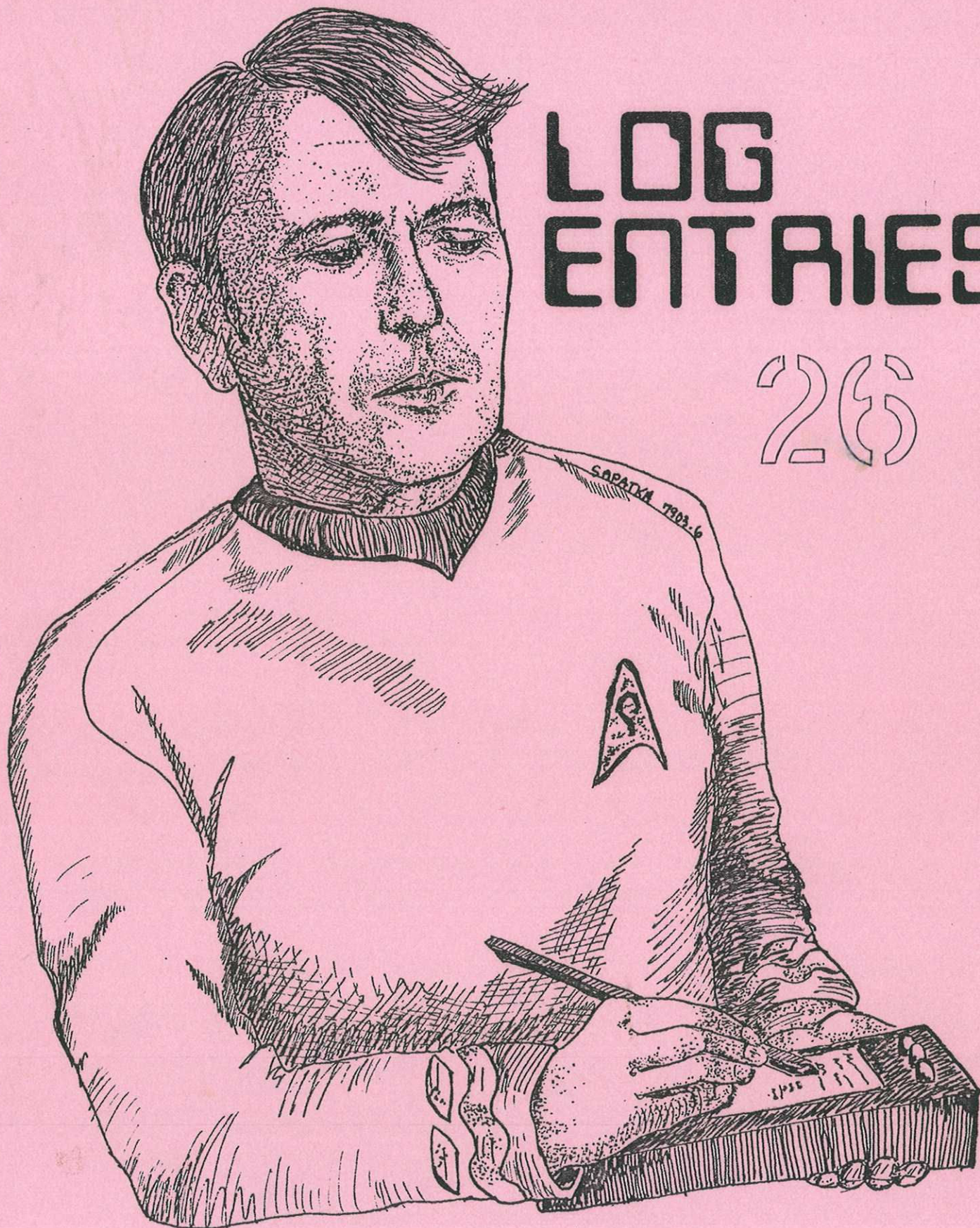


LOG ENTRIES

26



A Star Trek Fanzine

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Artwork

Cover - Sandy Sapatka
P2 - S Ward
P21 - Ann Neilson

Editor - Sheila Clark
Assistant Editor - Valerie Piacentini
Typing - Sheila Clark
Proofreading - Teresa Hewitt
Printing - Janet Quarton (and James T.)
Collating - Alison Rooney, Peter Grant, Nickie Moore, Linda Hannah, Hilda McCabe, Lorraine Godison, Cory King

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STAG Committee - Janet Quarton (President), Sheila Clark, Beth Hallam, Sylvia Billings, Valerie Piacentini.

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Hello, everyone, and welcome to Log Entries 26. (I'm beginning to lose count - have to check to see which issue it is!)

There doesn't seem to be much to say this time. At least we've been able to hold the U.K. price this time, although the foreign rate has had to go up a little more - the post office put a horrible 30% onto packet rates. However, this time we hope that we've reached equilibrium and that we'll be able to hold these prices for a while.

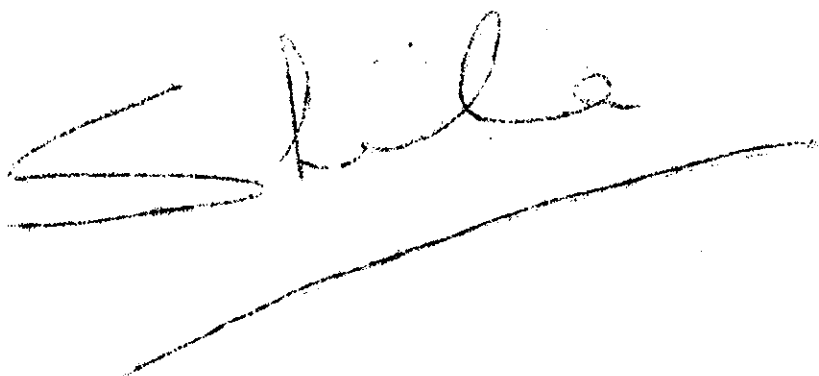
We'll be increasing the print run with this issue... again. When we started, we printed 100 copies of Log Entries 1; with issues 2 & 3, we went up to 150; a little later we increased to 200; then to 250. About six months ago, we upped the run to 300, and we're still running out of print within six months. At the moment, we have 12 zines in print, and some of them are running low; a few months ago, we had 20 titles available. It's nice to know we're so popular, and it certainly eases the storage problem, which was the main reason we decided not to reprint on Log Entries although we do reprint on the one-offs, but it does leave us very short of zines for new members!

For this reason, I'm trying to get LE 27 into print this time round as well. Whether or not I'll manage, I don't quite know just yet - but you will, by the time you read this, for if I do, both issues will be on sale at the same time.

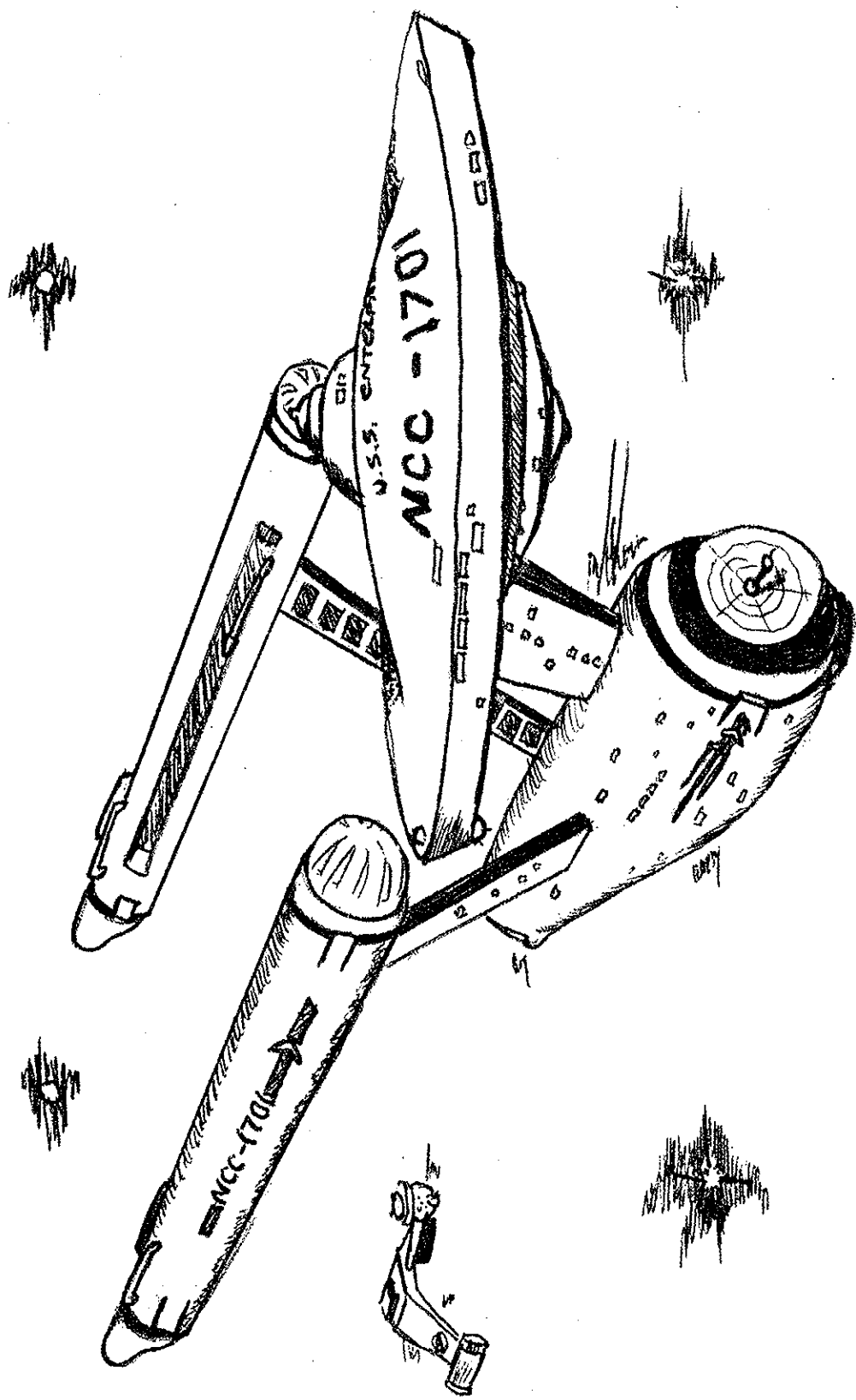
I've given Valerie the job of typing the stencils for Vice Versa 2 - with two of us doing stencils, it should mean we can get extra zines out during the course of the year. We're hoping that VV 2 will also be ready for sale the same time as LE 26, but if not, it won't be far behind.

We hope you enjoy the zine.

October 1979

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Shila', is written across the lower half of the page. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Colony 73



PRELUDE by Mary A. Smith

Had Lt. Spock not been Vulcan he would have sighed audibly as the turbolift doors opened with a whooshing sound to reveal the brown-clad figure of an Academy cadet. They were seemingly everywhere. As Spock entered the startled young man snapped to attention, dropping his armful of computer disks in the process. Spock did not even favor him with a lift of his flared eyebrows as he addressed the turbolift curtly: "Hangar deck."

The cadet bent to retrieve his scattered disks, his face brushed with a pink hue as Spock mentally calculated the number of hours until the fifty nine Academy cadets would complete their tour of exercises on board the Starship and return to their studies at the Academy. For the past 6.4 weeks the ship had been swarming with the eager young second year cadets who upset shipboard routine, interfered with discipline and alternately delighted and dismayed the crew of the U.S.S. Enterprise. Lt. Spock, whose duty it was to help supervise and train the cadets while they were aboard had begun to wonder lately if there was any justice, any logic, left in the universe. What had he done to merit this assignment he could not fathom. And if that wasn't enough the ship also carried a load of passengers from Tricon IV to Starbase Central, among them members of a medical convention which had recently taken place on Tricon IV. With their work behind them the doctors relaxed...relaxed to the extent that Captain Pike threatened them with the brig if they did not conform to shipboard rules.

Spock gazed solidly at the closed doors of the turbolift, hands behind his back, as the cadet, a young man with unruly sandy hair and warm hazel eyes, glanced at him curiously. During their six weeks on board the aloof Vulcan had gained an awesome reputation among the cadets as they discovered to their regret that he was an unyielding disciplinarian without an ounce of humor, yet undoubtedly an excellent, if exacting, teacher.

The turbolift slowed to a gentle stop as the doors slid open. Lt. Spock strode through, the cadet following with his armload of computer disks at a respectful distance. Near the shuttlecraft Galileo 7, the landing party was assembling - or attempting to assemble - for the assault on the planet below, Wobbit IV. Number One, second in command to the Captain, was trying without apparent success to gather her crew around the shuttle. She gave the Vulcan a weary grin as he approached.

"Don't look so eager, Mr. Spock," she observed, glancing down at the clipboard in her hand. "After all, this is your last assignment with the cadets. I still have two more landing parties to conduct."

"I offer you my sincerest sympathies, Ma'am," replied Spock seriously.

"I just bet you do!" laughed Number One, the tension easing momentarily from her fine-boned face. A sixth sense, heightened by experience, made both officers look around in time to see one of the cadets, a tall thin boy with wispy blond hair, pick up a small tubular casing from the sparkling array of equipment laid out on the floor by the shuttlecraft.

"Put that down!" snapped Number One, her eyes flashing. "Listen, you..." She continued to berate the cadet as she walked towards him. He hastily dropped the canister unceremoniously back on the pile of equipment.

Spock, snatching the clipboard from Number One's hand as she turned, ran a critical eye down the list of personnel and following that, the inventory of supplies for the landing party. They were taking enough equipment to set up their own science station, thought Spock disapprovingly.

"Cadet Kirk reporting for duty, sir." Spock, looking up, met the hazel eyes of the young man he had shared the elevator with. Checking his name off the clipboard, the Vulcan observed,

"You have been assigned to work with me, Mr. Kirk."

"It will be an honor, sir," replied the cadet politely.

"What is your major, Mr. Kirk?" asked Spock, curious to know the worst.

"Administration, sir," answered the young man, hazel eyes lighting with quiet humor at the dismay which slipped past the Vulcan's control. "The QAT, sir," he explained apologetically. "It said I was best qualified for administration. What can you do against a computer?"

"Indeed," commented Spock without enthusiasm.

"Ladies and gentlemen," interrupted Number One as she motioned for silence. "Your attention please. This is a scientific expedition and though you may find it difficult to believe we are not going down to this planet for your entertainment. So please - be careful. Each cadet has been assigned to a senior officer whom that cadet will obey IMMEDIATELY. Okay? You will be instructed in the proper landing procedure, what information is required, how to record it, what to avoid. This is a Class M planet but our sensors do not pick up any life forms. However, the sensors are not always accurate in this regard as you undoubtedly know. Cadets, if you would locate your officers, we can begin."

As Spock steered Cadet Kirk to the science equipment set out for their journey, he tried in vain not to remember what had occurred on former training expeditions such as this. He tried not to remember the fiery red-headed cadet who had 'forgotten' to turn on the recording key on his tricorder, thus losing twelve hours of data accumulated from the planet surface. Spock tried not to think of the painfully young child who had accidentally pushed him into a surging sea of quicksand on Laria Fison, then ran off for help, completely disregarding his communicator, as Spock slowly sank in the mire, more astonished than frightened. Fortunately, there had been a tree nearby and Spock had been able to pull himself free. But most of all he tried not to recall the very promising, intelligent young cadet who inadvertently phasered him as he tried to pull his weapon from his belt. Fortunately for Spock the weapon had only been set on heavy stun; but he had nonetheless trembled for days from the impact of the blast. Glancing with some apprehension at the seemingly harmless young man by his side, Spock wondered what was in store for this expedition. Administration, indeed. At least the cadet with the phaser had been a science major.

Despite Spock's uneasy foreboding the expedition had passed uneventfully. Kirk had proved to be a surprisingly bright young man who listened intently to Spock's instructions and followed them exactly with no need for additional prompting by the Vulcan. Although obviously unfamiliar with most of the complicated scientific equipment Kirk was soon handling it with ease and Spock gradually began to relax.

Sent to explore a steep ravine on the far side of the plateau where the shuttlecraft had landed the two men set off obediently. The rugged countryside reminded Kirk vaguely of the Himalayas minus the snow. As they climbed higher and higher a storm gathered overhead. Spock, who was leading, glanced up at the rapidly growing cloud formations, lost his footing and fell into the valley below. Bouncing off the rocks and boulders the Vulcan grabbed desperately for some hold on reality and finally succeeded in grabbing a clump of bushes, stopping his descent. Gasping for air, his shocked mind slowly assessed the situation, adjusting itself to coping with the fierce assault of pain which bombarded it. His communicator and phaser had continued to fall into the valley, his tricorder was crushed beyond repair. Expecting the worst he reluctantly made inventory of his own damage. The pain told him he was critically injured; a ruptured spleen, punctured lung, several broken ribs, a broken wrist and looking down he saw that his left leg bone stuck up out of his black pants. His stomach heaved and he threw up on the mountainside.

At that moment the clouds overhead crashed and rain burst forth and began to beat down on his trembling body, washing the dirt and soil of his fall from him but making him very uncomfortable. Belatedly he remembered his protegee and numbly wondered what Kirk had done. The Vulcan fervently hoped the young man had enough sense to contact the landing party. His hopes were dashed however as a shower of small rocks broke over his head and a figure slid into view.

"Mr. Spock!" gasped Kirk, out of breath. "Are you all right?" Expertly he braced himself against the side of the mountain as he looked over the Vulcan's still form.

"Functioning," replied Spock quietly, his own frustration mounting. "Did you contact the landing party, Mr. Kirk?" Spock asked hopefully, stubbornly controlling the pain which was pounding at his mind in crashing waves.

"Yes, sir," replied the cadet, running a gentle hand over Spock's leg.

"And?"

"Number One ordered me to return to the shuttlecraft, sir," answered Kirk calmly.

"In that case, what are you doing here, Mr. Kirk?" interrupted Spock, flinching as the cadet's hands pressed on his leg, trying unsuccessfully to stop the bleeding.

"The only way I could have returned to the shuttlecraft, sir, would be to have them track me with my communicator beam. I figured your communicator would be damaged or gone in which case there would be no way to locate you as the ship's transporter cannot function with the storm overhead. If I left you now they would never find you in time... I think I can get this bone back where it belongs..."

The rain continued to pound down relentlessly as Kirk talked, his voice calm and even. The cadet had character even if he did seem to have an appalling disregard for orders.

"Mr. Kirk, you are to leave me immediately and return to the shuttlecraft," ordered Spock sternly. "You are unnecessarily endangering your life. There is nothing you can do. My injuries are...critical; you cannot move me. It is... illogical to stay." His words came slower as unconsciousness began to overtake him. But he spoke rationally and with an air of detachment. Death, logical and sane, had merely arrived before he planned but that was not a matter for concern.

"No, sir," answered Kirk quietly as he began to pull the brown shirt over his head.

"You are disobeying a direct order," warned Spock, ominously. Then, "What... what are you doing?"

"You're shivering, sir," explained Kirk patiently as he tugged the shirt off and cautiously tucked it around the Vulcan's shoulders as he lay clinging to the ground, his free hand still grasping the tush. Pulling his black belt from his pants he said, "I'm going to use this to tie that leg down. This is going to hurt..."

Spock, twisting his head around, saw the young man dressed only in a thin black undershirt and regulation brown pants. He gritted his teeth as Kirk forced the broken bone down with a firm, unyielding hand. "Mr...Kirk..." he stammered through clenched jaws as he fought to keep conscious. "Were you...not taught... at the Academy to...obey...orders? This is...in...insubordination."

"Yes, sir," agreed Kirk cheerfully, wrapping the belt around Spock's leg carefully. "You can press charges when we get back to the Enterprise. Now then, let's see about those other wounds..." He cautiously adjusted his position on the steep slope. As his hands gently touched the Vulcan's battered body he noticed Spock's head nodding. "Sir," he said sharply, "you are going to have to stay conscious. I can't hold you up here all night."

Spock, struggling back to awareness, turned slowly to look at the cadet whose anxious face hovered over him.

"Your attempts...are useless...Mr...Kirk."

"No, sir," contradicted Kirk with the stubbornness which Spock would some day be quite familiar with. "You are not going to die."

"In...deed?"

"Indeed, sir," answered the cadet. "They'll find us in the morning when the storm has passed." It will pass by morning, Kirk decided. "It is only a few hours..."

"Twelve...point...four hours," corrected Spock, precise to the end.

"Okay, twelve point four hours. Whatever. But when they find us, you are going to be alive." He shivered from the cold in spite of himself as he tried to make the Vulcan comfortable; the rain beat down relentlessly on his bare arms, already his hair was plastered to his head and the water ran down his neck in microscopic rivers.

"It is...illogical..." mumbled Spock, feeling quite relaxed as blackness washed over him in unremitting little waves. "My injuries...are..."

"Awake! Stay awake!" ordered Kirk, shouting into the Vulcan's pointed ear. "And don't let go of that bush. Just talk..."

Suddenly, with a wrenching arch of his back, Spock vomited up a pool of green blood, spitting it out distastefully onto the soggy ground.

"I'm...sorry..." gasped Spock, mortified in spite of his weakened condition.

"Forget it," said Kirk, covering the mess up with a pile of mud. "Don't talk, then. Just listen. I'll do the talking. You just keep awake."

For the next twelve point four hours Kirk talked. He told the Vulcan about Iqwa, about his family, life at the Academy, why he had chosen Starfleet. As the murky moonless night closed in Kirk's voice rose above the pounding rain. When he could no longer see Spock's wan face he kept his fingers hovering gently below his nose and started a schedule of shouting at irregular intervals into the Vulcan's ears. The thunder rolled overhead and the lightning crashed and Kirk talked, talked as he had never talked before, gradually pouring out old hurts, memories of past conflicts, exposing inner wounds he had long ago forgotten about.

Although the rain contributed to his discomfort Kirk was grateful for it because the storm at least kept him awake; an effect it did not seem to have on the Vulcan. Nature fought hard to take over as the night slowly passed and Kirk could no longer be sure if the Vulcan were conscious or indeed even alive. It became apparent that Spock could no longer support himself on the mountainside so Kirk resorted to wrapping his legs around Spock's shoulders and under his arms and holding him that way.

"Damn you, Spock! snapped Kirk, losing patience with the comatose Vulcan. "How do you think this is going to look in my record? I lose my senior officer on my first landing party? I'm already in trouble with Number One. If you die, I'll be canned for sure. If you don't care about yourself at least have the decency to think about me. I've gone to a great deal of trouble to save your life and you could show a little appreciation!"

Whether his lecture did any good, Kirk would never know, but when the first tip of the peculiar red sun broke over the ridge of the mountain Spock was miraculously alive. The storm passed quietly and Kirk pulled out his communicator.

"Thought we'd lost you," commented Number One nonchalantly, apparently accustomed to miracles. "Stay where you are. We had an explosion in engineering last night. Sickbay is full and all our doctors are busy. One of the civilian doctors on board has volunteered to go down to you. Hold on."

It took nearly ten minutes before a form began to sparkle into view on the hillside. Unfortunately it was halfway down the slope before the materialised man got a foothold on the uncertain rocky ground. Cursing loudly the doctor awkwardly climbed up the mountainside. From his struggles Kirk guessed he was no mountain climber. This observation was promptly confirmed when the irritated man snapped peevishly, "Damn it! I am a doctor, not a mountain goat." His foot slipped out from under him and he slid back several feet. More savage epithets. Bedraggled and cold though he was Kirk couldn't help but smile at the doctor's predicament. Spock, beyond caring, lay deathly still, his face a frightening

green. Finally, after several more minutes of wry observations on Starfleet in general and the transporter chief in particular, the physician finally reached them=

"Dr. Leonard McCoy at your service." Glancing down Kirk met the friendly blue eyes of the doctor, a man in his early thirties dressed in one of sickbay's blue jumpsuits. Kirk liked him instantly.

"Hell, they didn't tell me it involved scaling a blasted Mount Everest." Still grumbling he brushed off his gloved hands, his eyes running over the still figure of the Vulcan. "They also didn't tell me Spock is Vulcan. I am no exobiologist." Pulling himself up he began to examine the soaked, unconscious man.

"He has a compound fracture of the left leg," offered Kirk, pointing to the bloodsoaked limb. "He told me he has a ruptured spleen, punctured lung, several broken ribs and his right wrist is broken. Also there seems to be internal bleeding; he has vomited blood several times."

"Not to mention pneumonia," added McCoy morosely, "or the Vulcan version of it. Damn, this man should be dead," he continued, running a medical scanner over the recumbent form. "Maybe he is dead. Well, call the ship. Tell them to beam us up. Can't do anything for him here."

Kirk obeyed and in a moment they lay sprawled in a muddy pile on the transporter platform.

Kirk entered Number One's office with agonizing apprehension. For three days - ever since returning from Wobbit IV - he had been expecting this summons. Kirk was relieved - almost - that it had finally arrived.

Snapping to attention in front of the desk, Kirk announced stiffly, "Cadet Kirk reporting as ordered, Ma'am."

Number One glanced up at the pale cadet, her eyes softening in sympathy. "Mr. Spock is recovering rapidly, Mr. Kirk," she said. "Dr. McCoy said he should be out of sickbay by tomorrow. We must thank you for saving his life."

"I am glad to hear it, Ma'am," answered Kirk. "It was nothing."

"However," continued Number One as Kirk's stomach muscles tightened. Here it comes. "Mr. Spock insists on placing you on report for disobeying a direct order. Under the circumstances he was persuaded from pressing charges against you for mutiny."

'Persuaded'. Vulcans. Damn them. "Yes, Ma'am," said Kirk. There was nothing else to say.

"You also disobeyed a direct order from me," reminded Number One gently. Kirk waited as images flooded his mind. 'Cadet courtmartialed...' Disgraced. Expulsion. "But I think we can overlook that - this time."

"Thank you, Ma'am," sighed Kirk. Gratitude. Pure gratitude.

"By the way, Mr. Spock would like to see you before you leave the ship." See him? "Dismissed," ordered Number One, wondering wistfully if she herself had ever been so innocent, so eager, so full of potential.

Kirk turned stiffly, his mind working at Warp 6. He was on report. There went his perfect record. Damn! He had saved a man's life...that should be something. But he knew Admiral Lwanda. Disobeying orders. He was really in for it. And Spock wanted to see him. To thank him? Hardly. Probably to chew him out for disobeying orders.

As Kirk entered the small improvised sick room where the Vulcan was staying due to lack of space in sickbay, he stopped short. The Vulcan already had a visitor. The doctor who had beamed down to them on the planet, who had later patched Spock back together again with one eye glued to his patient and the other

to a computer tape on Vulcan physiology.

"Just saying goodbye, Mr. Kirk," explained the doctor pleasantly, picking up his bag from the floor. Looking at the cadet, he continued, "You did very well down there. Kept your head. That was good first-aid. I've been trying to tell this hard-headed Vulcan that." He shrugged his shoulders apologetically. "I tried..."

"Thank you for your assistance on Wobbit IV," said Kirk, taking the hand the doctor offered him. "Have you ever considered joining Starfleet? We could use a good doctor who isn't afraid of mountain climbing."

"Not I!" laughed McCoy. "I'm not military material. Never could remember all those ports and starboards, afts and forwards. But if you ever get to Atlanta look me up."

"I'll do that," promised Kirk, suddenly conscious of the Vulcan's eyes on him.

"Ah, well," sighed McCoy, "I'd better go before I miss my shuttle to Starfleet Central. Don't want to get left behind. Goodbye Lt. Spock, Mr. Kirk." Waving a carefree hand the doctor picked up the rest of his luggage and walked through the swishing doors with a light step.

Face the music. Take your medicine, Kirk. Kirk instinctively braced himself as he turned back to the bed and the Vulcan who was peering curiously at him, his face void of any expression.

"I trust you have no ill effects from the landing party expedition," opened Spock politely. He looked almost normal himself. Vulcan healing trance, thought Kirk. How handy.

"No, sir," answered Kirk awkwardly. "I am glad to see you are feeling better."

"Yes. Dr. McCoy's improvised ministrations were apparently more effective than he had anticipated. He informed me that he had never 'doctored' a Vulcan before and seemed to be under the impression that a degree in exobiology was required."

Was this an attempt at humor? No telling, thought Kirk, who judged it best not to smile.

After a moment, continuing, the Vulcan said, "Your actions on the planet were most illogical, Mr. Kirk."

Here it comes. The Lecture. Yet considering the fact that he had already been placed on report, Kirk decided to get his money's worth. "Perhaps illogical for a Vulcan, Mr. Spock. But not for a Human."

"Indeed? Humans are exempt from obeying orders?"

"No, sir. But there are exceptions. I was a better judge of the situation than Number One or you, sir." Flared eyebrows rose as the brown eyes studied him with interest. Here I go, making an ass of myself, thought Kirk glumly. Now he really thinks I am one of those smart aleck know-it-alls. Hell, what difference does it make; I'll never see him again.

"Academy cadets, report to the hangar-deck," boomed the loudspeaker overhead.

"Well, sir...goodbye," said Kirk formally, anxious to get out of the confining atmosphere of the room and away from this somewhat stifling Vulcan.

"Mr. Kirk!" called the Vulcan as Kirk reached the door. "Aside from your disobedience of a direct order, you responded correctly to the circumstances we encountered on the landing party detail." He paused as though embarrassed. "Endeavor to survive, Mr. Kirk. You will make an excellent commander one day!"

Kirk stared with open-mouthed astonishment at the unreadable brown eyes as the loudspeaker blared once again. "Last call for the Academy cadets! Any cadet not at the hangar deck in three minutes will remain on the Enterprise. Last call!"

"Goodbye, sir!" shouted Kirk as he ran out the door and down the corridor. Ten minutes later he was seated safely in the shuttlecraft. Glancing over the navigator's shoulder he took one last look at the majestic Starship. The Enterprise hung gracefully in space, the most beautiful sight in the universe to the eyes of James Kirk.

KINSHIP by Susan Meek

We were born
Under different skies,
You and I.

You raised under sky of burning red
Learning cool in the midst of desert fires
While I, under Iowa's blue heaven
Learned the warm ways of caring.

Oh, how different
The patterns of our existence!
You, following the straight paths of logic
While I meandered on emotion's many byways.

Yet we were always different
From others. Only the best
Would do for us;
Eventually, we broke the shackles
Of our planet-bound existence
Each striving, reaching for new experiences.
We sought the stars.
Only the highest goals were good enough
For our restless, seeking spirits.

Until we found each other
And met our match.
Deep inside you, I saw myself
Mirror reflection.
Shared experience bound us
With a sense of harmony.
No brothers ever shared,
A rapport
No friend ever experienced.
No word describes it -
Brother? Soul-twin?
'Friend' is not enough.

REQUIEM FOR REENA by G.F. Deery

I reach for you, to ease the pain and guilt,
And feel the anguish of your mind cry out,
The loneliness that seeks but does not find,
The emotion I try to live without.
I am here, my friend -
You are not alone.
I have tried to deny the feeling, and yet
My mind reaches out
And touches yours,
And cries
"Forget, forget."

YESTERDAYS' DREAMS by Heather & Sue Hillsden

The watery winter sun cast weak, elongated shadows across the vast expanse of sparkling, crisp snow. The wind-flattened landscape was dazzlingly white and smooth as only untrodden snow could be, the only sign of passage being a much-used narrow path which receded into the distance before curving round to disappear behind a long, high-blown snowbank.

The small, slightly-built youth, his books held tightly in his arms, looked up at the pale sphere hovering just above the horizon. A few bold stars had unveiled their bright pinpoints of light but in the grey, late afternoon sky they appeared only as tiny, faint sparks. One day, he thought as he walked along the road towards his home, I'll be up there with you. This was his dream, for his greatest ambition when he left school was to join the Starfleet Academy and train to become a navigator. These were the hopes that helped him through each day in the classroom, for he was by far the brightest pupil and he was frequently beset by boredom as he waited for his fellow students to catch up to his level of work. The thought that one day maybe he, Pavel Chekov, would guide one of the sleek spacecraft, perhaps even a mighty Starship, through uncharted regions of space sent a thrill up and down his spine.

Yet how could this dream materialise? His father, a stern and very stubborn man, was determined that he gained diplomas and went on to become a teacher of mathematics at Moscow University. His amazing ability to juggle figures was a good pointer in that direction. So how could he, the only son - the only child - of his parents and last in line to carry on the family name, defy his father and risk his life in the perilous vacuum of space? Pavel sighed and continued walking, a resigned look of defeat on his young, babyish face. If only his father would come round to his way of thinking.

Suddenly he heard a faint scuffling sound in front of him, quickly replaced again by silence. He stopped. The noise came from just round where the path was hidden by the snowbank. He wasn't scared so far, for he knew that wolves no longer roamed the frozen wastes of Russia's desolate plains and the chance of robbery or attack this far out of town were very remote. But someone was round the corner, someone who was being very careful about concealing his presence. Pavel called out in what he hoped was a bold voice.

"Who's there?"

There came a snigger of laughter as three boys stepped into view. The smallest of the trio was at least two inches taller than Pavel and a good deal heavier. The youngster felt his stomach knot into a tight ball of fear as he recognised the older, middle boy. Pietro Birvok, the school bully, had made it very clear from the first day that he didn't like the Chekov boy.

"Hey, peasant," he snarled, showing bad, yellowing teeth. "Where are you going?"

Pavel glared at him with more defiance than he felt and ignored him. Pietro turned his hate-ugly face to his fellow gang-members. His lips curled back in a menacing sneer. "Well, well, well. So our little star-gazer doesn't want to talk. Lost your tongue, then, peasant?" The boy stalked forward in a menacing manner, forcing the other back a few paces. "It's a pity the teacher's pet didn't lose his tongue this morning."

Pavel lifted his head, drew himself up to his full height and stared Pietro in the eye. "If you had done the set work as you should," he stated simply, "you would have known the answer also. You can only know as much as you learn."

The bully's face turned a curious shade of crimson and, with a harsh cry of rage, hurled himself at the surprised boy. They crashed to the snow-driven ground in a tangle of flying arms and legs. From the start it was a badly-matched fight, the stockier Pietro towering above the diminutive Pavel. It was a very one-sided affray with the attacker gaining the upper hand almost immediately, and coming out on top. He rained blow after blow on the other, who could only use his arms to

ward off the worst of the punches. He couldn't even hit back for that would leave his face unprotected. In the end the two other boys, who were watching the battle with mounting horror, had to drag Pietro off his battered victim. Sanity returned to him as suddenly as it had left. With one final glance at the bruised and battered youth lying in the road, the three fled, fearful of the consequences of their actions.

For five long minutes the sobbing boy stayed huddled in a heap in the snow, eventually lifting his head to glance quickly all round. No sign remained of his assailants nor of the fight save for Pavel's split lips and a gash above his left eye which dripped tiny spots of crimson into the virgin snow. He pulled himself up on unsteady feet, gathered up his scattered school books and carried on home. His face was burning, not only from the cuts and grazes, but also from shame and humiliation.

"I'll show them all," he muttered through clenched teeth. "One day they will no longer laugh and mock me. I'll be a hero. I will show them."

Night had fallen by the time he reached the large, red-bricked house that had been the family home for five generations. It was the finest in the district and probably the oldest, although it had been thoroughly modernised throughout. It was perhaps the only one which had survived the terrible wars of nearly two centuries ago, but no-one was really sure. Opening the door with his voice and palm print he felt a warm rush of air flow out. He breathed a heart-felt sigh of relief as it swung shut behind him and he was inside the safety of his home. He started up the stairs towards the refuge of his room, for he knew how much his mother would fume. His foot hadn't reached the third step when a voice called from the living area.

"Pavel, is that you?"

"Yes, Mother," he replied and hurriedly retreated to his bedroom. Below, a small trim woman in her late forties stood looking up the flight of stairs, a puzzled look on her kind, still good-looking face. She put her hand up to push back a few stray locks of curly black hair, slightly peppered with grey. It was most unusual for her son to disappear so soon after coming in. With a mother's inborn instinct she knew something must be wrong.

Pavel was standing in front of the wall mirror ruefully examining his wounds. Footsteps sounded outside the door and he caught sight of his mother as she entered. He quickly moved away from the tell-tale looking glass, carefully keeping his back to her.

"Pavel," she said. "What is wrong, my son?"

Slowly, almost humbly, he turned round. Natalia Chekov gave a small cry of dismay as her eyes travelled across his face, taking in the dark purple bruise showing livid on one cheek, and the patches of dried blood on his chin and forehead. In total silence she led him into the bathroom and opened the door of a small cupboard above the waist-level hot air dryer. Taking out antiseptic and plaster, she gently bathed away the congealed blood and grime.

"There," she said, putting a small piece of plasti-skin over the gash above his eye. "That is much more presentable. Now, perhaps you can tell me who did this to you?"

Pavel had stood quietly while she had ministered to him. Now his soft brown eyes met hers in a steady gaze. "It was Pietro Birkov."

His mother clicked her annoyance. "That boy!" she exploded. "He deserves a... But no matter; that is up to his parents. Why did he do it?"

Pavel shook his head. "I cannot tell you."

She gave him a long, hard look. "Cannot or will not, Pavel?" She smiled tenderly. "You never were one for telling tales, were you?"

"I must learn to fight my own battles, Mother." He sighed wearily. "Running to you or Father will not help me in the future." Leaving his mother to tidy away the medical dressings he returned to his room and began to shed his rumpled clothing. Stepping into the shower in the corner of the room, he tried to relax and let the hot needles of water strip away the aches of the day's unpleasantness. He dried himself vigorously with a soft fluffy towel and dressed himself in trousers and a loose overtop, leaving his feet bare. Satisfied, he turned his attention to the large wood-effect bookcase which covered the whole of one wall. Numerous books were stacked, in neat order, along the shelves. Frowning thoughtfully for several seconds, Pavel finally selected a thick brown leather-bound volume. Tucking it under his arm he shut his bedroom door and descended the stairs.

Slight noises in the kitchen turned his steps in that direction rather than the quiet expanse of the living area. Natalia was standing before a long white worktop, preparing the vegetables for the evening meal; although the kitchen boasted most labour-saving devices she still, stubbornly, liked to cook herself. She glanced up at her son, who had perched himself on a high stool and was sitting staring at the unopened book on his knees.

"What is it you have there?" she asked. Pavel glanced up briefly, a strange look in his eyes.

"'The Final Frontier', by Col. E.L. Markham."

"Is it a novel?"

He laughed. "You mean you have never heard of Col. Markham or his work, Mother?"

With a slight shrug of her slim shoulders Natalia asked, "Why? Should I have?"

"You are so old-fashioned," he admonished, laughingly.

"Not 'old-fashioned'," corrected his mother. "Just not very well informed on some matters."

"Well," he began, staring out of the window at the night sky, "Markham was born in 1993 in a small state of old North America. His home town was small, the smallest in the outback of...um...Wyoming. For years he yearned to leave, to go to one of the larger cities, east or west, it didn't matter to him. Finally his love of flying took him into the air force, where he trained to become a pilot." His voice trailed away abruptly, causing Natalia to glance at him sharply. He was still gazing intently outside, a far away look etched on his features. He started suddenly as he felt his mother's eyes on him. "I'm sorry," he apologised quietly. "I was thinking of something else. When will Father be home?"

"Soon. Now, carry on with your story. It is very interesting." She turned back to the cooking console and entered the correct programme for the prepared food. "So he left the security of his home and family to pursue his dreams," she encouraged gently as he still sat in silence, frowning.

"No. That security was like a prison to him. He became an expert flyer and when N.A.S.A. called for volunteers for their revised space programme, he jumped at the chance. It was about that time that America was engaged in extensive space projects, and it was on one of these that Markham became a hero."

Despite her obvious ignorance of such matters Natalia found she was extremely curious, nonetheless, and she sat on another stool facing Pavel.

"What did he do?"

He took a deep breath and plunged right on. "It was on the first deep space mission to Jupiter, in particular one of her moons, Callisto. The craft then were large, cumbersome things, rocket powered, burning liquid fuel. Can you imagine it, a huge lumbering creature that took months to reach its destination?" He chuckled.

"Everyone and everything has teething problems, Pavel. If it had not been

for the men who invented those 'lumbering creatures' our own technology would not be what it is today."

Pavel nodded. "I know that, mother."

"So Markham was on that mission?"

"Yes. They made it to Jupiter, took recordings and rock samples, and landed probes on Callisto. On the way back to Earth, however, there was an explosion and most of the onboard computers were destroyed. Two of the crew were killed instantly and a third was badly injured. Markham was the only pilot left. It took him three months to make the final leg back with only the minimum of navigational computers operating. It was a brilliant piece of navigating, even by today's standards, with a crippled ship and virtually no help."

"He must have been a very brave man."

"He was." The boy spoke with great feeling. "Mother, will I be able to go to the Academy? They take pupils at seventeen."

His mother shook her head sadly. "Pavel, you know how your father feels about it. You should learn to accept it. He desperately wants you to teach, as your grandfather did. Who knows, in ten years' time you could be a Professor of Mathematics."

"How can you say that when you know I would never be happy doing that." She looked at him, understanding written on her face. "Space is in my blood," he said decisively.

If you only knew how much, Pavel, she thought. If you only knew.

The atmosphere was strangely tense in the living area later that evening. Two pairs of brown eyes were fixed unerringly on the tall muscular figure of Gregori Chekov as he stood by the wall cocktail cabinet.

"You have not answered the boy's question, Gregori," coaxed Natalia. She and Pavel sat on the low comfortable couch that ran three-quarters the length of one wall. The man poured himself another after-dinner drink before turning to face his wife and son. Dark curly hair and dark neat beard did nothing to detract from his expression of displeasure. Piercing grey eyes saw the eagerness on his teenage son's features, his face alive with anticipation. Finally he spoke, a deep mellow sound.

"Well, Pavel, for years I have wanted you to make teaching your career. I have taught you all I know, now it seems that you wish to oppose me." He paused and an air of sadness flashed across his face. "Many years before you were born, my younger brother, your uncle, joined Starfleet Academy." He almost spat out the last two words. "Much against our Father's wishes. However, he persevered and graduated with honour from the college to become an ensign on one of the early Cruiser Class ships. His visits and letters home became more and more infrequent. After about eleven years he became a Captain; he had his own ship, his own command. After that we only saw him once more. That was the year our Father died, and you were only a baby. The doctors say he died of an incurable disease but I still believe my brother's rash action was to blame. The grief and remorse were finally too much for him." Gregori stopped speaking and placed his glass to his lips, draining it in one swift movement. Pavel walked towards his father, and spread his hands palm upwards in a gesture of helplessness. His mouth opened but no words were spoken. Silence fell on the room and all that could be heard for some minutes was the steady, relentless hum of the air conditioning.

"Father," began Pavel, "I..." His voice trailed off. Gregori placed his hands on the boy's shoulders and subjected him to an intense scrutiny.

"My son, it is only in your best interests. No...before you speak, let me finish. My brother was a Cruiser Captain, a proud and respected man. But it didn't last very long." A pained expression etched itself on the man's face as

long-buried memories were brought to the surface once more. "Two months after his appointment we received word that Captain Andreievick Chekov, along with his crew and ship, were missing, presumed dead. No-one ever did find out what happened to them." He paused to allow his words to sink in before continuing. "Now perhaps you see why I'm reluctant to let you go. Space has taken my brother and my father from me. How can I allow it to wrench from my grasp another I hold so dear?"

A lump which threatened to choke him had formed in Pavel's throat, for his father had never spoken so frankly to him before. Tears brimmed over to slide quietly down his cheeks, then tearing himself from the gentle grasp, he fled to his room before he disgraced himself further. Natalia rose to follow him but Gregori laid a restraining hand on her arm.

"Let him be, wife. He is not a child any more. He has to learn to face up to those things for himself."

Anger blazed in her brown eyes and she turned an accusing face towards him. "Learn, Gregori? Learn to face what? You cannot deny him this because of what happened to Andreievich. All that is in the past. Pavel has his whole life before him, and he will not be happy anywhere but at the Academy."

Gregori looked down at her, knowing that what she said was true but not wanting to admit it. Shaking his head sadly, he left the room.

Pavel lay on his bed, his hands tightly clutching E.L. Markham's book, gazing out of the window at the star-studded sky. The hopelessness of the situation threatened to overwhelm him and he hurriedly blinked back the tears as footsteps paused outside his door.

"May I come in, Pavel?" called his father.

"Yes," replied the boy softly, carefully turning his head away. The man entered and sat on the edge of the bed, and found himself looking at the back of his son's curly dark head.

"Look at me, Pavel. Look at me!" The last three words came like a whiplash as the boy continued to stare sullenly out of the window. Slowly, grudgingly, he brought his head round, and Gregori was surprised by the air of infinite sorrow in his eyes.

"Going to Starfleet Academy means a lot to you, doesn't it?"

Pavel swallowed hard, and nodded. "Yes, Father, it does," he replied in a slightly husky voice.

"Can you forgive a foolish old man, Pavel? It was wrong to stop you because of somebody else's deeds. You may go to your Academy, with your Mother's and my blessing."

With a cry of delight the ecstatic teenager threw his arms around his father and hugged him fiercely. Through the mist of happiness he managed to stammer out a few words.

"Thank you, Father. Oh, thank you!"

Gently extracting himself from the boy's vice-like grip Gregori smiled. "Now perhaps you had better get some sleep. You have many months of hard work ahead of you." He walked towards the door, switching off the concealed lighting as he did so. "Goodnight, Pavel," he called as he slid the door shut.

"Goodnight, Father."

The new moon climbed across the sky, bathing everything in an ethereal blue glow. Light airy shadows spread pools of silver across the bedroom floor and on the bed where a very excited youngster lay. Many hours passed before he succumbed to the weariness of his body, and as he slept he dreamed. The stars were beckoning him again and this time he could answer their persistent call.

The last six months at school became one long incredible bore, for he rushed through his work with the speed of one possessed. Then came ten weeks of waiting; waiting for his exam results but, worst of all, waiting to see if he had been accepted at the Academy. At last his application was approved and he made the journey to Leningrad. The whole place held him in awe at first, but once he was settled in at the Academy's boarding house all else was forgotten.

The first year he found to be very arduous, both mentally and physically, but Pavel didn't mind. He was where he wanted to be for as far back as he could remember. There were times when he visited his parents during vacation and when he received letters from them, that he felt terrible pangs of homesickness, but by throwing himself wholeheartedly onto his studies he left himself little time to worry about it.

He was in class 4A, the lowest grade, and it was difficult to get used to the idea that he was no longer the outstanding pupil; he was just above average. After nine months of studying mathematics and physics he took his progression exam and passed with flying colours. He was now upgraded to 3A1. This was where his navigational teaching began in earnest. Much to the surprise - and delight - of his tutor, Commander Cristie, Pavel found he had a natural aptitude for the problems and tactics of navigating.

Three months after he had been upgraded two new students joined the class. One was a young man about twelve months older than Pavel's eighteen years; the other was a tiny, elfin-like girl, with long hair sleek and dark as a raven's wing. A delicate, heart-shaped face held exquisitely shaped features and deep violet eyes. He found out that her name was Irina Galluilin and that she was studying for a degree in communications. From the start he lost his heart to her but was afraid that she would never notice him. For weeks he dogged her footsteps but the nearest he got to socialising with her was when a crowd of them, including Irina and himself, met for coffee after class one day. Two days after the meeting in the coffee lounge Pavel had the good fortune to spot her sitting alone in the canteen. He picked up his loaded tray and quickly made his way to her table.

"Er...excuse me, Miss Galluilin, is anybody sitting here?" he requested, fidgetting nervously. She glanced up at him, choosing to ignore the empty tables and forms around them.

"No. Please sit down, I could do with some company." She smiled, a shy delightful smile which lit up her whole face. They ate in silence and Pavel got coffee for them both.

"I understand you are studying communications?" He stirred his drink abstractedly, not quite sure what else to say.

"Yes." She sighed, blowing gently on her cup. "But I didn't realise how many transmissions and receiving signals there are. Nor how many different wave-lengths on a normal communications console." She looked up at him, a twinkle in her violet eyes. "I have an appalling memory and the only way I can remember them is by going over them again and again."

Pavel stared fixedly at his half-empty cup, thinking carefully before replying. "I have a free evening tomorrow, perhaps I could help you to study? I mean ...if you don't mind."

She laughed, a gay tinkling sound. "Wonderful. Shall I wait for you here or somewhere else?"

"I think here would be fine. I have computer studies all tomorrow afternoon so I may not be finished until 4.30."

Irina gave him a dazzling smile and said she would look forward to their next meeting. That afternoon and all the following day dragged slowly by and Pavel found himself wondering whether the beautiful girl would be waiting for him. He fairly raced down the corridor to the canteen, pausing only long enough to catch his breath before entering. His gaze swept around the room taking in every detail; a group of girls who looked in his direction then put their heads together

giggling; several couples sitting drinking and talking - but no Irina. His heart sank as he realised she wasn't there, perhaps had never intended to be there. The thought that she could be dating another boy made him feel thoroughly wretched. As he turned to leave a small dark shape came hurtling round the corner of the corridor. A trim petite figure clad in an all-in-one black, clinging catsuit came rapidly to a halt before his startled eyes. A pert face, cheeks aflame, was turned up to him, a look of relief flitting across it.

"I...thought you wouldn't...wait," she gasped breathlessly. "I met an...old friend I hadn't seen for a very long time and...we...were talking, so I didn't realise how late...it was. He must have thought me very rude but no matter." She linked her arm through his and they walked down the corridor. "The least I can do after keeping you waiting is to feed you. I do a terrific Beef Stroganoff."

The young man was speechless, it was all he could do to mumble his thanks. The speed of Irina's appearance, the fact that she had turned up at all, had taken him by surprise. Now this invitation out of the blue was too good an opportunity to pass up.

Irina's home was only a five minute walk from the Academy. She was one of the few students with an independent income and could afford to live out. Her flat was small but luxuriously furnished, part of a large mansion-like building facing onto Russia's famous Red Square. That evening was one of many that Pavel was to enjoy in her company. Irina did indeed do a 'terrific Beef Stroganoff', among her many other talents and before long they were very deeply in love. Over the following weeks they were hardly seen apart, save for a few lessons, and speculation among the other students was running wild. Pavel and Irina were aware of this but they knew that if they decided on marriage their careers in Starfleet would probably be at an end.

A year passed, and the day before their final exam results were announced they had decided to splash out on an expensive restaurant dinner to mark the first anniversary of their being together. Pavel came from the gym, where he had just been having physical combat lessons, feeling refreshed and relaxed after an invigorating shower. There was a spring in his step, for tonight was going to be a night to remember for a long time. He was to meet the girl he loved at her flat when she was finished for the day, take the shuttle across town to Stravinsky's Palace, one of the rare and expensive 'Olde Worlde' places, and wine and dine her. As he continued down the corridor, lost in thought, voices drifted out of the half open door of one of the small study booths that lined the hall. He stopped abruptly, frozen in his tracks, as he recognised the merry laugh of Irina and a male voice he could not identify. He glanced in through the open door to see Irina quickly kiss a young man with curly blond hair sitting at her side. He thrust open the door with an angry gesture, causing them both to look up sharply. Fear shone briefly in Irina's eyes for she had never seen him this angry before,

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded furiously. Her gaze rested momentarily on her companion who made no move to speak or leave.

"Pavel, I..." She rose quickly, and walked out of the booth, followed by a stunned Pavel. "Let us discuss this matter in private. Come."

They made their way, in frightening silence, out of the college to her flat. Entering the small two-bedroomed apartment, they shed their coats and stood looking at each other for some time.

"Shall I make some coffee?"

Pavel could only nod, dumbly, as he sat in a low easy chair. His dream had been cruelly shattered and he just could not believe it. Irina came back and placed a mug of strong, steaming coffee in his hand. She curled up in the chair opposite him and waited for the question she knew must come.

"Who is he?" Toying deliberately with his cup he managed to keep his voice surprisingly steady. "How long have you known him?"

Irina placed her cup on a low table, clasping her hands on her lap. "His

name is Davy Martin," she whispered, gazing steadfastly at her fingers. "I met him at the students' dance six months ago."

A look of pain came into Pavel's dark brown eyes. "It's all over between us then, isn't it?" He thought he knew the answer before he asked the question.

"You think Davy is my lover, don't you?" His look said more than words ever could. "Well, you're wrong. Davy is a good friend." She paused, unsuccessfully trying to check the tears that filled her eyes. Rising, she went to stand by the window. "I'm leaving the Academy, Pavel, but not for the reasons you think."

"But why? Why? You know how much I love you."

Openly sobbing now she turned a tear-streaked face to him. "Please. Don't make it any harder than it already is," she cried in anguish. "I love you too, more than anything else."

He put his mug down and made an effort to control his shaking hands, though he knew he couldn't control the ache inside.

"Then can you at least give me an explanation?" he asked.

Wiping away her tears with a paper tissue, Irina gave a slight smile. "Yes. I think you deserve that." She sat down once more. "Well, I suppose it all began when an old school friend visited me. She came round one evening and we sat talking about old flames and the pranks we used to get up to at school. Anyway, the conversation got round to our jobs and I asked about hers. Nadia told me that she and several other people had formed an organisation, a Pacifist Movement." Surprise registered on Pavel's face for he had heard some talk about this group. "Nadia persuaded me to go along with her to a meeting that was taking place the next evening."

"That was the night you put me off coming to see you?"

Irina nodded sadly. "Yes. Anyway, the meeting was crowded, and...Oh, Pavel, you can't imagine what it was like. All those people with one idea, one purpose, striving and growing. They convinced me that the Federation is governing the Galaxy incorrectly. They don't need Starships to enforce law, all they have to do is approach things peaceably, without horrific weapons to maim and kill."

Pavel straightened in his chair at her last words. Irina had been as much committed to Starfleet as he was, and yet, in no time at all, she was denouncing it as wrong.

"Then you are condemning me also, Irina," he stated angrily, "For I believe in the Federation."

"No, you are wrong," she pleaded desperately. "I did not mean it like that."

Pavel stood up and looked down at her tousled black head. "Where does that other person fit into it?"

"Davy is my contact, nothing more." She glanced up at him. "Please believe me."

"Remember I love you, Irina. I always will." With that he walked to the door, her dazed expression following his every move.

"Pavel, wait. Don't go, I need you."

Turning, he looked at the girl he loved so dearly. "It is better this way." May you find happiness in whatever you choose to do." He choked back his tears and left her weeping convulsively, alone.

His small dark figure stared up at the brightly lit window from below. A strong wind blew up and scattered dark locks across his face.

"Oh, Irina," he murmured, but the fierce gusts tore his heartfelt words from his lips as though mocking him. He, too, was alone.

James T. Kirk, Captain of the newest and most powerful Starship on active duty, strode purposefully down the corridor towards sickbay. He had left his capable Vulcan First Officer in temporary command on the bridge, but worry still showed in his hazel eyes. His thoughts turned back to the events of the day.

The Enterprise and her crew had just completed an exhaustive six-week star-charting expedition of the far corners of the galaxy. She was on her way back to Starbase 4 for a well-earned period of R & R when the coded message had come through.

A small Class M planet, classification number PRA/739-6K, in the Remus IV star system was reported to be rich in nickeloxide, a material used specifically in the construction of on-board computers. As the Enterprise was in the vicinity, she had been ordered to make a primary investigation to confirm the matter.

The landing party, consisting of himself, Chief Science and First Officer Spock, Dr. McCoy and Ensign Pavel Chekov plus two security guards beamed down to the planet's surface as soon as they were in range. As soon as they materialised Kirk pulled out his communicator.

"Kirk to Enterprise. Come in, Enterprise."

"Enterprise. Scott here, Captain," came back the acknowledging voice of the Chief Engineer.

"Scotty, we've beamed down in a mountainous region. I'll call in at fifteen minute intervals but unless anything happens to the contrary, wait for my signal to beam us up. Kirk out."

The landing party had split into pairs, with orders to report anything unusual and to be back at the designated place within the hour. The basic survey proved to be of mixed fortune. The planet was indeed rich in nickeloxide, but unfortunately it was located on the part of the planet which appeared to be permanently surrounded by poisonous gases. The men who would come to mine the metal were going to find it very difficult for they would need to wear protective suits throughout.

The hour was almost up and the landing party was assembled when, without warning, sudden fierce earth tremors threw them violently off balance. The men scattered, desperately trying to avoid flying rocks as the cliffs above them began to crumble. Then just as suddenly the ground was still. Kirk dusted himself off and began to take stock of the situation when a low ominous rumble started. He barely had time to register the fact that someone shouted his name as Spock threw himself across the space between them, forcing him back under a rocky outcrop as a huge boulder loosened from its bed came hurtling down. A sudden harsh scream of terror was cut chillingly short as one of the security guards, not as nimble as Spock, was struck a fatal blow by the crashing menace. Kirk groined inwardly as he emerged from his place of safety. Although there were more than 430 crew members aboard his ship, each death that occurred was a personal tragedy. Then his gaze swung to a narrow crevice that had been ripped open by the quake, then to McCoy who was climbing groggily to his feet.

"Are you okay, Bones?" he asked, concerned.

"Just about," came back the reply. The doctor moved across to where Security Officer Payin lay, his skull all but caved in. One swift glance told him there was nothing he could do.

"Captain. Dr. McCoy." Spock's voice came floating over, a faint note of urgency in his tone. They looked over to see the Vulcan kneeling by the side of Ensign Chekov. They got to him fast. Blood was slowly trickling down the young Russian's face from a deep cut just below the hairline, and a bluey-mauve bruise was swelling on his right temple.

"Unfortunately the Ensign was not able to reach safety in time," Spock said.

Quickly adjusting his scanner over the prostrate form, McCoy took a hypo

from his medi-kit, adjusted the setting and shot the entire contents into the Ensign's arm. Then, taking another reading of the unconscious figure, he grunted with satisfaction.

"How is he, Bones?" Kirk asked worriedly. Concern for his crew came first.

McCoy straightened. "Well, he's got a nasty bump on the head and some concussion, and a couple of broken ribs. I've given him something to ease the pain so he should be okay until I can get him back to sickbay."

Kirk nodded, relieved, as he contacted the ship. The price of this investigation had been high, one crewman dead and another badly injured, but Starfleet issued the orders and Starfleet expected results, even on a potentially unstable planet such as this.

His thoughts came back to the present as the sickbay doors swished open before him. McCoy sat at his desk in the outer office, looking up as Kirk perched on the edge.

"How's Chekov doing?"

McCoy rose. "He's still unconscious, Jim," he replied, moving to the inner area. "But at the moment rest is just about all he needs."

The Russian lay on the diagnostic couch nearest the door, his ashen face in stark contrast to the dark unruly locks of hair that fell across his forehead. The readings on the panel above appeared fairly stable even to Kirk's inexperienced eye. As they moved away the young Ensign began to toss and turn, muttering indistinctly.

McCoy was immediately at his side. "Easy, Chekov. Easy." He placed a calming hand on the young man's shoulder.

"Irina. Oh, Irina," Chekov murmured. His eyes flickered open to focus on the doctor's face. "Dr. McCoy?" His gaze travelled past to rest on Kirk's smiling features.

"Welcome back, Ensign," he laughed. "It would appear you are taking things easy."

Chekov managed a slight grin. "Yes, sir. What happened?"

"You took a bad tumble down on the planet."

Chekov closed his eyes and swallowed. "I remember now, Captain. There was an earthquake of some kind."

Kirk patted his arm gently. "Well, get some rest now. You've been delirious and didn't get much sleep."

A pained look came to his face and he turned his head away. "I was just... remembering something that happened a long time ago." His voice trailed away to a whisper.

The Captain sat on the edge of the bed. "Irina. Is that the girl who was with Dr. Sevrin? I thought so. Would it help to talk about it?"

Chekov turned back to his superior, sadness in his eyes. "She was at the Academy with me, sir. We were...very much in love, but she became involved with that peace movement, and dropped out." Beneath his formal stiffness it was obvious that he still cared deeply for the girl. "I just can't seem to forget her."

Kirk nodded sympathetically, and his thoughts turned to Edith Keeler, a beautiful woman he had once loved and lost. "It's very difficult," he agreed. "But sometimes it's for the best that we lose something precious. It makes us all the more determined next time to hold on to them."

McCoy decided then that Chekov had done enough talking for one day and hustled Kirk out into his office leaving the Ensign to rest.

"A couple of days will see him as right as rain," McCoy said cheerfully as Kirk made for the exit. The doors slid shut behind him and McCoy settled down

to his paperwork.

Apart from one obvious absence the bridge crew was in full muster as Jim Kirk settled into his command chair.

"Mr. Riley, lay in a course for Starbase 4. Take us out of orbit, Mr. Sulu. Ahead Warp factor 2."

As the small planet disappeared from view, Kirk allowed himself a few moments' relaxation. All being well he could indulge in his favourite pastime, and spend a few quiet days fishing with Spock and McCoy very shortly. That was a pleasure he could look forward to at last.

THE MELDING OF MINDS by Jayne Turner.

And will it always be so?
When rain-filled clouds
chase across my wind-blown
mind.
When forks of spear-sharp
lightning
pierce my shattered skull,
trembling
Crying, moaning, sighing
for release.

Peace.
blessed peace, rainbow-hued,
bringing softness of a maiden's
kiss.
Sweet-smelling peace
many dew'd and sparkling
tears.

Joining.
Difference, merging, overlapping,
walking not running, slowly, stopping.
Water,
trickling, flowing, cleaning,
washing.
Patterns on the water.
carry all the muck and trash
of life - hard, needle-sharp
away.

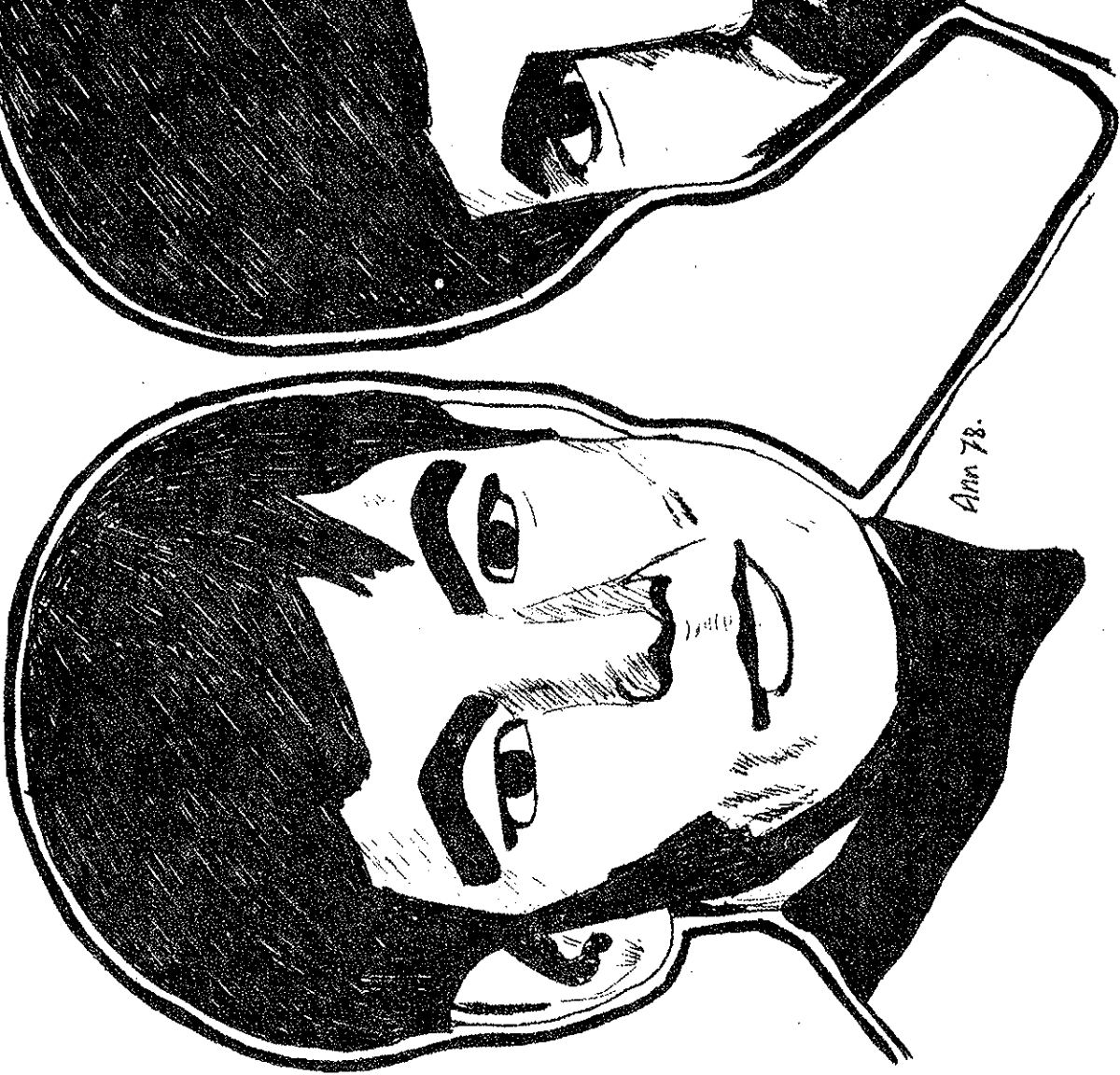
Soothing.
Misty fog, blanket warm,
sunlit and shining.
Give and take, count no cost,
anxious, sharing, caring.
Accept me for what I am.
Love.

Kirk: What's the charge this time, Harry?

Harry Mudd: I found a shuttlecraft.

Kirk: They wouldn't arrest you for that.

Mudd: You see, I found it before the owner lost it.



Ann 78.

A LILY FOR SULU by Josephine Timmins

Grown men don't cry.

A Samurai warrior certainly wouldn't cry.

Sulu struggled with his self-control.

It had all started six months before when the Enterprise answered a distress call from Massomo II. The Federation-backed botanical survey team had gone down with food poisoning and were in desperate need of medical help.

The botany department on board the Enterprise couldn't believe its good luck. Massomo was a botanist's dream-world - the Mecca of everybody who studied plant life. Lt. Sulu was such a man. Although not officially part of the ship's botanical section, he was a genuine enthusiast and his joy at the prospect of the forthcoming visit could not be concealed.

Massomo was a humid, forest-covered planet, incredibly rich in plant life of the most extraordinary kinds. The soil was so fertile that tall stories abounded of trowels left out overnight which had taken root by morning and flowered in the afternoon. In the eight years since the planet's discovery, a series of botanical survey teams had visited Massomo, yet threequarters of the huge forests were still unexplored. No permanent centre had been established because of the intense humidity of the planet; it had an unhealthy climate and sickness was common among the survey teams.

This time the trouble was food poisoning of a particularly virulent kind. Two of the scientists were rushed to sickbay, but Dr. McCoy decided that the others could be treated on the surface. It meant a stay of at least a week for the medical team, while the Starship orbited patiently above.

In the circumstances Kirk could hardly deny his own botanists the chance to visit the planet, and along with them, by special permission, went Sulu. Although their declared interest was general study, each member of the Enterprise party was secretly looking out for one particular plant; an extravagantly beautiful flower known as the Massomo Lily.

To give any bloom the title 'the most beautiful flower in the galaxy' was to invite argument, yet, in spite of fierce competition from the flora of many other worlds, the Massomo Lily reigned as queen. It was a strange plant; from a round, pinkish bulb grew a slender, leafless stem tipped with a small, green bud; for five months the stem grew till it reached a metre in height, and the bud swelled in proportion. Just as it seemed as if the burden of it would prove too much for the stem, the bud burst open.

Inside the green casing was the flower bud - almond-shaped and the most beautiful opalescent pink in colour. It took another month for the bud to mature, during which time it swelled and became almost too heavy for the stem to bear. Its opening was quite dramatic; within fifteen minutes the flower was in full bloom. In plain words; it was shaped like a Terran lily, and its colours ranged from palest pink to deepest purple, taking in orange, scarlet and crimson on the way. Poetically speaking it was as if some fairy hand had taken the most glorious sunset ever seen on earth and fashioned it into a flower. The petals were patterned like a butterfly's wing; the colours iridescent, changing with every subtle shift of light. Its sheer perfection reduced even the experts to utter silence.

The lily was as rare as it was beautiful - and just as short-lived. The flower lasted only one hour and then fell - its petals shrivelling and decaying almost immediately. The plant itself grew quite happily in greenhouse conditions, provided its native heat and moisture were maintained, but nobody had as yet been successful in propagating it and its rarity made serious study difficult.

A specimen of the Massomo Lily was the goal of each member of the Enterprise party and Sulu, with beginner's luck, found one. Falling flat on his face over a

tree root, he opened his eyes to see the unmistakable pink bulb growing a few inches away from his nose. He was just in time. The Enterprise left the planet a few hours later.

No Head of State could have received better treatment than that little bulb. It was given its own special part of the greenhouse with ideal growing conditions and round-the-clock security. Although the botany staff looked after it most of the time, Sulu was a constant visitor and his enthusiasm spread quickly. It wasn't long before the whole crew knew all there was to know about the Massomo Lily, and was receiving regular bulletins on its state of health via the recreation room notice board. As the months passed and the stem grew, so did the excitement.

The flower bud appeared right on time and the anticipation mounted. By the end of the month Sulu was almost a nervous wreck, spending the whole of his off-duty time, when he wasn't actually asleep, sitting by his 'baby'.

The calculated 'opening day' arrived at last and the Massomo Lily Fan Club filled the greenhouse, waiting breathlessly for the first tiny movement from the flower. Sulu should have been on duty, but Captain Kirk, knowing how special this event was, had given the helmsman permission to stay till the drama was over.

Sulu's concentration was so great that he was the last to hear the alarm and see the flashing red light. Puzzled, he realised slowly that the room was emptying, and a voice somewhere over his head was repeating urgently, "...battle stations! All hands to battle stations!" Training took over and he ran to the bridge.

The emergency was a sudden and totally unprovoked attack by three smaller ships of completely unknown origin. The aliens had appeared from the direction of unknown space and had been shadowing the Starship for some time, ignoring all Kirk's attempts to make contact. Fortunately he had raised the deflector shields when the visitors showed a reluctance to identify themselves, so that when the attack came the Enterprise was protected.

It had been like a dogfight in space; three terriers nipping the heels of an alsatian. Individually the little ships would have been merely a nuisance, but together they were putting a considerable strain on the shields. When Kirk's patience finally ran out and several warning shots failed to shake them off, he demolished one of the aggressors with a single phaser burst. The others fled with remarkable speed.

"Shall we pursue them, Captain?" asked Sulu.

"No, they'll have no difficulty losing us - and we have an appointment to keep at Starbase 13." Kirk was furious at the attack and frustrated at not being able to follow it through, but he already had orders which couldn't be ignored. "File it under 'pending', Mr. Spock, and put a tractor on the debris of that ship. We'll be back another time." He put his irritation on one side as another thought struck him. "How's your flower going on, Mr. Sulu?"

The Lily! In the excitement of the last two hours Sulu had forgotten about it. With permission to leave his post, he ran all the way back to the greenhouse. The room was empty except for one of the botanists who had been helping him look after the plant. She turned as he entered, eyes brimming with sympathy. "I'm sorry, Sulu. But we made a tape of it - at least you'll have that." She touched his arm and went out.

Out of the corner of his eye, Sulu caught the movement of the last petal as it fell. Wearily, he dragged himself over to the bare green stem and picked up the petal. Even as he looked, the colours faded and it crumpled in his hand. So...he'd missed what should have been one of the great moments of his life. Well - life was like that. He slumped into a chair and stared at the remains of the Massomo Lily.

Grown men don't cry.

A Samurai warrior certainly wouldn't cry.

Sulu gave up the struggle and wept.

HERE COMES THE BRIDE by Tina W. Pole

T'Pel was as beautiful as T'Pring and just as cold, and she had been previously bonded to a full-blooded Vulcan and now he, Spock, was expected to bond with her. It was something that he couldn't bring himself to do, no matter how logical the arrangement might be.

"It is with regret, T'Pau," he said, "that I must decline."

"What." T'Pau couldn't control the surprise in her voice. After all, how could he, Spock, an unbonded male, turn down the female.

"I must decline, T'Pau," Spock repeated, trying his best to avoid the inquisitive eyes of the proud and aloof female who stood to the left of his grandmother's chair.

"I trust you have a good logical reason for this, Spock son of Sarek." By bringing in his father's name, T'Pau had shown him how displeased she was, still he was determined to stick to his resolution.

"Of course, T'Pau. I must decline as I already have a wife. A Terran wife." It was strange how the lie had come so easily...

If T'Pau could have fainted she would have. Instead she just closed her eyes in resignation and leaned against the back of her chair for support. First Sarek and now Sarek's son, her grandson. She had expected better of him.

"If I may go now, T'Pau?" Spock asked nervously. The full implication of what he had just done had suddenly struck him. He, a Vulcan, had just told a lie, and as he had previously so proudly quoted to any Human, 'Vulcans never lie'.

T'Pau just nodded her head. It was too much for her to bear. Perhaps, she thought, it was time she gave up this job as Head of the Council and retired.

"Spock to Enterprise..."

"Wait!" T'Pau had her eyes open and was sitting on the edge of her elaborately carved chair pointing what looked like an accusing finger at him. "This Terran wife of yours. You may be bonded according to Terran custom, but there is the Vulcan rite to go through."

Spock swallowed hard. What was he going to do?

"Proceed."

"Spock to Enterprise. One to beam up."

"You have one hour, Spock," he heard her say as the transporter claimed him.

One hour. Five minutes of that hour had already passed; so far he hadn't been able to locate Chapel or Uhura or even the Captain or Doctor. He cursed the day Starfleet Command had obtained permission to build a recreation complex on Vulcan, for that was undoubtedly where threequarters of the ship's complement had gone. If only he had told Jim, or even McCoy, but as far as they were concerned he had beamed down to visit his parents, not to see his grandmother and participate in a bonding ceremony. Would it have been so awful to have bonded with T'Pel? Yes. He had lived and worked with Humans for far too long to be able to handle a relationship with a Vulcan female. He left the command chair and the ship in charge of Ensign Chekov again and stepped into the turbolift. Where could he find a female who could pose as his wife? If Chapel or Uhura had been there he would have explained and they would willingly have helped him out. He ended up on the lower decks walking into one of the crewmen's lounges. There he saw her, a likely looking specimen, an Ensign, tall, slim, dark...

"Ensign."

"Sir?" She looked at him, startled. It was unusual for any of the officers from the upper decks to come into the crewmen's lounge.

"Your name?"

"Name...?" She stared at him, her own name forgotten. She'd just realised who was talking to her. Spock, the Vulcan First Officer. Spock, the idol of the lower decks.

"Yes, your name, Ensign."

"Oh! Er... Mary, sir... Oh! Er...I mean Su, sir, Mary Su."

Spock was already beginning to have his doubts about her abilities but as she appeared to be the only female left on board he really had no choice.

"Ms. Su, I have an assignment for you. That is if you are not otherwise engaged."

"Oh! No, sir, I'm...I'm quite free." Spock, the idol, actually wanted her to do something for him.

"Good." Now how on earth was he going to explain what precisely he wanted her to do? He glanced at the chronometer on the wall. They had less than half an hour to prepare themselves. 'It was no use beating around the bush' as the Captain no doubt would have said.

"Ms. Su, I have need of a wife." By the way she suddenly sat down in the nearest chair he gathered that he should have put it a little more subtly. "I want you to pose as my wife," he quickly rephrased. She nodded her head, still at a loss for words.

"Come then." He took her by the arm and pulled her out of the chair. "Time is short. I will only be able to give you a few rudimentary instructions as to what you should do."

'Whatever you do, do not smile,' Mary Su quoted to herself as they stood in the place of, what do you call it...something with a K and an F... 'Walk behind, attend me in such and such a way. Oh! I'll never remember, and this stupid dress ...' She gathered the long folds of it up in her hands and hurried after him. Boy! but he could walk fast.

"Ms. Su, my wife. Put your dress down and walk. T'Pau could be here at any moment and it is unseemly to run."

"I'm sorry, sir." She dropped the dress and shuffled after him.

"Behind me," he ordered as she appeared at his side. As she fell into step behind him, Spock could feel the beginnings of a headache. He could see that everything was not going to go as smoothly as he would have wished.

"Sir," she whispered from behind as they came to stand still in the middle of the 'arena', a place which held unpleasant memories for him. "Sir..."

"Ms. Su," he reminded her. "You are not supposed to call me 'sir'."

"Well, Spock, then. Look, what if..." Just then T'Pau was carried around the corner on her litter, a rather awe-inspiring sight to the already nervous Ensign. "Oh my God..."

"Silence!" T'Pau ordered having caught the Terran female's exclamation. So this was Spock's choice.

Mary Su blushed a bright red as two pairs of cold dark eyes met hers. One pair being those of the First Officer and the other pair being those of T'Pau, Spock's grandmother.

"And thee art?" T'Pau asked as the litter was put down in front of her grandson and his Terran 'wife'.

Somehow Mary Su's vocal chords had seized up.

"T'Su," Spock answered on her behalf.

"And your Terran name?" she asked Mary Su again, determined to get some kind of coherent answer out of the female.

Mary Su took a deep breath. Mustn't let the side down. "Mary, Ma'am."

"Mary," T'Pau repeated in distaste. She diverted her attention back to Spock. "And she is your choice?"

"Yes, T'Pau," Spock said, resisting the urge to shout NO!!!

"And thee are bonded in the Terran way?"

"Yes," Spock said, hoping she wouldn't notice the sudden flush of green blood in his cheeks. All these lies were not doing him any good. 'A little white lie never harmed anyone'. More Human illogic, for he was learning the hard way... that 'little white lie' soon grew out of all proportion.

"Very well. Come here, both of you."

Spock glanced at Mary Su, why was she still standing? He had instructed her to faint during this part of the proceedings. But she was walking forward now to kneel in front of T'Pau. He had no choice but to follow her. Surely she would do it now... T'Pau's hand was on her head, coming down on his... T'Pau would discover...

Spock awoke in a nice cool bedroom. His bedroom in his parents' house at Shikhar. How did he come to be here? The door opened and his mother came in, followed by Mary Su - that brought it all back to him. The ceremony. What had happened? He had passed out...fainted at T'Pau's feet when she had touched his head, fainted out of fear of being discovered, and out of fear of being accidentally bonded to the Ensign.

"Spock, thank goodness you're awake," his mother said. "We've been so worried."

Mary Su took his hand in hers and smiled down at him. "Oh yes, Spock, we've been so very worried."

"Why didn't you tell us, Spock?" his mother asked.

"Tell?" Spock was still a little disorientated.

"That you'd married."

"Yes," Mary Su said as she squeezed his hand, "Why didn't you tell them?"

Spock looked at her accusingly. "You...you told them?"

"Of course, dear, after all when you were brought home by T'Pau's assistants, I had no choice."

"Of course not..." He struggled into a sitting position. "What about the ceremony, though?"

"Postponed, of course," his mother explained. "However, when you've recovered T'Pau will arrange to go through the procedures again."

Spock sank back against the pillow. He had not been discovered; however it would be best if he did not recover until he was safely back on board the Enterprise again.

"Ms... er... T'Su. has the Captain been located yet?"

"No... Why?"

He shook his head. Of course, why should they inform the Captain? He was after all on shore leave, and where he should have been in the first place, at his parents' home.

"Well, I'll leave you two alone for a minute while I go and get something for you to eat, Spock."

"Yes mother." 'You do that,' Spock thought as he looked at Mary Su, once they were alone.

"Oh - perhaps I should come with you..." Mary Su tried to pull her hand out of his, but this time he was doing the holding and he was determined not to let go.

"Stay!" he ordered.

"You'd better stay with Spock, Mary," Amanda said noting a certain 'glint' in her son's eyes. As she left them together she wondered if it was because his time had come. That being the case she had better not go back into the room for a while.

"I had no choice," Mary Su protested as she struggled to get her hand out of his tight grasp.

"At the ceremony you were clearly instructed to faint. You have only complicated the matter."

"I couldn't help it. T'Pau - I was sure she would have seen straight through me. At least when you passed out it was the real thing."

"She said nothing?" Mary shook her head. "And then," Spock went on to say, "you informed my parents that we were married."

"T'Pau's assistants were there."

"You could have told them afterwards."

"I just didn't get the chance, sir."

"And then that ridiculous display in front of my mother." He let go of her hand. "What must she think?"

"Well, she's Human, isn't she?"

"And I am Vulcan," he pointed out.

There was a knock at the door. "Come," Spock said, expecting his mother to walk in; instead it was his father, Sarek, the last person he wanted to face at that particular moment.

"Spock."

"Father?" What did he want?

Sarek was puzzled. Amanda had mentioned that Spock could be entering his time and yet he saw no sign of the madness in his son's eyes. On the other hand he did appear to be nervous, otherwise why was he screwing up the top of his blanket with his hands.

"I fail to understand why you did not mention your marriage to us earlier. I myself married a Terran female, there was no need to be ashamed of the fact." He looked over at the young woman who had gone to sit in a chair near the window. Hardly the type of female he had expected his son to choose. However... "It is also clear to your mother and me that you have given your wife very little instruction with regard to the way in which she should conduct herself whilst on Vulcan."

Spock looked up at his father and then across at Mary Su. Perhaps the moment of truth had finally come. It would be best to confess it all right now.

"We haven't really had much time together, sir," Mary Su suddenly piped in just as Spock was about to make a clean breast of things.

Sarek looked down at Spock seeking confirmation. What could Spock do but nod his head?

"That being the case we can accept your wife's lack of discipline. However, the sooner you teach her a little of our ways the better. I trust I will see you both at lunch. And T'Su, kindly remember that on Vulcan one does not talk at the table." And with that he left.

As the door closed on his father, Spock looked at Mary Su completely aghast. "You spoke at the table?"

"Well, how was I to know?"

Spock sighed. Of course, how was she to know? How was she supposed to know anything apart from the few simple instructions he had given her before they had beamed down to the bonding ceremony.

"We'd better go down to lunch, then, hadn't we?" she said.

Spock started to climb out of bed. When Sarek had said he would see you at lunch... There was no way he could lie there and pretend to be ill.

Lunch passed in silence and Mary Su did her utmost not to show Spock up again, though by the time they left the dining room and retired into the main living room she was shaking with nerves. Perhaps, she reasoned, before they started any kind of conversation and she put her foot in it, she should do what she should have done in the first place, faint. However, before she could put her plan into operation the doorbell rang. Visitors... She exchanged startled looks with Spock, could it by any chance be the dreaded T'Pol? No - it was worse than they had expected... It turned out to be the dreaded Dr. McCoy instead.

"I was just passing and thought I'd call on you." He sauntered into the main living room. "Why, hello there, Spock and...and..." There was something about the way Spock looked at him that warned him to be careful. "We... I didn't think to see you here..."

Mary Su smiled up at him. "I managed to get my shift changed round, Doctor. After all, a wife should be at her husband's side, shouldn't she? And especially as it's the first time I've been to Vulcan, and of course I had yet to meet Spock's parents."

"Of course..." McCoy gave Spock a look that said 'What the hell's going on here?'

"Sit down, Doctor." Amanda pulled out a chair for him. "I'll go and get some refreshments." The silence that followed her departure was unnerving, but they just couldn't think of anything to say to each other.

"Here we are, Doctor." Amanda put the tray down on the table in front of him and handed him a glass. "And now you must tell me all about the wedding. You won't believe it, but Spock never told me he'd married."

"He didn't?" McCoy looked across at the Vulcan, who was attempting to hide behind a glass of something. And Mary Su, yes, he had managed to place her now, having only recently given her a medical, was fidgeting nervously beside him. McCoy grinned. It looked like Spock had got himself into some kind of mess, well, he's just have to help out, wouldn't he.

"Now fancy not telling your parents that you'd taken yourself a wife, Spock. Tut! What'll Jim say when he finds out? Anyway, the wedding. I was best man of course, gave the bride away. She looked really lovely, she did, but then what can you expect from somebody who loves Spock so much. Ah! Love... You should have seen those two young things... It's a wonder they didn't get themselves hitched long ago, but then Spock's got that touch of romanticism in him. Must have inherited it from you, Lady Amanda." Amanda smiled at him. Sarek was eyeing Spock clinically, while Spock sat staring stoney-faced at the wall behind McCoy and Mary Su had turned a deep shade of red.

"And when," Sarek asked, "did this marriage take place?"

"Oh - not so long ago. Let me see... It's only been a week or two, hasn't it, Spock?"

"Yes," said Spock in a voice that was barely audible.

"I see," Sarek said. He glanced across at his wife, and they both looked

at Spock. Spock looked back at them, aware of what they thought was wrong with him. A touch of romanticism, indeed... So completely out of character and McCoy knew it. And for him to be so completely out of character could only mean one thing...

"Dr. McCoy," Amanda said, tearing her eyes off her son. "It is already quite late, perhaps you would care to spend the night here."

"Well, that's very kind of you, ma'am. But you see I'm sharing a room with the Captain at the Complex and as I didn't tell him where I was going he might get worried."

"Of course," Amanda said in delight, "Jim's here as well..." She looked across at her husband. "Sarek, perhaps we could invite the Captain over for the night."

"As you wish, my wife," Sarek agreed. "However, I have an important meeting tomorrow morning and I think it would be best if I retired. I trust you will take care of our guests."

"Of course, Sarek," Amanda said as her husband got to his feet.

"Good evening, Doctor, Spock and my Lady T'Su," and he was gone. For the first time that evening Spock and Mary Su actually let themselves relax. But then there was the awesome fact that their Captain would be turning up sometime during the next hour, and of course as soon as Amanda had left the room to go and make the call, McCoy turned to them.

"Okay, you two, how did you get yourselves into this mess?"

"Well, you didn't precisely help it, Doctor," Mary Su dared to say. In fact during the past few hours there were a lot of things that she had dared to say and do to her superior officers. "All that rubbish about the so-called wedding!"

"Okay, okay! So I played it up a bit. But I did, by the looks of it, get you out of a sticky spot."

"On the contrary, Doctor," Spock said as he stared gloomily at the glass he still held in his hands, "the situation, as I see it, has not yet been resolved. As far as my parents are concerned Ensign Su and I are married, and then there is T'Pau."

"And there's the fact that you still haven't told me how you got yourselves into this in the first place," McCoy said.

"Mr. Spock didn't want to marry this Vulcan woman that T'Pau had arranged for him. So on the spur of the moment he told her that he was already married to a Terran," Mary Su explained as Spock seemed incapable of talking at that moment.

"You actually told T'Pau...a...lie, Spock?" McCoy said in mock disbelief. After all he knew perfectly well that Spock must have done quite a bit of play-acting to get himself into the situation he now found himself in - with Mary Su.

Spock nodded.

"So he got you to play the part of his wife, Mary?"

"Yes, only things seem to have escalated. Oh, Doctor, what are we going to do?"

"I don't know why you're so upset about it, Ensign. I would have thought that actually finding yourself married to Spock, even if it isn't for real, not just yet, you would have been delighted."

"Just yet?" Spock asked. "To what are you referring, Doctor?"

"Pleased to see you're back with us, Spock. Well, I can see no other way out, can you? What'll your father say when he discovers you aren't married? What'll T'Pau say? What'll Starfleet Command say? What'll..."

Spock covered his ears with his hands. So this was what it was like to go mad.

At that precise moment Amanda came back into the room. She looked at her son in alarm. Indeed, he was displaying all the symptoms... He really shouldn't be down here in the main sitting room, he should be upstairs in the privacy of his own room with... She looked at Mary Su who was gently pulling at his arm.

"It s not that bad, Mr. Spock."

Amanda turned to the doctor, who looked up at her, concern clearly written in his eyes. Still, he did know what it was and wouldn't be embarrassed about it.

"I think we should tell your mother what precisely is going on, Spock," McCoy said as he noticed that Mary Su had managed to get Spock's hands off his ears, so that he could hear what was being said again.

"Yes," Mary Su agreed. She was beginning to feel the same strain as Spock.

"Tell me what?" Amanda asked, completely at a loss as to what they could be referring to.

"We're not married at all, Mrs. Sarek," Mary Su said.

"What!" Amanda exclaimed in surprise.

"It was T'Pau, Mother," Spock explained in as few words as possible. "She was in the process of arranging a bonding between T'Pel, the recently widowed wife of Sardak, and myself. I do not know what came over me... I told her I couldn't as I was already married to a Terran. Then she asked me to bring down my Terran wife for the bonding ceremony."

"So that's why you fainted," Amanda said in sudden realisation.

"Fainted..." McCoy was looking at him in that clinical way now. "You fainted?"

"If T'Pau had found out..." Spock mumbled. He looked up as he heard the familiar sound of a medical scanner. Where on earth had McCoy produced that from? But then of course even off duty he still tended to carry his medikit a around with him.

"Is it very serious, Doctor?" Mary Su asked on behalf of Amanda and herself.

"Hypertension. The sooner we get him back on board ship away from all the causes of the tension the better."

"But what am I going to tell Sarek?" Amanda asked. "And then there's T'Pau."

"And the Captain," Mary Su added.

"Oh, lord! Jim!" Amanda exclaimed, suddenly recalling that she'd just invited him over for the night.

"Well, he's going to have to know anyway," McCoy said. "He's the only one that can get Spock out of this mess."

"Do you really think so?" Mary Su asked.

"Of course. He'll have to marry the two of you and try to backdate the records."

"But, Doctor," Spock said in a strained voice, "I do not wish to be married."

"And neither do I!" Mary Su said. She'd seen enough of Vulcan life to convince her that it wouldn't work out. Good lord - you couldn't even talk over dinner, and what with having to walk behind your husband and all those other rules and regulations, being married to a Vulcan was worse than being a member of Starfleet.

"You've got no choice." And by the way he said it, Spock could see that the doctor was not joking. In fact, he looked far too serious. Just then the door-bell rang. It could only be one person - the Captain of the Enterprise.

"Hello, everybody," he began ever so cheerfully, but trailed off in mid

sentence. The picture before him reminded him of something out of the Inquisition.

"Jim," McCoy began. "Jim, Spock s got himself into a right pickle and you're the only one who can get him out of it."

"Aren't I always?" Kirk muttered under his breath as he took a seat next to the pretty young woman that sat next to Spock. Kirk wondered who on earth she could be. Five minutes later, he did, as well (of course) as knowing the rest of the story.

"If you'd told us about T'Pau in the first place, Spock," Kirk said, "I could have arranged it so that we went no-place near Vulcan."

"Vulcan stubbornness, Jim," McCoy said. "He thought he could solve the problem himself."

"I did not deem it necessary to involve you, Captain," Spock said in an attempt to defend himself against McCoy's words, words which were in fact far too near the truth. "Especially as it is highly unlikely that you hold fond memories of the place of Koon-ut-kal-if-fee."

"Good heavens, Spock. That was over two years ago and ever since then Vulcan seems to have opened itself up a bit. Anyway as to what we can do. McCoy's right. The only thing I can do is marry you and backdate it. You can always get a divorce afterwards."

"But that still doesn't solve the problem of T'Pau and the bonding ceremony," Amanda pointed out.

"He'll be light years away from here by the time she comes calling."

"Vulcans do not believe in divorce," Spock said.

"Vulcans don't lie, Spock," McCoy said. "If you can lie then you can get a divorce."

"On what grounds?"

"Good grief Spock. Here we are trying to get you out of a pickle with your father and T'Pau and all you can think of are objections."

"Incompatability," Mary Su suggested, determined that she was not going to be lumbered with the Vulcan First Officer for the rest of her life.

"Incompatability, then," Kirk agreed. "And now, ladies and gentlemen, I thing we should get ourselves back on board ship and get the ball rolling."

"What a pity," Amanda said. "Are you sure you wouldn't like to spend the night?"

Mary Su and Spock exchanged glances. "Most definitely not!" they both said.

"Yes," Kirk said, not able to suppress the lecherous grin that had broken out across his face. "It would cause some unnecessary problems, wouldn't it?"

"And brother," McCoy said, "have we got enough problems as it is!"

Back on baord the ship, Spock found himself confined to sickbay suffering from hypertension.

"I am quite capable of being left on my own in my own quarters," he complained. But McCoy just ignored him and Spock couldn't really say that much back. McCoy knew too much. The atmosphere in the sickbay also was far from pleasant for of course news of Spock's impending marriage to a certain Ensign Mary Su had gone around and Head Nurse Chapel and her assistants (who all belonged to the upper decks' 'Spock Appreciation Society') weren't too pleased. In fact, they were downright annoyed and let him know it, which didn't help his condition at all.

"Well, how are you feeling this morning?" Kirk asked as he walked into the sickbay ward.

"Oh, he'll be just fine," McCoy said as he stood looking up at the diagnostic panel above the bed.

'Fine', Spock thought. Couldn't they see that he was far from 'fine'? He was suffering from an inner turmoil of emotions, emotions brought on by guilt, brought on by - of course - that little white lie. After all, the situation had still not been resolved.

"Good," Kirk said as he beamed down at his First Officer. "Then I'll go and put my dress uniform on and get the necessary books and things. Pity McCoy won't let you go to the Chapel, but then of course if Sarek or T'Pol put in a call, it'll look more convincing, you being confined to bed."

"Dress uniform, Captain?" Spock asked, knowing too well what Kirk was referring to but not wanting to accept it.

"That's right, Spock. Don't forget we've got to get you married, and quick. Who knows, Sarek or T'Pol could be contacting Starfleet HQ right now seeking confirmation of the marriage. As soon as we've gone through the ceremony I'll get the backdated tapes sent off."

Spock closed his eyes. Would this nightmare never come to an end?

"Come on, Spock, wake up! This is hardly the time to sleep. It's your wedding day..."

Spock opened his eyes to find the Captain and the Doctor standing next to the bed, both resplendent in their dress uniforms. And there stood Mary Su, flanked at either side by Head Nurse Chapel and her glowering assistants.

"The sooner it's over and done with the better," Kirk said as he opened the book.

"Wait a minute, Jim," McCoy suddenly said. "We haven't got a ring."

"Spock, you got a ring?" Kirk asked.

Spock shook his head.

"You'll just have to use mine, then." McCoy started tugging at the ring he wore. "I want it back, though, straight after the ceremony."

"I can't go through with this!" Mary Su suddenly wailed.

"What?" Chapel exclaimed in disbelief. "How can you say such a thing?"

"Ensign Su," the Captain said, making sure it sounded like an order, "you have no choice."

As Spock struggled up into a sitting position he wondered what it would be like to be banned from Vulcan, and in one split second he decided that it could never be as bad as having to put up with this farce any longer. Enough was enough...

"Ensign Su is correct," he said as he continued to try and get into a sitting position. "We can't go through with this." Why had the doctor used restraints on him? He fell back against the pillow. "Dr. McCoy, remove these restraints immediately."

"Not until you've married Mary Su."

"Jim!" he pleaded.

"I'm sorry, Spock." Kirk started to read from the book and Mary Su burst into tears. Talk about a shot-gun wedding! she thought. It was a wonder McCoy wasn't holding a phaser on them.

"Well, that's that," Kirk said as he closed the book and looked down at a rather pale Vulcan and at a tear-stained Mary Su who stood reluctantly holding Spock's hand. "Well?"

They both looked at him. What now?

"The bride, kiss the bride, Spock," Kirk said.

"Kiss the bride," McCoy repeated.

"Yes, kiss the bride," Chapel agreed. "And then - " she turned to the other females " - we get to kiss the groom, don't we?"

Spock struggled against the restraints again only this time he awoke with a start.

Awoke?

The intercom was whistling. He let himself relax against the perspiration-wet pillows and then threw the equally saturated cover onto the floor. That was the last time he would be able to say to anybody that he didn't believe Vulcans ever dreamed. If that was anything to go by, they did, and very clearly as well. What a nightmare!

"Mr. Spock, sir," came Uhura's anxious voice over the intercom. "Mr. Spock, acknowledge, please."

Spock rolled over and activated the intercom. "Spock here. Go ahead, Lieutenant."

"I've a message tape for you sir."

Spock sat up. "Yes?"

"Strictly confidential. It comes from Vulcan, from T'Pol herself. Do you want me to relay it down to you?"

Silence.

"Mr. Spock?"

Perhaps Vulcans did not dream after all and what he had experienced had been a premonition. If so, what could he do?

"Mr. Spock?"

ADRIFT by Gillian Catchpole

Water, the first drop, falls on waiting rock
And the life created lives and loves and slowly changes.

Across the stars the sequence is disturbed.
Arriving too soon
The presence of logic unsettles the pattern.
Adjustments must be made to restore the order.

Float him free from detail, connect with passion,
Break through the control, surge anger to violence,
Overwhelm his precision with wondering love,
Remove the capacity for considered decision.

Reason is fading, there is nothing to sustain,
The man that was has not had his beginning.

McCoy: Ever had trouble with dyspepsia?

Scotty: Only once.

McCoy: When was that?

Scotty: When I tried to spell it.

LHI-SORANN by Jean Barron

Zantarian was a large, sparsely populated planet in the Minerva star system and it was pure misfortune that had placed the object of their search close to one of the few inhabited areas.

"Spock, have you seen any of this...this..."

"Xatle, Captain."

"Thank you, Spock. Is there any sign of it yet?"

"Not yet, sir."

"We're getting too close to the town. If we don't find it soon, we'll have to strike off in another direction."

McCoy had been searching the undergrowth a little way ahead but at these words he came back to them. He had had little rest since an increasing number of the crew had succumbed to a virulent fever for which the only known antidote was a compound extracted from the xatle plant. A search of the medical computer banks had revealed that the nearest available source of the herb was on this comparatively unexplored Class M planet. Now McCoy was facing the Captain, his eyes red-rimmed from lack of sleep.

"I know it's here, Jim. It's only faint but it is registering on my tricorder."

Kirk glanced interrogatively at his First Officer who nodded. "It would appear that the plant is growing in a minute quantity approximately three kilometres in that direction, Captain."

Kirk frowned, "Nearer the town."

"Affirmative, Captain. I am also registering an artificial construction of some kind in the same area although there is no sign of intelligent life in the immediate vicinity."

"Very well, we'll go on but we must exercise extreme caution. Bones, I want you to go back to the ship. Spock and I can do what's necessary."

McCoy looked mulish. "I'm all right, Jim. You forget that I'm the only one who's seen xatle in its natural state - I'll be able to recognise it at once."

Kirk sighed. "And you tell me I'm stubborn." Then he smiled. "Come on - let's get this damned plant and get out of here."

The three men continued on their way, following a narrow track between the trees, Kirk leading despite Spock's obvious disapproval, and McCoy in the middle where the other two men could keep an eye on him. Drunk with fatigue, the doctor repeatedly stumbled over rocks and half-hidden roots, scowling ungraciously when Spock helped him to his feet but saying nothing that would draw the Captain's attention. Kirk forged ahead, not entirely oblivious to what was going on behind him but anxious to complete the mission and get back to his ship. He came at last to a large clearing and was still standing, staring, when the others caught up with him.

An imposing temple-like building towered over them, glittering in the pale sunlight. When they approached cautiously, they could see that the black marble from which it was constructed was veined with gold, a fact which plainly intrigued Spock from a geological point of view but failed to hold McCoy's attention.

"There it is, Jim!"

Kirk followed the direction of McCoy's pointing finger.

"You see the white flowers with the pink centres? That's it - that's xatle!"

McCoy moved off, not waiting for Kirk's comment. The plant was some distance away, growing at the base of a clump of silver-barked trees and Kirk touched

Spock's arm lightly. "Go with him, Spock. I don't know what's keeping him going but he may need your help."

Spock looked up from his examination of the marble and glanced towards McCoy who was already half-way across the clearing, then back at Kirk who managed to conceal his amusement at the Vulcan's dilemma. "Go on, Spock - that's an order," he said firmly and turned away to indicate that he expected no further discussion on the point, but he knew that his First Officer continued to watch him for an instant before walking away.

Spock found McCoy on his knees, carefully selecting flowers and stowing them in his specimen bag.

"May I assist you, Doctor?"

"Thanks, Spock." McCoy was anxious to make up for his earlier ingratitude. "I'll need the smaller flowers with the deep pink centres - the larger ones are already past the useful stage - and we'd better take as many as we can, just to be on the safe side."

Within the space of a few minutes, the herb patch was stripped of every potent blossom and the two men prepared to return to the Captain.

Kirk was nowhere to be seen.

McCoy looked around. "Where's Jim?"

Spock glanced at his tricorder. "I do not know, Doctor."

"What do you mean - you don't know? You spoke to him last."

"I know only that he is not here. Nor does his presence register on my tricorder. Considering the short length of time that has elapsed, I must assume that he has discovered an entrance to this building and is at this moment inside its confines."

McCoy circled the black monument but could see no sign of a doorway. "Call him on your communicator," he said urgently, but Spock seemed more concerned with the readings he was taking on his tricorder. "Spock, do something! Jim may be in trouble."

"Doctor, it would be of little use to attempt to contact the Captain at present. The gold veins in this marble form a strong sensor web which, at the same time, effectively precludes us from communicating through these walls. We must find the entrance if we are to be of any assistance to the Captain."

They had completed a close examination of less than half the wall surface when Spock spoke quietly into McCoy's ear. "Doctor, please make no sudden movement. We are being watched. I would suggest you do not attempt to use your phaser under any circumstances until we are certain that the Captain is safe."

An instant later a dozen men dressed in unwarlike tunics filtered silently from among the trees, quickly surrounded them and stripped them of weapons and communicators. McCoy struggled indignantly despite Spock's advice but soon realised that there was little point in arguing with a force of this size. When it was made clear that they were to leave the clearing, he looked back helplessly at the sinister black temple with its gold filigree web but Spock kept his eyes steadfastly to the front as they were escorted towards the town they had been so careful to avoid.

Kirk picked himself up off the floor and stared, mystified, at the wall through which he had just fallen. He knew there had to be an opening in the shiny black marble - a brilliant Starfleet Captain he might well be but he hadn't yet learned how to pass through solid objects - but there was no sign of a door, no lever, no switch, no sensitized panel. He had stumbled, put out his hand to save himself - and here he was!

The softly diffused light that filled the circular room where he stood came from the roof which was formed of a crystal-like substance that glowed with a natural radiance. In the centre of the chamber was a stairwell. He peered down the steep steps but could see nothing in the gloomy depths below and reached for his communicator. "Spock! Come in, Spock!"

The communicator crackled briefly and was silent. No amount of jiggling with the tiny controls could elicit a response and he replaced the useless instrument on his belt. It looked as if he would have to search for another way out and the stairs seemed to be the only alternative.

The rim of darkness lay on the fifth step but the instant his booted foot touched it lights sprang into life and he could see clearly into the room below. His attention was drawn at once to the far wall which was covered in weird, sprawling patterns and images which, although he couldn't interpret them, fascinated him with their bold lines and strident colours. Here and there he saw what appeared to be sections of star maps with strange geometric designs superimposed upon them and, in the middle of the whole mind-dazzling composition, surrounded by radiating lines in all colours of the spectrum, nine stick-like figures were grouped together. The central figure held a cape in a protective gesture around the others and Kirk moved forward to get a closer look. Then he saw a movement to his left and whirled to face the tall, cowed figure which had appeared silently in a doorway. His hand hovered over the phaser on his hip but, since the newcomer made no threatening gesture towards him, he relaxed slightly.

"Who are you?"

His question was ignored. "You will come with me."

The voice was male but so cold and inflexible that Kirk wondered whether the shadowed recesses of his hood concealed the face of an android. He stood firm.

"I would like to return to the surface. My being here is an accident - I do not wish to intrude further."

"You will be taken to your friends. Come with me."

The figure turned noiselessly and Kirk followed, despite his natural caution, for he dared not ignore the inference that Spock and McCoy were already in this man's hands. They walked for some time along a faintly illuminated passageway until at last they emerged into a large hall.

Blinking a little in the strong light, Kirk saw a group of men approaching. Unlike his sombre companion, they were bareheaded and dressed simply in knee-length tunics and it was the complete lack of aggression in their manner that caught him off guard when they suddenly seized him and dragged him, struggling furiously, to a vertical metal frame where his wrists were manacled in such a way that his arms were stretched above his head and he was forced to stand rigidly upright to ease the strain on his shoulders. His silent captor came close and the hood was pushed back to reveal a thin, aquiline face from which grey eyes regarded him dispassionately.

"Your name?"

"Captain James T. Kirk. I have committed no crime and I demand that you release me."

His outburst was greeted with indifference.

"I am Rahtek - Principal of the Brotherhood of Zantarian. You are not from this planet."

Kirk's surprise showed on his face and Rahtek's lip curled slightly in a humourless smile. "We are not unacquainted with what lies beyond Zantarian - we merely choose not to concern ourselves with matters outside our own world. Space travel is within our grasp but we are content to remain here. Why did you come?"

"Some of my people are sick - we needed a drug and your planet has the only source in this sector of space. We mean you no harm."

Rahtek's eyes flashed. "You entered the temple where no-one but a member of the Brotherhood may go. The penalty for this transgression is death."

Kirk lunged forward, grunting with pain as the manacles bit into his flesh. "I touched nothing in the temple. We want only to take the plant we need and to get back to our ship. What have you done with my friends?"

"They will be here soon - to witness your execution and to warn others against intrusion into our world."

A sharp retort died on Kirk's lips as several more people entered the hall and by twisting his head awkwardly to one side he could see Spock and McCoy with an escort of Zantarians.

"As you can see," said Rahtek, "they are unharmed."

"Are you all right, Jim? Have they hurt you?"

McCoy's anxiety was obvious but, with an odd feeling that it was the Vulcan rather more than the doctor who needed reassurance, Kirk looked at Spock as he replied, "I'm fine. Just a little uncomfortable strung up like this."

Spock's eyes held his in a searching gaze and he felt a strange yet comforting warmth pervading his body and, when Spock looked away at last, he experienced a vague sense of deprivation though the warmth persisted. McCoy cut in on his bemusement. "What happened, Jim? How did you get here?"

Kirk opened his mouth to speak but was smoothly interrupted by Rahtek. "Do not speak to your companions of what you have seen unless you wish them to share your fate."

Shocked by the knowledge that Rahtek meant exactly what he said, Kirk fell silent and the Zantarian, who had been staring at Spock since his arrival, succumbed to his curiosity. "You are Vulcan?"

Spock inclined his head gravely.

"A long time ago, Vulcans came to this planet as conquerors. They were creatures of cruel, sensual appetites."

"My forefathers were barbaric people," agreed Spock imperturbably. "Today we are men of peace and seek only knowledge."

Rahtek appraised him thoughtfully for a while, appeared to form his judgment, and walked away from them towards a curved marble table facing them at the opposite end of the hall. Here he took his place and was joined at once by eight cloaked figures who had entered unobserved through yet another doorway. There was a brief, chilling silence, then:

"Captain Kirk, you have broken the first Law of Zantarian and, in so doing, have forfeited your life."

If Kirk had wondered fleetingly about the method of execution, he soon learned the answer. A hand gripped his hair and pulled his head sharply backwards so that the column of his neck was tautly curved, his throat exposed and vulnerable. He felt the point of a knife pricking just below his left ear and closed his eyes in an involuntary reaction.

"May I speak, Rahtek?"

Hands reached out to grasp Spock's arms as he stepped forward but fell away at a signal from their leader.

"Come forward, Vulcan."

Kirk wrenched his head free and, cursing the fact that he was too far away to hear what was going on, watched the arrow-straight figure of his friend approach the semi-circle of grim-faced elders.

"Speak, Vulcan - what is it you wish to say?"

"If it is required by your law that a life must be forfeit - I ask you to accept mine in place of my Captain's."

Rahtek's eyes narrowed. "Why should you offer to die for him?"

"Many lives depend upon his wisdom and leadership - these lives would be at risk if he were to die."

"As a Vulcan you would be quite capable of assuming his responsibilities."

Spock kept his tone level. "I beg you to accept my life."

Was there a gleam of compassion in the cold Zantarian eyes? Rahtek's next words seemed to deny it. "What you ask is impossible. Your captain's crime is not merely that he entered the temple but that he saw those things meant only for the eyes of the Brotherhood. No-one else is permitted to see the ancient symbols which depict the history of this planet and its people."

"But these things held no significance for him."

"Nevertheless, he has seen them. The Law has been broken." Rahtek paused to glance at the figure bound to the metal frame, before looking back at Spock. "Tell me truthfully, Vulcan - do you care for this man?"

"I do not understand the purpose of the question."

Again, gently: "Do you care for this man?"

A shiver went through the Vulcan. "Yes...I care for him."

"Then it is not only from a sense of duty that you would give your life for his."

"No."

Rahtek turned to his fellow elders, first to one side and then to the other, and each man nodded almost imperceptibly to the silent question in his eyes.

"There is a way by which you may save your captain."

"Tell me how it may be done and I will do it."

Rahtek regarded him silently for a long moment, then: "Do you understand Lhi-Sorann?"

Spock flinched at the mention of the ancient Vulcan ritual. As a youth, studying the cultural history of his father's race, he had come close to losing his perpetual struggle against emotionalism as he read of the traditional Lhi-Sorann ceremony practised by the military leaders during Vulcan's warlike period. Now it was being offered to him as a means of saving his friend - but at what cost?

Kirk had long since ceased to struggle against his bonds, his attention riveted on the tableau at the far end of the hall. He saw Rahtek shake his head, saw the rigid set of Spock's shoulders as the conversation continued and he began to feel afraid.

"What's he doing, Bones? I won't have him making any noble gestures for me. I'm the one they want."

McCoy could only shrug his shoulders but there was no doubt in either man's mind that Spock would willingly sacrifice his life for Kirk's.

"You understand that your captain must make his own choice. Many men would die - and have died - rather than accept the consequences of Lhi-Sorann."

"I understand." Spock's voice was so completely without inflection that Kirk would have demanded to know immediately what was wrong but Rahtek heard only determination, and nodded.

"Am I permitted to ask one further question?"

"Ask it."

"Is it required that the ceremony be witnessed?"

Rahtek frowned. "The deed must be confirmed by all nine members of the Brotherhood. But you presume too much, Vulcan - your captain may yet choose to die."

"May I have a moment with him?"

Rahtek picked up a smooth, gold disc and spun it on the surface of the table. "You may have until the disc comes to rest."

With the soft humming sound in his ears, Spock walked back to his anxious friends.

"What's going on, Spock?"

"I have no time to explain, Captain. I can save you but you must trust me. When Rahtek asks for your reply, you must say that you agree to the alternative."

"What alternative?" demanded Kirk, instantly suspicious. "I won't agree to anything that will harm you or Bones - you know that."

"I assure you, Captain, the Doctor and I will be perfectly safe. Will you do as I ask?"

Kirk stared at him, trying desperately to read something in his expression but without success. He sighed, "Yes. Whatever it is, it must be preferable to having my throat cut."

Spock sottd aside as Rahtek approached. "Has the decision been made, Vulcan?"

"It has been made."

"Your reply, Captain Kirk?"

"I have no wish to die. I agree to your alternative."

The Zantarian looked faintly surprised. "You have made this choice freely and without coercion?"

"It is my choice."

"Very well. Release him."

The metal bands were removed. "What happens now?" Kirk asked, grimacing as the circulation was painfully restored to his arms.

"You and the Vulcan will come with me. Your physician will remain - he will come to no harm."

McCoy started to his feet but hesitated when he saw Kirk's eyes. "Do as you're told, Bones. We'll be back."

Spock said nothing and McCoy felt a thin tendril of apprehension coiling round his insides when he saw that the Vulcan seemed incapable of looking him in the eye. Then the three men left, followed in dignified silence by the other members of the Brotherhood, and McCoy was left to stare bleakly at the doorway through which they had departed.?

Left alone in the great hall, his exhaustion forgotten in his deep concern for his friends, he paced back and forth, his eyes going constantly to the open door. His one attempt to leave was forestalled by a guard standing in the corridor beyond, McCoy faced him belligerently for a moment, then grunted and returned to his pacing. He had no way of measuring the passage of time and it seemed an eternity before he heard footsteps approaching once more. Rahtek entered the hall, the eight lesser members of his group close behind, and they resumed their places at the council table. After a brief pause, Kirk walked in with Spock at his elbow and McCoy was alarmed by their white, expressionless faces. As the two men drew level with him, he clutched the gold sleeve.

"Jim, what happened?"

The hazel eyes that were raised to his were cold and empty, devoid of intelligence, and he recoiled, his fingers releasing their grip.

"What have they done to him, Spock?" he demanded hoarsely of the Vulcan.

"I did what was necessary, Doctor," replied Spock tonelessly.

"You did it?" McCoy was incredulous.

"Would you rather he had died?"

McCoy stared at him too stunned to reply.

"Are you ready for the test, Vulcan?"

Spock took Kirk's arm and led him to the table where, at a sign from Rahtek, an oil-filled vessel was placed in front of them. At the touch of a slim metal rod, flames appeared suddenly on the surface of the oil, the heat forcing Kirk to step back but Spock held him firmly, watching thoughtfully as the bed of leaping flames steadied, turning from crimson and orange to a white, incandescent glow.

Rahtek fixed Kirk with a piercing stare. "You will place your hand in the flame, Captain Kirk."

"No!" McCoy stepped up, his face ashen, but he was quickly restrained. To his relief, Kirk made no move to obey the command and Rahtek seemed oddly satisfied by his blank-faced stare. "Repeat my order, Vulcan."

Spock released his grip on Kirk's arm and said quietly, "Captain, I want you to place your hand in the flames."

Kirk moved forward to plunge his hand unhesitatingly into the burning oil and McCoy's cry of horror effectively drowned the Vulcan's sharply-indrawn breath as he took upon himself the full force of Kirk's pain, the fingers of one hand curling up into the palm as he experienced the agony which flared in the Human's mind. By deliberately relaxing his own rigid mental shield, he was able to reinforce that defenceless mind with his own strength. Beads of perspiration formed on Kirk's upper lip but he remained calm and, presently, Rahtek's voice cut into the silence.

"Enough!"

Spock drew Kirk's hand from the oil, noting without expression the complete absence of injury despite the cruel heat to which the flesh had been subjected. There was a murmur of approval from the members of the Brotherhood and Rahtek nodded, obviously well-pleased.

"You have fulfilled your task - we are satisfied that your Captain's mind is under your control - his past is gone, his future for you to decide. You are free to leave."

Within minutes their equipment had been returned to them and they were led out of the hall and through the streets to the outskirts of the town. Here they soon found themselves alone and McCoy immediately turned on Spock. "Now are you going to tell me what's been going on?"

Spock froze him with a single glance. "No, Doctor. At this moment, I have something of greater importance to do. You will return to the ship. The Captain and I will follow shortly."

"What are you going to do?"

Ignoring this question, Spock flipped open his communicator.

"Enterprise - Scott here."

"Mr, Scott, you will beam Dr. McCoy up at once and await further orders before transporting the Captain and myself."

"Aye, Mr. Spock."

Before McCoy could voice his objections, his form sparkled into nothingness and the first officer was alone with the apathetic figure of his captain.

Torn between his duty to his patients and his anxiety for the Captain, and bemoaning the fact that M'Benga was on leave, McCoy fled to his laboratory, ensured that his assistants knew exactly how to extract the xatle compound and dashed back to the transporter room. When the two figures shimmered into view on the transporter pads, he thought he was prepared for anything, but his jaw dropped when Kirk stepped briskly down off the platform, obviously surprised to see the doctor.

"What are you doing here, Bones? Why aren't you working on that...that...?"

"Xatle, Captain."

Kirk glanced sideways with a slight grin as Spock once more supplied the elusive word. "Thank you, Mr. Spock. Well, why aren't you in your laboratory, Bones?"

"That's being taken care of," replied McCoy slowly. He stepped closer. "Are you all right, Jim?"

"Of course I am. Don't I look it?"

"Yes, but..." McCoy shook his head. "What happened to you down there? You looked..."

Kirk grinned. "Oh that! Spock explained it to me - I'm not sure that I understand his explanation but it seems he had to put me into some kind of trance to convince the Zantarians that I'd forgotten everything I'd seen in their temple. I don't know how he did it, but it worked. They let us go, didn't they?"

"Yes - they did." McCoy looked doubtfully from him to Spock and the glacial expression in the dark Vulcan eyes effectively paralysed his vocal chords and prevented his demanding more answers.

In the corridor, McCoy went off to check on progress in the laboratory and Kirk started towards the turbolift. Spock followed as far as the doors.

"Captain, am I required on the bridge at this time?"

"You're off duty, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir."

Kirk frowned at the stiff formality in his first officer's manner. "Is anything wrong, Spock?"

"Merely a slight headache, Captain."

A tiny warning bell rang in the back of Kirk's mind as he stepped into the lift and turned to scrutinise the pale features of the man waiting patiently for dismissal. "You look tired, Spock. Get McCoy to give you something to help you sleep."

Spock did not reply and Kirk knew that he had no intention of taking his advice. "I'll see you later, Spock."

"Sir."

The lift doors closed and Spock stared at them for a long time before turning on his heel and walking away.

There were only four patients left in sickbay when Kirk entered some time later, the others having responded so swiftly to the xatle drug they had been moved to their own quarters to rest for 48 hours before returning to duty. McCoy glanced up from the report he was dictating into his medical log. "Looking for me, Jim?"

"Yes and no, Bones. Have you seen Spock?"

"No - not since I left you both outside the transporter room. Have you tried his cabin?"

"I called him on the intercom and he doesn't answer. I thought he might be here."

"In sickbay?" McCoy laughed shortly. "Since when did Spock come here without being tied hand and foot?"

There was no answering smile on Kirk's face. "He complained of a headache. I told him to ask you for something."

McCoy looked startled. "Spock told you he had a headache?"

"I know - that's not like him. There's something more than a headache troubling him, Bones."

McCoy stood up. "Come on, we'll both go to his quarters."

Despite his normal reluctance to disturb his first officer unnecessarily during his off-duty periods, Kirk's concern had reached such a pitch that, when he got no response to his first buzz, he immediately entered the day cabin with McCoy close behind him. The austere furnished room was empty but, without quite understanding how, Kirk sensed Spock's presence and went through to the sleeping quarters.

The Vulcan lay fully dressed on his bed and they would have assumed that he was fast asleep if it had not been for the greyish pallor of his skin and the restless movements of his hands.

Kirk touched his shoulder. "Spock."

The dark head turned automatically towards the sound of his voice, the eyes opening to stare blankly at him. Then a glimmer of awareness appeared and he sat up, fending Kirk off with a trembling hand. "I do not require your assistance. I am quite able to cope with this temporary weakness."

"You're sick, Spock. Let me help you."

"No!" Spock was on his feet, swaying precariously, but still he would not allow Kirk to touch him. His eyes glazed suddenly, he put a hand to his head and McCoy caught him as he crumpled in a dead faint, while Kirk stood by helplessly, pain and anxiety mingled in his expressive eyes.

Once Spock was in sickbay it took McCoy only a few minutes to diagnose a severe case of the fever that had, until recently, been felling the crew like ninepins.

"Trust him to come down with it just as everyone else is recovering," he grumbled as he prepared a hypospray of the xatile compound. When the expected gentle reproof failed to materialise, he glanced across at the brooding figure by the open doorway. "Don't worry, Jim. He'll be fine - as soon as I give him this injection."

"I'm sure you're right, Bones."

"Then what's bothering you?"

"He didn't want me near him," replied Kirk slowly.

"He was burning with fever, Jim. Probably didn't even know we were there. Come and hold his arm for me."

Kirk came forward reluctantly to raise Spock's arm, pushing back the blue pyjama sleeve so that McCoy could administer the drug. Spock had been lying comparatively quietly but, at the touch of Kirk's hand, he began to move fretfully, his head turning from side to side on the sweat-dampened pillow.

"You see!" said Kirk bitterly. "Even unconscious, he knows I'm here."

"You're talking nonsense, Jim. He's a very sick man right now."

"But he will recover."

"You saw how quickly the others responded to the treatment."

Kirk watched McCoy press the plunger home on the hypospray, shooting its contents into Spock's bloodstream.

"I'm going up to the bridge. You'll keep me informed..."

"Yes - don't worry."

Kirk nodded and left without another glance at the figure on the bed.

Forty-eight hours later, Spock was still tossing feverishly and showing no signs of returning consciousness - and McCoy was more worried than he cared to admit to anyone but the Captain.

"I can't understand it, Jim. There's no reason why he should be like this. The drug did its job, so why doesn't he come out of it?"

"You're asking me? I'm not the doctor," Kirk snapped irritably.

Disturbed by the effect his presence appeared to be having on Spock, he had stayed away from sickbay with the result that he had been reduced almost to nail-biting frustration despite McCoy's frequent reports. Now, at McCoy's request, he was in the office leading off from sickbay and very much aware that Spock lay just a few feet away on the other side of the door. McCoy knew the reason for his ill-temper and made allowances.

It's not a medical problem - I'm sure of that. They must have done something to him down there on Zantarian. Don't you have any idea what happened when Rahtek took you both away?"

"I don't remember a thing until Spock snapped me out of that hypnotic trance just before we beamed up."

"I've never known Spock do anything like that. I ribbed him once about hypnotism and he insisted that it was something he had never practised."

"Then he must have used a mental block."

"In that case," said McCoy thoughtfully, "what was it he did to bring you back to your senses? If he removed a mental block, why is your mind still a blank about what happened? There's something he doesn't want you to remember, something they did to him - and the same thing is somehow preventing that drug from working as it should."

"But he told me they wouldn't harm him."

"Don't you think he would lie - if it meant your survival?"

Kirk suddenly felt dizzy with nausea and, seeing his white face, McCoy pushed him down into a chair. "Take it easy, Jim. Spock knew what he was doing. Whatever happened, you can't blame yourself."

"Oh, can't I?" Kirk's tone was savage. "Whose fault was it that we were in that situation? Mine! I should have known he would do anything to...to..."

"Save you?" finished McCoy, since Kirk seemed unable, or unwilling, to admit the extent of Spock's commitment to him.

"I have to find out what happened."

"Well, the only man who knows is in there, unconscious."

As they entered the ward, they could hear a vague muttering, the incomprehensible rambling of a man held fast in the grip of delirium.

"Does he talk like this all the time?" Kirk asked.

"Just about," replied McCoy. "Most of the time he's raving in his own

language but, now and again, there's a word I can understand. I only wish I could piece them together and make some sense out of them."

Kirk went close to the bed. "Spock. Spock, can you hear me?"

Spock suddenly became very still. "Say nothing! They are watching...keep your eyes on me...they must not suspect..."

"What is it, Spock? Who's watching you?"

"I know...it must be done...but he trusts me....." Spock's eyes opened abruptly, focussing on something only he could see, and he began to shake uncontrollably, shutting out the visions with an arm across his face.

"Spock! Wake up, Spock! You're safe with us."

Kirk's hands were on Spock's shoulders, shaking him gently, willing him to emerge from his nightmare to warm reality. Gradually, the violent shuddering ceased and Kirk became aware that Spock was conscious although his eyes were still shielded by his forearm. He looked across at McCoy who nodded in encouragement.

"Spock, are you awake?"

The Vulcan sighed deeply and moved his arm from his face. "Yes, Captain. I am awake."

"You've been very ill."

"I regret giving you cause for concern." He met Kirk's eyes a little reluctantly and Kirk forced a grin.

"Just don't make a habit of it."

Spock opened his mouth to speak, hesitated, then directed a question to McCoy. "Have I been delirious?"

"Yes, you have."

"What did I say?"

McCoy shrugged expressively. "I wish I could tell you, Spock, but my Vulcan is limited to 'please' and 'thank you'. If I'd known you were going to be curious about it, I'd have put it on tape."

"It is not important, Doctor. Thank you."

Important or not, the relief on Spock's face was glaringly apparent to Kirk who made up his mind suddenly. "When you're fit, Spock, I want to see you in my quarters. I'll leave it up to Bones to decide when that will be."

"Yes, Captain." Spock's voice was cool but there was a wary look in his eyes as he watched Kirk leave.

"Sit down, Spock."

"I would prefer to remain standing, sir."

Despite Spock's outward composure, Kirk was aware of the unnatural tension in his attitude and he decided against making the invitation an order. Not wanting to be at a disadvantage, however, he stood and walked round his desk to stand directly in front of the Vulcan.

"Why did you wipe out part of my memory?" he asked bluntly. "And don't try to deny it..."

"I was not about to do so," replied Spock stiffly. "I did place a memory block in your mind."

"Why?"

"I deemed it necessary."

"I refuse to go round in circles, Spock. What did they do to you?"

"To...me?"

"Yes. Something happened that hurt you badly and I want to know what it is."

"You are mistaken, Captain."

Kirk held his temper with difficulty. "I want you to remove the mental block."

"It would serve no useful purpose."

"It might help me understand why my best friend - " Spock flinched " - looks as though he's seen hell burning."

"Hell does not burn, Captain - it is white and cold," murmured Spock.

Kirk was puzzled. "What's that supposed to mean? No - don't try to distract me - give me back my memory and let me find the answers for myself."

"You will not reconsider?"

"No."

Kirk wondered whether he imagined the look of despair that showed for a split second in the Vulcan's drawn face, or the feeling that the temperature in his cabin seemed to drop several degrees. Then the slender hands were reaching out and he closed his eyes.

At first, there was nothing and he found that he was holding his breath as he waited for the gentle touch of Spock's mind upon his. The fingers encircling his face began to tremble as if with the effort of maintaining the ritual pattern and, fearing that the strain was too much for the Vulcan in his weakened state, he tried to break the link. Spock's voice was ice-cold: "This is not a mind-meld, Captain. I am merely enabling you to remember what happened on Zantarian."

He stood with Spock in the centre of the room and stared at the nine hooded figures ranged along one wall. No-one spoke and he turned to his first officer.

"What happens now, Spock?"

"Please believe me, Captain, when I say that I regret what I must do."

Kirk had no time to feel apprehension at these words, spoken quietly and obviously intended for his ears alone, for there was pain suddenly piercing his skull, white hot barbs of agony converging deep inside his head in a pulsating ball of light. The light was dazzling, blotting out memory, absorbing reality until, like a drowning man, he was clinging desperately to the last threads of consciousness but they were drawn remorselessly through his fingers. The fiery globe began to recede, growing smaller and smaller until it vanished, taking with it the very essence and individuality of the man who was firefly alone and acquiescent in the darkness. Observing himself from a great distance, or so it seemed to him, Kirk felt a sudden debilitating weakness and his head began to spin alarmingly. Strong arms caught him as he fell and lowered him into a chair. When he opened his eyes, Spock had moved away.

"What was all that about? I felt as if I'd been brain-washed.."

Spock avoided his bewildered gaze. "There would be little purpose in my offering excuses since what I have done is indefensible - but I will try to explain."

Still slightly disorientated, Kirk could only stare at him.

"I attempted to convince Rahtek that your execution should not take place - "

"How? By offering your life?"

Spock appeared not to hear the question and continued: "Rahtek was at first adamant but my Vulcan background interested him and he gave me a choice - your life in exchange for your mind."

"And how did he propose to accomplish that?" asked Kirk, sceptically.

"He would not accomplish it - I would, by means of Lhi-Sorann."

"Lhi-Sorann?"

Spock's eyes had never seemed so dark. "A mental power possessed by certain of my ancestors. As you know, my father's people were only a warrior race. During their extensive campaigns, they rarely took prisoners and those that were taken were kept alive only until all useful information had been extracted from them. However, a few were offered life - of a sort - as body-servants to officers, since no Vulcan would want, or be permitted, to carry out menial tasks for another. Some prisoners accepted but most chose death."

"Why?" demanded Kirk. "While they were alive, there was always the chance of escape."

The ghost of a smile touched the Vulcan's lips fleetingly at these heated words. "A problem that was not overlooked. The escape of a slave, who had probably heard many confidential matters discussed, could have meant disaster for the Vulcan forces. It was for this reason that the ritual of Lhi-Sorann was performed - publicly, to allay the fears of the troops."

Kirk was beginning to feel distinctly uneasy at this point but could not bring himself to halt Spock's cold recital now that he was so close to the truth.

"The ancient line of noblemen from whom military leaders were selected had developed the ability to destroy minds, to reduce a normal, intelligent man to the level of a newly-born infant possessing only the basic instincts, and then to train him to think and behave exactly as his master wished."

"And Rahtek offered this as an alternative to my death?" Kirk sounded calmer than he felt. For the first time since he had begun his explanation, Spock met his eyes. "Rahtek believed I could empty your mind, wipe clean the memory of what you had seen, and I could not allow him to believe otherwise. To deny that I had this ability would be to condemn you to death."

"I don't understand. How could you hope to deceive him?"

Although Spock had half-turned from him, Kirk could see that he was distressed and there was a brief silence before the reply came. "By placing your mind temporarily under my control. I performed a mind meld and in doing so without your knowledge and consent, I not only violated my ethics as a Vulcan - all that I had been taught since childhood - but I also betrayed your trust in me."

Kirk rose quickly to his feet and only just prevented himself from reaching out to touch his first officer's shoulder.

"You saved my life, Spock. I don't consider that a betrayal of trust. But, in any case, why couldn't you tell me what you were going to do?"

"I was afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

"I know the revulsion and fear that Humans feel on the subject of mind links, particularly with an alien mind, and I dared not risk your refusal. Rahtek seemed confident that you would choose to die rather than permit the merging of our minds - and I could not let you die."

"We melded before," Kirk reminded him. "When we met up with the Melkotians and I didn't back off then - what made you think I would this time?"

"On Melkot I kept the contact as light as possible but, even then, I sensed fear in you, fear I chose to ignore since time was of the essence, but I did not forget."

Kirk hesitated, not too sure how to answer, and Spock continued wearily, "I could not make a mere pretence of linking minds - I knew that the Zantarians would require proof of some kind - that they would devise a test. I had to be ruthless, to force your mind so far back within itself that you could not respond to any external stimulus but the sound of my voice and the touch of my thoughts."

"And did they demand proof?"

"They allowed you to believe that you were plunging your hand into burning oil. In fact, the substance they used only appeared to give off heat - it was actually cold. Although they had no intention of injuring you, they must have been aware that, because of your mental conditioning, you would experience pain. I was able to control your mind sufficiently to minimise your suffering - further proof to Rahtek that the ancient power of Lhi-Sorann still existed in me."

Kirk was not deceived by Spock's detached manner. "What you mean is that you suffered instead."

"It was necessary - a small recompense for what I had done to you."

"But you - "

Kirk stopped in mid-sentence as Spock suddenly slumped and leaned heavily against the bulkhead, his face drained of colour, making no protest when Kirk moved to support him. "Spock, what is it?"

The Vulcan shook his head weakly, unable to speak, and lifting him bodily in his arms, Kirk carried him to a chair before turning to thump a button on his desk with a clenched fist. "Bones - medical emergency - in my quarters!"

Kirk faced McCoy across Spock's bed. "How could you let him go while he was still this sick, Bones?"

"I can't understand how it happened, Jim. He seemed much better - his body signs were practically normal...unless the medical panel's gone haywire. I'll have it tested out."

"You'd better do just that," Kirk grated, then frowned. "I'm sorry, Bones. I'm not blaming you; it was my fault for putting him through that grilling."

The figure on the bed stirred. "The faulty was mine. I deceived the doctor by temporarily altering my own pulse and respiration so that he would release me. I knew the Captain was anxious to have my explanation and I had no wish to prolong his anxiety."

"And you succeeded in making yourself ill again. I could have waited, Spock."

"I regret that I was unable to maintain my control - I had intended to return to sickbay before you became aware of my true condition." The last few words were spoken in a whisper and Kirk bit his lip as he watched the eyelids droop and close. Spock was clearly exhausted and it was he, Kirk, who was responsible.

"He'll be okay, Jim. He just needs plenty of rest."

"I hope you're right, Bones. I shouldn't have pushed him the way I did - but I think I found out what's bothering him."

"Anything I can help with?"

Kirk gave him a brief, crooked smile. "You get him well, Bones. It's my job to sort out his crazy conscience."

Since this was a star system about which very little was known, Kirk ordered a survey to be made of its three planets. During the hours that followed, Spock slept undisturbed in sickbay while Kirk found his hand constantly straying to the intercom button on the command chair. He knew McCoy would let him know immediately if there were any changes but, nevertheless, he had to make an effort to concentrate on the minor items requiring his attention during the round trip.

Each of the two smaller planets proved to have a totally unbreathable atmosphere and Kirk decided against risking landing parties, merely orbiting each satellite to enable sensors to gather general data. Back in orbit around Zantarian, he ruefully acknowledged that it would be inadvisable to return to the planet's surface and ordered a routine sensor sweep to be made.

Some time later, having made a final notation on the ship's log, he leaned back in his chair and said briskly, "Prepare to leave orbit, Mr. Sulu. Warp one."

Sulu's acknowledgement was drowned by a horrified shout.

"Captain, you can't do that!"

"Belay that, Mr. Sulu." Kirk spun the command chair round to face Scotty who had just stepped onto the bridge and was staring wide-eyed at him. Under the circumstances, Kirk's manner was surprisingly mild.

"And why shouldn't we be on our way, Scotty?"

"Without Mr. Spock?"

"What are you talking about? Spock's in sickbay."

"He may have been, sir, but right now he's down on that planet. Mr. Kyle told me so himself not five minutes ago."

Kirk stared at his Chief Engineer, trying to convince himself that the man was either drunk or insane, but the sinking feeling in his stomach told him that Scotty was neither of these things. Somehow Spock had escaped McCoy's eagle eye and had beamed down to Zantarian for reasons Kirk didn't care to think about.

"Transporter room! This is the Captain. Did Mr. Spock give you his reason for going down to the planet?"

"Just that he was going on ahead to start a survey, sir. I assumed the rest of the party would be following but nobody's turned up yet."

"And nobody will, Mr. Kyle. What did Mr. Spock have with him - besides standard equipment?"

"Nothing at all, Captain, not even a communicator. He said they would be dangerous if he met up with the Zantarians."

"So we don't have any means of contacting him?"

"No, sir. I..."

"Never mind, Mr. Kyle. I'm not blaming you. Prepare the transporter with the coordinates given to you by Mr. Spock. I'll be with you in two minutes."

Scotty stepped hastily aside as Kirk strode past him into the elevator.

"She's all yours, Scotty. I'll be in touch."

Spock had beamed down to a wild and desolate area, far from any habitation, and Kirk grimaced as he looked around. Apart from a few stunted trees and bushes, there was little vegetation and the only break in the grey landscape was a low range of mountains some distance away.

The characteristics of their quarry being so distinctive, ship's sensors had been able to give him a general direction to follow. He paused, his confidence suddenly deserting him. Even if he found Spock, could he really hope to persuade him to return to the ship? In the fifteen months since he had taken over command of the Enterprise, he believed he had begun to understand his first officer but, right now, he wasn't at all sure. Did he have the strength needed to overcome the Vulcan's self-condemnation? Damn it, why did Spock have to be so Vulcan?

He shivered, not solely from the intense cold. "Kirk to Enterprise. Scotty, I'm relying on you. This is the last time I'll be speaking to you for a while. I can't afford to be caught with this communicator."

Scotty had been briefed on the events that had taken place during the first visit to the planet and he agreed, reluctantly, with Kirk's decision.

"We'll be keeping tabs on you, Captain. As soon as you get back with Mr. Spock we'll have you back on board in no time."

"I hope that moment's not too far off, Scotty. Kirk out."

Having cached weapon and communicator beneath the exposed roots of a tree, he moved off towards the mountains. The light was fading rapidly and he felt certain that Spock was heading for the foothills for shelter and concealment, no matter how erratic his route.

After an hour or so, it began to grow even colder. A strong wind sprang up and soon he was battling with head lowered against the powerful buffeting. Suddenly, clouds of dust were swirling about him, blinding him so completely that he was forced to stop. The wind dropped for an instant and he was able to make out the dim outline of the mountains lying ahead before they were hidden again by the choking dust. He trudged doggedly on, one arm held across his face to protect his eyes. Breathing became a painful and exhausting exercise which took all his concentration...until the ground fell abruptly away beneath his outstretched foot. He seemed to be falling in terrifying slow motion but, just as it appeared nothing could save him, something seized his arm in an iron grip and swung him violently to one side. Hopelessly off balance, he fell striking his head on a jagged spur of rock. A shadow loomed over him and reached down as darkness enveloped him.

When he awoke, it was to warmth and light, and he was lying on the hard ground. The dust storm was over and he gazed, with eyes narrowed against the brightness, at a pale gold sky. The nights on Zantarian were short, he knew, but even so he realised that he must have been unconscious for at least four hours. He tried to sit up but a firm hand on his shoulder prevented him.

"It would be wiser to lie still for a few moments before attempting to stand."

He turned his head sharply towards the voice, wincing as pain lanced through him. "Spock! Where did you spring from? I thought you'd be miles ahead of me."

"I would have been had I not begun to suspect that you would follow me. This ravine and the approaching dust storm presented a danger I could not afford to ignore."

"You only suspected that I would follow you?" asked Kirk, sitting up slowly and cautiously.

Spock rose to his feet, his expression quite unreadable. "I had hoped that you would consider your own safety and remain aboard the ship."

Kirk was more than a little disturbed by the fact that his first officer was being careful not to address him by his rank - as though he already considered himself free of Starfleet regulations - but did his best to conceal his alarm. He explored the tender lump on his head.

"What happened?"

"You struck your head when I pulled you back from the edge of a hidden ravine. I would have returned you to the ship but was unable to locate your communicator."

The last words sounded faintly accusing and Kirk was stung into replying, "Why didn't you use yours?"

Spock's chin went up. "I am sure you are aware that I have no communicator, nor do I have need of one since I do not intend returning to the Enterprise."

Kirk sprang to his feet. "You're coming back with me!"

"No. You must leave without me."

"That's something I'll never do."

Recognising the set of his Captain's jaw, Spock could no longer pretend indifference. "You must leave. The Zantarians are an extremely advanced race and it is more than probable that they have detected our presence here. Even now, Rahtek may be using a method similar to our transporter system in order to confront us."

"I don't care if he travels in a winged chariot, I am not going unless you come with me!"

"That is impossible."

Surveying the grim terrain, Kirk said bleakly, "You'll die here, Spock."

"Better to die now than to live with the knowledge of my disgrace - to know finally that I belong nowhere."

"You belong with me - on the Enterprise!"

"I regret I am unable to concur."

"You saved my life, Spock - do you regret that?"

"You know the answer to your own question."

"Do I, Spock? You make me feel it would have been better if I had died rather than put you through the agony of mind you're suffering now."

"No! The meld was necessary. It was the manner of it that was a betrayal of everything that is Vulcan in me."

"Did you have a choice?"

"I did not believe so."

"Then why are you torturing yourself like this?"

"I cannot ignore precepts that have been instilled into me since boyhood. I chose to follow the Vulcan way...and I am unfit."

"Spock, you didn't rape my mind! It wasn't fear you sensed in me on Melkot. You said yourself there was no time for you to analyse my emotions. If there had been, you would have discovered that I was just nervous. I had never experienced anything like it before and I didn't know what to expect."

"I could have been mistaken...I will admit that - but I have not told you everything. When you know how I have humiliated you, you will perhaps understand why I cannot remain in the Service. You would not wish me to do so."

"Isn't that for me to decide?" asked Kirk but his question remained unanswered.

"As if the theft of his mind were not enough, a further demand is made of the victim of Lhi-Sorann." Spock's tone became bitter. "In the true and arrogant tradition of my forbears, I forced you to swear lifelong obedience to me - your master! At my bidding, you swore to protect me with your life. Rahtek was impressed by the ease with which I accomplished the deed...a Starship captain on his knees and dutifully repeating the phrases I fed him!"

At last Kirk began to realise fully what his first officer had been going through and why he regarded himself as a traitor.

"I understand why you had to do it, Spock. In that situation, no-one could accuse you of treachery."

Spock made no reply but the desolation in his face was more than Kirk could stand. "Release me from the vow, Spock! You have that right."

"If it were that simple..." murmured the Vulcan, then his voice hardened. "The oath required of a Starfleet officer is both formal and specific - to the Service. However, at a time I considered appropriate, I swore a deep and binding personal oath which I have honoured - until the moment of Lhi-Sorann when my promise proved worthless. I am without honour and undeserving of my rank and position in Starfleet."

Before Kirk could protest this cold assertion, a strange sound filled the air, a shrill whirring from somewhere close behind him. He started to turn but, held by the unmistakable warning in Spock's eyes, resisted the impulse. A chill ran down his spine as a familiar voice stated tonelessly, "You have returned, Vulcan."

It seemed that Rahtek did indeed have the power to transport himself to any part of his planet.

"Yes, Rahtek, I have returned," agreed Spock.

"I trust you have adequate reason for ignoring my warning."

During this icy exchange, Kirk kept his gaze fixed on Spock and remained apparently oblivious to Rahtek's presence.

"I hope that you will find my reason acceptable. Circumstances have arisen that make it impossible for me to return to my former life. I have come to ask for asylum on Zantarian."

Shock rippled through Kirk's mind but, somehow, he managed to keep his facial muscles relaxed for the cloaked figure had moved forward into his line of vision and the pale eyes regarded him for a moment before turning back to Spock.

"You know that my people do not welcome outsiders. You could never hope to be accepted."

"I understand this and have no wish to intrude upon their lives. I would live far from your townships and ask nothing of you."

Rahtek stared at him for a long time, then nodded. "You may stay - you and your companion."

"No - my...companion will not be staying with me."

Kirk took an instinctive step forward even as Rahtek said indifferently, "Very well," and from beneath his cloak drew a short-bladed knife, extending it hilt-first toward the Vulcan. "Kill him now and we will depart to advise my Brothers."

Spock showed no reaction. "There is no necessity. He will return to the ship."

Rahtek made no attempt to conceal his surprise. "No necessity? I do not understand you, Vulcan. You would have me believe that your people are no longer barbarians and yet you would condemn one who was your friend to a slow and unhappy death. You took his mind - all that he was...he belongs to you. Look at him."

Reluctantly, Spock obeyed and met his Captain's unblinking stare.

"You see how he watches you? You are all he knows of life now, and if you abandon him, he will surely die. If you are merciful, you will not permit him to suffer. End it here - kill him."

He offered the knife once more and Spock recoiled from it. "No! I will make him understand that he cannot stay."

His hand, when he laid it upon Kirk's shoulder, was trembling. "Please, Jim, go back to the ship. You must not stay."

Without pausing to think, Kirk fell to his knees and lowered his head in silent submission.

"You have taught him well," said Rahtek softly. "You ensured that he would respond to your commands alone and he knows that he cannot function without you. Have you no pity?"

Spock turned away and there was contempt in the Zantarian's voice as he said, "Do you wish me to perform the task for you?"

Whirling swiftly, Spock snatched the blade from him and hurled it into a clump of bushes. "I will not have him killed!"

"If your love for him is so great, you have only two choices - allow him to remain with you on my planet, or return with him to your own home. You must decide now."

There was a long silence during which Kirk kept his eyes steadfastly on the ground. Then hands reached down to grasp his wrists and Spock drew him to his

feet. "You say he needs me...I do not know..."

Kirk held fast to his first officer's wrists and cursed the fact that he did not possess Vulcan telepathic abilities. He knew Spock wanted to be convinced that his 'crime' was not unpardonable, that there was still a place for him at Kirk's side, but there was no way he could remove Spock's doubts without betraying himself to Rahtek.

His fingers tightened involuntarily and something of his desperation must have communicated itself to Spock who stared intently at him until the uncertainty faded from his eyes.

"I will go back with him."

Rahtek exhibited no surprise at the Vulcan's decision. "You have chosen wisely. Go now before it is too late. My people are anxious to have you brought to account."

The shrill sound filled the air once again and, as they watched, a translucent bubble enveloped the tall, austere figure and in a moment they were alone once more. At the same instant, they both realized that their hands were still linked and Kirk smiled as Spock hurriedly released himself.

"What made you change your mind?"

"I had no choice."

"You could have told him that I would stay - and got rid of me later."

"I would still have required your communicator and I knew you would not produce it."

"Is that the only reason?"

"No," admitted Spock, and would have stopped there had he not looked up to see Kirk's eyebrows raised enquiringly. Even then, he appeared to have difficulty in putting his thoughts into words.

"I found it difficult to believe that you were not filled with revulsion when you learned part of the price of your freedom - yet you pursued me here. When I told you how I had further humiliated you, you did not turn from me. You continued to risk your life to persuade me to return. It seemed you were determined not to let me go."

"You know me for a stubborn man, Mr. Spock."

"Indeed, Captain."

The simple title filled Kirk with a warm rush of pleasure. Spock was back.

Some hours later, having suffered McCoy's ministrations to the abrasion on his scalp, Kirk escaped to his first officer's quarters. Spock greeted him in his usual quiet manner and seemed content enough to be back, but there was an air of brooding behind his outward composure.

"What is it, Spock?"

"Captain?"

"There's something still bothering you. Tell me about it."

The Vulcan stared into the recess where the firepot burned and the fiery glow bathed his finely-drawn features in an eerie light. His voice was low and hesitant. "The oath remains broken. I must..."

He stopped and the silence grew until Kirk prompted him gently. "What do you want to do, Spock?"

Spock tore his gaze from the hypnotic glow and turned to face him. "I wish to renew that oath."

"There's no - " began Kirk, before shrugging helplessly. "I can't convince

you that you haven't broken any regulations so, if it would make you feel better ..." He moved to the door. "I'll leave you alone."

"Captain!"

He paused.

"I would like you to stay."

Mystified by the quiet invitation to witness what had to be an extremely personal and private matter, Kirk came slowly back into the cabin.

"Wouldn't you rather be alone, Spock?"

"It would not serve. I must make amends."

Kirk did not attempt to argue with him. Spock needed to salve his lacerated conscience and had to be allowed to accomplish this in his own way. He waited.

Fixing him with an intent look, Spock began to speak - in Vulcan - and the hairs on the back of Kirk's neck rose in response to the undeniable emotion revealed in those harsh-sounding words.

"I don't understand Vulcan," he teased, but his voice wasn't quite steady.

It seemed to him, for a second, that Spock wanted to look away, then the dark, brooding gaze grew even more intense.

"From this time forward, your life and honour are more to me than my own. I swear to defend both to the end of my existence."

"A vow made to a ranking Starfleet officer?" asked Kirk diffidently and his face burned when the Vulcan replied gravely,

"A promise made to James Kirk."

The cabin, always too warm by Human standards, suddenly seemed unbearable to Kirk.

"Thank you, Spock," he said gruffly, feeling the beads of perspiration break out on his forehead. "I just hope I prove worthy of your loyalty."

"You have already done so, Captain - many times."

His emotions in a turmoil, Kirk dragged his thoughts forcibly back to more practical matters. "I have to complete my report. You're not to return to duty for at least 24 hours. Understood?"

Spock, noticeably more relaxed, nodded. "Understood, Captain."

The cabin door slid open and Kirk stepped through.

"Jim!"

He turned, startled yet pleased to hear his name on the Vulcan's lips.

"Will you allow me to release you from the oath you were obliged to swear to me?"

"No!"

Spock's eyebrows rose at the swiftness of Kirk's reply and there was a smile in the hazel eyes. "No, Spock. A captain swears every day to do his utmost to protect the lives of his crew and that includes you. You can't release me from command responsibility - and I don't want you to."

The door swished to and Kirk headed for the turbolift, smiling at the picture he carried in his mind of the unVulcan look of perplexity that had shown for an instant in Spock's face before the door closed between them. The smile broadened to a grin. It was a long time since he had felt so good!
