:  
 That once I had you,  
 Once I held you,  
 In a transitory, logic-free interlude in my life,  
 When I was momentarily free,  
 Which passed all too quickly;  
 And I lost you for ever.  
 But I still think of you  
 Leila.  
 I can make others forget,  
 But my own memories linger for ever.  
 I still think of you, Leila.  
 Do you sometimes think of me?

\*\*\*\*\*

# DECKER'S LAST LAMENT



It seems unfair that fate's decree  
An ancient race, long dead, should be  
Allowed to end my span of years,  
Before I have shed all the tears  
I have to shed.



Life is a 'vale of tears', they say.  
And strange it is, that I obey,  
A law that says I shall survive  
Until the day that fate deprive  
me of that life and tears.

That day, I know, comes now.  
And I must kneel and bow  
Before an alien tool of death,  
Fight 'til my final breath  
and life and tears are done.

Andy Hiron

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I THINK EVERYBODY  
SHOULD HAVE SOMEONE TO  
ADMIRE....



SOMEONE TO LOOK UP TO.  
SOMEONE ON WHOM TO MODEL  
ONESSELF....

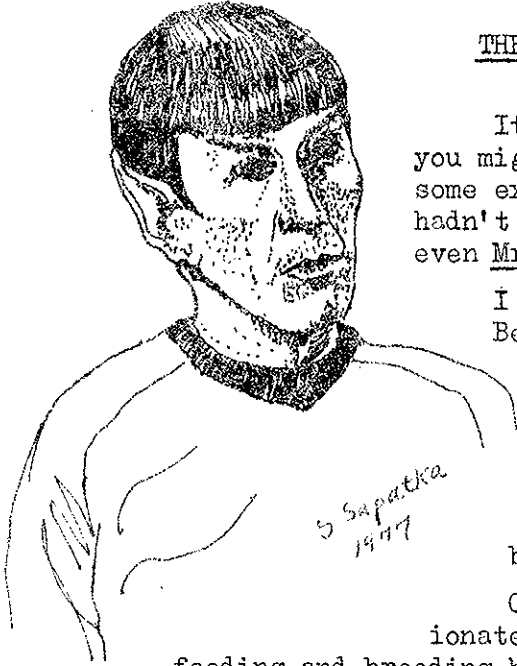


THEN WHO DO YOU LOOK  
UP TO?



LOOK, CHUM. TRIBBLES BEING THE  
SIZE THEY ARE, WE LOOK UP  
TO EVERYBODY



THE LAST TROUBADOUR by Margaret Draper

It was all Sulu's fault, really. On the other hand, you might say (though not in his hearing) that Spock to some extent brought it on himself. But then again, if it hadn't been for Admiral Harper in the first place - or even Mrs. Harper...

I see I'm going to have to start from the beginning. Better find yourself a chair, and suspend that disbelief for a while.

Sitting comfortably? Right...

Canis pseudocornis was its technical name; Harper's Plofflehound was perhaps the most complimentary of the soubriquets by which it was better known to the crew of the Enterprise.

Canes Pseudo... Plofflehouounds are loyal, affectionate, gentle, intelligent, clean, moderate in their feeding and breeding habits. They are herbivores from Alfa 3, small, somewhat dog-like in appearance - if you ignore that curious horny protruberance on the head for which no obvious purpose has been found.

They are slightly delicate.

They are rather rare.

A trifle temperamental, perhaps, but who would want to upset them?

They make excellent pets.

At least, that's what Mrs. Harper thought.

So did the Admiral, of course.

"It's a present for my wife, Captain. She breeds them, you know," said Admiral Harper, beaming all over his broad, beefy face. "I'm sure you'll take great care of the little fellow. His name's - er - Ploffles."

Ploffles had long, silky golden curls.

Ploffles had dark, melting eyes, and he sat at the Admiral's feet, his head cocked on one side.

Captain Kirk repressed sharp pangs of nausea, and put on his best 'humour the Admiral' expression. "Charming. It'll be a pleasure to have him aboard. Mr. Spock here will see he's properly looked after, won't you, Spock?" He smiled diplomatically.

Spock nodded impassively.

\* \* \*

McCoy swore comprehensively.

Sulu, in the next room inspecting the new nurse inspecting his cut finger, was greatly impressed.

"Er - what's up, Doc?" he enquired. Muffled objurgations about Vulcans and veterinary surgeons were his only answer. Curious, he slipped down from his perch on the corner of a medical couch and strolled to the doorway, followed by a rapidly unrolling bandage and Nurse Popper uttering shrill little cries of protest.

McCoy, red-faced and speechless with fury, was bending over what seemed to be a golden-haired Yorkshire terrier, tethered securely to the leg of his desk. Fastened round the animal's neck was a printed label reading 'Life Sciences'. Underneath that, someone had written, 'For the personal attention of Dr. McCoy'.

Vulcan script is quite unmistakable.

"That... that... if he thinks he... "

"Isn't it sweet?" Nurse Popper clasped her hands together with delight and made cooing sounds. "Aren't you the booful... ?"

McCoy turned a deeper shade of puce. Sulu grinned mischievously. "He's real cute," he agreed, watching the Doctor struggling for control.

"Mr. Sulu," he replied in a dangerously quiet voice. "Take that - creature, take Flopsy Bunny here, take them both and clear out of my office! And if you can manage to dispose of either of them, or preferably both, through some convenient airlock, I shall be forever in your debt."

"But, Doctor... "

"GET OUT!!!!"

Man, girl and plofflehound fled before the storm.

"And stay out!" roared the Doctor, hurling the bandage after them. Muttering savagely to himself, he swabbed at the little pool that had formed under the corner of his desk.

\* \* \*

So it was that Sulu, with the plofflehound in tow, became a familiar sight trotting up and down the corridors of the Enterprise between watches. The humorous remarks had almost died away, and Sulu was more or less resigned to the situation, when the catastrophe occurred.

He'd had a tough day dodging Klingons and beating off the amorous advances of purple princesses - anyway, he'd had a tiring day, and his quarters seemed more than usually humdrum, not to mention rather full of hot plofflehound, so it seemed an ideal occasion for an evening out.

He whistled up the mutt, who responded with his usual enthusiastic "Chigger chigger chigger," and clipped on the lead, and wandered off towards rec. room 4, where he'd heard there was to be an entertainment that evening.

The room was already crowded when he got there, but Chekov in the front row gave him a good-natured wave and squeezed up closer to Nurse Popper - Nurse Popper? - to let him and Ploffles in.

He nodded his thanks and seated himself with the hound on his lap, stretching his legs in the first moment of relaxation he'd had all day.

The 'entertainment' began with the usual amateurish comedy turns, a song or two, monologues, dancing, and a display of more or less successful card tricks... Sulu dozed, and Ploffles dozed too, lifting his head from time to time to snort at a more than usually inept item. Only the songs revived his flagging attention - Sulu had noticed before that he seemed to appreciate music, opera in particular, and would 'chigger' softly to himself when the background stereo was playing.

Towards the end of the first half of the concert Sulu suddenly yawned and sat up again. The highlight of the evening, for him, was to be the next item; a solo by Uhura, accompanied by Spock on the Vulcan lyre.

Ploffles, disturbed by Sulu's movement, sat up too.

Uhura, swathed in gold, came on with Spock in tow. The Vulcan settled himself on a stool, Uhura advanced a step or two, and the lights dimmed gently behind them both, softening to a deep, misty blue. The material of her dress seemed to glimmer with a light of its own as she stood motionless before them all, her eyes remote.

A stillness fell on the crowd, and in the twilit hush Sulu became aware for the first time of the tinkle of drops from the tiny fountain playing in the corner of the rec. room.

The fountain quickened; no, those clear, bell-like notes must be coming from the lyre, out of the shadows where Spock sat... now Uhura was humming, a rich sound that blended with the resonant tones of the alien instrument... and the words came at last. The Rain-song; a melody from her homeland, compulsive, throbbing, swelling till it filled the room, then falling away to silence. The audience sighed softly; then came the applause, and the stamping for an encore. Even Ploffles was chiggering with enthusiasm, though he was somewhat annoyed by Sulu's attempts to clap above his head.

Uhura smiled her thanks to the audience's appreciation. The lights swirled, brightened, turned green, and she nodded minutely to Spock as she caught his eye. The lyre broke into a quick, lively tune and she started to sing again, with Spock softly humming in harmony.

"Chigger chigger chigger," said Ploffles reflectively.

At the chorus everyone joined in - it was an old favourite with the crew.

"Chigger chigger chigger," uttered Ploffles firmly, ears pricked as he stared at the performers.

The second verse was Spock's...

"CHIGGER CHIGGER CHIGGER!!!"

The plofflehound hurled himself like a golden torpedo bolt from Sulu's lap, whipping the leash through his helpless fingers, and landed squarely in Spock's manly bosom. Totally unprepared, the Vulcan disappeared backwards off his stool in a jangle of lyre strings and a shower of pretty coloured sparks, and crashed to the deck.

Sulu sat paralysed, mouth open with shock.

Nurse Popper turned white.

Chekov, I regret to say, giggled.

Ploffles sat proudly on the First Officer's chest, licking his face and crooning happily, "Chigger chigger chigger."

Spock's expression was magnificently calm, his eyes closed. In a slightly muffled voice he said, very evenly, "Lieutenant, would you kindly remove this alien life-form from my upper torso?"

Uhura leaped forward as if stung, and hurried to his rescue. He rose with stately dignity. "Thank you." His eyes met those of the helmsman. "Mr. Sulu, I would suggest that you take this creature out of the recreation room for the remainder of the performance."

Sulu essayed a sickly smile. "Aye, sir." He was only too eager to follow Spock's advice. The other side of the door seemed an excellent place to be; the other side of the ship, better still. In fact, he had a feeling that the other side of the galaxy would be a nice spot for a holiday, say for the next ten years or so. Vulcans never forgot...

He bundled up the squirming hound and retreated hastily, gasping with relief as he reached the sanctuary of the corridor. The strains of the interrupted song had resumed, and he looked ruefully at the little animal in his arms. Just when he'd been enjoying himself, too! Slowly he turned away.

"Chigger chigger chigger," said Ploffles softly. Sulu took no notice.

"Chigger chigger chigger!" more loudly.

"Oh, shut up."

"Chigger chigger chigger!" There was definitely a threatening note in the plofflehound's voice now as they drew away from the vicinity of the rec. room, and he began to wriggle violently.

"All right," replied Sulu crossly, and halted. The song finished; the



plofflehound sighed, and cocked his head enquiringly.

"Chigger chigger chigger?"

The applause within died away, and a mumble of voices began.

"Chigger chigger chigger!" said Ploffles angrily. There was no response.

"CHIGGER CHIGGER CHIGGER!!!"

Obdurate silence from within, save for the murmur of the audience.

"CHIGGER CHIGGER CHIGGER.....eeeEEEE!!!"

Sulu dropped the plofflehound as if he'd been burned. The high-pitched shriek continued, echoing through the ship, varying its note but steadily increasing in volume. Louder and louder and louder.....

Chaos broke out. Six crewmen fainted - one of them three decks away. Equipment throughout the ship shuddered as Ploffles hit sympathetic resonances. McCoy, half dressed, burst from his room, a shattered tooth glass in his hand, while down in Engineering, Mr. Scott was on his knees, grieving over the wreckage of his whisky bottles. Delicate navigational instruments went wild...

Captain Kirk, up on the bridge, was frankly bewildered, but he issued immediate orders to seal off the afflicted area of the ship. In vain - the sound cut through emergency bulkheads like a phaser on full power.

At the heart of the maelstrom Spock, hands pressed over his super-sensitive ears, face contorted in agony, reeled out into the corridor to find Sulu desperately trying to muffle the hound in his uniform shirt. It was not the slightest use.

"What happened, Mr. Sulu?" bellowed Spock. His deeper tones penetrated the uproar, and the Oriental looked round.

"It was when you stopped singing, sir!" he shrieked back. "I think he was disappointed!"

"He was WHAT?"

"DISAPPOINTED!!!"

Ploffles choosing that moment to take a deep breath, Sulu's clarion voice rang out unopposed. Spock lowered his hands cautiously.

"Surely, Mr. Sulu, you're not suggesting... "

"Chigger chigger chigger," the plofflehound said meaningly, his pansy-like eyes fixed on the Vulcan. "CHIGGER... "

"Perhaps if you were to carry on... " Sulu cut in hastily.

"Mr. Sulu," Spock began frostily.

"eeeeeeEEEEEEEE!!!!!"

"For pity's sake, please try, Mr. Spock!" screeched Sulu.

"La la la," uttered Spock experimentally.

"EEEEeee... " The squealing stopped as if by magic, and Ploffles gazed adoringly up at him. "Chigger chigger... "

"Don't stop, please, sir," begged Sulu.

"La la la," repeated Spock self-consciously, "dum de dah. It must... la la la... be something to do... la la la... with certain frequencies which appeal particularly strongly... "

"Unless it's you personally, sir?" suggested Sulu.

"Let us hope... la la la... that it is not," replied the First Officer grimly.

So began the second worst period in the history of the Enterprise. It was ushered in by several remarkable discoveries.

Firstly, Dr. McCoy found out that no known tranquilliser could keep canis pseudocornis under for more than five minutes at a time. Early specimens had been collected of their own free will, apparently. "Never give a sucker an even break," the Doctor had muttered obscurely, on learning this. Stronger doses of his knock-out potions would be fatal; a consummation devoutly to be wished, he felt privately, but Ploffles was valuable - to Admiral Harper, at least.

Secondly, attempts to isolate Ploffles in a soundproof room were not entirely successful; emergency welding teams had to be called out to deal with the resulting metal fatigue, and it took thirteen verses of Brahms' Lullaby to soothe the hysterical creature down again. Someone suggested, only half jokingly, that Spock and the hound finish the journey by shuttlecraft - or even in a liferaft, on tow. Captain Kirk vetoed the idea on the grounds of the danger involved - to himself, chiefly, if he had to break the news to Spock. The Vulcan's temper was a little - frayed at present.

Thirdly, despite exhaustive trials, no mechanical methods of reproducing sounds could satisfy canis pseudocornis' aesthetic sensibilities. Sulu's misgivings were well founded; Ploffles didn't just like 'certain frequencies', he liked singing, preferably with a real live singer attached. He could be fooled only momentarily by the trills and warbles of the computer, and even tape-loops couldn't keep him happy for long. No, it had to be the real McCoy - or rather, the real Spock.

Life on the bridge became sheer hell. Only Uhura preserved a smiling countenance. Captain Kirk attributed this at first to her strong musical bent; it was only when he caught sight of her from the back that he suddenly realised she had transceivers in both ears. A heavy cloud of gloom enveloped the rest of the crew as the laryngitic Vulcan ploughed his way miserably through song after song - Ploffles liked variety, too.

Fifteen days out, Kirk could finally stand no more. As the last pathetic strains of 'Free from his fetters grim' died away, he steeled himself to speak to the Vulcan. With the Gilbert and Sullivan finished, he knew that ahead stretched the arid wastes of Gluck, Counod, Grieg and a host of deservedly little-known classics. If he had to listen to Spock declaring that he'd lost his Eurydice he'd... he'd...

"Mr. Spock!" he said decisively.

"Captain?" It was the merest croak.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Spock: I'm declaring you unfit for duty."

"But Captain - my work..." the Vulcan pleaded huskily.

"I know, I know, it's as efficient as ever - but I think it's in the best interests of the ship as a whole if we dispense with your services up here."

"Chigger chigger chigger," murmured Ploffles from his seat under the computer panel. Spock shot him a look of what might, in a Human, be called pure hatred. It might in a Vulcan too, come to that.

"I suggest that you withdraw to your quarters for the present," Kirk continued.

"Yes, sir." Spock paused, then added thoughtfully, "But is that entirely fair to my neighbours in the adjoining cabins?"

"Never mind..." Kirk's voice trailed off as he suddenly caught the implications of Spock's remark. Guess who had the adjoining stateroom? "Er - perhaps, after all..."

A quick burst of song interrupted him; Ploffles was getting restive.

"As I was saying, possibly it would be better to - er - distribute the load more fairly? If you were to walk up and down the corridors, say?"

For ten terrible days the Last of the Troubadours paced the decks of the Enterprise, shadowed by his faithful admirer, snatching quick naps while the hound slept (canis pseudocornis needs very little sleep), shunned by all and living mainly on liquids. For one ghastly afternoon he lost his voice completely; while McCoy frantically tried everything from throat-swabs to 'Mother Carey's Soothing Syrup' the entire medical staff attempted to divert Ploffles' attention with massed renderings of Great Operatic Choruses. They failed miserably, of course, and the resulting migraines and blackouts among the rest of the crew filled the wards to overflowing. Kirk's ship-wide appeal for 'anyone who can sing like Mr. Spock' bore little fruit; no-one would admit to such a thing, for numerous excellent reasons - except for Kevin Riley, and he was disqualified by unanimous consent. The Captain was desperately contemplating compulsory auditions on the hangar deck - or automatic destruct, even - when the glad news came through that Spock's voice was back. And through the ship the wailing died away...

All bad things come to an end, fortunately, and never was planetfall more gladly made than at Bellatrix 8, home of Admiral Harper's lady. The Captain, his exhausted First Officer and the excited Ploffles beamed down into what might have been mistaken for a private menagerie. Outside the palatial house were animals of every imaginable, and unimaginable, shape and size.

Mrs. Harper, a generously constructed lady, bore down on the trio with alacrity, clasping what appeared to be a golden chest-wig or large powder puff to her bosom. A muffled 'chigger chigger' sound soon enlightened the Enterprise crewmen, however, and Ploffles was overjoyed at meeting Mitsi, his new companion. Mrs. Harper tearfully thanked the Captain for the care he had taken of the dear little doggy. Kirk assured her it had been no trouble at all. Spock refrained from comment. Out of the corner of his eye he could see the two animals circling each other, chiggering softly, both pausing from time to time to gaze up at him.

"Captain..." he whispered urgently.

"Not now, Spock." The Captain was listening politely to Mrs. Harper's effusions.

"Captain," Spock insisted, and Kirk finally looked round. The ploffle-hounds appeared to be conferring about something, eyeing the First Officer carefully. Kirk stared at the Vulcan with a wild surmise, as the same appalling thought occurred to them simultaneously.

"Er - excuse us, Mrs. Harper. So nice to have... must get back - the ship, you know..." gabbled Captain Kirk, trained diplomat. Spock's communicator was already out and the Vulcan could be heard hoarsely imploring Mr. Scott to lock in on his signal.

Mrs. Harper looked at them in astonishment. "Must you... ?"

"We must."

Four dark, velvety eyes were fastened on Spock, two golden muzzles rose as one. "CHIGGER CHIGGER..."

"ENERGISE!" cried two despairing voices.

"eeeeEEEEEE..... "

And as they stumbled from the transporter platform, the scream was still ringing in their ears!

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AN INVESTMENT IN TIME by Nancy J. Kippax

Spock convulsed spasmodically, the restraints cutting painfully as his body arched. Kirk, alert despite the long vigil, reached across and quickly released the confining straps.

"Easy... it's all right... you're safe, now..." He reached up tenderly to push the damp hair from the Vulcan's face.

Spock turned grateful eyes to his Captain and focussed with difficulty, acknowledging the familiar presence with a thin smile before lapsing into the semi-stupor of the drug-induced rest his system craved.

Kirk ached with his friend's pain. Spock's chest and arms had been ripped open by the giant wang-cat on Regulus Seven. He had been rescued, half dead from infection and loss of blood, only his Vulcan abilities having saved him this far. McCoy's skills had done the rest, and the doctor was optimistic about Spock's recovery now, but my god, how it must hurt, Kirk thought in despair.

As Kirk settled on the side of the bed, he saw another flicker of pain cross the Vulcan's face, quickly replaced by determination. Spock was controlling the pain, but it was taking its toll on his strength.

"Spock... is there anything I can do?" he asked, his voice soft, yet sounding loud in the silence of the sickbay cubicle.

Without opening his eyes, Spock extended one hand, palm upward, toward Kirk. His arm, sterile dressing from the wrist up, barely moved. Understanding, and touched, Kirk gently grasped the hand with his own, transmitting his presence and concern. Instinctively, Spock drew nearer.

How far they had come together, Kirk reflected. As Spock's features relaxed again in sleep, Kirk couldn't help remembering another time, so long ago, when the situation had been almost identical, yet the two men involved had been so different. It had been only two months after Kirk had assumed command of the Enterprise. Relaxing, he let his memories take over, let himself drift back to that far away time...

\* \* \*

Anxiety consumed the new Captain. The entire bridge crew could see it. Three crew members, including the First Officer, had been separated from the rest of the landing party, and could not be located in the specified area of exploration.

Kappa Theta was an uncharted world, and a new planet could always contain unknown hazards. Kirk had sent down a routine preliminary science team to investigate. Four returned at the specified time; Spock and the other two - Lt. Selena Washington and Ensign Timothy O'Dell - had neither answered a call nor showed on a sensor scan.

As the hours spun away, the ship searched an ever widening arc. Finally, the unconscious body of Lt. Washington was found and brought aboard. Then, minutes later, before the young lieutenant could be questioned, they found the mutilated, lifeless Ensign O'Dell. Kirk was in sickbay with Dr. Boyce when the corpse was delivered.

Something - some unknown life form - had eaten away sections of flesh. Other areas were blackened with hideous burns. Ensign O'Dell had been twenty-three. Kirk felt ill.

He was the Captain. He could not afford to show how the death affected him. No matter that O'Dell was the first casualty in his crew. No matter that his First Officer was still unaccounted for. Boyce regarded him curiously as he straightened and cleared his throat.

"What did this?" Kirk asked tightly.

"We'll know after the autopsy is performed, Captain," Boyce replied, not bothering to mask his own sorrow. "My primary concern is Selena. She may hold the answer to all this."

"Yes," Kirk agreed mechanically. "All right. Carry on, Doctor." The correct military language, the precise detachment of a commanding officer; Kirk was so tired of it all.

He wandered into Boyce's empty office and stood, staring at nothing, unable to relate to his surroundings.

The past two months had been a whirlwind of adjustment - to the ship, the crew, the daily routine and the responsibility of command. Two months. Had it really been that long? So much had been crammed into the short span of time that he marvelled at having accomplished it all. There had been the seemingly endless departmental briefings, all the new names and faces to match up, the myriad details of shipboard routine to learn and consider. His senior officers had been helpful, polite, yet there was no-one to whom he could relate, no-one with whom he could relax and let down occasionally.

Now, taken by this new tragedy, Kirk saw that he had not tried. Perhaps there had not been time, but Kirk could see how his strong sense of duty had led to this awful loneliness. He had not been able to let down with anyone, not even his second-in-command.

Spock had been there, at his side, since the first day he came aboard. His cool efficiency had intimidated Kirk at first, then he had come to accept it and be grateful for it. He could be the detached, impersonal Captain with Spock, because that was what the Vulcan expected. Or, did he?

Of all the crew, only Spock had made an effort toward friendliness. No, that wasn't the correct term, either. Spock had met him as an equal, as one who gave respect, but expected it in return. When the Vulcan discovered that Kirk played chess, they had begun a tournament which filled many of their empty, off-duty hours.

Yet, even now, Kirk felt as though he did not even know the alien First Officer. He might be dead - Spock's body might be beamed up exactly like O'Dell's - and Kirk had never made any effort to close the gap between them.

Suddenly, Dr. Boyce was beside him; Kirk hadn't even heard him enter the room.

"Captain?" Kirk turned. "They've located Mr. Spock. All we know is that he is alive."

A wave of relief washed through him and he permitted the emotion to show. Boyce smiled; Kirk could read the approval in the old doctor's face.

"Let's go," Kirk said shortly.

As they entered the examination room, a security team was transferring Spock's limp form to a table. Kirk reached his side first, and the sight made him draw a deep breath.

Spock's entire right side, from neck to ankle, was blackened with the same corrosive burns which had covered O'Dell. His uniform had been torn to shreds, and there was a gaping, green mass of raw flesh on his hip where something had ripped his skin away. The First Officer was, mercifully, unconscious.

Boyce muttered a curse, and began cutting away the charred, blood-soaked clothing. Kirk watched, then he impulsively reached across the table to help. Cradling Spock's head, he drew the Vulcan towards him, onto his uninjured left side. Boyce nodded briskly.

"Good. Hold him steady."

Kirk found the comment rather incongruous, since the Vulcan was unconscious; still, he complied, holding quietly to the injured man. Spock's

breathing was warm and faint against his arm, and Kirk found it curiously soothing.

As the doctor sprayed a cooling antiseptic on the burned arm, Spock suddenly bolted to consciousness with a startled violence. Kirk reflexively tightened his hold.

"Easy, Mr. Spock - you're back on the Enterprise," Boyce said. Kirk was unable to speak; embarrassment at the intimacy unnerved him.

Spock tilted pain-filled eyes to see who was holding him. Kirk saw surprise flicker, then a dull mask cloud the expression.

"Captain... I am... all right now," he said formally. "There is no need for restraint."

Awkwardly, Kirk stepped back. "Good. Save your strength, Mr. Spock. Don't try to talk." He watched as Dr. Boyce completed his treatment and instructed two orderlies to transfer the First Officer to a private cubicle.

Kirk followed the doctor to his office persistently. "Your evaluation, Dr. Boyce? What is Spock's prognosis?"

It wasn't that he did not have faith in Boyce - the doctor was the top in his field - but the man was getting old; he had confided to Kirk that he would be retiring at the end of his tour next month. He frequently left the actual medical work to his junior officers, presiding over the administrative end of the department; in fact, Kirk had been surprised to see him treating Spock today.

"You saw the extent of his injuries, Captain!" Boyce snapped. "It's doubtful whether a Human would have survived this long. But Spock's Vulcan physiology is stronger than ours, and he has a higher tolerance to pain. Who knows? I've seen your First Officer through worse crises than this - but don't misunderstand, Captain - it is bad."

Kirk looked away, anguish seeping through his exhausted system. Still no answers, still no positive hope...

"Captain, I recommend you get some rest now. There's nothing further you can do down here," Boyce said more kindly. "You'll be notified if there's any change."

"No - I don't want rest, I want answers," Kirk insisted doggedly. "Has Lt. Washington regained consciousness?"

"When have I had time to check with her doctor?" Boyce retorted. "Whatever did this, there's no immediate danger to the ship or her crew."

The implication was plain; Kirk pretended to acquiesce. "All right, Doctor. I'll be in my quarters."

Perversely, he left Sickbay and went to the bridge. He informed the anxious crew what little information he had. Nothing was happening; eventually, Kirk did make his way to his quarters, but there was nothing to hold him there, and rest was an impossibility. He kept seeing O'Dell and Mr. Spock and Washington - people for whom he was responsible. Misery engulfed him.

It was all part of the job - and nothing he could not cope with, given time. But it was the first time - always the hardest, he'd heard. You mean it gets easier? I doubt it.

If the victim had been anyone other than Spock, perhaps he could have communicated his sorrow to the Vulcan. Spock had undoubtedly dealt with similar situations; his logical, non-emotional assurance would be welcomed right now.

Strange, how insidiously he had come to depend on his First Officer - almost without thinking about it.

Now, the Vulcan was... alone. Abruptly, Kirk left his cabin and returned to the Sickbay.

Dr. Boyce hailed him as he entered.

"Captain Kirk - I was just about to call you. Selena regained consciousness. We got her statement, then gave her a sedative to put her to sleep for a while. Quite a harrowing experience." Kirk waited; Boyce went on.

"She and O'Dell wandered off, following some irregular readings on the tricorder. Apparently, Spock went searching for them when he discovered their absence. Quite unexpectedly, they were attacked by some large... animals, beings, who knows? She described them as tripeds, winged but not capable of flight, dark, shaggy... huge, snoutlike mouths like a shark or a dolphin. They swept down on them - that's her term - and O'Dell managed to shove her through a small opening into a cave. He never made it through before they got to him. Their fur seemed to secrete some kind of acid - O'Dell couldn't touch them.

Selena wasn't armed, and O'Dell couldn't reach his phaser. Suddenly, Spock was there, joining the melee - he was armed, killed several of the things, but one got to him, burning and chewing at him. Selena saw him go down - that's when she passed out.

She must have regained consciousness, left the cave and headed toward the rest of the party, although she has no recollection of moving. And, we can also assume that Spock's weapon frightened the other beasts off and he was eventually able to defeat his attacker."

Kirk shook his head, trying to banish the gruesome picture Boyce had conjured. He swore, bitterly. Then, "How is Spock?"

"No change. Rest is good for him. He's been drifting in and out."

"I want to see him."

"I told you - he's asleep."

"He's also alone," Kirk returned reproachfully. Boyce offered no further objections, so Kirk entered the cubicle.

The Vulcan was lying flat on his left side, the steri-light above bathing his wounds. He was draped with a sheet, carefully exposing his injured side while affording coverage to the rest of him.

Pulling a chair close to the bed, Kirk sat quietly for several moments watching the slow rise and fall of Spock's breathing, the barely discernable twitching of the injured limbs. He wished there was some way he could let his First Officer know that he was not alone, that someone cared. Kirk knew it could mean so much.

He is Vulcan, others would argue. He has no need for warmth, for Human concern. Perhaps they were right - but what if they weren't? How could any living, sentient creature deny the basic emotional needs?

Suddenly, Kirk realised that was exactly what he had been doing to himself, letting his rank strip him of his basic warmth. He had been so concerned about doing a good job, presenting the best image, he had forgotten the simple, Human touch he had learned years ago.

Now he understood. No-one on the Enterprise had reached out to him because he had reached out to no one. Only Spock, in his own way, had tried to climb that wall - probably because he saw a mirror reflection of his own loneliness.

And just as Spock had pierced Kirk's somber mask, Kirk had seen beneath the surface of the Vulcan's immobility. He knew now that his instinct today was right. Spock, too, needed someone.

The Vulcan shifted, muttering something indistinguishable. His left hand slipped off the side of the bed. Gently, Kirk reached over and moved it back into place, letting his fingers rest for a heartbeat.

Spock's eyes opened for a moment, but Kirk wasn't sure if he recognised his Captain there.

"I'll be here," Kirk murmured softly, "if it means anything. I'll be with you as long as you need me."

Hours passed, a blur of fatigue and depression. Boyce came in twice to administer a hypospray, gave his Captain a curious look, shook his head to indicate no change, and said nothing. There was no change in the readings; they remained dangerously low. The steri-light was turned off and medicated wet-packs applied to the burns. Kirk watched Spock carefully after that, changing the dressings as soon as they began to dry out.

Once, as Kirk was beginning to doze, a nurse came in and offered to relieve him. He knew it was more of Boyce's patronising. Spock, from a medical standpoint, needed no one at his bedside, Captain or nurse. Kirk sent her away, kindly but firmly.

As the panel indicators began to rise slightly, Spock roused several times for a few moments. He seemed only dimly aware of his surroundings, but drank gratefully from the cup Kirk held for him. Again, his consciousness surfaced, this time as Kirk was changing the wet-packs along the side of his chest.

Kirk's movements did not falter, but he felt that same twinge of embarrassment, discomfort, which he had experienced in the examination room.

"Captain? Why are you... "

"Shh... " Kirk straightened, relieved to see the clarity in the thin brown eyes. "Lie still. How do you feel?" He did not want Spock to question why he was there. He didn't know if he could answer.

"The pain is... tolerable. I can manage it. You need not... "

"I know," Kirk interrupted the terse speech quickly, "but I want to. Call it an investment in time, for a very exceptional First Officer."

One eyebrow rose, whether in surprise, indignation or some other reaction, Kirk could not tell. But the Vulcan was very definitely back to his healthier self. Poor Spock; he'd go on denying himself those basic needs, denying the existence of emotions - well, Kirk reflected, perhaps it was right, for Spock. But not for James T. Kirk, not any more. And he would be there - if Spock ever made the same decision.

"I'll get Dr. Boyce," he said confidently, and left the cubicle.

\* \* \*

Kirk's memory broke off as Spock roused again. He had moved around the room as he thought, now he returned to the bed.

"Feeling any better, Mr. Spock?" he asked affectionately, easily, bending over to lay his hand along the Vulcan's cheek. It was cool and moist; the fever had broken.

"I am... tired," Spock admitted, staring up at Kirk with open candor. "However, I do not desire any more of McCoy's sedatives."

"I don't blame you," Kirk responded sympathetically, settling on the side of the bed, "but rest is best for you right now."

"I was... dreaming... about the cat," Spock confessed, his eyes sliding away in horror at the memory.

"You reached out... took my hand... "



"I remember."

"I told you once... I'd be with you as long as you need me."

Spock regarded him in puzzlement.

"After you were attacked on Kappa Theta. You were delirious - you probably don't remember," Kirk explained lightly.

"I recall the incident," Spock admitted. "You stayed with me... I wondered why, at the time."

"And how did you explain it - later?"

Spock pressed his head back against the pillow. "You called it an investment in time. I concluded you were filling some need within yourself."

"Within myself," Kirk conceded, "and within you. I think my investment paid off, didn't it?"

Spock did not reply, but a faint smile illumined his face. Silently, he reached up his hand, not in delirium this time, and Kirk entwined his fist within the Vulcan's. The past was remembered, then forgotten, as the reality of the present flowed between them.

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THE WHISKY CHORUS by Kathleen Glancy

Starfleet version - guess who's singing!

Now Spock he said tae me  
 "Just why do you like drinking?"  
 I answered him with glee  
 "It clarifies ma thinking"

A glass of guid Scotch whisky, Spock  
 Aye, just a little drappie  
 If Vulcans drank it, what a shock  
 They'd soon find they were happy  
 When we're flying off through space  
 The danger that's before us  
 Guid whisky helps us face  
 And that's the Starship Chorus.

"Now Seurian brandy's joys  
 Can make the Captain frisky  
 Mint julep is McCoy's  
 But I prefer Scotch whisky."

Chorus

"You'll run out soon, you will,"  
 Says Kirk, but I'm not fearing  
He disna ken about the still  
 I run in Engineering.

A glass of guid Scotch whisky, Spock  
 Aye, just a little drappie  
 If Vulcans drank it, what a shock  
 They'd soon find they were happy  
 When we're flying off through space  
 The danger that's before us  
 Guid whisky helps us face  
 And that's the Starship Chorus!

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THE CAUSE OF IT ALL... by Sheila Clark

Kirk intensely disliked the rare occasions when the Enterprise was used as a freighter. He accepted the necessity, of course - he had no choice; when an emergency arose, a Starship was the fastest vessel available -- but to Spock and McCoy he grumbled about the waste and stupidity of using highly-trained personnel as merchants. But his real reason - the one he could not bring himself to confide to anyone, even those two friends who knew him so well and would understand - was that he considered it a degradation of the lovely lady who - fickle and demanding as she was - was still the only woman he would ever truly love.

On this occasion the cargo was grain; a barley-like grain that was being taken to provide seed for the imminent planting on Craque, rodents having found their way into the seed store there and destroyed almost all of it. The planting season, because of climatic conditions, was fairly short; there was no time to waste.

Kirk, having watched in deepening gloom as the first ton of the stuff was beamed aboard, retired to his cabin to recover his equanimity, leaving Spock to check the cargo aboard.

The holds filled with containers, the stowage continued in the lower corridors, leaving only room for a man to pass, a pathway occasionally widening into double width where two men could pass each other, until every available inch of space was filled with containers of grain. Spock heaved an inner, silent sigh of relief as the stream of containers that was arriving trickled to a stop. He checked that everything was properly stowed, and punched an intercom button.

"Spock to Captain Kirk."

"Kirk here." The Human was aware that he sounded irritable; he tried to control his annoyance, knowing he shouldn't take it out on Spock, comforted by his failure to do so by the knowledge that Spock did understand and would not be hurt by his attitude.

"The cargo is all aboard, Captain."

"Take us out of orbit, Mr. Spock. Warp six."

\* \* \*

Scotty looked gloomily at the couple of inches of whisky left in the bottle, sighed, and poured it carefully, evenly, between the two glasses. He pushed one over to McCoy.

"And that's the last," he said sadly.

"Huh? Scotty, what happened? I've never known you to run out before."

"Bad luck, laddie; nothing but bad luck. The chap I get it from back there had an accident; he'd just recently taken on a new assistant, and the man thought the order for whisky had to be a mistake, there's so little demand for good Scotch out here, so he didn't get it in. By the time the boss found out, it was too late to get it... He was very apologetic - " Scotty shrugged. "It wasna his fault." He sighed again. "I'll just have to make do wi' brandy. But brandy - even Saurian brandy - ach, it's no' the same."

McCoy grinned. "There're other drinks on board as well as Saurian brandy," he suggested.

"Aye, and I've tried quite a few of them. They're no' the same," he repeated. "Oh, they're all right for a casual drink - but for a drink and a gossip with an old friend, there's nothing quite like Scotch whisky."

McCoy grinned again, secretly amused by his drinking partner's obstinacy. They drank companionably, in the comfortable silence only possible between good friends, making the drink last as long as possible.

At last, McCoy yawned. "I'll be glad to get to bed," he confessed. "It's been one of those days. Jim does try not to take it out on us when he's in a bad mood, but you know what he's like on these cargo-hauling jobs - edgy, irritable - and I'd to chase him up for his routine physical, which didn't help. Then I'd Spock to do after that, and you know what he's like about physicals... and it doesn't help that at heart I agree with him, that for him it's a waste of time. I just don't know what's normal for him - if two readings taken on successive weeks are different, I don't know which one's off - he doesn't follow Human physical patterns, but he doesn't strictly follow Vulcan ones either... and then I'd to recalibrate everything, of course..." He stood up. "Sorry, Scotty, I'm just taking my frustrations out on you. I'd better get to bed. Goodnight."

"Goodnight." Scotty's voice followed him out the door.

Scotty studied the empty bottle in unrelieved gloom for a little longer, then got up. He crossed to his bed, then hesitated. He wasn't really sleepy yet. He might as well check the night watch. Good for discipline, too - the odd, unexpected visit from the Chief Engineer did help keep all his staff, even the best of them, on their toes.

He walked out into the corridor, turning towards the elevator as he did so, and promptly bumped into one of the grain containers. Its edge was surprisingly sharp; it hurt. He muttered something inaudible but uncomplimentary about freighters incapable of travelling faster than Warp two, resulting in Starships being cluttered up with cargo...

He took two more strides - and stopped. He looked at the continuous line of containers marching in file along the corridor - and a half smile dawned as the beginnings of an idea began to take shape. He examined a container carefully, glancing up and down the corridor to make sure no-one was coming, then unerringly unfastened the lid and removed it.

The grain didn't quite fill the container - the top inch or so was empty. The smile broadened. He put the lid back on again, checked that it was secure, and headed on towards Engineering.

\* \* \*

The grain was duly off-loaded and the Enterprise headed back towards Starbase 11. Everyone aboard seemed more cheerful, from the Captain down; even the Enterprise herself seemed almost to prance as she sped through space - even though she was now travelling at Warp one instead of Warp six.

They were twenty-four hours at Starbase 11, then, with new orders, they were on their way again - on another of Kirk's pet hates, a diplomatic mission. At least Ambassador Fox was an old acquaintance who had learned quite a lot from a previous trip on the Enterprise; Kirk no longer had to worry about him or his reactions towards the crew. In fact, Fox made quite a congenial addition to the group that often formed in the rec. room, consisting of Kirk himself, Spock, McCoy, and often Scotty, Sulu or Uhura as well, when, by common consent, the one subject that was avoided was ship's business.

They reached the planet where Fox's mission was to try to reconcile the completely divergent views of two warring groups, both trying to grasp power. On the surface, all was at least relatively peaceful; and after consultation with Fox, Kirk decided to grant the crew shore leave while they waited for the Ambassador to complete his mission. Apart from anything else, the presence of Federation uniforms should remind the two warring parties that the Federation, while quite willing to accept whatever settlement the disputing factors reached, did insist that it should be a peaceful solution, not one gained by force of arms.

The first third of the crew beamed down for forty-eight hours leave. There was no trouble, not that Kirk had really expected any. Although one or two of the men did have a tendency to drink too much on leave, the most intoxicating liquor here was only about one percent proof. It wasn't impossible

to get drunk - if a man were determined enough - but it was unlikely that any would. The second group beamed down.

Six hours later, Kirk got a frantic call from Fox. Some of the men - a group of five - had managed to get roaring drunk and were threatening to undo a great deal of his work.

It took twelve security guards to overpower them - and only then by using phasers to stun them.

McCoy checked them as a matter of course - and promptly found himself in the middle of a medical emergency, as all needed treatment for acute alcoholic poisoning. It was three days before he was sure that all would recover.

Kirk made inquiries immediately. They had obviously found somewhere that sold real rot-gut; he intended to put the place off limits. He would have cancelled all leave, except that no-one else had found the place - not one of the first group had, nor any other of the second; clearly it wasn't easy to find. But he warned the entire crew that he would throw the book at anyone else who got fighting drunk, although he promised to overlook it if anyone would come forward who would admit to finding the place - where-ever it was. No-one could help him. The five had been together the whole time, no-one else with them. They had gone into one bar where some of their crewmates were gathered; had one drink - over a dozen of their crewmates testified to that - and promptly went berserk. The drink was the innocuous local brew that passed itself off as being alcoholic.

"The logical conclusion is that they drank something else before they entered the bar," Spock commented.

"They weren't seen in any other bar," Kirk objected.

"Therefore they found someplace that no-one else did."

"That's what I've been trying to find out, dammit!" Kirk snapped.

"If no-one else found it, no-one could tell you where it was," Spock pointed out in the reasonable way that sometimes became frustratingly irritable.

"Come off it, Spock," McCoy protested, temporarily raising his head from the results he was trying to process in his attempts to discover just what had been in the stuff that had poisoned the men. "You don't really believe that out of two-thirds of the crew, only five found the den that sold... whatever it was?"

"Bones is right, Spock," Kirk said. "This is a good crew, the best, but even so there are several that I'd guarantee to find the lowest drinking den possible when they're on leave. Only they didn't. No-one else got drunk, let alone fighting drunk. I want to know how they did it!"

"I'm afraid you're going to have to wait till they come round, and then ask them," McCoy said.

\* \* \*

As the men regained their senses - all with incapacitating hangovers that no pills seemed able to alleviate - McCoy tried gently questioning them.

"Oh, my head... never again... "

"What were you drinking? It must have been some hooch."

"... odd. I don't remember."

The reply was consistent. The men all recovered with an amnesia that covered not only the entire six hours of their leave, but several hours before it as well...

\* \* \*

McCoy joined Scotty that night for a quiet drink from the Engineer's store, replenished at Starbase 11 - the first night he had been able to do so since the emergency. It immediately struck him that Scotty was looking rather depressed.

"What's wrong, Scotty?"

"Oh -- nothing, really... Are those lads all right - the ones you've been seeing to?"

"Yes, they'll be O.K. now. They've lost seven or eight hours - can't remember a thing that happened, and the computer concurs; they are telling the truth, not just covering up. They honestly can't remember what they were drinking - or where."

Scotty nodded. He looked subtly more cheerful - but still rather unhappy.

"Any special reason for asking?" McCoy went on.

"Oh - no."

It was too forced. "Come on, Scotty. Tell me."

Scotty hesitated.

"I get it!" McCoy exclaimed. "You know where they got the hooch?"

"Aye."

There was a short silence.

"Well, come on, don't leave me in suspense... Oh, I see. You don't want Jim to know? Scotty, you know I don't betray confidences. What he doesn't know won't hurt him - even if it does leave him with an unsolved mystery to worry about. Give him - and Spock - something to think about."

Reluctantly, Scotty began, "... Mind when we were carrying that cargo of grain?"

"Yes."

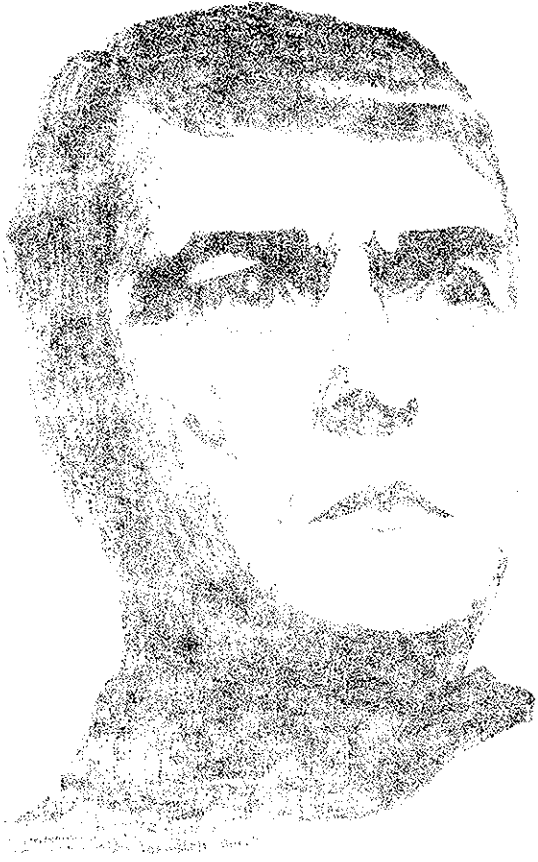
"And I ran out of whisky? Well, it struck me that I might try making my own. There was all that grain... "

"You mean you took some of it?"

"Aye. No much! A handful each from some of the containers. Just barely enough to try it out. I thought, if it worked, I could easily get some proper barley and keep on making it. We couldna drink it right away, of course, it'd need some time to mature... Anyway, it was easy enough rigging up a still - a few extra lengths of piping in the engine room, even of copper, wouldna mean anything to anyone... and there are areas we're no meant to go in while the ship's under way, but you can get away with it if you know what you're doing, and that gave me somewhere to germinate the grain where no-one would notice the smell. I did most of the work at night. I'd to watch none of the juniors saw me, right enough, but it was easy to fool them... I didna get much spirit, just about half a gallon... "

"And?" McCoy prompted, as the silence lengthened and it began to look as if Scotty wasn't going to say any more.

"Maybe I should have kept the jar where I germinated the grain, but I didna really fancy going in again so soon, and I didna want to have it in my room because I'd noplac really to keep it out of sight, so I put it in one of the unused storerooms in the lower levels, well tucked away. But they must have found it, for the jar's gone, where-ever they drank it. And it was pure alcohol, raw as the devil. Hadn't had a chance to mature. Maybe that particular grain doesn't make good liquor; maybe the radiation when it was germinating affected it; or maybe it just wouldna mix with anything, even the soda-pop they call liquor down there. But whatever it was, it was my fault.



I should have made certain it was hidden where no-one could possibly find it. At least I've learned a lesson - I'll no try again, in case I really do manage to poison someone else."

McCoy chuckled. "No, you'd better not try that again. But why don't we see if we could use sickbay facilities. The smell of some of my stuff would disguise the smell of the spirit, and - "

"We'd have to find somewhere else to germinate the grain," Scotty reminded him. "You canna have that lying around on the sickbay floor."

"No, but I could lock one of the smaller wards... "

Scotty began to look quite enthusiastic. "If you think we would get away with it... We'll have to wait till we can get the proper barley, of course - I'm no trying it again with anything else - but the first chance we get... "

"And this time, we'll make sure that no-one can find it before we're ready to drink it."

Scotty raised his glass. "I'm looking forward to it already."

\*\*\*\*\*

TODAY by Gillian Catchpole

Today, perhaps for the first time,  
 I truly felt the differences between us.  
 Such ugliness our friendship never knew,  
 Until today.  
 Today Vulcan stood up and spoke.  
 A voice born of bloodshed,  
 A calm even tone,  
 Yet not weak.  
 A voice strengthened by logic.  
 A voice with words of much significance  
 To the children of Vulcan.  
 A voice shouting for all the universe to hear,  
 Our alien differences.  
 I,  
 I say I, as if I am all important,  
 My way is right, I have the answers,  
 Let me whisper the words to remove such impressions.  
 Today, I do not recognise this child of Vulcan,  
 His words of logic are so without compassion,  
 My origins won't let me agree.  
 Today we stand apart, all contact lost.

\*\*\*\*\*



J.T. KIRK

OBSESSION by T.G.Z.C.

V. HENWOOD

The Farragut... years ago.  
 I smelt that honey-sweet scent then  
 And even thought it pleasant... Odd,  
 I've never been able to relish honey since;  
 I never realised that before.  
 We got away that time... those who still lived.  
 Nearly two hundred dead... among them my first Captain,  
 A man who taught me almost all I know  
 About my work. The planet Tychos 4...  
 We interdicted it, of course... not realising  
 That the creature could traverse the space  
 Between the stars. Creature... or creatures?  
 We must attempt  
 To destroy this one - and hope there are no more.

\*\*\*\*\*

A LACK OF COMMUNICATION by C. E. Hall

Captain James T. Kirk of the Starship Enterprise was writing a letter - a thing he did not often do, as he usually preferred more up-to-date and less effort-provoking means of communication. But the recipient-to-be was an elderly and somewhat irascible professor, who didn't care for 'those new-fangled affairs'. And, as Kirk loved and respected the old man, who had been like a second father to him since his teens, he was prepared to make the necessary effort.

He was really hoping that his communication would not be necessary, as his imminent visit to a special Conference at Starbase 4 should give him an opportunity to call in, if only for a few moments, at the office where Professor Galliford worked. But the old man was failing in health, and did not come to his office every day, and there certainly would not be time to visit his out-lying home. So, if he did not get to see his old friend, he would leave the letter for him.

He looked again at the Professor's latest epistle to him, several pages of untidy scrawl spread across his desk. He was gratified to re-read it, and feel again the enthusiasm bubbling through, but the deterioration in the writing grieved him. It was obvious that the old man was gradually failing, and Kirk hoped that he would be spared long enough to complete his project. He was planning a detailed book about alien life-forms - he had masses of data and pictures, but desperately needed some help to collate and classify it. He had asked if Kirk could suggest someone - the task would not take a methodical man long.

Kirk thought he had the obvious answer - Spock! His intelligence and logical mind would make short work of the mass of information, and, in addition, he was temperamentally most suited to the task. He would be unlikely to take offence at the Professor's irascibility and sharp tongue, especially if Kirk explained the high regard he had for his clever old friend.

It might well be fitted in with present arrangements too. Kirk was beaming down in the morning to Outpost 13, the small planet they were now orbiting, to catch a fast shuttle to Starbase 4, there to attend a three-week secret conference. Spock was to remain at Outpost 13, in command, while various essential repairs and refits were carried out. Then the First Officer was to bring the Enterprise to Starbase 4, and await the end of the conference. There might well be a few spare days to be found then. He would recommend the Vulcan to the Professor, and see what his reaction was. He would say nothing to Spock as yet, in case he found that the old man was too ill to contemplate the work after all.

He finished the first page of the letter, in which he had expressed his interest in the idea of the book, and went on to the second page.

"I would very much like to recommend my First Officer, Commander Spock, for the task you have in mind. He is very knowledgeable, and is logical and methodical in any work he does. And he knows how to keep a secret." (This he had added because one of the old man's idiosyncrasies was to keep the subject of his work hidden, to surprise his colleagues when it was published.)

I am sure he will do what you want most efficiently. If he seems reluctant, please tell him that I personally suggested that you should approach him, and it would please me if he were to comply. Show him this letter if you wish."

Then he signed it with a flourish, James T. Kirk.

He folded the two sheets of paper, put them in an envelope, and added it to his already-packed personal luggage. Then he retired for the night.

In the morning everything seemed to be somewhat of a rush. A fault in



his shower had delayed him, breakfast had been a rushed affair, and people seemed to keep popping up before him with dockets to be initialled. Scotty was fussing about the work to be undertaken in the refit, and McCoy was pre-occupied, bothered by the outbreak of an unusual rash among certain crew members. He said his 'goodbyes' to both and left them to it, knowing they would cope. He sought out Spock. He alone seemed unruffled, and was dealing patiently with a long list of items to be checked and counter-signed.

Kirk had had second thoughts about Professor Galliford and his proposed book. He had decided to tell Spock about it, so that he would be ready when the old man contacted him. But he got no further than his opening words.

"Spock, there's a job I'd like you to do for me - something rather hush-hush."

"Yes, Captain," said Spock attentively, preparing to listen, but they were interrupted again. Both were approached by yeomen with boards requiring close attention and initialling. By the time they had finished, there was another yeoman with a message from the transporter officer to say that Captain Kirk had better come at once, or he would be late for his connection. Kirk turned to Spock.

"I'm afraid there's no time to explain, Spock, but you'll hear about it later." He moved off to follow the agitated yeoman. His last words came floating back to Spock, saying, "I'd like you to take it on, Spock."

Spock filed the incident in his methodical mind for future reference, and got on with the tasks in hand, which were pressing and urgent.

Kirk beamed down, caught his connection with only a few moments to spare, and was soon on his way to Starbase 4. Arriving there, he found that he had barely an hour before he was due to report, so he went to call at Professor Galliford's office. But he was very disappointed to find his old friend absent. A pretty young secretary informed him that the housekeeper had called to say that the Professor was not too well, and could not face the long journey in to the office. He hoped to be in again in a few days, perhaps even tomorrow. At the girl's suggestion, Kirk laid his letter in the centre of the old man's desk, first clearing a space among the clutter there. He wished he could have travelled out to visit his friend, but there was just not enough time. Perhaps he would be able to manage it when the conference was over.

He made his way to the reporting centre, where he met up with many friends and acquaintances, and was soon deeply involved. To the great surprise of many of the delegates, they found that their meeting was even more secret than they had expected. They were whisked away to an isolated hotel, and held 'incommunicado' there, not allowed to make or receive any calls, and meeting only the well-screened hotel staff. So for almost three weeks, Captain Kirk had no idea what was happening outside his narrow little world.

He missed the announcement of his old friend's death, and the sad obituaries that followed. He would have added his own if he had known, expressing his praise for the fine work the old man had achieved in his long lifetime. He would have expressed regret for the interesting book that would now not be written, at least not in the special style of Professor Galliford.

A junior officer was assigned the task of clearing the Professor's office. With little regard for the treasures he was handling, he packed the books and papers into boxes to be sent to his home. Someone else would sort through them - hopefully someone with more appreciation of their value.

A letter sitting in the middle of a space in the clutter on the desk caught his eye. He opened and read it casually. It meant little to him, and he was about to throw it away, when the bold signature at the bottom captured his attention.

James T. Kirk.

A moment's thought and he placed the name. Ah, yes, the Captain of the famous Starship Enterprise. He was here at the conference, and his ship was at Outpost 13, refitting, and would soon be coming to Starbase 4. Thinking of the friends and connections he had there, the man re-read the letter, especially the second page. A scheming look crossed his face. Folding the paper carefully, he tucked it away in his pocket, and continued with his job. And such was the beginning of a train of events that was to cause a great deal of confusion and bother.

Captain Kirk had thoroughly enjoyed the Conference. At first it had been a bit irksome to be totally cut off, but he and the others had had to admit that it did sharpen their concentration. Now it was all satisfactorily over, and he was on his way back to join the Enterprise again. As he entered the Starbase Headquarters, an orderly approached him.

"Captain Kirk?" he enquired.

On receiving an affirmative answer, he informed Kirk that a Dr. McCoy was waiting for him in the Main Lounge. Slightly puzzled, Kirk made his way there. Why was Bones waiting for him here? He was due back aboard the ship, surely that would have been soon enough to greet him, unless there was something wrong. As he entered the lounge, he saw McCoy and Scotty sitting there together. One look at their sombre faces killed his light-hearted mood. Something was wrong, he could sense it. They saw him coming, and got to their feet.

"Bones, Scotty," he greeted them. "What's the matter? What has happened?"

McCoy avoided his eye, hating being the bearer of bad news.

"It's Spock, Jim," he said eventually.

"What about him, Bones?" Kirk asked anxiously. "Is he ill or something?"

"No," said McCoy flatly. "He's in jail."

"In jail?" said Kirk incredulously. "Whatever for?"

"He's accused of smuggling in some calcorin," said McCoy.

Kirk was amazed. Calcorin was an illegal narcotic drug, ten times more addictive than heroin, very dangerous stuff indeed.

"Spock!" he said incredulously. "I don't believe it - there must be some mistake."

"Of course there must," chimed in Scotty. "That's what I said."

"Let's go and sort this out," said Kirk decisively. Glad to have passed the problem on, the other two followed him as he strode towards the door. Now that the Captain was back, things should be put right. Both had felt so lost, when deprived of both their Captain and their First Officer.

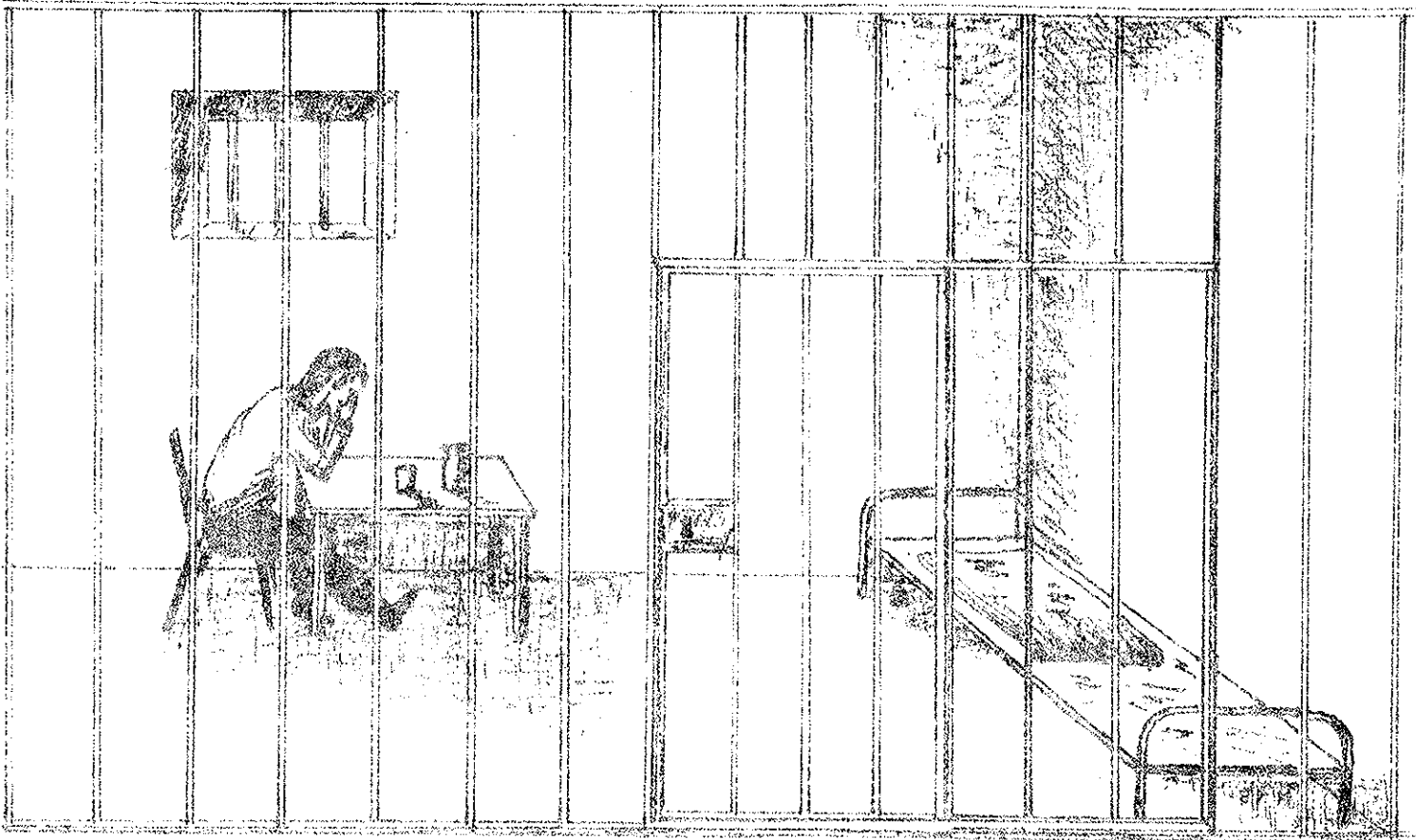
Kirk went straight to the Police Headquarters, and, pulling a bit of rank, managed to get an interview with a senior officer. He asked for the facts, and was soon told them - incredible as they seemed. Spock had been arrested in the act of handing over a package of calcorin to Varriman, whose nickname was 'King of the Dope Ring'. Varriman had also been arrested, along with most of his men. The officer was justifiably cock-a-hoop. It was a very successful coup - a long-awaited opportunity to scotch the calcorin trade in this part of the galaxy.

"What explanation has Spock given?" asked Kirk.

"None," replied the officer. "He won't answer our questions."

"May I see him?" asked Kirk. "He will talk to me, I'm sure."

Permission was granted, another officer was summoned, and he showed the trio down to the cells in the basement of the building. As they moved along



a corridor, Kirk spotted a figure in blue, sitting on a bunk behind the bars of a cell door. He quickened his pace. Spock heard the approaching footsteps, and looked up.

He rose and came to the bars, an almost eager expression lighting his dark eyes. Puzzled and concerned, Kirk spoke more sharply than he had intended.

"What's all this about, Spock?" he demanded. "Whatever made you do such a thing?"

Spock started back as if Kirk had dealt him a physical blow. For a moment he looked shocked and dismayed. Then his face closed, and his eyes became cold and expressionless.

"I have nothing to say, Captain," he said stiffly.

"That's not good enough, Spock!" snapped Kirk. But the Vulcan was not listening. Turning his back on them, he walked away and sat down on the chair pulled up to a small table at the back of the cell.

All three called his name in turn. He ignored them. Kirk ordered him to come back and speak to them - Spock gave no indication that he had even heard. Kirk asked the officer to let him into the cell, but he refused, having no authority to do so. At last, as Spock remained obstinately deaf to all his appeals, Kirk decided to seek the necessary permission, and asked to be taken back to the officer in charge of the case.

Their footsteps retreated, and finally the door at the end of the corridor clanged shut. Only then did the stiff Vulcan back unbend. The blue shoulders sagged wearily, the dark head drooped onto supporting hands. This, then, was the strength of Human friendship. Strong enough when all was going well, but failing when things went wrong. He had been waiting patiently till Kirk returned from the Conference, confident that in a few words he would explain the situation, and clear him of any criminal intent. But instead, Kirk had evidently decided to deny any knowledge of the scheme and his own involvement in it. To protect himself, Kirk was going to allow him, Spock, to take all the responsibility.

Well, if that was the way it was to be played, the sooner the whole farce was over, the better. Then he could get away, anywhere, away from those he had learned slowly to trust, and who had now betrayed that trust and abandoned him. Where would he go? He had not thought that far, but he would find somewhere, a place where he could keep himself to himself, and trust no-one ever again. His bitterness was deep and painful, especially as he knew, deep in his mind, that if he had behaved as a true Vulcan, he would never have laid himself open to be so hurt.

\* \* \*

Kirk, Scotty and McCoy hurried back to the officer in charge of the case; Kirk's mind was in a turmoil. What had got into Spock? Why was he behaving so obstinately? The only idea he had at the moment was to ask permission to make closer contact with the Vulcan, though he wasn't sure what he could do even if this were granted. Spock wasn't obeying orders, so what else was there? To attempt to physically force compliance from him would be stupid. Apart from the fact that it would only alienate him more, the Vulcan was by far his superior in strength and endurance. The other two were similarly confused, and had no suggestions to offer.

The officer in charge listened as they told him of their failure to get the Vulcan to explain his actions. Kirk made his request to be allowed into the cell, and the man considered it.

"Will it do any good?" he asked, as much of himself as Kirk.

"I don't know," admitted Kirk doubtfully, "but I'd like to try. Perhaps if I force him to look me in the eye, I might make contact."

They were interrupted by a secretary who brought in a sheet of closely-typed print, and handed it to the officer. He glanced at it, and then began to read it carefully. When he reached the end, he put it down, and faced the three Federation officers, a thoughtful look on his face.

"This makes a difference, gentlemen," he announced. "I have just had the analyst's report. The calcorin is not pure, it has been adulterated. It is totally worthless now."

This was an odd fact about the substance called calcorin. The addition of a tiny quantity of sodium chloride, common salt, could render it useless. Somehow the salt permeated the whole mass, and caused a reaction in it. In addition, it was undetectable. It made no difference to the feel or taste or smell of the stuff, and could only be discovered by a skilled analyst with special tests.

"That changes things, doesn't it?" speculated Scotty. "You can't charge Mr. Spock if he was transporting stuff that was harmless. That's not an offence."

"I must consult my superiors," said the policeman. "Where can I contact you to inform you of developments?"

"Aboard the Enterprise, I suppose," answered Kirk. "I'd better get back there, and wait for news."

The three returned to the Enterprise, and tried to busy themselves with various duties. McCoy and Scotty checked and rechecked their renewed supplies, just for something to do. Kirk listened several times to the meticulously-kept ship's log, which gave details of the refit and the trip to Starbase 4. Hearing the Vulcan's calm, so-precise tones tormented Kirk, as he remembered his latest encounter with him, and the icy coldness in his voice. Nothing in the log gave him the slightest clue as to what had been going on in the Vulcan's mind. It was a purely factual account.

His unhappy reveries were interrupted by a call put through to him by Uhura. It was the police officer from Starbase 4.

"Captain Kirk," he said, "I thought you'd like to know. We have decided to drop the charges against Mr. Spock. The matter has now been referred to the Starfleet authorities." The policeman was quite happy with the situation. A court case involving the silent Vulcan might have been difficult, and he was only a mere messenger anyway. The main gang was safely in the bag however, in spite of the latest development, for, in an effort to save their own skins, most of them had been 'singing' like mad, and there was enough evidence piling up to put them all away for years.

"Where is Mr. Spock?" asked Kirk anxiously.

"He's been transferred to Federation Headquarters," replied the man, obviously quite pleased to be relieved of one problem.

Kirk thanked him for the information and the conversation ended. He hardly had time to think about the implications of this new development before there was another call. This time it was an old friend, Commodore Talbot, at present in command at Starbase 4. His tone was friendly.

"Jim," he said, "what's the matter with your Vulcan? He's as stiff as a poker, and won't answer questions. He maintains he has 'nothing to say'."

"I wish I knew, George," replied Kirk. "I'm as worried as hell about him - he wouldn't talk to me either."

"Well, come down and see me tomorrow, Jim, and we'll have a long talk about it, I don't want to have to call a court martial, if there's a reasonable explanation, but he's verging on insubordination, and I might be forced into it."

Thankful to have found that matters were in the hands of someone who knew Spock, and was as concerned as he about his behaviour, Kirk agreed. He spent a restless night, trying in vain to fathom out any explanation of the Vulcan's attitude towards him - but the morning found him still as much at a loss.

After a sketchy breakfast, for he just wasn't hungry, he left Scotty in command, and beamed down to the planet. McCoy insisted on coming with him, more because he thought Kirk needed company than with any real hope of doing any good.

They made their way to Talbot's office, and he greeted them warmly, for he knew them both well, had done so for many years.

"Has he said anything?" asked Kirk.

"Not a word," replied Talbot, a worried look on his face. "Jim, what possessed him? He's usually such a stickler for regulations."

Kirk shook his head without answering. He couldn't understand it either.

"Let's go and try him again," said Talbot.

He led them to another part of the building, to where an armed guard stood outside a door. He stood to attention as they approached, and allowed them to pass in to a small simply-furnished chamber. Kirk had the merest glimpse of a figure slumped in a chair, before Spock jumped to his feet and stood rigidly to attention, his expression completely closed and wooden.

"At ease, Mr. Spock," ordered Commodore Talbot, but the stiff figure only relaxed the merest fraction.

"Mr. Spock," continued Talbot, speaking gently and earnestly. "Please tell us why you agreed to carry the calcorin. You must have known it was against all Federation directives. You must have had a reason - you never do anything without a logical reason," he added persuasively.

"I have nothing to say, sir," replied Spock stiffly. And that was the only answer they could get out of him. For nearly an hour they ordered, reasoned and persuaded, using every argument they could think of, but all the

Vulcan would do was repeat his same answer over and over again. At last, Talbot gave up, and issued an ultimatum.

"We cannot go on like this, Commander Spock," he said. "If an explanation is not forthcoming before this day is out, I shall be obliged to call a court-martial. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," replied the Vulcan, but added nothing more.

Defeated, the trio left, and returned to Talbot's office. Left alone, the Vulcan's attitude altered. The stiffness went from him, and he walked slowly over and flopped onto the bunk, exhaustion in every line. How long would this misery continue? he thought bitterly, and wondered if he would have the strength to stick it out to the bitter end.

The others too were concerned about his state of health. As they reached the office, Talbot turned to Dr. McCoy and said,

"Bones, how is he standing up to all this physically? He's so tense - he looks as if he might snap any minute."

"He looks pretty strained to me, too," agreed McCoy.

"Well," said Talbot, "go and see him again, in your medical capacity. Give him anything that might help - he may respond to your care."

"I'll try," said the doctor, "but I'm not hopeful. I seem to have a knack of putting his back up when I'm trying hardest to help."

He returned to the room where Spock was detained, and the guard at once admitted him. This time the Vulcan was too slow to move, and McCoy was across the room to the bedside before he could rise. He put a restraining hand on his shoulder, as he produced his medical scanner.

"Relax, Spock," he insisted, holding him down on the bunk. "Medical inspection - orders."

After a moment's hesitation, Spock submitted. He lay still and waited expressionlessly as the doctor checked him over.

"Hm," said McCoy at last. "You're wearing yourself out, Spock. You can't keep this up, you know. Why don't you tell me about it?" he added coaxingly.

His obvious concern touched Spock in spite of himself, and a tinge of regret came into the dark eyes, but his answer was no help.

"I cannot say anything," he said softly, and added, "I'm sorry, Bones."

That he should have spoken so revealed to McCoy more than anything that the Vulcan was under extreme stress. Anger at being unable to help made him speak more brusquely than he had intended - or maybe it was to drive away the frustrated tears that threatened.

"You'll face a court martial, then," he cried. "Is that what you want?"

The gentleness left the Vulcan too - he was as hard as granite again.

"The sooner the better," he snapped, "and let's get it over with."

McCoy turned on his heel and left. He felt angry with himself. Had he almost made a breakthrough, and then put his foot in it as usual? He was afraid so, but on the other hand, was he kidding himself in imagining that he could fight against the Vulcan's strong will.

Not wishing to interrupt Kirk and Talbot, he went instead to the large recreation room that served the building. He collected a cup of coffee, and, taking it over to a table, sat staring unseeingly at it, his thoughts going round and round in circles. He sat for a long time, absently stirring the coffee but not drinking a drop. His reverie was interrupted by a quiet voice.

"Can I get you another coffee, sir? That one must be cold."

It was one of the waitresses, a pretty fair-haired girl. He accepted her offer, and watched as she carried the wasted cup over to the counter. He had seen her before several times, when he and Scotty had been in the recreation room waiting for Captain Kirk. She was the kind of alert, intelligent-looking girl that one saw in these places, who made one wonder to oneself, 'What is she doing in a job like this?' Surely she could do better? If one took the trouble to enquire, one often found that these girls were working part-time to support themselves while attending evening classes to gain qualifications for something. And such was true of this girl too.

When she returned she carried two steaming cups.

"Sir," she asked politely, "I am off duty now. May I please sit down and talk with you? I may be able to help you."

Intrigued, and willing to be diverted from his gloomy thoughts by anything, McCoy waved her to a seat opposite him across the table.

"My name is Julie Brett," she introduced herself.

"And I am Leonard McCoy," replied the doctor politely.

"Yes, I know," she said. "Dr. McCoy, from the Starship Enterprise."

He nodded, somewhat surprised.

"I asked," she explained, "when I saw you visiting the Vulcan officer who is held in the detention room. Are you a friend of his?" she asked.

"I try very hard to be," he answered, his sombre thoughts returning.

"Well," she continued, "I take his meals to him from the canteen, and I find him intriguing."

Another one, thought McCoy to himself. What is it about that aloof creature that so attracts the women?

The girl went on. "You see, he is always perfectly polite to me, but no more. I have been asking about him - I've a boy-friend who works for Commodore Talbot," she confessed, "and I've discovered that he's just not talking to anyone, even though it may mean a court martial."

"That's true," admitted McCoy. "He won't open up to any of us."

"That's what made me try it," continued the girl eagerly. "You see, I work here during the day, but in the evening I study at the special college attached to Federation Headquarters." She hesitated slightly, then pressed on resolutely. "The truth is, Doctor, I have a special ability. I've strong telepathic powers, and I'm training to develop them, to qualify myself for experimental work for Starfleet."

McCoy had heard of this special college and its work, and looked at the girl with added interest.

"I thought I'd try and reach the Vulcan mentally," she said, "to find out what he was thinking."

"Did you succeed?" asked McCoy eagerly.

"Well, I couldn't think of a good excuse to remain for long in his room, but I got Joe to sneak me into the room next door. Anyway, you don't need visual contact for telepathy," she added.

"Come on, girl," said McCoy impatiently. "What happened?"

Instead of being offended by his impatience, she responded to his urgency. "At first I got on very well," she said. "I could feel such misery - he's very distressed about things. Then he began to think about someone called Jim, and he was very bitter about him. Apparently he had trusted him and relied on him more than a Vulcan should, and when this trouble came, Jim let him down and abandoned him, to save his own skin."

McCoy listened, fascinated. He might soon find the solution he needed. "Go on," he urged.

"I wish I could," said the girl sadly, "but somehow he must have felt my thoughts, for quite suddenly he closed his mind against me - Vulcans can, you know - and I could get no more. But I thought you would like to know even that little bit."

"Yes indeed," said McCoy. "I am glad you told me. Are you sure that is absolutely all you got?"

"Yes, I think so," replied Julie. "No, wait a minute - there was something about a letter. It's in a desk drawer in his quarters, and he was wishing he could get hold of it and destroy it. Does that help at all?"

"I don't really know," said McCoy honestly. "I'll need time to think. But thank you very much for trying to help."

"Well, I've watched you and your Captain," she replied, "and you both look so worried. And the Vulcan too - he hardly touches the food I take him."

The girl left to collect her out-door clothes, and went off to her class. McCoy sat for a while longer, but the constant to-ing and fro-ing in the recreation room was disturbing to his already chaotic thoughts. He must have peace to try and make sense of what he had heard. Leaving a message for Captain Kirk to say that he had gone back aboard, he beamed up to the Enterprise, and retired to his quarters, leaving instructions that he was only to be called upon if a real emergency arose. Then he sat down and began to ponder.

There were so many unanswered questions. Why had Spock agreed to transport and deliver the calcorin? Who had adulterated it? And to McCoy, most puzzling of all, why did Spock think Kirk had let him down? Kirk had been at the secret Conference, and totally out of touch during the time Spock had been bringing the Enterprise to Starbase 4. A further thought came to his mind. What was all that about a letter?

On a sudden impulse, he jumped up, left his room, and walked the few short yards to the Vulcan's quarters. He was inside, and starting to look around, before the audacity of what he was doing struck him. He stood stock-still and thought. How dare he invade a fellow-officer's privacy like this? Spock would never forgive him if he brought to light something that he wanted hidden.

But on the other hand, thought McCoy, if that letter gave him some real answers, it would be worth incurring the Vulcan's anger.

He pulled his key-ring from his pocket and approached the desk. As he had suspected, his keys fitted here as well. The first two drawers revealed nothing but tidy piles of notes on some scientific subject, in Spock's meticulously neat handwriting. The third contained a miscellany of personal items, and at the very bottom, under a message tape - a page of a letter! Pulling aside the tape, he lifted the sheet out. His eye was drawn immediately to the bold signature at the end - James T. Kirk! Now, there was another puzzle. Why should Jim be writing letters to Spock? Usually they were in daily contact, and if they were not, Jim would use a message tape, or radio, wouldn't he?

Stifling an involuntary quail of conscience, he read the letter through. He paused and then reread it carefully. It was vaguely familiar. He felt sure Jim had shown it to him sometime; but he was darned sure it wasn't to Spock. There was no heading to the letter. Of course, he could see now - it wasn't complete. He searched the drawer, but there was not another sheet. How had Spock got hold of this bit anyway? Had someone told him it was meant for him? McCoy sat down in the chair by the desk, and began to think hard again, trying to imagine what Spock had thought when he had received the message.

Suddenly McCoy began to see daylight. Suppose this note had been brought to Spock with the consignment of calcorin? Memories of a half-forgotten conversation came back to him, and his understanding - gradually built up over



long years - of how the Vulcan thought, began to clarify things for him. No wonder Spock was bitter, he thought, and felt himself abandoned. And still he was keeping silent, in the belief that he was protecting his Captain.

It was a stupid misunderstanding, of course, aided by deception, and as soon as he told Jim it would all be cleared up. No - on second thoughts, that wouldn't do. If Spock was to return to his old relationship with Kirk, he would have to be shown, in dramatic fashion, that he had made a mistake. He must realise for himself that Kirk was innocent of what he believed of him. Commodore Talbot was the man he must see, and as soon as possible. He left the Vulcan's quarters hurriedly, putting the letter safely away, and made his way to the transporter room.

Cpatain Kirk had just beamed up, looking weary and dejected. Bones waved an agitated hand at him.

"Can't stop to explain, Jim," he exclaimed. "Someone I've got to see. But stop worrying, I'm going to fix everything."

With that enigmatic remark, he stepped onto the platform, the Transporter Officer obeyed his instructions, and beamed him down to Starbase 4, leaving a bemused Kirk staring at the empty dais, wondering what on earth his impulsive doctor friend was up to now.

McCoy was only just in time. Commodore Talbot, looking as dejected as Kirk had done, was just leaving his office to go home. McCoy grabbed his arm, and assailed him with excited words.

"I think I know now what happened," he said.

Talbot led the way back into his office, sat down at his desk, and waved McCoy to a chair, opposite.

"Tell me," he ordered, making a real effort to throw off his fatigue.

"I don't think I'm quite ready for that," said McCoy, perching on the edge of his chair. "What's happening tomorrow?" he asked.

"I've no option," replied Talbot. "I must have a formal inquiry. I've detailed two senior officers to attend."

"If I were to make you a special list of questions," said McCoy, "would you ask them, and insist on answers?"

"What will they show?" asked Talbot cautiously.

"That Commander Spock was tricked by a scheming man," explained McCoy, "and that caused him to make an error of judgement." And please God, he added under his breath, that he made a mistake about Jim and his involvement in the affair.

"Dr. McCoy," said Talbot consideringly, "I've known you a long time, and so I'm going to trust your instinct over this. If you can clear Commander Spock of criminal intent, there needn't be an official court martial at all. But if I have those two senior officers there tomorrow, it will add weight to proceedings, making it seem official, and perhaps obliging that stubborn Vulcan to answer."

Talbot gave instructions that supplied McCoy with a quiet room in which to work, and he himself went home in a more optimistic mood than he had felt for days.

McCoy sat for several long hours, working out just what he wanted asked on the following day. Finally he was satisfied with his efforts, and, having written it all out carefully on several sheets of paper, relaxed at last, and snatched a few hours' sleep on the camp bed in his room.

\* \* \*

Not so very far away, someone else was not sleeping. Since he had felt that inquiring probing of his mind, Spock had been constantly on his guard. By

deliberate effort, he had shielded his thoughts, and the strain of doing so had brought him almost to breaking point with sheer exhaustion. He dared not sleep for fear of relaxing his defences, and fatigue showed in every line of his slumped figure and haggard face. But there was only one more day to be got through, surely! If only he could hold out through tomorrow's inquiry, until the ghastly business was over, then he could escape from it all, and hide his shame and fatigue well away from prying eyes and probing minds. It was a large universe - one could quite easily disappear and become anonymous, if that was one's aim.

\* \* \*

Up on board the Enterprise, Kirk was not sleeping either. He had retired to his quarters, ostensibly to rest, but found that he could not. He was not looking forward to the formal inquiry that would have to take place tomorrow. If only Spock had talked to him. That was what worried him most - the Vulcan's attitude to him personally. He thought back to when it had begun, on their first encounter in the jail. At first, Spock had seemed relieved to see him - then he had changed abruptly. Why? He considered carefully what had actually occurred and what had been said, and an odd thought struck him. It was almost as if Spock believed he knew all about it already, and was taken aback by his questioning attitude. But why should Spock think he knew? He had been away at the Conference - had left Outpost 13 weeks before Spock and the Enterprise, and had been totally out of touch until they were released from it. How could he have known anything?

Then he thought about McCoy and his odd behaviour as they had passed in the transporter room. What had the Doctor learned? But his curiosity had to remain unsatisfied, for when he put through a call for his medical friend, he found that McCoy had called in to say that he would be staying at Starbase 4 overnight. Strange!

\* \* \*

But McCoy had evidently returned early in the morning to shave and change, for as Kirk walked towards the transporter room half-an-hour before the appointed time for the inquiry, McCoy joined him, neat and tidy in his dress uniform. His face did not mirror the gloom on Kirk's, however, and his words of greeting were optimistic.

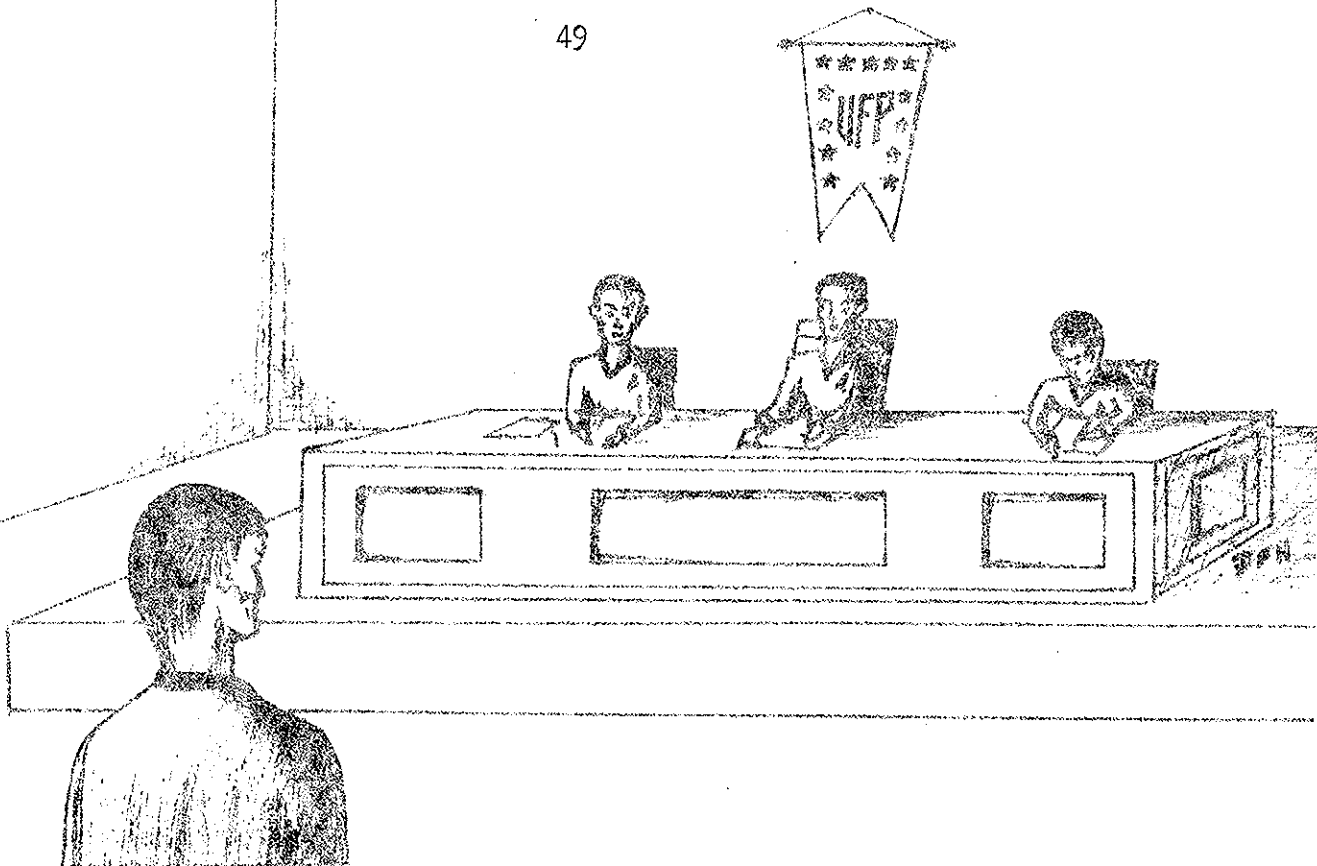
"Don't look like that, Jim," he said. "I've a feeling things are going to work out after all. You'll see."

Together the two friends beamed down to Starbase 4, and made their way to Commodore Talbot's office, where he introduced them to the two other officers who were to attend the proceedings. He had chosen well - both were quiet intelligent men of his own kind. Kirk warmed to them immediately. He could feel that they were reasonable unbiased men, who would listen carefully and judge sensibly what they heard. His main hope now was that they would have something to listen to. No-one would be able to do anything if Spock maintained his stubborn silence.

Talbot led the way into a special room. It was very austere and formal. Against the longest wall was a low platform with a large table and three chairs. In the centre of the floor, totally isolated, was a single desk and chair. Towards one end were several chairs, set unobtrusively almost back against the wall. Kirk and McCoy were directed to these, while the three officers took their places at the big table, Talbot in the centre.

The scene was now set - it awaited only the entrance of the leading character. There came a sound of footsteps in the corridor, and a sharp rap on the door. It opened, and prisoner and escort marched in. They came to a halt in the centre of the room. Then, responding to a nod from Talbot - and previous orders - the escort retired to a position outside the door of the room.

Spock was left standing alone by the solitary desk and chair. His dress



uniform had been sent for, and he looked immaculate as usual, but Kirk and McCoy, with eyes only for the set impassive face, could see the signs of stress.

Talbot broke the silence. "Sit down, Commander Spock," he said calmly.

"I prefer to stand, sir," replied the Vulcan, standing rigidly to attention.

"Maybe," replied Talbot mildly. "But this may take some time, and you put us all at a disadvantage. Please, sit down."

Somewhat disarmed by the man's gentle reasonableness, Spock capitulated and sat down at the desk. Although he must have been aware of their presence, he had not given Kirk and McCoy a single glance, and kept his eyes firmly fixed towards the large desk and the three officers there.

"Now," began Talbot, picking up a sheaf of papers, "there are some questions I should like to ask."

Spock almost interrupted him. "Sir, I do not wish to answer questions. I plead guilty to a breach of regulations, and accept the consequences."

Talbot lowered the papers, and gave the Vulcan a long look. Inwardly, he was sighing to himself. Oh dear, how hard it was to help this stubborn character! But help him he would, in spite of the Vulcan's resistance. He was too good an officer to lose over one mistake. Well, he would have to try his master bluff. He had primed his fellow-officers to show no surprise at anything he said, and hoped they would remember.

"Mr. Spock," he said. "Have you heard of Regulation 76B, Special File?"

"No, sir," admitted Spock, with a puzzled look.

"It gives me authority, at my own discretion," said Talbot, "to use truth drugs and will-breaking serums to obtain any answers that I think necessary in any case under my jurisdiction."

It was sheer prevarication, of course. Such things might happen in other regimes, but Starfleet had not taken on such an abnegation of Human rights, and probably never would.

Spock, and the two listening Enterprise men, were rather taken aback by this statement, but Talbot gave them no time to think about it.

"Well?" he demanded. "Are you going to impose upon yourself and us the indignity of such procedures?"

Spock hesitated a moment. It would be an interesting battle, to see how far his Vulcan training would enable him to resist, but it would be a degrading experience, and a protracted one too, and he didn't want that.

"No, sir," he answered quietly.

"Very well," said Talbot, his calm voice concealing the exultation he felt inside. "I shall expect straight-forward honest answers, as we ought to get from an officer and a Vulcan."

Spock made no reply. Suddenly he felt too tired to argue further. Let them get on with it. He would answer as best he could. They could not possibly know it all anyway. With eyes downcast, he did not see the look that Talbot exchanged with McCoy, a look that said plainly, 'So far, so good.'

Talbot picked up his papers again and began his questioning.

"Mr. Spock," he said, "do you know what calcorin is?"

"Yes, sir," replied Spock at once. "Calcorin is a narcotic drug, produced from the plant called lorina. It is ten times more potent than heroin, and extremely addictive."

"Correct," agreed Talbot. "And as it is so dangerous, it is illegal in all planets that are Federation controlled, and in many other areas too." He paused, then asked directly, "And what are Starfleet regulations about it?"

Spock knew the answer to that one too, and gave it. "It is an offence for any Starfleet personnel to be found in possession of calcorin, to further its spread from one planet to another, or to traffic in it in any way at all."

"But you did just that, Mr. Spock," said Talbot gently. "Why?"

Spock did not answer, so he continued, "Was it for money?"

How Spock wished he could answer 'yes' to that. It would have brought an end to the matter swiftly without involving Captain Kirk. But being a Vulcan he could not deliberately lie. His voice was very low as he answered, "No, it wasn't for money."

"You must have had a reason, Mr. Spock," pressed Talbot. "Vulcans do not act illogically."

Spock remained silent, so Talbot decided to leave that for a bit, and try another tack.

"You know who Varriman is, don't you, Mr. Spock?"

"Yes, sir," answered Spock readily. Questions like that he could answer, giving him a breathing space to gather his thoughts to combat the difficult ones. "Varriman is well known as the head of the organization involved in the distribution of calcorin. The police know him well, but his organization is so clever that he manages to evade capture and prosecution."

"Yes, he is very elusive," agreed Talbot. "In fact, that was the subject of a conversation shared by you, Captain Kirk and Dr. McCoy, a day or so before Captain Kirk left for the Conference, was it not?"

"Yes, sir," Spock agreed, wondering who had told him that, and why.

"Perhaps Dr. McCoy would give us a word about that," suggested Talbot. McCoy jumped up eagerly, and came to the corner of the large table.

"Yes," he said. "We talked for a long time about Varriman, and what a villain he is. We also discussed the crafty way he seems to be able to avoid the police. Finally, we came to the conclusion that the only way to snare him would be to trick him into the open by some deception, and catch him in the very act of receiving the calcorin."

(In fact, this was just what had happened; Varriman had been amused by the idea of a Starfleet officer bringing him his supplies, and had had to come in person to receive them.)

Spock was beginning to feel uneasy. Did McCoy know anything, or was he just speculating? But his doubts did not show in his unaltered expression.

"Is that an accurate report, Mr. Spock?" Talbot queried.

When Spock agreed, McCoy returned to his seat. But Talbot, instead of pressing the point any further, started off on yet another tack. Was it deliberately, to try and confuse him, Spock wondered. He must be on his guard.

"Captain Kirk," said Talbot. "May I have a word from you."

Looking rather puzzled, Kirk rose and came forward.

"Captain Kirk," Talbot began, "Is it true that sometimes you are involved in special secret missions - so secret that you do not let your own crew know what is going on?"

"It has happened," agreed Kirk, rather mystified as to the point of all this, but ready to answer if it would help Spock in any way.

"And sometimes," continued Talbot, "have you even kept Mr. Spock in the dark initially, relying on him to follow orders implicitly, even if he didn't fully understand the reason?"

"That's also possible," agreed Kirk, "for I know I could trust him to follow instructions, and wait for an explanation until I was ready to give it."

"Thank you, Captain Kirk. That's just what I wanted," said Talbot, and with his puzzlement unresolved, Kirk went to sit down again.

Talbot turned back to the Vulcan. "And that's the answer, isn't it, Mr. Spock?" he continued. "Talk of a much-needed deception to catch Varriman, added to a natural inclination to follow Captain Kirk's orders even if you didn't entirely understand them. That's why you reacted as you did, when Varriman's messenger produced Kirk's letter."

These last words produced a shock reaction all round the court-room. Spock especially was shaken, and for a moment an expression of consternation showed on his face. How had they found out about the letter? He had thought it well hidden, and had been waiting for a chance to destroy it secretly. How was he to conceal Kirk's part in the affair now?

In his seat at the side, Kirk too was thunderstruck. What letter? He hadn't ever written to Spock that he could remember, certainly not recently. He got to his feet, prepared to make a protest, but Talbot turned to him and said firmly, "Captain Kirk, please sit down. If you will allow me just a little longer, all will be made clear to you." Kirk subsided.

"Well, Mr. Spock?" demanded Talbot again. "Wasn't it this letter, brought to you with the consignment of calcorin, that decided you to break regulations?"

Spock's face was palely tight and expressionless again, as Talbot waved the incriminating letter at him.

"Be honest now, Mr. Spock," insisted Talbot, pressing home his advantage. "This letter made you think that Captain Kirk was devising a plan to catch Varriman, didn't it?"

"Yes, sir." Spock was forced to admit it was so.

"So you went along with it. Did you attempt to contact Captain Kirk to verify his instructions?"

"Yes, sir, I did try," explained Spock, "but I found that Captain Kirk and the other delegates were being kept in total isolation, and could not be contacted."

"Did either you or Captain Kirk expect this?" asked Talbot.

"I did not," admitted Spock, "and I do not think Captain Kirk did either. He was trying to explain something to me just before he left, and did not have enough time. I am sure he thought he would be able to contact me about it later."

"And when you were shown the letter, you thought he had?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you were quite sure it was from him?"

"Positive, sir. Distrusting the man who brought it, I, at first, did suspect forgery, but it was undoubtedly Captain Kirk's handwriting."

"And so you followed what you believed were orders from Captain Kirk, and carried the calcorin to Starbase 4, arranging to meet Varriman to hand it over?"

"Yes, sir," agreed Spock.

"And so you weren't surprised when the police arrived just at the right moment to catch Varriman red-handed. You believed it was part of Captain Kirk's plan?"

"Yes, sir," said Spock in a low voice. It was all coming out now - he couldn't stop it.

"Would it surprise you to know that the only reason the police arrived then was that they had had an anonymous tip-off from a woman claiming to be the sister of an addict who had died - a revenge motive?"

The whole court could see from Spock's suddenly uplifted face that he was indeed surprised at that.

"A few more questions, Mr. Spock," went on Talbot. "I presume you know how calcorin can be adulterated and rendered harmless?"

"Yes, sir," admitted Spock. "With the addition of a small quantity of sodium chloride."

"Did you adulterate the shipment?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why?" demanded Talbot.

"Because it is an extremely dangerous substance, sir," said Spock without hesitation. "It could be the cause of many deaths. I did it as a safeguard, in case anything had gone wrong with Captain Kirk's plan. I was beginning to have doubts as I hadn't heard any more from him, but at least the stuff would be of no use."

"Thank you, Mr. Spock," said Talbot. "That's all I want from you at present." He turned to the others. "Captain Kirk, will you please come forward and answer a few more questions."

With a very puzzled expression on his face, Kirk came forward to the officers' table.

"Captain Kirk," asked Talbot, "you do remember the discussion about how to capture Varriman?"

"Yes, sir," said Kirk.

"And also, do you remember trying to tell Mr. Spock something in a hurry before you left?"

"Yes, but that was about..."

"Not yet, Captain Kirk," interrupted Talbot. "Now, about the letter."

"I don't understand about the letter," burst out Kirk. "I'm sure I've never written to Spock in my life."

McCoy was watching Spock's face closely, and saw the pain and disbelief that he could not help showing at this flagrant denial. So, I was right, he thought to himself. This was what had upset Spock so - Kirk's apparent desire to deny involvement, to avoid any responsibility.

"This is your writing, isn't it?" said Talbot, showing him the letter. Kirk took it and read it through. It said clearly,

'I would very much like to recommend my First Officer, Commander Spock, for the task you have in mind. He is very knowledgeable, and is logical and methodical in any work he does. And he knows how to keep a secret. I am sure he will do what you want most efficiently. If he seems reluctant, please tell him that I personally suggested that you should approach him, and it would please me if he were to comply.' And then his own sprawling signature, James T. Kirk.

As he gazed at it, light suddenly dawned on him. No wonder Spock had done what he did - this did sound just like carefully disguised orders from him, for a deceptive mission aimed at trapping Varriman. He could see that Spock must have thought that, after their various conversations on the subject. Then he thought a little further. He could see now why the Vulcan had reacted so oddly. When he, Kirk, had behaved as if he knew nothing about it, Spock must have thought that he was abandoning him to save his own skin. How that must have hurt him! And yet, he'd kept quiet, accepting all the blame himself, and not attempting to involve Kirk at all. He would most likely never have told, if it hadn't been forced out of him. That was real self-denial and loyalty!

Swinging round, he flashed a smile of pure affection at his bemused-looking First Officer. Then turning to the bench again he began to explain.

"Yes, this is my writing all right, but it wasn't intended for Spock. It's the second page of a letter to Professor Galliford, in which I suggested that Spock might be a good person to help him with his proposed new book. As you know, he died before he could even start it."

Talbot and the others nodded; they all remembered the clever old man.

Kirk went on, "I think I can even find you a copy of the whole letter. The first one was a bit of a scribble, so I rewrote it, and it's still in my desk, I think. Someone clearing up Professor Galliford's stuff must have found my letter and used it cleverly to deceive Mr. Spock. It was all a misunderstanding!" he finished in a triumphant tone.

There was a long silence as the occupants of the room struggled to assimilate this newest revelation. It made things so much clearer.

Spock, especially, was thinking fast, and his thoughts were in a real turmoil. He had been wrong, so wrong! Varriman's emissary had deliberately deceived him with that bit of a letter - a letter not intended for him at all, and his own misjudgement had made him further their scheme. And how he had misjudged Captain Kirk! His show of innocence when they had met in the jail had been genuine, and not simulated, as he had thought. How puzzled he must have been by his, Spock's, attitude and stubborn behaviour. He sat with his eyes downcast, not daring to let them meet his Captain's until he could control his feelings better. He sensed rather than saw Kirk turn towards him, and mentally braced himself for a very difficult confrontation.

But Talbot saved him. He had for the last few minutes been having a whispered consultation with his fellow officers, which ended with their nodded agreement. Now he spoke authoritatively.

"Gentlemen, I think we have heard all we need to know," he said. "I should like a few words with Commander Spock alone now. Captain Kirk, Dr. McCoy,

thank you for your assistance. I suggest that you both return to the Enterprise now. I shall send Commander Spock back to you there later." And with a reassuring smile, he ushered them out of the door. They went, Kirk somewhat reluctantly, for he badly wanted a word with Spock, to put things right between them. But that would have to wait. Talbot would not have spoken so cheerfully, though, if Spock were still in trouble, so Kirk was in a happier frame of mind when he returned to the Enterprise. Maybe Spock would get off with merely a severe reprimand or a token fine.

Kirk changed his uniform, went up to the bridge and resumed command. The bridge crew noted with pleasure his more cheerful expression, but did not venture to ask questions yet. No doubt they would learn all about it later.

Sitting easily in the command chair, Kirk smiled to himself as he heard the report come through communications that Commander Spock had come back on board. When his spell of duty was over, he would go down to the Vulcan's quarters, and have a word with him.

McCoy also had the same idea. He wanted to make his peace with Spock over entering his quarters and opening his desk. He wasn't looking forward to the encounter, but was hoping desperately that the Vulcan would accept that he had done it for all their sakes.

Kirk came down from the bridge and went first to his own quarters. He freshened up, admitting to himself that he was really trying to delay an interview that could prove emotional and difficult. He was just about to leave when he saw the envelope lying on his desk. Wondering, he picked it up, slit it open, and read the contents.

He saw still staring blankly at it when, with a purely perfunctory knock, McCoy hurried into the room.

"He's gone, Jim," he said agitatedly.

"Bones, it's Spock's resignation," said Kirk dully, indicating the paper in his hand. Then suddenly realising what McCoy had said, he came alert. "What do you mean, he's gone? Gone where?" he asked urgently.

"Down to Starbase 4, I suppose," said McCoy. "I've just been to his room and his uniform is lying on the bed -- and some of his personal belongings seem to be missing."

It didn't take Kirk long to check. He made a few quick enquiries, which established that Spock had drawn some credits from his account and arranged to have them changed into local money, and that he had transported down to the planet, carrying a small bag.

"How long ago?" snapped Kirk.

"About an hour and a half, sir," was the reply.

"Come on, Bones," said Kirk. "Let's go and find him."

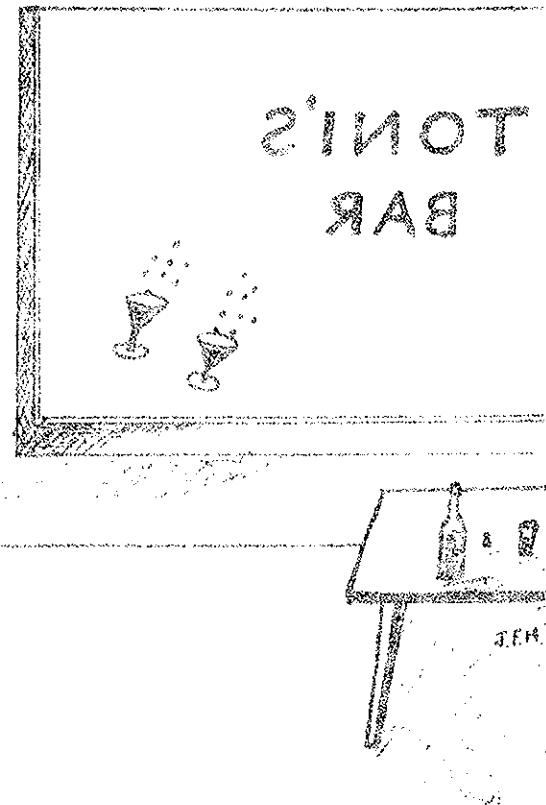
It did not take them long to get down to the planet, but it did take them a long time to find the missing Vulcan. It would have taken less time if they had contacted the authorities and arranged for an official search, but they didn't want to do that if they could avoid it.

At last they ran him to earth in a small bar on the seedier side of the town. Dressed in a green tunic and trousers, Vulcan-style, he was sitting in a dark corner, and several empty bottles stood on the table in front of him. As Kirk and McCoy approached, he raised lack-lustre eyes and regarded them dully.

"Spock, you're drunk," said Kirk accusingly.

"Yes -- eshtromely so," agreed the Vulcan. The slurring was very slight, and would have been almost imperceptible in anyone whose diction was not





normally as precise as Spock's.

Then he added in a plaintive tone, "But it's not any help."

McCoy felt a great surge of emotion, a feeling almost of compassion for this inhibited man, who could not even achieve the solace of 'drowning his sorrows'. Kirk, too, felt it, and spoke more gently.

"Come on, Spock, let's get back to the ship."

Spock shook his head dolefully. "No," he said slowly. "I can't go back."

"Oh yes you can," snapped Kirk. He grabbed the Vulcan by the front of his tunic, and dragged him to his feet. "Do I have to make it an order?"

Startled by the unexpected man-handling, Spock gazed at him for a moment, wide-eyed. Then his eyes glazed, his knees buckled and began to sag. Reacting swiftly, Kirk heaved his limp form over his shoulder in a fireman's lift. McCoy reached under the table for the travel-bag, and followed as Kirk strode towards the door. No-one gave them a second glance. More people got carried out of this place than walked on their own two feet, and people tended to mind their own business.

Finding a quiet spot in an alley round the corner, they called the Enterprise, and were swiftly beamed aboard. Fortunately, it was now the night watch, and there were very few to see them as they made their way to the deck which housed the officers' quarters. As they entered the Vulcan's room, McCoy put down the travel-bag, and then departed, saying, "I'll get him something that'll help."

By the time he got back, Kirk had lowered the Vulcan onto the bed, and loosened his clothes, pulled off his boots, and was spreading the silken bed-cover over him. McCoy came up to the bed, and shot the contents of a hypo into the Vulcan's arm.

"That'll help a bit," he said, "but I bet he'll still have a great hang-over in the morning." He smiled at the thought, but not unkindly. "What are you doing?" he asked, as he watched Kirk pull up an easy chair closer to the bed, and sit down to pull off his own boots.

Kirk put his feet up on the bed, wriggling them under the cover. "I'm staying here," he announced. "When he wakes up, I'm going to straighten him out."

McCoy looked at him a little doubtfully. Kirk smiled back at his anxious face. "Don't worry, Bones," he said, "I'll find the right words somehow." He gazed at the unconscious Vulcan fondly. "I'm not going to lose him over this - I need him around." McCoy was satisfied, knowing that the words meant a lot more.

"All right," he said. "Call me if you need me, won't you?" He put two white tablets down on the bedside table. "Give him these in a drop of water when he wakes."

After the doctor had left, Kirk settled himself back comfortably in the chair, prepared to spend his vigil in thinking out exactly what he would say. But it didn't quite work out that way. He quickly fell asleep, tired by the day's events.

He woke hours later, stiff and cramped, with no rehearsed speech ready in his mind. He looked at his Vulcan friend. Spock was beginning to stir. His dark head moved from side to side, a frown creased his brow, and he gave a stifled groan. Kirk smiled and waited.

Spock woke slowly to a pounding headache. He moved his head slightly, and regretted it at once. Through half-opened eyes, he saw a figure moving beside the bed. A sound of water pouring into a glass was followed by a clink and a loud fizzing noise. A familiar voice, his Captain's, said,

"Come on, Spock, drink this. Bones said it would help." A hand lifted his head, and another held a glass to his lips. He drank obediently, but the thought crossed his mind that McCoy could have prescribed some quieter medicine.

Then, realising how foolish he was being, he made a determined effort to clear his mind. So this was what a hangover felt like - never again!

Determined mental effort helped, and after a moment he opened his eyes, and found he could focus after all. Looking round, he recognised that he was back in his own quarters aboard the Enterprise, although he could in no way recall how he had got there. Captain Kirk was standing by the bed, with a half-smile on his face. As he met Spock's gaze, the smile faded, and a serious look took over. He sat down on the edge of the bed, and began to speak earnestly.

"Spock," he began, "I've just got a few things to say, and then that's the end of the subject. First of all, you are not leaving the Enterprise."

"My resignation..." put in the Vulcan slowly.

"Not accepted," interrupted Kirk firmly, "Insufficient grounds."

"But when everyone knows what happened..." began Spock.

"Who's going to know?" demanded Kirk. "Only a very few know the whole truth, and they won't say anything. Everyone else who hears the story will believe what you first believed, that it was all an elaborate plot to bring about Varrinan's downfall. And it did achieve that, didn't it? It was something well done, although we nearly paid too high a price for it." There was a thoughtful silence for a moment, then Kirk went on.

"Look, Spock," he said. "Why should you resign? Your reputation for integrity is unharmed. So is mine, come to that. In fact we'll probably be more famous than ever, as real smart guys." He grinned cheerfully at the thought.

"All that has been damaged," he went on, "is your pride, your trust in your own judgement - and your belief in me. I greatly regret that, but I'm

hoping that time will restore matters, and I'm determined it will get the chance."

He smiled widely at the thoughtful Vulcan. "Now," he said firmly, "I'm going to leave you to rest and recover. I bet you've got a super hangover, but that's your own fault. I couldn't have emptied so many bottles and still stayed awake, I'm sure. I bet even Scotty would have been impressed." He smiled again. "Use whatever Vulcan methods you like, or contact McCoy for help, if you have to, but I shall expect to see you back on duty, second watch. That's an order, Mr. Spock." His tone was authoritative, but the smile in his eyes, and the swift squeeze he gave to the Vulcan's limp hand, belied it.

Spock lay still for a long time, thinking hard in spite of his headache. He had made a mistake - no, several mistakes, he corrected himself. By believing what he had imagined to be true, he had almost spoiled the relationship that had been growing between himself and Jim Kirk. But surprisingly enough, Jim had evidently forgiven him his mistakes, and wanted to restore things to what they were before.

And most important of all, Jim still wanted him around. Spock wasn't fool enough to try to pretend to himself that it was only because he was a good, well-trained officer - he knew Jim intended more than that. Was the only barrier between them his own stubborn pride? If so, it was up to him to remove that barrier; it was after all a product of his Human side, and he did try so hard to be totally Vulcan.

He reflected again, as he gradually eased himself up on the bed. Should he fight his hangover with purely Vulcan methods, or should he seek McCoy's help? It would please the good doctor if he did, whether it was necessary or not, for it would show him that he had accepted his interference and invasion of privacy as well-intentioned.

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Jim Kirk sat on the command chair on the bridge. With a great effort, he tried to conceal his restlessness and anxiety from the others there. But soon several of them were wondering why the Captain kept checking the time every few minutes.

It wasn't as if anything special was due to happen, except a partial change of duty crew. But inwardly, Kirk was fretting. Had he said the right things to Spock? Had it been the right approach? Would the proud Vulcan respond?

Precisely at two o'clock, the lift doors to the bridge opened. Several crew members emerged. For a moment Kirk's heart sank, then soared again with a great surge of relief as a familiar blue shirt topped by a dark head came into his view.

Spock walked firmly round the bridge to his place at the computer station. Kirk eyed him surreptitiously. He looked a little pale, and there was still a frown between his eyes, but his step was sure and purposeful. As he turned to slip into the chair vacated by his other-watch substitute, his dark eyes raised to meet Kirk's. He said nothing, and did not smile, but his gaze was steady and resolute. He was back where he belonged, where he was wanted, and where he wanted to be, and he was ready to fill his place there to the best of his ability.

Kirk flashed him a special smile, unseen by the others, then turned back happily to address the helmsman, and issue his orders.

"Prepare to leave orbit, Mr. Sulu," he said cheerfully. "We're on our way again."

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