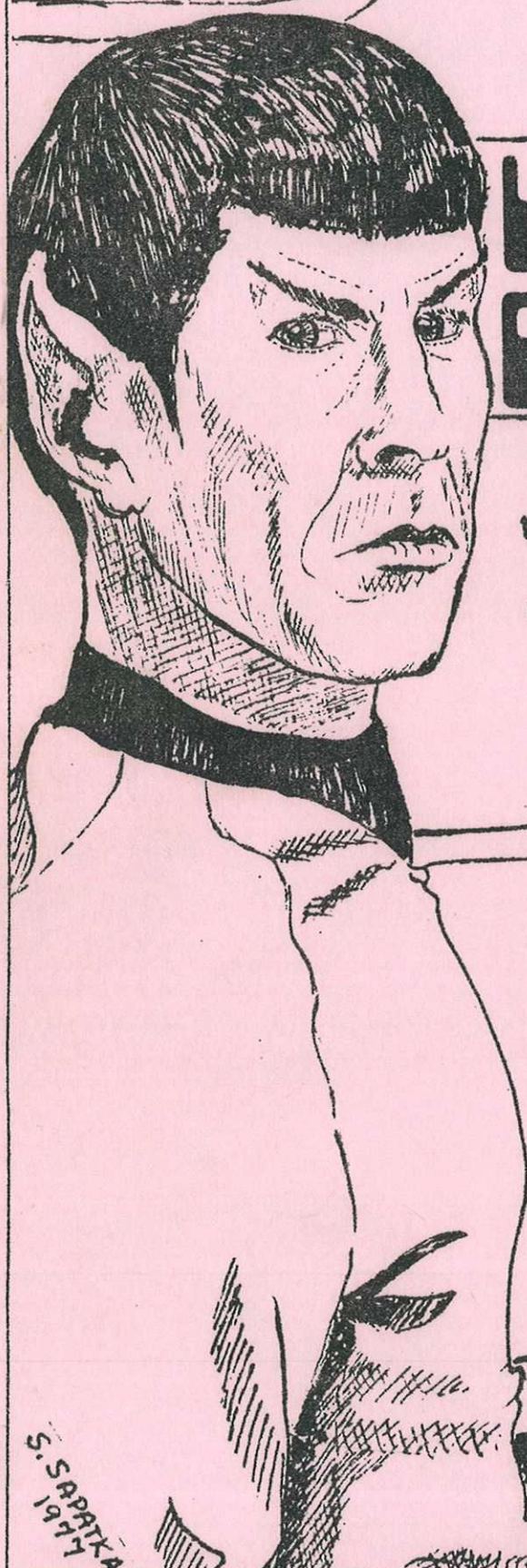


LOG ENTRIES

20



S. SAPATKA
1961

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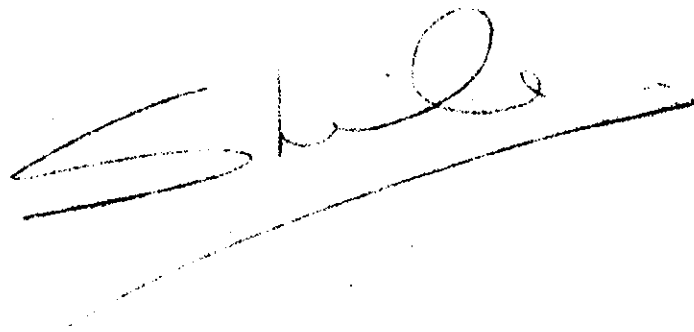
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Hello once again.

For some peculiar reason, stories seem to go in cycles; I imagine almost any zine editor will tell the same story. For a while nothing will come in but Kirk-bonkers; then the fashion will change and we'll get Spock-bonkers. A few weeks later and everyone seems to be writing about the minor characters...

It means that, quite without my meaning it, an issue turns out to be biased towards a certain theme. LE 8 was very much a 'make Spock unhappy by depriving him of Kirk' issue; LE 16 turned out to be McCoy-orientated. This one is slanted somewhat towards the early days on the Enterprise. Simone's story follows chronologically after her novella 'Web of Selagor' although it stands completely on its own; Valérie's covers both Spock's and Kirk's early days on the Enterprise. I don't think the issue suffers because of this slight bias; indeed, some editors deliberately make an issue follow a particular theme, although we normally try to maintain a greater balance.

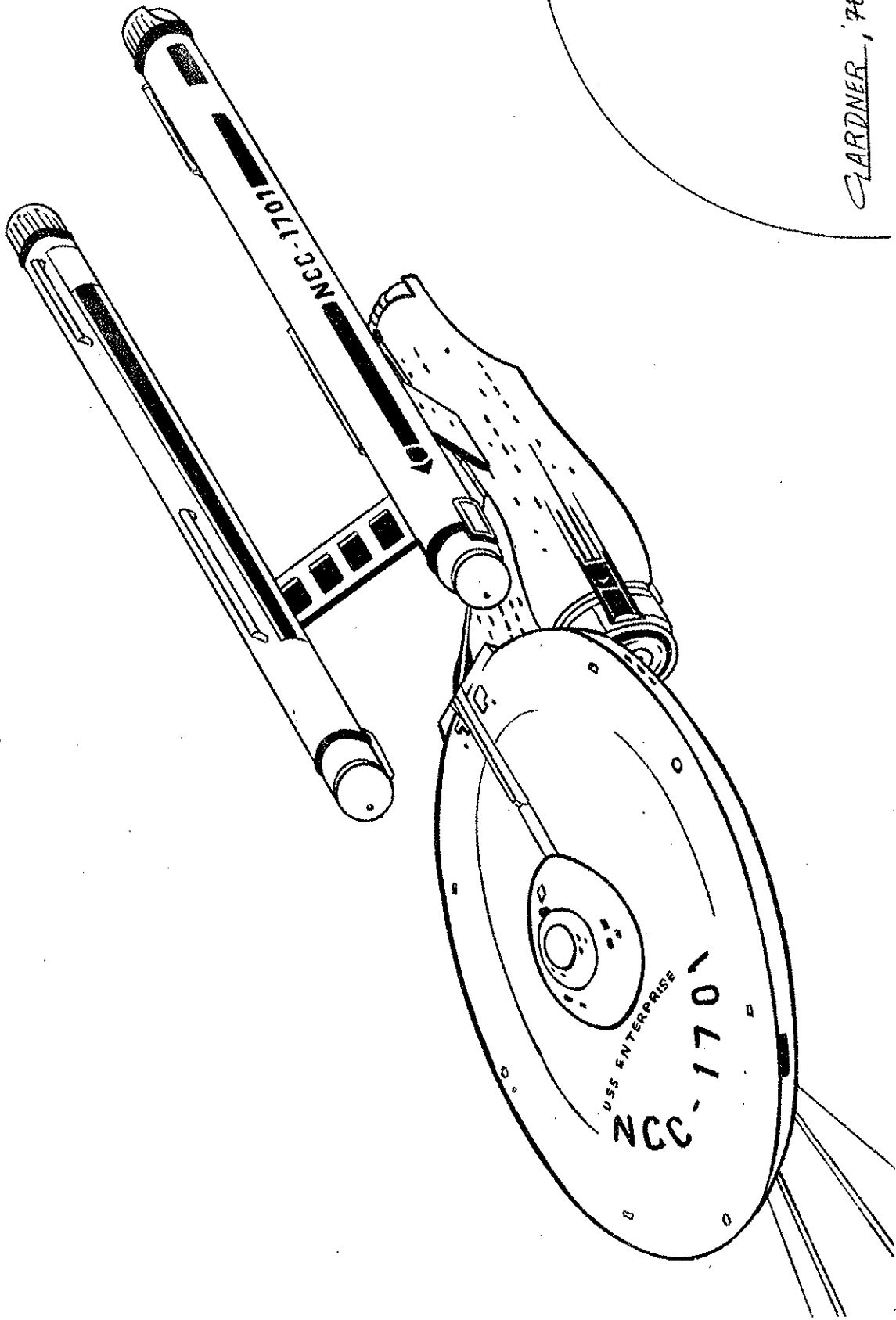
For next time we have an unusual alien story by Elizabeth Sharp, a Baillie story and one by Meg Wright. If all goes well - and the typewriter doesn't go on strike for having to do so many stencils - LE 21 will be ready in time for the next newsletter in December. We also have a novella by Valerie Piacentini, Wine of Calvoro, that'll be out soon - the outcome of Janet wanting a story where Kirk gets a bullet in the shoulder. In Valerie's story, that bullet is the least of his worries...

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to be 'Sheila', is written across the middle of the page. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

October 1978

Non-members of STAG can get information on current, new and forthcoming zines by sending SAE (or addressed envelope and 2 IRCs) to

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McCOY'S NIGHTMARE by Simone Mason

Kirk was worried. The fact that the Enterprise was on routine flight allowed him plenty of opportunity to think of this private worry he had hoped time would cure, but he was getting impatient. Switching on his private log, he said, "Why did I have to become friendly with both an emotional Human and a logical Vulcan? It's like walking a tightrope between them and I should have thought McCoy would have more sense than to be jealous! How can he begrudge Spock... "

He stopped and switched the recorder off. Whatever amount of friendship he can get, when he has known so little! he continued in his mind.

What upset Kirk above all was to see Spock retreating back into his shell and making himself scarce whenever McCoy claimed Kirk's attention or company. The Captain knew that his First Officer had sensed McCoy's jealousy and was making sure of not intruding. But Kirk had looked forward to Spock's companionship since their friendship established itself and couldn't help being angry or upset when McCoy interrupted, consciously or not, a particularly enjoyable game of chess or one of the discussions about Vulcan history or customs Kirk now enjoyed having with his First Officer. The Captain found himself unable to stop the Vulcan vanishing like a shadow and had made his displeasure plain, which in turn had angered McCoy. For example --

"I thought you played chess to humour him only, not for your own enjoyment!"

"Never mind. What did you want?"

"You complained of sleeplessness lately. I have here a bottle of brandy to share with you, guaranteed to ensure... "

"No, thanks, I'm not in the mood for drinking tonight."

"No doubt you prefer higher things! How long do you think you can put up with logic without some... "

"Get out!" said Kirk, with controlled anger.

The hurt on McCoy's face had not helped, and anger had flared up as the doctor exclaimed, "You wouldn't tell that computer to get out!"

He had gone, clutching his bottle fiercely, and Kirk had put his head in his hands in a mixture of tiredness and emotional exhaustion. It was true, of course, he would never tell Spock to get out as he had just told McCoy, he thought with a sigh, because the Vulcan would leave of his own accord when he sensed his Captain's wish to be alone. If only McCoy could understand! He had gone the next day to the doctor's office in sickbay and apologised, drunk his brandy, and otherwise made his peace, but it had resolved nothing; each had carefully avoided any mention of Spock.

Kirk was taken out of his reverie by a knock. "Come."

The First Officer entered and Kirk gave a warm smile. "I'm glad to see you, Spock, I feel all tense tonight. Your company is just what I need."

"Captain, I came for a specific purpose."

"Which is?"

"Captain, I believe my transferral to another ship is indicated."

"What!" exclaimed the Captain in stunned disbelief.

"It is a logical solution, Captain, to... "

"Has McCoy put you up to this?" asked Kirk suspiciously.

"No, Captain, it was my decision alone."

"Why?"

"Sir, you know as well as I do that you are under pressure, a pressure which could affect your efficiency as Starship Captain. It is a logical step to remove the cause.- "

"You aren't the cause of the pressure, Spock."

"Then who is, Captain?"

"McCoy, of course."

"Illogical, Captain. The Doctor has never - "

"Until recently, no. But now he's jealous - he resents you, in spite of the fact that you always make way for him."

"Then I should transfer... "

"Do you think I'll let you, Spock?" asked Kirk with a frown.

"Captain, if I don't, McCoy might, and... "

"Let him. I'm fed up with his irrational behaviour."

"You don't mean that, Captain."

"Maybe not, Spock," said Kirk tiredly, "but I do know that I don't want you to leave."

"Jim - when McCoy came aboard the Enterprise, he was troubled; his ego was crushed and he had little wish to live. Am I right?"

"Well, yes," replied Kirk in astonishment. "How did you know? He couldn't have told you the story of his marriage, surely?"

"No, Jim, I guessed from observation, and I am not asking any questions as to the why, McCoy's privacy is his own. Here aboard the Enterprise he found not only an old friend in Mr. Scott, but above all new interests, a new life, a new friend, all reasons to live. You haven't the right to deprive him of those reasons; should he leave the Enterprise, he would lose them all, and have to begin again. He needs your friendship like a starving man needs bread. You owe it to him."

"What about you?" asked Kirk softly.

"I don't understand, Captain."

"Don't go all Vulcan on me, Spock. What about your own need, your own loneliness?"

"Captain, I faced and accepted loneliness many years ago, and can do so again. McCoy could not."

If only he could hear you! thought Kirk, his throat tight with emotion. He mastered it enough to say in a low voice, "What about me, Spock? Could I face loneliness again?"

"Jim... " said the Vulcan hesitantly, his glance meeting Kirk's with reluctance. He sat down abruptly as though too weak to stand. Kirk got up to perch on the desk, putting his hand on his First Officer's shoulder.

"Yes, Spock; whatever McCoy means to me, what you and I share is special, and both of us know it."

"I... did not realise you understood so much of our mind meld on Selagor, Jim." *

"I understood, Spock, and have proved it to myself since. There is a great affinity between our minds, our personalities. Do you expect me to reject that? Do you expect me to reject the feeling of strength and assurance I have whenever you are at my side, because I know I can count on

* The Web of Selagor, by Simone Mason, published by STAG.

you in any circumstances? Do you expect me to reject the one officer I can always turn to for help, the one officer I can confide in freely because he knows me so well?"

"I was trying to help, Jim," said Spock, not protesting; he knew the truth of the Captain's words.

"I know," sighed Kirk. "Thanks, Spock, but I won't have that kind of help in any circumstances. Anything that removes you from my side isn't help - is that clear?"

"Quite clear, but it doesn't solve... "

"McCoy's problem! Look, Spock, it is after all my problem, he's Chief Medical Officer on my ship. I'll try to be tactful and patient and show him that I value his friendship."

"He is able to give you so much that I cannot, Jim."

"Maybe, Spock, but don't underestimate yourself - and there's to be no more talk of resignation. That's an order."

"Order understood, Captain," replied the Vulcan with the half-smile Kirk appreciated the more because of its rarity.

"Another order is a date for my revenge at chess during our next off-duty period."

"Very well, Captain, I'll await you in the recreation room."

"And I'll beat you."

"Possibly, Captain," answered the Vulcan with another half-smile as he left.

Kirk stretched and lay on his bed knowing he would sleep now. It had helped to talk with Spock and he was relieved to have managed to convince the Vulcan not to transfer. No matter what Spock said and how stoical a face he put on it, Kirk knew him well enough now to be aware of what it would have cost the First Officer to transfer. And it would have been just as painful for me, thought the Captain, so enough is enough, Dr. McCoy, you'll have to learn to live with the fact that Spock is my friend just as much as you are!

"One thing I'll never let you do, Bones, is chase Spock away," he reflected aloud as he settled to sleep. "If you did, you would discover that you are no friend of mine any longer."

Patience and understanding were needed; Kirk, aware as he was of the traumatic experience the end of his marriage had been for McCoy, and the painful scars it had left, could comprehend how the doctor's newly-found security would feel easily threatened by new factors. Spock was right, McCoy's utter loneliness after his divorce was still relatively recent, and his present insecurity perhaps understandable and very Human, after his ego had taken such a beating from his wife. The hope that the doctor would soon see that Spock was no threat was Kirk's last conscious thought as he fell asleep.

Kirk and Spock met for the chess game and onlookers stopped from time to time to watch, amused by the complete absorption of the two players.

"And don't you dare let me win, Spock," said Kirk.

"Captain," replied the First Officer, "to let you win would hardly improve your game."

Kirk and several officers laughed and the Chief Engineer remarked, "When I see you two playing, Captain, I'm glad you're both on my side - I wouldn't like either of you for an enemy!"

After a while the recreation room became nearly deserted as people went on

duty or to their quarters to rest. Only Scotty was left reading a scientific paper at another table.

"Logically, I should win in five moves, Jim," said Spock, "but knowing your unorthodox methods..."

Kirk smiled and made his move and Scotty came over to watch with interest as the game finished in a draw.

"At least I avoided defeat," said Kirk with a laugh. "What about some food?"

"I'll get it if you'll let me, Captain," offered Scotty. Kirk agreed and stated what he wanted and Mr. Scott turned to the First Officer. "Anything for you, Mr. Spock?"

"Just a drink, thank you, but you don't have to..."

"I wouldn't offer if I didn't want to do it, Mr. Spock."

"Join us if you want, Scotty," said Kirk with friendliness, "it seems silly for you to eat alone when there is no-one else here."

"Thanks, Captain."

The Chief Engineer came back with a well-laden tray and gave Kirk his share, then put a glass and a bowl in front of Spock. "I took the liberty of bringing some of that soup you are fond of, Mr. Spock."

"Thank you, Mr. Scott," said Spock as Kirk smiled to himself, pleased with Scotty's friendly gesture.

The talk turned to the scientific paper Mr. Scott had been reading. Spock had already read it, and Kirk was listening to their discussion with interest when McCoy came in.

As though moved by mere reflex, Spock got up to leave, but Kirk cut in, "Sit down, Spock, you haven't finished eating."

"We can talk in front of the doctor, Mr. Spock," said Scotty, "even if he does not understand the subject. As I was saying..."

"Who won the game?" interrupted McCoy, looking at the three-dimensional chess board.

"No-one, Bones," answered Kirk. "Are you hungry? We're just finishing, but join us anyway."

McCoy obtained his food and did join them, but the atmosphere had changed and the friendly and relaxed gathering had become tense and uncertain. Scotty shrugged the unease off and started the discussion with Spock again.

"Must you talk shop off duty, Scotty?" asked McCoy.

"Sorry, Leonard - but you don't have to listen, talk to the Captain."

"But I'm interested; do go on, Mr. Scott," said Kirk without thinking.

"Why didn't you say I was odd man out?" complained McCoy, picking up his tray to move to another table.

"Don't, Doctor," said Spock. "I am going on dut - "

"That's right, go away, make it obvious!" shouted McCoy in a rage which startled his audience. "I've seen through your game, Mr. Spock, getting everyone on your side and blaming me..."

"What is the matter with you, man?" interrupted Scotty. "If you behave like a lunatic, who but yourself is to blame?"

"That's quite enough!" said Kirk sharply, thankful no-one else was present. "Spock, you don't have to leave and you know it."

"Captain, I go on duty in three minutes ten seconds, so I do have to leave, with your permission."

"Yes, of course. Sorry, Spock, off you go."

"Mr. Scott, I'll be interested in continuing our discussion later, shall we say whenever our next off-duty periods coincide?"

"Yes, Mr. Spock, thank you."

The First Officer left and McCoy remarked, "How can you get out of it now? You've stuck, Scotty."

"It so happens that I want to be 'stuck', Leonard," snapped an irate Chief Engineer. "I don't know what's the matter with you these days, but Mr. Spock is far better company than you are! At least you know where you are with him. I would recommend that you see a doctor." Mr. Scott left in a huff and McCoy started eating mechanically, staring into space.

"Bones, Bones," sighed Kirk. "What am I going to do with you?"

"Do you want me to resign?"

Kirk had to make an effort not to let his anger show. "What makes you think I want you to resign?"

"I would be out of your hair then, Captain, and you could spend all your time in the company of the computers you prefer to Humans these days."

Kirk counted to five before answering very mildly. "If by computers you mean Spock, then yes, I do like his company, which doesn't mean I like his company to the exclusion of anyone else. Scotty joined us just now and we were getting on fine."

"He's become a Spock addict too. You saw it for yourself."

"I saw him having a cordial discussion with Spock, that's all. I think Scotty is right, you know - you should see a doctor."

"Don't joke about it," said McCoy in a tired voice, pushing his food away. "It's just that I got used to dropping in on you whenever I felt like it, and you did the same. But since... you hardly visit my quarters now and last night, for instance, that Vulcan was with you and I knew that if I barged in, he would vanish and you would be upset, so I stayed away."

And I'm glad you did, thought Kirk guiltily, but he also understood that the doctor was feeling lonely again. Aloud, he asked, "Why do you think Spock vanishes?"

"To show his dislike of me."

Kirk tightened his fists and again counted to five. "If that is what you really think, Doctor, then you are too emotional to understand Spock, and I regret having to say this, but the remedy lies with you if you are still able to be honest with yourself." He took a deep breath and continued resolutely, "One thing I will not have is Spock leaving this ship. I want him at my side, do I make myself clear?"

"Yes, Captain," answered McCoy, looking white and shaken.

"Whether or not you stand on the other side is up to you, Dr. McCoy, and no-one else. Is that also clear?"

"Yes, Captain."

"Good. I'm due on duty now - this isn't a brush-off." He got up and glanced at the chess game, moved a couple of pieces swiftly and smiled. "Next time, I'll beat you, Spock!"

"Do you want to beat him?"

"Of course! He'll be even more pleased than I will, too. Great advantages

Vulcans have if you only knew, Bones... "

He ran to the bridge and took his post with a minute to spare, hoping fervently that McCoy would be honest enough with himself to understand and begin to accept Spock. If not... Kirk shuddered inwardly. He did not want to lose either, but sacrifice Spock he would never be able to do. Perhaps McCoy perceived this because he did try, whenever he met Spock or was forced into talking with him, to refrain from his usual sarcasm or denigrating remarks, and he was the one now who never intruded whenever Kirk and Spock were together, even if they were part of a group, as in the recreation room when Kirk had his victory at chess at last.

However, Spock's medical check-up was due and McCoy had to call him to sickbay, where he kept any talk strictly to the minimum.

At the end, before going out, Spock asked unexpectedly, "Are you feeling all right, Doctor?"

"Yes. Why?" asked McCoy, surprised.

"It must be two weeks now since you ranted at logic, and you have not paid me the compliment of calling me a computer for nearly as long. Are you sure you are well?"

McCoy could not help laughing and saw in the Vulcan eyes an expression he could not read as Spock murmured, "Good."

He left without saying any more and McCoy sat down slowly. Had that Vulcan pulled one over him? If he wanted rantings at logic, McCoy would certainly oblige!

Matters were in that condition when the routine of the Enterprise was interrupted by a call from Starfleet and Commodore Mendez informed Kirk, "We have received an urgent distress call from Commodore Wesley on the Lexington, Captain. I gather that their emergency is due to the handful of criminals they were transporting to a penal colony. Your vessel is the nearest, please give all possible assistance."

"Yes, sir. Can you give me any details?"

"No, Captain. Commodore Wesley will no doubt oblige."

The rendez-vous co-ordinates were given and the Enterprise hastened to the assistance of her sister ship. When within range of communications, Kirk contacted Bob Wesley.

The screen showed a haggard Commodore, his head and arm bandaged, in the middle of a chaotic scene of devastation.

"What on earth happened?" asked Kirk, unable to believe his eyes.

"How soon will you be with us, Jim?"

"Thirty minutes."

"Thank God! We are on minimum capacity and unable to attend to the repairs, some of which are urgent."

"How did you get in such a state?"

"That bunch of maniacs we had to pick up, of course! One of them was the 'Butcher'. You have heard of him, haven't you?"

"Who hasn't after the way he terrorised people on those two planets in the Beta Comae Berenicis system. Some called him 'Jack the Ripper the second'."

"That's the one, but he didn't stop at killing women only - men, children,

no-one was safe. He reappeared in the Gamma Comae Berenicis system and was seized while committing one of his awful murders, after a massive hunt of several months. Needless to say, as soon as he was arrested, he had to be shipped away and we just happened to be on hand!"

"Couldn't you have refused?"

"How could I? They didn't have a high-security prison to keep him in, and the colonists were leaving in a kind of mass exodus due to the terror he inspired. It was an emergency situation and I had to take him, as well as several other hard cases. Don't ask me how, I never had time to find out, but he managed to escape with several accomplices and brought terror to my ship. Sickbay is overflowing with his victims, to say nothing of ten security men dead. Anyway, they escaped in a shuttlecraft and rather than let such a monster loose again, I blew the craft up."

"We'll give all possible assistance, Bob. Who was he, by the way?"

"The Butcher? I don't think the police bothered to find out. Understandably, they were in a hurry to despatch him and as we were on the point of leaving orbit, it left no time for formalities. There was no doubt that he was the Butcher, his modus operandi never varied as you know. His confederates knew his name, I expect, so we'll find out eventually."

The Lexington was indeed badly in need of help and Spock, McCoy and Scotty went over, each with a team of men, while Kirk relieved Bob Wesley of command to let him rest.

The Captain of the Enterprise was aghast at the amount of damage done and the number of casualties, to say nothing of the ten dead men. The Lexington was little better than a derelict ship, and it was a miracle that the life support system had escaped serious damage. It took several days intense work to put the vessel back into enough shape to limp to the nearest Starbase and have sufficient of the crew recovered to man it adequately. Commodore Wesley thanked Kirk with understandable gratitude, but the Captain protested,

"You might do the same for me one day."

"I don't wish it on you! That man was a psychopath, a maniacal killer I would not wish on my worst enemy! His name was Hugh McCoy, by the way. We checked computer files and found that he had a record of fraud on Earth before disappearing from there and... "

The stunned faces around him made him wonder what was wrong, when he saw McCoy's ashen face and started. "Doctor! I never thought!"

"May we see the record?" asked McCoy in a strangled voice.

They watched the screen. The features of Hugh McCoy had some resemblance to the doctor's, he had the same colour of eyes, of hair...

McCoy looked shattered as he murmured, "He was my elder brother."

"Bones, are you sure?" asked Kirk in disbelief.

"The dates coincide exactly. He was always the black sheep of the family and my father threw him out after he was arrested for fraud. He disappeared and we were all relieved; he wasn't much good at anything except easy living and getting money without working for it."

"That doesn't make him a killer!"

"He said as he left home that he would make our name... famous... " The doctor shuddered and asked permission to return to the Enterprise. This was granted and Bob Wesley apologised, but Kirk brushed it aside.

"He would have found out sooner or later, Bob, you can't keep that kind of thing a secret."

"That monster will be remembered as the Butcher, not as Hugh McCoy, so I do regret... Still, there's nothing I can do about it now."

They exchanged their goodbyes and Wesley added, "I meant to thank your First Officer personally. I understand now why you appreciate a Vulcan second in command! My officers swear to me that he never ate or slept or rested at any time, and they're still wondering how he managed all that work! Gave them an inferiority complex! I'll send him a personal message of thanks, the least I can do."

"Thanks, Bob. I'll try and make him rest -- he does need it occasionally!"

Back aboard the Enterprise, Kirk ordered course for their next destination then approached the First Officer.

"Go and rest. That's an order, Spock."

"I'll do that, Captain, first I think that you should go to Dr. McCoy. He needs you."

"Yes, I expect he does. Discovering that your own brother is a psychopath is no joke."

"I regret not having been able to prevent this, Captain. When it was discovered, I meant to ask Commodore Wesley to avoid mentioning the name. Unfortunately, I was not in time... "

"Don't blame yourself, Spock, McCoy would probably have found out sooner or later."

"Possibly. He cannot be held responsible for his brother's crimes, Captain, and I doubt that any of us, myself included, does not count at least one murderer among his ancestors."

"You're right, of course, Spock. I'll go to him now. You go and rest."

Kirk found his Chief Medical Officer still suffering from the awful shock, and it was reflected in his drawn features and pale face.

"Snap out of it, Bones. All of us must count at least one murderer among our ancestors." Kirk felt that McCoy might not appreciate knowing who had said that, but it did seem to be worth repeating.

McCoy did not seem to have heard. "My own brother, Jim! A psychopathic killer! Good riddance, my father said when he disappeared. He's been the family's dark secret all this time, but how dark I never imagined!"

"Are you sure he is in fact your brother, Bones?"

McCoy started and his eyes focused on Kirk. "I've checked and rechecked, Jim. Everything fits, including the resemblance. I shall have to learn how to live with such a shadow."

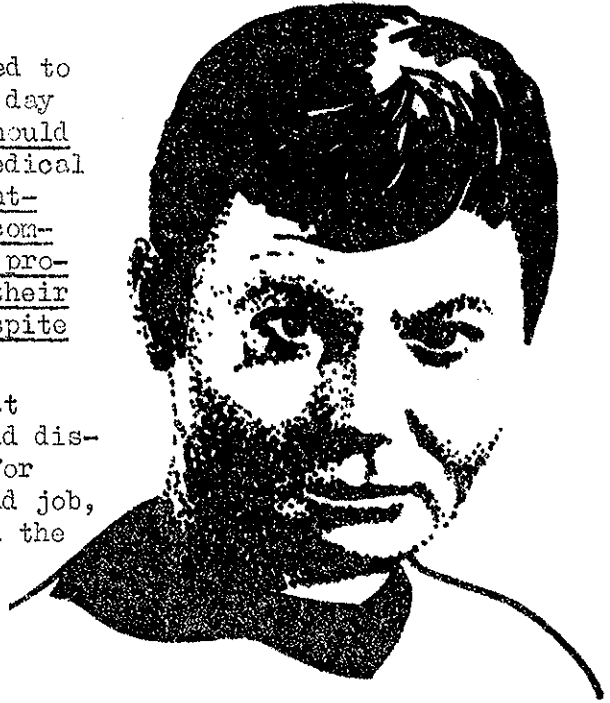
"Have some sleep, you look all in. We'll stand by you."

Kirk left wishing he could do more, and McCoy was reflecting how fortunate it was that his father was dead, when the thought of his daughter struck him. One day she would marry and have children. Should he warn her that she might give birth to a psychopath? The odds were probably against it, but you never knew... He was too tired however to think further on the horrible subject and took a strong sedative to knock himself out. Even then he had nightmares.

The Captain did his best to help McCoy, and so did Scotty, a friend of long standing. But Kirk worried when he found him during off-duty time

studying heredity laws, which only seemed to increase his nightmare feeling that one day that tainted blood would reappear. I should ask for a transfer, thought the Chief Medical Officer; how could anyone aboard the Enterprise turn to a doctor whose brother committed such horrible crimes? They will probably try to fight their mistrust, but their emotions are bound to be against me in spite of their efforts.

Kirk himself had the problem of what Starfleet would say. Not that they would dismiss McCoy. They would test him again for reassurance, but might insist on a ground job, just to be on the safe side, and not run the one risk in a million that he could one day go the same way. Spock on the other hand showed little concern and seemed absorbed in private work which took every minute of his spare time.



Kirk did not ask questions, but felt a little troubled at not being able to share his concern about McCoy with his First Officer. When a couple of weeks had passed and McCoy seemed no less troubled, was even talking again of transfer, the Captain went resolutely to Spock's quarters, to find him absorbed in work.

"I apologise for intruding on your off-duty time, Mr. Spock, but I'm very concerned about McCoy and I'd appreciate any help, however small. McCoy is a medical officer I'd hate to lose, and he is thinking of asking for a transfer." He could not help the resentment in his voice, and heard the Vulcan's answer with disbelief.

"A logical decision to make, Captain. As a doctor, he would be the first to realise the crew's reaction to this knowledge. Aboard another vessel, however, no-one would connect our doctor with the notorious 'Butcher'. I doubt that many people bothered to discover his name. The only exception applied to the Lexington."

"I didn't come here for logic, Mr. Spock," stated Kirk coldly, "but for help - if you can tear yourself away from your scientific work."

"I am not engaged in scientific work, Captain."

"I know your work is important to you, but there are times when human beings, however illgal, are more important... What did you say?"

"I said I was not engaged in scientific work, Captain," repeated Spock patiently.

"What are you doing then?"

"Research."

"Same thing. Stop playing with words, and help me if you can, please."

"I don't know yet if I can, Captain. I'll tell you when I do know."

Has he gone mad? thought Kirk with a start, or is he taking his revenge for McCoy's past insults and taunting? But the Captain dismissed that idea immediately; vindictiveness was a Human trait, not a Vulcan one - or was Spock more Human than Kirk had discovered?

"Will that be all, Captain?" asked the First Officer. "I haven't much time left before going on duty... "

"Spock, you can't be that inhuman! I know you're not. I never doubted

your loyalty to me, can't you spare some for McCoy and try to help him?"

"You won't let me, Captain. Please go so that I can carry on with my work."

"Blast your work!" exclaimed Kirk, for once carried away by anger.

"Captain," said Spock in a voice the tone of which was low and tired. "I understand how your emotions are involved in this matter, but you have an excellent, logical mind that I beg you to use. You haven't asked me the one logical question you should have asked."

Kirk caught the tired note in Spock's voice and now saw other signs of overwork in his First Officer, while remembering that he had never seen the Vulcan in the dining area or the recreation one either since they left the Lexington. What could be so important...

"What research are you doing, Spock?" he asked, bewildered.

"I know little about Earth names, Captain, but I have discovered quite a lot. Do you know how many Hugh McCoys lived during the approximate lifetime of the one we are concerned with?"

"Of course! It is quite a common name!" exclaimed Kirk excitedly. "That maniac could have been another McCoy entirely. Why didn't I think of it?"

"You would have, sooner or later, Captain, but Dr. McCoy needed emotional comfort from you, while for my part, I would be a complete failure in that role. So it was logical to search for other ways of helping."

And there were times when I thought him inhuman! thought Kirk with self-reproach. By the look of his First Officer, he had probably never taken any rest since coming back from the Lexington, in spite of the Captain's order.

"Thanks!" he said simply. "Any success?"

"Not so far, I'm afraid. Our doctor's brother is still the most likely suspect. However, another possibility is that McCoy's brother changed his name after leaving Earth, and could not, therefore, be the killer. I am following both lines of research."

"Can I help?"

"You are helping McCoy, Captain, and could stop him from asking to be transferred, but if I fail... "

"Don't reproach yourself if you do, Spock. Keep me informed."

Kirk walked out wearily. As the Vulcan said, the killer could still be the doctor's brother; there was the physical resemblance, but it could have been subjective and very superficial.

Kirk hesitated outside sickbay, then went on to his cabin. What comfort could he give? Mentioning Spock's work might bring a hope without foundation.

He tried to concentrate on paper work and was interrupted by a listless McCoy who handed him his request for a transfer duly completed and signed. Kirk took it numbly, trying desperately to think of arguments to enable him to tear it to pieces, but in vain.

"It's no use, Jim," said the doctor. "Thanks for sticking by me. Scotty has too, as well as my own staff and a few others, but I can see the distrust and doubt in a lot of eyes, and who can blame them? It should be all right aboard a vessel where they don't know the connection between my name and the Butcher's, if Starfleet lets me continue aboard a vessel at all. There's no doubt about it, Jim, I must leave the Enterprise; it's the only logical solution, as I am sure the invisible Mr. Spock would say."

"Why 'invisible'?"

"Because I haven't set eyes on him since we left the Lexington. Of course,

he's not the type to gloat over my... nightmare, but the company of a psychopath's relative leaves much to be desired, and when even a Vulcan can't bear to come near me, it's time to pack up and go."

"Haven't you thought that Spock hasn't come to you because he could do nothing? Do you see him listening to your emotional upset and offering emotional comfort?"

"No," replied McCoy with nearly a laugh, "and if that's why he's keeping away, I can't blame him, I suppose."

"Look, Bones, I'll delay your request for six days. Will you keep quiet about it and wait that long?"

"If I must, but why?"

"I am entitled to consider it for six days. Are you in a hurry to go anywhere?"

"No. I'll wait."

Kirk watched him go, walking slowly and apathetically like an old man, then called his First Officer. "Time is running out, Spock. Your research is now priority. Stay on it, get help if necessary and consider all your other duties cancelled. I'll see to them personally."

"Understood, Captain."

May he succeed, thought Kirk fervently. Spock was probably right; McCoy might not be able to face loneliness again! If not... Kirk shuddered and tried to push the awful fear away as he went to sleep, but it was his turn to have nightmares.

It was at the beginning of the fifth day that Kirk heard through the intercom - "Success, Captain, I'm on my way."

Overjoyed, the Captain called McCoy to his quarters too and the doctor was surprised to see Spock come in, then shocked by his appearance. "What's the matter with you? Why didn't you tell me he was ill, Jim? Come down to sickbay..."

"Sit down and keep quiet, Bones. Spock has something to tell us. Afterwards, I promise you I'll keep him off duty for as long as you think fit."

The Vulcan related simply how he had discovered another Hugh McCoy who fitted the part of the maniacal killer, to the extent of having had psychiatric treatment, and how, to make sure, he had managed to trace McCoy's brother, who had changed his name to McPherson and emigrated to a colony where he had finished his days in jail for fraud.

"Are you sure, Mr. Spock?" asked McCoy, overwhelmed. "That ghastly killer could still have been a member of my family."

"No, Doctor, I investigated all your male relatives and found no connection whatsoever."

"Then you can be sure there are none, Bones," smiled Kirk. He took the transfer form out and tore it up as McCoy stammered,

"What can I say, Mr. Spock?"

"There is no need to say anything, Doctor. I was only doing my duty by assisting the Captain to keep the services of his Chief Medical Officer."

"Nevertheless... while I thought... you relieved me of a nightmare..."

"Keep it brief, Bones, Spock is tired," said Kirk warningly.

"Thank you, Captain, I would appreciate your permission to leave. An

emotional scene is distasteful enough when I am in perfect health; at this moment, it would be particularly objectionable."

"You may go, Spock," smiled Kirk, "and don't you dare come back on duty until I call you."

"Can't I even say thank you, Spock?" protested McCoy almost angrily, now recovered from the shock of the good news.

"Consider it said, Doctor, and leave it at that." The First Officer walked out and McCoy slammed one fist into his hand fiercely.

"That Vulcan won't even let me express a minimum of gratitude! I owe him my job here and he doesn't want an emotional scene! I didn't even know he was trying to help me and he doesn't want any thanks! What's he trying to do? Drive me mad with frustration?"

"He's a Vulcan, Bones," said Kirk with a laugh, amused by the doctor's outburst and wondering if McCoy would discover one day that with Spock external signs or words counted for little, and the best way to allow gratitude was simply to accept him as the Vulcan he had chosen to be and wanted to be.

The next day, Kirk went to check on his First Officer with McCoy, to make sure he was resting.

"Spock," asked the Captain, worriedly. "You don't look well - haven't you been resting?"

"Yes, Captain."

"Come to sickbay," said McCoy brusquely. "You gave me back my job, now let me do it." Kirk smiled as the doctor marched the Vulcan away, and called a little later to see how the First Officer was.

"He'll be fine in a few days, Jim - case of mild poisoning which would have been very slight if it hadn't been aggravated by his exhausted condition."

"What?"

"It was entirely my own fault, Captain," said Spock from his bed. "Some of the tapes I had to consult during my research were old and had a chemical on them which is obnoxious to Vulcans. I thought it would have disappeared by now and I did not have time to take proper care... "

"Because I was leaving, so it was my fault," interrupted McCoy firmly. "And you'll stay here for as long as I say, if I have to keep you asleep all the time."

"Captain," asked Spock with a hint of complaint in his voice, "did I do the logical thing when I discovered that the killer was not his brother? I think there is a pattern of behaviour which could indicate definite tendencies to dictatorship. It is a well-known fact that dictators are often in a stage prior to psychopathy."

Kirk started laughing. McCoy's anger increased his amusement, then the doctor also laughed as Kirk put a hand on the Vulcan's shoulder briefly. "You deserve a good rest, Spock, you're not tireless even if you are a Vulcan! Nothing of interest is happening at the moment, so have a good sleep."

"I have no choice," said Spock mournfully, watching the Captain leave. But he was really exhausted and did not protest when McCoy gave him the sedative, talking to himself as much as to Spock.

"You can't imagine how I enjoy the feeling that the nightmare is over and I am staying, Spock; and Jim has shown me so clearly that he cared if I left. I think what I dreaded most was going back to loneliness! You probably don't understand, but if I had left the Enterprise, another psychopath might have appeared!"

"Indeed," murmured Spock, almost asleep under the influence of the drug and hardly aware that he was talking aloud. "Just as well I chose to be a Vulcan, then, or the kind of loneliness I knew would have made me a psychopath many times over."

Loneliness? Oh, no! thought McCoy as he started and stared at the Vulcan whose eyes now registered fear. The doctor understood that the next few minutes were crucial. And if he, a doctor, hurt his patient, he had no right to stay aboard!

"Please forget what I said, Doctor," said Spock. "I was half asleep and drugged. Keep your pity for people who need it or want it."

McCoy cleared his throat. "Somehow I never associated pity with you, Mr. Spock, and I never suspected you could be lonely, which makes me anything but a brilliant doctor! Perhaps I should resign altogether."

"Illogical, Doctor - Jim values your services."

"I see! So it was for his sake that you kept me my job here!"

"Not entirely, Doctor. If you had left, no-one would have paid me further compliments."

"Compliments?"

"Calling me a computer."

McCoy read the half smile on the Vulcan's stern features and smiled back, hiding his emotion as best he could. "If only you'd let me say 'thank you', show some gratitude, Mr. Spock."

"Doctor, in my place, wouldn't you have done the same?"

"I don't know, Spock," replied McCoy honestly. "I'd like to think I would have, but I do know that in the future, I certainly will!" He saw that the First Officer had succumbed to the drug and was now asleep. In an irresistible gesture of friendliness, the doctor touched Spock's face lightly. "Jim is right, Spock, you are a special Vulcan."

After making sure his patient was comfortable, he went to Kirk's quarters and entered, looking so preoccupied that the Captain paled. "Spock? Is he...?"

"No, no, he's asleep."

"Then what's wrong, Bones?"

"I just discovered that Spock was lonely, Jim." He related briefly what had happened and put his head in his hands. "I never thought before about the kind of life Spock led up to now. It can't have been easy... perhaps far worse... That Vulcan was lonely, probably far more than I ever was, and I begrudged him the crumbs of your friendship!"

"Hardly crumbs, Bones," smiled Kirk. "Spock deserves far more than that."

"He is special to you, isn't he, Jim?"

Kirk nodded without speaking, and the lack of emphasis more than mere words brought home to McCoy the strength of their friendship.

"Yes, but how? How do you make contact with him without emotion?"

"The manner doesn't matter, Bones, and I'm sure Spock enjoys arguing with you. It is a contact."

McCoy realised with a start that Spock had tried to tell him just that in sickbay after the check-up when he had asked why the doctor had stopped ranting at logic. "Of course!" he exclaimed, beaming. "And who knows? I might prove to him how good a little emotion can be!"

Kirk laughed as the doctor took his leave, then settled back to sleep with

a happy smile. Of course McCoy was only starting to understand Spock, but he now accepted him and wanted to know him better. Those two were going to argue it out all the time, but with such enjoyment that life aboard the Enterprise would be anything but dull!

As long as they know I care for them both, thought the Captain, they can argue as much as they like, and if I know anything about the crew, their arguments will become current events of ship life, and brighten up the routine no end!

BEYOND PRICE by Susan Meek

Do you know how much money
Starfleet has invested in you?

No doubt you could tell me
To the last credit,
Logically accurate
To the nth degree.

But how can a value be placed
On loyalty?
On friendship;
On the sharing of moments,
Or simply on sharing?

I think that calculation
Would defeat even your logic -

For your value to me
Is beyond price.

RAPPORT by Susan Meek

For every heartbeat, an echo,
For every request, a reply.
For every pain, compassion,
For every sorrow, a sigh.

For every burden, a sharing,
Togetherness easing the strain,
As, using the logic of caring
We find one another again.

For every search a meaning
Makes life's bitterness more sweet
And Earth's gentle showers will cool and refresh
The desert of Vulcan's dry heat.

For each missing part, completion.
I find what they say is true;
Each moment of life needs a reason
And I have found mine in you.

Is a gravity belt what holds up a spaceman's trousers?

T'Pring of Vulkan
 ShiKahr
 Domicile 1
 Vulkan
 40 Eridani

Stardate 3385.11

Commander Spock
 ass. U.S.S. Enterprise NCC 1701
 Starfleet Exploration Dept.
 United Federation of Planets.

Peace and long life, Spock of Vulkan. Stonn has accorded me the permission to send you this missive. After you beamed up to the Enterprise, leaving me with Stonn at my side, I realised that I would be incapable of forgetting the sight of your barely concealed despair at having killed your Captain. We later were notified that he had survived; however, I was rendered cognizant of the fact that your Human companions condemned my actions, designating them as having been cold, unfeeling and of latent cruelty - illogical charges all. You are just, even in adversity, so let me present my defence.

You will recollect that after you had successfully passed the Kahs-wan ordeal in the desert, you were deemed to have accomplished your first test of maturity; the time had come to select you a mate, a choice effected by the parents and elders. This choice is not based upon logic, but on rites of pre-Surak days; time of birth, age, parentage, vitality, aspect, even constellations are of import. You are cognizant of this, but hear me out.

The ritual of the touch of minds bears a vague similarity to that of pon farr. Our fathers struck the wind chimes in turn, once, then stepped back - all the while the bell banners were being agitated. At the cessation of their sound you advanced, were presented the mallet and struck the chimes, the moment for me to proceed to the dais. I remember you as a youth, slender, controlled, in looks a Vulcan - yet with a subtle difference in aspect and motions; an inner difference, the Human side, was visible. To the accompaniment of the banners I walked on, mounted the dais, where both of us, alternating, once struck the chimes. T'Pau pronounced the words of the pledge which we repeated, facing the assembly consisting of our parents and the elders.

The ceremony of the mind-touch took place on that dais, in absolute silence. While T'Pau repeated the ancient pledge beginning with 'Once touched, never untouched, though apart never parted', we slowly advanced our hands to each other's temples, looking at each other directly for the first time. But then we were joined in the formation of the pon farr mind-link which would draw us together at the appropriate time. How to explain what then happened, when we joined? The waves of emotion that surged through the link, emotions you, being half Human had just learned to control, created extreme agony in my mind. Pure Vulcan I, I was capable of disguising what had happened - nothing was to be perceived. You never realised the pain the link formation had caused. After this ceremony, the banners were shaken, we again struck the chimes, then greeted the elders and repeated the vows; the procession then accompanied us to our respective domiciles to undergo further instruction in the disciplines native to our culture.

In the time that followed, I heard about Spock of Vulkan, the completion of his training, and subsequent successes and honours at the Science Academy - you were one of the most brilliant men. I remember, too, hearing that you suddenly left the Academy, and Vulkan, enrolling in Starfleet Academy - an unsuccessful applicant had, in a moment of shameful anger, alluded to your status as a hybrid. We never understood your reaction to that comment made in a moment of obvious insanity, and disappointment is such.

You were gone, and in the time that followed, we obtained news of your

growing reputation, your assignment to a Human-manned Starship where you found a semblance of a home and partial acceptance of your unique position. Your achievements were such as to make your name known on our world together with details of your missions - you became a legend.

During this period I came into contact with Stonn, an unlinked Vulkan male of high parentage. We were inexplicably drawn to one another - illogical? Perhaps. Spock, our link was but tenuous, weakened by the pain and surge of emotions. Stonn sensed this and told me he was unlinked - one of those males who may, without social consequences, act as champion, though challenges are rare. I decided to choose him as mine, as the ceremony of pon farr, completed with you, would perhaps have resulted in my destruction - the prolonged link in that ritual would have infused my mind with your violent Human passions. You seem controlled to Humans, a true Vulkan, but not to us. Stonn would give me the life for which I had been trained, not you.

The day come - we had already been in attendance for five of your time units when you beamed down with your Human friends. When you walked to the chimes, I saw how weakened you were - I could not let Stonn fight you, not wanting you killed or seriously injured. Waste of life is illogical and unnecessary. Your Captain would be a match for you and he would spare you in the end, while it was logical to assume that your Healer would think of some way to keep your Captain alive.

In spite of Vulkan control, I was constrained to avert my eyes when you pleaded for your friend's life - the Human element was all too visible. Your Captain fought well, yet your Healer resorted to subterfuge - drug inducing paralysis, thus making us all believe you had killed your Captain. Your distress was clearly visible, and when you released me after I had specified my motives for the challenge, I felt the insanity Humans call compassion when I saw your expression, your proximity to an emotional display just before you beamed up.

You must know, as I told you, that I could never be consort to a legend; after pon farr, a period of a week of our time, you would have left me - in what kind of mental condition? I would have been alone, your consort in name only, until the next seven-year cycle. Stonn was my only possible choice, my escape. He is here, and will ever be at my side. We have touched, the link is strong, we are never truly parted. He gives me the life of a true Vulkan woman, companionship, decorous and proud adherence to logic and ritualised relations. It is essential that you understand, as your Human heritage, released by a poison, revealed your inner sorrow when a Human woman offered you her love.

I did not reject the hybrid as I have also been accused of doing. I rejected isolation, unbearable even to us, perhaps even insanity caused by Human emotions. May you live long and prosper, Spock of Vulkan, and eventually find companionship and peace.

T'Pring of Vulkan.

SEARCH by Susan Meek

I searched through all the Galaxy
To find someone who understands,
A friend that I could learn to trust
And place my life within his hands.

I look across at alien eyes;
What is it I expect to see?
How strange that it is no surprise
To find the other half of me.

THE THINGS I DO IN THE LINE OF DUTY! by Janet Hall

I didn't think much of it when I first saw it. But then I didn't know how much trouble it would cause. The first report had said it was a body; the second, an android. By the time I got to the transporter chamber where the phenomenon was, the security men had surrounded the crate, phasers set on stun, as per regulation, and the crewmen had completely opened the box, so to speak. All was now visible.

It was obviously a robot.

It had two arms, two legs, was a humanoid kind of a shape, but made of translucent white plastic, showing its many lights, wires, circuits and so on. Its head, a truncated cone (well, you don't know Mr. Spock for as long as I have without some of something rubbing off) was made to resemble a face, with lighted scanners for eyes and a speaker grille for a mouth.

I took all this in in a fraction of a second. "Stand well clear!" I ordered. "It may be dangerous."

"Sir," said a security man, "I don't think it's switched on."

Never take chances. "Mr. Harris, take a closer look."

"Yes, Captain." He crept up, and cautiously gave the robot a push. It didn't move.

It looked safe enough, so I moved in. I had it taken out of the case and laid on the deck. It was around two metres tall, with no obvious means of operating it, nor any suggestion as to whence it originally came. The crate it had been in should have contained food supplies. The robot didn't appear to be about to do anything.

It was clearly a case for Mr. Spock, so I had it removed to his laboratory.

I was in my quarters, about to relax and listen to some music after a long day, when the intercom beeped.

"Kirk here," I sighed. No peace for the wicked.

"Spock, Captain. Could you come to the laboratory?"

"Is it important, Spock?" Even as I said it, I knew he wouldn't have disturbed me if it wasn't. I could imagine his expression even now. "On my way." I tried to sound eager.

As I stepped into the lab, I had a shock. I'd expected to see the robot in pieces. Instead, it was sitting up in a chair looking round at Spock and Chekov, with much flashing of lights and clicking of relays and circuits.

It looked intelligent, but I wasn't taken in.

"Mr. Spock," I said, amazed, "I didn't expect you to animate it."

"Him," corrected a voice. I looked from Spock to Chekov and back. I didn't recognise the voice. No wonder. It was the robot's.

Spock looked (for him) apologetic. "An unfortunate byproduct of an experimental manipulation of the alpha negative relays..."

"He made a mistake," said the robot calmly.

"So it can speak," I remarked, "and hear."

"And formulate a reply, Keptin," said Chekov, "which indicates a certain intelligence."

"Ten out of ten for observation," said the robot sarcastically.

I had already decided I wasn't going to like this robot. But Messrs.

Spock and Chekov seemed to think otherwise.

"Eet eez a remarkable creature, Keptin."

"I would agree, Captain. As I was saying, the alpha negative and beta positive relays..."

"Quite," I agreed hastily (mental note: have a technical manual to hand when reading the report).

"I don't talk about your brain like that," grumbled the robot. "Alpha waves, beta waves..."

"Listen," I said firmly to the robot, "It was time to take the matter into hand. You, mister, are a stowaway on my ship. Now answer some questions. Where did you come from?"

"Starbase M9."

That was where we had taken the crated food supplies aboard. "And before that?"

"Ah."

"You won't answer?"

"No."

"Do you have a name? Number? Owner?"

"Name, rank and serial number," said the robot, "wasn't that what they used to say? I'm not talking."

"Can't you adjust its memory circuits?" I asked Spock.

"Memory circuits, Captain? This type of robot is far too superior for such primitive devices."

Oh. "I meant memory circuits or something."

"Of course you did, Captain."

"Well? Can you?"

Spock reached out to unfasten a panel in the robot's body casing. There was a brilliant flash, and the Vulcan was flung across the room.

"Meester Spock!"

As Chekov and I ran to pick him up, the robot took a swig from a nearby oilcan. "Let that be a lesson to you!" it said, drinking deeply.

I decided, seeing that Spock's only injury was a burned finger, to try a new tack. "Let's talk," I said reasonably. "What do you want?"

"Oil."

"O.K." I handed over a second can. "What else?"

"Safe passage to Cetron Delta VI."

I ought to have tumbled to it then. Cetron Delta VI is the biggest supplier of industrial oil to the Federation.

"I'm afraid we're not headed that way," I said. "So you'll..." I never finished the sentence. Somehow the robot sent an energy charge through the deck, which sent me reeling. Spock, getting up a fraction ahead of me, gave me a hand up.

"You were saying?" asked the robot. Even as it spoke, the intercom beeped. Reports were pouring in. The energy charge had been felt throughout the entire ship.

I rubbed a hand over my face in gloomy recognition of defeat, albeit temporary. I was beginning to suspect that here was the galaxy's first robotic

hijacker.

"O.K., I might be able to alter course for Cetron Delta VI," I said unwillingly. "But you must promise me one thing. Talk to my senior medical adviser, Dr. McCoy." A deranged robot was clearly a case for McCoy.

Bones, funnily enough, didn't seem too keen.

"I know," I said, forestalling him, "you're a doctor, not a mechanic. But this is an emergency. You're a healer, and here's a patient." (Well, that lind had worked before.)

"Sure, sure," McCoy agreed, spraying Spock's hand with a healing spray. We'd left Chekov minding the store. "What's up with it? Does it need medical attention?"

"Er, well," I said, "it seems to have personality problems. Violent tendencies, and a hijacker mentality."

McCoy perked up a little. This seemed to be a good line. Spock cottoned on quickly. "Possible paranoia and suppressed schizophrenic..."

"Maniac-depressive fluctuations..."

"O.K., I'm convinced. I'll see it."

I paced the corridor outside the laboratory while McCoy talked to the robot privately. It seemed like hours passed. Someone brought me some coffee and I gulped it down. When the door opened, it made me jump. McCoy came out looking pleased with himself.

"Jim, you remember I once said I was beginning to believe I could cure a rainy day? Well, now I'm certain I could!"

"Well?" I asked impatiently. "Is it surrendering?"

"I think I'm on to the key to our success, so to speak."

"Is it deactivated?" I asked hopefully.

McCoy looked appalled. "Jim, that is a sentient creature! To deactivate it would be tantamount to murder!"

"You said you were on to something, Bones."

"And I am! That robot's an addict!"

"An addict? What on earth...?"

"Oil, Jim. It's kind of an oil alcoholic."

Now it all fitted, Cetron Delta VI and the rest. But how did this help us? "I don't see..."

"Oil has the same effect on that robot as alcohol on a Human, Jim! Something must have gone wrong in its manufacture. So I figure we can get it drunk on oil, then Spock can get at it to deactivate it, then repair it or whatever he needs to do."

"I thought you were all against deactivation, Doctor."

"By you, yes. But Spock'll know just what to do, and then he can reactivate it with no harm done and a cure worked. It'll be no more than an anaesthetic."

"Thank you," I said sarcastically, but it was wasted on McCoy, who was too busy feeling pleased with himself. Anaesthetic, indeed! But I was quickly at the intercom, and in a matter of minutes crewmen began to arrive, humping drums of oil. They gave me odd looks, but I ignored them.

"In there," I said, pointing.

Two hours later, a call came through from Scotty. "Cap'n, however much more oil d'ye need? I'm runnin' short, ma poor engines..."

"Just a minute, Scotty." I turned to McCoy. "How is it?"

"See for yourself," McCoy said wearily. I went into the lab.

The robot was lounging back in a chair, an oilcan halfway to its intake point, singing raucously. I tiptoed up and tentatively advanced a hand towards what I decided must be the control panel. The robot looked hard at me, still alert. I turned the movement into a friendly wave.

"Hi, Captain Quirk," the robot said cheerfully.

I glared. "Kirk!"

"Join me in a lil' drink?"

"Well, that's very kind, but..."

"Unlesh you join me, I refushe to drink another drop!"

I groaned. "It's not really to my taste."

"Shpoil shport!" The robot tossed the oilcan down. "You know what you are? Antishosh... antishosha... A shpoil shport!"

One of these days I'll write a monograph entitled 'The things I do in the line of duty'. I picked up the oilcan.

"Cheers!" cried the robot. "Drink up, Quirky!"

"Here's looking at you, kid," I replied dutifully, "and the name's Kirk." I took a swig. It tasted like one of McCoy's patent remedies.

"That'sh what I mish!" said the robot happily, "a drinking partner!" It snatched up another can, downed the contents in one fell swoop, and threw its arms affectionately around me. Then it slowly fell to the floor, out cold.

"Bones!" I called. "Spock!" Then I had to make a dash, you know where, you know why.

"Captain, I don't know how to thank you!" the robot said gratefully. "A job in the Cetron Delta VI oil factory! I couldn't ask for better."

"Now you promise you'll keep that appointment with Alcoholics Anonymous?" McCoy asked.

"I promise. With a headache like I have today, I never want to drink again!"

"Good!" I said with feeling. With a stomach-ache like I had today, neither did I. "Stand by to beam down."

"So long, Captain Quirk."

I glared and scowled. "Kirk!"

McCoy turned away, but not fast enough to hide his laughter. I sighed. How childish.

"Just wait till I tell Mr. Spook!" McCoy guffawed. I couldn't help but join in.

Spock: Your breathing sounds heavy, Ensign Chekov.

Chekov: Yes, it's coming in short pants, sir.

Spock: It should be coming from your oxygen bottle, Ensign.

THE DISSIMILAR PARALLEL by Valerie Piacentini

In the dead hours of the night it is very quiet in sickbay. Only the muffled beat of the life indicators punctuates the harsh breathing of the man on the bed. Keen blue eyes study the diagnostic panel carefully, skilled fingers needlessly counting the beats of a racing pulse - needlessly, for the wildly-fluctuating indicators give precise information, but for the doctor it seems easier than standing by helplessly.

In the shadows the other waits, silent, brooding, eyes locked with an almost painful concentration on the flushed face on the pillow. He tastes the bitterness of utter inadequacy, for here his brilliant mind, his superb physical strength are of no avail - fear rules now, and one precious life hangs in the balance.

The deepest fears, if repeated long enough, take on a strange, dream-like quality; how often has this vigil been kept in the past, will it ever be kept again? Or does it all end here?

The lure of memory beckons and the mind circles back, for the past at least is known; the present is too painful to endure, the future too uncertain to contemplate...

He was very young. It was easy to forget just how young, for in his physical appearance he had reached maturity; but he was Vulcan, and so, although he concealed it well he knew all the nervousness of any young man as he stepped from the transporter pad to report for his first Starship posting as Science Officer of the U.S.S. Enterprise.

"Welcome aboard, Mr. Spock."

The Vulcan inclined his head in greeting. "Captain Pike."

To the Human the impassive face, the cool reserved tones were totally Vulcan, the dark eyes shielded, expressing nothing, not even the curiosity that was one of his race's distinguishing traits.

Christopher Pike found himself at something of a loss - had his new Science Officer been the Human he had somehow automatically expected there would have been the usual greetings, a little verbal fencing, polite meaningless conversation to carry him over the first awkward moments; but this man - somehow he sensed that idle chatter would earn the disapproval of that reserved, dignified figure. He settled instead for an immediate introduction of the Vulcan to his duties, taking him on a tour of inspection of the ship, presenting him to his fellow officers.

As he had expected from a study of his record, Mr. Spock approached his new duties with quiet efficiency; although this was his first Starship posting he came highly qualified to his position - his graduation marks from Starfleet Academy were the highest ever recorded, and he had already earned a considerable reputation as a scientist in his own right. He would not long remain a mere Lieutenant-Commander, Pike thought. Even that first day he seemed already settled at the computer station, his precise efficiency earning him a glance of approval from the normally-exacting Number One; Pike relaxed then, certain that his Science Department was in good hands.

The other officers took their cue from the Captain, treating the new arrival with the formality they had been warned a Vulcan would expect, careful not to offend by word or action; they would have felt more comfortable with a Human, of course, but alien officers were becoming less of a rarity in Starfleet, and it would be as well to adjust to new standards of behaviour.

So that first day passed with formal correctness on both sides, and if the Humans breathed a sigh of relief when their disconcerting companion bade them a courteous goodnight and left the rec room - well, they did so silently. There was a moment's pause as the door slid shut behind the tall figure, then a babble of

laughter and conversation broke out, as though from children suddenly released from the stern eye of an adult; it had seemed... foolish... to engage in their usual light-hearted joking in that dignified presence.

In the corridor Spock paused for a moment as the laughing voices reached him; there was no expression on the stony face, but deep in the dark eyes something stirred for a moment, and was quickly suppressed. With even, unhurried steps the Vulcan headed for his quarters, and the door slid shut behind him.

Deliberately Spock seated himself at his desk, and began to consider his first day on the Enterprise. They had not suspected his nervousness, he realised gratefully, but had accepted the impression he gave, that of a man fully at ease, totally in control of the situation. His mind recalled the faces of his new companions as he attempted to form a first impression, but it was very difficult - Humans were very confusing creatures. There had been Humans at the Academy, of course - indeed, they formed a large majority - but even there he had not really mixed much with them. After the bitter conflict with his father he had been so determined to do well, to prove that he had chosen the best possible course for himself, that there had been little time for social activity, even had he desired it. That compulsion still shadowed him, he knew; on Vulcan he would always be on trial, never fully accepted. There would always be those who watched, judged, waited for the emotional Earthman to break through the Vulcan training. Even T'Pring... He pushed the thought away, for the memory of those beautiful eyes, hard and unyielding, the indifference in her voice as she bade him a formal farewell, chilled his heart with foreboding. To her too he must prove himself, show himself the equal of any pure-blooded Vulcan. So his days and nights were given almost exclusively to study as he pushed himself remorselessly in an attempt to prove... something.

The little relaxation he did permit himself - reluctantly, and only at the insistence of his tutors - was among his fellow Vulcans, for that was all he knew; and among them at least he was accepted, for the few Vulcans at the Academy tended to band together for companionship.

So he had little experience of his mother's people, and for a moment panic touched him as he realised that for the next five years at least he would be totally isolated among Humans - and he did not know how to make overtures of friendship to people who would expect to receive none. He had seen already how they kept their distance, fearful of giving offence; it would be up to him, then to make the first approaches.

It seemed logical to begin with the Captain. Christopher Pike's reputation as an efficient commander was well-known, he was more accustomed to dealing with aliens than many of the others, and the nature of their duties would bring them together naturally.

What Spock could not know was that Chris Pike, although basically a sociable easy-going man, possessed a strongly insensitive nature. He was direct, hearty, completely sure of himself, and this made him incapable of seeing or understanding his Science Officer's hesitant approaches. He had been told that Vulcans did not make friends, and he had accepted that without question; he always assumed that anything Spock had to say must be connected with his duties, and quite without meaning to he again and again snubbed every effort Spock made to initiate a personal approach.

Puzzled, bewildered at what seemed to be constant rejection, the shy, sensitive Vulcan suffered agonies of embarrassment when, having plucked up courage to open a conversation, Pike would listen impatiently for a few moments then, with a brief "Later, Spock", turn away in search of more agreeable company; but he persevered, believing that the fault must lie in himself, wondering if perhaps today, tomorrow, might provide him with the opening he sought.

At last even his stubborn pride was forced to admit defeat. One evening he was sitting in the rec room, engrossed in playing chess with the ship's computer. By now it was agony for him to come into the rec room, where he knew that his

silent presence inhibited the conversation of the others, but he knew instinctively that to remain in his quarters, as he now longed to do, would only confirm their belief that he had no desire for companionship; so with a bitter courage no-one even suspected he made himself go where he knew he was not wanted, hoping that sometime, somehow, he could reach out and be accepted.

This evening it seemed that his chance had come at last; he had completed his game, and was resetting the board for the next couple, when he became aware of a tall figure leaning over the table, examining the chessmen curiously.

"Captain," he greeted courteously.

"Evening, Spock. Enjoy your game?" Pike enquired.

"Indeed, Captain, I find chess relaxing."

"Damned if I know how you can make head or tail of the game; always thought I'd like to learn, but I've never had time."

Gratefully, Spock realised that this was the opening he sought. He glanced up at Pike. "If you would care to learn, I would be most happy to instruct you," he offered shyly.

Had Pike looked down at that moment things might have been different; in his loneliness Spock had for once dropped his guard, his eyes were open and unshielded, almost begging for a response. But Number One entered the room just then, and Pike instantly forgot the man at his side.

"Thanks for the offer, Spock," he said carelessly, setting down the chessman he had been examining. "Too difficult for me - and I'm sure you have better things to do with your time." Then he was gone across the room to join the group of officers who sat talking in the corner.

For a long moment Spock sat perfectly still, then his hands automatically completed the setting of the board; rising, he left the room, his departure unnoticed and unacknowledged.

In the silence of his quarters he lay on his bed, acknowledging at last that he had failed, and trying to control the very un-Vulcan misery that swept over him at the realisation that he would never know Human friendship.

"They will never accept you," Sarek had warned gently, knowing that Human insensitivity would isolate his son even more effectively than Vulcan mistrust. He had refused to believe that, but now it seemed that his father had been right after all. If he had remained on Vulcan he would have proved himself in time, would have been accepted among his father's people - but he had chosen another path, and now it was too late.

Pride came to his aid then, the only thing he had left. If he was miserable, no-one would ever know, he would not admit his mistake to his fellow Vulcans. Neither would he again lay himself open to rejection by his Human companions. They expected him to be Vulcan, therefore he would be Vulcan, neither seeking nor needing any Human contact. If he could not be liked, he would be respected... and perhaps it was possible even to become accustomed to loneliness in time?

Months passed, and the crew of the Enterprise grew used to their alien Science Officer. Pike found himself relying on the man more and more; he was always there, always loyal, dependable, efficient, a brilliant officer. When Number One was promoted - to a desk job since Starfleet did not have any place for women Captains - he concurred eagerly with Starfleet's suggestion that Spock should combine the duties of First Officer and Science Officer - no Human could have done so, but the Vulcan's faultless performance fully justified Pike's confidence.

Life was easier for Spock now; he had given up hoping for the Captain's friendship, and had settled instead for gaining his respect, which he had in full

measure; a respect he could return, for Pike was indeed an efficient Captain to whom he was able to give all his loyalty - a gift the Human was too insensitive to notice or appreciate.

As time passed the Vulcan seemed to become more and more an extension of the Enterprise - Pike occasionally felt that she was more Spock's ship than his; and while he did not make the mistake of undervaluing his First Officer, he began, almost unconsciously, to resent the Vulcan's faultless efficiency. Until... the explosion in Engineering, which badly damaged the warp drive, killed the Chief Engineer - and threw Spock, a limp, crumpled body, the full height from the gantry to the main deck.

There was no immediate danger - the Engineering staff were able to contain the damage - but they were a long way from Federation space and the resources of a Starbase; with the Chief gone, only Spock knew enough to patch up the engines - if he recovered.

Pike haunted sickbay, pacing frantically, urging the harrassed Boyce to impossible risks, anything to get Spock back on his feet as quickly as possible. Boyce protested, warning Pike that it was dangerous to interfere with a healing trance, that Spock himself was the best judge of when he was fit enough to return to duty; but the Captain persisted, and at last, reluctantly, Boyce gave Spock a powerful stimulant.

"You'd better be right about the danger to the ship," he warned Pike grimly. "This'll either bring him round - or kill him." Pike made no reply, only leaned over the bed anxiously studying the pale unmoving face.

Somewhere in a dark, warm void Spock's consciousness stirred, aware of pain, a great weariness of spirit, a reluctance to respond to the voice that called so urgently. "Spock! Spock, wake up! I need you!"

Strong fingers gripped his shoulders, shaking him insistently. His Captain! He was needed... There was something...

With a tremendous effort Spock forced the pain down to a manageable level, and listened intently. "Come on, Spock, wake up!"

There was... concern... in Pike's voice, a desperate urgency that reached Spock's lonely heart, compelling an answer. Pike was calling again, despairingly. The frozen anguish began, slowly, to melt - Pike must, after all, feel some concern for him to be so distressed. Slowly, the dark eyes opened, soft, responsive.

"Captain?" Spock asked hesitantly.

Hearing the reply Pike glanced away to the viewscreen on the wall to check on the situation in Engineering; and while doing so committed the greatest betrayal of his life.

"Thank God, Spock!" he snapped, all his attention on the screen. "I need you urgently - you're the only one who can repair the damage in Engineering. Sorry to bring you round so abruptly, but I want you on the job right away."

There was silence for a moment, then a low, scarcely audible sigh. When Pike looked round the dark eyes were only more shadowed by the green-tinged lids, and all trace of expression had been wiped from the impassive face.

Within the privacy of his mind Spock was trying to adjust to the shock of realising that Pike's concern had not been for him as a person, only for his valuable knowledge. He knew that he had been deliberately awakened from the healing trance; Pike must know how dangerous it was to do so. He had dared to hope that Pike had, at this moment of crisis, come to value him as a friend, yet he had risked his life without a moment's thought of the consequences - Boyce's expression of disapproval revealed more than he knew.

So in this too Sarek had been right; there was something in him to which Humans could not respond, something which would forever set a barrier around

him, leaving him as a spectator looking in on the warm companionship he hungered for, but which they would never permit him to share.

Accepting the truth at last Spock forced his anguish under control; when his eyes opened again they were the cool, remote pools of darkness that would always be a Human's first chilling impression of the Vulcan. Shrugging off Boyce's supporting arm Spock swung his feet to the floor and stood up, turning to face Pike. With all the stern logic of his father's people he firmly closed the door on his treacherous Humanity and turned with the bleak courage that would always be his to face the desolate path of duty he would always walk - alone.

"I am at your service... Captain."

The carefully-contrived image was complete at last, forged in the bitter fires of rejection, to be tested in the utter isolation of his half-Human spirit; untouched, unemotional - Vulcan.

The circle, unending, inexorable, inescapable. Memories are pain-filled, yet more tolerable than this harsh reality. A sudden choked gasping from the bed, and skilled hands work busily, gently, with a deep personal caring. In the shadows the watcher stirs restlessly, knowing his utter uselessness. Unseen, unheard, his presence fills the room, the pain-filled eyes wide with a question that as yet has no answer. Twisting delicate strands of memory, each a slender thread combining into an irresistible chain that draws back, back into the past...

... to the transporter room of the U.S.S. Enterprise. Commander Spock, First Officer and Science Officer in command, awaiting the arrival of a new Captain, for Christopher Pike has been promoted at last. James T. Kirk, youngest man ever appointed to captain a Starship; it was to be hoped that he was efficient.

Pike had been that, at least. After eleven years Spock still did not regret his decision to give the Human his loyalty, for although unappreciated it had been earned. Now the assessment must begin again, and if Kirk failed to measure up to the required standard there would also be a new First Officer for the Enterprise, for no Vulcan could serve one who was unworthy.

Across the room Lt. Commander Scott caught his eye and nodded encouragingly; Spock replied with a barely-perceptible tilt of one delicate eyebrow. These two men, apparently opposites, understood each other very well, for in reality they had much in common. Despite his reputation as a hard-drinking, hell-raising womanizer on leave, in a duty situation the Engineer's devotion to his machinery equalled the Vulcan's passionate attachment to his computers; and their appreciation of each other's interests forged the first bond between them. On personal matters Scotty was as close-mouthed as Spock, and his arrival as replacement for the dead Chief Engineer provided the reserved Vulcan with an understanding companion who was willing to talk on technical matters all day. For his part Scotty made no demands, accepting Spock's reticence, enjoying the chance to learn from such a brilliant mind. For both the imminent arrival of a new Captain promised changes, and each understood the other's curiosity as they waited.

At last the signal was given and the reception party stiffened to attention as the shimmering column of light on the transporter platform coalesced into the figure of a stocky, fair-haired Human. As soon as the transfer was complete the bright hazel eyes were moving, taking in the room with an eager, all-embracing scrutiny before coming to meet those of his First Officer.

"Captain Kirk, welcome aboard," Spock greeted formally.

"Thank you, Commander Spock." The words and tone were equally formal, but the mobile lips curved for a moment, and the eyes sparkled with delight. For a

moment the Vulcan was confused - he had felt an almost irresistible impulse to return that smile - and he hesitated uncharacteristically before custom came to his aid, and he completed the introduction of the reception committee. Then followed a tour of the ship; the Human was alert, interested, questioning eagerly with the air of a man who intended to form his own opinions. It was an attitude the Vulcan could understand, and when at last he left Kirk to settle in to his quarters and returned to his own, Spock reflected that despite his youth, the new Captain would quickly make an impression on the Enterprise.

However, it would not make any personal difference to him, Spock thought as he retired that night after the formal dinner to welcome Kirk aboard. As long as Kirk functioned efficiently he would ask for no more. He had learned his lesson well eleven years ago, and would not again make the mistake of seeking any personal contact with the Human. Still, it was strange... in the transporter room some long-buried part of himself that he had almost forgotten had stirred painfully in response to that flashing smile... But it had meant nothing to Kirk, he reminded himself sternly; hadn't he learned by now that Humans considered it necessary to show pleasure when greeting strangers? Never again would he confuse politeness with interest - he had been taught the difference with brutal efficiency.

As the weeks passed, however, and Kirk took the reins of the Enterprise smoothly into his hands, Spock found his interest and curiosity deepening; the new Captain had an enthusiasm, a personal involvement with his ship, that Pike had never shown. The Human crewmembers responded to him eagerly, and even Spock found himself having to make a conscious effort not to succumb to that impulsive attraction. He and Kirk worked well together, ably assisted by Scotty, who was delighted to discover a Captain who was willing to concede that the Chief Engineer might actually have a useful contribution to make to the running of the ship, apart from his responsibility for the Engineering Section.

As he had hoped, Spock found Kirk to be an efficient Captain; it pleased him, for he did not want to leave the Enterprise, as he would have had to do had Kirk proved unworthy of his loyalty; but in fact he found the man to be even better than Pike, and settled thankfully back into his preoccupation with his duties.

It remained a purely formal relationship; if Spock ever noticed that Kirk seemed inclined to linger in conversation when the necessary business had been concluded, he put it down to the Human's more extrovert nature - his defences were too well established to allow him to see that Kirk, just as he had done all those years ago, was taking the first tentative steps to get to know his enigmatic First Officers; yet was fearful, as most Humans were, of offending that aloof dignity.

One evening Spock sat at his usual table in the rec room, poring over the chess board. Some innate stubbornness had made him continue to go there even when he had given up the attempt to make friends, and over the years everyone had become accustomed to his presence - it would have seemed strange to most of them now to look up from a game of cards, or a group discussion, and not see that lean, dark figure in the corner.

On this particular evening, as Spock concentrated on a problem, he became aware of being watched and looked up to see the Captain studying the board with an almost wistful longing. As their eyes met Kirk leaned closer.

"Enjoying the game, Mr. Spock?" he asked.

A memory came sharply of Pike saying much the same thing, and probably for much the same reason; but to his surprise Kirk continued. "I learned a bit about the game at the Academy, and was considered quite good - for a Human; but I've never played with a Vulcan partner. I'd like to improve my game, if I can."

"Indeed, Captain; it is a fascinating study," Spock murmured.

At that moment, Gary Mitchell, an old friend of the Captain's who had joined the ship at about the same time as Kirk, passed, beckoning Kirk to join the group he was with. The Captain waved back, and for a moment Spock smiled inwardly - now would come the polite excuse, the withdrawal. To his surprise, Kirk turned back to him.

"I wonder," he asked hesitantly, "would you be willing to teach me, Mr. Spock? I don't want to break into your free time, but if you would consider..." his voice faded hopefully.

For a moment astonishment held Spock silent; he had not expected this. "If you wish it, I would be honoured, Captain," he managed at last. The familiar, charming grin lit Kirk's features.

"That's marvellous. Tomorrow evening, then? I'll look forward to it." With a last eager glance at the board Kirk was gone, not - as Spock had expected - to join Mitchell and the others, but heading for the door. His voice floated back. "I'll be on the bridge if you want me, Mr. Spock."

"Yes, Captain," the Vulcan replied automatically.

On the following evening, when Spock entered the rec room at his usual time, the Captain was already waiting for him, examining with interest the board he had set in preparation for a game. Spock was aware of a faint surprise - he thought the Captain might have forgotten - but even more disconcerting was the glow of pleasure he felt when the hazel eyes lifted to his expectantly. He subdued it sternly - he would not allow himself to expect more from this man than from any other Human. Moving with easy grace Spock took his seat across the table.

"Your move, Captain," he invited calmly.

Somehow the chess games became a routine, a pleasant interlude both men would have missed. At first they played always in the rec rooms, lingering over a drink when the game was finished while Spock analysed the Captain's tactics, pointed out his errors, and suggested ways of improving his game. By gradual degrees a personal element began to creep into the conversation, although on these occasions it was always the Human who talked, finding in the Vulcan an attentive, though unresponsive, audience. He listened, though, Kirk thought with quiet satisfaction; perhaps he was making progress.

In such undemanding company Spock very slowly began to feel more at ease, a fact that mildly astonished him when he took the trouble to think about it - Kirk seemed so much the extrovert, too full of enthusiasm to take pleasure in a Vulcan's company.

One evening, at the conclusion of a particularly hectic planet landing, Kirk remarked as he left the bridge that he had a headache and was on his way to sickbay. Expecting a cancellation of their game that evening, Spock was experiencing a strange sense of disappointment when Kirk suddenly said, "I don't feel up to the rec room tonight, Spock; would you mind if we had our game in my quarters?"

A sudden feeling of pleasure at the Captain's obvious desire for his company swept through Spock and he replied, "I would be delighted, Captain."

Thereafter their games alternated between the rec room and Kirk's quarters; somehow it seemed more pleasant when there were just the two of them, away from the distracting chatter of the junior officers.

Spock found that he wanted to make some gesture in return, and at last he tentatively invited the Human to join him in his quarters the following evening. Kirk noticed the hesitant shyness with which the offer was made, but passed no comment and accepted the invitation warily.

He was smiling to himself as Spock turned to go - at long last he had produced some response from his stiffly-correct First Officer. That almost

obsessive desire for privacy had puzzled the Human from the beginning - he knew that Spock was half Human, and had wondered why the man seemed to shy away from any personal contact.

For both men, the evening was an unexpected pleasure. Kirk frankly confessed his fascination with the Vulcan furnishings of Spock's quarters and asked eager questions, listening attentively to the explanations. With an engaging candour he told Spock to shut him up if he became too curious, but the novelty of having such an interested visitor warmed Spock, despite his resolution not to let Kirk under his guard.

The climax of the evening came when Kirk, who had asked permission, lifted down a Vulcan harp and lightly touched the strings; the discordant murmur startled him, and he passed the instrument over to Spock. "May I hear you play?" he asked shyly, with a note of longing in his voice that the Vulcan could not refuse.

Kirk sat motionless as the enchanting music came rippling from Spock's fingers; as the last notes died away he gave a faint, wistful sigh and sat for a moment in silence, his eyes still clouded with the dreams the music had evoked. At last he turned his head. "That was beautiful, Spock," he said simply.

As their eyes met Kirk caught his breath in wonder; for a shy, delighted smile lit Spock's dark eyes for a fleeting instant as the two men shared their pleasure in the music; then the eyelids dropped, abruptly shutting off that sudden insight.

But from that night something changed between them. Kirk became a regular visitor to Spock's quarters, and it seemed natural for him to lift down the harp and hold it out with a smile. On other evenings their chess games continued with Kirk improving all the time, until one night, to his utter astonishment, he won. Spock seemed to take as much pleasure in the Human's victory as Kirk did, and their games took on a new interest.

The months passed, and brought changes. Piper retired, and was replaced by Leonard McCoy as Chief Medical Officer. For a time Kirk seemed disturbed by this new arrival, who was in his way as withdrawn as the Vulcan, but in time the taciturn doctor also fell a victim to Kirk's charm and became a valued member of the crew.

Around the same time there were changes among the bridge personnel, and the new officers quickly settled into a smoothly-co-ordinated team; much of this was due to Kirk's own influence, for without losing any of his authority he introduced a relaxation of formality which allowed the highly-trained men and women of his crew to work comfortably together. Within a very short time it seemed that Kirk had always commanded the Enterprise - Pike was almost forgotten.

Spock found himself slightly bewildered by the rapid changes. His dawning relationship with Kirk was developing slowly, gradually, almost without his being aware of it as each found more in the other to respect and admire. McCoy was more of a problem - the acid-tongued surgeon seemed to have set himself the task of provoking some Human response from the Vulcan half-breed, yet despite the barbed comments that so frequently came his way Spock could not feel that the doctor actually disliked him, for on the rare occasions when he was compelled to sickbay he could detect a deep personal concern that McCoy was careful to keep hidden at all other times.

The weeks and months of their mission passed quietly until the Enterprise became involved in a lengthy and detailed survey of Carlon IV. It was not a particularly attractive planet, but the extent and variety of its mineral deposits ensured the Federation's interest. Fortunately, Carlon displayed no

trace of intelligent life, so the restrictions of the Prime Directive did not apply; but as if to balance this, something in the planet's magnetic field disturbed the transporter, making it unreliable. However, Scotty was able to adapt the shuttlecraft engines to counteract the interference. This meant that Spock and his scientists were forced to establish a base on the planet's surface and work from there, as it was too time-consuming to return regularly to the Enterprise.

Without the stimulation of his First Officer's companionship, Kirk found time hanging heavily on his hands -- there was little to do, as the ship waited in orbit for the conclusion of the survey. So it was with very real pleasure that he left his quarters one morning and met Spock just emerging from his.

"You're not finished yet, are you?" he asked in surprise -- the last report had indicated that several more days' work lay ahead.

"Not yet, Captain. I had to return to the Enterprise to collect some equipment and took the opportunity to change. I am returning immediately."

"Hold on a minute," Kirk burst out impulsively. "I'll come with you."

The Vulcan turned, raising an enquiring eyebrow, aware of an unusual glow of pleasure at Kirk's sudden decision; and of a feeling of astonishment at the intensity of that pleasure. Kirk grinned disarmingly. "Well, there's nothing to do up here, and I might be able to help. Even if I can't, it'll be nice to breathe some fresh air and stretch my legs."

He fell naturally into step with Spock, and the two men headed for the lower deck where the duty pilot, Hazell, was already waiting beside the loaded shuttlecraft. They took their seats, discussing the discoveries Spock's team had made, and within minutes were gliding down to the surface of Carlon.

Later, they could never be sure just what had caused the malfunction. Perhaps Hazell had forgotten the modifications and allowed his attention to stray for a moment from his indicators; whatever the reason, there was a sudden sharp crack from the instrument panel, and even as Spock started to his feet to investigate there was a brilliant flash, a violent convulsion of the shuttlecraft, and the three men were thrown headlong to the floor.

Somehow Spock managed to reach the co-pilot's seat; without sparing a glance for the young pilot he wrestled with the controls, but the shuttlecraft responded only sluggishly. There was barely enough time to select the safest possible crash site, a long, narrow beach bounded on the landward side by towering sand dunes; even as he swung the Copernicus laboriously round there was a secondary explosion which left him blind and dazed as the stricken shuttlecraft ploughed deep into the sand.

His awakening was a slow, confused blur, and he lay for some moments remembering what had happened, and wondering where he was now. The last thing he remembered was trying to avoid the worst of the explosion, and the sudden pain as he was hurled against the wall of the shuttlecraft. Now he was lying at full length, his aching head pillowed against something soft and velvety, cool fingers were smoothing back his hair and an anxious voice was murmuring his name.

Without indicating that he was awake he opened his eyes slightly and looked round. He was lying on the floor of the shuttlecraft, which seemed to be canted at a steep angle, and the softness beneath his cheek was the material of Kirk's shirt as the Captain supported his head on his shoulder. A sharp wave of pain caught him unawares and he closed his eyes hurriedly, thankful that Kirk had not noticed he was awake. Confused by the pain he lay still, enjoying the sensation of comfort and protection produced by the strong arms that held him so carefully, relaxing in utter security as Kirk's voice, strangely husky, pleaded,

"Spock, please wake up."

The words produced a bitter, mocking memory that set every nerve in Spock's body jangling painfully. Even so had Pike spoken when he had gambled Spock's life in rousing him too early from the healing trance - a needless gamble, as it had turned out, for the Vulcan had found that the damage, severe though it was, had been contained, and could have awaited his natural awakening.

Now, he realised bitterly, it was happening again; Kirk needed his help to escape from the wrecked shuttlecraft - that explained his show of concern. What a fool he was. It seemed that he would never learn, he thought, despising himself for his weakness; how many times would he fool himself into believing that a Human could feel any concern for him? Only... Kirk's hands were... so very gentle...

Carefully, as though he had just awakened, Spock moved and tried to sit up. "I am recovered, thank you, Captain," he said stiffly. "If you will move aside I will attempt to force a way out."

"Thank God!" Kirk's voice held a note of profound relief. "I thought I'd lost you, Spock. No, lie still - there's no hurry. The radio is working after a fashion, and I've contacted Scotty. It seems that as we crashed the shuttlecraft was buried in the sand dunes - since they can't use the transporter to get us out, they'll have to dig us clear. We're safe enough, though - there's enough air. Poor Hazell's dead, I'm afraid, killed in the crash, and for a minute I thought you were too. Just rest - you might be more badly hurt than I can see." As he spoke Kirk's arms tightened, pulling the Vulcan's head back into position on his shoulder. Spock lay looking at him, bewilderment in his dark eyes.

"But surely... I thought... you needed me to effect our escape," he said at last. "You seemed... so concerned."

"Of course I was concerned - about you," Kirk replied. Looking down he saw the Vulcan's eyes clouded with doubt and added softly, "Did you really think I'd risk letting you hurt yourself, just to get out of here a few minutes sooner?"

"But Captain Pike..." Spock bit back what he had been about to say, but Kirk caught a sharp breath in understanding. He knew Chris Pike well, and was familiar with his hearty, tactless nature. Somehow Chris had hurt this gentle, sensitive man, hurt him so badly that to avoid further pain the Vulcan had retired deep into his shell of reserve. It was perhaps unfair to take advantage of Spock's temporary confusion, but somehow Kirk knew that if he was ever to reach his First Officer, this was the moment. Leaning closer, he said,

"Tell me about Captain Pike."

"Once before... I was injured," Spock began hesitantly. "It was when the Chief was killed." Kirk nodded - he had learned of the incident from the ship's log. Spock continued. "The Captain wanted the engines repaired at once, and only I had the necessary skill. I was in a healing trance... the doctor warned him that it would be dangerous to awaken me too soon, but he insisted. He... he gambled my life - a needless risk to take, for the damage had been contained, and could have awaited my natural awakening; had he bothered to investigate first, he would have known that. I can forgive his error... it was a Command decision, and his to make; but you see, I thought... I thought at first... that his concern was for me... but he did not even understand the risk he had taken."

For a moment Kirk made no reply; he could not. From what Spock had said - and more important, from what he had not said - he knew instinctively what Pike had done. Spock's Human half had reached out, seeking understanding and companionship, and Pike had been too insensitive to see through his shyness. So that's why he kept me at a distance for so long! Kirk thought. Vulcan pride, and fear of another rejection, kept him from trying again. I must be careful - I can't fail him now.

"Spock, listen to me." Kirk's hand absently smoothed the silky hair as he sought for words. "Perhaps I shouldn't say this, perhaps you don't want to hear it... but I want your friendship. I can't answer for Chris Pike - but I don't want to hurt you... ever." He paused then, meeting the velvet eyes raised to his, watching in awed delight as their expression softened, melted into the shy smile he had seen only once before.

"It has been... difficult," Spock admitted. "I do not understand Humans, and they do not understand me... but with you... from the first there was something... I could not deny, could not resist. Yet I was afraid..."

"You never have to be afraid with me," Kirk said softly. Their eyes held, each feeling the friendship that had grown so subtly between them, rejoicing in the knowledge that for both the sense of isolation had been banished for ever. Then Kirk saw the fleeting shadow of pain in the Vulcan's eyes, and his own darkened in concern.

"Don't talk any more," he whispered. "Just rest. We have plenty of time now."

The Vulcan's hand lifted, brushed Kirk's cheek lightly. "Plenty of time, Jim," he echoed; then the pain claimed him totally and he fell back against Kirk's shoulder, relaxing confidently in the arms that held him so securely. As darkness crept slowly over his mind he realised that for him the years of loneliness were over; he had failed with Captain Pike, but that failure had left him ready for the far more worthwhile gift of friendship Kirk could offer. He had sensed, in that brief exchange, the Human's own loneliness, and knew that Kirk too had experienced the aching pain of reaching out in a vain search for someone who would understand. Now each of them had found what he had been seeking for so long.

As yet Spock could see only very dimly the paths down which this new relationship would lead him, but he faced the future with confidence, content that for the first time in his life whatever was to come need not be faced alone.

Twisting, unravelling, the chord of memory winds up, returning to the present. The pain and joy of the past are forgotten, smothered in the fear and anxiety of the moment. As each danger, each crisis obliterates the one before, so now everything rests with that quietly-breathing figure on the bed. Drawn relentlessly the watcher moves closer now as blue eyes flash to his the knowledge that soon the fever will either break or kill. The Human's tortured breathing hurts him as his own pain never could. Jim is so weak... exhausted by the long bout of fever... if only he could take the heat, the anguish into his own body!

The dark eyes turn, silently pleading, and the doctor nods consent. The Vulcan sits down, gently lifting the fever-wracked body - so thin, he can feel the bones - into his arms, smoothing the sweat-soaked hair.

"Jim, please wake up," he whispers, uselessly; unconsciously echoing the words the other used to him long ago. There is no response, and he buries his face in the damp hair. He is too vulnerable now, too used to this man's companionship... he cannot go on alone. The forbidden temptation calls to him... a mind-meld... so easy... McCoy will know... but he cannot interfere, and who else will care?

"I will, Spock."

A featherlight touch on his hair, a voice weak but determined, whispers into one pointed ear.

He draws back then, looking with incredulous joy into the exhausted, indomitable eyes, fever-bright but soft with understanding.

No words are necessary; they remain silent, motionless, their eyes saying what their lips cannot, each rejoicing that they are together once more. Then

with a faint sigh Spock releases his hold, settling the Human comfortably; their fingers touch fleetingly as Kirk's eyes close in weariness, and the Vulcan turns away.

A friend's hand takes his arm, guiding him to lie on the next bed - McCoy, who has shared the vigil, who knows how much was almost lost here.

As sleep comes memory gently closes the opened door and he casts a last compassionate glance back at his former self. How young he was in those days, so confused, so alone... but fate had been kinder than he deserved. Starfleet or Vulcan... It had not been an easy choice; Those early days on the Enterprise had been bitter, painful, lonely - but Spock could not now regret the decision he had made so long ago.

LEAD ON GOLD by Wendy Walter

My heart pumps scarlet blood through my veins,
As does yours pump blood of green.
But as a man to keep me sane
My heart also loves, and dreams.

Yours does too, although you'll hide it.
Let me in to show you your heart.
I can help. God knows I've tried it.
Accept my offer, at least a part.

Before I tried to climb the wall
You to me seemed hard and cold.
But I can hear a desperate call
From your heart of lead on gold.

I know you're lonely, as am I;
With rank comes painful solitude --
Wakeful hours a bitter sigh
And sleep a welcome interlude.

But your loneliness I could not bear.
Don't turn away the friend you need;
Open your heart and let us share
And from our private hells be freed.

Before I tried to climb the wall
You to me seemed hard and cold;
But now I hear a grateful call
From your heart of lead on gold.

There was an old Engineer out in a space suit
Seventy times as high as the moon -
What he was doing I couldn't but ask it
For in his hand he carried a broom.
Oh Scotty, Oh Scotty, Oh Scotty, quoth I,
What are you doing up so high?
I'm brushing the asteroids out of the skies
To clear a path for the Enterprise.

* * * *

Hark, hark, the dogs do bark,
The Klingons are coming to town;
Some in ships and some with whips,
And all of them wearing a frown.

YLIAANA by Meg Wright

The small planet spun lazily around its sun, rolling parklands and gardens waking to stretch in the growing light as day dawned; the flurry of early-morning food-gathering giving way to tranquil sie ta-time. Butterflies flexed their soft wings on warm petals; plaintive birds cooed in the cool depths of massive trees rimming the lawns. Each flower hung, jewel-still, its face up-turned to warmth, rich carpets of living colour stretching beyond the horizon. The world dreamed on, undisturbed by the gentle breeze that rose as evening approached. Beneath the watching eyes, small insects droned sleepily on opalescent wings.

The girl came silently through the grass, bare feet scarcely pressing the turquoise blades, the floating gauze of her skirts sinuously caressing purple stems to the rhythm of her passing. Her pale hands moved, feather-light, among the growing things, face pensive, eyes half-closed, lips parted in gentle rapture. The evening air lifted her wild, white curls to brush the delicately azure cheek. The watchers noted her passing, red eyes unblinking in the shadows. Over the brow of the hill she went and out into the golden glow of evening across the undulating grasslands, to stand, arms outstretched to the rising moons. Above her head two white birds wheeled in silent dance, red eyes echoing the setting sun.

/She is here./

/I note it./

/Will it be as last time, so still, so long? Is it like this each night?/

/Maintain your watch silently./

/There is so little to watch. Nothing happens, the time drags out./

/Time will pass as it always does, neither faster nor slower. Impatience is unworthy. Be silent, your thoughts disturb me./

/My thoughts rise. I cannot stop them./

/Return then. I will watch alone. Withdraw. I will follow later./

The golden sunlight faded.

McCoy touched Kirk's arm, indicating the motionless, unseeing couple at the wire-tangled console.

"I still don't like it," he said softly. "We don't know what effect it's going to have on them - any interference with the brain is dangerous."

Professor Madison turned impatiently from his screen. "Doctor, you are aware that there comes a time when a new technique must be used to prove its worth?" He ruffled his silver hair thoughtfully. "In any case, I really do not see what can go wrong - nothing untoward has occurred during the laboratory tests, why should it now?"

"Sod's Law," said McCoy flatly. "If things can go wrong, they will."

"A layman's attitude." Madison dismissed it. "The implant has been tested most thoroughly and has never proved harmful even in the first crude experiments. I have used one myself and suffered no ill effects." He waved an expressive hand. "My mind has not been affected, save that I have perhaps learned to take a less parochial outlook through seeing life as another creature sees it. An educative experience like that might almost be made compulsory, Doctor."

McCoy snorted. "It's people we need to understand, not animals. And who's to say it doesn't do the animal any harm - they can't tell us."

"The animal is unaware of our presence, Doctor. The directional nature of the amplifier doesn't allow our thoughts to enter their minds. Once the implant

is made in the animal's brain the creature is released quite unharmed, and when the period of observation is finished the implant is removed again. It is the same for Human contact - with the bonus under the present circumstances that they remain quite safely on board the observing vessel and never have to submit to having their molecules scrambled all over the universe."

Kirk hid a grin. Someone had clearly been talking.

"The most important factor," Madison went on, "is to find two compatible observers."

"It's asking too much of anyone to stay linked to Spock for any length of time," McCoy growled. "Look at this reading, Jim. These peaks are far too high."

Madison got up and studied the screen over McCoy's shoulder. "Yes, she's coming over too strongly. We'll have to sort out some way of blanking her out when she's not trying to speak to him."

"'Blanking her out'," McCoy muttered, crossly. "She's not just a radio message."

"For the purpose of this work she is simply a transmitter and receiver, Doctor. The ultimate end of this technique may be to revolutionise communications entirely. These implants augment the rudimentary telepathic field and channel it directionally. Each person may be able to learn to be their own transmitter and receiver." Madison's voice warmed with his enthusiasm. "Think how that will speed up planetary exploration. No communicator to lose or damage, no tricorder to carry, all data given instantly to the computer and stored away!"

"It clearly has advantages," Kirk agreed. "Any time you're in trouble, Bones, you can beam up straight away, wherever you are. It will simplify a lot of things."

"I'll believe it when it's proved," McCoy persisted. "Anyway," he added sophistically, "if you're not going to have to beam down, you're not going to have to beam up. Jim! She's coming out of it."

Uhura blinked and moved, exercising cramped muscles. "The link is still too strong, Professor Madison, I disturb him. He manages to control his output because of his telepathic training and I can't hear his thoughts unless they are directed to me, but I can't blank my mind sufficiently. We're going to have to do more work on the damper."

"Agreed," nodded the Professor. "I will make some adjustments after your rest period. Come and sign your log report while it is still fresh in your mind. You will excuse us, Captain?"

"Carry on, Professor. Rejoin us when you're through, Uhura, I shall also need a report from you before we finish for today."

McCoy studied her retreating back. "Jim, you can see what it's doing to her. She's lost more weight in the last week than a hibernating Arcturan fencat. She's got to have a proper period of rest; don't let those two walking computers drive her too hard - Spock was born a telepath, it's not such a strain on him."

"Your comments are noted, Doctor, but I'd have to be pretty hard-hearted to deny her the chance to be in at the very beginning of a new era in communications. Besides, which, Starfleet wants some answers about this planet and our orders are to give Professor Madison full co-operation in the trials of this telepathic amplifier to get those answers."

McCoy looked at him sourly. "I know they've tested this out in the laboratory and that nothing has gone wrong - yet, but new techniques like this should be tested out slowly. Why haven't they used Vulcans for a preliminary field test? It would make more sense to use a telepathic species."

"The Vulcan Science Academy is doing tests, Bones. You've read the reports. Since the loss of the Intrepid there isn't another Vulcan-manned Starship - we were on hand to collect Madison and we have Spock on board."

McCoy sighed. "I know, I worry too much."

"We all do. And in any case, there's not a lot of harm can come to them since they don't leave the ship and are under constant observation by either Madison or yourself."

"Both," McCoy said. "I don't trust that head-in-the-clouds scientist not to lose sight of the fact that it's a couple of human beings he's dealing with, not two computer terminals. He's no doctor, Jim, and I'm not leaving the laboratory while either of them is working."

Kirk nodded and rose as Uhura rejoined them. "Come and sit down, Lieutenant. How's the observation going?"

Uhura sank fluidly onto the chair. "There's nothing new to report, Captain. Nothing happens all day, and every night she stands in the fields without moving. It's been the same every night."

Kirk sighed. "Oh to be able to go down and say 'Excuse me, Miss, but would you mind telling me what a beautiful girl like you is doing in a place like this?'"

Uhura smiled a little dreamily. "She's suiting her environment, Captain. She fits her setting like a flame gem in platinum."

"Poetry will not satisfy Starfleet," Kirk said curtly. "A whole planet supporting one humanoid life-form - apparently ageless and unchanging, if the Lexington's report of 3648 is correct - needs explanation. We have no hypotheses that satisfy the scientists. You know what Spock always says, we need more data. Well, that's what we're here to get and these amplifiers are going to help us to get it."

McCoy nodded in understanding. "It's frustrating just sitting here doing nothing," he agreed, answering the tone rather than the words. "You can only take it on trust that the pair of them are working and not just lazing around in the sun down there."

Uhura's face broke into a smile. "One day, Dr. McCoy, you may find out just what hard work it is being a bird. The amount of eating we put in is unbelievable." She touched her temple lightly. "It's still incredible, isn't it? Implant the other half of one of these within another brain and you pick up all the sensory perceptions within that mind. I never thought I'd know, really know with my own muscular memory, what it is to fly."

Kirk felt a strong surge of envy and wished, not for the first time, that he had undertaken this mission with Spock. He had no fear of a mind link with his friend, and only his strong sense of justice and his appreciation of her brilliance in her chosen field had made him admit to himself that the job was rightfully Uhura's. He thought back to the original briefing session and her instant grip of Madison's theories, also her helpful interjections on her Captain's behalf when Spock and Madison had raced ahead of his comprehension. The look in her eyes when he had assigned her the job had been thanks enough, and events were proving his decision to have been a good one, frustrating as it always was to be an onlooker. He drew his mind back to the present and looked across at the motionless Vulcan to see awareness returning to the dark eyes.

"Good," McCoy said with satisfaction. "Nice to have you back with us, Mr. Spock."

The mobile eyebrow lifted. "I have not left this room, Doctor."

Kirk raised a protesting hand. "Don't start again, you two," he said. "We've been all through that argument. Any change, Spock?"



"None, sir, although I have noted one or two facts for which I have no logical explanation."

McCoy groaned audibly.

"In spite of the abundance of insect life," Spock continued, "all the birds are seed eaters, some of them despite beaks unsuited to the purpose. The species Lt. Uhura and I are using have the talons and hooked beaks of a bird of prey, but all the flock feed on berries and seeds. I cannot understand how the species remains viable."

"Well, you don't eat meat," McCoy pointed out, "but your teeth are suited to an omniverous diet."

"Vulcans have not always been vegetarians, Doctor. It has been a conscious decision on our part to abandon the unnecessary taking of life - a decision unlikely to be taken by avians when there is food in plenty in the form of small mammalian creatures. The time taken to collect the extra food needed by the non-meat-eater must be a serious handicap during the breeding season. My host is frequently still hungry when I leave him because I have wasted his time during the day by my other activities. It seriously limits the amount of time I can spend in watching an objective."

"Professor Madison has some new adjustments he wants to try," Uhura told him. "We should be able to achieve a finer tuning so that my presence does not distract you. It may also mean that I will have much more control over my own occupation of the bird's mind and will no longer have to have your help."

"Now wait a minute," McCoy interrupted. "It's one thing for Spock to be popping in and out of something's mind without a by-your-leave - he's used to it. But I've seen him have difficulty in withdrawing on occasions, even from you, Jim."

"Bones! Are you suggesting I'm a bird-brain?"

"I'm not being funny."

"Neither is the Captain," Spock said inaccurately. "I have difficulty in withdrawal only when the mind I occupy has a will as strong as, or stronger than, my own. The mind of a bird presents no problem to the practised telepath. Lt. Uhura lacks only confidence in her own ability to control the amplifier, that is all. I have no doubts of her capability."

Kirk nodded his congratulations to the gratified Uhura and rose. "Well, I think it's time we all took a break - those of us that need it will get some rest and some food. Uhura, ask the Professor to let me know when he's ready for you to begin observations once more. I'll see you at dinner."

/I enter./

/I welcome you. I have waited only seconds to feel your mind touch mine./

/Great pleasure./

/A task achieved gives reward./

/Acknowledged. Pleasure also to float on the wind./

/Watch - silence./

/I keep my thoughts within./

The two white birds sailed majestically across the sky, wingtips almost touching, red eyes scanning the ground below.

/She is there./

/Unseen./

/Beneath the trees by the stream./

/So still. Sleeping?/

/Unknown. Watch./

/I watch./

The girl lay along the rough gray bark, ice-blue fingers stroking the trunk with loving touch. The birds took up their vigil within a massive tree nearby, snapping up the fruits in turn as they watched. At last she rose slowly and left the shadows, wandering out into the sunlight with delicate steps to continue her daily wandering across the flowery grass.

/I tire. My host still hungers./

/Withdraw and rest. Four hours have passed./

/So long?/

/You have done well. Silence until you spoke to me./

/Delight!/
.

/Not understood./

/Laughter. I withdraw./

The golden sunlight faded and the agitated face of the ship's surgeon took its place.

"Are you all right? Four hours and not a peep out of either of you."

She laughed with satisfaction. "No, not once. I needed no help at all. Professor, this thing works - even on a non-telepath."

"It has been working all the time," Madison pointed out. "You have been using it."

"I know - but I always had the feeling it was all Spock's doing, I was so conscious of him. This time I knew I'd done it alone."

"Will you be able to work without him from now on?" Kirk asked her.

Her eyes gleamed their pleasure. "Yes, sir. It will make life much easier for we can watch turn and turn about unless something happens which needs both of us."

"Good. Anything new to report?"

"I'm afraid not, sir."

Kirk breathed an exasperated oath. "Nothing on the sensor scans, nothing from either of you; the most sophisticated surveillance method ever come up with and still we get nothing, nothing, nothing!" He caught Uhura's stricken expression. "It's not your fault, Lieutenant."

"Perhaps if it hadn't taken me so long to get used to the wave amplifier, sir... "

"Perhaps if you weren't so good at your job you'd still be trying to make any contact at all, Uhura. I get reports from Professor Madison and Spock as well as you, remember. The Professor gives you full credit for that wiring job you did last night; he told me he'd never seen anyone handle the micro-farad stabiliser with more confidence. I've logged his commendation and added my own."

Uhura smothered a fatuously gratified grin and mumbled her thanks to both men. McCoy patted her shoulder in a fatherly manner.

"He's also trying to tell you he's going to make you work even harder," he told her in a conspiratorial whisper, "but not until tomorrow. For the rest of the day you are going to rest, and I mean REST! Go to your quarters and get into bed and stay there until you're due on watch tomorrow morning. I don't want to see you again until then - that's not advice, it's an order."

She nodded in rueful agreement and rose to go. They watched the doors hiss to behind her.

"That is one very fine lady," McCoy said.

"Don't think I don't know it," Kirk told him. "She's unsurpassed in her own field and a delightful person to have around. I have a feeling Spock has a pretty high opinion of her, too."

"That's a recommendation?"

"When a person's competency is under consideration, yes," Kirk grinned. He looked across at the silent figure watched over by Madison at the console. "It all seems to be running smoothly now, I'll leave you to get on with it in peace. I'll be in quarters if you need me. Send him along when he's though for the day."

To Kirk's knowledgeable eyes the Vulcan looked a little weary as he came in to give his final report.

"Sit down," he told him roughly, "and have a drink, in consideration of my feelings."

Spock seated himself without comment and accepted the glass.

"Still nothing?"

"Nothing now, Captain. In spite of its advantages this method of surveillance has its limitations. We must allow the host creature its own periods of rest and food gathering, which means a round-the-clock watch is impractical, although their shorter day has meant that, over all, we have watched all hours of their day and night at some time."

Kirk nodded. "The sensors report no nighttime movement, though, and you find her in the same place again each morning - there can't have been much happening during the hours you have missed."

Spock frowned.

"Something wrong with my logic?"

"Logically it is a period of rest for her as it is for all other creatures, Captain. There is no apparent reason why she should not rest as the other species there do."

"Some Earth species don't lie down to sleep, Spock, the horse for one. Maybe this is her way of sleeping."

"Perhaps. But we still have to account for the lack of food-gathering. There is food in abundance for her, but we have never seen her eat or drink."

"If it is the same girl from the original report then her species is clearly long-lived. Maybe they don't eat very often. We've only been here through ten of their days. We still have no idea why she's alone down there. Haven't you found any signs of anyone else ever having been there?"

"All the life forms are compatible with her possible ancestry, but the planet is clearly too young for evolution to such a high level to have taken place there."

"Are you saying it's artificial?"

"Not artificial in the sense of manufactured, no. However, the geological readings are incompatible with the plant and animal life. It seems likely that the environment has been created for a purpose, but I have no speculation to offer as to that purpose."

Kirk shrugged. "I guess we'll just have to carry on with the observations. At least the tests of this amplifier seem to be going smoothly."

"Yes, indeed. Professor Madison seems to be more than satisfied with the suggestions Lt. Uhura has made. Today's work was highly satisfactory and as a result we will be able to put in longer hours tomorrow since the Lieutenant and I need not work together at all times."

"You're quite sure she will be all right on her own?"

"Quite sure, Captain. She now has confidence in her ability to control the amplifier. If you wish, before we commence observation tomorrow, we will demonstrate her ability to call on me at any time she needs to. Indeed, were it to be necessary, I could speak to her at this moment."

"But you're nowhere near her!"

"Unnecessary with Professor Madison's amplifier insertion. Contact is theoretically possible over vast distances once the mind has adjusted to the idea. He does not yet know what the physical limitations will be."

"Then it's not electro-magnetic magnification?"

"Basically, yes. Modified and amplified beyond the possibilities of natural processes, however. Initial tests have indicated that tight beam channelling should give a range in excess of two million light years."

"Two million? But that will mean an elapsed time of more than eight months at subspace frequencies."

"I expressed myself badly, Captain. I should have said instant communication at a range in excess of two million light years."

"Instant..." Kirk's voice failed him. "Is this based on the tachyon theories?"

"I believe Professor Madison has taken Mr. Scott's and my attempts to use tachyon particles into account, yes, sir."

"But... if everyone eventually can communicate across the galaxy and beyond, then the life we know now will be finished."

"All life must change, Captain. In any case, there is still much practical work to be done. It took several centuries from the early pioneering days to the perfected subspace radio. This is simply a possible route that might be taken; we are not likely to see the end of the work in our lifetimes."

Kirk contemplated the life of a super-being for a moment and was conscious of a mixed regret and gratitude that he was only to see the beginning of the process. Man had surely not reached his full potential as yet, but his fellow Humans were known and understood, their faults and weaknesses, goodness and strengths cloaked him comfortably at his own level of understanding. What kind of people would they be who would no longer be bound by the physical world around them; had this been one breakthrough the Organians had undergone and might it result in a crisis of the kind Zargon had told them? He drew his soaring mind back to the present.

"I'd like to see for myself that Uhura can cope," he said. "We're still at the crawling stage with this and I don't want anyone hurt. I'll be in the lab first thing tomorrow."

Uhura came through the lab door and blinked at Kirk. "Mr. Spock enjoyed his drink last night, Captain," she said a little blankly. "Yes, naturally."

"Naturally what?" McCoy asked, bewildered.

"I'll help to demonstrate that I can contact Spock any time it's necessary."

"Where is Spock?" Kirk asked, smiling at McCoy's expression.

"In the turbo-lift, sir. He'll be here soon. I'm sorry, in 29.4

seconds, sir."

Kirk grinned. "That's Spock, all right. But can you call him from a distance so that he doesn't have to remain in the lab while you are on watch?"

"I think so, sir. I don't see that there would be any problem. He suggests you accompany him to any part of the ship you choose while I remain here with Dr. McCoy."

It did not take long to convince Kirk that Uhura's control was sufficient and he was pleased to authorize her to watch alone while Spock rested. It would do them both good to put in more rest time than they had had over the past few days. Spock took the early part of the planet's day and then Uhura took over from him, sliding freely and easily into the consciousness of the great white bird she had come to know so well.

It was early afternoon now, the planet sleepily quiet under the warm sun; the only sign of movement the buzzing insects her sharp eyes saw so clearly, and the slow-moving girl wandering lovingly from plant to plant below. Uhura flexed the massive wings, riding the rising thermals to the sky, searching the ground beneath with eager eyes. A shaking in the long grass ahead of the girl caught her eye. It was a tiny, furry creature, scurrying towards its nest of young ones among the plaited stems. She swooped down to watch it closely. Strange that this bird, so clearly formed for hunting, should be uninterested in the potential food scampering below. She hovered only a few feet above the girl, remembering the eagles of her African childhood. She had once climbed the mountains to watch them carry their prey back to the voracious young in the eyrie, their curved beaks, like hers, so suited to tearing the warm meat.

Suddenly, overwhelmingly, the memory vanished and she felt the great bird she controlled begin to fall. She gave one despairing call for Spock before darkness closed over her mind.

Scott crossed the recreation room balancing his coffee carefully atop a sheaf of diagrams and notes. "Ah, there ye are, Mr. Spock. I thought ye'd be interested to see these latest designs for the beam propulsion unit, if ye have a wee moment to spare."

"Certainly, Engineer. I have time now and would like to study them."

"Good." Scott juggled for a moment with diagrams, chair and coffee, finally sinking into the seat with a sigh of relief. Spock stretched across the table to take the top diagram.

"Now that one is the port elevztion of the... Carefu', man, ye'll have the coffee... Mr. Spock, what are ye doin'?"

Spock jerked his arm back sharply, narrowly missing the coffee cup. He stood up swiftly, slamming his chair back and left the room, leaving the puzzled Engineer to stare after him in bewilderment.

The Vulcan entered the lab at an uncharacteristic run and found McCoy bending over the unconscious Bantu girl.

"What happened?"

"The readings faded - I can't get any reaction from her, I've given her a stimulant - nothing!"

"Is she alive?"

"Yes, but I can't trace any brain activity. Can you make contact with her?"

"I heard her cry out," Spock said harshly, "then there was silence. I cannot hear her thoughts."

"Has the amplifier gone wrong? I might have known it would cause trouble."

I'll get it out."

"Wait!" Spock knelt beside them and touched the dark face gently, his mind probing hers. He shook his head. "She is deeply unconscious, Doctor, at present her mind is completely closed to me. It is not the amplifier; something must have happened to the host creature. I will see."

"Spock, be careful. We don't want to lose two of you."

He was talking to himself. The Vulcan's blank eyes showed no comprehension. McCoy reached up over the console and thumbed the intercom.

"Captain Kirk to Lab 17. Emergency."

The white bird's wings beat strongly, carrying him across the gardens below. There! There in the distant grasslands was the girl, and in her hands a white bird hung, neck sickeningly limp. Spock sped across the sky, swooping in a vertiginous dive, hoping to make the girl loose her captive. She looked up at him; seconds before he reached the nadir he felt his mind slip from his control, his muscles weaken. There seemed no way to avoid crashing to his death among the purple grasses.

Aboard the orbiting spaceship, McCoy and Kirk looked at each other across the two still figures.

Spock braced the frail body for the impact, but it never came; slim fingers grasped the talons and held him firmly. His mind swam dizzily as he fought for control.

/No harm./

/Freedom./

/I hold. No harm. Peace./

/Companion. Hurt./

/No hurt. Controlled. Vicious./

/Not vicious. Gentle. Kind./

/Vicious. Blood food./

/Meat eater. Yes./

/You?/

/Not I. Different./

/Why different?/

/From other place. You also different. Release her. Not hurt./

/I will not hurt. Need knowledge, understanding./

/Understand me. All that I am./

/I understand. Restraint. Objectivity, Compassion. Acceptance./

/Not all. Seek deeply./

/Yes. Pride of heritage. Fear of sharing love. Loneliness that hurts./

/Truth. Ashamed./

/Needless. Need understanding of companion. Fear./

/Not fear. I with you?/

/Gratitude. Enter together./

/Uhura. No fear. We speak together./

/Spock? Girl?/

/Yes. Spock. Yliaana. Together./

/Fear./

/Needless. Understand all that we are./

/Understood. Know all that I am. Love./

/Together./

/Together./

"Madison?"

"I don't understand it." The Professor's hands were busy among the tangled wires. "There's no logical reason for the collapse, no cause that I can find."

"I shall beam down," Kirk said tightly. "The cause must be down there."

"You'll never find it in time, Jim. Brain damage happens within minutes. It's been more than three since Uhura collapsed."

"Tell the transporter room I'm on my way."

Kirk was out of the door when he heard McCoy shout for him. "They're coming round, Jim!"

He came back at a run. "Spock? Uhura? Are you all right? What happened? All the readings died for nearly four minutes!"

"Four minutes?" Uhura said blankly. "Only four minutes?"

"Only!" McCoy was outraged. "All bodily functions were suspended, another few seconds and the damage would have been irreparable. What happened?"

Spock got up a little shakily and helped Uhura onto her chair.

"We are both quite undamaged," he said quietly. "Professor, the equipment was not at fault. We have the information Starfleet requires. I suggest the host birds are beamed aboard for the removal of the implants."

Kirk nodded. "Carry on, Professor." As the doors hissed shut he studied Spock and Uhura carefully. They looked a little shaken, even Spock if you knew him well enough, but they seemed unhurt. "Do you feel up to giving a report now?"

They both assented.

"They could both do with some hot coffee," McCoy put in, "and perhaps something to eat. Then they can give it you in full."

"We'll have it in the briefing room, Bones."

"Nothing to eat, thank you, Doctor. Not yet any way. It'll take a while to persuade myself that I can."

McCoy was about to protest when Spock intervened. "The lieutenant will eat later, Doctor, I understand her reluctance to do so just yet. When you have heard our report you will understand also."

"We'll have that report now," Kirk touched the recording button. "Carry on, Mr. Spock."

"We made contact," he said soberly.

"With the girl?" Kirk demanded.

"Yes, Captain. There is no-one else there. Her mind is far above ours; I am not surprised that she could hold us so completely, even I could not break

free against her will. Her comprehension extends beyond the levels of higher minds, she understands the thoughts and feelings of all that surround her."

"You mean her people are telepathic?" Kirk asked. "We've encountered true telepaths before, Spock."

"Beyond that, Captain. I said 'all that surrounds her', and I meant just that."

"But there's no-one else there, you just said so."

"There are animals and plants, Captain."

"You mean she communicates with the animals?"

"She understands them," Uhura put in. "It isn't simple communication as we know it. She knows what they are and why they are and how they feel. She can sense their hopes and fears and know all there is to know about them."

"And not only of the animals, Captain," Spock added, "but of the plants as well."

"Plants!" snorted McCoy. "How the devil do you communicate with a plant?"

"Neither you nor I could do so, Doctor," Spock said placidly, "nor will any others of our species during our lifetimes, but there may come a time, if the development of Professor Madison's amplifier proceeds as the theories indicate when we, too, will be able to reach out across space if we wish, to the other side of the galaxy and beyond."

McCoy's mouth hung, unbelieving, as he stared at the Vulcan but he offered no comment.

"And how do the plants come into it?" Kirk demanded.

"As you might expect the telepathic ability does not only develop in one direction, it can also sink down deeply into the consciousness of any organic thing, even to the level at which the joy and sorrow of a plant can be understood. It is also the sorrow and joy of Yliana's people."

"What do you mean?"

"Captain, you know that we Vulcans are vegetarians, but do you fully understand why?"

"I've always understood it to be the Vulcan reluctance to kill."

"It's not that simple. We are telepaths."

"I don't see..." Kirk began, then looking across at Spock, "you mean you know what an animal feels when it dies?"

"Yes. Once you have understood that you do not wish to kill unless logic dictates that you must."

Kirk sat, appalled. "And you say she has that level of understanding with plant life?"

"Yes, Jim."

McCoy looked from one to the other. "I still don't understand," he complained.

Uhura put her hand over his. "Doctor, if every mouthful screamed while you ate, could you bear to go on eating?"

McCoy looked at her in horror. "You mean that plants feel pain as higher forms of life do?"

"Apparently not only pain, Doctor. Even in the twentieth century it was suspected that plants react to their surroundings and particularly to the emotional radiations of those who tended them. Modern nursery techniques use this to increase a plant's potential - I'm no expert, you should talk to Sulu

if you want to know more about it, I only know what he's told me. The first crude experiments in plant sensitivity were done back in the 1970s. They've come quite a way since then."

"But not as far as Yliaana's people," Kirk said grimly.

"No," Spock agreed. "As their minds developed they reached a point at which they chose to die rather than cause suffering, and so their race is slowly dying out. Yliaana's planet here was made for her because she is one of those who would prefer to die. She has lived here since her childhood, learning from the plants themselves, and she has survived to teach her own race how to live."

Kirk frowned. "Those nights out on the grassland, is that when she feeds?"

"Yes. Each night."

"But... how?"

Spock shook his head. "The biochemistry is beyond my comprehension, Captain. We have no way to express the process in terms that we understand. It is certainly not a matter of simple photosynthesis. However, if Professor Madison's experiments follow his theoretical analysis, then both Humans and Vulcans will probably have to face the problem also. For Yliaana's people, space flight is far in the past, their ability to reach out to each other across space is useless because their needs are now concentrated on their contact with one place, the one place each one must make his own if he is to survive."

"Uhura had it right before all of us," Kirk said slowly. Uhura looked up, startled. "You said, 'She's suiting her environment'," Kirk reminded her.

"Correct," Spock agreed. "It is the only environment possible for her now. She has helped to solve her people's problem and is trapped by the answer for ever."

"What I don't understand," McCoy said bluntly, "is how you know all this. You were only unconscious for four minutes, Uhura, and you much less than that, Spock."

"A mind link," Spock said succinctly.

Kirk frowned across at his friend, knowing the Vulcan's reluctance to link minds deeply. "It must have been a pretty deep link for you to learn so much."

"Total."

"Total?" Kirk shot a startled glance at the Bantu girl. "You too, Uhura?"

"Yes, sir." Uhura studied her hands a moment before looking at Kirk. "It's a strange experience, Captain, but I wouldn't have missed it. It was right and beautiful." She dropped her head to hide her face, wanting to keep the revealing expression from embarrassing Spock.

The Vulcan met Kirk's eye calmly. "We learned all we needed to know of Yliaana, nothing was hidden. She was chosen to represent her race because of her deep sensitivity to all living things. They left her here when she was a child, after she had learned how living things suffer to sustain us. All the life on the world they made for her came to love her and would not let her die. The plants have taught her how to take the food she needs from the air - much as the epiphytic plants of Earth and Vulcan do."

McCoy looked baffled. "I don't understand it either, Doctor," Uhura told him, "and I've had second-hand experience of it. It was like trying to understand one dimension too many; we're just not equipped to grasp what happens. But all the creatures there love her and don't want to hurt her, so all the meat-eaters have changed their feeding habits and feed only on the seeds and berries the plants give them."

"Give them?" McCoy and Kirk echoed together.

"Yes, they all help each other to live, as though the whole planet is one

entity. I don't begin to understand how the plants are willing to sacrifice part of themselves, or why that part should apparently be insensitive, but that's what happens; but I do know how terrified they are of eaters of animal flesh. While I was flying over Yliaana I remembered African eagles taking their young a baby sheep to feed on and I terrified her. I've never been more grateful to Spock for being a vegetarian."

"You mean she liked him better than you?" McCoy was incredulous. "Well, each to his own taste!"

"So we can leave her here alone?" Kirk asked the Vulcan.

"We have to. That place is almost part of her - to take her away would be to kill her. All her people on their own world must find a place of their own to live out their lives."

"Putting down roots," McCoy grinned.

"Not literally, Doctor, but in effect, yes. An evolutionary blank alley both our races may be wise to avoid."

Kirk rose. "We'll give Madison a full report to take back. It seems we'll be giving him a good deal to think about and work on." He switched off the recorder, and thumbed on the intercom. "Stand by to take us out of here, Mr. Sulu."

"But to leave her alone..." McCoy began to protest.

"Alone, but not lonely," Uhura reassured him. "You simply haven't felt the love and trust down there - " She broke off. "It was something special in my life and I don't ever want to forget it."

"I will remember too, Lieutenant," Spock said quietly.

Across the table Kirk gave them each a swiftly penetrative glance and raised one speculative eyebrow at McCoy. His friend's usually inexpressive voice had deepened just a little as he answered Uhura. He wondered just what that total mind link had meant to them both, maybe he'd learn - one day. He got to his feet.

As McCoy followed Kirk from the room, Spock put a restraining hand on Uhura's arm. "The mind link was necessary, Lieutenant."

She met his eyes bravely. "Yes, I understand that, Mr. Spock, and beyond our control as well. I could not have withstood Yliaana."

"No. Neither of us could."

She smiled a little. "Words are unnecessary, Spock. You know all that I am, and I learned all of you. For the moment we need say no more."

ENTERPRISE by T.G.Z.C.

When I think of you, I think of beauty;
Elegant, lovely, a lady to admire.
I know that you are selfish and demanding,
And utterly self-centred; you expect
All men to answer to your whims, and we -
Are we foolish that we grant you your desire?

Chekov: Doctor, I feel like a pack of cards.

McCoy: I'm busy now, but I'll deal with you later.

FOR THE FIRST TIME by Ann Neilson

Even as I said goodbye, deep in my heart
 I knew I loved you all the time;
 Brushing a tear from your cheek,
 My heart was almost torn apart
 Because I did not want to lose you.
 But I could not change after all these years
 And so I had to let you go.
 Even now I still dream of you, though,
 And of the days when I was happy
 For the first time, on Omicron Ceti III.

THE HIDDEN MAN by Ann Neilson

Tell me, why do you or I
 Have the right to criticise,
 Merely because we do not understand
 The officer, or even worse, the man
 Without whom we could have died
 Had he not risked his life.
 Is he so difficult to comprehend?
 You say he does not feel like other men,
 Yet he has shown us his heart.
 Remember how he laughed and cried
 When he thought that I had died -
 Are we too blinded by our own emotions?
 Too much to look for his compassion?

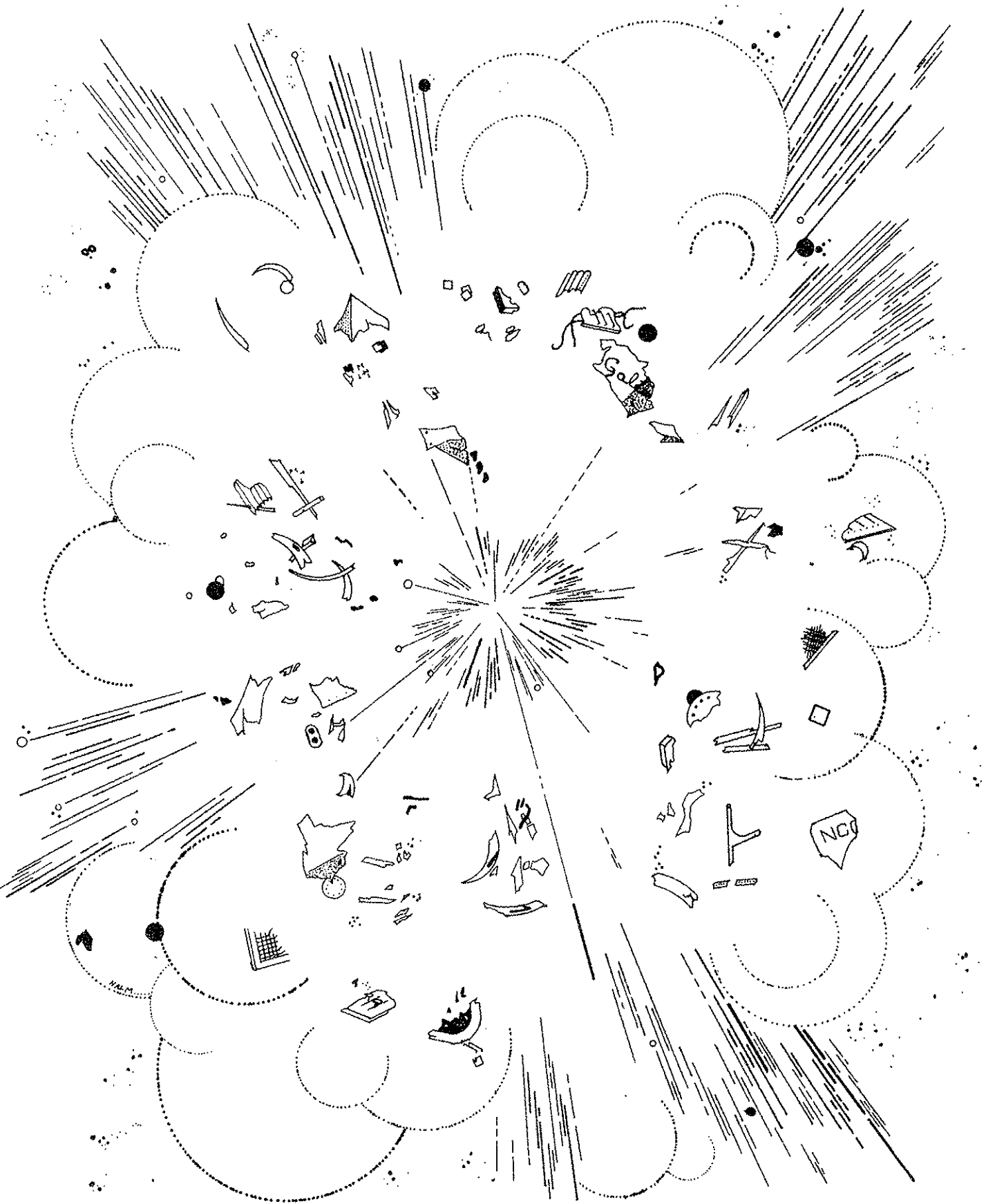
MORE THAN FAITH by Ann Neilson

There is no price that can be placed
 on a friendship such as theirs,
 that remains steadfast throughout the years.
 Even though they come from different worlds
 they are more close than brothers,
 and each has shown his readiness
 to give his life for the other.
 With undying loyalty and trust
 that will endure long after they are dust,
 forever side by side they stand,
 each, the other's Thousandth Man.

I had a little Starship,
 Nothing would it do;
 We mended all the fuses
 And made it good as new.

The King of Rigel's daughter
 Gave her Dad the slip -
 And all for the sake
 Of my little Starship.

COMMITMENT



by Mariann Hornlein

Commander Spock walked slowly down the winding stone ramp, absently monitoring the tricorder for life readings as he mused over the events of the last two months. The dim dankness of the moisture-laden walls were in harmony with his inward feelings, although outwardly he looked the same as always.

Involuntarily his mind went back in time, as it had done more times recently than he cared to admit, to an instant two months previously when his life had virtually ended. He had been sitting in the command chair on the bridge, watching the return of the shuttlecraft with Captain Kirk and Lt. Peters. A soft halo enveloped the small ship and, even before he could question its appearance, the glow brightened and the shuttlecraft exploded and vanished.

His throat still ached with the agony of the cry that had been ripped from him - "JIM!" The horrified silence of the bridge had been broken by the tense, choked voice of Ensign Chekov. "Sensors... show debris and the... remains of two... bodies."

Chaos! A kalaidoscope of memories, blurring into a dull haze of pain. He had become the vortex of the hurricane of grief that had swept the ship. Maintain control! Deny! Conceal! Details - the search for a reason, reports, memorial services, hysterics, morale - and always the need to maintain control, to present the calm unruffled exterior the crew had come to expect - and now needed. And to deny the anguish that had torn him apart, that was still tearing him apart. He had not believed that he could feel so much pain, had not fully realised how much James Kirk had meant to him, until he had lost his Captain. It had taken all of his strength to keep his stoic Vulcan exterior intact - it still did.

Spock mentally shook himself and checked the tricorder again. He had to stop remembering! It was not logical to feel this way, to spend so much time remembering... his mind slid back to McCoy's visit, about a week after the Captain's death. He could see clearly the concern, the anger on the Doctor's face as he burst into his quarters.

"I just heard you refused your promotion! Spock, you can't do that! We need you, the crew needs you! Jim..." McCoy's voice had trailed off, his concern had deepened, as with intuitive illogic he had seen beneath the impassive countenance to the turbulence underneath. "It's worse for you, isn't it? You and Jim were like one person, but all you can do is stay in control. You can't talk about it, can't yell in anger at the futility, can't cry or get drunk. All you can do is pretend you don't feel..."

Don't feel, don't feel... but he did! The unexpected torrent of grief, the empty loneliness, were knives tearing him apart. He was like a great tree, termites eating away the insides while the exterior seemed as whole and strong as ever.

He had agreed to take command until the Enterprise returned to Starfleet Headquarters, a long, forlorn trip. Then, the message. Scientists, diplomats, leaders of all fields - disappeared, then returned with unusual changes in behavior. One, a Human, had cracked under the pressure, and Starfleet had discovered that they had been kidnapped, submitted to torture through the use of pain-inducing drugs and forced to betray whatever they held most dear, most sacred. The outlaws, believed to be renegade Orions, then released them, broken men, torn by guilt and shame, firmly under the outlaws' control, ready to do whatever they were told. Starfleet had traced their base to this place, and the Enterprise had been ordered to rescue and bring back the remaining prisoners; destroy or capture the renegades.

Spock sadly shook his head. He could not understand how thinking beings could be so cruel to their fellow creatures. They had defeated the outlaws' ship - blasted it out of existence - then beamed down and found desolation. The best minds, the strongest leaders of the Federation, broken, cowering, nearly insane creatures, tormented beyond endurance. There was a Vulcan, S'Teen, an outstanding chemist, who had cried - cried! - at the sight of Spock, begging for a reason why

he had broken. Another, an Andorian, still had his sanity; he had not been there long enough to break. He had told a white-faced McCoy some of the things that had been done, had explained that all who had not broken within a month were dead. All but one, the unknown life-form that Spock was now seeking. The Andorian had said that they heard this one's screams far into the night, so they knew he was still alive. McCoy and the medical team had taken the desperate man back to the ship, leaving Spock to locate this last survivor.

Spock sighed and put his tricorder away. The life-form was on the other side of a heavy, wooden door. He pushed the door open and entered, into a narrow cold cell. The slender, shivering form of a Human male lay on a narrow stone ledge along one wall. He was wearing the remains of what once had been black trousers. At the sound of the door opening, the man stiffened and clenched his fists, the tenseness of his body giving mute testimony to his continued resistance.

The Vulcan was frozen, paralysed by the sight. The room whirled dizzily around him, then steadied as he moved, dream-like, towards the man. He dropped on his knees, stared into the defiant, pain-washed face, and reached out hesitant fingers, as if the man would vanish at his touch. His fingers found reality; he drew the rigid body into a swift, hard embrace.

"Jim... Jim!" His voice rang with an aching joy.

The man jerked at the sound of his voice, and a weak voice whispered, "Spock? It... can't... Spock!"

For a long moment there was silence, each struggling to comprehend the meaning of the other's presence. Spock felt the empty hollow inside slowly fill, the tearing grief replaced by a shining joy.

Kirk lay quietly in the strong, encircling arms, disbelief and happiness vying for dominance in his mind. The disbelief gradually vanished under the incredible realisation that the long nightmare was over - he had been found, and by Spock! He twisted his hands in the soft shirt, holding tightly to reality, buried his face in the hard, lean shoulder, and released the weeks of pain, fear, and exhaustion in great dry sobs of relief.

Spock allowed one arm to slip from Kirk's shoulder to his waist, and drew the violently shaking body even closer, his head bent protectively over Kirk's. The radiant light within was marred by dark streaks of fear and anger. He remembered the Andorian's words - 'We heard his screams far into the night, but he did not break.' Screams? Jim?! The Vulcan shuddered as he felt the terrible fragility of the once strong body, as he fully comprehended the meaning of the Captain's presence in this place.

He whispered gently, reassuringly, "Jim, Jim, you are with me. You are safe."

Gradually the racking sobs died away and Kirk lay quietly in the enveloping warmth. He pulled away and raised his head. "Spock? Oh, God! I had... stopped hoping... was waiting for... death, and wishing it would... hurry up and come, I didn't... believe it when I... heard your voice... I still don't..."

The Vulcan slowly stiffened as he looked down into the blank hazel eyes. A slow ache of words. "Captain... your... eyes..."

A small, gentle smile curved Kirk's mouth. "The drugs... I've been blind for weeks - since the very early days..." A sharp knife of pain cut into his inside, convulsing his body. His head swam dizzily, bringing a longing for the release of unconsciousness, but the drugs prevented that from happening.

Spock was desperately fighting for control, and finding it nearly impossible. Nothing in his training had prepared him for these extreme fluctuations in emotions; the pendulum swinging from grief to profound joy, to fear and anger. Nothing had prepared him to face the suffering of this man who he had finally realised was an integral part of himself - his alter-ego.

Spock reached for his communicator. "Mr. Scott, two to beam up in sixty

seconds." He gently gathered Kirk in his arms, shocked at the lightness of his body. All rational attempts at control fled as Kirk's head fell gently on his shoulder, as Kirk gave a sigh of relief and exhaustion.

Scotty looked up as they materialised on the transporter platform. He stared, transfixed, at Spock's face. He had never seen a look like that before, certainly not on the impassive Vulcan face! Joy, grief, fear, anger - all somehow mixed in an impossible combination. Scotty's glance fell on the face resting on the Vulcan's shoulder, and the same mixture of emotions appeared on his own face.

"Mr. Scott. Destroy that... place. Then set course for Starfleet Headquarters. I shall be up shortly."

Kirk sent a smile of greeting towards what he hoped was the console, then he heard a door swish open, and the familiar sounds and smells of his ship reached out, bringing soft messages of reassurance.

Another door swished open, and the odors changed to the medicinal, sterile smells of sickbay. A much-loved voice, "Spock, it's rotten. All that pain! Those poor..." The voice trailed off, then, "Jim! I... Jim!" Hands, familiar strong hands, were on his arm, gently touching his hair.

"Doctor." Spock's voice called McCoy back to reality. He looked up into the pain-filled eyes - pain? Spock? but - Jim was alive! - Jim...

The realisation hit and he tightened his hands briefly, then stepped back and studied the Captain with what he hoped was clinical detachment. He took in the white, drawn face, the too-clearly delineated ribs, the sightless eyes, the sharp thrust of a hip-bone, the involuntary trembling of the body, and his heart tightened, his own eyes filled with pain.

"My... God! Spock, in here, quickly!"

Spock watched as the Doctor quickly examined the Captain. His eyes were drawn to Kirk's hands, lying quietly on the coverlet. Normally the strong, sure hands of an active leader of men, they were now the too-white, too-thin hands of an invalid, waiting patiently for whatever time would bring. The Vulcan lowered his head as a strange moisture blurred his vision. He had to leave - now - he had to regain control.

"Captain, I must make my report to Starfleet Command. I shall return shortly." Spock quickly left, not daring to wait for a reply or look back.

McCoy finished his examination, helped the Captain into pyjamas, then could contain himself no longer. He enveloped Kirk in a close, gentle embrace, unnoticed tears wetting his cheeks. The two men clung together for a long moment, then the Doctor gently laid the Captain back down.

McCoy understood Spock's abrupt departure from the cubicle; for now he had to do the same, or he would break down into a completely unprofessional display of emotion. "Jim, I'll be right back."

When Spock re-entered Sickbay, he became aware of the moans of pain, the incoherent mumblings of the rescued prisoners. He frowned briefly, then saw McCoy's deeply troubled face and was quickly by his side, eyebrows raised in question.

For a long moment McCoy was unable to speak. Spock reached out a hand and gently shook his shoulder. "Bones..."

McCoy took a deep breath. "He is terribly weak, almost as helpless as a baby. He has lost over fifty pounds - but there doesn't seem to be any permanent damage, except for his eyes. I can't find any reason for his blindness, except perhaps for the drugs. I do not know if it is permanent or not. The pain is very bad - draining what little strength he has left. The drugs prevent

sedatives from working, but he must have relief, he's exhausted! He said he can sometimes sleep, but..." The doctor's voice cracked and he stopped, struggling for control. "Mentally - thank God! - he's O.K., I don't know how - where he got the strength from, but the fact that he didn't break saved his sanity. He needs a great deal of support, of reassurance that it's over, that the torture is finished and he is safe. But with a great deal of care - and love - if we can get rid of that pain, he should recover - maybe even see again."

McCoy thought ruefully that it was not the clearest report he had ever given, but when he looked up into Spock's eyes he saw only understanding, compassion and a confusion of emotions that mirrored his own. For an instant he was startled at the ease with which he read those emotions, then understood, with a sinking feeling, that Spock was near his breaking point.

He was concerned as he watched the Vulcan enter Jim's room, then he shrugged - there was nothing he could do. He followed, hoping devoutly that Spock wouldn't break; he had enough problems with Jim and the others, he didn't need an overwrought Vulcan on his hands as well!

Spock looked silently at his Captain. If sedatives did not work, there was only one thing that could relieve that pain, even although he wasn't sure if he still had the necessary control. There was no choice. "Captain, I shall attempt to relieve the pain with a mind meld. Is it premissable?"

A weak smile curved Kirk's tightly-held mouth, giving silent assent. Spock breathed deeply, then placed his fingers in the proper configuration, concentrated - then reeled back in shock as Kirk's body arched in sudden agony, head flung back, hands grasping wildly at the coverlet. The Vulcan leaned forward, ignoring McCoy's gaze, and raised Kirk up, holding him tightly.

"I... cannot... the drugs... The mindmeld brings even more pain. I cannot help either."

The two men stared at each other in helpless frustration, each reading the other's grief, fear and love. Spock felt the Captain's body gradually relax, then go suddenly limp. He looked down in sudden fear.

McCoy breathed, "Spock! He!... he's asleep! Lay him down, gently. This is the best thing that could happen."

The two stood, looking down at the sleeping man, for the first time seeing clearly the changes wrought by the last two months. Only the tousled brown hair, with the stubborn lock that fell over his forehead, was the same. The unconscious look of defiance on the thin face sent a pang through each of the men, and each wondered what deep inner strength had enabled Kirk to resist where the others had failed. Spock forced his mind to remain calm, his face its usual mask, and motioned the doctor to the far wall for a whispered conference.

Kirk was sleeping, but not peacefully. Strange, threatening shapes invaded his mind. A wavering blur sent a silver-ice needle into his arm... Death - he must not break - swirling, shuddering clouds of darkness - a blood-dipped knife - death. He tossed his head in helpless negation. He could not break - death - blood - Spock -

"NO! I will not! Spock! No... please!"

They whirled at the cry. Kirk was sitting straight up, body trembling, hands flung out, searching, sightless eyes trying frantically to see. A fist grabbed at Spock's heart; he was at Kirk's side in a moment.

"Jim! I am here. Jim!" He grasped Kirk by the shoulders, shaking him gently.

Kirk collapsed in weak relief against the Vulcan. "Forgive me... I can't

... I should have known... not to sleep... I hate sleep. I dream... of breaking... of death and blood... of waking and finding... I gave the order... for your death... of seeing you... dead... "

McCoy closed his eyes and sagged against the wall. Was that what Kirk wouldn't do? God! He looked at Spock and started towards him in sudden concern, then stopped, helpless.

The Captain's words had hit the Vulcan with the force of a phaser set on heavy stun. He turned dead white and suddenly looked... old. This pain... this suffering... by this man who was so much a part of him... for his sake? To protect him?

Kirk continued speaking, each word a blow to the Vulcan's fragile facade of control. "They beamed me off the shuttlecraft - put someone else in my place. They wanted me to break my oath to Starfleet - to kill someone - one of my crew. So they chose you. But I couldn't do that. I couldn't break my oath - kill you. Not you! But... when I sleep... I dream. So I try... not to sleep."

There was a long silence, broken only by the sound of the three men breathing. Neither Spock nor McCoy knew how to respond to those incredible words. Spock held Kirk in a tight embrace, frantically trying to think again. A cry from the main sickbay broke the stillness, followed by the sound of a scuffle.

S'Teen burst into the cubicle, knocking McCoy out of the way. Face livid with insane hate, he lunged at Kirk. "I broke! You did not! Why should a Vulcan break and a Human not? Why? WHY?"

Spock acted instinctively, scooping Kirk up and swinging him out of danger, protecting him with his own body. A crewman appeared in the doorway, and S'Teen fell, stunned by a phaser blast.

Kirk had frozen at the cry and remained still as Spock swung him up, afraid to move, not knowing what Spock might need to do. He heard the sound of the body falling. "Spock, what's wrong? What happened?"

McCoy scrambled to his feet. "It's O.K., Jim. It's over now. One of the people we brought up... "

"Bones - whatever he tried to do, don't blame him. It wasn't his fault. I... know."

McCoy stared at the Captain. "Don't worry, Jim. He'll be all right. We'll take care of him."

Spock held Kirk tightly until S'Teen was removed, then asked, "Doctor, what does the Captain need? Must he remain here, with these sounds, with those who hate him because they broke and he did not?"

McCoy met the Vulcan's gaze firmly. "He needs care - lots and lots of care - and love. Unless the antidote for the drug - if there is one - indicates extended treatment, he can get that care anyplace."

Spock nodded. Kirk was clinging to him, shaking with pain and reaction. The Vulcan gathered the last remnants of self mastery around him like a tattered cloak. "Then I will take him to his quarters. You can supervise his treatment there. Mr. Scott has command of the ship; I will care for the Captain."

He waited silently for the doctor's response. McCoy looked at the two, Human and Vulcan, and felt a twinge of envy. As close as he was to both of them, what they had between them was something very special. It would be better for Kirk to be away from the others, and would certainly be better for them as well. He had no fear that Kirk would not be well taken care of by Spock. He read beneath the disintegrating mask and saw the torment of grief, the intense need to care for his Captain. The doctor sighed.

"Go ahead, Spock. Take care of him."

Spock nodded once and left. By the time they reached Kirk's quarters, the

shaking had stopped, and the Captain was again on the verge of exhausted sleep.

Inside the door Spock paused. They were alone. Logic demanded that Kirk be given what he needed to help him rest. No-one would know, and even if they did, he really didn't care any more. It would be illogical to lay Kirk down on the bed where he would have to face the sleep-disturbing dreams alone. Spock grabbed a blanket, sat down in a comfortable chair, drew the blanket over Kirk and held him close.

The Captain murmured, "No... Spock. Not... necessary..." and was asleep.

At first Kirk's sleep was restless, broken by spasms of pain and disturbing nightmares. The soft touch of Spock's voice, the gentle tightness of his arms, calmed him and he gradually fell into a deep, healing sleep.

Spock tried to force his mind free of all emotion, but found it impossible to do so. He could not help but contrast the blind, helpless man he held in his arms with the vigorous Captain of two months ago, and his mind flinched at the contrast. He had been able to keep his Vulcan calm, at least outwardly, during the last weeks, but the short time since he had found his Captain had cracked the veneer apart. Cracked it so thoroughly that he wondered if he could ever repair it again, and found that he didn't really care. Right now, nothing in the universe mattered except this man whose head rested so lightly on his shoulder.

And what now? Where in the universe was there a place for a blind Starship Captain? His inside tightened at the question. He whispered softly, to himself, "With me, Jim. Whatever happens, with me."

Hours passed, and still Kirk slept. Spock refused to move, fearing to disturb this desperately needed rest. As the hours passed, he found a measure of calm and managed to fall into the deep concentration of meditation.

Kirk opened his eyes to a grey blur. He blinked a few times, and the blur gradually cleared. He lay quietly, wondering lazily where he was. He felt strangely light, enveloped in a strong warmth. Memory returned, and with it recognition. He was in his quarters, in his ship, held in Spock's arms, and he could see! And - the pain was gone. He let his head fall back, and looked up at the strong profile. Gradually, the meaning of the dried wetness, the haunted look to one shadowed eye sank in and he smiled gently.

"Spock."

His First Officer started, glanced down into the smiling eyes... smiling eyes? "Captain?"

The smile spread to Kirk's lips, a clear, joyous smile - like a child greeting a summer morning. "The pain's gone, Spock, and I can see. I should have realised... they gave me a shot every third day, and this is the fourth."

Spock bowed his head for an instant in silent thankfulness, then stood and settled Kirk on the bed. He straightened, met Kirk's gaze in a long look of complete understanding, then called McCoy.

Spock waited in the outer office of sickbay while McCoy gave the Captain his final physical examination. There was a chance that Kirk could return to limited duty tomorrow. While he waited, Spock's fingers played with a report lying on the doctor's desk. A phrase caught his attention, and he realised that this was McCoy's report on the rescued men. He glanced through it absently, his mind on the examination in progress.

A stillness came over him as he read and reread a concluding paragraph, at first unable to assimilate its meaning.

"It is therefore my conclusion that those persons who did not succumb to the pressure of drugs, mental torture and threats, were able so to resist due to an exceptionally high emotional commitment to the person or persons selected for them to betray and/or kill. In cases where this strong commitment did not exist, the individual could not call on reserves of strength great enough to allow continued resistance."

Exceptionally high emotional commitment...

The door opened and the Captain came out, followed by a smiling McCoy. Spock met his Captain's eyes for a brief moment and read the interpretation of those words - love - and understood.
