



LOG ENTRIES

21

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B. Willmott's drawing was the winner in the competition in N/L 30

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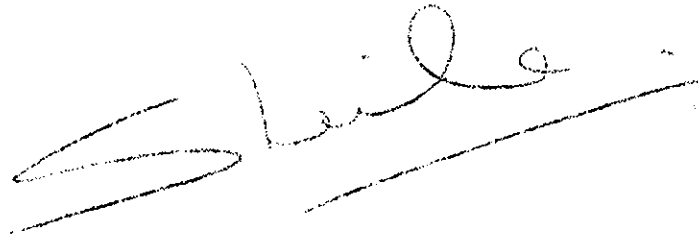
Hello, everyone.

And so another issue of Log Entries finds its way into your hands. I still have the stencils to do for Wine of Calvoro by Valerie Piacentini, and then my typewriter goes in for a well-deserved service - which means, among other things, that there will be only one new zine out in February, although we hope to have a novella in April as well as the usual issue of Log Entries; this by a new writer, Leslie Coles.

You will notice that this issue is the shortest we've had for some time - even the short LE 19 was a page longer! This is because we had to allow for getting the illo on P 2 printed half-tone. We've had extra copies of it done, and we are selling these for 30p each including postage (U.S. \$1.00 inc. postage). We also had to allow for getting Pp 27/28 photocopied - that was the only practicable way to print Karen's winning illo from newsletter 29, and we also decided that the best illo we could get for the poem on P 27 would be a photograph of the scene - and again, the only practicable way to print that was to photocopy. Our thanks to member Beryl Turton for arranging this for us. I hope to get back to the normal length next time.

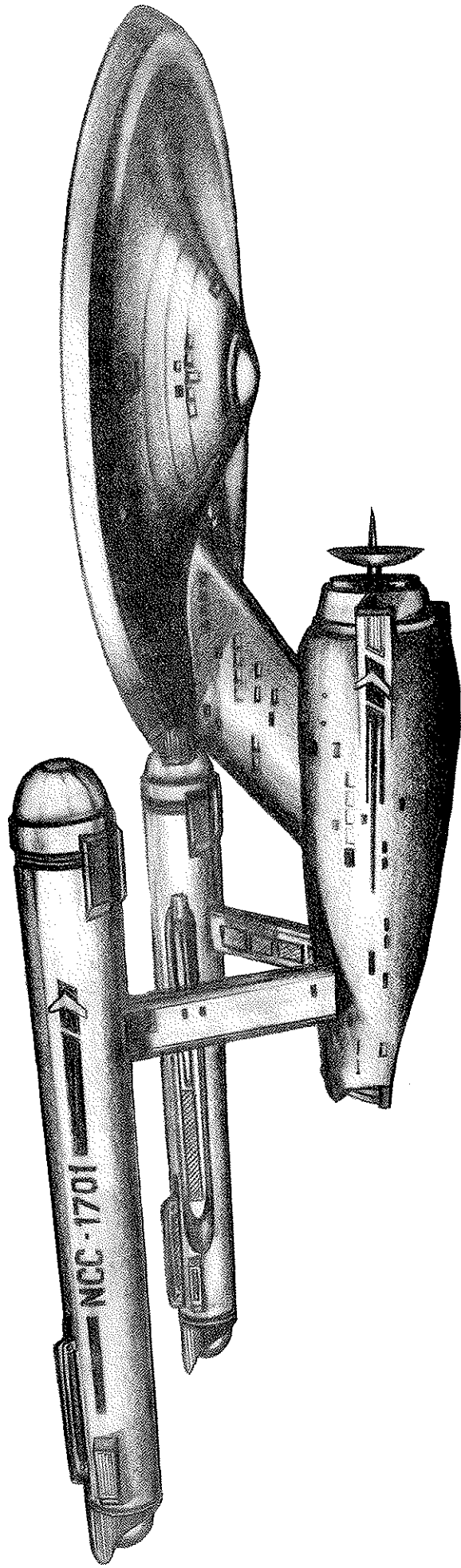
For LE 22 I have stories by Simone Mason, Elizabeth Sharp, Susan Meek, and others. I still have quite a few stories on file, but I'm always looking out for more - especially Kirk-bonkers; we like to have at least one per issue it's such a popular theme. Come on, you budding writers - at least let us share your secret vice. Even if your family doesn't appreciate it, we understand!

December 1978

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Sheila', written over a horizontal line.

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

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B.A. Willmott

THE LAST -- AND THE FIRST by Elizabeth M. Sharp

His name, even his own personal identity, seemed very important to him now. Separated from his companions, he was alone on a hostile alien world where the sun burned as fiercely as the hatred of the natives. There was no movement and no sound save for the shuffling of feet and the incoherent noises of the natives' language. The dark shadows moved closer, and he heard their laughter as they mocked him for his strangeness. He felt their eyes burning on him, for the blows to his head and face meant he could no longer see properly.

They were formless images now, taunting and despising him for his mere existence, for the shape of his ears, for the colour of his blood. And he felt his stomach sink and turn at the thought of his predicament, for he knew his death was both near and inevitable. They were growing tired of him now, for their beatings and continual questions in a language he could not understand had got them nowhere. His one remaining wish was that they would kill him quickly - that the whole sordid affair would be over. But it was not to be, for he suddenly realised that they had left him alone in his cell, the prison door banging shut behind them.

Pain was his only companion as he lay on the cold stone floor, staring up at the ceiling. It was such a stupid thing to have happened - to have become separated from the landing party in such a way - but his curiosity about this world had overcome his judgement, and his attention had wandered for an instant - which had been long enough.

Starfleet had requested information about the ancient history of this world and he had jumped at the chance of coming back in time all of these centuries to see what the first beginnings of Vulcan civilisation had really been like. He realised now he should have stayed behind on the Enterprise and kept Spock company, for the Vulcan had refused point-blank to come. Both he and the Captain had pleaded with him, shouted at him and threatened him, but still Spock had stayed behind. Now, sadly, McCoy understood why - the quiet, gentle alien feared his own origins - the ferocity and violence of his Vulcan ancestors.

McCoy shivered with cold. He could still hear the laughter of the Vulcan men as they walked outside the thick stone walls of his prison. As the darkness of the night came, and still he could not move, he began to wonder if they would ever come back.

There came a scratching sound, as if something was running across the stone floor. McCoy gasped, horrified, as the large rat scrambled onto his chest and sat, watching him with its pincer-like eyes. After a long moment, the rat came to a decision, and ran to the other side of the cell, out of sight, but still the scratching went on. The evil was lying dormant, waiting for the night time.

McCoy tugged at his chains, knowing even as he did so that it was futile. Neither the chain nor the wall to which it was fastened showed any signs of weakness.

The hours passed, and in a strange way the rat became his companion - the only other living creature in his universe. Once or twice it had come to look at him again, but always it had left him, always promising with its eyes that it would return.

Quietly he lay, staring up at the narrow slit that served as a window. The sky was black, and as he counted the few stars that were visible, he realised that his sight must have returned to something approaching normal. Almost immediately he cursed his eyes as the fates decided to taunt him even in his solitude. Slowly, a tiny star drifted across the narrow field of vision, from one stone wall to the other, and he almost cried at the certain knowledge that the star had been the Enterprise. In these ancient skies there were no other unnatural satellites.

The rat scurried back to its hole as the door opened slowly. There was



merely the faintest glimmer of light and the darkness remained almost unbroken. Only one man had entered and as far as he could tell, no-one else waited at the door. But McCoy did not watch the tall dark form as it came down the stairs and over the floor towards him. Turning his head to the wall he tensed his muscles for the beating he felt sure would come. He heard the man kneel down beside him, and again he felt the burning of the alien eyes as they scrutinised his face. But something was different this time. McCoy turned his eyes towards the man in amazement as the Vulcan gently touched his face. There was no violence, no anger here, and even the words the Vulcan spoke, unintelligible though they were, were soft and quiet. McCoy shook his head hopelessly, not understanding, then gasped as the man held a knife over him. Quickly he tried to move away, but his injuries would not permit escape. And then the man was talking to him again, using words that McCoy recognised but did not understand. He struggled to remember the meaning, for Spock had used these words several times before, but the memory failed him.

The man leaned closer, and again he gently touched McCoy's face, as though reassuring him. The blade flashed in the dim light and it was several seconds

before he realised the Vulcan was working on the lock of his chain. After five minutes of concentrated effort, the manacle slipped off his wrist to the floor.

The man sat back while he carefully hid the knife in the folds of his tunic. Although McCoy strained his eyes to their limit, he could not make out the features of the dark shadow beside him. Slowly, he felt himself being raised off the floor, as the man lifted him with all the ease and gentleness that one would use to lift a child. Carefully the Vulcan walked towards the door and out into the night.

The dim light of the street allowed McCoy a brief glimpse of his new friend. He was a young man, in his early thirties by Earth standards, with thick black hair and brown eyes. His regular features gave him a handsome face, despite the old, thin scar that ran from his left eye to his chin. He, too, was seeing McCoy clearly for the first time, and as he glanced down at the strange alien ear that rested on his shoulder, there was the merest hint of a smile on his lips as he repeated the words McCoy now remembered and understood so well - "I am your friend - I will not hurt you."

Artificial light is always harsh, but this light seemed unnecessarily so. Or perhaps it was the way Spock looked at him that disturbed the Captain's feelings so deeply. But whatever the reason, Kirk found he could not look directly at the Vulcan's eyes.

They sat in silence, the chief engineer being content to watch them both, for he too was reluctant to make the first move. When the Vulcan eventually spoke, Kirk felt himself cringe from the element of accusation in the voice.

"What do you mean, you lost him?"

Kirk sighed, going over the events in his mind for what seemed like the millionth time. "We just lost him. One minute he was there, the next he was gone."

"You looked for him, yet you could not find him?"

The Captain nodded. Spock stood and paced the room once. Without looking round he said, "You should realise that it is possible he is already dead."

Kirk tried to keep his voice steady. "Why should McCoy be dead?"

"If he vanished as suddenly as that, then it is possible - a ninety percent probability - that he found his way into a 'mankon', a form of trap used by the people of this time. Basically it is a very deep hole, well hidden from view, even when it contains a victim. They are emptied periodically, every day. If you had looked closely at the ground you may well have found them."

Kirk jumped to his feet. "Then there is still time. We can look for him now!"

"There is no more time. You wasted too much of it in futile efforts to find him by flying over the area in the shuttlecraft. In open country like that an aerial view is no good. They will have found him by now."

"What will they do to him, sir?"

"Imagine, if you will, Mr. Scott, that you are a citizen of ancient Rome on Earth and you find me in a deep hole in the middle of nowhere. What would you do?"

Scott nodded, his own imagination answering the question. "I know what I would do, sir, but I think I can guess what an ancient Roman might do."

Kirk looked directly at the Vulcan for the first time in minutes. "I am sorry, Spock, I should have come to you when it happened. I suppose I thought all I had to do was look for him, and that to drag you away from your research would waste time and serve no useful purpose."



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Spock shook his head. "You were not to know. You only went to collect general information on the period to satisfy some whim of a Starfleet official. How could you possibly know what my people are like at this time in their history?"

Kirk sat on the edge of the table. "I should have known, Spock, when you refused to go."

The Vulcan stood, frowning slightly. "It is my fault. I should have gone with you. He might have been alive now if I had."

They fell silent. After a moment Spock moved to the door.

"Spock - where are you going?"

The First Officer faced his Captain. "I am going to find McCoy," was the simple reply.

Kirk was puzzled. "You said he would probably be dead!"

"Yes, I said that - but I didn't believe it."

The two Humans watched him closely, aware that this was a side of Spock's nature they didn't often see. The Vulcan glanced towards the floor before he added, "I have to find out anyway."

"But you don't want to go."

"No, Captain, I don't. I would give anything not to have to go, not to have to see the barbarians my people once were. But no-one else can go. For once, I fit the picture completely, so if you will give me a few moments, stores will find me the correct period clothing." At the door he stopped and turned back. "I will require your help, Mr. Scott."

The engineer stood. "Of course, sir."

The two men left the room. After a few minutes' solitude Kirk made his way to the transporter room and waited for their arrival. He did not have to wait long.

Spock was dressed in a simple brown tunic and trousers of the same colour. The neck of the tunic was slit low enough to show a band of solid metal around his neck, that looked so tight that it might choke him. Spock ignored the tricorder Kirk had set down for him, taking only the communicator which he hid below his tunic.

"Why the metal band, Spock? It looks horribly tight."

"It is, but I have to wear it - or I would not live long."

"Why should your life depend on that?"

Spock stood on the transporter platform, the dim light of the machinery

illuminating his eyes. When he spoke his voice was as calm and dignified as Kirk had ever heard it.

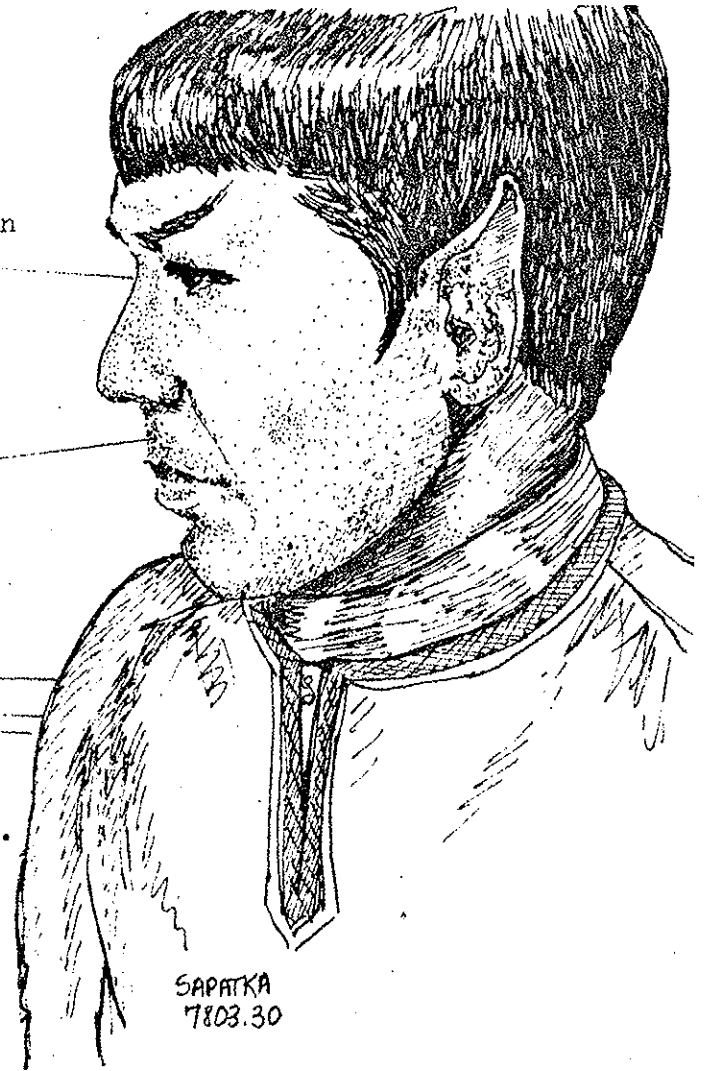
"Look at me. What do you see? A man with black hair, brown eyes and dark skin?"

Kirk nodded without speaking.

"In that case you see a slave, for in this time, only fair-skinned Vulcans had the gift of freedom. And a slave who does not wear a collar is killed - slowly."

Kirk turned away to hide the horror he felt. Mercifully, the Vulcan went on speaking - Kirk didn't think he would survive another silence. "I shall try to call you twice a day, but don't count on it - and whatever you do, don't call me. They would kill me if they thought I wasn't like them."

Kirk's hands moved over the controls. Before he activated the machine he said simply, "Take care," but his eyes said very much more. He was left with the memory of Spock's half smile, which said so much in return.



The sun crawled across an orange sky, and from his new 'prison' McCoy watched and waited. From the window he saw the open country stretch as far as the horizon. Time passed slowly, for Salen, his new companion, was usually gone all day, returning only when the stars appeared in the sky. The door was always locked - for his own good, McCoy knew - but after a week he would have given anything to walk across the green hills, even for only a few moments.

He was in what appeared to be Salen's home - only two rooms with the most rudimentary furniture, a bed, a table and two chairs. The other room held another table, and that was all, but McCoy had been intrigued to find several paintings scattered over the table and one or two on the floor. They were beautiful - scenes of the Vulcan countryside or portraits, none of which were of the same person. Some brushes and several pots used to hold the colour were lying on the floor in the corner of the room, along with several sheets of unused paper. McCoy had seen Salen work on the second day of his stay. For some reason the Vulcan had come back early and he had the paint with him. The painting he had started lay half finished in the corner with the unused paper. It was a beautiful picture of a little girl of about six years of age. He had spent four hours working on the painting until the fading light had made it impossible to continue.

Although both men were unable to understand each other's spoken language, they nevertheless communicated to a certain extent by using signs. When McCoy had indicated that he wanted to know who the child was, Salen's reply had been to point to himself. From this McCoy concluded that she was his daughter but he had not yet found a way of asking where she was.

McCoy sat down carefully on the edge of the bed, for his body still ached from the beatings of a week ago. He was very grateful to Salen who had taken great care of him. It was only now that he was beginning to regain the use of his arms and the mobility to move around the room unaided. McCoy's universe was now two rooms instead of one, but he had learned a lot from the Vulcan. It was

an uneasy feeling to have a Vulcan sit on the edge of your bed, watch you without speaking for two minutes, then burst out laughing. He knew there had been no malice in the laugh, it was simply the member of one race meeting the member of another for the first time. He was the first Human Salen had ever seen, and he was only too aware of how ridiculous he must look.

The sudden noise at the door made him jump. It was Salen, but he was far too early - it was not yet mid-day - but McCoy smiled in greeting and was not surprised when the smile was returned. What did surprise him, however, was the package Salen held out for him.

"Great God Almighty, Salen, where did you get them?"

The Vulcan sat, watching him carefully. He said something and pointed to McCoy. The Human understood and nodded. "Yes, they are mine. I'd love to know where you found them, though."

He carefully scrutinised the communicator and phaser he had given up for lost. The phaser was of no use - if he killed anyone he might drastically change the future, and he had no wish to get back to the Enterprise only to find that Spock had never existed. But perhaps the communicator still worked? He flicked it open, but it didn't take a science degree to show it was useless. It remained dead and quiet in his hand.

He sighed deeply. "It's no use to me either."

"Pardon?"

"I said it's no use..." McCoy's voice trailed off as he studied the Vulcan. "What did you say?"

After a few seconds' silence he replied, "I said... pardon?"

"Yes, that's what I thought you said."

Salen sat still, obviously perplexed; McCoy thought deeply, wondering how best to explain the situation. "Salen, this object lets me understand what you say, and you understand what I say."

The Vulcan nodded. "I see... I think. In that case, perhaps you will tell me what planet you come from. I should like to know."

McCoy was astounded. He had been thinking of telling Salen he was from a distant country, but obviously the Vulcans knew a great deal about their own world, not to mention astronomy, for Salen to ask such a question.

He decided to explore the situation further. "You know about that?"

Salen nodded. "Of course, for what else would explain your ears or your red blood?"

McCoy smiled. "I sometimes say something similar to... someone else." He paused, wondering how much to tell the Vulcan. It wouldn't matter if he told him where he came from, for Earth would not be discovered by the Vulcans for centuries yet. But not too much - just the bare facts. "I am from a planet called Earth. It is a long way from here, in another solar system."

Salen's eyes shone. "That's marvellous! I did not believe it possible for other systems to exist, but I have always kept an open mind. Salar, my cousin, always believed it possible, however."

McCoy considered this. It seemed very strange for the Vulcan to be talking in this way. He knew Salen was very different from the men who had captured him - he had saved the life of a man he knew to be an alien - but McCoy was puzzled by the intelligence this 'man from history' seemed to have.

There was a sudden noise at the door and a man rushed in. McCoy, having visions of being taken back to his prison, grabbed hold of Salen's arm in horror. But the stranger totally ignored him, so intent was he on speaking to Salen. The torrent of words that fell from the man's lips came so quickly that

the translator couldn't cope. To McCoy it was a confusion of sounds.

Salen held up his right hand and touched the man briefly on the shoulder. The man stopped talking and listened as Salen said, "Salar, this is McCoy."

Salar glanced at McCoy and nodded briefly before turning back to his cousin. The only comment he made was, "The man has a strange name." And then he was gone, closing the door behind him.

McCoy still had hold of Salen's arm. As soon as Salar had gone he tightened his grip. "He may tell them I am here."

Salen frowned. "Tell who?"

"Those men. The ones who imprisoned me."

There was a faint smile on the Vulcan's lips. "He would not tell the Dalanar anything. Did you not see the iron collar he wore?"

McCoy nodded. "It's the same as yours. But who are the Dalanar?"

"The Dalanar are the ones who control this world - for now, anyway. Their control will not last long, for they cannot sense thoughts. They had no way of finding out who you were, so they tried to kill you instead. They kill by starvation - they still don't know you are gone, for they have never returned to the cell."

"Salen, why do you and Salar wear collars?"

The Vulcan stood and walked to the other room. When he returned, McCoy saw he was carrying the half finished painting of the little girl. He held it out to the Human.

"This is my daughter, but she does not belong to me. The Dalanar have her. By the same woman I had two sons. They were killed as soon as they were born, for the Dalanar are afraid of male children, and keep only a few; they had no use for my sons. I am my master's property - a slave. Nothing more."

The silence lasted a very long time. Salen sat beside McCoy watching his reaction. McCoy did not object when he felt the Vulcan probe his thoughts, for the brief contact answered many of his questions. The fair-skinned Vulcans were the masters, and the dark skinned Vulcans were the slaves. It was as simple and straightforward as that.

Raindrops glinted on the white stone pavement. The sounds of early morning filled the air as man and creature awoke to the new day. At this early hour only the slave walked the surface of his planet, and it was soon to be their masters' undoing. But for now, for today at least, their work continued. And those who walked the streets tactfully failed to notice the slave Salen and his anonymous companion.

It was such a long way from home, so far away from the controlled, sterile emotions of humanity that had once meant so much to McCoy. Now all he wanted to do was return to the safety of normality that was the Starship Enterprise. His face was lost in the folds of the hooded cloak that he wore, but still he could feel the eyes of the Vulcans watching him.

Time stopped as suddenly as the rain. The lone figure walked towards them slowly, with a forced dignity that betrayed his weakness. All movement in the street stopped as the slaves waited, some with heads bowed, till the blond Dalanar master had passed. Their eyes watched him till he was out of sight and out of reach. Yet it was clear that something was going on in the small crowd. Salen's eyes met the gaze of a young woman of about twenty years of age, and she nodded once, then ran to the nearest building. McCoy came closer to his friend.

"What's going on?"

"Today is the day the Dalanar meet their deaths." He asked no more, for it was not his business.

They walked on again in silence. Salen had promised to show him the way back to open country, having explained in detail the traps that were set for runaway slaves. No-one knew where they were, but they were many and varied. McCoy only knew he must find his way back to the beamdown point in the hope that the Enterprise was still there to find him.

By the time they reached the end of the town the rain had started again. The green expanse stretched far ahead of them, so real and daunting that McCoy could almost hear it calling. Salen touched his arm and pointed.

"You go that way, towards the sun, but always in the shadow. Test the ground as you go, for you will not get a second chance. I wish you good fortune, McCoy of Earth."

He was glad to be on his way home, but saying goodbye to this Vulcan was proving to be very difficult. "I also wish you good luck, Salen. I hope you and your people gain your freedom. Goodbye."

The Vulcan waited until the Human was well out of sight before turning back.

The streets were unusually busy - more slaves than usual were up and about. Salen entered the massive building that housed his master and his family. Most of the slaves in this town worked at various tasks for this same master. He governed the country for hundreds of miles around, and important delegates frequently came for discussion with Malvek, Governor of the Sulasan Lands. Today there was to be an important meeting of army leaders. This was a frequent occurrence, since there was always a war going on somewhere. The slaves, of course, were never used in the army, lest they turn on their commander.

Salen's tasks were no longer manual. His long service with the same master had earned him a certain position. During his long day, which had only just begun, his job was to serve at table and, most important, be at hand in case his master wanted anything. That meant he had to stand close beside Malvek. Since slaves were considered too stupid to understand a language other than their own local dialect and the Dalanar talked freely in his presence, Salen knew their every thought; their every move.

The day progressed according to plan. The Dalanar were so engrossed with the occasion that they failed to notice the gradually increasing number of slaves, who waited silently outside the building, or moved about their tasks with a certain detached attitude inside.

All the well-known leaders of the surrounding countries were gathered at the table, arguing violently as usual, when the strange alien creature was again pulled before them. Malvek roared at the top of his voice, and silence descended in the massive hall like a curtain. No-one moved, least of all Salen, who, after a brief glance at a nearby slave, realised there was nothing he could do to help McCoy. It was not yet time for his people to act. They were not quite ready.

"I ordered the death of this abomination. Why were my orders not carried out?" Malvek's voice boomed throughout the hall with a power McCoy had not heard before. One young Vulcan stepped forward.

"We left him in the cell, Lord Malvek. Someone must have set him free, for he should be dead by now."

The translator was giving McCoy a perfect reproduction in English of the violent anger of the Vulcan called Malvek. While he listened, he was being forced to stand at the end of the hall facing the table guests by two soldiers who held spears at his back. There was no way he could hope to get round them, and there was no obvious escape in front. He clenched his fists and waited for

the inevitable order.

Malvek stood, his eyes blazing. Lifting a wicked looking knife he held it out to the slave nearest him. "Slit that creature open."

Salen looked on in horror. The Human had been doomed to failure from the start. There was no way through the defences of the slave traps in the open country as he should have known - the scar on his face gave evidence of that.

The slave lifted the knife and as he did so, McCoy stepped back a pace, till he felt the spear at his back and he could move no more. The dim light in the hall made the faces watching an anonymous sea of shadow. There was no way he could see Salen now, which, McCoy realised, was just as well as there was nothing he could do.

As the slave advanced towards his victim Malvek only grinned in pure enjoyment. McCoy balled his fists, determined to make a fight for it even though he knew what the result would be. The slave's pace never halted for a moment as he walked towards the Human.

But silence has great power and speaks with an intensity of its own. With one universal movement the slaves rushed forward towards the centre of the hall. The slave who had been approaching McCoy ran past the Human and had killed the astonished guard before he had realised what was happening.

Before McCoy's horrified eyes there then occurred one of the most violent scenes he had ever witnessed. Salen, aware that his men had not been fully prepared, had himself pounced on the astounded Malvek and was in the process of throttling him. The desperate need to succeed had increased the slave leader's strength to enormous proportions and he didn't even feel the blows of the Dalanar guards as they rushed at him from all sides. In a sudden rain of knives and fists several dark-haired Vulcans ran to his aid, and Malvek was soon forgotten as the guards fought for their lives. But over the centuries the Dalanar had become weak and careless as they lived with a false sense of security - even their wars were fought to rule - and in a few minutes the slaves had taken their revenge. Salen stood in the middle of the desolation and smiled slightly as several of his men ran outside to find and destroy any resistance that might remain.

The slaves had not bothered with McCoy and had, in fact, gone out of their way to avoid him. Perhaps the sight of the strange alien filled them with the same primitive fear that had condemned him in the eyes of their former masters. In any event, in the silence that followed the violence, McCoy was left alone. His heart was pounding and he felt sick. How was it possible that the peaceful Vulcans of his time could have evolved from people such as these, people who were capable of such anger and hate at the signal of one man?

And the silence stretched on. After a few seconds McCoy realised that the Vulcans were standing very still with their eyes closed, as if trying to forget what they had done. There was no movement, save for the wind that crept round the open doors and sent dust scurrying across the floor. The silence became almost physical, like a man walking through the hall towards the doors. It was so quiet, the feeling was almost spiritual.

Salen straightened and turned to look at McCoy. Slowly he walked over to the Human. "What do you think of me now, McCoy?" The voice was clear, but somehow sad. McCoy shook his head and looked away. Salen nodded understandingly. "They did it for you."

McCoy looked back at the Vulcan. "They what?"

"They did it for you," repeated Salen very slowly. "They were not fully prepared, but they did not have it in them to let you die. Oh, they would have done it anyway - but later today. As for me, I did not give the signal. After generations of slavery I wanted this day to succeed and they were not quite ready. But they acted on their own. I was going to let you die."

It was McCoy's turn to be silent. He glanced at the floor, not knowing what to say. In the end it was Salen who spoke.

"Will you forgive me?"

Almost at once McCoy nodded and smiled. "Of course. I owe you my life anyway. But what manner of people is it who would risk a revolution to save one man - and an alien at that?"

"A people who are aware of their barbarism. A people looking for identity and who know they can no longer live with telepathy and the emotions of others. It hurts too much - like killing."

McCoy nodded, but he was troubled. What if the slaves' action had altered history? His own presence had caused them to act before they were completely ready. He had altered his own planet's history once before - it would be just as easy to do it again, this time on Vulcan. What if something went wrong and he succeeded in killing Vulcan's modern society at its birth? He began to wonder if he would ever see Spock again.

Salen cleared his throat in a manner reminiscent of Spock. "There is a garden through that door. It is enclosed within the walls of the building. Would you like to wait there for me?"

McCoy nodded, and pushing open the thick wooden doors, he walked into the sunlight.

The garden was wild, but very beautiful. Tall green trees swayed in the gentle breeze and in the centre of the lawn a fountain cascaded among purple rocks. In the peaceful solitude, McCoy sat on a low stone wall and fixed his eyes on the rocking branches. The sound of running water mingled with bird song and if he tried hard enough he could almost believe he was on Earth. Almost.

In a dream, he watched the slave cross the lawn towards him. He knew who it was, but the dream-like state he was in would not let him move. He simply sat still, watching the man come closer, till he sat beside him on the stone wall.

McCoy closed his eyes, then opened them. The slave was still there - he was no illusion. Suddenly all the fear and tension of the past days fell heavily on McCoy and came to the surface. He sat with his head resting in his hands, as though it would be somehow obscene to reveal his own emotions in front of the Vulcan. But this state of mind lasted only a few seconds. The hand that lightly touched his shoulder and the question "Are you ill?" brought McCoy out of his dream-like hiding place and back to reality.

"No, Spock - I am quite well." Touching the Vulcan's hand he was both surprised and pleased that Spock did not draw away. "And I am very pleased to see you. I know how you hated to come here."

Spock came very close to smiling. "It was not hate, but fear that kept me from joining the landing party. It was my fault you got lost. I should have been there."

McCoy shook his head. "No - it was my own fault. I didn't do what you said, and wandered away from the others. I deserved to get lost, but you did not deserve to have to come to this place after me. I'm sorry you had to do it. Anyway, how did you find me?"

"I came to the nearest town. The people did not trust me for I am a stranger to them. But after several days' searching the Enterprise found you with the sensors. They told me your location when I called them, but even so, I had problems. You covered quite a large area of land today."

McCoy smiled. "It will look a lot different in your time, Spock. That would have confused you."

"Actually it didn't. You see, I have never been here before. I don't even speak the language."

McCoy sighed. "I am sorry, Spock. I cause you nothing but trouble."

The Vulcan stood. "We shall be in trouble now if we do not go. Someone is coming."

They walked together to stand in front of the fountain. Spock raised his communicator. "Spock to Enterprise - two to beam up."

The air around them thickened as the sparkle began. In less than a minute the Starship had claimed them.

Back in the garden, the rain had started to fall.

TO LIVE IN A VAULT by Crystal Ann Taylor

You tell me you don't wish to know,
 What it's like to have feelings inside,
 You show to us a face of ice,
 A heart of stone, expressionless eyes,
 You insist that intellect alone,
 Regulates the path of your life.
 You contend that logic, by itself,
 Supercedes any need for love.

You may be content to live in a vault,
 Imprison your heart behind a stone wall,
 Where Human touch cannot warm the cold,
 But I can see...
 The conflicts that rage inside,
 I understand...
 And won't let you pay the price.
 The grave is for the dead. You are alive,
 And you can love, as well as I.
 Feelings are a part of life,
 The bond that touches another's soul.
 If I must, I'll chip at the ice
 With gentle probes, and teasing laughter,
 Until it melts in the warmth of touch,
 And you accept friendship and love.

A FRIEND by Sandie Cowden

Your face is not like mine,
 - And yet
 Your eyes possess a glow.
 The softness in their depths
 Of two sparkling silver pools,
 Of velvet brown and starlight,
 Softly reflecting
 The colours of your life...

Your face is alien
 - To mine.
 But my heart is not to you.
 It beats a little faster
 When my eyes
 Glance shyly at your face,
 And see a friend
 Who is so much more
 To me...

A MATTER OF CONVENIENCE by Tina W. Pole

There was the Chief Engineer waving frantically at us from up in the hangar deck control room whilst we were making ourselves comfortable in the Galileo.

"Captain... Captain..." I tried to interrupt, but as usual nobody paid any attention to me. Still if it had been anything of importance Mr. Scott would have got in touch with us via the bridge; as it was we were given the all clear for lift-off, and I forgot all about the Chief Engineer as the hangar doors slid open and we were launched out into space. It was only my second time out in a shuttlecraft, you see, and I found it all very exciting.

"Yeoman."

The Captain was calling for a Yeoman, so what I was... Heavens, he was looking at me! Of course, how silly - how could I forget?

"Captain?"

"If you'll kindly stop daydreaming and check the controls on your panel..."

"Yes, sir." I peered at the controls at the side of me. Everything looked all right.

"Well?"

I crossed my fingers, hoping he wouldn't see. "Everything's in order, sir."

He nodded his head and I inwardly gave a sigh of relief. It wouldn't pay to look ignorant on this little expedition, my future career depended on it.

"When we're well away from the Enterprise," he said as he undid his safety belt and stood up, "we'll let you have a go with the main controls."

I didn't say anything, mainly because I was speechless. This I hadn't expected, after all a Yeoman is a Yeoman, not a shuttlecraft pilot. Oh! sure, they'd put us through the basics at the Academy, and we'd had a go with a simulator and had had a ride in one, but to actually take control...

"Mr. Spock!!!" The Captain was standing in the doorway of the back compartment of the shuttle.

"Captain?" the Vulcan First Officer asked without a trace of emotion on his face, whereas I looked up at the Captain in surprise, wondering what on earth had happened.

"There's no..." He looked down at me and then back across at the First Officer. "There's no john in there."

I blushed - I couldn't help it. It sounded so personal coming from the Captain.

"No 'john', Captain?"

"Toilet, Spock, toilet. It's been taken out."

"No toilet, Captain? Most peculiar, you'd have thought Mr. Scott would have informed us."

"You're darn right he should have, this shuttle shouldn't be in use without a... a... How long before we rendezvous with the Hood?"

"Two hours and thirty six minutes."

"And if we went back?"

"We'd never catch up with our schedule."

"Drat!..." He made his way back to the front of the shuttle and sat back down. "Two hours and thirty-odd minutes... talk about a test of will power."

I sat and fiddled with my tricorder, making sure I had my head bent well down over it because I was smiling... Of course, well, they wouldn't be wanting

me to take over the controls of the shuttle now.

Half an hour later I wasn't smiling any more. Well, you know what it's like when you know you can't go, you've got to and that one cup of coffee I'd had before we'd set off was apparently producing a gallon in return. I crossed my legs and tried to think of something else.

"Miss Wright." It was the First Officer this time.

"Sir?"

"If you would take control."

I just sat there and sort of stared at him.

"Yeoman." It was the Captain.

"Er... yes." I undid my safety belt with shaking hands, dropped my tricorder on the seat and nervously made my way towards the front of the shuttle and the control panel. How could they do this to me?... It was the First Officer who vacated his chair, probably because it was too risky to disturb the Captain - no word about me, though... I sat down and stared at the control panel. My mind had gone blank.

"I'll take it off the auto pilot," the Captain said as he stabbed a button making my heart leap in the process - there we were, nobody at the controls... well, you couldn't exactly call me anybody at that moment.

"For heaven's sake, relax," he whispered as he noticed how tense I was. I willed myself to sink back in the chair a little and to get my brain functioning whilst telling myself not to behave so ridiculously, and as I sat there trying not to panic I slowly began to recall what was what and actually found myself making a slight adjustment to keep us on course.

"There you are," the Captain said as he switched on the auto pilot again after what seemed an age. "Nothing to get yourself worked up about."

I managed a weak smile at him as I started to stand up.

"No, no, you haven't finished yet." I sank back down in the chair. What now... ? "I want you to contact the ship."

Oh, no! Communications was not one of my best subjects, I always felt so self conscious when I had to talk out in the open.

"Go on, then." I flicked the necessary switch and took a deep breath.

"Captain!" Spock called from the rear of the shuttle. We both turned and looked at him. "As well as having no toilet facilities this shuttle lacks the basic emergency equipment, food rations, weapons, some form of shelter - "

"In other words, nothing," the Captain interrupted before Spock got carried away and gave us a full inventory of what was missing. He looked at me. "Contact the ship, Yeoman."

"Aye, Captain!" I said as efficiently as was possible, having decided it was time I pulled my socks up. "Galileo to Enterprise, Galileo to Enterprise, come in, Enterprise," I called while cringing at the sound of my own awful voice. Luckily I got an answer straight away.

"Enterprise to Galileo." I looked at the Captain - time for him to take over.

"Uhura," the Captain said.

"Captain - thank goodness you've contacted us, we've been trying to get in touch with you since you launched."

"Ah! I see you know about this ill-equipped shuttle, then."

"Aye, Captain." It was the Chief Engineer's voice. "You shouldna' ha' used it."

"Why didn't you tell us?"

"We had a spot of bother with communications in the hangar deck control room. I did try to get yer attention - I was sure the lassie had seen me."

Captain and First Officer looked at me. I swallowed and nodded my head.

"You saw Mr. Scott, Yeoman?"

"Er... yes, sir. I... I did try to tell you that he was waving at us, but you were otherwise engaged."

"Otherwise engaged... You mean Spock and I were preparing for lift off."

"Yes, sir."

"You should have told us, Yeoman." He shook his head in disbelief. "You honestly didn't think that Mr. Scott was waving at us just for the sake of it..."

I didn't say anything. What could I say? He was right, I should have gone ahead and interrupted them and brought it to their attention.

"There's a lot of basic equipment missing," Mr. Scott said, as if we didn't know. "Communications are a bit dodgy as well."

"Outward transmissions are all right, though," the Captain said.

"Aye, it's only when we try to contact you. Heavens, man - that shuttle was in the process of being overhauled."

"Er... Scotty," the Captain said.

"Aye?"

"Was it really necessary to remove all conveniences as well?"

"Conveniences... oh."

"Precisely. Let's hope our rendezvous with the Hood is on time."

"Oh - er... about that, Captain, there's a slight technical hitch... navigation-wise."

"Don't tell me."

"Aye. Your readings may be fine, but it doesn't mean they are."

"So where in blazes are we?"

"I haven't a clue, Captain - hold on a moment... "

There was a silence, and I dared to look at the Captain. All he did was point at me and then at the back of the shuttle. Clearly he wanted me out of the way. I didn't wait to be told twice; I went back to my seat and the First Officer took over.

"You're in no danger," I heard Mr. Scott say as I sat back down in my chair and returned to fiddling with my tricorder. "We're coming after you, but I'm afraid that by the time we get ourselves turned around and catch up with you, it's going to take all of five hours."

"Five hours!" the Captain exclaimed.

"Five hours..." I echoed. That one cup of coffee was going to be the death of me yet.

"Aye. Well, it's best you just stay on your present course now that we've got a fix on you."

"Yes, I suppose so," the Captain sighed resignedly.

"Keep your channel open, then!" Mr. Scott called as he was apparently called away elsewhere.

And so we sat there travelling on to nowhere, and I must say it's really

amazing what you can do when you have to, body-wise, that is. Mind you, by the time we'd docked back on board the Enterprise the Captain and I were practically jumping and there was no time for the usual formalities as the shuttlecraft's door opened, we both clambered out and ran across the deck at top speed towards the nearest convenience.

Minutes later we both reappeared as very relieved people. It was only then that I actually stopped to think about what was actually going to happen to me now -- that little incident with the shuttle was not going to look good on my report at all. The Captain and the First Officer hadn't really said very much during those 'painfully' slow five hours, and in a way I wished they had, even just to reprimand me. If there's one thing I can't stand it's waiting for the hammer to fall... or whatever the expression is that one uses.

"Captain," I dared to say as I followed him towards the elevator. "Sir, about that shuttle..."

He turned to me; he was actually smiling! "Found your tongue at last," he said, much to my embarrassment.

"I... er..."

"And lost it again."

"Sir... I did try to tell you..." I trailed off. I couldn't think what else to say.

"I don't think we need to say any more about that little incident, Miss Wright. However, in future I suggest you speak up a little more... which somehow I think you will -- after all the last few hours have been anything but pleasant for us."

I managed to smile at him.

"And under the circumstances I think you conducted yourself very well." Heavens! Those were the last words I expected him to say.

"T... thank you, Captain." I felt myself blush.

"And now I'm going to grab a bite to eat. Coming?"

I gratefully followed him into the elevator. What a nice man -- one day soon when I'm fully qualified I think I'll apply for a permanent position on board the Enterprise. I'm sure the Captain would appreciate that.

"Yeoman." It was the First Officer. He'd been waiting for us in the elevator.

"Sir?"

"I believe your next training session is with me."

Perhaps I won't apply for a permanent position on board this ship after all.....

A SOLAR SYSTEM by T.G.Z.C.

As seen from Space...
 A blaze of light, many tiny sparks around it
 Circling, circling; they in turn
 Surrounded by minute sparklets in a captive orbit -
 A necklet of shining jewels
 Infinitely precious; yet in the void of space
 Seemingly negligible.
 Yet those tiny specks of light, so small
 To the distant observer
 Are huge, lifegiving, to the many species
 Of creature living there.

HI-JACK by A.M. Carthy

I'm Para of the planet Varos, and for those of you who are a bit shaky on Stellar geography let me explain that we are the fourth planet of the sun the Federation calls Sigmi Delta. Vulcan is our nearest neighbour, but for all that the Varoians and the Vulcans have never got along too well. That's why a group of guys from both planets got together and came up with the idea of Work Study Groups. What it boiled down to was that a party of Varoians went to Vulcan and studied their way of life and the Vulcans returned the compliment, the idea being that this would help the two cultures understand each other better. In theory it was fine. In practice there were a thousand and one problems.

What's this got to do with me? Well, I work in the Planetary Diplomatic Corps, in a junior position which means I get all the dirty work. Like escorting the Vulcan Work Study Group round Varos.

Now the trouble with Vulcans is that they're so cold and logical. Black is black. White is white. You know the kind of thing? No tact! When they want to know something they ask outright and to hell with anyone's feelings, and - well - Varoians are noted for their intense pride, so you can imagine there were some ruffled feelings over some of the questions. That's where I came in - old tactful me, trying to smooth things out. I tell you, no-one was more relieved than me when the whole thing came to an end. The Varoians returned to Varos and the Vulcans were due to leave for their home planet. Only then my chief informs me that there are still one or two things to be taken care of on Vulcan and I had the dubious honour of trotting over there with the Vulcan Work Study Group to do the taking care of.

Boy, was I mad! But no-one argues with my chief, which was why I found myself beaming aboard the only space ship that happened to be in the area at the time - the U.S.S. Enterprise. That was the only perk in the situation. I mean, who hasn't heard of the Enterprise? She's practically a legend in the Federation - and out of it too for that matter. And Captain Kirk has always been a sort of hero of mine. I'd heard they'd got a Vulcan Science Officer too, but I guess you already know that.

Well, there I was aboard the Enterprise and being shown around the ship by Mr. Spock, on account of the three Vulcans who comprised the Work Study Group, you understand. The tour lasted about an hour and it was all in Vulcan so it's kind of lucky I majored in that language in College, then just as we reached the Recreation Room for some, on my part anyway, very welcome refreshment, these three Vulcans pulled weapons on us.

Now I'd always felt there was something weird about those three, even for Vulcans, but I had no idea how weird until that moment. My heart missed a few beats, but Mr. Spock merely raised an eyebrow.

"I trust you have a logical explanation for this most illogical behaviour, gentlemen?" he asked. Boy, the cool of that fella.

"Quite logical," said one of the Vulcans - the one called Smuran. "We intend to take control of this ship."

Well, you could have knocked me over with a feather, as the ancient Terran saying goes. My mouth fell open a kilometer, but Mr. Spock just raises his other eyebrow. I began to realise all the stories I'd heard about him just might be true. I don't know what would have happened, but just then Captain Kirk came out of the Rec Room, took in the situation in half a second and leaped for the intercom. Only Smuran was too quick for him and fired his phaser. Even as Kirk fell the other two Vulcans had hold of Spock and were hustling him off down the corridor. I knelt beside Kirk, half expecting him to be dead although I didn't think the phaser had hit him full on.

He wasn't dead. The language burning my ears told me that. But he was

clutching at his side and seemed in real agony. He made it to his feet, but it took him a full three and a half minutes to do so. Just then the intercom beeped. It was Uhura. (Boy, is that some woman, even for a Terran!)

"Captain Kirk? I'm getting a most odd message from Engineering."

"Okay, Lieutenant, let's hear it." Kirk's face was white with pain and anger.

"Captain Kirk, this is Smuran. My fellow Vulcans and I are in the Engineering Department, where we have managed to over-ride all bridge controls. We also have control of your life support system. If you value the lives of your crew you will do exactly as I say. In addition, we have your First Officer as our hostage. The Vulcan form of execution is normally quick and clean, but there are ancient forms that cause death to be slow and painful."

The full implication of his words hit Kirk and his face twisted in fury. "You won't get away with this, Smuran," he said, his voice tight with emotion. "No-one can take over a Starship."

"On the contrary, Captain." I would have sworn Smuran's voice was amused, except that Vulcans are not capable of sounding amused. "We have taken over a Starship."

"If you've hurt any of the people down there..." began Kirk.

"The people down here have been rendered unconscious by the Vulcan neck pinch, otherwise they are fine. We do not wish to kill anyone - although that depends entirely on you."

Kirk said a word that, if it had gone over the intercom, would have frozen the ship in space. Then - "Just what are your intentions, Smuran?"

"We belong to a select group of Vulcans," said Smuran, "who believe that our planet should be for Vulcans alone, as it was long ago before it was infested by aliens. We intend to rid our world of these parasites - those creatures who have destroyed what is the very essence of Vulcan life. A Starship will be invaluable for our mission. Now to business, Captain Kirk. In precisely one point two four three hours we will reach the Rigeli Delta system. The third planet has an atmosphere - perhaps a little thinner than Earth's, but quite liveable. It also has vegetation, so you will not starve. You and your crew will beam down there when - "

"You're crazy if you think you can get away with this - "

"Please, Captain, do not weary me with your theatricals. I suggest you spend the next hour organising your crew into beaming down parties. All weapons and communicators will be left on board - oh, and tell your Communications Officer she can cease attempting to send out signals for help. We have blocked the switchboard."

Kirk swore and slumped against the wall. His face was ashen and beads of sweat stood out on his forehead. By rights he should have been dead, or at least unconscious, but in his haste Smuran had fired crookedly and the phaser beam had literally grazed past Kirk's side. Nevertheless, there had been enough power to do untold damage somewhere, probably to the internal organs. I reached for the intercom.

"I'd better summon the Doctor - " I began, but the Captain gripped my arm.

"No, there's no time. I must get to the bridge." Even as he spoke, he was heading for the elevator. I followed. There didn't seem anything else to do. Besides, I had no intention of missing out on anything.

Sulu had the con when we reached the bridge and all the bridge crew were crowding round him, shouting at the tops of their voices. It was a full minute before they noticed Kirk, then they all fell silent and moved back to their

posts sheepishly.

Sulu rose from the command chair. "What's happening, Captain?" he asked, worriedly. "None of the bridge controls are working. Helm, navigation, communications - nothing. Not even Mr. Spock's library computer."

Kirk faced his bridge crew grimly. "I presume you all heard what the Vulcan Smuran said over the intercom a few minutes ago?" There was a murmur. "Then you know what's happening. Incredible as it may seem, this ship has been hi-jacked. It is being controlled entirely from Engineering and unless we can break in to the engine room and regain control, we'll all end up sitting on the third planet of Rigeli Delta while those - those - crazy Vulcans take over Vulcan using the Enterprise to destroy whatever stands in their way, and that, gentlemen, would probably include the Vulcan High Council."

"And 'ladies'," murmured Uhura.

"I beg your pardon, Lieutenant. And ladies." Kirk gave a mock bow in her direction, then winced and clutched his side.

It had to be that very second that Dr. McCoy stepped out of the elevator onto the bridge. "Jim!" he exclaimed, hurrying forward. "What's wrong? Are you hurt?"

"No, no, it's nothing Bones." Kirk brushed the Doctor's arm aside and drew himself up straighter. "Just a touch of indigestion."

"Indigestion my eye. Let me take a look at you!"

"No time, Bones. Mr. Sulu, get a Security Team to meet me outside Engineering."

"Aye, Captain."

"And Sulu - " This as Sulu was already heading for the elevator at a run, " - use personal communicators, not the intercom."

"Yes, sir!"

"Jim, I insist on taking a look at you," said McCoy. "You're as white as a sheet and - "

"Lt. Uhura, get me Engineering. I want a word with Smuran."

"Yes, Captain."

"Jim, did you hear me?"

Kirk raised both hands. "Bones, please. There just isn't time. And I assure you, there isn't a thing wrong with me."

"I've been a Doctor long enough to recognise a sick man when I see one!"

"I have Smuran, Captain."

"Thank you, Lieutenant. Later, Bones, later. Smuran?"

"Affirmative, although I believe I have said everything I need to... "

"Well, I haven't!" snapped Kirk angrily. "First - I don't accept your conditions. You are not getting my ship. I have a Security Team ready to move in - "

"Such a move would only result in their deaths. Also that of Mr. Spock."

I saw Kirk's lips tighten for a second, then he resumed speaking. "I can't help that. No man's life can take precedence over the safety of this ship. Now, either you surrender or my team moves in. Should you show them resistance, this ship will self-destruct." He gave McCoy a lop-sided grin as he cut the contact. "That should give them something to think about."

"Now will you let me look at you - " began the Doctor, but he was talking

to thin air. Kirk was already on his way to Engineering, me close behind.

The Security Team was already waiting. They were a grim looking lot, but then I guess they weren't chosen for their pretty faces.

"Set your phasers on stun," ordered Kirk. "No-one is to move until I say so, but when you do move you move fast."

By that time, let me say, Captain James T. Kirk was more than a hero to me. I guess only I knew what pain he was in at that moment - although McCoy, who had followed us down, might have had a vague suspicion - and there he was, acting as if nothing was wrong, except for the merest grimace now and then. He hit the intercom button.

"Smuran, this is Kirk."

"I really don't see that there is anything more to say, Captain." Smuran's voice was emotionless. He might have been riding a Space Taxi instead of hijacking the largest Starship in the Federation. "We will arrive at the Rigeli Delta system in - "

"One thing you don't have in Engineering, Smuran," interrupted the Captain, "is radar. We've picked up another Starship in the area. If we don't acknowledge them they'll become suspicious."

"Then acknowledge them, Captain. We will clear Communications long enough for you to do so, but do not try to send any messages asking for help. To do so would surely help Mr. Spock on his way to his death."

"Nothing doing, Smuran!"

"I beg your pardon, Captain?"

"We're not acknowledging them."

There was momentary silence, then the sound of murmured voices as the Vulcans presumably discussed matters among themselves.

"Now!" yelled Kirk, making me jump out of my skin. The Security Guards were made of sterner stuff however and hurled themselves at the door of the engineering room. Even as their massive shoulders burst it open, there was a loud explosion that shook the ship and clouds of smoke billowed out into the corridor. It didn't stop the guards. They were inside and on top of the confused Vulcans before you could say 'A trayful of tribbles'.

When the smoke eventually cleared I could see one Vulcan on the floor apparently unconscious; several guards were literally hanging on to the second; and Spock was fighting the third. I noticed with pleasure that it was Smuran and he was definitely coming off worst. It was a pretty savage fight, as those of you who have ever seen two Vulcans fighting each other will know, but thankfully not as bloody as some such fights I've heard of. I believe sometimes they even tear each other's throats out. Spock chose not to validate this story, I'm glad to say, and managed to use the Vulcan neck pinch on his opponent. Smuran slumped to the floor.

Spock looked down at him for a moment and shook his head. "A waste of a brilliant mind," he murmured, then turned as Kirk reached him.

"Spock, are you all right?"

"Perfectly, Captain."

"Get those three to the brig," the Captain ordered the Security Team. "Spock, how the devil did you manage to create that explosion?"

"Simply by shorting a couple of circuits, Captain. I took advantage of the Vulcans' momentary distraction when you spoke to them over the intercom."

"Jim, you're reporting to sickbay right now!" said McCoy, striding forward.

"Really, Bones, I..." Kirk gave a sudden groan and would have fallen only both Spock and McCoy grabbed him. I watched them as they helped him out and along the corridor. There was concern all over their faces. Yes, even Spock's.

I later learned that Kirk was sent on sick leave for a couple of months, much to his annoyance, but luckily his injuries weren't as bad as McCoy said he deserved them to be. As for Smuran and his cronies, they were dealt with by a Federation Court of Law made up entirely of Vulcans. I don't think we'll be seeing them around for a while. And me? - oh, I still had to go to Vulcan. But you know - Vulcans aren't really all that bad - once you get to know them!

AMANDA'S SON by Gladys Oliver

There they stood... a crowd of Humans,
Laughing warm and free.
.. But on the edge... and oh so still,
Alone stood he.

There they loved and tarried long,
Engrossed in feelings so warm,
.. But on the edge... and still,
Alone a Vulcan torn.

There they were singing, with children,
In a Human circle of ease,
.. But on the edge... and silent,
A Vulcan boy was teased.

There they shouted to him teasingly
That his heritage was a lie!
.. But on the edge... and solid still,
A Vulcan would not cry.

There they scoffed at this child alone,
Emotions they tried to glean -
.. But on the edge... and governed,
His feelings remained unseen.

"You should join we Humans, Vulcan,
We have fun, as you can see!"

.. But on the edge... and lonely,
Is where he chose to be.

They stood for a moment, those Humans,
With silence he heard them speak.
.. But on the edge... still calm,
A Vulcan ever seeks.

Then the Humans turned away
.. Apart from only one.
And on the edge, and silent,
Earth woman stood with her Vulcan son...

Prospective buyer: Is that spaceship going cheap?

Harry Mudd: I hope not, sir, it should go whoosh!

THE IDIC by Rayelle Roe

Many Vulcans possessed an IDIC. It was a symbol of the honor and respect given to them by their home world. It was given to those who had achieved the epitome of success in their chosen field. It was given to Vulcan's greatest healers, scientists, artists and statesmen. It was one of the highest honors Vulcan had to offer. But it was not the highest honor.

The IDIC medallions worn by Vulcans all over the Federation were only copies of the original. The One, THE IDIC, had been crafted long ago by Surak as a gift for his daughter T'Mil. Incredibly old, unbelievably ancient, it was the heart and soul of the Vulcan people. No Human could conceive its meaning to the Vulcans. No Vulcan could explain. It was their greatest treasure.

THE IDIC was kept in a stasis box to preserve it from harm. Once each two or three hundred years it was given into the keeping of one Vulcan - the one Vulcan who was deemed by his fellow citizens to exemplify the teachings of Surak. It was the dream of every Vulcan, if Vulcans can be said to dream, one day to be the recipient of this highest of all honors.

Those who received THE IDIC kept it for the entirety of their lives. They were venerated by Vulcans everywhere; their names were transcribed in The Book of Traditions. The homage paid them would continue for generations.

Astounded, Uhura turned from the communications console, disbelief reflected in her dark eyes. "Sir, we have just been notified to stand by to receive a communication from the President of the Federation High Council."

Stunned, Kirk stared at her for a full minute before he regained control of his faculties. This was unprecedented; Kirk could not recall that it had ever happened before. He swallowed nervously - this could only mean something big. Hell, it could only mean something monumental was about to happen. "Put it on visual, Lieutenant."

He went to stand behind the helm. He could feel his heart thudding away behind his ribs. Spock left his chair and came to stand beside him. All eyes were fastened on the screen. Everyone on the bridge seemed to be holding his breath.

The picture shimmered into focus. President Thorlin was a politician to the core of his being. As a politician, the Andorian knew how to milk the most from any situation. He was gratified by the response his appearance was having on the crew of the Enterprise.

After what he considered a dramatic pause, he finally broke the silence. "Greetings, Captain Kirk. While this message is for you and the rest of your crew, it is primarily directed to your First Officer. Captain, you are ordered to proceed to Vulcan with all possible speed." Once again Thorlin paused - he was enjoying this. "Mr. Spock, the Vulcan High Council has decided that you are to be the next recipient of Surak's IDIC."

For one long moment, Spock stood frozen in disbelief, but as the meaning of the President's message penetrated, he sank slowly into the command chair. Joy flooded through him. For the first time in his life he felt like crying, and shouting, and singing, all at once; but he restrained himself. Instead, a smile he was completely unable to control lit his face and broadened to an ear to ear grin.

That grin was the signal for pandemonium to break out on the bridge. Crewmen were cheering; Kirk and Scott were pounding him on the back and shaking his hand all at the same time. From behind, Uhura threw her arms around him and planted a wet kiss in his ear. And for once in his life, Spock of Vulcan did not mind at all.

Kirk stared restlessly around the immense auditorium. Before him were rows and rows of the Federation's most important people. Dignitaries had come from every Federation planet. Were it not for Spock's request Kirk would not have been here on the platform beside his First Officer but relegated to the highest of the balconies where all the Captains and senior officers of all the Federation ships not on critical assignment were sitting. Somewhere, Kirk knew, in those rows of blue, red and command gold sat his officers. He wished he could see them; he would dearly love to see McCoy's face. Before they'd beamed down McCoy had cornered Spock in the corridor. Spock had steeled himself for one of McCoy's caustic remarks, but the good doctor had said nothing; he'd just beamed at Spock, pride, joy and affection unabashedly filling his face. Spock had responded by grasping the doctor's shoulder and saying, "I am honored that you will be there to share this moment with me - Bones." Bones had cleared his throat and replied, "Where the hell else could I go? It's Saturday night and my date stood me up."

A round of applause brought Kirk out of his reverie. President Therlin had finished speaking. A hush fell over the great hall as T'Pol rose unsteadily to her feet. Sarek stepped forward to escort her to the podium. The aged woman radiated dignity and strength despite her infirmities.

Kirk studied Sarek. It was apparent that he was so proud he could have burst his buttons. That is, if he'd been wearing any. Kirk shifted his glance to Amanda, only to discover that she was watching him. He smiled at her and she winked back. She was the only one in the family not making any effort to suppress her joy.

T'Pol reached the podium and transferred her grip from Sarek's arm to the sides of the rostrum. She began to speak of the significance of the honor about to be bestowed, and of the logic of giving it to Spock.

Spock swallowed nervously. Amanda reached out and touched the back of his hand.

T'Pol's voice rang out in the vast hall. "Spock, thee have brought honor to thy family, to thy clan, and to all the people of Vulcan. It pleases me that I may give thee this gift from the hands of Surak. Live long and prosper, son of Surak."

Spock rose to his feet, standing erect, hands clasped behind his back.

"Live long and prosper, son of Surak." Thousands of Vulcan voices affirmed the blessing.

T'Pol handed Spock a glass-like box. Nestled in the centre lay the chain and medallion shrouded in a patina of soft green. Spock took the box and stroked it reverently. He turned and faced the audience.

As a man the entire throng rose to its feet. Each race showed its approbation in its own manner. From the thousands of Humans that filled the aisles came thundrous applause. Kirk was on his feet, clapping for all he was worth, unnoticed tears streaking his face.

When the applause finally died, Spock began to speak.

"It is often said that one does not thank logic, yet there are many here that I must thank. First there is my father, who instilled in me the laws and traditions, who guided me in the principles that have governed my life. And I would thank my mother for the support she has always given me, for encouragement, and for her strength." He paused and turned the box slowly in his hand. "The IDIC represents the unity that may be found in life, regardless of the form it takes. All life springs from one source, one well of creation. All life is precious. That is the meaning of IDIC.

From the earliest days of my childhood I was taught this principle; it was the focal point of all my beliefs. When I left Vulcan as a young man I was

confident that I understood this principle in its fullest and deepest meaning.

I was in error.

It took me many years to realize that I was mouthing a mere platitude, that I was only offering lip service to my belief. This night, as I stand before you, I now know the meaning and the spirit of IDIC. I learned it from a man who lives it, from a man who has taught me the wonder and the challenge of all life. This man taught me by example to accept the differences of the life forms I encountered, and to accept the diversity in my own existence.

You, my people, have given me this IDIC, I am honored, but there is one who deserves this honor more. THE IDIC is now mine, and I choose to give it to the man who taught me its real meaning. I want to give it to my teacher - my Captain and my friend, James T. Kirk."

For Kirk, there was only himself and Spock in the universe - only the two of them, suspended in time. Spock stood facing him, the crystal box held out.

"Spock... no... I couldn't - it's yours..." It was difficult to speak around the asteroid lodged in his throat.

"Please, Jim. If I had a hundred such to give, they still would not equal what you have taught me, what you have given to me." Spock's voice was almost a whisper. No-one else but Kirk could hear the love in his voice. No-one else could see the expression in the deep, dark eyes.

For a brief moment Kirk remained undecided. He understood why Spock was offering him the relic, and he wanted to accept for Spock's sake; but he must also weight the effects of his acceptance. This could lead to a diplomatic free-for-all of the first magnitude. What should he do? Placate Vulcan and hurt Spock? Do what his heart told him and cause waves? He looked at Spock again. Disappointment was beginning to build in the shielded eyes.

Beyond Spock's shoulder he saw T'Pol watching him intently. Seeing that she'd finally gained Kirk's attention, she nodded her approval. Kirk reached out and took the box with one hand, and grasped Spock's outstretched hand with the other.

Some of the people present at the ceremony thought that the gesture stemmed from Vulcan's desire to show up other planets. There were others who said that it was Federation political theatricals. Some thought that Kirk was a fool, and some thought that Spock was the fool. Some left a little wiser than they were when they arrived.

Surak's IDIC was entrusted to Sarek for safe keeping - a Starship was not exactly the ideal place to store a treasure. Kirk and Spock returned to the Enterprise, and life went on as it had before. But another link was forged in the chain that had begun thousands of years before on hundreds of planets, when men of different races and different species first learned to trust.

SPOCK'S QUESTION by Gladys Oliver

Of Earth am I, and Human skies.
.. am warm and governed by my heart.

.. And yet ..

Of Vulcan am I, and Vulcan eyes,
.. am cooled, yet understand all that has gone.

So tell me Earth and Vulcan song,
To which of you do I belong?.....

WHEN ALL THE LEAVES ARE GONE by Gillian Catchpole

Autumn, now turned bare,
 The icy wind scrapes raw our cheeks
 As it blows unhindered through leafless trees.
 Fate in its cruel ways has once again returned to us,
 To refresh those thoughts we have tried to push aside.
 The crunch of dying leaves beneath our knees
 As we knelt to help - beside.
 The senseless want to put back the time,
 The wish to dawn again
 Some new, unsullied morn.

Through so many weeks
 When nothing seemed capable of restoring,
 I even began to feel that death, the final break,
 Would be more bearable than that perpetual lingering
 And then no matter how I tried,
 I cursed and raged as gradually within
 I fell apart with grief.

For Spock there has been no release,
 A spring that tightened every day.
 A burst of naked pain that shocked me through,
 Then weeks of work without a rest
 While I stood helplessly by.
 In the beginning there was a moment
 When we both could have helped each other,
 But as in other times it somehow slipped us by.

We find the place of Jim's attack
 And stare at the cold ground,
 Still but for the wind at our hair,
 Thankful that life signs have begun to strengthen,
 That recovery is not far away.
 A last leaf falls from a nearby tree,
 Blown by the wind across our feet
 And at last, mercifully, in this silence,
 A shared acknowledgement of past distress.

SONNET by Meg Wright

The bonds that bind my heart are sure and firm,
 I hold myself in check, I have control.
 No passion rules my tongue, no unconsidered term
 Of love or hate I use. No feelings rack my soul.

The petty tyrannies that rule your minds
 I leave to Humankind. To others I have proved
 Logic is clear, calm, cool, and ever binds
 My thoughts, to leave me free, unmoved.

Seeing his smile I felt my logic falter,
 The ice begin to crack about my heart.
 How may I now my disposition alter,
 Bidding my lifelong loneliness depart?

He takes me as I am, with heart and words inept,
 A friend who knows, and knowing, can accept.



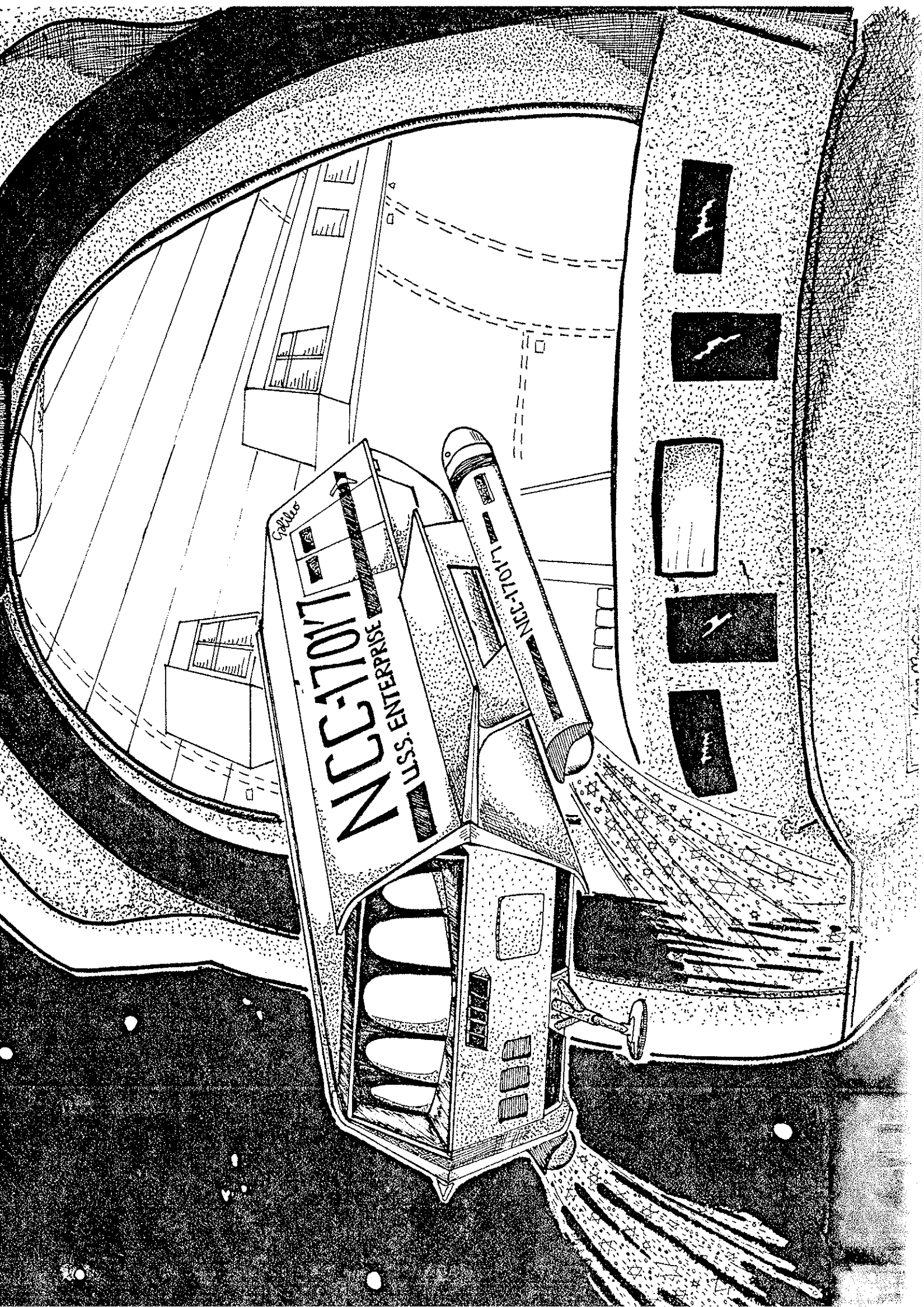
THE PROMISE by Crystal Ann Taylor

Forget!

Jim, please forget that you have loved
An android you can never have.
To compensate for such a loss
I offer you my own, instead.

I will wrap you up securely
In a protective web of silk,
And hold you tight against the pain
Until the arid void is filled.
Together we will explore those
Quiet moments we've learned to share.
Bring out your laughter, and you'll know
No loneliness. You will tease me
And I'll respond, until your eyes
Twinkle with that devilish joy
I know so well. We will play chess,
Pitting in our minds in play, until
You know no emptiness inside.

Sleep now in peace. Do not pine,
Unknown stars do beckon us.
The friendship you have shared with me
Will give you strength and comfort you
Until that day, when you do find
Another love to take its place.
Days of quiet joy are numbered
I know, and soon will pass. And I
Will content myself with knowledge
Of your rebirth, your happiness.
Alone, I'll whisper to the stars
That you, Jim, are loved forever.



NCC-1701-A
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ONE GOOD TURN by Security Chief Baillie

Do Vulcans have a sense of humour? Ask most Humans, especially Bones McCoy, and you'll get a resounding 'NO!' for answer; I'd have agreed with that once, but I know of one Vulcan who does - and who displays it at some pretty odd times, too. Such as? Well, such as after the Vebron affair, for instance.

Now that was an interesting problem, and serves to illustrate another maxim of mine, that it doesn't pay to have too much imagination. Oh, sure, it's fine for someone as smart as the Captain, or Mr. Spock - but that time it brought us a whole heap of trouble.

Vebron's an old planet - nothing spectacular, unless you want to count its four moons, which orbit in formation; pretty enough, I suppose, but of no practical value. Uninhabited - though there are traces of the civilisation that ruled it once; no rare minerals; pleasant semi-tropical climate, but the soil is too used-up to be of any use as a colony world. No dangerous wild life, so it's used from time to time as a break for Starship crews operating in that sector - or rather, it was.

It's the Enterprise, of course, that picks up the first hint of trouble. We're tucked safely into orbit, and the first shore parties have already beamed down. McCoy has blackmailed Spock into going with the first group, with the alternative of a week in sickbay if he doesn't cooperate - he's been working flat out in the computer section for the last few weeks, and though he won't admit it, he's almost dropping with fatigue. So our resident Vulcan beams down reluctantly, but not being one to waste time simply relaxing, announces his intention of investigating some ruins. Somewhat to my surprise Sulu volunteers to go with him; but Kyle tells me he overheard the Captain ask him to go along to keep a discreet eye on Spock - the Captain or McCoy would be too obvious.

I follow them down shortly afterwards, with a little red-haired yeoman from Engineering - it looks like a good chance to get to know her better.

Mind you, I should have known - things are just getting interesting when my personal jinx strikes again, in the shape of a call from the Captain.

"Sorry to disturb you, Chief," he says, "but have you seen anything of Mr. Spock and Mr. Sulu?"

"Not lately, sir; but from here I can see the ruins they're investigating. They went in about an hour ago, but they haven't come out yet."

"Would you mind checking up on them?"

"Is something wrong, sir?" I ask, with a nasty feeling that that's an idiotic question if ever I heard one!

"I'm... not sure. The sensors have them pinpointed, but they don't answer a communicator call. We're picking up some unusual readings from that area, and they might be interfering with communications... but I'd feel happier if you'd take a look, Baillie. I don't want to beam them up and find out that there's nothing wrong after all."

"Right, sir," I tell him. "I'll call in as soon as I've made contact with them, so if you haven't heard from me in... say... thirty minutes, assume something's wrong and beam us up."

I'm thinking as I move off that I don't blame the Captain for being wary - Spock's raised an eyebrow at me more than once for taking what he considers unnecessary action, and that's a nasty experience, let me tell you.

Once inside the ruins the only place to go is into a winding passageway twisting down into the ground, so I follow it; it's adequately lit at first where the roof has fallen away, but as a result it's partly blocked and I have to pick my way carefully over the rubble. There are two sets of footprints in the dust, though, so I'm sure I'm heading in the right direction.

After a few moments the atmosphere of the place begins to get to me; there's an aura of great age, a brooding stillness that I find curiously oppressive, and I'm aware of a distinct reluctance to advance any further - I feel as though I'm intruding, somehow; in fact, to tell the truth, if it hadn't been for those tracks leading steadily onwards, I'd've been tempted to turn back. But no way am I going to tell the Captain that I've run out on his favourite Vulcan just because of a feeling!

As I walk the passageway begins to change; the roof is complete now, but a soft light comes from panels of glowing stone set into the walls of what is now a tunnel. They've been deliberately cut and positioned, and I can understand why Spock must have been so interested - nothing like this has been reported before.

I calculate that by now the downward slope of the tunnel has taken me well below ground level, but the air is still fresh - there must be some form of ventilation, though I can't see anything. I take out my communicator to call the ship, but there's no response - something, perhaps those panels, is causing interference with communications as the Captain suspected; funny, though, that their energy readings didn't register on the ship's sensors.

As I walk on I become aware that the sense of repulsion has vanished, to be replaced with an almost compulsive desire to advance further; unconsciously my steps have quickened, and I slow my pace carefully, fighting the attraction - no sense in running headlong into trouble.

Round the next bend, and the soft light increases to a brilliant glow, flooding into the tunnel from a doorway cut into the wall; and huddled against the wall, his face pressed into the stone, is a familiar figure - Sulu. I hurry over to kneel at his side, afraid that he's been hurt; as I put my hand on his shoulder he flinches away, turning to look at me with eyes wide with fear. Gradually recognition seeps into that almost crazed stare, and with a sob of relief he sways towards me; as I reach out to catch him I can feel his body shuddering violently. He clings to me like a terrified child, and I wonder what he's seen to reduce him to such a state.

At last I hear him take a deep breath and he pulls away from me, steadying himself against the wall.

"All right now?" I ask sympathetically, and he nods, so I go on. "Where's Mr. Spock?"

"He went... on, through there." Sulu gestures to the open doorway without looking at it, but as I begin to rise he clutches me frantically, pulling me down.

"No, Baillie! Don't go! There's... something there... I felt it calling, pulling me... it took Mr. Spock... I tried to hold him, but I was thrown back. It was like walking into a force field; there's... intelligence there, I could feel it."

TAKE THE HUMAN AND LEAVE.

The voice comes from everywhere and nowhere, echoing from the walls, resounding in my head; I can't even be sure if it actually is a voice, or if something is reaching my mind, but the experience is shattering, painful.

"Who are you?" My own voice is none too steady.

WE ARE OF VEBRON. THE VULCAN IS ONE WITH US NOW. WE INTEND NO HARM, BUT HUMAN MINDS ARE USELESS TO US, AND CANNOT LONG SURVIVE IN SUCH CLOSE PROXIMITY. GO, AND DO NOT RETURN.

It's as though... something... slides into my mind, taking control of my body; I watch myself pull Sulu to his feet and we turn back along the tunnel. After a few steps Sulu slumps against me and I pick him up and continue my retreat, herded by that... presence. It fades as I step out of the ruins, and laying Sulu down I pull out my communicator - I'm not facing that again on my

own, and Sulu needs attention fast, he looks to be deep in shock.

Kirk's waiting in the transporter room when we beam up, but when he catches sight of Sulu he steps back and lets me carry him to sickbay; but as soon as I've laid him on the bed and turned away he whirls on me, his eyes blazing.

"Where's Spock?" he demands in that quiet, controlled voice I've learned to recognise.

I tell him about the corridor, the lighted room, and the single set of footprints leading into the doorway; his face tightens in anguish as I describe how I found Sulu, and I know he's visualising the Vulcan as the prey of some malevolent intelligence.

"The voice," he says at last. "Did you see anyone, Baillie?"

"No, Captain; and I can't even be sure it was a voice - it might have been in my head."

"A mind touch," Kirk says thoughtfully. "It would have to be a powerful entity then, to reach you so clearly without physical contact. So now what do we do? Spock's our only telepath, and he's the first victim."

NOT VICTIM, CAPTAIN.

McCoy jumps back as though he's been stung, for this time the voice has a point of origin - it seems to come from Sulu's motionless body.

BE ASSURED, WE INTEND NO HARM. THIS ENTITY WILL RECOVER SHORTLY - WE DID NOT UNDERSTAND THAT HIS MIND WAS SO FRAGILE. THE UNEXPECTED CONTACT WITH US HAS MERELY STUNNED HIM.

"What have you done with Spock?" Kirk's voice is low, dangerous.

HE HAS BEEN ABSORBED INTO THE OVERMIND OF VEBRON. MANY AGES AGO WE GAVE UP PHYSICAL FORM AND INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY TO COMBINE INTO THE OVERMIND. NOW WE ARE IMMORTAL, EXISTING AS A COMPLEX UNITY. WE EXTEND OUR KNOWLEDGE BY LEARNING FROM THE LIFE-FORMS THAT VISIT US, BUT WE HAVE NO DESIRE TO LEAVE - INDEED, WE COULD NOT. OCCASIONALLY WE RECEIVE A VISITOR WHOSE MIND IS STRONG ENOUGH TO JOIN US; SUCH A ONE IS THE BEING YOU CALL 'SPOCK'. HE WAS DRAWN TO US, AND HIS MIND HAS BIENDED WITH OURS. AFTER PHYSICAL DEATH HIS IDENTITY WILL CONTINUE HERE. IT WAS HIS OWN CHOICE - WE DO NOT COMPEL.

"I don't believe that!" Kirk breaks in angrily. "I want to see him, talk to him - I'll only believe it if he tells me so himself."

IT MAY BE DANGEROUS. YOU YOURSELF MAY BE DRAWN IN, OR THE SHOCK OF CONTACT MAY DESTROY YOU IF YOU APPROACH TOO CLOSELY.

"I don't care - I won't leave Spock unless I'm certain it's what he wants. I'm coming down."

AS YOU WISH, CAPTAIN. WE SHALL AWAIT YOU.

As the voice fades Kirk sways unsteadily and I reach out to help him to a seat. I remember McCoy telling me once that repeated mind links with Spock have sensitised the Captain to telepathic communication; even I feel the power of the Overmind, so I guess it must affect him even more strongly.

McCoy comes over and checks him out. "You'll be all right, Jim," he says, "it's just the strain of contact. Sulu's sleeping naturally now - he'll be back to normal when he wakes up. Now, what are you going to do about Spock?"

"I'm going down to talk to him," the Captain replies. "If it's really what he wants I won't stand in his way... but I must be sure. You understand, don't you, Bones?"

They look at each other steadily, then McCoy sighs and nods reluctantly. "Just be careful, Jim."

Over Kirk's head the blue eyes meet mine questioningly, and I signal back

agreement. "I'll go with you, Captain. The Overmind doesn't seem to bother me too much, but the contact tires you, and you might need help to return."

"Thanks, Baillie," the Captain says. "No point in wasting time -- let's go."

The sense of oppression has vanished as I follow Kirk along the tunnel, but I'm feeling very uneasy. I've worked with these two men for a long time now, and I'm used to them -- I know what Starfleet will lose if the team is broken. I'm also worried about the Captain -- that strange world of the mind, with which the Vulcan is so familiar, might be a refuge for Spock, but to Kirk it will mean losing his friend as surely as to death.

We reach the doorway, and I don't mind admitting that I don't look too closely into the light; but the Captain stands gazing directly ahead like a man seeing a vision -- but whether of Heaven or Hell I wouldn't like to guess. All I know is that I can feel the tension in him as he waits, sense the urgency of the longing he is trying to control; and my heart sinks then, for I know that he won't use the friendship between them in an attempt to change Spock's mind.

APPROACH NO CLOSER. YOU RISK BEING DRAWN INTO THE OVERMIND, AND WE DO NOT WISH TO HARM YOU.

The Captain's intent gaze doesn't waver for an instant from that brilliant light.

"Spock, where are you?" he calls.

I'm watching his face as he speaks, and I see joy and relief fill his eyes as he instinctively stretches out his hands.

"Do not attempt to touch me, Captain."

The sheer normality of the voice sends a shudder through me and I involuntarily turn my head towards the light to see the tall, lean figure take shape in the radiance. Spock remains poised in the doorway, his dark eyes fixed on the Captain with an almost wistful expression of regret. I think Kirk knows right then, for his hands fall to his sides.

"Why, Spock?" he asks huskily, and the pain in his voice reaches even to me. There's not even a flicker in the dark eyes, serene and untroubled now.

"I have sought long for this," the Vulcan replies calmly. "To be part of the Overmind, untorn by doubt or emotion; to be free at last of a conflict I cannot resolve, and can no longer endure. Here I have found peace, a sense of fulfillment -- I can be of value."

The Captain moves closer, pausing as Spock lifts a hand in warning; as he waits, seeking for words, I'm watching the Vulcan closely. It seems to me there's something... odd... about Spock, an almost transparent appearance, although the Captain hasn't reacted to it. I concentrate carefully, and when I'm sure I touch Kirk's arm; he turns to me impatiently.

"Well, Baillie?"

"Sir, that's not Mr. Spock."

"Don't be ridiculous!" His voice is raw with pain. "Do you think I wouldn't know...?"

"Mr. Baillie is correct, however," the serene voice confirms, unexpectedly. "My body still lives, Captain, but its proximity to the core of the Overmind is rapidly draining its strength -- it could not now reach the door. What you see is a projection which I have produced with the help of the Overmind -- I have approached you in this fashion because I know that you find purely telepathic contact disturbing, and I do not wish to cause you distress

by touching your mind - linked as I am, the contact would cause you pain."

"What's going to happen to you?" Kirk asks dazedly; he's accepted the reality already, even if he doesn't know it yet.

"As the energy drain continues my body will weaken and die within hours, but I will continue as part of the Overmind, learning, growing... you cannot imagine the wonder of becoming part of such an entity."

Kirk takes a step backwards then; his face is expressionless, but his left hand, unseen by Spock, is tightly clenched - and there's a smear of blood where the nails have driven deep into the palm.

"Is this really what you want?" Kirk asks dully. "Will it make you happy?"

"I do not know - but it will bring me peace."

"Then I wish you well, Spock - even if I'll never understand."

"Thank you, Jim. Please inform my family - Sarek will understand why I do this. Now I suggest that you return to the ship - the Overmind will inform you when my physical existence has ended."

For a moment he pauses, then the deep voice takes on the warm tone I've only ever heard him use to the Captain. "I am sorry, Jim; but for me, it is the logical way."

"Logical!" The word is almost a sob.

"Go, now, my friend; it is dangerous for you to remain any longer. Farewell, Jim."

"Goodbye, Spock."

They look at each other a moment longer then Kirk turns abruptly away and sets off down the tunnel. As I follow him around the corner I can't resist looking back to see the Vulcan still staring after him, with an expression I never thought to see on that impassive face.

But Kirk is my first concern now. When I reach him he's leaning against the wall, one hand over his eyes. He straightens and turns at my approach.

"Come on, Mr. Baillie - there's nothing for us here, now."

As I follow his stocky figure back along the tunnel the echo of his bitter words seems to ring in my ears; and somehow, I'm not so sure.

McCoy is waiting in the transporter room when we return. He takes one look at Kirk's face and dismisses Kyle with a nod.

"What happened, Jim?"

"He... he's staying, Bones. It's what he wants, and I can't... Oh God!" A shuddering breath that might almost be a sob.

"Damned Vulcan!" McCoy's growl doesn't fool me - I can hear the grief in his tone. "So your living computer finally ran out on you. Just goes to show you can't trust a Vulcan... but I'd have staked my life that his Human half was strong enough to keep him loyal - at least to you."

"Drop it, Bones." Kirk's voice is unutterably weary. "It's easy for us - we've never had to live with what he's got to bear, constantly torn in two, an alien both on Earth and Vulcan. I've never understood how Sarek and Amanda could have allowed... they must have known what their child would go through. He's found peace at last, and I can't regret it for him; only for myself because... because I couldn't help him after all." The last few words are almost a whisper; then he straightens and turns deliberately towards the door.

"I'll tell Scotty to hold orbit until morning, or until we hear from the Overmind. It may not be... logical... but I can't leave here while he's still

alive, at least physically. No-one is to beam down without my direct order, Mr. Baillie - it's too dangerous. I could feel the lure of the Overmind drawing me in, and something in me wanted to go... I don't have Spock's strength, I'd be destroyed totally."

Queer, I think. I didn't sense that; a certain curiosity, maybe, but basically repulsion.

But it's not my place to argue with the Captain. "Yes, sir," I reply. "I'll tell Mr. Kyle."

The hours of the ship's night crawl past with agonising slowness. It's none of my business, but I can't help thinking about Mr. Spock down there on Vebtron. God knows, he's weird enough at the best of times, but now he's being changed into something I can't even begin to understand, and a cold sick feeling grips me as I begin to think of how the ship will feel without his calm presence on board.

In an attempt to keep busy I decide to carry out a Security inspection, but at every turn of the corridor memories rise up to distract me.

The transporter room - and I see Kirk's face the day he and Spock returned from the hearing which stripped the Vulcan of Captain's rank and returned him to us as First Officer.

Shuttlecraft bay - watching Spock take off alone to probe the amoeba-creature that almost destroyed us in Sector 39J.

The briefing room, and the conversation no-one knows I overheard when, contaminated by the Psi 2000 virus, the barriers of custom and tradition first began to fall between Kirk and Spock.

The cargo holds - and the time the Vulcan was almost killed in a Romulan attack during which I learned a few surprising things about our First Officer.

Sickbay, quiet and deserted now - but how many battles I've witnessed there as one fought for the other's life or sanity.

The ship is quiet, secure, but I expect no less- I train my staff well. At last the elevator drops me near the officers' quarters, and I find my steps slowing involuntarily.

Kirk's door; I hesitate, but pass on - what can I say to him? McCoy's, but what can he do? The bitter quotation comes to mind; physician, heal thyself - and him, if you can.

Finally, Spock's; the door stands ajar, and curiosity fills me - who comes here at such a time? But I already know as I peer carefully into the dimly-lit room.

Kirk is sitting absolutely still, his face half turned from me, but every line of his body betrays wretchedness and misery. It's a weird vigil he's keeping there in the gloom, a death watch for a friend lost, not to death, but to a strange new life in which he can have no part. And all I can do for him is to leave him alone with his thoughts, never letting him know that I've seen tears in his eyes for a man who would deny response to them.

As I return to the elevator my pity for Kirk is gradually replaced by another emotion - a surge of overwhelming anger directed at Spock, an anger which sends me running down into the transporter room to confront a bewildered Kyle.

"Beam me down!" I order him.

"But Chief - the Captain said..."

Now I know - and he knows I know - one or two things about Mr. Kyle's off-duty activities that he'd rather weren't brought to the Captain's attention; so when I tell him that it's for Kirk's sake I'm going, and drop a few

hints about what I'll have to say if he doesn't cooperate - well, he caves in and moves to the controls.

So, sooner than I'd like I find myself back in that tunnel, wondering why I keep talking myself into this sort of trouble, and how the hell I'm going to get out of it this time.

The Overmind is aware of my presence; I can feel it around me, questioning, puzzled, but I plough on grimly, refusing to acknowledge it until I reach the by now familiar doorway in the rock. The emanations from the room beyond are weakening me, drawing at my life and energy. A warning beats in my head, urging me away - the Overmind is concerned, has no wish to harm me, but it is curious as to my purpose, and delays forcing me to go. I concentrate, channelling all my anger and grief into one urgent plea.

"Spock!"

I'm no telepath; I must use speech, and the echoes of my cry are absorbed by the pulsating light. Will he come to me as he came to the Captain, or must I try to speak with a disembodied voice in my mind? Or... will he refuse to come at all?

"Spock, answer me!"

There is... a response, a stirring in the brightness. Slowly the familiar figure takes shape before me.

"Return to the Enterprise, Mr. Baillie; you have no business here."

Even before I begin I fear defeat - what arguments of mine can disturb that calm certainty?

But I have a weapon he can scarcely understand, raw emotion unleashed in the service of one who will not use it on his own behalf. I allow the anger full rein, and it comes through clearly in my voice.

"I have; but have you?"

"My choice is decided; leave me."

"Yes, I'll go if I must - but not before I've shown you what you are. You're a coward, Spock, running out on those who need you - and care for you. So you're sick of being alone? Well, tough! Don't you think he is, too?"

"Did he send you?" A spark of anger.

"When did he ever send anyone to plead for him?" I sneer contemptuously. "You're changing already, Spock - there was a time when you'd never have considered such a despicable idea. He's tried so hard to help you, but you wouldn't let him, would you - he's only 'Human' after all, and that's a dirty word to you, isn't it, Spock? Try asking yourself just what the Overmind will make of you. Sure, you'll lose your doubt, your loneliness, the conflict that rends you - but you'll lose other things too; your compassion, your understanding, the love I know you can feel for those who need you. It seems so easy, doesn't it, to be free of emotion? You'll have the Vulcan detachment you always wanted - but you'll pay a hell of a price for it, and so will others. 'My father will understand' you said... oh sure, he will, but what about your mother? The Captain is going to have to tell her that her precious son was so ashamed of his Human blood he just gave up. That'll make her feel just great, won't it? And you'll pay too. You are half-Human, and all the wanting in the world won't change that; no Human could live like this - for ever - without going insane in the end."

I gradually allow my voice to soften, and continue pleadingly, "You taught me what courage meant - not only in a physical sense, but in the way you faced up to what you are. I can understand how hard it must have been sometimes, but you've achieved so much - don't throw it away now."

He's listening to me at least, but I can detect no softening in those

remote eyes. However, I have another card, the dirtiest in the pack, and I don't scruple to play it now.

"He wouldn't stoop to plead emotion to you, but I will. Do you know, or care, what he's doing now? He's sitting in your cabin, quietly, in the dark, because he can't leave until he knows you're dead; and he's crying for you, Spock. What a bloody contemptible idea - the Overmind will calmly inform him that his best friend is dead! I could spit on you for that damnable cruelty! Just what does it take to make you admit that you're Human too? Hasn't he done enough yet to earn your trust? That time when he had to get you to Vulcan - you never knew that he defied explicit Starfleet orders to get you there; they'd have crucified him if T'Pol hadn't intervened. God knows, I never thought I'd see the day when she was more merciful than you!

And that time you were stranded on Taurus II - he came within a hairs-breadth of mutiny then; if it hadn't been for the colonists on New Paris he'd have clapped Ferris in the brig and stayed there until he found you.

Even that scar on your forehead - you'd be dead now if he hadn't pulled you clear of that rockfall last week.

How are you going to repay him, Spock? Will you crawl back to the safe protection of the Overmind -- or will you come back with me now, back where you belong?"

That's it; I've said my piece, the longest speech I've made for many a day. Now I can only wait to see what effect I've had. The Vulcan stands before me, his face impassive, his eyes concealed under half-lowered lids.

I can sense that the Overmind too is waiting for Spock's decision; it is around me, patient, enquiring, and for the first time I can see it as something other than a threat. It's an intelligent life-form, after all, and it only wants to increase its knowledge as we do; but now I understand that it will not compel anyone to join it.

At last, with a faint sigh, the dark lashes lift, and the unfathomable eyes look deep into mine.

"The supreme irony, Mr. Baillie." The voice is faint, weary. "I concede your arguments; but it is... too late."

"Too late?" I whisper.

"The Overmind has taken too much from me, has drained my energy. I will soon become part of the complex; I cannot escape its field now, I do not have the strength to move."

Before my startled gaze the image of Spock wavers, begins to fade.

"Unfortunate, I would have liked... tell him..." The voice ceases abruptly; the figure shimmers and is gone.

For a moment I stare blankly at the curtain of light, trying to realise that on the very brink of success I have failed; it's not a nice thought. Then, that... voice... echoes in my head.

HUMAN, IF YOU HAVE THE COURAGE, ACT SWIFTLY. THE ONE NAMED SPOCK STILL LIVES, BUT HIS CONSCIOUSNESS IS ALMOST GONE. IF YOU TRUST US WE WILL LEAD YOU TO HIM, FOR WE WOULD NOT HOLD ONE WHO IS UNWILLING. CONCENTRATE ONLY ON HE WHOM YOU SEEK, AND WE WILL GUIDE YOU. DECIDE NOW IF YOU WILL MAKE THE ATTEMPT.

I don't have much choice, really; I'm not going back to tell the Captain that I had the chance to bring his Vulcan out and refused to take it. Besides, the way I figure it, I owe it to Spock too - I'm the one who raised doubts in his mind, convinced him that he should return. Taking a deep breath I step forward into the light.

The core of the Overmind... I have no real idea what it's like. Some of it I forget, some I never saw, and most of what I did see I can't make sense of anyway.

The vital thing is not to look up, to keep my eyes firmly on the floor; but even the shadows are... disturbing. I can feel the light swirling about me, almost tangible in its intensity.

Don't think, I warn myself. Just concentrate on keeping moving.

Again comes that sense of being herded, guided to where the Overmind wishes to lead me, and I yield to it, knowing that if I try to look around to locate Spock myself, I'll be lost. I can feel the pressure against my mind; so close, the sheer energy generated by this strange being is drawing at mine, sucking it out. It's so difficult even to walk - the strength is being leached from me, and I even have to concentrate hard to remember why I'm here at all. At last I'm reduced to crawling, my eyes clamped shut against the hypnotic pulsations of the light, my hands groping before me.

Eventually my fingers brush against something soft and velvety, the familiar texture of a Starfleet shirt; I risk taking a look.

It's Spock, lying on his side, his face pillowed on one outstretched arm, his hands reaching towards... no, I will not remember!

His face is pale, serene, almost glowing in the halo of flickering fire that seems to outline his body, and for a moment I wonder if I'm in time, he lies so still.

It's too dangerous for me to linger, the energy drain is increasing all the time; somehow I manage to gather him under one arm and begin the slow, agonising crawl back the way I came. If it was difficult to reach him, it's even more so to return; something within me is beginning to feel an almost overwhelming longing to give up, to allow myself to merge, to blend with the awesome power around me.

Two things save me. Fear; for I know that while Spock's mind is strong enough to retain identity as part of the Overmind, mine is not - I'd be totally absorbed, overwhelmed, annihilated.

The second? Merely a memory - the vision of Kirk's haunted eyes. There is also, I think, help from the Overmind itself; for it is not malevolent, has no wish to harm me - or even to retain Spock as an unwilling component.

At last, aeons later, I find myself back in the tunnel, Spock's limp body cradled in my arms, and with no memory of travelling the last few yards. The energy drain has lessened out of the direct presence of the Overmind, and although still weak I manage to pull myself shakily to my feet. There's no time to be lost - to me Spock looks dead already - but I owe a debt; I make myself turn back to face the light.

"Thank you," I say simply. The pulse of the Overmind beats in my brain.

THANKS ARE UNNECESSARY; WE REGRET HAVING CAUSED DISTRESS. THE VULCAN'S MIND WOULD HAVE ENRICHED US, BUT WE UNDERSTAND NOW THE HARM WE WOULD HAVE DONE. THE CONFLICT IS ESSENTIAL TO HIM - HE MUST ACCEPT WHAT HE IS, OR STRUGGLE AGAINST IT, BUT THE PEACE WE THOUGHT TO OFFER WOULD BE DEATH TO HIS MIND. WE MUST BE MORE CAREFUL IN OUR CONTACT WITH OTHER LIFE FORMS. AND NOW, YOU MUST GO.

Obediently I lift Spock up and for the last time retreat along the tunnel. The night sky has never looked so beautifully normal, so welcome, and I enjoy breathing the cool air while I pull out my communicator; Kyle locks on to my signal, and beams us up.

When I carry my burden from the transporter pad I see Kyle reaching for the intercom.

"No!" I tell him sharply. "Don't call the Captain yet -- let me get Mr. Spock to sickbay first. Time enough when we know how he is."

Kyle nods in understanding and I carry Spock through the deserted corridors to sickbay. With a sigh of relief I dump him on the nearest bed -- he might be thin, but he's no lightweight -- and go in search of McCoy.

He's sitting at his desk, his head resting on his arms, but he sits up at once when I come in. The blue eyes are very bright; he's been sharing Kirk's vigil in his own quiet way, unable to relax as long as there's any hope.

"What do you want at this hour, Baillie?" he grumbles as usual; but his heart isn't in it, it's pure habit. I jerk a thumb in the direction of sickbay.

"Patient for you," I tell him. "He looks in a bad way."

Give McCoy his due, he's no slouch when a patient needs him, whatever his personal troubles; he's moving even as I'm speaking.

He checks for just an instant as he recognises the patient, but it's the sort of shock you recover from quickly -- he's already in action as I reach the bed.

I watch the life indicators carefully -- I've picked up enough by now to get a rough idea of Spock's condition. The readings are low -- very low -- but steady, and when McCoy returns the last hypo to the tray and steps back his eyes confirm my instinctive sigh of relief.

"Does Jim know?" he asks, turning to the intercom.

"No, I didn't want to tell him until I was sure Spock would make it." A sudden impulse makes me reach for the intercom before he can. "I'll tell him, Doctor." McCoy might guess, but it's my belief the Captain won't want it broadcast where he spent the night. For that reason I ask for shipwide relay.

"Captain Kirk to sickbay, please."

When I look round McCoy's again leaning over the bed; he grunts with satisfaction. "He should be coming round soon," he says over his shoulder.

At that, Kirk comes through the door; his face is carefully controlled -- too carefully. His eyes move from me to the occupied McCoy and back again.

"What's the problem?" he asks crisply.

As McCoy steps back I indicate the bed, and he follows my gesture. He gives a sudden sharp intake of breath, then stands motionless for a moment before taking a hesitant step forward.

"Spock?" His voice is husky with disbelief, his eyes wide as he stares in bewilderment.

"Yes, it's Spock," McCoy confirms, struggling between tears and laughter. "Almost as good as new -- he'll be plaguing the life out of me before I can turn round."

"But... how?" Kirk asks, puzzled.

"Don't ask me. All I know is that Baillie strolled in about ten minutes ago and dumped him on the bed."

Kirk's gaze flickers to me, then back to the bed; only a fleeting glance, but his expressive eyes say all I need to know.

To an observer it must look a bit odd, the three of us staring moon-struck at that quiet figure; I can't see Kirk's face, but McCoy's grinning like an idiot, and I don't know that I'm any better. It's Kirk who moves first, stepping forward to sit on the bed as though he's suddenly none too sure of his legs.

Hesitantly he reaches out to lay a gentle hand on Spock's face; at the touch the dark eyes open, clouded with confusion. As they focus on Kirk's face I see them clear into a blazing delight, and the Vulcan's lips soundlessly form the word 'Jim!'

Kirk leans closer at that, and McCoy's touch on my arm reminds me that neither of us are needed here; resisting the temptation to linger I follow him into his office.

Without a word McCoy pours two large brandies and hands me one, raising his own glass in silent salute. As the powerful stuff hits me I feel myself reeling, and before I know where I am he's got me sitting down, his scanner whirring.

"Were you exposed to that... Overmind?" he asks with concern.

"Yes; but I think it shielded me as much as possible. I don't feel too bad now, but at the time..." I shudder, and reach again for my glass.

McCoy claps me on the shoulder. "Sheer exhaustion," he says. "You can't have been as sensitive to the mental effects as Spock. Come on, I'm prescribing a few days' rest; I'll take you to your quarters, and make sure you get a good night's sleep."

And I'm glad of his supportive arm as we head for the elevator.

I'm still confined to quarters next day when Kirk comes in to see me. He says that Spock's in worse shape than I am owing to his longer exposure, but with him too it's only exhaustion, and he'll be fine.

I fill him in on what happened on Vebron, stressing my impression that the Overmind meant no harm, and he nods understandingly.

"The Overmind contacted me before we left orbit," he says. "Now that its existence is known it is prepared to accept official contact with the Federation, so from now on it will be approached with the appropriate safeguards on both sides. But we've lost a shore-leave planet."

"Can't say I'm sorry," I tell him. "It may be harmless, but it makes me uncomfortable. That sort of thing is best left to those who understand it."

He laughs, but then his eyes grow serious. "Baillie - thanks for what you did - but what possessed you to take such a risk?" He shudders. "Even I could feel the power, the attraction - why weren't you drawn in?"

"I don't know. It just didn't seem so... compulsive to me. As for why..." I hesitate, decide this is getting too serious. "Sheer self-defence, sir," I tell him virtuously. "I'm used to Mr. Spock's ways - a new First Officer would be bound to turn the Security Section upside down just on principle, and I've already got it working nicely."

Kirk laughs again, and rises to leave. "Have it your own way, Baillie," he says. "But... thanks."

I'm rather dreading my next meeting with Spock, but I needn't have worried. It's not just chance that he catches up with me in the elevator when I'm reporting back for duty. He doesn't say much, but those eyes of his express all that is necessary - neither of us are given to making speeches. I took a chance and it came off; he knows and appreciates the fact, and for myself, I'm just glad that everything's back to normal.

It's not something I spend a lot of time brooding about. I don't know what the Overmind really was, and I don't want to know, but I do know this; Spock's sensitivity to it caught him in a trap he'd have grown to hate. The Captain - he felt it too, could never have survived as I did. He wanted to

go after Spock himself, make no mistake, but knew that if he did he'd be lost to the ship where he was needed. Their imaginations showed them what they would have gained as part of the Overmind, and almost made them forget what they would have lost. But me... well, I'm the stolid, unimaginative sort; there was nothing there to lure me, so I succeeded where the Captain, for all his brains, would have failed. There are times when too much awareness can be a real handicap.

But I started out to prove that Spock's not totally devoid of his own weird sense of humour. I'm in McCoy's office waiting for my official discharge as fit for duty when I hear one of the nurses collar him just outside the door.

"Excuse me, Doctor, but we don't seem to have Chief Baillie's first name recorded in his medical files."

"Curious - still, he's in my office now; give me the form, and I'll ask him."

No you won't! I think, making a hasty exit by the other door; but McCoy's thorough - he'll get to me sooner or later, and when I refuse to tell him he'll pull the information from my personal file in the main computer.

There's not a darn thing I can do to stop him either, but with vague ideas of maybe wiping my tape somehow, or even, as a last resort, blowing up the whole damn thing, I head for the main computer terminal. I'm standing there staring gloomily at the monster when Spock walks in, and of course wants to know what I'm doing there. I'm so depressed by now, I tell him before I realise it.

One delicate eyebrow rises in interrogation, but I stare dumbly at the floor - I'm not telling even him. After a moment he says,

"Well, Mr. Baillie, since the matter causes you some distress, I propose a compromise. I cannot wipe the information from the computer banks, but I can restrict the information so that it will be released only on my authorisation, or the Captain's, or yours. Will that be satisfactory?"

Satisfactory! I should say so! Kirk's never likely to want to know, and Mr. Spock would never stoop to vulgar curiosity, so I'm safe from any prying.

That man may say he doesn't understand Humans - but he sure tries hard!

SPOCK....TO BONES by Gladys Oliver

Craggy brows raised in query,
and verbal repartee!
And I know that the Doctor's in full flood,
Berating and prodding me!

Oh Bones McCoy, where would I be?
In this Vulcan shell of mine,
Without your dubious whip and wit
To release this man sometimes.

So carry on, dear Doctor,
... and I will always try
To give you cause to practice
Your sarcasm in full cry!

LIFETIME 1,001 by Susan Meek

Rana. Soft and golden and his. And gone.

The vision of her face was before him again...

Must it always be like this? No matter how many times he lost, it still hurt. But must it always be like this?

- All the women,- he thought. - All the women I have loved, and never have I been so tempted to share my secret as with this one.- She had been so young and full of life. At least they would have had many years ahead of them, and perhaps during that time he would have found the way to make her as immortal as himself.

It was too late now. The mutated virus that had been brought by one of the trading ships landing at the nearby spaceport had spread like wildfire through the city. Rana had been one of the first victims it claimed. The irony was that in his present guise as brilliant respected bio-research chemist, he had been in a position to save her. But not even his brilliance and wisdom, or the help of his robot-computer M-2, had been enough to find the antidote to combat the virus before she died. Oh yes, most of the city had been saved... "Congratulations, Dr. Samuels. Your discovery saved countless lives... your wife... a tragedy... " So many voices over the past few weeks echoing sympathy. But how could these short-lived beings really know what it was to bear the added pain and grief, the load of centuries.

Not even he could foresee every eventuality. He had so much control over his own life, that it was possible to forget that he could not always control others' destinies in the same way. The answer to this lay in acceptance that no guilt lay with him for her death.

"Misplaced guilt accomplishes no logical purpose," he said firmly to himself. That sounded almost a Vulcanism. He had come to admire the Vulcans very much in the years since first contact had been made with them. There were many admirable things in their philosophy. He remembered in particular meeting an ambassador at some diplomatic reception. What was his name... Sarek? In a life that had held so many names and faces, it was sometimes difficult to pinpoint one immediately. This Vulcan... tall, controlled, very dignified... bearing his years well... impressive... and his lovely wife...

But even the Vulcans, he thought, with their longer lifespans, would not be able to appreciate this. The years, the endless years, with no-one to share them - and no way to die.

Perhaps the Vulcans were right. The best way was to exclude emotion. But he was a Human, and he had never been able to stop himself loving.

So many times, finding a lovely woman, a beautiful face, a kindred spirit... enjoying a few years of love, sometimes, if he was lucky, a life-time of companionship and marriage... then losing to Death, the one thing he could never share with the rest of his species.

How many times must he love and lose, love and lose again? If there was only some way to capture the beauty and life... but no. He was the only one who was blessed - and cursed - with immortality. He had never been able to discover just exactly what it was, what freak of nature had given him this gift of eternal life. If he had been able to find it, perhaps he could end all this...

No. It might be impossible to recreate the exact conditions, the balance between anabolism and katabolism in another flesh and blood body. But... perhaps in an artificial body? Not impossible. An android?

Yes...

Suddenly he began to feel hope dawning in him. With his abilities and knowledge, accumulated over many millenia, it would not be too difficult. It would

take time and patience, but time was something he had in abundance. And there was still the problem of creating true life and emotion in an android body. But even that was not insurmountable.

Once his brilliant mind had grasped the idea, he swiftly began to make plans. It would be necessary to find some private, lonely place for research, away from the prying eyes of the mortals. Away from this planet...

Suddenly the idea seemed very appealing. There had been many useful experiences here on Earth. This planet had given him birth and he had learned nearly all her secrets. There had been much gaining of knowledge and joy; but also much pain and grief.

He looked up at the blue sky. It was a beautiful world. But there were others out there, equally beautiful, some even more so. This one held too many memories.

'Now is the winter of our discontent'. A line that as the Elizabethan Francis Bacon he had fed once to Shakespeare. He felt very old and tired. It had not been so bad in the Spring of his life, before the burden of years became too much; in the Summer, gaining knowledge, subtly trying to help and guide humanity. Then they had found the stars...

What did these young, eager Humans really have in common with him, Methuselah? And now he had to face the Winter that stretched on ahead to the ends of time.

Perhaps with a companion to share it, it would not be so bad. Already he could picture her in his imagination. She would be Rana. And she would also be every other woman he had ever known or wanted.

She would be perfect. He would call her... Rayna.

His mind went back to more practical matters. It would be necessary, of course, to end this present life, to find a new identity. But to the man who had lived a thousand lives, it would not be difficult. It was time to begin lifetime one thousand and one.

Only small details remained, such as a new name for the man he was about to become.

He considered for a moment. Something anonymous, but concise.

Flint... would serve, as well as any other.

VULCAN by Gladys Oliver

Through all the years of timeless sands,
Vulcan, unmoved, unchanged still stands,
With nights so dark in lonely space,
You revolve and turn with infinite grace.

Many worlds I've seen... and Earth... Then
Have shared the life of Human men,
Yet Vulcan bright as any still lies
In its timeless, changeless skies.

Oh, but sometimes I wish, my Vulcan star,
That life and love are what you are
- But these warm wishes are not for me,
Until, my Vulcan, you set me free!

A BRUSH WITH DEATH by Meg Wright

"Come."

Kirk's door slid open to admit the tall figure of the First Officer.

"Sit down, Spock. I've just opened the sealed orders from Starfleet; we are to proceed to Ainho to collect three Tellarite officers and transport them to Starbase 29."

Spock raised his eyebrows. "Ainho? Surely the mines there are worked out and inoperative now?"

"I believe so," Kirk agreed. "Reading between the lines I gather the deeper levels are well below sensor range and consequently provide a satisfactory hiding place for Commander Dev and his two companions. Apparently they have information for the Federation they are eager should not fall into unfriendly hands. Can you give me a rough E.T.A.?"

"Approximately twenty point two hours away at Warp Five, Captain."

"We're commanded to be there at 3264.8, so we'd better pile it on a bit!"

Since the orders called for a high degree of secrecy the landing party consisted solely of senior ranking officers. They beamed down to level 25, not the deepest level the transporter could safely achieve, but the deepest level communicators could reach; owing to natural interference the levels below that were out of range.

Scott looked around the wide cave, lit only by one dim glowpup. "Aye, the old power controls are over there, I can get the lights working again."

"Good man. Get to it."

A quarter of an hour later they were down to level 26. "Five more levels," McCoy complained. "You'd think they'd have had some quicker way down than all these tunnels."

"They had mechanised transport, Doctor," Spock informed him.

"Aye," Scott said enthusiastically. "With these hundred ton tunnel cleansing machines, the old Typhons, they could keep the sides smooth enough to get up quite a speed down here. I believe they used to hold speed trials over timed distances in those wee powered skimmers."

"Typhons, did you call them? I could use one right now." McCoy wiped his brow. "I'd like to ride."

Scott laughed. "You're way wrong there, Doctor. Typhons weren't the speed craft, they weren't for riding - they were automated and if you met one now you'd have a hell of a run for it. They had massive boridium brushes along both sides and over the top and bottom that swept off the heavy deposits. The miners carried remote control switches in their helmets in case they met one. If you didn't either stop it or find another tunnel you'd had it. Tear you to pieces, those things would."

"Just let me know if you see one coming," Sulu told him.

"Och, they'll all be deactivated before the last miners left," Scott replied.

"Level 27," Sulu said as the tunnel opened to a wider gallery. It stretched endlessly away from them, dark openings gaping along each side.

"It will take us another hour to reach the rendezvous at level 31," Kirk said. "We'd better hurry." As he spoke they were plunged into darkness. "Scotty!" Kirk sounded aggrieved. "It's not like you to do a botched-up job."

"It wasnae a botched job," the Engineer protested. "I can't understand it. Down here the system should be operative for centuries."

"Well, it's let us down!" Kirk thought for a moment. "Spock, how does it affect us? Can we still make our way down to level 31?"

"I believe so, sir. Doubtless the Tellarites will have light down there."

"Yes. Scotty, you and Sulu get back up to 25 and get handlights, then you, Scotty, work on the power while Sulu comes on down, picks up McCoy and rejoins us."

"You're not going on without lights!" protested McCoy.

"Aye, it could be a trap of some sort," Scott added.

"Or we could cause a diplomatic incident by not arriving on time," Kirk said curtly. "Come along, Spock. You wait here, McCoy."

The going was not too difficult, even in the utter blackness around them. Each level was marked by a plate on the wall at the tunnel exits and entrances, easily readable by touch, and an hour later they were almost at level 31 when Spock suddenly paused, holding Kirk's arm.

"What is it?"

"Listen."

Beyond them a dull rumbling was growing in intensity.

"A Typhon?"

"I believe it may be, Captain."

"How far to the intersection?"

"Too far. We had better go back."

"It will be quite a run," Kirk said ruefully. "Quickly, Spock. Let's get out of here."

They began to move. After a half mile or so it seemed to Kirk that he had been running since time began and that his life held no other purpose. The thudding of the giant machine was closing in now, the walls of the tunnel slid, terrifyingly smooth, beneath his guiding hand, giving no hope of safety. He could barely hear Spock's pounding boots up ahead, hot air knifed into his lungs, legs moved automatically, each stride an eternity of fear that he would fall. Abruptly, a hand caught his arm, steel fingers gripping tightly.

"An alcove, Jim, here."

He pressed against the wall, body as flat as he could hold it, heart pumping frantically. In the second before the huge leviathan thundered past he realised Spock was not beside him, the shallow depression was too small for both of them. He turned to join his friend and the giant boridium brushes caught his back. He knew that he screamed, but the roaring, thudding monster drowned his agony and was gone. He slid down the wall, nails searching uselessly for a grip.

"Spock!"

The cry echoed endlessly on in his brain as his body hit the ground.

Seconds - hours? - later he stirred, each laceration in his back a separate, fiery source of agony. He forced himself to his hands and knees, staring into the darkness ahead of him. Spock? How far would he have to go before he found his friend's body, torn and broken by the pitiless machine? How would he know in this unending blackness where the Vulcan's body lay? He caught his breath in one harsh sob and rose to his feet, ignoring the weakness of his legs and, steadying himself against the wall with one hand, stumbled forwards. After a pace or two he stopped, berating himself for his stupidity. Was he moving in the right direction or would each step be taking him further away

from his friend? He leaned against the wall, fighting the torpidity of his brain, straining his ears to catch the sound of the receding machine. His blood hummed in his ears, giving and snatching away hope. The silence seemed to hold him physically, binding his muscles and draining his will.

"Spock!"

The word was wrenched from his gut. The desperation in his voice shocked and steadied him. Somewhere in these endless tunnels he would find him, somewhere, somehow.

Satisfied of Jim's safety Spock lengthened his stride, drawing a little ahead of the throbbing roar of the motor that inexorably followed its blind course. The dry heat of the tunnel was no more trying to him than the noonday heat of his desert childhood and he ran easily, one hand brushing the wall searching for a niche in which to squeeze himself out of harm's way. A change in the pressure ahead warned him of a branching of the ways - no time to regret he had not brought Kirk this far, that depression had been deep enough to give him protection - he paused at the intersection, diving aside as the machine swung on its appointed path. As it throbbed and thundered away from him he noticed a wisp of light from behind him and swung round. There it was again, a brief flicker from the far distance. He paused a moment; should he go back and join the Captain or should he seek out the source of the light? Whether it was the Tellarites they had come to collect or McCoy and Sulu it was imperative he make contact. He began to run.

"Mr. Spock! Am I glad to see you!" Sulu's cheerful smile faded as he realised the Vulcan was alone. "The Captain...?"

"In the tunnel behind me." Spock turned to lead the way back. "We were nearly trapped, but he will be safe."

"Not your fault if he is," McCoy grumbled, falling into step with him. "Of all the crazy ideas - coming down here, just the two of you, after the power had gone. You could have waited until Scotty had fixed the emergency rig."

"Then we would have had no chance at all of being at the rendezvous at the appointed time. The risk had to be taken, Doctor."

"You didn't make it?" Sulu asked, his handlight making their shadows waver on the dark walls.

"No. It was a trap. One of the Typhons was reactivated ahead of us. We found a minor fault in the wall deep enough for the Captain to seek safety in. The tunnel branched out not more than half a mile on and I was able to avoid the machine. We should not encounter it again just yet."

McCoy paled. "I should hope not. Those things move faster than I can go for more than a few minutes. It must have been a hell of a run you made."

"We had to move quickly," the Vulcan conceded.

"How far back did you leave the Captain?" Sulu asked. "I can see the branch in the tunnel up ahead, but there's no sign of Captain Kirk."

"About half a mile down the passage to the left," Spock said. "He should not be far away."

They rounded the bend and peered into the darkness. Sulu ran the powerful light from side to side of the narrow tunnel. They hastened on.

"There's no sign of him, sir."

Spock frowned. "We should be able to see him from here. Look, there is the fault in the wall where I left ..."

Abruptly he began to run. His eyes had caught the gleam of gold lying close against the wall, a tiny scrap of metallic material glinting in the beam

of light. Puzzled, McCoy and Sulu followed. They joined him as he knelt beside the wall staring at the torn braid in his hand. Sulu ran the light around the floor and caught his breath.

"Mr. Spock, look. Shreds of cloth."

McCoy scooped the tiny pieces up on his fingers. The old gold cloth left tiny smears of red upon his skin. He thought of the giant brushes designed to scrape stone and metal --

"He was caught," he said savagely. "You left him to be mangled."

Spock rose to his feet. "It would seem that you are right, Doctor," he agreed, his face blank.

Sulu, with a compassion born of long experience, shook his head. "The fault in the wall is deep enough, Doctor, provided the Captain took care."

"He was exhausted, Lieutenant." The Vulcan's voice was toneless. "I do not doubt that made him... careless."

McCoy nodded, repentant for the umpteenth time. He knew Spock was used to his need to lash out, but it didn't stop him being sorry every time he did it to the Vulcan -- over Jim at least. He wasn't too sure it was undeserved at other times.

"Shine your light around, Lieutenant," Spock said quietly.

The helmsman obeyed. The powerful beam gleamed over the dark, smooth walls and floor of the tunnel.

"Around the fault, please, Lieutenant." Spock ran his hand over the wall and looked at it closely, then he stooped and did the same to the floor. His palm was smeared with red. "Strange," he murmured.

"Strange!" McCoy exploded. "Jim gets caught by that thing and you think it strange to find blood around!"

"Only on the floor, Doctor, not on the wall."

Sulu looked at him, frowning.

"There is only blood," Spock said softly. "Blood, braid from his sleeve and shreds from his shirt. The brushes caught his upper body, yet the blood is on the floor."

"Are you surprised he fell?" McCoy said sarcastically. "We're not all superhuman... " His voice died. "You mean he fell after it passed, but... then where is he?"

"Precisely, Doctor. Were he completely caught by those brushes they would have torn him apart, but there is barely any blood and it is on the floor. He was caught only lightly and then collapsed. He cannot be far away.

"Which way?" McCoy asked hopelessly. "He didn't follow you or we'd have seen him."

"Down the other passage?" Sulu broke in.

"Come on!" McCoy turned.

Spock did not move. "I think not, Doctor," he said. "He would have seen your light had he gone that way. He must have become disorientated and gone back the way we came."

"That's all right," McCoy said, more cheerfully. "All we have to do is follow the tunnel."

"There are two point six miles with no turning, Doctor," Spock said quietly. "Should that machine not be the only one that has been reactivated we may experience some difficulty. You and Mr. Sulu will return the way you came and collect Mr. Scott at the beam down point. Tell him to return to the

Enterprise and wait up to three hours for the Captain. After that time, if neither the Captain nor I have returned, he must report to Starfleet Command and follow their orders."

McCoy swore softly. "Damn these Tellarites and their cloak and dagger methods! This is a worked out mining planet. If they wanted a safe rendezvous they could have made it on the upper levels."

"Doubtless they could, Doctor, but they did not do so. Starfleet had emphasised the need for secrecy and below sensor range the Tellarites remain undetected."

"If they are here at all."

"Someone is here, Doctor. The power failure could well have been the result of disuse, the the Typhon had to be reactivated by some means. At this level it cannot have been done by remote control from more than two point eight miles away."

"Then you can't go alone."

"I must, Doctor." He met McCoy's eyes. "I can outrun the Typhon, Doctor, you cannot. You may well place the Captain in more danger."

"Damn your logic," McCoy said, unfairly.

"Three hours, Sir?" Sulu asked quietly.

"Yes, Lieutenant. You have a spare handlight?"

"Here." McCoy pulled his from his belt. "I'll wait at the beamdown point with medication."

"Very well, Doctor, but you will beam up on Mr. Scott's orders, whether we have returned or no. Is that understood?"

McCoy resisted an answer. Spock repeated the order.

"Understood," McCoy agreed at last.

They watched the tall figure run down the tunnel, and turned to go. "Three hours!" McCoy grumbled. "It could take him that long to find Jim, never mind getting him back to level 25 to beam up."

Sulu grinned broadly. "You weren't listening, Doctor. I heard Mr. Spock's order." McCoy stared at him. "He said... 'Tell Mr. Scott to return to the Enterprise and wait three hours.' It could take us more than that to get to level 25 and give Mr. Scott the message."

McCoy's eyes held an unholy gleam. "Always obey orders, Mr. Sulu, to the letter." He paused and looked back down the tunnel. "That damned Vulcan must be pretty worried about Jim to be issuing ambiguous orders. Let's get out of here, Sulu - slowly!"

Spock ran steadily down the tunnel, the handlight picking out the dull gleam of fresh blood from time to time. It seemed that Kirk was bleeding steadily from the wounds he had received - Spock lengthened his stride. Eventually he could see ahead the intersection they had so nearly reached before. He slowed down as he reached the junction and shone the light down each tunnel; the trail of blood led, unmistakably, down the right-hand fork. He switched off the light and stood listening. Far, far down the left passage there was a dull gleam of light.

He paused, irresolute. His duty lay in completing the Starfleet orders; he must go left and seek out the light source. Kirk, of all people, would understand what he had to do. He gave one last look down the other way.

"I'll be with you soon, Jim," he breathed, turned to go - and froze in his tracks. From the right-hand way there was the distant throb of machinery. He

was several yards down the tunnel before the first arguments against it had formed in his mind. Thankful McCoy was not there to see him he ran at top speed - logic gone.

Eternity passed before he caught the gleam of old gold ahead. Kirk was on his hands and knees, crawling painfully towards him. The sound was much louder now, too loud; he could not hope to carry his friend out of danger.

"Keep going," he shouted to Kirk as he passed, "as fast as you can."

Kirk staggered to his feet again, his will driving him upright. "No, Spock!" he shouted. "Come back, save yourself. There's no need for both of us to get caught."

The Vulcan kept going. The Typhon was in sight now. He slowed his pace to get control and leaped, free hand groping for a hold on the blank front of the machine. His fingers grasped a tiny bolt and he dragged himself aboard, sliding under the brushes that scraped the roof. He swung the handlight, mercifully still in his grasp, found the wires he sought and pulled hard. The motor coughed and died. The upward incline slowed the giant machine and it came to a halt, whirling brushes still. Spock slewed himself round with difficulty - the space was barely big enough to move in - and shone the light out into the tunnel. There was no sign of Kirk. He had not been in time. He gave one cry, instantly checked.

Shaking, he climbed out - to find his ankle held. He allowed his legs to fold under him - they were going to do so whether he would or no - and saw Kirk's face smiling at him from under the grey metal.

"Jim!"

"Don't just kneel there," Kirk said weakly. "Get me out."

Spock caught his arm and hauled, as gently as he could. He pulled Kirk to a sitting position and held him lightly, not touching the lacerated back. Kirk leaned against the whipcord body, and felt its trembling.

"Hey," he said softly. "It's good to see you, Spock. I've been looking all over."

"You went the wrong way."

"I wasn't thinking too clearly. I thought it had got you and I wanted to find you."

"Yes." The single word was all that Spock would admit of his own agonised search. He knelt up, still supporting Kirk with one arm. The shirt was shredded into the skin, deeply embedded in the wounds, drying blood caking the area.

"It could be worse," Kirk said drily. "It barely touched me."

"Yes. The wounds are shallow. If they had gone deeper you would have been unable to break free."

Kirk resisted an urge to shudder. "Let's get on with the job, Spock. Has anything been seen of the Tellarites?"

"I saw a light down a turning back there," Spock said. "If you wait here I'll investigate."

"No, we'll go together."

"Jim, you have lost a lot of blood and are in some pain... "

"I said together, Mister!" snapped Kirk.

"Sir," Spock said a little rigidly, "my intention was not to question your decision but to offer my assistance."

"I'll need your arm," Kirk admitted.

"No." Spock's voice was almost a whisper. "Not just my arm."

Relief flooded Kirk. "A mind link? Spock, why do we all say the wrong things to you?"

Spock shook his head but did not answer the question. "You would not object?"

"Object? When have I ever? But it will slow you down too, Spock. Hadn't we better have one of us on his toes?"

"As long as the link is not prolonged, sir, I can manage very well. I am accustomed to a link with you and that makes it easier to control. Besides which, there is little need for any barriers between the two of us."

"That's the biggest compliment I've ever been paid," Kirk said softly.

The warm fingertips pressed his face as Spock began the ritual, the warm tendrils of thought sought out his own thoughts, surrounding, merging.

"We have control." The inner voice was almost stern. "The mind rules. There is no pain."

The stabbing aches in his back eased and died. The pain was still there but under their control, stiff muscles loosened until new energy came flooding. Slowly, Spock removed his fingers, dark eyes locked with hazel. Kirk smiled.

"My Vulcan friend."

He allowed Spock to help him to his feet, and found that he could stand comfortably. "Where would I be without you, Mr. Spock? Come on, let's investigate. Our Tellarite friends must be wondering what has happened to us."

"Maybe they believe they know," Spock said soberly.

"There's always that," Kirk agreed. "Let's go see."

The light was dimmer than Spock had thought and considerably closer.

They could see the three Tellarites they were expecting, bound and gagged, closely guarded by two unmistakable figures.

Klingons

Yes

The mind link has its uses, Spock. At least we can't be overheard, but how are we going to avoid being seen? Kirk pondered the problem. *They believe us to be dead, Spock, maybe if we crawl in they'll underestimate our abilities*

A logical solution

They dropped to hands and knees and crawled down to the light. They were very close before the Klingons were aware of them and rose to their feet.

"Well, well, well. We have visitors, Korak. Look who has come to join our party. Welcome to you, Earther. Our Captain will be pleased to see you when he returns."

"Indeed, Kos, indeed." The two figures stood over them sniggering. Kos aimed his booted foot at Kirk's drooping head.

Now

Kirk and Spock launched themselves upwards simultaneously, catching the Klingons by surprise and toppling them. Two hands went to two necks and applied pressure; two figures went limp.

"How satisfying," Kirk said, looking at his hand. "I've never managed that before, Spock." He looked at the Vulcan's inexpressive face and allowed his

shoulders to slump. "I suppose I didn't do it that time, either."

"Not entirely," Spock said.

"Oh, well. Maybe it'll come more easily now I know what to do."

"Maybe."

Kirk laughed and went to release the prisoners. The three Tellarites scrambled to their feet, unhappily flexing painful muscles.

"You took your time," one grunted.

"But we got here," Kirk said lightly. "Which of you is Commander Dev?"

"I am Dev. You have a ship here?"

"As you requested."

"Then let us go before the Klingon ship returns to find us."

"And these two?" Kirk indicated the two Klingons.

"Let them remain." Dev shrugged. "They know nothing and are no danger to us. Their own race will punish them more suitably than the soft hearts of the Federation will allow. Use the ropes to bind them and get us out of here."

Jim, the link is getting too strong, we must break it soon

So soon? Kirk suppressed his regret at the prospect. The presence of the friendly, ordered mind within his own was as comforting as a warm bed on a cold night. *Very well, Spock*

As their minds slid apart agonising waves of pain flooded Kirk and he felt his knees buckle.

"Weakling Humans," Dev said contemptuously as Spock lifted Kirk in his arms. "Lead us out of here, Vulcan."

By the time they had reached the 25th level more than five hours had elapsed since Spock had left Sulu and McCoy, and he raised an eyebrow to see McCoy impatiently waiting at the beamdown point. The Doctor got up hurriedly and ran to Kirk, wincing at the wounded back.

"Unconscious?"

"Nearly so, Doctor."

"I'll give him a shot till we get back aboard."

"Spock to Enterprise. Six to beam up."

Kyle must have had his fingers on the lever because the sparkle of the beam took them almost before Spock had finished speaking.

"Steady!" McCoy yelled as he materialised. "How can I give anyone a shot if you're throwing my molecules around like confetti?"

"Sorry, Doctor." Kyle came round the console. "Are you all right?"

"Never mind me," McCoy said sourly. "Call a medical team and let's get the Captain to sickbay."

"I'm all right, Bones. What's the hurry, Mr. Kyle?"

"Klingon ship approaching, **sir**. We needed to get the screens up quickly."

Kirk brushed McCoy aside and went to the intercom. "Sulu! What's happening?"

"Klingon ship approaching slowly, sir. She's seen us and I think she's manoeuvring for a shot."

The ship shuddered slightly beneath their feet. "I think you're right,

Lieutenant." Kirk clutched at Spock's steadying arm.

"No retaliation," Dev said harshly. "You must get us out of here, Kirk. The information I have is vital to the Federation."

"Very well. Lt. Uhura, relay this message to Starfleet. Code II. Yes, II. No contact made with Tellarites, Klingons in attack. Enterprise will engage battle. Request further orders. Enterprise out. Mr. Chekov, set a course 218 mark 4 and engage on my signal. Lt. Sulu, raise orbit to twenty-four miles and bring us round to battle heading."

"Course laid in, sir."

"On battle heading now."

"Engage, Mr. Chekov. Warp 8, Mr Sulu - now!"

As the Enterprise flashed out of the Klingon's sights, Kirk ordered a further pattern of random course changes before setting a course for Starbase 29 and then resigned himself to McCoy's ministrations.

The process of picking the microscopic pieces of metal from Kirk's ploughed flied of a back was reasonably simple with the use of a magnetic probe. The deeply embedded pieces of cloth were not such an easy matter and entailed many hours of patient work by McCoy. He refused to hand the task over to any of his subordinates, alleging that the spectacle of the Captain flat on his face, making so much fuss over a process no more complicated than eyebrow plucking, would be bad for crew morale. Listening to his own groans Kirk felt he had a point. Major surgery, he decided, was a lot less painful than such a comparatively minor task. At the end of the third hour he'd had more than enough.

"How much longer, McCoy?"

"I've done about half of it," McCoy said cheerfully. "Enough for today."

Kirk groaned again. "I need to get back to the bridge, Bones, can't you speed it up?"

"No." McCoy's tone was definite. "Spock doesn't need you up there, and we shall be off-loading the Tellarites within twenty-four hours. Being in sick-bay at least preserves you from their gratitude."

Kirk managed to turn his head. "Gratitude?"

McCoy grinned. "That's what Dev called it. It didn't sound that way," he admitted, "but your second-in-command isn't losing any sleep over the tone in someone's voice. He logged the whole as a commendation for your gallantry."

"He didn't mention his own, of course."

"You'd hardly know he'd been there," McCoy said. "A bare mention of the fact that he managed to join forces with you while you were on your way to release the Tellarites after having been wounded. Wasn't that the way it was?"

Kirk snorted. "You should know him better than that by now, Bones. I'd lost my way searching for him - I thought he'd saved me at his own expense, and was looking for his body. Then I heard the Typhon again and had just about given up hope when he came out of the darkness like an avenging angel."

McCoy muttered something under his breath which Kirk decided to ignore. He described Spock's frantic leap onto the approaching machine.

"I don't know how he made it, Bones. If he had slipped... then he short-circuited the thing and it stopped just before the lower brushes caught me." Kirk paused, remembering that brief unearthly cry of agony from above. "I'll log his commendation all right once you let me out of here."

"I think not, Captain."

McCoy swung round. "It's usual to request permission to enter sickbay when I'm operating, Mr. Spock."

The eyebrow lifted. "I did, Doctor. You were engrossed in your conversation."

Kirk peered uncomfortably over his shoulder. "You'll take a commendation whether you like it or not, Mister," he said.

Spock came to the head of the bed. "It would be unwise to admit to having forgotten the Tellarites, Captain, and could lead to a degeneration in the present cordial atmosphere. Commander Dev has given the Enterprise full credit for her handling of a potentially tricky situation. Starfleet will hardly welcome anything leading to a breakdown in the current diplomatic situation."

"Have they said anything at all about the mission?"

"Nothing save that in allowing time for the Klingons to get to them first the Federation nearly put the entire Galaxy in jeopardy."

McCoy snorted.

"I, too, feel there is some little overstatement of their case," Spock said expressionlessly. "The Tellarite capacity for pugnacity and self-aggrandisement is well-known. However, we were fortunate that the Klingon's greed for the capture of the Enterprise led them to try to set a trap for us. Had they simply taken the Tellarites prisoner we would not have arrived in time to rescue them."

"Dev told them we were on our way?"

"Yes."

"'All's well that ends well'," Kirk quoted grimly, "but you can tell Commander Dev that I don't like the Enterprise being used as bait without my consent."

"Yes, sir," Spock said carefully. "Is it your wish that I inform him immediately, or would you allow the message to wait until he leaves his quarters in the morning?"

"Dammit!" Kirk roared, trying to roll over. "You know I don't want the message passed on."

Spock and McCoy put out restraining arms. "Spock, if you're going to learn to make jokes you're going to have to learn to time them better," McCoy said, grinning. "Jim, lie still, you've started one of the wounds bleeding again."

"Jokes, Doctor?" The face was rigid.

"Yes, jokes, Mr. Spock. Now if you've quite finished, go away and let Jim get some rest. I've more work to do on his back tomorrow, and a little plastic surgery to perform; then you can have him back as good as new."

"Yes, get some rest, Spock. It's been quite a day. Thanks - for everything."
