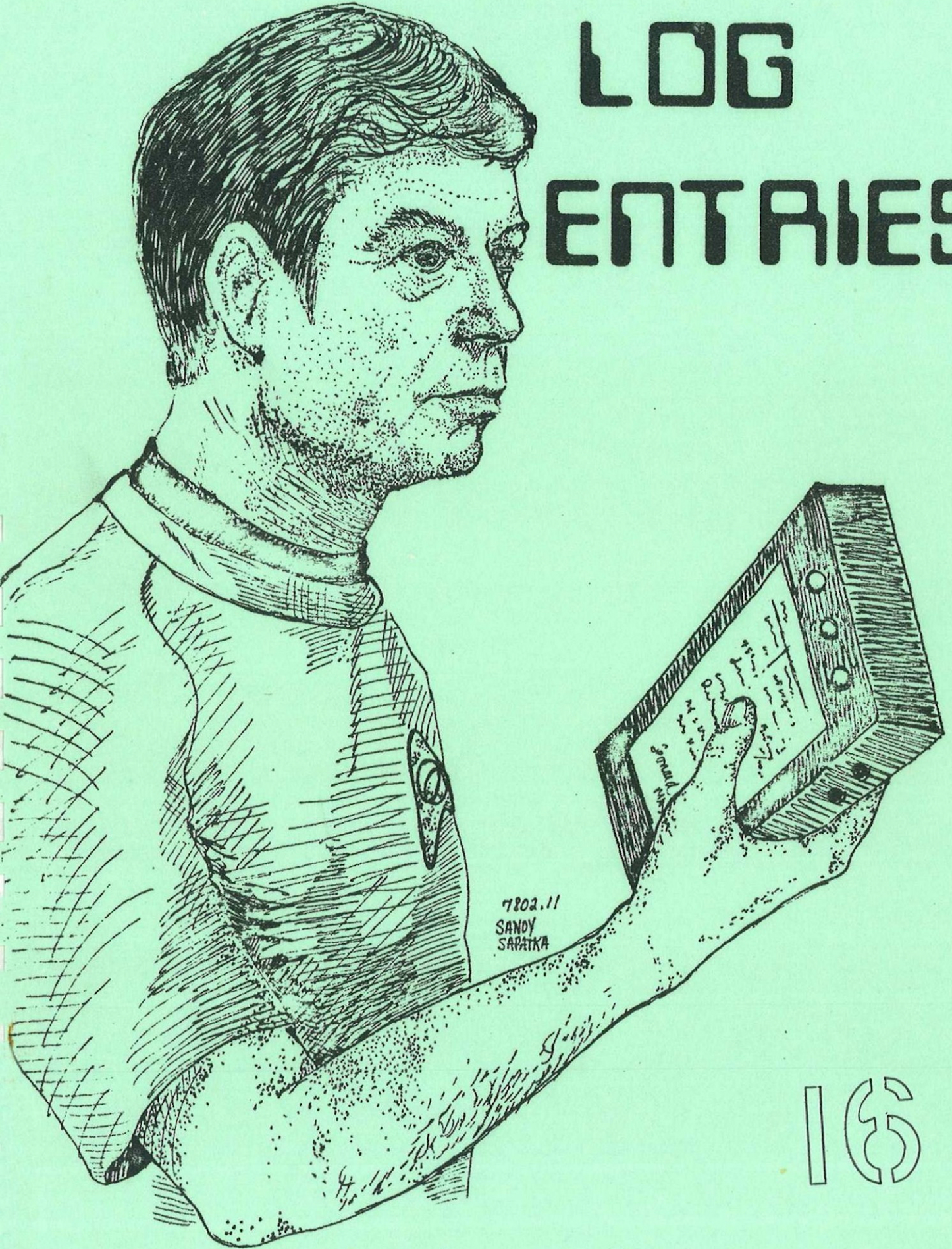
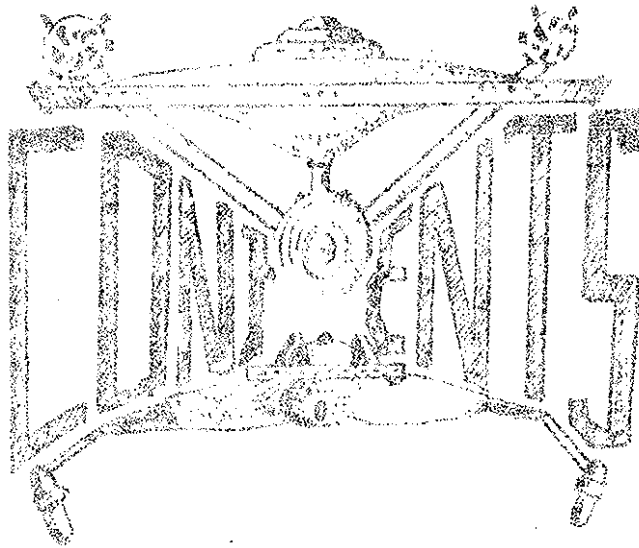


# LOG ENTRIES



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SANDY  
SAPIATKA

16



Captain's Gold by Valerie Piacentini	P 3
The Guinea Pigs by Audrey Paker	P 10
Alternate Universe by Janet Hall	P 25
Trial and Error by Kelly Mitchell	P 26
Our Star by Sandie Cowden	P 34
Open to Suggestions by Janet Hall	P 35
As Never Before by Gillian Catchpole	P 60

#### Illustrations

Sandy Sapatka	Cover
Barry Willmott	P 2
Audrey Baker	P 10
Karen MacGarvie	P 48
Ena Glogowska	P 52, 53

Competition winners - story, Trial and Error by Kelly Mitchell  
Artwork, Barry Willmott.

#### A STAG Publication

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Sheila Clark  
6 Craigmill Cottages  
Strathmartine  
By Dundee  
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Hello once more; greetings and salutations!

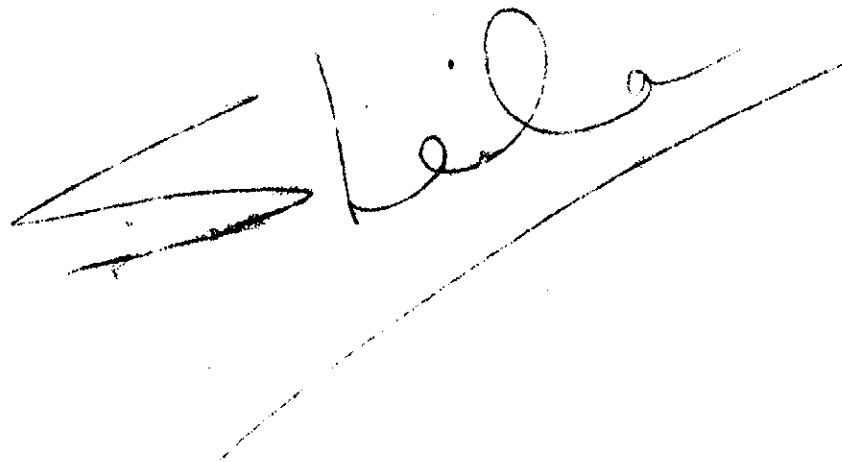
There doesn't seem to be very much to say this time, apart from an apology for not printing the story by Simone Mason that was stated last time would be included. I misjudged very badly the amount of space two of the other stories would require with the result that, in order to keep within our length (and thus our price!) I had to put in Valerie's story instead of Simone's, and also miss out a short one by Sandy Sapatka about Kirk as a child. However, both these stories will definitely be in Log Entries 17. After that boob, I hesitate to say positively what else will be included, but I hope there will be stories by Jean Barron, C.E. Hall and Meg Wright (space permitting!) as well as the winner of our current newsletter competition. (However, as I'm already so far on with the stencils for LE 17, with two of the stories already done, I may end up with all of the zine onto stencil before the closing date for competition entries, in which case the winner will go into LE 18... Sometimes I get carried away with doing stencils and find I'm miles ahead of myself.)

Thanks as usual to Valerie Piacentini, who seems to have become my regular proof-reader (and who seems to end up doing most of it around 4am, after I have departed to get some sleep... I'm sure it must take her at least a week to catch up on all the sleep she misses!) and to Janet for the running off, and whoever comes to help with the collating.

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

Sheila Clark  
6 Craigmill Cottages  
Strathmartine  
By Dundee  
Scotland.

June 1978

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sheila', is written across the lower right portion of the page. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end of the name.



B.A. Weller

CAPTAIN'S GOLD by Security Chief Baillie

I've served under quite a few Starship Captains in my time; most of them were pretty good on the whole - Starfleet doesn't go for incompetents - so I reckon I'm a fair judge. My boss now suits me just fine, and you'll hear no complaints from me if I get to finish my service under his command.

You'll have heard of him - Captain James T. Kirk of the U.S.S. Enterprise; youngest Captain in the Fleet when he was appointed. There was plenty said when he took over the Enterprise at first - a boy wonder for a Captain, and a Vulcan half-breed for a First Officer; now she's called 'the finest Starship in the Fleet', and we all know where to put the credit for that.

It's an education to watch Kirk and Spock at work - what one can't handle, the other can, and it's a standing joke in Security that as long as those two are up on the bridge, the crew will take whatever trouble comes along, and like it.

So it's like the end of the world when Starfleet Command takes a sudden rush of blood to the head, and give Spock a ship of his own. I'm on the bridge when the message comes in, so I see the reaction first-hand. I feel real sorry for Admiral Wright - she comes through with what she reckons to be good news, expecting celebrations all round, and her announcement falls flatter than a lead pancake. Spock just sits there, and if anyone tells you Vulcans can't turn pale, don't believe them - he does. The Captain looks over at Spock just once, then doesn't take his eyes off the floor for the rest of the session. As for me and the rest of the bridge crew, well, we stand or sit with our mouths open, giving a great impression of a bunch of stranded goldfish.

At last Spock finds his voice.

"Admiral," he says stiffly, "I regret I must decline. I have never sought command, nor do I desire it. I am unsuited... "

"Nonsense, Commander," says the Admiral briskly. "Your record speaks for itself - your promotion is long overdue. You are ordered to take command of the Orion at Starbase Five. I shall look forward to meeting you there."

So that's it. Spock tries, the Captain tries, but it's no use, Spock has to go. Apart from the fact that Spock is long overdue for a command of his own - Starfleet have only been waiting for a suitable ship - it seems that some busybody politician has been sticking his nose in, and decided that another Vulcan Captain would be good for public relations.

I've never known a crew get so depressed when the news sinks in. Even McCoy's in a shocking temper - as he says, who's he going to fight with now?

We reach Starbase Five, and everybody gets shore leave while we wait for the Orion. The Captain and Spock take off together like they usually do; Kirk's taking it harder than anyone, but then he's a lot closer to the Vulcan than anyone else. When we get back from leave, the Orion has joined us in orbit, and the transfer arrangements are completed.

I'm in the transporter room when he beams over; we're putting on a show for the Orion's crew, letting them know what we think of Spock, and I'm leading the Honour detail. The rest of the party have beamed over already to form a reception committee, and I'm waiting to escort Spock. There's no sign of Kyle, and I'm just beginning to wonder who's going to handle the controls when Kirk and Spock come in. It gives me a queer feeling to see them together, both wearing Captain's gold. I take my place on the transporter, and stand waiting while they talk quietly together for a few moments, then Spock holds up his hand in the Vulcan salute. Kirk copies the gesture,

and their hands touch for a moment. Spock joins me on the platform, Kirk moves to the controls, and the room dissolves in a golden shimmer.

Next thing I see is the transporter room of the Orion, and the welcoming committee. The Orion's First Officer is as nervous as hell as he makes his speech - it's not every day you get landed with a living legend as a Commanding Officer. Our own Honour Detail is well up to the mark, and it's obvious we've made a good impression.

Once the formalities are over, Spock leaves with his officers for a tour of his new command, and I head for the rec room with Bill Reynolds, the Orion's Security Chief. Over coffee I improve the shining hour by handing out a bit more information about Spock. Any crew's naturally curious about its new commander, and I know that what I tell Bill will be all over the ship in a couple of hours. I reckon it won't do the Orion mob any harm to know just what they're getting, and I quickly gather an interested audience as I fill them in. You know Spock as well as I do by now, but they've only heard Starfleet gossip, and they're glad of some first-hand information. I think some of them had never met a Vulcan before, and had been a bit unsure what to expect.

Well, after about an hour, the intercom calls me back to the transporter room. I see the Honour Detail on its way, and I'm talking to the transporter chief when Spock comes in and beckons me aside.

"I wished to bid you farewell, Mr. Baillie, and to commend you for your past services," he says. Now, that may not sound much to most people, but I know a lot more about Vulcans than I used to, and I appreciate it.

"Thank you, Captain; I've enjoyed working with you," I reply.

After a moment, he goes on. "When you return to the Enterprise, would you give this to the... to Captain Kirk," and hands me a small package.

"Certainly, sir," I tell him, and take my place on the platform. As the scene dissolves, I suddenly get the crazy notion that he looks somehow... very lonely, standing there in Captain's gold. Damn fool idea!

The scene on the Enterprise when I materialise is almost identical to the one I've just left on the Orion - the transporter chief at the controls, the Captain standing just inside the door. Kyle leaves as the transfer is completed and Kirk watches me as I come down the steps. He'll want a full report later, but I sense this is not the time; instead I hand him the package.

"From Mr. Spock, sir," I tell him.

He opens it, and stands looking at the contents for a long time, not speaking; then he holds up his hand, and dangling from his fingers is an IDIC, that Vulcan medallion Spock wears.

"I understand," he whispers, so quietly that I can hardly hear him, but he's not talking to me anyway. He fastens the chain round his neck, slipping the medallion under his shirt; for a moment he looks at me blankly, as though he's forgotten I'm there, then he gives a sort of grin, and walks out.

So that's how Spock leaves the Enterprise; things sure are different after that. Everyone feels it; McCoy's even snappier than usual, missing his favourite sparring partner; Scotty no longer has an interested audience to talk engines with; and the Captain - well, it's like he's lost his right hand. A hundred times I see him turn, ready to make some comment, then he remembers, and his hand strays automatically to his neck, as though the feel of the IDIC comforts him somehow.

We don't get a new First Officer right away - Starfleet don't want to land us with just anyone, and Spock is hard to replace. Secretly, I think we're all kind of relieved - it's going to be hard to get used to seeing someone else in Spock's place.

Then, just to prove that somebody somewhere doesn't like Captain Kirk much,

we get landed with a new assignment - a top-secret diplomatic mission to Zendi, a fairly recent member of the Federation. I get stuck with the security detail, so I'm in the briefing room when the Captain outlines the purpose of the mission.

It seems that the Kandar of Zendi, who is by way of being an absolute ruler, has sent an urgent plea for assistance to the Federation; the whole thing being so hush-hush that we're supposed to be paying a courtesy visit - the Kandar will fill us in on the details personally when we get there.

Well, we beam down nice and easy, the Captain, Dr. McCoy plus a full security team with me in charge. Our reception's real friendly, not a hint of trouble, but that goes for nothing. The Kandar comes to greet us in person, and we spend most of the day going through the diplomatic routine like nice, polite little gentlemen. In the evening they've laid on an official dinner for us, and we're expected to stay the night. The Captain accepts, but McCoy is needed back on the ship, so he leaves as the rest of us are shown to the quarters we've been assigned. As his personal guard, I've been given a room next to the Captain's; the rest of the security team is just down the hall. I warn my boys to stay alert, but we don't really know what we're looking for; neither does the Captain, as he tells me when I get the chance to have a word with him - we'll just have to wait until the Kandar feels like letting us in on the problem.

The meal passes off quietly, and when we retire for the night, everything is still peaceful, but I can't get rid of this nasty suspicious feeling that trouble's coming fast. I check with my boys, but they've got nothing to report either - it's all serene as far as they can tell, so I head back to the Captain's room. He opens the door as soon as I knock, like he's expecting me, and I can see he's real jumpy.

"Come in, Mr. Baillie," he says quietly. "We have a visitor."

As I move past him into the room I see the Kandar himself sitting on the couch. "My security chief, Mr. Baillie," Kirk introduces me. "You can speak freely in front of him, sir."

"First, I must thank you for your patience, Captain Kirk," the old man says. "I regret that even in my own palace I cannot act freely. However, I will now explain why I summoned you. Captain, this entire sector of Federation territory is in grave danger."

"Go on, sir," says the Captain.

"As you know, Zendi is an absolute monarchy - the Kandar holds supreme power. I have long felt that this situation must change; the people must be given more control. But this cannot be achieved overnight - it will require careful preparation.

My grandson Telman, who is my heir, is in agreement with my ideas; at this moment he is touring Federation planets to study their forms of government, and to learn from them. Unfortunately, his brother Ordon holds the opposite view; I recently learned that he is plotting to overthrow me and take the throne."

"Can't you move against him?" asks Kirk. "From what I know of Zendi, his following cannot be large - most of the people would support you."

The Kandar sighed. "That is true. If it were merely a rebellion by Zendans, I could contain it, but Ordon has been unexpectedly cunning. I have evidence that he has sought an alliance with the Klingons; in return for their help, he will allow them to use Zendi as a base."

Even I can see that this poses quite a problem - a Klingon base in the heart of Federation territory would give Starfleet Command nightmares for months.

"Would your people submit to this?" asks Kirk worriedly.

"If Ordon can establish himself as the legal ruler, yes, they would. The habit of obedience is strong, Captain. However, I have taken certain steps to hinder his ambition, and that is where I need your help. Have you ever heard

of the Shield of Zendi?"

"No, I'm afraid not."

"It is a jewelled badge of incalculable age, and has been for generations the symbol of power on Zendi; whoever holds it will be accepted without question as ruler. It is normally kept in my apartments, but as soon as I learned of Ordon's treachery, I took the precaution of concealing it in a place only I know. I will entrust it to you, in case Ordon moves against me, as he may very well do while Telman is absent. Only after my death will he learn that the Shield is missing; without it he will be unable to command the people. You, Captain, must then retrieve the Shield, and deliver it to Telman."

"But if you are prepared for treachery, surely your guards... "

The Kandar shook his head. "Alas, I do not know who to trust; Ordon's agents have already infiltrated my guard, I am sure. No, Captain Kirk, I must rely on you."

"Well, you can trust my men," I break in. "Captain, I could assign a couple of my boys to guard the Kandar until we can deal with Ordon - and the Klingons."

"Do you agree, sir?" asks the Captain.

"Thank you, I must admit they would be most welcome; even at my age, the idea of assassination is unpleasant."

"I'll see to it, Captain," I tell him, and head for the guards' quarters.

I don't know what it is that arouses my suspicions, but even as I push open the door, I know that something's wrong. Instinctively I drop to the floor, and that's what saves my life, because the phaser beam only catches me a glancing blow; even at that, I go out like a light.

When I come to, I take a look round. Whoever attacked me has gone, but has left the evidence of his presence; all six of my boys are dead. They must have been taken completely by surprise, because they're just lying where they fell without even the time to draw their weapons. The shot I took must have addled my brains, because it's a couple of minutes before I remember the Captain; when I do I return to his room at once. I'm too late, though - when I get there, he's putting up a good fight against a bunch of palace guards. I get one of them with my phaser, then somebody jumps me from behind, and knocks it from my hand. I join in the general mayhem, but the odds are against us - a few minutes later we're both held securely by the guards. To my relief the Captain doesn't seem to be hurt, but he's plenty mad. I soon see why - the Kandar is lying by the door, very obviously dead. The poor old guy was right all along the line - he just ran out of time.

The guards snap to attention as a young man comes in, Ordon in person, as it turns out. He's looking fit to be tied, and it's pretty clear he's already discovered that the Shield of Zendi is missing.

Right behind him is an unpleasantly familiar figure - Kolmak, the Klingon Security Chief. We've had several encounters already, the last one on Sentas, where he was the brains behind an attempt to kidnap Scotty. I managed to spike his guns on that occasion, and from the look he gives me, I somehow don't think he's forgiven me.\*

However, he's got bigger fish to fry at the moment, and turns at once to the Captain. "Well, Captain Kirk, and where is the Shield of Zendi?"

"The Shield of Zendi?" asks the Captain, all innocent-like.

"Let's not play games, Kirk. The Kandar has hidden the Shield, and you know where. You refuse to speak? Well, no matter; a Klingon cruiser is

\* Hide and Seek, Log Entries 13.



already on its way here... I believe you already have some experience of the mind-sifter?"

Kirk turns pale at this, but shakes his head stubbornly; Kolmak sighs patiently. "After all, a few days will make no difference. Guards! Take the Captain to the cells - make sure he is well guarded." Kirk is escorted out; Ordon hesitates a moment, then follows. Kolmak turns to me.

"Now, my dear Mr. Baillie, I am sure I can rely on your common sense. You must be aware that it would be... inadvisable for the redoubtable Mr. Scott to attempt to intervene in our little... dispute. The consequences for Captain Kirk would be... most unpleasant."

He really has me there; if Scotty attempts a rescue, Kirk will be punished. I know there's not much point in trying anything at the moment, so I pull out my communicator and call the Enterprise. Scotty answers at once.

"Baillie here," I tell him. "We have a problem, Mr. Scott."

"What's wrong, laddie?"

I fill him in on the situation, then Kolmak takes over. "Be very clear, Mr. Scott - Captain Kirk is securely guarded at all times, and I think you will find that your sensors will not penetrate the palace dungeons. If you attempt to interfere, the Captain will suffer; do not, and - perhaps - we will return him to you when we have finished with him." He snaps the communicator shut before I have a chance to warn Scotty about the Klingon ship, then turns to me. "I am sure you would like to join the Captain - allow me to escort you."

As we descend deeper and deeper under the palace, my hopes are fading fast. Even if we break out of the cell, it's odds against us getting this far without being seen, and the sensors will never work this far below ground. We come at last to an open cell door; Kolmak goes in ahead of me, and I hear him laughing - I soon see why. The Captain has been fastened to the wall; as I come in, Ordon turns round, a knife still in his hand, none too pleased at the interruption.

"You are impatient, Lord Ordon," Kolmak chuckles. "However, I fear you are wasting your time - such methods will not persuade the Captain. You must restrain your enthusiasm until my ship arrives - the mind-sifter will soon unearth the information you require. After that... well, I am sure that the Captain will provide you with considerable... amusement." He gestures to one of the guards, who goes over and unfastens the chains; Kirk slips to the floor, and ignoring Kolmak I go over to him. "I must bid you farewell for the moment, Mr. Baillie. I trust you will not find your accommodation too uncomfortable. I must also apologise for the presence of the guards, but I am sure you understand." He leaves with Ordon, but I don't have time for them, or for the guards he's left sitting just inside the door - the Captain needs help. At least the guards don't interfere - they've been ordered to watch us, and that's all they do while I try to clean up the cuts on Kirk's chest and arms. There's a jug of water in the cell, but I have to use part of his shirt to clean away the blood - it's cut to ribbons anyway, so it doesn't make much difference. There's a very nasty wound just at the base of his throat - the chain around his neck seems to be cutting into it, so I try to unfasten it to make the job easier. Even in his half-conscious state that gets through to him; one hand covers the IDIC protectively, while he tries to push me away with the other. I can see I'm not getting anywhere, so I stop trying. He quiets then, and lets me get on with bathing the wounds as best I can.

He comes round after a bit, though we can't talk much because of the guards. Some time during the following day we get fed at last, and the guards are changed; they're not exactly a chatty bunch, but at least they leave us alone.

Towards evening the Captain falls into an uneasy sleep; at first I'm pleased, he must be in quite a lot of pain, but after a while he begins to toss restlessly, and I can hear him muttering in his sleep. I go over to take a look

at him, and as soon as I touch him I can see he's burning up with fever - the cuts have become inflamed, and he's in a bad way.

I try talking to the guards, but it's no use, they won't help. All I can do for him is to keep bathing his face, but it doesn't seem to help much. As the night wears on he grows even more restless, calling for Spock. After a while he seems to think the Vulcan's there with him, because he acts like he's actually talking to him, listening for an answer; I can't make out what he's saying, though, because he's speaking in Vulcan - Spock was teaching him the language before he left the Enterprise - and all the time he's hanging onto that IDIC like it gives him some sort of comfort.

In the morning Kolmak comes by to take a look at us. He's plenty mad when he sees the state Kirk's in - even the mind-sifter won't work on a corpse. He barks out a few orders, and soon one of the palace servants comes in with some ointment and bandages, also a bowl of vile-smelling liquid which he tries to make Kirk drink. The Captain fights him off, but when I try he seems to know me, and I manage to get some of it down him. I'm re-dressing his cuts when his eyes open, and he looks at me with recognition. At the other end of the room Kolmak is talking to the guards, and Kirk takes advantage of their preoccupation to whisper to me,

"How long do we have before that Klingon cruiser gets here, Mr. Baillie?"

"I make it about three days, sir," I tell him.

"Listen, it's vital for the security of the Federation that Ordon doesn't get his hands on the Shield. I know where it is, and once they use the mind-sifter, I will tell them - I won't be able to help it. You're our only chance."

"Me, sir?" I ask him, startled.

"Yes, you. If the Klingons set up a base here, they'll be a constant threat. I'm giving you a direct order, Mr. Baillie - before that ship gets here, kill me."

"Kill you, Captain? I can't."

"You must. There's too much at stake. Promise me?" His fingers are biting into my wrist, and I can't avoid his direct gaze. He's right, I know, but it's a hell of a thing to have to do.

"All right, sir, I promise," I tell him. He sighs thankfully, and leans back against the wall; in a few minutes he's asleep.

Kolmak comes over and takes a look at him. "Excellent! Our good Captain should recover sufficiently to face interrogation - and to provide our friend Ordon with a satisfactory subject for his... hobby."

He goes out, and I sit down to watch Kirk, thinking about what he's asked me to do. I can manage it, I reckon, and decide that I'll make my move at the first indication that the Klingon ship has arrived - I'm fast enough to beat the guards to him, and it'll only take a couple of seconds to break his neck. There's one comfort - he'll have a cleaner death at my hands than at Ordon's. The only thing is, I'm praying he'll still be asleep when I come to do it - I don't want to see his eyes.

Whatever that stuff was they gave the Captain, it's a powerful sedative; he sleeps on, not even wakening when the guards are changed yet again. Kolmak comes in a couple of times to check on his condition, and seems satisfied. When the servant brings our next meal, he brings some more of the medicine with him, and though I can't get the Captain to eat, I manage to persuade him to swallow some of that - until the Klingon ship arrives there's still hope, even if I do have to kill him in the end. As soon as he's swallowed the stuff he falls asleep again, and several times I hear him talking in his sleep, still apparently to Spock; but it's different this time, he's much calmer.

So the hours pass, and I'm still no nearer to finding a way out - the

guards don't take their eyes off us for a moment. I reckon this is our last night; tomorrow the Klingon ship will arrive.

I'm leaning against the wall, watching Kirk, wondering when I should make my move - for his sake, I don't dare leave it too late - when out of the corner of my eye I catch a flicker of light just behind the seated guards. By some miracle I'm awake enough to recognise it at once as the shimmer of the transporter. Someone is beaming down directly into the cell - I guess that Scotty has somehow managed to locate us, and is risking everything on a desperate attempt to rescue the Captain before the guards can reach him.

Somehow I must help - distract their attention. With a yell I leap to my feet and run for the door, clawing frantically at the small barred window in it. I don't have a hope in hell of getting out, of course, but the trick works - the guards come after me and drag me back. They're so taken up with me that the landing party has time to materialise completely unnoticed - first thing the guards know about it is when they crumple to the floor stunned by phaser beams.

"Congratulations, Mr. Baillie - a well-timed diversion,"

It's the one voice I never expected to hear. I turn round with my jaw dropping, and sure enough, it's Spock in person, accompanied by Dr. McCoy and a couple of security men.

"What the... How the hell did you get here?" I stammer. Not exactly the most respectful way to address a Starship Captain who's just saved your life, but I'm so relieved to see those pointed ears again I don't really know what I'm saying.

"Explanations later, Mr. Baillie. Secure the door," he tells the guards, then moves over to join McCoy, who's already kneeling beside Kirk. Blue-eyes looks up and grins, and I'd swear I hear Spock breathe a sigh of relief before he turns back to me, impassive as ever.

"What exactly has happened?"

I tell him as much as I know, and warn him about the Klingon ship. He snaps open his communicator. "Spock to Enterprise. The Captain is safe, Mr. Scott. Beam down the remaining security teams, and proceed as instructed. Maintain full alert status - a Klingon ship may arrive at any time. Spock out. Are you ready, Doctor?"

McCoy nods. "The sooner I get Jim to sickbay, the better."

"Very well. I will lead the security teams, and secure the palace."

"I'll go with you sir," I offer. McCoy turns at that.

"Oh no you won't. You're for sickbay too - you look almost as bad as Jim does."

To tell the truth, I've almost forgotten about the phaser shot I took, but now that he mentions it, I do feel a bit groggy, so I don't argue when Spock tells Scotty to beam the three of us up. Once on the Enterprise, McCoy hauls us both off to sickbay; I almost make it to the bed when the floor comes up and hits me.

When I eventually come round the whole mess is just about over. McCoy is standing at my bedside, and he obligingly fills me in. Kolmak and Ordon have been rounded up, and are safely in custody on Zendi; Starfleet Command has been notified of the situation, and Telman is already on his way home to take over; as for the Klingon ship, as soon as the Captain sees the game's up it takes off at warp speed. Having told me that, and added for good measure that Kirk is recovering nicely, McCoy slips me another sedative, and it's bedtime for Baillie again.

When I come to again, I can hear the murmur of voices from the next bed.

It's the Captain and Spock, and I reckon they won't want to be interrupted, so I don't let on I'm awake; but I can't help overhearing them.

"How did you know I needed you?" the Captain is asking softly. "Was it a mind link?"

"No, Jim, we were too far apart. I did try to contact you, but as I warned you, because I am only half Vulcan, I could not reach you across so great a distance."

"Then how...?"

"I am not certain. There was no direct contact, as in the link, only unease, and the increasing certainty that you needed me. I slept, to see as in a dream the IDIC I gave you, and awoke knowing that danger threatened you. I had no evidence, but I... felt... your pain and your fear... so, I came."

"I thought - in my fever - that I spoke to you, and you answered me."

"You did not - you could not; it was only delirium."

"Then how do you explain it? I was so sure our minds had linked somehow."

"I think - perhaps - it is because our minds have touched so often. There is an... awareness... between us. In your pain you clung to the IDIC - perhaps it acted as a kind of... amplifier - and somehow your great need reached me, warned me."

"Whatever the reason, you came."

"As I always will."

"Spock..."

"Well, so you're awake, are you, Jim? Spock, you should know better - disturbing my patients like that!" McCoy's cheerful voice breaks in, so I decide I might as well surface. "And Mr. Baillie! Decided to rejoin us, have you?"

I take a look round. The Captain is sitting up in the next bed, pale but obviously on the mend. Spock is perched on the bed beside him, still looking very unfamiliar in the gold shirt, and McCoy is standing beside them, grinning broadly.

He gives us both a check-up, and tells me I can go back to my quarters if I take things easy for a while - he's hanging on to the Captain until we reach Starbase, though. That's our witch-doctor all over - he never did trust native drugs, and he's worried there might be some side effects from that Zendan potion, so he's taking no chances.

He calls a nurse to help me back to my quarters, and I trot off quite happily. She's much more my idea of entertaining company at the moment - funny I never noticed her before.

Well, next stop is Starbase, and that's when the fur really starts flying. The thing is, Starfleet Command has now got one hell of a problem. On the one hand, Spock prevented the forcible takeover of a friendly planet, and the establishment of a Klingon base in Federation territory; on the other, he did desert his ship when he returned to the Enterprise.

When the top brass don't know what else to do, they hold an enquiry; they call one in this case, and the Captain, McCoy and I are called to give evidence - that's when I finally fit all the pieces together.

As soon as he knew the Captain needed help, Spock realised he had a problem - how to convince Starfleet. He had no evidence, no details, only his own certainty. If he'd been able to say exactly what was wrong, they might have listened, knowing Vulcan telepathic abilities, but they could not be expected to divert the Orion on what was, after all, only a feeling. Spock didn't waste

time asking - he simply ordered his ship to rendezvous with the Enterprise, and as soon as the Orion was within transporter range, he took over. Nobody raised any objections - well, would you argue with Spock? - and anyway. McCoy and Scotty were sick with worry by then. (Their report to Starfleet didn't arrive until after we were rescued, anyway, because of the time lag caused by the distance). Scotty told him that the Captain was under constant guard and that the sensors couldn't locate him, but by now Spock was close enough to use the meld to find him.

Spock tells the court that having locked on to the Captain's mind, he organized a rescue party; he relied on me to catch on fast enough to distract the guards while he beamed down - from Spock, that's some compliment. Well, his plan worked, and we're all here to talk about it.

When all the evidence has been heard, the Board of Inquiry ask Spock if he has anything to say in his defence, and that's when I start to worry. Even if he could bring himself to admit that his concern for Kirk prompted his action, the Court can't take personal feelings into consideration. I'm watching him closely; as he takes his place on the witness stand his eyes meet and hold the Captain's for a long moment before he turns to face the court.

"I admit the charge of desertion," he says very quietly, very calmly. "The Vulcan oath of loyalty to a commander is not... easily broken; although Captain Kirk was no longer my superior officer, he had not formally released me from my oath, and I considered myself bound by it. In addition, when I was transferred to the Orion, I told the Admiral that I neither sought nor desired command - I do not consider myself suitable. She... chose to disregard my warning. I take full responsibility for my actions, and submit myself to whatever punishment the court shall think fit."

The Board then retire to consider their verdict, so McCoy and I return to the Enterprise - the Captain waits with Spock for the result. It seems to take hours, but at last the Captain's voice comes over the communicator.

"Two to beam up, Scotty."

It's impossible to tell anything from his voice; we have to wait until the two figures materialise on the platform, the Captain - and Spock, once more dressed in the familiar blue with commander's stripes. Kirk's grinning broadly as he comes down the steps; Spock is as calm as ever.

"What happened?" McCoy asks eagerly. The Captain chuckles.

"Well, they couldn't make up their minds one way or the other - that Vulcan oath of loyalty really stumped them, they just couldn't get round it. At last they decided that it would be best all round if Spock simply returned quietly to the Enterprise. Nobody quite knows if it's a reward or a punishment, but Spock's got his own way again."

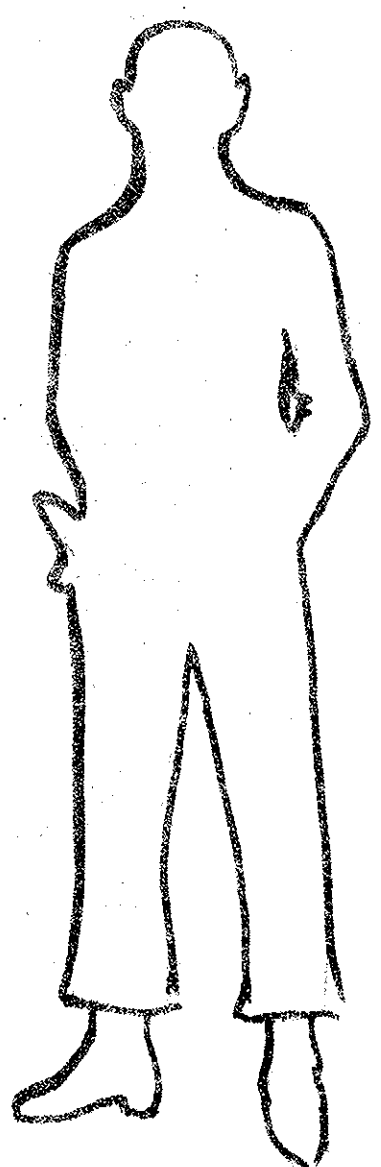
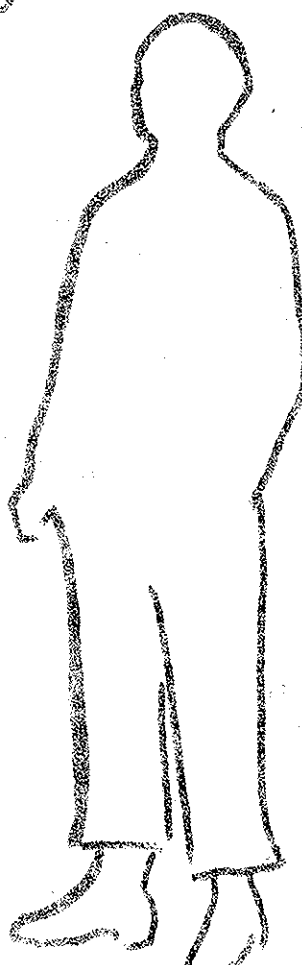
There's no doubt about how the crew see it; I think even Spock is more than a little surprised at the warmth of his reception, though of course he doesn't show it.

Amid all the confusion, I'm the only one close enough to hear the Captain as he says quietly, "Spock, that oath of loyalty... did you really forget to ask me to release you?"

The Vulcan stands silent for a moment, before he raises his eyes to Kirk's. Even more quietly, he replies at last, "Captain, Vulcans... do not forget."

Kirk's grin fades slowly; then he says, "Message received, Mr. Spock... and understood."

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The  
GUINEA  
PIGS

by Audrey Baker

McCoy looked gravely round the circle of faces that lined the table. Present were all the senior members of the Enterprise except the Captain. At the far end of the table McCoy could see the First Officer, but not even he knew why the Doctor had called this meeting.

"I'm afraid I've got some serious news for you all," McCoy said slowly. "It concerns the Captain."

From the end of the table he was aware of Spock's eyes on him but he continued, "The Captain has contracted a very rare disease. It is, in fact, so rare that it hasn't even got a name yet, only a number - K6. It isn't often we have come across it."

McCoy paused and Scotty broke in. "Is it fatal?"

"As far as we know, yes."

No-one said anything for a moment and then Spock said, "Do you not know of any cure?"

McCoy hesitated and then said, "There is one, but it's not easily come by."

"What difference does that make?" said Chekov impetuously. "What is it?"

"It's the juice from a certain plant, known as soldum. It's the only known thing that can arrest K6. The trouble is that there's only one planet where soldum can be found."

Spock spoke again. "And that is - ?"

"Molybarra," said McCoy.

"Then why isn't the ship already on course to Molybarra?" inquired Sulu.

"Because the Captain forbids it," said McCoy quietly.

There was a startled rustle. "But why?" demanded Chekov.

"Then he knows," said Spock before McCoy could answer the Russian.

"Yes, he knows," said McCoy. "And he says one death is enough."

"I am afraid that I do not comprehend," said Spock, puzzled.

"What do you know of Molybarra?" McCoy asked the company at large.

"Precious little," said Scotty and the others murmured agreement. Only Spock seemed deep in thought. McCoy looked at him.

"Well, Mr. Spock? Don't tell me you know nothing about it!"

Spock looked up at him. "Class M planet, humanoid inhabitants. Civilisation primitive and nomad and extremely superstitious. Planet not fully explored as yet, there is some suggestion of another intelligent life form not yet discovered," he said in a flat voice as if reading it off a printed page. "The Molybarrans - "

"As you say," McCoy broke in, cutting short the budding lecture. "The natives are very superstitious. I'd better explain the whole thing for the benefit of those less gifted in knowledge than yourself."

Spock ignored the jibe and McCoy continued. "The natives of Molybarra know about the soldum and its uses - the juice is a very fine medical drug and used for many differing ailments. However, it only grows in the remote areas of the planet and the Molybarrans have a strange way of acquiring it. They insist that it belongs to another race, that they themselves have never seen, and that this other race guards it jealously. The only way they can come by any, when they need it, is to pay for it - and they pay for it with their own lives."

Scotty said, "That's monstrous!"

"Yes, it is," said McCoy, "but that's their custom and has been for countless years. Their method is to choose the sacrifice - it only needs one - and send him out to a certain place, with a talisman. After a specified interval of

time, the others go to this place and find their soldum and the talisman waiting for them, but the sacrifice has gone and is never seen again."

A hum of talk broke out and McCoy paused to let the news sink in. Spock didn't comment. He sat in brooding silence. Presently Scotty called, "And so if we want some of this stuff we'll have to provide a sacrifice?"

"That's it in a nutshell," McCoy concurred. "And the Captain won't even consider such a thing."

"It's a pity he was told about it, then," said Chekov.

McCoy flushed slightly. "He already knew about it. In fact, he told me."

"But surely someone'll be willing to go?" Scotty said, and then hesitated. "Well, no, maybe not... "

"There's no question of anyone going!" snapped McCoy. "The Captain won't hear of it, I told you."

"Need he be told?" inquired Sulu.

"Can you certify the Captain as being unfit to command, Doctor?" Spock put in, breaking across the babel of voices.

"Well, I could... There's nothing wrong with him mentally, mind you, but he's sure cracking up physically."

Spock stood up. "Very well. If you will do so, I shall take over command and take the ship to Molybarra."

There were some murmurs at this and McCoy leaped up. "Aren't you being a little high-handed, Mr. Spock? I didn't say I would certify the Captain as being unfit for command."

Spock, already on his way to the door, turned and gave him a look of surprise. "I understood you to say that the Captain will die unless we obtain some soldum, Doctor."

"Yes - but - "

"If he will not take the ship to Molybarra, then someone else must do so. Have you any quarrel with that?"

McCoy sighed explosively and sat down again. "Oh. I guess not... All right, go ahead."

Spock went. Later, he looked into Kirk's cabin on his way down from the bridge - Kirk having been resting in his quarters - and found the Captain arguing furiously with McCoy.

"Ah, so there you are!" Kirk shouted at the sight of the black head and pointed ears in the doorway, and Spock tried to withdraw quickly but was too late. "Come in! Come in! I want a few words with you!"

"Yes, do come in," McCoy muttered. "You can take some of the bawling-out!"

Spock obediently came in. Kirk rounded on him almost with violence. He rated him without pause for five minutes. He wasn't nice in what he called him, either. Spock stood silent and said nothing. When Kirk finally ran out of breath he said mildly, "Captain, it is for your own benefit ultimately."

Kirk snorted. "That's what this lunkhead's been saying too! Mr. Spock, you know the conditions that apply to getting soldum on Molybarra, don't you?"

"Yes, Captain."

"And are you seriously suggesting I'd allow any member of my crew to sacrifice their life for mine?"

"There is hardly any question of your allowing it," Spock said. "I am in command now and what I allow is quite another matter."



"So you're taking the onus off me, are you? Thoughtful of you, Mr. Spock, but I'm afraid I can't have it. I refuse to allow any crew member to die on Molybarra. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly, Captain."

"Then stop all this bloody nonsense about going there!"

Spock shook his head. "I am afraid that is not possible, Captain."

Kirk took a deep breath. "And why?"

Spock looked at him serenely. "I must remind you that you are no longer in command. Under Starfleet Order No. 29968, sub-section (a), paragraph 2, I am empowered to - "

Kirk swung back onto McCoy. "Damn you, you're in league with him! I've had enough of it! Cancel that ridiculous certificate of yours. I'm perfectly fit to command!"

McCoy shook his head in his turn. "No, I can't do that, Jim. You see, you aren't fit to command. Refusing to go to Molybarra is a form of suicide, and suicides are of unsound mind, as I'm sure you'll agree."

Even Spock looked impressed.

Kirk stormed again for a few minutes, then fell silent. The other two watched him gravely but unrelentingly, united for once. Finally he spoke again, in a much calmer voice. "All right, so you'll take the ship to Molybarra, to find soldum. You know the penalty. Exactly how do you intend to proceed once you get there?"

"We will get the soldum," said Spock.

"Sure, but how? Whose life are you going to sacrifice for it?"

"There might not be a sacrifice entailed, Captain. How do we know for certain?"

Kirk looked at his First Officer keenly. "No? Listen, that custom is as old as time. I can hardly see the Molybarrans letting you waive it. A life for soldum - that's been their rule for countless ages. They're not going to let aliens walk in and change it, just like that! I ask you again, Mr. Spock, whose life are you going to sacrifice?"

"It is hardly a thing I can order anyone to do," said Spock.

"Exactly. And do you think anyone will rush to volunteer? Men are fond of life, you know. Do you hope to find someone who's tired of it?"

Spock said nothing.

"Well, Mr. Spock," Kirk said curtly. "Who are you proposing to send? I hope you haven't got any notion of making a burnt sacrifice of your wretched yeoman."

"Certainly not," said Spock, shocked.

"Bones," said Kirk to McCoy, "if you've got any brains at all, stop this absurdity! I'll put Spock in irons if I have to."

Spock looked at him calmly. "It would not help if you did, Captain. The ship is now on course for Molybarra and the crew would not obey your orders."

"I'll have you broken for this!" Kirk promised him.

"Captain, after we have been to Molybarra and obtained the soldum you are welcome to do what you like with me," Spock said simply. "But not until then."

Kirk turned away with an exasperated sound. "Tchah! It looks as if we've got to go there - you've won this round. But you won't win the next one, I'll see to that! No-one is going to throw away their life for me."

"Have I permission to go, Captain?" Spock said merely.

"Damn you, yes!"

He went and Kirk, feeling suddenly dizzy, reeled and almost fell. McCoy went and helped him to sit down, his face full of concern. "Take it easy, Jim. You shouldn't let fly like that in your state of health."

"I wish I could stop you going to Molybarra on this bloody fool's errand!" Kirk sighed.

"You just rest!" McCoy told him firmly.

When they reached Molybarra a small party beamed down to the surface. It consisted of McCoy, Spock and Kirk, who had insisted on going along too. The Molybarrans were thin, rather mournful people, but they weren't unwelcoming. They were willing to discuss the matter of the soldum and the sacrifice, and were quite definite that the latter was necessary to obtain the former. They didn't mind the Enterprise men getting some soldum and gave Spock the talisman they used. It was a large lump of crystal the size of a football.

"We would ask one thing of you," the Molybarran headman said. "That you will not try to rob the Others of their payment."

"We will not," Spock promised.

"If they are angered, much ill fortune will come to us."

"The sacrifice will be made, never fear."

"Not if I know it!" muttered Kirk, but McCoy hushed him.

"I don't see the point of getting all that information and bringing back the talisman," Kirk observed later when they'd left the Molybarran camp. "Neither of you is going after the soldum, I'm determined on that."

Spock's eyes met McCoy's and he moved unobtrusively behind Kirk.

"Of course not, Jim," McCoy said soothingly. "But anything's worth a try. There might be some way around it... "

Spock's hand arched forward and pressed Kirk's shoulder. Kirk went limp and Spock caught him and laid him on the ground.

"Right!" snapped McCoy. "Now let's get him back aboard - "

Spock reached for his communicator. "Spock to Enterprise. Two to beam up - the Captain and Dr. McCoy. Spock out." He flipped back the top of his communicator and looking at the infuriated and astounded doctor said, "I apologise, Doctor, but it is unavoidable. You will attend to the Captain when the soldum arrives. That is an order, Doctor."

McCoy tried to protest but had only got his mouth open when he started to vanish. He and Kirk disappeared in a golden shimmer, leaving Spock alone with the talisman. He deliberately tossed away his communicator into some thick undergrowth and started on his way at once.

The way to the glade of sacrifice was clearly marked by an avenue of gold-leaved trees. Spock followed it without difficulty, walking along with the talisman tucked under one arm. It wasn't a long walk and when he got there he found a wide clearing, in the centre of which was a wide flat rock with a projection like a back rest. There was no sign of life. Spock went up to the rock and held the talisman as he had been instructed, so that the sun's rays flashed off it like a signal. Then he sat down on the rock, leaned his back on the projection, put the talisman in his lap and waited. The sun moved across the sky and he waited, patient, for what was to come.

Back in the ship McCoy raged at the trick that had been played on him, for it had been agreed between him and Spock that they were going to get Kirk out of the way and then go for the soldum together, to see if two of them could

find some way of escape. He should have known better than to trust that pointed-eared son-of-a-bitch! Kirk, when he came round from the nerve pinch, was also considerably upset when he learned what had happened. He would have had Spock beamed up immediately if he could have located him, but Spock's jettisoning of his communicator had put paid to that and there was no way of tracing him. Which Spock had well known. McCoy was torn between two poles, the desire to remain and help Kirk when the soldum arrived, and the desire to go after Spock. After some thought he reasoned that perhaps if he hurried he might get to Spock in time to carry out their original plan of escaping or somehow overcoming the creatures who brought the soldum. It was worth trying, anyhow, and Kirk would be perfectly safe in the hands of Dr. M'Benga. Leaving Kirk in sickbay under sedation, McCoy slipped off to the transporter room. He knew how to reach the sacrificial glade, and when he had materialised below he set off for it hotfoot in pursuit of Spock.

He burst out into the clearing to find Spock still there, sitting on the rock, gazing in front of him. He took no notice whatever of McCoy, who was slightly irked at being so studiously ignored. He crossed to the Vulcan's side and said testily, "Well, you look safe enough! What happened? Wouldn't they accept you as a sacrifice?"

Spock didn't move his eyes. "Be quiet!" he said in a very level voice.

"Damned if I will!" exploded McCoy. "Stop sitting there like that! We were meant to - "

"Doctor, if I were you I should depart while I still could," Spock interrupted, without moving his eyes. "In a minute, indeed probably less, it might be too late."

"What are you talking about?"

"They have come for their payment."

McCoy swung round and looked for the first time where Spock was looking. He froze with horror. Looming above the gold-leaved trees were three huge towers. They stood black against the sun, covered with some kind of bark-like substance. They must have been over fifty feet high. As McCoy stared, astounded, one of them moved forward slowly, with trundling majesty, and then stopped. Then another moved a little in its turn.

"What the hell ARE they?" McCoy whispered.

"As one of them is carrying soldum plants, I can only assume they are those the Molybarrans referred to as 'the Others'," Spock answered. "I have been watching them approach for nearly half an hour."

"And you didn't bolt for it? God!"

"I am here for a purpose, but you are not. Go while you can."

McCoy hesitated, torn between fear and pride. Spock calmly watched the towers creeping closer. McCoy suddenly decided there was no point in both of them being captured. With a sudden instinctive impulse of self-preservation that he had no time to control or question, he turned and ran. The slow silent advance of those massive ominous figures had frightened him, and he was no coward. He was too late, however. A thing like a whip coiled round his legs and brought him crashing down. The tower began to reel him in like a fish. The second tower flung its whip thong about Spock and whirled him into the air. The talisman fell off his lap and bounced across the ground. The third tower tossed down a load of soldum plants on top of it. Then all three towers turned and retreated.

The two men were parcelled up in tough ribbon-like thongs and carried along through the forest. McCoy struggled for a while, trying to reach his communicator but when he finally managed to get his hand to it it was wrenched out of his hold and fell to the ground. Realising it was lost he ceased to struggle. It seemed pointless. Spock, who had hung limp and unresisting throughout, wasn't so tightly bound up and was able to examine his captor as they went along. He did so with his usual unquenchable scientific curiosity.

The creature was so immense it was difficult to see all of it, but Spock had seen many strange life forms in his time and gradually he picked out the various features. There was one eye, at the top of the tower. It was shaped like a crescent with its points downwards and was a yellowish colour. There was no visible mouth or nose, but these could have hidden in the folds of the bark-like black glistening skin. Some rather mossy growth above the eye passed for hair. The thong that had lassoed him so neatly was one of six, three per side, all identical in thickness but varying in length. Those not in use were carried neatly coiled up against the creature's sides. Spock craned his neck to look down but couldn't see how the creature moved. There were no visible feet or legs and it travelled rather as if it was on wheels. It paid him no attention whatever now it had caught him.

The towers travelled a long way deep into the unknown heart of the planet and they moved now at quite a pace. They appeared to be heading for a mountain range that now appeared over the horizon. Spock, who had resigned himself to his fate, presently dozed off where he was. McCoy, less at ease, fidgeted and tried not to think of what might be coming.

Back in the Enterprise, the Molybarrans had delivered the consignment of solum and Kirk was already being treated by M'Benga. He was stunned and couldn't take in the terrible fact that he'd lost both his friends.

"It's a terrible blow," Scotty said to Sulu later. "The Doctor and Mr. Spock both gone."

"I'm sorry we came to this darn place!" said Sulu with violence.

"Would you rather the Captain had died, then?"

"No, but as it is it's two lives for his one. And look at him! He isn't grateful for it!"

"They were the two men closest to him," Scotty said with a sigh. "You canna blame him for feeling it."

Nurse Chapel came by them and gave them a rather forced smile. They watched her until she was out of sight and then Sulu said wisely, "And there's another broken heart! Poor girl, she's really hard hit."

"Ach well, everyone knows she was just about mad for Mr. Spock," said Scotty. "He never bothered, though. He was more than half a computer."

In the sickbay Dr. M'Benga said to Kirk, "You've got to get better, sir!" and Kirk replied firmly,

"Sure I've got to! Do you think I'm wasting my friends' lives?" But when the doctor had gone, he sat and stared miserably at the bulkhead.

Far below the massive circling Starship, at the root of the mountain range, Spock and McCoy were prisoners in a cage. They were in what was all too obviously a laboratory. It wasn't difficult to guess why they were there.

"Guinea pigs!" said McCoy bitterly as they looked out of the heavy mesh that barred them from liberty. "That's what we are, Spock! Now we know what the towers need sacrifices for. They use them for experiments!"

"We must seem very small and insignificant to them," Spock observed mildly.

McCoy didn't look as if the idea appealed to him. "But surely they must realise we're intelligent beings? For one thing, we're clothed."

"And they are not," said Spock. "Possibly they do not know what clothes are. And anyway, intelligence is a matter of comparison, Doctor. To an insect no doubt a guinea pig would appear intelligent."

McCoy sighed. "I don't like the look of the immediate future, Spock!"

"No, nor do I," Spock admitted. He looked at McCoy with sudden unexpected concern. "You should not have followed me, Doctor. There was no need for a second sacrifice."

"Believe me, I didn't mean to sacrifice myself," said McCoy, not quite truthfully.

Spock shook his head. "Your following me was all the more illogical, then. This is all right for me, it is what I was prepared for, but YOU have no place here."

"I'd like nothing better than NOT to be here!" grunted McCoy. "However, there's damn-all we can do about it for the moment."

"Except wait," said Spock.

They weren't ill-treated, any more than laboratory animals are. Their cage was large and they had some woolly material to sleep on. They were fed regularly and the food wasn't unpalatable, although quite unrecognisable. They were given it on broad flat leaves as firm as cardboard, which passed as plates. They had to eat with their fingers, which the fastidious Spock resented, but in time they grew quite skilful at it. They were given a plentiful water supply, even for washing. The towers had provided their captives with a neat little sink in one corner and in another corner there was a low bowl that drained out into a pipe below the cage - they had evidently been accustomed to keeping humans and knew what was required in the way of sanitary arrangements. The two men had all they needed except something to do. McCoy became bored in a very short time but Spock found an interest in watching the towers as they moved about the laboratory outside the cage. At first they wondered if they would find any of the previous sacrifices still alive, but there were none visible. It looked ominously as if they'd been killed.

A short while after their arrival they were taken out of the cage one at a time and closely examined by two of the towers. These weren't the ones who had taken them from the glade. One was evidently old, as its skin was more heavily folded and greyer than the others'. The second tower was smaller and slighter in build and its moss-like hair was thicker and longer. These two carefully turned the men this way and that and probed them, but not painfully, although it tickled. Spock's ears were gently pulled, as if the towers weren't used to such appendages and thought they might be detachable. The sensitive thongs felt their clothes and the smaller tower of the two made notes in some kind of hieroglyphics on what looked like a sheet of cork. The two men were weighed and measured and then put back into their cage.

"I know what guinea pigs must feel like now!" McCoy commented ruefully.

"I think the smaller of the two creatures is a female," Spock observed thoughtfully.

"Do you? Perhaps it is. But whatever it is, it's no beauty."

"Very probably we are not beauties to them, either."

McCoy refrained from saying that he was in complete agreement with them if so, particularly where Spock was concerned.

Whether it was female or not, the smaller of the two towers took charge of them and fed them. It seemed fond of them in a way and would sometimes pick them out and hold them up, looking at them and apparently gaining pleasure from just petting them. It was always particularly gentle when handling them, and sometimes it would stroke their heads softly with the tip of one thong.

"Like a little girl with a pussycat," said McCoy.

The experiments began before long, but were bearable to begin with. First came intelligence tests. They couldn't tell if they'd impressed their captors with these or not, but presently they ceased and endurance tests began. These were much harder. It was evidently the older tower's intention to find out how

much these funny little creatures could stand. He put McCoy into a centrifuge that left him sick and dizzy for a long time. He threw Spock into a large pan of water and left him to swim for it. Spock could swim if he had to, but he didn't like doing it. This time, though, it was obviously a choice between swimming and drowning, so he swam. The pan seemed small enough to the towers, no doubt, but to him it was almost as wide as a sea. He got more than halfway across before he foundered and when he ran out of strength he floated. Seeing that he was exhausted, the tower fished him out and the smaller one tenderly dried him. To do the job properly she took his clothes off, very delicately - it must have been like undressing a tiny doll to her - and then rolled him up in a substance like cottonwool while she dried his clothes. She then dressed him again, holding him between two of her thongs and turning him around. McCoy, watching from the cage, couldn't help grinning, but Spock remained dignified and unresisting. He would have preferred to dress himself but he wasn't going to make an issue of it. The female tower appeared to find his nakedness fascinating and she stroked and smoothed him a while before putting his clothes on again. He ignored her icily, to McCoy's further amusement.

The longer they remained in the laboratory the more the two men got to know about their captors and before long they were almost convinced that the two towers were father and daughter. The father was evidently a scientist and his daughter was assisting him and being trained. They often watched the old tower showing the young one how to do something with the equipment and scolding her when she made a mistake. They spoke in muffled booms, but try as they might the men could never make sense of them or indeed differentiate between the sounds. Spock was sure the towers couldn't hear human voices, they were too high-pitched for them, and certainly when he once tried shouting at the female she took no notice of him at all.

After the endurance tests came the injections. These McCoy viewed with considerable misgiving, and even Spock showed some uneasiness. The first lot made them both vomit. The female tower, who McCoy had dubbed Bessie, showed signs of concern and tried to tempt them to eat with what she evidently considered to be great delicacies, but her father - if he was her father - didn't appear to appreciate her kindness towards his laboratory animals.

"Definitely a female!" Spock groaned, turning his head away from Bessie's anxious administrations. "She has all the characteristics of her sex!"

For all his thumping headache and churning innards, McCoy chuckled.

When the old tower - who McCoy called Moses - rooted them roughly out of bed and hauled them out for inspection, Bessie hovered nearby and tucked them both back into bed again with almost motherly care when he'd finished with them.

The next injections upset McCoy but didn't affect Spock at all. This appeared to vastly intrigue Moses, who couldn't understand it.

"It's your lousy Vulcan constitution!" McCoy said sourly to Spock. "And come to that, it's your fault we're here at all!"

"We can at least presume that the Captain is alive and recovered now," Spock said reprovingly. "Surely that should be sufficient."

McCoy, however, was feeling too ill to be sure of that.

The next injections brought them both out in an itchy rash. They scratched madly until Bessie took pity on them and dusted them both down with some kind of powder that soothed the irritation.

They both noticed when the time came for their next dose Bessie seemed worried and appeared to be asking Moses not to give it. Moses ignored her and injected McCoy only. Bessie then swept him up and hugged him gently before putting him back in the cage, as if in apology. They soon found out why.

Soon McCoy began glowering and muttering insults at Spock, who ignored them. Then McCoy got up and hit Spock across the face. Spock had been sitting cross-

legged on the floor - they had no chairs - and the blow knocked him off balance and bowled him over backwards. McCoy hurled himself onto him, or tried to, but Spock was too quick for him and had not to his feet before McCoy hit the place where he'd been. Not at all put off by this, McCoy scrambled up and advanced onto his companion with a murderous expression. Spock backed before him warily, every sense alert.

"What is the matter with you, Doctor?" he asked, trying to reason with him, although he guessed.

"I'll finish you off once and for all!" McCoy ground out. "Just wait till I get my hands on you, you pointed-eared slant-eyed son of a bitch!"

But Spock wasn't waiting. McCoy rushed him, he dodged. McCoy wheeled like an outraged bull, and once more Spock dodged.

The commotion had attracted Moses's attention and he trundled up to watch and take notes on how aggressive these little creatures could become.

After a considerable amount of dodging, Spock was finally trapped in the corner by the sink. Delighted, McCoy advanced on him for the last time. Spock waited as long as he could with safety and then came out to meet him with such suddenness that McCoy was taken by surprise. His arm was caught and jerked, his leg kicked away from under him and he somersaulted into the air and landed with a crash some yards off. Spock stood where he was and waited. Pleased, Moses scribbled busily with one of his thongs. It looked as if the little animals were really going to fight. If there was a fatal casualty he didn't mind. They were both the same sex, so he didn't need two of them anyway.

McCoy climbed to his feet, livid, and hurled himself to the attack again, reaching for Spock's throat. Again he was met and bowled off his feet, to land with a thud. He was stunned and stayed where he was for a moment, and Spock took advantage of it to get out of the corner. But McCoy still followed him grimly and he saw the only thing to do was to stand and fight it out. Once more they came together. Spock moved so fast that Moses couldn't follow what he did - and nor, for that matter, could McCoy, who found himself tied up in knots and dumped most ungently on the floor. As he tried to get up again, Spock's long hand reached over his shoulder and gripped. McCoy sagged like an empty sack and slid down again unconscious. Spock stood for a moment looking at Moses. Then he bent and hauled McCoy across to the bed and put him into it to recover.

By the time McCoy regained his senses he was himself once more and wanted to know why he ached all over.

"This is getting worse," he commented when Spock had explained.

"I think the one you call Moses wished me to kill you," Spock said without emotion.

"If you'd been doped too I don't doubt you'd have done it," McCoy said drily.

"Perhaps."

"Let's just hope he doesn't try it again."

They looked at one another and said no more on the subject.

Bessie came into the laboratory and gently lifted them out. She examined them both for damage, and stroked them, booming softly at them.

"She's apologising for her father," said McCoy, "And I don't wonder!"

The old tower saw what she was doing and roared at her to put them back. Bessie hastily did so, but she still didn't treat them roughly.

"I've got a soft spot for Bessie," said McCoy after she'd gone. "I'd like to make firewood of her old man, though!"

"An ambition you are unlikely to fulfil, Doctor," said Spock dampeningly.

McCoy walked to the mesh of the cage and looked through it at Moses, busy at one of the benches.

"What worries me is what they're going to do with us," he said. "I'm sure old Moses has no intention of keeping us permanently."

"No," Spock agreed. "Sooner or later he will have finished his experiments or one of the experiments will kill us."

"And if it doe n't, when he's done with us, then..." said McCoy and made a thumbs-down gesture.

"Exactly," said Spock gloomily. "All we can hope for is a speedy end."

Meanwhile the ship continued to orbit Molybarra. Kirk refused to take her away until he was fully recovered. He was trying to find some way that he could rescue his friends, if they still lived. He could have sent down a large rescue party with phasers and no doubt he could have tracked the two men, but the obstacle here was the Molybarrans. They refused point-blank to allow such a thing and in fact implored Kirk not to do it. It would, they insisted, endanger them all, for once the Others had been robbed of their payment they would be revenged. The headman agreed that McCoy had been an extra bonus and not in the contract, but even so, he said, the Others must not be annoyed. He implied that if McCoy had been silly enough to get himself taken off he must abide by the consequences. Kirk fretted helplessly but knew he couldn't act. He had no right to endanger the lives of the natives, even if he didn't personally believe anything would happen to them. They believed it would, and that was all that counted. Still, he thought, there must be some way of getting Spock and Bones free without angering the Others, whoever they are. I'm damned if I'm leaving here until I've had a good think about it. Maybe I'll hit on something in time. I'm not going off until I'm sure there's no way I can rescue them. He refused to consider that they might already be dead. It was an idea he couldn't bear to think of.

Starfleet Command was surprisingly understanding but told him he couldn't have much longer. The ship was needed elsewhere soon, and she must go, whether he'd located his friends or not. He would never have been given permission to remain as long as he had if the Admiral hadn't been a personal friend of his. Sometimes, he reflected wryly, it pays to have friends in high places!

In the laboratory miles below, relations between Bessie and Moses were growing increasingly strained as Bessie continued to make pets of the two men. On one occasion she was working alone when a strange tower came into the laboratory, another young one. By the way she reacted to it, it was a male, and she had a fancy for him, which was reciprocated. The two men thought he looked exactly like a less wrinkled edition of Moses, but Bessie seemed to think he was extremely handsome. She fluttered around him as seductively as a fifty-foot tower could flutter, and McCoy at least was thoroughly enjoying the spectacle when Moses returned suddenly, roaring like thunder.

"Oh God, that's done it!" exclaimed McCoy. "Poor old Bessie!"

Bessie and her boy-friend blundered apart. Moses shot out a thong and belted the young male one in the face - or what passed for a face - so that he almost measured his not inconsiderable length on the floor. Then Moses turned his attention to Bessie. He grabbed her and shook her until the laboratory rocked, roaring all the time. Then he let her go and chased the young male out, hitting and slapping at him. Once he had gone, Moses returned to Bessie and proceeded to beat her savagely. His thongs whistled and cracked like whips and the men could see raised weals appearing on the smaller tower's body.

"Revolting!" pronounced Spock with distaste. "There is no need for such behaviour."



"Could she be his young wife instead of his daughter?" McCoy wondered. "He seems terribly put out."

"I do not know, Doctor, but I do know that his violence is most objectionable," Spock stated. "He is hurting her badly. Would you beat your own wife like that if she was unfaithful to you?"

For a moment McCoy looked stricken, then he forced himself to reply lightly. "I might, if I was old and beyond it and looked like he does!" he said, and Spock gave him a look of freezing disapproval. They stood together and watched poor Bessie's punishment and McCoy shouted rude comments at Moses, which he couldn't hear.

After Moses had left, Bessie came over to them. She was moving jerkily and appeared to be in pain, but she came to feed them as usual.

"Poor old girl," said McCoy pityingly and as she lowered their plates in to them he caught hold of one of her thongs and held it to his cheek for a moment. Above them the tower's big single eye looked down on them with sudden softening. She caressed McCoy's head gently with one of her thongs.

"She knows how you feel," Spock remarked, sitting down with his food.

"I'm quite fond of old Bessie," McCoy said as Bessie trundled away. "She's been kind to us."

"She has indeed."

McCoy sighed and looked round the cage. "So this is where we end our lives. Rather constricting - and far too soon."

"Death is nearly always too soon," said Spock. "But it always comes."

"Vulcan philosophy!" snorted McCoy.

That evening there was a great argument between the two towers. They boomed at one another until the laboratory rang with the noise. For a long time Bessie seemed to be standing up for herself, but eventually she left, rather diminished, and Moses continued to bellow triumphantly after her.

"I wonder what all that was about?" mused McCoy.

"I am sure I do not know, but I do not like it," said Spock.

Moses came over to the cage and stood looking at them.

"You've forgotten our dinner, you son of a bitch!" McCoy told him.

"Or he deliberately has not given it to us," Spock said. "I do not think he forgets much."

Moses opened the cage and lifted the two men roughly out. He held them up, looking at them, not noticing - or not caring - that he was holding Spock upside down. He surveyed them both for a moment and then tossed them disdainfully back into the cage. They tumbled on top of one another on the cage floor, grunting with the impact.

"Wonderful!" said McCoy bitingly as he sat up.

"I am afraid this bodes ill," said Spock, dusting himself down. "That, unless I am mistaken, was a farewell inspection. We are going to be - disposed of."

"You always were cheerful!" observed McCoy.

"No, Doctor. Merely logical."

They sat on their bed and stared at the mesh of their prison. Moses had gone. They were hungry.

"Wish Bessie'd come and feed us," said McCoy after a long silence.

"Possibly she has been given instructions not to do so. That might have

been the cause of the argument we saw," said Spock.

"God, do you think they're going to starve us to death?" McCoy exclaimed.

"I do not know," answered Spock, and then lifted his head, listening.  
"Someone is coming now. Perhaps it is the female with our food."

It was Bessie, but when she came up to them she wasn't carrying any food. She opened the cage and took them carefully out, then instead of holding them up to pet them as she usually did, she set off across the laboratory with them.

"What's going on?" McCoy hissed to Spock, who was held in a neighbouring thong.

"I do not know," said Spock again, refusing to be excited. "Wait and see."

There was nothing else to be done, but in a moment they realised Bessie was taking them out of the laboratory. It was the first time they'd been outside since their original arrival.

"Great God, I believe she's letting us go!" McCoy whispered to Spock, who didn't reply. He wasn't going to be drawn into speculation.

Outside, the planet lay under thin moonlight. Bessie didn't put them down. She started trundling swiftly across the ground, brushing through the trees but being careful not to hurt her burden.

"She is returning to the sacrificial glade," Spock said after a while.

"Bless her!" said McCoy with feeling. "Moses'll have her hide for this when he finds out."

"I must confess that the thought perturbs me also," Spock confessed. "I hope he is not too rough with her."

"He'll half-kill her, poor thing!"

"Well, no doubt she is aware of what she risks. She might be able to blame our escape onto some other agency."

"I sure hope she does - and that she fools the old son of a bitch!"

"So do I," said Spock, and meant it.

Bessie, oblivious to the conversation, was moving more rapidly than they'd ever seen a tower move. She was obviously in a hurry. Pushing through the trees with a noise like a strong wind, she took them to the glade of sacrifice and put them gently down. They stood together looking up at her, as she loomed over them against the sky, her one eye shining down at them. She twined her thongs loving round them both, stroking their heads. They rubbed their faces on her thongs, it being the only way they could thank her. Then she let them go, with a little push each towards the avenue that led to safety. She couldn't have told them more clearly that they were free to go. Then, as they turned away from her, she turned too and went, and they heard her moving off, the noise gradually fading into the silence of the night.

McCoy looked at Spock. "God, who would have thought it? Talk of being born under a lucky star!"

"That is a ridiculous statement," said Spock precisely. "How could anyone be born under a star, lucky or otherwise?"

"Oh, you!" grunted McCoy, and then he said, "Well, we'd best find those Molybarrans. They'll tell us what to do next. We don't even know if the ship's still there."

Spock suddenly said, "No need, Doctor."

In front of them a golden glimmer began to show, gradually hardening into a familiar shape - stocky and well-built. Kirk stood there, gazing at them astounded.

"Spock! Bones!"

"I am glad to see you recovered, Captain," said Spock, completely unruffled, but McCoy exclaimed joyfully,

"Jim!" and went to grip Kirk by the arms.

"How did you get here?" both he and Kirk asked simultaneously, and then they both laughed.

"The ship's leaving orbit shortly," Kirk explained, "Starfleet Command's orders... I couldn't keep her here any longer. Had a job keeping her here this long as it was! I beamed down for a - well, a kind of farewell look, I guess. I never expected to find you here waiting for me!"

Spock looked at him shrewdly. "I understand, Captain," was all he said.

"Your side of the story'll keep until we're back on board," Kirk told them, and taking out his communicator said, "Kirk to Enterprise. Three to beam up."

\*\*\*\*\*

ALTERNATE UNIVERSE by Janet Hall

If I can penetrate  
 An alternate universe  
 Where Spock is so very different,  
 Yet the same;  
 Where all the standards I have prized  
 Throughout my life  
 Are changed:  
 And where my ship  
 (Oh my ship!)  
 Is abused,  
 Misused,  
 And utterly subverted  
 For an alien purpose  
 By a crew, in turn, completely alien  
 (Although Human by name);  
 Where only the evil man is  
 Praiseworthy and of use;  
 If I can penetrate  
 This universe and there,  
 Despite the inversion of all I've ever known,  
 Establish a rapport with  
 The man I call my close friend in this time,  
 Break through the barriers of  
 Time,  
 Space.  
 And race,  
 And see in him my friend of here and now.  
 If that is possible,  
 Then can't there be  
 Somewhere,  
 Somehow,  
 A universe  
 Where Gary Mitchell doesn't have to die,  
 Where Decker and his crew go safely home,  
 Where Spock and Leila have a second chance,  
 Where Sam is still alive, and where, at last,  
 Edith is waiting for me,  
 Unchanging and unchanged,  
 And only history altered so she lives.

\*\*\*\*\*

TRIAL AND ERROR by Kelly Mitchell

"Welcome aboard, Doctor!"

Captain James T. Kirk extended a hand to the newest member of his crew and smiled warmly in an attempt to put him at ease. Leonard McCoy relaxed a little as Kirk duly dismissed the crewman who had shown McCoy the way to the Captain's quarters.

If the truth be known, Kirk had arranged that McCoy come aboard without any fuss. He had deliberately stayed away and instructed Spock to do likewise. With all due respect for the qualities of his First Officer, the ability to put people at ease could not be counted among them.

"Please sit down, Doctor - I'll keep this as informal as I can."

McCoy obeyed, at the same time taking the opportunity to study Kirk as the Captain collected a file from a nearby cabinet before sitting at the desk. McCoy prepared himself for the big interrogation. ('Haven't you left it rather late to be joining Starfleet, Doctor? Running away doesn't solve anything, you know; are you sure you can cope with the rigours of this sort of life?') He'd lost count of the number of times he'd been asked those questions.

Why couldn't they just leave him alone? Accept his qualifications and leave him to get on with the job. The rugged face clouded and his eyes dimmed at the memories. Well - better get it over with. He looked up to meet the Captain's gaze.

Kirk closed the file and tried for an opening. "I understand you know Mr. Scott quite well?"

McCoy cleared his throat. "Yes - I... er - we are acquainted... Sir." Kirk had the impression that the 'Sir' was very much an afterthought.

He leaned back in his chair and tried to guess what was in McCoy's mind. He had thought this would be the best way for them to meet - perhaps he had made a mistake. The man seemed critical, suspicious of every action. Kirk was aware of McCoy's background; had studied the records, spoken to Scotty. Maybe in time...

"Well - I don't think there's anything else, Doctor - unless you have any questions?"

McCoy couldn't believe his ears. What kind of a joke was this? Sudden anger lent him courage. "Well... Aren't you gonna..." The southern drawl was almost accusing. Kirk waited. "Aren't you curious why I joined up? All the others were - or maybe it's common knowledge by now, all down there in black and white!" He indicated the file bitterly. Kirk's face had lost its warmth and McCoy - not for the first time in his life - regretted his hasty temper, whilst Kirk fought to keep his under control - and somehow managed to succeed.

"What your previous commanding officers did or did not want to know concerning your personal life, Dr. McCoy, is of no interest to me - what does concern me is the safety and welfare of the Enterprise and everyone aboard her. Whilst you are entitled to your privacy and your memories - however painful - " McCoy looked up sharply, but Kirk continued, " - I must ask that these be placed second to your responsibilities as Chief Medical Officer aboard this ship."

McCoy remained silent, confused. No-one had ever spoken to him like that before. He looked at Kirk, tried to analyse character. He'd heard the rumours ('Whizz Kid', 'Young', 'Ambitious') and drawn his own conclusions; promising himself he wouldn't join Kirk's Appreciation Society, he had come aboard prepared to dislike him, and yet - this man seemed to understand, was prepared to accept him for his worth and not poke around in his past. Maybe he'd been hasty...

"I shall endeavour to fulfill my duties adequately, Captain. If you would direct me to Sickbay - I'll get right on and..."

Kirk interrupted, relieved that the tension had eased. "I think we can do

better than that." He leaned over and flicked a switch on the intercom. "Lieutenant, have Mr. Scott report to my quarters right away."

McCoy heard the respectful "Aye, aye, sir," from Uhura and felt his dislike for the Captain returning. He was so damn sure of himself!

\* \* \* \*

A short while later after Kirk had deposited McCoy in the Chief Engineer's care, he reviewed the situation and frowned. Things hadn't quite turned out as planned. He had wanted only to put the man at ease but he had almost had a war on his hands. Kirk drummed his fingers absently on the desk - on McCoy's file, just a few pieces of paper, the record of a man's life. He glared at it and remembered his own first day on the Enterprise, just about one year earlier. He had had much in common with McCoy in a way - the same anxieties, McCoy feeling maybe his age would stand in the way of a new career; the newly appointed Captain of the Enterprise, as the youngest Captain in the Fleet feeling his youth would condemn him. McCoy trying to forget a past; Kirk searching for a future. He had hated every minute of that day - the dress uniform, the piping aboard, the formal introductions, the whispered comparisons, and Spock - the clipped, efficient but expressionless sentences through the days that followed, but Kirk had persevered, pretended he didn't notice - too much; and as time went by, they grew closer, learned to recognise and admire the qualities in the other until there came a day when Kirk had been hurt, though not seriously, and Spock had asked, "Are you quite all right, Jim?" with more than just a hint of concern. Kirk suddenly realised that it was going to be even harder for him to earn McCoy's loyalty and respect.

A change of expression, a gentle touch could tell Spock 'I understand you, trust me, I am your friend', and for perhaps the first time the Human side of Spock - maybe even the Vulcan too - had responded, acknowledged this to be so, and having accepted it as the logical thing to do - trusted.

But Kirk couldn't say to the Doctor 'I want to be your friend' - a man McCoy had once called friend destroyed his marriage and his life. How, then, having once trusted and been so wrong could any man be expected to make the same mistake again - but... he just might be persuaded, with a little time and a lot of determination - and James T. Kirk was an extremely determined man.

\* \* \* \*

It was just as well. Through the days that followed, even the carefully nurtured friendship with Spock became stretched; like the time when Kirk had asked outright, "You don't like McCoy, do you, Spock?"

"I find the Doctor -- most efficient, Captain."

But Kirk wanted more. "That's not what I asked you."

"Nevertheless, Captain - those are my observations." And that was the end of that.

In his turn McCoy didn't go out of his way to melt any ice as far as Spock was concerned. To him the Vulcan was some kind of freak. It wasn't prejudice - it was that damned superior, know-it-all logic. Even when McCoy had taken a great deal of trouble once over a priority report, cutting hours off the deadline, what had he got? Just a raised eyebrow and a cold stare. Well - why should he worry? Nobody worried about him.

But he was wrong. Jim Kirk was worried, for more reasons than one. With Spock he knew where he stood; knew that Spock understood what it was like to be alone in a crowded room; and on those rare days when Kirk's own kind of loneliness prevailed, he shut himself away and Spock had understood - respected his need for privacy.

McCoy's arrival had changed all that. Kirk suddenly sensed he was under scrutiny twenty-four hours a day. He didn't mind - not at first, and then it became increasingly difficult not to let up, to stop playing Captain sometimes

and become plain Jim Kirk just for a little while; but he found himself careful, wary lest McCoy should detect any sign of weakness or inefficiency. He knew that McCoy disliked him, was waiting a chance to prove - what? And suddenly Kirk felt very vulnerable and afraid; afraid that McCoy might learn something that Kirk himself didn't know until now.

\* \* \* \*

It had to happen some time and, although Kirk had dreaded the moment, the time when he would have to be the subject of McCoy's ministrations, Destiny had other plans. He had never asked anything of McCoy yet. Had put up with the occasional headaches; even managed to defer a routine medical; but some things just don't go away - like a broken collar bone, for instance.

The planet was a treasure trove of mineral deposits. Rytalin, dilithium crystals, you name it, it was there. It was too good to be true and Kirk should have known there'd be a drawback; but, if the thought had crossed his mind, he wasn't prepared to let it stay.

McCoy was included in the landing party, a couple of security guards, Spock of course, and - himself. Spock had questioned him on that point - not with words but with that quizzical look which said more than words ever could. It didn't work and Kirk's "Shall we go, gentlemen," dismissed any further argument as he took his place alongside them on the transporter pad.

They shimmered into existence again on the planet's surface and Kirk wondered - not for the first time - why it was that such valuable ores chose to position themselves on bleak, barren worlds, almost daring anyone to touch. This planet was no exception and for some reason Kirk recalled an old Earth quotation - "In order to command Nature, one must first obey".

McCoy and Spock had gone to work with tricorders. He could understand the urgency. The sooner they were finished, the better all round.

McCoy took himself off, followed by a bored-looking security guard, and Kirk hung around for a while trying to look interested. Why the devil had he come? Suddenly aware that Spock was watching him, he tugged at his shirt, took a quick look around and headed purposefully towards a section of rocky terrain some distance away. He stood for a second, contemplating, then started to climb. It wasn't difficult, although occasionally what appeared to be a solid rock crumbled to dust as his hand made contact. Half climbing, half walking, he reached the top.

It was a reasonable view; the planet's lack of colour making it easier to see the red and blue uniforms below. He watched the figures for a while and sat idly drawing fingers through the soil beside him, and then - a thought - strange, crumbling, almost like sand. He looked around and then he saw the hollows - at least, that was what they seemed to be one minute, the next - solid, all around him, the ground shifting, altering shape.

"What the devil!..." He got to his feet, banging the call button on his communicator. "Spock! Warn the others..."

"Captain!" the Vulcan interrupted and his tone added to Kirk's alarm. "I was about to call you. The planet is..."

"Explanations can wait - get everyone together - we've got to get the hell out of here..."

Silence.

"Spock?" The communicator crackled back at him. "Damn!" Half slipping, half falling, Kirk headed down to join the others.

Spock heard as far as 'We've got to get...' before he lost the Captain. He'd also lost the Enterprise - at least communication-wise; there was no sign of McCoy and the guards either. A decision reached, Spock started towards the area he'd last seen Kirk. Unconsciously his step quickened as his mind computed

the odds. If the land was shifting, altering mass and composition - the Captain was not in the safest of places.

\* \* \* \*

Kirk was rapidly making the same discovery.

The planet was indeed undergoing a transformation, had been doing so since her birth, and, not satisfied with her appearance, she had moulded away making a slight variation here and there; barely perceptible to the casual eye, but now - she was bored, restless - the time was right for a change; James T. Kirk just happened to be in the way when she decided to open up the ground beneath him.

He had warning. Perhaps only one second before, a sixth sense rang alarm bells. He was only feet from the bottom now, and almost as the ground disintegrated, he was diving headlong in an attempt to roll free of the chasm below. There had been no time to consider technique. His outstretched right hand took the full impact as he landed heavily on solid ground, slid the rest of the way to the bottom and lay still.

Suddenly aware that someone was shaking him, Kirk tried to answer and found his mouth full of choking sand. He coughed and decided that it was definitely a mistake. Spock rolled him over gently, cushioned his head.

Kirk opened his eyes, much to the Vulcan's relief, and blinked as scalding tears attempted to clear the sand from them. "Spock, I..." His throat felt raw and forgetting his previous mistake, he coughed again.

Spock held him, seeing the deep grazes near the elbows where cloth and skin had been rubbed away and powdery sand still clung to drying blood. Kirk was holding his own right arm now, his head leaning toward the shoulder as he tried to ease the weight on the broken clavicle. Spock took his hand away gently and Kirk cried out softly in pain.

"Captain? Jim?" Kirk managed somehow to lift his head. The dark eyes were concerned. "We cannot stay here."

Kirk nodded and tried to move, but the agony began again. Spock reached out a hand and Kirk felt the fingers search for the nerve between his neck and shoulder; press gently. The pain disappeared, replaced by a momentary anxiety, a reluctance to surrender, and then the world drifted away as he lost consciousness.

\* \* \* \*

When he woke up, Spock's uniform had shrunk; at least, that's what first impressions told him. Second impressions were better. The hem of Spock's uniform shirt was currently doing a very nice number as a sling for Kirk's arm. Amused at the sight of his First Officer with bare midriff, the Captain was finding it extremely difficult to keep a serious expression.

"You... could have used mine," he said, indicating his own tattered shirt. Spock was himself struggling with one or two problems, such as concern and a strange warm feeling inside at the sight of Kirk's tired smile. He turned to pick up the tridorder lying nearby. It helped - a little. His reply managed to sound suitably detached.

"Not necessary, Captain - you have the greater need."

Kirk struggled to get to his feet with Spock supporting him, and even a Vulcan had no immunity for Kirk's simple, grateful, "Thank you."

They looked around. It seemed so quiet now - like the silence that precedes a battle, and Kirk shivered. The pain was back with him again; he forced his mind to concentrate. "Mr. Spock - I'll hear those explanations now."

The First Officer hesitated for only a moment. "Structural realignment, Captain." As if that explained everything. Then he simplified for Kirk's benefit. "The planet is currently undergoing geophysical change, rearranging mass. Evidently the wealth of mineral deposits is intensifying the effect."

"Sensors indicated nothing unusual before we beamed down - "

"Negative, Captain - but warnings, however desirable, are not always forthcoming."

"McCoy and the guards?"

"I have been unable to make contact. The disturbance is effectively disrupting communication channels.... "

"And doing a very good job." Kirk frowned. "We're overdue for routine call in. Would there be any danger to a search party...?" He paused as the tri-corder hummed an unusual tune at Spock's touch. Spock released the button and looked at Kirk, stating the facts in computer language.

"Magnetic fields - unstable."

It took a second for the message to sink in and then Kirk's shocked voice said "Transporters!"

"Precisely, Captain - there can be no assistance at the present time."

Kirk's throat was dry. He reflected for a moment on the wisdom of his own inclusion in the landing party. If he had been on board the Enterprise... He pushed the thought away. Scotty would be doing everything possible.

Spock seemed to read his mind, sense the need for reassurance. A hand touched Kirk's arm. "Jim - it would make no difference."

Kirk didn't answer; couldn't. Spock was right. In theory it made little difference who was in command in a situation like this. No - the mistake had been in his own stubbornness and now he was worse than useless, would jeopardise the survival chances of the others - if they had survived. He thought aloud. "Safety in numbers... "

"Captain?"

Kirk turned, a plan of operation forming. The movement brought a stab of pain and he held his breath until it passed. "Advice, Spock - from long ago, but it still holds true. Let's go find the others."

"Indeed, Captain." Spock sounded almost relieved. "You will most certainly require the services of Dr. McCoy if we are to remain here for any length of time."

Kirk's eyes were already searching for a landmark, anything which would help them locate the spot where he had last caught sight of McCoy and the guards. He swallowed as the meaning behind Spock's words grew clearer.

"I was... afraid you'd say that." He spoke softly, not really to anyone in particular and started out feeling somewhat like the proverbial lamb to the slaughter.

\* \* \* \*

Apparently disaster hasn't struck all areas at once. McCoy was unharmed and very relieved to see them. When he couldn't contact the ship and only one security guard had returned, somewhat battered and obviously shaken, to report that the ground had upped and swallowed his companion, the doctor hadn't been enthusiastic about hanging around much longer. Neither was he interested in the technical explanation for their predicament. As he pointed out -

"I'm a Doctor, not a geologist!"

The journey had taken its toll of Kirk. He leaned back against the rocky overhang where they had found McCoy, and closed his eyes. Spock looked steadily at McCoy. The doctor's jaw tightened; he didn't need any Vulcan to tell him his job. The hypo hissed, not too gently, against Kirk's arm. McCoy had quite looked forward to this moment during the past months - the time when the oh-so-clever Captain James T. Kirk would need his help, but somehow as his eyes met



Kirk's, saw the pain, any victory lost its sweetness. He looked away, said gruffly, "That'll ease the pain - keep you on your feet for a little longer."

Kirk nodded, felt the stimulant taking effect.

Spock was not too pleased about the situation. He'd wanted Kirk safely asleep, spared further anxieties, for a little while at least. The doctor's action was illogical, and Spock told him so - out of Kirk's hearing, of course.

"Are you criticising my medical opinion, Mr. Spock?"

"Doctor, I merely point out that the Captain needs rest. There is nothing to be gained in prescribing a stimulant. When the effect wears off..."

There was anger in McCoy's voice. "That is my responsibility, Mr. Spock! It's no concern of yours what - "

"That's enough!" Kirk had heard the raised voices, caught the drift of the conversation. "We're all aware of our responsibilities, Doctor - squabbling amongst ourselves isn't going to..." the command tone softened "... solve... any problems..." He reeled, suddenly dizzy, and they were both at his side in an instant. "I'm... all right."

Ignoring the protest, McCoy made him sit, and reflected on Spock's words, but his original decision stood. Despite what the Vulcan thought, he'd had his reasons. They might need to move fast, and they needed Kirk mobile. "It'll pass - just lie back and rest." He was surprised at the concern in his own voice.

Spock had left them, and McCoy watched him approach Ensign Daniels, who managed to get to attention despite his aches and pains. McCoy couldn't make out what Spock was saying, but the young guard was nodding vigorously, indicating a direction just south of their position. He turned his attention back to Kirk who gave him a weak though cheerful smile which McCoy returned before he realised it. A delicious thought occurred, and he voiced it.

"What wouldn't I give for a cup of coffee."

"Or something... a little stronger?" Kirk agreed.

McCoy thought of the emergency brandy flask in his medical kit, but with a system in shock, blood pressure already low, alcohol was the last thing Kirk should have.

Spock came back with an idea. "Captain - with your permission Mr. Daniels and I will take the area to the south of this point and attempt to ascertain the extent of the disruption." Kirk was far from enthusiastic, and Spock had to try again. "Captain - it is possible that the magnetic interference is confined to a relatively limited area. Outside that range - we would have transmitting capabilities."

McCoy chipped in. "I think he's saying we can contact the ship."

Kirk brightened. "That's the best news all day, Spock, if you're right."

"It is only a theory - however, I would estimate our chances at almost..."

Kirk relented. "Just... get us out of here, and..." Spock turned at the words, "... be careful!"

\* \* \* \*

An eternity had passed, or so it seemed to James Kirk. If McCoy had been way out in his judgement of Kirk's intentions before now, he was right this time. Of all Human emotions, impatience is perhaps the most difficult to control and the Captain wasn't having having much success at the attempt.

"And just where do you think you're going?"

"Help me up, Doctor - I can't just sit around doing nothing."

"That's precisely what you'll do as long as I'm here."

Kirk glared. "First Spock - now me - do you always question orders from senior officers, Doctor?"

McCoy glared back. "If my medical advice is ignored - yes!"

For a moment it looked as though he had won, then - "Dr. McCoy - I am going to stand up if I have to crawl around all night in the attempt. I doubt very much whether that would comply with your 'medical advice' but I intend to get on my feet, either with or without your assistance!" He waited, and McCoy looked hard at his unwilling patient.

Over the past months his opinion of Kirk had alternated between admiration for his capabilities as a Captain and annoyance at the sheer stubbornness of the man once his mind was made up; like now for instance. He almost had a mind to call his bluff, bring him down to size; and then somehow McCoy knew that he couldn't go through with it; couldn't cause suffering - least of all to this man. He reached down, silently helped the Captain to his feet.

Kirk took an unsteady step forward, then another. McCoy tried not to let his anxiety show; maybe distract Kirk long enough... "If you're planning on climbing any more mountains, count me out!"

Kirk turned, a flush on his face. "More medical advice, Doctor?" He regretted the words as soon as they were said, tried to make amends. "I'm... sorry, Doc." He turned away, avoiding the hurt in McCoy's eyes. "You're only doing your job."

McCoy cleared his throat. "I... er... guess I asked for it." He played doctor again, went to Kirk's side, took a reading; and Kirk permitted it, was silent, a million thoughts crowding his mind. The light was fading now and as he searched the horizon with worried eyes, McCoy followed his gaze and tried to smother a growing concern. It was a long time since he'd felt that particular emotion - perhaps too long. It wasn't his own safety that bothered him; on the contrary, he didn't really care what happened to himself (wasn't that really why he'd joined Starfleet service? The risks, the chances of death on a million worlds?) - but there was someone else who deserved his concern now, even if it wasn't appreciated!

He shrugged the feeling away, forced himself to forget sentimentality. He couldn't afford it - not again. Lost in thought, he headed back towards where he had left his tricorder and the rest of the medical kit. Dammit! He was a doctor - concern for a patient was only natural... besides, he didn't know the Captain well enough yet to - He shuddered. Strange - those words; they seemed familiar somehow...

"McCOY!!!"

He whirled at Kirk's warning shout and then everything happened at once. There were more voices, shouting now, and then he caught sight of their rescue squad about half a mile away, scrambling down the shale towards them. A blur of yellow and black hurtled towards him and Spock's desperate "NO, CAPTAIN!" was ignored as Kirk put his head down, launching himself at McCoy with a force that carried them both clear of the yawning chasm which had appeared where McCoy stood only seconds before.

\* \* \* \*

The roaring sound grew louder, reached deafening proportions; and with horror McCoy realised the noise was coming from his own throat as he tried desperately to draw air into his tortured lungs. There was a weight across his chest. Instinctively, he kicked out, endeavouring to struggle free of the crushing pain, but it was useless. The roaring changed to a pounding in his head, and then miraculously he could breathe again - he lay gasping in exhaustion as strong hands lifted Kirk, laid him gently alongside. Sudden panic wrapped icy fingers around McCoy's heart as memory returned. He tried to sit up; winced at the effort. Spock laid a restraining hand on his shoulder, pushed him down gently.

He didn't - no, couldn't - resist. Kirk's rush might have saved his life but it certainly hadn't done anything for his respiratory system. And the Captain? McCoy turned his head, fearing what he might see.

"Spock?" The voice was his own, hoarse and barely audible. It seemed like a lifetime before Spock found a pulse, lifted a hand from Kirk's neck and sat back.

"Unconscious, Doctor." The clinical statement was without expression but McCoy saw in the dark eyes, just for one fleeting moment, something... He tried to interpret, put the expression into words and somehow knew he would fail; could never adequately describe what that look meant - and McCoy suddenly felt sorry for Spock, belonging neither to one world or another; logic dictating he must choose, in order to survive, the stronger way - the Vulcan way. But it wasn't easy and the Human in him cried out sometimes; fought for the recognition which Spock couldn't permit himself to give - certainly not now and perhaps not ever.

\* \* \* \*

Spock got them safely home and Leonard McCoy spent the next twenty-four hours in Sickbay - three of them blissfully unaware of any worries and the remainder making up for lost time; checking and rechecking on Kirk's condition. In between times he battled alternately with a large feeling of guilt, helpless anxiety and anger - at himself, at Kirk - at the circumstances which sent men millions of miles into space to face danger and death on strange worlds, and yet - it was through those very dangers that Man had learned, progressed; and the need for new techniques, new equipment, had given medical science the fruit of its knowledge. Even so, once he'd done everything - everything Humanly possible - no computer or fancy mediscan in the universe could deprive McCoy of the dubious pleasure of worrying about a patient, and when Spock visited Sickbay for the umpteenth time, a weary McCoy found a suitable target on which to vent his frustration.

"Dammit! I can't work miracles! I'll call you if there's any change, now - " McCoy's anger subsided. He turned away wearily. "Get out of here, Spock - I'll... let you know." He moved to Kirk's side, looked down at the sleeping figure.

Spock stayed, hesitated a moment before approaching McCoy. This would be difficult. "Doctor?"

McCoy turned, startled. "Didn't you hear - ?"

"Doctor - in any situation there are an infinite number of variables. That being so, I should also berate myself for leaving you and the Captain - "

"Get on with it, Spock! What are you trying to say?"

"Very well, Doctor." Spock folded his arms. "I believe that your own subconscious mind has concluded that you are to blame for what has occurred. To experience guilt for what has transpired is illogical. The fact that the Captain saved your life - "

"Blast it! Nobody asked him to, did they?" McCoy's fury melted abruptly as Kirk's voice came quietly from the bed.

"If you can't... keep your voice down... I may regret..." He didn't finish; looked up into two startled faces.

"Captain!" Then, more soberly, "I am pleased you are recovered, sir."

McCoy watched Spock's face - saw that look again, watched it vanish just as quickly.

"Well, you sure took your time." McCoy retreated once more behind the safety of his brusque manner and reflected suddenly how much he resembled the Vulcan at that moment; suppressing his true feelings, when what he really

wanted to say was - 'Thank God, you're all right!'

Kirk lifted his head, changed his mind, lay back against the pillow and closed his eyes. Spock and McCoy exchanged looks, and McCoy nodded towards the door, indicating a silent 'Get lost'. Spock took the hint. McCoy watched him go, then questioned his patient gently.

"Dizzy?"

Kirk nodded, frowned. "I can't feel my arm - shoulder... "

"I set the break - anaesthetised the area."

Kirk relaxed, smiled suddenly to himself. "Wise decision."

"What?"

"Saving you."

McCoy misunderstood, said gruffly, "Everyone's expendable, Captain. There are other doctors aboard."

Kirk met his eyes, said softly, "But only one Leonard McCoy."

"Captain... I... " McCoy struggled for the right words, looked at his hands for inspiration and tried again. "Oh, what's the use? It was a crazy idea in the first place - I should never have... "

Kirk reached out, gripped McCoy's arm fiercely. "You've a life to live, Doctor - a new life - here - amongst friends - if you'll have them - " Kirk caught his breath suddenly, lay back, and McCoy glanced at the diagnostic panel as the pain level indicator moved sharply upwards then settled again. He cleared his throat.

"Better do something about that." He left Kirk's side, then hesitated, turned, spoke the words he had never thought possible again.

"I trust you, Jim Kirk - I guess I always have, but I was too pigheaded to see it. I needed time, Jim - I had to be sure, and then it was almost too late. No - let me finish. Because of me, you nearly died - and after the way I'd behaved... " He forced himself on. "Maybe one day I'll get a chance - repay..."

Kirk smiled up at him, said simply, "You just did - Bones... " He closed his eyes as McCoy's delighted surprise showed in the warmest smile he'd ever seen.

"What in tarnation! - Nobody's called me that in years - how did you... ?"

But Kirk was asleep, and McCoy's mystery would have to wait - but he didn't mind - not in the least. After all, it was a small price to pay for a new life - amongst friends.

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#### OUR STAR by Sandie Cowden

The stars are bright tonight, my friend,  
Their beauty is sublime.  
They shine as torches, there my friend,  
To light our path through time.

They will shine alone, my friend,  
Each light a brilliant sun.  
They will still live on, my friend,  
As we die, one by one.

When our world is gone, my friend,  
Our star will still shine bright.  
To light the path again, my friend,  
A starry, black, cold night.

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OPEN TO SUGGESTIONS by Janet HallPART 1

"Captain's Log, Stardate 4759.4. The shuttlecraft containing the eminent Tellarite physician Hod, his medical team and his patient is due to rendezvous with the Enterprise in six minutes. Dr McCoy has readied his sickbay for Dr. Hod's use, and the entire Enterprise medical staff is standing by in case needed. I shall welcome Dr. Hod aboard and conduct him to sickbay personally."

Captain Kirk switched off the recorder. "Report, Mr. Sulu?"

"Shuttlecraft set to dock in 5.78 minutes, Captain."

"Thank you, Mr. Sulu." Kirk stood up. "Mr. Spock, I'll be in the shuttlecraft bay."

"Very good, Captain."

The doors of the shuttlecraft bay swept open to reveal the mysterious and awe-inspiring sight of deep space. The Enterprise was close to no major suns or planetary bodies, so no bright light stole away the splendour of the blackness of the galactic backdrop, dotted with the myriad pinpricks of multicoloured light that were suns. They seemed so slight, so trivial in comparison to the bulky reality of the Enterprise that Kirk, watching from the safety of the observation station, found it difficult, even with his trained and informed mind, to imagine the infernos that closer proximity would reveal them to be. It was a sight which never failed to fill him with a strange mixture of pride and humility.

These thoughts and feelings were but momentary. The shuttlecraft entered the bay in seeming silence, and when the outer doors were closed, air was pumped into the chamber. When the all clear was given, the doors ceremoniously opened, and men from security formed a guard of honour. For this was no ordinary visitor who was being piped aboard.

Kirk waited by the doorway as the physician Hod left the shuttlecraft, followed by several assistants and lastly by the stretcher-borne patient who was to be operated on. This was none other than the oldest son of the Tellarite head of state, who had become ill while doing fieldwork on a remote planet only minimally colonised by the Tellarites. No facilities existed there for the necessary operation, so Hod had been specially transported to meet the young Tellarite, and the facilities of the Enterprise had been placed at Hod's disposal.

"Dr. Hod? I am Captain James T. Kirk, in command of the Enterprise."

"I know," said Hod in a bored voice.

Kirk was somewhat taken aback; however, he firmly held on to his diplomatic mask and tone. "Is this your medical team, Dr. Hod?"

"Of course." Hod motioned towards four other Tellarites. "The finest in the galaxy."

"Well, Doctor, I'll show you to sickbay. Everything is ready. Dr. McCoy, my... "

"Sickbay, Captain?" Hod interrupted.

Kirk was this time quite surprised. "Well, I naturally assumed... "

"But surely refreshments are laid on first?" Hod asked; the other Tellarites began to mutter about feeling hungry and common courtesy and the like. Kirk looked about him in dismay, seeking inspiration. "But your patient, Doctor... ?"

"He," said the Tellarite with an airy gesture, "can wait in sickbay."

"But my senior medical officer is waiting!"

"Then by all means let him wait in sickbay too, Captain, I grow weary of this banter. Kindly lead the way to the refreshments."

"I don't care if you've got the president of the U.F.P. Council himself in there, Jim!" McCoy's voice boomed from the intercom. Kirk glanced helplessly around the hastily transformed rec room, where yeomen were serving hastily prepared refreshments to Dr. Hod and his aides. Luckily the chief medical officer's voice went unnoticed amidst the chatter and rattle of plates.

"I don't know if you realise it, Jim," McCoy was shouting, "but there's one very seriously sick Tellarite in my sickbay! Critically sick! I could even go so far as to say he's dying! He must be operated on immediately, his vital readings are dropping every second. Whilst that - that quack sits there feasting and making merry!"

"Bones, I am fully aware of that. But Dr. Hod has had a long journey, he feels he has to refresh himself before attempting such delicate surgery."

"Oh sure! And another thing! Do you know six of my nurses are looking after this sick Tellarite and not one of them has had any training in Tellarite medicine? Neither have I, beyond the basics! That patient might die while I'm speaking to you, and you make excuses...!"

"Doctor, I do sympathise with you. But Dr. Hod... "

"Just who does he think he is, anyway? His name's Hod, not God! Here's my sickbay - my sickbay - all ready for Tellarite surgery, my entire medical crew scrubbed up ready and waiting... "

"Look, Bones, I really can't talk now... "

"Oh sure, that's right! Shut me up! I've a damn' good mind to come right along down there myself and just have me a feast too, and let this pig-faced Tellarite die!"

"I'm sorry, Doctor." Kirk adopted his coldest, most commanding voice. "I know it's an inconvenience, but you'll just have to stand by. Kirk out."

"Great!" McCoy muttered into the dead intercom. "Let's just hope the patient knows he has to stand by and postpone dying!"

Eventually Dr. Hod and his team were persuaded to make their reluctant way to sickbay where, to Kirk's profound relief, McCoy was still at the ready. As an additional bonus, the Tellarite patient was still alive. Kirk introduced Hod and McCoy, but the former seemed more interested in the actual sickbay.

"Is this the best a Federation Starship can do?" he inquired in lofty surprise. "I take it this is the main medical centre? Rather archaic, wouldn't you say? I must speak to my government about it."

McCoy was seething and about to erupt; Kirk hastily stepped between the two physicians.

"Your patient is here, Dr. Hod," he said quickly, to cut off McCoy's retort.

"Thank you. I take it everything is in readiness, Dr. McCloud?"

"McCoy!" Bones shouted. "And everything's been ready three and a half hours!"

"If you are labouring under the misapprehension that I am deaf, Dr McCoy -"

"You will be needing Dr. McCoy, of course, Dr. Hod?" Kirk interposed with all alacrity. But Hod was too busy conferring with his aides to pay attention to Kirk. McCoy, his countenance now of purplish hue, pushed Kirk aside and grabbed the Tellarite's arm.

"Just how many of my personnel will you be needing?" he asked testily. Hod looked surprised.

"Your personnel? Why, none! I have all my assistants here. Of course, if you would care to stay as an observer, McRoy, you might learn a great deal."

McCoy was speechless with rage. With an inarticulate growl he ripped off his surgical gown and flung it onto the floor, then spun on his heel and stormed out.

Hod did not even appear to notice.

"Captain Kirk," said a Tellarite voice from the intercom some time later, "Dr. Hod wishes me to report that the operation was, of course, a success. The patient is sleeping, and Dr. Hod is resting in the temporary quarters you assigned him."

"Thank you," Kirk replied with an inward sigh of relief.

"We will be leaving your ship in one hour."

"Well, that's that," Kirk remarked to Mr. Spock, who was standing beside Kirk's command chair. "Then I suppose I shall have to placate Dr. McCoy."

"Indeed, Captain," Spock agreed, "even I can appreciate that the Doctor has been put to considerable inconvenience and annoyance."

"Yes, and it'll probably take at least a week for him to simmer down!" Kirk laughed.

So once again Kirk found himself waiting at the interior door of the shuttlecraft deck, looking out for the Tellarites. He heard the babble of their voices long before they themselves came in sight; Kirk was surprised to see only the four aides and the patient, however.

"Where is Dr. Hod?"

The Tellarites looked about them. "He will come," said one.

"Perhaps he is asleep?" suggested another.

Kirk tried the intercom, but could raise no reply from Hod's temporary quarters. Frowning, he turned to the nearest security guard. "Kroner, check Dr. Hod's quarters. He's probably too soundly asleep to hear the intercom, but he might have gone to look round the ship and lost his way."

"Aye, sir."

The seconds seemed like hours, so conscious was Kirk of their passing, and as he waited for the word from Kroner, he found to his surprise that he felt uneasy. The palms of his hands were moist, and something felt heavy in his stomach. With every passing minute, the uneasiness came closer to fear. The intercom, when it beeped, made him jump.

"Kirk here."

"Captain!" Kroner's voice was breathless, and scared. "Captain, you'd better come!"

The Tellarites and the Enterprise crewmen were all silent now; all eyes were on Kirk. Holding his voice steady with a conscious effort, the Captain asked, "What's wrong, Kroner?"

"His quarters weren't locked, sir, so I went in."

"And?" Kirk snapped.

"He's dead, sir. There's blood everywhere."

"On my way. Kirk out."

"Captain's Log, supplemental. A terrible tragedy has occurred. Dr. Hod has been found murdered in his quarters, and the murder weapon appears to have been one of Dr. McCoy's own scalpels. I have received orders from Starfleet Command to place Dr. Hod's body in cold storage, and to proceed at top speed to Starbase M71. No one is to leave or enter the ship until we reach the Starbase. I am also instructed to carry out preliminary investigations myself, and report my findings to Security Chief Podurov on arrival at Starbase M71... "

"But surely you don't believe it was Dr. McCoy?" Nurse Chapel burst out.

"And who, may I ask, are you?" Podurov, the head of U.F.P. Security, was a stern, grey-looking man, with an iron-grey crewcut and matching moustache.

"This is Nurse Christine Chapel," Kirk explained, "Dr. McCoy's senior assistant."

"I see. Well, Nurse, to answer your question - although of course it is none of your business - it is my duty to suspect everybody. Some people more than others... " The last sentence Podurov murmured softly, more to himself than to anyone else. "The body?"

"Here." Kirk opened a door to show, through a transparent viewing panel, the preserved body of the ill-fated Tellarite. "Of course, I awaited your arrival before ordering an autopsy, but it was obvious that he had been stabbed to death, straight through the heart. Must have died instantly."

"Hmmm." Podurov turned away from the refrigeration chamber. "Murder weapon?"

"That's here." Kirk handed him a sealed transparent box, containing a scalpel. "It was on the floor, beside the body. I picked it up myself, using a cloth, and sealed it in this container. No one has touched it since."

"Fingerprints?"

Kirk nodded. "The only ones on it were Dr. McCoy's." He sighed deeply. "I would say that proves nothing. It was one of McCoy's instruments, he must have handled it a hundred times; the killer could have worn gloves. But... "

"But... ?"

"We ran back the security scans. Of course it isn't routine procedure to scan private quarters, but when we have an important visitor aboard we always scan all parts of the ship. Normally these films are never viewed, out of respect for the privacy of all concerned, but they are available in case of just such an emergency as this... The evidence - well, come and see for yourself."

In the briefing room, Kirk played back the relevant section of security film on the table viewer. It showed clearly enough what had apparently taken place. Hod lay asleep on the bed in his temporary quarters. The door must have been unlocked, for after a few minutes, McCoy crept stealthily in, carrying the scalpel. He walked straight up to the sleeping Tellarite, gave one precise stab through the heart, withdrew the scalpel and dropped it on the floor, then turned and left the room.

"Do you want to see the scan of McCoy's quarters?" Kirk inquired. Podurov shook his head, and both men sat in silence for some time, the security chief lost in thought and Kirk waiting. Finally Podurov spoke.

"I understand from your report, Captain, that McCoy had a grievance against Hod, that Hod had been very rude to your surgeon, and abandoned him with a desperately sick patient, and had insulted McCoy prior to the operation."

Kirk was instantly on the defensive. "Yes, that's true, but it wouldn't make McCoy murder the Tellarite. You see, I know McCoy well, and he's a words man - he loves verbal arguments, tussles with words - but that's as far as it goes. He works off any bad feelings in words. Physical aggression - no, never."



"Never - until now." Podurov ran back the film, watched it through again. "Could it be an imposter? I don't know your surgeon. Could you swear, under oath, that the murderer on the film is McCoy?"

Kirk shrugged. "If I'm to be truthful... it's a damn' good imposter if it is one." Suddenly angry, he slammed his fist down on the table. "Hell, how can it be McCoy?"

"McCoy is in the brig?"

"Yes. I recorded his statement as soon as I'd seen the scans. Do you want to hear it?"

"No. I'll speak to him myself first."

Later, Kirk found Podurov back in the briefing room, turning off McCoy's statement as recorded by Kirk, to which he had just been listening. "Exactly what he told me, Captain. He was feeling tired, his head ached, so he went back to sickbay and took a painkiller, then lay down on his bunk in his quarters. He fell asleep, had some strange dreams which he can't remember. Next thing he knew, he was being awakened to be told of Hod's murder."

"You've seen the scan of his quarters?"

"Yes, and it tallies with his story up to where he lies down to sleep. Then after a few minutes we see him leave his quarters, quite normally, and later return and again lie down and sleep until he is awakened."

"McCoy wouldn't lie!"

"No-one's saying he is. His story could well be perfectly true as he remembers it. Except that he didn't fall asleep the first time he lay down. He murdered Hod instead. His mind has suppressed the memory of his action. It's a well-known phenomenon. If a memory would be too distressing, the mind sometimes suppresses it completely. McCoy's mind has suppressed the memory of the murder, and all he has is a blank, which he interprets - wrongly - as his having been asleep all the time."

"It's all too facile," Kirk said slowly. "It's too like a frame-up."

Podurov shrugged. "Good officer, is he?" His voice was sympathetic.

"He's also my friend," Kirk said quietly.

"But you can't deny that the facts are damning."

"The apparent facts."

The only facts we have to go on. McCoy will have to be transferred to the detention centre on Starbase M71."

Two days later, Kirk stood rather ill-at-ease in Podurov's splendid office on Starbase M71. The Security Chief looked up from the papers he was working on.

"Captain Kirk. Sit down." He waited politely until the Captain had seated himself in the shiny imitation leather armchair. "You know, of course, about the Tellarite government? Raising hell."

Kirk nodded. "I imagined they would."

"Can't imagine the extent of their protests. Demanding the works - official enquiry, arrests, reports, investigations, trials - I'm afraid, also, convictions, Captain."

"What exactly do you mean by 'convictions'?"

Podurov looked away. "If the case isn't cleared up," he said with uncharacteristic hesitation, "if the - murderer - isn't convicted, there could be an

interplanetary incident. And when I say 'incident', that hardly describes it! You know politicians, trouble they cause. Could mean a split in the Federation; could even mean war."

Kirk stared hard at Podurov. "So what you're in fact saying is that, guilty or innocent, Dr. McCoy must be convicted to avoid an interplanetary incident?"

"Weigh it in the balance, Captain. What's one man, compared to the havoc of full-scale interplanetary war?"

"It's the principle involved!" Kirk's voice was rising, although he was trying hard not to show his anger. "There's no absolute proof! You would wrongfully convict an innocent man...!"

"The facts don't suggest he's innocent."

"The apparent facts! There must be some other explanation! McCoy was framed!"

"So you said before. But evidence, Captain. Where is your evidence? A hunch will not hold up in a courtmartial."

"I'll find evidence," Kirk said bitterly. "I'll get you your evidence, Podurov."

Podurov pointed a cautionary finger. "Keep out of this, Kirk. Don't muddle in things that are far above you. This is not your Starship and 430 people. It's a galaxy full of billions of lives that's at stake."

"The ideas of justice and friendship are not, as you put it, far above me." Kirk's tone was stoney, his face set in defiance. "When is the courtmartial set for?"

"Three weeks tomorrow. But let me warn you... "

"You shall have all the evidence of McCoy's innocence that you need by three weeks today. Or else my resignation. Now if you will excuse me... "

"You're a fool, Kirk!" But Podurov's words bounced back off the closed door. Slowly he reached down and turned off the tape recorder that had preserved an accurate record of his conversation with the Starship Captain. For Kirk, there could be no turning back.

\* \* \* \*

## PART 2

Once back aboard the Enterprise, Kirk's plan of action seemed to him obvious. He checked and found that the whole crew was entitled to a month's shore leave, so he had a rota devised with all speed, ensuring that his own name appeared amongst those to leave immediately. When the arrangements had been made for the first shore leave party to be accommodated on Starbase M71, Kirk, with an expression of satisfaction, summoned his First Officer to his quarters.

"You wished to see me, Captain?"

"Ah, Mr. Spock. Come in." This was a delicate matter, and Kirk was unsure how to broach it. A circuitous route seemed indicated. "I've put you down for the first shore leave party. Just thought I'd let you know."

"I am already aware of the fact, Captain. However, I do not at present feel the need to take so protracted a vacation."

"You're taking it," Kirk informed him amicably. "That's an order."

Spock raised an eyebrow. "I see, sir. I therefore imagine that you have plans for your shore leave which include me."

"Right. Look, Spock," Kirk glanced almost guiltily about the room, his voice automatically dropping; he still felt subconsciously as if a tape recorder was eavesdropping. "I haven't had a chance to tell you the full story of what

happened when I beamed down to see Podurov."

"I am aware of what the records state."

"The official records, yes. But what I omitted from my official report was that I promised Podurov that on the day before McCoy's trial I would give him either firm proof of McCoy's innocence or my resignation."

Vulcan eyebrows shot up. "I see. And I presume you intend to use this hastily engineered shore leave as a period in which to investigate the case?" There was a note of disapproval there, which Kirk did not fail to detect, and it startled him; no, more, it stung him.

"You know what Podurov said about a conviction, Spock!"

"Yes, Captain."

"And you agree with him?" More bewilderment.

"I did not say that."

"No, but by disapproving of my plans you imply as much!"

"Captain." Spock's eyes, meeting Kirk's, were pleading. Jim. You cannot pit yourself against the whole machinery of U.F.P. procedure alone, and win. No one man could. You do battle, not merely with Podurov, but with a galaxy full of governments, heads of state and important representatives of races. No one man.. "

"So you keep saying, Spock, but I have to try. Not just for Bones, although he's a first-class officer and a good friend. For the principle involved. Whatever your personal opinion of McCoy is, surely you can understand that?"

Spock nodded once. "You would hazard your career, possibly your liberty, for this?"

"Wouldn't you?"

"Failure is inevitable, Jim, if you, or you and I, attempt this unaided. On what do you base your case, besides your knowledge of McCoy's personality?"

Kirk looked hard at Spock. Never in his wildest dreams had he anticipated this. Surely Vulcan loyalty and integrity could not allow Spock to see any man unjustly accused. Kirk felt his only hope was to try reason. "Well, for a start, why did McCoy - if it was McCoy - leave the scalpel behind? Why not clean it and put it away, or destroy it? Why not wear gloves, or wipe off the prints? It points at a frame-up."

Spock would not be drawn. "Perhaps."

"And secondly, how could McCoy know that Hod was in his quarters sleeping?"

"He followed the Tellarite, waited for a suitable time, then tried the door buzzer. On receiving no reply, he assumed Hod was asleep. Had he been in error, he could easily have fabricated some excuse."

"How did McCoy get the scalpel from sickbay without being seen?"

"He quietly removed it whilst in sickbay getting the painkiller for his headache. After the operation, all attention would be focused on the Tellarite patient, and McCoy could easily act unobserved. It would also require a medical-ly skilled person to locate so precisely the Tellarite heart."

"Why are you so hell-bent on condemning McCoy?" Kirk shouted, slamming his fist down on the table. Spock did not react perceptibly to the violence of the sudden outburst.

"I am merely trying to dissuade you from ruining yourself in a vain cause, Jim. Who could impersonate McCoy so excellently on the security scan? That is the damning fact, and no amount of incidental evidence will outweigh it."

"He was drugged, then. Or hypnotised."

"Immediate tests revealed no drug. It would be very difficult as the situation stands now to prove one was used. The same applies to hypnosis. Furthermore, Jim, the security scan of McCoy's cabin shows that the Doctor was absent from his quarters during the time that the murder was committed, and left and returned to his cabin quite normally, apparently quite in control of his actions."

"Damn it all, man, you think he did it!"

Spock calmly shook his head. "I only think it highly probable that Dr. McCoy will be convicted, despite the best efforts of any number of amateur detectives, unless..."

"Get out!" Kirk was on his feet, fists clenched. Rage and anguish blinded him to something in Spock's eyes that he would otherwise have noticed, for he was usually very sensitive to the half-Vulcan's slight expressions.

"Jim..."

"Get out, mister!!!" Kirk yelled.

"Jim, if..."

"I'm not going to tell you again, Vulcan! Get out and stay out!"

Silently, Spock turned and walked out.

When the door had closed, Kirk began to pace the room, fists still so tightly clenched that his fingernails cut into his palms. He had never expected this. Whatever their overt behaviour suggested, Kirk was certain surgeon and First Officer had a secret, healthy respect for each other, and a good deal of mutual sympathy and understanding. And he couldn't believe Spock could stand by and let any man be unfairly treated. Desperately though he tried, he could not understand Spock's response; all that was obvious was that, after all they had been through together, and just when he needed all of Spock's qualities most, his friend had apparently let him down.

But time was too precious to waste it brooding on what might have been. Quickly he packed a small holdall, for he anticipated a good deal of travelling, and as he packed, his thoughts raced.

His discussion with Spock had at least served to clarify his reasoning. Bones it must have been who had committed the murder, but it was now too late to prove that he had been either hypnotised or drugged by using any symptom or evidence arising from McCoy himself. So Kirk's only hope seemed to be to find the perpetrator of the deed, and extract a confession. Excluding McCoy, no one on the ship could have held a grudge against Hod, so the most likely suspects were the Tellarite aides who had accompanied Hod. It was these Tellarites that Kirk intended to get hold of. Fortunately for Kirk, they had all been subpoenaed to appear at the courtmartial, and must remain on Starbase M71 during the intervening three weeks, so the hotel at the Starbase was Kirk's first destination.

\* \* \* \*

### PART 3

On leaving the Captain's quarters, Mr. Spock walked straight to his own. He was grateful that he met no-one on the way. Once safely inside, he locked the door and sat down near his table. He made steeples of his fingers, his eyes unseeing.

He had expected Kirk to see and to understand what he had been able to express only with his eyes... no, on second thought, perhaps not. The expression 'blind with rage' could be literally true for Humans, Spock knew. And when he had attempted to express it in words, he found he had left it too late; Kirk would not, could not, listen.

Spock had also been thinking very deeply about Hod's murder, but he had found it easier to accept that McCoy had actually committed the crime, whilst

not acting under his own volition for some reason. Long before it had occurred to Kirk, Spock had suspected that one or more of Hod's Tellarite aides must have been responsible.

But his thoughts had run in the opposite direction to Kirk's from there. Instead of trying to track the future movements of the Tellarites, Spock had examined their past lives. He could almost certainly rule out hypnosis, for Tellarites did not normally make use of this skill. He thought a drug far more probable; but either a drug that was undetectable to the Enterprise's medical equipment, therefore having its origin outside the planets of the Federation, or a newly invented, rapidly acting drug which had left McCoy's bloodstream by the time tests were conducted. For it seemed that McCoy must have been somehow drugged (if this hypothesis were true) after he left his cabin slightly before Hod was murdered, immediately murdered Hod, and was back to normal by the time he returned to his quarters, except that he had no memory of what he had done whilst drugged. This was theoretically possible, Spock thought, but the drug must have been perfected extremely recently, and unpublicised, for McCoy kept up-to-date with the journals.

Spock's investigations during the previous night, when he could operate the computer unobserved, revealed that none of the Tellarites in question, including Hod, had been conducting research during the past year. So whoever had obtained and used the drug had had it supplied to him, by a person or persons unknown as yet.

Including Hod, for there was always the possibility, remote though it seemed, that Hod had engineered his own death, Spock had traced the histories of the Tellarites concerned over the past year, using the computer.

Amongst the myriad happenings of five people's lives during that time, Spock discovered one interesting fact.

Three months previously, and also six months prior to that, conferences had been held concerning medical and other issues of interest to different races. Purely by coincidence, these conferences had been held on planets extremely close to the U.F.P. - Romulan neutral zone. Hod and two of his assistants had attended these conferences.

It was tempting to jump to conclusions, especially as a scan of the remaining data showed no other events of any likely significance.

The ship's computer did not have access to anything beyond the barest summaries of what had taken place at these conferences. Full records would be filed away on every U.F.P. member planet, but could only be consulted by authorised personnel.

Spock was not so authorised; but he knew his father could obtain access to those files.

It would not be easy. For a start, it would mean going home, to Vulcan, and Spock was unsure of the reception he would receive. Secondly, to obtain his father's co-operation he would have to persuade Sarek that more was at stake than the future of one Starship surgeon. That might be difficult, when the only thing he had to go on was one of those hunches he so deplored in Humans. Thirdly, there was the problem of getting to Vulcan; he would have to - ahem - 'borrow' a shuttlecraft. He could not, in all conscience, involve his Captain in this last scheme, and he knew that the presence of anyone else while he tried to persuade his father to help might be just the thing to make Sarek refuse.

Spock had decided upon his course of action before he received his summons to Kirk's quarters. He had already resolved not to tell Kirk of his plans; and he had wanted to dissuade Jim from risking his career and reputation so blatantly, and then conduct the investigations himself, in his own way. Logically, his plan stood a greater chance of success than any of Kirk's could, and he preferred to hazard his own good name and protect his friend's, if at all possible. But Kirk's reactions did not affect Spock's plans. He did not know the Captain's

own ideas, only that he, too, would act.

'Get out, Vulcan, and stay out!' Spock pushed the words and their accompanying sensations out of his conscious mind. How easy it is, he thought bitterly, to see our errors in retrospect. But he could not change what had happened. He packed a bag, then put through a call to the crewman on duty on the shuttlecraft deck.

"Prepare for your shore leave, Mr. Carlotti. I will send a crewman to relieve you."

"Thank you, Mr. Spock!" Carlotti was surprised, but too pleased to question the First Officer's order. The shuttlecraft deck was pleasantly devoid of Human life when Mr. Spock arrived, carrying his bag.

\* \* \* \*

#### PART 4

Mr. Spock landed the shuttlecraft neatly in the courtyard of the house that had been his home when he was much younger. He was almost reluctant to open the door of the vehicle and descend into the heavy Vulcan heat haze. He had not been able to warn his parents in advance of his impending arrival, and there was an unaccustomed feeling in the pit of his stomach which a Human would have called 'nerves' but which a half-Vulcan must refuse to admit to.

Slowly, he stepped out into the bright sunlight.

A door opened at the far side of the courtyard and Sarek, wondering at the unusual sound, stood framed in the doorway, surrounded by cool shade.

"Spock." His voice registered no surprise, just a question; one eyebrow was raised.

"I trust that the sound of my arrival did not startle you," Spock said politely, more for something to break the ice than for any other reason.

"I was working on some papers," the older Vulcan replied. "I wondered at the noise."

Spock had been walking slowly forward; now he was face to face with his father.

"You are unwell?" Sarek asked, and Spock realised, with slight astonishment, that Sarek was in fact quite worried. He shook his head.

"No, I am quite well. I wish to consult you on a matter of urgency... it is really quite presumptuous of me..." He felt horribly like running back to the shuttlecraft and leaving with all alacrity. But Sarek held out his hand in a gesture unusual for him, which Spock found strangely touching.

"You are welcome," he said simply. "Come in."

Amanda was out visiting friends, so in the cool airiness of Sarek's home, father and son were able to sit over a refreshing drink undisturbed, whilst Spock explained the purpose of his visit.

It was far easier than he had anticipated. He told the story straight through, as it had happened, then explained his and Kirk's various theorisings, and finally his own ideas and proposed plans, giving his logical reasons.

When Spock was at last silent, Sarek sat lost in thought for several minutes without speaking. Eventually he looked towards his son. "If what you hypothesize is in any measure correct," he said, thoughtfully, "issues of far-reaching galactic importance are at stake."

"I could be in error."

Sarek nodded. "It would simplify matters if you were." He raised one eyebrow. "Knowing you as I do, however, I doubt it."

Spock inclined his head in acknowledgement.

"This matter must be investigated with all possible haste," Sarek continued, "and also with all possible secrecy. I shall obtain copies of the relevant files and we will peruse them together. I think it best that you come with me to my office tomorrow."

"I am not authorised to see such files," Spock pointed out. Sarek's eyebrows shot up.

"There are certain times when logic decrees that even the strictest rules be broken." His gaze turned by chance (or was it?) out through the window to where the shuttlecraft shimmered in the heat. "Of course, I know that you are aware of that."

In the coolness of the evening, Amanda came home to find her husband and her son playing chess together. Amanda had taught Sarek this game, and, like his son, he enjoyed it.

"Spock!" she cried. Spock stood up, and took the hands that she held out. "Oh, Spock, I didn't know..." She stepped back, his hands still in hers, and looked him up and down. "How are you? You look tired."

"I am well, thank you." His voice had automatically assumed the gentler tone that he reserved for a very few, very fortunate people. "I had far to travel."

"It's lovely to see you!" Amanda said happily. "Have you eaten? I didn't think so! Sarek, what are you thinking of?" she teased.

"I saw no reason to attempt to compete with your haute cuisine!" Sarek replied, understanding the intended joke.

"I'll go and get you both something!" Amanda laughed, and headed for the kitchen.

Ambassador Himalaya of Oranea pulled his brown felt hat, battered and discoloured with age, over his long snout covered with grey fur, and his brown beady eyes. Somehow he implanted this simple movement with a great deal of meaning. He tugged reflectively at one long furry ear.

"No," he said quite amiably, in his own personal broken English, "I am gorry, old friend, but - no. It ig too mush 'ard work, too mush rusharound. It ig all far too mush work."

"Your English has improved, Himalaya," Sarek commented. The two ambassadors had been friends for years.

"Yeg!" Himalaya was pleased.

"Regrettably, your enthusiasm for industry has not followed suit."

"Ha!" Himalaya snorted, and banged a furry paw on the table, making the coffee cups rattle. "Why can you not go, eh, and leave a poor 'ard-workin' ambaggador in peag?"

"I have already explained that," Sarek replied resignedly. "If I travel to the Tellarite Capital University and my son accompanies me, it will appear suspicious to those involved in this plot. They without doubt must have their connections also, and will be looking for any activity connected with the late Dr. Hod. But if he accompanies you..."

"And ju't 'ow do we get there, eh?" Himalaya's eyes lit up at a suspected flaw in the Vulcan's plans. "Tellarite' are very gush... gush... shushpishush. When we take a 'cheduled public gervish 'light, they will begin to wonder, agk too many awkward que'tion. My delicate con'titution may not 'tand it." As if to emphasise his point, Himalaya selected the largest slice of cake from the plate on the table and devoured it in two mouthfuls.

"Then you can use a private ship," Sarek said tranquilly.

"And where will I get that?"

"You have connections," Sarek replied pleasantly.

"I?" Himalaya heaved his bulky and massive frame upright in the chair, which creaked in protest. His silky grey fur quivered over his every inch with indignation. "Me? I will 'ave you know, Garek of Vulcan, I am a respectable Orinian Ambaggador, full of up'tanding and ighteougnegg and Eastern Promig and all other degirable quality!"

"Eastern Promise?" Sarek inquired, fascinated.

"Yeg! I 'ave geen it in advertigment on Earth. You eat it, and beautiful maiden run agter you. Very degirable!"

"I see." Sarek thought it wisest not to pursue this matter; he would ask Amanda about it later. "And as I was saying, you have connections."

"Who do you mean?" innocently.

"I think you know."

"Ha!" Himalaya tugged gloomily at his long striped scarf, which, besides his hat, was his only article of clothing. "But what good will it do ug to vigit this damn univergity any old 'ow?"

"Dr. Hod's private records will be filed at the university. They may throw a more conclusive light on what actually occurred at those conferences than the official tapes do. It seems possible that Hod may have used these opportunities to arrange secret meetings with Romulan agents."

"And 'e wrote all this down for po'terity, o' courg!" Himalaya interrupted sarcastically.

Sarek, with dignity, ignored this outburst. "Once you arrive, Spock will do whatever becomes necessary. You need only relax, eat, drink, and enjoy your visit."

"Then why needg me go at all?" plaintively.

"To furnish Spock with the opportunity to accompany you."

Himalaya sighed deeply. "You know, Garek mon vieux ami, you talk too damn mush. Hokay! I will arrange it. But it will be ekpenshiv, I warn you."

"And you will also arrange for someone to take the shuttlecraft that Spock borrowed back to Starbase M71?"

"Formore of Amanda' beautiful cake, anything can be arranged!"

"Well? Watcha tink?"

"It ig beautiful, Don Alto."

"T'ortcha'd like it. Lucky!"

"Yeah, Boss?"

"Ya ready ta go?"

"Sure ting, Boss!"

"Den le's shoot!"

"Sure ting, Boss."

Don Alto Petrinelli sat back in one of the luxurious seats of the private craft he had just appropriated from a private parking ground on a small planet in the backwoods of the galaxy. Pedro and Lucky, two of his 'boys' were, from experience, versatile pilots, and having collected Spock and Himalaya at Vulcan, they were now ready to lay in a course for the Tallarite capital city.

"Nekt 'top, nignog univergity!" Himalaya sighed peacefully.



"You must excuse him," Spock remarked. "He is extremely racially prejudiced, although probably the most tactful of the Orinian race."

"All a load og ungivilged wiggy-woggi!" Himalaya declared. "All very... very..." His voice trailed away into a snore.

"He has had a long day," Spock explained apologetically to Don Alto.

"Is O.K., kid. Him 'n me, we long-time buddies. I know him like my own brudder. He has his hang-ups, same as all of us."

"And do you also know my father well?" Spock asked with interest.

Don Alto adjusted the white silk tie that stood in stark contrast to his black shirt, then the carnation in the buttonhole of his pin-striped suit. It was all done for effect, as Spock well knew.

"Your pa. Yeah." Don Alto flicked imaginary lint from his Al Capone hat, which rested on his knee. "Ya see where I am now? I keep twenty boys in a job, plenty a small operations, one or two big ones, money ain't no problem. I even got a dooplicate of Al Capone's car, specially made. I got a name t'roughout the galaxy, not as a villain but jest as a character. Well, your pa was one o' the ones helped me git where I am now. Ya mebbe don't reckon it as much, but I'm content. So I repay a little, O.K.?"

Spock nodded.

"He tell ya da story?"

Spock shook his head.

"Mebbe some day, kid." Don Alto lit a long and prosperous-looking cigar, eyeing Spock closely through the cloud of blue smoke. "Ya surprised?"

"A little, I must confess."

Don Alto nodded. "Mebbe ya don't know ya pa as good as ya tink in some ways, eh, kid? Besides, he's a smart guy. Reckon he knew he'd need a return favour off of me an' mah boys some day, an' - " he waved an arm round to take in the spacecraft, " - here it is! Besides, Sarek once gave me a good compliment. D'ya know what he said I was? 'Colourful'! I like dat! 'Colourful'!"

Himalaya opened one beady eye. "Shut up! he said pleasantly. "'ow do you epect a poor 'ard-workin' ambaggador to get gum eye-shut when you two chitter-chatter like pair of old woman-washer?"

"Some shut-eye," corrected Don Alto, and

"Old washer-women," corrected Spock, simultaneously.

Himalaya's only response was a further snore.

\* \* \* \*

## PART 5

A cold, grey day; the city covered by a light fall of snow, which was still white on the rooftops and pockmarked by birds' feet, but was grey slush in the streets, kicked up by countless feet. Pedestrians trudged to and fro, women laden with shopping and with children in tow, men with briefcases and other men with working tools. Traffic, slowed by the weather conditions, crawled lazily. There were all the sounds of a city day, too; voices, klaxons, engines, feet, children shouting and crying.

Dr. McCoy thought himself lucky to have been assigned a cell in the outer circumference of the detention centre. Although his cell was some eight storeys above the street, the barred and reinforced window commanded an interesting and rewarding view of the city.

It was the only thing about his situation which the doctor regarded as fortunate.



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The sound of the double, securilocked doors opening drew his attention away from the window. The Starfleet defense attorney who had been appointed to deal with McCoy's case stood in the doorway, a turnkey behind him.

"Good morning, Doctor."

He was a pleasant young fellow, McCoy reflected, with a well nigh impossible task. He raised a hand, and nodded a greeting. Goodson, the attorney, waved the goaler away.

"Have a seat," McCoy offered, a touch of irony in his voice. "How goes it?"

Goodson sat down on the bunk, and sighed. He took a bundle of papers from his briefcase, shuffled them rather aimlessly, and dropped them onto the bedside table. "It doesn't, if I'm to be truthful."

"By all means. Be truthful."

"Look, McCoy," Goodson bristled, "it's no good taking that attitude with me. This whole damn' mess isn't my fault!"

"No more is it mine!"

"Then who the hell's is it?"

"You tell me!" McCoy retorted angrily. "The Tellarites', as I see it!"

"Proof!" Goodson shouted. "I've told you a thousand times! I have to have proof! And the only thing I have to date is a security film showing you murdering the Tellarite!"

McCoy had turned his back with an angry exclamation; now he stood for some minutes gazing out of the window at the scene below, blue eyes irate yet also hurt. Goodson, embarrassed, resumed his shuffling of papers. At last, McCoy turned back to face the lawyer.

"Look, I'm sorry," he said gruffly, his Georgia accent thicker than usual. "It's being penned up like this. It's driving me mad."

Goodson nodded. "I know." There was sympathy in his tone. "And I know this is a sore subject, but I still think insanity is your best plea."

"No, damn it! I'm not insane, and I never was! No way!"

"But you say yourself that you remember nothing. Nervous breakdown? Amnesia? You're the doctor, Doctor, you tell me!"

McCoy merely shook his head. Goodson collected up his papers and thrust them into his briefcase. "Until you come up with some fresh evidence or change your plea to insanity, I can be of no further help to you. I can say you don't remember murdering Hod, I can call character witnesses. But that's all. Good day, Doctor. Guard! Let me out, please."

McCoy hardly heard Goodson leave, or the doors close and lock. He was back at the window again, gazing out with unseeing eyes.

Evidence, the lawyer had said. And by all that was holy, evidence he would have.

But how?

Jim. Where was Jim? That was McCoy's first thought. In all the time he had been imprisoned, who had visited him. Sulu and Chekov, on shore leave. They had been three times. They had told McCoy that Kirk and Spock were both on shore leave too, and Scotty was in command, which was why the latter had not visited the prisoner. Later, Lt. Uhura and Christine Chapel had both been. But the two people Bones would have numbered, no, make that ranked prominently amongst his friends were conspicuous by their absence. The very two who had the influence and could pull the strings.

I can't believe Jim would desert me.

No, that could never be. In all the time they had known one another, Jim had always been loyal, as Bones had been loyal. Jim must be away, conducting investigations, pursuing his own trails and clues. But why hadn't he looked in, to give the sufferer some hope, however small. Can it be that Jim thinks I'm guilty? I can't believe that.

And Spock?

With Spock, the process would be quite different. Jim's conduct would be emotional; loyalty to a friend vs. loyalty to Starfleet. But Spock's would not be like that. McCoy could picture the half-Vulcan sitting alone, somewhere quiet, weighing up the facts - No, McCoy corrected himself, the logical facts! - balancing the two sides, reaching a verdict. If he decides I'm innocent he'll act; by heaven, he'll act, and effectively too, if I know my man! (Memories of Chris Pike and Talos IV rushed unbidden to the surface of McCoy's mind and made him grin.) A good man to have on your side in a crisis.

But if he decides I'm guilty?

McCoy turned wearily away from the window and sat down on the bunk. They had not visited him. They had done nothing to give him hope. He had no way of knowing what they had decided or were doing. But each day brought the trial nearer. He couldn't afford to wait.

From under his pillow he drew out some sheets of paper - he was allowed most conveniences - and read through what he had jotted down. He had spent a great deal of time trying to induce memory and recall what he had actually done the day Hod was murdered. He remembered storming into his quarters extremely angrily after the scene with Hod in sickbay, throwing off his surgical attire. He remembered a headache setting in, caused no doubt by his angry outburst, so he had returned to sickbay, taken a painkiller, then lain down on his bed in his quarters. He must have dozed; and then he was certain he had a vague remembrance of leaving his quarters and walking somewhere, urgently, and of a face and a voice, that could easily have belonged to a Tellarite, telling him something, and of coughing, fighting to breathe, and then suddenly feeling at peace.

It could be true. Or it could be a half-remembered dream, or merely wishful thinking. He had told no-one, for it only seemed to incriminate him further. But he had to find out the truth. He could, and would, find that Tellarite. If he existed in reality and not merely in McCoy's mind, he must have been one of Hod's assistants, in which case he would still be here, on Starbase M71, waiting like McCoy for the trial.

No sooner conceived than enacted. McCoy pressed the intercom switch.

"Guard? Could you come in here one minute, please?"

The old dodge worked like magic; the guard had come to trust the quiet doctor. As he opened the door, McCoy doubled up as if ill. As the guard rushed to help him, McCoy knocked him out, switched clothes and was away.

\* \* \* \*

## PART 6

Lucky Harciano, Don Alto's right-hand man, stood in the doorway of the office that had been Dr. Hod's, hefting his Sten-gun nervously.

"Caintcha move no quicker?" he demanded at last. "This place gives me da willies."

"I am working with all possible alacrity," Mr. Spock replied in preoccupied tones. "It is essential that I decipher these notes."

"Are dey in code?" Lucky asked with interest.

"No, simply shorthand."

"Oh." Disappointed, Lucky turned back to his scrutiny of the corridor.

Spock continued to scan paper after paper, working his way in a logical sequence through drawer after drawer, file after file. Lucky chewed gum, and occasionally whistled tunelessly through his teeth.

"Hurry up, caintcha?"

"I believe," Spock said slowly, "that I have discovered something of significance." He shone his flashlight about the dark room.

"Wotcha looking for now?"

"There must be other files, where Hod's assistants keep their notes and papers."

"Dere was filin' cabinets in da next room also. Why?"

"Mention is made repeatedly of Hod's 'research trips'. This is always in inverted commas, and I take it to be a disguised name for secret meetings with Romulan agents. There are no details of these meetings, nothing to substantiate my theory, but it seems significant that it was always the same assistant, Jat, who accompanied the doctor. Jat was also aboard the Enterprise when Hod was killed. The proof may be contained in Jat's papers."

Lucky crossed the room, peered out between the slats of the drawn blind, surveying the deserted night-time campus. Then he followed Spock out of the office, and carefully locked the door with his skeleton key.

"Archaic offices dese Tellarites have," he remarked. "Thumbprint locks're far easier to fool."

"Are they?" Spock asked in surprise.

"Sure. Ya tells da punk t'use his thumb t'open the door. If he refuses, ya forgets about da punk and jest borrows da thumb. Ya see what I mean?"

Spock nodded, one eyebrow quizzically raised.

They walked by flashlight to the next room, and Lucky pointed out the files with a wave of his weapon. "Dat's dem."

"So I observe." Spock began by reading the names on the drawers. Finding the one he sought, he quickly opened it, breaking the lock with a skilful flick of a wrist whose slimness belied its strength. He began to work through more papers.

"Hey!"

Spock ignored this and continued to search.

"Someone's outside!"

Spock lowered his light a little. "Ah."

"Ya got it?"

"I believe so."

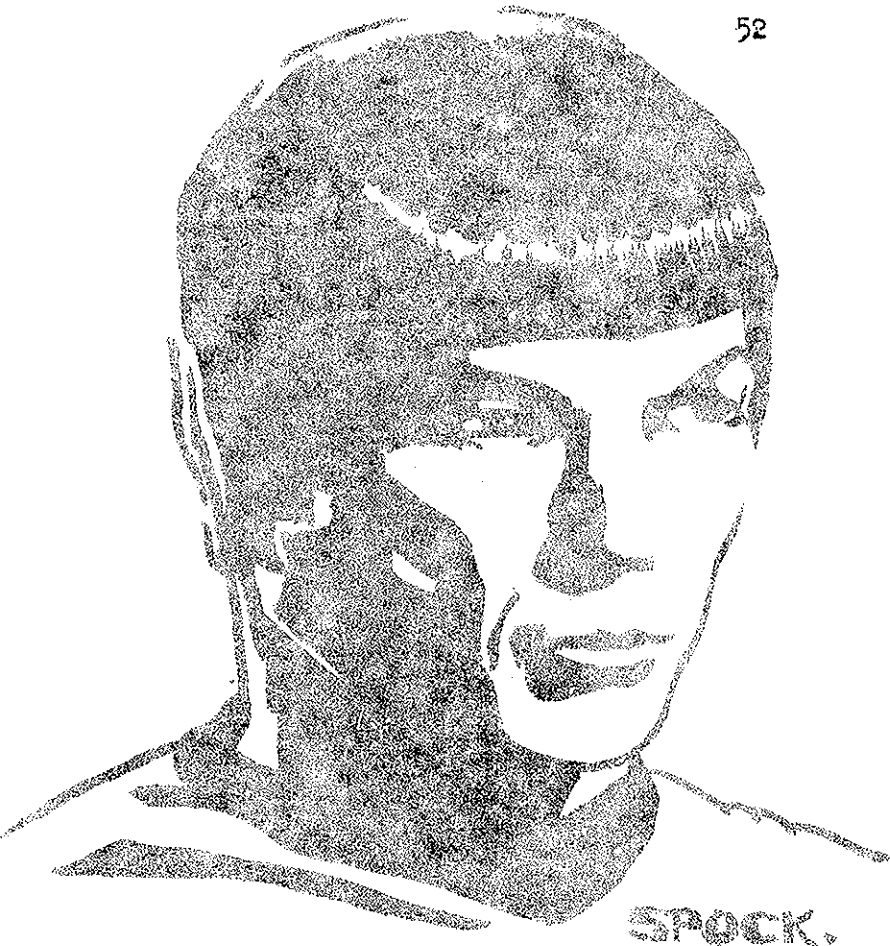
"Den le's split."

"Yes, these papers give details of... "

"Ssshhh!" Lucky grabbed Spock's flashlight and extinguished its glow. "Some punk's comin'."

They crouched close to the wall, with a desk between them and the door. Sure enough, the outer door at the end of the corridor could be heard stealthily closing. Spock, in the gloom, signalled to Lucky to remain where he was, while he himself crept round to stand just inside the door, pressed against the wall.

Cautious footsteps crept along the corridor towards them, paused, then continued. The two men waiting were poised ready, and Lucky's uneasiness was betrayed by his gentle tugging at his heavy black moustache.



As the unknown visitor stepped through the doorway, Lucky made himself visible, gun at the ready.

"One move an' ya dead," he warned softly.

The man leaped forward. Lucky sidestepped, Spock moved rapidly and caught the intruder from behind with a Vulcan nerve pinch. He crumpled into Spock's arms and was gently lowered to the floor. Lucky's torch beam played on the unconscious face.

"Ya knows dis punk?"

Spock nodded wryly. "My Captain, James T. Kirk."

Kirk opened his eyes, wincing from the seeming brightness of the room, and rubbed a hand across his face.

"Ya lucky," said a voice close by. "If ya friend hadn't of spoke up, ya mighta found yaself takin' a lil' swim - wit' concrete boots on."

Kirk went to sit up and fell back with a groan, rubbing his shoulder. "What happened?"

"You was lookin' for some papers, right? Well, me an' ya buddy got dere foist."

Kirk finally managed to sit up and confront Lucky on a level. "Who are you?"

"Da man in da moon!"

Kirk sighed; Lucky laughed. "Best wait till da Boss comes in. I'm paid t' keep my mouth shut, an' give punks lessons in swimmin' like I said, an' in parachuting wit' out da parachute, an' one or two other lil' skills. Dat's all."

"You could at least tell me where we're heading. I can see for myself we're aboard some kind of private spacecraft. Have I been kidnapped?"

Lucky burst out laughing. "Oh sure, sure!" Then an idea occurred to him. "Why, are ya' folks rich?"

Lucky's new train of thought was interrupted by the door of the small cabin opening.

"Jim."

Kirk's face froze. He stared in disbelief. "Not you?"

"Guess I'd best be leavin' ya to it," Lucky remarked, and beat a hasty retreat.

"You can get out too!" Kirk bawled at Spock. But his First Officer, on the contrary, came in and closed the door.

"Last time you issued that order, Jim, I obeyed. This time, I must speak to you."

"I've nothing to say to you, and you have nothing to say that I want to hear, Mister Spock."

"I believe you may retract that when I tell you my news."

Kirk was on his feet. "How did I get here?" he barked. "Where are we going, and just what is going on? And how does that - that character who just left tie in with you? Whose side are you on, anyway?"

Spock's hurt and puzzled eyes seemed to be boring into Kirk's soul. He said nothing, but waited patiently for the captain to work out his anger.

"Did that - that hoodlum jump me at the University?" Kirk was trying desperately to put the pieces together, but Spock's silence, his seeming refusal to co-operate, cut him to the quick. "Won't anything reach you? Oh God, Spock!" He sank back onto the bunk in defeat. Then - "For God's sake! Was it you at the University?" Light suddenly dawned.

"Yes, Jim."

"Why, in heaven's name? I had a clue, evidence that could have helped Bones. I got it from one of the Tellarites, it didn't involve him but someone he suspected. And then you had to ruin it all!"

"Is that what you really believe?" Spock asked softly. "Think. Why would I have been there?"

Kirk looked up at Spock, seeing him as if for the first time, in a totally new light. Suddenly it was all beginning to come clear; both what had happened and, perhaps more important for Kirk, the look in Spock's eyes.

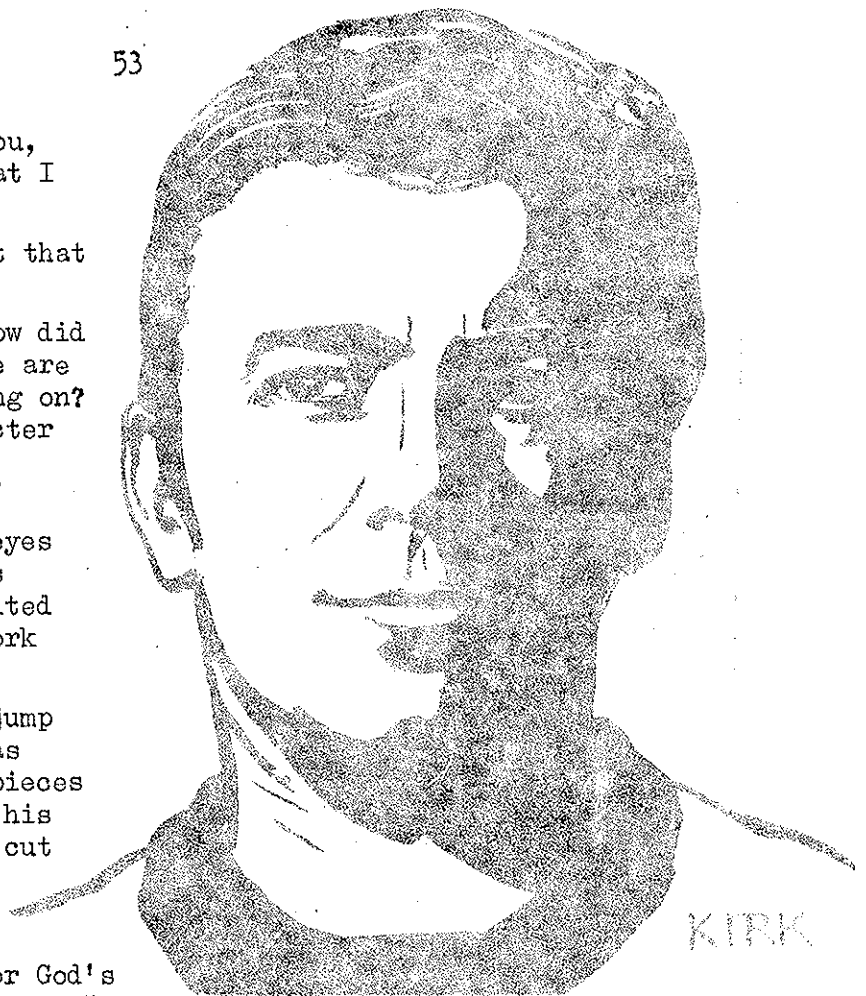
"My errand and yours were identical," Spock was continuing in the same tone. "I merely happened to arrive before you. I have the necessary documents, and we are returning to Starbase M71 to present them to Podurov. I came to inform you." He held out a sheaf of papers that Kirk had somehow not noticed before. "They make interesting reading."

Kirk would not take the papers, and when Spock saw that, he misinterpreted it as rejection, and turned slightly to leave, hunched and defeated. Kirk's heart and soul cried out "Oh, Spock!" and he stepped forward and instinctively caught the Vulcan's arm. "Don't go," he said quietly.

Spock turned, and the two men's eyes met. Kirk was still wondering what words to use, how to tell Spock of his own confusion and distress, how to say that in the stress of the moment they had each misinterpreted, misjudged and hurt the other, when he realised, from Spock's eyes, that his own eyes had said it already. Spock's hand brushed his very briefly, and then he smiled one of his rare smiles.

"Spock, I..." Kirk smiled too, apologetically, knowing that the words, whatever they turned out to be, would have been superfluous.

"It is all right, Jim. In a situation of urgency things are often overlooked which in a moment of leisure would be comprehended. We are all guilty



of that." He held out the papers again. "I would suggest that our time would be better spent in an examination of these."

Kirk grinned gratefully. "And I could use some coffee too."

\* \* \* \*

## PART 7

"How did you get these papers?" Chief Podurov asked with interest.

"That's not important," Kirk said hastily. "It's what's in them that is."

"I can see that. In shorthand, of course. This is clearly the name of the organisation, and this is evidently a list of members or contacts, or something like that. Look, the names indicate members from most planets and races, scattered throughout the Federation. I'm indebted to you, Captain, these papers are invaluable."

"And the list of names includes Hod and his assistant Jat."

"Precisely. Both working for this organisation, whose aim appears to be the overthrow of the Federation and government as we know it, to be replaced by anarchy."

"Or, more probably, by whoever's financing the whole thing."

"Yes... " Podurov mused, "most likely the Romulans, although possibly the Klingons are behind it and have made it appear to be the Romulans... Anyway, their intent's plain enough."

"And Hod," continued Kirk, "was only involved for his own ends - money and fame. That's clear from the last-but-one communication with their headquarters. They were afraid he was going to betray them. So in the last communication, Jat is ordered to eliminate him."

Podurov nodded. "You know, Kirk, much as I hate to admit this, I may have been a little hasty. Of course, I still think your doctor actually killed Hod."

"But he was just a tool, a weapon."

"Quite. Drugged, I should imagine. Some new-fangled alien concoction, no doubt."

"Then this'll alter the case?"

Podurov nodded again. "He'll still be tried, of course, but this sheds quite a different light on the whole thing. Might even have gotten off scot-free."

Kirk stiffened. "What do you mean, 'might have'?"

"Unfortunately, your surgeon has himself altered his case, too. He broke gaol three days ago. Whole security force is out after him, but so far no trace."

Kirk burst into Spock's room at the hotel on Starbase M71, and at the sight of his distraught Captain Spock's relaxed look quickly became one of concern.

"Spock, McCoy's broken gaol!"

"Why?" Spock asked incredulously.

"Heaven only knows! But he's ruined everything, the dumbhead! If only he'd hung on and stayed put! Podurov admits our evidence would probably have gotten him off. But now all our work is in vain, all the risks, everything! Now what are we going to do?"

Spock's thought were racing. "It may not be too late, Jim. We may yet



reach McCoy before he seriously compromises his case."

"How? Where would he go? The security forces can't find him."

"Just as they have not found Bertha's Bar."

"Of course! Bertha's Bar, right here on this Starbase! One of the contact points for the organisation."

"Did you point this out to Podurov?"

Kirk shook his head in dismay. "I didn't think of it. I was going to, but then when he told me about McCoy I just couldn't think straight. I forgot all about it. But how would Bones find out about it?"

"He would naturally seek out the Tellarites, as you did. Where else would they stay but at this hotel? There is no other, and Jat would not wish to risk calling attention to himself by separating himself from the other Tellarites, and joining his fellow gang members."

"That's it!" Kirk slapped Spock on the back in delight. "Bones would find Jat here, get him to tell him about Bertha's Bar. If I'd taken more time, I might have gotten on to Jat too, in the first place, but it's too late to worry about that now. I'll call Podurov."

He ran to the communications panel, and was precious minutes in conversation, whilst every second that ticked by further jeopardised McCoy. At last he turned to Spock with a gesture of resignation.

"It's no good, I can't get through to Podurov in person, he's in conference about the very papers I want to talk to him about! I've left a message, I can't do more."

"There are two further things we can do," Spock said quietly, "but risk is involved."

"Hang the risk! Quick, tell me!"

"We can contact Don Alto for back-up forces - he will move more speedily than the security forces - and we can ourselves take Bertha's Bar by storm."

Kirk grinned delightedly. "Mr. Spock, you'll make a hoodlum yet! Let's go!"

\* \* \* \*

## PART 8

Bertha's Bar was a grimy, single-storeyed building in a dingy back street. The pavements were bedecked with litter, and the daytime scene was one of slumber, and lack of life and interest. McCoy suspected that the nighttime visitor would be met by quite a different picture. The bar itself had a battered sign and the paint peeling, dusty uncleaned windows, and lace curtains which had once been white but were now between grey and black.

McCoy waved the phaser that had gone with the guard's uniform. "Where?" he demanded hoarsely.

"In here," Jat whispered. "The bar will be empty now, but the brothers-in-arms will be in the back room."

When McCoy kicked open the door that Jat indicated and leaped through the doorway dragging the Tellarite after him, phaser at his head, half a dozen brothers-in-arms jumped up, startled. They looked a motley crew, McCoy reflected; unwashed and poorly dressed. Somehow they looked the archetype of revolutionaries of all ages and all places.

"What's going on?" one demanded to know. "Who's he?"

"Your erstwhile fall guy," McCoy replied gruffly. "I just came to tell you you'll have to find a new one. I've got your little game nicely figured out, thanks to Mr. Jat here."

"He knows I doped him and made him murder Hod!" Jat babbled, terrified.

The one who was clearly the leader looked with shrewd eyes from McCoy to Jat, and back to McCoy. "So you are the famous Dr. McCoy."

"And who, sir, are you?"

"The leader of this little group - Bantey is my code name. You are bold, my friend, I grant you that. But do you really think you can overpower seven of us singlehanded?"

"I'm not alone," McCoy lied. "I've called the security forces. They'll be here in a matter of minutes." It was only now, faced with the reality of the situation, that the doctor began to wonder just what he was going to do, realising how completely without a plan he was.

"And in the meantime?" Bantey was saying.

"One move and your brother-in-arms here gets it."

"We are all expendible for the cause," another of the group said. "Jat knows that, don't you Jat?"

"Yes, yes," Jat muttered, although he did not look too sure. The six had all risen to their feet; now they were all advancing in a semi-circle towards McCoy.

"I'm warning you!" McCoy rasped desperately.

"Of course, Doctor," Bantey drawled.

Then, as McCoy decided on what seemed the best course, swung his phaser from Jat to Bantey and went to fire, Jat jumped clear and another of the group, diving beneath the line of fire, floored McCoy. McCoy fired but too late, then someone knocked him cold.

Some time afterwards, the unknowing Kirk and Spock stood poised, one on either side of the door into the back room at Bertha's Bar. Kirk felt horribly naked without a phaser, but there had not been time to obtain one from the ship; besides, he felt it as well to keep his activities secret, at least for now. So he hoped that there would be only three or four men in the room, that he and Spock could deal with with their hands.

He glanced at his First Officer, who indicated readiness with a nod. "It would be best to proceed immediately, Captain."

"Yes, let's hope we can handle it until Don Alto or the security forces arrive."

With an expression of determination, Kirk kicked open the door, and the two officers leaped into the room together.

The sight that met their eyes brought them up short. McCoy was sitting in the centre of the room, bound to a chair. Jat and another man were working at a cabinet of what was clearly medical equipment.

"Today seems to be full of surprises," Bantey remarked, covering Kirk with McCoy's phaser. "Sit down, Mr. Whoever-you-are," he continued to Spock, "or your friend is a dead man."

"It's Kirk and Spock!" Jat gasped.

"What've you done to McCoy?" Kirk demanded, but Bantey was too busy laughing to reply immediately.

"So!" he crowed at last. "The great Captain James T. Kirk and Mr. Spock! Sit down, Mr. Half-Human-half-Vulcan, and let your Captain tie you up."

They did as instructed, reluctantly, Kirk always in the direct line of fire of the phaser. One of the others checked Kirk's knots, then seated the Captain

in another chair and bound him.

"This is better than I had hoped," Bantey said, pleased. "I was going to send Dr. McCoy to kill you both. Now there is no need. He can do the job here. Oh, yes," he added, "I knew you were on my trail. I have my connections too, you know."

Throughout all this Kirk's mind had been only half concentrating on Bantey's words. He was watching Jat and his companion working with chemicals, mixing something, and McCoy, unconscious on a chair.

"So it was a drug," he said.

Bantey nodded. "A handy little Romulan device, just the result of one of the many useful researches Federation money will be spent on once our Romulan friends take over, instead of paying the salaries of diplomats and politicians and other useless individuals - bah! But you will see just how useful... are you ready?" This to Jat.

In reply, the Tellarite picked up a syringe and filled it, then injected the contents into McCoy's neck.

"Bring him round," Bantey ordered.

Jat gave him a different injection, and McCoy slowly began to revive. At last, he sat up straight and opened his eyes.

"Dr. McCoy?" Kirk asked gently, hopefully. "Bones?"

"Jim?! What's going on?"

"You see, quite normal," Bantey said. He reached out and took a small phial of bluish powder that Jat held out. "The drug has no effect until..." He shook the phial. "One inhalation of this, and the victim becomes as a zombie, totally open to suggestions. But if he doesn't come into contact with the powder, the drug leaves the body in a matter of an hour or so, quite harmlessly."

"I see," Spock said slowly, as McCoy struggled in vain to escape, staring about him wide-eyed and frantic. "Somehow the first dose was administered to McCoy - can it be taken orally?"

"The painkillers!" Kirk pointed out. "He took painkillers..."

"... which he took from his case in sickbay. Jat somehow distracted his attention momentarily and exchanged the painkillers for the drug in tablet form," Spock continued. "Later, he left his quarters for some reason..."

"... and Jat met him in the corridor with the powder and the 'suggestions'," Kirk concluded triumphantly.

"How clever you are!" Bantey mocked.

"The security scan of the corridors will prove it," Spock said. "If this surmise is correct, we have irrefutable proof of McCoy's innocence."

"What a pity you will not live to tell your story," Bantey grinned. "And once back on the ship, McCoy will destroy the films. That is the beauty of the inhaled dose. It removes all memory of events that occurred after the first drug was taken. With both of you out of the way and the scans destroyed, our path will be clear again."

"There's no way you can force me...!" McCoy shouted.

"Oh no?" Without warning, Bantey tossed the powder into the doctor's face. McCoy coughed, spluttered, fought for breath; then the change took place. The blue eyes that the surgeon now turned on his Captain were glazed, unseeing. Kirk shuddered, a movement which Bantey was not slow to detect.

"Yes, Kirk, it is frightening, is it not? And he is completely in my power." So saying, he signalled to a Tellarite to untie McCoy, and reaching

on to the table, took up a slender dagger, its point honed to needle sharpness, and handed it to the doctor. McCoy took it without looking at it.

"Now," Bantey mused deliberately, "whom shall I kill first?"

"Why?" demanded Kirk, playing for time.

"You know why. Hod would have betrayed us; and you... you know too much. It began at the university. Even if you had never come here, you signed your own death warrant on the day you went there."

His eyes travelled thoughtfully back and forth between Kirk and Spock. "I think the Vulcan first. Let his friend Kirk suffer. McCoy, kill the Vulcan!"

"No!" Kirk shouted. But McCoy walked obliviously across the room, knife poised ready. When he was only inches from Spock he halted, rested the knife against the place where his friend's heart lay. The weapon was so sharp that just the slight pressure of the point drew blood.

"Kill him!" Bantey ordered. McCoy leaned slightly on the knife.

"No, wait, Bones!" Kirk shouted desperately. McCoy's subconscious seemed to respond to his nickname, and he hesitated, turned towards Kirk. Green blood was staining Spock's shirt. The Captain could see only one chance, and that a slender one.

"You've made a mistake, Bones," he said frantically. "He's half Human too, remember? Half Human."

"So what?" Bantey drawled.

"Half Human," Kirk repeated tersely.

The ploy worked. McCoy moved the knife to the place where a Human's heart would be, and without hesitation plunged it home.

Mr. Spock made a kind of soft, sobbing sound, and fell forward against his bonds. Dr. McCoy stood by, indifferent, awaiting his next order. Kirk could feel beads of sweat cold against his forehead.

"You've killed him, Bones," he whispered, praying McCoy would not check Spock's pulse.

"Good," said Bantey cheerfully. "Now do away with Kirk, and we are free."

"On da contrary, punk," said a new voice from the door, "I tink you're gonna be locked up for a long, long time. Git against da wall, all of ya!"

Don Alto Petrinelli stepped into the room through the still open door, Stengun at the ready, and followed by a dozen of his boys.

"Like dey say, assume da position!"

"Aw, Boss," said Lucky, as Bantey and his group were frisked, "cain't ah git da concrete overcoats ready?"

"No, ya cain't!" Don Alto repeated. "Now git dat madman's knife, why dontcha?"

"Sure ting, Boss."

Don Alto, untying Kirk, was looking critically at Spock. "Is he dead?"

" hope not." Kirk, once free, ran to Spock. "Mr. Spock?"

Spock raised his head drowsily.

Kirk began to untie him gently and carefully, whilst Don Alto supported him, conscious that every movement jarred him and worsened the pain.

"Gee, Boss!" Lucky exclaimed admiringly, "stabbed t'rough da heart an' he lives!"

"Don' jest stan' dere gawpin', go git da ambulance, why dontcha?" Don Alto

sighed resignedly.

"Sure ting, Boss."

\* \* \* \*

## PART 9

Leonard McCoy stood in the Enterprise corridor, facing a door and rubbing his hands. He stepped forward and went to sound the door buzzer, then let his hand fall before its mission was accomplished, and began to pace silently back and forth, trying to gather courage.

He and Kirk had together paid the nominal fine that had been imposed on Spock for his 'borrowing' of the shuttlecraft; the amount had been very slight, as the craft had been safely returned, and considering the exceptional circumstances under which it had been taken. Kirk had asked Podurov not to mention the matter to Spock while he was unwell, since he and McCoy had, unknown to Spock, footed the bill. But McCoy had not yet spoken to Spock about what had occurred on Starbase M71.

"Och, Doctor, were ye just going to see Mr. Spock?"

"Oh, Scotty. Well, as a matter of fact... "

"Could ye give him these technical journals for me? I thought he might like to look them over while he's convalescing. I canna' tarry; I'm due on duty." And so saying, the Scotsman hurried away, leaving McCoy laden down with an impressive pile of journals. The doctor sighed. Now he had no choice but to go through with it.

"Come," Spock's voice answered McCoy's buzzing. To the untrained ear it sounded as always, but to McCoy his voice was still weak.

He was sitting up in a chair, against doctor's orders.

He glanced at McCoy. "Good afternoon, Doctor," he greeted politely.

"Scotty sent you these," McCoy said awkwardly. "Shall I put them on the table?"

"Thank you."

"He - uh - thought you might like to look them over."

"That was a thoughtful gesture. Please convey my appreciation."

McCoy thought that Spock was not making this easy for him. Then it occurred to him, in the rapid succession of thoughts that sometimes comes in moments of stress, that perhaps Spock did not even understand, could not understand. How alien is alien?

"Mind if I sit down?"

Spock politely indicated a seat.

"How are you feeling, Spock?"

"Somewhat improved, Doctor."

"Is there still pain?"

Spock looked away, affirming it. "You inquired about that this morning."

"I know."

The silence was painful. At last Spock turned towards McCoy. Bones sensed the intense Vulcan gaze, but could not meet the deep brown eyes.

"You are wondering if I can understand," Spock said gently, "that, although what occurred was not your fault, you wish to apologise. You feel guilty. Am I correct?"

"You're a Vulcan," McCoy whispered.

"I am also half Human."

"I'm sorry... "

"For an accident of nature?"

"No, because for once I forgot about it!" McCoy found himself laughing. "Damn it, Spock, there are times I think you should be the doctor! You sure know some good tonics."

"The situation in which you find yourself is not entirely unfamiliar to me. There was once a time when I also tried to kill someone when I was not myself... a good friend... "

A scene on Vulcan flashed through McCoy's mind; Spock, pon farr, and Jim bleeding and as if dead. He nodded. "I'd forgotten that, too."

"It is not an easy matter to come to terms with the residual... feelings," Spock hesitated fractionally over that word, "and it is impossible to forget. I know. But it can be... lived with. I believe Jim has never held that occasion against me. I can do no better than to follow his example. Besides," he added, "you were acquitted at the courtmartial. Who am I to contest so weighty a decision?"

"Do I detect a note of sarcasm, Mr. Spock?"

"I?" Spock queried innocently. "Of course," he added as if an after-thought, "the presiding judge was Human, and therefore not infallible."

McCoy could not let this pass. "Why, of all the...!" Fortunately, the intercom interrupted him.

"Mr. Spock, is Dr. McCoy with you?"

"McCoy here. What's the trouble, Jim?"

"You'd better come, Bones. Chekov just tripped and measured his length, and he says he can't walk, he's hurt his ankle."

"On my way. McCoy out." The doctor grinned. "I saw him talking to a pretty young yeoman yesterday, no doubt she's hanging about for him and he fancies getting off duty early!" he added to Spock, who simply raised an eye-brow, somehow making that an appreciative gesture. "Take it easy, Spock, won't you? I'll be in to see you again shortly."

So McCoy left Spock, and went about his mundane tasks, grateful for the return to normality. Humming quietly to himself, while he was also deeply thankful for two very good friends, he was musing about a fresh scar that would never completely heal, and some strange half-Vulcan balm.

\*\*\*\*\*

AS NEVER BEFORE by Gillian Catchpole

(Based on Metamorphosis)

When two lives blended, transformed to one,  
I saw you not in alien form  
But as you always hoped I would,  
A woman, soft and lovely.  
Days will dawn and days will end  
For a time after both our passings.  
Gone forever the stretch of eternity.  
A lifetime is all we'll ever have,  
For two as us that is enough.  
For now I see you as I never saw before,  
So very beautiful.

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