

# LOG ENTRIES



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18

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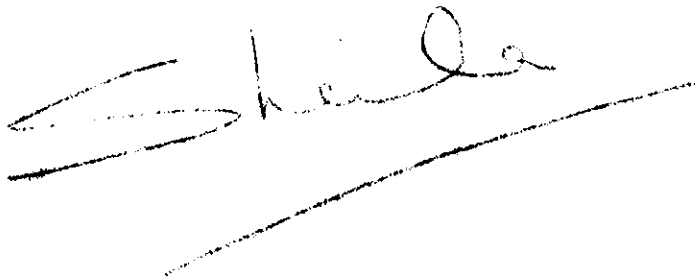
Hello again, and welcome to Log Entries 18.

There's not much to say this time - in fact, I was very tempted to miss out on this page this time round. However, we do have one apology to make.

Even as I write this, Janet is trying to run off LE 17. I say 'trying' advisedly, for we've just taken delivery of a new (though still second-hand) duplicator and she's having problems with the feed tray, which seems not to want to feed the paper into the machine. The result is the occasional missed sheet, with the machine generously putting the ink onto the roller - which means the next three or four pages are getting smudge marks on the backs. We have pulled out most of these, but some slightly smudged sheets are being left in of necessity to cut down on the wastage. If you've found the odd smudged page in your copy of LE 17, that's why, and we do apologise. We are expecting a mechanic up to look at the duplicator sometime in the next twenty-four hours, so hopefully it'll be all right for the rest of the run of LE 17 and for this zine.

And that seems to be all I have to say. My usual thanks go to Janet for doing the running off; this time, either she or I will be doing the proofreading (if we're to get it ready in time for Intercon '78 there isn't time to get it to Valerie) and Janet will also probably be doing most of the collating. Janet, I salute you!

August 1978

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Sheila', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is fluid and somewhat stylized.

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TIMESLIP by Christine Leeson

Captain James T. Kirk relaxed in the command seat. Everything had been quiet for the past four weeks, and the ship was on her way to Starbase 11 to pick up some medical supplies.

"Captain," said Mr. Spock, "sensors indicate a large energy mass ahead."

"Put it on the screen, Mr. Spock," said Kirk. "Full magnification."

The screen revealed a writhing, undulating cloud of energy, pulsating and spiralling in a myriad directions.

"What do you make of it, Mr. Spock?" asked Kirk.

Spock consulted his computer. "I'm afraid I cannot give an analysis, Captain. It is a totally new phenomenon."

Kirk was still digesting this when Dr. McCoy stepped onto the bridge, took one look at the viewing screen and asked, "What is it, Jim?"

"We don't know, Bones. Spock has no information available," replied Kirk. "Mr. Sulu - change course to 240 mark 11. We'll try to go round it."

"Aye, aye, sir," said Sulu. He wrestled with the controls - nothing happened. "She isn't responding, Captain. We're being pulled towards that thing."

"Mr. Scott!" ordered Kirk. "Divert all power to the engines." Sulu was still unable to change course; the Enterprise was drawn slowly but irresistably towards the energy mass.

Slowly, fighting every inch of the way, the great Starship nosed her way into the energy mass. The screen showed such a swirling, twisting image of colour that the senses of the crew reeled under the mesmeric effect - even Spock - so that they were lulled almost into a semi-conscious state. A pale green luminescence filled the ship, kindly voices sounded inside the heads of the crew.

"Do not worry," they seemed to say. "Be at peace. We are guiding you." Then all the crew sank gently into unconsciousness.

Kirk came to, feeling rather dazed. He took a look around the bridge and saw everybody picking themselves up from the floor and rubbing their eyes.

He took a deep breath, trying to steady himself, and swung his chair round. "Lt. Uhura," he said, "check all decks for casualties."

Uhura did so, and reported back, "No casualties, sir."

"Captain Kirk!" said Sulu in a startled voice, "Look at the screen!"

The energy mass had disappeared; instead, they were locked in orbit around a large planet whose primary was a yellow dwarf, the same spectral type as Sol.

"Readings on that planet, Spock!" snapped Kirk. "I want to know where we are and how we got here."

"Sensors indicate it is an Earth-type planet with... Captain, an extremely strong force-field has just come into existence around the planet," exclaimed Spock, his eyebrows lifting. "I am not receiving any information now from the planet. The field is completely impenetrable to our instruments."

"Lt. Uhura," said Kirk, "open a frequency to the..." The sentence remained unfinished as both he and Mr. Spock abruptly disappeared.

"Good lord!" exclaimed McCoy. "Where..." Before he could go any further, a male humanoid appeared on the viewing screen. He had a healthy, tanned face and body and he seemed to radiate vitality. He began to speak in a harmonious, reassuring voice.

"Do not worry about your companions. They are safe and will be returned to

you as soon as possible."

McCoy opened his mouth to answer angrily when the screen was filled with a vortex of surrealist shapes and colours. The crew's anger was gradually replaced with feelings of safeness and well-being. Oh, well, thought McCoy, the man said that Jim and Spock would be all right, so why worry?

Kirk and Spock materialised in what appeared to be a rather large room which was dominated by a large viewing screen on which flowed a kaleidoscope of shapes and colours which seemed to join and pull apart again.

"Fascinating," said Mr. Spock, referring to the screen. Apart from the screen the room was quite bare except for a couch made out of some velvety-black material that stood by one of the delicate pale green walls that seemed to radiate security. In one corner was a small door. The room was well-lit, though neither man could identify the source of the light.

The door opened, and a small, elderly man entered the room through the small door. Before he could speak, Kirk snapped, "Why have you brought us here? What have you done with my ship?"

The small man motioned towards the screen. The colours cleared to reveal an image of the Enterprise still in orbit around the planet. The bridge was shown; the personnel gazing hypnotised towards the shapes on their viewscreen. Then the scene broke up into jostling colours.

The small man spoke then. "Welcome to this planet. I am Professor Ten Fara - you may call me 'Professor'. We have been waiting for you."

"Who are 'we', Mister?" snapped Kirk. "Did you have anything to do with that energymass, and where are we?"

"One question at a time," said the Professor, smiling. "'We' are the Intergalactic Empire. I am its official representative here."

"Wait a minute," said Kirk. "There is no 'Intergalactic Empire'."

"It will all be made clear to you," said the Professor. "To continue; yes, we did cause the 'energy mass' - it is what is known to us as a time vortex. Any person or ship entering it is drawn either into the remote future or the remote past, depending on what the vortex is programmed for."

"You mean," said Spock, "that it is artificial. You created it yourselves."

"Yes," said the Professor. "I cannot explain how, because it would be beyond your understanding. It is sufficient for you to know that you have entered what is regarded as the remote future from your time - the year 5000."

"Interesting," said Spock. "Captain, think of all the tremendous advances that science will have made - all we can learn... "

"This is not a classroom, Mr. Spock," snapped Kirk. He turned to the Professor. "How can you prove that we are in our future? For all we know this could be an uncharted system in our own time."

"Look at the screen," said the Professor. "Empty your minds."

As they looked at the screen the colours seemed to coalesce into a scene so tremendous it was beyond belief. The shapes formed into what appeared to be a magnificent city under a beautiful green sky. The buildings towered into infinity and seemed to change colour every few seconds. They were spidery thin but gave an impression of strength. Small aircraft nosed their way between the buildings. Kirk and Spock knew they were looking into the future. Then the picture changed and the kaleidoscope of colours returned. The two men looked speechlessly at the Professor, who started to speak.

"That is the main city of this planet. I could not show you much, for the Intergalactic Council is anxious to meet you. Come - we will talk on the way."

They were hurried out of the room and down a corridor, and into what appeared to be a lift. "We cannot use the internal matter-transporters because the master computer has no knowledge of your molecular construction - your internal organs differ from ours. Evolution has not changed much since your time, but there are differences. We only possess patterns of those races making up the Empire."

"The city you showed us was very impressive," began Spock.

"We are in that city now," said the Professor. "It is called Tarro after the man who designed the first Intergalactic space vessel." The lift stopped and the two Humans and the Vulcan stepped out. The Professor led them through a door and into what looked like an underground tube station. "As you can see," the Professor went on, "our planetside methods of transport have changed little." He walked over to a large board covered with yellow switches and pressed an assortment of them. As he did so, a small vehicle came down the rail. It was circular in shape and was made out of a transparent material. It seemed to resemble a plastic bubble. Inside were comfortable white seats. The Professor led Kirk and Spock into the bubble-car and they sat.

The Professor pressed forward a huge red lever and the bubble began to move along the rail. "We all have our own private bubble-cars," he went on. "Of course, that is not our name for them, but it will suffice. Not many people use them nowadays. They are rather outdated"

The two men looked out through the transparent material. On each side there were walls made of a pale grey material which looked rather like a hard plastic but was not, as the Professor hastened to assure them. "It is a metal unknown to you - it was discovered on Alluria - a planet in the Andromedan Galaxy."

Then one of the walls expanded backwards to reveal a small platform. The bubble-car stopped and they got out. The bubble-car disappeared up the tunnel.

Kirk and Spock looked around curiously. The floor on which they stood was made of a dark grey substance differing only from the walls in its colour. On one of the walls was a large viewscreen which looked very similar to the one in the small room in which they had originally arrived. The colours on the screen cleared, and a male vulcanoid face appeared. He raised his hand in the Vulcan salute and said, "Live long and prosper, Kirk of Earth and Spock of Vulcan. Allow me to introduce myself. I am Salor of Vulcan."

Kirk and Spock responded, then Salor said to the Professor, "Take them to the preparation room, please."

"Come," said the Professor. "Follow me."

They followed him through a metal door into a room divided into one large compartment and two smaller ones.

"Each of you enter one of the small compartments and remove your clothing."

They did so, and two robots came gliding in. Each robot entered a compartment and proceeded to give its occupant a complete medical examination, including blood samples, blood pressure and pulse.

"The Council wants to make sure you are in good physical health before they set you any psychological tests and certainly before they see you," explained the Professor.

"I don't think Bones would approve of robot doctors taking over," grinned Kirk.

"I find them most efficient," answered Spock.

"We don't have much need of doctors," said the Professor, "since we have disposed of all mental aberrations and most physical ailments. Therefore, most mundane medical work is given to robots."

When the robots had finished, Kirk and Spock dressed again and entered the large compartment. The Professor led them to another lift, talking as he went.

"The tests show you are both in excellent physical condition as far as we can determine. The Council will set you some psychological tests such as IQ determinants. The average IQ in this time period is 400."

"That seems excessive," said Spock, arching his eyebrows.

"We have learned to use more of our brain capacity than used to be the case by selective breeding, allied to advanced educational techniques," explained the Professor. The lift stopped and they got out, into a small room. This time the walls were yellow, and Spock found himself wondering if there was any significance in the colour schemes. He did not have time to ponder this, however. A light showed above a door set in the opposite wall.

"Follow me," said the Professor. He led them through the door and into a large hall. A long desk ran all around the room. Behind it sat twelve humanoids. They were extremely diverse however in size and colour. Four of them appeared familiar; as for the others, one had green skin and was extremely thin, one had huge purple eyes and was small and dumpy and yet another had two antennae but unlike the Andorians looked vaguely feline.

"Captain," whispered Spock. "There are one each of Human, Vulcan, Romulan and Klingon, but I have no referents for the others."

"Welcome to our planet and to our time," said the Vulcan, whom they recognised as Salor. "You may go, Professor Fara." The Professor left quietly and Salor went on. "We are the ruling members of the oxygen/water worlds of the Empire, and we welcome you in the name of all the peoples of the Intergalactic Empire. Other members will be listening from their respective planets."

"May I enquire your purpose in bringing us here?" asked Spock.

The Romulan, who was female, stood. "I am Sen Tarra. I am, first and foremost, a historian, and at the moment I am studying your period in history. I could travel back in time, but we are afraid that that may alter the course of history, so we prefer to draw people out of the past into our time, examine them, then send them back to their own time. There is still a risk of changes being made, but it is minimal."

"You mean we are like guinea-pigs," said Kirk.

"Not at all," replied Sen Tarra. "We merely wish to find out about your sciences - sociology and psychology in particular. We wish to know your customs and social behaviour, and most of all we wish to know about you, our ancestors. You have already observed that we are a Council made up of many different species. In your time, we know, Klingons, Romulans and Humans were enemies. Now we live side by side and our former animosity is forgotten; we live in peace."

"That is correct," said the Klingon, introducing himself as Kool.

Kirk and Spock felt astonished at this. I never thought I'd see the day, thought Kirk. Aloud he said, "It is good to see so many diverse races living in peace with one another. Such a thing was striven for in our time."

Sen Tarra smiled. "Now you know your striving was eventually successful. However, let us get down to business. I should imagine that you have many questions to ask us - as we have many to ask you. We have certain tests we would like you to undergo so that we can test your reactions to various stimuli."

"What kind of tests?" asked Kirk, slightly suspiciously.

"Nothing dangerous, Captain - just the routine psychological tests the Professor told you about," she replied. "Meena - " she indicated the feline with the antennae " - will set you the tests."

"Come, Captain and First Officer," said Meena in a high-pitched voice.

Kirk and Spock followed Meena out of the room by yet another door. They found themselves in a room in the middle of which stood a huge machine out of which projected a head-shaped protruberance, underneath which was a comfortable-



looking couch. The machine itself looked extremely complex and caused Spock to raise his eyebrows in curiosity.

"I have never seen such a machine, Captain," he said. "It is far beyond the science of our day."

"It is a Psychonometer," said Meena in her high voice. "It tests reactions to stimuli, it records intelligence level and it reveals the secrets of the id."

"I'm not sure I like the sound of it," said Kirk.

"It is nothing to worry about," said Meena. "It is quite painless; you will feel nothing. You will both sit under it, one at a time. It will probe into your minds. From this we will perceive the answers to all our questions about your period in history. It is much less cumbersome than having to ask all our questions. However, you will both be given a chance to ask questions about our era."

Kirk sat down on the couch. It was as comfortable as it had looked. Meena placed the headpiece over his head. A minute later his mind went completely blank and he felt feelers gently sliding into his mind. They were very gentle and he felt completely safe. He heard voices asking him many questions about his childhood, his adolescence, his social relationships, how he entered Starfleet Academy, how he became a Captain. They asked about life and customs on all the planets he had been to, how they differed from one another. Then everything went blank again and the next thing he knew, he was lying on a soft surface with Meena and Spock looking down at him.

"You have been very helpful, Captain," said Meena.

"Spock?"

"Mr. Spock has already been examined," replied Meena, "but he did not remain unconscious as long as you have done."

"How long have I been unconscious?" asked Kirk.

"You were under the Psychonometer for fifteen minutes, then you were unconscious for twenty minutes," replied Meena.

"Fifteen minutes... but all those questions I answered," Kirk began.

Meena smiled but gave no explanation. Then she said, "Both your intellects are well above average for your era. However, that is to be expected in a Starfleet Captain and First Officer. Now, I have to give you a small injection."

"What kind of injection?" asked Kirk.

"Nothing to worry about," said Meena in a gentle, soothing voice. Before Kirk had a chance to protest, Meena inserted a needle into his arm and released the contents into his bloodstream.

Immediately, Kirk found himself back on the Enterprise. He was sitting in his command chair on the bridge. The ship was heading through space at warp six.

"Captain Kirk," said Sulu, "there is a Klingon vessel approaching us on an intercept course."

"Change course to 220 mark 11," said Kirk.

"The Klingon ship is changing course also," said Sulu. "It's chasing us."

"Open a hailing frequency to that ship, Lt. Uhura," ordered Kirk.

"Hailing frequencies open, sir."

Kirk began, "This is Captain James T. Kirk of the U.S.S. Enterprise. We are on a peaceful mission."

The Klingons responded by opening fire. Right, thought Kirk. If that's the way you want to play... "Fire phasers one and two, Mr. Sulu."

"Firing phasers, sir," said Sulu. "A direct hit, sir. The Klingon vessel

appears to be completely disabled."

"Beam all survivors aboard. We'll drop them at the nearest Starbase."

At that moment the ship faded from sight and Kirk found himself lying on a couch; once more, Meena and Spock were looking down at him.

"Oh, my head!" he groaned. "What happened?"

"It was the drug I gave you," explained Meena. "It is a hallucinogenic drug which caused you to experience a situation where desperate measures were called for. We, the Council, wanted to see how you would react. If you had totally destroyed the ship and killed all the survivors we would have known that you were still primitively aggressive. However, we were pleased to see that you rescued the 'survivors'. Come, the Council wishes to see you. Your headache will clear in a moment."

They followed her back into the Council chamber.

"We now have most of the information we need about your era," said Salor. "Are there any questions you would like to ask us?"

"Yes," said Kirk. "I would like to know when the Intergalactic Empire was first formed, and I would like some information about it."

"I should like to know more about your computers," said Spock.

"Very well," said Salor. He pressed a switch in front of him and a robot came into the hall. "Robot XVIII, take Mr. Spock to the main computer room."

"Follow me," said the robot. Spock followed it out of the room.

"Now, Captain Kirk," said Salor, "if you would look at the screen I think it will answer most of your questions."

Kirk looked at the viewscreen. Funny I didn't notice that before, he thought.

As he watched, an image of the galaxy began to form. Meena started to give a commentary.

"This is a view of the galaxy taken from outside," she said. "In your time period, Captain Kirk, it was the only galaxy we inhabited. Your race had two main enemies, the Klingons and the Romulans. The Klingons especially were violent and warlike. Six hundred years after your time there was a war between the Klingons and the Humans. Both sides suffered heavy losses. The Romulans were also drawn into the war. After it was over, by mutual consent it was decided that the galaxy could not withstand another war, so peace was declared. Treaties were made.

Near the end of the war a man named San Tarro was born. He was educated at the University of Usgor and was one of the most outstanding students they had seen. After his formal education was over he went to live on Capella III. While he was there he made a monumental discovery. He discovered the secret of Intergalactic flight by adapting certain of the Kelvan techniques. He designed a space vessel that could make the journey to other galaxies, not in the 300 years it took the Kelvans but in three months. This was one of the things that stopped the war. The Kelvans now admitted that compared to other races in their home galaxy they were comparatively peaceful. It was decided to present a united front to the other galaxies in our local group. We went forward in peace and we found peace. All superior races joined our federation until we became the Intergalactic Empire. Races from all the galaxies in our local group joined us. We are all peaceful races, Captain Kirk; we are all intelligent although intelligence takes many different forms and we all believe in making contact with as many different species as possible.

Does that help you to understand us better, Captain Kirk?"

"I find it extremely interesting," said Kirk, who was feeling rather dazed. "In our time we desired peace - now I know that one day we are going to achieve it."

"I will summon your First Officer," said Salor. He pressed a switch and

spoke into a microphone. "Robot XVIII, bring Mr. Spock to the main Council room."

A moment later Spock entered. "What do you think of our computers, Mr. Spock?" asked Salor.

"I find them extremely interesting," said Spock. "I also found them... somewhat incomprehensible."

"We could not have permitted you to see them otherwise," Salor pointed out. "Now I will beam you both back to your ship, and you will be sent back through the time vortex."

The next thing Kirk knew, he was standing on the bridge of the Enterprise, Spock beside him. The crew snapped out of their hypnotic state and Uhura exclaimed, "Captain Kirk, Mr. Spock, where have you been?"

"I'll tell you about it one day, Lieutenant," said Kirk.

"Jim, Spock, you're back!" shouted McCoy.

"I am pleased to see you still have your acute sense of observation, Doctor," remarked Spock.

"If I didn't know you better, Spock, I'd say you were being sarcastic," retorted McCoy.

Then Salor appeared on the viewscreen. "Captain Kirk, it was interesting talking to you. You will find that on your passage back through the time vortex you will become unconscious again. This is nothing to worry about.

Live long and prosper, all of you."

"Live long and prosper," replied Kirk as the Vulcan face faded from sight. "Well, gentlemen, let's return to work."

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IN LOVE AND HELL WE LET PAST HAPPEN by Gillian Catchpole

Gigantic rivers flowing to seas,  
Tributaries of past collecting forever  
Memories of joys and hopes, of love and pain.  
And into one tiny rush of rapid water  
Dived a sick and frenzied man,  
A man come crazy in this breath of time.

So quiet and still.  
Forgotten debris of an unthought-of life,  
The only remains of what once had been,  
We turn to listen to an empty sky.  
Dull and dark the light sinks fading fast,  
Shadows of dusk grow creeping long,  
We have to search, for once it's night,  
He and us will be all alone.  
So easy to save  
We stand and watch her die again.  
In love and hell we let past happen,  
To know again our own tomorrows.

Do you hear the sound of the wind,  
The crashing of rocks, the ripple of water?  
They at least will never change.  
Time becomes as time before,  
Except in us for sadness clouds,  
Memories exist and change our souls,  
We'll never be as we were before.

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INVISIBLE ASSET? by Meg Wright

Sulu set his empty glass down on the bar. "If we're to get back on board and into dress uniform for this dinner tonight, we'd better be on our way. Ready, Uhura?"

She nodded and climbed down from her high stool. A sudden burst of laughter from the other side of the crowded bar made them both look across. A young officer lay sprawled over a table in a welter of broken glass and spilt liquor. His unsteady companions were vainly endeavouring to pull him upright.

"Silly young idiots," Sulu said without much interest. "We'd better be going, Uhura."

"No, wait. Sulu, isn't that young Chekov?"

Sulu craned his neck to see and nodded. "Yes. He'll have a sore head in the morning."

"He'll have more than a sore head," Uhura said grimly. "He's expected at this dinner tonight and if he's not there the Captain is going to want to know all about it. Let's go and see how bad he is."

They shouldered their way through, arriving just as his companions managed to pull Chekov to a sitting position from which he slumped back onto the table.

Uhura surveyed the group icily. "Most edifying," she told them. "I suppose you're all having a wonderful time!"

"Jus' celebrating," said one of the steadiest. "I's not every day one of us gets made Navigator. We're jus' givin' him a good send-off."

Sulu picked up a glass and sniffed it. "With this?" he asked. "What in the nine worlds is it?"

"Some local juice," protested the Ensign. "It packs a powerful punch, though." He giggled at them. Uhura passed him a glance that seemed to penetrate his happy haziness because he backed off a little.

"You may not remember it, Ensign, but Ensign Chekov has to attend a formal dinner on board tonight, and it isn't going to make a very good showing if it has to be entered in the log that he was too drunk to attend." She cut the young man's protestations short. "Ignorance is no excuse, Ensign. This sort of behaviour in Federation uniform is intolerable on board, but in a Space Station it is unforgiveable. I suggest that all of you get back aboard as soon as possible. Lt. Sulu and I will deal with Ensign Chekov."

The coldness of voice and manner displayed by the normally friendly Uhura had a noticeable effect on the group; they left without protest, looking both sheepish and owlshly solemn. Sulu could not help but grin after they had passed him. Uhura grinned back at him across the unconscious figure. Her smile faded.

"It's all very well to laugh, Sulu, but the Captain doesn't take this kind of thing lightly. We've got to get him back on board and get Dr. McCoy to sober him up."

Sulu shook his head. "Much better to sober him up first," he said. "You've got to get him from the transporter room to sickbay, and I've got a nasty feeling that Mr. Spock and Scotty are going to be working on the transmission circuitry today. I've got a better idea. I know this station; old Doc Ansen is a terrible drunk but a past master with instant alcohol cures. I'll go and see him. You wait here."

He was not gone long, in about ten minutes he returned with a small ampoule of milky liquid; he was smiling broadly.

"This stuff should do the trick provided we can make him swallow it." He looked a little dubiously at the sleeping figure.

"That's easy enough." Uhura lifted Chekov upright in his chair. "I'll hold

his nose and you pour the stuff in."

This manoeuvre proved effective; in a short while a hazy, but sober, young Ensign was opening a pair of unwholesome eyes. Uhura shook him.

"On your feet, Ensign," she said sternly. "If you're not back on board quicker than a Vegan flea there's going to be trouble."

As they materialised, Sulu looked meaningfully at Uhura. Protruding from the console were the unmistakable legs of the First Officer; a concerned Chief Engineer clucked unhappily above him.

Uhura waved airily. "Hi, Scotty, see you later."

In the elevator Sulu breathed a sigh of relief. "It's lucky it was Spock who had his head in the console when we arrived and not Scotty. I wouldn't have wanted to find Mr. Spock giving us one of those mildly enquiring looks!"

Uhura laughed. "You've got a guilty conscience, Sulu, that never does mix with Spock. But I don't think he saw us, and why should he take any notice anyway? We were simply returning from a pleasant run ashore."

"You never know what Spock is going to notice until it's too late," Sulu said darkly, "and I don't usually have to hold Chekov's hand! Still, providing we have him ready to go on duty, we shouldn't have anything to worry about."

Indeed, apart from a slightly subdued demeanour, Chekov's behaviour was so normal that they left him to get ready on his own.

The farewell dinner for the Space Station staff went off smoothly too - up to the moment of Chekov's collapse.

Uhura followed McCoy to the sickbay as soon as she could slip away unnoticed, to enquire how the boy was getting along. McCoy shrugged a little.

"I don't know what's wrong with him. He'd had plenty of alcohol over the last few hours, but I don't think that's the cause of his collapse. Why are you taking such an interest, Uhura?"

"Sulu and I got him back on board earlier on. He'd been drinking and we wanted to get him back here on the quiet. Sulu got some stuff from the Doctor on G2 to sober him up. Could it be that that caused it?"

"What was it?"

"I don't know. Sulu went to get it, he's still in the mess. Shall I get him?"

"No, I'll call up Dr. Ansen."

"I'll do that for you, Doctor. You want to know exactly what the stuff was, I suppose."

"Yes, and how much of it he's had. It may be nothing to do with his collapse, but it needs looking into."

She passed the required information on to McCoy. He read her notes and frowned. "Ptisan! That should be all right. It shouldn't have this effect on him, quite the opposite. I'm surprised he isn't doing Cossak dances round sickbay. I'll have to look for some other cause. Thank you, Lieutenant, you've been most helpful. I hope he was duly grateful!"

Uhura laughed. "I think so. Certainly, if we hadn't sobered him up first the sight of Spock working in the transporter room would have done the trick. Chekov's got a healthy respect for Spock!"

McCoy snorted derisively, but said nothing. Uhura's eyes were lit with laughter as she left the sickbay. She was well aware of the running feud that existed between the Doctor and the Vulcan, but she was equally aware of the solid but unspoken affection that Dr. McCoy had for most of his fellow men. It would be interesting some day to find out exactly what they really thought of each other.

A few hours later the Enterprise left orbit for the crossing to Colony Delta 9. She carried a cargo of medical supplies that were needed in a hurry, and was due to travel at high warp speed in order to get the supplies there within five days. The normal passage time was three weeks, but this would have to be made at Warp 6 at least. It meant enduring a great deal of bad temper from the Chief Engineer. On such occasions most of the Human personnel on board kept a respectful distance from Scott, and prevented themselves from unnecessarily exacerbating a potentially explosive situation. Luckily for everyone, McCoy was too busy in sickbay to have time to annoy Scott, and for this Kirk gave thanks. Equally fortunately, Scott raised no objections to the interest Spock took in the proceedings. The modifications which he and Scott had been working on recently were coming into their own while the engines were under comparative stress, and the pair of them were frequently to be seen deep in conversation, their heads together over quantities of figures and diagrams.

"It's a good thing," Kirk said to McCoy in one of the surgeon's brief off-duty moments, "that those two can concentrate anywhere."

McCoy nodded. "They're well-matched occasionally," he agreed. "Heaven help the machine they get together over. How's the trip going, Jim? I've been too busy to notice what's happening around me."

"No excitement," Kirk assured him. "I get left to myself except when those two come to me for official approval. How is Chekov, has he come round yet?"

"Not yet," McCoy said. "Everything is quite normal about him, except for the fact that he's unconscious. His condition isn't deteriorating; that's some comfort."

Kirk got to his feet. "Let me know if there is any change."

McCoy floundered up from the deep, comfortable warmth of his dream, to find the persistent whistling of the crickets in the surrounding grass still ringing in his ears. Sourly, he stabbed at the intercom with a sleep-lazy hand only to come abruptly awake.

"Calm down, Nurse," he barked. "Now, give me a proper report."

She took a deep breath before she replied. "The screen shows a steady decrease in several areas, Doctor, but Chekov himself is showing unusual symptoms. Doctor, I can see through him!"

"See through him? What is that supposed to mean, Nurse?"

"I can't put it in medical terms, Doctor, his condition is way outside my experience. He appears transparent, I can see his bones like an old-fashioned X-ray print, and from the way the screen is acting I'd say his condition is rapidly deteriorating."

As he studied the young Ensign, McCoy could understand Chapel's agitation. Chekov's skin was now entirely clear and he resembled the plastic anatomical models made for the benefit of medical students, except that this was a working model. It was not, McCoy thought critically, the best advertisement for mankind. It was not a sight they were called upon to watch for long. In spite of all his efforts, by morning Chekov could not be seen at all, only the sterile gown that covered his body and the depression his head made in the pillow gave any indication

of his presence on the bed; while the diagnostic panel gave readings that McCoy could only gape at in disbelief. After his body had totally disappeared, however, the panel indicated that Chekov was beginning to come out of the coma. Like a small child waking, he stretched, rolled over and spoke, his voice sounding quite normal if a little bewildered.

"Whataas I doing in sickbay, Doctor? I feel fine."

McCoy hesitated, uncertain where to begin, when there was a rustle of movement from the bed and then Chekov's voice, with more than a touch of panic in it.

"Hey, I can't see my hand... or anything. Doctor! What's happened?"

McCoy felt his arm grabbed and did his best to sound soothing. "It's all right, Ensign. I'm not yet sure what has happened to you, but there is no cause for alarm."

"No cause for alarm!" The voice cracked on the words, the gown on the bed came bolt upright. McCoy reached for the shoulders; they felt reassuringly solid.

"Just keep calm. I'll find out what's going on and you can help yourself best by not panicking. Try and act as normally as you can and that will give us a chance to get to work on the problem all the quicker."

At last, satisfied that Chekov had sufficiently calmed down, McCoy left Christine with him and went to his office. He made sure the door had completely closed before he flipped his intercom switch.

"Captain Kirk."

"In quarters, Bones. What's up?"

"Can you come to the sickbay?"

"Straight away, Bones? I'm going over some data with Spock. Is this urgent?"

"As long as what you are doing can wait, I suggest you come over straight away; and bring Spock with you, his opinion could be useful. I have an interesting development here I'd like you to... " he paused, "well, not look at but consider."

As he thumbed the switch a confused babble of sound came from the sickbay; he went at a run. Christine was ludicrously struggling with a ballooning bedgown.

"You're laughing at me," Chekov shouted. "You're not to laugh at me!"

"Chekov!" McCoy's voice held all the authority he knew. "Chekov, lie down at once! I will not have my staff treated like this."

Nurse Chapel straightened herself, obviously free; the white gown subsided on the couch, stifling a sob.

"Now." McCoy came to the bedside, carefully maintaining his most normal manner. "From the look of that panel I would guess that your condition could be giving us some false readings. I'll have to check things out the slow way. I shall want some nail parings and hair clippings to test, and blood, skin and urine samples. It will be easier for you to cut your own nails and hair and I shall need your full co-operation for the rest."

As soon as Nurse Chapel brought the required kit, McCoy broke open the sterile packs and turned to Chekov again. The gown was sitting up; it seemed to wear a defeatist air.

"Put your hand on mine," McCoy instructed, "then I can feel what I need."

While he was working the door hissed open. "Don't talk, gentlemen," McCoy said over his shoulder. "This may look to you like the beginning of paranoia, but I assure you I am deadly serious. If you will be patient for a moment, I will be able to answer such questions as I can."

Kirk surveyed the scene before him in bewilderment, half suspecting an elaborate hoax; he shot a glance at Spock standing at his shoulder, expressionless as ever, head slightly on one side, eyes watchful. Kirk waited.

McCoy finally straightened. "Well, I think I've got enough here, Ensign, but it's difficult to be sure. If I haven't I will have to come back to you. Nurse, will you give him the scissors and a couple of containers and bring the samples to the lab."

Kirk watched, bemused, as Christine held out the scissors; they glided off into empty air and began to cut at nothing; he felt his jaw dropping. Pulling himself together he followed McCoy into his office, motioning Spock to follow.

"Bones! Is this some kind of joke?"

"I wish it was, Jim. The only thing I can tell you is that your eyes are telling you the truth. Chekov has become invisible."

"When did it happen?"

"It started in the early hours of this morning; Christine sent for me as soon as she noticed it. At the moment I've no idea of the cause; I'll start testing and let you know."

"I'd no idea it was even possible." Kirk was fascinated. "Is it radiation of some kind?"

"I doubt it, Captain," Spock put in quietly. "Some work on the subject has been done on Vulcan, and it is believed theoretically possible to synthesize a substance which will temporarily remove all colouring from the body cells. My information on the subject is hardly up-to-date, however."

McCoy gave an angry grunt. "I might have known this was some glorious notion cooked up by Vulcan scientists. Where's the logic behind this little piece of meddling with nature?"

"The practical applications are surely obvious, Doctor? I believe it was the work of another Doctor originally. His idea was to render the epidermis transparent for easier diagnosis of the tissues beneath."

McCoy opened his mouth, remembered his first view of Chekov in the early hours, closed it again carefully and turned to Kirk.

"Can you spare Spock to work with me? It looks as though his help will be valuable."

Kirk raised an enquiring eyebrow at the Vulcan, who nodded. "I have finished most of the work with Mr. Scott now, Captain, and will be pleased to give Dr. McCoy any help I can."

"Very well. Everything is going so smoothly I guess you can be spared. How long will it take, Bones?"

McCoy shrugged. "I've no idea, Jim - have you, Mr. Spock?"

"It is possible that it will correct itself, Doctor. As far as I can remember the theories indicated it would be a temporary condition. I think we can hope for a positive solution."

"Have you found out how Chekov is?" Sulu handed Uhura her coffee. "I haven't had time to go down to sickbay and no-one I've asked has heard anything new."

"I went down to see him," Uhura told him, "but they wouldn't let me in. I thought Christine looked more than a little worried, but I didn't get any details."

Sulu's cheery face lost its normal smile. "I hope it's not my fault, I did get him that pick-me-up."

Uhura shook her head. "It's nothing to do with that, I checked on it for



Dr. McCoy. I radioed Doc Ansen on G2 for him and got the full details of the stuff; according to him it was a standard stimulant, brand name Ptisan."

Sulu set his cup down sharply. "Ptisan? It wasn't that. One of the disadvantages of a mis-spent youth is learning to recognise Ptisan. This stuff was milky looking and Ptisan has a distinctly blue look. I checked with Doc. Ansen that the stuff was where he said it was, but he was pretty drunk himself."

Uhura stood up. "We'd better go and see Dr. McCoy. Come on."

They tracked him down in the lab; he heard them out in frowning silence.

"No hope you kept the ampoule? No, I didn't think so, that would make my life too easy. We must get on to Ansen again. I'll come with you, Uhura, and have a chat with him myself that will sober him up for once."

Christine Chapel sighed over the recalcitrant behaviour of her patient. She had grown accustomed to the eerie sight of the apparently empty gown as it moved about on the bed, but the young nurse on duty with her had not improved matters by being first of all terrified and then relapsing into hysterical giggles. Neither reaction found favour with Chekov and he expressed himself quite plainly. Christine dismissed her assistant and looked severely at the bed.

"Ensign! I fully realise this is a difficult situation for you, but I cannot have you speaking to Nurse O'Hara like that. Your language was unforgivable - and you may consider yourself lucky that O'Hara does not speak Russian."

The gown's shoulder hunched and Chekov said sullenly, "You should try what it's like. You think it's very funny but what sort of life as I going to lead like this?"

"I don't think it's at all funny... "

He interrupted her. "I don't want to talk about it. I'm hungry. I haven't had anything to eat since the day before yesterday, or had you forgotten? Are you all going to solve the problem by starving me to death?"

"Dr. McCoy sees no reason why you should not eat. Tell me what you fancy and I will go and get it."

When he began his meal she found she had to turn away. Food apparently did not disappear until it was fully absorbed by the body, and the process of mastication was unattractive. Christine could only be grateful that his digestive system was safely covered by the gown. She busied herself at the other side of the room, determined not to turn round until he had finished.

Chekov thought he could understand that averted gaze. "What's the matter, Nurse, as I repulsive as well as funny?"

She swung round immediately. "Don't be foolish, Pavel. It's easy to see you don't know much about nursing. At the moment I am merely thinking you are behaving like a spoilt child. Have you eaten all you want?"

The bedtray jerked sharply, slopping liquid from its container. "I don't want any more. Take it away and leave me alone!"

"Ensign," she said gently, "you only hurt yourself if you don't eat. Are you quite sure you have had enough?"

"Of course I'm sure!" he snarled. "I may not be visible, but I haven't gone soft in the head."

She shrugged a little, and removed the tray, taking it to the disposal chute in the sluice room. As she did so the outer door slid open and a fluffy blonde peeped in.

"Hello, Wanda. I can guess what you want - to see Chekov."

The blonde curls bounced with her vigorous nod. "How is he, Nurse? No-one

seems to know. He's not really ill, is he? Someone said it must be pretty serious."

Christine looked at her thoughtfully. "Wait here and I'll have a word with Dr. McCoy. It's possible that a visit from you is just what Pavel needs."

She went into McCoy's office and called the lab. It was a moment or two before McCoy answered. "Problems, Nurse?"

"Not medical ones, Doctor, but he's becoming depressed and belligerent. Yeoman Schnabel wants to visit him. If I brief her carefully she may be just what he needs. Shall I let her in?"

McCoy pondered. "We seem to be on the track of the substance, and once we've got that we'll be on the way to an antidote. Yes, let her visit him, but warn her not to go babbling all over the ship."

"Affirmative, Doctor." She switched off the intercom and went to the door, beckoning Wanda in. Once she had persuaded her it was not a joke, she emphasized the need to treat Pavel normally.

"He's upset and nervy, so you mustn't make it any worse for him. Understood?"

The girl nodded. "Of course. Can I go in right away?"

"Yes, carry on. I'll stay in here. I don't imagine you want an audience. It might be easier on your own at that, at least he can't accuse us of ganging up on him. Whatever you do, don't laugh. It's not at all funny for him."

Listening to the murmur of voices from the ward, Christine was beginning to congratulate herself on finding the right distraction for her patient when Wanda's voice rose in a perceptible plea to "Let go!"

She was about to go in when Wanda fled into the office crying hysterically and clung to the older woman. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to upset him but he tried to kiss me and... Oh, Nurse Chapel, it was horrible!"

Christine quietened her down and looked into the ward; Chekov appeared to be sitting quietly enough on his bed. She went back to the still sobbing Yeoman to administer a calming shoulder, finally sending her away with a warning against gossip, then she hurried back to her patient.

The gown lay limp and empty over the bed; she looked round the room. "Ensign, this is not the time to start playing games. Get the gown back on so I can see where you are."

There was no reply and, at last, she stepped to the intercom.

McCoy gave Spock a triumphant slap on the back. "We've done it, this is the stuff all right; now we can get to work on the antidote, and it should be reasonably easy to synthesize." He stepped impatiently to the buzzing intercom. "Yes, Nurse?"

"Doctor, Chekov has removed the gown and I can't find him, will you... "

A gasp followed by a thud brought both men to their feet. McCoy only just beat Spock to the door.

No amount of reassurance over the intercom that the antidote would shortly be found induced Chekov to return to the sickbay. He roamed the Enterprise attacking several crewmen and, more distressingly, Ensign Marie Mancini.

Raging impotently, Kirk took out his bad temper on Spock. The Vulcan heard him out calmly, nodded his agreement to the least outrageous parts of Kirk's summing up and got on with the job in hand. Balked - not for the first time, either - Kirk turned on McCoy.

"Are we any nearer the antidote, Bones?"

"No nearer than when you came in here," McCoy said tiredly. "Anything in those results, Spock?"

"One lead in the last molecular tests, Doctor. There is an interesting variation in the pattern that could account for the eventual breakdown of the haemoglobin as opposed to the swifter reaction of Vulcan cells. It may explain why the substance was effective on Human and well as Vulcan body chemistry. I should like to do some further tests however."

"We haven't got time, Spock," Kirk said bluntly. "Chekov has got to be found and stopped before I have to make an entry in the log that will stop his career before it's started. De Salle heard Mancini scream before she was actually hurt, the next girl might not be so lucky."

"You can't destroy a boy's life for a temporary, drug-induced psychosis," McCoy flared, "or do I have to remind you of young Riley, now doing very nicely aboard the Lexington!"

"There is no evidence that this psychosis is caused by the drug, Doctor," Spock said, "all the evidence points to it having been caused by the condition."

"I'll log that as caused by the drug!" snapped McCoy.

"Then you will be guilty of an unscientific and emotional lie, Doctor."

"Stop it," Kirk said evenly. "You're wasting time. At the moment our prime objective is to put Chekov under restraint somehow - anyhow. Once we've prevented any further action on his part we can then put ourselves to solving the rest of the problem at leisure. Any suggestions as to how we get hold of him, gentlemen?"

"There are too many hiding places on a ship this size for a person you can see, Jim. How you find one you can't see, I don't know."

"We'll have to wait for the next attack," Kirk said grimly, "seal off that area and flood it with anaesthetic gas and then go hunting for him by feel. It's the only way I can think of."

"Supposing there is no further attack, Captain?"

"I don't want another attack, Spock, but we're helpless unless he does."

"Captain, Dr. McCoy mentioned Lt. Riley - it occurs to me that Mr. Scott's recent modifications are somewhat vulnerable. Should we not ensure the safety of that area and of the engineering department generally?"

Appalled, Kirk strode to the intercom. "Mr. Scott, seal off engineering area D immediately and then the rest of the department. We want to make quite sure you don't have any unwelcome visitors."

"Aye, sir," Scott's voice replied comfortably. "I've already been keeping a watch for unexplained opening doors. If he's in here already he's keeping awfu' quiet about it."

Kirk breathed a sigh of relief. "Well done, Mr. Scott. Report to the Security Chief at any sign of trouble and he will deal with it according to Section B1, understood?"

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Chief Hanwell!"

"Affirmative. Section B1, sir. I'll have men standing by with filter masks."

"Good. Secure all other areas and check the elevators for unaccountable movements. Let's contain him wherever he is at the moment."

As Kirk turned, McCoy looked up from the electron microscope display. "Yes, I think this is it, Spock. We'll get M'Benga to work on it. You'd better go and

get some rest now. You've been on your feet too long."

His expression dared Kirk to argue. Kirk gave a tired grin.

"He's right, Spock. You came off watch eight hours ago; go and get some rest. We don't need you at the moment and we may later."

"Very well, Captain. A short period of meditation may well be beneficial at the moment. I will be in quarters."

Kirk subsided onto one of the lab stools. "We've still got to find him, Bones. Any ideas?"

"Not in deep space, Jim. We've too many on board to make the heartbeat technique feasible. It would take several hours to eliminate over four hundred possibilities, plus having to breach your security in engineering. What you need is a good bloodhound!"

Spock began the meditation ritual as he showered, allowing his mind to open freely. After so many years there was no need to proceed tentatively lest his thoughts should encounter another's, the mental boundaries of his own private area were as well known as the visual limitations of deck and bulkhead. He was hardly wet all over before he switched off the shower, allowing the stream of warm air to dry him. Stepping out, he crossed to the cupboard and, pulling on a clean uniform, said conversationally, "You will certainly not remain in that condition for ever, Ensign. Untreated, your body will commence to reappear in just over seventy-two point eight three hours. Given the antidote which Dr. M'Benga is working on at the moment the molecular changes will speed up considerably. You should be normally visible in point two six hours after receiving treatment."

"You were prying into my mind." Chekov's voice was shaky and out of control. Spock moved to the door and operated the thumb print lock.

"Not prying, Ensign. I intended to meditate and was unaware that you were within range. Had I been expecting to find you in my quarters I would not have begun the ritual."

Chekov caught his breath. "I know. I knew no-one would look for me here, no-one ever comes to your quarters except you and I thought you would be with the Captain, you usually are. As though you think he can't manage without you."

Spock looked across at the slight depression in his bed, realising that the slight impairment of its customary neatness should have informed him of his visitor's presence before.

"The Captain's ability is proven, Ensign. There is no need for anyone to doubt it. Just as there is no need for you to doubt his assurance that Dr. McCoy has found the antidote for your condition."

"I don't believe a word of it." The counterpane crumpled suddenly. "You want to get rid of me - all of you. No-one has behaved normally since I came round. I don't trust any of you."

Spock moved forward slowly. "If you think that, then none of us can help you, but if you will let me blend our thoughts you will know without uncertainty that I speak the truth."

"Don't touch me!" The boy's voice was shrill. "Don't touch me, you... alien!"

Spock stood very still, his eyes fixed on Chekov's so firmly that the boy thought for one glorious moment that he could be seen.

"How do you know where I am?" he demanded. "You're reading my mind again."

"I can hear your voice, Ensign," Spock said calmly. "Naturally I can estimate from that the approximate place your body occupies. I cannot enter

your mind unbidden unless the well-being of others transcends your right to privacy. That is why I have locked the door against anyone but myself.

I will explain the situation as I see it.

I have prevented you from doing any harm to others as long as I remain conscious; now I may not link minds with you without your free consent, therefore I have placed myself in an inferior position tactically.

You have the upper hand in attack since I cannot see you, and you can open the door by rendering me unconscious, using my thumb to unlock it. You cannot get out while I remain conscious.

Therefore you have a choice, to trust me or attack me.

Should you attack me you are on the run again, feeling everyone to be against you.

The better choice would seem to be to decide on whether or not you can trust me. I may here remind you that I am the proven friend of your Captain, and also that I am an alien from a world you do not understand. The choice is yours."

"But... " Chekov said, bewildered, "but I don't want to attack you."

"Naturally I welcome that." The silence lengthened. "I await your decision with interest, Ensign."

"Does it... hurt?"

"No-one has ever complained of it hurting," Spock told him, "but I believe Dr. McCoy finds it unpleasant. You must take that into consideration."

"And the Captain?"

"It has saved his life and his sanity," Spock said quietly.

The bed sagged once again. "I don't know what to do," Chekov whispered. "I'm tired and I seem to have lost myself and everyone else. I don't think I care. Do what you want to, Mr. Spock, nothing matters any more."

"You matter, Mr. Chekov. You have a fine career ahead of you; one day you will have your own command. Is that worth a little trust?"

"I trust you, Mr. Spock. What must I do?"

"Take my hand and put it upon your face and I will do the rest."

Spock's fingers touched his face, feather-light. Chekov felt his tensions drain from him - he knew, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that this was one man you could trust with your life, your thoughts, hopes and unspoken ideals. His whirling mind became centred in a deep well of compassion.

McCoy looked up as the sickbay door hissed open. "I thought I told you to rest, Spock?" he said roughly. "Don't stand there in the doorway, man. Come in!"

"Doctor, I am sorry to have caused so much trouble."

McCoy dropped his sheaf of notes. "Well, it's always nice to be allowed to finish a course of treatment, Ensign," he said jovially. "Come in and we'll get to it right away. Jim's in my office still, Spock, go and give him the glad news."

He rejoined them a short time later. "I've tucked him back up again and given him the antidote. Christine and M'Benga are with him. Where did you find him, Spock?"

"Spock is in the middle of his report," Kirk told him shortly.

"Oh, good," McCoy said unrepentantly. "Start it again. I'd like to hear the details for my log."

"It is quite simple, Doctor. Ensign Chekov went to my quarters because he thought they would remain empty. I persuaded him to return to the sickbay."

"Is that all? What do you mean, 'persuaded'?"

"Doctor, I am a Vulcan. 'Persuasion' means convincing another to do something by logical argument."

"Logical argument, in a pig's eye," McCoy snorted. "I'll bet you reminded him it's a serious offence to hit a superior officer."

"The subject was not mentioned, Doctor. I think you will find the psychosis was only a temporary matter and has entirely disappeared."

"Thank goodness," Kirk said. "Mancini and the rest have been most helpful. They seemed more worried about Chekov than about themselves. I'm glad you found him, Spock, your powers of peaceful persuasion are most useful on occasion. Let's go and get a coffee and then we can both get some well-earned rest."

As Spock followed him into the elevator, Kirk said, "By the by, I've been on to Commander Nilsson. I guess there are going to be some changes in the medical section on G2. That stuff was part of a consignment left to be collected by a group of Vulcan doctors on their way to Rigel Four, and there was the very devil to pay when they found it had gone astray. I'm glad I wasn't around to catch the worst of it."

Spock's eyebrow moved fractionally. "I am sure, Captain, that they were never less than fully polite."

"Exactly," sighed Kirk.

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McCOY'S REALISATION by Gillian Catchpole

I no longer see a Vulcan but a friend,  
That brings demands, sometimes fearful.  
I cannot dismiss any more  
His deep-silence,  
Nor explain what is left unexpressed  
As cold detachment.  
I am more sensitive, more attuned,  
To the hollowed loneliness within.  
And when sad thoughts come knocking at my door,  
When routine bores and responsibility oppresses,  
I doubt not his understanding  
Nor fear his betrayal.

As Humans just what do we know?  
That very term encompasses  
Such varying degrees of attitudes and desires  
It is impossible to apply a norm  
And yet we seek to judge another.  
Too ready with our quick assumptions  
We assess with standards that do not apply,  
Putting our Human valuations  
On non-Human responses.  
But this I realise now,  
There is not another man in all respects  
I would so fully trust.

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Vulcans are green  
Andorians blue  
Klingons are nasty  
Romulans too.

\*\*\*\*\*

NIGHTMARE DOME by Simone Mason

'Into the darkness you followed...'

Kirk was pacing his quarters with a frown, then sat down when he heard a knock and McCoy entered.

"Bones, thanks for coming. It's about Spock."

"Spock? What about Spock? He's fine, Jim. Why...?"

"I don't know! It's about two months now since Vulcan, isn't it?"

"Yes. What on Earth...? Look, I know you worried about him then like a mother hen, but I'm supposed to be the mother hen, and he's all right."

Kirk laughed and McCoy joined in at the picture evoked in their minds.

"Joking apart," continued the Doctor, "he's a Vulcan, or had you forgotten? M'Benga gave him these special psycho tests reserved for Vulcans and he sailed through them as though they were meant for infants!"

"They may have been meant for Vulcans of average intelligence, Bones. Even you must concede that Spock is far above average."

"Yes, yes, I concede it. He's in perfect health, Jim - had a medical only ten days ago."

"Glad to hear it, thank you, Bones."

"I don't understand your worry, Jim. Spock recovered from the shock of that fight on Vulcan and your presumed death with typical Vulcan sang-froid, and has behaved perfectly normally ever since - normally for him, that is! Computer-like and lacking -"

"Yes, Bones, I know. I just wanted to make sure. That very absence of any reaction is... odd?"

A Human would have taken time to recover, probably needed medical care for a while, but not Spock, he's too Vulcan, which was just as well for once! He certainly didn't need my help. I'll let you rest now, Jim, see you!"

McCoy left and Kirk lay down with a sigh. The Doctor was probably right, Spock was a Vulcan. But would that necessarily be a help? Vulcans were gentle ... Kirk took a deep breath and turned over to try to sleep. He had seen nothing amiss in Spock's behaviour since that visit to Vulcan, in fact apart from the one lapse when a beaming smile lit up Spock's stern features at seeing Kirk alive, the First Officer had been perfectly normal and the Captain could not guess whether the episode had affected him in any way. There was that one mind-meld they had shared, though, since the fight. There had seemed a slight hesitation on Spock's part, but Kirk had been tired and could have imagined it, and he had sensed nothing abnormal from the Vulcan's mind, but tired as he had been... Still, McCoy was right, Spock was a Vulcan and able to sort out his own problems, the loneliness for one... But that was in the past, there was no reason to suppose that the pon farr episode had left any scar in him. I am too much of the mother hen, like McCoy, thought Kirk with a smile as he felt sleep coming at last, but I do hope we find a suitable rest and recreation planet soon, we all need it.

Kirk was therefore pleased at their discovery, within twenty-four hours, of what looked like a suitable planet for shore leave. After a couple of very arduous missions and a magnetic storm, the crew was tired and its efficiency at a dangerously low level. The Captain had sensed it and had not been surprised when Spock had warned him about the need for rest and recreation.

This particular solar system had only one planet with a suitable atmosphere, and while it was inhabited, the inhabitants, for an unknown reason, kept to the

southern hemisphere. As they were primitives travelling on slow shaggy beasts, no interference would occur if the crew beamed down in the northern hemisphere.

"Spock," asked the Captain, "are you sure there is no danger? Why should the natives ignore half their planet?"

"Unknown, Captain. Their number may not be large enough yet to require the extra space, or it could be due to some superstitious belief. However, my last scan revealed a source of power in the northern hemisphere that I am investigating."

Kirk left him to it and waited, praying that this phenomenon would not be the fly in the ointment. They were all overdue for R & R.

"Captain," said Spock at last, "I am afraid I cannot define the nature of the power. I have pinpointed it to a specific area, which is not large, and there are no inhabitants or indeed any life forms anywhere near - at least no life forms as we know them," he added with his usual accuracy.

"In that case we'd better investigate first, Spock. Mr. Scott, you have the con. On no account are you to beam anyone down unless on my specific order. Should the ship show signs of being interfered with by that mysterious power, leave the area immediately, and report to the nearest Starbase at maximum speed."

"Aye, sir."

McCoy joined them in the transporter room, only to be told he could not accompany them. "If the ship has to leave for the nearest Starbase, Bones, the crew may have to be pumped full of stimulants and you'll be needed."

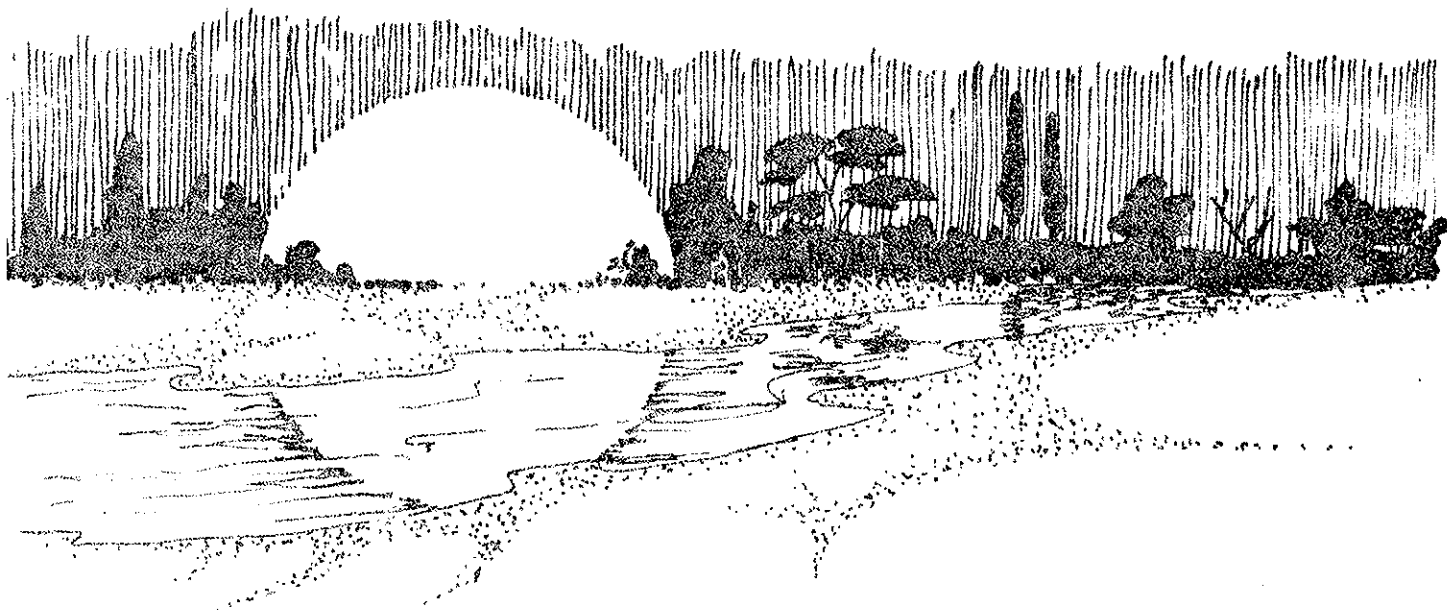
"What you want is priority shore leave, both of you!" muttered McCoy. "Watch out for dangerous animals or plants, keep away from anything that looks - "

"Are we cadets from the Academy, Doctor?" asked Spock, one eyebrow raised. Kirk laughed and gave the order to energise.

They materialised about one kilometer from the power source and could just see a brilliant dome reflecting sunlight in a luminous glare of sparkling blue.

"That's the place, Captain. Fascinating!"

"Beautiful, I agree, Spock."





"The level of power is holding steady, Captain. I can't explain this. It is obviously of alien origin."

The First Officer directed his tricorder to the soil, trees and plants and detected nothing amiss. The planet was Earthlike and very beautiful, and a glade near a river, the water of which shimmered a brilliant silver in the sunshine, was very tempting.

"If that dome spoils our shore leave, Spock, I'll scream!"

"I fail to see how such an act will accomplish any worthwhile objective, Captain, although it might give you a sore throat."

"It'll relieve some of my frustrations, Spock," smiled Kirk. "This planet is ideal for R & R. Let's investigate that dome, and hope it's harmless."

They walked around it and found no door. The substance it was made of was unknown. Kirk hesitated to use his phaser although there were no life form readings inside.

They threw stones at it and then reached for it with a branch, to no avail; there was no reaction. Reluctantly, Kirk let his First Officer touch the dome with his hand. An opening appeared immediately.

"Could be a trap, Spock, but I suppose we have no choice. In we go."

"Captain, I should go alone... "

"Negative, two heads are better than one, and it may be harmless."

They walked in slowly, and a voice startled them. "Welcome, my children."

"Not a Human voice, Captain, a machine. Still no life readings."

"As we're welcome, let's go on."

The corridor they were following led them to a large room with nothing in it.

"Some kind of joke!" exclaimed Kirk.

"I don't think so, Captain, I can hear movement - machinery, I believe."

Kirk had his phaser ready just in case. One section of wall opened and a wide, low bed appeared.

"Have a rest, my children. Relax to the sound of beauty." A whisper of ethereal music filled the room.

"Captain, I'll lie on the bed first."

"All right, Spock. This looks more and more like a beautiful trap, but we have to investigate."

The First Officer lay down and reported, "Nothing amiss, Captain, the bed is what it seems, there is no discomfort."

"I'll join you then, Spock. A restful sleep will do us good after all!"

"I doubt that all this is meant to make us sleep only, but cannot fathom the purpose... "

"Could just be a place of rest for weary travellers like us!" remarked the Captain, now lying down. At least whatever or whoever is behind this does not intend to separate us, reflected Kirk. He said so.

"I hope, however, they realise we are of the same sex, Captain."

Kirk started, realised that Spock was making one of his rare jokes, and laughed.

"It - or they - will be disappointed if they don't, and expect... "

A small flat disc made of an unknown alloy had appeared above their heads.

"We are being watched, Spock."

"Scanned, I would say, Captain."

"Could this be an alien observation post transmitting data to its planet of origin?"

"Possible, Captain - we have such automated devices on some outposts."

If that was the case, there was nothing they could do. Kirk found himself yawning. "I feel very relaxed - do you?"

"Yes, Captain. I believe it is induced by the music."

"Pleasing, however, up to now... "

"Don't be afraid, my children," soothed the mechanical voice. "Join your minds... become one... "

Kirk looked across at his First Officer. "Well, go ahead, Spock."

"Are you sure, Jim? If we mind meld, whatever happens to one happens to the other."

"I know. Whatever happens, we'll face it together, Spock. There is no one I'd rather have with me than you."

The half smile lit up the Vulcan features and Kirk felt the familiar touch of hands on his face and the gentle and delicate contact with his mind, a pleasing contact which never ceased to bring a thrill of affinity and friendship in its wake. Neither feared coming events while they were together.

A strange sensation was being relayed to their brain, and yet it originated within the brain.

"What is it, Spock?"

"I am not sure, Jim, but I believe our minds are being conditioned for something. This could prove a fascinating experience."

"Or a dangerous one! I haven't your thirst for knowledge at all costs... "

A floating sensation had now replaced the previous one, and it was overwhelming. Were we not spacemen, we'd be sick, thought Kirk as the sensation increased until they found themselves in pitch darkness.

"Spock?"

"I'm here, Jim. The mind meld will hold."

But Kirk had caught the thought provided it or they allow it in Spock's mind. "Have you sensed someone?"

"No, but an intelligence is clearly behind this, whether benevolent or malevolent remains to be seen."

The darkness exploded into brilliance and streak after streak of light sped by them.

"Fascinating," murmured Spock. "We could be travelling through space."

"But without a ship, we'll die! And yet I still feel fine."

"Our minds only are involved, Jim - it is an illusion. Our bodies are in the dome."

The journey, if journey it was, was very brief, and then they were in darkness again - such absolute darkness that Kirk was glad their training had conditioned them to this, and glad he was not alone. Then with a start he sensed a slackening of the meld, and knew it had been done by Spock himself... voluntarily!

Then the Vulcan's wild scream reached him: "Jim!" and he sensed it was a cry for help.

Frantically, Kirk hung on to the now very slight link with Spock, trying to join his First Officer wherever he was.

"Jim, no! Stay away - don't!" pleaded Spock in such an agonised voice the Captain disregarded the words. He reached for Spock, and suddenly found himself on Vulcan!

Then he understood, when he came face to face with himself starting the dreadful fight instigated by the disloyal and treacherous T'Pring. He was not in his own body, he was in Spock's! He sensed a last desperate effort from the Vulcan to break the link.

"No, Spock!" he shouted, hanging on. "Let me share this with you - you would, in my place!"

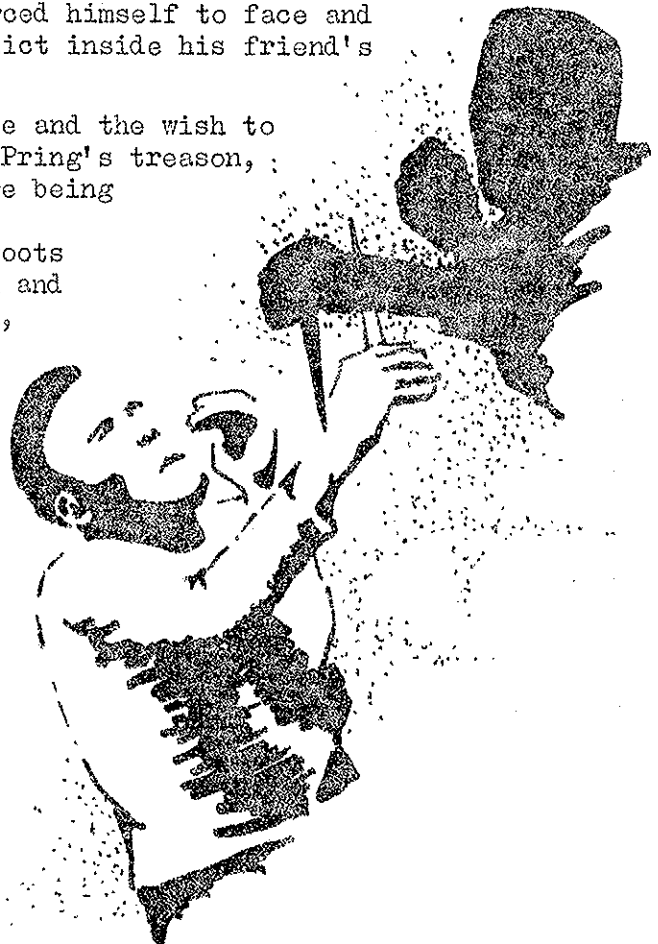
Spock's effort at breaking the link had failed, because Kirk found himself literally in Spock's mind, a mind seething with an insane rage and a wild lust for killing - for killing him! The impact of such extreme feelings was like a very severe blow and the Captain nearly screamed with pain. He tried to remember that it was not really happening, it had happened in the past, but it did not help.

The reality was the awful fight and the link with Spock's mind was becoming so painful that Kirk thought for a moment of breaking the contact. But he had heard Spock call to him for help... Forgetting his own discomfort, the Captain, using the linkage to the maximum of his ability, plunged deeper into the Vulcan mind, ignoring the madness, but nearly stopped and forced to retreat at the extent of the agony he detected. But this was Spock; he had to help him, whatever the cost. Fortunately the Vulcan was unable to stop him; he was literally reliving the awful fight and could spare no energy for anything else.

Kirk plunged on without further hesitation, desperately hanging on to his own identity, and forced himself to face and understand and share the horrible conflict inside his friend's mind.

Under the surface feelings of hate and the wish to kill caused both by the pon farr and T'Pring's treason, Spock's Vulcan logic and gentleness were being ripped apart by the struggle, with the enforced violence tearing at the very roots of his being, and tearing at the esteem and friendship his Vulcan half had for Kirk, while his Human half was seething in an agony of grief and horror which was tearing him apart in turn. Spock was watching himself kill his Captain and could not stop it; neither his Vulcan half, overwhelmed by pon farr, nor his Human half, always kept in check, were strong enough to control the madness.

Kirk felt all this onslaught like a dreadful nightmare, what could he do? Acute frustration seized him. There was Spock suffering all the tortures of hell, and he was unable to help! Or could he? There was that old saying that a trouble shared was a trouble halved, but it meant letting go of his own identity to merge completely with Spock, and he was unable to control a pause at the thought of sharing such



madness and torment. But it was brief. How could he fail to help Spock?

Resolutely, he let go and his mind was submerged by the violent madness and the agonised tearing underneath. He was literally suffering each single torment with the Vulcan, while trying to tell him he was not being killed, it was not real, but doubting that he was getting through. When Spock thought he had killed his Captain and the madness left him, Kirk again tried to tell him he had not been killed, but was unable to make contact through the agony of guilt and pain in Spock's mind. It was everywhere, choking him, and how his First Officer could speak and behave rationally in spite of it Kirk didn't understand.

The Captain had no idea how long it lasted, but it stopped suddenly and he found himself back on the bed in the dome. Spock was lying there, his head on his arms and shaken by heart-rending sobs, all his defences clearly broken. So he can cry, thought Kirk with a mixture of anger at their tormentors and pain at Spock's breakdown.

"Whoever you are," he shouted to the room, "stop it! How can you inflict such torture?"

He received no answer, of course, but then he was not expecting any, just relieving his pent-up feelings.

Very gently, he reached for Spock.

"No, go away... how can you... touch... what I am...?"

Ignoring the broken outburst, the Captain attempted to soothe the Vulcan as best he could, unconscious of the tears running down his own cheeks for all the torments he had seen and shared, and for all he had sensed in his friend's mind.

The meld had not been broken and the Captain had seen the surge of joy when Spock had discovered he had not killed him, but that one lapse was all the First Officer allowed himself. Afterwards, rigid Vulcan control had clamped down on the whole event and Spock had resumed his duties normally. No-one, not even Kirk, had suspected the constant burden of pain and guilt he had carried and fought against - the knowledge that he would have killed his Captain if McCoy had not intervened. Gradually, he had started to accept that he had nearly killed someone he cared for and owed loyalty to, but he had never allowed Kirk or McCoy to guess at the struggle he had had. The First Officer had felt he had to fight this out on his own; it was his madness, his Vulcan blood, and he had to learn to live with it on his own, without help from anyone. It was his problem, and Kirk recognised there the typical Vulcan stoicism and sense of dignity with which Spock had faced all the problems in his life.

To have to relive the fight now had been like plunging a knife into a wound not yet healed, or like a drowning man on the point of escaping the water being suddenly thrown back into it, and Kirk felt helpless rage against an intelligence who could show such cruelty.

But the Captain also felt bitter remorse at not having helped his First Officer more after the actual fight. He should have suspected that Vulcan stoicism would let no-one suspect the extent of suffering endured. Kirk had wondered at the time how best to help Spock to forget the nasty event, and had decided not to mention it, as though it was not important. With McCoy, he had made sure that the Vulcan was never alone when off duty for a while, and they had also tried to ensure that Spock knew nothing was changed between them and to show him that he held the same place in their lives. We didn't do enough after such torment, thought the Captain, angry at himself. Fine friend I was not to guess that more than that was needed!

"You did help, Jim," mumbled Spock, his head still on his arms but no longer sobbing.

Kirk started, then then realised the meld was still not broken. He did not mind, but needed to put something into words - it was more real to talk,

for a Human!

"You know now that the fight changed nothing between us, Spock. Even in my wildest dreams, I never suspected the extent of what you went through. Now that I do know, I feel anger - and remorse at not having helped you more at the time - and McCoy should have realised it, too! But I'm the one who should have guessed... "

"You did help, Jim," repeated Spock, his face still hidden. "I sensed your friendship reaching out to me."

"I'm glad, Spock... and I'm also glad in a way that this happened! You saw that I felt no horror of you, although you could say that I know the worst about you now. But I also know the best, Spock; I found out that even the Vulcan in you is my friend and fought the madness for my sake. Don't you see it makes our friendship the more complete?"

The First Officer finally turned over and opened his eyes to look up at Kirk, his hand reaching out to wipe his cheek. "You even cried with me, Jim... "

"Did you feel me with you all the time?"

"Yes, Jim. I called out at first because I was afraid to relive that particular episode in my life, then I did not want you to see me as I was then."

"I understand, Spock."

"It helped though that you could share it with me and not be horrified."

"Did you really think I would be? At you?"

The Vulcan shook his head and touched his Captain's face in a gesture of gratitude and friendship and Kirk sensed by the mind contact that the First Officer was himself again.

Both were exhausted; they fell into a deep sleep they could not resist even had they wished to.

They woke up rested and feeling normal; there had been no further nightmares.

"Let's get out of here, Spock. I don't like the way the dome builders treat their guests, and they dared to welcome us!"

"I don't think we can leave, Captain."

Spock was right. They could find no door in the room. Phasers and communicators did not operate, and their combined strength was unable to make any impression on where they remembered the door to be.

"So we're prisoners!" exclaimed Kirk, lying down again, out of breath after their exertions.

"It seems so," agreed Spock, sitting beside him. "We might as well save our strength, Captain."

"For further torment? What inhuman monsters are we up against this time?"

A small panel opened in the wall and a tray of food appeared, as though to deny the accusation of inhumanity.

"At least they don't want us to starve!" remarked the Captain, tucking in after Spock's tricorder had pronounced the food safe. It tasted most odd and was obviously alien, but they could not be choosy.

They lay down again, trying to think of a way of escape, without success, and after a while heard the mechanical voice. "It is time to join together again, my children."

"Oh no it's not!" stated Kirk. "Whoever you are... "

"Captain, I think we should obey."

"I don't want you tortured again, Spock!"

"We don't know what is in store, and if we don't merge minds, we'll each have to suffer it alone."

"I see your point... Very well, Spock, go ahead."

But now the Vulcan hesitated. "If you are reluctant, Captain... "

"Go ahead, Spock. If they mean to hurt you further, I'd rather be with you. You do believe that, don't you? What happened before didn't come between us, couldn't stop the link... "

"I know, Captain, but if you are the next victim, I only hope I find it in me to help you as you helped me."

This sobered Kirk. What Spock had said was logical, he probably was the next victim! But he had never gone mad, as Spock had, to his knowledge. Naturally there were things in his life he was not proud of, but no more and no less than other Humans... What could those fiends latch on to?

The mind meld soothed his worry. \*Whatever it is, Jim, I'll stay with you as you stayed with me. It cannot be worse than my own vicious behaviour.\*

\*It wasn't your fault, Spock, don't think about it; forget it if you can.\*

They were in darkness again, then the streaks of light recurred, then darkness again. Kirk sensed that Spock tried to reach out to whoever was behind it all, but without success.

The Captain braced himself. His tormentors would find him ready to fight them! Unlike Spock, he was forewarned!

A sarcastic laugh answered him. But Spock never laughed... The laugh was inside his mind... who... ?

"I am you, stupid!" jeered a voice, and Kirk found himself facing the one person in his life he had not come truly to terms with and only thought of in nightmares since discovering his existence - the Enemy within.

The mirror image facing him with all its bestial cunning and cruelty and anticipation of the idea of tormenting him freely brought back all the memories of the past and filled Kirk with horrified revulsion.

"I won't let you enslave me again!" continued the Enemy with a gloating smile. "You pretended to help me last time only to trap me! I'll have my revenge this time, and you won't be able to stop me!"

"Spock!" screamed Kirk with a desperate appeal.

"I'm here, Jim. The meld was nearly broken by the splitting of your personality. I had to adapt as best I could and hope to maintain the link."

"What do you mean? You can't be in his mind too... "

"Yes, Jim, it's the only way. I have to help both of you, if I can."

"Not him, Spock! You don't want to help him! He'll destroy me if he can... "

"He'll destroy himself then, Jim. Please trust me - I can only help this way."

"He doesn't want to help you!" sneered the Enemy. "He didn't help you with a mind meld last time, did he?"

"No... you didn't, did you, Spock?"

"I helped to the best of my ability, Jim. You would have refused a mind meld, you were too vulnerable and ashamed, and I understood and did not wish to humiliate you by intruding."

"He sees you now!" sneered the Enemy again. "And he despises you. I know, I can see it in his mind."

"Get away from me, Spock," pleaded Kirk. "Despise me if you must, but..."

"I don't despise you, Jim. Believe me, see for yourself. He is lying, trying to separate us so that he can be the stronger."

Kirk attempted to see clearly in Spock's mind. It was difficult to sense the link fully now that it was only half-strength. He was conscious of the Vulcan making some effort and the meld was clear for a second, a sure and strong support he clung to with relief.

"Stay with me, Spock, I'm all right with you. Be my strength to fight him."

"I can't maintain a full link, Jim, not with both of you. But I will stay and help as much as I can, I promise you that."

"And he'll know what you're really like!" said the Enemy, attacking again at the point which hurt most. "Fine friend you make for a Vulcan! Soft and weak and useless! Mind you, he can't like me either, cruel and bestial and obeying my basest instincts! That is how he'll see you in future, and he'll be revolted."

The Enemy touched him and the full force of his words appeared as feelings in Kirk's mind, base and horrible feelings he was facing with a reality and strength he had never faced before. He tried desperately to push them away, but it was useless; they were too strong, and they were himself! Spock would be revolted; he was coming to believe the Enemy now that his will and stamina were being sapped by that horrible image.

"I don't want you to see any of this, Spock," he pleaded, full of horror and shame at himself. "Break the link. The only help you can give is not to humiliate me by seeing this... "

"Don't, Jim... Let me stay... I can't help... if you reject me... Please... " Kirk sensed pain behind the last plea.

"Spock, am I hurting you? Forgive me, I don't know what I am saying... What can I do? Tell me and I'll do it..." begged Kirk, having reached the stage of indecision and helplessness he remembered only too well from the last time.

"I can't decide for you, Jim," replied Spock, the link stronger now that Kirk no longer rejected it. "Remember what happened last time. You need him and he needs you."

"I know, I had to accept it then, but I've never liked to think I had that beast inside me since... Now I see again how horrible he is..."

"You must face it once and for all, Jim, and accept the balance you have to maintain between the two, and the fact that he exists, that he is you. Then you'll have nothing to fear from him."

"Because I'll be aware of the danger he represents?"

"Yes, and because you'll be able to use him fully to master and enrich your personality, not to debase it as he would wish."

"Thanks, Spock... Spock?"

The meld seemed to have gone and Kirk felt true terror. The Enemy laughed and the Captain saw that he was armed with a knife and already looking forward to torturing him. Try as he might, he could not find his phaser.

"I am going to kill you once and for all!" screamed the Enemy, his voice

full of hate.

"No, you'll kill yourself... "

"That is what you say, that is what the Vulcan says, but I don't believe you or him. Why should I? He helps you more than he helps me, but he can't like you, you are a spineless and weak creature, afraid to fight because I'll win! I am the stronger! Even the Vulcan knows that! I am the stronger! And I won't let you imprison me again!"

Kirk tried to shout that it was not true, the Enemy was not the stronger, but the words would not come out. He tried to sense Spock in his mind, but he could not.

"Spock, please don't leave me!" he screamed in abject terror.

"He is with me, you fool!" shouted the Enemy with obvious delight. "He can't stand you any longer, a jellyfish... "

"That's not true! Spock... "

Nothing. He mustn't believe the Enemy, but... Where was Spock? A knife had appeared in his hand as though by magic and he was facing the mirror image. There was no doubt from the Enemy's ferocious and cruel expression that the fight would be to the death.

So be it, thought Kirk in true desperation. Let us kill each other and be done with it. I'd rather die anyway than go on living with that monster inside me! To face him once had been bad enough, twice was just too much!

They circled each other in a kind of death dance which made the Captain sick. If he was a barbarian he would die like one, and in his despair he found the strength to attack first and as viciously as he could. To his shock, amazement, he suddenly saw that it was Spock he was attacking!

"Don't, Jim, stop this madness. You have no choice but to accept... "

"So you are on his side!"

"He betrayed you!" gloated the Enemy. "Shall I kill him for you? You can't kill anyone, you spineless jelly!"

"I can and I will kill him, and you!"

"No!" shouted Spock, in vain.

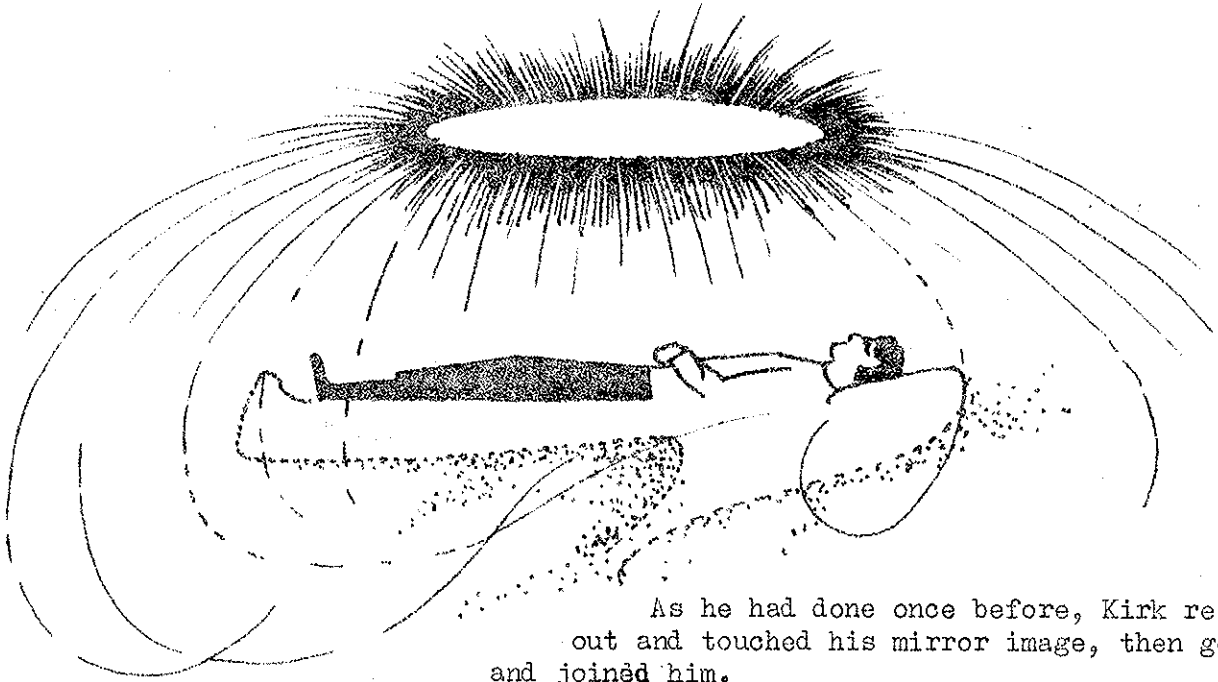
Kirk did not even hear. He felt sick and alone, and wanted only one thing, to finish it all. They would both die, but the Enemy would be killed at last. He just could not bear the knowledge that such a monster lived. Vaguely, he sensed the Vulcan trying to strengthen the meld, heard him shout 'No!' again, but the Enemy was attacking, his face contorted in an awful mask of lust for the kill and Kirk knew it was the end for them both. He did not care any longer, and it gave him the strength to strike back. To his surprise and the Enemy's, neither was hurt, yet both felt the knife...

Looking down, they knew why when they saw Spock's body lying full length with green blood spreading rapidly from two knife wounds. Full of horror, Kirk let the knife fall and knelt down by the Vulcan. The Enemy, strangely enough, also threw his knife away and knelt down, overcome by weakness.

"It was not him I wanted to kill," whispered the Enemy, looking dazed, his lust for killing spent and the loss of half his personality weakening him at last.

"He died for me, for us, so I have to live, we have to live, whether you like it or not," said Kirk with a new assurance he sensed came from his grief, and perhaps from Spock's mind reaching out before death? He was too shocked to know, but he had to live now and the Enemy was weak after the fight - they could merge and perhaps survive?





As he had done once before, Kirk reached out and touched his mirror image, then got up and joined him.

"We are one; I accept you because I owe it to Spock. I'll have to learn to live with the knowledge that I killed him - we both did. I doubt that you could be the stronger now."

Prompted by his grief, he thought he sensed the union of their two selves, then sank into blissful oblivion.

When he came to, he was on the bed in the dome and thought the merging had been successful, for he felt whole. Spock was also lying on the bed and Kirk touched his face with a shaking hand, then started violently as the Vulcan opened his eyes.

He stared uncomprehendingly, noticed there were no knife wounds or blood on his First Officer.

"You're not... dead..." he said haltingly.

"No, Jim. It happened in our minds only. I tried to communicate..."

"But I killed you just the same!" interrupted Kirk in a ragged voice. Memories were flooding back and he broke down at the bitter knowledge of what he had done.

It was now Spock's turn to soothe him and try to stop the painful tears. "Jim, it was my fault..."

"Illogical, Spock," stammered Kirk, clinging to him like a child asking for reassurance. Then he remembered Spock's dislike of physical contact and tried to let go.

"No need, Jim, if it helps you. I don't mind - not with you. It was my fault because I could not cope with the two of you at once. The result was that you felt betrayed, and your Enemy took advantage and turned you against me. The only way I could save you both was to put myself in between."

"I realise that, Spock... but that does not make me any less a murderer."

"Had I been a full Vulcan, strong as my father is for instance, I might have been able to cope with both of you, but my Human half is not telepathic and my Vulcan half was unable to be in two places at once, mainly since the Enemy fought against my intrusion. I only managed contact with either of you intermittantly. Therefore it was my fault."

"It may be logical from your point of view, Spock," Kirk managed to smile

as he slowly straightened, "but I cannot accept it. I was so sure of myself, thought I had no great weakness,... It serves me right! But I think that I have finally accepted my baser self, thanks to this. Would you like to check with a mind meld to make sure it's not loose somewhere?"

"No - it is not necessary, Captain; you know it."

The 'no' had been so emphatic that Kirk stared at the Vulcan; he had not been surprised to find the meld broken when he woke, for he had believed Spock dead; yet why...? Comprehension dawned slowly.

"Spock, did the Enemy hurt you when he kept rejecting you? When we fought and you 'died', we didn't hurt your body, but I remember now sensing pain... your mind was hurt, wasn't it?"

"Not seriously, Captain - it was merely the strain... "

"I don't believe that. Show me."

"It is unnecessary, you couldn't do anything... "

"Then it is serious!"

"No, Jim, believe me. The pain is gone now - only tiredness remains."

"You're not refusing to meld because I killed you... " As soon as he said it Kirk wished he could bite his tongue out, then heard the patient answer.

"Jim, if you could accept that I could kill you, why shouldn't I be able to accept that you could kill me?"

"You were not responsible for your actions."

"Neither were you, Jim. You were not yourself." The half smile lit his eyes but hardly disturbed his stern features. "But the very fact that we shared the experience and helped each other... "

"Yes. It was beneficial in the end," agreed Kirk.

Semi-darkness came, and Kirk shuddered and instinctively moved closer to his First Officer, both seeking and offering protection.

"Not again! I don't think we could withstand another... "

"I don't think it's the same this time, Captain."

A screen on the wall opposite lit up and the image of a very handsome alien appeared. Tall and well-made, he had bright yellow hair and strangely attractive eyes which shone with an unusual golden colour.

"Please accept our apologies, Captain Kirk, Commander Spock. This was never intended to trouble you."

"A bit late to apologise now, isn't it?" Kirk remarked ironically.

"Believe me, Captain, we are most distressed that this could happen. We would have stopped it before, had we been able."

"Can't you control your own devices?" Spock asked curiously.

"Yes and no. Let me explain. The planet you are on is Arcandra, the home world of our people, but we now inhabit a world in a system you have not yet discovered, on the rim of the galaxy."

"But there are natives here!" exclaimed the Captain.

"Yes, Captain. We left Arcandra because half our people evolved at a fantastic speed and achieved a very high degree of civilisation, while the other half progressed very slowly - so slowly it became incompatible for the two to remain together; each would have impaired the other's continued evolution. We had developed star travel and went in search of another world, leaving behind

the primitives to develop at their own rate."

"Couldn't you have helped them, accelerated their progress?" asked Kirk.

"Captain, you cannot teach higher mathematics to the newly born! The gap was too great; it just was not possible, I assure you. We did not like doing this, but we felt it was a matter of survival for both parts of our race."

"Where does all this come in, then?" Kirk asked.

"We did not wish to abandon our primitive half - so to speak - completely, so we devised this dome and left it behind. Its purpose was to test and transmit to us whatever level of civilisation had been reached by any primitive visiting it, in order to keep us informed so that we could send help if needed, or contact Arcandra again if a reasonable level had been reached."

"The primitives do not live in this part of the planet, sir," remarked Spock, "so you are likely to have a long wait."

"We knew that; we instilled the superstition about the northern hemisphere on purpose, Commander, so that they would not enter the dome before it was time. They had to overcome superstition first and reach a certain level of development. However, we made a grave mistake. It did not occur to us that aliens would find and enter the dome before our own people did."

"What you intend to put your people through is torture!" protested Kirk.

"It was for you, Captain, and for you, Commander, and again I repeat how sorry we are. Remember we are alien to you and therefore different. What the devices in the dome are meant to discover and analyse and transmit to us the the strengths and weaknesses of a personality - and even more, the level of co-operation they had reached should two enter together. Had you been unable to employ telepathy, the experiences you underwent would have been different."

"I still call driving someone to breaking point torture."

"It would not have been so for one of us, Captain, because a combination of hypnotic music and images, combined with a harmless gas, would have made the event painless and not even remembered by the subjects unless they had reached a high level of consciousness. Unfortunately, those methods did not work with you. You must appreciate that the transmissions from the dome took some time to reach us, so by the time we discovered the error and started working to remedy the situation, it was too late to prevent the cycle being completed."

"And yet you talk to us directly now, sir," said Spock.

"Yes, Commander. We have discovered methods of direct transmission we were in ignorance of when we built the dome. We did not think to instal them on Arcandra before receiving a communication from the dome, but we are now working at this, and giving instructions so that a similar mistake does not recur."

"I still don't understand why driving someone to breaking point should give you an indication... " Kirk began.

"Under extreme stress the true level of civilisation is revealed, Captain."

"Yes, I can see that, but it was harrowing to re-live those experiences."

"Are we primitives in relation to your race?" asked Spock.

"No, Commander. You are about half-way, I would say. Please do not take my words as arrogance - we are a much older race than yours, and the fact that half of us are far behind you in development gives us no cause for pride. Now that you understand, you will perhaps allow me to make amends and help you, either towards a better understanding of what happened, or by erasing the memory of the ordeal completely; the choice is yours."

"I don't want to forget, sir," protested Kirk.

"Neither do I," agreed Spock, "but further stress might injure my Captain

and myself; we are not fully recovered, sir."

"Such formality! My name is Aral, please use it. There will be no stress, I give you my word. Your answer indicates you are at the level I said; I'd have been disappointed had you asked to forget, felt yourselves unable to come to terms with the experience."

"I can understand that we are very far behind you, Aral," said Kirk with some bitterness. "Under stress, we killed each other."

"Neither of you has any reason to be ashamed," protested the alien in turn. "We do not condemn - we have no right. We went through uncivilised and difficult periods ourselves. You know the truth, as we do. The most difficult obstacle to overcome in order to reach high levels of civilisation is yourselves."

"My people are only too aware of this," agreed Kirk.

"Perhaps not as much as the Vulcans are; we can understand their rigid control of emotions, which is a step in the right direction, if a negative one."

"Not logical, Aral," was Spock's expected answer.

"Not to you, Commander," smiled the alien, a friendly smile which made his features even more attractive. "Your people however will understand one day."

"You approve of lack of emotion?" asked Kirk curiously.

"No, but we understand, Captain. The Vulcans showed greater courage than your people, and achieved as a result an inner strength which will be invaluable in their future evolution."

"Is there hope for Humans?" asked the Captain.

"There is hope for every race, Captain. The methods are their choice, and could not be the same for all."

"Logical," agreed Spock, "and yet... But my Captain is tired; I must not let my curiosity and interest prolong this fascinating conversation."

"I could not tell you much more, Commander," smiled Aral. "Any more questions before we help you as promised and say goodbye?"

"No, Aral," Kirk smiled back. "What do we have to do?"

"Remain on the bed and relax. We'll do the rest. If you prefer it, you may join minds - it is up to you."

"Might as well share it to the last, Spock, don't you agree?"

"Yes, Captain."

The semi-darkness remained and a glowing disc appeared on the ceiling and hovered over their heads, so brilliant they had to shut their eyes. Then they sensed the contact from the alien mind, and they lost any doubt they might have had and trusted Aral completely. It was a very wise and compassionate mind, understanding their need and coming down willingly to their level.

All their physical, mental and emotional exhaustion vanished, and most of the suffering and pain of the ordeal was lessened, not to make them forget but to allow them to think of it without unbearable strain.

Aral went on to show Spock how he could not possibly kill his Captain in the future, even in pon farr; the memory of Arcandra would be too strong, reinforced by the alien mind, so that it would be stronger than the pon farr madness or any other possible factors. Therefore the fact that he had nearly killed Kirk once did not mean he could do it again, and the fear in the Vulcan mind was eliminated once and for all.

To the Captain Aral showed how the Enemy was now well under control,

because he had faced him, seen the worst, and killed his best friend when dominated by his baser self. Again the memory of this would be too strong to allow Kirk to let the Enemy triumph ever again; he would be the stronger for it. "You are privileged in having met your other self so clearly, Captain. You know him well now and it will enable you to control him better, aware as you are of what he can do."

Kirk accepted the truth of the alien's words with exhilaration. He was whole at last, his two selves integrated and able to co-operate with stricter control of his baser instincts.

"You are free to go now, Captain, Commander," finished Aral softly. "May this experience have brought you more than anguish and pain - a better knowledge of yourselves and of each other. I have been privileged to share, if only for a short while, the close and rewarding friendship of two minds that I can only have esteem for."

The alien contact vanished after a last soothing touch; Kirk and Spock got up feeling as rested and relaxed as though they had already had shore leave.

"It's not fair, Spock, no-one will believe we need R & R - and I wanted to enjoy that glade by the river - even do some swimming," sighed Kirk as they left the dome.

"Why not do so, Captain? I believe we'll need some relaxation to assimilate what happened fully, once the alien mind effect has worn off. The planet is safe for the crew and shore leave can begin - but nowhere near the dome just in case Aral and his people have not finished the modifications."

"Right," agreed Kirk with enthusiasm. "And we can stay by the river to make sure the order is obeyed. We'll see the dome from there."

Aboard the Enterprise a frantically worried McCoy was saying for the umpteenth time, "Scotty, we must do something! Jim and Spock are overdue, and we can't even detect them inside that dome!"

"Will you come here, please, Doctor."

McCoy approached the command chair in surprise and faced a very angry Chief Engineer who managed however to keep his voice low. "Look, Doctor, I haven't Mr. Spock's patience. Your comments don't help - don't you think I keep imagining them cut to ribbons, dying? I've had hundreds of ghastly pictures going through my head... and you seem to blame me! I must obey orders."

"Sorry, Scotty," said McCoy contritely. "It's only because I'm so worried... "

"I know, Doctor," admitted Scotty, his anger spent. "I wish I could do something!"

"Mr. Scott, I have the Captain!" shouted Uhura excitedly.

An audible sigh of relief could be heard on the bridge as they heard Kirk giving orders for the shore leave to start, although no-one was to beam down near the dome. "Spock and I have started our shore leave, Scotty," finished Kirk, "but contact us if there are any problems. Kirk out."

McCoy did not look happy, though, and told the Chief Engineer, "Beam me down near them, I want to make sure for myself they are all right, and I won't go near the dome."

The Doctor materialised in the glade by the river and saw the two officers companionably having a frugal meal of native fruits. His scanner confirmed that they were in good health.

"Well, what happened in that dome?" he asked with his usual impatience.

Kirk and Spock, their meal finished, lay back again and looked up at the Doctor, an amused smile on the Captain's features, a hint on one on Spock's.

"It was a very special dome, Doctor -- not, however, meant for us."

"I'd like to go and have a look."

"No, Bones," ordered Kirk. "You would not get in anyway -- forget it."

"It has not done either of you any harm!" protested the Doctor.

"No," replied Kirk thoughtfully. "I walked into darkness but I was not alone. Spock?"

"It certainly would have been dangerous alone, Captain, and perhaps irreparable damage would have been inflicted on either of us."

"In a way I'm glad we killed each other, Spock," said Kirk with a sly glance at McCoy. "It makes us even."

The Doctor reacted as the Captain thought he would. "What are you two talking about? Who killed... You're both alive... You mean Spock when he fought you on Vulcan?... Sorry, Spock."

"It is not important, Doctor."

"There you are, Jim, you worried about him for nothing! He's a Vulcan! And what's that about you killing Spock? You would never do that unless you were insane... "

"There is insanity in all of us, Bones. You should know that."

"If that dome made you kill each other -- extraordinary as it may sound -- why is it so special?"

"It is the dome of self-knowledge, Bones, where you walk into darkness to face yourself."

"Is that all?" McCoy asked in disbelief.

Kirk and Spock stared back at him without answering, and the Doctor was struck by the look in their eyes, a look which seemed to have seen so much they just could not talk about it.

"Once you accept yourself," mused Kirk, "what is there to fear?"

"There is always something to fear, Jim," replied Spock. The Captain's gaze focussed on his First Officer and he understood that the Vulcan was referring to the pain either of their deaths would cause the other. "However," continued the Vulcan, "death is not final when you survive in someone's memory, Jim."

"Logical as always, Spock," smiled Kirk, "but I do not wish... "

"Neither do I, Jim," agreed Spock to the unspoken words.

McCoy was watching them uncertainly, aware of an even deeper sense of understanding and ease between them, something intangible and yet very apparent. The Doctor felt like an intruder and did not ask any more questions, just left for a walk to think further and the two officers watched him go in silence.

"Bones will try to puzzle it out," said Kirk at last.

"Does it matter? He may guess something, but not the whole. You should sleep, Captain."

"Who's the mother hen now?... Never mind, Spock," he added at the sight of raised eyebrows, "you're right... "

The Captain sank into sleep.

McCoy returned later and saw them both asleep, their features relaxed in

an expression of harmony and peace which puzzled him anew. What had they found in the dome of Arcandra? Whatever it was, he found himself wishing that he had found it too.

Why should common self-knowledge... He pushed the problem out of his mind as he undressed to enjoy a swim. Kirk and Spock had both benefitted from whatever it was, and the episode of the fight on Vulcan clearly held no terror for either of them any more. The Doctor had never confessed it even to Kirk, but he had worried about Spock - he had even come close to suspecting the truth. So to see his two friends so relaxed, apparently much closer than before, made his swim the more enjoyable, all worry gone.

In the distance, the beautiful dome of Arcandra radiated sparkling blue light like a beacon, and waited to fulfil its destiny.

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INSIGHT by R.E. Young

A product of the discipline of Ages,  
A symbol in integrity to all,  
Your countenance invariably unimpassioned,  
Logician, perfect - almost to a fault.

Your duties are performed with swift precision,  
A myriad of data at your call,  
Incapable of any form or error,  
Inspiring your contemporaries to awe.

To most an inexplicable enigma,  
Devoted to your scientific dreams,  
A Vulcan bred devoid of all emotion,  
An efficient and dispassionate machine.

Yet I have pierced the armour that surrounds you,  
No, do not be disturbed, my Vulcan friend -  
That secret which you guard with such discretion,  
Is one I will revere until the end.

For I have seen the side that lives in hiding,  
The longing and the love you would deny,  
But no matter how you battle to restrain it,  
You cannot help it showing in your eyes.

So set your mind at ease, I won't betray you,  
Though I wish that those who scorn could comprehend,  
That the one I would entrust my life and soul to  
Is 'That Vulcan' - both my brother, and my friend.

\*\*\*\*\*

Sing a song of sickbay, patients in a row,  
Four and twenty crewmen, nowhere else to go.  
When the door slid open, McCoy began to shout,  
Wasn't that a nasty day with Klingons all about?

The Captain in his quarters, feeling all his bruises,  
The Vulcan in hysteria, feeling what he chooses.  
"My engines," crooned the Engineer, "they're blown out  
like a candle -  
We'll never get the bairns to start without a starting  
handle!"

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COMMAND by Sally A. Syrjala

So this was the life of a Starship Captain. It could be described in one word - lonely. He had only been in command a little more than a month, but already the isolation of command was making itself known.

So long he had dreamed of having a Starship to command. Now the dream was reality. Would it have been better to have had the reality remain a dream?

Before, he had been able to enjoy the company of his fellow crewmembers. Now he was 'The Captain', and not allowed such luxuries. Yes, rank has its privileges, but also its restrictions. James Kirk was a caring person. Yet to care too deeply when your job sometimes forces you to send your crew to their possible death, caring could become a liability - but a liability he never wanted to lose.

The responsibility for the ship and her crew was now his burden. This was his ship. He was the one who must make the decisions and see to it that she would be the best ship in the Fleet.

An easy job it certainly was not, but had he truly expected that it would be?

He had wanted more than anything in the universe to command a Starship. Since those first days at the Academy, this had been his dream. He had forsaken all to reach his goal - love, family, security. Now that it had been attained, he must never lose her. NEVER!

Yet he was so lonely. A Starship could invade your soul, but could not provide the warmth of companionship. Companionship was a necessary element to his character. He needed someone with whom he could pour out the contents of his being. Someone who would listen and return those thoughts to their owner without the outside being a party to their contents.

Who could a Captain confide in? The choices were pretty narrow. Having a Vulcan First Officer certainly did not help matters. If this were a half-Vulcan, what would a full Vulcan be like?

He had yet to see a smile cross that face. He also had the feeling he was being judged. Wonder what the results will be? What if I don't measure up to the Vulcan's standards? Matter of fact, what if I don't gain the confidence of the crew as a whole?

Replacing Chris Pike was no new Captain's wish. Captain Pike had been one of the best officers in the Fleet, and his crew had been very loyal to him. The man who replaced him needed to be something special. Was he that man?

He wanted so badly to make this his ship. A Captain needed to make his own mark if he were to truly command.

A Captain needed to have those under him trust and follow him without question. Did he possess those abilities?

Those first few weeks on board, he could feel all eyes upon him. It was like constantly having to work within the confines of a goldfish bowl. One mistake and all would know.

Fortunately there had been no mistakes. After that initial 'try-out' he felt acceptance beginning to take hold. He was still the intruder, but each day brought the ship more into his realm and further from that of Chris Pike.

If only he could draw his First Officer out of his shell. A Captain needed a rapport with his second in command. They needed to work as a team. Indeed, if they were to work at their most optimum, they needed to learn each other's very thoughts.

What fates had he angered to get a Vulcan to be in that position? It would be a difficult enough job to accomplish with a Human, but could it even



be attempted with one so alien in character?

Indeed, would the Vulcan even accept him as Captain? He had been civil enough, but that was his whole frame of behaviour - civil. There had yet to be any show of warmth or acceptance. But could he really expect any? Was that wishing for the moon in addition to the stars?

Still, somehow he must try. He needed the Vulcan. Spock was the best Science Officer in the Fleet, not to even consider his talents as First Officer. But how to break through that stoney exterior and really communicate? That was going to be quite an undertaking. However, one that must be mastered if he were ever to run this ship properly.

One he also needed for himself. He desperately needed a friend. Someone with whom he could simply talk and be himself.

Spock seemed to have no close friends on board. Perhaps he also shared this need?

The buzzer on his door sounded and he responded "Come", wondering what problem had arisen to require his attention.

Spock appeared in the doorway, with a chess board in his hand.

"Care for a game of chess, Captain?"

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DIFFERENCE by Susan Meek

Fill up my turmoil with quiet,

Fill up my silence with sound.

Help me to know the meanings -  
The values of what I have found.

Show me the ways of caring,  
It is you who have planted the seed.

Cool down my heat with the logic  
That sometimes I know that I need.

Fill up the gap so empty -  
Teach me the ways I should feel.

Help me to hide any anger or rage  
That I know I ought to conceal.

Teach me of warmth and laughter,  
Fill up the darkness with light.

Show me the ways of difference,  
So I can learn what is right.

Stay by my side and help me  
As long as we sail skies above.  
Temper my love with reason.

Temper my reason with love.

\*\*\*\*\*

What are Humans made of?  
What are Humans made of?  
Ups and downs and smiles and frowns,  
That's what Humans are made of.

What are Vulcans made of?  
What are Vulcans made of?  
Logic and ice and never a vice,  
That's what Vulcans are made of.

\*\*\*\*\*

ORDEAL by R.E. Young

Sulu left the helm, and sauntered slowly through the door,  
 With placid Oriental dignity,  
 When he returned, 'twas Chekov - he went bolting out! - once more  
 The Bridge returned to mock tranquillity.

The Captain was annoyed, surely they knew it was his turn,  
 He tried to rise, but beat a quick retreat,  
 Spock nearly bowled him over, without waiting to explain,  
 Kirk sighed, and concentrated on his feet.

When the Vulcan finally came, he heaved a sigh of great relief,  
 And clambered to his feet to try again,  
 But once more his path was blocked, and as he choked on disbelief,  
 Uhura hurried out to stake her claim.

"I have had it! It's not fair! This thing has gone quite far enough!"  
 Cried the Captain, as he staggered to the door,  
 Then Uhura smiled, returning, and she waved her powder puff,  
 At Scott, who left to even up the score.

"Now it's my turn," snarled the Captain, there was murder in his eye,  
 "But I'm next in line!" wailed Chekov, and he ran,  
 Kirk stood there in astonishment, his colour rather high,  
 As they one by one went out in turn again.

"There's no Justice!" moaned the Captain, and he turned around to Spock,  
 "Just one moment, sir." Spock quickly made an exit,  
 "It's a crime," said Captain Kirk, when he recovered from the shock,  
 "When are those lazy morons going to fix it?"

"Fix what, sir?" asked the Vulcan, now returning to his post,  
 "The fault in the dispensers was repaired.  
 We will be somewhat uncomfortable - an hour at the most -  
 But the meals will now be properly prepared."

"I'm not on about the food, you fool - " the Captain now was desperate,  
 "It's my Whatsit on the Bridge I'm talking of.  
 Three days it's been out of order, and they haven't fixed it yet,  
 And I can't wait any longer, so I'm off!"

"Captain, wait! Are you referring to just what I think you are?  
 If I'm right, you needn't worry any more,  
 For your Whatsit was repaired, sir, and of that I'm very sure... "  
 With a scream, the Captain hurtled through the door.

(There's been talk of new arrangements for the Captain's comfort now,  
 To ensure no more embarrassments occur.  
 It was Spock who made it possible, though I'm not too sure how,  
 But two toilets make the Captain feel secure... )

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Tribble, tribble, where have you been?  
 I've been to the bridge to look at the screen.  
 Tribble, tribble, what did you there?  
 I settled myself in the Captain's chair.

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LOST AND FOUND by Valerie Piacentini

Captain James T. Kirk of the U.S.S. Enterprise was dead.

It was the source of a curious, rather bitter pride that so far he himself was the only one to recognise that fact. McCoy, had he known, would have argued - dead men do not reason clearly, function efficiently; but surely only the dead could exist in such a limbo of utter indifference? The problem might have intrigued him once, Kirk supposed vaguely, but somehow nothing seemed to penetrate the shell of isolation he had drawn round himself since... since Helotia.

As it always did, the thought of that name produced the now-familiar contraction of the mind, in which grief and guilt blended to the tearing pain he must somehow learn to live with now. He glanced round; the bridge was calm, working normally - he could safely leave. Slowly then, he stood up.

"You have the con, Mr. Sulu," he said steadily, and walked to the elevator without hearing the helmsman's acknowledgement.

The sanctuary of his quarters had never seemed so welcome, the familiar territory such a safe haven; but even here the reminders lingered, solid, tangible. No longer fighting the pain he leaned back in his chair and glanced around, permitting himself to remember.

Helotia. A simple diplomatic mission that had proved to be a trap. The Klingon commander had been waiting when he beamed down. The hopelessness of capture - he would not, could not, order the surrender of the Enterprise. The calm preparation for death. Then, Spock. Always, Spock. The frantic haste to escape. The Vulcan caught in the disruptor beam as he relayed his Captain's co-ordinates to the ship, caught just before he could reach safety. The last thing Kirk had seen was the tall figure slowly folding to the floor, the dark eyes closing as the scene faded.

Return to the Enterprise - and the hideous, the impossible order from Starfleet; leave orbit at once, do not attempt a rescue. He had argued, begged, pleaded - in vain. Finally, the triumphant, mocking message from Helotia; Spock was alive, in Klingon hands - he would not long remain so.

It had not been total abandonment; Starfleet's plans were laid, and could not be disrupted for one man. The Federation ships had returned in force, sweeping the planet free of Klingon influence. Too late.

"The Vulcan is dead," he had been told, flatly. There was no vengeance for Kirk; the commander, Kelath, had been recalled before the attack, and was not among the prisoners. There was not even a grave to visit, to make his final farewell; the body had been flung into one of the communal burial pits, and of what worth was one dead Vulcan, that anyone should trouble to record which?

Kirk had accepted his loss with an outward calmness that surprised his crew; only McCoy knew of the guilt that tormented him. It had come at last, Spock's life given for his. If only he had defied the Admiral, gone back... Spock would have done as much for him. So the circle of grief and guilt grew tighter, choking him.

But a Starship Captain cannot afford the luxury of grief; to hide his pain he had begun to build that shell of indifference, retreating layer by layer into a safe, secure refuge where nothing could intrude to hurt him again. His concern for his crew did not diminish, but it was an abstract idea now, no longer touching him deeply as it once had done. McCoy watched anxiously, knowing that the shell was too complete, too brittle - it would shatter one day, and Kirk's desolation would be terrible to witness. It was not even as though

Kirk withdrew completely into himself; he still mingled with his officers, joined in their conversation, even smiled occasionally; but the hazel eyes were dull and lifeless. Withdrawal would have been easier to handle, McCoy thought, but this deliberate... separation... allowed no contact at all.

However great one man's agony, the work of Starfleet had to go on; a new First Officer was assigned to the Enterprise, Commander Sheron, an Andorian. McCoy had dreaded his arrival, wondering how Kirk would react to seeing another in Spock's place; he did not react at all. He greeted Sheron with his sweet, remote smile, and thereafter treated him with the same distant courtesy that now marked all his relationships; all, save that with McCoy, and that too was altered. It was as though Kirk, blaming himself for Spock's death, was deliberately punishing himself by refusing to accept the comfort his friends tried to offer; it could not last, and McCoy waited, knowing that he must be there when that brittle shell broke at last, and Kirk was forced to face reality.

Now Kirk sat alone in his quarters, waiting patiently for his control to return. It would - it always did - but it was sometimes hard to push away those comforting, painful memories; it would be... so pleasant... to allow them full rein, to wander unchecked through the years he had shared with the Vulcan, years of companionship, utter trust, sometimes pain and fear - but always, always, complete understanding. Yet if he did so - if he gave way to that temptation - he would no longer be able to function as Captain of the Enterprise, for he would be compelled to recognise that Spock's life had been given for something that no longer mattered to him - his career. And it must matter, for if it did not, Spock would have died uselessly, and that, he could not have borne.

At last, as he had known it would, the raging pain subsided to the accustomed ache that was all that was left to him of feeling. He pulled his regained control carefully around himself again, wrapping himself deep in the protective mantle of routine. The door buzzer sounded, and he sighed.

"Come!" The single word came calmly.

For just an instant the sight of the blue shirt in the doorway lifted his heart; would it always do so? he wondered.

"Yes, Mr. Sheron?" he asked.

"A message from Starfleet, Captain - Priority Code."

The Andorian held out a sealed tape. Kirk rose and opened his safe, wondering idly what problem Starfleet had found for him now - something urgent, evidently, since they had employed a code to which only the Captain held the key. Taking the decoder from the safe, he bent to decipher the tape.

Sheron took advantage of his concentration to study his Captain interestedly; he still did not know what to make of Kirk. He had accepted assignment to the Enterprise eagerly, for the reputation of the ship, and of her Captain, made it an attractive posting for an ambitious officer.

Initially, however, he had been disturbed by Kirk's attitude. The man was always pleasant, always correct... but remote, formal, treating his First Officer with courtesy, but maintaining between them a distance the Andorian did not know how to cross. At first Sheron had wondered with dismay whether the Captain simply disliked working so closely with an alien, but observation quickly disproved that theory, for Kirk was exactly the same with his Human officers. Besides, surely he had heard that his predecessor, Spock, was also an alien - a Vulcan, wasn't he? Concluding that Kirk's reserve was natural to him, Sheron had given up trying to understand the man, and had settled for respecting the Captain; but he was troubled. His position was made much more difficult by Kirk's indifference, and although he could appreciate Kirk's reputation, it was impossible to understand the affection which the crew seemed

to feel for this remote, unemotional man.

While Kirk busied himself with the decoder Sheron glanced around with interest; he had never before been in Kirk's quarters, and he looked now for some clue to the private life of the man who had come to interest him. A jarring note struck him at once - while most of the furnishings and decorations in the room were Human, certain items here and there were clearly of Vulcan origin. On a small side table stood a chess board, a game half completed, awaiting the next move. He knew that Humans seldom played the complicated three-dimensional form of the game; an expert himself, he could tell that the opponents were well-matched, and he wondered who the Captain's opponent could be. Turning away with a regretful sigh, for his fingers itched to pick up a rook and make the next move, his eyes lighted upon an even more unusual object. On a shelf by the Captain's desk stood a Vulcan harp. A swift glance confirmed that the Captain was still busy, and Sheron edged forward for a better look. He had been right - the instrument was a priceless work of art, of the type usually jealously guarded by an accomplished musician; he would not have expected to find such a treasure in a Human's quarters. Attracted by its beauty, Sheron stretched out a tentative hand.

"Don't touch that!" Kirk's voice cracked like a whip. Startled, the Andorian turned to meet hazel eyes blazing with anger. Even as his amazement showed on his face, the Captain's eyes dropped.

"I'm sorry," he said in his usual remote tone. "I did not mean to speak so sharply... the harp is very delicate."

"I apologise, Captain," Sheron returned stiffly. "I meant no offence."

"Forget it." Kirk made an abrupt gesture of dismissal, was again the efficient, unemotional Captain. "We have work to do, Mr. Sheron. The tape orders us to Organia; I am ordered to place the Enterprise at the disposal of the Council. Please take the con - I'll be here for a while, then in sickbay if I'm wanted."

"Very well, Captain." More puzzled than ever, Sheron departed. This was the first sign of emotion he had ever seen from Kirk - and that he should display such anger over a triviality was strange indeed. As the elevator carried him to the bridge, Sheron made a mental note to discover what he could about the curious behaviour of his enigmatic Captain.

Behind him Kirk stared miserably at the closed door. He had not intended to offend the Andorian, he thought guiltily; but the sight of a stranger's hand reaching for the harp - Spock's harp - had aroused in him a fury of possessive anger, an irrational resentment that Sheron was here, taking the Vulcan's place.

When he had been notified of Sheron's appointment to the Enterprise Kirk had gone at once to Spock's quarters; no stranger would pry into his friend's life - he would pack his belongings himself, however much it hurt. There were tears in Kirk's eyes by the time his self-imposed task was completed, and he surveyed the pitifully small pile he had collected. Spare uniforms were the only clothing - Kirk reflected that, save when landing party duty demanded it, he had never seen Spock out of uniform. A few books - the titles had surprised and delighted him - he had always known that beneath the Vulcan shell the Human Spock still dreamed in secret. The chess board, over which they had lingered for so many hours. The harp - pain stabbed deep as he recalled evenings of enchantment. He reached out, touched the strings lightly, and recoiled at the discordant murmur; it was a beautiful instrument, of great value, but worthless to him, for the man who had awakened its music would never do so again.

Kirk glanced round, and shivered; he had lowered the thermostat to normal ship's temperature, and only now did he realise how automatically he had adjusted to the warmth Spock found comfortable. Cradling the harp carefully,

Kirk carried it to his quarters, returning for the chess set, and the small case of books and clothes. The room's emptiness screamed at him; now he really knew that Spock was gone, and he left the room without a backward glance, for he carried with him all that would remain of his friend - those few possessions, and the memories that would always haunt him.

In his own quarters he stowed away the case, stood the harp by his desk, found a place for the chess board, carefully setting the pieces as they had been at the interruption of their last, unfinished game. It would probably be wiser to pack them away, he thought, but they were part of the life he had shared with the Vulcan, and to do so would seem as though he tried to deny his sorrow.

Now, vaguely disturbed into guilt at his treatment of Sheron, Kirk reached out, drew his fingers lightly down the curved neck of the harp, producing, as the gesture always did, a faint echo of Spock's presence. The Vulcan's strict sense of justice, which he had almost unconsciously acquired, told him how unfair he was being to his First Officer, but he somehow could not find the energy to get to know the man. Not yet, he silently begged that haunting presence; give me just a little longer, Spock.

The voyage to Organia was uneventful. With the Enterprise secure in orbit, Kirk called Sheron to the transporter room, and prepared to beam down. The Andorian obeyed eagerly - he had heard much of the powerful thought-creatures who inhabited this planet, and maintained an uneasy peace between the Federation and the Klingons, and was looking forward to his first encounter with them. Their first appearance was something of an anti-climax, however, as Kirk greeted three apparently undistinguished humanoids.

"Trefayne, Ayelborne, Claymare, may I present Mr. Sheron, First Officer of the Enterprise?" Kirk began.

"Captain Kirk, you are again welcome, as are you, Commander," replied the being Kirk had named Claymare. "But Captain, what of Mr. Spock? Surely he..."

"Spock is dead," Kirk replied harshly. "He was a prisoner of the Klingons."

"We grieve with you," Trefayne said softly. "A fine man - and a magnificent mind."

"Indeed. How may I serve you, gentlemen?"

It was obvious to Sheron that Kirk had deliberately turned the conversation, even at the risk of seeming discourteous. Did Kirk's strange attitude have something to do with his former First Officer? But he would have to postpone consideration of that theory - Ayelborne was speaking now.

"Have you ever heard of a Klingon commander named Kelath, Captain Kirk?"

"Kelath?" Kirk started violently, his eyes darkening. "He was in charge on Helotia when... What of him?"

"We have received reports from the planet Swire; it seems that Kelath has taken over there - the planet, though undeveloped, is rich in rare minerals - and is using the native population as slave labour. This must be stopped."

"Surely that's a breach of the peace treaty?" Kirk enquired.

"The matter is not so simple, Captain. According to the Klingon government, Kelath is a renegade, acting on his own initiative; they have disowned him. While we do not necessarily accept their denials, we do not at this time wish to provoke an open conflict with the Klingons. However, as they have denied all knowledge of Kelath's actions, they will not interfere if the Enterprise, acting with our authority, moves against him to free Swire."

"You mean you want the Enterprise to attack Kelath?" Kirk sounded more animated than Sheron had ever heard him.

"Not quite, Captain; Kelath controls three ships - formidable odds even for the Enterprise. No, we have devised an energy screen, which we will instal on your ship; it will nullify the Klingon disruptors, but will permit your phasers to operate. Kelath will be unable to defend Swire, and you will be able to capture his base. You will return the Klingon prisoners here. I suggest you advise the Federation to have relief ships standing by - the reports we have received indicate that the condition of the native labourers is grave, and medical teams will be urgently needed. For their protection, the energy screen can be transferred to the surface, where it will prevent any Klingon ship from entering orbit."

"What of Kelath?"

"We will deal with him, Captain - Mr. Spock's death will not go unpunished. When may we begin to instal the energy screen?"

"At once, if you wish. I'll call Mr. Scott now." Kirk pulled out his communicator.

Assuming a casual air, Sheron strolled into engineering. The man he sought was very much in evidence, loudly expressing his opinion of the Organian device he had been studying ever since it had been installed. As Sheron approached, Scotty looked up with a broad grin.

"Whit kin ah be daein' for you, laddie?" he asked.

"Are you busy, Scotty? I'd like a word with you if you can spare the time."

Scotty cast a critical glance around his department. "Aye, I could give ye a few minutes-- there's yon infernal Organian machine, but my boys will call me if anything happens. Come into the office."

He led the Andorian into the small room that served him as office, workshop, and, the crew suspected, very often sleeping quarters as well. "Have a seat." Snatching up a pile of blueprints, Scotty indicated the cleared chair, and perched on a corner of the cluttered desk. "Now then - what's the trouble?"

"No trouble, exactly, it's just... I need some advice, Scotty, and I don't know who else to ask. It's about the Captain..." He paused, unsure how to phrase his question.

"Is Jim giving you a hard time?" Scotty asked sympathetically.

"No, it's not as simple as that... What's wrong with him, Scotty? Or is it me? Ever since I came aboard, he's been... strange, so distant... it's almost as if I didn't exist. I can't talk to him, get close to him... I can't go on working so closely with a man who'll barely acknowledge my presence. What have I done to offend him?"

"Nothing, laddie." Scotty sighed. "He's just the same with all of us now - you must have seen that."

"I have," Sheron admitted, "and that's the thing that really puzzles me. I could understand it if he just didn't like aliens, but he managed to work with Commander Spock..."

"That's your answer, you know, Sheron - Spock."

"I don't understand."

"Look, it's this way," Scotty settled himself comfortably. "Being a Starship Captain - it's a lonely life; the responsibility, the decisions, always knowing that somebody's life might depend on every move you make. There's no-one to confide in, no-one to understand; then he met Spock. He was lonely too, in his own way - a half-breed Vulcan, isolated among Humans. They seemed to

hit it off right from the start - they were closer than brothers, understanding each other in a way no-one else could share. Then Spock was killed rescuing Jim from the Klingons, so Jim has got it into his head that it was his fault. He hasn't accepted his loss yet, or come to terms with his feelings of guilt. Don't think he doesn't appreciate you as First Officer, it's just that to him, you've taken Spock's place. Oh, he knows it's not your fault, but every time he sees you he remembers."

"I understand now," Sheron said quietly. "Such a friendship is very rare - it cannot be easily broken. Now that I know the reason for his attitude, I can work with him until he learns to adjust."

"I'm sure he'll come round in the end - just remember that he was badly hurt. No criticism of you, Sheron, but Spock was... something special, even I could see that. Look, why don't you consult his records? And you could try asking round, discreetly; you can often get a good picture of a man from those who served under him."

"I might try that, Scotty - thanks."

"My pleasure - and don't worry; Jim only needs some time."

Commander Sheron halted the tape running through his desk viewer, and sat back to consider what he had learned. Following Scotty's suggestion, he had mentioned Spock to some of the junior crew members, and had been somewhat startled at their enthusiastic response. Sulu and Chekov had painted an astonishingly vivid image of an efficient commander, a perfectionist who was endlessly patient in training his staff, remorseless with those who wasted his time. He had tested his juniors to the limit, but was unsparing of himself in helping them. From all sections of the ship had come the same attitude; even the hard-bitten security men, notoriously cynical about their superiors, had quite openly idolised the Vulcan. Shaking his head in bewilderment, Sheron had retired to his quarters, and pulled Spock's record tapes from the computer. The service details he vaguely knew already, but he scanned them anyway, refreshing his memory. Half Human, half Vulcan, Spock had served most of his time on the Enterprise, first under the command of Captain Pike, later under Captain Kirk. There was one unusual entry - Spock had turned down an offer of his own command, giving as his reason that he preferred to continue with his scientific duties. Sheron wondered about that - non-Human Captains were still a minority in Starfleet, and he would have expected a Vulcan to be ambitious.

The identification details showed on the screen now, and he studied them carefully. The impassive face was wholly Vulcan, betraying no evidence of his Human heritage; under delicate, winged eyebrows dark fathomless eyes challenged him, giving no clue to his predecessor's inner nature. Yet there must have been something about him to produce so much affection in his fellow-officers - normal Vulcan reserve might have brought him respect, but surely not the devoted friendship of men like Kirk, McCoy and Scott.

Perhaps the clues he sought lay in the details of his service? Sheron reached out to re-start the tape when the intercom summoned him.

"Commander Sheron to the bridge," came Uhura's voice. "We are about to enter orbit around Swire."

"Acknowledged." Sheron snapped off the intercom and headed for the elevator.

"That's the last of the Klingons transported up, Mr. Sheron," the Security Chief reported. "The medical teams are hard-pressed - I've got every available man helping out. The relief ships are urgently needed."

"They're already on their way, Chief. Do you have Kelath safely in custody?"



"Yes, sir. He was the first one we beamed up. He's safely in the brig, and I've got two of my men on guard. I picked men who joined us after Helotia - the old hands were ready to take him apart."

"So I understand, Have you seen the Captain?"

"He's outside with Dr. McCoy, trying to organise things. I must get back - some of these poor devils are in a bad way."

"Right, Chief, carry on."

Sheron moved off in search of the Captain, mentally reviewing the events of the last few hours. Protected by the Organian energy screen the Enterprise had assumed orbit around Swire, and had been instantly challenged by the Klingon renegades. The response to Kirk's call for surrender was an attempted attack, but as had been promised none of the Klingon weapons functioned. Landing parties from the Enterprise had quickly taken over the base, and with Kelath in Federation hands the ships had no option but to surrender.

The problems really began when Kirk had to consider the plight of the labourers; the base was indeed a slave camp of the worst kind. The condition of the slaves was appalling - they had been half-starved, flogged, mercilessly overworked. What little Kirk could do, he did; medical teams were already at work, assisted by every man and woman who could be spared from the Enterprise. The most urgent cases were moved to a hut which had been set aside as a temporary hospital; for the others, food, water and warm blankets at least eased the worst of their misery. Most of the slaves had been chained to prevent any escape and Sheron, catching sight of a yellow-shirted figure across the compound, hurried to join him, steeling himself to ignore the pleading hands that were stretched out to him as he passed.

"Captain, the relief ships will be here in a few hours," he reported as he reached Kirk. "Dr. McCoy says that we should be able to save most of the slaves, though some are in a bad way - still, it's not as bad as he thought at first."

The dull hazel eyes turned to him listlessly. "I'm... glad of that."

"Mr. Chekov reports that there are a few Federation men among the slaves - it seems that the Klingons decided to put Starfleet prisoners to work. Kelath is - "

A hiss of pain from the Captain interrupted him. "Don't mention him! I don't want to see him, hear about him, think about him! Just arrange for him to be sent to Organia as soon as the relief ships get here."

"But, Captain, you should question him... "

"How much do you think I can take, Mr. Sheron? He's cost me... too much already. If I see him, I'll..." Kirk turned away quickly, trying to recover his composure. Sheron stood uncomfortably, unsure how to react; after a moment Kirk turned to face him. "Come on, let's go and do what we can to help Bones."

He began to move away, but something hindered him. Glancing down he saw that one of the slaves who had been chained to the compound wall near where he stood had crawled forward to the fullest extent of his chain; his outstretched fingers closed frantically around Kirk's ankle.

With a faint sigh Kirk knelt, gently loosening the clutching fingers. "It's all right," he said quietly. "You will be free soon."

"Jim... Help me..." It was the merest thread of sound, but Kirk shuddered convulsively. He could not see the slave's face, for in his weakness the man could not even raise his head; long dark hair trailed in the dust, the hand that gripped so tightly was slim, long-fingered, hauntingly familiar; across the man's back the welts of a merciless flogging showed green.

Green?

It was then that Commander Sheron received the shock of his life; his Captain, the reserved, dignified James Kirk, kneeling in the filth and mud of the compound, gave a sudden muffled cry, and gathered the stranger into his arms. His face shone with a mixture of anguish and delight, and he seemed totally unaware of the tears that poured down his face.

"Get McCoy!" The words were hurled over his shoulder at the astonished Andorian; Sheron fled.

In response to the Doctor's irritable enquiry, Sheron could only repeat the Captain's summons; what exactly had happened, or why, he was at a loss to explain. Grumbling under his breath McCoy nevertheless followed the Andorian back to where Kirk still knelt, his head bowed over the motionless figure in his arms.

"Jim, you can't pull me away at a moment's notice," McCoy was already protesting as he approached. "We'll get round to everyone in time - I just don't have the facilities..." His voice faded as the Captain raised his head. McCoy gasped in astonishment at Kirk's once-immaculate shirt, rumpled now and stained with blood and dust; then at his eyes, vividly alive for the first time in months, glowing with hope, with joy, and a terrible apprehension.

"Bones... help him," Kirk pleaded.

"Yes, Jim, I'll see to it." McCoy's voice was calm, soothing - had the shock of the slave camp, the reaction to Kelath's capture, broken Kirk's shell at last?

"No, Bones, you don't understand... look."

At though he touched something infinitely precious Kirk brushed back the slave's filthy, matted hair with exquisite gentleness, revealing under the dirt and blood the delicate curve of a pointed ear, a white, set face cradled against his shoulder.

McCoy stood motionless; to the confused Sheron it seemed as though he too had been struck by the same madness that had affected Kirk, for when he moved at last it was to join Kirk on his knees beside the silent figure.

"Jim... oh, Jim... It is... it really is... Spock," he stammered.

Kirk nodded, unable to speak for the delighted grin that spread across his face at this confirmation of his instinctive recognition.

"But how...? Of course, the Starfleet prisoners. Kelath told you he was dead, but he'd sent him here, to torture him." McCoy leaned forward, professional concern replacing his delight as he realised the state of the Vulcan's injuries. "Jim, we must get him back to the ship."

Kirk nodded again, and gathered the Vulcan closer, but as he tried to rise to his feet he was hindered by the chain that secured the prisoner. He glanced in appeal at McCoy, but the Doctor was unarmed, and Kirk would not release his hold. Sheron, stirred into action at last, drew his phaser and severed the chain; Kirk's expressive eyes thanked him silently. Then, moving very carefully, he rose to his feet; even so, the movement must have hurt Spock, for he gave a quickly-suppressed gasp of pain, and Kirk's face tightened in anguish. Sheron stepped forward to help his Captain, but a swift gesture from McCoy halted him - this was Kirk's task. The Captain glanced once more at the Andorian, briefly, before returning his intent gaze to the man he held.

"You're in charge here, Mr. Sheron, until the relief ships arrive; see to everything for me, will you? I'll be in sickbay if you want me."

McCoy had already alerted Kyle in the transporter room; Kirk had barely finished speaking when the familiar shimmer pulled the three men away.

It was several hours before Sheron was able to return to the Enterprise. The relief ships had arrived at last, and proper arrangements were made for the care of the freed slaves. The Klingon prisoners had been turned over to one of the fastest ships for transfer to Organia; that was one responsibility Sheron was glad to be rid of - with so many security men busy on the surface, he had been afraid that Kelath might risk everything in a bid to escape. The Enterprise herself had been ordered to the nearest Starfleet hospital with the most seriously injured slaves and the freed Federation prisoners.

Heading directly for the bridge, Sheron handed over command to Scott and relayed his orders. He thought longingly of his quarters, and sleep, but supposed he ought first to report to the Captain. An inquiry produced the information that Kirk was still in sickbay.

The isolation ward was dimly lit, apart from a soft light over the bed; as he stood hesitantly at the door, Sheron knew he must be invisible to the two men who waited so patiently.

Kirk sat by the bed, both hands clasping one of Spock's, his eyes fixed steadily on the pale face on the pillow; across the bed McCoy studied the diagnostic scanners intently. After a moment the Doctor gave a long sigh of pure relief; Kirk raised his head, and the two men exchanged grins of delight.

"He's going to make it, Jim." McCoy's voice was faintly husky. "He's been starved, flogged... yet that pig-headed Vulcan stubbornness wouldn't let him give up. He's going to be pretty weak for a while, but there's no lasting damage."

Kirk's sigh of relief echoed McCoy's; slowly, with unutterable weariness, his head dropped to rest on his outstretched arm, his whole body trembling with the relief of tension. McCoy touched his shoulder compassionately, his free hand reaching out and, with the same delicate care Kirk had shown, he brushed back Spock's night-black hair, still untrimmed, but clean now, and shining. The three figures might have been carved from stone, frozen in position, united in a circle that was complete, perfect at last. The aura of joy and relief and love flowing from them formed a barrier Sheron knew he had no right to pass - he was not wanted or needed here. With a feeling of utter loneliness the Andorian left silently, and headed for his quarters.

The following morning Sheron returned to duty to find that the incredible Enterprise grapevine had been hard at work; everyone on board had heard of Commander Spock's return to the ship, and wherever he went excited groups of crewmembers were discussing the implications of that fact. Gradually, those implications began to dawn on Sheron himself.

He had come to realise, if not to understand, the bond his Captain shared with the Vulcan, but until now it had not threatened his own position. A Kirk lost in his memories, haunted by his friend's death, yet still the efficient Captain - that man he could work with; a Kirk unexpectedly reunited with that friend could prove a dangerous adversary. Sheron was certain what Kirk would want, would move Heaven and Earth to achieve - Spock's reinstatement as First Officer of the Enterprise.

A smouldering resentment began to build in the Andorian as he began to appreciate the threat to his position. This assignment had won him envy and respect throughout Starfleet - he could imagine the subtle mockery if he were to be transferred so quickly; and worse - the damage to his prospects, for whatever reason was given for his transfer, there would always be those ready to believe that he had failed, had not measured up to the standard Kirk required. In all honesty, he had to admit that he was probably not Spock's equal, but he was confident of his own abilities; for a moment he found himself wishing that the Vulcan had died in that Klingon slave camp, but he suppressed the thought with shame, knowing how much the man had suffered.

Somehow Sheron endured that long, miserable day, hiding his worry, managing to respond with feigned enthusiasm to the jubilation of the rest of the crew. No word came from Kirk, who still remained in sickbay, closeted with McCoy and Spock. Planning the next move? Sheron wondered miserably.

Considering this, trying to foresee Kirk's line of attack, Sheron was finishing a solitary meal when he saw McCoy sitting at another table with Nurse Chapel. That meant Kirk and Spock would be alone in the isolation ward. In normal circumstances the Andorian would have turned in revulsion from the thought of deliberately eavesdropping on his Captain, but fear for his own future occupied him to the exclusion of all else. He knew how highly Kirk was regarded by Starfleet Command; he had only to request it, and Sheron knew he would be transferred from the Enterprise. He could think of no defence, but hoped that he could learn from their conversation what they intended to do.

As he had hoped, the isolation ward was still dimly lit, as it had been on the previous evening; once again he could listen unseen to the conversation of its occupants.

Kirk and Spock were talking idly of events in the past as he arrived; after a moment silence fell, and Sheron took the opportunity to study his... rival... properly for the first time. Spock's shining hair had been trimmed and combed into the smooth style he remembered from the record tape; he was very pale, and the deep lines on his face showed how much he had endured during the months of his captivity. The velvet-dark eyes were fixed on Kirk's as the two men exchanged a long, affectionate, reminiscent look. The Andorian cringed in shame as he saw Spock's face at that moment, for gone was the cool serenity, the impassive calm the image on the tape had worn; his Human half was showing clearly now, a man unutterably weary, in pain, but relaxing gratefully in his friend's company.

Sheron instinctively knew that he must never betray knowledge of what he had seen - only to Jim Kirk would the Vulcan willingly have revealed that part of himself. He felt a sudden overwhelming pity for the man - Spock had not asked for what had happened to him, meant no harm - but he fought it down savagely; whether he intended it or not, the Vulcan was a threat to his career, a threat that must - somehow - be overcome. Suddenly he became aware that Kirk was speaking.

"How do I go about it, Spock?"

"About what, Jim?"

"Getting you back, of course. You belong here, on the Enterprise - you're my First Officer, you always will be - you promised me that. If I contact Starfleet..."

"No, Jim." Spock's voice, soft but inflexible, cut through Sheron's anger.

"What do you mean - 'No'?" came defensively from Kirk.

"You will not contact Starfleet. You know that I wish to remain with you... but not like this. We cannot consider only our own wishes - there is also Commander Sheron. You told me yourself, he is a brilliant First Officer; to be removed from his post without justification, to be transferred merely because his presence is inconvenient - think what that would do to his pride, and to his career. I will not permit you so to hurt a man who has done us no harm; and what is more, I will not permit you to disgrace yourself - and me - by such an unworthy action."

"But I can't lose you again," Kirk whispered.

"Listen to me, Jim; all those months you believed me dead, and you began to accept it. We have been granted a respite - we may not serve together, but our friendship will not end, we will meet sometimes..."

"But I'll be alone again - and so will you," Kirk said miserably. "Yes, when I thought you dead I had to learn to live with it... but knowing you're alive... Spock, you know how much your support has meant to me - don't ask me to give it up."

"I must," Spock countered with gentle firmness. "Don't you see - if we do this, if we wrong Commander Sheron so, we will cease to be the men we are. We have never used our friendship selfishly - if we do so now we will destroy it, more surely than death or separation could, for we will grow to despise what we see in each other. No, I must go... and you must never indicate to Commander Sheron, by word or look, that you would have it otherwise."

There was a long silence, then Kirk bowed his head in defeat. "You're right, of course," he said dully. "We could never live with ourselves if we harmed Sheron - and I see now that we would, whatever excuse I gave to be rid of him. So now I've got to accept that I found you only to lose you again."

"Not altogether, Jim; we will keep in touch, meet from time to time... perhaps even serve together again... one day." His voice was urgent with the need to comfort, to convince the Human.

"Perhaps." Kirk's reply was very faint, growing stronger as he continued. "So we'll do our duty, as we've always done it - what we want always comes last, doesn't it, Spock? But we still have a few days; once you've... gone, I'll try to accept Sheron - but until then, we can go on as before, can't we?"

"We can." The Vulcan's hand touched Kirk's shoulder lightly for a moment. "I don't think he would grudge us this."

Outside the door Sheron backed away quietly, his mind a turmoil of confusion. This was not the reaction he had anticipated; he had thought Kirk and Spock would be united in determination to remove him from his post. Certainly, that had been Kirk's original intention, but Sheron had seen for himself how quickly he had accepted the injustice of such an action.

To protect his pride, his career, and because they could not in honour do otherwise, they were prepared to face the parting of their ways yet again. Sheron felt... he was not quite sure how he felt; he only knew he had to be alone, to think. Turning, he collided heavily with a familiar figure - McCoy. The Doctor's face was stern, his blue eyes unreadable. Sheron wondered how long he had been there, how much he had heard. McCoy had been a stable, enduring part of that complex unity he had sensed the previous evening; he too would be affected by its disruption.

With an abrupt nod of dismissal McCoy brushed past him into the ward; Sheron saw Kirk and Spock turn at his step, welcome in their eyes, before he fled to the sanctuary of his quarters.

Despite his revised opinion of Kirk, Sheron could see no way out of the dilemma, and he slept at last to dream again of the conversation he had overheard. On the bridge next morning he was too occupied to think about it, but he was forcibly reminded when Kirk made a brief visit of inspection to the bridge. He spoke to Sheron with more animation than he had ever shown before and the Andorian knew that he was already trying to put into practice his resolve to accept the situation. After his departure Sheron overheard Sulu and Chekov discussing the Captain's improvement; they attributed it to Spock's recovery, and were pleased, but Sheron had seen the sorrow Kirk could not quite conceal, and his pity and admiration for the man steadily increased. When he was able to turn command over to Sulu, Sheron went back to his quarters, hoping to decide how best to handle the awkward situation that would undoubtedly arise when the crew realised that Spock would not remain with the Enterprise.

A tape lay on his desk, a personal message from his family, and he scanned it eagerly in an attempt to calm his mind. Andorians possessed a strong sense of family unity, and the warm messages in the tape did much to restore him. As he removed the tape from the viewer his eyes fell on another, Spock's record tape which he had removed a few minutes previously. Impelled by curiosity he replaced it in the viewer and switched on, watching intently as the details of Spock's service on the Enterprise unfolded before him.

Stark, official language, of course; but the truth came through with stunning clarity, the awareness of Kirk and Spock as a perfectly balanced team. Over and over again he saw it - the risks taken, the challenges accepted, the dangers faced, each for the other. So many times sanity, life itself, willingly offered, yet by some miracle the final sacrifice was avoided - until Helotia.

The tape ended there, with the huskiness in Kirk's voice as he recorded the capture of his First Officer, and Kelath's vindictive message, 'The Vulcan is dead'.

Automatically the tape switched off, and Sheron found himself trying again to think of some way to help. It was up to him, he realised; Kirk would take no action, he could remain on the Enterprise and somehow, eventually, Kirk would accept him. Yet if he remained the Captain would retire once more into that brittle shell of loneliness that had surrounded him for so long; Spock would continue his career elsewhere, but among strangers his warm humanity would be suffocated by the customary rigid Vulcan formality, for Sheron knew that only to Kirk, and perhaps to McCoy, had Spock ever revealed his Human heart. And if he allowed that sacrifice, Sheron himself would do them the wrong they had refused to do him. Yet, was there another way?

His eyes were irresistably drawn to the tape from his family; an idea formed, began to grow... and Sheron smiled in understanding.

The shifts had changed, he noticed with some surprise - he had not realised how much time had passed. At the door of the isolation ward he hesitated, then entered quietly. Across the room Nurse Chapel turned enquiringly; the patient in the bed was one of the freed prisoners - there was no sign of Spock. Muttering an apology Sheron backed out hastily, only to come face to face, for the second time, with Dr. McCoy.

"Can I help you, Mr. Sheron?" Clearly, McCoy was not in the most co-operative of moods.

"I was looking for the Captain - I thought he'd be with Mr. Spock," Sheron replied evenly.

"Now why...?" McCoy bit off the question, studying the Andorian closely. Whatever he saw apparently satisfied him, for after a moment he continued in a warmer tone, "Mr. Spock is much improved, and I needed the isolation ward for a more urgent case. As sickbay is already full, he is sharing the Captain's quarters temporarily. You'll find them both there."

"Thank you, Doctor."

As he halted outside Kirk's quarters Sheron wondered how they would receive him; in their eyes he was a barrier to their wish to serve together - surely they must resent him?

"Come!"

The Captain's voice answered the buzzer. Sheron entered and paused just inside the door. Commander Spock was lying propped up in a sickbay bed in the living area; Kirk perched beside him, the chessboard standing between them. Two pairs of eyes turned to him, Spock's veiled, unreadable, Kirk's expressing only mild curiosity.

"Forgive the intrusion, Captain, Commander; may I speak to you for a few moments?"

"Sit down, Sheron. What can I do for you?" Kirk's face and voice betrayed nothing of the tension he must have been feeling; had it not been for that overheard conversation, Sheron would never have suspected his distress.

"It is a... personal matter, Captain," he said when he again had Kirk's attention. "I wish to request a transfer from the Enterprise to a temporary posting on my home planet." He kept his gaze firmly on the floor, resolutely ignoring the suddenly stiffening figures of both men. "There has been a crisis in the affairs of my family, and my presence has been urgently requested."

"You... wish to leave the Enterprise?" Kirk's voice was dazed.

"Not wish, no; I have gained much valuable experience here. But on my planet family ties are very close. It would only be for a few months, Captain, and I regret giving you so little warning... I have already completed my application - it requires only your signature."

"I... see." Kirk was, in fact, thoroughly confused; he had resigned himself to the inevitability of losing Spock, was determinedly making the most of these last few days in his friend's company... then suddenly here was this Andorian calmly informing him that after all there was a chance for Spock to remain!

"But... why?" He was interrupted by a faint sigh of pure weariness from Spock; turning at once he lifted the chessboard away, and settled the unresisting Vulcan comfortably on the pillows. "Rest, Spock," he urged softly. "McCoy'll have my head if you overtire yourself... wait for me outside, Sheron, we'll settle this in the briefing room."

As the Andorian turned away Kirk thought he saw a fleeting expression of concern in his eyes, and he was puzzled; but there was time enough for explanations - Spock came first. He reached out to dim the light, and his hand was caught in Spock's.

"Jim, did you hear?" The Vulcan's voice was very low, but the weary eyes were alight with hope. "He wants to go... and that means... Oh, Jim, I can stay!"

"Yes, my friend, I heard." Kirk's fingers tightened reassuringly. "Leave it to me... and sleep now; I'll come back later."

He lingered for a moment, watching as Spock's breathing settled into the tranquil rhythm of sleep; it seemed to Kirk in the dim light that the Vulcan was almost smiling as he lay.

Outside in the corridor Sheron awaited him; in silence the two men headed for the briefing room. When the door had closed behind them Kirk turned to consider the Andorian through narrowed eyes.

"All right, Mr. Sheron," he said at last. "Let's have the truth - why the transfer request? Why now?"

"As I told you, Captain... "

"Come on, Sheron, I wasn't born yesterday. You're up to something - I'll stake a year's pay you haven't been called home - and I can easily check."

"That will not be necessary. As it happens, I did receive a message from home, but it contained no summons. I phrased my request as I did because it seemed the most acceptable way. May I speak frankly?"

"Please do." Kirk indicated a chair.

"Thank you. Captain, my service on the Enterprise has been most rewarding; in normal circumstances I would have chosen to remain - but we both know that the circumstances are not normal."

"Explain."

"I am trying to, but I do not wish to give offence. I am aware of the close friendship that exists between you and Commander Spock; it is natural that you should wish him to return, but I stand in the way. I am also aware that that friendship makes you a formidable team; Starfleet - indeed, the Federation as a whole - would be the poorer for its loss.

Yet I believe that I have given satisfaction as First Officer; it is logical to suppose that Starfleet will leave me here, and transfer Commander Spock. You will not request that I be moved, for you know it would reflect badly on my reputation; however, if I request a home posting on compassionate grounds, and you support it, there will be no problem - Commander Spock can return."

"But what of you? What of your career?"

"Captain, there will be other Starship postings for me. I am confident that I have earned a good report from you - I foresee no problem there."

"Sheron, I know I haven't been fair to you while you've been here - why are you doing this?"

"To be honest, because I wish to earn your friendship. Until now, Humans have always been something of a mystery to me. I have learned from you that men of different races can indeed meet as equals, that the wish to understand can transcend all barriers of race and tradition. For that lesson, I thank you."

"Then all that talk of a family crisis... "

"Was only an excuse. It will serve for Starfleet - but I wanted you to know that my request was made willingly."

"Sheron, I don't know what to say. Just 'thank you', I guess. You see a great deal, don't you?"

"Captain - I wasn't born yesterday either." The Andorian smiled briefly for a moment. "My race understands friendship - you are both fortunate men."

"I am, I know." Kirk rose, held out his hand. "I hope, Sheron, that you will think of me as a friend. I owe you a great deal."

"I would be honoured, Captain." The Andorian clasped the extended hand for a moment. "Now... if you will sign the transfer... "

Kirk signed his name, and looked up. "If I can ever repay you..." he said haltingly.

"I understand, Captain; I am happy to have been of service."

Kirk smiled, then turned his head sharply towards the door, an expression of concern in his eyes.

"Is something wrong?" Sheron asked.

"No... it's only... Spock's awake... and he's troubled..."

"Go to him, Captain - your news will reassure him."

"Yes." It was a sigh of thankfulness; with a last smile of farewell, Kirk was gone.

Sheron stared at the closed door of the briefing room. Now that he had made his offer, he half expected a feeling of regret that he had acted hastily;



it did not come. Kirk's eyes, alight with joy and life, were reward enough. He might never experience at first hand the depth of friendship Kirk and Spock shared, but he was part of their world now, their happiness enfolded him too. Had he remained on the Enterprise he would have won, at best, eventual acceptance from Kirk and his crew - now he would always be welcome among them. He had lost, by his own decision, the most rewarding assignment he could have hoped for, but with Kirk's influence behind him there would be other opportunities; he had found instead a true understanding of the value of a friend.

It was, all things considered, a fair exchange.

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