

LOG ENTRIES

32



a **STAR TREK**
fanzine

contents

Cosmic Trap at Galaxy's End by Christine Leeson	P 3
Doctor's Dilemma by Rachel Tate	P 7
The Virus by Anne Flegg	P 8
Odonia by Anne Flegg	P 15
Mutiny by David Coote	P 16
The Test by Karen Hayden	P 21
Won't Somedoby <u>Please Help</u> the Captain by Tina Pole	P 33
Things Left Unsaid by Linda Green	P 38
Monkey Business by Josephine Timmins	P 39
Plea by Anne Flegg	P 42
The Kirk Syndrome by Christine Gray	P 43
A Taste of Afian by Kelly Downes	P 51
A Night Off by Phillipa Hammond	P 51?

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Hello everyone, and welcome to LE 32.

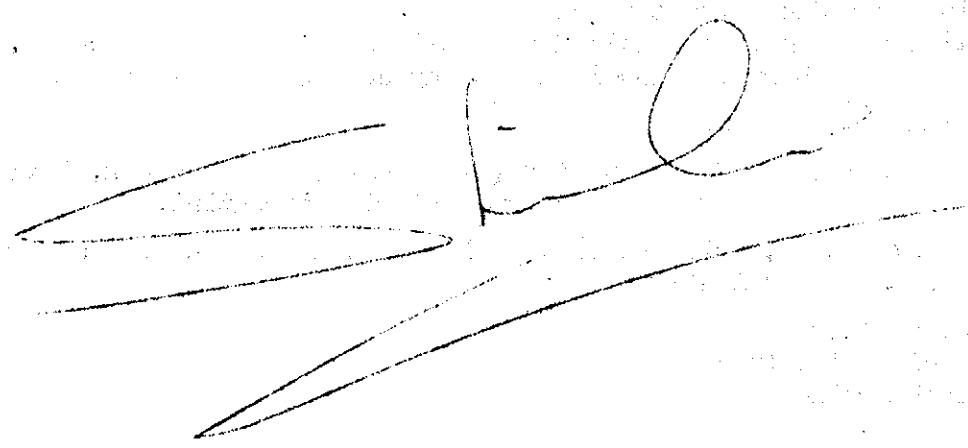
Having said that, my mind has gone completely blank. Putting in an editorial seemed a good idea at the time - every now and then there is something that very much needs to be said - but every now and then there's an issue when there's nothing at all to say. This usually happens when we put out two issues nose to tail (as now when we're trying to get two issues ready in time for the UFP con) but this time, Valerie is typing the stencils for LE 33 - and I intend pulling rank and insisting that she does the editorial for it.

Last time we had several stories by new writers. The same has happened this time. It's really gratifying to know that there are still so many of you out there who are writing STAR TREK stories.

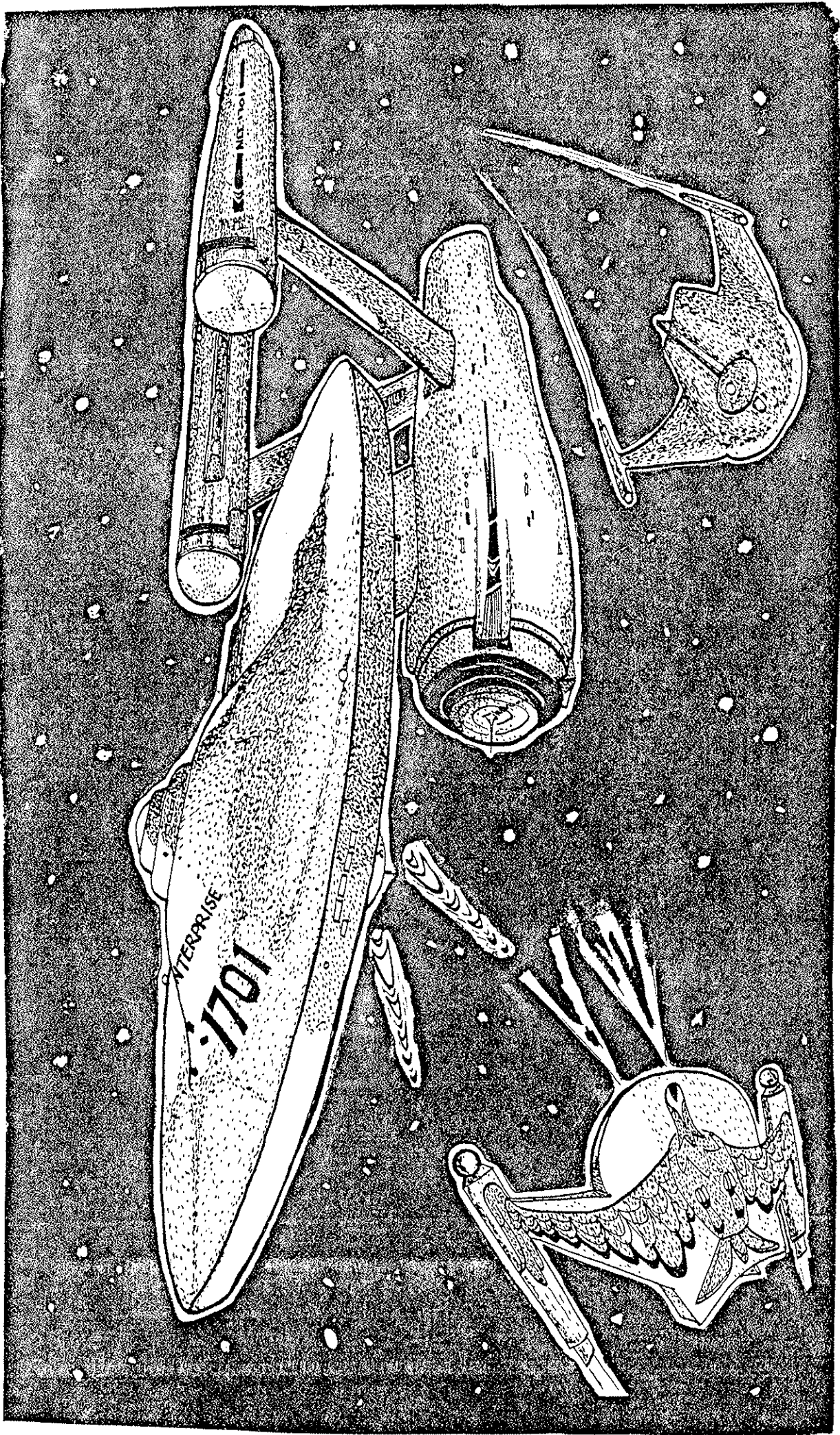
This last few weeks, too, Valerie and I have been very busy getting Variations on a Theme 4 finished. I'll be starting the stencils for it tomorrow, in the hope that we can get it ready in time for the UFP con too. This issue will not be over-18 rated - not that there's been anything particularly 'adult' in issues 1 - 3, but we did get a couple of letters from readers not too happy with the theme of Variations 1, and by leaving the series over-18 rated it does let you know that it isn't just straight action-adventure but does discuss to some degree 'adult' themes. We've also made a start on issue 5, and have done some serious thinking regarding the plot of issue 6, so it does seem as if the series will be continuing for a while yet.

And I think that's all I have to say. Happy reading.

May 1980



Karl Macdonie



COSMIC TRAP AT GALAXY'S END by Christine F. Leeson

The U.S.S. Enterprise cruised through deep space, on one side, the blackness relieved by stars of many hues. Red giants, white dwarfs - all as strange as the worlds they shone upon. On the other side stretched the infinity of extra-galactic space.

Captain James T. Kirk looked at the viewscreen, at the faint cloud of the galaxy historically designated as M31 - the Andromeda Spiral.

"Captain," said Spock. "I am receiving some unprecedented readings from the sensors."

"What sort of readings, Mr. Spock?" asked Kirk, half irritated at being wakened from his reverie.

"There would appear to be a stellar system approximately one parsec ahead," said Spock.

"What!" exclaimed Kirk, now totally aware. "But the Auriga performed a survey of this spatial sector recently, and no systems were reported in this area."

"I am aware of that, sir," said Spock.

"Maybe it was overlooked," suggested Chekov brightly.

"Don't be silly, Mr. Chekov," said Kirk.

"It is highly improbable, Mr. Chekov," Spock put in. "In fact, I would quote the odds as being - "

"I was only joking, sir," muttered Chekov, blushing scarlet.

"What spectral class does the star belong to, Spock?" asked Kirk.

"It is a main sequence yellow dwarf - type G3," replied Spock.

"Any planets?"

"Affirmative, sir," said Spock. "There is one. It is Earth-type with a mainly oxygen-nitrogen atmosphere, with traces of neon, argon and krypton. Three large land masses. The rest is ocean made up of ordinary water."

"Are there any life readings?" asked the Captain.

"Negative, sir," replied Spock.

Kirk swore softly to himself. How on earth, he wondered, could the Auriga have failed to record this remarkably earth-like system?

"Take us into the system and put us into orbit around the planet, Mr. Sulu," ordered Kirk, deciding to investigate further.

A few minutes later, Sulu reported, "In orbit, sir."

"Right," said Kirk. "Mr. Spock, we'll beam down to the planet with Dr. McCoy. Mr. Scott, you have the con."

Kirk and Spock left the bridge and proceeded to the transporter room, where they were joined by Dr. McCoy and a security guard named Wilkins.

"Energise, Mr. Kyle," ordered Kirk. They dematerialised in a shimmering haze, but a few seconds later Wilkins rematerialised on the transporter.

"What happened?" he asked, looking around, realising the Captain, Mr. Spock and the Doctor had not rematerialised aboard the ship. "Is there a malfunction on just one - "

A non-Human voice suddenly reverberated around the ship. "Humans. You will leave this spacial sector at once. Your presence is not required here. Do not resist. Go!"

Then, to Mr. Kyle's astonishment, the transporter exploded.

Simultaneously, on the bridge, a horrified Mr. Scott, looking at the screen, saw the planet and star simply wink out of existence.

Meanwhile, Captain Kirk, Spock and McCoy had materialised on the planet. Kirk, looking around, realised that Wilkins was not present. He took out his communicator and was about to call the ship when a tingling sensation like an old-fashioned electric shock ran through them all. A feeling of weightlessness followed, everything went black, then sanity returned.

Kirk opened his eyes and looked around curiously. The earth-like appearance of the planet had gone; instead, he, Spock and McCoy were lying on the ground, imprisoned under a transparent dome on a ball of rocky matter resembling an asteroid. The 'asteroid' was orbiting a bloated red giant. Of all the stars visible in the coal-black sky, about ninety-nine percent were in various stages of senile decay. Kirk did not recognise any of the stars.

Spock stirred and sat up. "Have you any idea where we are, Spock?" asked Kirk, who was feeling totally disorientated.

Before the Vulcan could reply, McCoy opened his eyes, looked around, and said, "Where in heaven are we, Jim?"

"That is what I just asked Spock," said Kirk, who was becoming more and more convinced that he was dreaming.

Spock, busy with his tricorder, said, "I have a hypothesis, Captain. It would seem the planet we beamed down to was in fact a gigantic transporter as well as being an illusion. It was placed on the boundaries of our galaxy by advanced life entities, possibly from another universe, as a trap. When we arrived on the planet, the aliens drew us through the space barrier into their universe. The planet and star had to appear earth normal otherwise we would not have beamed down. This star - and this asteroid - make up the system we perceived."

"What about Wilkins?" asked McCoy.

"Obviously the aliens were monitoring and observing the Enterprise," said Spock, "and they did not allow Wilkins to beam down to the planet, possibly because he might threaten them in some way. They may possibly believe him, as a security guard, to be more aggressive than we are. This is only a theory, of course - the facts may differ considerably."

Kirk walked up to the transparent dome and touched the material gingerly. "What is this stuff, Spock?" he asked.

Spock took a reading. "It is a type of metal/plastic alloy, Captain, and it also had properties which I cannot define. Its purpose is to hold an atmosphere suitable for us to breathe."

"I wonder who brought us here," said Kirk, "and why? I'd also like to know what's happening aboard the ship..."

Aboard the Enterprise, Scott and the other bridge personnel were still transfixed, looking at the screen, at the place where the planet and star had been.

Scotty was disturbed by the urgent bleeping of the intercom.

"Scott here."

"Kyle here, sir. The transporter's just exploded. Wilkins failed to beam down to the planet - he materialised back here on the ship. But he was caught in the explosion and was killed!"

Kyle sounded distraught, and Scott automatically proceeded to reassure him, "Well, laddie, I'll send a medical team down to collect Wilkins. I dinna ken what is happening here - the system has jist disappeared, and noo we've been told tae leave, but I'm no' leaving withoot the Captain, Mr. Spock and Dr. McCoy. I'll come doon and hae a wee look at the transporter."

After looking at it, Scott realised that it would take at least four hours

to repair. He put a team of engineers onto it, then returned to the bridge.

Lt. Uhura immediately said, "Mr. Scott, I've been combing the area with all frequencies open, but I'm not receiving a thing, either from the Captain or from our alien 'friends'."

"Thank you, Lieutenant," said Scott, then he went on, "Mr. Sulu, check for radiation, gravity waves or traces of hydrogen concentration - anything like that. If that star existed it must have left traces of some sort.

I wonder where the Captain is now..."

Meanwhile, the objects of their concern were feeling more and more curious.

"It seems to me," said Spock, voicing a thought which had occurred to them all, "that this universe is close to extinction. All the stars visible are close to the end of their life spans."

Kirk nodded. He was feeling oppressed by the sight of all those red giants, and longed for the splendour and variability of his own universe, where space and time were young, where stars proudly radiated the vivid light of youth.

"I wonder what manner of creature inhabits this strange place," said McCoy. "And why they have as yet made no attempt to communicate with us?"

"They, whoever they are, will probably have a logical reason for their actions, Doctor," said Spock. "It seems perfectly probable that creatures from an alternate universe could be totally incomprehensible to ourselves, and what seems rational to them may seem meaningless to us. I would think that they are observing us now, to see what our reactions to being brought here are. If that is so, then they must be logical beings, to try to ascertain..."

"I might have expected you to be on their side!" exploded McCoy. "They're probably computers or something tinpot like that."

"What logical reason would you have for formulating - " began Spock, but was stopped by an exasperated Kirk.

"If you both tried to concentrate on getting us out of here and back to the ship instead of arguing, I'd be extremely grateful."

"Sorry, Jim," said McCoy contritely.

"I sense something," said Spock suddenly. "An alien mind is approaching us from space."

"I can't see any ships," said Kirk, "and the tricorders aren't picking up any life readings."

"No," said Spock. "It is a life form consisting of pure thought. It has a much more powerful mind than any of us have. I am not receiving any of its thoughts, although I can sense it."

"Wait a minute!" exclaimed McCoy. "I can feel something too."

Kirk stared at them, then he too felt an alien presence attempting to probe into his mind. A series of meaningless pictures flooded through their thoughts, then an ethereal voice sounded.

"Welcome, aliens, to our universe. Can you understand me?"

I see from your minds that the answer is affirmative. I speak for all - " the next word was incomprehensible. "You will be wondering why we have brought you here. My purpose is to inform you. Our universe is close to extinction. Its life energies are almost depleted. We need solar energy in order to survive. Your universe has plenty of solar power and hot, young stars. We have brought you here to test you, to see if our life forms are compatible. If they are, then we shall transport ourselves to your universe in order to continue our existence."

"And if we don't want you in our universe? What then?" asked Kirk.

"The objection is meaningless."

"What kind of life form are you?" asked Dr. McCoy.

"I am much more advanced than the primitive organisms to which you are accustomed. So are all who live in this universe. We consist, as you have deduced, of pure mental energy. When our universe was alert and young, even then we were capable of altering the structure of space. We made stars go supernova, we formed planets out of the gaseous nebulae ourselves, we created biological and mental life artificially. Now we have hardly any energy left. I am able to read only the top layer of your minds. You seem to use remarkably little of your brain capacity. Our race did not realise you were so primitive."

Pompous, big-headed... thought McCoy.

"You do not belong in our universe," stated Spock calmly. "You are an ancient race. We are at the dawn of our species' development. Age and youth rarely see eye to eye."

The alien ignored Spock and was silent for a few minutes, as if it was tired, then it suddenly said, "More of my people approach. A more competent telepath is among them. He will be able to lay bare your minds."

"Jim, more of the aliens are approaching," said Spock, his face impassive as though he were discussing the weather.

"That alien seemed to tire rather quickly," said Kirk. "I wonder..."

"Silence, creatures!" said another of the aliens. "Our telepath will now sample your minds and see how developed you are. We will make our minds receptive to the response the telepath receives."

The three men felt as though a giant hand was inside their skulls squeezing their brains. Stars and constellations whirled; red-hot agony shot through them.

Suddenly the pain stopped. Everything became normal. Everything except -

"Captain," said Spock. "The aliens are destroying themselves. They're diving into the sun."

"But why?" asked a bemused Kirk.

Traces of thought impinged on their minds.

Hatred, jealousy, visions of destruction, seething rage...

"I know!" said McCoy. "They came into contact with our unconscious minds, with all their ferocity and aggression."

"Yes," said Kirk, realisation dawning. "The first alien only contacted our conscious minds. Then the others probed more deeply."

"They were unable to withstand the primitive violence they saw there," said McCoy, "and it was so alien in concept to them, they were compelled to destroy themselves."

At that moment, the aliens made contact with the star and Kirk, Spock and McCoy suddenly experienced the electric shock sensation again. Everything went black, and when they regained consciousness, they were on the transporter platform on the Enterprise. They all felt physically ill, though after he checked them, McCoy stated they would be all right after some rest.

"Obviously with the death of the aliens we were flung back violently through the spacial barrier," said Spock. The others felt too ill to be interested.

Three days later, the travellers were back at their posts.

"Contact Starfleet Command, Uhura," ordered Kirk. "We have a report to make."

"Where have you been, Kirk?" asked Commodore Wesley. "We could only raise

Mr. Scott, and he was quite unintelligable."

"It's a long story, sir," replied Kirk.

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DOCTOR'S DILEMMA by Rachel Tate

Damn you, Spock!
You Vulcan fool.
Don't kid yourself
That logic rules all.

Don't look so blank
You pointed-eared elf!
I know you're at war
With your Human self.

Why deny your feelings,
They are plain to see.
Admit you have them,
Just to me.

Why, you computer!
Of course I am sane.
It's you, you hobgoblin!
And you are to blame.

If it wasn't for your honesty
We wouldn't be here.
Locked up in this jailhouse
Perhaps for a year!

And all you can do
Is clamp up like a shell
While Jim and the Enterprise
Are missing as well.

I'm sorry, I've hurt you -
I've hurt you again.
I've put my foot in it,
And you're not to blame.

No, wait, please don't argue.
I know I'm a fool.
I didn't consider
Your feelings at all.

Of course you've got feelings;
Why do you pretend?
Come on now, admit it.
I am your...friend.

After all, I'm a doctor.
So don't just sit there.
God damn it, you Vulcan!
I love you...I care.

+++++

THE VIRUS by Ann Flegg

Captain Kirk entered the bridge; glancing round he noted that McCoy was doing one of his 'on the spot' check-ups. As he settled down in his command chair, McCoy finished checking out Uhura and walked over to Kirk. He had put Kirk on a special diet, so now he asked with a wicked grin, "Enjoy your dinner, Jim?"

Kirk gave him a dirty look and answered, "How you have the gall to ask me that, Bones, I'll never know."

McCoy laughed and walked over to the two officers sitting at the navigational console. Kirk looked over to where his Vulcan First Officer was sitting at his library computer station.

"How far are we from Alsusim now, Spock?" he asked.

"Two hours, sir," Spock replied.

Kirk thought of the message he had received from Starfleet two days ago. The ore freighter which had been carrying needed supplies of topaline to the planet Cetus Two had exploded due to a malfunction in the engine room. It had been estimated that by the time another freighter had loaded at the Lorigan refineries and reached Cetus Two they would arrive at least a week after the life support systems had failed completely. Luckily for Cetus Two a new source of topaline had been discovered, on Aisusim, two years previously. It was an uninhabited world, its deposits of topaline easily equalling those on Capella. Aisusim had another advantage. As the planet was without life, the Federation had decided to build refineries on the planet itself. This would save the time and expense of transporting unrefined ore to off-world refineries.

The planet was relatively near Cetus Two; as the Enterprise was also near, she was chosen to deliver the consignment. Kirk was glad it was a simple transport mission, even though it had to be accomplished at high speed. The Enterprise was on her way to Starbase 8 for minor repairs and R & R. As it was, it would not take long to reach the Starbase from Cetus Two.

His musings were interrupted by a call from Uhura. "Message coming from Aisusim, Captain."

"On the screen, Lieutenant," Kirk ordered.

"Aye, sir," Uhura replied, her hands busy with her control panel. The starfield was replaced by the face of a man who Kirk remembered was called Ellison. Kirk stared, shocked at the way the man had aged since the last time he had talked to him, two days before.

McCoy walked over to Kirk. Ellison began to speak. As he listened, Kirk's heart sank as the import of the words hit him.

"Captain, we desperately need medical supplies. An unknown virus is killing us down here, regardless of race. Our doctors are doing what they can, with very little effect."

An appalled silence pervaded the bridge.

"Why didn't you report this before?"

"We were all right two days ago."

"But..." Kirk started to say, but was interrupted by Ellison.

"The best we can figure is the supply ship that came since then. The captain mentioned that a couple of his men were ill, but we didn't think anything of it until the next day when people started to drop where they stood. We tried to isolate the incoming cases, with no success. It's still spreading."

Kirk sympathised with the man, who clearly showed the agony of mind he was suffering. Kirk knew how it felt. Years ago the Enterprise had been stricken with Rigellian Fever which had raged among the crew many long days.

"Five hours after the victims lose consciousness, they're dead. Kirk, you have to get that supply ship before they spread it further. As for the topaline for Cetus Two, we can't risk beaming it up to you for fear of infecting the Enterprise."

"We can decontaminate."

"Which would make it useless," Ellison pointed out tiredly.

Kirk briefly promised himself that never again would he look forward to a simple mission. Seemed like every time he did, something was bound to go wrong.

"As soon as we are within transporter range I'll send down a medical team," Kirk assured Ellison. He was therefore surprised when Ellison shook his head.

"I said we need medical supplies, Captain, all that you can spare. It was decided that we couldn't ask anybody to come down and risk an unpleasant death."

"Don't be a fool!" snapped McCoy, and moving nearer to Kirk went on. "You need help, and we can provide it."

Ellison started to protest, but McCoy waved him to silence, and looked at Kirk. "I'll be insickbay gathering the supplies we need. I'll ask for volunteers as well. When we are in transporter range, call me."

Kirk could only nod, and swallowed. He watched McCoy leave and turned back to Ellison, asking, "What was the registry of the ship and where is it headed next? If you know?"

"The ship is called 'Lodestar', registry WH1480R. The Captain told me that Diatis was the next port of call."

Kirk sighed his relief at the news. The only inhabitants of that planet were a small group of scientists. Kirk would have to send a message to them to warn them of the danger. Privately, he didn't think the ship would make that far. He turned to Spock and asked, "How soon will we be within transporter range?"

"We will be in range in an hour, Captain," Spock answered quietly. Kirk nodded his thanks and turned back to Ellison.

"The medical team will be with you soon, Ellison. Don't worry - the medical crew of the Enterprise is the best in the fleet. They'll find the answer. You're in good hands."

"I..." The man shook his head and said in a husky voice, "I'll give you the co-ordinates for the quarantine area."

Kirk nodded once. He waited until Ellison had given the co-ordinates to Uhura so that she could give them to the transporter chief. "Good luck, Ellison. Kirk out."

Ellison was gone from the screen. Kirk turned to communications. "Lt. Uhura, inform Starfleet of the situation here. Tell them we're going after the supply ship," Kirk ordered.

"Yes, sir," Uhura acknowledged.

"Kirk to sickbay."

"McCoy here."

"We'll be in transporter range in an hour, Bones," Kirk told him.

"All right, Jim. We'll be ready be then. I'm leaving M'Benga in charge of sickbay until I get back."

"Okay, Bones. I'll see you in the transporter room."

"Sure. McCoy out."

Kirk sat back in his chair trying to relax tense muscles. He wondered briefly how Starfleet was going to solve the problem of Cetus Two.

The Enterprise was nearing the point where the medical team could beam down. Kirk started speaking as he stood. "Mr. Sulu, set course for Diatis as soon as the medical team is down. Warp six."

"Aye, sir," replied Sulu.

"You have the con, Mr. Scott." The chief engineer nodded and got up from his station and walked forward, saying as he did so,

"Tell Dr. McCoy good luck from me, sir."

"I will," Kirk answered briefly, with a smile which faded as he turned away. A worried frown took its place. He made for the lift with Spock at his heels. They didn't speak as they headed for the main transporter room. Kirk was grateful for the silence as he tried to push away the thought of his crew going into danger. Most especially McCoy. As Captain of the Enterprise, Kirk couldn't afford to be over-friendly with his officers, which meant that those with whom he was friendly were doubly special to him. Aside from Spock, McCoy was the closest to him and he knew that it would hurt damnably if he lost him. These thoughts came to an end abruptly as they reached the transporter room.

McCoy was alone except for Kyle who was at the transporter console talking to him. They broke off what they were saying as Kirk and Spock entered. McCoy moved over to them and Kyle checked his board yet again.

McCoy started saying, "Christine hasn't arrived yet." Seeing the enquiring look on Kirk's face, he explained. "She's one of the volunteers. The others have already gone down."

"Does she have to?" Kirk asked, more for something to say than in protest.

"I couldn't stop her," replied McCoy ruefully.

There was a heavy silence as each tried to think of something to say but found they couldn't. Memories of the things they had shared, the good and bad times, intruded, stilling their tongues. Perhaps this would be the last goodbye of the trio who were bound together by something only death could break. A moment later Christine Chapel entered. The time to say that goodbye had come. Kirk held out his hand to McCoy, who took it. They gripped hands hard.

"Take care of yourself, Bones." Kirk's voice broke slightly on the nickname only he used.

"Count on it," McCoy answered with a tiny smile.

"Scotty said to wish you good luck for him," Kirk went on in a slightly strangled voice. He let go of McCoy's hand and turned to Nurse Chapel. McCoy eyed him for a moment before turning to Spock.

Kirk started to speak to Chapel. "You don't have to go, Nurse Chapel."

"I know, sir," she replied.

"You're a very brave lady, Christine," Kirk said, admiration for her courage in his voice.

"Not really, Captain," shrugged Christine with a smile.

While Kirk spoke with Nurse Chapel, McCoy was saying to Spock, "If anything should happen..." McCoy hesitated an instant before going on. "Take care of Jim for me."

Spock looked into the blue eyes that more often than not held laughter and now were deeply serious, and said, "You know I will, Doctor."

"I know," McCoy admitted, looking into the dark eyes which held something he couldn't define, and held out his hand. Spock took it and said in a perfectly even voice,

"Good luck, Doctor."

"Thanks." McCoy turned and went on. "Ready, Christine?"

"As I'll ever be," she replied.

They took their positions in the alcove. A familiar grin lit McCoy's face and he said, "We'll see you when you get back." Then - "Energise."

Kyle moved the levers on the console and McCoy and Chapel turned into two shimmering columns and were gone. Kirk moved over to the intercom and informed the bridge the medical team was down. Kyle left while he was doing this. Afterwards, he stood silent.

Spock, who knew his Captain very well, said in an emotionless voice, "Dr. McCoy is an excellent doctor; he has found answers before and I have no doubt he will this time also." He noted with quiet satisfaction the look of worry fading from Kirk's eyes and added, "Though he will perhaps be harder to live with."

Kirk started laughing as he caught the drift of Spock's remarks, and said, "I agree he'll be insufferable for months when he finds the cure."

"Exactly, sir," agreed Spock. Kirk laughed again, and they both left the room.

The hospital was small, but the equipment was the best money could buy. The Enterprise contingent had found it already overflowing with the victims of the virus and more kept coming in. It was heartbreaking for the doctors and nurses who looked after them; until an antitoxin could be found there was little they could do. McCoy was glad he was more concerned with research - he didn't think he could take it, having his patients die on him while he stood helplessly by. He had the frustrating feeling he was missing something - what, he had no idea. Nurse Chapel entered the lab carrying a tray of cultures. She placed it beside him on the bench, then looked at him intently.

"You should get some sleep, sir. You have been working almost from the moment we got here."

"I'll sleep when this is over," McCoy replied.

She forebore to say any more on the subject and said instead, "These are the latest blood samples you wanted, Doctor."

"Thanks, Christine. Are our people all right?" he went on, looking down at the prepared cultures. She didn't answer immediately - he looked up. "Who?" he asked quietly.

"Doctors Camalin and Lenon."

Christine, watching, thought he looked suddenly old. He looked at her in concern and asked, "How do you feel?"

"I'm fine, sir," she answered reassuringly.

McCoy, looking relieved at her answer, said, "We'd better get back to work."

Christine had fallen asleep in the chair. McCoy let her sleep undisturbed because he knew she needed the rest. He worked on alone for several hours, then suddenly realised that he had found what he was looking for. The nurse was abruptly awakened by a jubilant shout from McCoy. She blinked the sleep from her eyes, jumped up and ran to him. He hugged her fiercely, saying,

"We found it! We found it!"

She felt happy tears trickle down her cheeks at the thought of nobody else dying in agony of the virus. She saw an understanding smile on McCoy's face and smiled back. Four more of their people had fallen victim to the virus - the first two had died some time before - discovery had come too late for them, but not for their other sick. Christine knew she should feel ashamed of thinking first of her friends, but for a moment, she couldn't help it.



After McCoy notified Ellison events moved fast. Antitoxin was processed and given to the patients first before anyone, even the medical staff, was given inoculation.

McCoy was still waiting for his inoculation as he visited the Enterprise medical personnel who had caught the virus and had already been given the antitoxin. They were recovering nicely.

"It was simple, really, once I knew what I was looking for," he said.

"Maybe for you, Doctor," replied Dr. Peters with a grin. "But I know I couldn't have done it so easily."

"Nonsense!" snorted McCoy. "You'd ha..." He didn't finish the sentence. The doctors and nurses in the room saw him turn ashen and a look of pain appeared on his face as he crumpled unconscious. Peters leaped out of bed to him, while another of his men called for help. As they waited, Peters reflected it was a good thing McCoy had found the antitoxin before he also caught the virus.

An hour had gone by since the medical team beamed down. Kirk was back on the bridge leaning his hip against the rail near Spock, talking to him. Uhura suddenly cried out,

"Captain, I'm picking up an automatic distress signal from the Lodestar. They're giving their position as - " She reeled off the co-ordinates. Sulu was already feeding them into his board. Kirk walked to the command chair; sitting, he gave rapid orders.

"Uhura, inform them we're on our way. Sulu, Warp six."

"Aye, sir," came in unison.

"Sir, they don't answer," Uhura said a few minutes later. Kirk exchanged glances with Spock before answering.

"Keep trying, Lieutenant."

"Yes, sir."

Kirk looked at the screen, asking Sulu, "How long until we reach the Lodestar, Mr. Sulu?"

"Nine hours, sir," Sulu replied.

Kirk nodded his thanks absently. Spock moved over to him.

"Think they're alive, Spock?" Kirk asked in a voice so low that only Spock could hear him.

"From what we know of the virus, I do not think so," Spock replied in an equally low voice.

"I don't, either," Kirk admitted. "If they are dead, we'll have to send someone over for their ship's log."

"Agreed, sir. Starfleet will be most interested in finding out where the virus originated," Spock concurred. Then he went on. "I will go, sir."

Kirk looked up at him, hesitating even although he knew there would be no danger as Spock would be wearing an environment suit, then nodded. It would be better if one of them went, and Spock was the more logical choice.

The Enterprise's main viewing screen showed a drifting Lodestar.

Though Kirk thought that in all probability there would be no one alive, he said, "Uhura, contact..."

He was interrupted by Spock. "Captain, sensors indicate that there is no life aboard."

Kirk felt shock at having his fears confirmed.

"Poor devils," muttered Scott from his station.

"Get suited up, Spock," Kirk said. "I'll warn the transporter room."

"Yes, sir." Spock started for the turbo lift, only to stop as his Captain spoke again.

"And Spock - be careful."

Spock's eyebrow rose sharply as he replied, "I always am, Captain."

"Yeah. I've seen your version of being careful, remember," Kirk grinned.

"Captain!" Spock said indignantly. Kirk's grin widened as he watched Spock leave, his back projecting disapproval.

In a short time Spock entered the transporter room, wearing an environment suit. Kyle was waiting for him, and together they ran a final check on the suit before Spock went to the alcove.

"Energise." Spock shimmered out of existence and reappeared on the bridge of the Lodestar. It was smaller, more cramped, than the one on the Enterprise. He looked around, his gaze resting briefly on the body of a man at Communications, the top half of his body lying across the control panel. Spock looked away sharply from the look of intense agony on the man's face, and held himself rigidly for a second before going to the computer station. He was careful not to look at the man again.

He worked quickly in extracting the log. At last he was finished. He had originally planned to spend a few minutes investigating the ship, but now all he wanted was to get back to the Enterprise, away from this ship of death. Holding the log, he spoke into the communicator inside his helmet.

"Spock to Enterprise. Ready to beam aboard."

A moment later he was back on the Enterprise. He waited until Kyle signalled the decontamination process was completed and left the room. He changed quickly back into uniform and was soon back on the bridge. He gave the log to Uhura to transmit to Starfleet, then went to stand by Kirk.

Kirk, looking up at his face, saw behind his expressionless mask the sadness there. He reached and gently touched the arm nearest him. Spock looked down into Kirk's face, seeing the concern - he had long since ceased to wonder

how Kirk could read him so easily. Kirk, looking up into the dark eyes, saw a tiny smile dawn in them and smiled back. He turned back to the screen. He didn't like what he now had to do, but he couldn't risk anyone else who might have picked up the distress signal finding and boarding the ship. He squared his shoulders and gave the expected order.

"Ready phaser banks, Mr. Sulu."

"Ready, sir," Sulu answered.

"Fire."

Sulu's finger stabbed down on the firing button. Two beams of pure energy hit the ship, which disappeared in a flash of blinding white, the computer automatically darkening the screen so that nobody's eyes were hurt. Seconds later, the Enterprise felt the shock waves.

"Lt. Uhura, contact Starfleet and inform them that we found the ship and destroyed her after finding the crew dead. Then transmit the Lodestar's log."

"Aye, sir." She watched in surprise as her board lit up. She hastily flicked switches and turned to Kirk. "Sir, message from Starfleet."

"On the screen, Lieutenant," he ordered.

The face that appeared on the screen was that of Admiral Clay. "Captain Kirk, you are to proceed immediately to rendezvous with the Excalibur, who have a consignment of topaline for Cetus Two. Don't worry about the supply ship - another vessel has been detailed to find it."

"That won't be necessary, Admiral," Kirk said. "We've already found it."

"And?" Clay asked anxiously.

"The crew was dead. I destroyed the ship after getting her log, sir," Kirk explained.

Clay nodded his agreement with Kirk's action. "We'll be glad to get the information where the virus came from."

"Yes, sir," Kirk said, then went on. "Admiral, I have crew on Aisusim - couldn't the Excalibur take the topaline for Cetus Two?"

Clay shook his head. "Sorry, Captain. The Excalibur has already been diverted from a top level scientific mission. They are well behind schedule and we dare not delay them any further. The co-ordinates for the rendezvous are being fed into your navigational computer. Clay out."

The screen resumed its normal view of the starfield. Kirk sighed. He had wanted to get back to Aisusim. He wondered how he was going to control his rising anxiety for McCoy and his staff, but knew that Clay was right. They could not delay an official mission further just to satisfy a personal need.

"Warp six, Lt. Sulu," he ordered.

"Aye, sir," Sulu acknowledged.

The Enterprise had met and received the topaline from the Excalibur and got the consignment to Cetus Two with only hours to spare. Captain Kirk had firmly refused any hospitality from the grateful leader of the colony there. They had had no contact with Aisusim since the medical team beamed down, and Kirk was going through hell wondering if his men were all right. Spock, aware of this, had tried - ably assisted by Scott - to divert his mind from this painful subject with quiet optimism. Kirk knew exactly what they were doing, and was grateful for it.

He was sitting talking to Spock, who was standing at his side, as they neared Aisusim. Uhura broke into their quiet conversation.

"We're getting a message from Aisusim, Captain."

Kirk stiffened, then forced himself to relax. Unobtrusively, Spock moved even closer to him.

"On the screen, Uhura." Kirk wondered how he kept his voice so calm.

A delighted Ellison appeared. "Kirk, the epidemic is broken!" he all but shouted.

Kirk's hands clenched until the knuckles showed white as he asked, "My people...?"

"I'm sorry, Captain," Ellison said, sobering. "Two are dead."

A shocked silence descended on the bridge. Kirk felt a leaden weight settle on his stomach. He opened his mouth to ask who, but to his dismay, found he couldn't. With a surge of gratitude he heard a quiet, even voice at his side speaking.

"Who were they?" Spock asked.

"Doctors Camalin and Lenon."

Kirk closed his eyes, relieved that McCoy was all right, knowing that Spock also felt relief. He opened them again as Ellison went on.

"Dr. McCoy was marvellous. Once he had the virus pinpointed he found an antitoxin almost within hours. It's a pity he contracted the virus, but he was one of the last."

"What?" Kirk said sharply.

Ellison, seeing the alarm on Kirk's face, made haste to reassure him. "Don't worry, Kirk, he's recovering." He grinned. "It's true, the old adage, isn't it?"

"What do you mean?" asked a relieved Kirk.

"That doctors are the worst of patients," replied Ellison.

Spock looked on with a raised eyebrow as the rest of the bridge crew, including the Captain, started laughing.

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ODONA by Ann Flegg

Think well on this my child.
 This act, you cannot regret.
 Think of the life
 That could be yours,
 Of the many paths
 You could follow.
 Cold comfort is the thought,
 The reason for this act,
 Of the memories yet before you
 Of the love
 You will not have.
 Think of these things and more -
 Of the life before you,
 Of your hopes
 And your dreams.
 Think well on this, my daughter,
 Before you give life up
 For the love of your people.

+++++

MUTINY by David Coote

"Noting it down, Joseph?"

The tall negro turned from the small table. The large smile was obviously a well-known friend of the carefree face.

"Yes. Another planet visited. I'll have been halfway round the galaxy soon," he added with another smile.

"How many is it now?"

"Eighty-seven in all, though I haven't actually set foot on more than half of them."

He returned his attention to the book while the questioner settled down again to the video tape. There were only the two of them in A Security Section mess at the time, Lt. Joseph Denab and Ensign Phillip McKee.

A further half hour of companionable silence was broken by the return of several of their section. From their comments it seemed very little was happening in the rest of the ship, although Jellen had heard a rumour that the Captain was acting strangely. This was laughed off and the general conversation turned to more ribald subjects until the Chief made an appearance.

"Lt. Denab, Ensign McKee. I know you're off duty but there's a couple of C Section reported sick and I'd like you to cover for them."

"All right, Chief," replied Joseph immediately. Phillip had been about to protest but took his lead from the lieutenant and agreed. Amid sympathetic comments and somewhat harsh comparisons between the sick records of A and C Sections they left the mess. Once outside and away from the Chief, Phillip spoke.

"Why did you agree so quickly? I was all set to make a scene that would have got us off."

Joseph sighed. "Why would you want to avoid it, Phillip? We're well rested and alert, quite capable of doing the duty. And so far as the practicalities are concerned, you'll get extra off duty time or credits, whichever you prefer. Why should you create difficulties when there are none?"

It was Phillip's turn to sigh. "You know, there are one or two people that think you do what they want to get promotion."

Joseph stopped walking and turned to face Phillip. He spoke quietly. "Do you believe that?"

"You know me better than that," Phillip replied, somewhat angrily. "I do find you a little difficult to understand at times, but I'm glad we're friends," he finished in a quieter manner.

"Good - so am I."

No further words were necessary and they continued walking. They entered the elevator together, a short ride leaving Phillip at the armoury while Joseph continued to take up his tour of duty in engineering.

The tour of duty at the armoury had been uneventful and Phillip returned to the mess with the intention of going straight to recreation room three for a special showing of the new comedy 'Colonel Green - My Part in his Downfall' by Mike Spilligan. But he felt something wrong almost as he entered the mess. The mere fact that there were so many of the Section present was strange. Some of them should have been asleep and others away engaging in various forms of pastime.

The mild surprise he felt must have registered in his face as the senior lieutenant, Chalek, pointed to the Security indicator board. Phillip noted with disgust that Security was on minimal alert. Those Security personnel not on normal duty had to be close to their mess. Even worse was the fact that the

majority of the crew would be totally unaware of this and the film would go ahead.

He angrily walked to his locker and threw the phaser to the bottom. Then, relenting, he retrieved the phaser, pulled the foldout table, gave the weapon the required check and handed it to the duty weapons officer.

Joseph returned shortly afterwards and the two of them joined a small group of their colleagues engaged in a favourite pastime - bemoaning their lot.

"Don't even know what it's all about," muttered Jodie Burton. "Had a date with that pretty lieutenant in B Section as well."

"Well, well. Ensign Burton dating a lieutenant! Is she loaded?"

"Hasn't got two credits to rub together - but she's loaded!"

The conversation would have drifted off but for the intervention of Gomez, a much respected ensign who had never sought promotion. "I've been hearing the rumours about the Captain acting strangely. I wonder if that has anything to with it?"

They all agreed that could indeed be the cause and Phillip started telling the group, for probably the twentieth time, of a rather well-endowed girl he'd met on Starbase Three. He was halfway through the story when the ship-wide address system came to life. It was the Captain's voice.

"First Officer Spock has been placed under arrest." Disbelieving looks around the table. "He has conspired with Dr. Lester to take over the ship from your Captain."

Gomez mouthed 'Never' to no one in particular.

"A hearing will be immediately convened to consider the charges and specifications of a general court martial on the charge of mutiny."

There was ten seconds of silence, then everyone was speaking at once - the talk gradually becoming more and more heated. Joseph remained fairly quiet but Phillip reacted to what he saw as a very unfair attack on Spock and was pulled into the discussion as a defender of Spock. He was in a minority.

Someone asked where Joseph stood.

"The Captain is a fine man. But so too is Mr. Spock and I find it difficult to believe this. However - " He raised a hand to stop protests and support alike " - I will await news of the evidence presented before forming a judgement."

"I don't care what they say," Gomez replied. "Spock is not guilty. He can't be. He has too much integrity and loyalty."

Phillip leaped into the short silence to tell another often repeated story of how Spock had saved his life, pulling him from under a rockslide on a planetary exploration. He finished, "He didn't even want any thanks. Just said it was the logical thing to do and got back on with his work. He could have been killed!"

The guard that had been on duty at the detention block returned shortly afterwards and told how Spock had visited Lester, one of the survivors of a disaster at a research colony at their last planetfall and now imprisoned. She'd told a story that she was really the Captain - that Lester's being was in the Captain's body and vice versa. They had then, apparently, tried to break out - obviously without success.

Such a story did not do anything to help those defending Spock - it was seen as going a little too far. Chalek congratulated the man on his efficiency and eventually the argument died. Phillip retired to his bunk for a little sleep still trying, and failing, to remember the last time the Captain's actions had been so criticised.

He awoke within the hour to sounds of renewed arguments. Phillip returned

to the mess room, recognising a visitor - Eloise Patten from B Section. It seemed that she'd managed to talk to Lumli, who was on duty in the room they were using for the court martial. It was not going well for Spock.

Phillip also noticed the absence of Chalek and was told he was meeting the Chief. He was also informed that before leaving Chalek had double locked the weapons locker.

"But that's not allowed during a minimal alert!" Phillip protested. "I'm going to see what's going on. Anyone coming?"

Gomez and Patten immediately agreed and they started out of the mess. They were interrupted by Joseph, the only one left above the rank of ensign.

"We are still on minimal alert, ensigns,"

"We won't be far from the mess, Lieutenant," Phillip replied formally.

Joseph considered quickly. "I shall come with you, if only to prevent any trouble."

The four of them had hardly left the mess when they met Helga Junge, from Eloise's Section. According to her, Spock had told the Captain that he didn't belong and that he (Spock) would do everything in his power against the Captain. Phillip turned to his companions with a determined look on his face.

"We've got to do something," he stated definitely.

"Such as?" asked Helga.

That stopped Phillip in his tracks, but he covered up quickly. "First, we get over to the room and find out exactly what's happening. Then we'll sort it out."

They stopped just around the corner from the room. Hearing voices they listened closely. Phillip recognised the voice of Chief Surgeon Leonard McCoy. Joseph whispered that the other voice was that of Chief Engineer Montgomery Scott. Scott was saying something about the Captain not accepting a 'not guilty' verdict. McCoy replied with a comment that the group didn't catch. Then Scott said that would be the time to move against the Captain - to take over the ship!

The group withdrew from the area quickly, each with their own thoughts at this escalation.

"The story has to be true, then," Gomez said aloud.

"Yes," replied Helga. "But what do we do?"

"We've got to fight, back up the Doc and Mr. Scott. Be ready to move when they do," stated Phillip.

"Sounds great," said Eloise cynically. "What do we do if the rest of the command team and most of Security back him up?"

"We fight," reiterated Phillip.

"Look, there a few top officers defying the Captain and I guess a lot of ensigns will back them. But the Captain will have the majority of the middle ranks, lieutenants and the like." Eloise trailed off, remembering that Joseph was still there.

"Your analysis may be a little dramatic, Ensign," Joseph said after a little thought. "I would guess a majority of the crew will be confused and uncertain, not knowing what to do. Just like me," he added.

They all looked at each other for a long moment before they spotted Jodie and two other A Section ensigns coming towards them. Phillip quickly explained what they'd heard.

"There's something even more recent," said Jodie. "The Captain found out about Scott and McCoy. They've been sentenced to death."

"What?" exclaimed Joseph. "He can't do that. The only death sentence still left is for visiting Talos 4, and we've been nowhere near there."

"Makes no difference, he's done it," replied Jodie. "And all Security personnel of lieutenant grade and over - or, at least, those seen as reliable - have been issued with phasers. We're on yellow alert but we've been kicked out of the mess with no orders. There are senior Security people guarding all mess weapons lockers and a triple guard on the armoury."

There were a few moments of silence, Joseph eventually breaking the quiet. "Well, I am decided. Phillip is quite right, we must back up Spock and the others. Eloise, Helga, go to B and C Sections, see if you can rally some support. Get any weapons you can and meet us in engineering. Pass the word around wherever you get the chance."

The two women set off at a run while Joseph told Jodie and the other two to visit sickbay with the news and raise support. As they left Phillip asked Joseph what the three remaining were going to do.

"You, Gomez and myself are going to A Security's mess to get hold of some weapons."

As they strode off towards the mess Phillip glanced across at Joseph. Well, no-one could say he was just going after promotion now - they would all be facing the death penalty if things went wrong!

Chalek and a lieutenant from C Section were the only ones there. They obviously knew what had happened and had phasers clipped to their belts.

"I understand phasers are being distributed, Lieutenant," Joseph said levelly.

"To all reliable crew members, Lt. Denab," replied Chalek. "Please leave the mess."

"I have always proved myself a reliable member of the crew, Lt. Chalek."

Chalek's tone changed. "Please leave, Joseph. I am under orders, but I don't want to hurt you."

Joseph stood his ground, facing Chalek, their eyes locked. Gomez and Phillip stood poised. They knew what they'd planned, but it was different facing it directly - mutiny. It began to look as if the three would have to withdraw but, perhaps fortunately, the other lieutenant panicked and reached for his phaser. Joseph leaped for him immediately. Phillip reacted quickly, slamming his left fist into Chalek's stomach. He was off balance as Chalek doubled over but Gomez finished it with a left hook to the face. Joseph had also laid out his opponent and they quickly broke open the weapons locker. Fifteen type one and six type two phasers together with a couple of phaser rifles and miscellaneous other armaments were removed, leaving the locker empty.

With their load they left for the engineering section, reaching it in a few minutes. There were some forty crew members assembled, including some fifteen engineering ensigns who's been ready to 'pull the plug' on the warp engines on hearing of their Chief's arrest. Eight of McCoy's medical team were there, including Dr. M'Benga and Nurse Chapel, with more promised. But it seemed as if Eloise's initial comment could be proved correct as the overwhelming majority were ensigns.

"We need more 'brass' or we won't gather much support," Helga stated.

"What about Pavel Chekov?" Phillip asked. "I know him and he could be a link to the remainder of the command team."

There were a couple of objections that Chekov was a 'follow orders' man but Phillip got agreement to trying after Chapel had put in a word. He activated the intercom.

"Security to bridge. Mr. Chekov," Phillip said, rather more confidently than he felt.

"Chekov here," the filtered voice replied.

"Pavel, it's Phil McKee. Can you talk?"

"There's only Sulu and Uhura here. It's all right."

Phillip took a deep breath and told Chekov what they were doing. There was a long pause before Chekov spoke.

"Phil, we were just wondering what we could do if you backed the imposter. We've already refused to carry out orders, so - " He paused, and Phillip could hear a couple of 'Yes' comments in the background, " - we're with you. Only problem is that someone has to stay on the bridge, we're still at Warp four."

"Not for much longer." Phillip gestured to one of the engineering ensigns. "Warp power is being out; we won't be going anywhere for a while. We'll send a couple of Security ensigns to hold the bridge for us. Quite honestly, Pavel, we're mostly anonymous ensigns down here. We need anyone better known or of higher rank here with us to give us credibility."

"You've got it," replied Chekov enthusiastically.

Phillip told them to meet in the section adjoining the detention cells and to try to raise support on the way. Joseph ordered several of their own group to make a last tour of anyone that might be sympathetic; the rest made their way to the rendezvous.

"Time to move," said Joseph. He raised his voice. "There's about sixty of us altogether. I'm sure more are sympathetic and may join us. You've all got phasers - set them on stun. We're going to storm the detention blocks and release Spock, Scott, McCoy and Dr. Lester, or rather, the real Captain. From there on, we'll be guided by what they suggest. Let's go."

They moved off like a small army. Several times they ran across light opposition but surprise was on their side and only one of their number had been stunned in exchange for twelve of the opposition when they turned the corner to the detention blocks.

Then they saw the Captain - his body - coming towards them - but he was talking to Spock. Jodie raised his phaser but Joseph stopped them.

The Captain saw the group and came over with Spock, assuring them that he was back. He said, seriously, that what they were doing was mutiny. Then he just smiled that little smile and said he'd say no more about it this time!

Jodie was back to complaining to a well-filled room.

"But they could have said 'thanks'. We were putting our necks on the line for them and not even a thank you."

"What did you expect, Jodie?" asked Joseph. "Orders and discipline are vital on a starship; it is a matter of fine judgement when orders are so totally wrong that they have to be opposed, but that can't really be encouraged!"

"That's right," emphasised Gomez. "Anyway, all the thanks I need are to be under way again like before."

"Same here," agreed Phillip. "And I have no doubt that the Captain and the others have found out exactly who made up the 7th Cavalry - even if we were a bit late!"

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Security Chief Baillie - Why are you wearing that red and yellow patterned outfit?
Guard - Just a routine check, sir.

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THE TEST by Karen Hayden

Dedicated to Sue Stockley, who provided the idea.

"It's a class M planet, Sir, but the sensors indicate no life forms whatsoever. That seems highly improbable, judging by the favourable structure of the planet. Its flora, vegetation, geological structure - all seem able to sustain life such as our own, yet we detect none. A most unusual planet - and one I would say warranted investigation."

James Kirk looked across at his first officer, disguising his amusement at the Vulcan's enthusiasm. Though restraining himself from smiling, he found himself pleased that his friend had found something at last to really occupy his insatiable curiosity. The past few months had been particularly uninspiring for the ship's science officer, and Kirk himself looked forward to the distraction from routine.

Rubbing his chin and smoothing back his hair, he answered the Vulcan. His eyes shone brightly. "Calculate orbital status, Mr. Spock, and give the relative information to Mr. Chekov. We'll beam down with a party - and follow your advice! It should prove interesting."

He stood up, stretching, and smiling openly this time. Heading for the elevator, he called over his shoulder, "You have the con, Mr. Sulu!"

A green valley met their appreciative eyes as the party materialised. The meadow swept upwards into a hill, topped by stately trees which looked surprisingly like oaks from their native Earth. McCoy exclaimed at the beauty around them.

"It's almost too beautiful, Jim. It's just too good to be true."

Kirk smiled, tucking his communicator back under his shirt after reporting their safe beam-down. "Don't be such a pessimist, Bones. It's just what we need...and it'll provide our Vulcan with plenty of interesting research!"

He watched as the party spread out, tricorders already working, to carry on with their research. "Come on, let's take a look around and leave them to it."

McCoy nodded in assent, and followed his Captain down the hill. Nothing was said for a while, as both enjoyed the solitude and the scenery around them. Then Kirk noticed the thoughtful expression on McCoy's face. Touching the doctor's arm gently to break his reverie, he enquired,

"Anything wrong, Bones? It's not like you to be so quiet."

"No. Nothing wrong. Just...memories. The past is never very far away and when you have physical associations around you it makes it even more difficult to...forget." He sighed. "It's so like Earth... And it also reminds me of one particular planet-fall we shared a few years back."

This time it was Kirk's turn to be thoughtful as he too found his mind wandering. He sank to the ground, lying down and savouring the feeling of real grass beneath his body, the smell of fresh, wild things around him. It reminded him, too, of a planet - Miramanee's. He had thought he'd forgotten it, and her, but now he realised that he never would. Even the stream winding its way through the valley was the same...

Then he rose quickly to his feet, unsure of whether he had dreamed it or whether it was fact. No, running water bubbled merrily over the stones in its path, flowing gently downhill to its destination. Quite normal, really - except for the fact that the stream hadn't been there a moment before.

Pointing at the sparkling water he grasped Bones' arm, pointing him in the right direction. "Bones, that stream wasn't there before."

The doctor nodded, but feeling the need to keep his over-active imagination

in check, he answered, "No, Jim, it wasn't, but don't go asking me where it came from. I'm a doctor, not a water-diviner."

Despite the gravity of the situation, Kirk couldn't help a smile as he appreciated the joke. Then, all business, he pulled his communicator out and contacted his first officer.

"Kirk to Spock. Come in."

There was an immediate answer. "Spock here, Captain."

"Have you seen anything...unusual, Spock? Anything at all?"

"Negative, Captain. I would of course have informed you if I had. Has anything happened? You sound...concerned." Further proof that Spock could read even that which Kirk tried to hide.

"I am. When streams appear from nowhere, I begin to wonder what else could happen. Beam back aboard, Spock, just to be on the safe side, and arrange for a few security guards to rendezvous with me here. I want a closer look around before I beam back up."

Spock acknowledged the order, not making any comment, but he was concerned nonetheless at the apparently illogical decision to remain. When Kirk made up his mind, however, it would do no good to argue with him - Spock knew his Captain well.

Kirk turned to the friend beside him. "You'd better go up too, Bones. I don't like this, despite the fact that it appears so harmless. I'd prefer you to be safe on board ship."

McCoy was about to argue when he noticed something registering on the face of his companion - a strange look, as if he could sense something McCoy himself was oblivious to.

"I'll go, Jim, but it's not like you to be so over-cautious. We've encountered nothing that could be termed belligerent, so why the extreme urgency to get us out of here but remain yourself?"

Kirk's brow creased as he answered. "O.K., so I'm being over-cautious. But my intuition has been right before. There's something wrong here, but I feel that I have to be the one to discover what. I can't explain it more than that. Just listen to me, Bones, and do as I say, please. If I'm wrong, then we can laugh about it later."

Despite the attempt at a joke, McCoy could see that Kirk was deadly serious, that it was important to him for McCoy to obey his order without further questioning. He pulled his communicator from his belt and was about to request beam-up when Kirk's voice again echoed in his ears.

"I'll be O.K., Bones, and take care of yourself, like you're always telling me to. Don't worry about me - go and worry about your other chicks!" He smiled a goodbye and walked downstream, intending to meet the security team further down the slope, as McCoy dematerialised behind him.

As the transporter chamber came into being around him, McCoy joined in a conversation taking place between the transporter chief, the security chief on the planet's surface, and the Vulcan. The outcome of that conversation had him leaving the transporter room at a run some ten minutes later.

The bridge was a hive of activity and his anxious entrance went unnoticed. Spock was operating the sensors, probably for the hundredth time; Uhura was monitoring communications, but her face was strained, openly concerned. The concern was mirrored on the faces of everyone present.

Allowing his shaking feet to descend the steps to the command chair, he stood beside it for a few seconds, thinking of the man who usually occupied it. Finally he brought himself to speak to the first officer.

"Any more word, Spock?"

The Vulcan's eyes left his scanners to meet those of the doctor, realising his presence for the first time. Chekov noticed the silent exchange between the two men and quickly averted his eyes, knowing it held a special, private significance.

"Negative, Doctor. The security guards beamed down to rendezvous with the Captain but he did not join them. They immediately implemented a search but found nothing. They are broadening the search area, but my sensors do not indicate his presence at all." Pulling his shoulders up even further and placing his hands behind his back, Spock continued with barely disguised concern evident in his voice. "It is very ominous. He is evidently not on that planet - and yet he isn't dead."

McCoy's deep blue eyes were apprehensive as he asked the inevitable question - "How can you be so sure, Spock?"

"I would know, Doctor."

McCoy could do nothing but nod in acknowledgement. He understood completely. He turned away slightly before speaking again.

"It's strange really. Jim had a feeling that something was wrong, a feeling of foreboding, almost. He persuaded me to beam back aboard to be in safety, but insisted on staying himself because he said he felt he had to be the one to discover what was wrong." He snorted in disgust. "We always seem to find them, Spock. The most beautiful planets always prove to be the most dangerous. They always seem so damned innocent..." He hesitated. "I should have stopped him."

"Dr. McCoy, you are talking about Captain James T. Kirk."

There seemed to be no appropriate answer to that statement. There was just an eerie silence as the bridge personnel carried out their duties with their own thoughts to plague their minds.

The smell of the grass, the trees, the sound of the water, seemed to have an almost hypnotic effect. Kirk felt as if he'd become intoxicated by the beauty of it all, but he found he just couldn't keep his thoughts focused, no matter how hard he tried. The harder he tried to look ahead the more confused his mind became.

A curtain of sparkling ir idescence seemed to surround him; a myriad lights shone around him, and within him, capturing his consciousness, clouding his brain, numbing his senses. Kirk clutched at his head, turning around, trying to escape the weird effects which were pervading him, but they intensified instead of dispersing. He sank to his knees...and remembered nothing more...

...Until pain brought him back to consciousness. He felt groggy, as if he was drunk on some unheard-of concoction. His head throbbed abominably, as did his left arm. He seemed to be in a cave, and yet he seemed to be able to see through the very ceiling above him. The blue, blue sky looked down on him, the sun seeming to have the effect of a halo around his field of vision. He was lying on a couch, unfettered, free to move.

Curious to discover what was causing the pain in his arm, his eyes wandered down to it. The shirt of command yellow had been removed and he could clearly see a long deep wound running the length of the inside of his forearm. It had bled profusely and now lay in a pool of his blood. He rose to a sitting position with some difficulty, and sat on the edge of the couch, ripping a strip from the sheet on which he had lain to clean and bind the wound.

Feeling dizziness and nausea grip him he placed his head in his hands, closing his eyes. His mind was active, nonetheless, and he began to wonder what the strange effect which had overpowered him had been. And how had he been brought to his present location? And why had he been chosen from the landing party?

Pulling himself together he looked around his 'quarters' more thoroughly - after checking for his communicator, which as he had half expected, he found to be gone. The room was small, the walls semi-transparent, but he could see nothing but trees through them. With extreme effort he forced himself erect. He swayed a little at first, but steadied after a few moments.

His prime concern was to find a door, a means of escape. Spock and McCoy would be worried, he knew, and his place was with his ship and his men. He could not help remembering his previous feeling of foreboding, and immediately connected his present predicament with that feeling.

He found no way out.

"Even under such circumstances, your prime concern is for your men and your duty. How admirable in a species such as yours."

The voice was slurred, but it held an impossible air of authority, as if it belonged to the owner of the universe itself. It resounded in the small room, seeming to come from the walls, yet also seeming to come from the air in front of the Enterprise's Captain. Curiosity made him turn round, trying to find the origin of the voice.

There was nothing behind him, and rubbing his sweating palms on his trousers he turned once more - in time to see a wall of the room slide back to reveal another room, one of enormous size, bare, but holding an inexplicable aura of welcome.

Kirk was hesitant. To enter might be hazardous, but there was no other way out of his prison and he was gaining nothing by remaining where he was. Quietly, carefully, he approached the opening, not quite passing the whole way through it.

The humanoid who stood before him was tall - very tall. It dominated the room with its presence, appearing proud and regal, authoritative beyond doubt. Raven hair topped a craggy face which had an orange hue. It was thin-lipped, noseless, but with large expressive eyes. A robe of stately purple clothed it, enhancing the air of authority that surrounded it like an impenetrable wall. James Kirk, though a man of authority himself, felt strangely awed.

"Captain Kirk, I am honouring yourself and your crew - yourself in particular."

It was the same voice, and it was obvious it had come from the humanoid, but the lips had not moved, the mouth had not opened, and there was no expression on the alien face. Pointing at Kirk's injured arm, the alien continued to 'speak'.

"It is regrettable that my matter-transmitter caused you injury and pain. It is, unfortunately, still in the experimental stage, and has never been used on a Human before. In fact, I have never encountered your race before. You are an interesting breed - you seem to have arrived at an opportune moment."

As the words continued to reverberate around him, Kirk tried to analyse what he had just heard. Humans being referred to as a 'breed', albeit interesting... The humanoid's appearance, then, was a false one if it considered Kirk an alien creature, a rare specimen for study. But if that was so, and the humanoid form an illusion, what then was its true appearance?

The Enterprise's Captain decided to try to communicate, to learn something while he had the chance. "You know my name. You must know that we mean you no harm. Our intentions are peaceful. You are a being of intelligence as we are, even though your abilities greatly exceed our own. Why did you not contact us on our arrival, instead of this unconventional approach?"

While talking, Kirk had stepped a little closer, eager to study the alien a little more closely. He wasn't sure if he expected a reply to his question, but he received one immediately.

"As I already stated, Captain, I have never encountered Humans before. I wanted the opportunity to study you, to see your behaviour when you thought yourselves alone. My observations indicated that you are a very interesting species,

with some admirable qualities. You yourself, Captain, are an exceptional man; possibly one of a kind. It is these qualities that you possess which have made you my choice, above all others, to undergo my test."

Kirk could feel himself rebelling against these words. He resented being used as a guinea-pig in an alien experimental assessment of his race. But he said nothing, preferring to wait, to heat the humanoid out, until an opportunity to act should present itself.

The alien continued. "The test has been designed to provide me with exact details of any race undergoing it. Having decided that you are the prime example aboard your vessel, it is your skill, courage, determination, strength of character and will which I must try. It is regrettable that you have been injured even before the start, but it will make the experiment all the more interesting."

In all this time the alien had not moved, and even now, in the face of Kirk's all-too-evident anger it made no move. Kirk glared at it.

"You can get your guinea-pigs elsewhere! My race resents being used as an inferior type of experimental 'property', and I'll not willingly undergo any test for you, either now or any time in the future. You may think you can keep me here indefinitely, but my ship has many resources, many ways of tracing me. And they'll find me. And when they do, I know what report I'll make to Starfleet on this planet and its inhabitants!"

He had said too much, and knew it, but diplomacy was not his strongest point. The outburst seemed to have little effect, however. The alien simply continued to study him as a specimen would be studied by a scientist after it had bitten him.

One word was uttered by the alien. "Interesting." The word was so reminiscent of Spock that it made him shudder slightly. He had no idea where his beloved ship was or whether his friends were safe and well; or if they too were in the power of this strange, obviously dangerous humanoid.

There was a short silence, then the being continued. "It will alter the results of the test to make you undergo it by force. However, I think I can persuade you to co-operate. If you have...I think you call it a 'stake'...to play for, then the result will possibly prove most interesting. Observe..."

A long sinewy arm was raised and gestured in the general direction of the ceiling - or at least, where the ceiling should have been. What dominated Kirk's attention was a gigantic screen, a picture gradually forming upon it - a picture of his beloved Enterprise.

The ship was unharmed. He could see her sailing majestically as she always did in the deep ocean of space. Kirk drew a deep breath, a smile involuntarily playing over his lips. No matter how many times he saw that picture, he never tired of it or lost the magic of its beauty. As he watched, the picture dimmed and was replaced by the images of his closest friends.

Both Spock and McCoy were on the bridge, their concern openly evident on their faces as they talked. Behind them, Chekov manned Spock's station; Uhura was busy, clearly trying to make contact with him. Then Spock and McCoy also vanished from the screen. Even as Uhura glanced round and discovered that they were missing, the bridge also faded from sight, to be replaced by the image of a small, nondescript room. Spock, blood oozing from a cut on his forehead, was bending over the prone, shirtless body of McCoy. Both looked to be in poor physical condition.

An involuntary gasp escaped from dry lips as Kirk realised their danger. The alien must have probed his mind to have obtained the knowledge that these two men were dearer to him than any other living beings. Angrily, he turned towards the alien once more, infuriated almost beyond control that it should use his deepest emotions both as a weapon against him and to harm his friends.

"Captain, before you carry out your intentions, listen to my words. Your friends are relatively unharmed - for the moment - and hidden deep within this

planet. They will remain safe - for two of your day periods. You have that long to reach them, by completing the trials I will set you. If you fail to reach them in that time, they will die." It paused, then - "Believe what I say, Captain - I do not bluff."

The room, the alien humanoid, the screen, all disappeared from around him, and he found himself at the end of a long, narrow passageway. There was only one direction in which he could go, and with the alien's statement resounding in his brain, he knew he had no option but to go ahead and undergo the test.

Uhura rose to her feet, pointing at the viewing screen. "Look!"

All eyes turned towards the screen and there was a simultaneous gasp of astonishment. Since Spock and McCoy had mysteriously disappeared from the ship moments before, the ship's complement had been prepared for almost anything except this.

The screen showed an indistinct but recognisable image of Captain Kirk.

He was standing in a dimly-lit cave, and even as they watched, he began to move along it.

Sulu was the first to pull himself together. "I'm not sure what's happening, but I don't like it. Have the search parties found anything, Uhura?"

"Not a thing. There isn't even any mountainous terrain close to where the landing party beamed down where there could be a cave like that. It's as if they aren't even on the planet, but..."

"But that's impossible," Sulu finished.

The corridor was dark, and chillingly cold. It seemed to stretch endlessly before him, hiding unknown dangers, the dim lighting only sufficient to let him see a few yards ahead. He could not discover any source for the light, and could only assume that the alien provided it in the same way that it had provided the viewscreen. He could only be grateful that the alien had realised that without any lighting he would have been unable to travel any distance at all.

As he began walking he couldn't help thinking of other times he had been in a similar predicament. He recalled with greatest clarity their meeting with the empath Gem, and the trials they had undergone then. He remembered how he had felt when Bones had willingly gone with the Vians, willingly sacrificing himself for his friends. Would he himself have to do that this time? It didn't seem such a difficult decision to have to make - especially as the incident in the Tholian sector drifted into his memories. Spock had risked everything to try and retrieve him; both he and Bones had clung to hope after everyone else had given up, believing him dead, but they had not been able to 'pull' together until after they had listened to his last orders on the tape he had left for them long before. Afterwards, they had denied playing the tape, but he knew them too well to be fooled; he had never let them realise how amused he had been at the way in which they had instantly backed each other up in their denial.

Still thinking of the past he failed to notice that the corridor had narrowed ominously. His foot hit something, and looking down he noticed for the first time that it was becoming increasingly rock-strewn. A few feet further on was utter blackness. He moved forward cautiously, to discover that the ground fell away, a sheer drop into blackness.

He had been unutterably careless, allowing his memories to distract him. He would not make the same mistake again.

A noise behind him drew his attention. He couldn't make out what it was at first - the shape of the corridor caused a muffled echo. Then recognition finally dawned. Something heavy was approaching, its footsteps dragging. He moved away from the drop, ready to face whatever might appear, flexing his

injured arm, loosening the stiffened muscles ready for action.

"Mr. Sulu, surely there's something we can do!"

The image on the screen was causing Uhura more and more concern. She wiped sweat from her brow, sweat caused by her fear for the Captain, trying to keep her hands from shaking.?

"What can we do but keep on looking?" But Sulu too was sweating in apprehension as they watched the screen. It didn't take much imagination to figure out what was happening and why, and they felt pride mixed with the fear at the realisation that their Captain was undergoing this in an attempt to save all of them.

A large biped appeared in the corridor, fully blocking any means of escape. Its shaggy shoulders scraped the rocky walls, its horned head almost touched the roof.

Danger! It seemed to emanate from the very walls. Kirk was weaponless - helpless, in fact. It would be brute strength alone which would bring him through the coming conflict, and he was not at all sure that he had the strength to defeat this savage brute.

Before he had time to think clearly about any possible method of defence, the biped shuffled forward, its intent all too obvious. Kirk sidestepped, trying to get further from the chasm, knowing the ease with which he could be thrown over and realising that the corridor was too narrow for him to dodge past it to a safer position. He kept his eyes focused on the huge beast, studying its every move, attempting to anticipate its intentions.

Suddenly, he realised that the beast looked very much like the mugato that he had encountered on Tyree's planet. It had the familiar horn atop its ape-like head, stood erect...large canine teeth projected from its maxilla. Did it, too, possess the lethal poison in its bite? He dared not chance that it did not; the only difference between this creature and the mugato was that this animal's fur was golden, not white.

These thoughts had flashed through Kirk's mind in a split second; he did not have time to consider them, for the beast charged, grunting. One flailing arm clubbed Kirk's head and it grunted in apparent satisfaction as Kirk hit the ground.

An involuntary yell was wrenched from Kirk as he landed awkwardly on his injured arm, causing him agonising pain. A cold sweat broke out on his forehead as he fought the nausea it caused. His arm was clearly more severely injured than he had thought - or had this simply aggravated the injury?

The beast was circling him, awaiting its chance, and for a moment he wondered why it did not attack him as he lay. Then he realised that the alien did intend to give him a reasonable chance of success in this test - the results would be far from comprehensive if he was killed right at the beginning as he lay helpless, incapacitated by pain. The creature would not attack until he was on his feet again.

He was tempted to lie still for a short while, to regain strength perhaps, to see if the beast would become discouraged when its enemy did not fight back, and wander away. But although he felt like a caged animal, a circus specimen about to perform for a reward, the situation was too desperate for delay. His friends' lives were at stake. He had to fight the beast, now, he had to win this fight...for their sakes.

He gathered his feet under him, clasped his hands together to form a club, then straightened suddenly and ran forward. The beast failed to move quickly enough and received the full force of Kirk's clubbing action on its shoulder. The blow should have downed a man twice Kirk's size, but the beast seemed

unaffected. The shock of his failure momentarily caught Kirk off guard, and he was knocked off his feet again as the beast lashed out at him. Falling to his knees, Kirk saw his chance, and rolled quickly, driving the beast's legs from beneath it. The resulting thud resounded through the cave, echoing and re-echoing and Kirk clutched at his head as the sound seemed to beat at his skull.

Still reeling from the impact, the beast rose and approached Kirk again, slowly, calculatingly it seemed. Backed against the wall, there seemed no way out this time...except, perhaps, for one.

Lowering his head he charged at the beast, his head driving into its abdomen knocking it to the ground once more. This time it struck its head with some force. An agonised roar escaped from it. It rose to its feet again and turned on Kirk before he had time to move.

It felt like a press around his defenceless chest as its arms encircled him. He felt the breath forced from him, and felt ribs crack. His senses reeled as vital oxygen was denied him and he felt himself blacking out.

The beast seemed satisfied with the results of its attack because it suddenly released its captive and let him fall unceremoniously to the ground. Gasping for breath Kirk observed the beast as it circled him expectantly. Blood trickled into one eye from a wound opened when he hit the ground. Wiping it away, he saw a chance presenting itself, for the first time. The beast was beside the chasm, oblivious to the dangerous position it was in.

Repeating a previous action Kirk forced himself upright, then charged at the beast, butting it over the edge. He barely prevented himself from following. Amidst the echo of the creature's howl as it fell, James Kirk sank to the ground in exhaustion.

In the deathly silence which followed, Kirk couldn't help having doubts as to his ability to fulfil the awesome task facing him. He couldn't breathe properly, and he was afraid one of the ribs broken in the fight had punctured a lung. Sweating profusely from the exertion of the battle and the pain which seemed to invade his very soul, his chest heaved as he tried to regain his breath. He rose unsteadily to his feet. The thought of Bones and Spock, the fate that awaited them if he failed, gave him the energy necessary to drive himself onwards.

Approaching the chasm again, his brain racing, he tried to figure out a way of crossing. Then he saw it. A bridge of rock spanned the gap. He was sure it had not been there before; it was evidently being provided by his captor, the first 'reward' for a trick successfully performed. He crossed, forcing himself not to look down, unsure of his ability to control the dizzy spells which had begun to affect him.

Ahead of him the corridor curved onwards, and he had no choice but to follow it. It wasn't long before he was panting heavily and he found himself having to take frequent rests to regain his breath. His chest was becoming more and more painful, and he longed to sit down, find what relief he could in resting until the Enterprise found him, but he knew that he had to go on. His captor would not let the Enterprise find him...or Spock, or McCoy. He had to keep going. It was the only way to save them all.

McCoy stirred painfully and opened his eyes.

"Spock! What happened?"

The Vulcan beside him hesitated before answering. "It appears we are being held hostage, Doctor. The Captain is being forced to undergo certain...tests..." He turned away from the physician. "Only the successful completion of them will result in our release."

McCoy made no comment, instead staring at the black, glistening ceiling above him, painful memories returning to torment him. Memories of a time when he had undergone a 'test' for the sake of his two friends. He could imagine, as he

knew Spock could not, what was going on in Jim's brain, the trauma he must be going through; but he also knew, as he knew Spock knew, that James Kirk, their Captain and their friend, would succeed in his task - or die trying.

"Is there nothing we can do to help him, Spock?"

The Vulcan shook his head. "We are powerless. The Captain is on his own. Be content in the knowledge that he is Jim Kirk."

The black, obsidian-like rock surrounding him was shaking, and a rumbling noise resounded around him. Kirk stopped in his tracks, unsure of what he'd next be facing, wiping the blood from his eye.

Suddenly the roof above him shattered into a myriad pieces and showered down around him. Running forward, he barely escaped being buried as a whole section of the corridor caved in. There was definitely no turning back now. Refusing to give in to the agony that his chest was causing him, he pressed onwards. Time, he knew, was running out. His strength could not hold out much longer.

Shining with a luminescence which was almost blinding in its brilliance, the corridor abruptly changed. His surroundings were bathed in blood-red, in sickening orange, but there seemed to be no purpose in it. Parts of the wall were opaque, parts translucent, but there seemed to be no purpose, no reason here.

Wary, he stumbled on, hardly able to place one foot in front of the other now. It must be time for another trial...

Silently, suddenly, a wall slid back in front of him. He prepared himself to expect anything...

A large room was revealed to him, deserted except for one solitary couch in the centre of it, and he was again reminded of how they had first found Gem, for on the couch, bathed in yellow light, lay a female figure, naked, beautiful. Kirk approached the couch cautiously, prepared, he thought, for anything.

Not for this!

On the couch, alive, breathing, was Edith Keeler. His beloved Edith, lying there, alive...

He stared at her for a few moments, savouring the feelings that welled within him. He reached out, placed his hand on her arm, his other hand reaching to caress her face. Her skin was warm, vibrant with life...

He snatched his hands away, and shouted to the walls,

"No! She's dead! You're not going to catch me out like that. She'd dead!" Looking down at the face once more, he whispered, "You're dead..."

His words echoed back to him, seeming to ridicule him in his pain. It was true, however, and he knew it. It was what he had wanted for so long - to hold Edith in his arms once more, to be able to tell her that he loved her. But not now. Not here. It wasn't possible. He was being tested. This had to be the ultimate test. He was being offered Edith - or his friends.

He bent over the couch and gently kissed the silent mouth. Then, with tears running from his eyes, he turned away and walked firmly from the room. Once again the 'iron maiden' had won. He could not - would not - betray his ship or any member of his crew.

Returning to the corridor once more, he began to relive in his mind the incident in the past when he had had to allow Edith to die. Spock and Bones had been involved even then, and he didn't think he could have coped with his grief and guilt if it had not been for their help.

Command decision. Who could live and who must die. Command decision. What he wanted could never be considered, not when it conflicted with his duty.

Ploughing on, he began to feel the mental and physical exhaustion taking

over. He could not keep on indefinitely, he knew that, but he was afraid to stop in case sleep overcame him. The decision to rest was made for him when he encountered a cliff-face rising upwards beyond the light. There were no alternatives. It had to be climbed - but he had no way of telling if the climb would be one of a few yards or an extended one of hundreds of feet. In his present state, he had no strength to attempt such a climb. In an agony of apparent failure, he sank to the floor.

Fighting to remain awake as he rested, he found himself drifting in a dizzy euphoria, and at first he failed to notice the water seeping into the chamber in which he lay. It was lapping around his ankles before he became conscious of its presence, and he could see that the level was rising rapidly. So - the alien did not intend him to rest, and there was only the one way out of the chamber - up. Sighing deeply and painfully, he began his ascent.

The cliff-face was not totally vertical, fortunately, but he still found the going very difficult, especially with one arm practically useless to him. He forced himself on, becoming more and more determined to succeed as he saw the top not too far above him. One foot slipped, and it took him several painful, anxious seconds to regain his footing. His chest connected with the rock as he pulled himself further up, knocking the breath from him, forcing him to stop where he was, panting. As he rested, his eyes wandered downwards again and he was shocked to see, not lapping water beneath him, but vicious-looking stakes gaping at him hungrily. He closed his eyes, trying to shut out the image of the broken bodies of his friends impaled on those stakes - a 'gentle' reminder from the alien, it seemed, that time was running out...

At the top he reached his arm over the edge, looking for a handhold to help him haul himself over. Instead of smooth rock he encountered needle sharp protuberances, inches long, which gripped his fingers in their painful vice. The sudden pain caused him to cry out and lose his footing once more. For several seconds he hung there, suspended only by his lacerated hand, before he was able to scramble once more onto a narrow ledge. Fighting the blackness which threatened to engulf him he wriggled upwards over the edge, freeing his hand with some difficulty as he did so. The entire area was covered with the sharp spikes, but he ignored them, dragging himself over them, ripping his already damaged chest and arm over and over again on them. When he eventually reached clear ground he glanced down at himself, barely conscious of the blood which ran freely from the gaping wounds.

His hair was matted with the sweat and dirt which now caked his entire body, and he felt like giving up there and then. It would be so easy to sleep, to give in to the exhaustion, to the dizziness and the pain. But he could still see the image of those broken bodies, could still imagine the fate of his friends if he did not reach them in time. He could not let his failure cause their deaths - not while he still lived.

With an effort which surprised him, he scrambled to his feet.

He was in a rock chamber. In it there were two humanoids. He struggled to focus on them. They looked familiar...and yet - could he trust his already exhausted mind to register the truth? He wanted to see Spock and McCoy, to know they were safe, and he felt that his brain was allowing him to see what he wanted to see. But they were approaching him at a run. He could fight no longer. Helplessly, he raised his arm in a futile gesture of protection, and sank to his knees.

Hands grasped him gently and eased him to the floor. Quiet voices were directed at him, pleading, but he couldn't understand the words, couldn't even register the fact that he was being helped. He struggled against their restraining hands, desperately trying to get up, to go on, then went limp as merciful unconsciousness finally overcame him.

Spock said nothing, simply staring at the doctor as he attempted to do something to staunch the blood pouring from the ghastly wounds with what little

clothing they had, but finally he looked up at Spock helplessly.

"I can't do anything for him here, Spock! We either get him to the ship - or he's a dead man." The doctor choked into silence on the last words. Spock looked down at the convulsed body, the still-tense face resting on his arm, then raised his head again, his eyes meeting McCoy's once more, concern mirrored in their expression.

"Doctor...I..."

Spock was interrupted by the alien, the deep voice now holding a strange kind of pride; the alien was evidently pleased with its captive's performance.

"Mr. Spock. Dr. McCoy. Your Captain has concluded my test in a satisfactory manner. He has saved your lives, although I cannot guarantee that his own life can be saved. That will depend on your skill, Doctor - a final test of your species. It is regrettable that I had to encounter the Human race under such circumstances. Perhaps, one day, you will understand my motives..."

The cavern grew colder, causing them to shiver, as the alien's voice faded. McCoy turned his attention back to Kirk, who was now shivering uncontrollably.

Spock swallowed, took a deep breath, and called on every vestige of control he had learned during long years of childhood when his peers had not considered him Vulcan and he had had to fight constantly to be even marginally accepted. He could not break now. "His condition, Doctor?"

"I can't tell for sure. I've no medikit, so I can only give a broad diagnosis. There are several broken ribs - one may have punctured a lung. I don't like the look of that arm, and with those gashes he must have lost far too much blood. That alone is enough to..." He couldn't finish. He allowed his head to sink into his hands, feeling totally helpless and inadequate.

Spock touched his arm gently. He jumped in surprise - Spock so seldom touched anyone except, perhaps, Kirk - then looked at the Vulcan. Spock's eyes were fixed on Kirk's face.

The Captain's eyes were open, looking up at them. Before either of them could speak, a fit of coughing racked the torn body. Spock supported him, oblivious to the blood that now covered him as well.

"Jim, you did it!" McCoy reassured his friend, although he was far from sure that Kirk could even hear him. "You completed the test, Jim. We're safe."

Kirk's eyes wandered from the tear-bright blue eyes of the physician to the austere face of his Vulcan, easily reading the warmth in the dark eyes. He managed a smile before more coughing caused him to subside once more.

"Spock, you must do something! I'm helpless down here, and god knows how long it'll be before the Enterprise locates us. I suppose that's another part of the test, though why that blasted alien couldn't have returned us all to the ship the same way he removed us, after he did this to Jim, I'll never understand. Does he want Jim to die?"

"What would you suggest I do, Doctor? In his present condition, a mind meld, even to relieve some of his pain, might kill him."

"Spock, if you don't, he'll die. Do you hear me? He's dying now, and there isn't a damn thing I can do about it. But if you meld, relieve the pain a bit, it'll buy some time because that will ease the strain on his heart. Spock, you have to do it!"

The Vulcan continued to stare at Kirk's gashed and bloody face, his matted hair, for a moment. Then he flexed his hands slightly, placing them on his Captain's head, trying to avoid the worst of the many cuts there also. He ignored the blood that ran over his hands, trying desperately to make contact with the mind. His face creased in concentration, then he screamed as he felt the pain that Kirk was experiencing, and with the shock of what Kirk had gone through.

McCoy wrenched his hands away from Kirk's face, slapping Spock's face to bring him back to full consciousness. The Vulcan blinked, half dazed.

"Did you manage to help him?"

"I...I don't know. The Captain is experiencing such severe pain that I could do little more than reassure him that we are, in fact, safe - he was not certain that he was not hallucinating when he saw us. That fact alone will undoubtedly ease his mind - but I do not know how he is maintaining his hold on reality, in the face of such pain." Spock tightened his grip protectively.

A familiar hum sounded behind them, and turning, McCoy heaved a sigh of relief as he recognized Chekov, phaser in hand, surrounded by security personnel. The young ensign's face registered the shock he felt as he saw the condition his Captain was in, but he acted instantly.

"Enterprise, beam up the Captain and Dr. McCoy immediately. Medical emergency! The rest of the landing party will follow shortly." He gestured the security guards to check around.

Spock shook his head. "I do not think we will find anything," he said quietly, as the transporter took Kirk and McCoy out of the cave.

The sickbay had seldom been so quiet - or so busy. Every off-duty crewman, it seemed, made a point of looking in to discover if there was any change in the Captain's condition.

Despite all McCoy could do, there was little change, however. The broken ribs had been set satisfactorily, the jagged end penetrating a lung removed, the necessary transfusions given, the torn muscles laser-stitched, but the strain of the necessary operation had weakened Kirk further, and he was barely holding his own. Spock was hesitant to try melding again, and McCoy was unsure if he'd even allow the risk again. It was one thing to meld as a last resort when there was nothing else at all to do, but here there were all the facilities of a well-run sickbay. A meld could accomplish little that McCoy's medical equipment could not. It was up to Jim himself, now. His will to survive would have to take over.

Spock remained at his side continuously, not even reporting to the bridge when Chekov reported that the mysterious planet had disappeared as soon as his party had beamed back aboard. And to McCoy's concern about Jim was added concern about Spock - he was not eating or sleeping, apparently unwilling to do anything that would take him from Kirk's side even for a minute.

Three days passed, with Kirk's life hanging in the balance and with Spock sitting beside him silently willing him to live. At last the Vulcan noticed the subtle change in the diagnostic scanner above the bed. The life reading had strengthened - was it enough?

"Doctor."

McCoy came over from the desk where he was trying to complete some routine reports. As he arrived the hazel eyes opened.

"Spock... Bones..."

McCoy placed his hand on Kirk's shoulder. "It's all right, Jim. We're O.K., and you're going to be fine. All you need now is rest."

Kirk smiled crookedly, his eyes returning to Spock's face. The Vulcan's eyes were smiling as he returned the steady look, grateful that this was not the stare of a last farewell.

"C...couldn't let him...kill you," Kirk struggled, feeling the need to explain. "Had...had to find you..."

His friends said nothing. Words were not needed. The look in their eyes said it all.

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WON'T SOMEBODY PLEASE HELP THE CAPTAIN... by Tina W. Pole

He really did feel ten times better that morning, and by the afternoon he really couldn't understand why they should keep him confined in sickbay any longer, and as the sickbay was clear of any other patients, doctors or nurses... He carefully, if somewhat weakly, slid out of bed and sneaked over to the open doorway of McCoy's outer office. If he could just find his uniform and get out of the place then they'd have no jurisdiction over him any more. Damn! He might have guessed that of all the nurses on duty it just had to be Chapel and she was the one nurse he wouldn't be able to talk his way around. With a pounding heart, at the fear of being discovered by her, he quietly tiptoed back to his bed and had barely managed to climb rather wearily and breathlessly back into it when he felt a pair of eyes on him. Looking up he smiled nervously and guiltily at the head nurse, fully expecting her to accuse him of leaving his bed.

"You really should be asleep, Captain," she said, advancing towards him, hypo at the ready. "If the doctor finds you sitting up he won't be very pleased."

Well, at least she hadn't suspected he'd been on his feet.

"I really don't need an afternoon nap any more, nurse," he said, but once Chapel was set on doing something... He backed away from her as far as was physically possible in the restricted confines of the bed and the... How on earth had she managed to do it? He hadn't seen her touch the restraints, and yet he was firmly pinned down again. It really was too much. He was after all the Captain of a Starship, not a laboratory specimen.

"Nurse Chapel, I order you..." But the hypo was already being pressed against his arm. As he fell back against the pillow, sleep washing over him, forcing him to close his eyes, he could swear that he saw a very malicious grin on the nurse's face.

"Making the best of it, aren't we." McCoy's voice broke through his foggy thoughts.

"Uh!" He slowly opened his eyes. They felt like lead. It took him quite a few seconds to fully comprehend where he precisely was.

"Damned noisy sleeper as well."

"Bones..." He struggled up into a sitting position, relieved to feel the restraints had been removed again. "Bones, I really feel much better and..." He stared down at the tray McCoy had placed in front of him and was suddenly wide awake.

"I am not eating that!"

"It's good for you. New sickbay regulation 'pap' full of vitamins, just the thing - have you on your feet in no time."

He resisted the temptation to say 'I've already been on my feet'. No sense in treading in dangerous waters.

"The only place that bowl of muck will have me is in there." He pointed in the direction of the bathroom.

"No need for that, Jim. Nurse Chapel can always bring you a bed pan."

There was something about the sound of the word 'bed pan' that always made the Captain turn that tiny shade redder in the face and McCoy knew it and delighted in bringing the subject up.

"You won't appreciate my being sick all over your nice clean floor, Bones," he said, deciding that it was better to just ignore McCoy on that subject.

"How are you in that way, anyway?"

"What way?" the Captain asked in all innocence, the sleeping draft still

clogging his otherwise very active brain, leaving the pathway wide open for the doctor.

"Have you been today?" McCoy waited for Kirk's face to show those tell-tale signs of embarrassment again. He knew he really shouldn't do it, but he was a bit of a sadist at heart, especially when it came to having the Captain down in his domain for a change and under his power.

"For heaven's sake, Bones!" Kirk hissed, glancing around the sickbay ward, turning bright red in the face as he caught the junior nurse smiling at him. He glared at McCoy. Just wait until he was back in command on the bridge again. He'd arrange it so that next time the Enterprise was under inspection by the top brass, they'd concentrate all their efforts on the Medical Section for a change and not on the bridge as they usually tended to do. That would really put the wind up McCoy, especially as he knew the doctor just hated other medical staff, besides his own, poking and prying throughout his section.

"Got to keep an eye on these things, Captain as well, you know."

Kirk wondered what kind of charge Starfleet Command's Medical Branch could get him under if he slugged the doctor one. However, the head nurse arrived at the bedside before McCoy could antagonise him any further. She too had a tray.

"Oh! I thought I was to give the Captain his dinner," she said, looking extremely disappointed because McCoy had beaten her to it.

"Well, as I'm most definitely not going to eat this..." Kirk pushed the tray away and looked at McCoy. McCoy exchanged glances with Chapel and as he swept his contribution away and Chapel replaced it with hers, the Captain wondered if he had done the right thing. The moment she whipped the cover off he could see he hadn't.

"I hate sprouts!"

"Sprouts are good for you," came the answer, and she wouldn't let him have the plate or cutlery, instead she insisted on putting one on a fork and waving it in the direction of his mouth.

Being fed while he wasn't able to do it himself was one thing, but now...

"I'm not that ill any more," he protested.

"Now come on, open up..."

Never before had sickbay seemed more like a torture chamber than it did then.

"But I..." he started again, but it only gave Chapel the ideal opportunity to pop the dreaded sprout into his open mouth. He had no choice but to chew it and swallow it.

"Ugh!"

"Come on," she coaxed again. McCoy just had to turn round to observe the scene.

"What do you think I..." Kirk tried, only to be rewarded with another mouthful of food. He just didn't stand a chance against her.

McCoy shook his head in amazement. If anybody was in the wrong job it was Chris - she really would have made a good children's nurse...

"She would have made a good torturess in days of old," Kirk grumbled to his First Officer, who had called in to see how his Captain was standing up against the rigours of sickbay. "She..." he started again, but she was making her way towards them. Still, perhaps it was only because Spock was there. On the other hand, why was she carrying a tray...?

"Your supper, Captain," she said, depositing the tray on his lap, smiling at the sombre faced Vulcan, and picking up a spoon.

"I'm quite capable of feeding myself, Ms. Chapel, thank you!" he said as he quickly snatched the spoon out of her hand. There was no way he was going to let her feed him again, especially not in front of his First Officer.

"Very well, as long as you make sure you eat them all."

"Eat what?" He pulled the lid off the bowl. Six wrinkled brown objects stared up at him from out of a sickly yellow bed of custard.

Conditions were definitely not improving.

"I hate prunes!"

"Just you eat them, sir. Medical orders."

He suppressed the urge to salute her and shout "Aye, aye, Ma'am!" Instead, he looked across at his First Officer for sympathy.

"I'm sure Mr. Spock will see that you follow those medical orders, Captain," she said as she made to go, her final parting shot being, "I'll be back in ten minutes to collect the tray."

"Spock. Spock, what am I going to do?" He frantically looked around the sickbay ward, where on earth could he deposit one plate of prunes and custard? Strange how he found himself staring his First Officer straight in the eye...

Nurse Chapel looked very suspiciously from one officer to the other. All the prunes had been eaten as well as some of the custard, yet she couldn't bring herself to believe that the Captain had actually followed her orders, and there was an aura of guilt in the air. Those two were two of a kind, be they Human or Vulcan. She took the tray away, but not without giving them one more long, cool, calculating, searching look before actually disappearing through the door.

"Thanks, Spock."

"Not at all, Jim. I..." Spock had suddenly turned a peculiar shade of green. Nurse Chapel was at his side without even being summoned. The Captain found himself sliding down under the blanket to hide from her accusing glance.

"You'd better lie down, Mr. Spock." She helped the Vulcan over to the adjoining bed. "Now, then," he heard her asking, even though he knew she knew the cause of his sudden bout of sickness. "What do you think's wrong with you? Could it be something you ate at dinner time?"

From under the protective covering of his blankets Kirk heard Spock mumble the dreaded word, "Prunes."

"I see..."

The dose of something called cod liver oil that Nurse Chapel insisted he take in front of his First Officer and the assisting junior nurse did nothing to restore Kirk's confidence in his command image.

Next day, whatever day it was, dawned bright but far from beautiful as all the lights came on, half blinding any patients that there just happened to be confined in sickbay.

"I don't see why you've got to wake me up at six o'clock in the morning," was the Captain's first complaint of the day. "You've only got two patients and Spock... Where's Mr. Spock?"

"He discharged himself during the night, sir," the junior nurse explained.

"He discharged himself..." The Captain threw back the cover and jumped out of bed. "If he can discharge himself, then..." The floor came up to meet him; the junior nurse just managed to catch him in time.

"Really, sir," she said as she carefully eased him back into bed. "What'll

the Doctor and Head Nurse say when they find out..."

He dreaded to think.

"Please, nurse, don't tell them," he pleaded. "I'll give you anything you want, but please don't tell them!"

The junior nurse looked at him in astonishment, not quite able to believe her ears. Had he really just said 'I'll give you anything you want'? Yes, he had... Before he could change his mind and she lost her nerve she quickly pulled out her medical notebook and pen.

"Are you sure you don't want it all written down in blood, nurse?" Kirk asked as he signed what she had requested for her silence, wondering what on earth had possessed him to utter such damning words in the first place. If he hadn't got in such a panic he could have easily ordered her to keep quiet.

"Your signature will be just fine, sir. Thank you." And with a smug, satisfied expression on her face she set about straightening the bedclothes and getting his breakfast.

The Captain could just hear her boasting in the nurse's rest room. 'Guess who's coming on our next shore leave with me?'

What would McCoy say when he found out? Especially as that particular junior nurse just happened to be his daughter. Still, with a bit of luck, by the time their next shore leave came around he'd have managed to arrange a transfer for her.

"And how's our patient today, then?" The bright cheery voice of McCoy told him that there was no way he was going to be released that day.

"Fed up to the teeth," he admitted. "When are you going to let me out of here, Bones? I could easily stay in my own quarters, my own bed."

"No, you'd have that intercom open and be involved in the everyday running of this ship before I'd let the door close on you. You're not getting out of here until I personally authorise it - got that?"

"Well, get me something decent to eat, then."

"Now we might just do that today. But for now, eat your porridge and drink your milk."

"I've had porridge every morning for the last five days, Bones, and milk. You trying to make me lose the use of my jaws? How about something different?"

"Making you lose the use of your jaws might be a good idea. As for something different... Hmmm... All right. Nurse, get the Captain our 'special'."

Kirk had his suspicions. "What 'special'?"

"Why, sickbay regulation 'pap', of course."

"On second thought, I'll just stick to the porridge and the milk - and I promise not to bring the subject up again."

"That's the spirit."

Several boring hours later - having to wake up so early really made the day drag - the Captain looked up from reading the latest copy of the Intergalactic Times which was displayed on the bedside's mobile viewscreen, to find both head and junior nurse watching him.

"Ladies?" He wondered what they could want now. Hadn't he already submitted to his daily round of hypo shots, (he still couldn't figure out what half of them were for) the most embarrassing ordeal of the bed pan with her, the Chief Torturess herself, and he had even eaten a few mouthfuls of McCoy's 'special' - were they never satisfied?

"Don't you agree?" Chapel asked, but she wasn't talking to him but to the

junior nurse.

"Yes, Ms. Chapel."

"Agree to what?" he asked. If there was one thing he couldn't stand it was having people talk over his head as if he weren't there, and if there was one place on board ship where they were experts at doing that it was sickbay.

"We couldn't do it before, but his wounds have all healed now and the Doctor did give the go-ahead."

"Nurse Chapel!" he exclaimed, losing the last vestiges of his patience.

Both females looked at him, quite unconcerned by his outburst. He was, after all, only the patient. That was the problem, he decided. He was the only patient and they were concentrating all their efforts on him.

"You're dirty," Chapel told him straight, meeting his eye, daring him to say anything about it.

"Dirty?" he echoed.

"Dirty," she repeated. "And in need of a wash."

"You're not!" he exclaimed in sudden realisation of what they were planning to do. The junior nurse was already swinging the bedside viewer to one side and Nurse Chapel - with what appeared to be a gleeful look in her eye - was pulling back the covers, and with her usual agility efficiently removing his sickbay overall at the same time.

"Stop this!"

"We're only going to give you a blanket bath, Captain," the junior nurse explained as she produced a bowl of steaming hot water, sponge, soap and towels from somewhere...

"Like hell you are! I've had enough of this. Let me out of here!"

"Honestly, Captain," Chapel chided as she struggled to keep him in the bed. "You're causing a big fuss over nothing."

"No...I...am...not..." He broke free of her manacle-like grip, rolled over and out of bed and dashed for the nearest intercom.

"Stop him!" Chapel ordered the startled junior nurse, but although she was a nurse she was just not used to having naked Captain streaking in front of her.

The Captain desperately opened the channel, ship-wide or not he didn't care; somebody might hear him.

"Please," he begged. "Won't somebody please help the Captain!" His desperate cry for help was heard from one end of the ship to the other.

Seconds later McCoy burst into the sickbay ward, in time to catch Nurse Chapel in the process of disengaging the 'naked' Captain from the intercom, and in time to witness his junior nurse (and daughter) taking a far from medical interest in their patient.

"What on earth is going on here?" he demanded as he grabbed his daughter by the arm and propelled her through the open door of his outer office, out of the Captain's sight.

"Dad!" she protested, but he closed the doors on her and turned back to face his head nurse.

"Ms. Chapel?"

For the first time since the Captain had been detained in sickbay he actually saw her wilt. "I...I...we...er..."

"Nobody, but nobody, is going to give me a blanket bath, understand?" Kirk stressed.

"Blanket bath?"

"Yes, Doctor. You did authorise it," Chapel said in her defence, having regained some measure of her self-assurance.

McCoy glanced at the closed door of his outer office. "I also told our junior nurse in there - " he jerked his thumb in the direction of the door " - that she was to inform you to release the Captain from sickbay during my absence and let him spend the rest of his convalescence in his own quarters."

Chapel looked genuinely shocked. "She never told me, Doctor."

"So it would appear."

"I can go then?" the Captain asked.

McCoy nodded. He was busy thinking of the junior nurse, his daughter. If she was going to be anything like he used to be at her age...

"Jim!" he said, catching sight of the Captain who was just about to go out of the door, the sight bringing him out of his reverie.

"What?" Surely McCoy hadn't changed his mind?

"You can't walk out like that!" He grabbed the discarded overall from the rumpled bed and threw it at him. "Put some clothes on. You've given sickbay a bad enough reputation as it is! Hell - what kind of excuse can I use to explain your shouting down the intercom like that? It's a wonder that..."

"They have," Kirk said as Spock and several security guards appeared in the doorway of his outer office. Outer office...his daughter. Yes - there she was peeking through the crowd.

"Nurse McCoy!" he bellowed. "Get the hell out of here this minute!"

She turned and fled.

"You do reliaise that I'll be wanting a transfer," McCoy said as he and the First Officer escorted the Captain to his quarters.

"Transfer!" Kirk looked aghast. Even Spock seemed shocked. McCoy couldn't mean it.

"My daughter, of course. You don't get rid of me that easily. I'm not leaving your body - bodies - in the hands of another doctor, not after all the work I've put into them over the years."

"Of course, Bones, of course. I'm sure she'll be a lot happier elsewhere," Kirk said in relief, having suddenly recalled his written promise. He just hoped that she would have the sense to destroy it and not leave it lying around for her father to find, otherwise his next visit to sickbay might be his last!

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THINGS LEFT UNSAID by Linda Green

I said it was a duty, and I tried
 To understand myself what I had said;
 But all my hard soul-searching deep inside
 Made nothing of the words, they sounded dead.
 I thought they were the rightful things to say,
 But as I heard them I knew they were wrong;
 I could not analyse, not in that way,
 The things which made my 'duty' seem so strong.
 Forgive me when I do not speak of love,
 I cannot, you know that is wrong for me;
 Duty alone is all I can speak of,
 I sorrow, but that is what has to be.
 I go, but not because I feel I must -
 It seems I am commanded by his trust.

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MONKEY BUSINESS by Josephine Timmins

I'm being used as an errand boy again, thought Kirk, as he listened, stonily, to Commodore Hills.

"The Enterprise can collect the miners from Zorbi Beta," Hills was saying, "while you transport down to Alpha to talk to Professor Blayne. You'll have a few hours to persuade him to come back with you before the ship returns to pick you both up."

"If Blayne doesn't want to return to civilisation," objected Kirk, "what makes you think he'll listen to me? I haven't seen him for fifteen years."

"Very few people have. In all that time he's made one brief trip out to publish his work on the Zorbus apes. For the last three years, since the colonists gave up, he's lived there entirely alone. But he'll remember you, Jim. It's on record that young Lt. Kirk played an active part in organizing Blayne's expedition to Zorbi Alpha."

Kirk had one more try. "Commodore, Blayne is obviously happy on Alpha, so why not let him stay? He's a civilian; he can't be forced to leave without good reason."

Hills sighed. "Jim, Blayne is an old man. He's also, because of his work on the apes, one of the most respected anthropologists in the Federation. There's a lot of concern in scientific circles about his continued absence. Secondly, Zorbus is a minor star in an uninhabited, unproductive backwater of the galaxy now that the mine on Beta has finally closed down. We just can't afford the expense of maintaining supplies and safety checks for one old man on an isolated planet. Take Dr. McCoy with you - he may find some medical excuse for bringing the professor back."

Kirk frowned. The assignment had a distinct smell about it - hounding a harmless old man because he was a slight inconvenience.

He decided to take Spock with him as well as McCoy. The Vulcan's logic might come in useful as they were dealing with a scientist.

"Give us five hours," Kirk told his chief engineer (he had decided that Scotty could handle the trip to Zorbi Beta). "We should have sorted the matter out one way or another by then."

It meant five hours out of contact with the ship until she returned; Zorbi Alpha was surrounded by a ring of asteroid dust, the properties of which played havoc with communications. He took the Enterprise through the ring and into orbit, then beamed down with Spock and McCoy.

They materialised, standing in a lush tropical paradise. A dilapidated group of huts crouched in a grassy clearing, and the forest, like a green wall, surrounded them barely a hundred metres away. It was hot, rather humid, but very colourful.

Blayne was delighted to see them. He welcomed Kirk like a long-lost son, and greeted the others warmly. He introduced them to a smallish ape, rather similar to a Terran chimpanzee, but more upright and with a much more intelligent face.

"Prudence is three years old. She's marvellous company, but very mischievous, so watch your belongings."

Kirk explained what the Enterprise was doing and described their visit as a social one. Blayne seemed to accept the explanation, but his eyes were apprehensive.

He proudly showed them round his research station. They came to a well-designed compound where a group of chimps was happily playing. "They are far more intelligent than any ape on Earth. Come back in a few million years and they'll be ready to join the Federation. At the moment they're more like naughty

children. Prudence managed to let them out last week - they got into the house and created havoc."

Blayne was talking non-stop - as if afraid to let his guests say anything. Kirk noticed that Spock seemed to be finding the ground of great interest.

It was a couple of hours later before Kirk could bring himself to mention the real reason for their visit.

Blayne was polite but adamant. "This planet is my home now. I have all the company I need and my requirements are very simple. You are welcome to take back all the results of my research. But I am staying here."

Pleading and argument failed. It was Spock who found the one chink in Blayne's armour.

"This planet is beautiful, Professor. It is also snake-infested. During our walk round the camp I saw no less than three 'solan' vipers close to the buildings. That snake alone was responsible for the deaths of four of your colonists - including Dr. Solan himself."

Blayne tried to make light of it. "Yes, the snakes did put an end to colonising the planet. We were a long time finding an antidote. But even Eden had a serpent!"

"The 'solan' viper is a bit more dangerous than a serpent with a nice line in sales talk," said McCoy with a worried frown. "Without treatment, death is a certainty inside three hours."

Blayne assured them that the snakes were a nuisance - nothing more.

It was a good try, but it failed. So did Dr. McCoy's medical examination. When he rejoined his colleagues in the garden, he was shaking his head.

"No go, Jim. He's nearly as fit as we are, and I'm not going to say that he isn't."

Kirk sighed. "There must be something we've missed. I was all for letting him stay here at first, but now I'm not so sure. I don't like the place."

"I agree with you, Captain," said Spock, as he watched yet another tail wriggle under a bush. "This is not a healthy environment."

If Kirk hadn't been so preoccupied with the problem, he would have been more careful before putting his hand into the clump of brilliant orange flowers that bloomed near the path. At his cry, Spock whirled round, and with his phaser dealt death to the attacker. But it was too late.

Shocked, Kirk stared at the two specks of blood on his hand and then staggered as the world started to spin.

Between them they carried him into the house.

"Solan viper - where do you keep the antidote?" demanded McCoy as he looked round for his medikit.

Blayne's face went grey. "There is none," he whispered. "When the chimps got loose they ransacked the storeroom - the bottles of anti-venom were smashed."

McCoy swore, then - "Where the devil's my medikit? I left it on the table."

Blayne looked horrified. "Prudence! She must have picked it up!"

"Well, for God's sake find her! There's a general antitoxin in my kit, but he needs it fast!"

When a rapid tricorder scan of the outbuildings proved negative, Spock and Blayne ran towards the forest. Spock fretted at having to slow down to let the professor keep up with him, but only Blayne knew where the chimp might be.

The forest was dense. Both men were panting by the time they reached a small glade.



Prudence was perched in a rough nest twenty feet up a tree. In response to her master's pleading she started to climb down - clutching the kit. Spock quietly got out his phaser, set on stun, but Blayne saw it, and fearing for the life of his pet, cried out in alarm.

The chimp panicked and leaped for the safety of another tree. Desperate not to lose her, they headed her off and she turned in the direction of the camp. They were almost clear of the forest when she suddenly changed her mind. She jumped down to the ground and started back along a different trail.

Spock hurled himself on top of her and instinctively applied the Vulcan neck pinch. The chimp sagged in his arms. He passed her body to Blayne, then raced for the house.

Kirk was delirious and drenched in sweat. McCoy had spent an agonised hour

applying cold compresses and pain-killers, knowing that he was helpless to stop the poison circulating. If Jim died, he would blame himself for the rest of his life - he should never have put down his madikit.

When Spock appeared, McCoy quickly found what he needed and pressed the hypo to Kirk's arm. Then he closed his eyes and prayed.

He opened them to find the professor standing in the doorway, carrying his unconscious pet. Blayne looked old and pathetic.

"Is there any hope?" he whispered.

"Only if we can get him to sickbay in the next hour." McCoy turned to Spock. "Call the Enterprise," he begged.

"The ship is not due for forty-five minutes at least, Doctor. Until she passes through the ring she cannot receive our signal."

"Call her," McCoy insisted. "She might be early. It's the only chance Jim's got." Spock opened his communicator.

"Is there anything I can do?" asked the professor nervously.

"Yes," rapped McCoy, without looking at him. "Go and pack your things." Blayne hesitated for only a second, then obeyed.

They were in luck. Zorbi Beta was an unattractive place and the miners were anxious to get home. Scott burned up the distance between the two planets, intending to orbit until he received a signal. The Enterprise passed through the ring of asteroid dust barely ten minutes after Spock started calling, and the Captain was beamed aboard.

Several hours later, Kirk, weak but recovering, was sitting up in bed watching Dr. McCoy attending to Spock's hand. The Vulcan was looking grieved.

"I went along to Professor Blayne's cabin to see if he had settled in, and, absolutely against regulations, he had the chimp with him. Without any provocation at all, she leaped at me and bit my hand!"

Kirk tried to keep his face straight. "Come now, Mr. Spock, you had been a bit rough with her, after all. I should think, from Prudence's point of view, being knocked out cold by a fully-grown Vulcan is plenty of provocation!"

Spock declined to reply. McCoy was grinning.

"You'll live, Spock. Now I'd better go and treat that poor animal."

"I assure you, Doctor, she's remarkably fit," said Spock, but McCoy shook his head.

"Can't be too careful, Spock. I find you a bit hard to swallow myself, sometimes, so heaven only knows what a mouthful of Vulcan hand has done to Prudence!"

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PLEA by Ann Flegg

You travel the road of life alone, never
Seeking that which is every man's need -
Afraid of being hurt, you turn away from
Everyone wanting to get close to you.

Don't turn away from me.

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THE KIRK SYNDROME by Christine Gray

The U.S.S. Enterprise was surveying a recently discovered star system. It was the mission of the Enterprise to make a thorough, detailed exploration of the star system, code name CXVMG, to discover if the system would be suitable for future colonisation by Federation members. When the mission was completed, the Enterprise was to report to Starbase 19.

The star system consisted of five planets. Tests on three of the planets having been completed, Spock reported that the first two were unsuitable for colonisation. The third planet, surrounded by a low oxygen content atmosphere and with a high gravity, would prove suitable for colonisation by certain Federation members.

The Enterprise was currently in orbit around the fourth planet in the system. Completion of preliminary studies showed that further investigation of the planet was required. These studies noted that the planet, surrounded by an oxygen-nitrogen atmosphere with equal ratios of sea and land masses, was a great discovery for the Federation.

Ten survey camps were erected on the surface of the planet, complete with all available scientific equipment from the Enterprise. A crew of twelve was assigned to each camp to conduct the investigations.

Captain Kirk entered the transporter room. Recently recovered from a fall which had confined him to sickbay for two days with cracked ribs, he now stood on a vacant transporter pad and said, "Energise."

He was met at the beamdown point by the First Officer of the Enterprise. "I am pleased to see you are quite recovered, Captain."

"Thank you, Mr. Spock," said Kirk, taking in his surroundings. "I think I would have screamed if Bones had kept me in sickbay one day longer. How about a guided tour of our immediate surroundings? My first impressions are favourable."

"Indeed, Captain. The planet is a rare discovery. No trace of previous intelligent life has been found. Of course, a wide selection of other animal life inhabits the planet."

"Are any of the animals dangerous?" asked Kirk.

"Only if provoked, Captain. Otherwise they are content to stay clear of the survey camps. Vegetation is ideal and edible fruits grow in abundance. Climatic conditions are very favourable. The temperature is a constant 21° Celsius. You may be aware of the pleasant tropical surroundings."

Kirk nodded in agreement. As they walked to the first camp he began to relax. He was finding everything very refreshing; if had been some weeks since their last planetfall.

They entered a clearing in the forest where the main survey camp was erected. Kirk took in the organised activity around him. To his left, Sulu was carefully testing specimens of various plant life with solution for detection of chemicals before the specimens were transporter to the Enterprise. Nearby, Dr. Keller, Chief Geologist, was gently placing rock samples into containers.

After speaking to various scientists and exploring the camp, Kirk returned to Spock, who was in conference with Dr. McCoy.

"Well, gentlemen, everything seems to be progressing well."

"Indeed, Captain," replied Spock. "If you will excuse me, sir, I have a problem I wish to discuss with Professor Douek of Meteorology."

"Sure, Spock. Go ahead," said Kirk. Turning to McCoy he asked, "Care for a walk over to the second camp, Bones? I would appreciate the company."

"Okay, Jim," replied McCoy. They entered the forest and talked as they

walked along; the conversation gradually turned to Kirk's recent detention in sickbay. "How are the ribs now, Jim?"

"Fine, Bones. They have healed perfectly, thanks to your assistance," said Kirk.

"I hope you will be more careful in future in the gym. Working out is supposed to keep you fit, not give you an excuse to lie abed for a couple of days," commented McCoy.

"Yes, sir!" saluted Kirk, laughing.

They arrived at the next camp and were soon engrossed in matters there.

On the Enterprise that evening, McCoy was having a quiet drink with Kirk in the Captain's quarters when Spock joined them.

Refusing a drink from McCoy, Spock turned to Kirk and said, "Tests will be completed on the planet tomorrow, Captain. We will be able to continue our mission on schedule."

"That's good news," replied Kirk. "Providing we meet with no problems on the last planet, we should make Starbase 19 on time."

The three friends talked for a while before McCoy said, "Well, I have some reports to bring up to date, so I'll say goodnight."

"Goodnight, Bones. Don't work too hard," replied Kirk. Alone with Spock, he challenged his First Officer to a game of chess. Spock agreed, and they passed the remainder of the evening in mental combat.

When Spock left for his own quarters, Kirk checked with the bridge that all was satisfactory before he too retired for the night.

"Bridge, Kirk here. Any problems, Mr. Chekov?"

"None, Captain. All survey camps have reported in. Everything is fine, sir."

"Thank you. Goodnight, Mr. Chekov. Kirk out."

Next morning Kirk again beamed down to the planet and headed for the first camp, where he found McCoy. As he talked to the doctor, Kirk observed that preparations for leaving the planet were under way. They decided to take a last look around the camp.

They approached Sulu who was completing his work on the various plant life of the planet. "Good morning, Captain, Doctor," he called, placing a fruit sample into its container.

Kirk was intrigued by the fruit. "What is that?" he asked.

"It's a pomellion, sir," replied Sulu. "Would you care to sample one?"

Kirk accepted the fruit Sulu offered him and gave them both a quizzical look. Turning the oval-shaped, dark green fruit around in his hand, Kirk took an experimental bite; at that moment, McCoy's communicator beeped.

"It tastes very much like a peach, only more bitter," commented Kirk. "Are there many growing around?"

"Yes, sir. We found several trees bearing the pomellions. I...er...I named the fruit myself after sampling one, Captain."

Kirk gave the enthusiastic Sulu a startled look and began to laugh. "Very well, Mr. Sulu. Carry on," he said, proceeding to eat the remainder of the pomellion.

Rejoining Kirk, McCoy said, "I'm needed back on the Enterprise, Jim; Ensign Rogers decided to break his tibia and Christine has requested my assistance."

They talked a few minutes longer before McCoy was transported back to the Enterprise.

Each of the ten survey camps was preparing to leave. As the Enterprise passed over each camp in her orbit, equipment and crew were transporter back to the ship. Camp one was last to depart, and Kirk remained at the camp awaiting transportation.

The weather, which had been warm and pleasant at the beginning of the day, changed by mid-morning. The air became humid and clouds began to form. Finally rain started to fall, lightly at first but becoming heavier by the second. Soon everyone remaining on the planet was soaking; no shelter could be found from the rain. Kirk was very relieved when he was finally back on the Enterprise.

He quickly made for his quarters where he stepped out of his cold, wet clothes and into a warm shower. Thirty minutes later, after changing into a clean uniform, he entered the bridge. Spock vacated the command chair as Kirk approached.

"Status report?" asked Kirk. Receiving reports that everything was ready for them to leave orbit, he turned to the helm and said, "Take us out of orbit, Mr. Sulu. Heading - the fifth planet."

"Aye, sir," came the reply and Sulu guided the Enterprise towards the final planet in the CXVMG system.

Thirty-six hours later investigations of the fifth planet were progressing well. Preliminary studies showed that the planet would be unsuitable for colonisation. All necessary investigations were carried out from the Enterprise.

The simulated night of the Enterprise was almost at an end. In his quarters Kirk was awake. Although he was not due on the bridge for some time, he rose, and was immediately aware of a tightening sensation across his chest. Assuming that the pain was due to the manner in which he had been lying during sleep, Kirk ignored it. He quickly dressed and made his way to the bridge.

The morning turned out to be uneventful. Progress reports proved conclusively that the planet held nothing of value to the Federation. However, during the morning the pain in Kirk's chest increased, and he also felt a headache coming on. He did not understand why he felt so tired, and was thankful when his watch ended.

Leaving the bridge, Kirk returned to his quarters. Selecting a tape he lay down on his bunk and listened to the music. He closed his eyes to relieve the headache, and was soon asleep.

He was roused a few hours later by a fit of coughing. Feeling cold, he undressed and slid under the coverlet on his bunk. Trying to find a comfortable position for his painful chest, it was some time before he fell asleep.

Next morning he was no better. As he dressed, a spasm of coughing caught him unaware. He clutched at his chest as stabbing pains shot through him. The attack left him breathless.

Leaving his quarters he headed for the bridge. Overcome by another spasm of coughing, he entered an empty turbolift, and leaned back against the wall. His head ached terribly and beads of perspiration formed on his forehead; he realised how humid it was in the lift.

As the lift doors opened revealing the nerve centre of the Enterprise, Kirk composed himself and stepped onto the bridge. He acknowledged the morning greetings and sank into the command chair. It had not been constructed with any degree of comfort in mind, but it felt almost luxurious to Kirk this particular morning.

Tests had been completed on the last planet in the CXVMG system four hours previously. Her mission complete, the Enterprise was now en route to Starbase 19. She was scheduled to reach the Starbase in ten days. They would have no trouble making that schedule.

A yeoman handed Kirk a report which required his signature. The stylus shook visibly in his hand. He gave the report back to the yeoman. "Are you all right, sir?" she asked.

"Yes, thank you," he replied casually.

Sulu and Chekov arrived on the bridge. They were laughing and the noise drove into Kirk's pounding head.

"Do you think we could have a little less joviality and more concentration on our work, please?" asked Kirk.

"Yes, sir," replied the guilty pair as they reached their respective seats.

Feeling another bout of coughing beginning, Kirk forced it back, the effort making his flushed face burn. The attack ceased and he put a shaking hand to his face, and rested his aching head for a few moments.

Time seemed to pass slowly. Kirk snapped at another yeoman who had served him the wrong coffee. Not waiting for the coffee to be replaced, he gulped the hot liquid down, trying to sooth his burning throat.

It was becoming harder for Kirk to breathe. Every part of his body ached; his chest especially was causing him great discomfort. He shivered as a chill washed over him, yet his uniform clung to his back with perspiration.

Kirk knew he would have to seek McCoy's help soon, as he realised it was becoming increasingly difficult for him to stay in command of the Enterprise. He asked Uhura to call Spock to the bridge.

An eternity seemed to pass before Spock arrived. He moved to stand by the command chair.

"Mr. Spock, would you mind taking command. I have some pressing work to attend to in my quarters," Kirk said, trying to sound casual, but his voice was shaking.

Spock looked at Kirk, noting the flushed complexion even as he registered the unsteady voice. "Are you feeling all right, Captain?" he asked.

"Yes, I'm fine, Spock," Kirk bluffed. "Just got a headache, that's all."

Rising from the command chair, Kirk headed for the turbolift. He never reached it. A wave of dizziness overcame him. He grabbed for the support of the rail, waiting for the bridge to come back into focus whilst he fought down a wave of nausea. He felt his legs slowly collapse under him and he sank to his knees, his hands still groping for support. A shuddering gasp escaped him as he began to cough once more.

The attack was sudden, leaving everyone transfixed as Kirk collapsed. Recovering quickly, Uhura called sickbay. "Medical emergency. Dr. McCoy to the bridge, please. Repeat, medical emergency."

Spock was already at Kirk's side. The coughing attack passed and Kirk sank to the ground totally exhausted. His respiration was laboured, each breath sending sharp pains through his chest.

Cradling Kirk's head in his lap, Spock tried to ease the pain which showed on Kirk's face. Kirk opened his eyes and looked up at the Vulcan.

"Spock...c...cold," he whispered, though his skin was burning and was clammy to the touch. The remainder of the bridge crew watched, not knowing what to do. They were very thankful when McCoy arrived.

Taking in the scene immediately, McCoy knelt down beside Kirk and ran his medical scanner over the prone body. Kirk's eyes followed McCoy's movements. Switching off the scanner, McCoy turned to Uhura.

"Get a medical trolley up here at the double." Looking down into Kirk's pain-filled eyes, sensing the unasked question, he went on. "You have pneumonia, Jim. You have a temperature of 103°. Dammit, why didn't you come to me before,

you stubborn, pig-headed... You must have been feeling ill for quite a while. Oh, what's the use?"

"Sorry...B...Bones," Kirk stuttered.

"Okay, Jim. Lie still, now. Everything will be fine once we get you down to sickbay," McCoy said.

The lift doors opened, giving access to two medical technicians with a trolley. They gently lifted Kirk onto the trolley and covered him. Then it was wheeled into the lift again as McCoy once more checked Kirk's condition. Spock followed without comment, a quick look passing command on to Sulu.

A shocked silence had fallen on the bridge. No-one talked as work was resumed.

As the medical party headed for sickbay, McCoy looked down at Kirk with reassuring eyes. A group of people in the corridor stopped when they realised it was Kirk on the trolley.

"Captain!" exclaimed Yeoman Gary. She caught his attention and a trace of a smile showed on his lips, highlighting his flushed face. As the doors to sickbay closed on the group, Yeoman Gary stared after them.

Entering sickbay, they carefully placed Kirk on a diagnostic bed. His damp clothes were stripped off him and warm robes replaced them. A thermal blanket covered him to retain the heat his body was rapidly losing.

All readings on the panel above him looked bad. His temperature remained at 103° but his pulse rate was 120 instead of a healthy 70.

McCoy administered the prepared serum to destroy the pneumonic virus within Kirk, who fell into a deep sleep.

News of Kirk's illness travelled through the ship. Soon the intercom to sickbay was jammed with calls as concerned crew sought news of their Captain.

McCoy finally had to call the bridge. "Uhura. McCoy here. Please have all calls to sickbay stopped apart from those concerning medical problems. The Captain has pneumonia, and will need a few days rest. McCoy out."

Uhura sighed with relief and proceeded to relay McCoy's message.

McCoy then turned his attention to Spock, who had been waiting patiently. "He has contracted double pneumonia. I have administered an antibiotic serum which destroys the pneumonia in a matter of hours. He will sleep now for approximately four hours, and afterwards should make a quick recovery."

Spock nodded. As he turned to leave sickbay he looked over at Kirk. Then, satisfied that all was well, he headed for the bridge.

Four hours later, McCoy checked Kirk's condition. He noted that Kirk was showing signs of waking as expected, and he glanced at the diagnostic panel; the readings had not changed.

"What the hell..." began McCoy. Kirk turned in his sleep, and a now concerned McCoy began calling his name.

Kirk slowly came out of the depths of unconsciousness. His thoughts cleared and his body tensed against the searing pain once more in his chest. Through the mist and pain he was aware of McCoy's voice.

Kirk slowly opened his eyes and focused on McCoy. "Bones..." he gasped, trying to sit up. Pain shot through him and he sank back. The exertion brought on another spasm of coughing which racked his body. The attack passed and Kirk closed his eyes again, his respiration laboured.

"Easy, Jim, take it easy," said McCoy as Nurse Chapel approached. Taking her to one side McCoy said, "Christine, prepare for an immediate medical examination of the Captain. He has not responded to treatment and I want to know why the serum failed to destroy the infection."

Nurse Chapel began preparations for the examination whilst McCoy crossed to the intercom. "Bridge. McCoy here."

"Go ahead, Doctor," replied Spock.

"Spock, could you please come down to sickbay right away." He hesitated a moment before continuing. "It's Jim..."

"I am on my way. Spock out."

McCoy turned at the sound of Kirk coughing again and was instantly at his side. The current attack was more vicious, and Kirk was doubled up with the pain, his hands clutching at his chest as the coughing persisted.

McCoy held Kirk's shoulders through the attack. It passed and McCoy laid the limp body back on the bed. Kirk lay very still, his body glistening with perspiration as his chest heaved, fighting for air. Alarmed, McCoy noted that the tips of Kirk's ears and his lips were turning blue through lack of air to his abused lungs.

He immediately applied a portable oxygen mask to Kirk's face, and oxygen was fed to his starved respiratory system.

Totally exhausted, Kirk now lay in a semi-comatose state. McCoy administered 500cc of tri-ox compound as Kirk lapsed into oblivion.

Spock entered sickbay to find McCoy and Chapel completing the medical examination. Nurse Chapel hurried the tests to the labs for analysis as Spock approached Kirk's bed.

He noticed the low readings on the diagnostic panel and looked down at Kirk's drawn features, half-hidden as they were by the oxygen mask. He followed McCoy into the office.

Once inside, McCoy sat on a vacant chair and rested his head on his hands. Spock remained standing, waiting for the doctor to speak.

Finally raising his head, McCoy looked at Spock and said, "The serum failed to combat the infection. Jim should be recovering now - instead, he is lying there fighting for his life. Dammit, something must have prevented the serum being effective. I should have examined Jim thoroughly when he was first brought in - that might have prevented all of this."

"You proceeded in the correct manner, Doctor," replied Spock. "You were not to know that the serum would be ineffective. Your diagnosis was correct."

"You may be right, Spock, but I feel responsible, all the same." Rising from the chair he strode out of sickbay headed for the lab to obtain the test results.

Spock re-entered the small darkened ward where Kirk lay. Nurse Chapel retired behind a desk as Spock approached. The steady bleep of the diagnostic panel was the only sound in the ward but Spock ignored this as he stood beside his unconscious Captain.

He noted the flushed complexion, and the stray lock of hair that persisted in falling over Kirk's forehead. Kirk lay unmoving except for the slight rise and fall of his chest as he breathed in the purified oxygen. Spock remained with Kirk for several minutes before leaving sickbay.

He entered the research lab to find McCoy in discussion with M'Benga. "It has to be the answer. Get all available staff working on an antidote immediately."

"Yes, sir," replied M'Benga as he walked to the nearby intercom.

McCoy noticed Spock standing in the doorway and went over to him. "M'Benga found traces of a solution in Jim's blood sample. It is identified as the type used in the testing of alien plant life.

While we were on that fourth planet, Jim sampled one of Sulu's pomellions. Sulu must have had some of the testing solution on his hands when he handled the fruit. Normally it wouldn't have mattered - the solution is normally harmless. But Jim became ill. The solution remaining within his blood stream counteracted with the antibiotic serum, changing the chemistry and thus rendering it ineffective. M'Benga is going to work on an antidote immediately."

"How long before it is ready?" asked Spock.

"That I don't know," confessed McCoy. "I only hope it's soon."

He was interrupted by the sound of Nurse Chapel's voice over the intercom. "Dr. McCoy to sickbay immediately. Dr. McCoy to sickbay."

Spock and McCoy were headed for sickbay before the message ended.

On arrival they noted a flurry of activity around Kirk. Taking charge immediately, McCoy assessed the situation. "What happened?" he demanded.

"The Captain's condition suddenly deteriorated, Doctor; all his readings dropped. I placed him on total life support immediately," replied Chapel.

McCoy checked Kirk's readings again and was relieved to see they had steadied. Kirk was deeply unconscious, all his bodily functions now performed by life support.

McCoy looked at Spock, who returned the gaze. "All we can do now is hope for the antidote to be found in time. Jim has the will power to live, but he may not have the strength," commented McCoy.

News travelled along the Enterprise grapevine that Kirk's condition had deteriorated. Kirk was well liked by those who served under him and everyone wished they could be of help in some way.

Spock and McCoy remained by Kirk's side for what seemed an eternity before M'Benga finally entered sickbay with a filled hypo. He handed it to McCoy, who administered the shot to Kirk.

"Now we wait," he said grimly.

Over the next eighteen hours Kirk hovered between life and death. The antidote took some time to work, and Kirk's fever rose alarmingly. His temperature reached an alarming 105° and he was constantly bathed in perspiration. He began to struggle as he rambled in total delirium.

Spock and McCoy kept vigil over Kirk the whole time. The fever was finally broken. Kirk's struggles lessened, and he became silent. The movements ceased and Kirk once more lapsed into a deep unconsciousness.

His temperature dropped two degrees and McCoy gave a sigh of relief. "He'll be okay now, Spock; he's over the worst. What he requires now is plenty of rest - and - " he yawned, " - that goes for me, too."

Leaving Kirk in the capable hands of Dr. M'Benga, McCoy went off duty to catch up on his sleep. Spock refused to leave, and remained in sickbay.

In his quarters, McCoy called the bridge and passed on the news of Kirk's improvement. Kicking off his boots he lay down and was soon asleep.

McCoy entered sickbay some five hours later and found Spock lying on the diagnostic bed next to Kirk's. The doctor checked the readings and discovered that Kirk's temperature was now well down. Furthermore, Kirk was regaining

consciousness. McCoy awakened Spock, who moved to the doctor's side.

Kirk's eyes slowly fluttered open. He blinked several times before he recognised the faces of Spock and McCoy as they bent over him.

"Welcome back, Jim," said McCoy.

Unable to reply because of the oxygen mask, Kirk slowly raised his left hand in a silent wave. Then his eyes drooped and he drifted into the black emptiness once more.

For the next few days Kirk lived in a dream. Part of the time he was conscious, but mostly he slept, giving his body a chance to recover. In these wakeful times, faces floated into his vision, sometimes those of McCoy and Spock, and other times the faces of his senior officers as they sat with him in their off-duty periods.

On the third day of his convalescence, Kirk awoke to find that the life support systems had been removed. McCoy noticed Kirk was awake and went to stand by the bed. Kirk tried raising his right arm to his face, and was unable to do so.

"Bones..." he said as he looked at McCoy with worried eyes.

"It's okay, Jim," reassured McCoy. "Your right side is partially paralysed from the effects of the pneumonia. It will be all right in a few days."

Spock entered sickbay as McCoy finished speaking. "How do you feel, sir?" he enquired.

"Terrible," replied Kirk. "I feel as if I could sleep forever."

"That is just what I'm prescribing for the next week," McCoy commented. "Plenty of sleep."

"For once, Bones, I agree with your treatment," replied Kirk with a chuckle which turned to a groan as his abused chest protested. Then - "What is the status of the Enterprise, Spock?"

"We are on course, on schedule, for Starbase 19, sir, and will arrive there in two point four days," the Vulcan replied.

Kirk nodded, satisfied.

Spock and McCoy stayed talking to Kirk for a while. Gradually Kirk's eyes began to close as he found it difficult to concentrate on the conversation.

"That's enough talking for now," ordered McCoy as he noticed Kirk's movements. "Get some sleep, Jim. You can have more visitors later."

Kirk didn't reply. He was already asleep. McCoy lowered the lighting in the small ward and ushered Spock out.

Spock headed for the bridge as the Enterprise travelled onwards across the vastness of space towards Starbase 19 and her next mission.

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Kirk: I thought I told you to keep the Enterprise in orbit.
Scotty: She's safe enough, sir - I left her at a parking meteor.

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Spock: Mr. Chekov, I wish you would pay a little attention.
Chekov: I'm paying as little as I can, sir.

++ ++ + ++ ++

Kirk: Have you told Chekov not to go around imitating me?
Spock: Yes, I told him to stop acting like an idiot.

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A TASTE OF AFIAN by Kelly Downes

(Age 9)

Space, the final frontier. These are the voyages of the Starship Enterprise, its five-year mission to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilisations...to boldly go where no man has gone before.

We have had a strange signal from a planet called Afian. The signal was a Mayday signal, which meant they were in trouble. Mr. Spock, Dr. McCoy and I were going down there to see what the trouble was.

When we were down on the planet, everything was so beautiful - but what danger lies ahead?

We were trying to find some of Afian's people, but we started to get thirsty so we started to look for water. Soon we came to a lake. We started to drink the water when suddenly a giant seal came out of the lake. We brought down some other men and one of them got killed because the seal trod on him.

Soon we were able to get it back in the water by using our phasers. We went on and soon we came to a patch where there were flowers and a man got killed by a flower that shot tiny poisonous spears in his chest.

Then we saw a man. He said they were being attacked by a seal - a giant seal. So we went back to the lake and when the seal came out of the water we set our phasers on kill and we killed the seal, and the people were very happy. We had saved a few more lives again.

"A logical thing to do," said Spock.

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A NIGHT OFF by Phillipa Hammond

The lad in the yellow shirt leaned nonchalantly on the bar's counter and grinned at the barmaid. Bolting on a bored, oh-yeah expression, she said,

"And what can I get you, sonny? A fizzy orange?"

The young man's self-confidence seemed to wilt ever so slightly under her gaze, and he went a most becoming shade of pink. But the curly-haired man with him, who wore a red shirt of the same design, was watching his embarrassment with something very like enjoyment, so he decided to have one last try.

"Er...Vodka tovarich snemoskov Russchian, please," he said nervously.

There was a pause. "Pardon?" The barmaid's tone would have frozen a volcano.

"Well, I said vodka tovar - "

"I heard. Now would you mind just explaining what the hell you're talking about?"

The older man laughed, and slapped a handful of credits onto the bar counter. "I told him!" he said, winking at the barmaid. "Gi' us two o' your best Scotch whiskies, and have one for yersel'." His voice was unmistakably Scots, and very attractive. The barmaid was now looking decidedly coy, and slipped the coins into the bar computer, which produced a couple of full glasses after some rather strange noises.

"Needs servicing," she said apologetically.

The two of them downed several rounds, then reeled out of the best bar on Aldebaran 4, singing something about taking Kathleen home again. The barmaid watched them go in amazement.

She raised her eyes - all three of them - and fanned herself with one tentacle.

Humans!

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