

LOG ENTRIES

35

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Artwork: Cover, Sandy Sapatka
P2, M. Delaney

Editor - Sheila Clark

Assistant editor - Valerie Piacentini

Typing - Sheila Clark

Proofreading - Valerie Piacentini

Printing - Janet Quarton (and James T)

Collating - Sheila's Chain Gang - Allison Rooney, Lorraine Goodison, Hilde McCabe, Cory King and anyone else rash enough to say 'Can I help?'

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

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Hello everyone, welcome to Log Entries 35.

As always at this stage, I find myself sitting with a blank mind and no idea of what I want to say. The main purpose of an editorial does seem to be to point out to readers any particular comments that have come in on stories in past issues, or any pertinent comment on any story in this issue, and I don't have any of either. I do have a couple of 'by the way' comments, though.

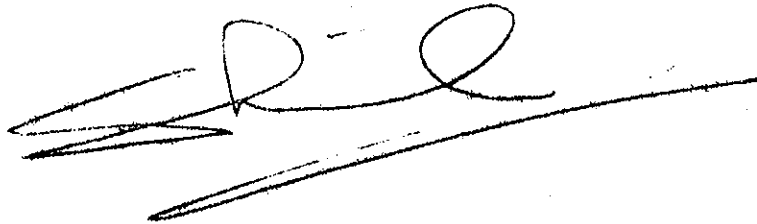
First of all, I'm delighted to have stories in this issue by several new writers, including the winner of the competition in N/L 40. This is the first story Jane has sent us and we certainly hope it won't be the last. The other entries in that competition will be printed in due course.

We also have in this issue at least one 'other entry' in another of our fiction competitions - the one about a story featuring a dragon.

Material 'sparked off' by the movie is beginning to come in, mostly in the form of poetry so far. I suspect that those of our readers who have completely rejected the movie (there are a few) won't have too much to worry about regarding movie-based stories appearing, although I'll be very happy to consider any such.

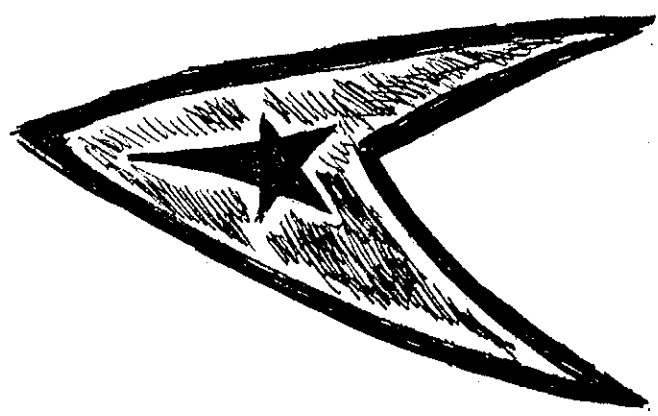
Enjoy the zine.

July 1980

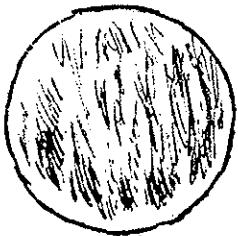
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'S. Clark', written over a horizontal line.

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NCC-1701



M. DELANEY

THE COLOURS OF DARKNESS by Simone Mason

McCoy met Scotty coming out of the recreation area and the Chief Engineer put a finger to his lips.

"Whatever you do, don't talk in there!"

"Are you drunk? This is the recreation area!"

"Yes, and the Captain and Mr. Spock are engaged in a game of chess as though their lives depended on it."

"Is that all?"

"The Captain says he's winning, and has threatened to strangle anyone who distracts him. You've been warned!"

"Just like children!" muttered McCoy as he entered and took a tray, then sat down at a table to eat.

He looked at the two players sourly at first, then with an indulgent smile. They were in very deep concentration indeed.

Relaxing with a shrug, McCoy sipped his coffee and observed his two friends with a benevolent stare. It was clear they were enjoying the game and he had to resign himself to their silent company.

The bleep of the intercom made everyone start.

"Curse whoever it is!" snapped Kirk, getting up. "I've got you, Spock. Wait and see."

He ran to answer and heard Uhura's voice. "Captain, top priority call from Commodore Mendez. Shall I transmit it to your quarters?"

Kirk agreed and returned to the game with a fierce glare. "Come on, Spock, we'll get back to this as soon as possible. Checkmate in three moves."

"No, Captain. My move now - and checkmate."

Kirk stared at the board, then at Spock with an exasperated sigh. "You diabolical Vulcan! I did think I had you cornered..."

"Captain, Commodore Mendez..."

Kirk sighed. "Let's see what he wants."

Their superior officer looked very worried as he faced them from the screen on Kirk's desk. "Proceed to Planet Q17 immediately, Captain Kirk, and investigate the reported presence of natives on a supposedly uninhabited world."

"A mistake by the survey team, sir?" asked Kirk, amazed by such an unusual occurrence.

"Perhaps, Captain. We can't question any of its members; they died in an accident when their vessel exploded during an ion storm."

"Was it a genuine accident?"

"We have no reason to suspect otherwise. The colonists on Planet Q17 are not happy about the discovery, but report the natives as friendly, so it may be possible to let the colony stay. It's your job to see what the situation is and act accordingly, Captain. Try to find the reason why those natives weren't reported before."

Kirk acknowledged and gave the necessary orders, then left for the bridge with his First Officer. Both knew that their minds were following the same pattern of thought.

"Spock, how often has a survey team made a mistake of this magnitude?"

"Twice, Captain, but it was over a century ago, when sensors were not always accurate."

"Exactly. I don't like this at all."

"Any specific reason, Captain?"

"No, just a feeling. I know, it's not logical." He smiled at Spock, who had raised an eyebrow.

The Enterprise established orbit round Planet Q17 without difficulty and the first obvious check, on the presence of any space ship in the area, proved negative.

"A vessel could have brought the so-called 'natives' and departed," reflected Kirk aloud to his First Officer.

"We found no evidence of this, Captain. This planet is very distant from either Romulan or Klingon territory, and so recently colonised that it has not acquired a name yet..."

"So it's too much of a coincidence that another race should have colonised so soon after us," finished Kirk. "Unless the natives were here before and the survey team made a huge mistake."

"A very remote possibility, Captain. Another odd factor is the very small number of native settlements."

"Hmmm... The sooner we find some answers... Lt. Uhura, contact the colonists and ask their co-ordinates for the landing party to beam down."

The officer complied, and looked startled.

"What is it?" asked Kirk.

"Perhaps nothing, Captain, but this is supposed to be Planet Q17, isn't it?"

"Yes. Why?"

"The answer to my call was, and I quote, 'This is Planet Voodoo'."

"Voodoo?... The word is vaguely familiar... However, it means the colonists have named their world. Go ahead with your communications." Kirk drew Spock aside. "If my memory serves me right, voodoo was some kind of witchcraft, wasn't it, Spock?"

"Yes, Captain, practiced by a minority of Earth races until the 21st century."

"It was greatly feared, and although said to be extinct, some people believe it to be surviving," added Kirk thoughtfully.

"Indeed, Captain. A very strange name to have chosen for a planet. My check of the records indicates that none of the colonists were natives of the West Indies, the region of Earth where voodoo was mostly practiced."

"I don't like this at all, Spock," sighed Kirk. "Dealing with superstition is always so..."

"Captain," interrupted Uhura, "I have the co-ordinates for you to beam down. Your arrival is eagerly awaited."

"At least we'll be welcome, Mr. Spock."

"It would be illogical to suppose that any Starfleet officer could be involved in voodoo, Captain."

Kirk smiled and assembled his landing party, to consist of, apart from his First Officer and himself, Dr. McCoy and two security guards.

"What is this I hear about witchcraft on this planet?" asked McCoy as he joined them.

"Voodoo, to be exact, Doctor," replied Spock, "so please do not forget your rattles and beads. They might be very useful for once."

"Why, you...!" swore McCoy. "Jim, will you stop encouraging your First

Officer by laughing so much at his 'jokes'? This is Planet Q17, so what is all this about 'voodoo'?"

"The name Q17 no longer applies, Doctor," explained Spock. "The planet is now called Planet Voodoo."

"I expect someone has a sense of humour, which is more than can be said for Vulcans!" muttered McCoy, with, however, a good-humoured smile.

"Let's hope that is all it is, Bones," said Kirk. "The landing party is ready - let's go."

They materialised just outside the colonists' settlement and were amazed to see a high fence around it.

"Those people are afraid!" exclaimed McCoy, stating the obvious. "Of what? It's a beautiful world."

The landing party had to agree with the doctor. A beautiful landscape of wild and colourful plants and tall trees spread as far as they could see, with lush green meadows here and there.

"Appearances can be deceptive, so take care," warned Kirk. "Let's see what the colonists have to say."

"The natives are reported as friendly, Captain," said Spock. "The situation has clearly deteriorated."

"Which will make our job more awkward," said Kirk as they arrived at the gate. They had stopped in front of it when a voice said, "Identify yourselves."

"Trusting lot, aren't they?" muttered McCoy while Kirk obliged, naming each member of his party.

The gate opened after a short wait, then was hastily shut by two colonists.

"Are the bogey men after you?" asked McCoy. "All that cloak and dagger stuff!"

"It's quite necessary, I assure you," replied one of the colonists, coming forward. "None of us wants to become insane. I am Bryan Del Mont, leader of this colony."

"The name of the colony leader on our records is Klint Von Heimer," said Kirk.

Del Mont smiled bitterly. "I can assure you there has been no foul play on my part, Captain Kirk. I never wanted this position. You may meet our ex-leader if you wish."

"We do wish it, Mr. Del Mont," agreed Kirk.

They followed the colonist to a part of the settlement where a small dwelling was isolated. As they approached, they were able to hear someone shouting incoherently.

"Voodoo! Curses! Doom! Fire... Colours... Firebirds... Colours of light ... Colours of darkness... Beware of the colours... Dance... Fire... Light... Go away... Voodoo..." The last word was taken up as a kind of chant which grated on the ears.

"The man is quite insane," explained Del Mont unnecessarily, "and morale in our settlement is low enough without having his cries heard all the time, hence his seclusion. Our doctor does visit him regularly and he is well cared for."

"How and why did he become insane?" asked McCoy.

"The natives did it to him, Doctor. One evening there was such a huge fire in the native village, with flashes of colour reaching so high and far, that Klint went to investigate, ordering no-one else to follow. He returned the raving maniac you hear now, unable to tell us what happened to him there."

"Bones, go and check him over, will you?" asked Kirk.

McCoy entered the dwelling after Del Mont had unlocked the door. "I have to lock you in, Doctor, but he has not been violent so far. We'll stay here just in case."

While they waited, Kirk drew Spock aside. "What do you make of the strange words, Spock?"

"Insufficient data, Captain, but if we assume that the natives are responsible, the words make a rough pattern indicating that inhabitants bring death and curses and doom. The one odd factor is the colours of light and the colours of darkness."

"Yes... Whoever heard of 'colours of darkness'?"

"If the man is insane, his words may not be significant, Captain."

"We'll know when McCoy has finished his examination."

The doctor came out shortly afterwards and shook his head. "I can do nothing for him, although I'll have a medical team down to test him further. The man is hopelessly insane, Jim."

"Cause?"

"Your guess is as good as mine. Something happened to him in that native village, something his mind could not cope with, so it snapped under the stress of whatever it was."

"Torture?"

"Who knows, Jim? It's possible, of course, but there were no marks of violence on him when he returned, according to the medical record."

"Captain," said Spock, "what you might call torture may not necessarily be a fact applicable to everyone."

"You mean the natives did not intend to harm him? That it was an accident?"

"It is a possibility, Captain."

"Few of us, if any, believe that, Mr. Spock," said Del Mont. "Not after all that happened."

"Explain," asked Kirk.

"To see our leader reduced to insanity angered us. We decided to give a warning to the natives, make them realise that we could harm them if we wished, so they would leave us alone. No, we didn't apply any physical violence," he added hastily at the sight of Spock's raised eyebrows, "we made a raid on their village and destroyed their primitive dwellings, a very moderate reaction when you think that the weather is clement and they can rebuild their houses in a couple of days."

"Are you sure that's all you did?" asked Kirk.

"Yes, Captain. None of us wish to kill. The natives watched us as though they couldn't care less, but they must have cared, because the next day our best engineer died in an explosion while he was blasting some rocks..."

"That could have been a genuine accident," interrupted Kirk.

"Perhaps, Captain, but the man was always so careful that he would have had to have made a very stupid mistake. And since then we have been plagued by accidents and setbacks, and the situation has only improved since we vowed to leave the natives strictly alone. You can't blame the majority of the colonists for believing that our neighbours have some sort of power, hence the name Planet Voodoo, the word Klint keeps on using."

"I see. Any other reaction from the natives?"

"None to speak of. Akhisar, the native chief, came to the gate of our settlement the day after Klint became insane to apologise and offer us fruits."

We sent him back, of course - how could we trust him? He had a woman with him he called 'the fire in his life', if you ever heard of such a thing!"

"It could be another word for love," suggested Kirk.

"Maybe, Captain. But he also said many strange things."

"Tell us."

"They were meaningless, Captain."

"Let us be the judges of that."

"As you wish. He said he did not know that our leader was a man without colour. They were having a Fire Dance that night, presumably some act of worship, and they did not see Klint until it was too late."

"Too late for what?"

"He didn't say, Captain. Too late to hide from him, I suppose, which would explain why they had to take his mind so that he could not betray their secrets."

"Any other hostile acts on the part of the natives?"

"Not overtly. There have been many accidents, but these have stopped since we ignored the natives and had no commerce with them at all."

"How do you manage to tend your crops?"

"We have parties out during the day, always in large groups. They take care to return to camp at sunset or before, and everyone is confined to quarters at night. That is the time when they worship fire and have their rites. We loved this planet, it was our home, but now fear is always present and I sincerely hope that you can remove the threat these people are."

"But they may have been here before you!" protested Kirk.

"No, Captain. There was no native village here when we arrived. Then, one day, suddenly there it was."

"That's impossible!" exclaimed McCoy.

"Not if they are nomads, Doctor," said Spock. "However, it does not explain why they were not detected by the survey teams."

"No, it doesn't," agreed Kirk. "The sooner we find some answers, the better. A visit to the native camp is the next step."

"Take care, Captain," begged Del Mont. "They'll try their magic on you, although you should be safe in daylight."

"I'm sure we can cope," smiled Kirk. "Don't you think so, Mr. Spock?"

"Indeed, Captain, it could prove a fascinating experience."

Del Mont looked at the Vulcan as though he was mad, but refrained from comment and watched them leave with a shrug, as though to say 'Don't say I didn't warn you!'

Kirk asked, on their way to the native village, "Any ideas yet, Spock?"

"Still insufficient data, Captain, and the words of a madman are hardly a logical basis to arrive at any conclusion."

"There's one thing I can tell you, Jim," said McCoy. "Medical records show that Von Heamer had no history of insanity in his family, and no indication that he could be prone to it. This means that it took something pretty drastic to make him lose his reason."

"In that case we'd better take care, even in daylight." Addressing the guards, he ordered, "You will remain on the edge of the village, ready to come to our assistance if necessary. Spock, Bones, we'll adopt a very friendly attitude for the time being in order to learn as much as possible from the natives. Besides,

we only have Del Mont's word for what happened."

"Sir," said one of the guards, "we talked to a few colonists and they're afraid of the natives."

"The trouble is that a word like 'voodoo' is bound to cause a remnant of superstitious fear even in a hard-bitten Human," said McCoy. "Add to that, strange aliens..."

"Yes, a perfect combination for superstition to flourish," agreed Kirk. "But Von Heimer went mad, which must have been caused by more than superstition."

The village was not far, and they observed the dwellings built of bamboo and foliage in such a way that they blended perfectly with the countryside. Yet the primitive houses were well spaced and decorated with beautiful flowers which made them pleasing to the eye. Spock had his tricorder out and stated with a hint of amazement, "Captain, I cannot say how long this village has been here, a century or a day."

"Why?"

"It is literally part of the vegetation, Captain. Nothing has been cut, just adapted to provide shelter."

A native came out of the nearest hut and bowed slightly. "Welcome to our village, Strangers. May you come in peace and friendship. My name is Akhisar."

Kirk thanked him and introduced his party, observing the native as he talked. Akhisar was a rather attractive humanoid with a dark orange skin, almond-shaped eyes and startlingly white hair. Several natives had approached behind him, showing normal curiosity. Costumes were simple tunics, brightly coloured, while the women wore sparkling glass-like ornaments in their hair and around neck, arms and legs. In other words, they appeared to be typical primitives. Their features however were relaxed and gentle, and they watched the visitors with a calm which impressed Kirk. Clearly, they did not fear them, in spite of the unknown artifacts like tricorders the visitors carried.

Akhisar led them to the centre of the village where a clearing was large enough to assemble everyone. The middle was occupied by a wide hole with a low edge, and a fire burned in it.

Spock approached it cautiously. No-one tried to stop him and he said with understandable surprise, "Captain, this fire is not hot!"

Kirk verified the statement by going very near, and yet he felt no heat. "What is the purpose of a fire that doesn't provide warmth?" he asked Akhisar.

"The climate is temperate; we don't need warmth, Captain, replied the native.

A few children were playing with sheets of transparent glass-like material, making them reflect the glow from the fire. Kirk was going to pursue the subject when he saw Spock examine a native curiously, and the Captain joined him, struck by the absolute immobility of the man whose eyes were lost in some private vision of their own.

"A trance, Spock?" he murmured.

"Possibly, Captain. If so, a very deep one."

McCoy had joined them and made a move to touch the native, but was stopped by Akhisar. "Don't touch him!" McCoy withdrew his hand hastily as the native added, "He must not be touched. He is a Dreamer."

"What does he dream about?" asked the doctor.

"That is his concern, Doctor. We shall know one day."

"When?"

"When he is ready, of course."

"Why shouldn't he be touched?" asked Kirk.

"It would ruin his dream, Captain."

"What is so important about a dream?" asked a puzzled McCoy

Akhisar looked shocked. "Dreams are the most beautiful of all things, Doctor, and the Dreamers are revered among us. Isn't it the same among your people?"

"I'm afraid not," replied Kirk. "We're different, and my people prefer action."

"Why should action stop dreams?"

"It doesn't," the Captain had to explain. "We dreamed about the stars for instance, but dreaming wasn't enough, we had to build ships to take us there."

"Ships? What are ships?"

Spock took over to explain, in his most concise manner but in simple terms, what a spaceship was, and the native nodded. "I see. You need a dwelling to carry you everywhere."

"A good similarity," smiled Kirk, thinking Akhisar intelligent to have grasped the concept so quickly. "We come from a very distant star. Our people settled here thinking the planet uninhabited. They say your village was not here when they built their settlement. Have you been here long?"

"Our ancestors were here before us, Captain. We don't claim to own this world, however; your people are welcome."

"If that's the case, why did you hurt one of the colonists so badly?"

"It was never intended, Captain, and we deeply regret the harm we caused him. I can assure you that we'll take care not to repeat our mistake."

Kirk glanced at Spock and saw that his First Officer thought, as he did, that Akhisar's words had the ring of truth. Indeed while they visited the village and talked further to the natives, Kirk knew he liked the feeling of peace and calm communicating itself to him. The natives' friendliness seemed genuine enough. One thing was bothering him, though - those primitives were treating them as equals, with an absence of fear or questions which was rather bewildering.

They had separated to talk to as many natives as possible and visit various dwellings, and Spock now returned from a look at their crops with Akhisar. With great politeness and amiability, they were invited to share the natives' fare and they settled in the middle of the village once McCoy had pronounced the food suitable for Human or Vulcan consumption.

"Adequate crops, Captain," murmured the First Officer to Kirk, "but sufficient for their needs only. They do not intend trade with any other native settlements or with the colonists."

"Which may be best!" whispered Kirk. Aloud, he congratulated Akhisar on the food, and the native answered, indicating a woman -

"The fire in my life saw to the food."

Kirk repeated his thanks to the lady and added, "Do you mean she is your wife?"

"Wife? I do not know the word."

"Does she share your house?" asked McCoy.

"Of course," replied the native, clearly surprised at the question.

Spock had finished eating and was watching something with interest. Kirk and McCoy followed his gaze and saw a Dreamer being carefully fed, like a child, without coming out of his trance.

"Those Dreamers have it made," said McCoy in a low voice. "Talk about being pampered!"

"Spock, any ideas about those Dreamers?" asked Kirk. "Could they be the ones responsible for the madness?"

"No, Captain. I do have a theory which is pure speculation at the moment."

Kirk was going to ask for it when a couple of children appeared with a vaguely harp-like instrument, very primitively made. Akhisar took it away from them with a reprimand and saw Spock's eyes on it as the First Officer asked if he could handle it. The native looked absolutely struck, but handed it over without a word, then watched Spock's movements as though fascinated.

The Vulcan studied the musical instrument with great care and Kirk sensed that he was puzzled as he tried a few notes. "A fascinating instrument, Captain," said Spock, "and its primitive appearance is deceptive. It has a much wider range of notes than usual."

"Can you play it?"

"I am not sure. Should I?"

Akhisar answered before Kirk had time to ask. "You may play it if you wish, Mr. Spock, and if you can."

Kirk wondered at the words and noticed that Spock was concentrating very hard just to pick out a scale. Used to the beautiful music of the Vulcan lyre, the Captain did not expect the discordant sounds his First Officer produced. Spock however persevered, after apologies. His random notes suddenly acquired a pattern and he murmured, "Fascinating!"

Afterwards, harmony flowed from his fingers and he became so lost in the music that his eyes acquired a fixed look, trancelike; neither Kirk nor McCoy cared for such an occurrence, but the natives were as fascinated as Spock and the Captain wondered if they would resent his interference.

"Jim," whispered McCoy with a note of urgency, "something weird is going on. Stop him now."

Kirk no longer hesitated and put his hand over Spock's, then took the instrument away. He had to shake his First Officer for his eyes to focus again.

"Spock, are you all right?"

"Yes, Captain, perfectly," he replied in a normal voice, to Kirk's relief.

"Why did you stop him, Captain?" asked Akhisar reproachfully. "Didn't you follow the music too?"

"What happened, Spock?" asked Kirk.

"This is a very unusual instrument, Captain. The notes are not like ours. They follow the spectrum of light, and you have to think in terms of colour as you play."

"I see. Why such absorption?"

"The colours you follow in the mind to make the pattern you want have a hypnotic effect, Captain, and a very strong one, but it is a fascinating process. I was also able to sense the natives' similar vision of my music."

Akhisar was watching the Vulcan with a combination of bewilderment and wonder. "You are a strange man, Mr. Spock," he said at last, "and I saw very strange patterns and colours in your music, when I thought you had none."

Kirk wondered whether to pursue the subject of their obsession with colours but decided against it in case it was offensive to the aliens. The Captain preferred to discuss this with Spock first, and also take McCoy's advice, then decide... His thoughts were interrupted by the sharp exclamation from a native as he pointed towards a tree.

"The Dream is finished!"

As though moved by a single mind, Akhisar and the others dispersed widely

and returned at a run, carrying a large piece of canvas and an assortment of paints and brushes. They put their offering in front of the Dreamer whose eyes now had lost their trancelike look; grabbing brush and paint, the Dreamer started painting with a rapidity and sureness which awed the three visitors. He was left to it, and Kirk made the obvious remark.

"So they are artists."

"I had formulated the theory that they might be, Captain," agreed Spock.

Akhisar, when asked, did not evade the question and explained that Dreamers composed music or a painting or a sculpture in their mind first, then transferred it to reality in a matter of hours, after which they slept for several days. "Fascinating," murmured Spock - as expected.

It was getting towards sunset by then and the visitors were asked politely, but firmly, to leave. Several natives were attending the fire, and an increasing glow spread from it.

The Captain thought it best to leave as required; this was only their first visit.

He stopped his party a short distance from the village, out of natives' hearing, and asked for opinions.

"They are friendly and look harmless enough, Jim," said McCoy.

"Yet they drove a man insane."

"By accident. They're peaceful and have no weapons."

"Probably because they do not need any, Doctor," said Spock.

"Ideas, Spock?" asked Kirk.

"Pure speculation, Captain, but there are contradictions. Those Dreamers and that music indicates a mind power which is not at a primitive level."

"They're very intelligent," agreed McCoy, "but I got no abnormal readings, and you must admit their civilisation is primitive."

"Which could be an illusion, Bones," Kirk said thoughtfully. "That obsession with colours, that fire which doesn't provide heat... Wish I knew what to make of it all. The answer may be revealed at night..." Turning to the two guards, he ordered, "Stay behind and observe the village from a safe distance. Under no circumstances - I repeat, no circumstances - enter it. Call me if anything untoward occurs."

The guards obeyed and Kirk, Spock and McCoy reached the colony settlement to spend the night. They were given a small house to share after Kirk had assured Del Mont that he did not mind sleeping in the same room as his two subordinates.

The Captain was awakened during the night by something... A noise? He saw that Spock's bed was empty and was relieved to see the Vulcan's silhouette on the verandah. Joining his First Officer, he understood what Spock was looking at.

"I was wakened by music, Captain," murmured the Vulcan, "but it has stopped now."

Kirk nodded, watching in wonder the orange glow of the fire from which myriads of coloured rays shone in the night, bathing the countryside in a shimmering symphony of ever-changing patterns.

"Fascinating," murmured Spock.

"How do they do it?" asked Kirk, trying to tear his eyes away from the magnificent sight.

"Unknown, Captain."

Kirk seized his communicator and called the guards. It was only after ...

several calls that he received an answer from a dazed voice.

"The natives are using large sheets of metal or glass to reflect the light from the fire, Captain. They are sitting all round like zombies, children too. Now the children have been sent to the huts and... How beautiful!"

"What is?" asked Kirk impatiently.

"Two natives in an orange...no, white costume which looks orange because of the fire. They are dancing around it, with long trains from their tunics... Beautiful!"

"Like firebirds?" asked Spock

"Why, yes, Mr. Spock."

"Keep watching but stay put," ordered Kirk before shutting his communicator. Faint notes of music could now be heard, probably not so faint for Spock, which was a shame, thought the Captain, the melody sounded very beautiful if only he could hear it better. The report from the guards bothered him a little. Aloud, he said to his First Officer, "It seems that they are primitive after all, Spock, and worship fire... Spock! Spock!"

The Vulcan was staring fixedly at the everchanging glow. "Captain, I must go. Such a fascinating combination of words and music... I must go and join..."

"Spock, no!" Kirk slapped him hard and just managed to stop him leaving the verandah. The Vulcan's eyes focused at last.

"I regret... Captain, I see the wisdom of confining the colonists to their houses at night."

"Just because of a few coloured lights?"

"Can't you hear the music too? It is getting louder now."

"Yes, I can..." Kirk's eyes, staring at the display from the fire, acquired a glazed look and he took a step forward. "Yes, I see... I must go..."

"Jim!" The First Officer seized him boldly and carried him into the room where he slapped his Captain hard in turn.

"Spock, have you gone stark raving mad?" snapped McCoy, wakened by the noise and getting up.

"It's all right, Bones," smiled Kirk, rubbing his face gingerly. "He's only getting his own back with typical Vulcan strength."

"Captain," protested Spock, looking faintly worried, "my only purpose was to get you away from the compulsion, and not to exact revenge."

"I know, Spock, forget it," grinned Kirk.

"Do you mean to say you two have been fighting?" McCoy came purposefully towards them armed with his ever-present scanner. "You're both mad!"

"Put that away, Bones!" snapped Kirk impatiently. "We're not mad, although an attempt may have been made... Spock, something is worrying you. Out with it."

"I am not sure whether it is significant, Captain, but the fact that we both felt the same compulsion is strange."

"Why? Because you're Vulcan and I'm Human?"

"Yes, Captain. Our reactions should have been different."

"Not necessarily. You're half-Human..." He was interrupted by the communicator and an incoherent voice that stammered,

"Captain, they're gone... Awful... Those monsters... They should be stopped..."

"Get back here immediately," ordered Kirk. "We'll come to meet you."

The two security guards must have run as though pursued by demons, because Kirk, Spock and McCoy met them not far out of the settlement and led them back to their quarters as quietly as possible.

The two men were in a state of shock and McCoy administered a stimulant, after which one of them managed to report.

"The two dancers walked into that fire, Captain, compelled by the music or the patterns of colour, we don't know which, but they died, killed by those monsters!"

"They worship that fire, Captain," added the other guard, "and make Human sacrifices to it in such a cunning way, using hypnotic sounds and colours... It's monstrous! The victims walked into death willingly!"

The doctor took charge of the men and settled them on beds, then joined Kirk and Spock on the verandah where the glow from the fire was now much fainter.

"No wonder there're so few natives if they kill a couple of people regularly," said McCoy. "You must stop such insanity, Jim."

"Was the witnessing of such an event the cause of Von Heimer's insanity," queried Kirk.

"I shouldn't think so," the doctor had to admit. "You saw the two guards. They were shocked, but perfectly sane. Von Heimer should have had a similar reaction."

"Then what made him insane, Bones?"

"Who knows what these natives can do? Maybe he was nearly burned to death too!"

"Spock, what do you make of it all?" asked Kirk.

"The data we have is contradictory, Captain, and my own observations do not fit at all with a race of primitive fire worshippers."

"They killed two people, Spock!" protested McCoy.

"Did they, Doctor?"

"Why, you... You heard the guards!"

"Don't start fighting about it," protested Kirk. "We have enough to contend with without that. Spock, what makes you think those two people were not killed?"

"The fire does not burn, Captain."

"Because it doesn't provide heat? It could still have burned its victims..."

"Captain," interrupted the First Officer, "I put my hand to a flame during our visit. Doctor, will you look at my hand?"

"There's no trace of a burn," said McCoy, bewildered.

"Therefore the two dancers may not have been burned either."

"Perhaps it takes time. Trust you to do such a thing, Spock!" the doctor remonstrated, always angry when one of his friends took unnecessary risks. "But anyway, Jim, it doesn't matter how the sacrifice was done, it must be stopped. The colonists may be the next victims."

"There is however the Prime Directive," remarked Spock, "and interference could be dangerous."

Kirk nodded, deep in thought, then stated firmly, his decision taken, "Until we have proof that Akhisar and his people were in fact here first, our prime duty is to protect the colonists, who were here first according to our records."

"Logical, Captain," agreed Spock.

"To destroy that fire is the obvious thing to do," reflected the Captain

aloud. "Without it, they might come to their senses and learn to live normal lives. We'll see to it in the morning. Let's have a rest now."

McCoy was wakened by Kirk's forceful voice. "No, Spock, I won't allow it! A dead First Officer or an insane one is of no use to me!"

"Captain, I only wish to study the music and the patterns of colour. I am a Vulcan and now that I am aware of the dangers..."

"Being a Vulcan didn't prevent you from being drawn in to the music, and drawn towards the fire."

"The very fact that my mind was unable to resist indicates that we should take care, Captain, but I was unprepared then. I am prepared now - and such a study would be fascinating."

"I wouldn't find it at all 'fascinating' to look after an insane Vulcan," McCoy intervened forcefully. "Jim is right, Spock. It's far too dangerous."

"It may be far more dangerous to destroy the fire, Doctor."

"You have a point, Spock," admitted Kirk, "but I can make it clear to the natives that any interference will bring reprisals from the ship, and even arrange a demonstration with Scotty. If they need help to adapt to a life free from fire worshipping and voodoo rites, I'm sure the Federation will provide it. Let's go."

They were however delayed by Del Mont and several colonists, who insisted on a report and promised their support if needed, and the Enterprise officers were finally allowed to go to the native village where Akhisar welcomed them with the same friendliness, but added with remarkable perception,

"You do not come as friends. Why?"

Kirk did not answer. He was staring at Spock's absorption in something. Then the First Officer beckoned to him. McCoy followed with his usual curiosity and they saw the finished painting the Vulcan was looking at.

"Yes, it's very beautiful, Spock - but it doesn't excuse murder!"

"Captain, you don't understand. Approximately a third of this painting was taken from my mind." He pointed to a beautiful star shape pattern of random glittering effect and three dimensional to the extent that the onlooker felt literally drawn into it. "My mind sensed this pattern as I played, Captain, and the Dreamer picked it up. I may have sensed it slightly, but not enough to guess at the probe, and this indicates considerable telepathic ability!"

"Perhaps because the Dreamer was in a trance. But it changes nothing, Spock."

The Vulcan nodded reluctantly. "If only I knew what it all means..."

"Come on, Spock. I'm concerned with protecting the innocents at the moment, not the meaning of a coloured pattern."

Kirk returned to the centre of the village, followed by his First Officer and the doctor, and addressed Akhisar.

"We're now aware that you worship that fire and make living sacrifices to it. This cannot be allowed to continue, therefore I will destroy the fire. None of you will be hurt - you have my word."

The natives did not seem in the least perturbed. "How do you propose to destroy the fire, Captain?" asked Akhisar.

Kirk drew his phaser, set it to maximum power and fired into the hole.

Nothing happened.

He contacted Scotty, and after ordering a retreat to a safe distance, had the Enterprise phasers fire straight at it.

Nothing happened.

"I could have told you, Captain," said Akhisar, without any sign of animosity. "Only you wouldn't have believed me."

"How can that fire be destroyed, then?"

"By killing us, Captain," was the calm reply.

Kirk took an involuntary step backwards. "I can't do that, not even to save the colonists! They'll have to be evacuated to another world, one free from fear..."

"Captain, we have no wish to inspire fear or drive people away. Such wide differences in the way of life and customs as yours and ours are not compatible. If you could only understand... But it's too dangerous for you to understand, Captain, although Mr. Spock and yourself have colours. We will leave this planet. It belongs to your people."

Kirk, Spock and McCoy were understandably surprised. "When... Where will you go?" asked Kirk.

"We will go tonight, Captain. Where, need not concern you."

"You aren't going to commit mass suicide, are you?"

"What is suicide?"

"Taking your own life."

"How could anyone wish to do that? There are many planets we can choose from, Captain, where we'll be just as happy."

"Then a ship will come for you?"

"Please Captain, return now to your own people and tell them the good news. Tomorrow they will be able to take the fence down."

Kirk was distracted by McCoy's shout. "Spock, what do you think...!"

The First Officer was stepping into the fire, and the doctor ran - and then stopped dead. The Vulcan stood calmly in the middle of the flames, the orange tongues reaching up to his waist, and his clothes were not even singed. Kirk reached out and touched a flame, and felt no pain.

"Spock!" he murmured, awed.

The Vulcan suddenly seemed to lose his balance and clutched at Kirk's hand. The Captain hurriedly pulled him out with McCoy's help and saw a combination of fear and astonishment on his First Officer's face for a second.

"Spock, what happened?"

"I am not sure, Captain. I was falling..."

"Into what?"

"Unknown. A tunnel, I believe... Captain, this is a door, a way."

"Where to?"

"Unknown."

"Spock, you're delirious!" exclaimed McCoy. "Let's get back to..."

"Just a minute, Bones," interrupted Kirk, now as always taking his First Officer's words seriously. "Akhisar, would you care to comment?"

"I cannot explain, Captain. However, I do believe we could show Mr. Spock and yourself the way. It is not an ability you can acquire easily, I am afraid. It exists at birth, although it has to be developed. Our children learn through music and colours and the fire is the threshold. We have to make it visible for the young."

"The fire is pure mental energy," stated Spock.

"Generated by yourselves," finished Kirk. "Which means those two people did not die last night, did they?"

"Of course not, Captain," assured Akhisar. "I understand your curiosity. I doubt that you would be able to make the journey alone, but I believe you and Mr. Spock could do it together."

"Fascinating," murmured Spock.

"Where would we go?" asked Kirk curiously.

"I won't say, Captain. Now, you believe me; if I were to tell you more, you would lose that belief. If you wish to make the attempt, come at sunset with your First Officer and you might then understand more about us."

Back at the settlement, Kirk and Spock had to listen to McCoy's irate protests about their insane project, but Kirk was adamant. "We have to discover once and for all what it's all about, Bones. If these natives are harmless, it would be monstrously unfair to let them leave their homes, their world."

"Is it their world, Captain?" asked the First Officer.

"So you wondered about that too, Spock," smiled Kirk. "If our speculation is correct that they do indeed come from somewhere else, we're the more reason to investigate."

"Agreed, Captain. It should prove most interesting."

"For you two, maybe!" snapped McCoy. "But what happens if neither of you returns? Or if you return insane?"

"I doubt that Akhisar would make the same mistake twice, Bones."

"He would not," agreed Spock. "However, may I point out, Captain, that there is no need for you to accompany me..."

"You heard Akhisar, Spock. We might make it together. Besides, I'm curious too!"

McCoy had to admit defeat and did not look forward to the experiment at all. His most dreaded nightmare was that something would happen to Kirk or Spock that he could not put right, and the very thought that something irreversible might happen to them both made him wish that he could join them and share whatever fate awaited them.

He did not mention it, however, aware that he might be an impediment to his friends. Those two shared an understanding, a bond the more powerful because of its silent strength, and the doctor had been slightly jealous once. Now he accepted it, although still a little envious, and was grateful neither Kirk nor Spock had changed their attitude towards him, and still treated him as a close friend.

He was distracted from his thoughts by Spock's words. "Captain, may I have your permission to withdraw into private meditation to prepare myself?"

"Yes, Spock. Bones and I will go and spend the rest of the day with the colonists."

Kirk was to regret his decision. Bryan Del Mont asked for news and was told of the coming experiment. The news spread like wildfire throughout the settlement and it was not very comforting for Kirk to be looked at as though he was already mad, while the colonists, however, admired his courage.

The Captain was glad to get back to Spock when sunset approached and the settlers retreated into their homes.

As they walked to the native village, Kirk gave his instructions to the ship in case they did not return, after which the rest of the walk was made in silence. For once even McCoy did not feel like talking. The doctor did not want

to show Kirk and Spock how much he feared for them and hoped with all his heart that they would be at his side on the way back.

When they arrived at the village, the fire was already high and the natives assembled and ready. Akhisar led them to the centre and stated, "We don't want a recurrence of the insanity we caused your colonist to suffer, so we have taken precautions this time. We hope they will prove adequate should you fail..."

"Why didn't you take these precautions before?" asked McCoy.

"We thought that a race of people able to conquer the stars by technological means would have enough understanding and ability to follow our way. We were mistaken where your unfortunate predecessor was concerned, but the fact that Mr. Spock was able to play our music is a good omen, and the friendship between you will also be beneficial, it is so close."

"How do you know that?" asked Kirk, startled.

"I know, Captain," replied Akhisar without elaborating. "If you are both ready..."

"Couldn't I go with them?" asked McCoy.

"No, Doctor. You know you cannot join into something you don't understand."

McCoy stared at the native, amazed by his insight. How did such a primitive guess that he often wondered at Kirk and Spock's close relationship? Kirk smiled as though to tell him not to worry, and the music started, while several natives took sheets of translucent glass-like material and sent sparkling reflections into the night sky.

"Look at the colours, Captain, Commander," whispered Akhisar softly. "Colours are nothing to be afraid of. The more you merge into them, the more you will understand. Remember that whatever you see or feel, you can control it."

Kirk was not sure what there was to understand, but he found pleasure in watching the beautiful patterns emerging from the glowing fire like a fountain of colours.

"Now step into the fire and you will find the way," said Akhisar. "It will be of assistance if you hold hands."

Kirk was about to protest that they were not a couple of children needing reassurance, but Akhisar forestalled his protest. "You are stepping into the unknown, Captain. If you are in physical contact, you will be able to help each other should the need arise."

"A logical suggestion, Captain," said Spock. Kirk nodded and linked hands with the Vulcan, feeling slightly foolish, but aware that he welcomed the reassuring contact of his First Officer's hand.

McCoy watched worriedly as they stepped into the fire and stood motionless for a few seconds, unhurt, then disappeared.

They were falling into a seemingly endless tunnel which had no substance. They had no substance either. The Captain could still feel Spock's firm hand clasp, but was unable to see either himself or his First Officer. The tunnel was made of light and a symphony of colours whirled round them in fantastic and crazy patterns which Kirk guessed as being a reflection of his instinctive fear. They were falling more quickly now and the colours acquired a nightmare quality, became visions of horror accompanied by a cacophony of sounds. His ship was being destroyed, his crew killed, but there was worse... Spock... Spock was being tortured in front of his very eyes. Kirk screamed soundlessly, his worst fear coming true in hideous detail...

"Captain! Jim!" he heard Spock shout as his hand felt crushed in the strong Vulcan grip. "You are going off course! This tunnel is of the mind; eliminate your fear and the pattern will change. You will see the colours of light as I see them."

Kirk reacted against his fear and curiosity replaced it as he realised the truth of Spock's words. The tunnel was indeed made of pure light and the patterns became settled, ordered into attractive colours blending together to create beauty.

"You and I are forming the shapes and patterns, Captain," Spock said. "And the music we now hear."

Kirk heard it seconds later, enchanting sounds which made him literally shiver with pleasure. This was a dream, a beautiful dream, but he had to wake up, return to his ship...

"No, Jim, this is no dream!" shouted Spock urgently as Kirk fell into patterns distorted into ugliness and discordant music for a few seconds, but the Vulcan's hand wrenched him back from the nightmare and he gasped with relief.

"Thanks, Spock. Akhisar was right to make us hold on to each other."

Both were startled when utter darkness suddenly replaced the light. They would get lost...

Wispy clouds of fantastic shapes appeared, and misty colours shimmered through, making them into clouds of coloured lights floating gracefully in the darkness. The tunnel was now black, but the blues and reds and yellows mingled into harmony of glittering shapes.

"The colours of darkness," murmured Spock in an awed voice.

Kirk was now getting used to the odd phenomenon and even enjoyed it while darkness and silence engulfed them.

"Alone... I am alone..." moaned Spock in a thin voice Kirk heard with anguish. His hand clung to Spock's and he saw vague pictures emerge into the darkness, pictures of the Vulcan desert and Spock lost in it, then pictures of space and the Vulcan lost in unending blackness.

That was not all, though. Spock was running through the never-ending desert to get to Kirk, who would die otherwise. The Vulcan would never make it in time, Kirk would die and he would be alone again... Sheer agony tore at the Vulcan and he screamed while awful sounds grated in their ears. They would go mad...

"Spock, you're not alone!" shouted Kirk. "Feel my hand, reach out to me; remember the colours of light. We're together! Would I leave you alone when I need your help as much as you need mine?"

He sensed Spock's other hand touching his face. "Captain... Jim... You are here! I can't see you..."

"I can't see you either."

"But we know... The darkness was too strong, it plunged me back into loneliness...the loneliness I knew before I met you...and then you would die unless... You were leaving me..."

"I know, Spock," murmured Kirk soothingly. "But it was not true; only a reflection of your worst fear." The knowledge that their survival perhaps depended on him as much as on Spock enhanced Kirk's resolution to succeed. He had to when his friend's life depended on him, too, and the reverse was probably true... In that case, thought the Captain with an inward smile, we'll win!

He sensed an echo of his thoughts in Spock's mind, an echo of the same fierce resolution to succeed and save the other from any possible harm.

The darkness was now slowly being lit up by a beautiful orange glow, and orange rays of light streamed past and gave warmth and comfort and...

"Spock!" exclaimed Kirk excitedly, "What we're seeing are emotions! That's why you retreated at first. Orange or red always symbolised affection, love..."

"Yes... A fascinating process, Jim. What we saw at first, the regular patterns symbolised logic, reason. Then the darkness became lit up..."

"...by emotion," finished Kirk. "Now that we've accepted the reality of what is happening, we might as well enjoy it. The combination of our thought patterns should prove... 'fascinating'!"

"Agreed. To create beauty is always rewarding."

From then on, the journey through the tunnel of light and darkness held no fear, only pure joy. They still held on to each other and glided along rainbows, reaching out to silver beams piercing the darkness and entwining with golden beams to form a web of silver and gold. Orange rays sped by them, the tunnel being pervaded by their warmth and light.

And Kirk and Spock knew. They knew that the orange aura following them was their friendship, their affection translated into light, colour, warmth; translated into the beauty of the golden-silver web.

They were no longer falling, but flying high on the crest of their knowledge, the knowledge of their inner thoughts revealed to each other.

Colours of light, colours of darkness could no longer hold any fear for either. They were creating a wonderful world of the mind, the beauty of which filled them with exhilaration, while the shimmering web glowed brighter and brighter, a magnificent star of love.

They had no idea how long the tunnel went on, how long they shared the exhilarating experience, when the colours became dim, an ice blue light exploded into myriads of stars and they felt solid ground under their feet rather abruptly, so abruptly that Kirk fell hard. Spock however broke his fall by holding on to his hand.

"Jim! Are you all right?"

"Yes. A rather sudden arrival, though! Where are we?"

"Unknown, Captain."

They stared at the strange world round them, a beautiful and lush world of blues and yellows and greens...and a few kilometers away, a fantastic city gleamed in the morning sun, a city of sculptured towers and glass structures sparkling like pure crystal.

"Fascinating," murmured Spock, as expected, and Kirk smiled at him.

"I have to agree with you, Spock."

They heard hurried footsteps and an alien who resembled Akhisar, but wore sumptuous clothes, bowed and smiled. "Welcome, Captain Kirk, Commander Spock. Akhisar and I are very pleased that you made the journey safely."

"Journey where?" asked Kirk.

"This is Tamarlan, our native planet, Captain, in the sense that our race evolved from this world. Many of us are born on far away places we travel to, and we each live in accordance with our wishes. I prefer city life. My brother Akhisar prefers simple ways, but we can still meet as often as we wish."

"So you're not primitives," Kirk said. "Anything but!"

"Our civilisation did not follow a similar pattern to yours, Captain, and we are perhaps nearer to the Vulcans, although we do not reject emotions. We developed our minds, and discovered that the mind is the key with which to open every door. We are able to go wherever we want through what we call the Threshold. It is a door into a mental world and through this world we reach out to where we want to be."

"Fascinating!" said Spock. "Do you realise, Captain, that these people have discovered teleportation?"

"Yes, Spock. It explains many things - the mind power you sensed...the way

the 'natives' appeared on Planet Voodoo...and the Dreamers and their fantastic concepts..."

"The Dreamers tend to favour the simple life, Captain," smiled the alien, "although some do live in cities."

"What happened when the colonists' leader tried to... Couldn't precautions have saved him so that he made the journey as we did?"

"No, Captain, and it was unfortunate that we did not guess his disability. Contrary to you and your friend, he was prejudiced, saw us as evil beings practising some form of barbaric rite at least similar to one found in your planet's history, I believe. When he entered the world of his mind, that evil was so strong it took over and he was unable to fight it, although it was an evil of his own making. Our mind power has limits, and we could do nothing once the process had started. Akhisar did blame himself, with great sorrow, but we had had no previous contact with your race, and he sensed little from a mind without telepathic ability."

"While you did sense things from Spock?"

"Yes. The Vulcan mind was not easy to read, but what we guessed at was enough. Through your First Officer, we saw a glimpse of your mind, Captain, and we knew you would have a fair chance of success, as long as you were together. Thanks to Mr. Spock's telepathic ability, we would have been able to pull you both out, had anything gone wrong."

"So you waited for us here and helped too?"

"Yes, Captain. I was in mind contact with Akhisar. But you should return now, Captain; my brother tells me that Dr. McCoy is restless and starting to threaten violent measures..."

"He's rather impatient," smiled Kirk. "But it's true, I wouldn't want him to worry for longer than necessary, although Spock and I had many questions..."

"Akhisar will answer them. Please link hands again."

Kirk and Spock complied without protest and the alien world dissolved around them; they were back in the tunnel.

The colours of light and darkness appeared again, different and yet just as beautiful. There was no terror or mishap this time and they thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

McCoy, after all his frantic worry, was taken aback to see them both stepping from the fire as though they were returning from a very ordinary trip. His scanner confirmed that they were none the worse for their experiment.

Reassured, the doctor joined them as they sat on the ground near the fire with Akhisar, who was perfectly willing to answer any questions.

"As you can guess, we don't need the fire," he explained. "But it is very useful to teach the children, get them used to colours and it also helps young people to cross the Threshold. Only mature adults have enough mastery to travel freely."

"Literally speaking, each individual travels through his own mind, am I correct?" asked Spock.

"Quite correct, Mr. Spock, and if there are frightening things within a mind, you will meet them once through the Threshold. I sensed some of your difficulties without knowing their nature, and we were ready to pull you back, but it proved unnecessary, as I hoped it would." The native did not elaborate in spite of McCoy's questions, and Kirk smiled, aware of his relief - and Spock's - at the native's discretion.

"I now have the task of explaining to the colonists how you arrived here!" sighed Kirk, anxious to change the subject.

"We arrived after the colonists settled here, Captain," said Akhisar. "Although my ancestors did inhabit this world two or three generations ago. We had planned to remain for some time, but we're ready to withdraw should you think our race incompatible with yours."

"No. I'm sure the colonists can learn from you once they forget their 'voodoo' nonsense. I see no reason why cohabitation should not work. What initially worried my superiors was that you might truly be a primitive race, not yet ready for contact with a more advanced culture."

"I hope you are right, Captain. I assure you that we are peaceful, and would rather leave than cause any conflict."

"I am sure the Federation will be honoured to ratify your presence here. Peaceful races are always welcome, and yours has much to offer us."

As expected, explanations to the colonists were not easy. They were sceptical at first, but reluctant to question the word of a Starship Captain. However they rose to the challenge Kirk threw at them of proving that Humans had outgrown superstition and were now able to accept facts and things that would have smacked of magic in ancient days.

The Captain supervised several meetings between colonists and natives led by Akhisar and saw with relief that they talked freely of their past misunderstanding. By the time the Enterprise left orbit, his work was done, and Planet Voodoo had become, by a unanimous vote, Planet Tamarlan II.

Back aboard the Enterprise, where McCoy had preceeded them, Kirk and Spock were welcomed in the transporter room by McCoy, who walked with them to the bridge.

"Jim," he asked with his usual curiosity, "Akhisar mentioned 'difficulties' you met during your 'journey' and I can guess... You feared the loss of your ship, and Spock feared leaving the Enterprise which has become a home to him."

"Not a bad assumption, Doctor, but inaccurate," stated the First Officer.

McCoy saw Kirk exchange a look with the Vulcan, who continued smoothly, "Captain, may I suggest that I put Starfleet's latest orders in hand while you have a rest?"

"Thanks, Spock. Go ahead, but don't stay on the bridge too long - you need rest too."

McCoy accompanied Kirk back to his cabin. "What was Spock on about, Jim?"

"You should have a pretty good idea, Bones - but I refuse to discuss it."

"You would. There are times, Jim Kirk, when you're as secretive as that Vulcan of yours!"

Kirk smiled as he stepped into his cabin. "Whether he's 'my' Vulcan or not, I'll get my revenge at chess if it's the last thing I do! Spock," he called through the intercom, "I'm not at all sleepy. Join me as soon as you have finished up there and I'll give you a game of chess you'll remember!"

"Illogical, Captain - I remember every game."

Kirk laughed as he cut the communication and pushed McCoy out.

Setting the chess pieces ready, Kirk thought back to their fantastic journey, aware that neither he nor Spock would ever forget it. All barriers had fallen in that world of light and darkness, and both had discovered that what each feared most was the death of the other and the nightmare of loneliness it would entail.

And I'm glad Spock knows! thought Kirk as he welcomed the Vulcan with a smile and they settled to their game without a word.

Words were quite unnecessary.

McCoy was lying on his bed trying to solve a puzzle. Why had his guess been inaccurate? Nothing counted more for Jim than his ship, or was a certain Vulcan... The doctor turned on his side with a grunt. Loneliness was not likely to trouble those two friends of his again!

Something surprised the good doctor, though; he was even more pleased for Spock than he was for Kirk! That certain Vulcan had all the luck!

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THE STARLORD AND THE WANDERER by Jayne Turner

Come and listen all you children
gather round and hear me talking.

Let me sing a song of legend,
not of dragons or of gold
but of deeds and brave adventures
of a Lord and One of Old.

Came they from a world of magic
journed long and wandered far.
Star-maker, slim and shining
Sun-bringer, warm and flowing
Star-shining, soft and glowing
Came the Lord and One of Old.
It was said, they flew the heavens
soared aloft in windships light
For they tarried long, far-travelled,
star-children.

For they knew music of the raindrops
knew the colours of the rain-bow
knew the thunder and the lightning
all embracing - ever knowing
was this God and One of Old.

Yet he stood as dark to lightness
as a shadow to his sunshine
as a cloud across the brightness
for we knew this One of Old.
Came he from a time-beginning
wrapped in misty, shimmering moonlight,
bending to his needs, the fury
and the brightness of the starshine
and the sharpness of the lightning.
Could he tame the darkest heavens
holding just a drop of star-light?
came he based in wisdom-knowing
Moon-maker, tall and glowing
Earth-bringer, cold and flowing
Friend of darkness, and master
of stars.

Came the Wanderer.

Came they seeking one
who'd fallen
a star-child
lost and weary.

Came they to our place of eating
 asking questions, have you seen him?
 Aye, we'd seen him, lost and weary
 cared and kept him, safe and warming
 look inside, and see him sleeping.
 Starlord, stay and hear our legends,
 stay and listen to our music.
 take our food and lie here dreaming
 Stay awhile, and give your blessing.

And they tarried long and heard our music
 heard our legends and our song.
 Then he awoke, the one they came for
 strong of mind and well in body.
 Joyous was the Lord and Wanderer
 called him as a friend and brother.
 Walk in quietness as a Healer,
 death-defying, softly-spoken.
 Dawn is coming, gone the starshine,
 gone the softness of the darkness.
 As the Starlord and the Wanderer
 take the one whose name is Healer,
 take him to the shimmering forest,
 where the wind-flows, light and dancing,
 Where the sunshines, bright and sparkling.
 Call farewell to you Starlord, Wanderer,
 Farewell to one called Healer.
 Give my blessing to your starfolk
 give my blessing to your children.

Wrapped are they in shimmering moonlight,
 wrapped are they in misty starlight.
 As the darkness takes the Starlord,
 As the darkness takes the Wanderer,
 and the one who's called the Healer.
 As the wind-flows light and dancing,
 and the sunshines, bright and sparkling.

Let me sing a song of legend.
 not of dragons or of gold
 but of deeds and brave adventures
 of a Lord and One of Old.

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A MOTHER'S THOUGHTS by Josie Rutherford

A solemn little boy of three,
 you'd sometimes sit upon my knee.
 I'd tell you stories secretly
 — old tales; from my home.
 You listened, spellbound. Laughed and cried,
 Revealed to me your Human side.
 My son, have those emotions died
 now that you are grown?

I think about you and I pray —
 (though this is not the Vulcan way),
 that you will understand one day
 the feelings I have shown.
 For you're my only child and so,
 sometimes the tears and memories flow,
 a Mother's thoughts; that ever go
 with you, beloved son.

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CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE FOURTH KIND? by Vicki Richards

(With apologies to the North American Space Agency!)

Captain James T. Kirk settled down into his command chair and gave the order for the Enterprise to move out into space. The R & R on Starbase XI had been very welcome; but the crew was all rested now and ready for the next assignment. Strange how going out into deep space always seemed like coming home to him, he thought, as much almost as a rare visit to Earth; but then, not so strange after all, really, he mused; he'd always believed that Man was as much at home between the stars as on terra firma. As the great starship began her journey to a colony on Rigel VII to deliver medical supplies and collect a party of scientists, Kirk decided to relax and enjoy the trip. He watched his bridge crew going about their tasks with the usual quiet efficiency, and felt for the thousandth time his pride at having such a crew. Also as usual, Spock was busy at his computer console, looking into the viewer with obvious fascination at something; everything's fascinating to Spock, thought Kirk, and decided he really would have to make his First Officer actually take some R & R next time they had the chance; as he habitually did, Spock had stayed on board the Enterprise with the skeleton crew, minding the store while the rest of them had beamed down to Rigel VII. He'd met Kirk's and McCoy's pleas to join them with his standard comment about rest being just that and not merely a change of activity. Still, Kirk supposed, he must have relaxed in his own way, and Kirk could sense that his Vulcan friend was as glad to get back into space as he was.

He was watching the stars speed past the viewscreen and trying to think up a particularly sneaky move in his current chess game with Spock, when the voice of Uhura broke into his thoughts.

"There's a message coming in from Starfleet, Captain - Priority One."

Kirk straightened in his command chair. Priority One? Uhura quickly unscrambled the message and brought it over to him. What he read caused a sinking feeling in his stomach, and that didn't happen very often.

"Change of orders, Mr. Spock," he said to his Science Officer, whose eyebrow was rising with curiosity. "Mr. Sulu, set course for the planet of the Guardian of Forever. Lt. Uhura, have Dr. McCoy and Mr. Scott meet Mr. Spock and myself in the briefing room immediately. Warp six, Mr. Sulu."

Spock didn't say anything till they were in the turbolift, but Kirk could tell that his Vulcan friend didn't like hearing that name any more than he did.

"The Guardian, Captain?" Spock asked with obvious distaste.

"Yes, Spock. I'm afraid that we're in for another little encounter with the past - and it could be worse than the other times," Kirk replied.

Kirk was certain that if Spock had been a Human he would have groaned. "I have always been of the opinion that any encounter with the past is to be avoided if at all possible, Jim," said Spock.

"I don't like it any more than you, Spock, but it just isn't possible to avoid it this time - I'll fill you in when we get to the briefing room.

Kirk was always glad that Spock knew the logic of not repeating things more than necessary, but his urgency had communicated itself to the Vulcan, and they made it to the briefing room in record time. McCoy and Scott were already there, almost bursting with curiosity.

"What is it this time, Jim?" asked McCoy. "Uhura said it was Priority One."

"It is, Bones, and as I've already told Spock, it means another visit to the Guardian of Forever." After he'd waited for this information to sink in, he went on. "What we feared would happen has come about; the Klingons have forced their way through the Guardian with the definite purpose of changing the past - our past. Starfleet has managed to discover that the Klingons somehow mean to sabotage Earth's space programme at some critical time in the past, causing its cancellation, and thus preventing the Federation ever being formed."

Spock's voice was almost toneless. "I have always doubted the wisdom of not mounting a permanent guard on the Guardian's planet, even though the Guardian itself would not permit it, and now, no doubt, the Klingons, realising that they are unable to defeat the Federation in the present, have therefore decided to attempt to change our history in order that the Federation will not exist to trouble them."

"Right, Spock," Kirk replied. "And it's up to us to stop them. We should arrive at the Guardian's planet in a few hours."

"You mean we've got to go meddling in the past again?" McCoy managed to get a word in edgeways. "I don't like it, Jim - I don't like it at all."

"For once, Doctor, I agree with you," said Spock. "However, I wish to make a suggestion. I presume our orders are to return to the past to prevent the Klingons changing it?" He looked at Kirk for confirmation. Kirk nodded. The Vulcan continued, "I suggest it would be logical for us to return to the past in the Enterprise, using the slingshot effect we have employed before, rather than enter the Guardian ourselves; that way we will have the Enterprise's resources with us, and gain a considerable advantage over the Klingons by so doing."

"And go rushing about at warp eight with ma poor wee bairns?" Scott almost exploded.

"Sorry, Scotty," Kirk told him, "but I agree with Spock - we need the ship. As soon as we've paid a visit to the Guardian to determine what period of Earth's history the Klingons have returned to, we'll set course for Earth." He gave his Chief Engineer a sympathetic look. "You'd better go and warn engineering."

"Aye, Captain." Scott sighed resignedly and left the room.

"How do we know that the Klingons haven't already done something to change the past?" asked McCoy.

"The fact that we are still here would tend to indicate that they have not, Doctor," Spock replied.

"Couldn't it also mean that we're going to be successful in stopping them?" ventured McCoy.

Spock's eyebrows climbed in surprise. "Indeed, Doctor - a most logical assumption!"

It was then that Kirk decided that Spock really did need some R & R.

Spock switched off his library computer viewscreen and stepped down to where Kirk was waiting in his command chair. Jim looks worried, he thought, but what he said was, "I believe I have discovered the Klingons' purpose, Captain."

"Well, what is it, Spock?" Kirk sensed the Vulcan's concern.

Spock could feel the entire bridge crew listening. Chekov turned round in his seat. It was four hours since they had left the Guardian, and in a few more they would reach Earth orbit. The Enterprise grapevine had proved as speedy as ever - sometimes Spock thought that curiosity was as much a Human trait as it was Vulcan - and he realised that they had all been eagerly awaiting his analysis of the information from the Guardian which he had stored in his tricorder. And they have every right to know, thought the Vulcan.

"The Guardian yielded the information that three Klingons have returned to the year 1980. I have examined our library computer records, and, in my estimation, the only possible target they can have in mind for that year is to in some way sabotage the launching of Earth's first orbital space shuttle, the Columbus. I believe a failure of the shuttle would have proved disastrous for NASA's space programme at that time - resources were low and public opinion in some quarters was that they would be better spent on solving some of Earth's other problems at that juncture."

"Then that's the one we'll go for, Spock - I think you're right," said Kirk.

"I am wery glad the space programme wasn't stopped, Keptin!" Chekov put in.

"Indeed, Mr. Chekov - it may yet be, if we are unsuccessful," said Spock, and thought, no wonder Jim's worried.

They reached Earth orbit some hours later, entered the hyperbolic orbit around the sun which would produce the slingshot effect that would send them back through the time warp to the year 1980, and, with some frayed nerves, not a small amount of howling from the usually quiet engines, and a great deal of grumbling from a certain Chief Engineer, they completed the complicated maneouvre and were now safely orbiting the Earth in the required year.

"Deflector shields up, Captain," reported Sulu. "That'll stop them thinking they're being invaded by Martians," he added quietly to Chekov.

But not quietly enough to stop Spock from hearing. "Earth's scientists had already confirmed the absence of sentient life on Mars by 1980, Mr. Sulu!" said the Vulcan, fully aware that Sulu had been joking - or Spock hoped he was - but he couldn't quite resist the temptation to continue Sulu's 'education'.

Kirk shot him a quick glance, and thought he detected a slight curl at the corner of the Vulcan's mouth, but it disappeared as quickly as it came, and before Kirk could accuse his friend of being caught in the act.

The turbolift doors swooshed open and McCoy stepped onto the Bridge. He went to stand behind Kirk. "So now we're here - what next, Jim?" he asked.

Kirk repeated what Spock had discovered, and decided the only way they could really be sure if the space shuttle had been 'got at' yet was somehow to manage to examine it at close quarters; he realised they'd have to beam down actually inside the NASA complex - hopefully to get to the shuttle without being detected. He ordered stores to provide Spock and him with the kind of outfit worn by NASA scientists at that time. Earguards habitually worn by rocket engineers as noise protection disguised Spock a little, but Kirk realised that he'd still look somewhat strange to any Terran who might encounter them. McCoy wanted him to take along a security team; but Kirk knew, and Spock pointed out, that the fewer of them who went lessened the chances of anyone inadvertently doing anything which might change the future; so the landing party was to be just Spock and him.

McCoy accompanied them to the transporter room. Spock had made the disquieting discovery that the launching of the shuttle was due in ten hours, which made their examination of the craft all the more imperative. McCoy went to stand by Scott at the console, while Kirk and Spock took up their positions on the platform.

"Good luck, Jim - and favourable random factors, Spock!" grinned McCoy as Scott worked the controls. Kirk grinned back, and Spock merely gave him a quizzical look as the transporter took them and they shimmered out of existence.

They materialised just outside a giant hangar which they suspected housed the shuttle prior to its launch, and Kirk noted subconsciously that Scott had transported them with the accuracy they always expected of him. The bustling activity on the base had, in itself, served to conceal their arrival; only trouble was, someone had noticed; an open-mouthed security guard was just recovering from his shock at seeing them apparently pop out of nowhere; he had just reached for his old-style revolver while they were still finishing materialising and was now pointing it at them in an extremely unfriendly manner. Damn reflexes, thought Kirk, and because he couldn't think of anything else to do, he started walking towards the guard who was now regarding them with downright hostility; Spock followed close behind him..

"Good day, my friend - can you tell us how we get into the hangar from here? We're new on the base, and we've been called on to help give the Columbus its final checkover." Kirk knew it didn't sound very convincing, but it would have to do.

"A likely story - get those hands away from your sides, and let me see your

papers, quick!" the guard snapped at them.

"And how do you suggest we comply with both those requests simultaneously?" retorted Spock, logical to the last. And then the guard really noticed him. Kirk could see his eyes widening in astonishment, and thought, now we're for it!

"And who the hell are you - or maybe I should say what!" yelled the guard, and started to move towards an alarm button on the wall. Kirk knew they had to do something quickly - but what? Oh well, he thought, it worked that other time might as well try it.

"What's that on your shoulder? Looks very strange to me!" said Kirk.

"Uh? Whadd'ya mean?" said the bemused guard. "No tricks now!"

"Yes, just there!" said Spock, quick as ever to take the hint, and had his hand on the guard's shoulder before the man knew what was happening. Spock caught the guard as he fell.

"Quick, Spock - in here!" Kirk gestured towards the door the man had been guarding. They went in, and hid the unconscious guard just inside the door. With any luck he wouldn't be found until it was too late for them to be stopped. They hurriedly made their way through the corridors with as much caution as time would allow, and it didn't take Spock long to locate the whereabouts of the space shuttle. As they approached the entrance to the hangar, they discovered a guard and a scientist unconscious on the floor. Spock quickly examined them while Kirk kept watch.

"They're phaser-stunned, Captain - it would seem that the Klingons are not too far ahead of us," Spock told him.

"Then we'd better be ready for them, Spock - stun anything that moves!"

As they entered the hangar, it became obvious that all the NASA personnel were out of action. The Klingons had done their work thoroughly. Kirk realised the Klingons hadn't been showing uncharacteristic mercy by merely stunning them - they just didn't want to panic NASA into calling off the launch entirely - though what they thought the Humans were going to make of this little episode, Kirk really couldn't imagine. And then he saw her; Earth's first orbital space shuttle, perched on top of the big jet aircraft which would carry her into the upper layers of Earth's atmosphere, where she would leave the aircraft to go into space under her own power, and safely complete the historic flight - if we're in time, Kirk thought grimly. When he looked at her, he felt a strange surge of pride, not unlike the one he felt when he looked on his own graceful ship, now orbiting unseen high above them.

Spock was looking at him with a knowing look on his face. "Quickly, Jim - we must hurry," he said in a quiet voice.

Kirk nodded, and the two made their way up a series of catwalks that served as access to the shuttle, phasers at the ready. When they looked through the open doors of the craft, their fears were confirmed; more unconscious scientists. Spock wasted no time in aiming his tricorder at the control consoles, while Kirk wondered at the primitive equipment that would take the twentieth century astronauts into space in such a short time.

Spock turned from his scanning. "I have traced the fault, Captain - the Klingons have removed a microscopic, but vital, piece of computer circuitry which controls part of the craft's re-entry mechanism, and have done it in such a way that NASA's scientists will believe it to be functioning correctly. They have, in effect, programmed this craft to burn up during re-entry. Also there is evidence of further tampering with the computer, which needs more analysis."

"There's no time, Spock - there they are!" Kirk had been keeping watch out of a shuttle window, and had seen a movement in a corner of the hangar. "They're hiding behind some cabinets; must have seen us come in. Come on, Spock - quick!"

Spock didn't need telling twice. They raced down to the hangar floor in time to cut off the Klingons' escape. They made a run for it, and one fired at them; but

Kirk and Spock were too quick for them. They stunned the Klingons as they ran, and all three collapsed in a heap.

"Come on, Spock, they've got that computer part! We'll have to search them." Kirk started towards them.

Spock caught hold of his arm and pulled him back. His Vulcan ears had heard a growing commotion in the corridors. "Someone's coming, Jim."

Kirk flipped open his communicator. "Kirk to Enterprise - emergency! Bring us aboard immediately, Scotty - wide scan; five to beam up. Security team to the transporter room. Kirk out."

The transporter took them home to the Enterprise just in time to stop a lot of Earthmen having yet another big surprise on a day full of them.

It was quite some time later. Kirk was on the bridge, waiting to hear from the Brig that the captive Klingons had come round. He was still inwardly fuming at the discovery that the unconscious Klingons did not, after all, have the missing computer link on them. When they did come to, he meant to get it out of them what they had done with it - he'd get it out of them all right! He told himself to calm down and wondered abstractedly why Klingons always seemed to have this effect on him. Spock was working at the computer, and looked totally engrossed, but Kirk didn't bother to ask him what he was doing; he knew Spock must be looking for something he considered important. Kirk's thoughts turned once again to the shuttle which was now almost due for launch. Uhura, who had been continually monitoring Earth communications, had reported that NASA intended to continue with the launch on schedule, believing, as Spock had said they would, that it was still in perfect working order. The bewildered Terrans had decided that the strange happenings at the base had been some kind of terrorist attack, and were keeping it quiet; they don't really know what to think, thought Kirk, not that you can blame them. They are going ahead with the launch before anything else can happen. Kirk frowned. Little do they know; something already has, and what are we supposed to do now? It crossed his mind that he didn't have the faintest idea. He glanced at Spock - what was he doing? He was just going to ask the Vulcan when McCoy stepped out of the turbolift.

"Well, Bones?"

"They're conscious now, Jim; I've just left the Brig. You can question them whenever you like," said McCoy.

"How are they behaving themselves? As if I couldn't guess."

"That's just it, Jim; they aren't being their usual Klingon selves - no threats or protests - they just seem incredibly smug."

Spock turned from his computer and came to join them. "It would seem the Klingons believe they have in some way made it impossible for us to do anything - most probably they have destroyed the missing circuit."

Kirk grimaced - it seemed only too likely. "Well, I'm going to find out! Mr. Sulu, you have the con. Gentlemen!"

Kirk, Spock and McCoy made their way to the Brig where they found the three captives looking very pleased with themselves, as McCoy had said. Kirk didn't think he liked that. He found himself wondering why the Klingons hadn't bothered disguising themselves; but then, rushing in like a bull in a china shop was just like them.

One was wearing the uniform of a commander. Kirk spoke to him in his command voice. "I am Captain James T. Kirk of the Federation Starship Enterprise; you will give me your name and rank and tell me the whereabouts of the computer circuit you stole from the NASA space shuttle immediately."

"So, we meet at last, Captain Kirk - I have heard a great deal about you and your ship, and your strange choice in friends!" smirked the Klingon. Spock

pointedly ignored him. The Klingon continued, "I am Commander Kroll - the names and ranks of my underlings are of no importance. Certainly I will tell you where the circuit in question is; I had the presence of mind to place it in a waste disposal unit conveniently at hand in the shuttle's hangar."

It was no more than he had expected. The Klingon's self-satisfaction was enough in itself to convince Kirk that he was telling the truth; and what difference did it make - they still didn't have it. Even if the Klingon was lying and it hadn't been destroyed, they couldn't very well go back down to the base and search for it, not with the guard NASA would have put on the shuttle since the last escapade. Kirk could feel himself beginning to lose his temper.

"We have an old Earth saying, Mister - don't count your chickens before they're hatched! Don't think you've got us beaten this time - you haven't! Just don't bet on it!" Kirk couldn't stop the anger from creeping into his voice - why did the Klingons always get him so darn mad?

"Really, Captain?" said the Klingon Commander with an evil grin. "I think you're bluffing."

Kirk had had enough. "We'll just see about that - in the meantime you can stay here and stew till we hand you over to Starfleet Command - no doubt they'll know what to do with you."

Kirk spun on his heel and left the room. Spock and McCoy followed closely behind him, the Vulcan giving the Klingons a disdainful look as he went. They went to Kirk's cabin.

"One thing that's been bothering me, Spock - how come they got into the base so easily without a transporter?" asked Kirk.

"The information I acquired from the Guardian of Forever indicates that Klingon spies have in some way had access to the Federation's scientific papers on our new theories of how to programme the Guardian to return one not only to a specific moment in time, but also to a given location - it would appear that the Guardian put them right inside the base," Spock answered him gravely.

Kirk sighed tiredly. "Then, if we get back, the Federation has got to put a proper guard on that confounded time portal!"

"Agreed, Captain - I believe the Guardian might consider it, now it finally has proof of what manner of beings the Klingons are," Spock tried to reassure him.

"So what do we do now? Any ideas, gentlemen?" Kirk looked from one to the other.

Spock looked at him a moment before answering. "I believe there may be a way, Jim."

"For goodness sake, Spock, what?" McCoy almost yelled.

Spock didn't even bother to raise the customary eyebrow at him. "It may be possible for me to construct a replacement circuit, using the data stored in my tricorder when I scanned the shuttle. However, the materials needed are practically obsolete, and it may take me some time."

"Then you'd better hurry, Spock - but how do you propose getting it into the shuttle's computer? That base is crawling with guards now." Kirk didn't like the way this was leading.

"You will have to beam me aboard the craft when it is already in Earth orbit." Spock's face was almost expressionless.

"What? That's crazy!" McCoy definitely didn't like it. "Those Klingons could have rigged up all sorts of booby traps - it might even explode!"

"Bones is right, Spock - you know you didn't have time to do a full scan. It's far too dangerous - I can't possibly allow it." Kirk was adamant.

"Jim, please listen - there's no other way. You must let me try this."

"I have to admit it, Jim - I think Spock's right," McCoy said slowly. "It is the only way, and Spock's the only one who can do it. And I don't much fancy the idea of there being no future for us to go back to."

Kirk knew that McCoy was as concerned for their Vulcan friend's safety as he was. And then he realised the two of them were agreeing again. He gave in. "All right, Spock; I know you're right. Just be careful - and that's an order!"

The first historic launch of the orbital space shuttle had taken place without a hitch. Kirk and McCoy had watched it with the rest of the bridge crew on the main viewscreen. Kirk had again felt that jolt of pride when he saw the tiny shuttle in space for the first time. Man reaching out to the stars, and he was watching it.

McCoy knew what he was thinking. "Don't worry, Jim - Spock'll be O.K. He'll get that shuttle through re-entry safely - you know there isn't a computer invented that can beat Spock!"

Kirk gave him a half-hearted grin and turned back to watch the little craft proudly orbiting her home planet, unknowing of her great starship descendant keeping unseen vigil. Spock's plan seemed plausible enough, thought Kirk, as they always were, but he still didn't like the idea - the safety margin wasn't big enough. Spock was to be beamed aboard the shuttle, which they knew to be on automatic pilot; phaser-stun the astronauts, and repair the computer before it was time for the craft to re-enter Earth's atmosphere. Before being beamed back on board the starship, he would use the mind-meld to remove the memory of seeing him from the astronauts' minds; Spock said there was no alternative; the NASA men would believe they had flown the entire mission themselves. But his Vulcan friend would have to be quick - the replacement part was taking him a long time to make, as he had predicted, and it wasn't all that long till re-entry was due. It was going to be a very finely-timed thing. Uhura had patched Earth's Mission Control into the intercom so the whole ship could listen in. They could hear the jubilation of the twentieth century scientists. Kirk hoped it wouldn't be short-lived. The thought was making him depressed.

The turbolift doors opened and Spock came onto the bridge. He was carrying a small box of tools, his tricorder, and the replacement computer circuit he had made. He came over to Kirk and McCoy and showed the tiny thing to them. "I believe this will 'do the trick', Captain."

"I hope so, Spock, I certainly hope so," Kirk said very quietly. The concern in his eyes showed clearly. Spock saw it, and understood.

"Don't worry, Jim, I shall be perfectly all right."

"Spock, you and Bones are beginning to sound like each other!" Kirk held up both his hands to forestall the protests he knew would be forthcoming following that remark. "I know, I know." Kirk gave them a small grin. "Come on, Bones; we'll go with him to the transporter room. Make sure he doesn't get lost on the way there!"

As Spock stood on the platform and the shimmer of the transporter effect took him, his watching friends were trying, and failing, to dismiss the thought that it might be the last time they saw him.

Spock materialised aboard the space shuttle. NASA astronauts were very carefully chosen, he knew, and not likely to panic easily - but the sight of a Vulcan suddenly appearing on their spacecraft? He saw their eyes widen in disbelief; one of them suddenly recalled his training and attempted to inform Mission Control of the strange being with pointed ears who was trying to take over the shuttle - not caring if they thought he was crazy - but Spock was too quick for him, and stunned the Terran astronauts before they could get a word out. He went to the controls, checked that the shuttle's automatic pilot mechanism was

functioning correctly, then checked the chronometer. It was already so close to re-entry that he hoped Mission Control would think the sudden lack of communications from the shuttle was part of the usual interference with the old-fashioned radio waves experienced during re-entry. The modern communications of the starship would of course not be affected. Not that he had time to communicate. He bent down to each of the astronauts in turn, placing his hand on their faces in the position of the mind-meld and concentrating for a few seconds, till he knew he had removed their memories of seeing him, then quickly crossed to the computer. He glanced at the chronometer again. Time was indeed short. He would have to hurry. With a slight frown at the ancient computer banks, Spock began to work.

The minutes were ticking away all too quickly. Kirk sat in the command chair, unable to tear his eyes from the viewscreen, where he watched the decaying orbit of the small spacecraft aboard which his friend was working at breakneck speed. McCoy stood behind him. The whole starship seemed to be holding her breath.

Kirk turned to McCoy and thumped an armrest with his fist. "Dammit, Bones - what is he doing over there?" Kirk's mounting frustration at being ~~able~~ to do nothing but sit and watch was making him edgy. And he was getting more worried for the Vulcan's safety every second. "I'm going to call him, Bones - I've got to know what's going on!"

McCoy stopped him. "No, Jim, you mustn't! He has little enough time as it is - you might interrupt him in the middle of something vital!"

Kirk sank back in his chair again. Bones was right.

"Three minutes to re-entry, Keptin," Chekov reported from where he was manning Spock's computer station.

Kirk didn't need telling. He could see the hull of the shuttle already beginning to glow faintly red as the heat of the approaching re-entry started to affect it. I've got to contact him, thought Kirk. I must. He was just reaching for the switch when the Vulcan's calm voice came over the intercom.

"Spock to Enterprise."

"Kirk here. For God's sake, Spock, what's happening?"

"I have effected repairs to the computer, Captain," Spock's voice was more expressionless than ever. "However, there is a slight problem."

"What, Spock? Spit it out, man!"

"It is this; the shuttle's computer is completely archaic - by our standards - that I cannot, without more time, be entirely certain that I have repaired it correctly; I have no alternative but to remain aboard during re-entry. I have concealed myself at the rear of the craft; the astronauts are showing signs of regaining consciousness, but they will not see me here. If the craft should start to malfunction, it will be necessary for me to re-stun them, and then take the craft through re-entry manually."

"No, Spock - I won't let you do it! You've done all you can - we're bringing you out of there right now!"

"Jim, please - you know I have to do this."

McCoy put his hand on Kirk's shoulder and nodded at him. Kirk sighed helplessly; they both knew that Spock was right - as always.

"All right, Spock - but the second that shuttle shows the slightest sign of breaking up, we're beaming you out of there! Kirk out."

"Understood, Captain - thank you, Jim. Spock out."

Kirk gave the transporter room the order. Scotty would see to it himself. He would beam Spock, and the astronauts, back to the Enterprise the moment anything went wrong, and if everything went okay - it must be okay, thought Kirk - Spock would be beamed back on board the instant the craft was through re-entry. Kirk

turned back to the viewscreen. He hoped nobody could see he had his fingers crossed. What he didn't know was that so did McCoy and half the bridge crew. Then Kirk realised he was holding his breath again.

Spock was crouched behind some equipment at the back of the shuttle. The astronauts had come round and had carried on as if nothing had happened, as the Vulcan had instructed them in the mind-meld. They were too busy with re-entry procedure to notice him, and obviously remembered nothing of seeing him earlier, as Spock had known they would not. He could feel the shuttle growing hotter and hotter as re-entry progressed, and realised how uncomfortable the Terran astronauts must be if he, a Vulcan, was feeling the heat. He noted with satisfaction and not a small amount of relief that the computer seemed to be functioning correctly, but he still didn't trust the primitive machine. The outside of the shuttle went from red to white hot and yet hotter still. It crossed Spock's mind that re-entering Earth's atmosphere in a flimsy twentieth-century spacecraft was not an experience he had ever expected to have - and one he certainly had no wish to repeat.

The shuttle was safely through into the stratosphere. James Kirk decided he could let himself start breathing again. He flipped on the intercom. "Kirk to transporter room - Scotty, have you got him?"

"Aye, Captain; that we have. Mr. Spock is on his way to the bridge. "

Grins of relief were breaking out all over the bridge, and Kirk and McCoy were certainly no exceptions.

"Come on, Bones - let's go meet him." They made for the turbolift, and Kirk almost forgot to say who had the con.

The Enterprise was once more in her own time, and was on her way to Starbase VI with her cargo of disgruntled Klingons in the Brig. Her stressed engines were recovering from the return flight through the time warp (and so was Lt-Commander Montgomery Scott). Kirk, Spock and McCoy were all in Kirk's quarters, the owner of which had just poured the other two a drink. Even Spock had accepted a glass of Saurian brandy in honour of the occasion.

Kirk raised his glass. "Well, gentlemen - let's drink to this being our last visit to the past."

"I'll drink to that, Jim," said McCoy. "The idea of changing the future definitely does not appeal to me."

"I am not at all sure that the future can be changed, Doctor." The Vulcan looked extremely thoughtful.

"What in heaven's name do you mean, Spock?"

"I have formed the opinion that history is, by its very nature, unchangeable. Our various encounters with the past have led me to this conclusion. I believe we had no other course of action open to us but that which we took. In other words - it was meant to happen."

"But Spock," said Kirk, "what about our first encounter with the Guardian; when Bones went back in time before us, and changed history, or so we thought, until we went back after him and put things right, the Enterprise had ceased to exist. How do you explain that?"

"Yes, Spock," protested McCoy. "Are you trying to tell us that it's impossible for us to do anything to alter the past whatever we do? Why, we might as well have stayed here and done nothing!"

"I merely said it was my opinion, Doctor."

"Aha!" said McCoy gleefully, seizing the opportunity. "Spock, are you actually admitting you might be wrong about something?"

"Doctor! I..."

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" Back to normal, thank goodness, thought Kirk. "I'm just glad to be back where we belong - aren't you?" He grinned at his two friends. "Come on, let's go mind the store."

As Kirk put a hand on each of his friends' shoulders and led them from the room, he was remembering how, as a Starfleet cadet, and even now sometimes, he had often wished he could have been there in those early days when Man was taking his first pioneering steps into space, lending a hand; and the sobering realisation suddenly came to him that he had.

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TO SPOCK, TAKE HEED by Jackie High

I am in the Sea of Time.
 Trapped in a prison of my own making.
 I created its obscene depths in my mind.
 Fool that I was...
 To deny all I once felt;
 I cannot feel anything now.
 Let me help you.
 I watch you following the path of my Fate -
 Turn back, friend, before it is too late.

You hide behind a shell of fear and loneliness.
 You say you don't like to touch, you seem so cold;
 But deep inside I know, I can see
 A warm and caring heart.
 Please reach out before it is too late,
 Tell them that you care,
 Hold out to them your love.
 You will never be alone -
 They'll smile, they'll understand.
 You'll not need me to give you a helping hand.

I hid like you, once,
 Until I realised it was far too late to escape.
 I withdrew behind my shield;
 My feelings withered and died.
 My heart turned to cold stone that crumbled,
 Till just an empty tenement was left;
 I am trapped in this Space of Time forever.
 Do not be a blind fool like I was, or you will find
 What you once hid and want to free will not exist.
 You will be like me, lost and all alone.

Empty of all, everything, hollow shell with no emotion.
 A lifeless hulk, swamped, in a storm tossed ocean.

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Spock: I understand fish is supposed to be a brain food.

McCoy: Yes, I eat it all the time.

Spock: There goes another scientific theory.

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Sulu: Did Uhura really say your voice was out of this world?

Riley: Not exactly. She said it was unearthly.

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BY THE RULES by Linda Chapple

Uhura wandered through the pine-smelling copse, taking tricorder readings and occasionally looking around to admire the view. It wasn't often that she got the chance to survey a planet as pleasant as this and she had taken full advantage of her time here to relax and unwind all the tensions that had built up in her over the past few weeks. The Enterprise and her crew had had a couple of tough missions lately and it was about time they had some R & R.

Her tricorder registered a large animal in a clearing ahead so, after checking that her phaser was primed and set on stun, she proceeded in that direction. On the edge of the clearing she paused and cautiously looked ahead. What she saw very nearly made her drop her tricorder and head for the hills. She'd seen some strange creatures before but this one...

The dragon was fast asleep on its side in a patch of warm sunlight, snoring faintly. It was a very handsome specimen - coloured a dark green on its back, shading to apple green on the underside, with big silver patches on its stomach. Even as she stared at it, however, Uhura saw that its eyes had opened, and that it was staring at her unblinkingly.

Rolling onto its stomach, the dragon got to its feet and resumed its scrutiny of her. Now that it was standing on its hind legs, Uhura realised that it was a good seven feet tall. Its eyes were sherry-coloured and very bright. Both Human and dragon surveyed one another for several minutes in silence, Uhura being afraid to back away in case that action triggered a hunting instinct in the animal. What came next really shook her, for the dragon took a couple of paces forward, tilted its head to one side, and spoke.

"Why aren't you hysterical?"

Uhura was torn between the fact that the dragon had spoken and was therefore intelligent, and the ridiculous statement. Finally her pride rose to the occasion and she moved forward a few steps, tilting her chin up a little.

"Why should I be hysterical?" she asked.

That seemed to take the wind out of the dragon's sails. Indeed, anyone would have thought that she'd hit him, the way he rocked back on his hind legs. Uhura almost smiled at the ludicrous picture the flabbergasted dragon made.

"Why?" It was almost a squeal. "Why? Don't you know the rules? Every time a dragon meets up with a beautiful, unaccompanied lady, the dragon has to bellow and act tough, while the lady screams and faints. It's accepted custom!"

Uhura's lips twitched a little at that as the dragon managed to sound bewildered, aggrieved, indignant and generally put-upon all at the same time. She decided to tread carefully, though, since the dragon was still very much an unknown quantity. An idea struck her and she got out her communicator.

"But I'm not unaccompanied," she protested. The dragon perked up at that, and began to look around eagerly, rubbing his hands together.

"You mean you've got a knight in shining armour hidden around here somewhere? Great! I haven't had a decent fight in months!"

A little unhappy at the dragon's less-than-peaceful attitude, Uhura tried to move away. Much as she'd expected it didn't do much good, as the dragon simply followed her. As she still wasn't too sure how fast the other could move she couldn't break into a run, so it seemed that she was lumbered with him.

At the brisk pace she set it only took them ten minutes to reach the beam-up point. She had half hoped that there wouldn't be anyone there, but to her horror, when she cleared the last of the trees and looked into the clearing, there in all his glory stood Mr. Spock.

Did it have to be Spock? she wailed to herself. The Vulcan had obviously just been about to contact someone since the communicator had been on its way to

his mouth. At the sight of Uhura and her companion, however, all motion ceased and for one wild moment Uhura thought that the super-cool Mr. Spock was going to gape. In the nick of time he recollected his position and contented himself with an eyebrow being lifted so high it vanished into his hairline.

"Is this your knight in shining armour?" inquired the dragon. Uhura watched Spock's second eyebrow join the first before she found her voice.

"Not exactly."

"Hmfff, I should think not. If my eyes don't deceive me, that fellow is at least a half-elf, and everyone knows that elfin folk don't go in for the chivalry bit. So where's the knight?"

By this time Spock was looking even more dazed and it was perhaps opportune that Chekov chose that moment to enter the fray.

"Is this him?!" the dragon bellowed. Chekov's expression changed from one of boredom to one of apprehension - via shock and disbelief - in about three tenths of a second. Uhura attempted to explain and the dragon listened for about a minute. Then he seemed to lose patience and managed to silence her by knocking her feet from under her with his tail. She landed with a thump on the ground, but the bouncy nature of the native grass prevented any serious damage to the anatomy - if not her ego.

"It seems to me," stated the dragon, settling himself down on the grass, "that you lot are uneducated. Which Academy did you go to?"

Typically, it was Spock who recovered first. "Starfleet Academy."

The dragon considered this reply, absent-mindedly blowing a thin wisp of smoke from his nostrils. A gleam appeared in Spock's eyes and with a muttered "Fascinating," he made a grab for his tricorder.

"Never heard of it. Obviously one of those modern-minded establishments that couldn't teach a fish to swim. All right, let's see what we can do about bringing you up to date. MORGANNA!!!" The last was a roar that nearly burst the eardrums of Uhura and Chekov and caused Spock to drop his tricorder and clasp his ears in real pain.

Their discomfort, however, was soon forgotten when they saw what was happening to the left of the dragon. A thin pillar of greenish light had appeared and even as they watched it started to thicken until it had assumed the shape of a humanoid. There was a flash of intense green light, a mutter of thunder and then silence. But where the light had been, there stood a woman.

She was tall - as tall as Spock - and thoroughly Human. Her features were fine-boned and classical and framed by white-blonde hair that fell in gentle waves down to the ground. Large sapphire-blue eyes glanced in the direction of the Enterprise party, then turned their attention onto the dragon. She was dressed in a tight-fitting white dress with a golden belt clasped around her waist, and a golden torque hung about her neck.

"Why have I been summoned?"

The dragon harrumphed and fidgeted a little. "It's these people, Morganna. They don't seem to know anything about the most basic of rules. I was just wondering if you could magick up a few copies of the rule-book to help me educate them?"

"You're not spoiling for a fight again, are you?"

"Me? Fight? Morganna, you astound me. Surely you realise I'm the most peaceful, unassuming, brilliant and modest dragon in the length and breadth of this galaxy? I wouldn't dream..."

"That's not what you told me!" Uhura decided that it was about time the conversation got back to basics. Whirling around the dragon glared at her, but was distracted from any violent ideas by the sight and sound of Morganna laughing.

She moved forward past the flabbergasted dragon and reached a hand down to Uhura. Accepting the unspoken offer of aid, Uhura got to her feet and dusted herself down. Morganna eyed her thoughtfully then stared in turn at Spock and Chekov. Then she turned back to the dragon and tapped him smartly on the nose.

"Ow! What was that for?"

"Idiot! No wonder these people don't know any of our rules. They're Federation!"

"Is that what they are? I must admit I did wonder about their daft costumes but I thought it might be the latest fashion somewhere." He paused for a moment. "Does that mean there isn't a knight in shining armour?"

"Aha! So you were looking for a fight!"

"Welllll..... Only a little one. I was bored."

"That's no excuse. You wait until I tell your mother about this little escapade. She'll burn your hide off! Now apologise to these people and then clear off home?"

Accompanied by her special effects, Morganna vanished, leaving behind her two stunned Humans, one fascinated half-Vulcan, and a very woebegone dragon. For several minutes no-one said anything or moved. Then the dragon heaved a big sigh and directed his attention onto Uhura.

"Are you sure you're not a princess?"

Uhura nodded firmly.

"Ah, well. Sorry if I upset you. You look a bit like the Lady Melissa, you see, and she said she'd let me fight her latest knight."

He sighed again and Uhura found herself feeling sorry for him. Without realising it her eyes slid in Chekov's direction and almost gave the young ensign heart failure.

"Oh no, Uhura, you can get that look out of your eye. I'm not a knight, I've never wanted to be a knight, and I'm not going to be a knight. So there!"

Uhura grinned to herself over Chekov's deplorable lack of chivalry, but couldn't very well blame him. Nevertheless she couldn't resist giving a mock-sigh of regret.

Spock, meanwhile, moved a little closer to the dragon. "I take it that you are not native to this world?"

That roused the dragon in no time and he bounced to his feet immediately, bringing his jaws together with an audible crash.

"Ouch! That hurt... Native to this dump? You've got to be joking! I'll have you know that I come from one of the oldest dragon families on Pendragon! Dammit, the planet was named after our kind!"

"Er... Pendragon?"

"Oh, that's right, you haven't found us yet. Pity. Tell you what, when you do get around to discovering us, why not pop down for a party? You can't miss the place, really. Head from here to Fingle's Nebula, turn sharp left and it's the third G-star on the right. Ask for me. Bye now!"

The dragon started to disappear in much the same way as Morganna and it wasn't until the light - red in colour this time - had almost faded entirely that Uhura came to life.

"Wait!"

The light brightened a little. "What is it?"

"How can we ask for you? You never told us your name!"

"Didn't I? How careless of me. The name is George. See you soon!"

The light vanished and there was no trace of the dragon anywhere. Before they could their scattered wits, another pillar of light appeared. This time, however, it was a perfectly normal occurrence since it was the Enterprise's transporter. When its sparkle faded, Kirk stood in its place. He stared at the three of them and then started to grin.

"What happened here? Even Spock looks as if he'd seen a ghost!"

Spock's eyebrow rose a trifle at that, but he refrained from comment, turning instead to Uhura. Chekov, too, seemed perfectly willing for her to explain. Uhura gave a silent groan of dismay, then turned to where Kirk was waiting patiently.

"Well, Captain, there was this dragon called George....."

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CENTRE SEAT by Susan Meek

All the familiar faces surround me
Except one -
And although the pain of that
absence cuts deeply,
It still feels so good to be back.

Two years Earthside had almost
made me forget
What a satisfying thing it is
to sit here
At the centre of all the
bustling activity;
To feel the power, the energy
within her.
To know she will live again for me,
Some faces have changed
As have the surroundings,
But there's a sense of rightness,
A sense of belonging,
In being here.
I should never have let
them talk me
Into giving her up.

I'm afraid, Will Decker,
That you were right.
I'm not sorry at all.

+++++

TO BOLDLY GO by Sue Simon

A place where no man's gone before,
Perhaps the final frontier,
Cruising through the asteroids,
Across the distant void.
To seek out worlds with alien life,
Civilised or without strife,
On and on our heroes travel
On a ship that's sturdy and strong.
Be careful, Enterprise, for you have far to go;
Civilisations to reap, and many seeds to sow.

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COMMUNICATIONS BLACKOUT by Jane Tietjen

(With a grateful acknowledgement to my husband Geoff, whose advice and encouragement were invaluable.)

Dr. Leonard McCoy paced Spock's quarters, fuming with pent-up frustration and anger. He had come to see the Vulcan as a last resort, swallowing his pride in the knowledge that only he had any chance now of saving Jim Kirk from the Admiralty - and himself.

Spock was seated; outwardly, calm as ever; listening to the emotional tirade that poured from the Doctor; the account of his efforts to get through to the Admiralty top brass which had ended in failure without even the courtesy of a proper hearing.

Suddenly McCoy ceased his pacing and turned to face Spock; his eyes were bright as he spoke. "They're smothering him, Spock, wrapping him in glittering cotton wool and putting him on show. 'Come and see the explorer of the stars, the people's hero!' What they really mean is - 'Here is physical evidence of where your tax money went. Send us your sons and they have a zillion to one chance of turning out the same way'." The sarcasm was hard in his voice. After a few seconds he went on, softer. "He'll fade away into obscurity, until he's forgotten and people think he's dead. And so he might as well be, except his body will be walking around and reading the history tapes to try and recapture what he's lost." He stopped short, too choked to continue.

Spock stirred uneasily in his chair. His own inner turmoil was too near the surface for comfort, and he carefully controlled his voice when he replied, "I agree his acceptance of the Admiralty post is somewhat out of character." He sighed, not quite knowing how to continue. "Is he ill, in your opinion?"

McCoy snorted. "The only thing that's wrong with Jim is being Earthbound. He's lost; like a...a fish out of water. Look, he lived, breathed, ate, slept, worried on, was that ship for five years. She kept him alert. When she flew, straight as an arrow, she exhilarated him beyond words - he loved her, Spock. Even you must have known that." He paused and when he spoke again, his voice was cracked and hoarse. "Now they've taken her away from him, abruptly, cruelly, with no promise of any space service ever again. Nogura and that...Ciani - " he almost spat the word out " - woman have somehow convinced him and he's let them do it. He's become submissive and agrees with practically anything they suggest." He sighed. "If only they would let us see him, but they keep him closeted away with her except for special occasions when they dress him up and bring him out all pristine and new to smile for the people." He turned to Spock, pleadingly. "That's where you come in, Spock. You are the only one left he will listen to. I've tried, the others have tried... Can you use your influence with him to show him that you don't stop being a Starship Captain just like that? God, I never thought I'd ever be in a position when I had to ask you to use logical arguments. Spock, go to him, talk to him. Please." Exhausted, McCoy sank into the only other chair, his head bent in misery.

Spock looked at his tired and defeated companion. He felt drawn to this man by all the trials they had experienced together over the years, knew that love for Jim Kirk united them now despite any past differences they had had. McCoy had seen and known the private side of Spock for too long not to see into the torment beneath the cold exterior. Spock half wanted to pour out the heartbreak that was tearing him apart inside; but was half afraid that once started he would never stop.

How could he explain the reasons behind his sudden decision? How could he make him understand the dangers of those terrible moments three nights ago?

During the day, Spock had been alone in his room, unable to get Jim out of his mind. When they had first returned to Earth, he had noticed the changes in

Jim, subtle at first, then growing into deeper bewilderment and disorientation as he strove to readjust and find some new purpose in life. Secretly, Spock had hoped that his friend would come to him for help during those early days, but the weeks went by and he did not come. Debriefing was over and the refitting of the Enterprise in dry dock had begun, but there was no contact from Jim.

When he had heard of the one-year pairing contract with Vice-Admiral Lori Ciani, he knew Jim would not come to him for comfort, advice. He had been hurt, but had pushed the feeling away. He could wait; wait until Jim had recovered from this bout of Earth domesticity. And then, together, the stars awaited them!

The bombshell of Jim's acceptance of Admiral's rank had devastated him and left him numb for days with all its implications. As McCoy had put it, Jim was Earthbound. He would never more sail the silver star charted ways, never beam down to the stimulating unknown...never, never have to turn to his Science Officer for help, advice or reassurance. In the busy, bureaucratic, public-relations-orientated world of Earth, where was the room - the privacy - for that special relationship that they had once cherished.

The confused hurt had changed to smouldering anger when Spock had seen how the Admiralty was using Jim for its own political purposes. He had tried to contact him on video but the communications computer had rejected his call, informing him that Admiral Kirk's location was being kept secret during his rehabilitation, to allow him to rest, and no calls could be put through from unauthorised personnel.

He realised grimly that the Admiralty had a prize too valuable to risk having its memory jogged or eyes opened before they were ready to allow it. He understood why; Earth's population was becoming restless under the increasingly heavy financial burden that Starfleet was placing on them and from which they seemed to obtain little, if any, return. This was a golden PR opportunity that they could not let slip through their finger.

It only made him more determined.

It was the easy matter of a few hours for Spock to break the authorisation codes and obtain Jim's apartment address. One of the more luxurious and secluded ones, not far from his own, but in an area definitely reserved for the upper echelons of the Service. He read the brief description of the area's pleasant rural assets, such as parks, lanes, trees, stretches of water. Knowing Jim's tastes, they had even provided a library in the apartment with a small selection of real books. They knew him well, he thought; these are just the ideal conditions to persuade him he has found Paradise!

Spock had stood silently in the shadow of the trees opposite the apartment, and waited. His eyes had flickered to and fro over the building, taking in all the details. It had been built in an old style to resemble a low cottage. It had a pathway to the front door flanked by small flower beds. Small windows peeped out from under low eaves. Very homely, thought Spock sardonically. They've certainly gone to a lot of trouble... He noticed a side access path that ran the full length of the building next to a small side lawn. A light fell on the lawn from a tall window towards the rear of the house.

Spock slipped swiftly across the road and crept along the side wall towards the window. He was about to look in when a shadow was thrown onto the grass. Jim! Spock quickly shrank back into the shadows of the wall.

His mind raced. What to say, how to convince Jim that his decision was wrong. Somehow he had never considered that there would be any difficulty. What would he do if Jim resisted his arguments - what if he had turned against his old friend? Hot thoughts such as this chased each other around and merged with his anger, building up into a crescendo of emotions so high that, for a few moments, desperation blocked out logic!

There was one way to persuade him! With his hand already curving into the mind-melding position, Spock moved along to the edge of the window. Peering in, he saw Jim, sitting now, relaxed in a chair, reading. He had not heard the cat-like movements outside.

Spock's lips set in determination. His yearning for contact was red-hot now, blurring out all else, spurring him on, on, ON.

His other hand tightened on the handle of the window; a few more seconds and he would be inside.

Suddenly, he stopped. Jim had looked up towards an unseen, inner door. He was smiling tenderly, getting up and moving away to greet someone. Quickly, Spock ducked back alongside the window. A woman came and drew the blinds, blotting out the light, leaving Spock in darkness, staring wildly down at his hands.

The Vulcan sank to his knees, his hands over his face, defeated. What had he been thinking of? The full horror of the act he had been about to commit hit him with full force. His body began to tremble. To use the mind-meld to force another being, maybe against his will... It was unthinkable! And he had been about to do that, driven by boiling Human emotion.

He had to get away from the scene of his shame. He got to his feet shakily and stumbled back to the roadway. He hurried away, glancing over his shoulder to make sure no-one had seen him.

As he walked, his mind was in turmoil. He'd wanted so much to help Jim. For the rest of the crew's sake, for Jim's sake - and, he realised, for his own. And he had failed, failed them all.

A dull, aching pain in his chest grew greater and threatened to choke him. He stopped and leaned against a wall to regain his control. He felt drained and exhausted. Was this the result of the love and friendship he and Jim had exchanged? He ground his fingers into his palms. Why did it have to hurt so much?

He had seen this pain of loss in others many times before - in McCoy when he knew he had lost Nancy to an alien being; in Jim as Edith had been killed while he stood helplessly by. And, he remembered sharply, an even deeper, desperate pain in the eyes of his mother when, as a child tormented by his fellows for his Human failings, his Vulcan pride had made him thrust away her affection and treat her coldly.

So this was how it felt. He closed his eyes over the scenes and breathed deeply.

Wearily, he pressed on and, after what seemed an age, reached his quarters. He entered and sat dejectedly at the table. He stared unseeingly at the opposite wall. He cleared his mind and tried to consider the problems objectively.

Tonight, his Human emotions had driven him so close to the brink of insanity that it scared him. He could not take the chance of that happening again. He knew now that there was no place for him in Jim's new life. Jim seemed happy enough and Spock knew he could not trust himself near him. So he must remove himself from Jim's vicinity, and that meant leaving Earth with all its reminders.

What then were his alternatives? Another assignment with Starfleet, on a different ship, with a different Captain? No. He shook his head. The Admiralty's callous use of Jim had somewhat loosened his loyalty, and he knew he could not stand to see a different face in the command chair other than that of his beloved Captain.

He needed a place to rest and be alone, to let his feelings cool and bring his emotions back under control. He had lived too long with Humans. He steepled his fingers and considered.

With one swift movement, as if any second's hesitation would change his mind, he rose and crossed to the communications console. Slowly, but deliberately, he tapped out his resignation and addressed it to Starfleet Headquarters. For long moments he read and re-read the words on the screen.

Then, with a final swift move, he punched the 'send' button and turned away from the console.

Now, with his control already returned and growing stronger, how could he explain his recent misery to McCoy. His Vulcan pride would not allow such an admission.

He turned to the table where he had been occupied sorting through the few personal items that remained from his years aboard the Enterprise. There was not much to show for such a time, but then he was not given to sentimentality. Just his own personal record tape, an old communicator - and the chess pieces with which he and Jim had spent so many hours. His fingers lingered lovingly over these.

Finally, he sat back and, with as tightly controlled a voice as possible, said, "As the Captain has raised no objection to the promotion himself, Doctor, I would suggest you are acting somewhat improperly." He stared at the objects on the table, unable, for once, to look at McCoy's face. His voice dropped almost to a whisper. "As for myself, it is of no concern. I am returning to Vulcan on tomorrow's shuttle."

The silence that now filled the room became electric as McCoy stared at him, open-mouthed, unable to believe what his ears were telling him.

"You're what?" he gasped out. "I just don't be..." His voice trailed away. Spock still could not look at the man who had just seen his last ally turn from him. His hands wandered absently over the objects on the table.

McCoy found his voice at last. "Why? Spock, you could get another commission easily. Don't let them get rid of you as well." He searched for words. "You were the only one left who could reach him - at least wait until he comes out of this... this euphoria. He'll need you then. Don't desert him!"

Spock straightened in his chair. He knew he must maintain his calmness at all costs. "The decision has been made, Doctor. Starfleet has accepted my resignation."

McCoy looked at him, feeling anger starting to well up. How dare he sit there so cold and unfeeling while the man they had both loved and served was throwing his life away!

"You really don't care, do you," he said finally. Spock flinched at this and his control slipped for a second, showing a flicker of the conflict going on inside. McCoy, with a sudden flash of insight, pressed home his attack. "You're afraid, aren't you?"

Spock gasped, and McCoy carried on, with a hint of triumph in his voice. "Something's already happened, hasn't it. Don't tell me, let me guess. Could it be that our good old Vulcan couldn't stand the strain? Could it?"

Spock felt his body stiffen and fear begin to choke him. No! his mind screamed. Too close, you're too close! He closed his eyes to cover his panic.

McCoy closed in again, desperation making him lash out, wanting to hurt. "So I've touched a raw nerve, have I? What have they offered you, Spock, to go away conveniently and let them work their little scheme unhampered? Thirty pieces of silver? That's what they gave to Judas, in case you forgot!"

Spock whirled on him, his eyes filled with maddened pain, his fist clenched above him ready to strike out to stop the cruel jeers. They stood in time, gazing at each other, McCoy supremely unafraid, Spock fighting hard for control. He lowered his fist, still clenched, and gasped out. "I'm going back because I have to. You don't know..." His breath came and went harshly. "...What it means to stay here and see him like this."

"Then stay here and help him get out of it instead of running away behind his back like a coward." McCoy was really turning the knife now, directing all his anger and bitter disappointment towards Spock. "You disgust me."

It was too much to bear. Spock turned away and ground his fists around the object he had picked up, striving to direct his forceful emotion at any inanimate object, not at McCoy who had once been his friend. That would be the final degradation!

Through clenched teeth, he rasped, "Get out. Get out and leave me alone!"

McCoy moved towards the door, pausing only for a parting shot. "Oh, I'm going all right, and I hope never to see your traitorous face again. Sneak off back to your precious Vulcan. Maybe there's a stone small enough for you to crawl under and hide for the rest of your life."

The door slammed and he was gone, leaving Spock in a sad silence, staring down into his open hand at the communicator, crushed beyond repair. He put it and the other items back into the small box and threw them into the disposal unit. As he pressed the destruct button he knew he had severed his last ties with the Human race.

The next day, he stood at the window of the shuttle, watching Earth turn beneath it. The crew was quietly and efficiently making final preparations for leaving orbit. He had said no further goodbyes; had left no messages; no trace of his existence remained on Earth save his Starfleet record locked inside some computer. It was as if he had never been there.

He took one last, long look down as America passed beneath and the Western Coast came into view. He could see the dark blob that marked San Francisco, where Jim was, and watched it march across the globe until it disappeared over the horizon.

Then, resolutely, he set his face towards Vulcan, and a new life.

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TWO SELVES by Gillian Catchpole

Support through shock of separation,
Like a rock his loyal understanding.
Spock.
Someone to lean on, lending strength,
When mine was too shallow to sustain.
Gone the edge that cut decisions,
Remained a spongy mass of hesitation
Incapable of Command.
The beast, so part of me,
Controlled he went unrecognised,
His brutal strength, his wild desires,
His black and primitive fear.
Hard to accept his ugly dark was mine
And that I needed him.

Daily the struggle to deny emotions,
Harsh sacrifice of every feeling,
Heard only in the mind where others never hear,
Felt only as distress whose pain is never spoken,
The Human self in a lonely corner.
Only an unrelenting discipline
Upholds the principles of Vulcan life,
Emotions lead astray the senses.

Haunted by all the now remembered times
When in my ignorance I failed to see
The suffering within two selves.
I am sorry, Spock - but I have learned.

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ONCE UPON A DREAM...by D. Helen Baldwin

Uhura hummed quietly to herself as she checked her control board, her slim fingers casually running over the buttons like a pianist playing an arpeggio. Sulu the romantic relaxed in his chair, letting the melodious voice of the communications officer wash over him like a warm wave on a sun-kissed beach. Kirk and Spock were engaged in idle conversation (that is, if the physics of matter-anti-matter imbalance came into that category). Ensign Pavel Chekov glanced around the bridge and smiled. It had been many weeks since the atmosphere on board the Enterprise had been so relaxed, but now the mission was over and the schedule called for two weeks of R & R on Starbase 5. It was a chance for him to get to know the new Environment Officer, Lt. Fiora, daughter of Ezra of the planet Nazarene, a humanoid race of ancient and great heritage, with unusual genetic development.

Thinking of the lieutenant, Chekov turned to smile at her, and felt a flutter in his stomach as two golden eyes met his, and a returning smile was on her soft lips, as if she knew his thoughts - she probably did, as her people were telepaths of great powers. Fiora was beautiful - if only she were interested in him! Perhaps if he were of higher rank; they always flocked after the Captain. If only he were a Captain...

Figures flashed upon the navigator's console, alerting Chekov to the presence of an object ahead.

"Captain! Unidentified object ahead, on collision course!"

Kirk sprang into action. "Deflectors up, Mr. Sulu! Spock, verify and identify. Mr. Chekov, plot a diverting course!"

"The object is a planetoid, Captain."

"Gravity and atmosphere are Earth normal, sir," reported Lt. Fiora at the Environment console. "Sentient life forms are present on the planet, Captain."

"Verified by scan, Captain," said Spock. Kirk shot a glance at his new officer. He had of course read the report on Fiora's telepathic capabilities when she had been posted to the Enterprise, but this was the first time he had actually witnessed the telepath 'at work', and was amazed. To be able to sense life forms at this distance by mind alone...!

"They have us in a tractor beam, Captain," Spock reported evenly.

Kirk hit the intercom button. "Mr. Scott, I want full power. Break free of the tractor beam. Mr. Sulu, be ready with full reverse thrusters."

The voice of the Chief Engineer filtered through the intercom. "I cannot do that without risking serious damage to the engines, Captain. We've only got 75% power as it is - we still haven't finished repairs after the incident at Altair Three."

"We are being pulled into planetary orbit, sir," reported Sulu.

"All right, Scotty," said Kirk, frowning. "Don't strain her if she won't take it. We will just have to see what those beings want. Mr. Spock, I want two security guards to meet us at the transporter room to complete a landing party. Mr. Scott will have the con." He moved towards the turbolift. Spock stopped him.

"You are very hasty, Captain. Surely we have not yet found out enough about the situation to risk sending a landing party?"

Kirk paused for a moment, listening to the words of his friend, the man he had trusted with his life so many times - but he shook his head. "I know that you're right, Spock, but something says to me that we will find the answers below, so that is where we are going."

"I am going too - and Ensign Chekov!" Lt. Fiora stepped forward as Kirk spun round, startled. The young officer hesitated, then carried on. "Whatever

is down there, I can sense - I know that our presence is required too, sir," she explained.

Kirk looked at Spock enquiringly. The only reply was a raised eyebrow. Kirk nodded.

"All right, Lieutenant, let's get going."

"Energise, Mr. Scott."

Six figures shimmered and faded on the transporter pad, only for three of them to reform moments later into the figures of Spock and the two security guards.

"Mr. Spock!" exclaimed the amazed Scott. "But where is the Captain? And the two young 'uns?"

"I wish I knew, Mr. Scott," said Spock as he adjusted the controls on the console to which he had just hurried. "I cannot get a fix on the Captain, Lt. Fiora or Ensign Chekov. We have lost them!"

"Energise, Mr. Scott."

Three shimmering figures coalesced into the puzzled but recognisable features of Jim Kirk, Pavel Chekov and Fiora of Nazarene.

"Captain, welcome back! The repairs have been completed, and the Zarcons have been very helpful with spares. They know just as much about these engines as I do, if you can believe that!"

To an already confused Jim Kirk, the information offered by the Chief Engineer made no sense - the whole situation was ludicrous - but especially the fact that Scotty was not addressing him but Ensign Chekov. Kirk stepped off the transporter pad.

"Scotty..."

"Just a moment, lad - can't you see that I'm talking to Captain Chekov? Mr. Spock is awaiting your arrival on the bridge, sir."

Captain Chekov? Chekov looked at his Captain, totally bewildered; Kirk stared unbelievably at Mr. Scott, and Lt. Fiora could only look at them both, searching their faces for reassurance.

None came.

The girl thought quickly. "Captain," she said, addressing Chekov, "May we resume our posts?"

Chekov sensed a message from the young officer, urging him to agree. He nodded.

"We had better make our way to the bridge, Mr. Kirk." The three left the transporter room.

"Come on," whispered Kirk as he led them to the Captain's quarters, ignoring and avoiding the glances of other crew members.

Once in the safety of the cabin, Chekov turned to Kirk. "Captain, what is going on? Why are they calling me Captain?"

"I don't know, Ensign. Perhaps the lieutenant can help us."

Fiora shook her head. "From what I can sense of various crew members' thoughts, Pavel is, to them at least, the Captain of the Enterprise - and you are Ensign James T. Kirk, navigator. I seem to have remained the same in both character and rank."

Kirk paced up and down thoughtfully.

"We were supposed to land on the planet. Instead, we're on an Enterprise to which we don't belong. Someone or something transported us here for reasons unknown - that sure gives us a lot to work on!"

"Captain," interrupted Fiora, "if we have been reported as going to the bridge - won't we be missed?"

Kirk nodded appreciatively. "We will just have to carry on in our assigned roles. Ensign, you will have to take the hot seat and give the performance of your life."

The young ensign protested. "Captain, we Russians may be brilliant, but we do have some limitations!"

Kirk grinned. "I'm sure you can cope, Mr. Chekov. Now, shall we see what is happening on the bridge. We may get some clues there."

The bridge was as normal as could be expected. Uhura and Sulu glanced round and smiled, then carried on with their work. After a moment's hesitation, Chekov seated himself in the command seat that Spock had just vacated. Kirk and Fiora 'resumed' their stations.

Chekov glanced round nervously, then steeled himself to give a performance worthy of an Interstellar Award.

"Report, Mr. Spock."

The Vulcan Science Officer stepped forward slightly and handed Chekov a report tape. "We are leaving the planet Zarcon for Antares IV at warp factor five, Captain. The load of medical supplies has been placed in cargo hold seven, and Dr. McCoy is checking them now. The Enterprise is now functioning at maximum efficiency.

Chekov nodded in acknowledgement. Just then, McCoy entered the bridge.

"Well, the cargo is all present and correct, Pavel, and there are no problems in sickbay, so I thought that you might just have time now for that long overdue physical checkup."

Chekov blanched. What should he do? He looked at Fiora, who gave him an almost imperceptible nod. This might be a chance to find out more about the situation. He rose.

"Very well, Doctor, lead on. Mr. Kirk, Miss Fiora - I should like to see you in the briefing room for a few minutes after my visit to sickbay." That would give him a chance to pass on any information that he managed to glean. "Carry on, Mr. Spock."

Chekov's performance would have made Jim Kirk grin, if the situation had not been so serious. What had happened to the real Captain, navigator and environment officer of this Enterprise? Were they going through the same reversal of roles, the same situations on board his ship? And Spock? Would he know that the Kirk aboard his Enterprise was not the friend he had known all those years, with whom he had a special link? A link that did not seem to exist with this Spock?

Kirk wondered - and worried.

Spock wondered - and worried. Several very thorough scans had revealed that Kirk and the two other officers were alive, but not their exact locations and circumstances. The fact that the transporter was not functioning did not help either. In fact, Mr. Spock was showing a very unVulcan concern for the safety of the three missing crew members, Jim Kirk not the least - and for once, Spock did not care who knew.

The journey to sickbay had not been of any help to Chekov. On the contrary,

the whole incident had made the usurper Captain certain that he had aroused the suspicions of the good doctor.

"Well, Pavel," he said afterwards, "You're in good shape physically, but you're as nervous as a Mexican jumping bean - what's wrong?"

"Nothing," lied Chekov. "Everything is fine, Doctor."

"And that's another thing - the only time you stop calling me 'Bones' is when you're worried about something. So don't lie - has Spock beaten you at chess again? Though I can't see why that should upset you - that walking computer has beaten you before."

Chekov was glad to leave sickbay and report to the briefing room, where he voiced his doubts.

"Well, we can't do much about that," said Kirk. "Our problem at the moment is to go over the events which led up to the switch over. Apart from the sudden appearance of the planetoid, which seems to have disappeared again, can either of you remember anything that could be related. Fiora?"

The dark haired girl shook her head. "Nothing, sir. Immediately prior to the incident I remember...smiling at Ensign Chekov...and sensing his thoughts." She blushed.

Kirk smiled. "Chekov?"

"It is as the lieutenant says, sir. But..."

Kirk leaned forward. "Carry on, Ensign - it could be important."

"Well, sir... I remember wishing that I was of higher rank. It...er... seems more impressive with the girls, sir."

"What rank? Think!"

"I think it was Captain, sir. Yes, I'm sure it was Captain."

The real Captain nodded his head, turning the information over in his mind, sensing, forming an idea.

"You thought of being a captain, and hey presto, you were! A thought cast away was picked up and transformed, shaped... A wish became reality; a dream come true..."

"Someone...something...decided to give Pavel his wish?" asked Fiora. "But who? And why bring you and me, Captain?"

"Don't you see, Fiora? You are the reason that Chekov made his wish - and I was the obstruction. He is the only Captain of the Enterprise now; of this Enterprise, by its very nature - and our Enterprise has no Captain, since I am not there."

"Who could have this power, Captain?" asked the bewildered Chekov. "And where is he?"

"He - it - must be near, perhaps to check on our progress, to see how its experiment has worked."

"You are right, Captain," agreed Fiora. "I sense...many eyes, watching us, but not unkindly. They wish us to be happy."

"Happy?" Kirk suddenly stood up and shouted, "It hasn't worked! We've seen through your game, and we don't like it! Let us go!"

The ship began to shake wildly, and the walls of the briefing room cracked and crumbled. The girl grabbed hold of the young ensign, frightened, holding on to him for reassurance and comfort. Kirk struggled to keep his balance, but failed and was flung to the floor, as were the others. They were lost from his sight for a few moments as a fierce wind blew dust into his eyes, stinging and irritating them. He rubbed his eyes frantically.

The dust settled as the quake stopped. Whereas before there had been a solid room on board a Federation starship, there was now a dusty arid landscape, dotted with shrubs and weeds. A shimmering, multi-coloured ball of energy was before them. Sparks glittered inside the ball as it spoke in a deep, echoing voice.

"We are the Dreamgivers, programmed to grant all wishes. We granted the wish of one Pavel Chekov of Earth. Now we have been told to take back this gift. Why?"

Chekov stepped forward before Kirk could speak. "Why me? I wasn't serious when I wished I could be Captain - Captain Kirk is my Captain. He knows how to run a starship - I don't." He turned to Kirk. "I'm sorry, sir," he said.

Kirk shook his head. "It wasn't your fault, Ensign. However," he said angrily to the luminescent cloud, "I want to know who you are, who made you, who those people were, and when I can return to my ship - and I want to know now!"

If a ball of energy could be visibly shaken, this one was now. "We are the Dreamgivers," it repeated, "programmed by the Masters to fulfil their wishes. But they have been gone so long, so long... You are the Masters returned to us - we will fulfil your wishes. The people you saw were illusions, given substance by us to fulfil your wish - was this wrong? If your wish now is to return to your ship we must fulfil it. Pavel Andreievich has had his wish, you have made yours - what is the wish of the woman Fiora?"

Fiora took hold of Chekov's hand, gazed into his eyes, and said, smiling, "Pavel does not need to be a captain to make me care for him. All I ask is that I may be allowed to learn more about him, to know and care for him better. "

A moment of silence, as the girl gently, tenderly kissed a surprised Chekov, then the energy being spoke again.

"You have chosen - may all your wishes be granted."

The three figures shimmered and faded from the surface of the planetoid, only to reappear moments later in the transporter room of the Enterprise, much to the delight and astonishment of Scotty, who had been contemplating tearing the console apart in an effort to get the transporter to work.

"Captain Kirk...!"

"Now those are the best words I've heard all day," said Chekov. Fiora and Kirk laughed, and Chekov joined in heartily. A bewildered Scotty looked at each of them in turn.

"Will somebody let me in on the joke?"

"Some day, Scotty, some day," said Captain James T. Kirk. "When a certain young ensign becomes a fine starship captain - some day!" He grinned at the ensign and the lieutenant, then laughed again.

Jim Kirk was home.

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MY VULCAN FRIEND by Sue Simon

As the Enterprise warps through the skies,
I find a friend that's loyal and shy.
Within the dark and coldness of space,
He's logical with a lot of grace.
He stands beside me cool and calm,
Ready to give me a restraining arm,
That tells me he's my friend,
That I can trust him with my life -
Don't worry, Spock, my Vulcan friend;
I'll keep your secret till eternity's end.

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HOME COMEING by Crystal Ann Taylor

The memory has never left me, of
 Pain-filled eyes that begged
 What the voice could not, holding back
 The tears you would never shed,
 The fists that clenched, opened under restraint,
 In need of a target to vent frustration.
 The lips, thinned and pressed together
 Unable to say what the heart cried out,
 The fine features flushed in anger to hide despair,
 The stance a mixture of defeat and survival.
 You asked me to stay, pleaded with me to explain,
 I refused to do either, adamant fool!
 I turned my back on you, before your plea
 Could rip my intent and purpose from me.
 Closed the door on our lives, our friendship, sharing,
 Locked out your understanding, needs, dreams, hopes.
 Fled before your magnetism could change my mind.
 But I remembered...

...and have never forgotten...

That you were the love that breathed life into me...

...I could not tell you then...

And now...

...it all comes back to haunt me...

For how will you react when I return
 From my self-imposed exile?
 Will your eyes grow soft with welcome
 And glow with that special understanding?
 Will your face light up with that warmth
 Whose absence has chilled my brightest day?
 Will your lips curve in that lopsided grin
 Of unrestrained pleasure and child-like delight?
 Will your arms reach out in invitation?
 Or will you meet me with the coldness I deserve?
 Eyes dark-brown in anger, dead to caring?
 Will you order me away, reject my assistance?
 Hide behind your pride and find your own way?
 In a few moments this ship will dock,
 I will know if my return's met with surprise or rage.
 It matters not what manner you greet me,
 I could not tell you then...
 ...nor can I tell you now...
 But I will not let you face...
 ...the unknown alone...
 I will control...I must control...
 ...yet can I really face you?

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Sulu: Hey, Riley, where did you learn to sing?

Riley: I took a correspondence course.

Sulu: Boy, they sure lost a lot of your mail.

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Kirk: How can anyone make so many simple mistakes in a single day?

Chekov: I get up early.

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...ANOTHER DAY by Judy Miller

Kirk weaved around the figures in the transporter room, and, the doors parting at his approach, stepped out into the corridor, his gait and glazed expression like that of a man drugged. From within his head came a voice: the voice of the Starship Captain, reminding him of his duty: Debriefing, it said. Instructions... commands...ship's status... But another voice vied with the first. It said, In a while, but not now...not now.

Back in the transporter room, glances were exchanged. Those that passed between the members of the landing party who had waited on the planet below whilst their superiors and friends went through the time portal in an endeavour to rectify the past, held puzzlement, confusion, curiosity. The glance that passed between Spock and McCoy was far more meaningful.

McCoy now knew of the circumstances surrounding Edith Keeler's death. Spock had told him; quietly, evenly, but not, despite mustering all his Vulcan stoicism, with total dispassion. McCoy hurt inside. The pain he knew Jim Kirk must be feeling tore at him too, as it did at Spock. The Doctor could see it in the Vulcan's eyes and in the tautness about his mouth. But what in hell were they to do to ease Kirk's pain? Kind words, silent sympathy, the nearness of caring friends... They might help, but they wouldn't make him forget. What a mess! thought McCoy angrily, and guilt nagged at him, for it had been his derangement which had taken then into the past. Oh, it had been an accident, reason assured him; a series of events no-one could have predicted. No-one could blame him, except himself. And to crown it all, what had he done when the vehicle had careered into Edith? Yelled at Kirk. "Do you know what you just did?" he'd screamed accusingly, shocked by Kirk's action in holding him back when he could have saved Edith. He'd rubbed the salt harder into the wound. Insult to insult, injury to injury.

"No, Bones." A whisper, but McCoy heard, and it brought him out of his black reverie. McCoy's eyes held mute thanks. The guilt remained, but Spock had taken the sting out of it, as only he could. Had either of them chosen at that moment to debate the point, they might have realised that they were closer now than ever before.

Spock turned and dealt with immediate matters. He dismissed the rest of the landing party to their quarters, perceiving their need to relax and let the strain of the last few hours wash away. Scott, however, waved off his suggestion, saying he'd go on up to the bridge "Tae see how things are doin'." Hindsight told him something was amiss here, and he reckoned it best to take the centre seat and leave McCoy, Spock and Kirk to work it out in peace.

As he left, Scott laid a hand on the Doctor's shoulder. "Are ye all right, Len?"

McCoy glanced up at the touch and formed a weak smile. "Yeah, I'm okay, Scotty, really."

Scott was unconvinced, but he was wise enough to let sleeping dogs lie, and he walked out of the transporter room, Uhura and the security guards close on his heels.

McCoy roused himself. This wouldn't do! He saw that the First Officer had also dismissed the transporter technician. They were alone, he and Spock, both worried and uncertain in their own particular fashions. McCoy fumbled for his words, searching for the right thing to say. Finally, he said simply, "If anyone goes to him, Spock, it ought to be you."

Spock was briefly disconcerted and embarrassment flickered on his face, but this was no time for typical, and false, denial, and he knew also what it had cost McCoy to speak as he had. As much as the doctor longed to administer what comfort he could and however he yearned to make amends for his outburst at Kirk, he had sacrificed his dearest wishes, and his perfect right, to visit the Captain in favour of Spock. The Vulcan would not hurt the Doctor further by refusing to accept the concession he had made. Spock nodded once and left the room.

Kirk had entered his quarters, but had not moved from the door. His hands were clenched into tight, tense fists, the nails digging deep into the palms, but although he drew blood, his senses were shuttered to the pain. His breathing was harsh, his skin pallid, beaded with perspiration. God, how he envied the Vulcans now! He wished he could control his grief as they did, control the anguish until the load lightened with the passage of time; but he was Jim Kirk, and Human, and he had to release his grief as his race had for aeons and would for aeons to come. He took a step away from the door, but got no further, for he whirled and struck the wall as hard as he could with a clenched fist.

"I had to do it, Edith!" he shouted. "I had to!"

It was the truth, wasn't it? He'd had no other choice. To keep the present intact, to save millions of lives, he'd had to allow the past to run its course. It couldn't be changed, too much had been at stake. It had been the only possible decision, the only possible choice...

I let her die, thought Kirk. I loved her and I let her die.

There was no evading the simple truth. Whatever the reason, no matter how many times he told himself he had acted in the only way he could and that it had been necessary for Edith to die, his heart would go on protesting and he'd weep inside, as he did now. She couldn't even forgive him, for she was dead in her own time and in his own past and in the past of his universe. Dead.

The door buzzer grated on his ears. He didn't want to see anyone, not yet. Let me be! he begged silently, but the caller was persistent and at last he said, "Come," and opened the doors. He did not have to look to know it was the Vulcan; hadn't he felt Spock's quiet presence a hundred, a thousand times before to be able to recognise it now?

Kirk straightened. "Yes, Spock?" he asked, his voice level - or so he hoped.

Spock had not rehearsed what he would say as many might have done, he hadn't arrived with a prepared consolatory speech and thus he did not answer immediately. He was unused to grief and displays of the same made him feel somehow inadequate, but Jim Kirk was his friend and he could not betray that friendship.

"I'm sorry, Jim," he murmured.

A pause. Kirk turned slowly and walked to the desk, a hand trailing over the familiar objects there; the intercom, the cassette unit and the cassettes themselves, the old-fashioned pen set his mother had sent him from Earth, the onyx statuette... He slid into the chair, his hands knitted together on the desk top. He drew in a deep breath and struggled to regain his composure. This was no way for a Starship Captain to behave! he berated himself. They had to be machines on legs, capable of making life and death decisions yet not succumbing to the Human fôible of sorrow when death scored the upper hand. But, Kirk knew, the day he started to act like that would be the day he'd quit the service. But that was the grief of command, were Captains allowed personal grief, the privilege of mourning for their own private tragedies?

"Jim..."

Kirk glanced up at the Vulcan who had come to stand at his side, just where Edith had said he would always stand. "I've told myself it was the only thing to do," he said. "Are you going to tell me too?"

"It is the truth, Jim," said Spock. "There was no other alternative open to you,"

Kirk nodded. "Suppose so." He uncurled his hands and wiped a palm across his dangerously moist eyes. "Wish to hell I could really believe it," he said through gritted teeth.

Spock's voice was gentle. "Given time..."

"I have the time. Edith doesn't," Kirk shook his head. "There must have been alternatives. I didn't look hard enough."

"The past could not be altered, it had to proceed as intended, otherwise the universe would not have developed to how we now know it. If Edith Keeler could have chosen, what would her choice have been?" Spock gazed down at the bent fair head, wishing (and he did not chastise himself for being illogical) for the total compassion and understanding Kirk needed. His mother owned those qualities, indeed they had served him well enough during his difficult childhood, and, logically, as Amada of Vulcan's son he should have inherited a measure of her abilities, but he had never called upon them before and was not sure he could do so now. Could he draw on some previously untapped reserve of emotion, greater than he had ever displayed even to this man?

"Jim, would I lie to you?"

The hazel eyes lifted. "No," stated Kirk.

"And I do not lie to you now. Edith Keeler had to die, Jim."

Kirk's eyes had not left Spock's face for a second and, gradually, amid the ravages of pain, there appeared acceptance in them. Spock would be there to make sure the acceptance grew. Kirk nodded again. "Time is a known healer," he said but without rancour.

Spock laid a hand on Kirk's shoulder. "You ought to sleep. Do you wish me to...?"

Kirk smiled faintly, but declined the offer of a meld to send him peacefully into slumber with a negative gesture of his head. "Thanks, Spock, but no. I'll sleep all right. You should follow the same prescription yourself."

"Later, I shall," said Spock. He removed his hand and, gauging the need for silence, said no more as he went towards the door, but, before he left, he glanced over his shoulder and saw a James Kirk that very few ever saw; the exhausted, preoccupied, unhappy individual. He watched as Kirk flung himself onto his bed, boots and all, and then let the metal close between them.

Ship's morning, the next day. Spock had the con, and would have normally been readying himself for the Captain's entrance, vacating the chair as the Commanding Officer's turn of duty began. This morning, however, if McCoy's advice that Kirk should take a day off had been obeyed, Spock would be occupying the command chair a little longer.

The turbolift arrived at the bridge and discharged its passenger. Spock swivelled and stood up. "Good morning, Captain."

"Good morning, Spock," replied Kirk and his expression and eyes and thoughts projected 'I'm all right, my Vulcan friend. Let me lose myself in the job I chose to do.'

Spock inclined his head, just a fraction. "I'll be taking breakfast in the rec room if you need me, Captain."

The Vulcan turned and exited and Kirk settled back into his chair.

It was another day.

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