

LOG ENTRIES

31



a *STAR TREK*
fanzine

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Hello everyone, and welcome to Log Entries 31

First of all, if the artist who sent me the drawing on P42 will get in touch with me, I'll credit her for her contributor's copy. It doesn't happen often, but sometimes the covering letter gets separated from the submission - in this case, when the drawing went off to get the electro-stencil cut. I can only say sorry.

We have items from a fair amount of 'new blood' this time, which is very gratifying at a time when a lot of zine editors are finding fewer people writing. It's possible of course that a lot of regular writers were waiting until the movie came out to see which way STAR TREK was going to be heading before they put work into any new stories; I know that one or two editors also were doing this. However, as we've said already, it seems to us that in fact the movie hasn't changed anything important, and we'll consider movie-orientated as well as series-orientated stories equally impartially.

Several people have written to me recently asking if they, as new STAG members, could submit stories to us. Of course you can! Without you, the budding writers in the club, there would be no Log Entries. However, let me state once more our editorial policy regarding story content.

We will not print any story in which the characters hop irresponsibly in and out of bed; inferred sex is all right provided the characters are married first. This may be an old-fashioned view, but I'm a strong believer in monogamy and sexual responsibility. We will not print any story in which one of the main characters dies (although he may be believed dead for a while) or leaves the Enterprise permanently. We did print one such story (Valerie Piacentini's 'Legacy' in LE 8) and the response to it was adverse. We don't like this kind of story ourselves, and it seemed from your response to Legacy that most of you don't either.

Stories must be about characters who appeared in aired Trek (or the movie, of course), although the story can include characters of your own invention, even as main characters provided the story isn't too long. We're not interested in stories set aboard other Starships with a completely different cast. To us - and as far as we can make out, to most of you, our readers - STAR TREK is the Enterprise, her crew, and the people they meet. I know that some fans are interested in all of the Federation and want to write about other aspects of it, but we feel that these stories are science fiction rather than STAR TREK, and what we put out is first and foremost a STAR TREK zine.

Alternate universe stories are acceptable, but must be clearly seen to be alternate universe.

Happy writing!

We're hoping to get Variations on a Theme 4 out next time along with LE 32. It's reached final first draft stage now, and scenes have gone for illoing. If things don't go as smoothly as we'd like and it does get held up, it should still be ready by August.

Non-members of STAG can get info on zines in print and on forthcoming zines by contacting me enclosing a SAE (foreign, addressed envelope and 2 IRCs. We only get enough postage on 1 IRC to send a letter surface, which takes 2 - 3 months).

Enjoy the zine.

April 1980





THE LATE MR. SPOCK by Gladys Oliver

Kirk stepped from the shower, dripping and utterly refreshed.

That was what a couple of McCoy's 'specials' did for you, that, together with a long sleep, undisturbed by the usual array of bleeps and noises from the intercom. Now into a nice crisp clean uniform prepared by Yeoman Rand - and he was ready for business.

Sitting down on the edge of the couch he pulled on his boots, then stretched luxuriously, a smile like a young boy's playing on his mouth.

NOW was the time to look at that last diabolical move Spock had made on their chess board. He had kept Kirk waiting long enough for that move, so Kirk had played his own waiting game, aware that Spock thought he now had him checkmated. Well... now was the time to display the right amount of carelessness and lead Spock into the trap... He rubbed his hands in anticipation. He moved across to the closet he and Spock had built into the bulkhead between their quarters.

The panelled door slid easily open, and he stepped up to the board, smug smile creasing his features.

Of course, the move meant that he would have to sacrifice his Queen and a Rook, but...well, it should fool Spock into disregarding the danger from Knight and Bishop...

He picked up the Queen and made to place her in her new vulnerable position, when the wall intercom beeped. Still holding the chess piece, he made his way across the room, depressed the switch, his mind still half on the chess board.

"Kirk here." The Queen turned in his fingers.

"Scott here, Captain." Scotty's voice came clearly over the intercom. "It's time to beam back the landing party, sir. That ionic disturbance will soon be in range, and the quicker we put some space between it and us, the better I'll like it."

"O.K., Scotty, contact Spock and the others and tell them it's time to pack up and come home. I'll be up in five minutes." He flicked the switch and made his way back to the board. He studied it a moment more, then with a decisive movement brought the Queen down.

"Here's hoping Spock buys it!" he muttered, sliding the door shut with a firm click, an almost evil grin on his face. "It's about time I won a pair of games back to back." He left his cabin moments later and headed for the bridge.

On the way up in the elevator he tried to forget the game and concentrate on the new planet they had discovered.

They had come across it a couple of days ago. It had now been coded as Cayniz B. It boasted no humanoid life forms, yet held an abundance of very early types of life form such as Earth had had in its prehistoric days. The surface was almost completely covered in forest, dark and dense, which was broken only by the high rugged mountains. Water covered at least a third of the surface, and readings had indicated a large number of sea creatures.

It was a new world, untouched until they themselves had arrived.

The only problem was the presence of two moons, each revolving in an opposing orbit. The region between their orbits contained a huge field of ionic disturbance, the 'storm' Scotty had referred to. It was pulled this way, then that, as the moons completed their orbits.

This made standard orbiting very difficult. If they came in too close, the strong magnetic pull of the moons disrupted their readings considerably. They had been forced to make a wide circuit of the planet, nipping in to beam down a landing party, then getting out sharply before the fast-moving 'storm' caught them. There was no telling what it might do to them - but it was better not to tempt fate.

The landing party had been planetside for nearly twelve hours, more than enough time for Spock to quench his scientific curiosity and Sulu to collect samples of plant life, as well as check out mineral deposits.

The bridge doors slid open and he headed cheerfully for the command chair. Scotty stood up almost too eagerly, glad to give the con back and return to the engines. "We're in contact with Mr. Spock, sir."

"Thanks, Scotty." He pressed the switch. "Kirk here."

"Spock here, Captain." The Vulcan's calm tones came over the air firmly and with just the right amount of excitement.

"Go ahead, Mr. Spock." He smiled to himself - all that contained excitement...

"Captain - we have just discovered a rather interesting crystal. Request permission to stay another ten minutes to add it to our collection."

"That ionic storm is moving in fast, Spock - we're cutting it a bit fine now," Kiek said bluntly. "We won't be able to come in again for another thirty-six hours to get you if we miss out now."

There was a moment's silence, then Spock's voice. "Sir, I have computed the time we have. It will take us a further eight minutes to gather sufficient crystals which will leave us two minutes to beam up, and a further five minutes to leave the area - in complete safety."

Kirk could almost see Spock's brow on the rise. He grinned despite himself.

"Mr. Spock - " he began.

"It will save us a return visit, sir," Spock insisted. Kirk turned to Scotty.

"Mr. Scotty?"

"It'll be tight, sir - but safe enough."

Kirk turned back to the intercom. "Very well, Mr. Spock, carry on. I just hope that lump of rock is worth it."

"Indeed," came the quick reply. "It could be a breakthrough in energy crystals."

Oh yes, thought Kirk, the enthusiasm is there all right. "Let's hope so, Spock. As soon as we have you aboard we'll leave the area, and debrief at leisure."

"Very well, Captain. Spock out."

Kirk swung to where Scotty was monitoring the rising activity of the storm. Already some of their equipment was having to be recalibrated to compensate for slight fluctuations. "Scotty - let's keep on the safe side of that thing out there, secure all positions to code four, and have the transporter stand by. You'd better see to the actual beaming yourself." Scotty nodded, and Kirk swung back to the helm. "Mr. Chaney, I want all shields activated at minimum strength until the landing party is beamed aboard, to cut down interference from the storm. Once the landing party is aboard give me full shields until we're out of range."

"Aye, sir." The acting helmsman turned slightly in his seat. "Sir - " he began, his voice tentative.

Kirk's eyes rested briefly on him. "Yes, Mr. Chaney?" Kirk reflected that Chaney had a very capable look about him, and he had been Sulu's recommendation. At this moment, though, the young man looked worried.

"Sir - I have noticed a slight change in my readings, which would suggest that the storm is approaching faster than first thought."

"Computer readings are seldom wrong, Mr. Chaney. We have already compensated for any disruption in the readouts."

The young helmsman looked a trifle embarrassed, but still pressed home his point. "I realise that, sir. But I have a feeling...call it intuition... but..."

Kirk interrupted, understanding the man's concern. Hadn't he been the same years ago, the first time he had been responsible for the helm? He hadn't forgotten how easily the gremlins could set in.

"Your intuition is noted, Mr. Chaney. Perhaps it's fortunate that Mr. Spock is planetside, and not seated here, for he would tell you that the computer deals in hard facts, not emotional 'feelings'. He would also point out that Lt. Commander Scotty has checked and rechecked the readings." He turned in his seat. "Right, Scotty?"

Scotty nodded cheerfully. Kirk swung back to Chaney. "Satisfied, Mr. Chaney?"

Chaney wasn't - but then he wasn't Captain of this ship...who by all accounts was pretty unbeatable when it came to the safety of his ship. If he thought it was O.K., then who was he to argue the point?

"Aye, sir. Sorry, sir..."

"No need, Mr. Chaney. Your concern is noted and logged. And, as I am not Mr. Spock - " he turned to where Chekov manned Spock's station. "Mr. Chekov, please do a recheck on the previous readings. We'd rather be safe than sorry. Isn't that so, Mr. Chaney?" he cast the young man a melting smile, which won him a fan for life.

"Yes, sir!" he breathed in relief, then turned back to the helm.

Kirk for his part turned back to the screen, mentally noting that Spock would be aboard again in eight minutes - then, perhaps a couple of hours from then, he would notice the move Kirk had made on the chess board. A brow would rise in blank surprise...and...

Chekov's voice brought him back with a sharp crack. "Captain - Mr. Chaney is correct!" He swung to face Kirk. "Computer readout shows that the storm is closing faster now than first estimated...the energy mass will hit us in...seven minutes." The Russian was as surprised as the rest of them.

"Why wasn't this noted before?" Kirk snapped.

"I can only assume that we did not allow enough margin when we recalibrated, sir - or else there was a faulty reading initially, which made all our calculations incorrect."

Kirk exchanged looks with Chaney. "Your 'feeling' was correct, Mr. Chaney," He stabbed at a button. "Transporter, stand by for immediate beamup of the landing party." He turned to Scotty. "Scotty, get down to the transporter room now. Uhura. Contact Mr. Spock and tell him that the storm is imminent. I want him and the others on board now, or we can't pick them up for another thirty-six hours." He turned to the screen, watching the red-blue dust-like substance about the planet sparking out in all directions. Pretty - but not something to be caught in.

They had to get that party back on board... He wouldn't envy them thirty-six hours planetside, twenty-four of which would be during the planet's night.

"Mr. Chaney - plot us a wide course out of the area as soon as we have them."

Kirk was about to turn to Chekov when Uhura called urgently. "Captain - we have an emergency on the planet! The landing party is being attacked by a large creature... Mr. Sulu has lost contact with Mr. Spock and Dr. McCoy."

"Put him on, Lieutenant."

A quick dance of fingers over crucial controls, then, "Sulu here, sir." He sounded breathless.

"Report, Mr. Sulu."

"We've been attacked, sir. Mr. Spock gave us orders to scatter. The monster got Security Guard Thayer, sir. Mr. Arna and Mr. Dlegish are with me - but there's no sign of Mr. Spock and the Doctor..." Another intake of breath. "Dr. McCoy... was injured, sir."

"Stand by to beam up, Mr. Sulu. Once we have you we can sweep the area for other readings."

"Scanning will be a bit off, sir," Scott broke in. "That storm's getting too close."

"We'll have to chance it, Scotty!" Kirk snapped, rising. "Mr. Chekov, take the con. Mr. Sulu - get ready to beam up." He did not wait for any reply, but headed for the turbolift as it came.

"Yes, sir."

By the time Kirk reached the transporter room, Sulu's group was just shimmering into existence on the platform. The figures faded in and out, and Kirk threw an anxious look at the console, where Kyle and Scotty fought to retain the patterns. Finally the figures solidified. Eager hands helped the bruised trio down.

"Sir," Scotty said, "that storm will hit us in three minutes. I won't have time to lock onto anyone down there properly."

"Sweep the area anyway; lock onto any life forms..."

"I might end up with a dinosaur in the beam," Scotty grumbled as he set to work, his capable hands moving surely over the controls.

At that moment the intercom bleeped. Kirk thumbed it quickly.

"Uhura, sir. Mr. Spock has made contact. He and the Doctor are in imminent danger from a large creature, sir. Feeding communicator co-ordinates to transporter now. Emergency beam up!"

"Scotty," Kirk turned - and at the same moment a shudder racked the ship in sudden violence.

"I daren't beam them now," Scotty said, ominously calm. "That storm - there's no telling -"

"Scotty!" cried Kirk. "They're in more danger on the planet's surface! Get them out of there before it's too late!" He made to reach for the controls that Scott was already operating. His worried eyes watched the Scotsman's hands move over the board with hurried care, and mused at the way fate could change a relatively 'safe' period into an emergency. A knot was forming in his stomach as he saw a shape begin to take shape on the platform. The ship gave another shudder that nearly knocked them off balance. Kirk noted only that Scotty's strong hands remained absolutely steady.

On the platform the shape sparkled weirdly...faded...then suddenly became whole as Scotty snapped up the controls.

It was McCoy...battered and bloodied. He stood for only a second before he collapsed to the deck. Kirk raced up with Kyle to help him. He struggled up.

"S...Spock. Get...get him outa there!" He gasped, sinking to his knees but still trying to get up. "Jim...get him out!!!" Kirk held him still as Scott again swept the area, locked onto Spock and began to operate the controls once more.

A figure once more began to take shape on the platform...faded...only to be hurriedly brought back once more by a sweating Scotty. Kirk made out Spock's tall figure clearly as the shape began to solidify. Kirk let out a sigh of relief.

It was cut off midstream as suddenly, violently, a terrible blue-red bolt seemed to cut right through the Enterprise and the next second such a shock wave hit the craft that it tossed about like a little toy, their world went askew... Everyone was thrown brutally against the far wall - and hands that only a moment before had held a precious form nearly complete in the transporter beam were wrenched away from the controls. At the same time a blue flash rebounded off the console and sparks flew after Scott as he was hurled to his knees.

Kirk was first to regain his feet, staggering to the intercom as the lights faded to the barest glimmer. "Emergency override!" Then he turned to the now empty transporter platform, his eyes widening in disbelief that changed to horror.

"Scotty!" he cried. "Where's Spock?"

The engineer came to his feet, his eyes on the empty transporter platform.

"Spock!" Kirk staggered forward. He swung back to Scotty, who was furiously working at the console. "Scotty," he whispered again. "Scotty - you had him!"

Scotty turned deadened eyes to him. "Aye, sir. But I've lost him." He looked at the near-collapsing McCoy. "He was in the beam... The storm has scattered it."

Kirk crossed to the platform as though Spock would suddenly appear out of the bulkhead. "Spock," he uttered, in total disbelief. "Spock..."

He turned back to the shaken Scotty. "You had him!" he cried in utter despair.

It was on those words that McCoy's legs suddenly buckled under him, and he fell, bloodied and broken, to lie at Kirk's feet...

...and Kirk couldn't move a muscle to help him. A sudden creeping paralysis was keeping him rooted to the spot, eyes searching the empty platform before him and a slow numbness moving over every reflex he possessed.

"Spock..."

CAPTAIN'S LOG Stardate 7809.09. It is now twelve hours since Mr. Spock was lost in the transporter beam. Lt. Commander Scott has tried to repair the unit in one last hope that we may still manage to retrieve Mr. Spock, but hope has now diminished. On Mr. Sulu's recommendation I wish to make a citation for Mr. Spock's bravery, since it is clear that Dr. McCoy owes his life to Spock's quick actions. I wish also that it be entered that Mr. Spock...

Suddenly the switch was savagely thumped off, and Kirk stared blindly at the wall. He threw back his seat and rose in sudden panic, a hand viciously pressed to his eyes, which stung with unashamed tears. He flung himself against the bulkhead, feeling the coolness of the wall, yet cursing it because he didn't want to ease the ache in his head. He wanted to feel it - because, dear Christ! - it meant he could still feel something...

And there was still Bones - who needed him. Who was just as alone and bereft as he.

But he couldn't go to him yet. Not yet. Not until this first terrible pain had burned itself out, and he could face everyone with some semblance of leadership.

Then - and only then - could he go to the bridge...and face that empty console - a console that was marked with the invisible label 'Logic'.

Only when this first dead shock left his mind would he chance stepping from the room. Only when he'd governed himself enough to hide behind a mask of polite mourning.

Only then.

He felt as though a part of him had vanished.

It had.

"Spock!" cried his mind. "My friend..." answered his heart. "My loyal, loyal friend... Somehow I have to face them all..."

He straightened, drawing back his shoulders. He was a Captain - wasn't he? Had lost officers before...had lost friends before!

"Who the hell am I kidding?" he cried to the unheeding walls.

"Yourself," came the inner reply.

"If his death had only had some meaning!" he told the silent viewscreen.

He sank onto his couch, hands turning and twisting between his knees. "Spock," he whispered yet again...for the hundredth time...in the same disbelief. "I should have insisted that you beam up without the delay... I knew it was cutting things too fine," he murmured in self recrimination.

Flashes of countless incidents moved in the deep tormented recesses of his mind. The first meeting...the cool, logical Vulcan, whom Kirk hadn't really understood at first. The flashes of concern...as time and time again Spock denied himself - and Kirk - the luxury of caring. The growing understanding. Loyalty. Friendship - that had grown slowly at first - then more surely, tying the two men together heart and soul. Gently. Almost unspoken. Yet persistent in its deep-rooted strength.

They had found something in each other that few mortal men ever touched, let alone ever held onto. It was total; good; kept them surviving, time and time again, when many would have perished...and now?

Now...

Kirk stared into his hands, his face gaunt and more pained than it had ever been. "Now was the one time I couldn't help you," he whispered dully. "And now I must face your crewmates...and your parents...and watch them smother their grief - because it isn't proper. Because Vulcans don't mourn as Humans do..." He suddenly moved from the couch, his eyes full. He shook his fist at the air about him. "But here's my grief, Spock!" he cried as his tears overflowed. "And I'm damned well proud of it!"

Within moments he had regained control of himself, and moved abruptly out of the cabin. The door swished shut behind him.

Moments later he entered the bridge, his face controlled to the point where it seemed carved from stone. He moved to the edge of the steps, jaw working furiously... All was as it should be, Sulu, Chekov, Scotty, Uhura - all at their stations...all silent, shocked at the news.

Kirk's eyes moved reluctantly to Spock's station. It was empty. Lonely.

He clenched his teeth, determined to keep utter control of himself, and began to move forward. He might have made it, had he not glanced across at Uhura. Met the ravaged face, tears running unashamedly down her cheeks, and he felt his own eyes begin to sting with gathering moisture. They registered each other's depth of loss, and Kirk moved towards her and laid a gentle hand on her shoulder. It was trembling with suppressed sobs, and Kirk understood her need to busy her hands at the console.

He made his way to his seat and sank down. Finally he managed to force some words past the huge lump that all his attempts could not swallow. "Position, Mr. Sulu?"

He watched Sulu's shoulders pull themselves upright in an effort to appear normal. "Wide orbit around Cayniz B, sir. Magnetic disturbances now at safe distance."

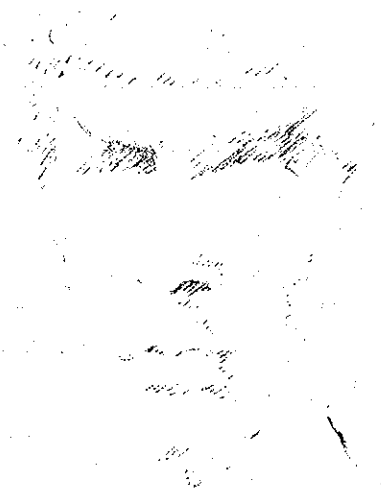
"All data of landing party logged?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then let's get the hell out of here, Mr. Sulu," he said quietly. "Warp factor 4."

"Warp 4, sir."

Kirk turned to Uhura. "Get a message off to Starfleet, Lieutenant, informing them that Cayniz B is rich in mineral deposits and suggest they get a survey team



out here as soon as possible. Tell them the dangers as well."

"Aye, sir."

Things went on...didn't they? He turned to Chaney, who was standing beside Scotty at the Engineering station. "Mr. Chaney."

"Sir?"

"I was most impressed by your performance earlier, Mr. Chaney. I have also been informed that had it not been for your presence of mind at the helm during the emergency, things would have been a great deal worse. I am therefore appending this report to your record." He dragged up a protesting smile from somewhere. The young officer drew himself up gravely.

"Thank you, sir," then he turned back to a beaming Scotty, who patted him briefly - but heartily - on the back.

Good man! Kirk thought. He swung round in his seat, saying, "Mr. Spock - " His mouth clamped shut on the words he had so casually been about to say, even as he noted the understanding looks of the rest of the bridge crew.

"Mr. Chekov," he corrected himself quickly. "Take over the science station. Give me a report on the fluctuation of the readouts that we experienced and add that to the report to Starfleet."

"Yes, sir." The young Russian moved towards the station, and seated himself with obvious reluctance. He had stood in at this post often, but now... His face worked hard for a few moments, then he bent to the viewer.

Kirk looked away. He would have to start getting used to seeing someone else at the Science Station; at least Chekov was not...unfamiliar...there. He glanced at Uhura. "Put me on ship-wide intercom, Lieutenant."

She did so sadly, knowing what must be coming. She saw him brace himself, then thumb the switch at his side.

He went to speak...and his throat closed. What to say? How to say it?

He could feel the whole ship's breath suddenly catch...waiting for him to

speaking.

It seemed the hardest thing that he had ever done to keep his voice calm and steady as he found words.

"This is the Captain speaking." Pause. "As everyone must be aware by now, Mr. Spock - " Strange how he could still utter that name and sound normal " - Mr. Spock has been lost to us in an unfortunate accident with the transporter. " Keep going, don't fold up now, Janes T. "I'm sure everyone will wish to pay their final respects to an officer who has aided us all since he has been aboard. There will be a service in the Chapel in one hour. Those of the crew who must remain on duty will hear it over the intercom. I... Kirk out." Enough! I need privacy!

He came abruptly out of his seat and made for the lift. "Mr. Scott - take the con. If I'm needed, I'll be in sickbay." The doors closed after him, and the bridge crew looked with concern towards the closed doors.

He wasn't fooling anyone.

Kirk's feet dragged him towards sickbay, where he knew McCoy was still under the influence of the drugs M'Benga had given him. He had taken an awful bashing; his recovery would be slow. It was thanks to Spock that Bones was here at all. He had sustained a broken arm and dislocated shoulder, two smashed ribs, numerous abrasions and a hefty whack on the head. "Like he's had an all-out fight with a Treedean Yushmac!" exclaimed M'Benga as Kirk approached the still, silent figure on the bed. "He should be out of the drug soon - and going to wonder what hit him." Then, after satisfying himself that McCoy's readings were all he could expect them to be, he left Kirk alone with the unconscious doctor.

It seemed to Kirk that he sat there beside his friend for hours, his shoulders slumped in grief, his haunted eyes staring down at his hands. It would be a long time, he knew, before he would ever smile spontaneously again.

A thousand and one visions flitted through his mind, memories of shared danger, tentative caring, companionship. Moments of contented silence shared across a chess board...a calm oasis in their hectic way of life.

Memories of a lifting brow, a half smile...curiosity over a new-found life form...memories of hurt, pain, laughter, teasing... Memories that now kept him silent, still robbed of feeling.

It was almost no surprise when he was suddenly brought hastily back to a painful present by softly uttered words of - "Hey - I'm supposed to be the invalid - remember?" and tired but brilliant blue eyes met Kirk's sleepily across the bed.

"Bones!" Kirk reached thankfully to grasp the held up hand.

"Hi, pal." McCoy made to move but Kirk pushed him back, making him lie still as he called M'Benga.

The dark doctor came and made a quick inspection of his colleague, whilst Bones kept a brow cocked at him. Finally, M'Benga smiled. "You'll do, Doctor - but you'll need to take it easy for a while."

"Thank you, Doctor," came the wry reply. He threw Kirk a mock depressed look "They've always kinda wanted me in here, you know."

"... 'And you'll do as you're told, or else'," Kirk managed.

"I wouldn't be here at all, though, if it wasn't for that stubborn excuse for a First Officer... Damn fool Vulcan nearly got it once and for all pushing me out of the way of that charging monstrosity..." His mouth broke into a lop-sided grin. "It was the most illogical thing I've ever seen him do." He looked highly delighted at the thought. "Why, do you know what that lug head did? Do you? He only pushed me over a cleft in the rocks then jumped himself, right on top of me - ten feet down. Only that man can try to save someone's life - then let them end up nearly as bad off," he complained in mock tones, although he was obviously delighted at the action that had prompted Spock... He threw Kirk a

knowing look. "Though I don't suppose he's told you any of this... I doubt I can expect a visit from him in the next couple of days either - he'll be too embarrassed!" He would have rambled on contentedly but suddenly he caught sight of the quick fired question that Kirk glanced at M'Benga. "On the other hand - " he made to get up " - I thought he'd be the first one come to gloat over me," he contradicted himself, firing a glance at Kirk. "Jim?" The question came out half afraid.

Kirk must have shown the sudden pain that was filling his heart once more, for suddenly McCoy was struggling to sit up, while M'Benga, alarmed, tried to ease him back. He would have none of it.

"Jim!" he cried. "You had him - I saw him! What's wrong?"

Kirk reached out a hand, but he brushed it away. "Damn it, tell me!"

Silence. Utter, terrible silence.

"Spock..." began Kirk, but broke off again.

Their eyes met. The truth suddenly dawned on McCoy. A stillness gripped him, held him a moment...then he sagged against Kirk's restraining hands. "Spock," he whispered.

"The storm...the transporter..." Kirk tried again, but McCoy no longer needed it explained. His memory returned, and he remembered the horror in his heart before he sank to his knees on the floor.

"Spock..." he muttered once more, allowing the two men to ease him back.

He was aware that the pain of his injuries wasn't so bad after all - for somewhere deep in the hidden recesses of his heart there was another pain fighting to possess him. One he had denied so long. Hadn't he been as guilty as Spock of hiding his feelings from everyone? Now it was too late...too late to let him know... Too late!

"That poor stupid lug head," he whispered to himself, feeling a light somewhere inside him go out.

The dark doctor was at his side instantly, gently applying a hypo to McCoy's arm. Bones opened his eyes a moment, registering the medication. "A moment's peace..." he murmured sadly. "A moment's peace...then a lifetime of realising that I'm only here because of that dumb, fool headed..." His voice trailed off into nothing as the 'moment's peace' encased him.

Kirk turned without a word and left.

His steps took him to the Chapel...and the shock of discovering that he had been with McCoy for so short a time. The corridors were filled, and he could barely push his way through to the altar on which one candle burned. Who had put that there? he wondered. It had surely been for their own comfort, for burning candles was not a Vulcan custom. He turned at last to face the massed sea of faces; friends and comrades Spock hadn't realised that he had had. Christine Chapel was there, tragically silent; Uhura, Rand, Sulu, Chekov, Scotty, Baillie, Kyle, and many others, countless others who had not worked with Spock, had known him only as the efficient, trustworthy First Officer, crowded every inch of the Chapel and the corridor outside, to listen to the simple words he spoke, with saddened, bowed heads.

Words that time and time again stuck in his throat.

Words that he barely whispered.

Did they still hear them, whispered though they were? At last it was over, and he almost stumbled from the room, his gaze fixed to the floor as he tried to disguise the pain flooding him.

He pushed his way back through the silent crew members. He made it as far as the door, and halted there as a sound filled the air, soft, gentle...

He turned to look at Uhura who had pushed a tape into the wall receiver - and gently, soothingly, the haunting strumming of Spock's favourite Vulcan tune filled the air with bittersweet chords.

"Uhura?" he asked quietly.

"I asked Mr. Spock to record it for me months ago," she replied simply.

He made his way back along the deserted corridors, the haunting melody chasing eagerly at his heels awakening new and more poignant memories in him. It was no longer the officer he saw, but the man whose quiet gentleness was captured for ever in that beautiful sound.

He entered the bridge which was still manned by the skeleton crew, realising that this was where he had to be. He had to keep busy, be seen to be carrying on.

Young Chaney turned his grave young face towards Kirk as he entered. "I'm proud I knew him, sir - even if he didn't really know me."

Kirk studied the young man a moment before turning to look at Spock's empty chair. "Oh, he knew you, Mr. Chaney," he replied. "You can bet your career on that."

"But I never spoke much to him sir, or worked with him," the young officer replied.

Kirk turned back to the viewscreen. "As Mr. Spock would say - 'Words are illogical when they are unnecessary'."

Chaney turned back to his controls. The Captain had told him something... and he wished now, more than ever, that he had had occasion to work with Mr. Spock occasionally.

When the first incident happened, Kirk never really realised the importance of it. It happened nearly three days after the service for Spock.

It was the early hours of the ship's morning, before the main crew took over from the night watch. A few crew members were on the move, but the ship, in the main, was quiet.

Kirk was in a restless sleep. The sleeping pills prescribed by M'Benga still stood untouched in the phial on his bedside table.

The cover was tossed to the foot of the couch as he once more wrestled with vivid dreams, memories and visions of the empty cabin next to his where he had as yet been unable to go.

He had to go there some time, he knew. But not yet. No, not yet. He couldn't face it - touching the so very private possessions of his dead friend.

The words seared his mind, and once again he tossed restlessly.

Finally the dreams drove all sleep away. He gave up trying to pretend that he could sleep again, and slowly opened his eyes. He lay for a moment then glanced at the clock. Another two hours...

Pushing back the remnants of the bed clothes he sat up, swung his legs out of bed. He might as well get up...

Without warning a shrill cry shattered the silence of the corridor outside his cabin, and the next moment a frantic thumping sounded on his door, followed by a hysterical scream from a female crew member.

Kirk was across the room before the first scream died away, punching the door open. As it opened, a young Yeoman almost fell into his arms, her eyes wide and fearful as she clung to him.

"It was him, sir...I know it was...I could have touched him" She began to

claw at his chest, crying incoherently, "It was him, sir. It was... It was!"

"Him? yeoman," Kirk asked sharply, looking at Scotty who had just raced onto the scene with two security officers in tow. When she didn't reply, he shook her gently. "Who did you see, Yeoman? Who?"

The young woman however showed no signs of being able to talk, Her panic was rising even more; so Kirk pushed her roughly back to stand erect and snapped formally, "Make your report, Yeoman. Do you hear, me, report!" At his sharp tone the woman suddenly tried desperately to pull herself together. She met his eyes, which were hard and formal, then sagged slightly before she managed to grasp some sort of control.

"Yeoman... Yeoman Westerly reporting, sir," she managed. Freeing herself from his grasp, she managed to stand upright.

"That's better." Kirk softened his tone a little, seeing that her panic was receding. "Now then, what happened?"

"I'm sorry, sir... I was foolish to make such a..."

"What caused it, Yeoman?" Kirk sut in.

"I...saw someone, sir." She paused, then corrected, "Or something." She swallowed hard, taking in a deep breath.

"Someone."

"Yes, sir."

"There are four hundred people on this ship, Yeoman." Kirk gave a wry grin. "Which makes the odds of seeing someone...very high."

"But this was..." she began, glancing at Scotty as if asking for help. "Well, this was...was..."

"Yes?"

"This was Mr. Spock, sir," she finished hurriedly, dropping her eyes at the sudden pain-filled anger in Kirk's.

Silence hung around them for a moment. Whatever Kirk had expected, it wasn't that. He straightened, his eyes becoming hard. He turned away from her, fighting for control. "You are aware of Mr. Spock's death, Westerly?"

The woman nodded mutely to his back, then mumbled "Yes, sir."

"If you are aware of that fact, you must also be aware that to see Mr. Spock is impossible." The way he spoke made her shiver.

"I know that, sir," she stammered, then stood up, suddenly very calm. "But I also know what I saw, sir. He was as clear as you are now, sir." She approached him, her face earnest. "I was on duty for Mr. Scott, sir. As I approached his cabin to waken him, Mr. Spock came round the corner of the corridor... I was so shocked that I just stood dumb as he approached. He passed me...as though I wasn't there...then paused a second at your door, sir. He hesitated, then went into his own quarters." She pointed in the general direction. "He must be there now, sir," she added. "Couldn't we at least look, sir?"

Scotty stepped forward, placing a hand on her shoulder. "We could do that, sir - even to ease Westerly's mind about what she thought she saw," he suggested quietly.

"Very well." The reply was clipped, as Kirk strode across the room. "Let's take a look."

They all followed to Spock's door. Kirk paused only a moment before he pressed the door release. Sudden apprehension gripped him. Supposing... He shook himself, calling himself a fool as the door slid open and they stood on the threshold of Spock's quarters. Kirk glanced across at Westerly's concerned face, then with a shrug he passed into the room, flicking on the light as he went. Scotty urged the nervous Yeoman in after him.

It was empty.

Neat and sparsely furnished...just as it had always been, with only a few personal belongings placed carefully...where they too had always been. A Vulcan harp...as well as the new one that he, Kirk, had bought Spock on Leim, having spotted it in the window of a small shop... On the rest of the unit was Spock's prize collection of early Vulcan engineering books, bound in Khi'at leather...a few unusual works of art from different worlds that had captured the Vulcan's attention because they were so rare... Two pictures adorned the wall; one of the City of ShiKahr taken from a far angle - the city where Spock's parents lived - and the other, a gift from his mother when he had left Vulcan to join Starfleet, a study of a landscape where she had lived on Earth; one that Spock treasured very much.

The cabin spoke clearly of Spock; unpretentious, empty of clutter such as most Humans collected on their space travels. Everything was as Kirk could remember - and that hurt suddenly, unbearably, so much so that he turned and almost snapped at the young woman who stood now silent, almost forlorn.

"Satisfied, Yeoman?" He gestured about the room. "It's as it should be when someone is no longer able to use it - empty."

The woman however looked up as steadily as she could at him. "I know what I saw, sir," she said quietly, with utter conviction.

Kirk's face suddenly softened. "I do not doubt that you saw someone, Yeoman," Kirk said. "Maybe even a practical joker with a warped sense of humour. But the fact remains, Mr. Spock is dead." He moved towards the door. "He is no longer aboard this vessel." He reached the door, and glanced back at Scotty. "Mr. Scott - see the Yeoman to her quarters. And Westerly - " He looked at the woman. "I don't wish rumours to sweep the ship. Please keep this incident to yourself." With that he went out, leaving them to secure Spock's room once more. He needed privacy to collect himself once more.

A few moments later, Scott stopped outside Westerly's door where they had walked in silence. Once there, however, she turned to face Scotty, her head held high. "I shall respect the Captain's wishes, sir," she stated calmly. "But I know what I saw. It sounds crazy, I know - but it was Mr. Spock; and I have a feeling that before long someone else will see him."

She turned and walked into her cabin, leaving Scotty to return to his own quarters in slow pondering silence.

As he entered his cabin, he muttered quietly to himself, "It isn't logical... but then again, weird and wonderful things do happen. When Mr. Spock was alive, he would never have left the ship, or the Captain, by choice; could it be that... now he's dead, he's having the same trouble?"

Scotty shook himself. "Westerly isn't given to hysteria... I dinna know what to think. But that's all we need - a spectral First Officer walking the ship;"

Westerly was right.

Two days later, Kirk was called on the intercom by Security Chief Baillie. When he arrived at the scene in the rec room, it was to find a very distraught young ensign from engineering, surrounded by four other crew members, one being Sulu.

The Ensign explained in faltering tones that he had been up early for first watch - one of his crewmates was ill, and he had been assigned to cover. He had come in about ten minutes ago to snatch a quick breakfast.

"I...I came in, sir," he went on shakily, his teeth still chattering as if from a recent fright, "and..." he pointed to the corner table where the viewscreen on the library reader was still alight "...and there he was, sir - sitting studying the computer."

"Who?" Kirk asked in the mildest tones he could manage, feeling that something important was coming.

"Him, sir," the young man cried. "Mr. Spock - sir."

A stunned silence filled the room. People held their breath, and Sulu moved nearer to Kirk as the others began to throw the young ensign pitying glances.

"Sir - " began Sulu.

"I'll handle this, Mr. Sulu." Kirk stepped up to the youngster, who, just as Westerly had done, pulled himself up and looked straight into the cold eyes of his Captain.

"I saw him, sir - just as clearly as I see you now." He pointed to the computer that was still operating. "The screen is still on, sir."

Kirk's eyes met Sulu's. He nodded and moved to the table, looking down at the topic that was programmed.

"Computations on ionic spacial differences, sir," he reported, meeting Kirk's eyes once more. "Also some data on cycomomic energy once encountered on Deuth'noy 34."

Kirk moved to the table, looking down at the figures still marching across the screen. "Did you see...whoever it was...leave, Ensign?" he asked at last.

"No, sir. I just dropped my tray and ran..."

"Very well." Kirk looked about him again. "Everyone back to duty. Be assured that when I discover who is perpetrating these incidents, I will deal with him severely." His voice brooked no arguments. They left sharply - but Kirk knew that the ship's grapevine would soon be overworked. He turned to Baillie with a sigh. "Any notions, Chief?" He glanced over at the viewer that Sulu had just switched off.

"Selkie's a good man, sir. If he thought he saw someone - then he did."

"Then someone is playing games - and not the sort I'm going to tolerate." Kirk moved to the intercom. "Kirk to bridge."

"Bridge here, sir."

"Tie me in to shipwide intercom, Lieutenant."

"Aye, sir... Operating, sir."

"Thank you... This is the Captain speaking. I wish all crew to take note. Most of you will be aware by now that we have a practical joker amongst us, who is using the guise of the late Mr. Spock. Should he be caught doing this just once more, I will personally see to it that he is dismissed the service. Kirk out."

He turned to Baillie once more. "Keep your men on their toes, Chief. I want to get whoever it is, understand?"

"Yes, sir." So did Baillie.

They left the rec room; Baillie turned one way, Kirk and Sulu headed the other,

"Strange, to say the least, sir," Sulu commented. "Why should anyone...?"

"I'll get to the bottom of it," Kirk promised grimly.

"Sir... Could there be..." Sulu paused hesitantly. Kirk stopped.

"Sulu?"

"Well, sir... Could there be any other explanation - one that didn't involve a sick joker?"

"What are you suggesting, Mr. Sulu - that Mr. Spock has got up and walked from the grave?" he asked bitterly. Then he saw Sulu's embarrassed expression and was immediately contrite. "I'm sorry, Sulu. Right now I don't know what to think."

"Understood, sir. The place is...different without him isn't it."

"Yes, Lieutenant. It is different." He took a deep breath. "If anyone wants me, I'll be in sickbay for the next hour or so."

"Aye, sir."

As he entered sickbay, Kirk was aware of a deep sense of hurt. Whoever - or whatever - was causing these incidents was picking at his still raw sense of loss. He felt Spock's absence so keenly that he was beginning to feel that he would never recover. The emptiness was getting worse, not better. If only Spock's death had had some meaning...

Spock's steadfast friendship had been like a wall; always there for him to lean on even at its most unobtrusive; always firm to help him when he was uncertain of the best course to follow.

He now sought out McCoy more and more. They had found some small measure of comfort in talking together. Bones had taken it hard, Kirk knew. There had been a real fear that at Spock's death might in some way come between them, but their terrible sense of loneliness had managed to pull them even closer than before. In the past both men had been lonely; neither wanted to return to those days. Besides, Kirk knew that at this time, Bones needed him as never before.

McCoy was propped up against a mountain of pillows when Kirk arrived in sickbay, and poor Dr. M'Benga was the focal point of all his grumblings. Kirk felt himself grin wryly, if briefly; here at least was some order of normality.

"And how's the patient today?" he asked as airily as he could, ignoring the snort from the bed as he addressed M'Benga.

"Ratty - as usual," the doctor replied with mock woe. "Still threatening me with all kinds of curses if I keep him in bed much longer." Kirk gave another wry grin. He knew too well how poor a patient McCoy was.

McCoy threw Kirk a look that said 'Don't you believe what he tells you'. Then he said, "I heard your announcement. What's it all about? Nobody's told me anything."

Kirk explained the two incidents, finishing up with, "When I get hold of him, that's going to be one sorry practical joker."

"Then you're sure it is a joker?" Bones finally commented.

"Come on, Bones. You sound like Sulu. What else could it be?"

"There're stranger things in life than we'll ever understand," McCoy commented dryly.

"Are you telling me that you believe in ghosts?"

"Let's say that I don't disbelieve," McCoy answered gruffly. "Besides, that's just the thing that Spock would do given the chance - come back and haunt us."

Kirk had to chuckle at that. "Doctor - you're delirious," he stated, thinking for a moment that McCoy was trying desperately to cheer himself a little. Then he looked again at McCoy's face. "What do you really think?"

McCoy looked distant for a moment, then sighed. When he did reply, his voice was quiet; Kirk could only just catch the words.

"As a doctor, I'd say we do have a sick joker aboard - though it's funny he's never shown up before this. None of the personality profiles show any tendency..." He broke off. "As Spock's friend...I'd say I wish it were Spock's ghost."

It was true. As Kirk returned to his quarters he thought that it would be nice to think that some part of Spock had survived on the Enterprise - in whatever form.

He removed his boots and lay down on his couch, hands clasped behind his head. Too soon he would have a new First Officer. Too soon they would reach Starbase 8 to pick him up. Too soon he would have to face the many future journeys without the one man he trusted above all others at his side.

Although these thoughts were milling about inside his mind, he must have dozed off to sleep. Just how long he slept he couldn't be sure...but suddenly a noise brought him wide awake, all his nerve endings spinning into a finely tuned receiver of sound. That noise...

It was the unmistakable sound of the wall chess cupboard clicking open - from Spock's side of the bulkhead.

In a blur of movement he was up from the couch and racing across the short distance to his own door. He threw up the switch on his side and the door slid open decisively, revealing the chess table he had not looked at since making that last move. It also revealed the open door into Spock's cabin.

So great was the shock that Kirk could only stare dumbly at the chess board - the obvious move had been taken; his Queen was gone, her place taken by Spock's Bishop.

Just how long he stood transfixed in the doorway, the darkened cabin beyond echoing his very silence, he could never have said; but slowly his senses returned. A cold anger began to burn inside him, almost frightening him with its intensity.

"How dare they?" he whispered. "How dare they..."

He turned back into his cabin so sharply that he stumbled against the wall, and made his way to the intercom. "Kirk to bridge."

A moment passed before Uhura replied, "Bridge here, Captain," but it was enough for a sudden thought to hit the enraged Kirk.

One thing he had done was lock Spock's cabin door; locked, it would only open for three people. Spock himself, and the Captain and Chief Medical Officer, both of whom had voice override to any cabin on the ship. He had not unlocked it; Bones was still in sickbay...

"Captain?" Uhura's voice pulled his thoughts back into place.

"Belay that, Lieutenant."

His voice didn't sound quite right. "Are you all right, sir?"

Automatically, he straightened. "Yes, Lieutenant, quite all right."

"Very well, sir." The intercom clicked off.

Kirk walked slowly back to the game board. He looked once more at the changed layout, then passed on into Spock's cabin. It was dark and silent, and he stood in it hardly daring to breathe.

"Spock?" he whispered at last.

The silence echoed back deafeningly.

What had he expected? A reply? He moved across to the light switch, flooding the room with sudden light. He turned slowly, studying the emptiness, noting that everything was in its place... everything - except...

He was interrupted by the bleeping of the intercom in his cabin. With one last look about him, he put out the light and made his way back through to his own quarters. "Kirk here."

"M'Benga, sir. Request your presence in sickbay - urgent!"

"On my way." Sudden fear gripped him. What could be urgent in sickbay except McCoy?

He let out a sigh of relief however when on entering sickbay he found McCoy standing beside M'Benga. They turned towards him as he came to a halt beside them.

"Well?"

"The drugs safe has been broken into, Jim." McCoy motioned to the open door. "A neat job, too. Goodness knows when - everything was left shut up again, but there are drugs missing." He moved back and sat down. "Only two - both of which are kept aboard especially for Spock."

Kirk studied the open safe. "How could they get in without being seen?"

"Oh, there are plenty of times they could do that. If the duty staff were in the lab, for example. But only M'Benga and I can open that safe... For anyone else, it should have been impossible." McCoy shrugged. "Add to that, I've been in here since just after the last routine check of the safe. If anyone had tried to get in, I should have seen them. Even if I'd been asleep, the noise would have wakened me - doctors tend to be light sleepers."

Kirk looked at M'Benga. "There's nothing else missing at all?"

The negro shook his head. "Not from that safe. Nothing else is so regularly checked - I'll go and institute a full check immediately." As he left, Kirk turned to McCoy.

"Come on, Bones, back to bed. There's nothing you can do right now except give me some information. The drugs that are missing - what are they used for?"

"Both are standard Vulcan drugs. One is an antibiotic used on open wounds, the other...the other a stimulant. On a Vulcan ship they wouldn't even be kept locked up, but both are lethal to Humans. Because of his Human blood elements, Spock always got a modified dose of either. In the wrong hands..."

"We have to find them quickly."

"Agreed. But Jim... Why those drugs? Anyone on the ship who's developed a drug addiction but managed to hide it from me would go for whatever drug he'd been given that caused the addiction, not for something else."

"That only leaves us one answer, doesn't it." Kirk was surprised at how calmly he spoke.

"Jim, do you know what you're saying? Spock's dead - you saw it happen yourself! Spock was good, Jim - but even he wasn't that clever."

"He's been seen," Kirk said.

"Or someone looking like him was. You agreed yourself that it was a practical joker!" countered McCoy.

"That same 'practical joker' managed to get into a locked room, make a move on a chess board, and leave again, all inside half a minute!" Kirk shook his head. "He also managed to get past you and open a locked safe without being detected."

"Jim - what do you believe?" McCoy asked, his voice gentle.

Kirk met his look squarely. "I don't know any more, Bones." He sank onto the edge of the bed.

"Jim - if Spock somehow had survived - don't you think he would have found a way to let you know?"

"Perhaps he can't, Bones - perhaps he isn't strong enough."

"That's a lot of 'perhapses'."

Kirk looked at him with a ghost of a smile on his face. "You think I'm... imagining things?"

"No," came the simple reply. "Though I should. Perhaps I've had a knock on the head too many." He paused. "But I think he would have tried every means... weak or not."

"Perhaps it's me. Perhaps my own grief...has shut him out," Kirk murmured.

"Pity you aren't Vulcan - then you'd know for sure," McCoy said thoughtfully.

The comment was enough to start a train of thought in the Captain. "That's it!" he exclaimed. "Don't you see, Bones, that's it! I shut myself away behind a wall he couldn't break down!" Suddenly hopeful, he went on. "Bones - is there a drug you could give me, one that will make me more mentally receptive? That will enable me to 'feel' more?"

"Yes...but it's dangerous. It would have to be done under strict supervision." McCoy's voice was suddenly very careful.

Kirk shrugged this off. "Could you do it?" he asked. "The fewer who know..."

"You're damn right!" McCoy agreed in a loud whisper, looking towards the door. "The fewer who know about this damn foal experiment the better - or you'll end up with the entire crew believing you've lost your wits!"

Kirk nodded. "Maybe I have. But I have to know for sure!"

McCoy studied him for a moment, aware that even now Kirk was still unsure of what to think. But there was something steadfast in Kirk's eyes, and McCoy shook his head. "No, you're not mad. A little too strung up, maybe, but perfectly sane. Though don't go by me - I'm supposed to be done in myself!" he added with a grin. Kirk found it surprisingly easy to return it.

"Thanks Bones," he said simply.

"Don't thank me yet. All we might prove is that we're both crazy."

Ten minutes later, Kirk was back on the bridge. There were still four hours to go before he went off duty - then McCoy would meet him in his cabin. Provided of course that he could pull rank on M'Benga.

His eyes moved to Spock's station, where Chekov was busily at work.

Perhaps Spock's death had affected him more, even, than he knew. Did even he yet know fully the depth of feeling he had for the Vulcan? Perhaps even now he was afraid to admit even to himself how much he did care. So how could he really know how much of this crazy stunt he was planning to pull was due to logic and how much was due to an insane refusal to accept fact?

He tightened his lips. No. He wouldn't let any doubts creep in. If there was even a shadow of doubt, then pursue it he must. Something he had read once came back to him. 'When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable...'

"I've got to know - one way or the other," he whispered grimly to himself.

Sulu turned to him. "Sir?"

Kirk shook himself mentally and glanced down at the helmsman. "Talking to myself, Mr. Sulu," he explained, giving a wry grin.

Sulu grinned back, reassured. "First sign of madness, they say, sir," he offered in an attempt at lightness.

Kirk looked up at the screen, his voice suddenly very distant, very thoughtful. "You could be right, Mr. Sulu," he replied quietly. "You could just be right."

"I had a helluva time convincing M'Benga I was coming to see you just for a chat." McCoy eased himself into a seat. He looked tired and drawn, and once Nurse Chapel, who had accompanied him to Kirk's quarters, had left, he let himself slump wearily. "He said, why not just have you come to sickbay; I managed to persuade him that I had to have a change of scenery."

Kirk handed him a stiff drink. "Look, Bones - if you're not up to it..." he began, his concern for his friend showing.

"Since when did you qualify as a doctor?" McCoy stated flatly, tipping back a healthy mouthful of the fiery liquid. "Settle down, Jim. I'm O.K., honestly."

He drew himself up firmly. "Now then - where would Dr. Kirk like this experiment carried out?" he asked.

"Spock's quarters," Kirk replied quickly. "I thought that would be the best place."

"Good idea." McCoy accepted Kirk's arm to rise again, wincing slightly. "I'll be glad when these ribs have healed."

Kirk looked at him in concern, then clamped his mouth shut. They moved across the room and through the chess closet. Bones looked questioningly at the board, but Kirk could not bring himself to look at it, to see again that move so recently made.

Once he had Bones seated, Kirk moved to the light control and flicked it on. A familiar feeling gripped him. It looked so lonely here.

McCoy motioned him to a seat then hitched out a small pack from the confines of his sling. With precise instructions he had Kirk fill up the hypo spray. Once this was done, he held it in his good hand and looked up at Kirk.

"We won't be disturbed?"

"Nothing short of Code One," responded Kirk with a slight grin. McCoy nodded.

"This'll last for about twenty minutes or so. It will act in direct contact with your adrenal glands."

"What do I expect? What sensations?" Kirk watched the hypo as it touched his arm.

"All your senses will become acutely tuned in. Your hearing will become very sensitive, smell more acute, any minor injuries will hurt more, heartbeat will sound like a hammer. You should be able to 'touch' things - feel them with your senses, so to speak. Your whole metabolism will speed up - and when it's over, you'll be as weak as a new-born babe."

Kirk set his jaw. "Let's get on with it before I change my mind."

Kirk lay back on the couch as McCoy directed him, breathing deeply to relax himself. The doctor took up a position near him and took his wrist to monitor the pulse.

Kirk shut his eyes as he waited.

It was fluttery at first. Like a distant drum in a hollow corridor - then slowly the steady throbbing began to grow, beating louder and louder, filling his ears as he finally recognised the sound of his own heartbeat, thumping steadily... Then over this came a clattering and clattering that began to pound at his eardrums, assailing his senses. Footsteps outside, moving along the corridors... voices in unison... He could hear McCoy's heart thumping...

And smell. He could smell the brandy McCoy had left in the other cabin...

He could feel the blood pounding in his veins.

He could feel the chilliness of the cool walls around him. Could detect muted sounds of laughter from somewhere.

He felt bruises he had received days ago begin to throb with new pain...

His mind was assailed with feelings he had never known so clear before... He opened his eyes.

McCoy's gaze was steady on him. "Jim?"

He knew McCoy was whispering, but it sounded like a shout. "O.K., Bones. I feel...alive." He spoke as though he had never been alive before. He sat up slowly, swinging his feet over the side of the couch gingerly, testing the sensation of movement. "I feel as though I've just been born."

Suddenly he could understand why some men became addicted to a drug. This

clarity of sensation radiated lethal appeal. "What do I do now?"

McCoy, satisfying himself that Kirk was indeed handling the drug satisfactorily, leaned back in his seat, letting go of the shaking hand where the pulse was pounding at increased speed. "Concentrate, Jim. Focus your whole mind on Spock."

"I thought I would just see him." Kirk allowed the disappointment to show in his voice. McCoy came forward and placed a hand on his shoulder.

"It's up to you whether or not you see him," he growled, not unkindly. "Use your sensitivity to reach out! Let your mind see for you. Forget your eyes - use your brain." His voice became earnest. "Don't limit yourself to your physical body - to the confines of this cabin. You should be aware of the whole ship..."

Kirk shut his eyes to help him concentrate. He let his mind dwell on Spock.

In its new strength the grief he felt was suddenly tenfold worse, rising like a black cloud to smother him, overwhelming him with a loss he thought he had governed. "Spock..."

The agony in his voice stabbed at McCoy.

"Spock... Listen to me!" Kirk spoke in a whisper, but inside his mind, he was shouting. He let his mind finally go where it would. He let it travel over every step of the Enterprise that he knew, seeking in every corner he could imagine his friend being.

He saw every inch of the way with mental clarity. And as he let himself into each section he let his heart cry out the one word. "Spock..."

When nothing transpired he began again, going over every step of the way once more. "Spock! If you can hear me, let me know. Spock!"

Still nothing.

Silence filled the room - for McCoy. For Kirk, the room was filled with noise. He concentrated again for long, precious minutes that ticked away the time he had left; McCoy would not risk this again, he knew. Each moment he became more aware that he was losing a gamble...losing hope. He cried out desperately again, "Spock!"

Nothing.

"It's failed, Bones. I was wrong!" he cried suddenly, flinging himself up from the couch, lost in this new, tormented world where he had thought to reach a dead man. "I must have been demented..."

"You're not trying properly!" exclaimed McCoy. "Sit down. Now - reach into yourself."

Kirk rounded on him. "I can't! I was wrong!"

"The hell you were!" McCoy snapped back. "You're calling him like a frightened kid, not as a friend. You're letting your grief blank you out again."

Kirk let McCoy push him back down. He shut his eyes again and made a desperate effort to govern the pain that was swamping him. It was hard - but at last he began to feel himself controlling the loneliness inside himself, the coldness melting. He let his thoughts linger on memories of the silent man he called friend.

His thoughts became gentle as he recalled the years they had shared.

Spock at his station, efficient, capable...

Spock calling him 'sir' in those early days - so formally.

Spock calling him 'Jim' for the first time. And later, in how many variations? Worriedly, concernedly, warmly...almost smiling, but not quite...

Spock saying "My game, I believe," with just enough 'I told you so' in the tone...

Kirk grinned inwardly. "But what about this last game, Spock? Have I got to finish it myself?"

A last futile cry from so very deep inside himself that he hardly knew he uttered it. "Spock....." And the love in that one thought was inexpressible.

Silence.

Another endless second passed. He began to open his eyes in defeat....

...and stopped in mid-movement. A sound...so distant that for a moment he wasn't sure he'd heard it...

Then it came again, this time clearly. One syllable. "Jim?"

It was surprised; disbelieving, and it was deep inside Kirk's head. He reached out.

"Jim?" The sound was firmer this time. Then, filled with wild hope, "Jim!"

Kirk didn't remember calling, leaping to his feet in the hope that even then he couldn't quite believe. "Spock!"

"Yes, Jim... But where? How?" And there was such pleasure in the words inside Kirk's head that his eyes filled with sudden moisture.

"Never mind how - just come. Your cabin."

And with shuddering thankfulness he heard Spock's voice say quietly, gently and so very happily, "Captain, it will be my pleasure."

The relief in that voice washed over Kirk's mind with the coolness of a mountain spring.

He felt every eager step that Spock took to get to him. Hurried, yet contained as though the Vulcan could not really believe - would not let himself believe what he knew to be true. That his Captain - his friend - awaited him. He had come to believe that Kirk would never be aware of him again.

Kirk felt - saw - him pause outside the door, almost fearfully. Then the door swished open.

McCoy turned, to see - an empty doorway. His brow crept slowly up his forehead; he felt a shiver run over his body. He glanced at Kirk.

Kirk turned to the opening door with fear in his every move at the same moment as McCoy. And he saw Spock.

The Vulcan stood poised, and as their eyes met across the room, both breathed a sigh of thankfulness.

"Spock."

"Jim."

They stood for several uncounted seconds, just looking, drinking in the fathomless feeling of having come home; of having triumphed over an immovable object.

Spock broke the spell first - that spell that was beating at his Vulcan control with utter thoroughness. He moved into the room, the doors swishing shut behind him with shocking normality, his eyes never moving from his Captain's face.

With deliberate movements he reached up a somewhat unsteady hand and placed it with shaking gentleness on Kirk's shoulder. His expression fought to be normal and failed as a slow fleeting smile curled his mouth, and his eyes shone warmly.

Kirk sensed in that moment, more clearly than words could ever say, all that this grave man kept hidden behind his contained mask of logical apartness. It warmed him. He smiled in return, and raised his hand to the Vulcan's shoulder. His fingers closed on the stiffly held muscles, and slowly he felt the tension leave the Vulcan.

"How?" Spock finally asked. "What made you suspect?"

"You were seen," came Kirk's simple reply.

"I did not believe that possible... I have been beamed into a different time plane." The voice was mildly surprised.

"Time sometimes shifts," Kirk responded. "People once thought they saw ghosts... I have always believed that there was some other answer."

"And that made you guess that I was not in fact really dead?" Spock asked calmly - so calmly that Kirk could have hugged him!

"It was sufficient to make me wonder... I began to get this vague feeling - call it intuition if you like - that there was something amiss. I had to know for sure," he stated flatly.

"Quite possibly Starfleet would have certified you unbalanced had they known," the Vulcan put in as a matter of fact.

"Yes. But I had to try. And besides... Bones..."

"... helped you in this illogical act," Spock finished for him. He turned to where McCoy watched wide-eyed, seeing only Kirk standing there, arm raised, talking to... Spock? "The time shift has put me forward a matter of a fraction of a second - enough to obliterate me from your sight although I, of course, can observe you."

Spock finally drew his hand away with a wrenching feeling then turned to McCoy once more. "The good doctor concurred with this experiment," he said. "He did not suggest rest and rehabilitation for you?" For once there was only affection in Spock's tone.

"Bones pressured me to go on - when I would have given up," Kirk stated flatly. Spock met his gaze in understanding.

Finally Kirk pulled his attention away from the so very familiar figure of his First Officer - who, he now noted, was very bruised about the face, and showed the marks of several healing cuts. He turned to McCoy. "You'll be pleased to note, Bones, that we have Spock here with us." He laughed.

McCoy flicked a wary glance about the room, not sure where to look. Finally he growled softly, "A solid Spock I could stomach - just! An invisible one..." He left the innuendo open, before he added gruffly, trying to conceal his own joy at the news, "You'd better establish a link of some sort with him. That drug has just about run its time - and I won't be a party to giving you any more for a long time."

"Oh, Bones!" Kirk turned to Spock. "Well - what do you suggest?"

"A tape would be ideal," Spock replied, walking across to his desk unit. Once there he picked up several tapes already on the table.

Kirk felt a sudden enlightenment. "Have you used that way already... to try contacting...?" He trailed off as Spock turned to meet his eyes once again. He nodded, then said quietly,

"But you would not come." Spock's voice held a wealth of understanding.

"I would have - sometime," began Kirk, kicking himself for not registering the disturbed tapes when he had come into Spock's cabin after the chess game. He could remember being aware that something was wrong... "I would have come," he repeated. "When I could have faced it." He felt a sudden wave of dizziness grip him. He leaned against the table, seeing Spock and McCoy start forward together. "Tell me, Spock, that chess move..." The room began to appear blurred. He gripped the table harder, determined to hear the answer.

"When you wouldn't come to my cabin," Spock answered hurriedly, "I came to yours. As I could not reach you even there... that was the only thing left to do." He allowed a note of amusement to creep into his voice.

Kirk nodded, a silly grin dawning. He made to speak again, but this time the room tilted at a wrenching angle.

"Bones - " he began, but McCoy and Spock already had him. They eased him onto the bed, McCoy forgetting for a moment that the Vulcan existed at all. He did snap once into the empty air about him, "Just keep out of my way, you excuse for a dead man!" But the growl in his voice never reached his face as he pushed the hypo against Kirk's arm.

Kirk's last conscious vision was of a distorted Vulcan face peering over McCoy's shoulder before he finally lapsed into unconsciousness. He murmured, "It's O.K., Spock...the tape..."

"He's got to rest!" snapped McCoy, unaware that he was only inches from Spock. "And I've got to look at you - those drugs you took..."

The Vulcan raised an amused eyebrow, then strode across the room. He picked up a writing board and stylus and wrote on it. McCoy watched the board float, seemingly unaided, across the room, only to place itself in his hands. On the board was written, 'That statement, Doctor, must be your most illogical yet.'

As the words sank in, McCoy felt a sudden warmth flood his body. "By golly - we're almost back to normal - allowing a little change here and there." He gave a low chuckle of delight that made Spock's brows rise unseen in surprise, and a fleeting warmth showed on his own usually grave features. He felt the tape pushed against his chest, where obviously McCoy thought his arms must be. The Vulcan took it from the grinning doctor, reading what McCoy had written.

'Welcome home.' He made to write that it was illogical to write those words when McCoy could speak them, then realised that McCoy did not necessarily realise that he could hear perfectly well; McCoy could very well think that he only heard Jim because of the drug. He took the stylus from McCoy, and replied in kind.

'Thank you, Doctor - but I still have to find a way back into your time plane.'

McCoy pulled at his lower lip, then said, "Spock, can you hear me?"

'Yes.'

McCoy grinned, then said cheerfully and with lashings of deviltry, "Off-hand, I'd say we got the better bargain - but no doubt you'll spoil our peace by finding a way through to us." He moved towards the door. "Meanwhile...I'll leave you to take care of Jim. We need Scotty, and I can hardly call him to meet me here. I've already overstayed my 'leave'." He leaned heavily on the table as he passed it. For a moment, Spock followed him, his concern for the doctor clear on his face but safely unseen. The board was thrust under McCoy's nose.

'Doctor - if you do not feel able...'

"I'm all right, Spock." McCoy stopped the writing in mid-stream. "If M'Benga puts out a call - you haven't seen me, right?" He chuckled at his own turn of phrase. "See you - I hope!" He left hurriedly.

Spock stood still for a moment, then turned back to his charge, who lay silent in his drugged sleep.

The Vulcan pulled forward a seat, and sitting slowly down beside his Captain, he took up one of the lean hands. Peace settled on him, as he understood now why he could not reach Kirk before. Kirk's grief had been like a steel shroud about him, cutting off everything. Now that it was over, strange emotions filled his whole being. He did not try to smother them, for now he knew with surety that he would never again feel ashamed of his friendship with Kirk. It was right...and at this moment, all of Vulcan's teachings could go to hell!

Ever try explaining to a cynical Scots engineer that a dead man is alive - and invisible?

McCoy was met with a wall of... "Look, Leonard - if ye've been at the bottle, I'll no' tell," and then "Doctor, I don't think ye should be up just yet."

It took considerable stubbornness on McCoy's part - and no small amount of cursing - to convince Scotty that he was serious. The Scot only then conceded when McCoy looked as if he might collapse. He pulled McCoy into his office in the engineering section out of the hearing of passing personnel.

"Do ye mean to say, Leonard, that we've a similar happening to when those Scalosians tried to take over the Enterprise?"

"Very like that, Scotty - only this time, we're not trying to get rid of anyone. We're trying to get someone back..." McCoy sank gratefully into a seat. Scotty unearthed a bottle of whisky from a deep locker, and poured him a drink, forgetting, in his shock, to pour one for himself.

"Does Mr. Spock have the answer?" Scott asked hopefully.

"No - or at least, I don't think so. He's like always - can see and hear us. The trouble is, he's forward in time just enough to obliterate him from our sight. Maybe the answer's in the transporter. That blasted storm!" McCoy muttered the last words angrily.

"Aye. It could be. But we'd have to be pretty certain before putting Spock back through it, or we'll lose him altogether." He held out a hand to the wilting McCoy. "Let's get over to Spock. The sooner the better."

McCoy was too tired not to accept the help. He was beginning to think that he'd be wise to admit defeat, and return to his bed.

They had to enter Kirk's cabin to get to Spock. Too many people were passing in the corridor; and even the senior officers had no right to enter the cabin of a dead man apart from whoever the Captain assigned to pack his effects; and the whole crew knew that this was one job Kirk would do himself.

Spock had sealed the door through the closet as a precaution, so McCoy had to tap loudly to let him know they were there. As the panel slid open, McCoy ushered Scotty in first. The engineer looked about him warily, only now accepting that McCoy must be right; the door had opened for them, but apart from the still sleeping Kirk, the cabin appeared to be empty.

"Mr. Spock?" he whispered. The tape board floated, seemingly by itself, across the room, and completed his conversion. "Why didn't ye let us know sooner?" he asked, turning to help McCoy to a seat.

The exhausted doctor sat out the next ten minutes in silence, watching the proceedings at Spock's desk with amused interest. The tape board did overtime as Scotty did his best to converse with someone he could not see. Every now and then his exasperation clearly showed. McCoy contented himself with grinning occasionally, letting the engineer do all the work.

It was Kirk who finally brought them all to silence as he returned slowly to awareness. McCoy, his own exhaustion forgotten, was at his side instantly, checking his readings, then satisfied that all was well, he sat back as Kirk opened his eyes.

Kirk's head thudded unbearably as he tried to ease himself into a sitting position. He thought better of it, and contented himself with resting on his elbow.

"How do you feel?" McCoy asked with a smile of sympathy.

"Like I'm in eight parts," he replied groggily, looking towards Scotty, who sat watching him with a wary smile. "Scotty?" Kirk tried to formulate a question, but the engineer nodded quickly.

"Dinna worry, sir. Mr. Spock and I are formulating a plan of sorts."

"Good for you, Scotty. I knew I could rely on you." He eased himself up further and swung rubbery legs over the side of the couch, looking directly at the other seat. "Spock..." he began, only to feel a hand beneath his elbow that didn't belong to any visible man in the room. He grinned, letting the strong

unseen hand help him gain his feet.

"Thanks, Spock." Then he took a deep breath to hide what he really wanted - needed - to say to the Vulcan, but which would have to wait. "Well, gentlemen, we have some work to do."

"Mr. Spock has already worked out a process, Captain. It will mean going back to Cayniz B and setting up conditions like those we went through last time." Scotty put all his worry and doubt into that sentence.

"The idea doesn't appeal to you, Scotty?" Kirk asked quickly.

"It's likely to be verra dicey, Captain. We could lose him altogether this time. There has to be another way."

At this point the tape board was pushed into Kirk's hand. Kirk read -

'Captain, I have computed the odds and all applicable data. The computer is capable of calculating the situation and timing needed to within a fraction of what is required. There is no alternative.' Kirk frowned as the board was taken once more, only to be put back in his hands moments later with a hastily added note. 'Of course, if there is any danger to the ship or her crew, then I would prefer to remain where I am.'

Kirk smiled at that. "And let Starfleet lose a first class Science Officer? Mr. Spock, you're not thinking logically." He turned to Scotty. "Scotty, I want a meeting of department heads in the briefing room in thirty minutes." He strode to the intercom. "Kirk to bridge."

"Bridge here, Captain."

"Get the helm to plot a course back to Cayniz B immediately, Lieutenant, warp factor five. Then I want you in the briefing room."

"Aye, sir. Bridge out."

Scotty was already at the door, realising that his engines were to be over-worked but for once making no complaint.

"Scotty - not a word to anyone. Not yet."

"Understood, sir." He departed in a flurry of movement.

Kirk turned to McCoy. "Bones, once there, I'm going to need that drug again."

McCoy nodded, resigned. "Just make sure we don't lose you as well." He grinned tiredly.

Kirk grinned back. "Don't worry, Bones. You'll get us both back."

"Yeah," replied McCoy, coming gingerly to his feet. "That's what I'm afraid of. Been kind of peaceful around here of late." He sighed. "Now I'd better get back to sickbay, or M'Benga will have out a search party. I'm surprised he hasn't been chasing me up already." At the door, however, he paused and looked back. "By the way, Spock - those drugs. How badly were you hurt?"

The board floated across to him. McCoy leaned over it to read - 'Doctor, you are not the softest person to land upon. I suffered several cuts and abrasions. However, I have now treated them successfully.' There was a pause, then a hurried addition. 'However, I believe that in future I would prefer to have you deal with any injuries I may suffer.'

McCoy was thoughtful for a moment, then said slowly, "You know, Spock, one day you and me are going to thrash out what we really feel, 'cause right now I actually want to see your face again!" And with those words he too was gone, leaving the room filled with unspoken emotions.

Both men still in the room were fully aware that it was an extremely good friend who had just left them. It filled them with blinding awareness of how wrong it would feel if ever any one of the three of them was truly lost for good.

Kirk suddenly let out a chuckle.

"I think we had better sit down together, don't you? Or I'll be talking to anything but you!" Kirk moved across to the couch and sat down. Moments later he felt the movement of a body settling beside him.

Not realising that for once he was looking at a face that was expressing all that its owner felt, Kirk could only guess at what Spock must have been thinking. However, his friend's face was so vivid in his mind that he didn't need to see it to know the expressive non-expression he could guess was on it.

Spock, for his part, for once relaxed his control and let his features break into the usually denied smile of warmth that he so often wanted to share with Kirk but so rarely did, while he watched the expression of thankfulness that was so clear on his Captain's face. It warmed him. And so did the hope that he now felt. He was here, wasn't he - with the man he most trusted in life, who at last had realised he was there. Kipling's Thousandth Man...

But all he wrote on the board was - 'Even if I cannot return to your world, I will still be here. We can still communicate...'

"You're coming back," flashed Kirk. "Apart from anything else, we have that game to finish." He paused and held out his hand. A moment elapsed before he felt his grasp returned, then he continued. "Here's your anchor, Spock. However long it takes - we'll get you back."

He stood up, still clasping the invisible hand, and felt Spock rise with him. "We'll stand here again, Spock, just like this, only the next time will be 'normal'." He hesitated as a new thought entered his mind. "Were you here... when I first thought you lost?"

The invisible hand released his, and the stylus moved hastily. 'I did not wish to intrude, especially since I was not sure if I could return. When I saw the extent of your grief, I decided that I could not attempt to let you know I was there; I did not wish you to hope, then suffer again if my return was not possible.'

"I would have known you were alive, even though... Where were you?" Kirk asked, remembering how he had behaved.

The board was again pushed into his hand. 'By your side.'

A simple statement. "Where you belong," Kirk responded. Then he added quietly, "I meant all that I said." His head came up proudly in total commitment to their friendship.

'Yes.'

Kirk reached out to where he knew Spock's shoulder must be, and felt 'nothing' relax under his grip. "Come. We have a lot of work to do - together." Then he turned and pressed the door release.

Minutes later he was in the briefing room where his senior officers waited with no small amount of curiosity. At his side, unseen and steady as any known rock was Spock.

Just where he had always been.

Just where he would always be.

Of course there was disbelief at first. This was followed by horror - then slow realisation that Spock was alive, even if in a kind of limbo. This was all superceded with such a show of pleasure that there was hope for Spock to return that it brought an illogical lump to Spock's throat. To say he was deeply moved by the ensuing jubilation would have been an understatement, and he was glad of the invisibility that hid his reactions.

It was Uhura who summed up everyone's thoughts before they all departed to begin their given tasks. At the door she turned, looked at Kirk - correctly guessing Spock to be beside him - and said gaily, "We have to have you back, Mr. Spock - the computers have been just too impossible to live with!"

As she was about to turn into the corridor she was surprised to feel a tape board pressed into her hands. She read - 'Lieutenant, it is my guess that it is pining for a logical conversation, as opposed to the usual irrelevancies it has to deal with.'

"Touche!" she laughed, and disappeared into the elevator.

To say that it was a 'sticky' ride would have been an understatement. It was more a 'by the skin of our teeth' episode, where nerves attacked everyone with such thoroughness it took everyone - even those not directly involved - a full day to get over it.

The approach to the planet had been easy enough, it was the exact timing that had pushed each of them to the limits of his abilities.

Scotty and Chekov had been crucial in the co-ordination of the facts. Sulu and Chaney were the key to the precise moment of re-entry into the storm. It had taken spot on reactions, and they had not failed. Uhura, too, had been crucial to the success of the trip, for even intraship communications were affected by the storm and it took all her skill to keep the communications channels clear.

The idea was that Spock should be beamed down to the surface, then as they came back through the storm, a slightly delayed beam back would bring him back into their plane of time. The timing for this was crucial.

It was while everyone was going through a final check that Kirk tossed a hot coal into the fire by calmly announcing that he was going to beam down with Spock, having taken the drug so that he could remain in touch with him - otherwise they would be out of contact with the Vulcan when he was on the surface.

"Anything could go wrong while he's down there. This will minimise the risk that loss of contact would create."

"No, Jim!" exclaimed Bones. "We could lose you both."

Kirk swung onto McCoy. "I have to, Bones. You know I planned on taking that drug again - what else did you think I needed it for?" When McCoy didn't reply, Kirk went on. "Anything could happen down there. If we can't hear Spock, how could he let us know if something had gone wrong? And we can't trace him, either, but you can lock on to me."

A tape board almost flew across the room. 'I cannot allow you to risk your own life and existence.'

Kirk lips tightened. "I'm still commanding officer aboard this vessel," he said. "I'm not risking anyone else in this situation."

Chaney turned at this point. "Sir, I'm expendable personnel."

"No one is expendable, Mr. Chaney," Kirk snapped. "There will be no further discussion." He turned back to McCoy. "Let's get on with it, Bones. Mr. Sulu, you have the con. Spock - Scotty, Chekov..." He made for the elevator.

Eons later Kirk strode with quick eager steps towards sickbay.

His cheerful smile infected everyone that came into contact with it - not that they needed much infecting. Mr. Spock was once more with them.

The cheer had been heard in every corner of the ship, mused Kirk, when he and Spock had materialised on the transporter platform four hours ago, intact, normal.

Kirk, still under the effect of the drug, had been able to see Spock all along, and when they were brought back he could only wait, breath held, waiting for the reactions of the others as they solidified.

He needn't have worried.

Despite his injuries McCoy had leaped forward and grabbed Spock by the hand, nearly shaking it off in his eagerness to welcome Spock aboard. His yell of unrestrained delight had filled Kirk with warmth. "I never thought I'd see your pointed-eared face again!" he beamed, then, realising that he was showing too much, he hastily made way for the others.

Spock merely raised an eyebrow and stepped, shockingly casually, down from the platform. "It is good to be back," was all he was able to say before he was engulfed in a wave of unrestrained greeting.

Kirk remembered how calmly the Vulcan had taken all the unaccustomed slaps on the back, his face as expressionless as always but with a quiet content in his eyes.

As the first welcome died away, the others had stepped back and Kirk and Spock met each other's eyes across a strangely warm room. Kirk's heart was still thumping painfully under the effect of the drug, and as it had once heightened his loss, so now it enhanced his joy at Spock's return to a point where it was unbearable.

He could not utter a word. Spock, however, had understood, and said quietly, "Thank you, Jim."

Kirk had nodded, then, before his feelings had overtaken him, had strode quickly from the room.

The others gazed after him, slightly puzzled. Only two men understood just what all this had cost James Kirk. Spock moved to follow, but felt a restraining hand on his arm. He turned to meet McCoy's eyes.

"Let him go, Spock. He's got to wear that drug out, and he's also got to put a lid on some pretty strong emotions. He needs privacy right now."

Spock nodded, accepting McCoy's evaluation. He was not surprised.

Kirk had heard about all that later, of course, just as he heard of the reception Spock got when he entered the bridge. Much to everyone's amusement, Uhura, the calm and correct, had leaped to her feet at sight of him, and planted a firm kiss on his surprised lips. However, showing no sign of embarrassment, Spock had merely remarked, much to everyone's amusement,

"Your greeting is noted, Lieutenant," then he turned to the helmsman. "Mr. Chaney, you are already an excellent helmsman. One day, you will be unbeatable."

Whilst Kirk slept off the remainder of the drug, M'Benga had appeared, to drag both Spock and McCoy off to sickbay, where he had deposited them in beds, side by side, under threat of imminent death should either of them move.

He had then run tests on a grumbling McCoy, and announced, almost gleefully, that he had overdone things so much that he would require at least five days bed rest. The Vulcan had looked mildly amused, especially as McCoy had muttered dire threats of what he would do and the jobs he would give M'Benga once he was fully fit again, until his test results arrived and M'Benga ordered him five days in bed as well - under strict observation.

Spock and McCoy looked at each other - this time in perfect accord. Both considered the other's 'sentence' necessary, but not his own...

Now as Kirk entered the room he found them eyeing each other warily across the space between their beds. He moved cheerfully between their beds, grinning almost wickedly, a chess set 'borrowed' from recreation under one arm, the other hand holding a bag. He put down the chess set, then from the bag he pulled out a bottle of warm brown liquid and three glasses.

Measuring very carefully, he poured out three glasses of the liquid. McCoy gulped, recognising the Saurian D'Cos brandy.

"My god - you actually broke out your best brandy?"

"Purely medicinal," Kirk countered. Then he handed them each a glass, and

delicately placed the stopper back in the decanter.

"Wellllllll," he began innocently. "It's nice to see you two enjoying this encounter - which is a good thing. You both have five days of it," he added more innocently than ever. He lifted his glass, gesturing to the others to do the same.

They did, though Spock eyed him suspiciously. "Captain - I don't usually..."

"I know." Kirk perched himself on the edge of Spock's bed. "But I thought you might indulge me for once." His eyes, now more controlled, met Spock's. He clinked glasses with the Vulcan. "A toast," he said quietly, then turned to McCoy, who gave him a wide grin.

"It's got to be some toast for you to break out your precious Saurian brandy," he commented, his craggy face breaking up into all kinds of pleasure.

Kirk turned back to Spock, raising his glass as he said, "To the late Mr. Spock. Welcome back."

The three sipped the warming liquid. Bones agreed quietly. "Yeah, Spock. It's been like a grave around here." He leaned back, savouring the warmth hitting his stomach.

"Thank you, Jim, Doctor. I surprise myself - firstly by being glad to be back, even incarcerated here; and secondly, by finding this illogical liquid... palatable."

Kirk grinned. "Couple of shots of this," he chuckled, "and Bones might just beat the pants off you at chess."

The Vulcan eyed him in mild surprise. "It would be preferable to his usual play," he commented. "I find much lacking in his game. He tends to operate purely by illogic - which no normal mind could possibly understand."

McCoy sat up sharply, eyes narrowed. "Just because I beat you once - " he began.

"I was not really concentrating at the time, if you recall - " Spock tried to continue but he never got the chance. McCoy was already setting out the chess pieces with furious haste.

"Why, you pig-headed... You lost that game fair and square! And to prove it, I'm going to do it again!"

Spock looked suspiciously at the doctor then turned to Kirk. "You did this on purpose, of course," he accused.

"I just wanted to make you both feel at home," Kirk grinned, hoisting himself to his feet. "After all, you've got to live together for five days - you need to have something to do apart from arguing."

McCoy pushed the last piece onto the board, and growled, "Well, Jim, you're going to end up with a half naked Vulcan."

Kirk halted halfway to the door. "Bones?"

McCoy stared at Spock, daring him to defy the challenge. "That's what this game is for. Your pants - or mine, Spock. Unless of course you're afraid to take on the wager."

Spock looked at him, then at the board, then finally at Kirk. Then he shrugged and reached out for the board. "Very well, Doctor, as you require yet another demonstration of my superior ability at the game. Regard it as another lesson in how to play chess properly."

Was that a sigh? Kirk didn't wait to hear more. He moved out into the corridor, grinning happily. The fur would fly soon, and both men would enjoy every minute of it. Then in five days, his ship would be back to normal. He halted outside Spock's cabin, thankful that now he wouldn't have to enter it except when invited once more.

He moved to his own quarters, suddenly remembering the last time he had taken time off for a shower. He entered his cabin and put on the light, moving to the chess closet, the door sliding open under easy fingers.

The game stared back at him, the move that Spock had made while invisible no longer threatening. Thank God, thought Kirk as he made his next planned move.

Moments later he was enjoying a hot shower - and remembering too late his brandy decanter. He shrugged. That was one bottle of Saurian brandy that he was unlikely to taste any more of.

Then he grinned warmly. Under the circumstances...

His friends were welcome to it.

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SECURITY LAMENT by Ray Dowsett

"Who'd be in Security?" the young man said,
 "Odds on you'll end up dead."
 Danger threatens - you're the first to go.
 Death or glory, that's all we know.

Science, Engineering and Medical too,
 They don't get killed like us lot do.
 Cannon fodder - that's all we are,
 No thanks at all, not even "Ta."

Does anyone care we exist?
 When we're gone, are we missed?
 By Kirk, Scotty or even Spock,
 Suppose we're just a number to the Doc?

Would someone tell me by and by
 What happens after we all die?
 Who then gets killed off one by one,
 'Cos there'll be no Security - we're all gone!

Yes, it's a hell of a life - Security crew.
 On Enterprise we're called the few.
 Strong in the arm, weak in the head.
 "Who'd be in Security?" the young man said.

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ENTERPRISE by Gladys Oliver

Lights flashed through space and skies,
 Trembling in the quick and instant eyes
 Then gone!
 Bright as a star set free,
 Too quick for the slower eye to see.
 Space and milkways abound, crosses them
 On a whispered sound.
 Then gone!
 Like a ship in the night
 Shimmering on a glimmer of distant light,
 Gone!
 To where she must always belong,
 Leaving the Enterprise's haunting song.....

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McCoy's so fond of arguing he won't eat anything that agrees with him.

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THE MISTS OF TIME by Mariann Hornlein

I, Kirshna, Senior Lieutenant of the Klingon Empire, am making this tape as a record of the unique experiences I encountered on the planet Earth, and as the personal memento of my coming of age.

I was part of a force sent to capture and control the so-called 'Guardian of the Gate of Forever' - not that I truly believed that this circle of stone could possibly be a time portal - and was very excited over my first deep-space assignment. Perhaps I would meet some of the strange races I had so far only studied. We captured the planet without undue trouble, but were then defeated in turn by the Federation Starship, the Enterprise.

I seethed inside as I watched the arrogant Human Captain calmly order our weapons confiscated. He was a brave warrior - I had seen him fight - but it is the utmost humiliation for a Klingon Warrior to lose his weapons. I stared at the Captain, trying to decide what kind of person he was, and felt a deep scorn when I saw his face reflect sadness as his gaze fell on the stone circle and the strange mists swirling within. I had no idea what caused such an emotion, but knew that no Klingon would ever reveal such a weakness to an enemy!

A tall, blue-shirted man materialised and approached the Captain, and I felt my lips curl slightly as I recognised a Vulcan. The Human's face seemed to become strangely gentle when he looked at the approaching man, and the scorn I felt grew stronger. I was a Warrior; although I was also a woman who was, I had been told, quite pleasing to the male eye, I would never consider myself gentle!

I was seized with a sudden desire to avenge the capture of my landing force, to make the Humans pay for the seizure of our weapons, and became determined to kill the Starship Captain. Only the Vulcan was nearby, and a member of that peace-loving race could not stop a Klingon!

I stretched, reaching to the nape of my neck where I had a knife hidden under my tunic. It seemed to float into my hand, and I lunged, the tip pointed up so that it would penetrate under the ribs, ripping into the lungs and heart. Someone grabbed me, twisted the knife from my hands, and I fell against the Captain. He staggered...there was a blinding, suffocating haze, and I was rolling on the rocky ground.

I started to rise...and found myself staring in wonder at the strange mist-filled world that now surrounded me. A deep blue, endless body of water stretched to the horizon. I felt my mind whirling as I looked around and saw the reed-filled swamp that lined the ocean's shores. In the distance I saw a strange green jungle. Over the swamp rose a thick haze, filled with the faint buzz of insects and the smell of decaying vegetation.

The vegetation was strange, unlike any I had ever seen or studied. Tall and short, thick-trunked trees had long feathery fronds growing flower-like from the top. Tall slender trees had branches like an upside-down steel half-arc, with all the leaves hidden at the top. My frantic eyes finally stopped as I recognised ferns - but such ferns! Tiny ones, barely an inch high, and those waist high I had seen before; never ferns as tall or taller than the surrounding trees! Here and there grew an evergreen, similar to those I had seen pictured on Earth. Yes, we know what Earth looks like, though I do not believe any Human has ever seen a picture of my home world.

"A...gingko! Where...are...we?"

Startled, I looked around to find the Human Captain and the Vulcan standing nearby. The Human's face reflected my own wonder, and I felt a moment's kinship with him. The Vulcan - cold, impassive, one eyebrow raised - was entirely different. I decided I did not like that one!

My dislike grew at his answering words. "I believe the question should be 'when', not 'where', Captain."

Vulcans! Couldn't the creature even answer his own Captain's question? As much as I disliked the Vulcan, I still listened intently as he continued. "I believe we are in the Mesozoic Age of your Earth. Probably in the Late Jurassic Period. The presence of seed trees together with the ferns indicates..." Both eyebrows arched and his eyes widened slightly. "I believe the appearance of that creature substantiates my statement, Captain."

I followed the direction of his gaze, and a gasp was startled out of me as a beast from my darkest nightmares broke out of the strange jungle. Fully ten metres long, it had massive hind legs and thighs that reminded me horribly of some huge bird of prey. Its thick trunk tapered slightly towards the chest, where it held shorter forearms close to its body. Even at this distance I could see the three claws on the ends of the short arms. The meter-long head looked a great deal like a featherless bird's head, except the cavernous mouth was lined with curved dagger teeth, unlike any bird I had ever seen. The beast lumbered swiftly over the ground, swaying slightly from side to side, and I could see the long tapering tail swing behind it, as it pursued another, smaller, creature.

The Vulcan spoke again, and I felt a red rage boil inside of me at the insufferable calm of the cold voice. "That, I believe, is a Theropod. A carnosaur known as an Allosaurus. I believe it is chasing a small Sauropod, perhaps a young Brontosaurus."

I started to snarl a question at the Vulcan when the Captain interrupted. "Interesting place to visit, but I don't want to live here. Guardian, we wish to return."

Nothing happened.

I moved impatiently. Surely the fool did not expect... He did. "Guardian? I said, we are ready to return."

The Vulcan broke in. "Captain, I do not think that the Guardian intends to remove us, therefore, since the Allosaurus has now seen us, may I suggest we remove ourselves, and quickly."

I glanced towards the jungle, and my heart stood still. The creature, its previous prey clearly forgotten, was lumbering in our direction, its great strides eating up the distance between us. My wrist was caught, and I was unceremoniously dragged across the ground towards a small rise of rock. I was thrust behind a clump of ferns and ordered to remain silent. The red rage grew stronger. Who did that Vulcan think he was, ordering a Klingon... The creature lumbered into view and I settled back. I would have my words with the Vulcan later.

The creature - I would not call it by the Vulcan's name - stopped, and swung its massive head from side to side, the long sharp teeth glittering in the sun. Then a bird-like creature not quite two metres long rushed into view, followed by a man-sized version of the monster. The smaller beast saw the larger, came to a sudden halt, turned, and raced off towards the jungle. The monster's head swung round, followed by its entire body, and he went after this new source of food.

"An Ornitholestes! Fascinating!"

I scowled at the Vulcan. I had never met one of his breed before, but I had read a great deal about them, and what I knew filled me with disgust. We Klingons are an aggressive race, proud of our courage, our fighting ability and our violent emotions. I felt nothing but loathing for the logical, peaceful Vulcan philosophy - a belief that I felt covered cowardice.

The Human stood and looked around. "Analysis, Mr. Spock?"

I listened with dismay to the Vulcan's answer. "I have no data concerning the Guardian's failure to return us to our own time, and speculation is useless. However, it is highly probable that there has been a failure of some type."

I could keep quiet no longer. "Can't you ever speak, so others can understand? What were all those long words you were using before? And what do you mean, a 'failure'?"

I seethed as he eyed me and yearned to hit that calm face. How dared he be so controlled when my inside was churning with a fear never before felt?

When he answered, his voice was almost condescending - how I hated him! "We are approximately 140 million years in Earth's past, in a time period called the Jurassic. There were two types of dinosaur present at this time; the Saurischian or lizard-hipped, and Ornithischian or bird-hipped. Sauropods and Theropods were two different kinds of Saurischian; Sauropods were four-footed and vegetarian, while Theropods were biped and mostly carnivores - meat-eaters. Allosaur and Ornitholestes are names given to two of the meat-eaters. The other animal was a herb-eater, a young Sauropod."

I was already bored by the explanation I had demanded, but it seemed that he was finished. He pointed to the ocean and looked at his Captain. "I believe that is what is called the 'Sundance Sea', which would put us approximately in the mid-western region of the North American Continent, perhaps in the area of the Morrison Fields."

The Captain was frowning at the Vulcan thoughtfully, and I thought I detected a trace of the same impatience I felt. "All very interesting, Mr. Spock, but... do you have any suggestions as to how we can return to our own age?"

The Vulcan slowly shook his head. "I do not." He frowned at the Human and I wondered why. Then I noticed the perspiration pouring off the Human's face, staining his gold shirt, and realised that this planet was much like my own home world in climate - very hot and humid.

The Vulcan's gaze met and held the Human's for a long moment, and I found my anger growing. I did not understand that look, and I do not like things I do not understand! I stepped between the two and looked from one to the other. "If we are to be stuck on this planet in time, perhaps we had better introduce ourselves. I am Krishna, Senior Lieutenant of the Klingon Empire."

The Human smiled, and I was somewhat taken aback at the masculine charm revealed. "I am Captain James T. Kirk and this is my First Officer, Commander Spock."

Kirk! I had heard about this Human, mainly from Kor. I could see why Kor did not like him - but I am not Kor, and if I had to be in such a place with a Human...

I tried to ignore the Vulcan - strange that I did not wonder how he had become a Commander in Starfleet - but he continued speaking as if I were not even present. "This world is filled with areas similar to this; low alluvial plains covered with swamp and jungle, crossed by small streams and rivers of fresh water. I suggest, Captain, that we try to find one of those streams as soon as possible."

The Captain nodded and felt his belt. "Damn! I dropped my phaser. Spock?"

The Vulcan held out the small hand weapon. "Affirmative, Captain. However, the weapon is nearly drained. It will be impossible to use more than once or twice. I also have the knife used by the Lieutenant."

We walked for hours, following a narrow sliver of solid land that ran between the ocean and the swamps. I spent much of the time glaring at the Vulcan's straight back and the rest speculating about the Human. The First Officer irritated me - thoroughly. He reminded me too much of our ship's computer...but he could be a problem. The Human, Kirk, now - he was different. I knew that he was a warrior, had been successful against the Klingons on more than one occasion, and he was all male. He would be a fitting mate for a Vulcan Warrior, particularly one in my position. However, I felt that the Vulcan would not think that a joining between Kirk and myself would be 'logical'.

I caught the Vulcan (I could not bring myself to use his name) glancing at Kirk, and I wondered why. A few moments' speculation gave me what I thought to be the answer. Kirk was suffering intensely in this hot, humid climate; it was conceivable that it could kill him. I did not believe the Vulcan, with his

cowardly way of peace, would wish to be stranded in this inhospitable world with a Klingon Warrior, alone. As to that, I did not wish to be alone with him, either. My glance flickered to Kirk more and more often as well.

The path grew treacherous, with small islands in the bog penetrating into the solid ground. I finally had to keep my eyes on the ground, limiting myself to brief glimpses of the two Federation officers. I noticed though that the Vulcan kept looking at Kirk, and nodded to myself at this confirmation of my judgement.

The Vulcan stepped forward, his gaze intent on the Captain. My eyes were on the ground, and I saw the softness into which he was stepping. Good! Perhaps this would be the time to lose this computer. His leg sank deep into the muck, which released bubbles of evil-smelling gas. Caught off balance, he brought his other leg forward - and was firmly held, and sinking rapidly.

Kirk jumped forward and stretched out both hands. "Spock! Grab hold!"

There was reason to hurry, the Vulcan was already almost too deep to pull free. The mud seemed to suck at him like a living creature ready for the kill. I watched their hands meet, and wondered why Kirk was so anxious to pull the Vulcan free. Was it simply his responsibility as Captain? Then I nodded in understanding - Spock had both phaser and knife.

Kirk braced his legs, leaned backward and pulled. I watched the swamp, searching for possible danger as, with a slow, reluctant slurping sound, the muck released its victim. Kirk fell backward, the Vulcan on top of him, and for a moment they lay together, breathing heavily under the strain. I was watching some reeds move against the wind, wondering what creature would next appear, and did not really see what happened, but I could almost have sworn that Kirk's arms tightened for a brief moment around the Vulcan. Then both rose, and I knew that I must have been mistaken.

The Vulcan sat and removed his boots, calmly shaking out the mud, and I felt anger stir inside. The creature had not even thanked his Captain for saving his life!

"Captain, may I have my knife back? I'd feel safer. And, as Commander, shouldn't you be the one to carry the phaser?"

The Vulcan stilled, his eyes boring into me, and I felt uneasy, as if he could read my thoughts. I looked steadily at Kirk, who smiled at me and then nodded. "Give the Lieutenant her knife, Spock." The realisation that he thought I was afraid came as a distinct shock.

The Vulcan handed me the knife, then extended the phaser to Kirk. "She is correct. You should be the one to carry this." His voice dropped and became very low. "I prefer it, Jim."

I looked away in disgust. No Klingon would voluntarily give up his weapon. I had expected the Vulcan to protest; that he did not was, I felt further proof of his basic cowardliness. I decided then and there to rid myself of the Vulcan, somehow. I was not so foolish to believe that Kirk would accept my killing his First Officer...but I was very confident of my ability as a female. I was certain that I could make Kirk desire me to a point that he would do exactly as I wished; perhaps even wish himself to be rid of an interfering third party.

We continued walking, somewhat slower now as the Human showed more and more the effects of the intense heat. I admired his almost Klingon-like stubbornness as he insisted on continuing. The day grew hotter, and small animals appeared from the depths of the swamp. Small, rat-like mammals, equipped with sharp, jutting teeth, and tiny dinosaurs, barely the size of my hand. Insects buzzed in greater numbers, many discovering for the first time the joys of Human and Klingon flesh. The Vulcan's green blood seemed to make him immune to this annoyance, and my irritation grew greater. Large shapes shadowed the ocean, but only the Vulcan was at all interested in what they represented.

Eventually we reached the junction of a small stream of fresh water, but the

Vulcan would not let us stop. He pointed out that predators, both of land and sea, would be likely to come to this spot, and that it would be safer for us to travel a way upstream. Kirk agreed, mainly, I believed, to shut the insufferably calm voice up, and we went about a thousand meters further before we collapsed to the ground.

My opinion of the Vulcan did not change greatly over the next few days, except to become more firmly entrenched in my mind. I could find no reason for his ill-concealed concern for Kirk except personal fear, and perhaps the realisation that I was slowly but surely gaining Kirk's attention. Once I wondered if there could actually be friendship between the two, but quickly put the thought aside. Vulcans did not have emotions and friendship was not logical - how I learned to hate that word! Kirk's reaction was, I was certain, simply the Human one of showing responsibility for a crewmember.

My campaign was proceeding well. Kirk was adversely affected by the heat, and was forced to rest often, time I used to my advantage. We talked for long hours while the Vulcan worked to erect a shelter from the ferns and locate food. Many times Kirk would join in the work, but I pleaded fatigue and the Human, plagued by an over-concern for women and the conviction that women should be weaker than men, accepted my explanation. The Vulcan, I am certain, did not, but he never said anything, only raised that very irritating eyebrow. I enjoyed watching Kirk work, even though it took him from my side. The Human's muscles rippled under the bronze skin, so unlike Klingon flesh, and the sight made me burn with desire. Finally I decided to join them, and stripped off the outer portion of my uniform, retaining only very brief briefs and a narrow breast support. I saw Kirk's eyes widen in appreciation as I joined them, and knew satisfaction. It was nearly time for my move.

Food, at least for Kirk and myself, was plentiful; the small mammals and reptiles, mussels, various insects and grubs were all edible. However, the Vulcan was a vegetarian, and there was little that he could eat. Pine cones and needles, leaves and seeds, do not form the basis of a very nourishing diet. He was forced to experiment with various fungi and mosses - sometimes with results that pleased me greatly.

Once he tried a strange pale green mushroom, and before long was doubled over in pain. It was very strange to hear moans coming from behind those tightly held lips, it made the Vulcan seem too vulnerable for my liking. I preferred to think of him as a machine. I settled back to enjoy his suffering, and watched in amazement as Kirk put his arms round the Vulcan and supported him until the agonizing retching passed.

I expected Kirk to leave him then, but the Captain did not. Instead, he settled the Vulcan against his chest, holding him close as the Vulcan slowly drifted into a sleep of utter exhaustion. I realized then that there was much about the Human I did not, perhaps never would, understand. I had utterly forgotten that Kirk was just as much an alien to a Klingon as a Vulcan. I watched the two together, and again wondered if Kirk regarded the Vulcan as a friend. Perhaps - I could not understand, but Kirk was Human...

If he did, it would make my task harder, but not impossible. I was Krishna - and I had never been refused! No Human could resist me, of that I was certain. I waited patiently for the proper time, using all of my not inconsiderable knowledge to entrap Kirk. Spock helped. Almost as if underscoring his superior strength, he worked continuously on the shelter and in getting food and fashioning various utensils. He made me feel guilty, as if I were not doing my fair share, and I was sure Kirk felt the same. More than once he scolded Spock for doing so much work.

Although the Vulcan exasperated me, I was nevertheless grateful for the work that he did do. It made our situation much more comfortable, and enabled me to spend time with Kirk. My admiration for the Human grew as we talked. He never took credit, but he told me about his ship, though guardedly, never betraying any

detail of military secrets. I realised that here was a true leader. Even Klingons would follow this Human. And, even here with the Vulcan doing the work, Kirk was still Captain, and we both obeyed his orders without question.

The time for me to act came sooner than I expected. Spock took off on one of his foraging trips, and I finally had the opportunity to work on Kirk. I was convinced that he wished to be alone as much as I did; he had watched me often enough.

As the afternoon drew on, however, I realised that his attention was not on me at all. His eyes kept searching the nearby jungle for some sign of the returning Vulcan. Although the gesture was, by now, very familiar, I was still irritated; his attention should have been on me! Was it possible that, for the first time in my life, I was failing to attract a man I wanted?

Then Kirk jumped to his feet, grabbed the phaser, and ran, shouting loudly, towards the trees. I slowly rose, my lips curling as I saw the Vulcan trying to outrace an Allosaurus - and failing. Just like the Vulcan to lead the dinosaur directly to camp! The fact that there was simply no other place for him to go did not cross my mind.

Kirk raced to intercept the Vulcan. I waited, hoping that the monster would reach the Vulcan before Kirk. Spock fell and my hopes rose, then were destroyed as Kirk straddled the fallen Vulcan and fired the phaser at the dinosaur. An eternity seemed to pass before the creature fell to the ground, then Kirk grabbed the Vulcan, swung him over his shoulder, and headed back to camp.

By the time they arrived, the Vulcan was conscious, grey-faced, and breathing heavily. Kirk lowered him to a large rock, and the Vulcan steeped his fingers and concentrated, trying to even his breathing and still the slight trembling of his body.

I walked over to the Captain and placed my hand on his shoulders, looking at him with all the feminine charm I could muster. "Jim, I cannot be silent any longer. Twice now the Vulcan has endangered your life by his own carelessness. We don't need him, we need each other. We are both emotional creatures, not cold and filled with logic."

I faltered at the frown on Kirk's face, but firmed my resolve and continued, putting my arms around his shoulders. "He can find his own camp, nearby, perhaps, but away from us. He doesn't need companionship, not like we do. He is nothing but a computer, and a computer cannot be lonely. The nights are long - we can find much happiness in each other's arms..."

I watched Kirk's face in amazement. It had become as expressionless as the Vulcan's. I tried again. "Jim, think! We may very well be here for the rest of our lives! You are Human, I Klingon - both races that have emotions and need to express them. You desire me, I know that you do, and I desire you. Let him go..."

Very gently, Kirk released my arms from round his neck and moved over to the still Vulcan. He placed his hand on the Vulcan's shoulder and looked steadily at me. The Vulcan's head turned slightly at the touch, but his face remained carved marble.

"Krishna, you're selling both yourself and me short. You're asking me to desert a member of my crew to a life alone in a dangerous world, and I will not do that." I could see the knuckles on Kirk's hand grow white as he gripped the Vulcan's shoulder, and a furious rage started to grow inside me. Kirk continued. "You're no weak helpless child, you're an adult, a warrior who should know that only in unity can we hope to survive. Had it never occurred to you that Spock has a hard time living with your uncontrolled emotions - hard as you find it to live with his logic? Yet he is willing to accept you."

He gave the Vulcan's shoulder another squeeze and approached me. I was so angry by then that I barely heard what he said. "You are a very desirable woman, and I would like nothing better than to accept what you would offer; but not at Spock's expense! We are three people stranded here, and we need each other..."

"I do not need anyone! I do not need you, Human, and I most certainly do not need that peace-loving, logical, cowardly computer!" How dare he! How dare Kirk refuse me! "I will leave here. I prefer my own company to yours."

Kirk's voice grew quiet, very serious. "Krishna, I could make the decision for you, make you stay. But I will not. You must make your own decision. Both Spock and I wish you to stay, but you must make up your own mind, as a responsible adult."

Make up my own mind? I suddenly realised that I had never done that before. Always, someone else had made my decisions for me. The knowledge made me more furious than ever. I grabbed up my discarded clothes, took a bag of food, and marched out of camp, conscious that I must have looked like a fool.

At the jungle's edge I turned and glared at Kirk. "Stay? With the Computer? Never. But neither will you. The time will come when you yearn for the feel of warm arms, for the touch of soft lips, for the understanding of emotions like your own. Then you will come to me, and then we will see who wins!"

I moved behind a small rise in the ground, and made a hasty camp underneath some ferns. As angry as I was, I did not wish to get too far away, not with those dinosaurs around! Throughout the night I heard the predators fighting over the dead Allosaurus, and cursed Spock for bringing the creature so close to our camp. The more I thought about it the angrier I became. By morning I was ready to tell them both exactly what I thought of them and where they could both go.

I climbed the rise and looked towards the camp. Spock was alone, sorting out some supplies, and wondered where Kirk had gone. Perhaps I could still change the Human's mind. I did not wish to admit it, but I had not liked being alone...

A sudden noise, a kind of heavy blowing and loud thumping, interrupted my thoughts, and I cautiously made my way to the other side of the rise... and froze in horror.

Kirk was standing, back to a cliff wall, trying to dodge a curved horn on the nose of a dinosaur that seemed determined to skewer him. Every time Kirk tried to get away, the creature snorted and jabbed at him with the horn. I saw red staining the gold shirt and knew that the horn had struck home at least once. I wanted to go to Kirk, to help him in some way, but was paralysed by a fear greater than any I had ever felt. If only I had the phaser!

I saw the Vulcan, attracted by the noise, round the corner of the rise, and my lips tightened at the look of total terror that crossed the normally calm face. I felt a contempt unlike any I had ever felt, a contempt heightened by the fact that the terror was a reflection of my own fear...

Then I gaped in sheer disbelief as the Vulcan raced towards the creature, shouting loudly as he did so. My mouth dropped open as I watched the Vulcan dance enticingly just out of its reach.

"Spock! Go away! That's an order! Spock, please!"

The Vulcan ignored the frantic cry. He picked up huge chunks of rock and threw them at the dinosaur, hitting it squarely in the eyes. The huge saw-toothed head swung and I gasped as the horn missed Spock by mere inches.

Unwilling admiration filled me. I know no Klingon Warrior who would have faced that monster, who would have challenged it to weaponless combat. Was this the calm, cowardly Vulcan I had condemned to exile?

"Jim, run... To the rocks, hurry!"

I watched, unable to move, my gaze darting back and forth between the two men. Kirk made his way slowly to the shelter of some tumbled rocks, collapsing on his face behind them. Spock danced ahead of the dinosaur, leading it out of the gully and around the rise. Once he had the creature safely away, he darted between the rocks and headed directly towards Kirk.

I held back, subduing my desire to do the same. I wanted to see what would

happen, without their knowledge. I seemed to have misjudged the Vulcan's courage - what else had I misjudged?

Spock fell to his knees by Kirk's side, and I clearly saw the fear - for Kirk - on his face. He carefully turned the Captain over, and his face showed shock at the amount of red blood on the torn shirt.

I approached carefully, silently, my gaze fixed on the two men. Kirk's eyes opened and he blinked, then smiled up at the Vulcan. My heart stopped, then thudded painfully at the look of relief, of naked love on Spock's face. I sat on a low rock and watched as Spock carefully removed Kirk's shirt, and, using a piece of his own blue shirt, bandaged Kirk's injury. He then helped Kirk to sit, supporting him in the curve of his arm.

Suddenly, all was clear. What a fool I had been! Kirk's face was pale, but he was smiling as he looked up at the Vulcan, and Spock was smiling back. They loved each other, those two, loved as only two men, both Warriors, can love. They were brothers, brothers of mind and spirit, Warriors bound to each other in life and in death. No wonder Spock had done the work - he had wanted to protect Kirk against this climate. No wonder Kirk had watched for Spock so anxiously, had risked his own life to save the Vulcan.

In that minute I grew up, becoming the adult Kirk had thought I was. I finally realised that I had judged Spock in the light of my own desires and weakness - and that I had always done this, with everyone. No wonder I had advanced so slowly in the service!

Spock finally sensed my presence and looked up, the mask once again on his face. I was not fooled. I dropped to my knees and stared at him. "You are no computer. You love him, and he, you."

A Vulcan eyebrow rose on a tilted head as Spock stared at me in silent disapproval, but I noticed how carefully he still supported Kirk, how gently his arm curved around the Captain's shoulders...

I smiled. "I will not speak of this again, but I was wrong. I thought that control and a desire for peace indicated cowardliness and an inability to feel. I was unable to appreciate that differences need not be better or worse, but just ...different. If you let me, I would like to join you again."

Kirk grinned and looked up at the Vulcan. "Well, Spock?"

The Vulcan nodded slowly. "It would be...logical, Captain."

I couldn't help it. I grinned at the memory of his barehanded rush at the dinosaur and wondered how he would explain that action logically. Kirk's grin widened, and I knew that he was thinking the same thing. The Vulcan eyebrow raised again, but now I could see the brown eyes twinkling with amusement. How blind I had been! Spock shifted Kirk to a more comfortable position, and Kirk held out his hand.

"Welcome back, Krishna."

I took the offered hand...and the world faded into a mist...and we were sitting on the ground before the Guardian of the Gate of Forever. A slender, blue-shirted man yelled, "Jim! Spock!", ran a tricorder over them and before I could begin to think straight, we were on board the Enterprise.

A few hours later I walked down the corridor, keenly aware of the feeling of cleanliness, the superb fit of the red uniform, and of the masculine glances that followed me. I swung into sickbay, and perched on the side of Kirk's bed. The doctor - McCoy was his name - glared at me, but I smiled back at him. "After all, Doctor, I did live with your Captain for some time!"

He spluttered, but I ignored him and looked up at the watching Vulcan. "Why did the Guardian return us?"

Spock looked at Kirk, and the Captain answered. "It seems that in order for the Guardian to be able to return time travellers to the present, they must be in accord, must all have the same desire. Although we all wanted to return, you wanted to kill me, then to exile Spock. When we all accepted each other..."

* * * * *

I sit now before my window on my home planet, looking out over the tropical jungle, the heat and humidity reminding me of those days spent in Earth's past. Our enforced stay had been my fault, and mine alone, but I was very glad those days had happened.

Since I returned home, I have looked at Klingon men with new eyes. I know that I will be a better officer now, and that some day I will have a ship of my own. Yet...I wonder. I find myself missing Earth's past, and the two most 'remarkable' and 'fascinating' men I have ever known. Will I ever meet their equal here? I will no longer be satisfied with less.

Yesterday I met my new Commander. He is tall for a Klingon, with deep brown eyes and a ready smile. His name is Kirna and he has a reputation for bravery and rationality. I wonder.....

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TRIBBLE IN STORE! by Pippa Sykes

The level was quiet, no person in sight,
 They all gathered there from the left and the right.
 Thousands and thousands poured in from below,
 From bulkhead and foodhatch they seethed to and fro.
 Silently surging they shuffled through doors
 They crawled on the viewscreens and slid on the floors.
 Then at last they were there, at the scene of their crime,
 The doors were just closing, they got through in time.
 Then up to the air vents they wriggled as one,
 The guards did not see them or know where they'd gone.
 At the end of the air vent they bounced to the ground
 Still silent as shadows they jostled around.
 Then suddenly started a terrible din,
 As one had located an overturned bin.
 With mewling and purring and cooing with glee
 They surrounded the wheat store and started their tea,
 And happily munched for an hour or so,
 When no wheat remained, they decided to go.
 So, fat and contented, they moved in a throng,
 They thought they weren't noticed, alas they were wrong.
 They were seen by a yeoman who passed by the vent,
 And heard all the noise - for the Captain he sent.
 "Oh no!" sighed the Captain, "that's all that I need!
 I'll be down in a minute, just stay by that seed!"
 So the yeoman just stood, looking down at the floor,
 'Til his Captain arrived and said, "Open that door!"
 "But I can't," cried the yeoman, "it seems to be stuck."
 "Move away," said his Captain, "and I'll take a look."
 "Look out!" said the yeoman; it moved, as he'd feared,
 Under mountains of tribbles, James Kirk disappeared.

+++++

Chapel: How's your tribble?
 Uhura: I had to have it put down.
 Chapel: Was it mad?"
 Uhura: Well, it wasn't exactly pleased.

+++++

SOULSTEALER by Lorraine Goodison

"Your mind is not on your game, Lieutenant."

Lt. Uhura glanced quickly up from the piece she had been slowly turning in her hand and smiled in apology to her chess opponent.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Spock. I just can't seem to concentrate."

"Then I suggest we continue the game at a later date," said the First Officer. He rose, depressing the switch which would indicate on the table that a game was in progress. "Tomorrow, perhaps," continued Spock. "Your game is improving remarkably well, Lieutenant. I shall look forward to this game's continuance."

"Umm," murmured Uhura, her mind on other things. She barely registered the fact that Spock had gone, but stared at nothing, trying to retain the image that kept flashing before her eyes.

It was a face that she saw, the face of a woman she had never seen in her life. She had dreamed of the woman two nights running, but she could only remember vague images and references to something which was faintly frightening. The dream-image had remained with her all day, turning her thoughts into a state of turmoil. Only by concentrating hard and keeping her mind busy was she able to drive away the face, and sometimes even that failed. Uhura felt...uneasy.

Eventually she left the rec room and headed for her cabin to freshen up and change. Once there, however, she decided to go to bed early. Perhaps she could sleep it off, whatever it was. If only she could shake off that vague uneasy feeling...

She fell asleep almost at once, and was instantly caught in a world both frightening and beautiful.

There was no visible ground beneath her feet, lost as it was in a blanket of mist, but she could feel its solidness. A palace built of glittering gold crystals rose directly before her, a blood-red sun hanging like a ripe fruit in the white sky above it. The minarets and domes shone with a light bright as Earth's sun, a light that made her shield her eyes with an upflung arm. From out of that light came a figure.

It was tall, over six feet high, and elegant and slim. Delicate purple robes flowed from its shapely body; a body that would shame Venus. Marble-white hair fell about the head and shoulders like a waterfall. Gold glinted at wrist and throat. Dark blue eyes looked deep into Uhura's, and suddenly she recognized the ominous figure. It was the woman from her dream. The woman who had plagued her all day. The woman who, the night before, had told her what would happen next time they met.

In sudden mind-wrenching panic Uhura turned and ran, her own screams ringing in her ears. The woman glided after her, the mist rolling about her feet like a live animal.

Uhura ran as she had never run before, the woman's dream-words shrieking in her mind. "I want your soul, Uhura. I want your dreams, your very life. I need your soul, and I shall take what I need."

A wall reared up before her, closing round to trap her in a corner. She pressed against it, her fingers desperately searching for a hold.

"Uhura."

Fearfully she spun round, pressing her back against the smooth stone. Her eyes widened and she screamed until her voice gave out. The woman moved closer, reaching out with a milk-white hand.

"Oh, please let me wake up," sobbed Uhura. "Please, please. I want to wake up. I want to live, I want to - "

The woman glanced at the crumpled figure at her feet. A satisfied smile



crept over her pure features.

The Captain of the U.S.S. Enterprise strode through the door to sickbay, a worried frown creasing his forehead. When Lt. Uhura had failed to report for duty earlier he had sent Yeoman Kregan to her cabin to find out what, if anything, was wrong. Minutes later Kregan had called the bridge to say she could not wake Uhura. Dr. McCoy was summoned at once, and now Kirk was on his way to find out what was up. He hoped it was not serious. Uhura had seemed all right yesterday. A little preoccupied, perhaps, but not ill.

McCoy looked up from the couch as he entered. Kirk noted he looked a little haggard, and remembered Bones had been about to go off duty when he was called. The last few days had been tiring for the medical staff after picking up the casualties from the Klingon attack on Talles Five, and Bones McCoy would never rest while there were injured to attend. A personal failing or an admirable dedication? Kirk was never quite sure.

"Well, Bones? What's wrong?"

McCoy's eyes were haunted and sunken in this lined face. He gestured to the limp form of Uhura on the couch. "I don't know, Jim. I really don't know."

Kirk's frown deepened as McCoy indicated the monitor above the bed. "Look at it," sighed the doctor. "Life functions are normal. Heartbeat, blood pressure, breathing, everything. Physically there's nothing wrong with her, but mentally..."

"Mentally?" echoed Kirk, a dead feeling in the pit of his stomach.

"Mentally there's nothing. She's a vegetable with no thoughts and no responses; nothing to show that she lives. Her body works perfectly, her brain is unaffected, but she just won't move or speak. I've tried everything I know, but it's as if something has gone from her. A spark of life. Her...soul."

"Dammit, Bones, there must be something! Some clue to why she..."

"There isn't!" McCoy snapped back. "She's become a vegetable and I can do absolutely nothing!"

Kirk laid a hand on his shoulder. "I know, Bones. Sorry. You're tired, and you've done your best."

McCoy nodded mournfully. "Yeah, and my best just isn't good enough. I need some sleep..."

"Then I order you to go and get some," said Kirk firmly. "Nurse Chapel can keep an eye on Uhura and tell you if there's any change. You can't think if your brain is tired."

"No, I guess you're right. As usual. If only I knew..."

"Bones - "

McCoy waved a weary hand. "Yeah, yeah, I hear you. Sometimes you're as bad as Spock, you know that? Chris..."

Captain's Log. We are on course for Starbase Three with casualties from Talles Five. Situation is normal, except for the mysterious collapse of Lt. Uhura.

At this present moment Dr. McCoy is unable to establish the exact cause of her collapse, but is hopeful that the surgeons on Starbase Three will be able to help...

Kirk paused for a moment, cutting off the Captain's Log. He couldn't stop thinking of Uhura lying in sickbay. McCoy had put her on life support shortly after he had supposedly gone to bed, and she had been sinking deeper into a coma ever since. Bridge seemed a little empty without her crisp efficiency. If they couldn't...

"Captain, there is a small unidentified object directly ahead of us."

"Where exactly, Mr. Chekov?"

The young Russian scrutinised his instrument panel. "Bearing 263 mark 5, sir. It appears to be drifting in space."

Kirk absorbed the information and turned to Lt. Craven, who was currently manning the science console. "Mr. Craven?"

"Sensors indicate it is a Class three escape pod, Captain. Badly scarred and pitted, but still operational."

"Anyone on board?"

"One passenger, sir... Sir, there is an indication that the pod is about to blow up!"

Kirk slammed a finger down on the command chair panel. "Captain to

transporter room. Prepare to beam aboard unknown life form. Mr. Chekov, give them the co-ordinates."

He headed for the turbolift, his thoughts centred on the unknown survivor. "Lt. Uhur - uh, sorry, Lt. De Soto, contact Mr. Spock and Dr. McCoy. Ask them to meet me in Transporter Room One."

Blonde-haired De Soto watched as he disappeared into the lift and turned to comply with a heavy heart. She'd much rather Uhura was sitting here now instead of her.

McCoy was waiting when Kirk arrived, and Spock appeared a few moments later. McCoy's expression was puzzled and still a little haggard. "What's up, Jim?"

"A survivor from a space crash by the looks of it, Bones," said Kirk. He turned the man at the transporter controls. "Beam him aboard, Mr. Kyle."

As the Lieutenant moved the controls Kirk enquired about Uhura's condition. McCoy shook his head. "Not good, Jim. She's going down-hill fast and I can't stop it. When we reach Star - "

He broke off in mid-sentence and stood with the look of a love-starved school-boy. Kirk raised an eyebrow and turned to face the platform. The survivor had arrived, and Kirk found his mouth hanging open in astonishment. His eyes gulped in the beautiful woman standing before him, and he realised that every other woman he had met paled to insignificance beside her.

Silence reigned as the men ogled, and then the woman smiled, tossing her perfect head to that her white hair swirled in a white cloud about her shoulders. There was an audible sigh from McCoy.

The woman spoke in a voice like a peal of joyful bells. "My name is Ilandra. Where am I?"

Kirk pulled himself together and elbowed McCoy in the ribs. The doctor stood to attention, grinning sheepishly.

Dignity, thought Kirk. You've seen women before, James...

He flashed his most charming smile and held out a hand to help Ilandra down from the platform.

"I am Captain James T. Kirk of the U.S.S. Enterprise, the vessel you are now on board. This is my First Officer, Mr. Spock..." Kirk's voice trailed away as he saw Spock was standing to one side with his eyes closed, one hand to his forehead. "Mr. Spock? Is anything wrong?"

The Vulcan's eyes snapped open and he looked at Kirk as if his mind were elsewhere. "I am perfectly all right, Captain," he said. He nodded curtly to the woman at Kirk's side. "Lady Ilandra."

Kirk frowned and gave Spock a puzzled stare. It was not usual for the Vulcan to be so short with visitors, especially women. It wasn't usual for him to be standing like that, either. He shot Spock an 'I'll-see-you-later' look and went to introduce McCoy. He needn't have bothered. The good doctor was already turning on all his Southern charm with the look of a cat-on-a-canary-diet.

"Dr. McCoy to sickbay. Dr. McCoy to sickbay."

De Soto's announcement fell on deaf ears so Kirk gently but firmly distracted McCoy's attention long enough to get a word in edgewise. "Bones, sickbay wants you."

McCoy kept his eyes firmly fixed on Ilandra, who was now gazing round the room with great interest. Kirk moved in front of his mesmerised face.

"Bones, Uhura."

That broke the trance at once, and McCoy sped away as if the hounds of hell

were at his heels. Kirk glanced worriedly at Spock, who had not budged from his position by the door. He was studying Ilandra with a concentration that had nothing to do with her unique beauty.

Long acquainted with Spock's minute changes of expression, the Captain could tell that he was puzzled, and more than a little concerned. Kirk glanced briefly at the woman and looked quizzingly at Spock.

"Something up, Spock?"

"Nothing is 'up', Captain, but something is very wrong."

"Such as?"

Spock raised an eyebrow slightly and looked as if he was not too sure how to begin. He drew in a shallow breath and straightened his back. "Captain, when Ilandra came on board I experienced a most peculiar sensation." He paused and met Kirk's puzzled look. "I 'heard' Uhura in my mind."

Kirk's eyes widened. He began to ask more, then subsided as Spock went on. "She was pleading for help... Captain, I did not imagine it."

"No, I know that," said Kirk. "The question is, how and why?"

"I suggest you look to Ilandra for the answer to that," murmured Spock.

They both turned to watch Ilandra as she flirted with Kyle, and both wondered just who and what this mysterious woman was.

Two days later Kirk still was not sure of Ilandra's identity, and didn't feel inclined to ask too many more questions. She had given him a loose story of her lucky escape from a passenger cruiser before it blew up, but no firm answers were forthcoming about her background, her past, or her future plans. She was an enigma, and that intrigued Kirk. He would have liked more time to devote to her, but the demands of the Enterprise and Starfleet came first, and it looked like McCoy was doing a good enough job without his help. Kirk decided to give Bones a clear field with this lady.

The Enterprise was fast approaching Starbase Three, and Kirk could see McCoy getting more and more worried about Uhura. When he wasn't with Ilandra, he haunted sickbay and the bridge like a forlorn ghost, looking as if he would get out and push if he could.

True, there had been a change in Uhura's condition, but whether it was better or worse was hard to say. Her body functions had picked up again, but she frequently woke up screaming, and would continue screaming till McCoy sedated her. She did not speak, lying instead in a kind of trance, seeing nothing.

Kirk quizzed Spock about the experience he had had when Ilandra arrived, but the Vulcan could tell him nothing more. He had heard nothing from Uhura since that moment. It was puzzling and a little frightening. Spock had suggested a mind meld with the communications officer, but McCoy had vetoed it. He was beginning to fear Uhura had gone insane, and he wasn't taking a chance on Spock going that way too.

Yeoman Marie Moravia wearily collapsed on her bed and shut her eyes. It had been a hard day, and she had kept making mistakes; she had even given Captain Kirk the same form to sign three times! He'd been very nice about it, though...

She smiled at herself and found her thoughts centering on the woman rescued from space a few days ago. She hoped Ilandra would be left on Starbase Three. There was something about that woman that gave her the creeps.

Marie Moravia drifted off into a restless sleep and a string of weird dreams involving strange landscapes and golden palaces. Ilandra was in her dreams too, like an avenging angel of death.

Next day Yeoman Moravia was found dead, her body a lifeless husk.

Dr. McCoy was beginning to feel there was a jinx on him. Moravia's death was the third in five days, and with Uhura hovering between life and death there would probably be another before long. He half-heartedly prepared for the autopsy, knowing he would find nothing. It had been exactly the same with the other two women. They had been injured in the Talles Five skirmish, but not fatally. Funny the deaths were all women...

He lifted his head as Spock entered the room. McCoy scowled with characteristic irritation. "Well?" he snapped.

Spock was as unperturbed as ever. "I came to see Lt. Uhura," he explained. "How is she?"

"How should I know?" cried McCoy. "I'm only the doctor!" He swept out the door muttering about half-wit Vulcans with no sense. Spock watched him go with raised eyebrows. The doctor's emotional displays never ceased to amaze him. However, he was here for a more important reason than merely to irritate McCoy.

Moving purposefully into Intensive Care, he halted by the side of Uhura's bed. Under all the life-support equipment the beautiful dark-skinned woman lay still as death, a faint spark of life holding her soul to her physical shell. Her hair was sticky with sweat, her sparkling eyes dull and withdrawn. Uhura was dying.

Taking care not to move any of the vital equipment, Spock placed one hand on Uhura's face, his slender fingers quickly finding the vital pressure points so necessary to the mind-link. He lifted her limp hand and held it likewise to his face. Now was the moment.

As his mind slipped out to meet Uhura's, Spock was slightly perturbed to find a void where once lay dreams and hopes and memories of her life. He waited, senses stretched to their limits, and then she came.

Spock reeled back from a torrent of emotion and terror, and he struggled to calm Uhura down. His mind cried out for restraint, but he would not let himself retreat. Patiently he waited till Uhura's mind had played out all its fear and pain, and then he followed her into the limbo she had drifted through since her collapse.

Time passed slowly as he absorbed her experience, and when their minds finally parted, he knew what had to be done.

Spock returned to the harsh material world...and found McCoy standing at his side, his eyes sparking with anger.

"Just what the hell do you think you're doing?" yelled McCoy, fairly itching to get his hands round the Vulcan's throat.

"Mind melding, Doctor," answered Spock calmly.

McCoy looked as if he would explode. "You know damn fine what I mean! I told you not to - "

"Nevertheless, I did," interrupted Spock. "And I contacted Uhura."

McCoy's angry ranting ceased abruptly and he looked at Spock in amazement. "You contacted... What happened? Did you find out why - "

"He did, Doctor, and he will wish he had not!"

McCoy spun round to find Ilandra in the doorway, her face twisted with fury. She stabbed an accusing finger at Spock, who looked as if he had expected her to appear. McCoy could only stare at them both, the link between Ilandra and what Spock had learned not yet clear.

"You interfering fool!" shrieked the woman. "I had every right to take her and the others. Every right!"

"No," said Spock quietly. "You had no right at all. You are a vampire. A soul-stealer who has no soul of her own."

McCoy continued to gape in bewilderment, a terrible fear forming in his mind. He put his hand on Spock's shoulder, hardly able to believe the incredible truth. "Spock, you don't mean Ilandra - Ilandra has taken their souls!"

The Vulcan nodded gravely. "She takes them for food as we would drink water, Doctor. For some reason, she - NO!"

McCoy watched in numb disbelief as Spock suddenly crumpled in a heap on the floor. He was still asking questions when he too felt Ilandra steal his mind.

Kirk stared numbly at the bodies of his two best friends with a feeling of dread in the pit of his stomach. He had rushed to sickbay as soon as Dr. M'Benga called him, and now it looked like Uhura all over again. He glanced up at M'Benga and asked the inevitable question.

"Will they live?"

M'Benga stared unnecessarily at the monitors a while before answering. "I don't know, sir. It's the same as Lt. Uhura and Yeoman Moravia, and I have no way of knowing whether they'll come out of it or not."

"Then you'd better find out, hadn't you?" said Kirk angrily, striding out into the corridor in a rage. He realised at once that he should not have shouted like that, but he didn't feel like apologising just at that moment, since that meant going back...with Spock and Bones lying there...

Kirk found his feet taking him towards his quarters, and for the moment, he let them. He needed time to think, he realised, as he stepped into the lift. A massive yawn forced its way up his throat as the lift came to a smooth halt. He suddenly felt very tired.

A vague connection came to mind as he entered his quarters. Ilandra was still a mystery and a definite enigma. Could she have something to do with this?

He flopped down on the bed, sleep overpowering his leaden limbs. It occurred to him that he had not given anyone the con, nor had he mentioned where he was going. He would just close his eyes for a minute and then he'd...

When Kirk finally reopened his eyes he found his familiar cabin replaced by a building more magnificent and beautiful than any he had ever seen in his life. The light was bright, brilliant white, the sun a pulsating blood-red, and the woman who approached very, very beautiful.

"Ilandra," said Kirk. The woman nodded, a graceful nod. Kirk made a sweeping gesture with his arms.

"All this...all this beauty... Is it a dream?"

"A dream can become reality."

As Kirk watched unbelievably, Ilandra's features subtly changed until it was Ruth who stood smiling at him. Kirk took an involuntary step forward, a cry sticking in his throat as Ruth became Miramane, Edith, Elaan, all the women he had ever known and loved.

"Now I know for sure it's a dream," he murmured.

"I can become anyone you desire, James," said Ilandra, her features changing back into her own stunning beauty. Something that had been niggling away in Kirk's mind finally crept to the forefront of his thoughts.

"Spock, McCoy, Uhura... Did you have anything to do with their collapse?"

Ilandra moved seductively closer, gazing into his hazel eyes. She flashed him an intimate smile and pressed closer. For a brief moment Kirk was captured by her spell; felt tempted to abandon all thought and get to know this beautiful creature better, but there was still the knowledge that she had something to do

with his crewmembers' collapse. Shrugging her off, he strode towards the magnificent palace. He wasn't surprised when Ilandra appeared in his path, her beauty made all the more alluring by her anger. Kirk halted, standing with his arms folded and with an air of easy superiority, even though his intuition was sending out alarms nineteen to the dozen. Watch it, Jim, he thought. She's a lot more dangerous than she looks. Aloud, he said, "What do you want of me, Ilandra? What do you want with the Enterprise?"

"The ship is nothing. A heap of metal, that is all," snapped Ilandra. "It is your women's souls I want. And you."

Like McCoy before him, Kirk felt he had the answer forming in his head and it wasn't a pleasant feeling. He continued with the questions.

"My women crewmembers? What do you mean?"

Ilandra laughed, a coy smile chillingly like Uhura's crossing her face. "You are incredibly dim, James Kirk. I feed off the essence of what a person is, call it soul, life force, whatever. Every experience, every thought, joins in me to nourish my body. I am a woman, and I need women's souls to live. I was near death when I sensed your Uhura. Her mind tasted good, so I decided to come aboard your metal hulk. Was that not fortunate for us?"

"Us?" echoed Kirk, a revulsion to all she was filling his voice. He forced himself to remain still as the woman moved closer, a sweet smell of musk hanging in the air. Anger completely dissipated, Ilandra rested her lovely head on his shoulder.

"I have looked for you for years, James," she murmured. "You are so like my...mate. He died, but I live on, and found you. I love you, James. Say you will be mine... I can create anything you desire, anything at all..."

"Then create me back my ship!" cried Kirk, disentangling himself. He rounded on her, his anger matching hers. "What did you do to my friends? Why did you take their souls? I want some straight answers, Ilandra!"

"Then you shall have them!"

Her wild cry rang in his ears as he suddenly found himself choking on acrid fumes and smoke, orange flames eating into his uniform. He threw himself on the smoking earth, rolling over until the flames were beaten out. He stood up then, and that was when he saw the three poles and the people tied to them.

Frantically Kirk ran to the wooden poles, tearing at the ropes which held Spock, McCoy and Uhura. Gently he helped each of them down, quickly checking their heartbeat and respiration. That done, all he could do was wait.

McCoy was the first to come round, his face creasing into a broad grin as the Captain leaned anxiously over him.

"Why, hello, Jim. See what that damn Vulcan's got us into this time?"

"On the contrary, Doctor. Logically, the blame is as much yours as mine. If you had allowed me to - "

"Spock," murmured Kirk. He was in no mood for arguments at this time. Spock raised his eyebrows, and Kirk was sure he saw a glint of amusement in the dark eyes.

McCoy suddenly sat up and gripped his friend's shoulder. "Jim - Ilandra -"

Kirk nodded. "I already know what she's like, Bones. Would you believe I'm the image of her last mate? I imagine this is some sort of warning - this is what I - and my crew - get if I don't join her." He looked round at the fierce flames and grey smoke. "I've been in worse places..."

A bout of coughing drew their attention back to Uhura and McCoy was at her side immediately, ignoring the pain of his lacerated wrists. Spock seized his chance to speak to Kirk.

"Captain, you realise Ilandra will soon take you away from here?"

"Yes, and there's no need to try to guess what she'll say," Kirk replied. His expression hardened. "I've got to stop her, Spock. God knows what she could do if she was let loose among more people."

"You will have to battle her with your mind, Jim," said Spock softly. "You have to remember this is not real. It is happening in our minds, but Ilandra can twist our dreams into anything she wishes. If we do not believe, her power wanes, but McCoy and Uhura have not the mental strength to combat her, and I can do little on my own. If you can break her hold on you then I think she will lose us all. You must refuse to -"

Abruptly Spock vanished to be replaced by the glittering palace, and Kirk steeled himself for whatever might come next. Ilandra was so unpredictable... He took on a still military stance, staring fixedly ahead as Ilandra swept into view. She seemed even more beautiful than before, a silver aura playing about her head.

The rolling landscape slowly changed to a grandiose hall of white marble pillars and brilliant tapestries. Ilandra sank gracefully onto an ornate ruby-red throne, her delicate robes billowing gently in a barely-felt breeze. She rested her hand on one of the carved arms, her dark eyes drinking in the sight of Kirk.

"Well?" she murmured, her soft voice tinted with steel. "Have you decided to join me?"

"No," said Kirk, his mind racing as he thought over Spock's words.

"You realise I can do anything at all to your friends? There are many interesting tortures I can create for you to witness..."

"I know."

Ilandra's eyes widened slightly. "You would rather watch your friends suffer than join me in love?"

"Love? You?" Kirk's voice dripped with scorn and Ilandra recoiled as if stung. "What makes you think I love you?" continued Kirk. "I may look like your mate, but I don't intend to be a replacement for him. I'm not part of your dream-world, Ilandra."

For the first time Ilandra was confused. She ran to Kirk, her features twisted in anguish. "But I can give you so much! You can be a king, a lord..."

"I'm the Captain of a Starship, and that's all I'll ever be," said Kirk coldly. "You may own my soul, but you'll never own my heart. I will hate you for eternity, no matter what you create. I reject you, Ilandra. I reject your false world with all its lies. You are not real!"

"I am real!" Ilandra cried in real pain. She flung herself from the Human's side, running to touch the pillars, the tapestries, the throne. "All this is real! It is real in our minds! It lives in our thoughts! Please, please..."

"I don't believe you."

Ilandra stopped short at the cold words, as Kirk knew she would. She stared at the Human who so resembled her former love, and recoiled in despair as she heard his next words.

"I know this is only a dream," he told her. "I'm going to wake in my cabin and find I dreamed this fiasco. I do not believe in you, Ilandra."

"No!"

Instantly the throneroom wavered, changed to a million different scenes which joined into one huge shifting jumble of images and colours.

"Jim! Jim, help us, please help us!"

The eddies of colour merged together in a nightmarish scene of horror and noise. Kirk watched in shock as a garish, red-limbed monster reached out to

seize a helpless McCoy, the tentacles contracting as they drew him closer to the monster's cavernous mouth. He ran to help his friend, only to come to a halt as he saw Spock in the throes of madness, a Klingon mind-sifter ripping out his whole personality. Kirk stood in indecision, his mind confused and upside-down.

"Kill you! I must kill you!"

He spun round just in time to prevent Uhura plunging a glittering knife into his back. The African woman crouched before him, the knife in one hand and saliva dripping from her mouth. The noise around him rose to screaming pitch, and then he remembered what he himself had said only minutes ago. He shut his eyes to the horror and focused his mind on one thought.

I will not believe. This is not happening. It's all in my mind, my imagination. I will not believe what my eyes see!

The moans and screams faded into silence, and when he opened his eyes he was once more in the throne-room. Ilandra's eyes met and locked with his.

"You have a strong will, I concede that, but not strong enough. That, I will admit, was an illusion, a dream within a dream; but I have absolute power over this land. What I do to your friends in future shall be reality in its most painful form."

"Are threats your most potent weapon?" asked Kirk.

Ilandra's eyes glinted. "I have powers you would not dream of, James. In tapping your souls I have absorbed your deepest thoughts and emotions. I can twist the fabric of your lives as easily as I control this world. I do not wish to, but I can, and I will." She leaned back in the throne, her eyelids half closed in contemplation. When she spoke again, Kirk knew she meant every word.

"The Vulcan... I sense he is close to you, more than a mere friend... Is that not so?" Kirk did not reply. A thin smile touched the woman's lips as she continued.

"The mind-sifter. What you saw before was an illusion. I will make it happen for real, and this time no strong conviction will make it cease. Do you wish to see your friend die?"

She glanced quickly at Kirk, whose face was like stone. He stood like a rock, immovable. "Very well, I shall begin the torture..."

"Stop!"

Ilandra let her hand fall with a look of triumph on her delicate features. She watched closely as Kirk bowed his head in defeat. When he looked up the resemblance to her long-dead companion cut through her like a sharp blade.

"All right," sighed Kirk. "You needn't torture my friends, Ilandra. I'll stay here with you in your...paradise. The only thing I want is for you to return my friends to the ship and let my crew go. If you do that, I'll be yours willingly. If not, then I'll fight you all the rest of my life."

An odd expression flickered across Ilandra's face at that. Pain? wondered Kirk, or something else? He waited for the answer, wondering all the time how the others were. Would Ilandra let them go? The white head lifted slowly, and Ilandra snapped her fingers.

Instantly Kirk's head reeled and darkness replaced the brilliant light. A kaleidoscope of colour and sound burst in his mind, then - silence.

No. Not silence - for there were soft hums and clicks in the darkness, a gentle throbbing hardly heard; the sounds of a Starship speeding through the void of space. Kirk opened his eyes and saw a smooth unblemished ceiling.

He sat up, undecided as to what to do next. Why had Ilandra returned him here? It could not be another illusion, he had made it clear that he would stay if she freed the others. What, then?

The intercom at the side of his bed beeped, and Sulu's face filled the tiny screen. "Bridge to Captain Kirk. We are approaching Starbase Three, sir. ETA four hours thirty-two minutes."

"Thank you, Mr. Sulu. I'll be up in a minute."

He switched off, his mind still trying to cope with the unreality of it all. Could this still be Ilandra's dream? In a sort of daze he swung himself off the bed, his legs already taking him towards the door and sickbay. If Spock and the others were all right, he would know it was real. If not...

A vague, transparent shape was forming by the door to his cabin. It solidified as Kirk watched, becoming Ilandra. The Captain's eyes narrowed in anger.

"What are you up to now? If you think - "

Ilandra hushed him with a gesture. "Cease your accusations and listen. I have only a little time left." She sighed deeply, her shoulders slumping as if they held an unbearable weight. "You are so like my mate... His name was Nakama. Did I tell you that?"

"No. Ilandra..."

"Listen. I have returned your Uhura, your Spock, your McCoy... I could not return the others I took, for I have eaten, and their essences are part of me now. Nakama would not have approved of what I did, but I was so... You are more like Nakama than I thought, your willing sacrifice was so like him..." Her voice trailed off then, and she seemed lost in thought. Kirk waited in silence as she shook herself and returned to the present. Somehow she had lost the aura of vibrant beauty she had in her own world. Kirk felt a curious foreboding inside.

"I have decided."

His heart leaped at her words, but he still felt puzzled. All that torment and pain, and now... Her next words floored him.

"I shall let you go. You belong here, not at my side. Your sacrifice made me see sense. Perhaps victory is not so sweet after all. Goodbye, James."

"Wait!" Kirk cried as Ilandra began to turn transparent. "You said you had only a little time left. What do you mean?"

A small smile played about Ilandra's lips. "As I said before, you are incredibly dim, James Kirk. I have returned your friends' souls, therefore I must eat again, or die. I could not take any more of your people, not now, after all that has happened. Death is approaching, my loved one. Death, and realisation of what I have become. A parasite, looking for a host, a leech who would take all and return nothing... I shall be that no longer. I go to meet Nakama now; if I cannot have my companion in life, I shall have him in death. Farewell."

"Ilandra, wait..."

She was almost gone now, a faint blurred outline of colour and form. Kirk tried to speak, but the words would not come. Ilandra wavered, and she spoke one last time.

"James, I love you..."

The cabin was empty save for him. Kirk felt drained of all emotion. How had it come about? Why had she died for him? His legs felt shakey and weak, and he sat down as he tried to collect his thoughts.

Had it really happened, or was it a dream as Spock had said? What was a dream anyway?

The emotions returned with a sudden rush, and slowly, James Kirk began to cry.

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