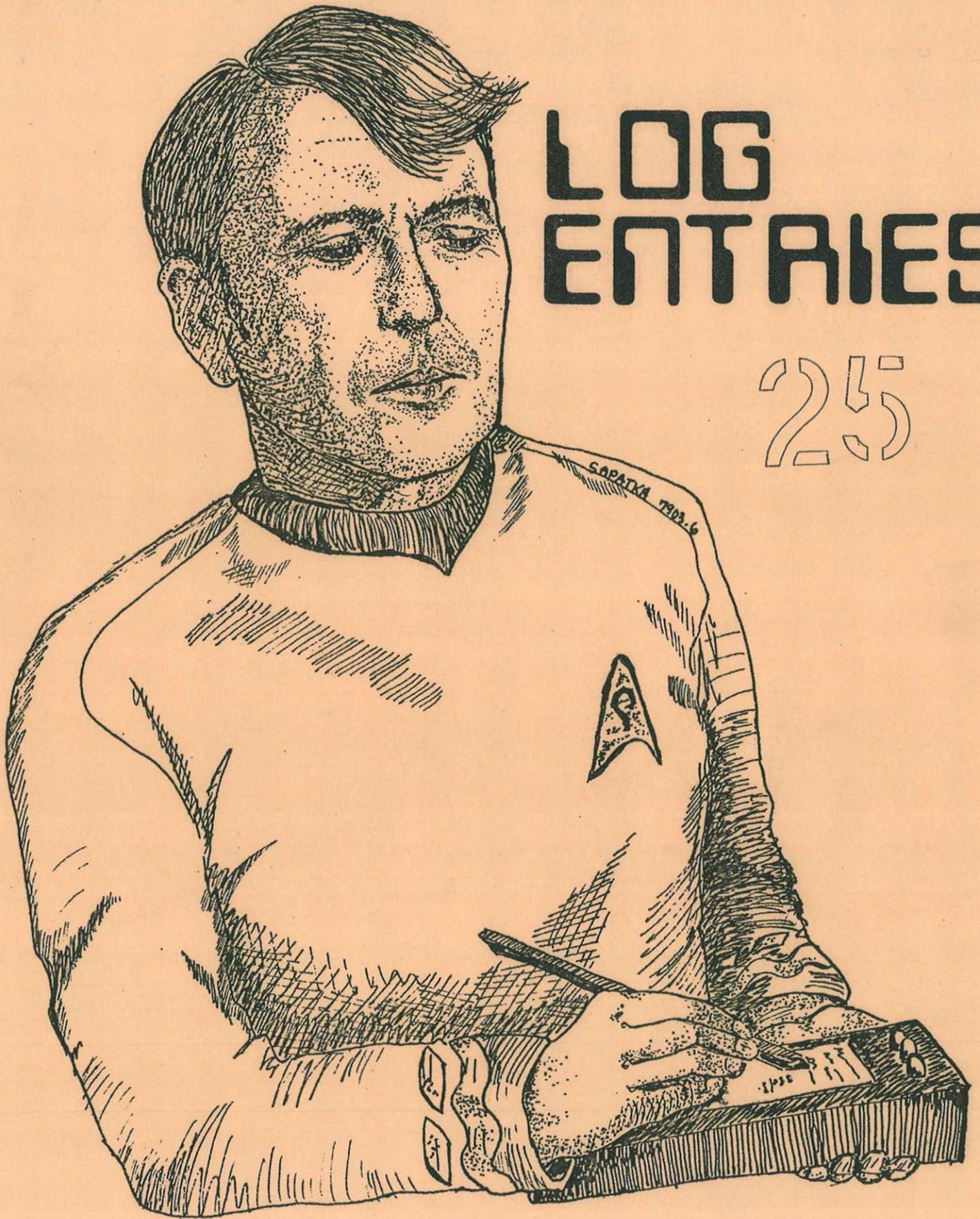
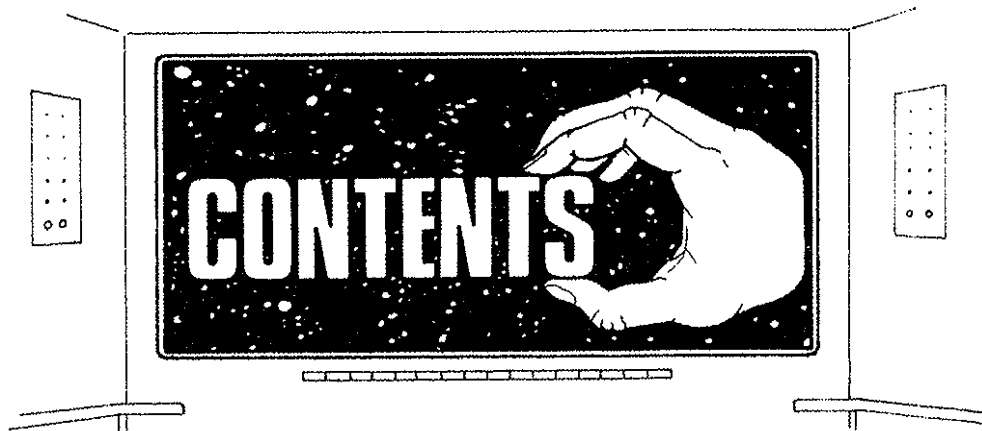


LOG ENTRIES

25



A Star Trek Fanzine



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Welcome to another issue of Log Entries.

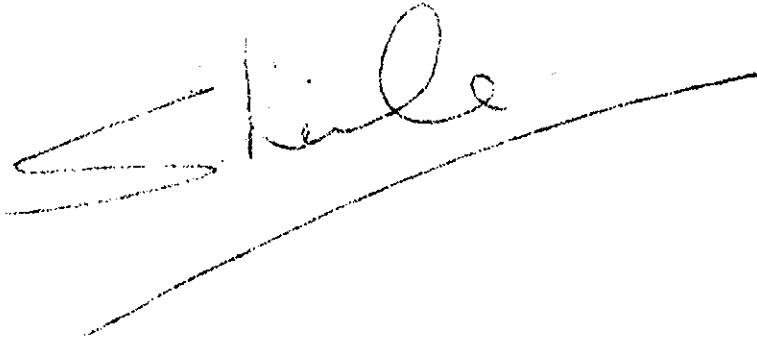
And we've had to put the price up yet again. Hopefully, however, we'll be able to hold at this price for a few issues. The reason for such a big increase immediately after last issue's rise is simple enough - the price of paper has gone up yet again - that makes the third rise in price since February. This rise was announced before the Budget added 7% to the price, so there's that to add to our increased bill as well. And the post office stopped making soft rumbling sounds and started making loud threatening ones instead. There was no way last issue's increase of 5p was going to begin to look at covering those increases.

We've also had to increase the foreign rate too, for exactly the same reasons plus a rising exchange rate. Six months ago we were getting 50p to the dollar; today we're getting 45p, and the exchange rate is still rising. And of course, just to add insult to injury, all zines in print have had to go up too, because of the increased postage and cost of envelopes.

I forecast this in my last editorial (does that give me second sight or merely make me a pessimist?) but it doesn't make it any easier to have to do!

For next time I have stories by Jean Barron, Tina Pole and Mary A. Smith among others, and I think it will be a good issue.

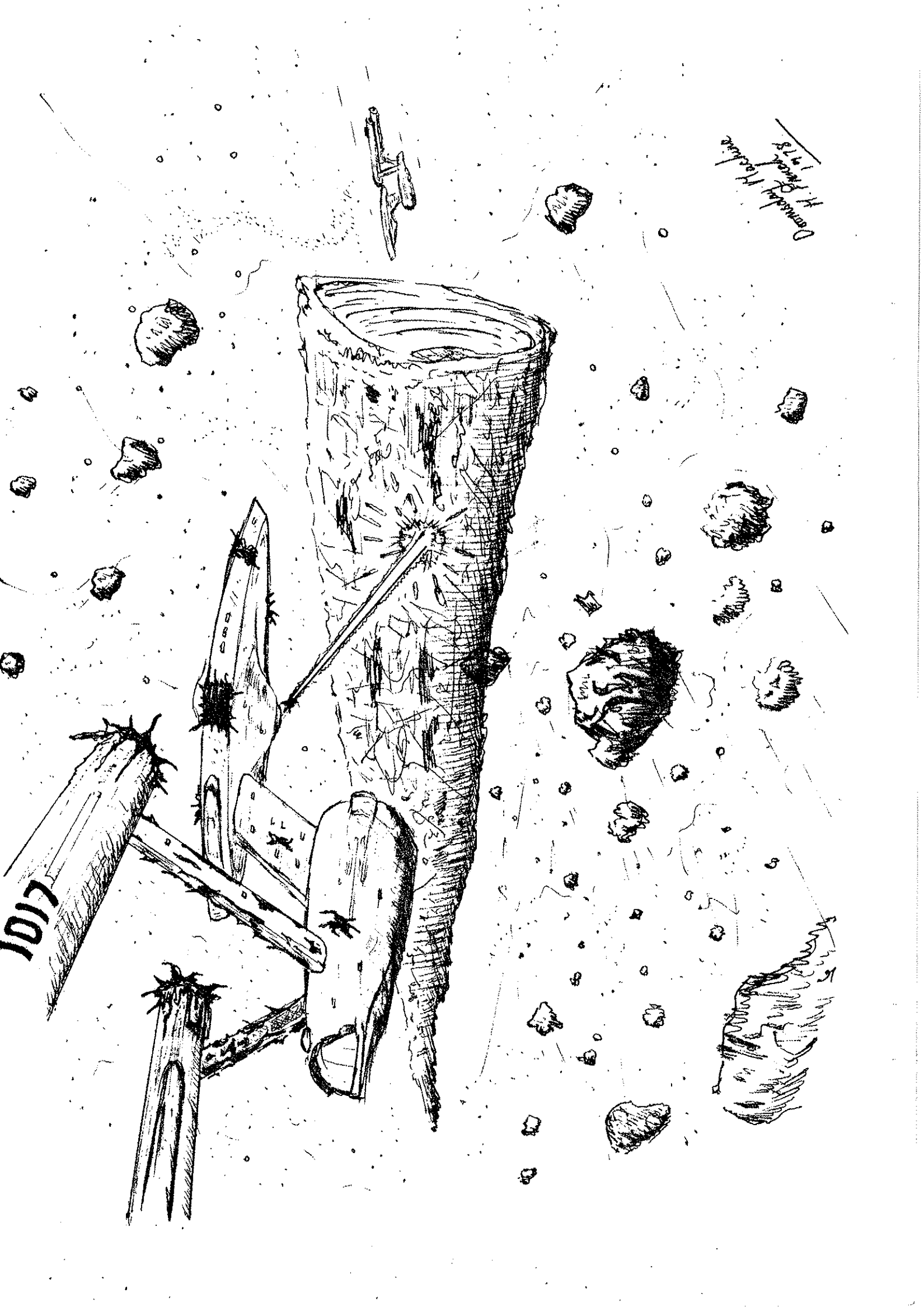
August 1979

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Steve", is written over a long, thin horizontal line that extends across the width of the page.

P.S. - The above mentioned price rise will apply in particular to the June issue, As New Wine by Meg Wright. When it was priced (and the first few pages printed) we were working on paper at the old price, but we weren't able to finish printing it until we got in a fresh order of paper, and most of it was printed on that - but it is paper charged for at the new rate. As I write this, we haven't yet had the invoice for it, so we don't know yet just what the increase on it will be - although everyone who ordered it from the June newsletter have had their orders supplied at the price we gave.

I would like to thank Janet for the work she did on As New Wine - after printing it, she also collated all of it single-handed. I arrived at her house expecting to have to start collating immediately in order to get the orders out within forty-eight hours of my arrival and was able to start stapling immediately instead - which saved me a great deal of time and let me get the orders posted that much quicker. I was not looking forward to that particular job - thank you, Janet!

Demetrius H. ...
H. ...
1978



1017

A BRASS FARTHING'S WORTH by C.E. Hall

As the last manoeuvres were completed to take the Starship Enterprise out of her orbitround the planet Zereba, carefully avoiding its seven irregularly-spaced satellites, Captain Kirk heaved a sigh of relief, and settled back in his chair. Well, he congratulated himself, that was a job well done. During the last week, they had sped half-way across the galaxy, bringing a cargo of specially treated seed to Zereba. Speed had been essential, to catch the now planting season, to save the inhabitants from the effects of last year's poor crop. The coming harvest should see a vast improvement and renewed progress for the small colony there.

Now, at last, the Enterprise was free to make her way to Starbase 7 for a period of rest and recreation, much needed by most of the crew. Kirk crossed his fingers mentally as he thought of it. So often something had turned up to delay the break that had been promised, and although his crew always responded magnificently to any emergency, they were not supermen. Please don't let anything crop up this time, Kirk begged of fate.

For the next three days everything went smoothly. Backlogs of minor tasks were cleared up in all departments, small repairs were done, records were brought up-to-date. Kirk even managed to complete a few personal message tapes that he'd been promising himself he'd do for a long time. Dr. McCoy finally got round to reclassifying a set of records that had been niggling him for ages, and Spock had spent many absorbed hours reprogramming a special section of the huge computer.

But it couldn't last. Captain Kirk had only been on duty for an hour on the fourth day when the message came in. As Uhura turned to face him, saying,

"Message from Starfleet, sir," Kirk felt a pang of apprehension. Oh no, not again!

"Put it through, Lieutenant," he ordered resignedly.

The high-ranking officer whose face appeared on the viewscreen was known to Kirk only by sight. His message was terse and to the point. The Enterprise was required to answer a call for assistance from the Starship Scimitar, which was at present working in the Gamma IVb sector. They were to change course immediately for that area, and contact the Scimitar for details as soon as they were within range. The transmission ended, and the screen went dark.

Kirk looked around him at the watching faces of the bridge crew. All were showing varying expressions of disappointment, with the exception of two. Sulu was already busy working out the required course, and Spock, of course, showed no reaction at all, concealing his thoughts as usual.

I might have known, thought Kirk to himself as he gave the necessary orders. He began to wonder what the Scimitar's problem might be. She was a new ship, built some years after the Enterprise, and he hadn't encountered her before, though he knew some of her officers slightly.

"How long before we reach contact distance with the Scimitar, Mr. Spock?" he asked his First Officer.

"Two hours, forty-one point seven minutes, sir," responded Spock in his precise fashion.

So, as the ship sped swiftly through space in the direction of Gamma IVb, they had to wait this long for further details. Advance sensors soon picked up the Scimitar, but revealed no other ship in the area, so it seemed reasonable to assume that she wasn't under attack. Nor was there any sign of external damage. She appeared to be moving under her own power, though rather slowly, it was true.

At last the Enterprise came within communication range, Uhura established contact and Kirk was able to seek answers to his speculations.

The face of the Scimitar's Captain appeared on the screen. Captain Shepherd was a young man. He'd only been a couple of years older than Kirk when he had assumed his first command, which meant that there was no doubt about his ability and competence. He greeted Captain Kirk formally, almost shyly, mindful of the high reputation of the Enterprise and her crew.

"Captain Kirk," he said. "I am very pleased to see you."

"Captain Shepherd," Kirk acknowledged. "What is your problem? How can we help you?"

A worried look crept over the young Captain's face as he said, "I have a survey shuttlecraft overdue."

Kirk felt a stab of irritation, and thought to himself, Was it really necessary to call us away for this? Surely they have facilities to find their own shuttlecraft? But Shepherd was going on, explaining.

"We've searched ourselves as long as we can. But we've a serious malfunction in our warp drive power unit. If we don't leave for the nearest repair base within two hours at the most, we won't reach it at all."

There was a touch of desperation in the man's voice, and Kirk's mood at once changed to sympathy. He remembered an occasion when he had been desperately searching for a lost shuttle, knowing he must leave the area soon. He realised how Shepherd must be torn between concern for his missing shuttlecraft crew, and responsibility for the safety of all the rest aboard his ship. He reacted briskly.

"Can we have the tapes of all the transmissions you have received from the shuttle?" he asked. "It will give my specialists some data to go on."

Shepherd agreed and arranged the transfer instantly. "Right, now be off with you," said Kirk in a friendly tone. "Get that ship to safety. We'll do whatever we can to find your men, I promise."

"I'm very grateful," responded Shepherd. The communication closed, and a few minutes later the viewscreen showed the Scimitar limping away.

Kirk mentally wished her luck and a safe planetfall, then turned to his Science Officer. "Well, Mr. Spock," he said. "Let's see what those tapes tell us."

"They are already being run through and computer checked, Captain," replied Spock, efficient as ever.

"Let me know as soon as you have the report, then," said Kirk.

"Acknowledged, sir," said Spock, and turned back to his scanner.

Kirk returned his gaze to the front scanner awaiting his first sight of the Gamma IVb system. He was surprised to find Chief Engineer Scott hovering beside his chair, looking rather troubled.

"What is it, Scotty?" Kirk queried.

"Sir," began Scott diffidently, "are there any names for the missing men?"

"I don't know yet," replied Kirk. "Why?"

"Och, it's just that I have a nephew on the Scimitar. He's a geologist, and often included in survey parties. I just wondered..."

"If anyone's named, I'll let you know straight away," promised Kirk. "But there must have been several shuttles out, Scotty, so don't worry prematurely."

"Aye, sir," said Scotty, and retreated to his station.

Spock came to Kirk's side with his first report. He began in his precise and measured fashion. "There are three parts to the findings from the tapes, sir. Firstly, it is clear that this shuttle had found a planet inhabited by a humanoid race. There is a considerable amount of detail on that."

"Secondly, there is a great deal of technical data, which is now being analysed to show us which of the planets in the Gamma IVb sector they had been researching. Results should not be long.

"And thirdly," he continued, "there is evidence of a severe power fault developing. When it took effect, it must also have caused a breakdown of communications, for the record ceases there, and we have no way of knowing as yet whether they were able to control their entry into the planet's atmosphere and effect a landing."

"This power fault," asked Kirk. "I suppose it could have destroyed them altogether, blown them up?"

"Possible, sir," replied Spock, "but unlikely. However, a scan for any debris will soon clarify that point."

The next few hours were filled with a great deal of activity. Spock's skill brought out the full potential of the computer, extracting every possible bit of information out of the last tapes from the missing shuttlecraft. When all was ready, Kirk called a conference of his senior officers in the briefing room. As soon as all were settled, he asked Spock for his report, which as usual was concise and to the point.

"It is established that at the time of its last transmission, the shuttlecraft from the Scimitar was in orbit round the small planet marked M7 on this chart." He stopped for a moment to activate the viewing screen so that all could see the chart, before continuing.

"The Enterprise is at present on course for M7, and will achieve holding orbit there, in one hour fifty-three point one minutes. Long range scans reveal no trace of debris. As soon as the Enterprise is in orbit, surface scanning of the planet will begin."

"Thank you, Mr. Spock," said Captain Kirk. "Any questions, gentlemen?"

"Yes," said Chief Engineer Scott. "Could I see some details of the power malfunction." Quickly, Spock put up some slides for his experienced gaze to study. "I see," he said at last. "What do you think, Mr. Spock? Could they have got down safely in that state?"

"I believe it possible, with an efficient crew and no adverse weather conditions," said Spock in a considered tone.

Kirk asked the question he knew Scotty was dying to ask. "Any names for the men, Spock?" he enquired.

"Yes, sir," replied Spock, a faint flicker of surprise in his voice at the unexpected question. He consulted his notes. "Carson, Zorda, Li Singh and MacGregor."

Kirk threw a questioning glance at Scotty, who nodded grimly and whispered back, "Roddy MacGregor, my sister's boy."

"We'll find them, Scotty," Kirk said reassuringly.

Two hours later the Enterprise was in orbit round the small planet M7, and sensor scans were in progress, searching for any sign of the missing vessel on the surface.

"Any luck, Spock?" asked Kirk, peering over his shoulder at the scanner.

Spock gave him a disapproving look. Luck, indeed! "No success at present, Captain," he said. Even as he spoke, something in the scan alerted him. He reached swift fingers to back-track a little and refocus.

"Concentrate on area 67b," he ordered. He gazed intently at what his screen was showing him. "Found it, Captain," he said, his satisfaction just showing in his voice. "It's down - damaged but not extensively." He altered the dials and

scanned in more detail. "No sign of any life forms, though - the whole area is deserted."

"Bodies?" queried Kirk anxiously.

"No, Captain," Spock answered firmly. "None."

Kirk pondered over this. It was a rule that whenever possible, a crew should stay with a grounded craft, as that would be what a search party would look for first. If they had left it, had it been of their own free will or under duress? There were so many possibilities. Spock answered his thoughts, as he so often did.

"Speculation is useless, Captain. I think a party must go down, and make investigations on the spot."

"I agree," said Kirk. "But we'll have to be very cautious about this planet. From the data we have, it's clear that there is quite an advanced civilisation here. The prime directive of non-interference must apply."

"Undoubtedly," agreed the Vulcan. "But as there are no life forms within quite a large area round the craft, it should be possible for a repair party to make a survey without encountering any of the inhabitants. A constant watch will be kept."

Kirk gave swift orders. Mr. Scott asked for, and was given permission, to lead the repair party. They beamed down safely, and began their investigations. Kirk waited anxiously for his Chief Engineer's report. At last a call came through.

"The shuttlecraft is not in too bad a shape, Captain," Scotty reported. "Three hours' work, and it should make it back to the Enterprise. Shall I go ahead and arrange transportation of the gear I shall need?"

"Yes," Kirk agreed at once. Recovery of the shuttle would be one success. Apart from the salvage of expensive equipment, removing it from the planet's surface before the native population could investigate it would conform with the prime directive.

"What of the crew?" he asked next. "Any sign?"

"I was just coming to that," said Scotty. "They left a message. It seems the crewman called Carson was badly injured. They hung on for a while, hoping for rescue, but in the end they decided to take him to seek medical assistance. There are tracks leading off in the direction of the nearest town, but that's nearly twenty kilometers away."

Kirk thought rapidly, then issued his orders. "You stay there, Scotty," he said, "and get that vessel repaired and back aboard as fast as you can. We'll put a party down nearer the town, and see what we can find." He closed the channel, and turned to his First Officer. "Come on, Spock," he said. "We've got some careful planning to do."

Half an hour later, there was almost an argument going on in the briefing room. The subject was the composition of the first search party. McCoy was insisting that he should go, because medical assistance appeared to be needed. But he was busy pointing out that as Scotty was already on the planet's surface, if both Kirk and Spock were included, the Enterprise would be left without a senior officer aboard, and this was foolhardy when so little was known of the planet below.

Spock was for once agreeing with Dr. McCoy. He frequently deplored the eagerness Kirk showed to lead missions personally, when, in his opinion, his place should be on the ship, overseeing the co-ordination of all that was going on. "I agree that Dr. McCoy should be included," he said, "but respectfully suggest that you should stay aboard to deal with any problems that might arise."

"Why me?" argued Kirk, almost petulantly. "You could do that just as well."

Spock searched his memory, and found a cogent piece of data to support his argument. "Sir," he said blandly, "I have an advantage, in that I have encountered Zorda and Li Singh before, and would instantly recognise them."

Kirk could find no counter to this, and gave in reluctantly. "Very well, but be careful," he said, disappointment written all over his face. But Kirk was not one to sulk like a thwarted schoolboy, and quickly got down to business. "Now, what do we know about the people down there?"

Spock recounted what had been learned from the tapes. The inhabitants were humanoid, in a fairly advanced state of civilisation. There were numerous towns and cities with many buildings, square and flat-topped, reminiscent of the Middle East of old Earth. There appeared to be a flourishing agricultural development, with many farms supporting various crops, and varied species of domestic livestock. There did not appear to be any mechanical development - there was no sign of railways or of any motor transport.

"Any ideas about language?" asked McCoy.

"No," replied Spock. "I suggest we take the small translators."

"Good idea," agreed Kirk, then had second thoughts. "But you daren't let anyone see you use them."

"No," agreed the Vulcan. "But if we conceal them under our clothing, we will at least be able to understand what we overhear."

Disguise was easy, for the prevalent style seemed to be long dustcloaks, enveloping blanket-capes or vast ponchos. These were quickly reproduced and donned over ordinary uniforms minus the distinctive gold braiding insignia of rank. As no close contact with the inhabitants was expected, this would be sufficient. The ubiquitous Arab-style head-dress also solved the problem of Spock's distinctive ears, while the voluminousness of the garments gave adequate space for the concealment of their communicators and the small translators. McCoy also had his scanner and some basic medical supplies, and the two security men had small hand phasers.

At last the barely recognisable figures assembled in the transporter room. Kirk suppressed a smile at their rather Desert Song appearance, remembering the seriousness of their mission - they were seeking four missing space-travellers in a world that knew nothing of such things, and must not accidentally find out.

The transporter officer checked his co-ordinates one more time, and then beamed the party down. They materialised behind a clump of plam-trees close to the city towards which the missing party had been heading. The aim of the first survey was to use their eyes and their ears while mingling with the people, endeavouring to pick up anything that might suggest that the men had arrived here.

A straggling pack-train was moving into the town - a dozen or so mule-like animals, heavily laden, with groups of men following them along. The party of men from the Enterprise tagged on after they had passed by, and no-one took the slightest notice of them.

As they moved further into the town among the dusty buildings, the streets became more crowded, and they found they could merge easily into the crowd. In actual fact, there were so many strangers in the town that a few more went unnoticed.

To their great disappointment, they found that the language was a complete mystery to them - seeming merely a string of guttural sounds. Even Spock, with his wide knowledge, had never come across anything like it before. But it was quite easy to hold the small translators high under their cloaks, and after following Spock's whispered instructions as to the setting required, they found that they could understand what was being said pretty well.

The crowds seemed to be moving in one direction, so the Enterprise party

went with them, their ears and eyes alert for any mention or sign of strangers. They passed beside a man-made canal, a waterway mostly used for transport, judging by the rows of slow heavy barges moored by the banks. Beyond that lay a large open square - a market-place. It was filled now with dozens of market stalls, piled high with fruit and vegetables, clothing, pottery - all sorts of produce. It was crowded to capacity with people, talking and haggling with the stall owners. The prospect of pushing their way round this crowded place was rather daunting, but it seemed likely to be the only way of gleaning information.

They decided to divide into pairs, each pair going round the perimeter of the square to the far side, then back through the central aisles, thus covering as much ground as possible. As finding each other again in such a crowd might prove difficult, they arranged to meet again on the spot where they had beamed down, in as close to two hours' time as was possible. Spock and the security man called Randall went off to the right, and McCoy and his companion, Torino, to the left.

Almost exactly two hours later, Spock and Randall were sitting in the shade of the clump of trees, awaiting the return of the Doctor and Torino. They were rather dusty and tired, and disappointed too, for they had heard nothing of significance. Each was hoping that the other pair had done better, and would return soon with some sort of lead. Randall was peering through between the trees to watch down the road. Spock had already contacted the ship, and all was ready for beam-up as soon as the other two arrived.

"I can see them now, Mr. Spock," reported Randall. Then his voice changed. "Sir, I think there's something wrong."

The Vulcan quickly looked where the man was pointing, then set off in that direction. As he got nearer, he saw that Randall, who had followed after him, had been right. Something was wrong! Torino seemed to be supporting Dr. McCoy and helping him along. The Doctor looked very pale, and was clutching his middle as if in pain. They reached the pair.

"What is wrong?" demanded Spock.

"I don't know," panted Torino, relieved now to pass the problem on to a senior officer, especially one as capable as Spock. "He seems to be ill - he collapsed once."

"Doctor?" queried Spock.

"I'm not sure," McCoy gasped as pain racked him. "I've never felt like this before."

"You have your equipment, have you used it?" said Spock, practical as ever.

McCoy fumbled under his enveloping cloak. His groping hand found only the communicator and his medical pouch. "My scanner!" he gasped agitatedly. "I've lost it! It must have been when I fell, halfway along the canal bank."

The party was now in somewhat of a quandary. Dr. McCoy obviously should be returned to the ship and into medical care as soon as possible. But leaving the scanner to be found by these unadvanced people might have serious consequences.

After a moment's thought, Spock issued swift orders. "Randall, Torino, get the Doctor to the beam-up point and back to the ship. I'll find the scanner, and follow as fast as I can."

The security men hesitated, not really wanting to let Spock go alone, but a further groan and a gasp of pain from McCoy decided them. After all, Spock had issued clear orders, and he was the senior officer present. One on either side, they helped the Doctor towards the group of palm trees, while Spock, drawing his cloak around him, set off with a long stride back towards the town.

He soon reached the road by the canal, and stopped short as an unexpected sight met his eyes. A new activity was taking place! The moored barges were now

heavily laden with goods, piled high with boxes, baskets and bundles, and were being moved off down the waterway. But it was the motive power that had given Spock cause for astonishment - it was slave labour! Teams of men, ragged bare-foot men, were hauling the heavy barges with thick ropes. Overseers directed the work, standing over the straining men with long leather whips, and frequently encouraging the straining men by laying these viciously across the bare backs.

Deploring this state of affairs, but knowing he could in no way interfere with it, Spock watched till the barges were out of sight round the bend in the canal. Then he walked slowly along the road, his eyes alert for the small silver and black cylinder that he sought.

He had almost reached the end of the road before he spotted it, lying on the grass verge beside the canal bank. It was sheer good fortune that it had not been already found by someone, for it was in no way concealed. He quickened his pace, but as he did so became aware of a little group of men approaching him on the otherwise deserted road. He eyed them warily. If they saw him pick up the object they might well demand to see what he had found. He moved gradually forward, trying to appear casual.

The group of men, in turn, was watching him, and speculating. They were a gang of robbers and pick-pockets, who came regularly to the market and enjoyed rich pickings in the crowded square. They were very skilled at choosing their victims, and the solitary stranger looked promising. They could see he was no poor peasant. By his bearing, he might well be a rich merchant, with his pockets full of money after a good day's trading.

They began to advance. Spock could see the menace in their faces and correctly guessed their intentions. He thought rapidly. The street behind him was empty - if he turned and ran for it, he should be able to leave them standing, but the problem was the exposed medical scanner. If he left it, it would undoubtedly soon be found, with possibly dangerous consequence.

Taking a decision, and a chance, he took three swift steps forward, and with a side kick that would have done justice to an old-time football star, flipped the small object over the edge of the canal bank. It disappeared with a dull plop, and he turned swiftly to make good his escape.

But the delay had cost him dear - the gang were upon him, and flight was impossible. Hands grabbed for him, and although he twisted agilely under the enveloping cloak, he could not evade them. Blows were rained upon him as the four fought to subdue him - he was more of a handful than they had expected.

Then fortune favoured the heavier odds. A flying fist caught the Vulcan on the throat, and as he staggered, gasping for breath, a hard leg pulled his feet from under him, and he fell heavily. His head struck the hard kerb of the roadside, and he was temporarily stunned. Everything went black as the blood pounded in his head. He could feel hands rummaging among his clothes. The robbers were searching in vain for a fat money-bag.

The Arab-style head-dress had been knocked awry. A hand yanked it off - it was a frequently-used hiding place for money. The unusual appearance thus revealed surprised the robbers, but did not disconcert them. The little translator which Spock had attached high under the collar of his cloak was still working, and as if from far away, he heard the words.

"Here's an odd one," they said. "Let's take him to Salar. The Katuk likes unusual ones, and pays well for them."

Spock felt himself dragged to his feet and hustled along the road. Dazed as he was, he realised that immediate resistance would be futile. He must wait for a better opportunity to present itself, and for his strength to return. He was pushed and pulled along narrow streets, the men holding tightly to his arms. At last, he was prodded through an archway in a wall. He and his captors emerged into a stone-walled courtyard. On the left was a set of steps leading to a door, while directly opposite were some huge iron-barred gates, giving onto a dusty compound with buildings beyond.

The door opened, and a man came out - a man dressed in the flowing robes and head-dress so common in the streets, though his seemed made of richer material. He had a narrow-featured unpleasant face with a thin black moustache. But it was his companion that drew Spock's attention. Following the man came the largest negro he had ever seen, a giant of a man. Clad only in baggy trousers and a turban, he revealed mighty chest and arm muscles rippling under an ebony skin. Not one to argue with, thought Spock.

The leader of the gang was talking eagerly to the first man. "Salar," he said, "we've brought you a good one this time. By the look of him, he must be one of the far hills people."

"You'll give us a good price, won't you, Salar?" begged another in an obsequious tone. "The Katuk will like him."

Salar stelled to where Spock was still being held by two of the robbers. He eyed him up and down speculatively.

"Who are you?" he demanded. "Have you money to buy your freedom? Will your family pay a good ransom?"

With the translator still in place under his cloak, Spock could understand every word, but of course was unable to reply without revealing the instrument. Besides, what could he have said that would have helped the situation?

Salar mistook the silence for stubbornness. Rage lit his eyes fiercely. "You'll learn to be more responsive!" he yelled, and lashed out a vicious back-handed blow that would have felled Spock if the robbers had not been holding him. As it was, he staggered, and blinked rapidly, as his head swam dizzily.

"Let's have a better look at him," said Salar. His hand shot out and released the catch holding the concealing cloak. With a swift movement he dragged it off and threw it to the ground as the two robbers released their hold on their captive.

Taking a desperate gamble on what he felt was his last chance of escape, Spock grabbed one robber, pushed him into Salar and the others, and made for the archway to the street.

Without the translator, he did not understand Salar's shouted command to the negro. But as he shot towards the doorway, he suddenly felt himself grabbed from behind by two large hands. The negro lifted him effortlessly off his feet, and forcibly pitched him towards the wall. Unable to stop himself, he slammed into it hard. The breath was knocked gaspingly from him. He felt a sudden agony explode in his side as it encountered something hard - an iron ring set in to the wall. He dropped limply to the ground and lay still, unable to move any more. His breath rasped in his throat, he ached all over, and knew that his last strength was gone.

Vaguely he heard an exchange of voices, Salar's and the robbers', all talking at once. Then there was the clink of coins being tipped from a bag, and the voices ceased. Footsteps hurried away towards the archway.

He felt himself grabbed by the back of the collar and heaved to his feet. His wrists were grabbed and both transferred to the vice-like grip of a huge black hand. The negro moved towards the iron barred doors, pulling him along, and he stumbled after him, powerless to resist.

Salar opened the gate, let them through, then relocked it; tucking the large key back into his belt, he returned up the steps to his rooms, grinning evilly. He was well pleased. Another unusual slave cheaply obtained! The Katuk would be pleased with him, and the Katuk's pleasure meant rich rewards for his officials.

The negro dragged Spock into a small room off the compound. As he threw him roughly to the ground, he let out a stentorian shout. Three men came running, cowering men clad only in ragged trousers. With practised hands they set

about the prisoner, stripping him of his shirt and boots. These they found very attractive, and a squabble over them started. The negro settled it quickly, by snatching the things from them, tossing them into a corner, and cuffing the men soundly with the flat of his hand. Then the long black fingers reached out, and picked the communicator from Spock's belt. But it evidently didn't impress him, for after a cursory glance, he tossed it over with the clothes and forgot about it.

The men pulled Spock to his feet, and over to a large stone block in a corner. The negro followed. In his huge hands were a mallet and a pair of manacles linked by a chain. Realising what was in store, the Vulcan made a last desperate effort to resist. In vain, for the men held him tightly. The negro slipped the manacles round each wrist in turn, and with several pounding blows closed the cold circles about them, callously careless of the bruising he was inflicting.

Dismissing the men, who scuttled off quickly, he pushed Spock before him and out of the room and across the courtyard.

As soon as they were out of sight, there was a movement in the dark shadows round the corner from the room. A small lithe figure slid down a rope, and glancing furtively around, crept along the wall to the door. Barely twelve years old now, Zai had been alone and living by his wits for years, and was an accomplished thief. Just recently he had discovered that a convenient tree and a rope gave him access to the slave compound, where the Katuk's slaves were kept. It was a risky place to venture, but on the other hand, the belongings of the newly-captured slaves were often very saleable, and no-one ever seemed to bother about their disappearance. Quick as a brown streak, he slipped into the room, grabbed the discarded articles, cloak, shirt and boots, and a funny little box, and then was out and back over the wall. Unhitching his rope, he would it round his bundle, and dropping down from the tree, unnoticed by any passers-by, soon disappeared into the anonymity of the poorest side of town.

The negro pushed Spock before him across the dusty compound. As they came round the corner of a building, Spock's eyes quickly took in the scene before him. The slave-gangs from the canal bank were here, busily engaged in unloading the moored barges, and piling their contents onto flat barrows. To these were harnessed teams of men who dragged the full loads away. There were several overseers supervising the work, all armed with long-lashed whips, which they seemed to use freely and indiscriminately.

"Here's another one for you," the negro called to an overseer, though now minus his translator Spock was unable to understand the words. He pushed the Vulcan roughly towards the gang-plank where slaves were moving onto the barge to pick up their loads. One of the overseers helped him on his way with a flick of the long-lashed whip. His eyes lit up as he saw the green streak leap across the pale back. Delightedly, he laid another beside it, as he called to his companion.

"Look, Ahmed," he crowed. "We've got a 'greenblood'. It's a while since we've had one of these."

The other came over to see, and just had to confirm it with his own weapon. He chuckled with glee. "I remember the last two 'greenbloods' we had. Strong but very stubborn."

"Yes," agreed his mate. "I hope this one's awkward too. It will be fun to show him who's master here."

In this he was disappointed. Spock had had a few moments to think, and had made the most of the time. Realising that protest and resistance would be useless, and would probably only result in further injury, he had decided to keep a low profile, and invite as little trouble as possible. He knew that exhaustive searches would be made for him, although they would be hampered by the dictates

of the prime directive. He must be patient and await events.

So he joined the workgang, and laboured with them as unobtrusively as he could. In spite of his severely bruised side, his natural strength made the arduous toil bearable, but his efforts to avoid attention were wasted.

Evidently a 'greenblood' was a bit of a novelty. (He had noticed in the market-place several people whose appearance suggested Vulcan or Romulan ancestry and was to learn later that most of them lived in the hilly North and seldom ventured into this area.) Every overseer in turn seemed to want to see for himself the green marks the vicious thongs of his whip could make, and Spock collected a great deal of malicious and undeserved punishment. Although he endeavoured by mental effort to close out the discomfort, he was becoming very tired. He was very relieved when the work period was over, and the slaves were herded into a large cell closed off by huge iron-barred gates.

Most of the men pressed up to the other end of the room, where pans of food were handed out through a small opening. Spock did not follow them, and when he saw the unappetising slop that the dishes contained, he knew he was right in his choice. He'd have to be very hungry to eat that!

He found a dark corner and sat down there, trying to ease his scarred back to the least uncomfortable position against the wall. It was not easy, and eventually he found he gained most respite by drawing his knees up, resting his folded arms on them, and pillowing his aching head on his arms. He reviewed his unhappy situation. Help would come eventually, he did not doubt, but the wait-in was going to be hard. His side hurt severely, he suspected cracked, if not broken, ribs, and he was evidently going to be a constant target for the cruelty of the overseers.

He made a thoroughly dejected picture as he sat there, and this rather daunted the three other slaves who were approaching tentatively.

But the first of the three pressed on, squatted beside the bowed form, and put a hand on his arm. "Mr. Spock?" he said questioningly.

As he heard the Terran voice speaking his name, the Vulcan's head lifted sharply. Instantly he recognised two of the faces before him, one Caucasian and one Oriental.

"Zorda, Li Singh!" he exclaimed. His spirits lightened rapidly in spite of his exhaustion. Although it was no thanks to his efforts, part of the mission had been accomplished after all - the missing party had been located. And when Captain Kirk rescued him, as he trusted absolutely that he would, the others would be saved too.

The next little while was spent in detailed explanations. Spock told the men how it was that the Enterprise had come searching for them, and also the misfortunes that had brought him into this place. In turn, Zorda explained how they had decided to seek medical help for Carson, as his condition was so serious. But before they had even reached the city, the unfortunate man had died. They had just buried him under a pile of rocks and were debating whether to go on or return to the shuttle, when they had been captured by a group of men, and forced into the slave-gang, much as Spock had been.

"Well," said Spock at last, "it won't be for much longer. It may take a little time, but Captain Kirk won't stop looking till he's found us, I know."

"We'd better all get some rest," said Li Singh. "We start work pretty early, and it's a long hard day."

So making themselves as comfortable as they could, on the hard ground, they settled down to rest, the Humans buoyed up with renewed hope, and the Vulcan secure in his confidence in Jim Kirk.

A confidence not misplaced, for Kirk was sparing no effort to find the

missing First Officer. But he was encountering considerable difficulty because of the prime directive, which forbade him any action which might reveal their nature and presence to the unenlightened inhabitants of this world, who knew nothing about space travellers and other worlds.

His worries had increased steadily. First, the landing party had reported no success at all. Then Dr. McCoy had been brought back on board by the security men, almost in a state of collapse. He had been carted off to his own sickbay, and was now in Dr. M'Benga's care.

Agitated, Kirk had waited in the transporter room for Spock to follow them up, but he waited in vain. As time wore on, he became more and more concerned. He got Scotty to try the beamdown point, but, of course, that met with no success, he wasn't there. Kirk had sensors concentrated on the immediate area round about, but they showed nothing. The temptation to use the communicator to call Spock was overwhelming, but he dared not, for if it sounded while the Vulcan was trying to remain unnoticed, it could put him in danger. Why hadn't they delayed long enough to implant tracers, he thought with wasted hindsight. But they hadn't expected trouble, and had intended to avoid close contact. What could have gone wrong?

When the security men heard that Spock had not returned, they at once volunteered to return to the planet to look for him. Kirk readily agreed, and worriedly paced the floor of the transporter room as he awaited word from them. When it came, it was entirely negative, naturally, for there was nothing for them to see that would have given any clue to Spock's disappearance. They had haunted the market-place, using their eyes and ears earnestly, but with no result. They dared not reveal themselves by using the translators to ask direct questions, and although they prowled the streets for several hours they neither saw nor heard anything that was any use. As it was growing dark by the time they made their final report, Kirk recalled them, not forgetting to give the weary men due praise for their efforts. They left to seek rest in their quarters.

But there was no rest for Captain Kirk. His mind was racing busily, seeking any ideas. What could he try next? He called a consultation of senior officers in the briefing room, and sought their suggestions. Mr. Scott came up with the best one, something already in hand.

"We're doing a detailed scan of the whole city, sir," he said. "If we find a Vulcan trace, we'll pinpoint it exactly, and then it can be investigated when it's daylight again."

"I'm going myself this time," declared Kirk in such a determined tone that no-one dared argue.

"Well, sir," said Scott, "in that case, may I suggest you get some sleep?"

Accepting the wisdom of the suggestion, Kirk retired to his quarters, where he managed to sleep a little, but not very well, for in spite of all his efforts dreams and imaginings gave him a restless night. Spock was a stickler for strict observance of orders, but he would have made contact by now if he had been able to. So what had prevented him from doing so?

Kirk woke early and forced himself to shower, dress and eat a quick breakfast before going up to the bridge to ascertain what progress had been made. On the way he called for a report on Dr. McCoy, and was relieved to hear he was much improved. That was one less worry!

He found Scotty and his team very busy checking readings, fixing co-ordinates and making notes. The Chief Engineer greeted Captain Kirk briskly, only the tired lines round his eyes and the dark shadow on his chin indicating that he had been working hard all through the long night, following a normal day's work.

"What news?" asked Kirk. "Have you found a Vulcan trace?"

"You'll be as surprised as we are," replied Scotty, "to hear that we've

found several! There's more than one half-Vulcan in that city, though I don't really understand how."

(No-one involved in the search did, or ever would, but the answer was quite simple. More than fifty years before, a small Vulcan scout ship had crashed in the hilly North of the planet. A group of survivors had wandered around in the mountains, to be found at last, half dead from cold and hunger, by the nomadic hill-people. These had gradually come to accept the strangers as eccentric but harmless. They had been absorbed into the community. Some had married local girls and offspring had been produced. These were the 'greenbloods' who appeared occasionally, but only rarely came as far south as the city, most remaining in the mountain area where their differences were accepted without question by the simple hill-people.)

Kirk also was amazed at the news, and listened intently as Scotty went on. "We've pinpointed each one, and drawn you a detailed map of the city," he said. "You'll have to check each reading individually."

Kirk hurried off to get himself the garments needed for his disguise. On his way he was met by Randall and Torino, who begged to be allowed to accompany him again, their main persuasion being that they had already begun to learn their way about, and that might save time.

Acknowledging the sense of that, Kirk agreed, and very soon the small party was ready. The plan was to investigate each reading pinpointed on the map, to hang about in the area till they managed to get a look at the occupant of each denoted building. Kirk was carrying a miniaturised tricorder set on Vulcan readings so that he could check on individuals disguised by the concealing clothing native to this place. As they could not risk being seen or heard using their communicators, they also made arrangements to return every three hours to the beam-down point, to report progress and receive any further information. It would be a slow process, a painstaking task, but it was the only way, as far as Kirk could see.

The first elimination was easy. The map was very clear, and the house shown was on the way into the market. They sat down on a convenient wall, and pretended to be waiting for someone. After only a few moments, a man emerged from the house bearing two heavy-looking baskets. He moved off towards the market and passed within yards of them. They could see that the rather sallow colouring and the steeply upswept eyebrows betokened some Vulcan ancestry, but it was obviously not Spock! One crossed off their list.

The next was equally easy, but took a bit longer. They squatted in the shade of a convenient tree, trying to appear casual. No-one took any notice of them, but it was nearly an hour before a side gate opened, and a man appeared pushing a handcart loaded with vegetable produce. Once again his appearance revealed his ancestry, and another reading was eliminated.

The third was a lot more difficult. The house indicated was a large one on the far side of the market-square. Observation was fairly easy, they could wander round the nearby stalls and still keep the two entrances within sight. But although there were a great many comings and goings all day, not one was the source of the reading.

One of the security men slipped away to report and came back, but still nothing had happened. Kirk had managed several unobtrusive glances at his concealed tricorder, but still the trace remained obstinately still - inside the house. He had begun to convince himself that this was a helpful sign. If Spock had not called in, it must mean he was under some sort of restraint, not free to reach the appointed spot, and that fitted with the lack of movement of this trace. Maybe he was shut in somewhere?

Pondering this, Kirk determined to try to find out. Stationing his men to keep watch on the front of the house, he reconnoitred down the narrow back alley. He met with some success, for he discovered a yard behind the house. Piles of old boxes and a lean-to shed suggested an easy ascent to a first floor

window which stood half open.

There was no-one in sight. Moving swiftly but carefully, he climbed up till he could peer in through the opening. What he saw was interesting but rather disappointing. An elderly man in a rich-looking gown sat dozing in a chair, with a heavily bandaged foot propped up on a stool. Being indoors, he wore no hat, and Kirk could see the distinctive pointed ears.

He clambered carefully down, and returned to his men. He supposed it was progress of a sort - another trace eliminated, but they had wasted hours over it.

It took them quite a while to locate the next site, but once found it was quickly crossed off. For as they prowled in the narrow street, Torino accidentally knocked over a large dustbin. A man emerged on a top balcony and bellowed at them. The shouted words meant nothing, but the appearance was enough. They shot off rapidly and sought refuge round a corner out of sight.

Kirk sighed heavily. Four investigated, and four eliminated, but it had taken so long! It was beginning to grow dark. They would have to get back to the beam-up point now and return to the ship. They could do no more today. Perhaps they would have better luck tomorrow.

Kirk slept that night, from sheer weariness and disappointment, an exhausted dreamless sleep. Down on the planet, Spock and his three companions also slept exhaustedly. They had had a hard day, Spock because he was still the target of the overseers' cruelty, and the others because their sustaining hope of imminent rescue had gradually faded as the day wore on.

Kirk was ready sharp the next morning, and so were Randall and Torino. I give them full marks for perseverance, thought Kirk to himself. I must put in a commendation for them when this is over. He had debated with himself as he had washed and dressed whether it would be wise to increase the numbers of the landing party, splitting up to cover more ground, but had decided against it. Larger numbers and the need for communication between them increased the risk of revealing their presence accidentally.

They beamed down, and things went well for them. They had eliminated three traces before the first call-in time, and only four remained to try. Surely success must come soon. Kirk returned with the men and called in. He was greeted by an agitated Scotty.

"Captain," he exclaimed, "we've been waiting for your call. Lt. Uhura wants a word."

"What is it, Uhura?" asked Kirk.

"It's Mr. Spock's communicator, sir," she began.

"You mean he's called in?" Kirk almost shouted.

"No, sir, he hasn't," she replied. "But the communicator is 'live'." She hesitated, and then went on. "It's as if someone's playing with it, not knowing what it is."

Kirk pondered this for a moment, then issued orders. "Get me an accurate fix on it," he said, "and we'll go and investigate."

It didn't take them long to reach the area, in a poor part of the town. Kirk and the two men moved cautiously down the back alleys till they traced the reading to a tumbledown shack at the back of a disused shop. They crept up to the ill-fitting door and peered in, suppressing a gasp of astonishment at the sight that met their startled eyes.

A scarecrow figure was strutting about inside. He wore a blue shirt with a black neckband, that hung like a frock almost to his bony knees. On his feet were black boots several sizes too large for him, coming halfway up his spindly legs. Corrugated pushed-up sleeves covered his waving arms, and in one hand was clutched a very familiar object - a communicator!

Kirk put his finger to his lips, and motioned his men back, as he thought very rapidly, trying to decide what to do. He would take odds that the things he had just seen were Spock's. The lad had to be questioned to find out how he had come by them, but what was the best way?

Kirk knew this type of boy - every big city had them. Skilful thieves, agile of body and mind, and slippery as eels. They must be sure of holding him fast to question him, for if once they lost him, they would never find him again.

Bearing this in mind, he made a swift decision. Not delaying to explain his plan, he drew out his phaser and carefully set it on stun. Moving fast, he reached the door, pushed it open, downed the occupant with a swift burst, and was inside, his startled men following on his heels. Ignoring their astonished looks, he picked up the dropped communicator, adjusted it, and called the Enterprise.

"Latch onto these co-ordinates fast, Mr. Scott," he ordered. "Four to beam up."

The job was in hand even as Scott answered. "Four, Captain?" he exclaimed. "Have you found Mr. Spock then?"

"No, Scotty," replied Kirk, "but we've got a lead."

Scott met them as the transporter beam deposited them on the platform. He gazed in astonishment as Kirk picked up the unconscious child.

"Captain," he protested, "what have you done? Bringing that child aboard..."

"It was necessary," replied Kirk shortly. He'd already weighed all this up. "Anyway, he's not going to see much. One room and a few of us, that's all, and if he tries to tell anyone he was kidnapped, I doubt if anyone would listen to such an urchin. But he's wearing Spock's things, and I've got to know where he got them."

He chose a small interview room, barely furnished with a table, some chairs and a couch on which he laid the boy. He shed his cloak and head-dress, placed the small translator on the table before him, and sat down to wait for the boy to recover. Scotty stood behind him, still with a disapproving look on his face.

The boy stirred and woke. He looked all round the small room and at the two men watching him. Fear, and then cunning, lit his beady, bright eyes as he tried to assess his situation.

Jumping up suddenly, he ran for the door, but the over-large boots were his undoing. He could not move with his usual alacrity, and tripped and stumbled, giving Scotty ample time to take two long strides and place his bulk before the door. The boy gazed up at him, then back at Kirk, who had not risen from the table. Perhaps considering him to be less forbidding, the boy turned back. Kirk smiled reassuringly, and activating the small translator asked,

"What's your name, lad?"

"Zai," replied the boy warily.

"Sit down, Zai," said Kirk persuasively. "We won't hurt you - we only want to ask some questions."

The boy glanced from Scott, standing squarely and dourly in front of the only visible escape route, to Kirk sitting at the table, and decided to try co-operation. He slid into the seat, and stared at Kirk, trying to conceal his unease with a defiant glare.

"Those clothes you're wearing," began Kirk. "Where did you get them?"

"Found 'em," declared Zai, his bright eyes defying Kirk to call him a liar.

Kirk smiled disbelievingly. "I bet," he said. "Stole them, I expect, didn't you? And very smart about it too, I'll be bound."

A grin of pride came over the boy's face. Didn't he have the reputation of being the smartest thief in the city, and stealing from the slave compound was the smartest thing he'd done yet. "Well..." he said with a grin, and waved his hands deprecatingly.

"Zai," continued Kirk, "I'm not interested in the clothes themselves - in fact, I might let you keep them if you help me. It's the man who was wearing them. Do you know where he is?"

"Course," replied the boy matter-of-factly. "He's in the Katuk's slave compound. Salar's men must have caught him."

Kirk exchanged a glance with Scotty, who had come closer to listen. Fired by the attentiveness of his audience, Zai went on to explain how strangers were often caught and forced into the slave gangs that laboured for the Katuk, the ruler of the city. He painted a vivid picture of how badly they were treated, and Kirk cringed inwardly. The sooner they got the Vulcan out the better. He had an idea, maybe he could use the lad's quick wits.

"Zai," he said. "You're a clever chap, I can tell. How do I get him out of there?"

"Can't be done," said the lad confidently. "The Katuk has an army of guards, and no slave ever escapes. And he kills those that try."

Kirk and Scott exchanged worried looks. They had a big problem.

Zai eyed Kirk speculatively. "Are you rich?" he demanded.

Kirk managed a faint smile, in spite of his troubled thoughts. "No," he said. "Why?"

"Well, it's Salar, the slave master," said Zai. "If the price is good enough, he'll sell a slave out. Sometimes relations club together and buy freedom for one of the family who's been caught." "

"Money," said Kirk thoughtfully.

"Yes," said Zai helpfully. "Zotars, like this. I've got one. I sold a cloak." he hoisted up the hem of the shirt, fished in his belt, and produced a coin.

Kirk took it and showed it to Scotty, who examined it carefully. "Looks rather like brass," he said thoughtfully.

"Can you reproduce it?" asked Kirk.

"Aye, I'll see what I can do," answered Scott, and left rapidly. Zai let out a cry of protest as his precious coin disappeared, but Kirk reassured him.

"You shall have it back, Zai," he promised. "But for now, how about something to eat?"

He went to the door, and sent one of the guards posted there for some food. When he returned with a loaded tray and put it down on the table, Zai's eyes lit up. He'd never seen so much food in all his short life.

"You must be rich," he declared, and set to with a will, as Kirk watched him with amusement. He was an engaging rascal!

Scotty walked down the corridor, turning Zai's coin over in his fingers. Brass. Now what had he got that was made of brass? An alloy of copper and zinc, it wasn't a metal used much on a modern Starship. How much would he need? Then suddenly a recollection came to him. He stopped off at the Engineering Section only long enough to hand the coin over to two of his best lads with instructions to them to take an impression of it and to prepare some sort of coin press.

Then he went on to the stores, concentrating to remember exactly where he had stowed the case he wanted. After a short search, he found it and dragged it out.

The label read 'For Ceremonial Use'. He opened the lid and peered inside at the contents - a dozen of so fluted brass posts with hooks to hold heavy cord, designed to rope off an area on ceremonial occasions. They hadn't seen the light of day for over three years, he thought to himself. Pity to destroy them now, but if it was to help Spock...

Kirk had been busy, keeping Zai amused, teaching him to play noughts and crosses. He's taught him too well, and now the lad kept beating him. They looked up as Scotty entered carrying a box. As he put it on the table, they heard the clink of metal. They peered into the box. It was half full of gleaming brass coins.

"Whew!" exclaimed Zai. "You are rich - there's enough here to buy four or five slaves."

Kirk's eyes met Scotty's as the same thought occurred to both of them. Of course it was odds on that the missing survey party had ended up in the slave-gang too.

"I might just do that, Zai," said Kirk hopefully.

As it was now evening on the planet, it was too late to do anything that night, so Kirk had to summon all his patience and wait for the morning. Zai was settled down to sleep under the watchful eye of an orderly from the medical section, and Kirk retired to his quarters and tried to get some rest.

He was awake and ready early, and returned to join a re-enlivened Zai, busy demolishing a good breakfast.

Kirk had thought hard during the long night, and had made his plans carefully. He had decided that he would use the shrewdness and quick wits of this local urchin to the full. Together they counted the coins - there were 871 of them. Zai's eyes widened as the total mounted - he had never seen such riches! He would never have understood that they didn't have the same value to Kirk and the others. To them they were just fabricated brass discs that were going to serve a purpose.

Trying to keep it as simple as possible, Kirk explained to Zai that he didn't want anyone else to see him using the box that helped them to talk to each other. It was to be their secret, he suggested. He continued to explain his plan. They would go to see Salar. He, Kirk, would find some way to point out the slaves he wanted, and Zai could do the bargaining with Salar. He also promised that as long as they had success, Zai could keep any zotars that were extra to the price. This idea appealed to the wily youngster - he would bargain well, and what he saved would keep him in comfort for a long time!

They solved the problem of Zai seeing the mysteries of the transporter room by slipping him a sleeping draught in a drink. By the time he awoke, he was halfway to town, carried by a security man. Kirk had decided to keep to just the same two. More might have attracted undue attention. Besides, these two knew how to behave now, and had even picked up a word or two of the language. All three carried communicators and the little translators hidden under their clothes. The guards had phasers, too, just in case of trouble, and Kirk carried the money in several bags attached to his belt. The voluminous dust-cloaks concealed all these.

As soon as Zai came to, he demanded indignantly to be set down - he hadn't been carried since he was a baby. Soon he was leading the way through the town. They detoured to his hut, to leave the shirt and boots, which he didn't want Salar to see, naturally.

At last he led them through the curved archway into Salar's courtyard. The big negro was there - quite a shock for Kirk and the others. Zai marched up to

him boldly, not one bit abashed by the menacing size of the man.

"We want to speak to Salar," he announced firmly.

The big man glared at this show of impudence by a little street urchin, and might have proved difficult, but his eyes rose from the boy to the three figures behind him, and something in their eyes stopped him. As he hesitated, Kirk surreptitiously clinked one of his money bags. This decided the negro, who shot up the steps to knock at Salar's door. Salar opened the door, listened to a few whispered words from his servant, and emerged to have a look at his visitors. Curiosity brought him down to the yard, and greed, for the man had mentioned the sound of money.

Zai seemed more in awe of this man - he had a reputation for evil and his cruelty was well-known. He retreated to stand nearer Kirk, but he spoke up bravely.

"Salar," he said, "these are merchants from a far land, come to buy slaves. They will pay good money. I have seen it."

Salar was instantly interested, and addressed himself to Kirk, smiling in an oily fashion. "We have many slaves," he said. "I am sure we can find some to suit you."

Kirk nodded. Salar looked puzzled that he didn't answer him, but the inventive Zai broke in quickly. "They do not speak in the morning," he lied boldly. "It's part of their religion. But I know what they want, and they have chosen me to speak for them."

Kirk and the others smiled inwardly at the lad's quick wits, for they could hear and understand every word, but they endeavoured to keep straight faces.

Salar seemed to accept this without question. He himself had no religion, but he knew there were many and varied ones throughout his world, and anyway, rich men must be humoured!

He handed the key to the negro, who opened the gate to let them through into the compound. Salar addressed himself to Zai, accepting him as a go-between. "Do you know what kind of slaves will please them?" he asked.

"They like unusual ones," announced Zai airily. "Have you any like that? 'Greenbloods', perhaps?"

Kirk almost held his breath. Don't be too eager, Zai, he pleaded silently. You'll spoil it.

But Salar was quite used to discussing slaves as if they were inanimate merchandise, and Zai's use of the term only meant to him that the lad knew the trade. He led his prospective customers down to where the slaves were busy loading the barges with bales of goods. The heavy barges would later be dragged down to the market for the goods to be sold.

Kirk tried to maintain a pose of calm indifference, but his eyes raced over the straining slaves, seeking a familiar figure. He noted with dismay how thin and cruelly-used they seemed. He felt a fleeting yearning to be rich enough to buy them all and set them free, but knew it was a vain dream. All he could do here was rescue his own, and that as unobtrusively as possible.

Salar spoke to an overseer, who disappeared aboard one of the barges. He came back driving a slave before him with blows and prods from his whip handle. Kirk's heart leaped as he recognised the stumbling figure, then sank again as he saw the state the Vulcan was in. Clad only in dusty stained trousers, he showed the marks of his ill-treatment - a massive dark green bruise down one side of his chest, and numerous green weals across his back and arms. Kirk felt the anger rising as he saw also the iron manacles and the bruised wrists beneath them, but he controlled himself firmly.

"Here's a 'greenblood,'" said Salar, grabbing Spock by the arm and dragging him roughly forward.

Zai gave a sideways look at Kirk who nodded imperceptibly. The lad brought into play all his native skill at haggling for a bargain.

"He might do," he said, feigning disinterest. "What do you want for him?"

"Three hundred zotars," said Salar eagerly.

"Oh, hardly," replied Zai, in an airy manner. "Two hundred and fifty, perhaps, if he's strong. What else can you show us?"

Kirk had to admire the lad's self-possession, outstanding for his age. But he hoped he wasn't going to hang this out too long. Kirk's strongest desire at the moment was to get Spock out of this place as quickly as possible.

He was worried by the Vulcan's listlessness. Spock seemed withdrawn, in a world of his own. He hadn't even lifted his eyes yet. Kirk concentrated his thoughts, trying to reach the Vulcan's mind as he had learned to do over the years. He met little resistance, and experienced a strong feeling of physical exhaustion and pain. But the contact was enough. The Vulcan suddenly became alert, his mental defences snapping into action, driving Kirk out, but his eyes lifted and met Kirk's squarely. His Vulcan self-control was now reasserted; he gave no visible sign of recognition, except the light that woke deep in his dark eyes. But Kirk saw it, and his deepest concern eased.

But now that Spock's quick mind was active again, one pressing problem was concerning him. Somehow, without arousing any suspicions in Salar and his men, he had to let Captain Kirk know that the men from the Scimitar were here also. He was not to know that Kirk had already made an inspired guess on that possibility. Deciding to risk a bold action, he rattled the chain between his wrists loudly to draw attention away from Kirk, and said clearly, "Three men from the Scimitar are here too."

Although the words meant nothing to the local men, such audacity in a slave just asked for punishment, and a mighty blow from the negro sent him sprawling across the yard.

His arm was jarred against his injured side, and the intense pain nearly made him pass out. He was certain now that at least one rib was broken. Dazed still, he was dragged roughly to his feet by the huge negro, fist poised ready to strike again.

But Kirk intervened cleverly. He raised a hand and waved it in a negative gesture, at the same time using the other hand to rattle a money bag. Salar took the hint; people don't pay good prices for damaged goods, and quickly ordered his man to desist. The negro grunted angrily but obeyed, and contented himself with pushing and prodding the Vulcan along as the party moved off to look at more slaves.

Kirk kept his eyes open as they walked along past the toiling slaves. With a bit of luck he should be able to pick them out himself. For one thing, not having been here long, they would be fitter and stronger than most of these poor creatures. Also, being Starfleet personnel, they should have a certain air about them. Surely he would spot that!

He carefully avoided looking at Spock, though inwardly he was worried sick about him, for later he might have to seek his aid for confirmation, and it must be as unobtrusively as possible, so that Salar suspected nothing.

A slight cough from Spock alerted him. Glancing sideways, he followed his gaze. A large load was being carried up the gangway on the back of a slave, who was almost hidden by his burden. Kirk got a swift impression of someone small and Oriental. Could this be Li Singh? He waited till the man had put down his bundle and returned down the gangway, then touched Zai's shoulder and indicated.

"We'll consider that one," Zai said to Salar, and at a word from him the overseer pushed the man over to join Spock. He almost stumbled against him, and Kirk saw the Vulcan's lips move, whispering some swift words. The bright Oriental eyes flashed over Kirk and his party, but then dropped as he stood docilely

with Spock. Two down, two to go, thought Kirk, his spirits rising.

The next two he found easily by himself. He spotted a young man, medium height but sturdy with it, and when they got closer, the gingerish hair and the eyes so like Scotty's confirmed it. A nod to Zai, a word from him to Salar, from Salar to his men, and the young Scot joined the party.

Zorda, whose appearance was in no way distinctive, revealed himself. As the overseer chivvied him up the gangplank with his heavy load, his eyes gazed back at Spock, Li Singh and MacGregor with such a look of desperation and fear that Kirk knew him instantly for the last member of the party. He obviously feared that he was going to be overlooked and left behind...When he returned down the plank and was picked out to join the other three, his expression changed so much that Kirk was momentarily afraid that he would give them away. Li Singh quickly saved the day, by banging his hand against a box to attract attention, and giving Zorda a fierce look, which said, in effect, 'Cool it!' Fortunately Zorda responded immediately, regained his composure and hid his feelings.

Now that all four had been found, Kirk touched Zai on the shoulder and indicated that these were the ones he wanted. Zai started to talk with Salar, haggling over the price. He was in his element, and the three Enterprise men, who could understand his words, had to admire his skill, while deploring his deceit, and some of the language he used. But he worked well, with comments and arguments about each one of the slaves, determined to earn himself as much of Kirk's supply of money as he could.

At last he was satisfied with the prices he had fixed. He'd beaten Salar down to 175 zotars each for Zorda (because he's older) and Li Singh (because he's so small). He'd been forced to go up to 200 for MacGregor (because he's young and strong) and to 275 for Spock (because he's a 'greenblood' - a rarity). This made a grand total of 825 zotars. Zai was very pleased with himself. A good day's work, and a nice sum left for him, he thought.

They made their way back to the front courtyard, Salar, Kirk and Zai leading the way, followed by the chosen slaves, Kirk's two men, and the big negro, who locked the big iron gate behind the.

The first three went up to the office to deal with the money. Kirk felt a moment's apprehension as they mounted the steps. Suppose Scotty's fabricated zotars didn't pass muster! But all went well. Salar watched greedily as Kirk counted out the money and handed it over.

They left the office. As Kirk looked down on the scene in the courtyard, he felt a glow of pride in his two security men. They must have been aching to help their Starfleet comrades, especially Spock, but apart from a muffled gasp from one when the negro knocked Spock down, they had maintained their attitude of complete indifference with amazing self-control. He only hoped he could do the same. His every instinct was to rush to do something to ease the pain he had felt in Spock. He spared a swift glance for him now, and was shocked to see how pale he looked. Knowing him so well by now, he sensed that the Vulcan was close to collapse, although he was endeavouring to conceal the fact a little longer.

Pulling himself together, Kirk made himself stroll down the steps very nonchalantly. Ignoring the slaves utterly, he waved his men on, and walked resolutely towards the archway. What it cost him to keep on without looking back, only he knew.

But he needn't have worried. As he strode off, with Zai skipping along beside him, the ex-slaves followed on docilely, and the two security men brought up the rear, as if it were a job they did often. They marched through the archway and out into the streets of the city. They encountered a few curious stares from passers-by, but managed to ignore them.

Zai tugged at Kirk's sleeve. "What about my money?" he whispered.

Using the translator, Kirk whispered back. "Find us somewhere where no-one will see," he suggested.

Quickly, Zai turned down an alley, and the others followed. Two more turns and he led them into a dusty disused workshop. Kirk turned at once to Randall, and told him to call the ship, asking Scotty to be ready for beam-up shortly. Torino was exchanging swift words with the slaves. Out of the corner of his eye, Kirk saw Spock sink wearily onto a stool beside the work bench.

He ached to go to him, but his immediate task was to get rid of Zai now, and then he could give all his attention to getting the Vulcan back up to the ship for the care he needed. Kirk turned to the boy.

"You did well, Zai," he said. "Thank you for your help."

"The zotars," said Zai eagerly. "Can I have them?"

"I suppose it's no good hoping they might help you give up thieving?" asked Kirk, as he handed over the chinking bag containing the rest of the coins.

Zai gave a wide grin as he answered. "Well, I might buy a share in a market stall."

As the lad grabbed the bag, tucked it into his belt, and ran off on his quick spindly legs, without a backward glance at his strange new friends, Kirk very much doubted it. However he felt he could safely trust Zai, for his own sake, to keep very quiet about his strange adventure, and to conceal his sudden new wealth. So it was unlikely that any awkward questions would be asked.

Turning to Randall, waiting with the open communicator, he called the ship. "Seven to beam up, Scotty," he said. "As fast as you can."

Scott was standing beside the transporter officer as the party materialised on the platform. As he scanned the group descending the steps and recognised the stocky frame and ginger hair of his nephew, he let out a joyful whoop. Dashing towards them, he enveloped the young man in a bear-hug that nearly lifted him off his feet. He grabbed Spock's hand and shook it fiercely, then greeted all the others with much back-slapping and hand-shaking.

Kirk tried to stem the exuberance as he said a quick word of praise to the security men and dismissed them. "Steady on, Scotty," he smiled. "See those three down to sickbay for a check-up. will you? And do something quick about those manacles. Tell Dr. M'Benga I'll be down in a minute with Mr. Spock. I must just call the bridge first."

Spock stood waiting patiently as the others trooped out and Kirk went over to the intercom. He had never felt so low, and he tried to think why this was so. True he was in some physical discomfort, his side hurt agonisingly, he ached all over, and his feet were sore through going barefoot on rough ground for a couple of days, but all those ills would soon be alleviated.

No, he realised suddenly, it was thoughts of the planet below. He had not appreciated till now just how much he abominated slavery! It grieved him that on the world below humanoids bought and sold others of their own kind, treated them worse than animals, and even gloried in it, and yet the Enterprise, symbol of all the power and understanding of the Federation, would depart and leave it all behind her, having done nothing to alter any of it.

Kirk closed the intercom, having ordered the ship on her way again, and they moved towards the exit. As they entered the turbolift, Spock's pace slowed, and for a moment it looked as if the doors would close on him. In a light-hearted mood now, from relief that it was all over, Kirk reached forward, grabbing the Vulcan's wrist to pull him in.

"Come on, slave," he said jokingly. "You belong to me now. I paid a tidy lot of money for you down there."

To his surprise, Spock pulled his hand away violently and answered stiffly. "I shall repay you the money as soon as it can be arranged. I am no man's slave."

Staggered by the vehemence of the words, Kirk gazed at the Vulcan. Standing there, bare-footed, shirtless, and still manacled, he looked oddly defeated.

"Spock, you are an idiot sometimes," exclaimed Kirk. "Can't you see when I'm teasing? Do I have to spell it out?" As the Vulcan stood silent, eyes down-cast, Kirk continued, affection shining in his eyes. "Don't you see, it's my only alternative! If I gave way to my instincts, I'd behave as Scotty did. I'd throw my arms round you, and give you a bear-hug, in sheer relief that I've got you back safe and relatively sound. But I know you wouldn't like that, so I do the only other thing I can to relieve the emotional strain - and tease you. But you take things so literally!" he added in exasperation.

Spock lifted his eyes, and the expression in them was very odd, as he assessed this further demonstration of Human illogicality. At last he spoke and his voice was low and gentle.

"Captain," he murmured. "I apologise for my lack of perception. I think it must be because I am tired and in some discomfort."

"I know," said Kirk gently. "That's why I want to get you to sickbay. Bones will soon put you right."

"Is the Doctor recovered, then?" asked Spock.

"Oh, I'd forgotten that for the moment," replied Kirk. "Yes, he's much better, but M'Benga has confined him to bed for a couple of days." His face lightened as he teased again. "How about that? How do you fancy a few days in sickbay with Bones for company?"

This time Spock recognised the teasing. "No, thank you, sir," he replied lightly. "I think I would much prefer to recuperate in my own quarters. I understand that doctors make notoriously bad patients, and I have no wish to be a captive audience to his protestations at Dr. M'Benga's ministrations. I need to rest."

"So you shall," promised Kirk, and as the lift doors swished open, he put a gentle hand on Spock's arm to lead him towards assured care and comfort. This time he was not repulsed.

RELATIVE VIEWS by Sandie Cowden

A Klingon View of a Tribble

Small furry, shapeless, squeaky thing,
What kind of panic do you bring,
Tormenting hapless Klingon crew
Who have not done a thing to you.

Your fur stands up all o'er your frame,
As ours does when we hear your name.
You creep about with careful skill,
And, unawares, you catch us still.

But we will have the final say -
The Tribble race has had its day!

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A Tribble View of a Klingon

Hisssssssss!

As Spock remarked - to err is Human; to cover it up is, too.

Untitled, by Elaine Booth

A shaft of brilliant sunshine threw its spectrum of many colours into the small dimly-lit cave. Its powerful light struck the opaque rocks that had been welded into the cave walls millions of years ago. The sunbeam broke into a multitude of colours that played on the dark mahogany features of a Bantu woman, a face that twisted in an inner agony in troubled sleep.

"Final sensor scan completed, sir. Class M planet, verified. Atmosphere high in oxygen, with acceptable levels of nitrogen, carbon dioxide, krypton; an unusually high level of radiation, but not so high as to harm the landing party. Gravity a little higher than Earth's, low in surface water. Two major land masses. This indicates a desert condition planetwide, with probable extremes in temperature."

"Thank you, Mr. Chekov." Kirk sat leisurely, almost lazily, in his command chair. His eyes never left the deep pink coloured planet that was on the main viewing screen. He was gently tapping the fingers of one hand on the arm rest, and nibbling the thumbnail of the other. He heard a subdued chuckle from the helmsman.

Sulu was at the helm - where else? - expertly splitting his attention between the main viewing screen, his helm, and a conversation with the navigator about his new hobby. His abundant enthusiasm bubbled over and infected anyone fool enough to listen.

The navigator, Chekov, was listening out of politeness; Sulu's hobbies changed as often as he changed his shirt.

Both men sensed Kirk looking at them. Chekov shook his head as Sulu glanced in Kirk's direction. They agreed, silently, that Kirk was in one of his not too pleasant moods; they fell into silence.

Kirk swivelled his chair to look in Spock's direction, and sighed. Spock's head was bowed over his hooded viewer in concentration. As usual.

The Captain turned back to communications. Uhura was a much pleasanter sight! She was chatting quietly to her communications second. She was leaning on the console, her legs looking long and slender, even though she was only a little over five feet tall.

There was a tech at Engineering. Before the Captain's attention could move any further, it was claimed by a pretty young yeoman who handed him an order board to sign.

"Life readings, Mr. Spock?" asked Kirk as he handed back the board.

"My sensors indicate the inhabitants to be humanoid, nomadic... There are a number of large 'oasis' type areas. These appear to be areas of concentrated water possible supplied by underground streams. The inhabitants appear to travel from oasis to oasis. There is no evidence of cultivated land. They do not have any form of artificial power supply, nor is there evidence of pollution such as would be caused by the burning of hydrocarbons. Typical desert characteristics; as Mr. Chekov has already stated, they experience dramatic climatic changes. Not a very pleasant place for a prolonged stay."

"Is your landing party ready, Miss Uhura?" asked Kirk as he swung his chair back again to face her. He flashed his little boy smile at her as his flyaway curl slowly slipped down his forehead. There was worry in his eyes.

Uhura detached herself from the console where she had been giving her subordinate a few last-minute instructions. "Yes, sir. Chapel from life sciences, Casters from geophysics, Peters and Wright from security. I'm meeting them in transporter room two in five minutes. May I, sir?" She indicated the turbolift door.

"Of course."

"Thank you, sir."

"Just one thing before you go, Lieutenant - after the rather pleasant description given by Spock and Chekov, I suggest you stay out of trouble. Unless you wish to stay there after dusk?"

"Trouble, sir? Me, sir? Never, sir!"

The playful sarcasm had lightened Kirk's mood but he still felt something was going to go wrong. Uhura nodded her head and left.

She hummed to herself as the turbolift took her to the required deck. It's not very often I get the chance to lead a survey party, she thought. Which is silly, we get the same training as the men. Did the Captain seem more worried than usual? Why he should, I don't know - we may lack a bit of brawn, us girls, but we sure ain't short on the brains! She left the lift and entered the transporter room.

The three men were standing together. One was telling a clearly none too choice joke; the voice went to a barely audible level as she entered. Christine Chapel was talking to Scotty while she checked her medical tricorder: she looked up and smiled as she handed a phaser and communicator to Uhura.

"Ready when you are, Scotty," said Uhura. The landing party moved onto the platform.

"Don't get into too much trouble, lass," said Scotty in his best father-figure pose. Uhura looked indignant. Chapel laughed as she leaned over and said to Uhura in a low voice meant to be overheard,

"I think it's about time we showed these men what we're made of, don't you?"

Uhura drew herself up in an attempt to look dignified and said formally, "Energise, Mr. Scott."

"Energising."

As the transporter beam began to dematerialise them, Uhura thought, I hope we don't get into trouble... Come on, Uhura, don't let them get you down. They're just a shipload of over-protective mother hens, trying to convince themselves that women can't do anything without men around to depend on!

The black eyelashes were flicked up quickly, startled, showing large brown soulful eyes filled with fatigue and sadness.

She wiped a now grubby, soiled hand over her once fresh and serene face which was now drawn and somehow paler than its usual shiny mahogany. Her raven black hair was no longer neat and tidy; it lay limp and matted, in dire need of a wash.

She blinked several times, but the nightmare wouldn't lie down. She relived the nauseating effect of the transporter, and found herself surrounded by an alien countryside...

"Uhura to Enterprise, come in Enterprise."

"Kirk here."

"Beamdown successful. We're on the edge of the oasis chosen by Mr. Spock. We're quite close to some caravan type vehicles - not close enough to be seen, but there are no locals nearby anyway."

"Good. Keep it that way. Kirk out."

She put away her communicator, and looked around. "Beautiful," she said as she took in the exquisite purple of the oasis.

There were tall trees with thick trunks. The branches were all up high,

with big circular leaves that were spread out so as to make the trees look like tables on one leg. Around the trees were bushes about four feet high, with leaves of many shades of purple. There was a powerful stench of decaying leaves with an underscent of perfume from the few bright flowers that were scattered about the underbrush.

Caster's tricorder began to shrill in the background. "Lieutenant - " he began, but never had time to finish.

Bodies appeared out of the underbrush, like rats out of a hole. They were all a head smaller than Uhura, but she had no doubt they would be stronger, due to the extra gravity. They were hairless and clotheless. Their bald eyes blinked in surprise.

Casters and Wright drew their phasers, but before they could be put to use they were both impaled on two long slender spears. Peters collapsed, an arrow in his thigh.

Uhura drew her phaser and communicator in unison, but never had time to use them. A heavy club came through the air. As she dodged out of the way, another one came from a different direction. It was only a glancing blow to the temple, but she fell.

She felt a cold hand touch her shoulder; the dimly lit cave came back into focus. She jerked, startled, turning to look into the questioning eyes of Christine Chapel. She touched her hand and nodded to an unasked question, her face hard, trying to cover her inner torment.

"There was nothing you could have done, Uhura."

"There is no excuse."

"Casters didn't activate his tricorder until it was too late."

"I was in charge."

"It could have happened to anyone."

"I was in charge. The blame is mine." Uhura looked down at her hands. Watching her bowed head, Christine remembered too.

The ambush had happened so fast, she had had little time to react. The three men had gone down almost together. Three of the small aliens had taken her on before she could draw her phaser, let alone use it. As for Uhura, she was unconscious before Christine could look around. The cold sharp spearhead shoved in the small of her back told her that to struggle was useless.

Their weapons were removed, and dumped in a heap along with the communicators. To Christine's surprise she was left her medical tricorder and medikit. Later, she realised that the aliens had had the intelligence to realise which of their gadgets had been used for communication or defence; these, used for neither, were presumably considered by the natives to be harmless.

Uhura and Peters had been slung unceremoniously over the shoulders of two muscular men. Christine consciously collected her thoughts and tried to steady her beating heart and shaking legs as she was pushed in the direction of the caravans.

The journey through the oasis would have been pleasant, except for the circumstances. At last they came to a small group of caravans set apart from the rest. Christine was pushed into the centre of this group of caravans, and Uhura and Peters were dropped to the ground a few yards away. Uhura was still unconscious, but Peters yelped in agony as his injured leg hit the ground with his full weight on it. Christine's professionalism clicked into gear. She was over by Peters before anyone could stop her.

Rough hands gripped her from behind, pulling her away. A rather filthy looking specimen ran a grimy hand through her fragrant hair, clearly fascinated by it. She stood stock still. There was really nothing she could do; resistance would accomplish nothing. She tried to calm herself with the thought that Peters and Uhura needed her medical assistance. She'd be of no use if she too was knocked unconscious.

Christine almost collapsed with relief, however, when a gruff voice sounded from across the circle and her captor threw her into a wheeled cage. Uhura and Peters were thrown in beside her.

The wagon was dirty and smelly; she pulled a face at the stench, then turned to her fallen comrades.

Almost immediately she felt the wagon jolt; the caravans were on the move. Looking up at the sun she saw they were heading towards it. It was still morning -- that meant they were heading east.

Her hopes rose as they headed into the desert. In a desert, a trail should be easy to follow, she thought. The Captain will soon find us. But within an hour, to her horror, two caravans crossed their path at a right angle. A little of her hope was chipped away.

Uhura was conscious by that time. Not a word was said as they looked back at the lush vegetation of the oasis, then at the mile after mile of arid sand that was in front of them. It wasn't quite a desert -- the sparse stubby shrubs saw to that, but then it wasn't savannah either!

Pure white rocks and towering mountains in the distance made patterns in the sand and on the skyline. "It's like icing on a birthday cake," mused Christine.

"Yeah," answered Uhura offhandedly as she blinked at the endless expanse of pink and white, then up at the blood red sky. It was kind of oppressive. "You can get sick of too much of it... Where the hell are they taking us?" But no one could answer.

Two days across an arid desert. They had no shade and just an occasional drink of foul tasting liquid that their captors deigned to give them. The nights were just as unbearable as the days, for they were cold. They had been given only one blanket between them.

Then came four days through the mountain range. Spirits fell, but were not forsaken. Christine did the best she could for Peters; Uhura tried as best she could to keep the air of pessimism at bay -- it could so easily take over.

They took it in turns to sit at the far corner of the cage, trying to look indifferent to their surroundings but in fact breaking finger-nails and cutting fingers trying to untie a loose binding on one of the corners. A hope, at least.

They didn't speak much -- there was very little to say apart from an odd comment or joke. Eventually Uhura said drily, "Hey, Christine, if the Captain leaves it any longer, they'll be able to find us by smell instead of by sensor."

"He could get a reputation as a Human bloodhound..."

"A Human what?"

"Oh, never mind... What do you think of the locals?"

"If you know of any flies that are looking for an iceskating rink, you could tell them about their bald heads."

"They must be nervous -- look at all the hair they've pulled out."

"Could be they wash too often."

"Then I don't think much of their aftershave. A bit sort of...ah..."

"Strong?"

"Something like that." Again they lapsed into silence.

Suddenly the caravan stopped.

"It's been nearly five hours since we left the mountain range."

"Do you realise we haven't been fed since we left the Enterprise?"

"Must admit, I don't think much of the service. Or the accomodation, if it comes to that."

"We could complain to the manager."

"They certainly know how to pitch tents. They're up like mushrooms already."

"Feeding time at the zoo, I guess."

Uhura smiled radiantly, like a dog with two tails. "Convenient. Let's not hang around too long. They might want dessert. This being the first time they've stopped moving." She held up the vine that had been holding a corner of the cage together. "Shall we go?"

"It's going to be hard on Peters. His wound is festering, he has the beginnings of a fever, and he shows no signs of recovering consciousness."

"Well, we can't leave him! We'll have to do the best we can and carry him."

Uhura levered a wooden bar aside and wriggled out. With great difficulty they got Peters out. Christine had to carry him on her own for a couple of miles while Uhura shuffled behind, trying to cover their tracks by dragging the blanket across the sand behind them.

"It's like one of those old films or adventure stories, with the sheik's men chasing you for their harem. Or the Indians in the desert."

"What are you going on about?"

"All we need is the cavalry."

"I'd settle for a li'l old phaser."

Christine let Peters slide to the ground, and sank down beside him. "You'll have to help me. This guy's heavy."

"They'll probably track us anyway." Uhura looked doubtfully at her attempt to disguise their tracks.

The five hours in the carevans took them ten on foot. They reached the enigmatic mountains about dawn.

Christine looked back fretfully. "They will have found out we're missing by now."

"If they didn't last night."

"I think I saw some caves when we passed this way before."

"Maybe if we find a not-too-obvious one, we just might get away with this."

"Which way?"

"The way we're going is as good as any."

They went on in silence for a few minutes. Then - "I don't think Peters is going to make it."

"He has to, Christine. He has to..." I don't want to take the blame for another death was what she didn't say.

They found a cave. At first it looked more like a pot-hole. Uhura went to look at it. "There's a large cave inside... I hear voices. Come on - let's at least try to hide."

The cave was dark, but not pitch black, as a shaft of light entered through

a hole in the roof.

"Well," said Uhura in an official voice. "Quite a home from home. We have one blanket, no water, no food. One sick man, and a herd of wild men after us." She smiled a sad, weary, wistful smile. "Do you think the good Captain will let us have a coffee break? I'm parched."

Christine didn't answer. Her head was bowed.

"Christine?"

"He's dead."

Uhura clenched her fists and closed her eyes as frustration and anger began to well up inside her.

Christine stood up quickly. "What was that?" She spoke very softly.

"I don't know..." Although she had heard nothing, Uhura answered as quietly.

"By the entrance."

"Think there's another exit?"

"We'd better start looking."

They moved deeper into the cave, taking the blanket with them but leaving Peters behind, hoping their pursuers would think they had left the cave.

"Uhura... maybe there is someone on our side. They've even provided lights."

Uhura looked closely at the phosphorescent rocks that were in great abundance. "Yeah - no expense spared on this here luxury trip."

They were finding it nearly impossible to keep their spirits high.

They found a small niche behind a group of rocks, just big enough for the two of them to crawl into, and barely in time. Suddenly there was a lot of noise from the outer cave - shouts, hoots and harsh 'words', a shuffle of feet and their growing feeling of terror grew as the noise came nearer and nearer, louder and louder. Christine could feel a scream forming in her throat. She thought of Roger, then of Spock and Kirk, then closed her eyes.

Uhura was in no better shape. You don't feel sick, Uhura, she said to herself. It's all in the mind. With a bit of luck you might wake up in time to go on duty. She closed her eyes too.

It seemed an eternity before the aliens left. The voices faded into the distance, and an eerie silence fell. After lying quietly for a while, scarcely daring to breathe, they decided to make a move.

Peters' body was gone, but the odour of the aliens lingered. They slowly looked around the cave. Christine swallowed hard. "Let's get some sleep."

Christine lifted her head off Uhura's shoulder. Her face was drawn and tired. Her usually bright eyes were heavy and bloodshot. She pushed away her hair, straggly now, and licked her sore, dry lips, which were close to blistering from the dry windless days under the relentless sun.

That was yesterday, she thought. "What do we do now?" she asked.

Uhura shrugged. She was finding it difficult to think straight, between sheer exhaustion and the rising tide of frustration and anger. Then an eyebrow lifted, and she visibly brightened. "It would only work if the Enterprise was still scanning the area," she said.

"What would?"

"Then again it might not work anyway."

"I'm a nurse, not a mind reader. What might work?"

"It just might work, with a little bit of luck...and a lot of cussin'. I just might be able to adapt your medical tricorder to emit some kind of signal. Not in the same class as the communicator, it hasn't the power. If Spock is scanning in the right area they just might find us. Or if there's a landing party down looking for us, they might pick it up, if they recognise it for what it is. Give."

Christine handed over her tricorder. "There's a lot of 'ifs'."

"Yeah - so we'd better try to get back to the beamdown point. Stand a better chance of detection."

Uhura went to work like a beaver. She waded into the job and left Christine to do the worrying for the two of them. She worked all that day and most of the night.

"Damn!"

"What is it?"

"I've dropped something."

"Where?"

"It rolled over that way..."

"...Is this it?"

"Yep."

"How's it doing?"

"YOU look after the medicine. Let me take care of communications... Sorry, Christine. Didn't mean that. I'm just so damn tired. Damn this bloody thing. Damn those savages. Damn this flaming planet. Damn the Enterprise! Damn! Damn!! DAMN!!!" She picked up a nearby rock and flung it violently across the cave.

"Feel better now?"

"My eyes hurt."

"How much longer?"

"Last few circuits. With the right tools I could have had this finished in half an hour. And the light's pretty awful. The progress is so painfully slow. If only we could go outside without the risk of being spotted."

"Spock would be proud of you."

"Spock? Proud? Hardly. Anyway it might not work."

"Course it will!"

"Wish he were here to check my great masterpiece... I sometimes get the feeling he thinks we Humans have a great lack of grey matter between our ears. Maybe he's right."

"Will it work?"

"He could probably tell you... I dare say he'd quote the odds, too, down to the fiftieth decimal place... There, finished. Next thing to do is use it."

"No test?"

"Not enough power to risk a test."

"You need rest. Or your eyes are going to rebel."

"They already feel like gravel pits."

Christine hesitated. "What if it doesn't work?"

Uhura sighed and moved over to sit next to her on the blanket by the cave wall. "Then we get used to hot days and cold nights and no fresh coffee."

"I wonder what's going on on the Enterprise?"

"The Captain's probably going frantic. McCoy will be pacing up and down the bridge, and Spock will have his nose stuck in the computer console, monitoring. Same as usual when a landing party goes missing."

"I wish he were here."

"Who?"

"Spock... Or the Captain."

"Spock would be more use. His life readings are a lot different from the natives; ours aren't."

Christine smiled wistfully. Uhura noticed. "How are you two getting along these days?"

"Who?"

"You know who I mean."

"Yes... The same as usual, I guess."

"Picked a right one there, didn't you?"

Christine grinned. "Yeah. I know. I'm...stupid."

"Maybe. I must admit I do see why."

"So do a lot of other women."

"He knows how you feel, doesn't he?" Uhura knew he did.

"Yes... He avoids me as much as possible. To make it easier for me, I think."

"Must count for something."

"He says he's incapable of Human love."

Uhura snorted. "And what about the Captain and McCoy?"

Christine smiled a sad little smile. "It's a different sort of relationship. With me... Maybe he's afraid of getting burned."

"Or showing how really Human the real man is inside."

"If that's the case...then he has a point. Wear your heart on your sleeve and you'll get it battered sooner or later."

"You think he's right to lock himself away?"

"I'm inclined to agree with him - or think about it, at least."

"Yes...but... I know you've had more than your fair share of tragedy. But you've survived."

"And I'm stronger for it. Or harder because of it. Depending on how you look at it."

"Emotions are the stumbling blocks of life. Let others fall, not I. What do you think he'd say to that?"

"He'd probably say something similar."

"Yeah. I figured that too." Uhura ran her fingers across her eyes. Her speech was becoming slurred. "You've always had others to turn to. That's how you've survived."

"True."

"Spock has only James T. Kirk. And if anything should happen to him... Spock won't confide in Dr. McCoy. We all know that."

"He plays a dangerous game giving everything to one man."

"But what a man!" Uhura rolled her eyes playfully.

"I don't know who to... Uhura?"

Uhura's face was peaceful as she slept. The tired lines were gone. Christine smiled and pulled the blanket around them. Not even the freezing cold was going to keep them awake.

One blanket and a lot of hope could create a lot of warmth.

The night slid by. Neither spoke when they awoke; Christine handed the tricorder to Uhura, then she folded up the blanket and tucked it under her arm.

They went to the entrance of the cave and smoothed their crumpled, soiled uniforms.

"No water. No food."

"We might last a week if we're lucky."

Moving slowly they kept to the shade as much as possible as they crossed the range of mountains. Days merged into nights, then back into days. The four days it took them to cross the range were just a jumble of colours and sensations. They knew they were going in the right direction, but that was all; it was all they could do to keep moving. They dared not stop for too long in the hottest part of the day in case more savages should creep up on them unawares.

After what seemed like a lifetime they arrived at the desert. They had found a reserve of energy when they had first looked over the last mountain peak and saw an oasis in the distance. Now as they stepped onto the desert, the oasis was no longer visible. It was below their horizon.

"Two days," said Christine.

"Four days...we're on foot, remember?"

"Four days... We'll never make it without water - we'll dehydrate."

"We have to try."

They linked arms as they set out. "It's hot out here."

"Really? I'd never have guessed."

"Care for tea and biscuits?"

"Ice-cream?"

"Why not. I reckon my credit can stand that."

"We'll stop at the next beach cafe we come across."

"Do you think they'll be open?"

"For a pair of attractive ladies like us, they better had be."

The next two days were agony. Finally Christine sank onto the hot sand. "I've had it. You go on without me."

"No."

"Look, just go on, will you. I can't go on, and I won't let you carry me, either."

"You're coming with me or I don't go anywhere."

"GO!"

"Bull."

"You're stubborn. You know that?"

"Yep." Uhura lifted her head and looked towards the mountains. "Oh, no," she groaned.

Christine looked towards the mountains too. She too saw the dust cloud . . .

behind them, made by fast-moving animals. The same group of natives or another, what did it matter now? The riders would reach them in about an hour, she guessed.

"We're not going to make it."

"I'll have to try out my gadget. Now or never."

"I'd forgotten about it."

"Forgotten!... Well, it's activated. May I suggest we make ourselves comfortable. I for one am not going to move another step unaided.

"I couldn't agree more, Lieutenant."

Christine spread the blanket out beside her.

"Thank you, nurse."

"You're welcome."

The dust cloud grew larger and they could hear a whooping shout from the natives. Christine looked down at the device in front of them. "Are you sure it will work?"

"No."

"I'm scared."

"Join the club, honey - so am I."

"You can see their faces now."

"I think I'm going to faint."

"Mind if I join you?"

"What? You'll miss all the entertainment."

"That was the general idea, as we're going to be the entertainment."

"Well, as we're the stars, it should be artistic..."

"Can I scream now?"

Uhura shivered. "I feel sick."

"So do I."

"Christine??"

"Transporter...It's the trans..."

The cavalry nearly missed us that time, thought Uhura as the smiling face of her Captain came into focus.

Then she fainted.

NO END by Gladys Oliver

Infinite sky, unfathomable sea.
 No end to stars in the galaxy.
 The moon does not finish, nor sun diminish,
 They take their turn revolving endlessly.
 No end to sky or sea,
 No end of life, or me.
 No trying to trace the Human race;
 Nothing can define end of life -
 So our ways will wend;
 There is NO END!

THE MISTS OF ELO'AN by Simone Mason

For once, Kirk was unable to summon any enthusiasm for his next spell of duty. That man Denberg would be on the bridge, going on and on about his Company's mining plans for Elo'an. Either that or he would be complaining about something or other.

The Captain had been unable to resist Spock's offer to take extra time on the bridge, but it was unfair to take advantage of it too often, although the Vulcan was able to take Mr. Denberg's constant talk with an equanimity the Captain envied. He had not his First Officer's ability of appearing to listen while working out some mathematical problem.

"Bridge to Captain Kirk," came Spock's voice through the intercom. Kirk answered, and heard that they were establishing orbit around Elo'an. Now the mining group aboard would be anxious to start operations, thought Kirk as he stepped into the lift. As though the planet already belonged to them! In a way it did, the Federation Council had granted mining rights - the fact that the rights were subject to further investigations by the Enterprise would be considered as mere red tape by Mr. Denberg.

Stepping out of the lift, Kirk saw that his fears were justified. He could have sworn that his First Officer left the command chair with more alacrity than respect for his Captain called for.

Can't blame him! thought Kirk, with a smile at the Vulcan. Wish I could pass this buck too!

Mr. Denberg, the short but hyperactive mining representative, hastened to the command chair, looking upset. "Captain, your Mr. Spock is most stubborn! He won't let us beam down to Elo'an!"

"Quite rightly," replied Kirk in a stern voice. "So far, all we have on Elo'an is a preliminary survey by a scout ship."

"Rich deposits of various ores have been detected, Captain. They are vital to my Company..."

"Your Company will have to follow the usual procedure," interrupted the Captain. "It's my responsibility to pronounce Elo'an safe before any of you set foot on the planet. I beg you not to interfere further or the study will take even longer. I would hate to have to confine you to quarters, but I will have no alternative if you delay our checks - as you are doing now." Kirk's tone made the representative speechless and Spock took the opportunity of giving his first report on Elo'an.

This world sounded most dull, thought the Captain as he listened. No inhabitants, sparse vegetation, stable atmosphere and conditions. The First Officer had put views of the planet, recorded by the scout ship, on the screen and it was indeed a dull world. Under a grey sky, large clouds of mist floated near ground level and also high up in the atmosphere. They made an irregular pattern of change between the two levels as clouds either rose or came down from time to time.

Kirk made up his mind. "Spock, are you sure there are no life forms?"

"None, Captain. No trace of past civilisation, either."

"Right. No need for you or me to beam down - this is standard routine. Select a scientific team and have them beam down to do the survey."

The First Officer complied. Mr. Denberg's expected request to accompany the scientists met with a firm refusal and a last warning not to interfere. Disgusted, the representative left the bridge. No-one missed him.

The Captain relaxed in the command chair. He could do with routine just now. A strangled cry from Spock startled him and the bridge crew. The Vulcan had slumped over his console. He was gripping it so tightly that the metal was cracking in places.

"Spock!" Kirk sprang up and shouted, "Get McCoy!" then ran to his First Officer. "What is it, Spock?" he asked, trying to detach the clenched hands, disturbed by the slight shaking of the Vulcan's body.

"Pain...such pain...dying..." murmured Spock in a broken voice.

"Spock!" Kirk shook him, now frantically worried by the strange words. "Hold on, here's Bones."

McCoy hastened towards them as the Vulcan straightened, still looking shaken, but in control of himself. "I am all right, Captain, Doctor."

"You were in pain a second ago!" protested Kirk.

"Come on, Spock, sickbay for you," said McCoy in the soothing voice he reserved for patients.

The First Officer got up, eluding their grasp, and stated, "Something or someone just died, Captain."

"Who? Where?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Lt. Uhura, contact the survey team immediately," ordered Kirk, full of foreboding.

His fear proved groundless. The four scientists were fine and had seen or heard nothing abnormal.

"One of you keep a watch over the others at all times," ordered the Captain. "Now, Spock," he added, turning to his First Officer who seemed fully recovered. "Can you explain what happened to you?"

"All I can say, Captain, is that I shared pain and death with another being."

"On Elo'an?"

"I don't know, Captain. I could see nothing and sense nothing but the pain."

"It could be in space, Jim," said McCoy. "When the Intrepid died, Spock knew it."

"Whoever was dying was not Vulcan nor Human, Doctor, but it could have been in space. Captain," he continued, "I regret I gave way and provoked such alarm. It was a very powerful contact."

Kirk nodded. "Are you sure you're all right now?"

"Yes, Captain."

"Then organise a full scan of space as far as possible, in case a ship is in distress."

The First Officer concentrated on his task and Kirk sat back in his command chair feeling very uneasy. Who or what had been near enough to die that Spock had sensed it so painfully? Were there any beings threatened or in need of help? Aliens?

"Captain," reported Spock, "there are no vessels within a radius of..."

"Captain," interrupted Uhura, "I can't raise the survey team."

"Keep trying," ordered Kirk, his sense of foreboding stronger than ever. "Spock, locate..."

His voice died when he saw the sudden rigidity of his First Officer as he reported, "Captain, there are no life readings on Elo'an."

"What happened to my men?" gasped Kirk, unbelieving.

"Unknown, Captain. I have scanned the area they were studying and no disturbance of any kind occurred."

"Explanation?"

"I regret I can offer none, Captain."

"I want a full scan of the planet. We must know why they died or where they have gone," ordered Kirk.

No answer could be discovered. The survey team had vanished, but how? Why? So much for routine, thought Kirk, fighting the feeling of guilt at having, perhaps, sent four men to their deaths.

"You could not have known, Captain," murmured Spock at his side. "I reported the planet as safe, therefore I am as much to blame."

Kirk threw him a grateful glance; trust Spock to guess his thoughts and be ready to help, to share...

"Nothing can be found from the ship," said Kirk, his mind made up. "We have to beam down to get the answers. Mr. Scott, you have the con. No-one, and I repeat, no-one, is to beam down except on my specific order. Spock, Bones, come with me."

No interference occurred from Denberg. He had heard the news of the scientists' deaths and was no longer keen to set foot on Elo'an!

The landing party materialised where the survey team had done before them. No sign of danger could be seen, and silence reigned among the low clouds of mist drifting here and there.

They soon discovered the four bodies, but the discovery posed more problems rather than solving any.

"They killed each other, Jim," stated McCoy, awed.

"With what? All that blood..."

"With their pocket knives, Jim."

"They never contacted the ship for help. A disease?"

"Attack of insanity more likely."

Spock and McCoy made a careful analysis of the atmosphere and condition, and came up with no solution. There were no gases or plants or any other factors which could have caused insanity.

Kirk noticed that Spock was making an effort not to shiver. It was getting cold, probably due to these low clouds of mist. "Spock, ask Scotty to beam down extra clothing."

The Vulcan looked as though he had not heard. "Spock? What's wrong?"

"Captain, I can sense pressure...and fear..."

"There is no-one here."

"I know, Captain."

"Jim," said McCoy, "my head is aching."

"So is mine," remarked Kirk, wondering what was happening.

The doctor was concerned about Spock; the Vulcan did not look well, and the cold and damp were increasing. McCoy turned to Kirk and saw him pick up a knife which one of the team had dropped. Suddenly he heard Spock shout, "No, Jim!"

Rooted to the spot, by disbelief, the doctor saw the Captain explode into action with incredible speed. Kirk rushed to his First Officer and plunged the knife into him before he succumbed to the neck pinch.

A horrified McCoy managed to move at last, and he ran to Spock. The Vulcan had fallen to his knees, clutching his side. Green blood filtered slowly through his fingers.

"Don't touch me, Doctor," Spock gasped.

"You need help..."

"Stay away."

The First Officer had his communicator in his hand and opened it. "Three to beam up," he managed to say before crumpling to the ground.

Scotty's eyes widened when the three figures materialised on the pad. McCoy, the only one who appeared still alive, had a fixed expression of horror.

"What happened? Are they...?" asked the Chief Engineer, shaking the doctor.

McCoy's eyes focused on him. "Alert sickbay and get M'Benga here, Scotty. Have the Captain put under restraint immediately."

"Yes, Doctor," said a worried Scotsman. What was going on?

Kirk was rather startled when he came to. He was in sickbay and under maximum restraint. Yet he felt fine except for a stiff neck.

The door opened and McCoy and M'Benga came in, pushing a bed upon which lay Spock. They transferred the Vulcan carefully from the mobile bed to the one next to Kirk, and the Captain paled. Spock's face was lifeless, his skin without colour.

"Bones, how is he?" he stammered anxiously.

"He's not dead yet."

"What? Bones, why am I under restraint?"

"Why do you think?"

"You mean... I...? Oh, no!" So that was why he was under restraint. He had tried to kill his best friend... Vague memories were coming back. He remembered the headache, then there was a blurred vision of Spock shouting something and the feeling of metal in his hand. It was true; he had tried to kill...

Kirk bit his lip, fighting the fear rising in him. If Spock died...

"It's all right, Jim," soothed McCoy, satisfied now that Kirk was, for the moment at least, in full possession of his senses again. "Spock will live."

All the tension ebbed out of Kirk and he felt tears of relief sting his eyes. "Bones, what happened?"

McCoy told him, and the Captain exclaimed, "But there was no-one... What made me attack Spock?"

"I've no idea, Jim. What made the scientists kill each other?"

"Why didn't you stop me?"

"It was over so quickly, Jim! Don't you remember what happened?"

"Not entirely. I don't remember hurting Spock. Weren't you affected?"

"No, but when I ran to help Spock, he stopped me."

"Was he afraid you'd... Can you blame him?"

"No, but why wasn't he affected?"

"And by what? There was nothing there!"

M'Benga, who was keeping a check on Spock, called out, "He's fighting the healing trance, Doctor."

McCoy approached the other bed as Spock moved and his eyes opened. "Captain..."

"He's fine, Spock, but you're not, so - "

"Captain..." persisted the Vulcan in a weak voice.

"Let me go to him, Bones!" demanded Kirk with impatience.

McCoy visibly hesitated, then obeyed with a grunt as Spock called out again.

"Hurry, Captain," said M'Benga. "Try to quiet him or he'll bleed again."

"Spock," murmured Kirk gently, taking his hand. "Go into a healing trance, please."

"Captain... There is intelligence on... Eol'an."

"Where? What does it look like?"

"Unknown... I only sensed it... Alien life forms...hostile...full of hate..."

"Why?"

"I don't know... Jim, don't go back!"

"I won't. Are we safe here?"

"I am unable to sense anyone...but I am too weak, I can't..."

"Jim, make him go into a trance," interrupted McCoy sharply, "or I won't answer for the consequences."

"You heard Bones, Spock. Let go now, please."

It was with relief that the Captain sensed the hand clutching his own relax, and both McCoy and M'Benga sighed with equal relief.

"What about you, Jim? Are you all right?" asked the doctor.

"Yes, perfectly. Nevertheless, one of you doctors will accompany me at all times, just in case." Kirk, after a last glance at Spock, left for the bridge, closely followed by McCoy, and ordered another scan of Eol'an for life forms. "And don't tell me there're none there, because I know there are," he finished.

"But sir, Mr. Spock himself..."

"I know, Mr. Chekov, but Mr. Spock detected life when we were down there."

The scan took place, with the same negative result.

"Then it's not life as we know it," stated Kirk.

"Which doesn't help, Jim. It could be anything," said McCoy.

"How long until Spock is fit, Bones?"

"Two days at least, and if by 'fit' you mean dealing with hostile beings, three days, is my verdict."

Kirk nodded and addressed the bridge crew. "I want a constant watch kept on that planet, and records taken of anything that moves, no matter how trivial it appears. Mr. Sulu, take us out of orbit and establish another at double this distance."

"Aye, sir."

"Whatever is down there doesn't seem to be able to affect us on the ship, and I'd like to keep it that way," Kirk muttered to McCoy as they returned to sickbay. After a glance at Spock, Kirk settled back into his previous bed and McCoy got hold of the security restraints.

"I'm fine, Bones," protested Kirk.

"You are now," agreed McCoy, "but it is best to make sure, with Spock so near."

Kirk no longer protested and accepted the straps without further complaint. He slept normally and showed no signs of odd behaviour, to everyone's relief.

A solution to their problem remained out of reach. Whatever was down there, considering them as enemies when they had done nothing, was a complete mystery.

All this delay was not to Denberg's taste, and Kirk's patience was sorely tried. Only a reminder of what had happened to the scientists silenced the representative and made him retreat to his quarters, where Kirk hoped he would remain for ever!

When McCoy informed Kirk that Spock was coming out of the healing trance, the Captain headed for sickbay where a stern doctor stopped him at the door. "First you listen to me, Jim. You are not to start harassing Spock with questions and get him back to the bridge."

"No, no, Bones. I just want to talk to him, for heaven's sake!"

"I'll keep an eye on you. I wouldn't have called you, only Spock is asking for you."

Kirk went in with a smile. McCoy considered anyone healthy as enemies of his patients!

The Captain was pleased to see his First Officer looking back to normal. "Glad you're with us again, Spock! How do you feel?"

"Not too bad, Captain, in spite of McCoy's drugs."

Kirk stopped McCoy's expected protest with a glance and changed the subject. "We're found nothing about these mysterious life forms, Spock. Can you tell us anything?"

"Very little, Captain, except that they exist."

"What do they look like?"

"Unknown, Captain."

"How did you know that Jim was going to attack you, Spock?" asked McCoy.

"I had opened my mind, in case I made contact with anything, and I was receptive to thoughts. I was not spying, Captain."

"No, Spock, I know you weren't," assured Kirk. "Go on."

"The pattern of your thoughts suddenly changed and became lust to kill. I was so amazed that I was too late to defend myself with proper accuracy, hence the wound. I had no way of knowing if Dr. McCoy was also affected and deemed it safer to beam back."

"If you sensed Jim being affected, Spock, you would have sensed me also!"

"No, Doctor, not necessarily. I am always..." He stopped and looked away, clearly embarrassed.

"What is it, Spock?" asked Kirk softly.

"I am always attuned to your thoughts," he finished in a low voice.

Kirk nodded with a smile and asked, "Why should these beings want to make us kill each other, Spock? Any ideas?"

"None, Captain. We are their enemies and they are powerful, can take control of Human minds."

"I was unable to resist," agreed Kirk.

"I believe you would have, had I been able to warn you. However, I was not sure myself about the pressure I sensed in my mind. They also fear us, Captain."

"But what are we fighting? Ghosts?" asked McCoy irritably.

"If they fear us, we can hurt them," declared the Captain. "Therefore we can defend ourselves if we only knew what they are."

"Captain, I'll beam down alone and attempt a contact."

"Out of the question, Spock. They'd kill you."

"They have not killed yet, Captain, only made people kill each other."

"They may have the power to make you kill yourself. For the moment, just get well."

Spock reported back for duty within the three days proscribed by McCoy. The Captain assembled his senior officers in the briefing room and stated:

"Our constant watch of the planet's surface revealed no life forms. Spock, see for yourself, nothing moves."

They watched the small screen and the First Officer said, "Nothing moves except the clouds of mist, Captain."

"The mist? You don't think...?"

"Captain, I was merely rectifying your statement, which was inaccurate."

"But you may have found the answer, Spock," Kirk said, with excitement.

"Yes... I believe you may be right, Captain. Should the survey team have materialised in the middle of a cloud, it could have killed."

"And that's what you sensed, Spock!"

"Captain," said Scotty, "whatever is down there is hostile. Shouldn't Elo'an simply be put off limits?"

"Starfleet will want to know the reason why, Scotty, to say nothing of our Mr. Denberg. They'll never accept as fact a wild theory Spock and I have evolved."

"Our speculation fits the facts, Captain."

"Yes, Spock, but we should endeavour to make contact, explain we never meant to kill. Too much is speculation."

"Yes, I have to agree, Captain," admitted the Vulcan. "May I have your permission to make a further study of those clouds of mist?"

"Yes, Spock, go ahead. We meet here again in a couple of hours."

"Well, Spock, any news?" asked Kirk when the meeting took place.

"I must beam down and attempt a physical contact, Captain."

"With mist? How can you do that?"

"I have been running a detailed study, Captain, and if you look closely, you'll observe that those clouds are very dense. Their shapes vary, but not to a great extent. Sensors, while they can analyse the outer surface, cannot penetrate inside. Those clouds, therefore, have a physical substance."

"You mean they could be a craft of some sort?"

"A possibility, Captain, but I detected no opening. However, I did notice that the clouds which rise up possess a lesser luminosity than the ones coming down. Whether it is significant is impossible to ascertain at this stage."

"Why do you think the sensors can't penetrate the clouds?"

"Unknown, Captain. It could be merely a freak occurrence due to many possible factors, like... "

"What you're saying, Spock," interrupted McCoy with his well-known impatience, "is that those clouds may be just what they seem - clouds!"

"Nevertheless, we've got to try something, Bones," Kirk said, "and we have nothing else to go on. The Doctor and I will beam down with you, Spock. Each of us will keep an eye on the other, and stun him should he be affected. The

clouds of mist seem to take over only one mind at a time."

"They may be able to do more than that, Captain."

"A risk we'll have to take."

"Captain, I still think I should go alone."

"If they're stronger than you, they'll make you kill yourself, Spock, and nothing will have been achieved except your death. My decision is final; we beam down with you."

The meeting over, the Captain gave instructions to the Chief Engineer to help the First Officer to set up a special scanner, in order to avoid materialising inside a cloud of mist. He also ordered phasers which could stun only for the landing party, to ensure a degree of safety.

The three officers materialised at a safe distance from the nearest cloud of mist. Kirk and McCoy followed Spock as he approached the supposed alien life form. "I can sense pressure," said Kirk, with a frown.

"Yes, Jim, so can I," McCoy agreed.

The Vulcan tentatively touched the white cloud and recoiled from it. His hands flew to his head and he fell to his knees, moans of pain escaping him.

"Spock!" Kirk tried to run to him, only to fall, and McCoy fell heavily on top of him. Thin tendrils of mist were encircling their ankles and moved to their wrists when they attempted to free themselves. McCoy was completely immobilised, but Kirk, after a struggle, felt the tendrils give way. He got up quickly.

The pressure in his head was increasing, and he fought it as he ran to Spock. The Vulcan was now lying near the cloud and seemed to be choking under a thin layer of white vapour.

"You'll kill him! Leave him alone!" shouted the Captain, trying to drag Spock away.

He was unable to move the First Officer, and his head was bursting under the tremendous pressure. Something snapped in his mind.

McCoy, unable to move to intervene, saw the Captain seize one of the abandoned knives of the survey crew with the horror of watching a recurring nightmare.

"Jim, don't!" he shouted desperately, fighting against his bonds.

Kirk was swaying as though drunk, standing over Spock with the knife in his hand. He took a couple of steps backward with obvious difficulty. "No!" he gasped in a choked voice. "I won't...I'll...kill myself...rather than him!"

McCoy saw with increased horror the knife turn in his hand. It seemed that either way, one of his friends would die.

The cloud of mist had left Spock to concentrate on Kirk, and the Vulcan seized his Captain's hand. "Jim..."

"No! Let me go...or it'll make me kill you!" screamed Kirk, his other hand pressed to his head in agony.

With a tremendous effort, Spock reached out to him and touched his face, and Kirk crumpled on top of him.

"Spock!" shouted McCoy anxiously. The knife was somewhere between them!

"He did not harm me, Doctor," said the First Officer, extricating the knife and throwing it as far away as he could. "Take care. It may be your turn next."

"These barbarians have no right..." He stopped as the pressure in his head increased so sharply that he had no chance to fight it. His bonds fell away and he picked up a nasty pointed stone.

Spock pushed Kirk away and tried to get up, but was unable to. The movement revived the Captain and he started at the sight of McCoy trying to batter Spock. He threw himself on the doctor and pulled him back and the Vulcan was able to apply the nerve pinch.

"That's enough!" said Kirk firmly. "We beam back up and put this planet off limits."

"Captain, I believe I could make contact."

"Spock, they'll only take control of your mind."

"They have not succeeded up to now, Captain."

"So that's why they had McCoy and me try to kill you?"

"Captain, I think I understand how to reach them. May I attempt it?"

"Are you fit enough?" asked Kirk worriedly, helping him to sit up.

"Yes, I was able to resist them."

"I'm not letting you run such a risk," Kirk said abruptly.

"Captain, I have no choice."

"Why?"

"They are powerful and are slowly draining my strength. I could only stop this by killing them, and I can't do that. Unless I merge very soon, I will be unable to restore my mind to its normal level."

Kirk stood still, shocked. Would this nightmare never end?

Instinctively, he seized Spock's hand, as though to stop the process, but he was determined. "I'll come with you, Spock."

"Captain..."

"I may not be much help, Spock, but I'm not letting you face those aliens alone!"

"Then we'll have to mind meld."

"Agreed, but what if they try to make me kill you again?"

"I doubt that that would be possible while we were melded, Captain."

"Then go ahead, Spock. Bones will be safe for the moment."

Kirk felt the gentle touch of Spock's mind with the usual inner thrill he always welcomed. On that level alone did Spock let him cross the barriers, and they could merge in a true affinity of thought and close friendship both appreciated.

"Do we now approach a cloud?"

"I believe they are coming to us, Captain."

Spock was right. A large shape hovered nearby and slowly came over, then started to settle. Spock said urgently, "Don't resist, Jim, or no contact will be achieved. Let yourself go - follow me."

Kirk obeyed, letting himself be led by his First Officer with complete trust, and he could truthfully say that he felt little fear. Whatever awaited them, they would face it together.

A grey mist surrounded them. It was cold and the Captain sensed that Spock was shivering. Before he could try to help, the mist disappeared and a hot glow of bursting lights made them shut their eyes, blinded.

"Welcome, if you come in peace," a soft voice said.

Kirk opened his eyes slowly and blinked. He must be dreaming!

They were inside the cloud and hovering near them was a small being, no taller than a young child, with incredibly beautiful and delicate features and brilliant yellow eyes. The contrast of the rich silver robe and the pure gold of long hair added to the sense of beauty. A little behind the alien, several others looked at the visitors, half curious and half afraid.

The atmosphere was no longer cold and damp, but warm and comfortable. Their surroundings sparkled with myriads of tiny crystal lights reflecting colour among soft and fleecy patterns of mist.

"It's like being in fairyland!" exclaimed Kirk.

"But this is real, Captain."

"Yes, it's real all right." He studied the small alien with wonder. The cherub-like being only needed a pair of wings to resemble an angel. Kirk looked at his back, but no wings were there. The features, however, when studied closely, were adult in spite of the impression of youth.

"Who are you?" he asked the alien.

"My name is Yehor. I was chosen by my people to contact the so-beautiful dark-haired alien who could not kill."

A small and delicately shaped hand reached out and touched Spock's hair, to his embarrassment, while the Captain was amused.

"You have night in your hair and night in your eyes," said Yehor in a soft melodious tone which conveyed emotion, at the same time stroking the black hair, "and yet any darkness inside you is well controlled and hidden by clear light."

Spock was not at ease and only tolerated the stroking of his hair in order not to upset the alien. Yehor continued, touching his face in a soft gesture, more like a lover's caress, "Your eyes... We never thought that black could be such a beautiful colour! Why did you bring the ugly one from the killer race?" the alien added, turning to Kirk.

The Captain smiled, amused by Spock's embarrassment at being the centre of several admirers, as other aliens had come closer and were also trying to stroke his hair.

"No, he is mine," stated Yehor categorically. They retreated, to the First Officer's relief, and he moved a little further from Yehor.

"Captain Kirk is not ugly or from a killer race," stated Spock. "You are the ones who killed."

"We killed no-one."

"You made my men kill each other!" protested Kirk.

"Why did your people kill the Oldest? What harm had he done you?"

It soon became clear that Kirk and Spock's assumption had been right. The survey team had materialised in the middle of a cloud of mist and killed the 'Oldest' without being aware of it. "He was too slow to get out of the way and he lived alone," said Yehor with great sadness.

"It was an accident, we didn't know!" assured Kirk.

"We wondered about that," replied Yehor, "but the four beings started chasing us and one of them fired something which hurt, so we had to defend ourselves. We couldn't contact them to talk to, but we could contact the darkness in them and we released it. They killed each other and we were safe."

"Humans are not telepathic; that is why you were unable to contact them," explained Spock.

Yehor nodded and continued. "Then you came - three of you - and two were also members of the killer race, while the other was different and very strong."

We could not reach him, and we were afraid. So we attacked again, and you returned to your ship. We thought you had left, but you came back. The dark one wanted to meet us, which made us curious, but we were too afraid of what he did, so we attacked again, and failed. It was then that we agreed to a contact with the dark one, and we were able to drain his strength so that perhaps he would not be too strong for us. We saw that in spite of our antagonism he would not kill and wanted above all to find out more about us. But why did you bring him?" finished Yehor, indicating Kirk.

"He is my Captain and my friend, and he is not a killer," repeated Spock patiently. "Both of our minds can be seen by you now. We are telling the truth - we regret the accidental death of the Oldest."

"Submit to full contact and we'll be sure."

Kirk and Spock complied. The alien probe was so thorough that the First Officer found it unpleasant. Kirk protested. "You've no right to upset Spock. He's a Vulcan, and Vulcans respect mental privacy, unlike your species!"

"Is that what the beautiful one is? A Vulcan? A beautiful name." Regretfully, Yehor stopped the probing. "You were right. You never meant to kill. We are sorry. Four of us are ready to follow you to replace the lost ones. But we have a problem."

"What is that?" asked Kirk.

"We all want to belong to the beautiful one."

Kirk nearly smiled at Spock's embarrassment but refrained from comment. "We don't want any of you to leave your people to follow us," he assured. "We must try to forget this misunderstanding and be friends from now on."

"Thank you, Captain Kirk. We are not sure we could have lived on your ship. We depend on our shell, or what you call 'the cloud of mist', for life support. But I regret not going with you," added Yehor to Spock with a sad smile.

"Why do you like Spock so much?" asked Kirk, half teasing, but interested.

"Perhaps because he is different from us. We never saw such beings with black hair and black eyes, to say nothing of such beautifully shaped ears... To us he is fascinating."

Kirk grinned as Yehor added with a sigh, "With the beautiful one, I would want to be female."

"You mean... You can be male once, and female the next time?" asked the Captain, with typical Human curiosity.

"Yes, of course. I can be what I choose to be according to what my selected partner wants."

Spock retreated hastily from Yehor's roach and Kirk came to his help with a hidden smile. "A concept which is very alien to us, I'm afraid, Yehor. We should get back soon, or my men will worry. Do not fear; this planet belongs to your people, and we will not interfere."

"We do not mind visitors, especially dark ones like him," replied Yehor, pointing to Spock.

"I'll send a report about your people to our Old ones and they'll decide," assured Kirk. With Spock's assistance he gave a brief explanation of the Federation's ways and absolute policy of non-interference.

Before leaving, they were shown inside the cloud of mist and marvelled at the beautiful tiny lights, which were droplets of moisture reflecting light and colour. It was explained that from time to time, the clouds of mist rose high into the sky to collect a supply of sunlight which was stored inside the damp layer and used gradually.

The aliens lived by absorption of elements from the air and from the

moisture, through the skin, a very simple process which fascinated Spock, as did their geometrical pattern of lights. Kirk was sorry to interfere with his First Officer's interest, but they had to return to the ship.

They emerged from the cloud of mist to find a frozen-looking McCoy pacing up and down to get warm. The doctor would have waited until frozen stiff rather than leave without them!

"About time! Are you all right? Have you dealt with those fiends?"

"They're not fiends, Bones, they're little angels," smiled Kirk. "And one of them actually fell for the Angel of Darkness."

"What?... Have you gone mad?"

"Let's beam back to the ship, Bones. I must get my report on Elo'an to Starfleet as soon as possible, and deal with Denberg. He won't be pleased when he hears that he has no job to do here."

Kirk was glad of his First Officer's assistance in dealing with Denberg, how had been waiting for them impatiently. To have to accept that Elo'an's riches would never belong to his company was not to the man's taste and he retired to his quarters, rather upset, but knowing he had no choice.

After making his report to Starfleet, Kirk settled into the command chair and noticed that Spock was preoccupied. He called the Vulcan over.

"Anything wrong, Spock?" he asked in a low voice.

"Captain, you referred to me once before as Satan, and today as 'Angel of Darkness'. Do I really look like that?"

"Maybe you do, Spock," replied Kirk, his eyes smiling with friendliness. "Which just goes to show that it's illogical to judge by appearances."

"A very logical statement, Captain, and no-one aboard ever told me..."

"Told you what, Spock?" interrupted McCoy, who had just arrived on the bridge.

"That I resembled the famous Angel of Darkness."

"I should hope not!" exclaimed the doctor heatedly, "and if anyone does, just let me know and I'll deal with him!"

Kirk laughed at McCoy's glare and Spock's raised eyebrow as Scotty remarked with apparent innocence, "Why Doctor, the Vulcans have no better champions than you!"

Laughter became general and McCoy joined in with good humour while the two Vulcan eyebrows shot up in wonder at such insane behaviour. The First Officer returned to his station, ignoring the undignified mirth behind him.

Kirk stopped laughing and followed Spock with his eyes. You may have night in your hair and night in your eyes, Spock, he thought, remembering Yehor's words, but to us you'll never be the Angel of Darkness!

Chief Baillie: Did you shave this morning, Hansen?

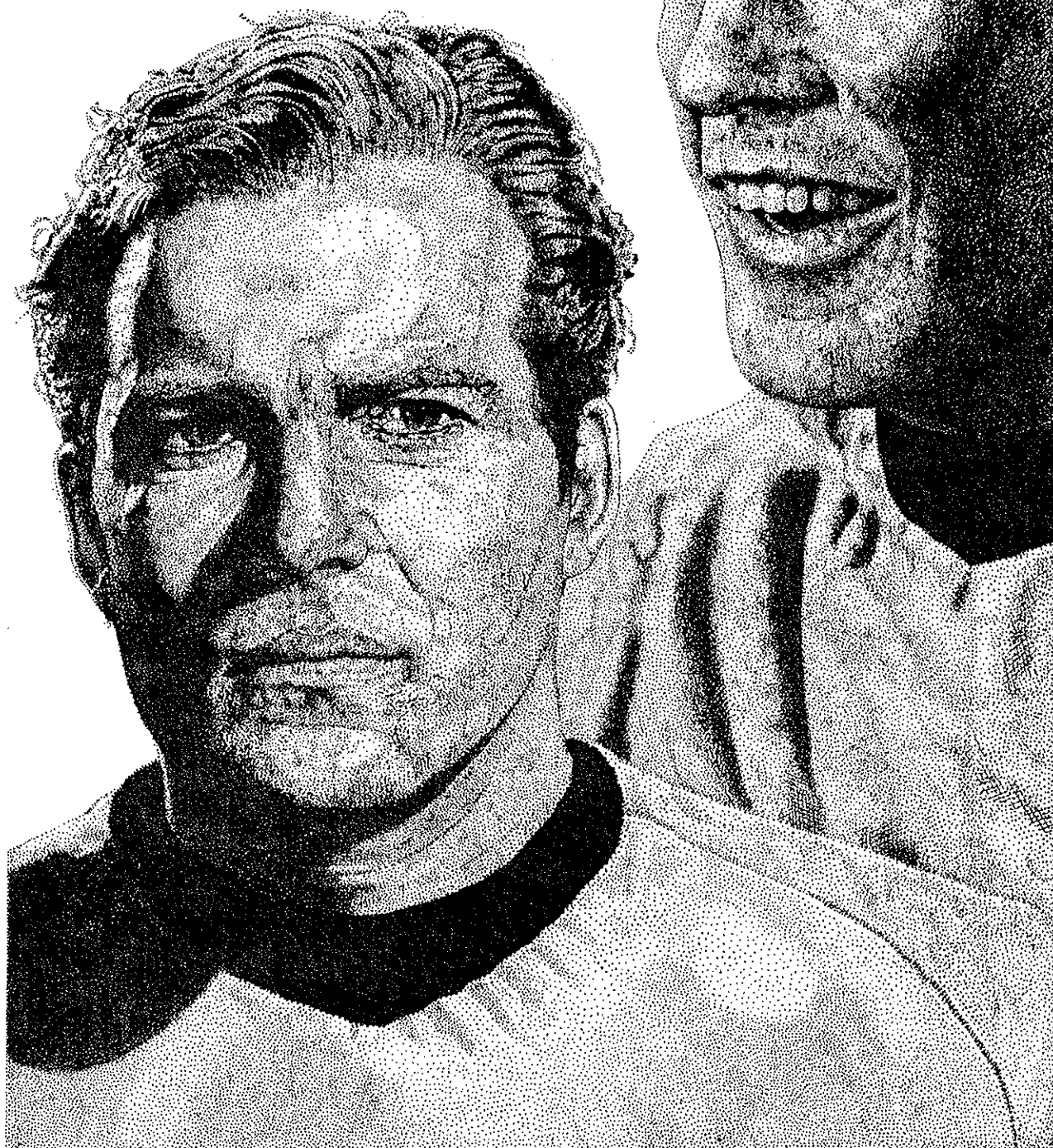
Ensign Hansen: Yes, sir.

Baillie: Well, next time stand closer to the razor.

* * * * *

McCoy warns - anyone who goes to a psychiatrist ought to have his head examined.

The Bird of
Time



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Transience

The Bird of Time has but a little way
To fly - and lo! the Bird is on the Wing.

Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam

* * * * *

For the hundredth time Jim Kirk paused in his aimless pacing and glared balefully at the unheeding facade of the Guardian of Forever. He knew a little more now about its operation, and it was certainly not functioning as he had expected.

There were two methods by which a traveller could return - after a specified interval in the time to which he had gone, or by retracing his steps to his exact point of entry, and calling the Guardian to his assistance. Spock, uncertain how long it would take him to locate his own younger self, and to repair the damaged time-line, had opted for the latter method.

Kirk also knew that time passed differently when the Guardian was in operation - on that first journey into Earth's past he and Spock had been away for some weeks, while for Scotty and the landing party only seconds had elapsed; and on this latest disastrous expedition he, Spock and Erickson had spent two and a half days in the Orion Empire, though in 'real' time they had been gone only thirty minutes.

So where was Spock? More than five hours had passed for Kirk since the Vulcan had stepped into the vortex of the Guardian; the Human had waited stubbornly, ignoring all attempts to persuade him to return to the Enterprise.

"He failed, Jim - accept that." McCoy had been the last to try. "But the ship is still here, and your friends... Thelin's a good officer, I'll vouch for that."

"No!" Kirk snapped, sick with misery. Of course, Thelin was the only First Officer this McCoy knew, he had no personal interest in the problems of a strange Vulcan... but Kirk could not forget a pair of dark eyes that gazed trustingly, half-smiling, into his. "I'll wait, Doctor."

And he did wait, for another interminable hour, the realisation gradually growing in him that Spock would not be coming back.

Time... So confused, so convoluted... They should never have meddled with it. Had not Edith's fate been warning enough? And now... Spock dead, at seven years, a small, confused and very lonely child...

Thelin was still on the ship... So the child had died... Or had Spock succeeded, then somehow been unable to return, become lost in the past? He had to know... Deliberately Kirk opened his communicator and called the ship.

"Captain! Are ye ready to beam up?" came Scotty's anxious enquiry.

"Negative. Send me down a Vulcan desert cloak, survival rations and a medical kit, Scotty."

"Sir! Are ye sure...?"

"Mr. Scott, that was an order!" Kirk's tone was glacial, and he received in response a chastened "Aye, Captain." Moments later the requested items shimmered into existence.

Kirk pulled the cloak's concealing hood around his face and advanced determinedly towards the Guardian. "I want to visit the planet Vulcan, just outside the city of ShiKahr; time..." He paused, remembering. "The twenty-first day of Tasmeen." That was the closest he could come, allowing that Spock had achieved his purpose. "And Guardian - set me down as close as possible to Commander Spock's point of entry. I will request return when ready."

"Time and place are ready to receive you," came the Guardian's sonorous tones. "The entry point coincides exactly."

Without a moment's hesitation Kirk stepped through the time portal.

He materialised on a barren, rocky hillside; almost at his feet a slab of rock bore a faint mark, Spock's indication of his point of return. He added his own initials, on the faint chance that Spock might even yet find his way here during his absence, and would know from that that Kirk was looking for him. Then, turning his face in the direction of the city, Kirk set out on his quest.

The route was familiar to him, for he had walked these hills with Spock; it was difficult to realise that in fact those expeditions lay in the future. Once within the city however his steps slowed uncertainly as he wondered what to do - it would be risky to call at the house and ask for Selek - Sarek was not easily deceived, and if he saw Kirk now he would surely remember the encounter when he boarded the Enterprise... It would create yet another anomaly in time, with unpredictable results.

Kirk halted across the street from Sarek's house, considering his best approach; then he shrank back behind a concealing pillar as the house door opened and Sarek himself emerged, escorting an elderly Vulcan dressed in the robes of a Healer. Behind him came Amanda, and at her side... It could only be Spock. Kirk stared in fascination at the child who would one day become his First Officer and friend; then realised suddenly that if the child was here, Spock must have succeeded in his mission.

So, where was he? The presence of a Healer... That was disturbing...

After exchanging farewells with his host the Healer turned to leave; Kirk thought rapidly, then making sure that the others had re-entered the house he stepped forward and greeted the Vulcan.

"Forgive the intrusion," he said softly, "but may I speak to you for a moment?" He blessed the fact that Spock had taught him Vulcan so carefully - it was unlikely that the man would speak Terran.

"How may I serve you?" The Healer was politely curious, recognising the stranger as Human.

"I had arranged to meet an associate of mine, a distant cousin of Sarek's named Selek. He was not at the meeting place, and I thought to enquire at the house, but I do not wish to intrude if there is illness."

"No - no illness, Sarek merely wished to be reassured that his son was well - the child was involved in an accident last night. However, I fear that you are too late; Sarek informed me that his cousin Selok continued his journey early this morning. Perhaps you may overtake him on the road."

Kirk bowed. "Thank you for your courtesy, sir. I will do as you suggest."

The Healer watched him go thoughtfully; really, these Humans were not too bad when you got used to them. The Lady Amanda for example was a model Vulcan wife, and the young man who had spoken to him had been properly respectful. Yes, he thought, I will vote in council to further our association with Earth.

Kirk retraced his steps, frowning. Spock had left Sarek's house, and could only have been trying to return; but he had not reached the entry point. Had he, perhaps, been injured, sought shelter? Otherwise Kirk would have met him on the road... There were no dwellings the way he had come, but Kirk remembered suddenly that Spock had once shown him a complex of caves in the foothills... he might be there, unable to continue his journey... Kirk quickened his pace.

The caves were cool, and Kirk welcomed the respite from the blazing sun; but he knew that for Spock the temperature would be uncomfortably cold. At first he searched at random, but his usual clear-headedness reminded him that one of the caves contained a natural spring, and was therefore the most likely place for the Vulcan to be...if indeed he was within the caves at all.

He had forgotten that part of the cavern roof had fallen in, admitting a flood of light that revealed a huddled shape sprawled against the rear wall. Kirk hurried across and knelt to turn the limp body gently; it was Spock.

He closed his eyes, savouring for a moment the sheer relief of finding his friend alive; but as he brushed back the hood of the desert cloak he recoiled in shock when his hand touched the burning heat of the Vulcan's skin.

Gently Kirk opened the cloak, and saw that beneath the concealing folds the sleeves of Spock's tunic had been slashed to ribbons, stained green with blood. Long scratches disfigured his arms, the flesh swollen and angry. For a moment anger set him trembling - how could Sarek have allowed him to leave in this condition? - then he realised that Spock had probably concealed his injuries and tried to return to the Enterprise for treatment in case a Vulcan Healer detected the Human elements in his blood and became suspicious.

Kirk shrugged off his own cloak and opened the medical kit he had brought, carefully cleaning the vicious scars and bandaging them; then he covered Spock with both cloaks, and brought him water from the spring.

As he raised the dark head to his shoulder Spock's eyes flickered open; the Vulcan seemed to have some difficulty in focussing as he peered at Kirk through a haze of pain.

At last, with some difficulty, he managed, "Jim!"

"Yes, of course. Drink this, Spock - you must be thirsty."

Spock swallowed avidly, the cool water soothing his parched throat. "You should not have come," he said at last. "It is dangerous...you could alter the future..."

"It was altered, for me," Kirk said, his voice rough with emotion. "You didn't come back. Thelin was still on the ship... I had to find you, Spock."

The dark eyes dropped before his. "Thank you, Jim."

Kirk produced a laugh that was very close to tears. "One does not thank logic," he quoted. "I didn't fancy trying to command a ship I didn't know, with a total stranger as First Officer, instead of... and besides, there could have been other differences that I didn't have time to discover."

Spock looked up again, his eyes lighting in his half smile. "Thank you, anyway," he whispered; then he shuddered as a spasm of pain racked him.

"What's wrong?"

"Last night...the...the child...was attacked by a le-matya; between us the sehlat and I overcame it. But...the sehlat died...and I am dying."

"No!" Kirk's arms tightened in instinctive denial.

"It is no use, Jim." The Vulcan sighed at his friend's vehemence. "The bite of a le-matya is poisonous to Vulcans... there is no cure."

"But you are half Human." Kirk was frantic.

"Yes; that has given me a little resistance, but no immunity. Death is inevitable."

Kirk stared down in horror at the tranquil face; was this how it was to end, in a confused web of Time's weaving?

"No," he repeated stubbornly. "There must be something I can do - I won't let you die."

"You have no choice, Jim. Even if I was able to reach the Guardian and return to our own time, there is nothing that could be done for me. But I am... pleased," his voice dropped to a whisper, "that you are with me."

There was no reply Kirk could make in words. He could only settle the

Vulcan's head more comfortably on his shoulder, hoping that his physical presence and his touch - the only one from which Spock did not shrink - would comfort his friend.

After a time Spock seemed to fall into a light sleep, and Kirk allowed the grief and worry to show in his eyes as he looked down at the pale face against his shoulder. Everything in him rebelled at this stupid waste - Spock had saved his younger self, only to die in doing so; what was the point? And he, Kirk - what awaited him now? What would he find on the other side of the Guardian? He shuddered at the thought of returning, his memories intact, to an Enterprise where Thelin held Spock's place...and there could be other changes, so that he would find himself a stranger in a world he had loved.

Worst of all was the grief he felt for the future Spock would never see now, the years of companionship that were lost to them both, all the plans they had made... And just as he had begun to accept his Human blood.

His Human blood... Kirk thought about that very carefully, refusing to allow himself to hope. It was ridiculous, illogical...but Kirk was too much of a fighter to let even the smallest chance slip by untested. Gently, he laid Spock down and turned to pick up the medical kit.

Kirk had just finished redressing the last of the scratches when Spock stirred and woke; aware of some difference he glanced down, saw the fresh dressings and raised puzzled eyes to his Captain.

"What have you done?"

"I was only trying to make you more comfortable." Trying to speak lightly Kirk lifted the water flask. "Would you like another drink?"

Suspicious, the Vulcan watched him carefully and saw that as Kirk moved he deliberately concealed his left hand. Spock reached out and turned the Human towards him; Kirk was not quick enough to conceal the bandage around his left wrist.

"What have you done?" Spock repeated.

"Spock, I had to try it," Kirk said. "I thought...the Human elements in your blood slowed your reaction to the poison...it seemed possible that Human blood might therefore contain an antidote. I gave you a sedative to keep you out, opened the scratches and dressed them with a mixture of antiseptic powder and my blood. I gave you more blood by injection..."

"And seriously weakened yourself in the process," interrupted Spock, seeing the pallor of the Human's face. "You should not have risked yourself...I cannot believe it will do any good."

"I had to try," Kirk repeated stubbornly; and Spock sighed, aware of his Captain's determination.

"Rest, then," he said, pulling Kirk down beside him. After a moment he continued, "Jim... I am grateful."

Kirk gave his arm a reassuring pat, and settled down. Despite his intention to keep watch he was soon asleep. Outside the cave the shadows lengthened towards evening.

Kirk awoke several times during the night. On the first occasion it was dark and very cold, so he used his phaser to heat a section of the cave wall. The dim glow from the heated rock was not bright enough to disturb Spock, but gave enough light for Kirk to see what he was doing as he drew more blood from the vein in his arm and injected it into Spock. He repeated the dose each time he woke, unable to tell if the treatment was having any effect, but continuing with it as the only thing he could do. The drain on his own reserves of strength was considerable, however, and at last he fell into a deep, exhausted sleep.



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mirror

The sun was high in the sky when Kirk next awoke, its questing rays filling the alcove with a gentle warmth that held the promise of the scorching heat to come.

Kirk went to drink at the spring, then refilled the water flask and moved back to Spock; the Vulcan was awake, watching him with fever-filled eyes. Smiling a reassurance he did not feel Kirk reached for the hypo, but Spock's powerful hands closed around his arm.

"No, Jim."

"But I must try..."

"You have tried, but it is too late. I know I do not have long... It is pointless to weaken yourself further. I am dying, Jim."

The dark eyes held no fear, only concern and a wistful regret. Kirk's instinctive denial died unspoken as he accepted that Spock did indeed know his own condition.

"I wanted you to live," he whispered.

"I know. It seems that it was not meant that we should continue together. Jim, will you... Will you remain with me, until...?"

"Do you need to ask?" Kirk lifted despairing eyes to his friend. "Then what?" he asked dully. "What can I do...when...?"

"You will return to the Enterprise," Spock replied firmly. "Be her Captain as you have always been mine. In that time line you will be the only one who remembers that once I stood at your side...but Jim, look to your future - you have still so much to do."

"Without you, it no longer seems important, but I will do as you ask."

Spock's eyes lightened, and he reached out to clasp Kirk's hand firmly; the Human knelt in silence, watching the pale face intently, unwilling to lose one moment of Spock's companionship, one glance from those unshielded eyes. He was numb, his grief was contained for the moment, but he knew that when he returned to that unfamiliar Enterprise the absence of his trusted friend would be almost intolerable...and there would be no-one to understand, no-one to share his grief.

Kirk's hand tightened as Spock's breathing grew harsher, more laboured. Slipping his arm under Spock he raised the dark head to his shoulder, gazing down in anguish.

"Jim..." Spock's hand rose, brushed Kirk's eyes. "Your tears...for me..."

"Don't leave me," Kirk choked helplessly.

"It seems that I must." Spock smiled then, his rare delightful smile that as always tore Kirk's heart. There was a moment's silence, then the dark eyes widened suddenly. "Jim...I was wrong...the other side...the other side of time..." His head fell back on Kirk's shoulder.

"What do you mean?" Kirk began, then fell silent in horrified realisation. The slim body was heavy in his arms, the skin already cooling; as he moved the dark head rolled limply on his shoulder.

"No! Oh no!" With a groan of despair Kirk pulled his friend closer, burying his face in the silky hair; slow tears spilled from his eyes unnoticed as he wept quietly, bitterly.

It was mid-afternoon when Kirk paused at the entrance of the cave, turning back for one last look at the low pile of stones that concealed an unmarked grave; then, heedless of the blazing sun he set his face to the path and walked slowly, determinedly back to the contact point.

Almost he wished the journey longer, dreading the moment when he would step onto the bridge without Spock's presence at his side. Instead there would be Thelin, an unknown quantity...but Kirk was aware that the Andorian, however competent he might prove to be, would never take the place of his Vulcan. If only McCoy had remembered too...at least then there would have been someone to understand, to share the pain...

So absorbed was Kirk in his sombre thoughts that he scarcely noticed when the swirling mists of the Guardian reached for him; only the cooler temperature of the ruined planet roused him for a moment, and he pulled out his communicator.

"Kirk to Enterprise."

"Enterprise - Scott here."

"Stand by, Mr. Scott." Kirk paused for a moment before saying the words. "One... One to beam up."

He started awake, roused by the insistent bleep of the intercom. "Yes?"

"The Captain is coming aboard, Commander."

"Thank you." He deactivated the screen and sank into a chair, pressing his hands to his eyes to dispell the memory of the dream... No, not a dream, he thought suddenly. What, then?

But he knew. Dressing hurriedly he left his quarters, heading directly for the transporter room. "Has the Captain beamed up yet?" he asked.

"No, sir." Kyle did not seem surprised at the question. "I've just been notified that he appeared on the sensors, but he hasn't given the order to beam him up yet."

"Very well; I will handle the controls myself. Dismissed." Alone, he waited only a few moments before he received the expected call.

"Kirk to Enterprise. Energise."

The familiar figure shimmered out of silver mist into safe reality, and his eyes were soft as he watched the arrival. "Captain?"

There was no response. Kirk's shoulders were slumped as though beneath an intolerable weight, his eyes cast down as he carefully descended from the transporter platform.

"Captain? Jim!"

The bowed head lifted at that, and the dull eyes narrowed painfully. "Hallucinations already?" Laughter rasped harshly in the Human's throat. "Go away - you're not real."

"Jim, I am real." Spock stepped forward, catching Kirk's arms in a painful grip, shaking him slightly to emphasise the words.

"How...? I don't understand." Kirk shook his head, trying to clear his thoughts. One hand rose and gently, carefully explored Spock's head and face, seeking out the well-known features. "You - here? Then the Guardian..." The Human was trembling with shock. "You were dead... I watched you die, hold you, buried you... I didn't imagine it, Spock; an illusion couldn't have hurt so much."

"You did not imagine it," Spock agreed. "I saw what you saw - at first I thought it a dream. Now I believe it was your mind reaching for mine across time."

"It's not possible," Kirk breathed, but hope shone in his eyes. "You went back to repair the damaged time line, and died as an adult. How can you be here?"

"The child survived, and grew to manhood to become your First Officer, Jim," the Vulcan replied. "I think we were caught in a loop in time - the 'I' who was Selek died of the le-matya's bite, but the child... I can detect only one difference, Jim - I did not travel with you to the Orion Empire."

"So..." Kirk hesitated. "All is as it was when we reached the Guardian?"

"I am sure of it. My memories are clear until then, but the events you recall since your return from the Empire are to me only a confused vision seen through your eyes."

"Selek?"

"Even that. He saved me, but I understand now - he was not my adult self, as we thought, but the 'I' from a different time line. We are as we were, Jim - I do not think I could bear it if they were different." The last words were almost whispered, and Kirk, echoing the Vulcan's relief, sagged slightly, feeling the powerful arm encircle his shoulders in support. For a moment the two stood in silence, simply allowing their joy to flow from mind to mind; then Kirk drew a deep breath, and straightened.

"The Guardian..." he said thoughtfully.

"Is more dangerous than we knew," Spock finished for him. "I will report on this - we cannot risk using the portal again until we understand much more."

"If we ever do," Kirk's voice was very soft, "if we ever do, Spock, it must be together. I couldn't go through that again."

"Nor I," Spock admitted quietly.

Kirk's eyes were lifting to Spock's when the transporter room door opened abruptly, and he turned away.

"So there you are!" McCoy's voice rang with indignation. "If you've quite finished playing hide and seek, Mr. Spock, I'm ready for your medical. My instruments are all recalibrated."

"You don't know the half!" Kirk chuckled.

"Huh?"

"You might have had...to recalibrate...for an Andorian!"

Even Spock seemed mildly amused at that, and McCoy snorted in indignation. "Andorian, Vulcans, whatever... I'll tell you, Jim Kirk, there are times when you're weirder than any of them!

THE CHOICE IS MADE by Sheila Clark

Five hundred pounds...
 The weight of three grown men.
 This place is inhospitable --
 Those left behind will surely die.
 Three to die that four may live...
 Which three? When Boma said
 "Draw lots" -- the thought appealed,
 For then the choice would not be mine.
 But Jim would not allow himself
 The luxury of dodging the decision --
 Nor then must I. The choice
 Has to be mine.
 Five hundred pounds...three men...
 The woman is too light; so too
 Is Mr. Gactano. Mr. Scott
 Is needed on the ship, and so must get
 The chance to go. Dr. McCoy
 Is likewise needed; his subordinates
 Though good, lack his proficiency.
 That only leaves
 Boma and Latimer -- and I myself.
 Logic provides the answer;
 The choice is made.

SONNET by Theresa Holmes

I had no other world, no other home,
 Yet, solace, even here, was I denied.
 From solitude my caged thoughts would roam,
 Returning silent, aching, so to hide.
 For oh! my mind was troubled, filled with shame,
 My chosen path had long been empty hell;
 I seemed to have disgraced proud Vulcan's name
 By yearning after -- what? I could not tell.....
 Until its radiance filled my weary night,
 And breathed upon my soul a gentle prayer;
 Then shadows gladly died in blessed light,
 And faded ghosts, rejoicing in their slayer.
 When first his smile my wondering spirit kissed
 All care dissolved, dispersed like morning mist.

MIRROR ? MIRROR by Sandie Cowden

The viewscreen filled them all with awe,
 As Human men afraid they saw --
 Two men with weapons, full of fear,
 Confronted by a monster queer,
 A creature with a gaping maw,
 And tentacles and writhing claw,,
 Reached out to catch them in a grip,
 Their heads to crush, their limbs to rip.
 The image faded from their sight;
 Uhura tried with all her might
 But could not trace the view once more
 That shocked them to the very core.
 "Our ship was ordered to this place
 To contact there this unknown race,
 And we must therefore beam right down
 And do our duty without frown."
 The Captain turned to face his crew,
 "I'm speaking now to all of you."
 "But Captain," interrupted Spock,
 "If all these readings do not mock --
 They are not what they seem to be.
 They do not seem at all like we."
 "Oh, sir! He have that view here now!"
 Uhura calls, and adds, "Well, how!
 It's not true fact, but fiction, so --
 It's what they call a TV show."
 "Ah now I see," said Spock aloud,
 As he addressed the bridge crew crowd.
 "All their ideas of wondrous fear,
 Are bipeds, stiff of limb and queer.
 They know that THEY'RE a handsome race --
 We're but monsters from outer space!"
