

LOG ENTRIES

29



STAR TREK
fanzine

contents

Here be Dragons by Tina Pole	P 3
The Final Denominator by Crystal Ann Taylor	P 9
Letter Home by Judy Miller	P 10
Art Thee Human or Art Thee Vulcan by Jayne Turner	P 12
A Shared Nightmare by Jacqueline Newey	P 13
I Can't Stop... by Sandie Cowden	P 22
The Fling by Tina Pole	P 23
Partings by Josie Rutherford	P 31
The Trouble with Tribbles by Linda Green & Wendy Emery	P 32
Ancient Meets Modern by Joanna Ray	P 33
Missed Opportunities by Gillian Catchpole	P 38
Out of the Frying Pan by Therese Holmes	P 39
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Hello everyone, and welcome to Log Entries 29.

We're sorry that the price has had to go up this issue - blame the Post Office and their second postal rise in six months. Let's just hope that we can hold the price steady for a while now. As of the time of writing, we don't know what the new foreign rates are; although it's only a week till the new rates come into effect, the post office has not yet had the forms in that give the new foreign rates! Come to that we only know the British ones approximately, but we can estimate them from the last time.

We originally intended to print a separate zine for stories/material that was specifically movie orientated; however, now that we've seen the movie, since it actually changes nothing (except the uniforms and some of the technology) we've decided that it is possible (though not compulsory) to accept the movie as a valid continuation of the STAR TREK series. We are therefore prepared to accept stories incorporating movie references. These should be consistent with both series and movie and a logical progression - in other words, no Kirk/Ilea stories as these are rendered impossible by the facts as portrayed in the movie.

When dealing with the movie, Gene's book is the acceptable reference.

We're hoping to get two issues of Log Entries out next time. We've got a lot of good stories on file and we've had some of them for a while; we'd like to get some of them into print.

February 1980

Steve

Valerie



'HERE BE DRAGONS...' by Tina W. Pole

S'mmm... s'nice and s'cosy in s'here but s'time to s'break out...

S'cold out here, s'hummm... I detect movement..s'thought patterns...

"Whatever was in this egg, Jim," McCoy said as he stood taking tricorder readings of the broken shell of an enormous egg that they had found, "was mighty big."

"Is that a scientific observation, Doctor?" Spock was quick to ask. However, McCoy was in no mood to start one of their verbal battles. He was too concerned as to where the thing that had been inside the egg could have gone. According to his readings it had hatched only minutes ago.

S'McCoy s'Chief Medical Officer on board s'tar s'hip, Enterprise? S'interesting.

"Well, gentlemen," Kirk said as he pulled out his communicator, "I think that just about concludes our preliminary survey. A possible world to colonise, eh, Bones?" he joked.

"You must be kidding, Jim. This place is so barren, so bleak... And what about that egg we found?"

"Well, if we could find the occupant..."

S'Kirk, James s'Captain of this s'tar s'hip Enterprise?

"Tricorder readings indicate there are no life forms in the vicinity," Spock reported.

S'pock... First Officer, s'Vulcan s'different...

"Tricorder readings indicated that there were no life forms before," McCoy pointed out. "Yet we came across that egg and something must've just hatched out of it!"

"Maybe it flew away," Kirk suggested.

McCoy flicked his communicator open and without even waiting for the Captain's consent ordered them to be beamed back aboard immediately!

No doubt, Kirk thought as they found themselves on the transporter platform, he had visions of something swooping down out of the sky and carrying him away... "Ouch!" He found himself at the bottom of the platform steps.

"Are ye all right, Captain?" Scotty ran over to assist him but the Doctor and First Officer were already hauling him to his feet.

"How did you manage to do that?" McCoy asked as Kirk stood rubbing his sore knees.

"I tripped."

"Over what?"

"Beats me..."

"Too much fresh air," McCoy suggested as he watched the Captain limp painfully towards the door.

"Well, it was your idea to go down in the first place," Kirk grumbled.

Mmm... S'nice and s'warm in s'here...like in the s'hell... I s'tay!

"Well, that's the transporter checked out," Scotty mumbled to himself as he switched off the main circuits and then headed for the door.

PAD! PAD!

He spun round, hadn't he been alone in the transport room? Yes, he was, so...

PAD! PAD!

He looked down at his boots. Must be time he got himself a new pair.

PAD! PAD!

Noisy critters, those boots. He'd go and see about them right away.

"This is Mr. Scott to environmental control." Scotty pulled at the collar of his tunic and wiped the perspiration off his brow as he stood next to the intercom in the turbolift.

"Environmental control, sir."

"What's with the turbolifts, laddie? Ah'm fair roasting alive in here!"

"Nothing, sir. There's no warning light on our panel."

"Forget about the warning light - Ah'm on ma way up tae the bridge. Ah'll tak' a look there."

S' nice and s' cosy in s' here...

"What's the problem, Mr. Scott?" Kirk asked as the Chief Engineer stalked out of the turbolift and headed for the Environmental Control console.

"Ah'm no' sure, Captain. It's the turbolift. It's like bein' in a sauna."

"Just the turbolift?"

"Aye, sir."

PAD! PAD!

'An' ma shoes,' he almost added.

S' looks like the s' hell.

Kirk returned his attention back to the planet on the main viewscreen. No doubt Scotty would sort it out. He glanced at the chronometer, the last half hour had just dragged.

"Anything new, Mr. Spock?" he eventually asked.

"We still have no life readings, Captain."

"Well, there must have been something down there." /And,/ he thought, /until we solve the mystery of that egg we can't break orbit./

"Ow!" THUD!

Kirk swivelled the Command Chair around to see what all the commotion was about. It was Scotty - he was sitting on the deck.

"Mr. Scott?"

Scotty climbed carefully to his feet, rubbing his sore backside. "Ah walked intae something, Captain."

Kirk eyed the empty space between the Chief Engineer and the turbolift.

"It wis like a forcefield, Captain," Scotty explained. "Ah bounced straight off it!"

Kirk glanced at Spock, who just shook his head.

"It's all right, Scotty, we believe you. As for the sensors, they haven't proved themselves to be of much use on that planet below."

"Then there could be something here, Captain." Scotty backed away from the area where he had just fallen. "Something connected with that planet."

"I wouldn't rule it out. Ms. Uhura..."

"Security's on its way, sir."

S' they be s' upset...

PAD: PAD:

The turbolift doors opened and then closed. The one solitary security guard that stood near the doors made no attempt to stop whatever it was. Kirk couldn't blame him. It was something big.

"That thing was in the turbolift wi' me," Scotty said in sudden realisation. "And Ah heard it in the transporter room, an... That noise! Ah thought it wis ma boots!"

"The transporter room?" Kirk queried.

"Aye, sir. It must've come aboard wi' you."

"That's what I fell over!"

"Aye, but Ah walked intae it. It must be big... You must've fallen over a part of it..."

Kirk shuddered to think what part it could have been. As for it being big...

"The egg, Captain." Spock voiced his thoughts.

Now s'what did s'he do? If s'I s'reach out s'mind...

"SICKBAY!" Its voice boomed in the unfamiliar tones of a language it had never spoken before. "SICKBAY!" The turbolift moved off.

"Find out where it's going to," Kirk ordered as he saw the tell-tale light of the turbolift light up on the engineering board and heard a familiar whine as it moved off.

"I have a recording of a voice, sir," Spock reported and played it back.

"Sickbay!" a voice boomed over the bridge in the unmistakable tones of the Chief Engineer. "SICKBAY!"

"Bones!" Kirk exclaimed in sudden realisation. "It must be following the landing party around."

"But Ah wasnae part of the landing party, sir," Scotty pointed out.

"You were there though when it came on board. I wonder..."

"It must have been in the vicinity when the Doctor approached the egg, Captain," Spock said, voicing his thoughts again.

"Yes, and he was the first person it saw."

"Captain..." Scotty was over at the engineering console, following the progress of the turbolift. "The turbo's stopped on Deck 5..."

The babble of voices from Uhura's console told them why. Several of the crew members had requested it to stop at Deck five; the doors had opened and they had been pushed, ever so gently, aside. Well, at least it wasn't some brainless creature.

Christine hummed softly to herself as she switched the sonic shower on. It was then that she became aware of something watching her. She slowly turned around. One steel grey eye set in an enormous lizard-like head stared at her through the parted curtains. Christine screamed. It vanished.

Poor S'Christine s'I did not s'mean to frighten. S'pecially s'friend of s'McCoy. S'where now though? S'hungry.

"I've an urgent message from the 'park', sir," Uhura reported less than five minutes after Christine Chapel called in. She opened the channel.

"There are footsteps in the ship's park," somebody whispered. "Giant four-toed ones..."

"Get a security team down there!" The Captain was on his feet and heading for the turbolift, Spock at his heels.

There were footprints all right, not only embedded in their precious green grass but up the bulkheads!

"Mr. Spock?" Kirk turned to the Vulcan.

"It has wings."

"I gathered that!" Kirk snapped, getting irritable. "Most things that come out of eggs do."

"On the contrary, Captain," Spock hastened to correct, "Ms. Chapel's brief description was that of a reptilian. Most reptiles do not have wings."

Kirk found himself staring up in the air. It wasn't difficult to imagine a flying lizard... Next time he wouldn't laugh at McCoy's antics.

"Come on, Spock, let's get out of here."

"Well, at least we know where it is," Scotty said as he set about closing all the entrances to the ship's 'park'.

"Ah know we're no' supposed tae hae it on board ship, sir, but..." Scotty held up the empty bottle of what had once been whisky, which he had brought with him into the briefing room. "A whole case, Captain."

"That explains the footprints up the bulkheads," Spock said.

Kirk and Scotty looked at him, but Spock had his most innocent expression on and it was difficult to tell whether he was being serious or not.

"Right, so how are we going to get a drunken flying reptilian out of our park and back to the planet?" Kirk asked.

"It was on its way to sickbay, Captain," Spock pointed out. "I believe that some species attach themselves to the first thing they see..."

Just then McCoy came into the briefing room. The otherwise impassive and professional Nurse Chapel clutched his arm. Which only went to show what a shock she had had.

"If you'd paid more attention to me in the first place," McCoy grumbled as he pried the nurse off his arm and guided her into a vacant chair, "we mightn't have this thing on board now."

"Well, it's too late now, Bones," Kirk said. "It's on board and we've got to find a way to get it off."

"Indeed," Spock agreed. "Especially as there is the possibility that it could have parents and that we are therefore violating the Prime Directive."

Kirk swallowed hard. Those were the two things he hadn't stopped to consider.

"Well, then, we've really got no choice." He looked across at the Doctor. "I'm sorry, Bones."

"Eh?" McCoy stared at him across the briefing room table.

"It was on its way down to see you before it got side-tracked," Kirk explained.

"On its way down to see me?" McCoy echoed in disbelief.

"That is correct, Doctor," Spock confirmed. "And we have come to the conclusion that it was because you were the first person it saw and so naturally it assumes you are its..." McCoy's glare told him he had better say no more.

"But that's ridiculous."

"Bridge to briefing room, bridge to briefing room. Acknowledge, please," came Uhura's voice over the intercom. The Captain leaned forward and activated the intercom.

"What's the problem, Ms. Uhura?" - /Didn't he have enough problems as it was?/

"The alien in the ship's Park, sir," she told him. "It's escaped."

"Oh, no!" he groaned. That was all he didn't need.

"Where was it last located?" Spock asked, noting that the Captain was at a temporary loss for words.

"In the turbolift, sir. The voice command it gave directed it to sickbay."

McCoy jumped to his feet. "Sickbay! What about my patients?" He ran out of the room, all fear of the unknown forgotten. Visions of his precious sickbay smashed to pieces drove him onwards. As Kirk quickly followed him, just managing to jump into the turbolift with him, he could well imagine the Doctor dressed in a suit of armour and waving a sword.

He retracted that thought as soon as they burst into sickbay and found it lying asleep - or was it unconscious? - on the deck.

"A...a...dragon?" Scotty spluttered in disbelief as he, Spock and Chapel trotted in behind them. But it was there and then it wasn't there...

"Fascinating!" Spock was heard to exclaim in a quiet whisper.

"Yes, that's it," Christine Chapel confirmed as it came into being again and then started to fade once more.

"No wonder we couldn't pick it up," Scotty said. "It doesn't exist...well, not completely...in our space-time continuum. Does it?"

"We shall have to do more research in that area, Mr. Scott," Spock said.

"Okay - everybody stand aside." McCoy started running his medical scanner over it. "Strange..."

"What's strange? It's alive, isn't it?" Kirk asked in concern. Ye Gods, if anything had happened to it...

"Yes, but... It's drunk, Jim!"

ZZZ ZZZ ZZZ

"And apparently the alcohol is making it visible to us," Spock said.

"Will somebody please explain to me how this here dragon got itself drunk?" McCoy asked.

"Ma whisky..." Scotty lamented. "A whole crate of it. Whit a cryin' shame!"

"On the contrary, Mr. Scott," Spock said. "It has made this fascinating creature visible to us."

"Yes, well, we haven't got time to start making any tests, Spock," Kirk said, noting a certain glimmer of enthusiasm in the First Officer's eye. "While we can see it, let's try and get it off the ship."

Three medi-trollies, a couple of antigravs and a whole collection of medical staff later, McCoy found himself wandering around the place where the egg had originally been found, keeping a vigil on the sleeping dragon.

"Come on, damn you," he cursed as he huddled a little closer into his coat. "Wake up and then I can go home."

"How are you doing, Bones?" Jim's voice asked him from his open communicator.

"Bloody freezing, that's what."

"Sorry we can't offer you any whisky, the dragon drank it all," Jim said, trying to sound cheerful, but McCoy could hear the concern in his voice.

"I'll be all right, but - Jim, what if it doesn't fly off on its own or its parents come? What then?"

"Don't forget to come and visit me on the penal planet they'll send me to when we arrive at the nearest Starbase with a dragon!"

Oooo! S'ma head... Poor wee s'head...

One eye blinked open and surveyed the tiny being that stood stamping the ground.

"IF YOU DON'T MIND," a voice boomed out behind McCoy. McCoy froze to the spot. "THANK YOU. MY HEAD IS HURTING, YOU SEE. THAT LIQUID I CONSUMED...HICC!"

McCoy turned around and narrowly missed the ball of fire that went bouncing past him. "Steady on there!"

"SORRY!"

McCoy stood looking up at the still visible dragon. What now

"NO, I HAVE NO PARENTS," it explained as it struggled up into a sitting position and set about wrapping its long serpent tail around itself and fanning its baby wings in exercise.

"Er...then you're not attached to me?"

"HARDLY...BUT YOU STRUCK ME AS BEING NICE TO KNOW."

McCoy felt himself blush at the compliment. He hoped that Spock was around to hear it at the other end of the open communicator.

"Excuse me," Spock's voice said. McCoy wondered what he was going to say in retort. "We are curious to know if there are more of you on your planet?"

"OH YES, I'M ONE OF MANY. BUT UNFORTUNATELY - OR FORTUNATELY, DEPENDING ON WHICH WAY ONE LOOKS AT IT - YOU CANNOT SEE US."

"But I can see you now."

"INDEED, BUT THAT IS BECAUSE OF THAT WHISKY STUFF."

"You're telepaths, aren't you?" McCoy said, suddenly cottoning on. "That's how you're speaking to me in my own language."

"CORRECT."

"Been tuning in to Spock's brain by the sounds of it."

"ONE OF MANY...OH!" The dragon began to shimmer. S'whisky s'tuff beginning to s'go.

HICC! Another ball of fire rolled past McCoy and the dragon was gone.

"You still there?"

"SORT OF."

"I think it's time to go, Bones," Jim's voice said. "Time we designated the planet - definitely a No Go area and moved on."

"WE APPRECIATE THE NO GO AREA," a different voice said to that of the dragon McCoy had been talking to and the soft thuds of more than one set of invisible dragons' feet convinced him that it really was time to go!

"Go on, Jim," McCoy urged him.

"I do not believe that it is standard Starfleet classification, sir," Spock pointed out.

"Be a devil, Jim," McCoy said, deliberately looking in Spock's direction, "even if you don't look like one!"

"Ms. Uhura," Kirk instructed, turning to the Lieutenant with a mischievous smile on his face. "When you send that report..."

"Sir?"

"Designate that planet not only under classification DRG 1 but..." He still couldn't quite bring himself to do it.

"Jim," McCoy prompted him.

"All right, Bones. 'Here be dragons'."

"Here be dragons," she repeated in disbelief and then broke into a smile. "Whatever you say, sir. HERE BE DRAGONS..."

THE FINAL DENOMINATOR by Crystal Ann Taylor

Loneliness stretched through the black reaches of space
Screaming its song of isolation,
Lost in the cold emptiness around it,
Crying for completion, begging to be heard,
Seeking its own death in welcome oblivion,
Imprisoned by its nature, craving for escape,
Everything it touched turning to ice...

Small specks of matter adrift in infinity,
Each caught within himself, dependent on none,
Apart, alone, facing demons unaided,
Functioning without heart, only with purpose,
Until worn out, used up, and discarded,
Left dead for eternity in the endless void.

Loneliness cried until it met two flames,
Bright with wonder, bubbling with anticipation,
Filled with joy of discovery, glowing with life,
One golden with warmth, the other cool and restful,
Pulsating and playing their own separate tunes.
Each man alone, inside the shell of his being,
Fighting the ache of existence.

Isolation answered by reaching out, touching,
Two flames brought together, merging to one,
Surging to fire, sharing the pain,
Bringing forth hope in a laugh or a smile,
Boundaries broken between two restless souls,
Though they are different, alike in their needs,
Together they face the inviting unknown,
Confident in each other, no longer alone,
Stronger together than the forces around them,
No terror in darkness when met side by side,
Burning a path of companionship to melt through the cold.

Loneliness's cry dying in the warmth of their friendship,
It welcomes the dissipation it finds in their world,
It now knows the answer, the final denominator,
That through time and space, whatever's lost, whatever's gained,
It is love that endures and survives.

Uhura: I lost my tribble.

Chapel: Why don't you put an ad. on the ship's notice board?

Uhura: That's no good, he can't read.

* * * *

Chekov: I heard Riley sang a popular song at the concert.

Sulu: Well, it was popular before he sang it.

To:-

Professor D & Dr. K. Arvette,
Ferndale Medical Centre,
Area Reference E/45,
England,
Terra.

U.S.S. Enterprise,
c/o Starbase 24,
Starfleet.

Dear Mum and Dad,

Yes, it's me again! I bet that when you told me to be sure and write, you never dreamed I would, and so regularly? If Starfleet hasn't done anything else for me, it's turned me into a faithful correspondent. Maybe one day (if, that is, you've saved my letters, and you, Mum, never throw a thing away!) we could put them together and publish a book, calling it 'Thoughts of a Security Guard'. No? Ah, well! So much for my claim to fame!

But back to business - how are you both? Fit and thriving, I hope, and taking the best possible care of yourselves. I heard via the general news reports we get (the little god of communications satellites permitting) that your winter has been pretty tough - snow, ice, the whole package; the kind I remember from way back yonder. I suppose I shouldn't even think it, let put it to paper, if the winter has caused difficulties, but I almost wish I could have experienced its toughness. Got caught in a snow storm or raced along the ice or simply felt cold. It's the damndest thing about being in space. You miss the weather! We have a season simulator in the rec. hall, but somehow you can just feel it's not the same. That's why I get so excited when my name is one of those on the top of the landing party duty roster. Space travel is fantastic, but that sensation when you materialise on solid ground, in fresh, non-recycled air, and with a horizon in sight...it's pure magic.

I guess that you're saying it's all very well for me to jump at the opportunity to make planetfall, but what about those who don't return? If I'm ever fortunate enough to meet the Federation beurocrat who, quote, 'In the public interest' unquote, published those fatality statistics for Starship security personnel, I'll send him off pronto in a pre-flighted shuttlecraft to the Romulan Neutral Zone where he can personally discuss Starship losses with an arch foe. You wrote in your last letter that these figures are frightening, but so are any other set of statistics when singled out for consideration. There are plenty of other risky occupations and I've no regrets about choosing the career I did. You mustn't worry, really you mustn't. And as big brother Andy often said, 'Deric's head's so hard you couldn't knock it off with the Galactic Demolition Company's biggest building wrecker'. And Andy is second only to Confucius when it comes to his words of wisdom and truth, so pay heed to him!

Talking of the perils of space and the like brings me very nicely to the next part of my letter. By now you've probably seen the hologram Lorn Ulvarsson, a pal (?) from Botany, sent his mother who lives quite close to Ferndale and who promised when writing and asking for the 'grams to show them around. The 'grams were taken aboard our merry vessel after our last port of call, and I would imagine you're wondering why in said 'grams I have a black eye and a busted lip.

There is a simple explanation.

It began with the tribbles. No, it didn't. It began with the quadrititi...quadroto...hold on a mo while I ask the computer for the correct spelling. Quadrotrotriticale. (I wish I'd had a Starship computer as a kid at school!) This quadrotrotriticale is a grain, but Pav Chekov, my fellow vodka-swigger, could tell you more about its scientific make-up than I, but be assured, it's very, very valuable. Our Enterprise was assigned to look after it. Well, valuable it may be, but nursemaid to grain...! I was as unbelieving as the rest of the crew when word spread. Then, not an eternity later, came the next bombshell. Not only was a mighty ship of the fleet guarding grain, but we also had to share the delights of Station K-7, about which we were in orbit, with a shipload of Klingons!

Orders were, in diplomatic parlance, to maintain equable relations with the Klingons for we knew there was no way, under the terms of the truce, they could be

refused the station's facilities. My heart went out to our Captain. On one hand he had to play nanny to the quadrotriticale whilst on the other he had to act buddy-buddy with a bunch of aliens whose usual bent was to create trouble and, however they could, kick the Federation where it hurts.

(Actually, it came about that the Klingons' intentions were anything but benign - that's where the tribbles come in, but it's a long, complicated story and not really involved with my tale. Tell you more next time.)

As I was due for shore leave, down to K-7 I beamed, along with Gillies and Chambois, both of whom share my tastes in off-duty pursuits - nothing I wouldn't write home to gran about, folks!

There we sat in the station's main bar, quietly drinking our favourite poisons, the clientele composed of both Federation and Klingons; all models of exemplary behaviour, but the atmosphere in general was a-buzz! Nearby sat Pavel Chekov, Johnny Freeman and Scotty, our Chief Engineer, whose mechanical skills have won him a place in the text books and whose affection for the Enterprise is legend. The man is made in the mould of geniuses and is a great guy to boot. It was nice and peaceful, just as ordered, when this burly ape of a Klingon began to crack snide remarks about Captain Kirk. Everyone in Starfleet uniform tensed and I saw Scotty lean across the table to restrain Pav, who had risen from his chair, looking as if his greatest ambition was to stuff the Klingon through the waste disposal. Scotty was our ranking officer and we had to take our lead from him, keeping to our seats and not letting that ape set our blood boiling. It wasn't easy. Then the Klingon, loud enough for everyone to hear, insulted the Enterprise. He sure must have been stupid for anyone catching the expression on Scotty's face would have filed for immediate transfer back home. But no. The Klingon sailed right on, cackling that our beloved ship ought to be hauled away as garbage! That did it! Scotty handles his engines with the tender care you'd lavish on a new-born babe, but oh, the strength behind the fist that crashed wham! bang into the Klingon's face! Now, in my job as security guard I'm trained to protect my crewmates from the manifold dangers and hazards of space (I didn't earn my commendations and rank for nothing - bang goes my modesty again) and maintaining the peace is ordered by the senior officer present and, as I said earlier, we had to take our lead from Scotty. We did. We gave those Klingons a shore leave they won't forget in a hurry! Personal result? A black eye and a busted lip. My assailant? He didn't look too well either.

Fifteen minutes later when both Terrans and Klingons were bruised, battered and a little weary, calm was resumed. By then, of course, the...er...disturbance ... had been brought to the Captain's attention, and not a half hour after that we Enterprise men were lined up before him, an unsavoury looking collection, being battle-scarred and unkempt.

James Kirk has a well-deserved reputation for being the most understanding and patient of captains with his men. I've seen him in the best of humour, jovial and laughing, ready with a joke of his own and eager to smile - at that moment, there wasn't a trace of a grin in sight. He demanded to know who started the fight. We were as tight as clams. He questioned Pav and Johnny Freeman in turn, but got no joy. The Captain fumed, confined us all to quarters and dismissed us, with the exception of Scotty. Our sympathies were with him as we trooped out of the door, somewhat stiffly. What happened once those doors closed we have no idea, but I reckon the Captain learned the truth. His coaxing tones could loosen the tongue of the most silent of enemy agents. Poor Scotty never stood a chance! Anyhow, our confinement to quarters didn't last long!

So that's how I came to look like a punch bag in those 'grams. Lorn's mother had written to him with her request and, being nearby at the time, I was roped in to show off my red shirt while Chambois took the 'grams. You're not to concern yourselves that I'm making a hobby of getting into fights, nor am I taking it up as a hobby. I protect my crewmates - remember? - not scrap with them, and to be that closely associated with Klingons again is a pessimist's nightmare. I only told you the whole story, omitting nothing, because I knew you'd speculate and imagine the worst if I didn't. Call it a brief spell of boyish adventurism. Okay, so I'm twenty-five, but Scotty's even older and a Lieutenant-commander!

The happenings on K-7 were really the liveliest events to occur for months. We've had the odd encounter with weird life-forms, but nothing out of the ordinary. At present, we're on our way to Starbase 24, to pick up some new personnel. Who knows, perhaps there's a nice little female lieutenant amongst them who could take me in hand, get me tamed just in case the nightmare ever looms! No, don't start writing the wedding invitations. The majority of women in Starfleet are, quite rightly, very anti-marriage. I'm not going to get hooked in this profession.

Well, that's it for now. I'm due back on duty in five minutes. Write soon, won't you, and let me have the news from home. Andy's pictogram arrived a day ago from his new hospital on Alverous II. He promised to follow it up with a letter. Knowing Andy, it could take years! Aren't you glad to have one literary son?

Take care,

Deric.

+++++

ART THREE VULCAN OR ART THREE HUMAN.

You stand before me.
A silent figure, so calm
seemingly mature
That my heart cries out in protest
He's just a boy.

You're so like your father.
With serene eyes and ways
That hide the tumult of your soul.
I want to hold you in my arms
But would not try.

For you are you, and I am I.
To look at we are worlds apart
A Human mother - a Vulcan boy.

Oh son of mine I love you so
My heart is yours can yours be mine?
So restless, yet so still.
It's time for you to go.

You turn - I turn away.
For there is nothing else that we can say?
Except farewell.

Mother!

Eyes meet eyes.
Hands touch hands.
I look at you - you look at me.
I wonder now what do you see?
A Vulcan woman? And I,
And I - a Human boy.

Jayne Turner.

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SULU: That's a magnificent stuffed lion you have there. Where did you get him?

UHURA: At home, I went on safari with my uncle.

SULU: What's he stuffed with?

UHURA: My uncle.

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A SHARED NIGHTMARE by Jacqueline Newey

Kirk dreamed of pine trees that night. They swung around and captured his gaze, their slim splinter-like branches shielding him from the strong wind. He imagined them stretching on and on in endless rows at the top of a mountain ridge, holding their stiff rough limbs up to the light, and capturing a faint whisper of wind and throwing it into an enormous roar. His knees were aching to kneel before their majestic sways, but instead he moved on in between them and let the needles gently brush over his tingling face.

Suddenly the kindness of the branches seemed to turn to vindictive anger. They twisted and turned Kirk in amongst the prickly mass, covering him in the green revolting vegetation. Kirk spluttered, tried to sit up, and found himself smothered in a silky sheet. Wrenching it free he gained control of the disorderly mess, and hurried to get dressed.

The corridors seemed somewhat quieter than usual, thought Kirk, as he strode along one such empty passageway. He smiled politely at a passing yeoman, who appeared to be the only other person on duty besides himself. It was not until the Captain was approaching the recreation room that he remembered. A trickle of sound reached his ears, and as the doors swished smoothly open a small group of crewmembers became visible at the far end of the room.

"Captain Kirk!" The deep voice resounded across the width between Kirk and a giant of a man who was obviously not a crewmember. Those surrounding the owner of the voice immediately backed away - both from respect for the man, and from the honest fear of being trodden underfoot. Upon seeing Kirk's bemused glance they all scurried away to various tables in a cloud of chatter.

"Mr. Kavran!" Kirk replied with equal enthusiasm. "Won't you join me for some coffee?"

"But of course I'll join you," went on the large man. "But I'll do without the coffee, thanks," he added hastily.

Kavran sat down as lightly as he could in the chair, which was - for him, at least - a midget's chair. He tucked his feet awkwardly in under the table, cleverly folded his bulky arms, and tilted his ginger-haired head down to look at Kirk.

Kirk's eyes were filled with respect for this man. One who had, alone, brought up a colony of apprehensive people on a planet seemingly wrought with disaster. Kavran was now being transported to another impatient group of men, women and children who had recently colonised a planet in the sector through which the Enterprise would be travelling, and were having some difficulty in controlling their situation.

For a few minutes Kirk and Kavran talked busily, appreciating each other's company. Then Kirk was called to the bridge.

Spock also noticed the stillness in the corridor. As he approached the door to the recreation room he could scarcely fail to miss one of the causes of this emptiness, as Kavran launched himself through the confined space of the doorway, followed by an alerted Kirk and a crowd of bustling off-duty crewmembers - all anxious to hear the knowledgeable words of the giant.

As Kirk stepped into his familiar stride beside the Vulcan he began. "What's up on the bridge, Spock? Sulu says there's a shuttlecraft floating around in space."

"Indeed, Captain. The design of the shuttlecraft is identical in every way to those of Starfleet, and it is suspended in space whilst maintaining no functions at all, even those which are vital for supporting life. It is logical to assume that it is dead."

"Maybe. But where did it come from?" murmured Kirk, more to himself than to Spock. But he had, once again, underestimated the hearing of Vulcans.

"Its origin is unknown, and will probably remain so unless we bring the craft aboard, sir," was Spock's reply.

They entered the bridge.

"Very well, Mr. Spock, let's have this shuttlecraft brought aboard." Kirk smiled before adding, "With all the usual precautions, please. This may be a bait of some kind."

"Naturally, sir," came the instant response from behind his right shoulder.

A technician was juggling with switches on a panel of dazzling flashing lights when McCoy paused on his way through towards the hangar deck. He tried to look interested in the variety of gadgetry before him, but the lights made his head ache.

The technician, noticing his agitation, said, "The Captain is on his way, sir." He pointed to a nearby chair. "You can sit there to wait, if you like, sir," he smiled, and went back to his work.

McCoy was just about to say that he was managing quite well where he was, thank you, when Kirk walked in through the opening door, Spock following close on his heels. Thinking better of his reply McCoy grunted and shuffled towards them.

"Hurry up, Jim," complained McCoy. "I hate it down here - it's like a different ship altogether."

"Sorry we're late, Bones," said Kirk. "There was an unexpected traffic jam outside the elevator - Kavran and another of his crowds."

Spock was staring at McCoy in a way which would not be considered polite on Vulcan. One eyebrow rose slowly. "Perhaps we should excuse the Doctor from this engagement, Captain. He does appear to be extremely uncomfortable in these surroundings."

Kirk anticipated the oncoming argument. He turned to Bones. "Before you answer him with some retort or other, just think," he grinned. "Who's going to win?"

Spock had overheard again. "Logic estimates that the possibility of the Doctor..."

"Shut up, both of you!" McCoy shrugged. "I haven't retorted anything, yet, and anyway - " he looked at Kirk " - whose side are you on?"

They were both interrupted by the technician. "Captain, the shuttlecraft is ready to board now."

Somehow they had managed to open up the shuttlecraft. The three men filed in past the two security guards and looked casually around. They were not casual for long. Kirk had suspected that this might be more than a routine investigation, and glancing at their faces he noted their immediate reactions.

Bones shuddered. He stood just inside as if uncertain whether to venture any further. His eyes flitted quickly around the interior and seemed to grow wider with disbelief. Or was it amazement? Kirk couldn't be sure.

Suddenly the Doctor sneezed. He wrinkled up his nose. "The air in here is foul," he murmured. Kirk nodded in agreement.

Spock had managed to study every console, screen and switch, and now at last he was faced with just one more area of exploration. They all were. Yet something still held them back - just for a moment - as if their minds had united as one and so became aware of some terrible danger which the future held.

Kirk suddenly became conscious of the absolute stillness. It had seemed to bombard him all day, and now it stifled the already thick, heavy atmosphere. It reminded him of his dream, but he hurriedly pushed it from his mind and turned his attention to the two occupied seats.

Yellow faded bindings which were crinkling up at the edges had been wound around the shapes on the seats. They were unmistakably the shapes of Human figures, and their weight pushed down the seats.

Spock, without hesitation, began to scan one of the objects with his tricorder, and McCoy, reassured, joined in the examination. Both busily employed, they failed to notice Kirk. Neither saw him tentatively tug at a loose end of material which dangled temptingly from the top of the other 'figure'. A little more of the strip unravelled and Kirk caught it lightly in his hand. His face was filled with a glowing radiance - enraptured, caught in some far away dream. His lips began to mouth silent words as they drew up into a smile.

McCoy had been discussing their discovery with Spock. He was just saying, "They're just like the mummies which ancient peoples of Earth used to..." when the sight of Kirk cut off his sentence and replaced it with one word, expressing more emotion than any thousand sentences could have done.

"JIM!"

That one word hit Spock instantly. He felt it wrench painfully at his heart, the emotion wanting to tear down his Vulcan half and give all his Human help to the one man who now needed it most, the man to whom McCoy had addressed that single word.

But he didn't. The situation was begging for his Vulcan half instead. But the situation as Spock and McCoy saw it was mostly hidden. A small corner peeked out for them to view, but it was only small. They had both suffered this same torment before, and now, within almost a few seconds, they were sharing the burden.

Kirk had been pulled to his knees. His face was contorted with an expression of evil, and his shoulders heaved in jerks as he tried to fill his lungs with the foul air. He tried to drag his arm up to his face to wipe the sweat from his eyes, but the pine trees forced it down in his mind, and when the attempt was a failure he began to moan.

In front of him, still occupying one of the shuttlecraft seats, was the figure - now free of bindings to the shoulders, and with the head exposed. Although the decay had already begun the familiar features were distinguishable. The face was that of Captain James T. Kirk.

Then their Kirk crumpled in a heap on the floor.

As Spock knelt down by his side a faint whisper came from Kirk's now calm mouth. "Spock..."

McCoy brushed his hand against Spock's shoulder, and the dark eyes looked up into his. No words were spoken, but this time both knew that medicine could wait. Their silent communication ended swiftly.

McCoy staggered outside and gulped the fresh air. His face a deathly white, he avoided the questioning glances of the guards, and waited. He might wait for ever, but wait he must.

When Kirk woke up he felt refreshed and calm. He found himself lying across several folded down seats in the shuttlecraft, and...why was Spock sprawled across his legs? Fearing the worst he quickly leaned forward and slid his hands under the still body, trying in vain to move Spock carefully to another seat.

The disturbance woke Spock up, and Kirk relaxed again, allowing the Vulcan to pull himself to his feet without embarrassing him with any comment. His eyes followed Spock's to a covered object at the other end of the shuttlecraft. Nothing registered in Kirk's face except a puzzled expression, and then suddenly he

knew that he needed to thank Spock, but for what, exactly?

"Spock..." Kirk felt his hands and flushed cheeks, still sticky with sweat as though he had just had a fever. "Did you make me forget? I don't think you did, yet I feel so..." He couldn't reach the right words to put over his feelings, and a hopeless look dawned on his face.

Spock knew exactly how he felt, and as Kirk looked deep into his face he realised that Spock knew. It made him feel unaccountably sad.

"I only searched for the source of the trouble. You made yourself forget - a total rejection of everything you experienced. Unfortunately it means that I have been unable to discover anything essential about our problem. However - " Spock prevented himself from glancing towards the still-bound figure, which sat hidden from Kirk " - I intend to remedy that situation in the very near future."

There was a slight pause before Kirk said falteringly, "Thank you, Spock."

Another pause, and absolute silence. Then Kirk noticed the stuffiness of the atmosphere. "Can we get out of here, please?" he asked. "And then I'd like you to tell me about it, if it won't hurt you too much."

At first he thought that Spock was not going to reply. But he must have imagined the hesitation - Spock's voice contained a hint of urgency. "I have to tell you everything I know, and perhaps suggest even more. However, I believe we should now inform Dr. McCoy of your recovery."

McCoy watched as Kirk left the sickbay on his way to his own room. Perfectly healthy, both physically and mentally. Well, at least that was a relief. So Jim's display must have been brought about by external forces - something to do with that thing in the shuttlecraft.

He had to let Spock explain what had happened. Jim hadn't seemed shocked or upset - it was just as though all his memories of the incident had suddenly come flowing back, but this time without the repulsive shock and the endless torment. Spock seemed to know instinctively how to explain, how to prevent the wound from worsening and the infection spreading. That made McCoy glad. For once he too longed for the calm, soothing words.

Suddenly, as if some fairy godmother had waved her wand and granted his wish, Spock appeared in the doorway. The Doctor immediately wanted to change his wish. Spock was needed in too many other important places on the ship.

"Spock, shouldn't you be on the bridge?" he asked. "The crew will begin to wonder if you..."

"Mr. Scott is quite capable of directing activities on the bridge," replied Spock, "and the crew still appears to be enchanted by the presence of Mr. Kavran." He sat down opposite McCoy. "Doctor, I need your help urgently."

Realising the urgency of the situation, McCoy didn't interrupt.

"I said before that when I searched the Captain's mind I was unable to discover a reason for his display because of his loss of memory on the subject. However, I omitted to say then that I knew the reason for this loss of memory. Some alien, some 'thing' has planted at the back of his mind the false belief that this ship will be destroyed by someone on board, by a colleague of his, perhaps a friend."

They were both thinking along identical lines. It could be any of them - even Spock, or McCoy. "Have you told Jim this?" McCoy asked.

"Yes," Spock replied. "He asked to know everything, and I complied."

McCoy knew - and Spock knew he knew - that Spock had complied as Jim's best friend, and not as the Captain's First Officer.

"I want to help," said McCoy. "What can I do?"

Spock explained.

The door to Kavran's cabin was not locked. Never in his wildest dreams would he have suspected that the most improbable enemy of all was now stealthily creeping through the door.

Kirk's face was glowing with that same radiance again. All around him swayed the beautiful pine trees in his mind, and whilst believing himself to be kneeling under them, he was in reality stooping at the side of the sleeping Kavran.

Then, as always in these terrible nightmares, Kirk was beginning to be smothered by the prickly branches. Lashing out with his arms he caught hold of a thick tree trunk and shook and squeezed it with all his might.

But that was all an illusion. In reality Kirk was strangling Kavran, digging his nails into the thick skin, his bones sticking out and forming little gullies on the backs of his hands as he struggled to reach death.

Kavran fought back breathlessly, not yet aware that the would-be murderer was Kirk. He finally peeled the hands away from his neck and pushed Kirk to the floor, where he immediately fell unconscious.

Kavran had carried Kirk all the way to sickbay. When he became unconscious, Bones, Spock and Kavran were talking quietly at the other side of the room, and by listening to their conversation he managed to piece together, bit by bit, what had happened.

Noticing that he had not been strapped to the couch, he called across, "Bones, you'll have to put me under restraint. Whatever's got into me is obviously perfectly willing to kill to achieve its goal."

They walked across. "You're too weak to even think of injuring anyone physically," said McCoy.

"But I might get hold of a phaser of something," argued Kirk.

Reluctantly, McCoy fastened the restraints and Kavran, excusing himself, left the three alone.

"What did Kavran say?" inquired Kirk.

"Nothing much, really. I told him as briefly as I could that some alien force seems to be influencing your actions, and that it had got into you when you entered the shuttlecraft. He understood immediately that I couldn't tell him everything, and he certainly doesn't blame you for what happened." McCoy turned to Spock. "Could Kavran be the colleague who somewhere in Jim's mind is capable of destroying the Enterprise?"

Kirk winced.

"My thoughts entirely, Doctor," replied Spock.

"But supposing that these beliefs which have been planted in my mind are true, what then? Kavran may indirectly bring about the destruction of...of this ship, but that doesn't give me the right to murder him in cold blood." Kirk leaned back and rubbed a bruised shoulder - McCoy had used minimal restraints, which left Kirk's hands free. He doubted if he could ever kill Kavran with his bare hands anyway. He was the one with the injuries. His eyes closed, and for a moment he saw those stark pine trees again, only this time they were still and calm, and they bowed their heads towards him.

"Captain?"

Kirk started and opened his eyes. "What is it, Spock?"

"Have you ever dreamed of pine trees?"

"Pine trees?" McCoy couldn't believe his ears. "What have they got to do

with anything?"

Kirk suddenly understood. "So you have seen them too, Spock."

"Fleetingly, yes. They are etched on your mind - at first welcoming, and then they smother and torment you to the brink of death, but not quite over the edge. At first there is the feeling of unbelievable joy, and then a sudden replacement of it, with such a sheer weight of emotion that pain is the only thing left."

Kirk was plainly shocked. "Did you feel all that? Everything that I don't remember lingers on, tormenting you?"

"Not quite. I barely touched the feelings which you were experiencing. I sensed them, but you suffered them."

Kirk was very tired. Seeing this, McCoy led Spock away into his office. "Spock, you never told me that. I may not understand pine trees, but I know what emotion can do to a Vulcan. And you plan to unwrap the second figure and just let yourself be stifled with these emotions? You can't do it. Why not let me instead, Spock? Spock?"

"I can. I will. I have to do it," came the voice softly.

They had sat together for a while, each thinking their own thoughts, each drawing on the other's companionship for his own comfort.

Soon, they both knew, Spock would have to do that which in his own heart he had secretly sworn to do. McCoy thought he could see all Spock's thoughts etched in his face, but he couldn't interpret them all. Looking away, he wondered what his own face revealed about his inner thoughts and the feelings he found it so hard to describe.

Time went quickly. Time not wasted, but time granted for the necessary thought and understanding.

Then suddenly it seemed as if something had touched them both. Together they looked up, unable to avoid looking deep into the other's eyes. McCoy was the first to approach the door. He was not held in a trance, but he knew instinctively that now was the time, and the place was the shuttlecraft.

As Spock followed McCoy through the door Kirk's dream was beginning in the other room. So peaceful and gentle - a faint chuckle in the dim distance, and then the whispers of the pine trees rustling in the fresh breeze.

The shuttlecraft was filled with the stench of death, but neither Spock nor McCoy noticed it. Their concentration was so intense even before the link had been moulded, that the atmosphere seemed void of any capacity to overcrowd them with its denseness.

McCoy's knees sank to meet the floor; he was breathing shallowly, he could feel the muscles in his face becoming tense - then relaxed, repeating over and over; no thoughts that seemed sane, was he trembling? It was fear, no doubt of that, fear and worry for them all. Worry? He was petrified beyond scope of his imagination. But still he had faith; his trust in Spock, and courage because he knew Spock trusted him.

So when Spock's fingertips played over his temples he was ready. When their touch grew stronger he gasped a deep breath, felt the air rush into his lungs, and then relaxed. Slowly, but without hesitation, he accepted Spock. It was so gentle, and in other circumstances an experience so beautiful that he felt like crying out with joy and... But he didn't. Couldn't. Not now. To let Spock and Jim down would be such an utter failure, and all his own. He was here as Spock's memory, and in that role he knew he was indispensable. And as Spock began to unwrap the second figure with his free hand McCoy did not even need his faith to believe in. The pure total belief of the experience enveloped him in the unique

strangeness of the shared mind. And the familiar voice renewed McCoy's strength as it echoed softly in his mind. "You belong, belong, belong..."

Kirk could not see anything for a split second but pitch black darkness. Then when sight returned his dream was being dissected by the slender shadows of the pine trees which were blotting out different images in his mind. He thought that he was perhaps finally overcoming the viciousness of these evil trees, but when for one moment his concentration lapsed, he lost his grip. The rich ancient red of the weathered bark curled up high branches towards the sky, and then dived downwards with the wind, seeming to sweep Kirk off his feet. He fought on in desperation, but this time he was not alone. Two others also lived in his nightmare, yet even as the burden was shared it tripled in strength over and over again.

Spock had not been as badly affected as Kirk by the sight of his own mummified body. He had known what to expect, or at least he had thought he had known. The initial shock was over, but then he remembered. Much, much worse was to come. He had never really forgotten, but he sensed that the thought of the ordeal had lain hidden in the darkest depths of his mind.

Spock was grateful for McCoy's presence. It was not just necessary for the situation, but needed by him. And when it had begun he had felt as though the whole universe had abandoned him. But no - never. He could never lose or be lost when those two names resounded in him. Jim had taught him so much, and now Bones was begging him not to give it all up in one vast leap into the unknown. Instead he crept along slowly and reached forward with care, and never would be tempted to surrender.

McCoy's eyes had been closed, but when he felt the irregular twitching of the cold hand, he prised his eyelids open to look. First his eyes saw Spock's fight for control, then he felt it in his brain, rushing around and searching for more strength.

Spock was leaving him behind!

But no - Spock would never do that. He never had done it. Never will, thought McCoy. I am lagging behind.

Breathing evenly he managed to catch up slowly without draining away any more strength. Then he closed his eyes and waited for the beginning of the edge of Spock's most minute thoughts, tinged only slightly with the pain which was already twisting itself in Spock's face.

McCoy was the first to wake up. He felt peaceful and rested, but also confused. Then he recognised the shuttlecraft. Stained bindings littered the floor, one end entwined tightly around one of Spock's hands. The other hand, the one which had been held up to McCoy's temple for what had seemed like an eternity, had fallen with the Vulcan's unconscious body to the dirty floor.

At first McCoy was trying so hard to remember that his memory failed him. But as he let his thoughts wander aimlessly they merged and formed one persistent memory.

McCoy leaned over Spock's still body. The eyelids fluttered. "Spock! Are you all right?" He spoke quietly but urgently. How would the experience have left him? Like Jim? Apparently all right but actually brainwashed?

As Spock came to McCoy reminded him gently about their link. At first Spock's eyes seemed to light up, but then he thudded back on the floor and closed his eyes (angrily? thought McCoy) again. He repeated over and over again, "I've forgotten."

"No, Spock," said McCoy, still gently. "You've remembered. It's just that your memory is preserved in my care, and I'm just waiting to hand it back to you."

At last Spock sat up. He seemed relieved that McCoy could easily relate to him what had happened. "Please take me to sickbay," he said. "Or - no. Doctor, remember how the Captain attacked Kavran? I may also be plagued with the desire to kill him. I had better be taken to the brig immediately."

He stood up quickly, but McCoy stopped him. "No, Spock. You're my responsibility now. And besides, you have to come to sickbay to persuade Jim that his hidden beliefs are false. And yours, too," he added hastily.

But Spock did not seem to comprehend the full meaning of McCoy's words. He just nodded and followed him out of the wretched shuttlecraft.

Kirk's nightmare had ended when Spock slumped down unconscious on the shuttlecraft floor. He had slept deeply for a long time, but when McCoy and Spock came in he was awake and alert. It was as if someone had shaken down all the pine cones from the trees and woken him up out of all this nonsense.

But a nightmare of a different kind, a worse kind, made its presence felt when Spock stumbled into sickbay. Kirk suddenly remembered everything which he had forgotten before, everything which Spock had now forgotten.

"It's horrible, Bones," Kirk uttered. Their eyes met. In that one moment McCoy knew that Kirk was no longer held in the alien grip. But his relief was shattered when he had to lead Spock to a bed, urge him to lie down.

"You've got to help him, Jim," he said. "You're his only hope." McCoy paused. "He...he did this for you."

"I know, Bones," managed Kirk. As McCoy was leaving, he added, "Keep everyone away from that shuttlecraft, Bones. Seal it off. Do what you have to. Talk to Scotty, But don't destroy it yet. I don't like to imagine what it might do to Spock, and I certainly don't want to see it happening."

Kirk had been let loose from the restraints and was now pacing around Spock who was sleeping restlessly. Must be one of those dreadful nightmares, he thought. He didn't have to wonder how Spock was coping, either - just look at his face. He broke off in mid-thought. Spock was stirring.

"Don't come near me!" growled Spock.

Kirk sprang back quickly. He was stuck for words. What could he say that would bring round this man? Standing back, he wondered. Perhaps this was a time when words were just not the right way. There must be another way, a better way. The only way.

So he stood quietly, looking at Spock as though casually, all the while thinking furiously.

Then he seemed to have come to a decision. Approaching Spock slowly he succeeded in removing the restraints from the Vulcan and then stepped swiftly back to his former position.

Time slipped quietly by, and by, and by... On the outside Kirk looked like the calm, efficient Captain he was. From within he was struggling to hold together his patience, telling himself that this was the solution, that...

Then he saw Spock pushing his feet firmly to the floor, forcing himself to stand without hesitation now that he had moved. But Kirk saw the faint trembling rippling through the body. He did not miss the expression on the other's face as he pulled himself together - not totally, but steady enough for them both to accept.

For a moment Kirk thought that Spock's curiosity would pull him through and land him firmly in reality, but his hope was premature. Just as he seemed to be gaining control Spock slid to the floor, unable to forget, as Kirk had, the trip into a nightmare.

This time Kirk could not stand it. Rushing to Spock he grasped him under the arms and hauled him to a nearby chair.

"Let me go! Let go! Let go!" Spock's arms swung through the air.

"I give the orders around here," spat Kirk. Perhaps if he could make Spock really angry... If Spock could be made to release all his feelings blindly... No, aimed at him...then he could reach him as his guard was down...when he was open to attack...then perhaps he could be talked round.

Kirk pulled Spock, still resisting, to his feet. Swaying gently, the Vulcan stood opposite Kirk, his brain bombarded with thoughts that told him he should remember, before it was too late. Slowly, small fragments of memory floated back to him.

"Captain, the shuttlecraft. We must..."

"We must destroy it, Spock. It is evil, and the alien forces within it intend to kill Kavran and prevent him from saving many lives on a problem planet."

"Negative, sir," managed Spock. "We must preserve it. It holds within it beauty beyond our capacity to imagine. In it life itself is defined, all evil and hatred are flung aside and peace is shared by all." Spock lifted his hand and Kirk recognised the Vulcan salute. "Peace," whispered the Vulcan.

Kirk could not bear to watch any longer. He turned away. Spock really believes... He has sacrificed himself totally.

No. Spock would not believe that. The alien force was believing it for him...just let Spock loose...out of its grasp... He turned round again.

"Spock, just let me..."

But Spock was not listening. His body twisted and turned in different directions, and then he seemed to spiral to the floor.

Instantly by his side, Kirk shouted urgently to him. "Spock. SPOCK! Speak to me now. That's an order, Spock." No answer. He shook the limp body, and began again more gently. "It's getting to you, Spock. Slowly but surely you have given in to that alien...whatever it is. Because you have pushed away all those emotions to which I ignorantly surrendered without a fight, it has to tackle you in a different way. It has to force its way of thinking into you. You have had no choice but to let it command you. But it has shown signs of weakening. You can overcome it. You will, because you must."

"It's too late," replied Spock dully. "Jim's dead. Gone. And now such emptiness. Bones? On the endless search for him. Forever in eternity. Gone."

"Stop it now. Now, Spock. Stop torturing us both. You're hurting me too, Spock. Not just yourself. Me. Jim. For my sake..."

Kirk finally saw that he was getting through. Something was building up behind that Vulcan mask - something good. Something which would bring the end of this shared nightmare.

Suddenly Spock drew himself up and slapped Kirk hard. It had hurt, but the Captain allowed himself to smile before preparing for the next outburst. But it never came.

Spock drew back his hand. "Uh... I am sorry, Captain. Uh...Please excuse my behaviour. I believe I am..."

"Back to normal, Spock?" supplied Kirk, still smiling.

"Yes, sir. And beginning to remember. But...uh...why did I slap you?"

"It was the logical thing to do. You and the alien were fighting for control in your brain, and because the alien is mainly made up of emotion you had to get rid of any surplus emotion so that you were concentrating fully on forcing the alien away. So you hit out angrily at the first thing you saw, and that just

happened to be me. Fortunately that was all you did. I suppose you could just as easily have pulled me to pieces in seconds."

"And if you had not been there," murmured Spock thoughtfully, "I would have 'hit out' at myself and just been filled with even more emotion. Eventually I would have killed myself... Thank you for being here."

They both understood and were silent.

Far away in the distance a beam of light reached its target, and the shuttlecraft exploded in a ball of more light.

"You know, Spock," said Kirk, "you didn't have to expose yourself to all that emotion in the shuttlecraft to try and reach me. After all, the effect wore off after a while, and I was perfectly all right."

"Correct, Captain," replied Spock. "I did not have to. Just as you did not have to remain with me as I underwent the effect of those emotions."

A firm steady hand drawing up into a familiar salute caught Kirk's eye.. He stood staring - diving deep in his mind into what had once been an aching emptiness. Then even before the explosion of light on the screen he had been showered with that remembrance - those putrid, rotting figures flashing back into view at the moment of their creators' death.

"Peace..." supplied Spock.

One word - said so much - yet to 'them' had meant so little. Carrying their disease in the ever-hopeless search for cure - on through dark and dreary years - unintentionally destroying others - yet pained with the threat of eternal life. Death - the ultimate medicine. Perhaps 'they' were at peace now...

Kirk blinked away from thoughts, and returned his gaze to the salute. This time he did not turn away. This time he too lifted his hand.

Behind them on the bridge, Kavran smiled. Even he had learned something on this trip.

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I CAN'T STOP... by Sandie Cowden

I can't stop climbing Vulcan trees:
It's wearing out my hands and knees.
It skins my shins and gives me fleas -
But I can't stop climbing Vulcan trees.

I can't stop singing Klingon songs:
My ears vibrate like brass-bound gongs.
My teeth click shut like sugar tongs,
But I can't stop singing Klingon songs.

I can't stop quoting Terran rhymes:
It's getting on my nerves at times.
I'm worse than ancient hall-clock chimes,
But I can't stop quoting Terran rhymes.

I can't stop flying Martian kites:
In marrow-chilling Martian nights.
It loses friends and leads to fights,
But I can't stop flying Martian kites.

I can't stop doing funny things:
Like painting dots on beetles' wings.
The doc says these pills cure all things,
But I can't stop.....Hey! I've stopped!

Will someone wind me up again?

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THE FLING by Tina W. Pole

Scotty studied his handiwork with pride. At last, at long long last, after all these years, he'd done it. Managed to programme the fabrication processor to make him a proper Highland kilt. From now on he wouldn't have to keep his real kilt just for those special occasions. He'd get the Captain's permission, but as far as he knew there was nothing in the rules that stated that you couldn't wear a kilt on duty, and then he'd show them.

"Aye! I'm bound to attract mony a lassie this way... an' Ah wouldna' be at all surprised if the Captain himself decided tae change over tae wearin' one as well..."

Kirk stared at the length of pleated red tartan material that the processor had just given him. "Mmm... I must've done something wrong, somewhere. Don't know what, or how, I've been using this thing for long enough... Still, these things aren't infallible."

He fed his instructions in again and waited. Another bundle of red tartan material came forth. That did it. He reached for the intercom button.

"Maintenance, this is the Captain."

"Maintenance here, sir," came the soft feminine voice of Lt. Marshall.

"Ms. Marshall, I'm having trouble with my fabrication processor."

"You are, sir?" She didn't sound too happy about his observation.

"Yes, it keeps on giving me a length of tartan material."

"It does?" She really did sound dejected. "Well, I'll be right up, sir."

"Er...you will?" Kirk looked down at his state of undress. If only he hadn't fed yesterday's trousers into the recycler.

"Yes, sir, if it's convenient."

What could he say? "Yes, yes, of course, Lieutenant." He switched off the intercom.

Blast! I haven't even got a dressing gown. He looked across at the bed. Thank heavens he hadn't got around to dumping the cover. He quickly pulled it off the bed and wrapped it around his waist. Fine sight he was going to look! Why couldn't she have sent up one of the juniors, preferably a male as well?

The door buzzed and he shuffled across to his desk and released the door.

Lt. Marshall of Maintenance walked in, a petite brunette with flashing brown eyes. A woman whom at any other time he would have been pleased to see - however, not at that particular moment, not when he was the one who was at a disadvantage. She eyed him as he stood trying to cover up his embarrassment behind his desk.

"Sir?"

He smiled uncomfortably and pointed in the direction of the processor. She gave a sigh and walked over to it, picking up the two bundles of tartan.

"I thought as much," she said. "It's the same as the rest."

"The rest?" Kirk asked as he sat down in his chair.

"Yes. Yours isn't the only call I've had to deal with this morning, Captain," she explained. "You were programming it for trousers, weren't you?"

"Yes. Yes, I was," Kirk confessed, thinking, As if you hadn't already guessed.

"And," she said as she held up one of the lengths of material, "what you've got is a kilt, sir."



"A kilt?"

"Yes, sir, a kilt." She demonstrated by wrapping the offending article around her waist.

"I see... Well, what are you going to do about it, then, Lieutenant? I can't go on duty in a kilt."

"Well, at the moment there is nothing I can do, sir. We are working on the problem."

"How long do you estimate it's going to take?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "I don't know, Captain. So far it's rejected all our attempts to re-programme it. If we can't get at it through the programming system, we're going to have to take the whole thing apart, and that means that we're all going to be out of clean uniforms for a while. And not only clean uniforms." She eyed the stripped bed. "Everything that fabrications produces."

"In other words, what we've got on our hands is a minor catastrophe."

"Precisely, Captain."

"But how did all this come about in the first place?" he asked. "And why, of all things, is it producing kilts?"

"That, sir," she said rather sarcastically, "is a question you should put to our Chief Engineer."

"Chief Engineer..." He eyed the kilt. "Ah! I see..."

"I admit that I am partially to blame, sir," she said. "I did give him permission to use the fabrication processor, but it was he who messed up the programming."

"Yes. Well, you'd better get yourself back down to your section, Lieutenant. The sooner you un-programme it, the better."

"Yes, sir. I'll let you know as soon as we've got it fixed."

"Yes, you do that, Lieutenant."

As soon as the doors slid shut after her, he was on the intercom. "Mr. Spock this is the Captain."

"Spock here, Captain."

"You're on the bridge?"

The viewscreen lit up and Kirk saw that his first officer wasn't on the bridge. "Negative, I am at present confined to quarters."

"Confined?"

"There appears to be a malfunction in the fabrication processor, Captain, and regrettably I am unable to procure a uniform."

Kirk couldn't help but grin.

"I do not understand why my predicament should be a cause for amusement, sir."

"I'm in the same predicament, Spock. No trousers..."

"Not in precisely the same, Captain," Spock pointed out. "I have been unable to obtain any of my uniform, whereas I see that you have managed to get a tunic top."

"Yeah! And a fat lot of good that does me."

Spock raised a quizzical eyebrow.

"I still can't go on duty without my trousers."

"Have you received one of these, Captain?" Spock held up a length of red

tartan.

"Yes."

"I believe it is called a kilt. Perhaps if you were to wear it..."

"What!" exclaimed Kirk. "You must be joking."

"Not at all, Captain," Spock said, as serious as ever. "It is an acceptable form of dress. I believe the Doctor has already dressed in one."

"McCoy...in a kilt?" He couldn't believe his ears. The last person he'd ever expect to wear a kilt was McCoy...apart from himself, of course.

"Yes, Captain," Spock confirmed.

"Well, I... Stay where you are, Spock!"

"I have no intention of going anywhere, Captain."

He switched channels. McCoy wasn't in his quarters. Kirk called sickbay. At last, an answer. "Jim?"

"Bones, you aren't...are you?"

McCoy grinned at him, and then moved away from the veivscreen to show his Captain. "Great, eh? I think I could grow to like these things."

"Sure you haven't been drinking?"

McCoy ignored the comment, but moved in closer to the screen. "You want to know something, Jim," he whispered. "I've had more passes since I put this thing on than ever before in my life."

"Oh, lord..." Kirk groaned, and switched back to his first officer.

"You have spoken to the Doctor?"

"Yes, and of course, as usual you're right. I still can't believe it, McCoy in a kilt, singing its praises..."

"Praises?"

How could Kirk explain why McCoy was singing its praises to his first officer? "Never mind. What are we going to do? Lt. Marshall had no idea as to when she might get the processor fixed - in fact there's a chance of the whole darned thing having to be taken apart."

"Well..." Spock looked thoughtfully at the wrap-over robe that he was wearing. "With your permission, I could of course wear my own clothing."

"Yes, yes you can. I don't suppose you've anything that would fit me?"

"I very much doubt it, Captain. I am after all somewhat slimmer than you, and I believe there is a slight difference in our heights. However, if you would care to come to my quarters, perhaps we could do something."

"Oh no you don't, Spock. You come to my quarters, and bring anything that you think might be suitable. I am not walking down the corridor in a kilt. Understand?"

"You have made that point very clear, Captain. I shall be with you within a few minutes." The viewscreen went blank and the Captain stood up, still wrapped in the bed cover. A kilt? How could they think that he would even consider wearing one?

Spock crossed his arms and looked at his Captain.

"Spock... Do you realise what this is?"

"Of course, Captain. It is in every sense of the word, a kilt - however, a Vulcan one."

"And a full length one at that." He looked down at the deck where his feet should have been. "And too darned long..."

"I did warn you, Jim."

"You warned me. Well, I can't possibly go out in this. Haven't you got anything else?"

"They will all be too long."

Kirk sat down on the bed with a sigh. "Yes, you're right. They will be." He reached over to the bedside intercom.

"It is highly unlikely that Lt. Marshall and her department have got the fabrication processor working yet."

Kirk took his finger away from the button he had just been about to press. "Guess I'm expecting too much. Well, Spock, you'd better get yourself to the bridge; at least one of us has to go on duty."

"Captain, you are forgetting..."

"No, Mr. Spock, I am not. I am not going to wear a kilt."

Spock could see that it was time for him to go. At times like this the Captain could be very stubborn - too stubborn for his own good. Still, perhaps he could arrange to rectify the matter. "I shall keep you informed as to the status of the ship, sir."

"Yes, of course."

"Jim," McCoy said as he paced up and down the Captain's quarters. "This is the second day you've been missing off the bridge. What are you going to put in your log as an excuse? I can certify you off with something, but I'll need some kind of medical report. I do need medical reports, even for such a minor ailment as a headache, to balance out my log. That fabricator's going to be out of commission for a few days at least - Lt. Marshall and her crew have only just given up on the programming side of it; they'll have to take it apart. Things are going to be chaotic enough as it is. Imagine - we're all going to have to use things again. It's going to be like hell in sickbay, I'll have to get all the old style sterilisers out, I'll have to..."

"Bones, all right...calm down..." Kirk stood up and gently pushed the harassed Doctor into a nearby chair.

"'Calm down' he says. My staff - they'll come out on strike, they'll..." He looked up at the Captain. "Why, Jim, you've put one on!"

"I have. Anything for peace's sake."

"But you look just great! Yes, it really suits you... Good job that these dress uniform tunics aren't the recycling kind, though, it looks best with them, even though..." he tugged at his collar..."they do tend to strangle you a bit."

"Well, are you going to come with me then?"

"You are actually going to leave this cabin?"

"I've no choice."

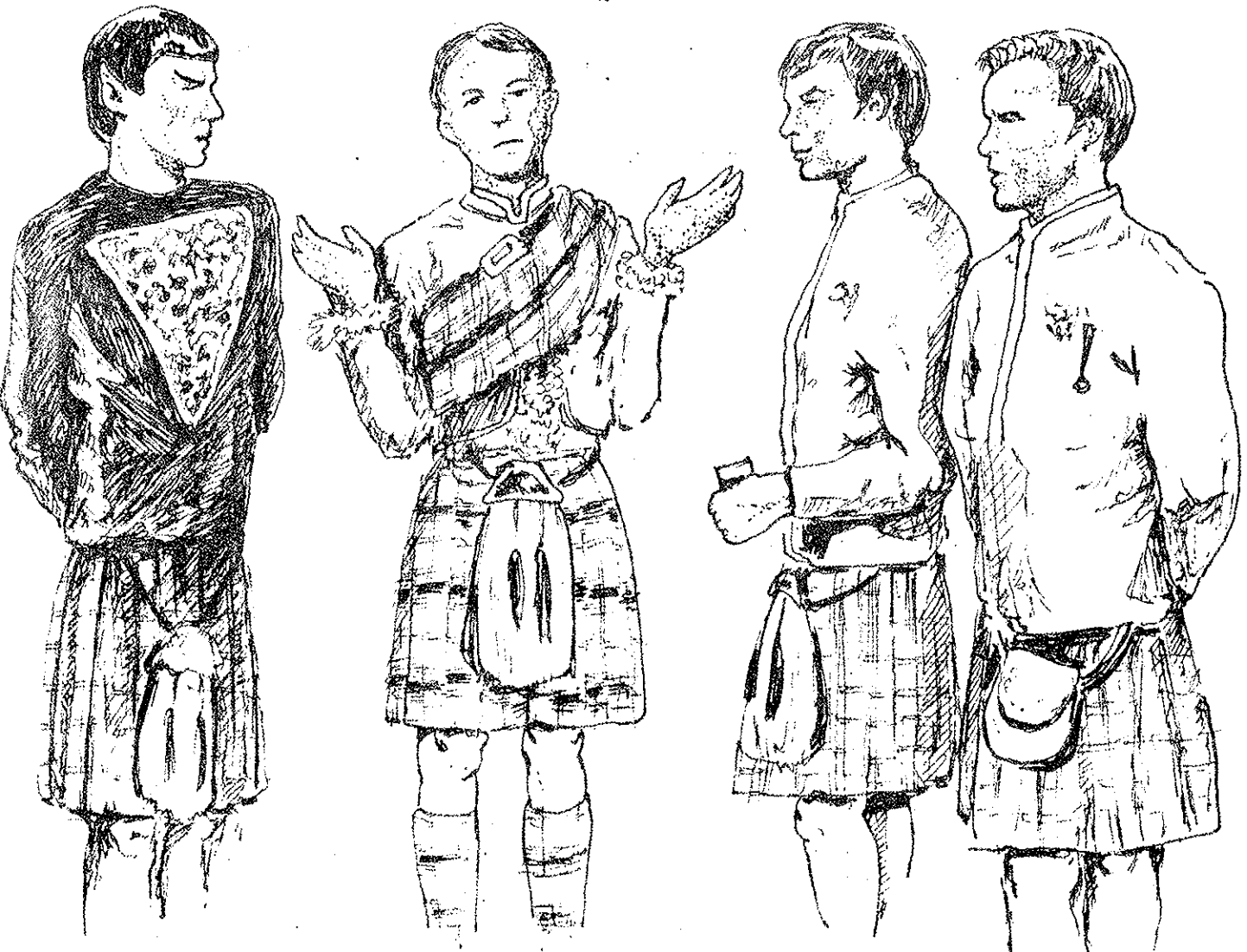
McCoy was puzzled. "How's that?"

"I don't get any dinner if I don't."

"Why, surely one of the yeomen...?"

Kirk shook his head. "My faithful first officer and friend has issued orders to the contrary. In fact, he's starved me into submission."

"He hasn't..." McCoy couldn't believe his ears. Spock, that Vulcan... using his tactics.



"He has. Now if you'll lead the way, I shall go and make a fool of myself. But I warn you, one wrong look, one wrong word, and I'll throw whoever it is in the brig!"

Scotty looked up uncomfortably from where he sat at one of the mess room tables. There was the Captain, dressed in one of his kilts, looking like thunder. He himself couldn't understand what all the fuss was about. What was wrong with a kilt? In fact it made the male members of the crew look a lot smarter, and as for the fabrication processor, well, surely his programming couldn't have upset it to such a degree. It must've been going wrong anyway, it just happened to finish going when he had perfected his 'kilt' programme, and now they were all blaming him.

"Mister Scott."

Scotty swallowed hard and looked up at his Captain. "Er...sir," he acknowledged.

Kirk pulled out a chair and sat down, making sure his legs were well hidden under the table. He didn't want a repeat of the incident that had just occurred in the corridor - somebody had wolf whistled at him...a female at that! Trouble was he hadn't been able to find out who the culprit was. Still he had had the whole group of six or so females confined to their quarters - that would teach them he was in no mood for jokes.

"What do you want to eat, Jim?" McCoy asked. He was having great difficulty in keeping a straight face. There was Scotty blushing profoundly under his Captain's scrutinising gaze, while the Captain himself was still blushing from that encounter with those females out in the corridor.

"Anything, Bones. I can't say I'm really hungry any more."

"Er...Captain." Scotty was actually daring to speak to the Captain.

"Mister Scotty?"

"Would ye care for a wee nip o' whisky?" He brought out the bottle that he'd kept hidden under the table. He'd brought it along on purpose, just in case the Captain did happen to come along, and needed pacifying.

Kirk looked at the bottle...and then smiled. "I think that's an excellent idea, Scotty."

The Captain awoke with a splitting headache, a bad taste in his mouth and of all things an aching jaw.

"Here, drink this, Jim." McCoy poured some foul-tasting liquid down his throat.

"Bones...Bones...please..." he spluttered as he pushed the glass away.

"Yeah! Well, you need something after last night."

"Last night..." Somehow he couldn't seem to recall last night.

"And don't kid me on that you don't remember."

Kirk looked up at the grinning face of his Chief Medical Officer. "But I don't..." Even as he said it memories came drifting back...memories of Scotty's extra potent whisky, memories of a certain young 'lassie' Scotty had introduced him to, memories of...

"Oh no, Bones, I didn't... Tell me it was a dream."

"Which part don't you want to know about?"

"I didn't...do the highland fling and a sword dance with two knives in the mess...did I?"

McCoy nodded.

"Oh hell," he moaned. "I'll never live it down..."

"You won't live it down? What about poor Scotty? You drank him under the table!"

"I did?"

"You did..."

"Hardly anything to be proud of, Doctor," came the unmistakable voice of the first officer.

"That's right - just when I'm cheering Jim up, you come along and put the dampers on."

"Not at all, Doctor. I merely stopped by to inquire as to the Captain's health." He picked up the half empty glass of liquid that McCoy had been pouring down the Captain's throat, and looked at it in distaste. "Also to inform you that Lt. Marshall has managed to repair the fabrication processor."

"She has? Great..." The Captain struggled up into a sitting position. "That's the best news I've heard in a long time."

"There is also, I believe the correct term is 'lassie' waiting outside to see you, Captain."

"Oh no, that must be the girl I vaguely remember Scotty introducing to me last night."

"Indeed. Then it might also interest you to know that she is in fact also a distant relative of our Chief Engineer."

"That's all I need, an involvement with a member of my crew who also happens to be related to one of my officers..."

"Shall I let the young lady in, Captain? I believe she has something she wishes to give you."

Kirk looked at McCoy, but the Doctor just gave him a 'don't ask me' look. "All right, Mr. Spock, let her in. I'm going to have to face her some time during the day, better get it over and done with."

Spock nodded and left. No sooner was he out of the door when Lt. Marshall of Maintenance walked in, carrying of all things a pair of trousers. Kirk just stared at her. She couldn't be... But he knew she was.

"The sly dog..." he heard McCoy mutter, and he knew there was only one person the Doctor could be referring to, and he had to agree with him. Who said that Vulcans didn't have a sense of humour, because like hell...his first officer did, and a peculiar one at that!

"Captain, I believe these are yours."

"Er... Lieutenant..."

"If you will remember, I managed to get them for you last night, after you made me take you down to the main fabrication processor."

Kirk swallowed hard. He still couldn't quite remember...

She smiled at him. "Nothing happened, sir," she reassured him. "You were concerned about the processor, so concerned that I decided to work through the night and - " she laid the trousers down on the bed " - after the initial breakthrough, thanks to you, I got it working. Everything's back to normal."

"It is..." He still sat there just staring at her, but more fragments of memory were coming back to him.

"Yes, sir. Well, I'd better go and catch some shut-eye. If either of you gentlemen should ever need any help with the selecting of garments, just give me a call..."

"Jim! Jim!" McCoy shook Kirk by the shoulders. "Snap out of it! Just because nothing did happen, there's no need to go into shock."

"I'm all right, Bones, I'm all right..." he mumbled, still staring at the door through which she'd passed.

"Good, because as soon as you've recovered enough you can get yourself dressed and on the bridge. Hangovers aren't covered by my department, and this'll be the third day you haven't been on duty. It's going to be difficult enough as it is, covering up for two days."

"Yes, all right Bones... I'll be there."

The Doctor left him, and he leaned back against his pillow. Yesterday evening's incident had all come back to him. Initial breakthrough... Hadn't she put it sweetly. The initial breakthrough had been when Lt. Heather Marshall had socked the Captain one...for trying to get a little bit too familiar, and he had fallen against the processor and hey presto! It had coughed out one pair of trousers, his size as well... He rubbed his jaw. If there was one 'lassie' on board this ship that he would never try it on with, it was her. And now... There were more important matters awaiting his attention...such as his throbbing head, his poor burned out stomach, a certain Vulcan first officer and the disposal of one red tartan kilt!

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RILEY: Now you've heard my voice, what do you suggest to accompany me?

UHURA: A bodyguard?

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PARTINGS by Josie Rutherford

I looked back once and only once, at the planet which had given me birth. Vulcan; already reduced to a small, glowing, reddish orb, which diminished further as I watched, till all that remained visible was a minute pinpoint of light. Vulcan; one star among uncounted millions. My Father's world, and the adopted home of my Mother.

I turned away from the observation port, my mind filled with memories of all that had happened during the past few days. I found it difficult to dismiss these remembrances, so I relaxed in my chair, closing my eyes and allowed my thoughts to flow back...

Sarek, my Father, could not - or would not - understand my decision to leave. I tried to explain that though it may be socially acceptable for one in his highly esteemed position to take a Terran woman to wife, no such allowance is made for the offspring of such a union.

How could I hope to make him understand the loneliness I have had to endure; Vulcan - and yet not so. That small Human part of me, which I have striven so hard to contain, would sometimes escape from the rigidly disciplined training of my boyhood; the cold mask of logic would slip and some small vestige of emotion would show.

For such unforgivable lapses my Vulcan peers subjected me to stinging taunts which I pretended not to hear, but the veneer of indifference was thin and eventually the situation became so unbearable that I avoided all but the most necessary of personal contacts.

There were some few exceptions; Sovek, who had been severely injured in his early childhood, whose lameness and frequent ill-health had made it impossible for him to join the other boys in rigorous physical training, I called friend; and T'Vanne, Sovek's sister, whose gentle discerning eyes seemed to look deep into my inner self and somehow see my hidden pain and indecision...

But I digress. This also is unseemly in a Vulcan. My patterns of thought should be arranged in a thoroughly logical manner.

My Father refused to give his blessing to my decision and we parted in disharmony.

Amanda, my Mother, said little when I took my leave of her - torn between husband and son. But there was a hint of a smile on her lips and a brightness in her eyes which might have been unshed tears. Amanda had adapted well to the Vulcan creed of non-emotion, though occasionally, like her son, she allowed the mask to slip, and when we parted I was aware of a sadness within her. She touched my hand briefly, covertly, so that my Father should not see and wished me 'Good luck' after the manner of her own people. I realised then, for the first time, how deep was her love for me. I saw how the strain of living among Vulcans showed on her face and wondered at the depth of her feelings for my Father, and the emotion which had persuaded her to leave her own world and come to live on Vulcan, where she was accepted for Sarek's sake and not her own. She seemed tired and somehow very vulnerable as she turned away from me.

I gave her my word that I would return to see her when my studies permitted, and, as Vulcan honour demands, I will keep that promise; yet I sense that time will be long in coming, for I can foresee no reconciliation with Sarek. Pride is a Vulcan trait which we both possess.

T'Vanne alone accompanied me to Vulcan Space Central, where I was due to catch my flight. Sovek, whose constitution was delicate, had been taken ill and was unable to make the journey, though I visited his home the day before I left. He gave to me, as a parting gift, a copy of Sarek's 'Principles of Logic and their Application' with instructions to consult this volume whenever I felt in need of guidance. It is among my most treasured possessions, for, in the departure area, before my flight was called, T'Vanne informed me that Sovek was

dying and nothing further could be done for him.

I told her then that I would not leave Vulcan. It would be incorrect to depart when one whom I regarded as a friend was so near to death, but T'Vanne persuaded me that it was Sovek's wish, and her own, that I enrol in Starfleet College, where, he hoped, I would be able to make a new life for myself and find a solution to my own, unique, problem.

"Live long and prosper, Spock." T'Vanne recited the ancient blessing as we made our farewells and I knew that these words, coming from her, meant more than a formal repetition of the old saying. She touched my hands in the ritual manner, but as I looked into her dark eyes, I saw, or perhaps I imagined, something deeper than friendship.

My thoughts turned to T'Pring, to whom I am betrothed. She had sent no message, but then, such contact was not to be expected. I hardly know T'Pring; indeed, we met only once, on the day of our bonding, though we are destined to meet again, when the time of pon farr comes to me.

I looked for the last time on the face of T'Vanne. There was an inner tension about her, visible only to one who knew her well. Incredulously, I found myself wishing that instead of the coldly formal, disdainful T'Pring, it was to T'Vanne that my bond had been given...

I left her standing alone in the departure area. She watched till I disappeared inside the waiting shuttlecraft. From a window I saw her slowly turn and walk away.

I knew then that I would not see her again...

Now, I must put all such thoughts behind me. What is done is done and some things cannot be altered. As the ship speeds on towards Earth I must look to the future and my career in Starfleet. I will have much to learn; an abundance of new information with which to occupy my mind, opportunities to meet many cultures from diverse and fascinating worlds.

...And one day, perhaps, somewhere in the vastness of the star-filled void now surrounding me, I will find a place which I can truly call home.

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THE TROUBLE WITH TRIBBLES

(With apologies to David Gerrold...)

Ten little tribbles sitting down to dine,
By the time they'd finished eating, there were ninety-nine.

Ninety-nine tribbles on board the Enterprise;
Some were in the engines - Scott could not believe his eyes!

A thousand purring tribbles gorged upon the grain,
Fell out on the Captain, who began to feel the strain

OF...

Ten thousand breeding tribbles inhabiting his ship.
If someone didn't move them, Kirk would very soon let rip!

A hundred thousand tribbles with Cyrano Jones,
The sound of all the trilling only just drowned out his groans.

A MILLION⁺ tribbles on board the Klingon ship.
Captain Koloth was not happy, it was NOT a pleasant trip!!!

Linda Green & Wendy Emery

⁺ Please place your own adjective here.

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ANCIENT MEETS MODERN by Joanna Ray

Yeoman Janice Rand felt the burning sun beating down on her head and neck. Her mouth was parched with thirst and fear as she slowly looked upwards from the dust where she lay. A tall, lean man stood before her, speaking in a language that she did not understand. Surely they would come back and help her...but how could they? She remembered now. They were far away. The planet, Osiris Beta Halenis III, had become surrounded by a natural forcefield which defied transporter or shuttle penetration. Captain Kirk and Dr. McCoy had just been in time to beam back, but she, heedless of all except the mineral survey which she had been conducting, had missed the crucial moment of reporting for beam-up.

Now she was stranded, for...how long had Mr. Spock said that forcefield would last?...18.7342 months in real time; she felt more at ease thinking in real time. But they would return for her; Captain Kirk had promised to come back over the dying communicator channel. Now she clung fast to that diminishing hope as a drowning man clings to a straw. There was silence, and then she felt herself being dragged to her feet in one swift movement, and found herself looking into the face of a Vulcan. It did not however come as a surprise to her. They had monitored planet life forms, and had found much in the way of farm-type animals, and these vulcanoid people. There had been barely suppressed excitement among the Enterprise officers; especially Mr. Spock who enthused at the idea of making contact with an offshoot of the Vulcan culture.

But as she looked into the face of the man standing before her, her courage ebbed away. She imagined his eyes to be cold, completely cold. Shivering, she looked away; but when she raised them once more to look at him, there was a glint of derisive mockery in his eyes. Instinctively she brushed the dust from her hair, and attempted to meet his gaze without faltering; the movement of her hand had brought a hard smile to his lips.

What to do for the best? Janice Rand knew that this man stood between her and death; without a survival pack she could do nothing, and she had lost that in her desperate effort to get away from what she thought to be a hostile wild cat. If he helped her, she would survive the eighteen months, if not she would die as surely as she was stranded on this planet. But how to ask for help? She tried to smile, and say, "Will you help me?" Her throat was parched and she rubbed it. He answered in a language unknown to her:

"Chevarr; averimast-ay, ilyashin, Ashon, t'aversh?"

To her consternation he spoke no Galactic, and she, no Vulcan - though of course it was no guarantee that because he was vulcanoid he should speak the language of that planet. In fact, it was highly unlikely.

Suddenly the man reached out and touched her fair hair, then pointed to a distant logwood cabin that she now saw for the first time. Unceremoniously he began pulling her towards it. She attempted to shake him off, but received a back-handed slap for her pains. Astonished, she stared at him, tears springing to her eyes. What sort of man was it that would strike a defenceless woman? She had eighteen months to find out. Shaking her by the shoulders, he said something. His voice was sharp and cutting. She did not try to resist again. Once inside the house, he tossed her ungently into a wooden chair, and called something out in a loud voice. A woman's voice replied, and a young boy of about nine came running into the room, saying, "Armi!..." but stopping dead when he caught sight of Janice.

"Aresh, idann?" he questioned; but his father - so she assumed - interrupted him sharply, and spoke to him for a few moments.

The man was not only rough with her, she saw now that it was apparently his normal behaviour; the boy accepted the rough words, replying meekly. As the man walked out of the house again, crossly slamming the door behind him, Janice got the distinct impression that he might have said, "Another mouth to feed!" had she understood him.

Going up to Janice, the child smiled shyly, and handed her a drink. Swallowing it quickly, she smiled, and said, "Thank you." Suddenly the little boy laughed, and reached out impulsively to touch the tip of her left ear, drawing back quickly. Making a game out of this, Janice soon made a firm friend of him. He began to show her where the kitchen crockery and wares were kept, and as he did so he pointed to each in turn and named it. Janice had to repeat some words several times before she could say them with any certainty. Eventually the child took her into an adjoining room where lay a frail, elderly lady; her hair was silver and hung in long plaits across her shoulders. But the thing that struck Janice most was the finely marked cheekbones, so like the man's, that spoke of some beauty in her youth. She looked warily at Janice, but beckoned to her to sit on the bed, and spoke softly, smiling.

"Chē adesh, Sher-idann."

The little boy sat beside Janice swinging his legs. He pointed to the old lady and said, "Are-var-darsh." Janice repeated the word, and they all laughed. The old lady patted her hand and pointed to the child, saying,

"Al'eyrish."

There was more laughter and Janice began to genuinely enjoy herself. No sooner had she rested than Al'eyrish began showing her what to cook and where to wash the dishes. So they began to prepare the evening meal together.

Darkness fell, but three splendid moons lit the sky, and myriads of stars glittered in the heavens. The earth was still except for shrill cries of prowling wolves. Janice shivered and moved closer to the log fire which Al'eyrish had set alight a good hour ago. The night was indeed bitter, and she sat huddled with the child, contented as the aroma of stew bubbled through the room. The outer door creaked open and the man returned, slamming the door again. The old lady's voice could be heard from the other room: "Ashon! t'aversh, ivthalyin."

He answered rapidly, swinging two sacks to the floor; one filled with roots, and the other with small, dead rabbit-like creatures. The boy beckoned to Janice to help with the sacks, and together they dragged them back into a large side cupboard which had in it a cooling grid that would keep the meat fresh until they had had a chance to cure it.

Janice had realised by now that drinking water was scarce, and strictly rationed, but the boy had shown her a stream nearby, big enough for bathing.

The man, whose name she had gathered by now was Ashon, disappeared, and returned ten minutes later with wet hair. He quickly rubbed it dry with a worn towel and squatted before the fire, shivering and rubbing his hands and face. Of course, Janice had forgotten that vulcanoid races could not bear the cold as they could the heat; Humans were more adaptable to nights such as these. She felt a moment's compassion for him as Al'eyrish took a blanket and wrapped it about his shoulders. "Arni, aversh?" he asked. Janice had gathered that the word for father was Arni, as the boy had used it several times when addressing him. The man drew the child to him for a long moment, touching his face and kissing his forehead. Janice was surprised at the first gentle act that she had seen the man perform that day. Wearily he sank into an old, cushioned floor seat, and took the boy onto his lap. Happiness radiated from the child's face as his arms slipped round the man's neck, but Ashon did not return Al'eyrish's smile.

Janice had already decided that she did not like this man and was now consolidating that opinion. She waited for quarter of an hour and began laying the table. The earthenware crockery was chipped and the designs faded; pretty designs of flowers budding and leaves in autumnal colours, they were certainly hand made but there was little doubt that the potter possessed no mean artistic skill.

Janice went over to father and son seated by the fire, and gently touched the boy's arm, thinking the man asleep. With startling speed Ashon opened his eyes and glared up at her with such intensity that she coloured. No - she did

not like this surly man - but she would have to humour and tolerate him for eighteen months if she was to stay alive. Pointing to the table, she moved to the sideboard and began serving the steaming stew, and having laid a tray for the old lady she took it in to her and returned, the man watching her with something akin to open astonishment at the gesture of friendliness.

'Some of us can be civilised, you know, Mr. Ashon,' she thought to herself, rather smugly, still inwardly seething from the slap that she had received earlier on.

The better part of the meal was eaten in silence. From time to time Janice would glance up from her plate to find the man's large, dark eyes fixed upon her face. They were beautiful eyes, she thought, viewing them objectively, just like those of the old lady and the boy. Ashon had high cheekbones and the slanting eyebrows and pointed ears of a Vulcan, but in no other respect was there a resemblance between Ashon and first officer Spock. Ashon was...she could not quite make up her mind...uncivilised, barbaric...primitive. Yes, that was it. Janice felt very superior for a moment, mistakenly overestimating the thin veneer of civilisation of both Human and Vulcan cultures alike.

Dinner was over and the little boy was yawning. He kissed his father and went to bed in the old lady's room. Where Janice was to sleep she knew not, but after washing up she curled up in front of the fire and laid her head on a cushion, and closed her eyes preparing for sleep. Her reverie was abruptly disturbed by something thick and soft hitting her squarely between the shoulder blades. Leaping to her feet, she realised that Ashon had rolled up two blankets and tossed them carelessly at her. She glared at him for such a churlish act but felt obliged to mutter "Thank you" even though he did not understand. She rolled herself in the blankets and went to sleep.

Ashon was awake before dawn the next day preparing a lunch pack to take to his work, and also breakfast. Janice was roughly wakened by Ashon shaking her shoulder and indicating the table. For a moment she had forgotten where she was, and seeing the Vulcan, whispered, "Mr. Spock?" but then sleep rapidly left her and she said "Good morning, Mr. Ashon," and smiled vaguely. He did not return the greeting but pulled her to her feet and into a seat at the table. 'Ill-mannered' was not the word for him, thought Janice, infuriated. How dare he? She, a Starfleet officer, a degree holder, how dare he? She ate the breakfast put before her... He was a good cook, she mused...

Impatiently he watched her finish eating, then beckoning to her he went outside; she followed. He made her wash in the icy stream, and then taking her arm, began to walk. The dawn was just breaking. Where were they going? Surely he was not going to abandon her after only one day. Perhaps the churl had decided that she ate too much - after all, she had had that second helping of stew last night. But she had been starving, not greedy!

They walked for ages, and still he tenaciously held onto her arm. True, it had prevented her from falling several times on loose ground, but really! What did he think she was? Mindless? Witless?

She began to hear bleating sounds in the distance, and then caught sight of a herd of forty or so begraggled sheep-like creatures pulling restlessly and hungrily at the parched earth. They were enclosed in a pen which was in need of repair at one point in the fencing. But few animals had strayed; too listless, she thought; there were a few skinny cattle in a neighbouring pen, their eyes sunken and hollow, staring at anything and everything. Janice suppressed the rising tide of pity within her as Ashon thrust a piece of timber into her hands. She knew now why he had brought her. There was no thought of abandonment - he needed help, and needed it badly. All right, she would give it willingly in repayment for food and board; she need not feel guilty any more about the second helping of stew. They worked solidly until mid day and stopped to eat lunch. They had repaired the fence, fed the sheep and cattle tight rations of barley and

water, hunted a few paltry hares, dug up roots and tilled some of the parched ground, ready for planting at the onset of the rainy season. Janice knew the climatic changes, scanners had indicated the approach of rain in 29 days. Would the hungry animals survive until then? And if they did not...? She had been tempted to give more than the rations to some of the starving herd, but common sense had stopped her in time. Better to have a little often than starve after the rations had run out; by her calculations they should just hold out until sixteen days into the rainy season. Janice vaguely wondered how Ashon had managed until now without help. What had happened to his wife? Dead, she guessed - worn out by the harsh wilderness...and the old woman was dying too, the harshness of her coughing told Janice as much.

Perhaps that was why this man never smiled, why there was such a fierce bitterness and impatient resentment in every task he undertook. There was nothing for him to smile about. Even the cattle and sheep looked accusingly at them, asking for death, a merciful escape from the dreadful heat. There was no release for this man either, he must survive or his child would die, and his old mother would be uncared for and fade away. He stood between them and death. But Janice wondered just what there was to live for here.

As she sat back tiredly feeling painful muscles that she did not know existed until now, Ashon divided the food and gave half to her. She ate a little, then realised that the food was only enough for one; he had shared his lunch with her, even their food had to be rationed...and he had done more work than she. She watched the tiredness of his lean features. Nothing to smile for... A sudden wave of pity shook her, and she handed him back two-thirds of the food, and smiled, saying, "Thank you, but I've had enough to eat. You can have it - after all, you've done a lot more work than I have." She pushed it into his hands. He looked curiously at her as she spoke, and shrugged his shoulders slightly, saying, "Chè varr." He took it.

Yeoman Janice Rand had by now made up her mind that she would help this man all she could. She would make him smile - she would raise heaven and earth and make him smile! Why?... She sat back suddenly, realising the full import of her thoughts. Why? Because...he deserved it. Why else? He deserved some respite. She understood loneliness and grief, in some ways they had driven her to the haven of Starfleet.

Over the weeks she watched the courageous determination with which Ashon fought the elements. One night four days into the rainy season, the third of the rainstorms caught them on their way home. They were forced to take shelter in a cave, where the cold steadily penetrated; Ashon sat shivering, staring at the ground. Janice had not realised just how low Vulcan tolerance of the cold could be - moving close, she huddled up against him, sharing her body's warmth. Gratefully he held her closely and in less than a minute was asleep, his head resting on her shoulder. She was wakened by dawn breaking; it had only been four days since the rains began, and almost miraculously green shoots had begun to appear out of muddy ground, new life, and with it, fresh hope, which Janice imbibed like an elixir. Ashon looked pale that day, eating nothing and going to bed as soon as they got home that night - the cold damp cave had taken its toll. Janice felt a surge of panic; he must not, could not, get ill now.

He could, and did.

So now Janice worked the land by herself, determined to do everything that was necessary to grow those crops. In four days Ashon had shown her a little of the routine of planting; as to the rest she trusted to luck and common sense, and at the back of her mind a prayer echoed - "Oh God, don't let him die, please don't let him die!" A week later her prayers were answered, the fever broke, but Ashon was too weak to leave his bed.

Janice took him breakfast each morning and an evening meal; somehow she found the strength to do so. Sometimes Al'eyrish went with her, making himself useful with the small tasks, though he was needed at home.

Today her hands were too sore to work without aid, so she bandaged the blisters tightly and with an iron will set to the usual tasks. That night she took Ashon his soup and bread on a tray, trying not to let him see her bandaged hands; he took the food and put it on the bedside table and indicated that she sit next to him. Utterly exhausted, she sat heavily on the bed. Ashon took her hands in his; she feebly tried to pull them away, without success; then suddenly, to her astonishment, he kissed them.

Janice blushed fiercely, not knowing where to look; it was so unexpected, and she was so tired. Silently he slipped out of bed, laid her on the pillows and taking off her shoes, covered her lightly. Vainly she tried to protest, and tell him that he should not be up, but then remembered that he could not understand her anyway, so she became silent. He waited until she had drifted into sweet oblivion, and then went into the other room to sleep on her usual bed by the fire. Morning came and he was dressed, bringing her in some breakfast. Her hands were so stiff that she could not hold the spoon, so Ashon fed her. When she had finished eating he put down the plate, and once more kissed her hands. Again in confusion she blushed shyly and lowered her gaze to the bedcovers. A laugh escaped from Ashon's lips. He was smiling...smiling! She had made him smile! A glorious Hallelujah rushed through her mind. It had needed all this for him to smile. Ashon rubbed a soothing cream into her hands and pushed her back onto the pillows, left his son with her and went out to tend the crops. The little boy crept into bed with her, and snuggled up to her, to go instantly back to sleep. She followed his example.

A month later, she and Ashon were married. Three months later the old grandmother died peacefully in her sleep, contented in the knowledge that her son was once more happy, and her grandson had a mother again.

And when the Enterprise returned to pick her up, Yeoman Janice Rand was the proud mother of a baby boy. She had sustained Ashon through loss of both mother and son. Al'eyrish had died of a fever. Now Ashon had a new son - he had delivered the baby; there was no-one else and no time for last minute paternal nerves. Once again Janice admired him for his quiet courage.

But here now was the Enterprise, as if from another universe; Captain Kirk and Dr. McCoy, hugging Janice; astonished at her survival on this primitive vulcanoid world. The doctor sympathised with her at the price she had had to pay for her keep to this barbarian. At this point Janice had lost her temper. How dared he call Ashon a barbarian? She had lived here for six months before marrying him; she had been made to do nothing against her will; she was in love with Ashon.

Dr. McCoy hastily apologised, seeing in her eyes that she spoke the truth. Also in the way Ashon covetously guarded her, fiercely rejecting McCoy when he had tried to examine his wife, until Janice had made him understand that Dr. McCoy meant her no harm.

Together they all beamed aboard, Janice in an old, handwoven sack dress, the baby in her arms, and Ashon in dusty work clothes. They were greeted by an astonished welcoming party - Ensign Chekov impulsively rushed forward to fling his arms around Janice, but the baby came between them.

"Chekov, wait a minute," beamed Janice, and handed the baby to Ashon; now they were free to hug each other.

"Is that yours, Janice?" asked Chekov.

"Ours," she answered, squeezing Ashon's hand. He smiled faintly at her. Taking the baby from Ashon, Janice went up to Commander Spock. "Mr. Spock, this is my baby Cheron. He's a hybrid too - perhaps you'll advise me on his upbringing?" Captain Kirk looked on with amusement: Yeoman Rand had for once left Spock totally bereft of words. He nodded slowly. "And this is Ashon, my husband," Janice continued, holding out her hand to him. He came forward and put an arm around her shoulder.

Ashon bowed slightly and said, "Chēvarr, aver imastay, ilyashin Ashon."

"Chēvarr, aver, tarevalish?" answered the First Officer.

"Tarevalish, ilyich," answered Ashon.

"You understand each other!" gasped the ever-impetuous Dr. McCoy.

"Indeed, Doctor, Ashon's language is indistinguishable from Ancient Vulcan. It will be fascinating to speak with him at length. In answer to your question, Yeoman Rand, I shall endeavour to help in any way I can with the child."

"To bring the poor mite up like a logical Vulcan, I suppose," snorted McCoy.

"And what is wrong with logical Vulcans, Doctor? The child's father is Vulcan."

"Ancient Vulcan!" retorted McCoy.

"Ancient or modern is irrelevant, Doctor."

"Of course it's not irrelevant, you walking computer!"

"You flatter me, Doctor."

Janice Rand began to laugh, along with Captain Kirk and the rest. Not a lot had changed in eighteen months of her life.

Ashon looked at her and smiled. The time of waiting, for his people, was over. They would once more be a proud race, and journey to the stars, a legend would come to life. For centuries his people had toiled in soil that was unyielding, starved, died; their ancestors had felled from the skies - now they would return.

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MISSED OPPORTUNITIES by Gillian Catchpole

All I dream of is to be reunited,
 Once more to be a family
 Free of silences.
 Now your career has been successful,
 Reasons to remain once so important
 Are never mentioned.
 Explanations have ceased to matter
 But still that barrier keeps you from us.
 Should you not return
 The memory of opportunities not taken,
 To be forever lost,
 Replaced only by regret,
 Would be too much to bear.
 So much happiness you gave would all be clouded,
 A shadowy half-remembrance,
 Should you not return.
 Through long days I wait
 Eager for a breath of news,
 A hint, a morsel,
 Anything to ease the ache
 To know a moment free from worry,
 A flood of joy, a rush of elation,
 Before the mind remembers.
 Right now perhaps some distant world devours you,
 Maybe yesterday some shining star
 Savage within its silver beauty
 Claimed you for its own,
 But I would be filled with joy,
 For days, weeks, maybe months past,
 You escaped from danger and could still return.

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CUT OF THE FRYING PAN by Therese Holmes

As the flames rose high around the Captain, McCoy never took his eyes off Kirk's face. One little mistake twenty years ago, and now he was paying for it twice over - with the life of his best friend, and then with his own. He struggled helplessly against the bonds securing him to the post as he watched the fate he was so soon to share. And where was Spock? Why wasn't he here, as he always had been before, stepping in so opportunely to save his friends?

Not this time, thought McCoy. This time he's missed his cue.

The scene before his eyes began to shimmer, and he coughed as smoke rose from the wood piled about him.

So this is it, he thought. The end at last. "Goodbye, Jim," he croaked uselessly. "Forgive me..."

"Did you say you'd been here before, Bones?" asked Kirk as the shuttlecraft neared the single continent in all Sentinax's vast expanse of sea.

"Oh, years ago. I did a bit of research here as a medical student, among the Outer People."

"The Outer People? But - "

"Yes. I had a permit."

Kirk stared in surprise. "They must have thought pretty highly of you, Bones. They don't dish those things out to just anybody. What were you working on?"

"Oh, just a little something. I had to do it, you know, as part of the course. Otherwise I wouldn't have bothered. Research was never my line."

"I believe I read the results of Dr. McCoy's 'little something', sir," put in Spock. "His work led directly to the development of a vaccine against xylatosis, a disease to which these people are naturally immune. Isn't that correct, Doctor?"

McCoy beamed modestly as Kirk regarded him with renewed respect. How like him to have kept quiet about it all this time, he thought, and how like Spock to have known all along. "Can you still remember the place, Bones?" he asked. "Because if so, you can show us around a bit when we've finished this business."

McCoy shifted uncomfortably. "Well, Jim, you know you're not allowed into the Outer Zone."

"Yes, I know, but you can show us around the middle part, what's it called - the Median Territory, can't you? We're allowed in there. And we've got plenty of time. We don't have to be back on the ship for another day."

"Well, O.K., but don't forget we won't have phasers or even tricorders down there, and there are some pretty fearsome beasts around, I can tell you."

"A situation not unfamiliar to us, Doctor," remarked Spock dryly.

The shuttlecraft touched down well into the Medial Territory, about one hour's walk from the Great City. Several miles away in the opposite direction could be seen the great dark mountains where the Outer People lived. Actually, this was a complete misnomer, as the mountain district comprised the inner part of this continent, and was encircled by the Lowlands of the Town Dwellers. However, this was the Town Dwellers' own name for these people, and it had stuck despite all logic.

The Outer People were a primitive hunting race, at a very sensitive period in their development. If they followed normal patterns, then within the next few hundred years they would gradually settle down and turn to agriculture rather than hunting. So as not to influence their progress in any way during this period of

change, the Federation had imposed a ban on all visitations except with a special permit. Normally, any contact would be forbidden absolutely, but this particular race provoked special interest because they shared their world with a people rather more advanced than themselves - the Town Dwellers. Yet neither side showed the least interest in the other, and there appeared to have been no mingling of the two cultures at any time during their history, although both were fully aware of the other's existence.

Most of the Town Dwellers lived in the Great City to the north-east, but there were smaller towns and villages scattered throughout the perimeter of the continent. On the Federation scale their society was Late Medieval, and largely agricultural. Their main occupation was the cultivation of a high protein grain, not unlike quadtrottricale to look at. They produced far more than they needed, and by a long-standing agreement with the Federation, the surplus was left in a warehouse just inside the walls of the Great City, and was collected by any passing ships and taken to the nearby Starbase 7, whence it was shipped to its final destinations. The Federation's half of the bargain was rather negative (and from the Town Dwellers' point of view, non-existent, since they knew nothing of it). Starfleet took it upon themselves to ensure that the supplies were all collected in person, and not just transported up. The Town Dwellers displayed the same indifference towards the Starfleet personnel as they did towards their own Outer People, but the sight of sacks of grain regularly disappearing into thin air was a different matter. That was thought sufficient to disturb even the most imperturbable Townie, and Starfleet had no wish to start the legends of witchcraft and 'Gods from the sky' which had so plagued early explorers.

The three officers quickly changed into the uncomfortable homespun suits which were requisite wear on these missions. Federation Standing Orders stated that, if questioned by the natives, Starfleet personnel were to explain that they were merchants from a distant land who had come to collect the grain for their country, since this was the disguise under which the bargain had first been struck. So far, however, nobody had ever been approached, and even more strangely, the Town People had never asked for anything in return for supplying the grain.

Having assembled the authentically ramshackle-looking cart onto which the grain was to be loaded, the three set off in the direction of the city.

"Ever visited the Townies, Bones?" asked Kirk.

McCoy hesitated before replying. "No. Why?"

"I just wondered. Not much is known about them, is it?"

"Certainly not until recently, no. But now a Federation 'spy' has infiltrated the Great City, disguised as a native from one of the outlying villages, and he's been sending back regular reports for a while."

"Oh? I didn't know that."

"Well, he hasn't been there long. I only know about it because I make a point of keeping up with any developments here. The fact is, having actually lived and worked here, I became interested in the place, and the interest has stayed."

"And has this so-called spy discovered anything important, Doctor?" asked Spock.

"Nothing really new that I know of, except to reinforce what we knew already about their lack of curiosity in anything and everything - which is why you're here, of course."

Normally in such a situation, anyone as obviously alien as Spock would be excluded from the landing party out of deference to the Prime Directive. But in this instance, the Town Dwellers' quite unhumanoid lack of interest in anything unusual had provoked comment, and Starfleet had specifically asked that Spock go along with the others. 'If you are seen,' his orders ran, 'you are to note the natives' reaction, if any, but on no account are you to go out of your way to force an encounter.'

"Apparently they have another peculiarity," continued McCoy, "which is probably part of the same trait. They have no god. No religion, no deity, no church, nothing."

"That is indeed unusual for a civilisation at this stage of development."

"And another thing. They have very little in the way of art of any description - painting, writing, music, whatever. What they do produce is very crude and primitive, more what you'd expect from the Outer People, really."

"What about the Outer People?" Kirk asked. "What are they like?"

"About as different from the Town Dwellers as they could be. They're fierce, superstitious, independent, typical, in fact, of most primitive cultures. Of course, even less is known about them than the Townies, because so few people have ever even seen them. I reckon I must know as much as anybody." He paused as though struck by this realisation.

"What about the fact that they share their world with the Townies?" persisted Spock. "Surely that's not typical?"

"No, that's true," admitted the Doctor. "But they take it so much for granted, you know, that it doesn't seem unusual until you really stop to think about it. As far as they're concerned, the Townies might as well live on another planet. They would no more consider crossing the Median Territory and visiting the towns than they would...well, visit another planet."

"Fascinating."

"Yes, for once, Spock, I have to agree with you."

"Do the Townies ever come into the Median Territory?" asked Kirk.

"Well...now and then. But it seems to be a sort of No-Man's Land as far as anyone can gather. I suppose in the end, they'll both be forced out into it, when their populations really begin to grow, and what will happen then is anyone's guess. But of course that won't be for several hundred years at least."

"Well, all the same, we must be getting close to the City now, so we'd better keep a look out just in case."

They trudged on in silence, until at last, topping a small rise, they looked down to see the Great City spread out before them. A few minutes more brought them in sight of the Main Gates.

"Hello, what's this?" Kirk stared in surprise. "I don't remember any mention of guards, so you, Spock?"

"No, Captain. Indeed, it seems to go against everything the good Doctor has been telling us about these people." He turned enquiringly to McCoy.

"Don't look at me, Spock. I'm as surprised as you are." He frowned. "It does seem odd... Still, perhaps there's a perfectly straightforward explanation."

They said nothing more until they were within a few feet of the two men at the gate. Then one of the guards stepped forward with upraised hand.

"Show your papers please."

"Papers?"

"You must show your papers before you can enter the City."

Somewhat at a loss, Kirk launched into the Starfleet formula. "We are merchants from a distant land. We have come to collect the grain you have stored for us in your city. This is an old agreement between our peoples. We know nothing of any papers."

"Strangers are forbidden in the City. You must go."

"But why?"

"It is the law."

"May I ask how long this law has been in operation?" put in Spock.

The guard looked directly at Spock for the first time. If he noticed anything unusual, he gave no sign of it. His face remained as stony and impassive as it had been throughout the interview. "Since the Elders decreed it."

"This is hopeless," muttered McCoy. "Why did they decree it?" he demanded.

The guard looked at him blankly. "It is the law," he repeated. "It is decreed. You must leave."

Kirk saw that to pursue the matter further would only invite trouble. "Very well," he said. "We honour your laws. We will go."

They turned the cart round and set off in the direction they had just come from. For a while no-one said anything. Then McCoy shook his head.

"I just don't get it. This contradicts everything we know about the Townies. They never used to care who went in and out of their cities. Now it seems even their own people need passes, and strangers aren't allowed in at all. I wonder if Starfleet knows about this."

"Apparently not," remarked Kirk, "otherwise they'd have warned us. Which must mean that this spy of yours has been failing in his duty."

"It is possible that the two matters are connected, Captain," said Spock. "There has obviously been some disturbance or upheaval here to cause such a radical change in these people's outlook; it may well have been accompanied by violence during which the spy was captured or otherwise silenced."

Otherwise silenced. Kirk didn't like the sound of that. He stopped in his tracks.

"This matter needs further investigation, Bones. you and I are going to get into that city somehow and find out what's been happening." He turned to his First Officer. "Spock, I know that native didn't bat an eyelid when he saw you, but we really can't risk you in a sensitive situation like this. You go back to the shuttlecraft and let Starfleet know what's happening. We'll be back in five hours."

They parted company, Spock pushing the cart on his own now. The two humans turned round and surveyed the landscape before them. They had not come far from the City, but they could not see it since it was situated in a hollow behind a low hill.

"How many other entrances to the City are there, Bones?"

"Three, I think. But they're bound to be guarded too, Jim."

"Yes. We'll just have to hope they're not patrolling the walls in between as well. We could get over them quite easily, don't you think? They didn't look very high."

McCoy replied that he had no doubt that the Captain could go on scaling walls of twice the height till Judgement Day with no difficulty, but that he (McCoy) felt that his own mountaineering days were over. Kirk dismissed his objection with a laugh. "Nonsense! You're as fit as I am. Come on."

There was nobody in sight when they reached the walls, but they waited concealed behind a rock for a few minutes as a precaution.

"What now?" McCoy found he was whispering, somewhat unnecessarily.

He was not left in doubt for long. Suddenly, strong arms pinioned him from behind and a brawny hand closed over his mouth. He struggled in vain; within minutes he was as securely bound as he had ever been in his life, and quite unable to move. Looking across, he saw with dismay that Kirk was unconscious and bleeding from a head wound.

He looked around for their attackers - and only the rough gag in his mouth stopped the startled cry which rose to his lips at the sight of them. One was a

stranger to him, but he recognised in the broad muscular body a typical representative of the Outer People, or Hunters as they called themselves. The other... There was no mistaking the flattened nose or the ugly scar running fully from hairline to chin down the left hand side of his face. The glossy hair that twenty years ago had been jet black was now grizzled, but the face was as youthful as ever. McCoy did not even stop to wonder what two Outer People were doing at the Great City, of all places. The sight of that face had swept him back through the years to an earlier time, a time of windswept rocky hills and barren wild places, and he was momentarily disconcerted by a flood of disjointed recollection. Then he was picked up and swung over someone's shoulder. The big Hunter was bearing him away across the Median Territory towards the distant mountains. By craning his neck, McCoy could see that Kirk was being carried in the same undignified fashion; the gash in his head was dripping, leaving behind them a dark trail on the hard ground.

Night had long since fallen. Kirk and McCoy had been dumped unceremoniously in a damp cave overlooking the tribe's present encampment. Kirk was awake now, but weak and pale from loss of blood. He was a comical sight, sitting with his head wrapped in the shredded sleeve of McCoy's woollen tunic. But McCoy was in no mood for laughing; even now, red was beginning to show wetly through the rough material. He mentally cursed the Prime Directive, which had forced them out into this primitive world without even an anabolic protoplaser, normally standard field equipment.

Kirk was groggy, but taking notice. He wanted to know where they were, how they had got there, and why. McCoy answered the first two easily enough, but then he was stumped.

"I just don't understand it, Jim. One of the men who jumped us - I recognised him. He was the medicine man in the tribe I worked with when I was last here. We were quite friendly for a while. He helped me take blood samples and so on from the people; I told them I needed them to make medicine and potions for my people. They were quite willing and never questioned my story. Actually, I did have fun once or twice, making up a few supposed medicines while E'langa was there, just in case there was any doubt. I think he was quite convinced. But I was surprised, because I expected him to take a sort of professional interest in what I was doing, but he didn't seem to be curious at all. I remember - "

"Your cosy reminiscences are very fascinating, Bones, but they're not helping us get out of here."

"Well, there's always Spock. We're long overdue at the shuttlecraft now, and he's bound to be searching for us."

"I sometimes think we place too much reliance on Mr. Spock's godlike powers." Kirk rose shakily to his feet and went to the entrance. It didn't seem to be guarded, so he stepped out. Instantly a spear thwacked into the ground a foot in front of him. He could hear it humming as the shaft vibrated in the moonlight.

"O.K., I get the message," he said to the unseen watcher above the cave, and went back in.

"I'd get some sleep if I were you, Jim," said McCoy, "and rest that head. After all, having brought us here, they're hardly likely to let us just walk out, even if they have untied us. The next act's probably set for tomorrow."

"You're taking the whole thing very quietly," remarked Kirk questioningly. He sat down again with a grimace on the cold hard rock.

"Well, to tell the truth, I'm interested to know what's been happening around here. There's something odd going on - the Great City guarded and practically swarming with Outer People, and then E'langa; he must have recognised me, so why attack us like that? It doesn't make sense."

"I take your point - and I think I'll take your advice as well. This head does hurt." He stretched himself uncomfortably on the ground. "Though how anyone is expected to sleep in this place is beyond me."

Notwithstanding this last remark, he was asleep in minutes, leaving the world to darkness and McCoy. The night was pleasantly warm, so the doctor did not suffer from the loss of his sleeve. He went to sit at the entrance of the cave, and leaned against the wall watching the starlit scenes below him. He couldn't see much, just one or two small fires with flickering forms seated around them, and now and then a dark shape moving about. Sounds rose indistinctly; the murmur of conversation, the crackling fires, occasionally a laugh, a cry, a woman's shrill exclamation. McCoy's eyes closed, but his mind was too full for sleep. Images formed and vanished, scenes crowded through his memory, visions of the past forgotten for twenty years...

...He lay on the windy ledge, powerful viewers trained on the valley beneath. A party of hunters had just returned with their kill, a large deer-like animal, and the women were preparing it. He studied faces and physique, assessing them critically with his doctor's mind. Yes, they seemed suitable; they would do. He shifted uncomfortably. His arms ached. The wind was chill, and soon he would go back...to the carefully concealed hut deep in the mountains. Here his analytical and processing equipment would be kept. Tomorrow he was to make contact with the tribe in the valley, and he was gathering together what he would need; a makeshift tent, a fur rug, a primitive pestle and mortar, and a few clay pots containing sundry herbs. His 'cover' was that of a traveller from a distant land (McCoy hoped they hadn't yet discovered that theirs was the only land mass on the world) who was collecting ingredients for his medicines..."and I ask for your help in my quest."

The old chieftain was scarred and wrinkled. He fingered the gifts that McCoy had remembered at the last minute - the traditional beads, a headdress of bright feathers, and a small wooden statuette of a woman. Indicating a younger man seated on the ground beside him, he said, "E'langa is the Medicine Man. He will help you."

Gathering the gifts into his arms, the old man rose and left them. McCoy regarded his companion with interest. He was young, about McCoy's own age, and he had a watchful, intelligent face disfigured down the length of one side by a livid scar...his broad flat nose seemed to spread even more when he smiled, as now. They were sitting in McCoy's tent, and while the doctor industriously scraped and stirred over his bogus medicines, E'langa answered his inquisitive questions. Yes, they roamed continuously, stopping for a period only occasionally, when the hunting was particularly good, as it was here. They would move on from here when the rains came, driving the animals away. Yes, they sometimes came across other tribes, sometimes travelled with them for short distances. Membership of a tribe was not rigidly enforced, but changed continuously. People were always moving about from one tribe to another. Oh yes, the chieftain and his family always stayed. The chieftain was the central point about which the tribe formed. No, no-one ever went off to live by himself. How could a man hunt alone? No, and here E'langa laughed, no-one ever crossed the Median Territory, No-one ever even went into the Median Territory. There were no animals worth hunting, so why should they? Town Dwellers? Yes, he knew of them. They lived on the other side of the Median Territory, in the Far Places. Sometimes one would leave the Far Places and come into the lands of the Hunters. Sometimes they would be accepted into a tribe and stay.

"Oh?" McCoy was surprised. He hadn't realised there was any contact at all between the two peoples. However, he didn't pursue the matter. The last thing he wanted was to become too intimate and matey with E'langa, and have to start answering questions about his own hypothetical people. He had armed himself with a few mythical facts and stories, just in case, but so far they had not been needed; E'langa asked him nothing. Nevertheless, he played safe and changed the subject.

"Now then, E'langa. Tomorrow I am going to make a very special potion for which I need very special ingredients. I have most of them already, but the most important is still missing. I will need to take blood from your people." (There at last!) "Will that be acceptable?"

E'langa nodded, quite unperturbed. "I will tell them tonight."

"They won't mind?"

"We are accustomed to shedding blood. Marok demands it."

"Ah yes, Marok..."

...Thanks, Marok. I hope you're satisfied with your share. Back in the hut, McCoy rubbed his hands gleefully over his prize. You're a bloodthirsty old devil - I mean god - but I like you.

It had been ridiculously easy, something of an anti-climax after all the play-acting which had led up to it. E'langa had told the tribe that the foreign doctor wanted blood to make his strange potions, and that he would offer some to Marok to ensure their efficacy - and they had literally queued up with arms bared. It appeared that to have blood offered to Marok was a great honour, as well as a necessary rite somewhat akin to the old style Catholic confession of Earth. When Marok tasted the blood he saw into the heart of the donor, and seeing what was hidden there, meted out punishment or reward as appropriate. Thus every stroke of good fortune, every unlucky accident that occurred, was looked upon as a judgement from Marok. It was a singularly happy state of affairs for McCoy.

He hummed as he set up his apparatus and prepared the samples. There was enough here for extensive study, so he probably would not even need to go back for further supplies. He had told E'langa he was going away to continue his medical quest elsewhere, but that he would probably be passing this way on his journey back to his homeland. His permit still had a full three months to run - plenty of time to complete his experiments and prepare his thesis. And then, when he was finished, he would go back to the tribe with the gifts 'gathered' on his 'travels', and bid farewell to E'langa, his friend whom he would never see again... Just before he reached the encampment, McCoy met a group of Hunters. They were bearing a battered, bleeding object which they dropped to the ground as they drew level with him; he saw it was the body of a man.

"What's this?" he cried in horror.

"He came from the Far Places," replied one of the men. "He wished to become one of us. He failed to pass the test."

McCoy had dropped to his knees beside the body, and was examining it gently. He looked up angrily to exclaim that the man was still alive, but the Hunters were already ambling back to their camp. The young medic fumed helplessly. What should he do? Every instinct urged him not to leave the unfortunate man here to die of his wounds, and yet... Conscious that he was probably making a great mistake, he set down the gifts he had been carrying, picked up the body and headed off in the direction of his hut. The load was heavy and he began to regret his charitable impulse. He cursed his healer's mentality. The absurd words 'Good Samaritan' kept leaping into his mind, but he found himself wishing that he had 'passed by on the other side', whatever the consequences to his immortal soul...

"...Dronn, why did you leave your home?"

"My home? You mean in the Great City? Pah! Those people! They were blind; their minds were closed. They saw to the ends of their noses and no further. They had no thoughts for the things that really matter, the meaning of life, the reason for our existence, the question of destiny..."

"The whichness of the why," murmured McCoy.

"Pardon, Master?"

"Nothing. Go on."

"I feel there must be something more to life than just this. There must be something to live for, something to strive for. I tried to tell them what I meant, but they wouldn't listen. Do you know, they actually cast me out of the City believing I was Tainted? Hah! It is they who are tainted, poor fools, if only they could see it."

"So you came along here to see if the Outer People had what you were looking for."

"Fah! Mere savages. I should have known. But Master, they are not entirely benighted. They led me to you, for which I shall ever give thanks. You have opened my eyes, and at last I can see clearly my true path."

There would be more of the same, McCoy knew, but just now he had neither the time nor the inclination to listen. His permit expired today, and he wanted Dronn out of the way so that he could make his preparations for leaving. About the only bright thing he had done this last week, he reflected grimly, was to pack away most of the incriminating evidence while Dronn was still unconscious. But that still left plenty that might raise questions in an enquiring mind. This wasn't a characteristic for which Townies were renowned, McCoy knew, but Dronn had turned out to be no ordinary Townie. He was alert, intelligent, and very inquisitive, and from the moment he had regained consciousness two days ago, McCoy had not dared to leave him alone. Now he could walk, and McCoy urgently wanted him to make use of that facility.

"Look, Dronn, it's been nice knowing you, but you have to go now. Take my advice and go off into the mountains where you can meditate unmolested on the meaning of life or whatever. But whatever you do, don't tell anyone about this. Just keep it to yourself, O.K.?" "Right, now scoot."

"If it is your wish, Master, I shall go." He hesitated. "Am I permitted one relic from your dwelling, to comfort me on the journeys that lie ahead?"

"No! Nothing. This whole thing never happened, understand? Just go away and forget about it."

Dronn bowed, still slightly stiffly, and left without a word. McCoy saw with satisfaction that he was headed inland.....

McCoy slept.

Kirk woke early, and soon wished he hadn't. His head throbbed painfully, his mouth tasted bad, and he felt decidedly at odds with the world. He decided to lie quietly while he could. Some time later, he opened his eyes to find McCoy leaning over him, accompanied by two fierce-looking men with spears.

"How are you feeling, Jim?"

"I'll live. Who are your friends?"

"Oh, uh, they've come to take us somewhere. I don't know why. I told them you were ill and oughtn't to move, but they - you do look awful, Jim."

"Don't let that fool you," said Kirk, struggling to his feet. "I'm happy to follow these gentlemen anywhere if it will help clear up this mess and get us out of here."

"Well, if you're sure... Here, lean on me. That's right." They made their way slowly out of the cave and down towards an encampment, a guard before and behind them. "I wonder where the devil Spock is."

"Spock's quite capable of looking after himself, Bones."

"Yes. Yes, I know." That hadn't been exactly what he meant, but he didn't pursue the matter, not wishing Kirk to realise that he doubted their own ability to handle the situation unaided. A wounded man and an old country doctor, what hope had they against these people? He wondered if perhaps he was worrying unnecessarily. After all, they had no idea what it was the Hunters intended with them. But the thought kept returning that E'langa must have recognised him, remembered him.

They reached the centre of the camp and stopped. Kirk's head was spinning and he clung to McCoy, but he looked around and tried to make out the scene around them. His first impression was that they were surrounded by people, a mass of silent people staring at them. They he saw in front of them a young man sitting on a painted boulder. His face and body were daubed with bright colours, and round his shoulders was the skin of some dead animal. Kirk guessed that he was

the chieftain. At his feet were arranged a string of beads, a headdress of bright feathers, and a small wooden statuette of a woman. By his side stood the one McCoy had spoken of as E'langa. Of all those present, he alone was quite naked, wearing neither clothing, jewellery nor paint. Presently he stepped forward and turned to address the chief.

"The tribe is gathered together at your command."

The young man nodded. "Proceed."

E'langa began to speak in a ringing voice. To Kirk it sounded fantastic, unreal, a fairytale, of a piece with this whole dream that was rapidly becoming a nightmare. But McCoy knew with cold certainty that he was awake, and comprehension grew in him as he listened to the words.

"I am E'langa, for many cycles Medicine Man of this tribe, in the eye of Marok. The Hunters have lately seen troubled times; they have forsaken the true path to follow falseness. Before you stands the cause, the perpetrator of this wickedness. For Marok has been gracious; he has delivered the Enemy into the hands of his children."

A murmur ran through the crowd, which the chief suppressed with a motion of his hand.

"This man has most blasphemously been called a god. If there are any among you who still secretly believe this, I who know tell you it is not so. There is but one true god."

"Marok be praised!"

"All hail Marok!"

E'langa turned once more to the young chieftain. "My lord, in the days of your grandfather, this man visited us. He cast spells upon us so we should not see him as he was. He took our life blood, sacred to Marok, and made his devil's potions with it in the mountains. He even, most horribly, made offerings of it to Marok, shameless mockery in the face of the god. I, who was with him, know all this. I tell you it was terrible to behold.

"There came among us once a man from the Far places, cursed be his memory. He wished, as they sometimes do, to join us, but he failed to survive the test. We all know how this man, the Enemy - " he indicated McCoy " - claimed the body, and how later the Preacher reappeared among us, telling how he had been raised from the dead, and breathing his poisonous words. His power was such that many were led astray by him, out of the eye of Marok. Many came to believe that the Enemy was indeed the true god, and they spread their contamination from tribe to tribe, till not a child of Marok was untouched. But Marok had spoken to me, and I gathered about me those of his children who were still faithful. We did what we could, but the Enemy had done his work well. The disease had driven deep and was not to be plucked out easily. For many cycles, as you know, the battle was fought hard. We, the Faithful, with Marok on our side, were able to keep the evil in check, but for every wanderer we reclaimed into the eye of Marok, another was lost to us.

"Then the Preacher returned from his travels, and announced that he would venture into the Far Places to carry his evil ways to his own people. Marok spoke to me once more, and I knew what had to be done. Marok would be avenged! The Glorious Day had come!"

The crowd had begun to murmur again, and at this broke out into an excited babble. E'langa had to raise his voice to make himself heard. "At a signal, you rose up and slew the unbelievers, every one! Their ashes now blow with the winds, under the wrath of Marok. Throughout his land, even now, the sacred work is still being carried out. His children shall be cleansed!"

He paused while the noise died down.

"You have done your work well; Marok is well pleased. Neither the Enemy

nor his Preacher will trouble us ever again, and I have now to tell you how I know. When he left for the Far Places, I waited for a few days, to make sure all was in readiness here. Then I set out after him with two of the faithful, mighty Hunters both. We tracked the accursed one across unknown lands until we came to the Far Places. There is a mighty place there, of great darkness and all enclosed, and from within came a mighty noise. When night fell, we scaled the high fence and went in search of the Preacher. There are no words to describe the awfulness of that place. There were people, if such they can be called, everywhere, meagre, pale little folk running hither and thither without purpose, making a great noise all the while. There were lights and fires turning night into day, and everywhere was confusion and chaos. Dead men lay unburied at our feet, and we frequently saw great crowds fighting together, seemingly driven from their senses. Suddenly we found him for whom we had been searching. In front of one of the high, dark shelters that were everywhere, a stake was driven into the ground, and from the top of this stake a severed head stared. Friends, it was the Preacher. Marok's work had been done, by a hand other than mine. We gave thanks, and returned, trusting in Marok to guide us safely out of that place of madness. One of my comrades was struck down before we reached the fence, but he died gloriously, knowing that he gave his life in the service of Marok.

"By the grace of Marok, we escaped, but our work was not, as I had thought, complete. For there at our feet crouched the Enemy, and this other, his familiar. He had returned to aid his disciple, and he had failed! Had I not seen the proof of his failure, I rejoiced at the sight of him lying there, he who purported to be a god, and was not! Now could the matter be finally put to rest! He must be shown to be mortal man, and not immortal god; for the one immortal god is Marok, whose name must never more be doubted."

He turned triumphantly to the chief. "We await your word, my lord."

The painted face surveyed the prisoners dispassionately. Then he stood,

"It is the will of Marok, speaking through me, that these two shall suffer the same fate as those whom they caused to abandon the true faith and stray from the eye of the god. Namely, they shall be burned until they are but ashes, and these ashes scattered to the winds to suffer the wrath of Marok. For they are but mortal men, and those who yet doubt this will believe. Further, it is Marok's pleasure that these objects - " he indicated the gifts at his feet " - recalling as they do the Enemy and his evil days, be likewise burned and scattered. Thus shall the Hunters finally be cleansed and made pure.

"Let us give thanks unto Marok, who is terrible in his anger, but is merciful and just, that his children once more walk in the eye of the god."

"Thanks be to Marok! Marok be praised!" cried the crowd as one man.

Up to now, McCoy had been too dazed to speak, but now he opened his mouth in protest. "E'langa! What..."

What could he say? He saw all too clearly what had happened, the awful inevitability of it. He had contravened the Prime Directive, and was being punished for it. Punished? By Marok? He was beginning to think like these savages! He couldn't help it; the will of Marok was upon them, and they couldn't escape... couldn't escape...

Kirk, however, was under no such illusions. Swaying a little and blinking unsurely in the sunlight, he stepped forward. "I don't understand what you've been talking about, but I assure you my friend and I are both innocent of whatever it is you accuse us of - "

He was allowed no further. "Silence! Guards, take them away. They are to be burned at sunset today. See that all is prepared."

"Now wait a minute..."

The guards advanced, and Kirk lashed out blindly, but he was weak and easily overcome. McCoy stood entranced, unable to help, unaware indeed of the scuffle.

He saw only his own and his Captain's approaching death, and there was nothing he could do to stop it. They made a sorry pair as they were shepherded back to the cave.

"All right, Doctor, I suppose this explains what we found in the Great City? I wish you'd enlighten me."

"I just don't know what to say, Jim. I just can't believe it."

"Well, you'd better start believing it, and soon. Those people didn't strike me as being practical jokers. I want to know exactly what we're doing here, and why, and I want to know now."

"Well... When I was here before, there was a Townie..."

"Yes, that's what I thought they meant. What was a Townie doing among the Outer People?"

"They come sometimes. But only the oddballs, what they call the Tainted ones, the ones who show any marked leaning towards art, or music or...or science, even. Anyone, in other words, with the slightest spark of creative genius in any direction. They happen only very occasionally, and nobody really knew anything about them until fairly recently. I certainly had no idea when I was here. Apparently the Townies regard anything the slightest bit innovatory or inspired, anything that escapes from the routine of life and tends towards higher things, with the utmost suspicion."

"But - "

"I know what you're going to say. Why do they accept us so calmly? It hasn't been explained properly, but my own idea is that it's because we appear so similar to them that they never bothered to wonder about us. They're not a reflective people. Anyway, the Tainted ones, by their very nature, aren't generally very discreet about their...ah...condition, and when they're discovered, the Townies throw them out. They're left to fend for themselves in the Median Territory or where they will, and no-one bothers about them any more. Some, like Dronn, wander across to the Outer People, but nobody knows how many don't, or what happens to them, if you follow me."

Kirk nodded.

"Well, if they come to the Hunters and decide they want to stay, as Dronn did, they are put to certain tests. If they survive, and many don't, they are accepted without further question; if they don't, they wouldn't have made a good Hunter anyway. They have to undergo a course of fairly unsubtle torture, and it's not surprising that many don't make it; details vary, but basically they're burned, frozen, drowned, stoned, made to fight some particularly nasty wild animals, and finally they're whipped, scourged, and beaten with a variety of implements surprising in so primitive a people."

"Let me venture a guess. The choice of who survives is left entirely up to Marok?"

"That's right."

"From what you say, it's a wonder he gets any choice at all."

"Ah well, he has to be particular. But just occasionally one does survive."

"Like Dronn."

"Dronn? Well, actually, no. That's the whole trouble. He would never have pulled through if I hadn't been such a fool as to take pity on him."

"You mean you...you treated him? Bones!"

"I know, Jim, I know. But he was dying and I knew I could save him. I was young, I - oh, I could think of a thousand excuses but there is none really. I

acted contrary to the Prime Directive, and I was wrong." He stopped, then he went on softly. "But somehow, Jim, when I stood with that man lying bleeding and broken at my feet, it wasn't wrong. It was the only thing to do."

Kirk regarded him sympathetically. "They should never allow doctors on Prime Directive planets," he said gently. "It complicates life."

McCoy continued as though he hadn't heard. "It wasn't until he came round and started to talk that I really realised my mistake. Up till then I'd thought he was an ordinary Townie, although I did wonder what a Townie was doing in the Outer Zones. But there was nothing ordinary about Dronn. He was a religious fanatic with no god, and I, unfortunately, supplied the deficiency. Goodness knows why. I was never very civil to him, and I kicked him out with very little ceremony as soon as he could walk. I remember he asked for something of mine to take with him, and I told him to go away and forget all about me. I never dreamed ... I honestly had no suspicion of what was going on in his mind. I guess I was too anxious to get rid of him before he asked one question too many, or before my permit ran out." He laughed bitterly. "What a fool!"

"Compassion is an expensive luxury, Doctor. As we are about to find out."

"All those people dead. All those lives wasted because of me." He seemed suddenly to realise what Kirk had said. "Expensive? It's cheap at the price. But Jim!" He started up as though stung. "Jim! Not you! You're not part of it; you shouldn't have to pay! Call the guard. Let's explain that you had nothing to do with it - "

"Bones," Kirk cut in drily. "Didn't you hear them? They think I'm your familiar."

McCoy sat down wearily. "Whatever are we going to do, Jim? We can't just sit here and let them take us. Can't you talk to them? You've wormed your way out of worse places before now with that silver tongue of yours."

"But none so delicate." Kirk shook his head. "If I did speak to them, I don't think they'd listen; or if they did, I'm afraid it would only make things worse. I'm sorry, Bones."

McCoy was filled with an anger born of desperation. "Where the hell is Spock? Why doesn't he come? Why isn't..." He faltered to a stop.

"I'm sorry, Bones," Kirk repeated quietly.

The doctor turned on him heatedly. "You're sorry. You're sorry! You sit here under sentence of death for no reason save my own stupidity, and you tell me you're sorry! Well, let me tell you, I don't feel too good about it either!"

Kirk made no reply, and McCoy's anger subsided. He stared at the Captain as though seeing him for the first time. When he spoke, there was something in his voice, awe perhaps, that sounded oddly in Kirk's ears.

"You're going to let them do it, aren't you? You're actually going to sit here and let them burn you, scatter you in the wind, you, Captain James T. Kirk... The Prime Directive..." He shook his head. "Captain, I'm ashamed to say that I never fully realised you until now. I'm proud to have known you." He tried to smile. "I'd always considered dying for an ideal the noblest thing anyone could do. Now I'm about to do it, I'm not so sure... But when I look at you, I am sure. You're right, you're absolutely right."

"And you're wrong, Bones. That's not it. The Prime Directive is never more than a means to an end, not the end itself. But what we have here is a race of people who have been interfered with and thrown out of line. They've managed to straighten themselves out, and it only needs one final act for everything to fall back into place and life to go on as before. I think that's worth dying for, don't you? It's not a question of paying the price for past mistakes or dying for an ideal called the Prime Directive; it's a question of honouring an oath we both took. Remember?"

"Yes, I remember," said McCoy humbly.

"Believe me, Bones, if there was a way out of this that wouldn't foul up things here even further, I'd be the first to take it."

There was silence for a while, then McCoy said, "What about Spock?"

"Really, Bones, it's unreasonable to keep harping on Spock. I'm sure he's doing his best, but the chances of finding us before - "

"That isn't what I meant."

Kirk turned away. "He'll understand."

"Oh, sure. He'll understand. And I'm sure it will be a great comfort to him. But how will he know? What if he never finds out? He knows nothing of all this; as far as he's concerned, we'll just have been captured and murdered needlessly..." Seeing the expression on Kirk's face, McCoy stopped and cursed himself. "I'm sorry, Jim, I guess you knew all that."

"My one regret," said Kirk after a pause, "is that Spock will not know why we died. If only I could tell him somehow, explain it to him..." The voice was steady, but McCoy could guess what was hidden beneath the words. Kirk was imagining himself in Spock's place, vainly scouring the planet in search of his friends, eventually reaching the logical conclusion; seeing the bleak, lonely years stretch out ahead, empty, empty.

And McCoy was thinking, If he does find out, will he ever forgive me? Dear heaven, how many more people must I hurt before all this is over?

The light was falling. Footsteps approached the cave. The men rose to their feet, and Kirk briefly clasped the doctor's hand. "Goodbye, Bones."

McCoy found he could not speak.

Abruptly, Kirk could breathe again. Long refreshing draughts of cool air entered his lungs; hands gripped him firmly; a much-loved voice asked if he was all right. He opened still smarting eyes and was not really surprised at the scene which confronted him. The transporter room, Scotty at the console, Lt. Kyle in the corner staring intently at something in the viewscreen. Kirk became aware of someone supporting him and helping him down from the platform. It was Spock, of course.

"Spock," said Kirk. "Heaven wouldn't be complete without you."

"Captain?"

"But where's Bones?"

Kyle made a signal of some sort to Scotty, and the transporter shimmered into life. In a second McCoy stood there, coughing and rather disconcerted. Then Kirk understood.

"Oh," he said. "We're home, Bones."

McCoy said nothing.

"How did you manage it, Spock?"

"Captain, you are wounded. May I suggest that explanations wait until your head has been seen to? I believe that Dr. McCoy would profit from a little medical attention as well."

Thus adroitly they were bundled down to sickbay. Kirk was ordered to bed immediately by Dr. M'Benga, who then turned on McCoy. Spock saw with infinite satisfaction how the doctor's ministrations provoked McCoy to some caustic comments. Finally they were all finished, and M'Benga left them alone.

"All right, Spock, let's hear it."

"Just a minute, Jim," interrupted McCoy. "Spock, I hate to say this, but I'm awfully glad to see you. However you did it...thank you."

Spock nodded and looked at Kirk, who smiled. "O.K., Spock,"

"Captain, Doctor - are you sure you're not too tired?"

"Spock!"

"Sir?"

"For heaven's sake get on with it!"

"Yes, sir. There is not much to tell, as you will discover. When we parted company I returned as you requested to the shuttlecraft. I contacted the ship in order to transmit the message to Starfleet, but found that in fact a message had been sent to us which had just missed us. Apparently their agent in the Great City had failed to report in for a few days and we were asked to investigate as far as we could. I apprised Starfleet of the situation we had found, and returned to look for you. I came upon you sooner than I expected, as you can imagine, but I was able to hide in time and your captors did not see me. I followed you from a safe distance, tracking your progress by means of a convenient trail of blood."

Kirk grimaced.

"When I reached the camp you were nowhere to be seen. I supposed they had you held somewhere, but I was unable to search without being discovered myself. However, throughout the night I investigated the place as best I could, and tried to devise some means of escape should the opportunity arise. Early in the morning I saw you taken from the cave, and I was able to position myself so as to hear what passed. When I heard the sentence passed on you, that you were to be burned, I knew what had to be done, but there wasn't much time. I returned as fast as I could to the shuttlecraft, and thence to the ship. We located the encampment with the scanners and put out a camera probe to monitor the situation. We saw the preparations being made, and then you were brought down from the cave, and - well, I need not remind you. The Doctor, as the star of the show, was evidently to be kept till last, for they lit the Captain's fire first. As soon as the fire was strong enough for the smoke and flames to hide him from view, we transported him up to safety. Then we simply repeated the operation on Dr. McCoy."

"And here we are."

"As you say, Captain."

McCoy shivered. Then a thought struck him. "Er, Spock... Er, have you been in touch with Starfleet Command over this?"

"Indeed I have, Doctor."

"Did you tell them what you heard?"

"I did. I confess I was somewhat concerned as to the possible consequences to yourself arising from your past action, should you survive the rather more immediate danger."

"And?"

"There is no cause for alarm. The Legal Department have notified me that the affair occurred before the present stringent regulations concerning the Prime Directive, and the harsh penalties for contravening it, came into force. Indeed it was just such situations as these which highlighted the need for tougher legislation. This, coupled with your otherwise spotless record to date, has persuaded them not to pursue the matter any further. Of course, they will be requiring a full report from you on what exactly did happen. I was only able to pass on the somewhat garbled account as I heard it from E'lanna. I fancy that as a result of this, they may decide to prohibit absolutely all contact with the Outer People."

"A very wise move," said Kirk emphatically from the bed. "But what about the Townies, Spock? They seem to have been somewhat disrupted as well."

"Apparently they are a remarkably resilient people, sir. The Federation agent, who was forced underground when the troubles began, is now reinstalled, and reports that life is continuing in the Great City as though nothing untoward had occurred. The sentries are no longer at the gates, and all traces of the recent disturbance have disappeared."

"That means the grain is still sitting down there waiting to be collected."

"Yes, indeed." He paused. "However, they did suggest that perhaps it would be prudent to depart and let another ship have the job of collection."

"A decision with which I heartily concur," laughed Kirk.

Meanwhile, McCoy had sat silent for an uncharacteristically long time.

"What's up, Bones?" enquired Kirk.

"Well, it's very nice to be let off the hook like that. But there's just the small matter of all those innocent people who died because of me. Nothing much. I just feel like a mass murderer, that's all."

Kirk, for once, could think of nothing to say to fill the uncomfortable silence which followed. Finally it was Spock who spoke.

"Dr. McCoy, I feel you are being unnecessarily harsh on yourself. It is true that many people died who might otherwise have lived, but I do not think that you can be held wholly to blame for that. We know very little of these people, but they are proven to be unpredictable and savage. No-one could have foreseen that they would take such drastic action in this situation. Of course you feel guilty; anyone would. But if you had not acted as you did twenty years ago, you would not be Leonard McCoy, and you would not have become the respected and esteemed doctor that you now are."

McCoy was rather taken aback at hearing such a Kirkian speech issuing from Vulcan lips. "Thanks, Spock. I..." He cleared his throat, suddenly feeling foolishly embarrassed. "You're just making excuses for me. Sure, I was young and so was the Prime Directive. But nothing you can say can alter the fact that I, who was pledged to save and preserve life wherever I can, am directly responsible for several thousand deaths." He faced them defiantly.

"Doctor - "

"Bones, listen to me." Kirk spoke at last. "You're absolutely right. You acted wrongly; you allowed your heart to rule your head, and as a result hundreds of people died. I could say it was an unfortunate accident, which it was. I could say you weren't to know the consequences of your kindness, which is also true. But I know you wouldn't listen to me. So all I'll say is: it's over, finished. Nothing you can do, no amount of self recrimination, will bring those people back again. Just be grateful that we can learn from our mistakes, and be confident that it won't happen again."

McCoy nodded, and the subject was dropped. He knew Kirk was probably right; but he also knew that there were some long, soul-searching nights ahead of him before he could come to terms with the situation.

Meanwhile, however...

"By the way, Spock. You cut it rather close that time. My eyebrows are distinctly singed."

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