

# LOG ENTRIES

# 30



a *STAR TREK*  
fanzine

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Hello everyone, welcome to another issue of Log Entries.

I'm sitting looking at this stencil, and my mind just won't work properly. I'm feeling quite tired - physically and psychologically. I spent three hours this morning shovelling snow, clearing the rather large space in front of my garage and digging a path to the log and peat sheds (in company with my father, I hasten to add!) and now it's snowing again, and a driving wind is blowing all the snow into the paths we so laboriously dug... At least we can say that if we hadn't dug it clear today, it would have been twice as hard to clear tomorrow.

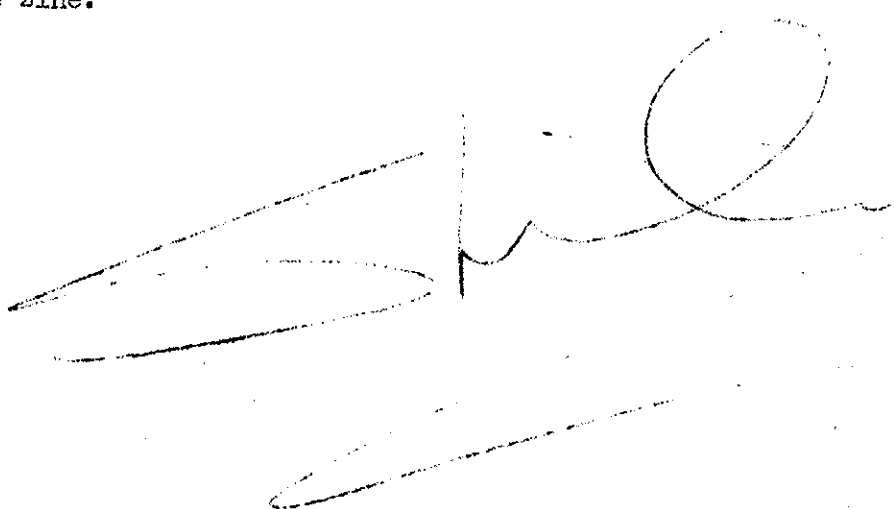
I'm even going to have to proofread this zine myself. I had hoped to give the job to my 'chain gang' but there's no way they'll manage to get here in the foreseeable future - even if they did, there's no place for them to park. Nobody should proofread stencils they've cut themselves; if a spelling mistake has slipped through once, it's likely to slip through again, and you can develop blind spots for your most regular mistakes. I call them my 'chain gang', but I'm really very grateful to them and to the others, like Nickie Moore and Peter Grant, who come from even further afield some weeks, to help me collate, etc. And some weeks we even manage to meet just to talk!

Some of you may see a slight resemblance to 'The Empath' in Rita Oliver's story 'The Psyche'. When she sent it in to me, Rita told me that she'd written it before she saw Empath - proof again that there's no copyright in ideas.

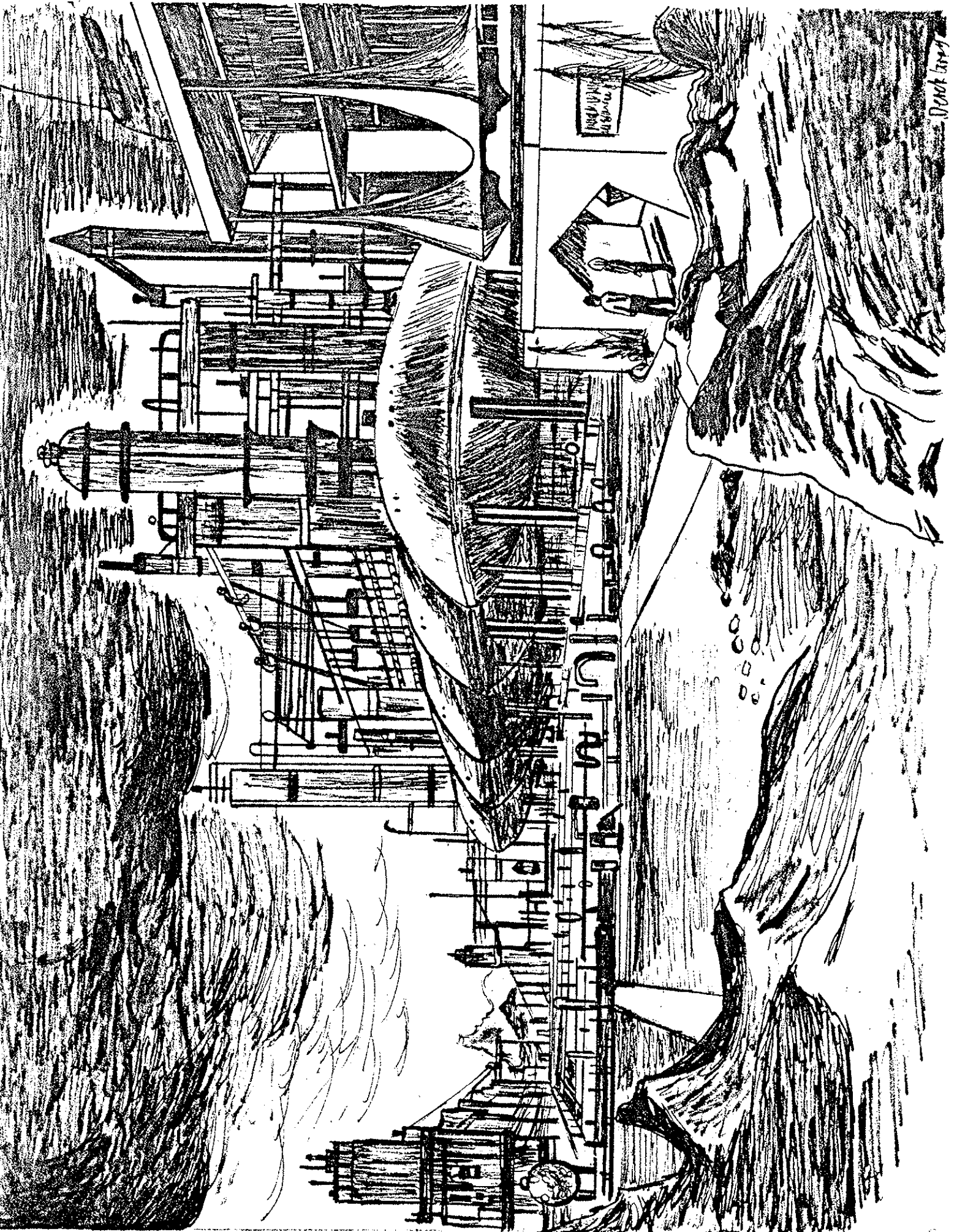
I'd like to set a sort of competition this time. Sally Marsh's story 'Companionship' is more of a scene than a story proper; Kirk is exhausted after a difficult mission during which he has been overworked. Would anyone care to write the story of that mission? I'll give you till the end of September to send something in - don't forget to say that it's in response to the competition in EE 30. The winner will be printed in the zine due out at the beginning of December.

We're looking for stories long enough to be printed as one-offs. At the moment we have none in the pipeline apart from Variations on a Theme 4, which we're still hoping to have ready for a May publication - don't hold your breath, however, it might take us just a little longer. It's almost written now, but needs quite a bit of tidying up.

Enjoy the zine.



P.S. We apologise for the poor quality of some of the pictures. The electric stencils were faulty and tore. Unfortunately we did not have time to have new ones cut.



Deck 1899

THE XALPA AFFAIR by Simond Mason

Kirk's present mission was not to his liking, and his officers sympathised, while the First Officer remained unaffected, at least in appearance. The presence aboard of High Commissioner Ferris, and the obvious fact that Ferris did not like Spock - whether personally or as a Vulcan was not clear - was quite unable to affect the Vulcan impassivity Kirk could envy at such times as these.

The Captain had clashed with the Commissioner a few times on previous occasions and could find no esteem for a bureaucrat whose political aims overran any humane consideration. He could still remember the harassment Ferris had inflicted during the Galileo episode, when he had wanted to abandon the shuttlecraft to its fate even when there was time for a search, however futile. Spock, McCoy and Scotty had been aboard and it was no thanks to the High Commissioner that they were still alive. Perhaps it explained his dislike of Spock. Ferris might not have been able to understand such concern on the Captain's part for a mere Vulcan. Apart from Kirk, though, no-one was enjoying the man's presence aboard and the sooner they landed him at his destination the better as far as everyone was concerned. They were getting tired of hearing Ferris boast about the importance of his mission and his high opinion of himself. His task was to obtain a treaty for mining rights on planet Xalpa, where the inhabitants had to be persuaded that the Federation was preferable to the Klingon intervention which was also feared, if they heard of the rich deposits of minerals there.

Their journey was interrupted by the sighting of a derelict, medium-sized commercial vessel, the hull of which had been damaged. There was no sign of life aboard. It looked like a straightforward case of accident and the crew was either dead or had escaped, but it was routine to check and Spock, McCoy and Mr. Scott left for an inspection of the wreck while Kirk went to his quarters to catch up with his paper work. He met Ferris on the way, who as expected protested loudly and vehemently at the delay, but the Captain pointed out that they were slightly ahead of schedule for his treaty conference and they would soon be under way again. Not anticipating any tragedy, Kirk became absorbed in his work and surfaced some time later to call the bridge.

"Mr. Sulu, are we under way again?"

"No, sir. Mr. Spock and the others are not back yet. Lt. Uhura is trying to contact them."

"But... I'm on my way."

The Captain ran to the bridge, his mind full of anxiety and dark premonition. This was not going to be a repeat of the Galileo affair, surely?

"Any success, Lieutenant?"

"I believe I have Dr. McCoy now, sir."

"Bones, what's going on?" asked Kirk. "We should have been finished here by now. Do you need help?"

"We're coming back immediately, Jim. Have M'Benga and the medical team standing by."

"Survivors?"

"No, Jim."

"Then who is..." But the doctor had cut the communication and his voice had sounded strained. Kirk, standing by his command chair, felt numb.

"Spock?" he murmured in a shocked voice.

The other officers were staring at each other in fear and Uhura whispered, "Mr. Spock? It can't be..."

Kirk came out of his few seconds' anguish and alerted M'Benga, then ran to

the transporter room. His way was barred by the inevitable Ferris.

"May I ask when - "

"Get out of my way!" said Kirk sharply.

"Captain," gasped the High Commissioner. "You'll regret this..." But Kirk was running on and did not hear.

"Materialising now, sir," said the officer operating the transporter. M'Benga and his team was ready and as soon as the three officers appeared, Kirk rushed forward and helped to get the space suit off the First Officer and help lay him on the mobile bed, then looked at the pale and lifeless face with a feeling of nightmare.

"Bones, is he...?"

"Dead? No, Jim, but..."

"But what? Out with it!"

"He isn't hurt physically, but his mind... We'll do what we can, Jim. Get out of our way."

Kirk moved aside and stopped himself from going with them with difficulty. What could he do? He turned to Scotty, whose face was white and strained.

"Captain, have that wreck destroyed, please. I think Mr. Spock killed it, but we should take no chances."

Kirk complied and gave orders to resume their course, then led Scotty to his quarters and awaited the explanation the Chief Engineer tried to give coherently - he was still suffering from shock.

"I'm not sure what happened, Captain. The ship was a wreck and the crew dead, as we had anticipated. There was no sign of life at all anywhere. I had just rejoined the others when I felt a pressure on my mind. Someone - or something - horrible was trying to take me over. I could see that the Doctor and Mr. Spock had sensed it too. It was... I can't describe it, sir, but it makes me feel sick to think of it."

The Chief Engineer stopped and swallowed convulsively, then grabbed the drink Kirk offered him with understandable eagerness. "Take your time, Scotty."

"As I was saying, that ghoulish thing was trying to take our minds, control us, I think, and it was strong, I couldn't see any chance of winning. Mr. Spock ordered us to stay back, and not to call the Enterprise - the thing wanted the ship. He would ascertain what it was, try to make contact with his mind. It wasn't Human, that much we knew, and we couldn't see it. All we saw was a shape move in front of him as he advanced to meet it. When he clutched his head in pain, we fired our phasers. It did nothing. The vague shadow continued to advance and it was surviving in a vacuum! Spock seemed unable to move from the wall and was talking into his tricorder, then he ordered us not to interfere and went to meet what was clearly an alien life form." Scotty stopped again and passed a shaking hand over his face, then added in a low voice, "May we never meet the like of it again! We know that Mr. Spock incapacitated it or killed it, but it may have killed him."

"Let me have the tricorder," said Kirk.

They saw the events as Scotty had described them and heard Spock's voice with mounting anguish.

"Alien...unable to ascertain its origin...attacked vessel and killed crew... attacks minds. It feeds on minds... It is dying...from hunger...desperate... Must be stopped. Phasers useless...can live in vacuum... Will attempt to master it. Earth minds could not resist... I might not be able to, but will endeavour to destroy it, by self-destruction if necessary once the mind meld has taken place. It is not a pleasant species... I can't..."

The tape finished and Kirk put his head in his hands in sheer misery.

"Captain," mumbled Scott, "he is not dead yet."

"You rest, Scotty, I'll see McCoy now."

"I couldn't... I'd rather go on duty, sir. I've things to do."

Kirk nodded understandingly and went to the surgery where McCoy's drawn features were not reassuring.

"We have done all we can, Jim, which is nothing," he said bitterly. "His mind is damaged, he is no better than a vegetable at the moment, his consciousness completely out of our reach."

Kirk handed him the tricorder tape and McCoy listened attentively. "I suspected that much, Jim. I've no idea what that thing was, but it was evil, and we had no defence against it. Only a telepathic mind could attempt to fight it on its own level, so to speak, and destroy it, but it was so utterly alien and so desperate that it proved too difficult for Spock. He destroyed it, but..."

"If only I had listened to Ferris and ignored that wreck, the alien monster would have died of starvation and Spock would be..."

"You couldn't have known, Jim," said McCoy soothingly. "Spock himself, if he could talk, would tell you that you followed routine procedure and couldn't be blamed."

"I know, Bones, but he's dying..." Kirk controlled his grief and asked, "Can he recover?"

"Not here, no. Neither M'Benga nor I can do anything. Only Vulcan might save him, provided we get there in time, and even then there is no guarantee, only a slim chance."

"A very slim chance which might not even exist," added M'Benga, who had heard the last sentence as he came in. "I am sorry, Captain, but you should know the truth. Unless their level of knowledge on mind injuries has improved since I was last on Vulcan, there is nothing they can do. It is of course logical that their knowledge has improved."

"But has it improved enough?" asked McCoy.

"I am afraid I don't know, Doctor, and no Vulcan physician could tell you either until seeing Spock and making tests."

"There is nevertheless a chance," stated Kirk, "even if it is one chance in a thousand, so we'll go to Vulcan."

"We can't, Jim - Ferris - "

"If you think I'll let that bureaucrat kill my friend..."

"Look, let me down at the next colony we come to and I'll get transport for Spock."

"How long will it take?"

McCoy sighed wearily. "Too long. He would be dead before getting to Vulcan."

"How long have we, Bones?"

"Not more than five or six days in my opinion." M'Benga nodded in agreement, his dark face reflecting his frustration at his inability to help his patient.

Kirk called the bridge. "Mr. Chekov, lay a course for Vulcan immediately. Mr. Scott, maximum power to engines."

"Aye, sir, don't worry about that," replied Scotty.

"Lt. Uhura, call the nearest Starbase and contact the Vulcan Embassy there. Ask them to get in touch with Ambassador Sarek and inform him that his son's condition is critical and if he is not on Vulcan, he should try to get there as soon as possible.

"Yes, sir."

A stormy interview with High Commissioner Ferris followed. Closeted by themselves in the briefing room, they exchanged angry words and antagonism grew on both sides.

Kirk, worried that even on Vulcan Spock might die, was in no mood to listen to so-called reason. He pointed out that the treaty discussions could be postponed by a few days, and although it might upset the natives, no-one was likely to die of it, while Spock would certainly die if they did not go straight to Vulcan.

"I am not condemning my First Officer to death for the sake of your treaty," stated Kirk, irrevocably committed.

"But you admit he could die even there..."

"That is no reason to give up yet, Commissioner."

"Are you aware that if I am late, it might be considered an insult and the negotiations cancelled?"

"Temporarily, I expect. Your skill will no doubt reopen them."

But High Commissioner Ferris would not be placated. Much depended on his coming success or failure in respect of his political career, and Kirk, tired and exasperated, finished by stating bluntly, "This is my ship, and what I say goes."

"You are defying orders, Captain. I rank you. Do you realise...?"

"The implications?" interrupted Kirk. "To tell you the truth, Commissioner, at this moment, I couldn't care less."

"I fail to see why I should be the one who has to pay for your mistake," said Ferris with venom. "If you had ignored that wreck as I asked..."

How he mastered his hurt and anger Kirk never knew, and his throat was so tight he could not speak for a second. "Spock is paying, not you nor I," he managed to say in a strangled voice before walking out to avoid further confrontation and taking no notice of Ferris' parting threat - "You'll regret this, Captain, I promise you,"

The High Commissioner kept sending messages after this, and Kirk did not have the authority to stop - or see - any of them. As a consequence, a direct order arrived from Starfleet to proceed to planet Xalpa and put the First Officer into the care of the hospital at Starbase 8.

"In other words, I am to kill Spock with my own hands!" said the Captain bitterly to McCoy in the privacy of his quarters. "You and I know that Starbase 8 has no more facility to cure him than we have."

"Jim," said McCoy, his voice tense and worried, "if you disobey such a direct order from Starfleet, on top of Ferris' orders..."

"I know, Bones, but I have no choice, and in my place, you'd do exactly the same."

McCoy nodded, and heard Kirk murmur, "If he lives, Bones, it is all worth while. If he dies on Vulcan... I don't care what happens to me afterwards."

He left for the bridge and McCoy followed him, trying desperately to think of a solution which he knew was not there.

The Chief Engineer approached Kirk as he sat in his command chair and stated, "Captain, I want to assure you that we are all behind you in your attempt to save Mr. Spock's life."

"Thank you, Scotty," said Kirk, surprised. "I know your esteem for Spock, and I never doubted..."

"It's that man, sir," said Scotty in a sombre voice. "A proper Sassenath, that's what he is!"



"All he thinks about is his stupid treaty," said Sulu, disgusted.

"The worst kind of Cossack I ever met!" added Chekov, also sounding upset.

"If he was the one in need of medical care, he would soon change his tune!" said Uhura with disdain.

"He'll make trouble, Captain," warned Scotty.

"At the moment the priority is to get to Vulcan. Spock would say that it is not logical to anticipate..."

"Captain," interrupted Uhura, "I have a message from Ambassador Sarek, relayed through the nearest Vulcan Embassy. He is due on Vulcan at about the same time as we are and will meet us in orbit. He has given instructions to the Vulcan Medical Centre and they'll be ready and waiting."

"Good news at last! We could do with some."

High Commissioner Ferris was now keeping to his quarters after a last injunction to Kirk to reconsider, which fell on deaf ears, and no-one was sorry not to see him around.

It was just before Vulcan that Ambassador Sarek's craft came aboard and Kirk went to meet Spock's parents and led them to sickbay with what impassivity he could muster. Sarek betrayed nothing of his anxiety, as befitted a true Vulcan, but Amanda's anguish could be read in her pale and drawn features.

"You may be able to help him yourself, sir," said McCoy to Spock's father as they stood around the First Officer's bed.

"I'll try, Doctor, but from what you said, I doubt that I can do much." Sarek sat on the bed and touched Spock's face lightly, concentrating. He remained so for a couple of long minutes, then got up and his voice had a faint uneven tone as he said, "He is beyond my reach."

Amanda clung to the bed and asked, trying desperately to speak without trembling, "Will he live? Please tell me the truth, Sarek, I beg you..."

He went to her and touched her face lightly in turn. Her near hysteria subsided and she regained control of her emotions as they crossed fingers and he said evenly, "My wife must accept that I cannot do anything, and would if..."

"Yes, I know, Sarek. Forgive my lack of control."

"Is my son ready to be taken aboard my shuttlecraft, Doctor?"

"Yes, Ambassador. Dr. M'Benga and I will see to it personally."

"What chance has he to survive, sir?" asked Kirk tensely as they followed the two doctors pushing the mobile bed.

"I am not a physician, Captain," replied Sarek, "and cannot answer. The damage is extensive, but we have on Vulcan two Melkotian doctors who will endeavour to be of assistance. They are exceptional in the field of mind injury and we are learning much from them."

"That is good news, sir. Thank you."

The small procession was stopped by the sudden appearance of High Commissioner Ferris, who addressed the Vulcan. "Are you aware, Ambassador, that your son's illness is probably causing the failure of an important treaty?"

"In that case," replied Sarek in his toneless voice, "you should be gratified to have a legitimate reason if you fail this time."

Ferris became livid with anger and Kirk understood now why the successful treaty was so important. The High Commissioner had failed before. The man's rage however could be vicious and Kirk moved unobtrusively to Sarek's side; not that the Vulcan needed his help, he reflected wryly, he was more than a match for Ferris,

but the Captain was not going to have a fight on his ship if he could help it.

The High Commissioner must have realised the futility of physical violence against a Vulcan because he made no move to attack, and Sarek added, "Would you please move aside, High Commissioner? Any logical process of thought should indicate that the sooner we leave this vessel, the sooner you will get to your negotiations."

Ferris moved aside obviously seething with anger, and Kirk was shocked when the High Commissioner turned his venom on Amanda. "You realise your son may not recover even on Vulcan from the telepathic attack. But it is too late for you to regret not having a Human son."

Amanda's face was calm as she addressed Ferris, her expression glacial. "When 'Human' means you, High Commissioner, I am not only proud, but relieved, to have a Vulcan husband and a Vulcan son."

The procession went forward again, ignoring the High Commissioner, and soon arrived at the hangar deck where the patient was taken into the small craft and Kirk bade his farewells to Sarek and Amanda. "I would be grateful if you could let us have any news as soon as possible, Ambassador. I am sorry to have to leave Vulcan, I'd much rather have waited."

"I will let you know, Captain, and understand that your concern for my son must be superceded by your duty even to someone like High Commissioner Ferris."

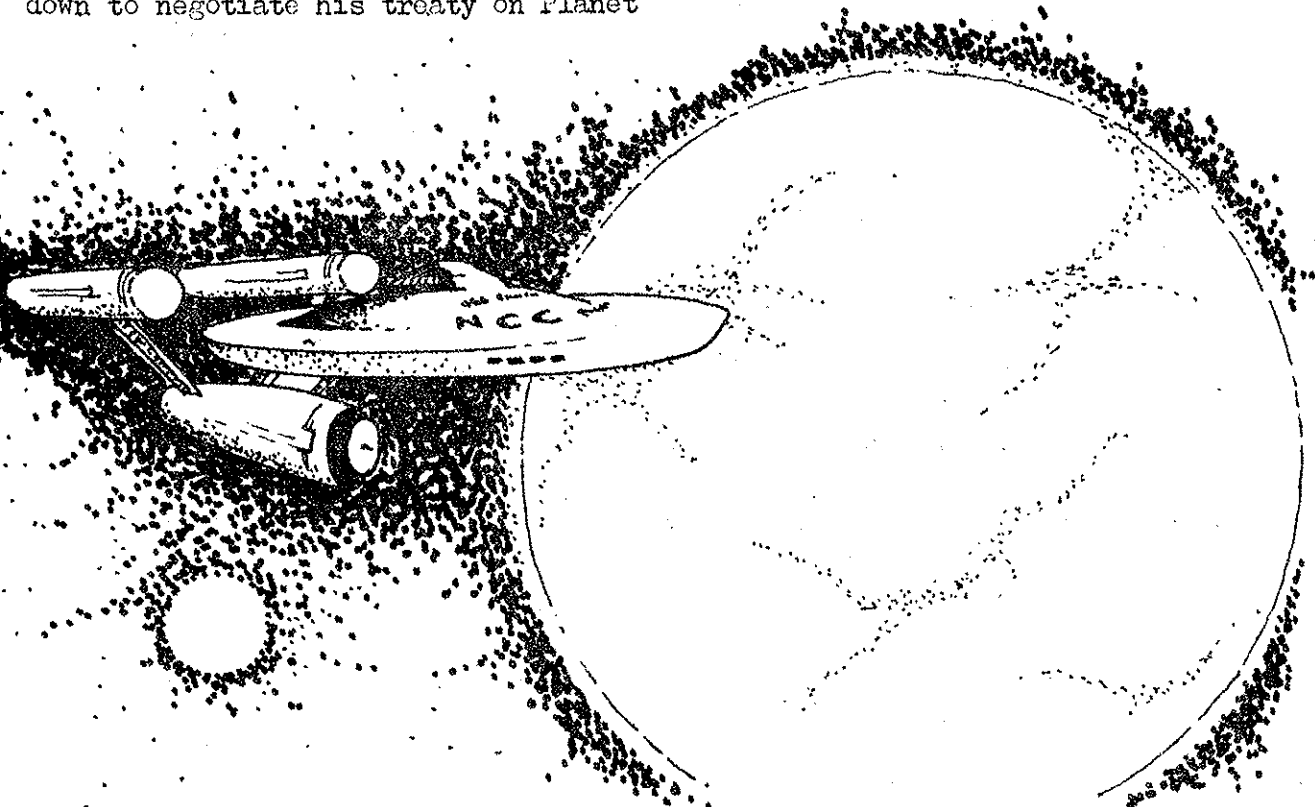
"Thank you for all you did, Captain," murmured Amanda with a trembling smile before disappearing into the craft.

The alarm sounded and they cleared the hangar deck. From the control room adjoining, they watched the ship disappear towards Vulcan, with contained emotion.

"There is nothing else we can do but wait," said McCoy.

"There is hope, Captain," added M'Benga encouragingly. "Commander Spock will have the best of care in the quickest possible time."

High Commissioner Ferris remained in his quarters for the rest of the journey which suited Kirk fine, and was beamed down to negotiate his treaty on Planet



Xalpa with only five days' delay. He was barely civil and ignored Kirk's attempt to make amends with good wishes, but did not repeat his threats.

The Enterprise went on to collect scientific reports and samples from a survey team on a newly discovered planet, then the ship was due for a check up and the crew for shore leave on Starbase 2.

Vulcan was only a slight detour on the way to the Starbase, so Kirk ordered maximum speed in order to have time to stop for news of Spock. The Captain and the Doctor beamed down and called at Sarek and Amanda's house where the sight of Amanda hastily wiping her eyes made them pale with fear.

"Captain, Doctor, welcome. My husband was about to contact you. Spock will live!"

The two officers let their breath go in a surge of relief. Amanda was wiping her eyes again and smiled. "Forgive me, I was trying to recover my self control before Sarek returns. He deserves better than to find me in tears."

"Have a good cry. We'll go in the garden," offered McCoy.

"No, no, Doctor. I am all right now. My husband will be back very soon."

"Would he have objected to you crying?"

"He would have helped me, Doctor, as he has done throughout this tragedy. But I do not like to make too many demands on him when he has been under strain, and..."

Sarek's entrance interrupted her and he welcomed the visitors, then went to his wife and crossed fingers. "Why were you crying, my wife? Spock will be recovered in a few weeks."

"I was happy, Sarek. You know how Humans cry with joy."

"Most illogical and sometimes confusing. Captain Kirk, I am afraid Spock cannot return to duty yet."

"I understand, sir. We called for news. We are glad he is out of danger. May we see him?"

"We'll take you to the Medical Centre and the doctors will decide."

"We hope to have him home soon," said Amanda with anticipation.

"And my wife will treat him like a five year old," added Sarek.

"Mothers make excellent nurses, sir," assured McCoy.

They were allowed to see the First Officer for a few minutes and tactfully, Sarek and Amanda let them go in alone. Spock was connected to elaborate apparatus and still did not look in the best of health, but his eyes were very much alive as they smiled at Kirk and McCoy and he managed a weak handclasp.

"Jim...Doctor... Sorry to let you do all the work."

"We'll manage," smiled Kirk. "I don't know how, but we'll manage."

"In an illogical manner no doubt," added McCoy gruffly, "so hurry up and get better, Spock."

"I'll do my best, Doctor. My idea of home leave is not to find myself a specimen in the lab with doctors making experiments."

"Your mother is looking forward to having you home," said Kirk. "Take your time, Spock, don't come back until you are one hundred percent fit."

"Take care, Jim," said the Vulcan, then his features contorted in pain and he murmured, "Father..."

Kirk and McCoy ran to the door as it opened and Sarek came in, followed by a Melkotian doctor who pushed the two Earthmen out.

Amanda asked them anxiously what was wrong, but the Melkotian doctor returned

and reassured them. "There are still occasional recurrences of pain, but they are not frequent." Addressing Amanda, he continued, "Your husband was an essential factor in your son's recovery. We might or might not have succeeded otherwise."

"Please explain, Doctor," asked McCoy, interested.

"When you brought Commander Spock to Vulcan, we did not have much time to reach him before it would have been too late, so Ambassador Sarek assisted by letting us use his mind to reach his son. Because of the father-son relationship, it allowed us to start the cure with the minimum delay. The Commander was so weak at first that his father had to sustain him for quite long periods in between sedations."

"Couldn't you have sedated him all the time while he recovered?"

"No, Doctor, he had to learn to use his mind again after we restored the damaged areas, and we had to check all the time that our restoration had been correct and successful. It was a very long and tiring process for all of us."

"And we are grateful, Doctor," said Amanda.

"Please, I am a doctor and it is my work to cure the ill. To continue what I was saying, when we let Commander Spock return home in about three or four days, your husband should be relieved of all care and have an extensive rest. We greatly admired his strength, but it is not without limits."

"I know, Doctor," replied Amanda. "I have learned to sense when he is tired and I promise you I will take care that both patients obey my orders for a change."

Sarek had heard the last comments when coming out of Spock's room and addressed the Melkotian. "Doctor, I doubt you have the right to upset Vulcan marital custom by transferring authority to my wife in this manner."

"I'll upset anything when the welfare of my patients is concerned."

"I am not your patient, Doctor."

"No, but you will be if you don't heed my advice, and I'm sure your wife's authority will be beneficial in the circumstances."

"Sarek," said Amanda, trying not to smile, "I do not want authority and you should know it by now."

"My wife does not have to state the obvious. Doctor, let me know if my presence is still required here before Spock comes home."

They went back to the house where Sarek and Amanda offered them a meal, which they accepted. It was a pleasant house, and much as they were enjoying their visit, it was soon time to leave.

Sarek went to his office to get the medical certificate about Spock for the Captain and Kirk thought he would never forget Amanda's radiant smile as she said, with emotion, "Captain, thank you for all you did. Sarek and I are aware that Spock owes you his life."

"I owe him mine more than once," protested Kirk, "and Vulcans saved him - the doctors, your husband..."

"Yes, my husband. I must see that he gets back to normal life and less emotion. He would go on until he was ill himself if he was not stopped."

Sarek came back with the papers and they took their leave. Kirk was particularly moved when Sarek told him in an even voice, "Captain, although bringing Spock here was logical, I understand and appreciate the concern which made you disregard Ferris' wishes, and which made you come here today."

"Thank you, Ambassador. I am gratified that Spock is recovering and look forward to having him at my side again."

"Live long and prosper, Captain, Doctor."

Kirk's news of Spock's recovery was greeted with relief and enthusiasm aboard the Enterprise, and the Captain wished Spock could have seen this, while McCoy remarked that the ship might feel less like a morgue now.

"And why anyone should miss that logical computer so much is beyond me!" he added with his usual sarcasm.

"Considering that your face was among the longest, Doctor," said Scotty, "your comment is illogical - as Spock would say."

"Don't you start about logic - let's have a holiday from it."

Kirk laughed and felt acute pleasure at being able to laugh again. With a bit of luck and that strong Vulcan constitution, the First Officer would probably be back by the time their check and shore leave were over.

But a shock was in store for them on arrival at Starbase 2, showing that if Kirk had forgotten Ferris' threats, the High Commissioner had not. When the Enterprise had established orbit, the Captain received a call from Commodore Landson, the Portmaster,

"Captain Kirk, it is my duty to inform you that you are relieved of command as from now, pending a Court of Enquiry. In the absence of the First Officer, Lt. Commander Scott will take charge, but the crew can go on shore leave."

"Sir, why..."

"Serious allegations have been made by High Commissioner Ferris; as a result of your disregard for orders, the Xapla treaty was lost. You may choose a defence counsel, and study the charges against you. You'll be informed when the enquiry is to take place, and your senior officers will be expected to attend."

Such a thing could not be kept secret and the news shocked the crew and spread dismay, while curses against Ferris could be heard loud and clear. Shore leave started with a lack of enthusiasm never before seen.

Kirk, after the initial shock, prepared to fight whatever charges Ferris had dreamed up and chose Captain Vilay as his counsel. The officer had an excellent reputation and promised to study the whole affair, research into it, then have a consultation with Kirk.

McCoy was understandably worried and neither could enjoy what should have been a relaxed shore leave.

"Jim, I've been thinking about this. Don't you think powerful friends would be a help?"

"I haven't that many, Bones."

"What about Ambassador Sarek?"

"A Vulcan Ambassador could not have influence at Starfleet..."

"Not directly, but he may know highly placed officers - "

"Out of the question! I refuse to interfere with Spock's convalescence, and Sarek himself looked very tired. Spock would rush here if he knew."

"Yes, he would, of course. Maybe Sarek could do nothing anyway, but this is going to be sticky."

"I'll fight the top brass if necessary. What have I to lose? Not Spock, that is the main thing."

"Are you sure you don't want me to contact Vulcan, Jim?"

"No. Don't you dare go against my wishes!"

McCoy sighed and could not help having strong misgivings about the future.

"Whatever happens, Bones, I have no regrets and would do the same..."

"Don't tell the court that! Ferris..." He was interrupted by the arrival of Captain Vilay and they awaited his opinion with a mixture of hope and apprehension.

"I will not try to be a false optimist, Captain Kirk," said the officer bluntly. "This is bad. Two things are the main factors which could make your suspension permanent."

"Go on, and thank you for your frankness, Captain," said Kirk. "I'd rather know the truth."

"The worse item of course is the failure of the Xalpa treaty, due to the delay which upset the natives, and Ferris could not convince them to overlook what to them was an insult. The second factor is less damning. Had you ignored the wreck as Ferris asked you to, the delay would not have occurred, but we can fight this on the ground that routine demanded the inspection of the disabled ship."

"Yes, I see. Isn't it a factor also that Commander Spock may have saved the whole crew of the Enterprise by killing the alien monster?"

"That is a very debatable point, Captain, because who is to know that the alien would have in fact managed to get into the Enterprise? I don't think we can make too much of it, unfortunately. What we can emphasise of course is the value of Commander Spock and the fact that his life was saved, obviously an advantage for Starfleet, apart from a Captain being expected to take care of his men."

"What is Ferris after?" asked McCoy.

"He is asking for Captain Kirk to be dismissed from Starfleet."

"That man is a menace and..."

"Please, Bones, insulting him won't help! Why is he so vindictive?"

"I have tried to discover this, and it is simple. The Federation Council had no Ambassador to spare for the Xalpa treaty, so High Commissioner Ferris volunteered. Had he succeeded, it would have offered chances for promotion. If he can prove that the failure was caused by you, not himself, he will naturally benefit."

"Yes, of course. Politics is a... Never mind. You said no Ambassador was available, but Ambassador Sarek was free, and..."

"No, Captain, he was just returning from a difficult assignment had had been granted leave on Vulcan. The Federation Council did not think the Xalpa affair serious enough to necessitate cancelling his leave. Ferris was expected to be good enough for what should have been a simple negotiation."

"But the natives were touchy. Just my bad luck. I wonder why Starfleet sent that order to put Spock in hospital, though..."

"This was in answer to Ferris' request. He did not make the severity of your Commander's injury clear, so the disobedience of that order we can prove to be justified; it was given in ignorance of the proper facts."

"That is something anyway. How long until the enquiry?"

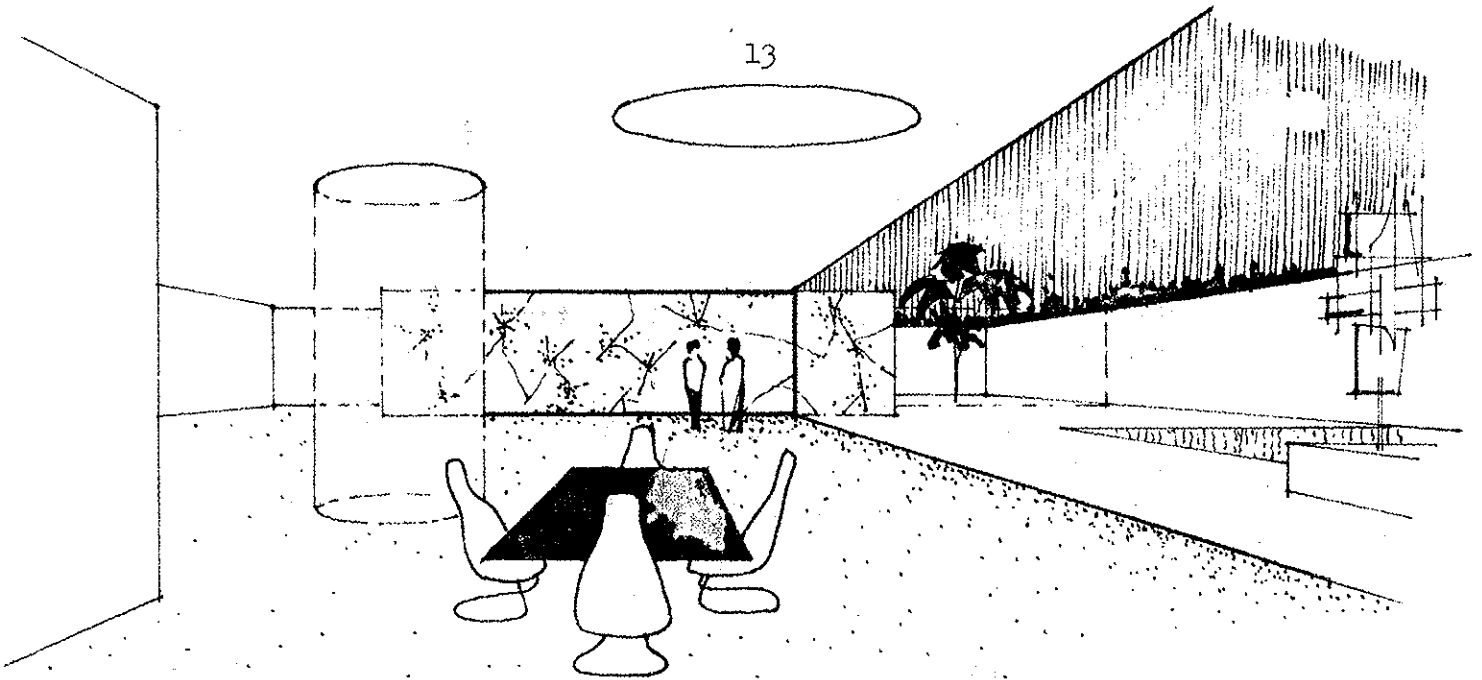
"There is some delay, I am afraid, because Starfleet wants an Admiral in on it. As your ship is in for a check, there is no urgency for a Captain..."

"Yes, I can see that. We can only wait and hope, then."

"I will do my best, Captain Kirk, but I cannot promise success. Ferris is not an easy adversary, and of course he outranked you."

"I know. Thanks for what you have already done."

"And may justice be done and Starfleet ignore that politician!" added McCoy.



Meanwhile, on Vulcan, Spock was now home and getting stronger every day, to his mother's relief - and regret.. She could no longer pamper him, but then pampering Vulcans was never easy and she had had great difficulty making Sarek rest properly for a while. The fact that Spock was home had helped, and she was glad that father and son seemed closer now than they had been for a long time.

They were just finishing supper one evening when they had a visit from Commodore Sulul, the Vulcan officer in charge of the Starbase on Vulcan. Spock got up hurriedly, but his superior protested, "Please sit down, Commander, this is a friendly visit. Your father and I have known each other long enough..."

"Yes, indeed," agreed Sarek, "and you are always welcome, Sulul. Have you eaten?"

"Yes, thank you. Actually, my visit is due to disturbing news I just received, and I took it upon myself to come and tell you." He informed them of Kirk's suspension and Ferris' charges, as well as the projected court of enquiry, and added, "I don't believe it would help if you cut your convalescence short and rushed to Starbase 2, Commander Spock, and the enquiry date is not even fixed yet. I will not let you leave Vulcan without a medical certificate establishing without doubt that you are fit for duty."

"And I realise you were not supposed to tell me, sir. Thank you for doing so. I will not leave too soon or you would perhaps be suspected..."

"I doubt that Ferris would meddle with Vulcan matters..."

"The man has never shown outstanding ability," said Sarek, thinking aloud, "and the Xalpa situation... Sulul, have you any information on it?"

"You may come to my office and see whatever you wish, Sarek, but whether it would help..."

Sarek and Spock followed the Vulcan officer and saw that indeed the tape on Xalpa was not long, as the planet had been known for such a short time. They went back to their home, and to a casual observer, Spock would have appeared as he always did, cold and unemotional, but Kirk would have noticed a tenseness and his mother was not fooled.

"That Ferris should be thrown out..." she started to say indignantly.

"Please, Amanda, this is no time for emotional displays," interrupted Sarek. "It achieves nothing. Unfortunately I do not see how you or I can do much to help your Captain, Spock."

"We must, Father. You know the Grand Admiral of Starfleet well."

"Yes, but such matters are not his province at all, and he would need logical grounds to intervene in any case. I believe the answer is to be found on Xalpa.

We have only Ferris' word for what happened there, and as he is not a Vulcan..."

"Would he have lied?" asked Spock.

"Of course," said Amanda, "if it suited him. Most politicians are not as bad as they used to be, but some are worse."

The two Vulcans looked at each other, slightly confused. Then, correctly assuming that his mother knew what she meant, Spock turned his mind to more important matters. "You could go to Xalpa, Father."

"It is not that simple, Spock. I am on leave, therefore a free agent, but I have no mandate to go there and bother an alien race with a treaty they have already refused."

"Then you should have a mandate. Ask T'Pol to get the Federation Council to give you one."

Sarek visibly stiffened. "I have never asked favours from my mother and will not start now."

Amanda looked away with the accustomed guilt she could not help feeling. Sarek had defied his mother when he married her, and although the breach had more or less healed, a coldness remained between mother and son which upset Amanda. It had made them even more determined to make their marriage a success and have at least one child when T'Pol had predicted no children and a ~~separation~~ <sup>reparation</sup> within a few years - Vulcan, of course, did not recognise divorce except by the Kal-i-fee. Amanda could still remember her happiness and Sarek's hidden pride when Spock was born, it had been the realisation of a deeply shared dream, and the knowledge that whatever happened in the future, nothing could wreck their union.

She stared at Sarek's hand on her shoulder. "My wife is either deaf or lost in her emotional dreams," said Sarek's quiet voice.

"Were you talking?... Forgive me, my husband."

"I was asking you," repeated Sarek patiently, "whether it would be more logical for Spock to approach T'Pol."

"Would she take the request seriously? Your mother is never anxious to ask for favours on behalf of her family."

"I am not either, Amanda, as you well know."

"Father," said Spock, "I would not ask for myself, and never did. Until recently, no-one on board the Enterprise even knew that my family was among the highest on Vulcan. I am asking for my Captain, who is being unjustly treated."

"The injustice could make my mother act. Also, the Federation Council is afraid of Xalpa falling into Klingon hands... Very well, Spock. I'll see T'Pol. I will also put a call through to Admiral Derval from the Starbase, and see if he can suggest anything."

It was with hidden anxiety that Spock awaited his father's return the next day, and he was grateful that Amanda did not try to make conversation and left him to his thoughts.

Sarek did not return until the evening and Amanda wished the answer could be read on his features, which were expressionless as usual.

She served the meal quickly and Sarek did not keep them waiting. "T'Pol has left for the Federation Council to ask for my mandate in regard to Xalpa. Logically there should be no difficulty as Klingon intervention is feared. So far they have not heard of the planet, however, and I think I should be in time,"

"Thank you, Father," said Spock, trying to sound detached.

"Was it difficult, Sarek?" asked Amanda.

"To convince my mother? Yes and no, but we understand each other. I will say no more."



Amanda and Spock looked at one another and guessed that it had probably not been easy at all. Both T'Pol and Sarek were very strong-willed and this sometimes made a clash inevitable. But they respected Sarek's wish and asked no questions.

"I also contacted Guy Derval," continued Sarek, referring to the Grand Admiral of Starfleet. "In his opinion, after a quick study of the case, Kirk might keep his rank. A Captain's duty to his men has always been considered important in Starfleet and it is a question of whether your life was more important to Starfleet than the treaty on Xalpa. But should it be proved that Kirk made a wrong decision somewhere along the line, and should it be feared that he might start disobeying orders because of not agreeing with them, then he could lose his command."

"If he keeps his command, though..."

"Derval could not guarantee this, Spock, it was only his opinion. The court of enquiry will decide, and he cannot intervene just because he is a friend of mine."

"Of course I realise this, Father. My medical check-up has proved I am fit now, so I will probably leave tomorrow, after seeing Commodore Sulik."

"And we'll leave for Xalpa shortly. I hope you understand that we might achieve nothing there."

"Yes, Father. I appreciate your help, however."

The next day, Spock made his farewells to his parents and Amanda said, her voice not quite steady, "Take care, Spock. You nearly died..."

"Mother, the odds against meeting a similar alien monster are..."

"I don't want to know!" she managed to protest without smiling. "Why I ever doubted that you are as Vulcan as your father, I'll never know!"

Spock's eyes smiled at her and he touched hands with his father briefly, then departed to board the transport for Starbase 2.

His mother hastily wiped her eyes but knew Sarek was not fooled. "I will not be sad, Sarek," she assured him. "Sons always leave home, it is logical. As long as my husband does not leave..."

"That would be illogical," he interrupted, reaching out to cross fingers with her.

What she saw in his eyes for a second and his brief mind contact were enough to dispel her sadness and settle to her occupation with inner contentment.

The next day Sarek called her from the spaceport. "We are leaving in a couple of hours, Amanda. Meet me here."

"But... Have you heard from T'Pol?"

"No, but we are leaving for Xalpa because there is now a ship available to take us there. I don't think my mother will fail, but if she did, we would be recalled during the journey. We'll gain several days by not waiting for the Federation Council's mandate."

T'Pol was received with due honour by the Federation Council, as any leader or member of ruling governments always were, and the Chairman asked hopefully, "Do we owe this visit to a reconsideration of your refusal to take a seat on this Council?"

"No, Mr. Chairman. I am not in the habit of changing my mind."

"It is your privilege, much as we regret your refusal. You mentioned an offer to put to us?"

"Yes, a possible solution to the Xalpa affair."

"Please proceed."

"Send another Ambassador, in this instance my son Sarek, who has no commitments at present."

This provoked an angry response from some Earthmen who had approved of Ferris and wanted to justify their choice; they would not admit any slur on his reputation. When T'Pau pointed out, however, that it was either sending Sarek or virtually handing the planet over to the Klingons, the opposition was silenced and Sarek's mandate approved with a large majority.

"We'll instruct your son to leave immediately for Xalpa," said the Chairman.

"There is no need, he is already on his way."

The whole Council stared at the old woman in amazement which, for some, turned to anger.

"What made you assume we would grant your request?" asked a Council member.

"It was a logical request. Don't you always act in a logical manner?" she asked without a hint of irony being discernable. All the protests were squashed by her words and the Chairman smiled.

"We endeavour to, Madam, not always with success. That is why your presence here would be beneficial."

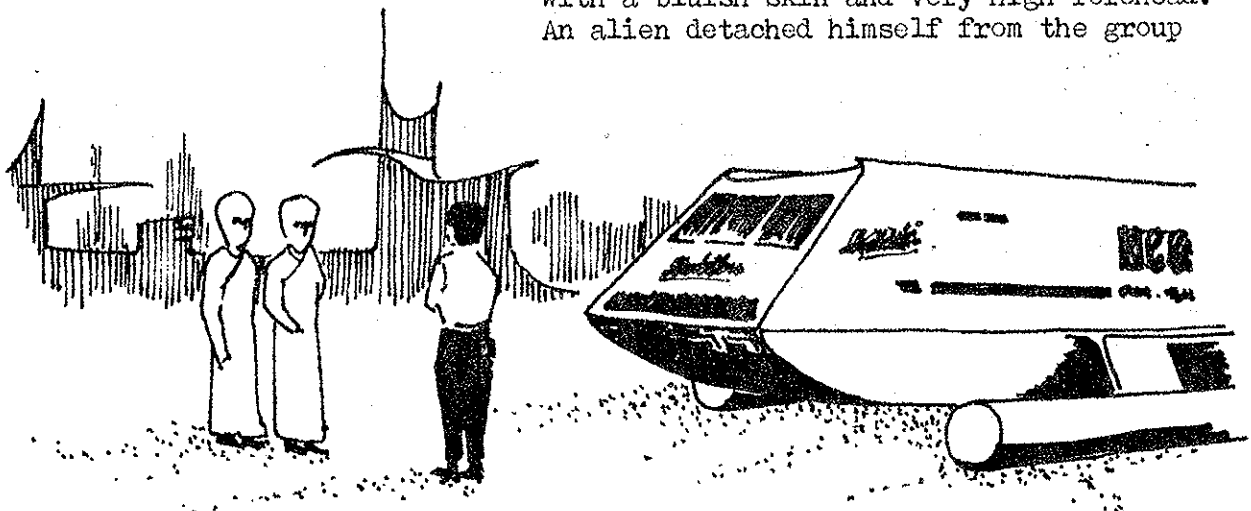
"I have duties on Vulcan I will not relinquish. My people will always support the Federation's policies or projects - if they are logical and peaceful."

"We have often been grateful for Vulcan support - thank you." The Chairman escorted her back to her ship and was amused when re-entering the Council Chamber to find the atmosphere quiet and subdued, as though T'Pau's influence could still be felt. I only wish I had that woman here on some occasions! he thought with a sigh as he started another debate.

Sarek was nearly at Xalpa when he received confirmation of his mandate. The facts known about the inhabitants were few and he could only 'play it by ear' as the Earth expression went. There was no Klingon vessel in orbit, which was fortunate, and he saw that Amanda wanted to accompany him. The inhabitants were reported as peaceful, so he saw no reason why she should not, and took a shuttlecraft with his wife and his two aides aboard. They landed as near as possible to the capital city mentioned in Ferris' report and Sarek said he would get out alone first, but remain near the craft to await the natives.

The planet was pleasant and mainly agricultural, and it was no long before a reception committee approached.

The natives were not armed, but they looked hostile. They were Human-like, with a bluish skin and very high forehead. An alien detached himself from the group



and announced, "I am Klar, in charge of external affairs. This craft is a United Federation of Planets vessel, is it not?"

"Correct. My name is Sarek. I come on behalf of the United Federation of Planets, and I come in peace."

"There are others in your craft. Please ask them to come out. We also come in peace."

Amanda and the two aides joined Sarek and the sight of the Earthwoman seemed to puzzle the natives.

"Who is the woman?" asked Klar.

"She is my wife, Amanda. The other two are my aides."

"You, Ambassador, are not an Earthman."

"No, I am a Vulcan."

"Your wife is not Vulcan."

"No, she is from Earth."

"We find this strange and perhaps disturbing, but we will reserve judgement."

"I fail to see any logical reason why my choice of a wife should concern you," said Sarek in his quiet voice.

"We might explain later. Why is the United Federation of Planets not accepting our refusal to negotiate for the mining rights?"

"It was felt that your reasons for rejection were perhaps not sufficient to justify refusal."

"Please elaborate, Ambassador."

"I can understand that the five-day delay in the arrival of the previous negotiating team could appear to your people as lack of consideration on our part, and I apologise, mainly as my own son was the cause of High Commissioner Ferris' late arrival."

"I see. This is a very clever move on the part of your Federation, Ambassador."

"I am afraid I don't understand."

"Why do you think we refused to negotiate?"

"I have only Ferris' report, which states that you are proud people and do not like to be insulted by emissaries not keeping appointments."

"Please answer me this; had your people awaited an envoy who arrived late, would you feel insulted?"

"It would depend on the reason for the delay. Had it been caused by the need to save a life, no-one on Vulcan would have felt it unjustified."

"Are you being completely truthful, Ambassador? Or is there another reason for your coming here?"

Sarek hesitated, then decided on the whole truth and explained Kirk's difficulties, caused by Ferris.

"As I said, it was clever to send you, Ambassador Sarek."

"Please explain."

"Your son's life being the cause, you naturally approved of the delay."

"Anyone's life would make me approve, sir. I am afraid I have to make it clear that, personally, I find your attitude and decision to reject the treaty unjustified."

"A very bald statement! Is that the view of the Federation Council?"

"They hope you will excuse the offence and reconsider negotiating with us."

"We would not have reconsidered, had Ferris returned. However, we never met a Vulcan before and we find many differences. Your statements are clear and decisive; we hope they are also truthful. Are you prepared to prove your integrity?"

"Yes." Curiosity moved him to add, "Did you ask this of High Commissioner Ferris?"

"No - it was unnecessary. You will come with me, Ambassador. There are tests we would like you to take."

"Please," interrupted Amanda, "you will not hurt my husband..."

"Have no fear, Madam, we are peaceful people and hold violence in abhorrence. Your husband is in no danger. But we have to be sure of his sincerity."

"May I come?"

"No. You will be a guest at my house; my wife will entertain you."

"I also trust my wife will be safe," said Sarek, crossing fingers with Amanda.

"You have my word, Ambassador Sarek. Your two aides may accompany your wife and be my guests also."

Thus separated, Amanda and the two aides were led to a large residence and made comfortable. Klar's family showed curiosity and asked many questions about Vulcan and the Federation, but they also readily answered the ones about Xalpa. Amanda however found it difficult to hide her anxiety as time passed and saw Klar come in alone some hours later with undisguised fear.

Klar was quick to reassure her. "Your husband is in need of rest, so I took him straight to his room. You may join him."

Amanda ran out and was relieved to find Sarek seated meditating over steepled fingers.

"Please don't fuss, Amanda, I am fine."

"But those tests..."

"They were interesting. Their purpose was to test my veracity and discover the general beliefs of my race. While I can understand this, I fail to understand why they did not test Ferris also. I sensed little from Klar's mind except distrust. That was before the tests; I was too tired afterwards to sense anything."

"It is not logical, Sarek, but they did not hurt you!"

"If the distrust continues, a mind meld might become advisable. I had hoped to avoid it."

She nodded, knowing how he disliked the necessary lowering of barriers and the loss of privacy it entailed.

"Come and rest, my husband; I am tired, and you must be also."

"Yes, Amanda, and let us hope we get some logical answers tomorrow."

Meanwhile Spock arrived on Starbase 2 and reporter to Commodore Landson.

"You will be here for the enquiry, Commander. The date should be known any day now. The Enterprise is out of dock, but still in orbit being subjected to various tests, with most of the officers and crew back from leave. You will naturally take over as temporary acting Captain, or maybe permanent, depending on the results of the enquiry."

"No, sir - I would refuse command," said Spock stiffly.

Before going aboard the ship, Spock went in search of Captain Vilay and told him what his father was attempting. "I have heard that my grandmother obtained his mandate, and he should be on Xalpa by now."

"It was a good move, Commander, and it was fortunate your family had the influence to manage it."

"I can assure you I do not normally - "

"Please don't take offence, Commander, I understand that it was for your Captain that you did this."

"There is no guarantee of success and I'd prefer to say nothing for now to Captain Kirk."

"I understand. If your father does not get a treaty... Count on me to be discreet."

"If there is still no news when the enquiry starts, could you attempt to prolong it and gain time?"

"Yes, I can try. There are ways of making it very, very slow..."

Kirk and McCoy had heard of Spock's return and Kirk addressed the bridge crew. "I hope Spock will not be blamed for anything; he saved us all from the alien monster, and my predicament is not his fault."

"Of course not, sir," assured Scotty.

When Spock arrived, they tried not to show too much enthusiasm, but could not hide their pleasure at his return and the Vulcan was surprised at how moved he was by the welcome he received.

"Are you sure you are fit, Spock?" asked McCoy with a mock threatening look.

"Yes, Doctor. If you don't mind, I have seen enough of medical facilities to last me quite a while." He turned to Kirk and added, "It does not help to say I regret what happened here, Captain..."

"Yes, I know, Spock. Don't blame yourself, you couldn't help it. I wish they'd get that enquiry over though, it is preying on my nerves and I complained about the delay - "

"You should not..." Spock stopped suddenly and Kirk looked at him in surprise.

"Why shouldn't I complain? Ah, you mean it could make it worse for myself if I annoy the top brass with complaints? That is just too bad, I have not your nerves of steel and your Vulcan nature. I wish I had at times!"

A technician came to ask questions of Kirk and McCoy drew Spock to one side. "What are you going to do, Spock?"

"Put my personal effects in my quarters, Doctor."

"Don't play dumb! About Jim, I meant."

"What do you expect me to do, Doctor?"

"Throttle Ferris, for a start! That would help."

"I fail to see how, Doctor. The only result would be my incarceration on a criminal charge."

"Jim saved your life. You are not going to do nothing, are you?"

"I will naturally testify at the enquiry if asked to do so. Now if you'll excuse me, Doctor, I must settle in, catch up with the overhaul of the ship and take up my position of temporary acting Captain."

McCoy watched the Vulcan leave the bridge in baffled anger. "I don't believe it!" he exclaimed so loudly that everyone turned to stare at him.

"What's wrong, Bones?"

"That Vulcan can't wait to be acting Captain!"

"Glad to have him, Doctor," said Scotty. "He can take charge now."

"Don't start a wild goose chase, Bones," advised Kirk. "You should know better by now than to take Spock literally."

The news of the enquiry date arrived at last. It was fixed for ten days' time and would be presided over by Admiral Vetnikov, assisted by Commodore Landson and Staff Captain Li Yang. High Commissioner Ferris would prosecute with the assistance of Counsel Faridan, a well-known lawyer who specialised in political cases.

Captain Vilay, who had brought the news, told them, "It is a fair court, Captain Kirk. Vetnikov however is in favour of stronger discipline and Ferris ranks you. Landson is fair-minded and Li Yang even more so. But the combination of Ferris and Faridan is dangerous."

"I'm relieved it's only ten days to go," sighed Kirk.

Spock beamed down to Starbase 2 and went to the Vulcan Embassy the next day. "I wish to put in a personal call to Vulcan."

"Yes, sir. Who is the person concerned?"

"T'Pol."

"With respect, sir, you cannot call a High Vulcan Elder without previous..."

"She is my grandmother," interrupted Spock.

"Oh. I ask forgiveness, Commander Spock. I did not recognise you."

"There is no reason why you should. Let me know when the call comes through - I will be in the library."

Spock hated to take advantage of his family's position, but wanted news from Xalpa - if any - now that the enquiry was near.

But there was no news from Xalpa and T'Pol reprimanded her grandson severely; she had been called away from an important meeting. Spock ignored this and asked for any news to be sent to the Vulcan Embassy on Starbase 2, then went back aboard the Enterprise worried about his parents. Xalpa was after all not well known and... He hid his anxiety under typical Vulcan impassivity. Kirk sensed his tension, but thought it was due to the enquiry, while McCoy kept wondering how Spock could do nothing, only he had no idea what Spock could do.

He started to notice however that the Vulcan was not eating and refused even to look at food.

"Look, Spock, the enquiry is tomorrow. What good will it do if you pass out from lack of food?"

"Illogical, Doctor, I can manage without food for long periods as you know."

"This is not like you, Spock," said Kirk, worriedly. "There is hope until the verdict has been announced."

"It is not only that, Jim," Spock started to say, then stopped abruptly, and refused to answer their questions. Even after McCoy left, Kirk could get nothing out of the Vulcan.

"Spock, I always share my problems with you. Why can't I share yours?"

"It would not be logical. Jim, please trust me."

"I hope it is not some desperate scheme that will put you in danger," said Kirk with a frown.

"No, Jim, I am perfectly safe, I assure you."

"I know better than to insist with you, Spock. See you tomorrow. Wish me luck?"

"Good luck, Jim."

The next day the enquiry started and Spock made a negative sign at Vilay's questioning look. There was no news from Xalpa, and Spock did not want any worry about his parents to distract Kirk from his defence.

Ferris made no mystery of the fact that he was after Kirk's blood to make him pay for the loss of the Xalpa treaty and the probability of the planet finishing in Klingon hands. The Captain had not only disobeyed a ranking officer, but had committed an error of judgement; he should have ignored the wreck or reported it for inspection later, when the alien monster would have been dead. The saving of the First Officer's life was considered a poor excuse when there was no guarantee of a cure on Vulcan. Kirk should have either organised other transport for Spock or gone to Vulcan afterwards. They only had McCoy's opinion that it would have been too late, and the doctor himself had to admit that he had been guessing about Spock's injury; besides, he was a friend of the Captain's! What proof had they that he was not, even subconsciously, twisting the facts to make things look more favourable for Kirk? McCoy and the other Enterprise officers were upset and angry but they could do nothing. McCoy and even M'Benga, in a difficult field like mind injury, which non telepaths still knew relatively little about, could not give any proof of Spock's desperate condition at the time, except their medical intuition - the fact that they had been right was immaterial, at the time they had not known that they were.

At this point the prosecution remarked that it was felt Human doctors should suffice on board a mainly Human-manned ship. Commander Spock, as a member of an otherwise Human crew, should expect to be treated as such, without any privileges.

They heard the prosecution say that it was believed that Kirk had taken the opportunity to discredit Ferris. The crew stared at each other in disbelief, and Captain Vilay did not look happy; the events at Murasaki 312, slightly twisted, were given as reason and in such a manner that denial was impossible. It started to look as though Kirk might indeed lose his command, as the attack continued by saying that there was no proof that the Captain would not again put his friends' lives before his duty; in this instance, it was fortunate that no lives depended on the Xalpa treaty - but lives had nearly been lost at New Paris. And if the Klingons took over Xalpa, the natives could suffer losses - and Kirk would have caused them.

The Captain protested vehemently that had other lives been involved, he would have had to let Spock die, quoting instances where he had ordered his First Officer into danger, but the prosecution skilfully conveyed its scepticism. Kirk had an impressive record, and a long one, but perhaps he no longer was functioning at the peak efficiency required of a Starship Captain. His disregard for orders could become worse...

The day of the plea by the defence arrived and Vilay did his best, emphasising the value of the First Officer to Starfleet and pointing out that the Klingons might never discover Xalpa or even be interested in it if they did.

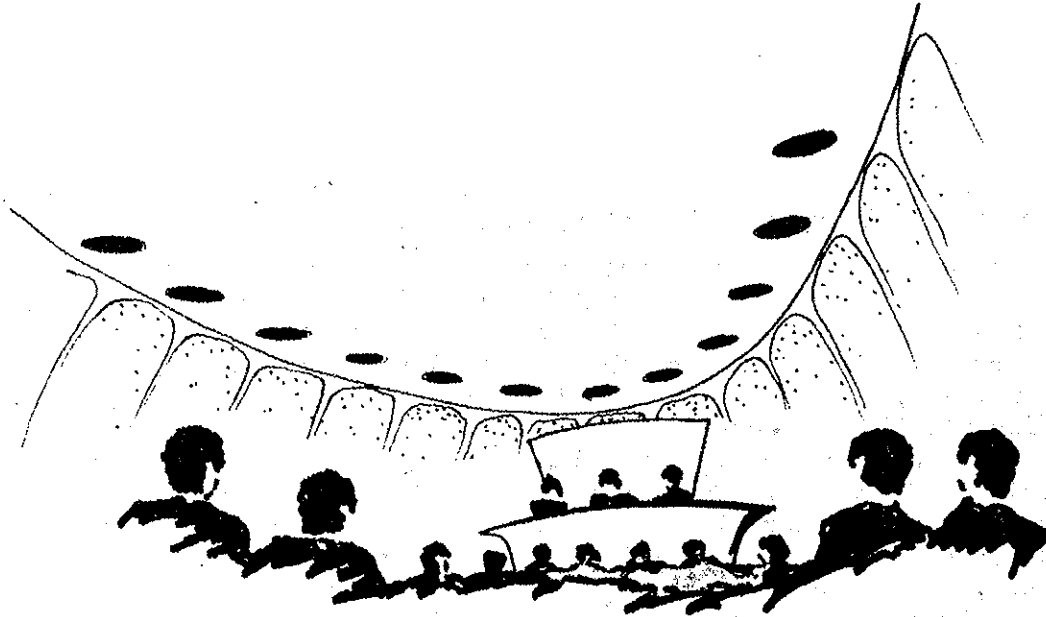
He stretched his defence out as long as possible, but try as he might to delay proceedings and make his speech as long as possible, Vilay finally had to stop and the court retired to consider its verdict.

Spock, who had left unobtrusively some time before, came swiftly back and caught Vilay's arm. "Call the court back quickly - Father is here."

"Excellent, Commander!" exclaimed Vilay. A note in the otherwise calm voice had given him hope, and he ran out to comply.

"Spock?" asked a bewildered Kirk. "What difference does it make if your Father...?"

"He has just returned from Xalpa, Jim. A communications malfunction made it impossible for him to send any messages... I was becoming concerned..."



"So that's why... Spock, why did you keep such a worry to yourself?"

"You had enough to contend with, Jim. However... The court is coming back. You'll hear what happened."

Admiral Vetnikov announced, "Captain Vilay has informed us that Ambassador Sarek is bringing new evidence - "

"Objection!" exclaimed Ferris. "He is an interested party - "

"High Commissioner," interrupted the Admiral coldly, "are you making insinuations against a Vulcan's integrity?"

"No, sir," replied Ferris hastily.

"Any unfounded attack on the integrity of any witness will result in an immediate dismissal of your case," the Admiral added. "Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes, sir," replied a subdued Ferris.

The Vulcan Ambassador came in and gave a couple of tapes to Spock, then addressed the court and explained how he had gone to Xalpa in an attempt to salvage the treaty, which provoked an angry reaction from Ferris. The court ruled him out of order; and Sarek went on to describe his arrival and talk with the natives and the tests he had been put through.

"I was placed in front of a screen which showed specific situations one after another, and I had to give my reaction to each, or a solution if they presented a problem. The natives were finding out what kind of a person I was."

"I was not put through that!" Ferris exclaimed. "They were too offended - "

"That is what they told you, High Commissioner. It was only an excuse. They were too polite to hurt your feelings and provoke a possible wild reaction on your part."

"I don't understand!" exclaimed Ferris, baffled.

"The day after the tests," said Sarek, "Klar, the natives' representative, apologised for having doubted my integrity, and explained how the High Commissioner had made excuses immediately on his arrival for his delay, and violently criticised Captain Kirk's actions, claiming that deliberate refusal on the Captain's part to obey his orders had caused the late arrival. Klar asked him for full details, and when they were given, the people of Xalpa were appalled by Ferris' callousness and lack of consideration for the saving of a life. They decided without hesitation that they wanted nothing to do with a Federation that included people like High Commissioner Ferris. They hold violence in horror, and feared that he might be upset enough to attack them had they told him the truth, so they simply



said they felt insulted by the delay. It was the easiest solution. I was able to show them that the Federation is made up of many races and individuals, some better, some worse, but generally peaceful; I was able to quote Captain Kirk's behaviour as an example - and they have now agreed to negotiate further."

Ferris, stunned by Sarek's words, now suddenly came to life, but his Counsel forced him to stay seated and silent, and asked, "I presume, Ambassador, that you have proof of this."

"I have tapes of the Xalpan discussions," replied Sarek. "In addition, Klar, the minister for external affairs from Xalpa, came back with me to conclude the treaty, and is ready to testify if necessary."

"That will not be necessary," stated Faridan, recognising defeat when he saw it.

"Does the prosecution concede that the loss of the treaty by High Commissioner Ferris cannot be blamed on Captain Kirk?" asked the Admiral.

"Yes, sir," answered Faridan.

"Do you also concede that he was justified in acting to save his First Officer's life?"

"Yes, sir."

"Case dismissed," said Admiral Vetnikov. "Ambassador Sarek, may I offer the thanks of this court for your intervention, and our congratulations on your success on Xalpa."

"Thank you, sir."

The court withdrew and Faridan led a dazed Ferris out, all the fight knocked out of him and probably worried about his future career in politics.

"Sir," said Kirk to Sarek, trying to control his feelings, "how can I thank you?"

"Captain," replied the Vulcan in his quiet voice, "my son is alive. Don't you think that is thanks enough for me?"

"Logical, I suppose," smiled Kirk, "but I won't forget. I would be honoured to receive you aboard my ship, with your wife, and you can give me more details about Xalpa; we are naturally interested."

The Enterprise crew was very pleased at the outcome of events, and Kirk tried to indicate that the men should show in their expression of gratitude to Sarek some reserve; but realising that it was wasted effort, he gave up advising restraint.

And so it was that a Starship with a Human crew - apart from Spock - gave an enthusiastic reception to a Vulcan Ambassador and his wife and the hangar deck resounded to the cry of "Three cheers for Sarek!" - a cry everyone responded to with the utmost enthusiasm.

Sarek never told anyone apart from his wife and son that the noise had been torture to his ear drums!

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FIRST MOUSE: Well, I finally got Dr. McCoy trained.

SECOND MOUSE: How so?

FIRST MOUSE: Every time I go through the maze and ring a bell, he gives me something to eat.

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TO A FRIEND by Rita Oliver

I am not a man of gracious words,  
 Of wit or repartee,  
 That is not the man I am.  
 I am Jim, and you know me.  
 But I thought that I would try  
 To express my thanks in rhyme,  
 For kind thoughts deserve kind words,  
 And they'll receive them this one time.  
 I am a man of action,  
 Force, strategy and mind,  
 Honest, I think. At least,  
 I hope that's what you find.  
 My tongue is still and silent,  
 It cannot find the words,  
 So I put an anxious pen to paper  
 So they may yet, some day, be heard.  
 So my pen is put to task  
 To speak it out this way.  
 Please, please don't doubt the truth  
 In all I write today.  
 So when I say 'Thank you!'  
 Believe me, it is meant,  
 For they mean much to this man,  
 Those moments heaven sent.  
 'Gratitude and thanks for what?'  
 I can hear you ask -  
 Or can you guess the thoughts that lurk  
 Behind this Captain's mask?  
 Thank you...for all the years  
 Is what I wish to say,  
 All the years I've suffered, learned,  
 Struggled through, until today.  
 Thanks must be said as well  
 For the moments very small,  
 Of grief or sadness, love or joy,  
 I thank you for them all.  
 Thank you, I repeat,  
 For just being there with me,  
 Lending an arm in strength,  
 Or shoulder, strong in pity.  
 The back to share the burden,  
 Heart, beating with my own.  
 I am a commander, I rule,  
 I decree, so I'm always alone.  
 There have been many times,  
 Times when I have hated this -  
 Hated playing God with lives,  
 And dealing death's immortal kiss.  
 There are times I often forget,  
 Hidden tension beneath our success,  
 The times that I have failed;  
 But they're important none-the-less.  
 Always. Constant, You were there,  
 Never once did you depart,  
 The arm, the shoulder, the back -  
 But most of all, the heart.  
 I've been known by many names  
 From 'Him' to 'The Thousandth Man',  
 But the title that you know me by  
 Is a title that warms this Captain.

You chose to call me friend, and I,  
 No poet or artist, can ever express  
 Just how much that knowledge  
 Can fill me with happiness.  
 So as simply as I can,  
 In bold words which are true,  
 I thank you for your friendship,  
 And give my thanks to you.  
 'But which friend?' do I hear you ask,  
 'Is it I, or him, or me?'  
 Questions, all deserving answers,  
 As to who my friend can be.  
 But this message is for two,  
 For my friend is not one man.  
 Both mean very much to me,  
 Please believe that if you can.  
 This is not between, but to each of you,  
 You know, each of you the other one,  
 But I don't think you'll ever know  
 How necessary your friendship has become.  
 This Captain, alone as he rules,  
 Steps down now from his chair,  
 To thank you for the friendship he grasps,  
 When command is too much to bear.

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DEAR DIARY... by Lorraine Goodison

Dear Diary.

It sounds stupid I know, but that's what I feel I need tonight, a substitute thing I can talk at. No discussions, no whys or wherefores... just talk. Besides, 'Dear Personal Log' sounds even more stupid, and I want to think this out while I can.

Now, where to start? Why did I start speaking anyway? Who started this?

Stupid question, Christine. Who else but Spock? God, I could do with a little of his control... I guess in a way though, I've followed his example a little. Cut off outside stimuli, avoid digging deep into personal feelings, keep it light and authoritative and end up lonely as hell.

Yesterday I saw him for the first time in almost three years. I know I gave him an idiotic girly grin, I know I did. That did nothing to help him either. Stupid. All those feelings, those dreams I once had - where did they all go?

You know, diary, I can practically pin-point exactly when my 'feelings' for Spock evaporated. I cannot believe I lived for years in the blithe assumption that I loved him - that I would give anything for a single response of some kind. Ka! I would have run a mile if he had...

Funny how realisation hits you like this. Leonard would say my 'love' for Spock was an emotional crutch. Safe. Secure in the knowledge that as long as I pursued him I would never get hurt. Little lovesick Christine... I wonder what they all thought of me while I ran around making a fool of myself?

It's getting late. I have reports to make up, my hair to wash. Another day in the life of Dr. Chapel... Ilia, I envy you.

Everything so simple, so right. A puzzle fitting together. That doesn't make sense. Scratch it, erase irrelevant data. Dr. Chapel never goes mushy on herself.

Goodnight diary. I won't put a date on this - I'll remember when I said it. Back to work now - be professional. Goodnight young lovers - wherever you are.

Goddam crap...

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THE PSYCHE by Rita Oliver

The subdued lighting of the Captain's quarters lent the room a warm and friendly atmosphere that seemed to capture the mood of the two men sharing an off-duty moment.

For several hours James Kirk, Captain of the Starship Enterprise, and his chief medical officer, Leonard McCoy, had been discussing plans for receiving delegates from Castellan II. The delegates were a cosmopolitan mixture hailing from all parts of the galaxy, but all had one thing in common: medicine.

McCoy explained with enthusiasm that the delegates were meeting together with an aim to share their medical knowledge and that whilst their stay upon the Enterprise lasted, their talks would continue.

The two men had talked earnestly of the plans for the following day, but now, aided by friendly and not ungenerous administrations of McCoy's favourite beverage, the conversation had turned to much more informal lines. They argued amiably on all sorts of trivial matters but realising that neither would concede any argument, the two men leaned back in their chairs silently declaring a truce.

"Do you know, Jim," said McCoy thoughtfully, "I am quite looking forward to tomorrow."

James Kirk looked up with a start. "What's this? I never thought I would hear those words from your lips, not when you had to entertain a party of delegates."

"Ah, but as I said before, this party is a bit different...and..." The doctor seemed to stall, then summon up the right words. "...Just a little bit special."

"Oh? Tell me," said Kirk, prompting, sensing the mood changing within McCoy.

"Well, this bunch of medical techs come from all over the place, but one of them, just one, is Human and rather special."

"I don't wish to seem inquisitive, but..." The Captain looked at the doctor, whose face said more than words ever could, 'Oh, no?' Kirk went on unabashed. "This Human, is he just special or special to you?"

"Since I'm...in a decidedly good mood I'll tell you. The delegate I speak of is a woman, Suw. A charming woman I've met before and one whom I like very much." He leaned forward impulsively, closing the gap between himself and the Captain considerably. "She's a lovely woman, Jim, kind and happy...and once she helped me through a bad stage in my life. But all that apart, she has the most wonderful gift. She is a Psyche..." He paused for an instant, then carried quickly on. "To look at her you wouldn't know it, she carries her gift with all modesty and does not readily reveal what she is. But she is what she is; a lovely woman."

He stopped and waited for Kirk to speak. It took some moments for Kirk to gather the words together. His friend had spoken with so much passion in his voice, so much... What could he call it? Love? What could he, James Kirk, say now that would not lessen his friend's enthusiasm? There seemed to be no words to express all he wanted to say, so trusting his luck to simplicity, he asked.

"You like her?" It was as much a statement as a question. His friend looked serious for a moment before he continued again to smile.

"Yes, I like her, Jim. When you meet her you'll see why...and that isn't a totally biased view, either." He stopped and smiled at Kirk, who looked at him quizzically. "Maybe you're right, Jim, maybe I am more involved than an old country doctor like myself ought to be, but I feel for her, Jim. I feel such an empathy with her that perhaps it's... Oh, I don't know, Jim, it's just when I think of her and the power in her..." The doctor's voice trailed and he slumped back into his chair, a look of confusion on his face. His thoughts were broken by the Captain's voice;

"Bones, before I go mad wondering, tell me what a Psyche is! You say she has great power - as what?"

"As a healer, Jim." The doctor went on eagerly. "She can cure any illness you care to mention, not injuries like fractures but real diseases. She is the only Human Psyche I've ever heard of, but all the same, she has only to lay her hands on a man - or woman - for him to be cured, whatever is wrong with him."

"How, Bones?" asked the Captain quickly. "I mean, if there are such miracle workers, why do we still need doctors? Why don't they heal everyone?"

"Because they are so few, Jim." McCoy's voice was suddenly filled with a passion that Jim Kirk did not think that he had ever heard before. "There are so few of them in the whole Universe that you could count them all on your fingers and toes! Get Spock to compute the ratio of patients to Psyches - he'd enjoy that, the great argumentative lump of organic circuitry!"

"But Bones, I mean, how do they do it?"

"I don't know, Jim, and truth to tell, neither do they! They just touch and cure." He paused. "But if you put one in front of a medical scanner, they'll register every disease known to man. They register as living dead."

"Fascinating!"

"Oh, don't you start!"

The Captain looked taken aback at his friend's outburst. "Start what?" he asked innocently.

"'Fascinating', 'logical', all that! You almost sounded like Spock."

James Kirk laughed outright at the insanity of the statement. "Oh, that'll never happen, Bones, at least I hope not. Now come on, we really ought to see about getting some rest, otherwise we'll be in no fit state to see your lady-love tomorrow."

The doctor had been crossing the room but at the Captain's words he stopped and turned, staring at Kirk's face. The Captain tried to apologise. "I'm sorry, Bones, I didn't mean to make light of... I didn't intend to say that..." Kirk was still stammering uncertainly as the doctor placed a hand on his shoulder, a strange look of realisation - or at least a kind of sudden understanding - on his face.

"That's all right, Jim, don't apologise. We almost came that close once, but her gift..." His voice trailed thoughtfully off, but then he brightened immediately. "Goodnight, Jim. Thanks for your company!"

With that the Doctor took leave of his friend to prepare for sleep and the following day.

The next day dawned as it always did, with nothing obvious to make it special, nothing to make it worthy of Leonard McCoy taking more than normal care over his toilet, other than the fact that they were in orbit over Castellan II.

Soon the delegates were welcomed aboard by the Captain, who was immediately almost brushed aside by the doctor. Kirk and Spock stood back and could only watch with some amusement as the amiable McCoy hustled the group of delegates away to 'his' conference.

The welcome had been a formal affair, carried out following rules of protocol, the origins of which had been lost in history. But there had been one touch of sheer informality that made the Captain smile and caused his Vulcan first officer to quirk an eyebrow in surprise.

When the forms of the visitors had at last materialised on board, a warm and touching smile crossed the face of the only woman there. The smile, open as it was, was meant for only one person, and Dr. McCoy returned it readily. The occasion proceeded along customary lines thereafter while the doctor greeted each

delegate in turn, shaking each hand or limb in turn; however, when he greeted the woman they just stood facing one another for several moments until he took her hand with the gentleness of a very old, very good friend.

"Welcome aboard, Suw." He fell silent for a moment, then carried on. "It's so good to see you again." It was not his words but the tone in his voice that seemed to melt the features of the delegate. A radiant smile crossed her face and a light of gladness shone in her eyes as she looked up at him from her short height.

The doctor further destroyed convention when he placed the woman's arm within his own and requested the delegates to follow him.

The visiting party and McCoy left, leaving Kirk and Spock alone. The Vulcan raised a quizzical brow. "They seem to know one another, Captain."

"An understatement, Mr. Spock. They seem to know one another quite well. McCoy told me last night that he and she are old friends - apparently it goes back some years into Bones' past."

"Most fortuitous, I am sure, Captain."

"Yes. Bones seemed...well, involved."

"Yes, Captain."

"I think our good friend Dr. McCoy is on the edge of something very deep."

"We can only hope it is as lasting as it is deep, Captain."

This time it was the Captain's turn to raise an eyebrow at his friend's unexpected understanding and small trace of concern.

"He desires her a great deal; she is bound to him in a way, through his love of medicine." The Vulcan looked questioningly; Kirk explained. "She is a 'Psyche', apparently, though what that is, I'm still not sure."

"Fascinating," said the Vulcan, as Kirk half knew he would. "I had not known that there were Human Psyches."

"There aren't - at least, there's only one, and Suw's it."

"Logical. This really is most fascinating."

The Captain and the First Officer left the transporter room and made their way to the bridge to return to duty. They walked slowly, deep in conversation.

"Can these Psyches cure anything, Spock?"

"Apparently, Captain. No limit has yet been found for them."

The Captain shook his head in wonder. "No limit! They just go on healing? For ever?"

"No, Captain, like all of us they eventually die. They can perform many thousands of cures during their time alive, though. No record has ever been kept so it could be one or ten thousand cures. I would imagine, though, that what and how often they are called on to heal would affect their lifespans."

"How, Spock?"

"One would expect that if they treated only minor ailments, that they would have the capacity for many cures, but if they are called upon to cure more dangerous, or more advanced diseases, their capacity would be diminished."

As they stepped into the lift the Captain paused to request their destination, but then continued thoughtfully, "I see, so they do have a limited power. What do they do when their power is finished?"

"They die, Captain."

They emerged onto the bridge. Kirk paused before going to the command chair to finish the conversation. "They die?"

"At the precise moment of the cure, Captain, as if they forfeit the last ounce of their life for that of their patient. I only speculate, Captain, but I imagine that their power may be of this mould: they give life force and withdraw the disease. Most fascinating."

"Most; horrific, I would have said. To cure someone of some dreadful disease only to drop down dead!"

"It is not so dramatic as that, Captain. Psyches know when they have only enough power left to effect one cure; it is a universally recognised law that the Psyche has the right to choose when and to whom they shall give their final cure, even if it means that people die through their refusal to cure."

The Captain moved to seat himself in the command chair; Spock stood beside him. Kirk looked thoughtfully at his First Officer. "I suppose that is only fair. After all, if you hold the key to the end of your life you should be able to say where and when you are to die."

Spock said nothing. A very slight nod of his head was Kirk's only reply before he leaned back to give his orders.

"Take us out of orbit, Mr. Sulu."

As the planet slid from the edge of the screen the doctor was busy in the conference suite. There he talked and introduced others who did the same, until much had been said, learned and understood.

The delegates fell in easily together, bound together by their common knowledge and love of medicine. But as much as each of them realised that the most desirable path for them to take was to share multi-fold knowledge, they each knew that they had to bear in mind the politics of others. No matter how much they wished to share, they all knew it was unobtainable, a fool's notion, for although all were from member races of the Federation, their political superiors in many cases wished to retain some knowledge for the sake of their own planets' importance. But what they had started, there would be more; thus the union of medical minds would grow and would perhaps lead them to the day when the power of medicine was greater than the power of politics.

Later, when each delegate was housed in his respective quarters, the doctor gave his hopeful report to the Captain.

"It's going well, Jim. So much is being shared, so many views being understood. I'm so glad I'm part of it. I mean, I theoretically have no right to be part of their discussions, after all, Earth is well represented without me."

"Just - 'interested onlooker', right?"

"Right; I'm lucky, Jim, there's a million ship's doctors who'd give their right arms to have protocol's right to listen in. Think of the knowledge we gain, as much as we can teach the smaller races, we can learn in triplicate from others." The doctor turned his eager eyes on Spock who listened with interest. "Today, Spock, I heard some things that could be revolutionary. Of course, they were only hinted at, but what I heard taught me that we are but children playing with medicine when we compare ourselves with others..." McCoy's speech was broken off as a fourth person entered the room. Standing unsure and a little embarrassed was the woman delegate; dressed in a gown of fine blue, she seemed, to the men, as a decoration to the room.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Leonard. I was told you were in here, I didn't realise you were working. I'm sorry. I'll go."

The Captain, who had risen to his feet on her entry, spoke up for the others. "You'll do no such thing. Come and cheer us up. It is well past time for us to stop talking of duty and work. Perhaps you will join us in a little refreshment?"

The woman crossed the room and seated herself in the chair that Spock held

ready for her. She accepted warmly the beverage offered her and commented on the fact that the Vulcan did not join them.

"Our friend here is almost teetotal, he doesn't drink, he doesn't swear - I'm at a loss to know what his vices are." McCoy raised his glass to Spock and beamed at him across the amber liquid.

"I'm sure, Leonard, that Mr. Spock has no vices - at least, none that we would wish to reproach him for."

In the short moments that the woman had been in the room, the Captain decided he liked her and also that the Vulcan was not impervious to her charm. You could not help but warm to her grace, her so feminine of manners and her disarming smile could only lead to friendship. He could well understand why McCoy was so enamoured by her; however old the acquaintance was she could not be easy to forget. The conversation drifted along pleasant and informal lines for a time, with both Kirk and Spock noting how easy McCoy and Suw were in each other's company, how easily they spoke together and understood without having to speak. They noticed, perhaps Spock more than Kirk, how often their hands touched, how often they laughed together and how they accepted it as natural. The couple were well matched, well humoured, caring, happy, bound inseparably by medicine and perhaps by an unrecognised love.

The evening grew late and McCoy offered to escort Suw to her quarters, leaving Kirk and Spock alone. The two men sat silent for some while, trying and rejecting the words they each wished to say of their friend. It was Kirk who spoke first.

"I'm happy for him - he has found something fine."

"Indeed, Captain. It will be good for him."

The Captain leaned lazily back in his chair and gazed across at his friend. "I can understand how he is enamoured by her. He said how lovely I would find her, and he was right. A charming lady." The Captain raised his glass to the door. "Do you find it strange, Spock, that our friend should find himself some happiness...perhaps love, even?"

"Not 'strange', Captain. Just...rather disconcerting."

With no words, the Captain questioned his First Officer. Spock went on. "I find it off-putting to know a totally amiable Dr. McCoy. It is so unusual that I am tempted to call it unnatural."

The Captain laughed and motioned Spock to join him as he stood to leave the room. "Don't worry, Spock. I'm sure Bones will return to his normal argumentative self. Not even love could change him that much."

"Indeed, Captain," replied Spock.

The Captain smiled to himself at how his two friends both regarded the other as argumentative, but never themselves.

"Captain?" Spock asked as he caught the smile that lingered on Kirk's face. But Jim Kirk assured him it was nothing, and the two parted, one to his quarters and one to return to duty, but both sharing thoughts of their mutual friend, both pleased and both a little concerned.

The lights on the bridge were dimmed for evening, the room was quiet. Night reliefs for Uhura, Sulu and Chekov silently and conscientiously went about their duties, leaving Spock free with his own thoughts. For all their feuds and sallies, which everyone saw through, Spock hoped for happiness for his friend. But something in his Vulcan self would not let him believe that love would come easily. Somehow the Vulcan understood the difficulties that would arise when so-mortal man would combine with such a gifted god-like woman. His logical mind computed the pros and cons and could come to no satisfactory conclusion.

There was a stage somewhere between joining and parting that seemed to fit



McCoy and Suw, but it would fraught with unhappiness. The Vulcan felt that his friend deserved and needed more than that.

However, his thought were stilled by a report from one of the duty crewmen.

"A strange form upon the screen, Mr. Spock."

"Sensors say it is a large energy mass... Sir! It is accelerating!"

Spock's body shifted into tenseness as he gave his orders, still the crewman's voice recorded the force's approach. Even as Spock ordered evasive action he knew that they could not outrun it. There was to be no evasion - they must encounter it. Hope that the deflector shields could combat the energy field filled three other minds as well as Spock's.

Nearer and nearer the field approached, filling the viewscreen with a pink opalescent haze that danced alive with bursts of light and energy. The crew members on the bridge could only sit and watch whilst waiting expectantly for the impact that was to come as they rode out the field. Nearer and brighter it reached until it seemed to enter the ship through the viewscreen. The ship began to shudder roughly and uncontrollably until with one final climactic shake the field passed. Crewmen all over the ship, unaware of the approaching force field, hardly had time to respond to the yellow alert before they were thrown to the floor. People were hurled from their beds, others tumbled down ladders, others grasped railings, anything that would support them, until the ship grew calm and the disruption ceased.

Spock was inspecting damage reports and listening to the report from the sensor station when his Captain's voice reached him. "Spock, what on earth was that?"

"That, Captain, was the result of our passing through an extremely powerful energy field caused, I believe, by the combined forces of..."

"I don't care how it was caused, I want to know what it has done to us!"

The Vulcan looked at the communications officer, still receiving damage reports. She shook her head in a relieved negative. Spock went on, "As yet we have no reports of damage to the ship, though I imagine Dr. McCoy will be busy for an hour or two whilst he tends breaks and bruises."

When the Captain spoke again there was reproof in his voice. "I'm coming to the bridge."

Spock waited and vacated the command chair as soon as his Captain stepped onto the bridge.

"Why was no sufficient warning given?"

"I gave the yellow alert as soon as I recognised that the force might be hazardous, but there was no time for a further alert before it engaged us."

The Captain's face was hard and stony. "What were you doing, Spock - were you asleep?" Kirk's voice was low and strained.

"No, Captain, I can assure you I was fully alert." Spock's voice held no feeling or intonation, but Kirk wondered if he only imagined the reproach it seemed to contain. Suddenly feeling guilty, he wanted to erase his angry remarks.

"I'm sure of that, Spock. But how did you not see it coming?"

"As soon as our sensors touched it, it began to accelerate towards us."

"Report from sickbay, Captain." In response to the statement from the communications officer, Kirk flicked a switch on the arm of his chair to hear the anxious voice of McCoy.

"Mr. Spock, can you come to sickbay immediately?"

"Kirk here. He's on his way." Kirk motioned Spock to go. "What's the matter, Bones?"

The man at the other end of the speaker sounded tired and worried when he replied. "It's Christine, Nurse Chapel. She's trapped in the lab. We need someone to free her. Isn't it typical that when we have a crisis, it's the nurse that gets hurt."

"I'll clear up here, Bones, and then I'll come along. Perhaps I can help."

"Thanks, Jim," replied the harassed doctor before signing off.

Spock entered sickbay and was a little surprised at the number of people filling the small entrance. Several were clutching arms or hands and some had small trails of blood seeping from their bodies.

"IS SPOCK HERE YET?" bellowed a voice, which received a quiet and calm reply.

"Yes, I am here, Doctor. How may I be of assistance?"

"Thank goodness. It's Christine, Spock, she's in there. She's trapped by one of the delegates' cases of equipment. It must have broken from its restrainers during that storm or whatever." Spock stood in the doorway of a small supply room beside McCoy. "As you can see, there's only room for one man, but it will take the strength of two Humans to shift that thing."

Nodding his understanding, Spock eased himself into the cluttered room and placed his hands on the heavy equipment-filled case. Slowly the crate began to move, very slowly. The Vulcan's great strength moved it with apparent ease, but the doctor could see slight tell-tale signs of the great effort it cost even the Vulcan. The knuckles of his large hands were whitening and the tendons in his neck stood out like iron cords. The doctor revised his first estimation; it would probably have taken the strength of three or even four Humans. Eventually the case was returned to its original position and the immediate danger to the nurse was averted.

Spock bent and lifted the form of the nurse into his arms. McCoy hovered nervously in the doorway, wanting to enter and check her, afraid of getting in Spock's way.

"Is she all right, Spock?"

"I shall leave that to you to decide, Doctor. I hesitate to pass a medical judgement in your presence, but it is apparent that Miss Cahpel has cut her hand."

As he carried the limp form to one of the nearby beds, the doctor was already examining the cut hand.

"It's a nasty cut, Spock, but nothing too serious. Put her down here, I'll see to it."

"How's it going, Bones?" asked the Captain who had just entered. But the commanding officer remained unanswered. The doctor was bent over the form of his nurse, his eyes taking in the readings that his instruments gave him. When he finally spoke it was not to the Captain but to Spock, and his voice was strained and guarded.

"Spock get those people out of here. Only the badly hurt may stay. I don't care what you tell them, just get them out."

Without question, the Vulcan went to carry out his orders.

"What is it, Bones?" came the Captain's anxious voice. The doctor turned and looked earnestly at this friend.

"I don't know, Jim, but according to my readings, she is to all intents and purposes dying."

"Dying?"

"Yes. I don't understand it either. The readings give every cause to suggest..." A light seemed to dawn in McCoy's eyes and he rushed into the supply

room. On the floor amidst the nurse's blood were the crystal remains of a broken medicine phial. He looked at it, then all but staggered from the room, to stand by his nurse's bed, his face a mask of helplessness. "Damn!" He beat his fist onto the bed. The still figure did not move.

"Bones, what is it?" demanded the Captain, swinging the doctor round to face him.

McCoy's answer was a statement of the bare facts. "Christine was labelling a flask for one of the delegates. Just one of the standard medicines of an alien race prescribed about as often as I'd prescribe aspirin. Nothing dramatic about that except that it happens to be deadly to Humans. I assume that when the ship lurched, she was knocked down, the bottle broke and she cut herself. End of story. End of nurse." He slammed his fist again down onto the bed. "There's nothing I can do, Jim, except stand here and watch her die." The doctor's voice rose until the Captain thought him about to panic, but the rage passed and the doctor relaxed to stand over Christine's bed.

"Bones?" The doctor gave no reply. "Bones, what of Suw? Can't she help?" Kirk saw the doctor's back stiffen as he realised the possibility of help.

"Yes, Suw!" The doctor swept across the room, almost knocking Spock down in his haste. Moments later he re-entered with the Psyche.

"So you see, Suw, I need your help. There's nothing I can do, otherwise I wouldn't ask you." The doctor's voice was urgent, almost pleading for the help of the so familiar yet so strange healer. "You can help, can't you? Your power does extend to things such as this, doesn't it?"

Suddenly the woman looked very unhappy and afraid. She seemed to shrink back from the doctor's hand that beggingly held her own. The doctor looked directly into her eyes. "You'll cure her, won't you, Suw?"

"No." The voice was breathless and timid.

"What do you mean?" The disbelief grew in his voice and his friends watched as they saw through familiar eyes the way in which his anger grew. "What do you mean - 'No', Suw?"

The woman pulled away, afraid. "No. No, not yet."

"Not yet?" The doctor almost yelled the words. "Not yet? Later may be too late! What's got into you, Suw? She's dying, Suw, she needs your help."

"Leonard!" The woman's fear was replaced with no small amount of anger. "I am not ready. I cannot just cure, I have to get myself ready, prepare. Now please let me go; I must prepare." The woman rushed from the room, hardly heeding McCoy's apology.

It was a short while later that the woman sought and entered Spock's quarters. As the door swished shut behind her she sighed as she found the Vulcan sitting quietly at his desk. She stood silent for a few moments, pale and drawn, and Spock noticed how unwell she seemed.

"Mr. Spock, I have come to request your help."

The Vulcan merely raised an eyebrow and drew a chair out for her. The Psyche sank gratefully into the offered seat.

"You may find it strange that I should come to you, Spock, for help, but of all the people on this ship you are perhaps the best qualified to understand." She paused. "Although your face is a mask of non-emotion, Spock, several times I have seen expressions on your face that I can only describe as...well...feelings." The Vulcan's face remained expressionless as the woman went on. "Compassion, Spock, as though you realise how fated my love is."

The lovely face showed nothing of its charming smile, gone was the gaiety; instead there was grief and emotional pain. Spock, unused to feelings as he was,

could still understand and sympathise with her pain. He recognised it and was thus half way to feeling for her.

"You, Spock, understand because you too have felt the forbidden taste of love." The First Officer made to speak but was given no opportunity. "I mean no disrespect to you, Spock, but you have known love, have you not? We are alike, you and I, able to feel but forbidden to show it; you because of the path of your birthright, and I, allowed no right to love because of an accident of birth. We have both tasted love when we have no business knowing the slightest emotion."

The Vulcan listened quietly then spoke. "But you are a Human woman."

A very faint smile crossed the woman's face. "Yes, I am a woman, a Human woman. But first of all, I am a Psyche. After that, nothing counts. Imagine, of what use is a Psyche with a husband? She would waste cure after cure on him just to keep him at her side! It is naive, Spock, to think that I am a normal Human woman. By some quirk of fate I belong to the whole Universe. Everyone has a claim on me, yet no-one can dictate to me, least of all myself." The woman paused, her eyes shining with unwept tears. "You can understand, Spock, how my love for Leonard is futile, and will come to nothing. For all that, I want you to help him, to ease the pain that I will cause him."

The Vulcan raised an eyebrow in question, and steepled his hands before him in thought. "You wish me to tell him this, that your love is fated, that you no longer wish to pursue it? Would it not come better from your own lips?"

She sat still, her eyes downcast. "No, Spock. I want you to help him, to help him to cope. To explain to him that my last cure...was my penultimate."

Her words dropped stonily into the air between them. Spock did not move.

"This time you will die." It was not a question but a statement of fact.

"Yes, Spock. I shall die."

"You are very young."

"Perhaps. That will make it all the harder for Leonard to understand. I suppose I gave my help too readily, perhaps I am not as strong as other Psyches, I don't know. I only know that this will be my last cure, my last act of life." She grasped the Vulcan's hands between her own. "You understand, don't you, how only you can help? How only you have the strength to help him recover himself. Please don't fail him, Spock - when I make this cure, he will need you."

"You must remember, Suw, you have the right to refuse."

"Do I? Do I really? I can't ignore Christine lying there. I must help. But if I did refuse, what would I have then?" Slow tears traced glittering paths down her cheeks as she continued. "If I refuse, I shall lose Christine and Leonard because he will hate me. You saw his anger; how quickly that could turn to hate. Oh, I would have the rest of my life before me, but nothing to live for. But if I do cure, I shall save Christine. I shall still lose Leonard because I shall die, but at least I shall still have his love. So you see, Spock, I really have no choice. The decision is almost non-existent. How can I refuse?"

"It is your right."

"It is all very well being 'my right', but who will understand?" Suw sank back into her chair, exhaustion on her face. Spock looked unguardedly at her for a moment, a feeling just short of pity filling him, a sadness for her and for his friend. Much sadness.

"Do you not think you would make it easier for the doctor if you told him?"

Suw leaned forward in her chair, something very much like fear in her face. "No. Never. That would put most of the decision onto him. Although the decision to cure is almost negligible, I might as well make it on my own." She calmed a little and carried on, much softer. "It would be unfair to place such a thing on Leonard - Christine's life, or mine. How could he cope? It is not right."

Spock stood, looking down on the tawny head of the woman. "I am...grateful... that you came to me for help. I give you my word that I shall help McCoy in every way that I can or that he will let me. I hope your trust in my ability is justified."

Very subtly his voice changed as he looked at the woman's bowed shoulders. It became yet softer, yet more gentle, mellow. "You said that you had to prepare yourself. Should you perhaps try to continue that?"

The woman never moved except to lift her head to look at him, tears flowing freely from her eyes. She choked out the words. "How do I do that, Spock? How do I prepare to die?"

Spock stood silent, watching her head shake with sobbing as she cradled it in her hands, carefully unsure, even to himself, of what he was about to do as he placed a hand upon her shoulder and then knelt beside her. He eased her hands from her face.

"How can I, a living man, tell you that? It does not somehow seem fitting. But perhaps one prepares for death by facing the reasons for it. You are to die because it is the ultimate design of your life; also you chose to die because in this way you will retain Leonard McCoy's love. Think of that. Think of your love for him..."

It was a very different Suw and Spock that entered sickbay to stand by Christine Chapel's bed. Spock stood silently by, motionless, but anyone who knew him that cared to notice might have seen the small flicker of concern in his eyes.

Suw stood radiant, almost elated. Love unrivalled emanated from her. She had accepted what was to come and could look lovingly at Dr. McCoy, who stood at the other side of the bed, anxiety clearly showing on his face. Every few moments he stole a glance at Suw and smiled reassuringly, apologetically.

Christine's face was peaceful. Suw looked at the pretty face and smiled. "I hope I can help you, Christine. I do so hope."

And she did. The gentle heart of the woman went out to the still form on the bed. Her whole being was filled with the desire to help the other woman. Perhaps this was the secret of her power - wanting so much to cure and believing it was possible.

Tenderly she laid her right hand upon Christine's forehead. She smoothed the nurse's hair away from her eyes and took Christine's left hand in hers. For some moments she stood thus, then as Christine's life readings surged, she closed her eyes, a mask of concentration on her face, her hand gripping Christine's harder. Steadily the faint life readings grew until the beat of Christine's heart seemed to fill the room. The Psyche trembled, breathing both fast and shallow. Then calm seemed to descend on the two women. The nurse opened her eyes, recognition on her face whilst Suw removed her hands from her body, a look of tiredness and relief on her pleasant features.

The Captain and the doctor both moved to the nurse's bed, occupied with greetings and questions they did not notice the Psyche fall softly into the arms of the Vulcan.

Carefully, Spock lifted the woman into his arms and laid her onto the adjacent bed. The moment he had been waiting for had come and passed. It only remained for him to fulfil his promise of helping McCoy. Softly the Vulcan spoke, his back to the three rejoicing figures.

"Doctor."

There was no reply until he repeated his word with a rarely heard tone of urgency. "Doctor!"

McCoy turned and saw only the form of his beloved Suw lying upon the bed.



Anxiety washed all other thoughts from his mind.

"Suu!" He moved quickly to the bed. "What happened, Spock? What is the matter?"

With no expression in his voice, the Vulcan replied, "She is dead, Doctor."

Horror crossed the doctor's face as he realized the potential truth of the words, words that echoed his own thoughts as his expert eyes glanced at the panel above the bed.

"She can't be dead! What do you know? I'm the doctor here!" Panic seemed to fill his voice. "She can't be dead."

The Vulcan placed his hand upon his friend's arm. His voice was commanding. "She is dead, Bones. There is nothing you can do."

The unfamiliar contact and the use of his Captain's affectionate name seemed to bring the doctor round. Disbelief now filled his face as he questioned Spock with his eyes. "How can she be dead? Why?"

The Vulcan had to answer. He looked deep into his friend's eyes. Suddenly he was consumed with pity for this man before him. Humans were so frail; why were they cursed with the added torture of emotions? He had chosen, earlier in his life, to follow the harder Vulcan way, thus contact and expressed emotions were abhorrent to him. Yet as he looked at his friend he saw only the bewilderment and pain behind the grief that filled McCoy's eyes. Why should his friend suffer? He supplied his own answer. Because he loved. It seemed it would always be thus.

The doctor leaned against the bed, clasping her hand in his. He hardly heard the Vulcan as he spoke.

"Doctor, Suu came to me for help. She asked me to explain to you. I said I would. When you feel you are ready, I will be here and I will try."

James Kirk and Christine Chapel waited silently as they watched the tall Vulcan speak so softly and caringly. Never before had the Vulcan extended such tenderness, such closeness, to the doctor alone. They had shared grief and concern before over others, Kirk more often than most, but this was between them alone. It was rare, it was touching.

The Vulcan moved away with no further gesture or words. As he reached the door the doctor's voice reached his ears.

"Spock..." The doctor's voice cracked, too full of pain to remain strong.

"Why?" He cast his eyes on the form of the lovely Suw. The Vulcan stood a moment, remembering all the woman had said. Finally, he spoke, barely a whisper.

"Because she loved you." He paused slightly. "She wanted your love..." His gaze locked with that of the doctor. "...More than she wanted life."

He turned slowly with the weight of his sympathy bowing his head, leaving the doctor alone with his grief.

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QUESTIONS by Lorraine Goodison

Why did you do it?

I had my reasons.

You had your reasons. That is not a logical answer.

No.

Why did you put your life on the line, risk your future, for one man from your past?

I do not feel I did so.

Why didn't you tell me? I would have understood.

Would you?

I'm sorry.

There is no reason for sorrow.

I did not trust you. You asked me for help, and I condemned you to death.

You were doing your duty as my Captain and Judge.

Duty.  
Sometimes I hate it.

There is no need.

But what if things had gone differently?  
What if...

We both know what transpired.  
That is enough.

What you did...it was very Human. It was illogical to risk your life for another's happiness.

It was...necessary.

Would you do it again?  
For another?

Yes.

It was a Human, emotional thing to do.

I concur.

You're learning.

I have a good teacher.

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KIRK: Harry, you've been convicted ten times for offences against Federation law. Aren't you ashamed of yourself?

HARRY MUDD: No, Captain. I don't believe a man should be ashamed of his convictions.

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CLOUDLESS CLIMES AND STARRY SKIES by Therese Holmes

Lieutenant Junior Grade Sinead Durrell came slowly to wakefulness. A noise she could not immediately place pattered insistently in her head. The noise was familiar and incongruous - and it had wakened her up. Suddenly she sat up in bed, fully alert with the shock of recognition. Someone was taking a shower in her bathroom.

For fully ten seconds she sat listening. Then she climbed out of bed and crept silently from the sleeping quarters determined to catch the intruder even if it was the Captain himself. She was all for practical jokes, but there was a limit!

The door to the bathroom was closed and clearly framed by a thin shaft of light. As she approached, the noise of the shower diminished rapidly and ceased, and a second later the light winked out. She stood triumphantly in the darkness, waiting for the misguided washer to walk out into her arms. She waited...and no one appeared. No sound came from behind the door. Puzzled now, she groped for the light control and illuminated the main room where she was standing. There was, she knew, no other way out of the bathroom other than the door in front of her. She felt her heartbeat gather speed as she opened it.

The shower partition was closed and she could hear the slow drip, drip of water that always accompanied the end of a hydro. But she had taken a sonic shower that evening. Quickly she turned on the light; the floor where she stood was dry. Drawing aside the semi-transparent partition, she looked into the shower unit. The floor and walls were wet, and the atmosphere was unmistakably steamy. The selector was set to 'hydro'.

Sinead backed away, reminding herself that she was a lieutenant in Starfleet, a qualified navigator, and such persons had better not hallucinate. She would go back to bed now, and in the morning she would go to the bathroom, and the shower selector would be at 'sonic' as she had left it earlier. And she would tell Dr. McCoy if such a thing happened again.

Sleep did not easily return to Sinead that night.

Lieutenant-Commander Sulu had translated Kirk's vague indication of 'that-away' into a more accurate form for the benefit of the helm computer, and the newly-refitted Enterprise was cruising proudly along towards the Klingon neutral zone. After the Vejur incident, Kirk should have returned to Earth to receive his orders; but he had not done so, and the orders had to be sent after the errant Starship. They had arrived as the Enterprise sailed slowly past the orbit of Pluto, and at the end was appended a personal message from Admiral Nogura to the effect that while Kirk may have made history again by being the first Captain to be promoted straight to Admiral, and then take a voluntary downgrading back to Captain, incidentally bypassing the rank of Commodore in both directions, and while he had no doubt earned the gratitude of all Earth for his actions in the recent crisis, he would kindly remember that he was still subject to Starfleet rules and Starfleet discipline, and as such was not empowered to take a Federation Starship whatever and whenever his whim dictated. Such a breach would not be overlooked again.

Kirk smiled and considered himself duly reprimanded as he listened to the message in his quarters. Their first task was to investigate and discover as much as possible, without violating the Organian Peace Treaty, about the new K't'inga class cruisers which the Klingons had developed, three of which had been destroyed by Vejur during its eventful journey home. The recording from the fated outpost Epsilon 9 had shown little obvious difference in design from the old familiar Klingon ships, and Starfleet was anxious to discover just what was new before finding out the hard way.

The new navigator, Lt. Durrell, came on board at Starbase 3. The duties of



Exec (or First Officer, as Kirk still preferred to call it) had once more been assumed by Mr. Spock, also newly reinstated as Science Officer. Everything was ticking over smoothly; the Enterprise had her family back where they belonged, and once more she reigned supreme among the stars. Then the happenings began.

Sinead had decided not to tell anyone that her shower selector had still pointed to 'hydro' in the morning. But the same thing had happened the following night, and again the night after that. On the fourth night she sat up and waited, with the bathroom door open and the light on. Hours went by and nothing happened; she began to feel slightly foolish. There were four hours to go before the next watch when she dragged herself yawning to bed.

Next morning she awoke with a start before the alarm sounded. Despite her lack of sleep, she was fully alert and acutely aware of a presence in her quarters. She could even see an indistinct figure through the grilled partition by the bed, moving slowly towards the door. Without thinking, she was out of bed and into her living quarters, just in time to see the doors swish shut behind an elegant female leg. Something lingered in the air, a strange heady perfume that she could not quite sense. Sinead was angry now, and heedless of her skimpy nightdress she rushed out into the corridor; empty, as she had expected. She stood fuming helplessly as the nearby turbolift doors opened and Mr. Spock stepped out. He halted momentarily at the sight of her, then passed wordlessly by. The eyebrow climbing into his hair was sufficiently eloquent. Feeling thoroughly chagrined, she returned to her quarters.

Dr. McCoy listened patiently to the young yeoman sitting opposite him. This was her first deep space voyage, and it seemed that the strain of the recent encounter with Vejur was beginning to tell.

"I was in the rec room, Doctor," she said, striving to keep her voice calm. "There was no-one else there - I know there wasn't. I was looking at the pictures; you know, the Enterprise through history?"

McCoy nodded.

"Well," she paused and took a grip on herself. "All of a sudden I heard a - a sigh, Doctor, from right next to me."

She stole a glance at him, afraid that he might laugh. Reassured, however, she went on.

"I nearly jumped through the bulkhead, I can tell you. It was so near, but there was no-one there. And then something brushed past me, and I heard footsteps walking away."

She laughed nervously as she relived the experience.

"I didn't imagine it, Dr. McCoy, I know I didn't. Something was there."

The doctor nodded kindly, resisting the temptation to pat her hand.

"Now, Miss Withers, is there anything else you want to tell me?"

She frowned, thinking, and then her face cleared. "Yes, there was something. As it walked away, whatever it was, I smelt a sort of...I don't know. Not a perfume exactly. There was something in the air. Just for a second I could sense it, and then it was gone."

McCoy nodded again, and tried a more direct tack. "Have you been sleeping well, Yeoman?"

This struck home, and she sat up sharply. "I'm perfectly well, if that's what you mean. I'm not given to hallucinations. I didn't imagine what happened, I know I didn't. You've got to believe me."

"I believe that you believe what you saw, Yeoman," he said, "or rather, what you didn't see. We've all been under a certain amount of strain recently, and this sort of thing is only to be expected, even from the most seasoned space

travellers. You may consider yourself relieved of duties for the rest of the day, and my advice is to take it easy. Relax."

She smiled. "In the rec room?"

"If you like. It isn't haunted, you know."

She rose to leave. "I wonder," she said.

"Next!" called Dr. McCoy. "Ah, good morning, Lt. Durrell; what can I do for you?"

The huddled group dissolved into guilty silence as Kirk entered the rec room, but not before he caught the tail-end of a hastily squashed sentence. "...and opened and shut by itself..."

Kirk wondered idly what they could be discussing that was not for the ears of the Captain, and made a mental note to order some battle drills over the next few days. It wouldn't do to let the crew take it easy for too long; they became restless and inefficient. He punched himself a cup of coffee from the wall dispenser, and sat down in an empty corner to wait for Spock. He passed the time in setting up the chess board in preparation for the game, the first they'd had time for since the start of this new mission. Kirk smiled, remembering their games of old, and how he had missed them during his years as Admiral.

He looked up and his smile broadened as Spock arrived and sat down. Since his mind meld with Vejur, the Vulcan had been looking happier than Kirk ever remembered. He was relaxed and apparently at peace at last. He knew who he was and where he was going, and Kirk was glad.

As the match progressed, Kirk noticed that the conspiratorial group had reformed and were speaking together in low voices. With a frown he noticed that it was not just a gathering of junior crew members as he had at first supposed. His chief navigator, Lt. Durrell, was at the centre of them, and indeed seemed to be holding the stage. A general air of dissatisfaction was emanating from the group. Kirk decided he would speak to Lt. Durrell later. This sort of thing could lead to trouble.

"Your move, Captain."

Spock's quiet voice broke in on his thoughts, and he turned back to the game. But his concentration had gone, and he looked up to find Spock regarding him thoughtfully.

"Sorry, Spock. Guess it's going to take me a while to get back into the habit."

They both turned as Dr. McCoy entered the room. He approached them, passing the whispering group on the way. His psychologist's instinct immediately sensed something was wrong; as he passed, his eye met Sinead's, and she subsided into silence under it. Kirk saw her watch the doctor's retreating back, and then lean forward, whispering with increased intensity.

"Evening, Jim, Spock," greeted McCoy.

"Bones, what's going on?" asked Kirk.

McCoy understood immediately. "You've sensed it too? I don't know, Jim. But if I wasn't essentially a cynic, I'd say this ship was haunted."

Spock's eyebrows leaped at that, but he made no comment.

Kirk started to laugh. "Haunted? Bones, you can't - " He saw the look on McCoy's face, and quickly sobered. "Explain," he demanded.

"That's just it, Jim. I can't. All I know is that three separate people have come to me today complaining of strange happenings. One heard and felt something right here in the rec room; another said he saw - someone - entering a turbolift which was empty when he went to investigate."

"And the third?"

"This one is the strangest, Jim. Lt. Durrell claims that on three consecutive nights someone took a shower in her bathroom, and on the fourth she actually caught sight of someone leaving her quarters. I asked her for a description and she said all she saw was a female leg wearing a high-heeled shoe, but she has an idea there was a white or cream tunic above it. Sound familiar?" he asked, seeing Kirk's eyes widen.

"Ilia," he breathed.

Spock leaned forward. "Captain, you will remember that Lt. Durrell's quarters are those previously occupied by Miss Ilia. And furthermore, Miss Durrell has never seen Ilia."

"And that's not all, Jim. The crewman who saw someone going into the turbo-lift only went to investigate because he had the distinct impression that he had seen Ilia. And not just seen, either. All three, independently, report sensing something in the air at the time of the visitation. Ensign Japacek in particular remarked on it, saying that that was what made him so certain it was Ilia. Her pheromones, Jim. He recognised the sensation."

Kirk could well believe that, remembering the effect they had had on him.

"But... Ilia?"

"I know, we assumed she was dead. But do we really know what happened when Vejur took her?"

Kirk shook his head. "It's incredible, Bones. Are you saying we have ghosts on board?"

The doctor shrugged and said nothing.

Kirk stood up. "It's ridiculous," he said firmly. "This is what comes of having too quiet a run. Minds begin to wander. Starting at 0600 tomorrow I shall be implementing a series of drills and tactical exercises to smarten things up a bit. That will soon get rid of any ghost stories." He turned to go, then paused and looked back at the doctor. "Bones...let me know if anything else happens."

They were three days away from the neutral zone. Sulu quickly scanned his instruments in a routine check; he looked again, a surprised frown creasing his face. He glanced at Sinead, sitting beside him at the navigation console, but she was staring placidly out at the stars. He tried to sneak a surreptitious glance at her board, but Kirk had seen.

"Is something wrong, Mr. Sulu?"

Sulu turned, slightly flustered. He did not know quite what to say, but he was saved by a startled gasp from Sinead, who had happened to look down at her board.

"What is it, Miss Durrell?" Kirk's voice was sharp. He was not best pleased with the navigator at the moment.

"Sir...I...I don't..."

"Miss Durrell, what has happened?"

Kirk rose and went to see for himself. What he saw sent his eyebrows climbing in astonishment.

"Lieutenant, this shows a heading of 327 mark 5. Did I order such a course change?"

"No, sir. I don't know how - "

"Kindly rectify the mistake. Mr. Sulu, put us back on course."

"Aye, sir."

"But Captain, I swear I didn't do this!" cried Sinead. "I laid in the course you ordered, sir, honestly! I can't imagine..."

She was obviously distressed, and Kirk was moved to smile in spite of himself. He quickly suppressed it however.

"Lieutenant, no-one but you had access to your instruments since the watch began, at which time we were on the correct heading. Please be more careful in future."

"But Captain..."

"That will do. Lieutenant."

Kirk started back to the centre seat, reflecting that it would be as well to keep an eye on this new lieutenant. She seemed to be a trouble maker. His eye was caught by Spock, swinging round to face him from the library computer station.

"Captain," he said quietly, indicating that he wished for a private word.

"Yes, what is it, Spock?" asked Kirk, coming to stand beside him.

"Captain, the course apparently laid in by Lt. Durrell would have taken us directly towards Delta IV."

Kirk was conscious of a sinking feeling inside. Delta IV had been Ilia's home planet.

Before he could reply, the turbolift doors beside him swished open. He stared stupidly into the empty elevator as the doors calmly closed again. A second or two passed while his mind registered what he had seen - and felt. Then he turned crisply to Uhura.

"Lieutenant, get Dr. McCoy to the briefing room, now. Spock, come with me."

McCoy was waiting for them as they walked into the briefing room. "What's up, Jim?"

"Bones, have you had any more - reports?"

"Yes, I have. Mr. Solento, who has Decker's old quarters, complained that a female accosted him in bed. But when he turned on the light, there was no-one there. The experience seems to have shaken him rather."

Kirk nodded. "Pheromes?" he asked.

"Yes," replied McCoy succinctly. "Jim, this is going round the ship like wildfire. It's unsettling the crew. You're going to start getting transfer requests if something isn't done."

"I know it, Bones. But what can I do?"

He remembered that the doctor was not yet aware of the latest manifestation, and hurriedly explained what had happened on the bridge. "At first I thought Lt. Durrell had simply been careless, but now I'm not so sure."

"Captain," said Spock, "one thing puzzles me. Assuming this phenomenon is somehow Ilia, why should she be anxious to return to her home planet?"

"I don't know, Spock," sighed Kirk. "That's just one more puzzle. We don't even know how she comes to be here, let alone why. The question is, how do we, well, get rid of her?"

"Exorcism?" suggested McCoy.

"If you know how, go ahead."

McCoy shook his head. "Not me. I'm just an - " He caught sight of Spock's face suddenly. "Whatever Spock may think, my qualifications do not include a licence to deal in spirits."

"As you say, Doctor," replied Spock. "I have sometimes wondered what they do include."

"Gentlemen, please," interrupted Kirk, annoyed. His friends could sometimes pick the most inopportune moments for their verbal duelling. "We have something of a problem here."

"We do indeed," agreed McCoy.

"Bridge to Captain Kirk! Bridge to Captain Kirk!"

Kirk snapped on the intercom. "Yes, Mr. Sulu, what is it?"

"Sir, the course has changed again, same setting as before."

"Remedy it, Mr. Sulu. On my way up."

He strode out into the corridor, leaving Spock and McCoy in the briefing room. As he approached the nearest turbo-shaft, he heard running footsteps behind him. He turned - and looked down an empty corridor. As the noise died away, cold shivers tingled up and down his spine.

Further shocks awaited him on the bridge. He emerged from the turbolift with a glance at the officer seated by the door. He stopped in his tracks, and looked again, feeling a cold sweat break out over his body. The chair was empty - but he had seen Commander Decker sitting there.

With an effort he pulled his attention back to his surroundings. Lt. Durrell was sobbing on the floor by her station, being comforted by Uhura. Sulu was sitting helplessly while his console flickered and spluttered angrily. All round the bridge, the crew seemed frozen or stunned into immobility.

"What's going on here?" he demanded. He looked over at the navigation console. "Mr. Sulu, I thought I told you - "

"I know sir. I tried. But it - it wouldn't..." He indicated the navigator. Sinead was thrown right out of her seat when she tried to correct the heading.

Kirk knelt beside the weeping girl. She did not seem badly hurt, just shocked.

"Uhura, take her down to sickbay," he said gently.

Turning back to the navigation console, he attempted to take matters into his own hands, and was rewarded with a hefty electric shock which threw him back against the rail.

"Manual override," he directed, nursing his tingling hands.

"Helm won't respond, sir," replied Sulu simply.

"Captain, what's going on?" asked the chief security officer. "I've been hearing stories..."

"I don't know, Mr. Chekov, but it seems we are going to Delta IV."

He turned as Spock entered the bridge. Kirk watched him do a double take at the Exec's post. The absurdity of the situation suddenly hit Kirk and he sat down heavily in the command chair, fighting the urge to laugh.

Spock came to stand beside him. "Captain," he said matter-of-factly, "I have just seen Commander Decker."

"I know, Spock, so did I." The sight of Spock's face was too much for him, and he started to giggle. It turned to a gurgle as a long, ghostly sighing moan echoed round the bridge. It was followed by what sounded very like a sob. The lowly anguish in the voice stopped Kirk's heart, and drove from him all thoughts of laughter. Whatever had made that sound was very, very unhappy, and all at once he understood. Understood how she must feel, doomed to walk the corridors alone, in search of her lost lover, forever out of reach. If a detour to Delta IV would somehow help assuage that terrible grief, then they would go there.

"Fascinating," breathed Spock.

Uhura had returned to the bridge, and was monitoring her communications

console. "Captain," she reported, "I am receiving reports from all decks. Damage reports, sir." She looked at him in wonder. "They say instruments are - are running amok, sir. Out of control, shorting themselves. They want to know what's going on."

Kirk opened his mouth to reply, and was interrupted by the sound of an irate chief engineer on the intercom.

"Captain, what's happening up there! You're playing the very devil with my engines, they're up to Warp 7 and - "

"Stay with it, Scotty," said Kirk wearily. "I'll explain later."

He was about to open a ship-wide channel when he was interrupted yet again.

"Jim! What the - !"

"All right, Bones, all right! Will someone let me get a word in edgeways? Now get off the line!"

McCoy did so, grumbling.

"All hands, this is the Captain. The ship is temporarily in the grip of an unknown force. It does not appear to be belligerent, but it would seem we have no choice but to go where it wants us to go. It is probably responsible for the strange happenings that have been reported all over the ship. Ignore them as best you can; stay calm and carry on with your duties. I know I can rely on you all. Kirk out." He thought it best to make no mention of Ilia or Decker. "How soon till we get to Delta IV, Mr. Spock?"

At our present speed, approximately 2.6 hours, sir."

"And what is our present speed?"

"Holding at Warp 7, sir."

"Can you reduce that, Mr. Sulu?"

"No, sir."

Kirk settled back and resigned himself to the inevitable.

Two and a half hours later he had grown almost used to the way both sets of turbo-lift doors would suddenly open and then close again; to the way the navigator's chair kept spinning round and round of its own accord; to the constant chatter of computers and flicker of lights from every station around the bridge; even to the way in which the restrainers on his own chair kept snapping to unnervingly over his legs, and as suddenly snapping back again. The disturbances had increased steadily as they approached Delta IV; but at least they had got there.

"Put us into standard orbit, Mr. Sulu." Now what? he thought.

"Standard orbit, sir."

"Captain," reported Spock, "we are being scanned."

"Delta?"

"Negative, sir. I am unable to locate the source."

"Captain, disturbances around the ship are increasing dramatically." Uhura had to raise her voice above the din now pervading the bridge.

Kirk looked around helplessly, his chair rocking beneath him. Okay, Ilia, he thought, I've done my bit. Now it's up to you.

Above the clamour, Decker's voice was heard, tormented, wracked with anguish. "Ilia! Ilia!"

Kirk was thrown bodily from his chair by a final burst of energy from the invisible power. Then suddenly, shockingly, normality returned. A low chuckle rippled round the bridge, and was gone.

"Object materialising directly ahead, sir!"

"Spock?"

"Sensors... Sensors unable to identify, Captain."

"Captain, look!" cried Uhura.

A figure, a female figure, elegantly clad in a short white robe and stiletto shoes, walked away from the ship.

"It...it's Ilia," gasped Chekov.

As easily as closing a door, she faded and disappeared from their sight.

"Scanning has ceased, Captain."

Kirk slowly picked himself up from the deck. "Now what was all that about?" he mused. He walked over to the First Officer. "Opinions, Spock?"

"I doubt that we shall ever know for certain, sir, but we can speculate. We have already assumed that when Vejur, Decker and the Ilia-probe merged, they moved on to another dimension, a higher plane of existence. It would now seem that the essence that was originally Ilia, that which Vegur took and replaced with his probe-being, was left behind - "

"And she came back here," said Kirk softly. "Came back to look for her lost love, and when she found he wasn't here, she set out to reach him."

"Apparently, from what we saw and heard, he too was instrumental in the quest. It would appear that for some reason, the melding could only be effected here, above Ilia's home planet. It is to be hoped that all parties are satisfied with the transaction, but as to how it was achieved..." He shook his head.

"The power of love, Mr. Spock? Or...or what?"

There was no reply.

"Well, at least they're together again." Kirk smiled at the Vulcan. "This must be the season for reunions."

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THE CAPTAIN'S LADY by Josie Rutherford

(With apologies to Gene Roddenberry)

Captain,  
 She knows that you love her,  
 Will never  
 Place mere women above her,  
 She seems  
 More lovely in your mind  
 Than  
 Other females that you'll find.  
 She flies  
 Like some beautiful bird-thing,  
 She makes  
 Your wondering heart sing,  
 And she knows  
 By the love in your eyes,  
 Your life is...the Enterprise.

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KIRK: Which of the Klingons gave you the black eye?

SCOTTY: None of them - I had to fight for it.

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COMPANIONSHIP by Sally Marsh

McCoy entered the rec room on Deck 10 and was pleased to see his friend sitting relaxing at one of the tables.

Kirk had a coffee and a spoon before him, although he didn't seem to be aware of either. McCoy noticed his blank and tired expression with concern - and recognised it as one of too much work for too long a period. But he knew that situation was about to change - if a little on the late side.

He walked over to his Captain's table, pulled out a chair and asked as he sat down, "Mind if I join you?"

Kirk looked up, startled, jolted from his own thoughts - he'd not seen McCoy's approach.

"Oh - hello, Bones. Want a coffee?"

"No, thanks," replied the doctor. "I came to see you - I've heard you've finally got some leave."

After no response from Kirk, who seemed intent on stirring his unsweetened coffee, and wetting the rim of the cup, he said,

"You look as if you could do with it, too."

Kirk sighed. He had no enthusiasm for defending his health once again to the mothering doctor. Past experience had shown it to be a useless exercise anyway. But he did speak.

"It's only for a few days this time, Bones - and I can't say I'm looking forward to it. We're too far from Earth, and I don't fancy any of the planets or Starbases available. I've few real friends there anyway." He paused, still intent on the swirls he was forming on the surface of his now-cold coffee. "My place - my home - is here, on this ship. I think I'll probably give my leave a miss this time - either that, or take it here."

McCoy raised his voice in alarm. "Jim, you can't be serious! Staying on the Enterprise is no leave for you! You need a proper break, away from the ship and your responsibilities here. And what's all this talk of not having any friends? Both Spock and - "

"You're both here, Bones. There's no reason why I can't have my leave on the ship - here, where my friends are," Kirk complained sharply, looking at McCoy directly for the first time.

McCoy continued unperturbed by his friend's cross tone. He knew Kirk had been under a lot of pressure recently. Their missions had seemed endless, and tension was building up.

"Can you imagine - I mean, really imagine - spending your ten days leave - or whatever - aboard ship without so much as going to the bridge or just 'checking things over'? There's no way you'd get the break you need that way, Jim - and you know it!"

"Bones, I'm not that tired, you know," replied Kirk more softly. "In fact I don't know why Starfleet gave me leave so suddenly - It wasn't anything to do with you, was it?" He looked at his chief medical officer accusingly.

"No, not this time - but I'll have a lot to do with it if you stay aboard ship!" retorted McCoy.

"Can't wait to get rid of me, eh?" chipped in Kirk, uncharacteristically, then went on. "Spock's got leave for the same period too - it's the first time they've coincided for months. In fact, I think it may be the first time..."

McCoy wasn't sure whether Kirk was just making a statement or a suggestion, but he knew what to suggest. "Well then, who don't the two of you go off someplace and take your leave together? I know Spock doesn't usually accept his, but



if you ask him he probably will - you know you're the only one he would go with, and you understand him the best. You'd probably enjoy yourselves in a more relaxed atmosphere...although I admit Spock might need a bit of persuading..."

Kirk shook his head. "No, it's unfair to put him in the position where he'd feel obliged, out of duty, to..."

"Jim, you do have some strange ideas," said McCoy, flabbergasted. "If he doesn't want to go on leave with you, it wouldn't be 'logical' for him to do so - you know Spock well enough for him to be completely honest - not that he ever isn't, as you know! Why don't you try asking him? You might be surprised by his answer; who knows? History may change yet!" McCoy added drily.

"I dunno... I'll think about it. We'll be passing near Vulcan, actually..." he let his words trail off, and put his spoon down resignedly.

"Anything bothering you, Jim?" McCoy asked with a hint of concern in his voice.

Kirk leaned forward, folding his arms, and studied the table-top in detail, seeming not to hear the doctor's words.

"Jim!"

He looked up again, startled. "Oh, sorry, Bones - did you say something?"

"I think you've just answered my question," McCoy murmured. "I asked if there was anything worrying you."

"No. But I think you're right, Bones - maybe I do need a break from the ship. See you later." And with that he got up and left, leaving behind one cold coffee, a spoon, and a pair of blue eyes that followed his exit with concern.

Kirk went directly to his quarters as he was off duty. He didn't really know what was bothering him. He just felt tired...and miserable. Not his usual self. Bones was right, he reflected, he did need a break - but he didn't want to take it on his own. On the other hand, neither was he in the mood to bother Spock about it. He was pretty sure Spock would prefer to go alone, if he went at all.

Kirk was aware that he had seen very little of his Science Officer of late - apart from when they were on duty. He felt a little guilty about it - although their lack of companionship had been due entirely to too much work and too little time off recently.

Subconsciously, Kirk was a little anxious about the situation; he didn't realise how much he missed his friend's company. He eventually decided not to bother Spock - although he would have welcomed his presence right now.

Sitting at his desk, he tried to get some paper-work done, but couldn't concentrate. He rested his head on folded arms and closed his eyes.

After a while, there came a buzz at the door. Sure that it would be McCoy to check on him again, he didn't bother to look up, but shouted "Come" without glancing up.

Spock entered his Captain's cabin, his features visibly altering at the sight he saw.

"What is it now, Bones?" Kirk asked tiredly, looking up for the first time.

Spock raised an eyebrow but said nothing, his Vulcan mask once again in place.

Kirk sat up quickly, his eyes welcoming. "Oh, sorry, Mr. Spock. I thought you were Bones." He yawned.

"Evidently, Captain," Spock said softly.

"Sit down - please," Kirk said, smiling, indicating the chair opposite.

There was an uneasy air of silence, then Spock asked, rather hesitantly, "Captain - are you quite all right?"

Jim Kirk smiled. It was nice to know his friend still cared - not that there

was any doubt in his mind, but he liked to be reminded now and again. A Human trait - as Amanda would say.

"Yes, of course, Spock - just a bit tired, I guess. I got fed up with this paperwork and decided to sleep on it instead."

Spock's expression softened at the attempted joke.

"What can I do for you?" Kirk asked, looking at his friend with a steady gaze.

Spock appeared unrelaxed and tense to Kirk, who studied him carefully as he spoke.

"I have discovered that our dates of leave are identical, Captain - and I was wondering..." He paused as if uncertain of how to continue. "Well, I wondered if you had made any definite arrangements towards your own leave."

Kirk was quite surprised at the subject being brought up by Spock. "Nope," he answered honestly. "In fact, I was even considering not bothering this time, Spock - thought I might stay aboard ship - although Dr. McCoy seems to think I'm in need of a break."

"I must concur with the good doctor, Captain - you have been working under particular stress lately, and are more than due for a leave."

The formality in that sentence told Kirk that Spock was not at all relaxed. He answered, "What are you doing about your leave, Spock? Or aren't you taking it again?" The question did not hold any trace of sarcasm, and both men knew it.

"I thought I would accept leave this time, sir - and that is why I have come to ask permission..."

"Oh, good," said Kirk, genuinely pleased. "But you know you don't need permission from me."

"Well, actually, Captain - I was considering leave on Vulcan as we are in the vicinity - and I wondered if you would care to accompany me."

So that's it! thought Kirk, his recent conversation with McCoy still fresh in his mind.

He got up and paced his cabin, partly cross at what he believed was McCoy's interference, but nevertheless honoured that Spock should invite him. He tried to let Spock know he understood his predicament.

"Well, er...thanks for the offer, Spock - but under the circumstances... I think I'll take a raincheck," he answered, deliberately avoiding eye contact with his friend.

He awaited the typical response for the use of the unfamiliar vocabulary, but it didn't come.

"Under what 'circumstances', Captain?" asked Spock, genuinely puzzled.

Kirk turned to face his friend, and saw his genuine expression of puzzlement. He sat down again.

"Bones did corner you - and tell you to invite me along - didn't he?"

Spock looked hurt, and Kirk immediately regretted his accusation.

"No, Captain - I have not seen Dr. McCoy today - I came of my own wish."

Kirk realised he'd put his foot in it well and truly. He rubbed a hand across his tired face. "Oh Spock - I'm sorry! It's just that Bones and I were discussing the same subject only an hour ago - and he... Well, the top and tail of it is that I thought you were dutifully acting under McCoy's instructions - get me off the ship."

Spock's features relaxed, his eyes softening in comprehension. He was well aware of McCoy's typical attitude also - and did not blame Kirk for his obvious

conclusion.

He spoke quietly. "No, Jim. I have not come out of a sense of duty. I come as a friend - and I would be very pleased if you would accompany me to Vulcan for leave. I thought that now the rift between my father and myself has been closed, both my parents would welcome my visit - and yours also."

Kirk felt his eyes sting with tears he fought to hold back. He felt stupid and utterly imperceptive. He understood his friend's earlier behaviour now - even with his Vulcan formality controlling him, Spock had still found difficulty choosing the right words. Kirk was pleased to see him now relax.

"Spock, I'm honoured. It would make me very happy to come with you. Thank you," he finished simply, but it was enough. They understood each other completely.

Both smiled, grateful that the misunderstanding, small though it had been, had already been forgotten.

"Fancy a game of chess?" Kirk asked, suddenly keen, and also sensing that it might be a good idea to change the subject.

"Certainly, Captain - we have not played for quite some times."

"I know," Kirk admitted. "I guess we've both been rather busy lately, but now we're en route to Starbase 4, I think we deserve some time off."

Spock rose. "Shall I bring my set here - or would you prefer to play somewhere else, Jim?"

"Here will do fine, Spock. I'll clear these papers away while you get it."

Spock left, returning moments later with the chessboard and men, placing them on Kirk's desk.

"I think I'm going to beat you this time," Kirk said optimistically, helping to set out the pieces.

"Indeed," Spock replied, a glint of amusement in his eyes. "Your game, based upon illogical decisions and Human instinct, does often prove successful, Jim."

They finished setting out the chess men in silence - a silence they often shared without embarrassment, each thinking his private thoughts, both understanding the other's needs.

They also began to play in silence. After a while, Spock was the one to break it, surprisingly enough.

"Jim, are you sure you want to come to Vulcan with me? I don't want you to feel you should come just because - "

Kirk cut him short. "Hey, Spock!" He smiled, peering through the lattice formed by the different levels of the board between them. "We've had enough of that sort of talk for one day - and I believe you know me better than that. I can't tell you how pleased I am at your invitation; I can't wait to see your parents and planet again - so long as we don't have to go through what happened last time all over again!" He smiled mischievously.

Spock smiled in return, completely aware of what he was doing, and unashamed here, in Kirk's company. His memory of that incident was most vivid - and would always remain so.

"I'll be able to show you the planet properly this time," he said, moving his rook to attack Kirk's knight.

"And I'm really looking forward to that," Kirk said, his complete honesty now obvious. "Is your father completely recovered now?"

"Yes," replied Spock, his concentration also on the chessboard. "His recovery has been very rapid and he has already assumed some of his duties, although he works from the house for the time being."

Kirk smiled at this information - although his friend might not care to admit

it, he now kept in fairly regular contact with his parents his mother was always keen to tell him news.

They continued to chat, each remarking how little they had really seen of each other lately - and how lack of recent companionship had made them both feel rather lonely. Kirk particularly emphasised this - and how he disliked the temporary solitude.

The game also continued, but was obviously going to be a long one. Kirk tried to disguise a yawn as the hours passed; he was feeling tired but was enjoying the game and the company of his friend too much to admit it.

Spock, however, had noticed Kirk's increasing paleness and wasn't going to let it pass. "We seem to have come to a convenient place in the game to stop if you wish, Jim - we can resume it tomorrow if you like," he said tactfully.

Kirk objected. "Oh, no, I'm enjoying this, Spock - I'd like to carry on. Unless, of course, you want to call it a day, and concede me the game."

Spock studied his tired and drawn features again, and came to a decision. "No, Jim. I think we should stop here," he said firmly, pushing the game to one side so he could face his Captain directly. "You look tired."

Kirk was about to protest but then fell silent. He knew Spock was right - as always - and that he wouldn't accept no for an answer.

"O.K., have it your way - this time," Kirk sighed, stretching his tired limbs, and yawning yet again, openly this time. "You know, I think Bones is influencing you - you're beginning to sound like him," he said, waiting for the inevitable response.

"I had no idea my vocal chords had - " Spock began to reply.

Kirk waved him silent, grinning. "You know exactly what I mean, my friend," he said, getting up and stretching again. "Just don't turn into a mother hen, like him - that's all I ask."

"Just one more thing before I go, Jim," Spock said, after a moment of hesitation, waiting for Kirk's reaction.

Kirk turned to face him. There was a silence for a few moments, their eyes meeting in their usual understanding.

Kirk resumed his seat opposite Spock, and waited, half guessing what Spock's next words might be, and hoping he was correct. It had to come from Spock - he knew that - so he waited.

Spock continued slowly, choosing his words carefully. "You seemed somewhat ...distressed, Jim, when we discussed our recent lack of companionship." He paused, still looking directly at Kirk, who didn't speak, his expression unreadable.

Spock spoke so softly that Kirk could barely hear him. "Now that we have spent some time together again - do you still have any doubts that I might have any reservations about having a Human as my friend?"

Kirk felt something sink within him. He was so hoping that Spock would offer...It had been such a long time since they last linked. Perhaps that was why he had felt uneasy recently - he didn't really know.

He responded firmly. "I never had any doubts, Spock. But somehow there are times when I feel more secure if..." He stopped himself just in time. He lowered his eyes, slightly embarrassed.

Spock, however, knew his thoughts. Without saying anything more, he leaned across the desk, his fingertips making contact with the warm skin of Kirk's face, their eyes again meeting. He sensed his friend's willingness immediately, and strengthened the link gently.

Kirk knew physical contact helped Spock, so he reached for his other hand

and held it tightly, knowing that he was the only person with whom the Vulcan welcomed contact.

He closed his eyes after a while, enjoying the closeness of the meld as they shared their deepest thoughts and feelings. The link seemed to be stronger than he had ever before experienced, and he welcomed the calm and logical thoughts that soothed his tired mind.

At last Spock began to draw away, afraid that the link was too deep for his Human friend, but Kirk pulled him back, the strength of his mind surprising even Spock. Neither tried to hide his feelings from the other - neither was ashamed or embarrassed over the deep and unselfish love which drew them together, and which made their friendship unique - two men of different cultures who could appreciate their differences as well as rejoice in their similarities.

Many minutes passed. A meld usually drained Spock by this time, but on this occasion he was not tired and continued, comprehending Kirk's need for this contact at this time - and he also felt that the healing touch of the meld was long overdue.

Eventually Spock drew gently away leaving his Captain completely relaxed and fast asleep, his head resting on outstretched arms on his desk, and his right hand still clasping Spock's.

The Vulcan sighed quietly, and sat completely still for a few moments, studying the bowed head of golden-brown hair, the relaxed body of the man before him.

Then he gently released Kirk's hand and moved round the desk, lifting him gently and with care, carrying him across to his sleeping quarters. He laid him on his bunk, pulled up the cover, and once again studied the relaxed and peaceful features.

He then turned away, and dimming the light, returned to his own cabin to sleep deeply as well, too tired himself to undress but pleased that Kirk was now untroubled.

In the aftermath of their empathic closeness, both men dreamed of their coming leave, eagerly anticipating the peaceful days that they would spend on Vulcan.

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