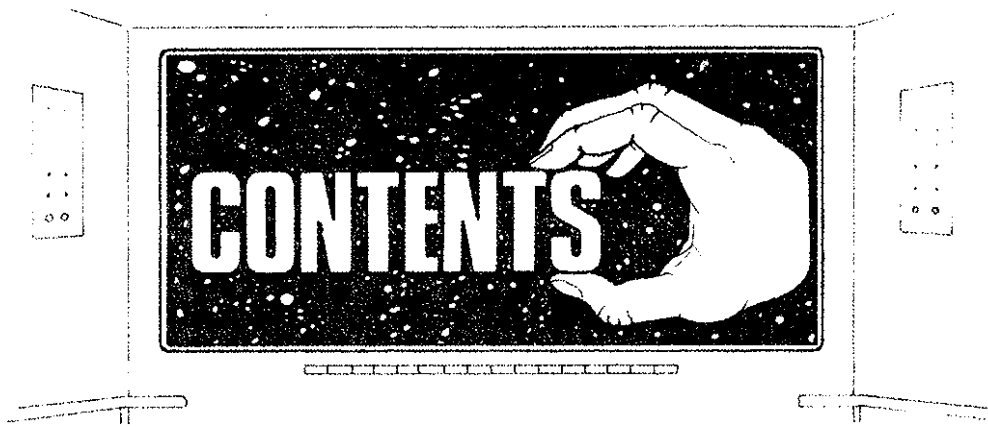


LOG
E
C
T
R
O
N
I
C
S
36

a STAR TREK
fanzine



The Last Journey	by Lesley Bryan	P 3
One More Duty	by Gladys Oliver	P 11
Diplomatic Incident	by Meg Wright	P 12
Going Home	by Gillian Catchpole	P 17
The Flower	by Gladys Oliver	P 17
Replacement Robot and Radiation	by Christine Leeson	P 18
The Most Logical Combination	by Gladys Oliver	P 23
A Captain's Thoughts	by Susan Meek	P 26
Another One	by C.E. Hall	P 27
For Leila	by Susan Meek	P 38
More Deadly Than the Male?	by Meg Wright	P 39

Artwork: Cover, Sandy Sapatka
 P 2 - Martin 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, Lorriane Goodison, Hilde McCabe, Cory King and anyone else rash enough to live near her and visit!

A STAG publication.

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

Log Entries 36, price £1.10 inside the U.K., is put out by the STAR TREK Action Group and is available from -

Sheila Clark
 6 Craigmill Cottages
 Strathmartine
 by Dundee
 Scotland.

Foreign rates - USA \$5.50 (£2.50) airmail; Australia, £2.75 airmail; Europe and all countries surface, £1.50 (\$3.50 US). If you pay by dollar cheque/bank draft, please add \$1.00 per total order to cover bank charges.

(C) STAG July 1980)

All rights are reserved to the writers and artists. Anyone wishing to reprint any of the material herein is asked to obtain permission in writing first. It is understood that this only applies to original material herein, and no attempt is made to supercede any rights held by Paramount, NBC, BBC or any other holders of copyright in STAR TREK material.

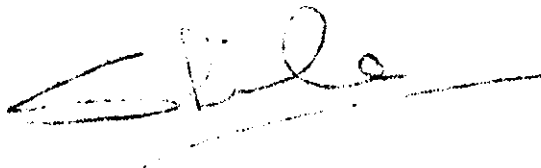
Hello everyone, welcome to Log Entries 36.

Once again the zine contains a non-winner from a past N/L competition - however, many of these stories are excellent in their own right, and it was just their misfortune to be up against another story that, for any one of several reasons, we liked better. Often unsuccessful entries in a competition are just quietly forgotten; I don't think that's fair when a story or poem is very good.

We have a good line-up for next time, too; The Aerolythian, by Jenny Watson, a new writer, is about a most unusual new crew member. The Understanding by Lesley Coles involves a space liner being hi-jacked - and Kirk, Spock and McCoy are travelling on it at the time. Friends in Need by Ann Preece is concerned with Kirk's thoughts when Spock is seriously injured. Ann is another new writer. I certainly hope we'll see more from both Jenny and Ann. Lesley, of course, is already known to most of us. If there's room - all three stories mentioned above are quite long - we'll also have one of the unsuccessful entries in the competition for a story about why Spock went back to Vulcan; IDIC? Tense, Nervous IDIC? by Therese Holmes.

I think that's all I have to say for this time. Enjoy the zine.

July 1980



Non members of STAG can get information on zines in print, new and forthcoming zines by sending a SAE (foreign, addressed envelope and 2 International Reply Coupons) to

Sheila Clark
6 Craigmill Cottages
Strathmartine
by Dundee
Scotland.



THE LAST JOURNEY by Lesley Bryan

"I have had a long day," groaned Dr. Leonard McCoy, Chief Medical Officer of the U.S.S. Enterprise.

"Never mind, Bones, you can soon go and put your feet up, the Reception is nearly over." Captain Kirk grinned at the sight of the Doctor tugging at his dress uniform collar for the umpteenth time. He knew his friend's complete dislike of the formal attire.

"Jim, how come Spock missed this? Why did you bring me and not him?" McCoy smiled sweetly in the direction of one of Federation Ambassadors who had caught his eye.

"You know perfectly well the situation on this planet. Vulcans are not welcome here because their appearance is similar to that of Romulans, and these people have had first hand experience of them. To let Spock attend this function might jeopardise the forthcoming mineral negotiations and the Federation doesn't want that to happen."

"I could have fixed his ears. Anyway, whatever this planet has to offer, I don't want it," commented the Doctor sourly.

Their discussion stopped there as the new Regent stepped onto the dais in the centre of the large hall, and started his closing speech. He thanked the visiting dignitaries for their support and requested them to return for the coronation of his nephew in ten years time.

"I hope," muttered McCoy, "that I am nowhere near this place in ten years time."

"Bones!" hissed Kirk reprovingly.

Fortunately the speech was not long and the guests were able to make their way to their rooms, or, as in the case of the Enterprise men, return to their ship orbiting the planet Pritol. The Reception had been long and tedious and both Kirk and McCoy were very grateful when the Regent and his wife said their goodbyes. With McCoy still tugging miserably at the neckband of his uniform, complaining bitterly about dress uniforms in general and no-one in particular, the two men disappeared into the transporter effect.

On the Enterprise, just as Kyle made the necessary adjustments, a warning light on the console began to flash. Alarmed by this he was very relieved to see the Captain and Doctor solidify with no apparent ill effects. However, as he completed the transporting, he notified the bridge of the warning light and requested Mr. Scott's assistance.

"Are you all right, gentlemen?" came Kyle's anxious enquiry.

"A little dizzy for a moment," replied Kirk. "What happened?"

Before Kyle could answer, the door slid open and Scotty hurried in. "What happened? Are you both all right?"

"Thank you, Mr. Scott, Dr. McCoy and myself are quite well." Before Kirk could continue, Spock entered. "Don't ask, Spock - we are all right." The response from the First Officer was the characteristic raised eyebrow.

"Sir, I respectfully suggest that you and Dr. McCoy should be checked in sickbay to make sure you are unharmed."

Kirk opened his mouth to protest, but realising Spock was quite correct in his suggestion, ushered McCoy out and left Scotty to continue the investigation.

As they entered the turbolift Spock noticed the Doctor's open collar, but waited for Kirk to request the destination before commenting. Then -

"Doctor, are you aware that you are out of uniform?"

"Thank you, Spock. If it wasn't for the fact that I can now breathe unimpaird, I would never have known!"

"Bones, I thought you were going to programme the computer for a bigger size?"

"Captain, I can only think that a certain computer operator has sabotaged my efforts."

Spock was prevented from defending himself by the arrival of the turbolift on the appropriate deck and they were soon in sickbay.

As McCoy reached to set the diagnostic read-out in operation he froze. "Jim!" he croaked hoarsely. Kirk and Spock were by him instantly.

"Bones, what is it, are you ill?" asked Kirk worriedly. McCoy had shut his eyes and just whispered,

"My hands. Look at my hands."

Puzzled, Kirk and Spock did as they were asked but could not understand what the Doctor meant. "Bones, I'm sorry, I don't understand. I see four fingers and a thumb on each hand, so what...?"

"The ring," spluttered McCoy. "It's on the wrong hand!"

Kirk and Spock exchanged puzzled glances and examined McCoy's hands once more. Sure enough, the ring McCoy always wore on his left hand was now on his right. "So you changed your ring. I still don't understand," sighed Kirk.

"That's the point, I haven't changed the ring, it has changed itself."

"Doctor, how much alcohol did you imbibe at the Reception?"

"I only had one, Spock, and that was on a full stomach."

"Perhaps there was sherry in the trifle," muttered Spock.

"What?" shouted McCoy.

"I said, perhaps there was sherry in the trifle you had a large portion of at lunchtime. That obnoxious gastronomic concoction it was my misfortune to observe you indulging in." This time Spock permitted himself to shudder at the memory.

"It is better than that damned purple soup you were 'indulging in' and as for your main course - yuch! It defies description. Anyway, it must have been the transporter and if it has done that to my ring, goodness knows what it's done to me. Against nature, that's what it is."

By this time Kirk was having trouble curbing his laughter, convinced that the Doctor had changed the ring without thinking. However, he suddenly remembered that the Enterprise should be on her way to Starbase 3 so he left the two of them disputing the merits of transporters while he contacted the bridge and gave the necessary orders. By the time this was done Spock had been ordered from sickbay by an angry McCoy who then started the Captain's medical. Kirk endured it with the happy thought that it would be McCoy's turn next, and there was no way the Doctor was going to escape that!

An hour later Spock, in charge on the bridge, received a call from the Captain and was told that the medicals had shown no ill effects from the transporter malfunction.

"I am gratified to hear that, Captain. Mr. Scott reports he is unable to find anything wrong now and thinks it could have been a temporary fault in the malfunction alert itself."

"That's good - I'm going to turn in now, Spock, see you in the morning. Goodnight."

"Goodnight, Jim."

Kirk settled himself in bed. He could not help chuckling to himself about McCoy and his ring. He could not understand how the Doctor came to change the ring onto the other hand and not remember it. "I suppose it is a case of being

an 'absent-minded professor' - I expect it applies to other highly qualified people too," he mused. It was not long before he fell asleep.

His pleasant dreams were soon interrupted by a draught. As he came to awareness he realised this was impossible. The air conditioning did not make draughts, but he could certainly feel one. He reached for the light and operated the switch but nothing happened.

Strange, he thought. That was working perfectly earlier. He tried again but still nothing happened.

His blood chilled as he heard soft laughing. I'm dreaming, I must be! Suddenly the light came on, this time without his touching the switch. As he reached for the switch, the light went out again. Feeling very nervous and not at all the brave Starship Captain, he felt for the switch and this time, at his touch - much to his relief - he was rewarded by light filling the room.

Sitting in bed, he realised that he no longer felt like sleep. That had been a very vivid dream indeed. In fact, he could have sworn it was real and not really a dream at all.

The next morning saw Kirk on the bridge early. After having a leisurely breakfast (he had not gone back to sleep after his disquieting experience), his dream was virtually forgotten. As usual he was greeted by Spock who entered a few minutes later and he in turn was followed by Uhura. Soon all the regular bridge shift would be there. He settled himself contentedly in his command chair, revelling in the feeling of being pleased with life and turning his mind away from nightmares. He was looking forward to a nice easy journey to Starbase 3 and the possibility of some shore leave for the crew.

"Captain, can I have your signature please?" The young woman by the command chair handed him a board and stylus at his nod of agreement and patiently waited.

"Yeoman Stokes, you must have pressed the 'erase' button by mistake, there is nothing to sign."

"I didn't, sir, it's the fuel consumption figures. I..." She broke off as he showed her that the board was in fact blank. "I'm sorry, sir. I don't know how that could have happened."

"Never mind, Yeoman, get the figures again and we'll have another try," ordered Kirk patiently, aware that she was new to the bridge crew and probably rather nervous.

"Y...yes, sir," stammered the blushing girl as she retreated to the engineering console.

"I didn't have an opportunity to ask you yesterday, Captain, but how did the Reception go?" enquired Spock. "Did everything work out as planned?"

"Yes, the new Regent is installed and it would seem everything will go as the old King wished until the Grandson is old enough to take charge. The Federation representatives will stay on Pritol to negotiate the mineral rights and ensure the old man's standards are adhered to." He stopped to take the board from Yeoman Stokes once more. He looked at the board and then back at the Yeoman.

"Miss Stokes, will you please look at this board."

"S...sir?"

"Where are the figures this time? You must have pressed 'erase'." The girl looked at the blank board and chewed her lip nervously, trying to think. Her first Starship assignment and the first time on the bridge and the Captain thought she was incompetent.

"I didn't, sir. I was most careful and I definitely did not touch the button."

Kirk softened when he saw how upset she was - to demoralise her on the first day would not help her to work efficiently in any crisis. "Miss Stokes, take the board to Maintenance and collect another, and we'll try again."

"Yes, sir."

Kirk sighed as the bridge door closed behind her. It was not going to be a good day after all.

A few minutes later the doors opened once more and Yeoman Stokes went straight to the engineering console. Kirk watched her enter the figures on the board and joined her, taking the board from her before there was any chance of another erasure. As he signed the board, he was amazed to see the figures disappearing from the top of the board; they were followed by his signature ~~vanish-~~ing too.

"Mr. Spock, I think you had better take a look at this."

Spock moved to the engineering console and took the board and the Captain explained what he had just witnessed. Spock fed in the figures and he too watched incredulously as everything entered disappeared.

"If you will excuse me, Captain, I think this warrants further investigation."

"Carry on, Mr. Spock," agreed Kirk.

The bridge returned to work but the routine was interrupted when Uhura swore softly.

"Did you say something, Lieutenant?" queried the Captain.

"Er, not really, sir. It's just that I am getting some strange..." Before she could say what was strange, the panel in front of her exploded and flames shot out. Spock reacted quickest and operated the automatic fire extinguishers which had somehow failed to function. Kirk pulled Uhura away from the fire and pushed her into the command chair. By the time the fire was out, and the smoke extracted, McCoy had made his entrance in answer to the Captain's call. After a quick examination of Uhura's hand and arm and a shot to deaden the pain, he declared her fit enough to accompany him to sickbay for further treatment.

As they left a damage control party arrived to repair the damage to the communications panel. Fortunately the internal communications were still operational as the damage had been limited thanks to Spock's swift action.

"Mr. Spock, you have the con. I will be in sickbay."

Not long after Kirk had left the bridge an alarm on the communications board sounded. Spock activated the receiver and heard Sulu's cry for help. "Someone, anyone, the turbolift's gone mad, it's out of control!"

"Mr. Sulu, Spock here. Use manual override immediately!"

"I can't, sir, it won't work!"

Spock moved to the computer and punched in the necessary commands. However, it was over a minute before the bridge door opened and Sulu shakily entered. As the door slid shut behind him his legs gave way and he sank to the floor.

"Mr. Sulu, are you injured?" Spock was by his side in an instant.

"Just a bit shaken, sir. I'll be all right in a minute. It was pretty rough in there." As he rose, he added, "Thank you, sir."

"You are welcome, Mr. Sulu." Spock had changed over the years and knew better than to answer a Human's gratitude with a comment on logic.

"Mr. Chekov, please initiate checks on the elevator system and warn all decks not to use them. I am going to sickbay via the emergency ladders. Mr. Sulu, if you are up to it, you have the con."

"Yes, sir, I'm quite recovered now, I just needed a few minutes to get my breath back."

In McCoy's office, Kirk paced back and forth restlessly. "This is ridiculous.

the first three incidents were minor but the last two have been downright dangerous."

"Three incidents, Captain?" Spock's eyebrows rose quizzically. "If you include the incident of the Doctor's ring that only makes two relatively harmless occurrences."

"I didn't tell you before because I thought it was just a bad dream but now I'm not so sure." Briefly he outlined his experience. "And I'm beginning to think they are somehow connected to our visit to Pritol."

"Why, Captain?"

"That's where our troubles started. If not, we are no worse off than we are now."

"Bridge to Captain Kirk." The intercom burst into life with Sulu's voice.

"Kirk here - go ahead, Mr. Sulu."

"Captain, the elevator system has been completely checked and there is nothing wrong with it that we can find. All turbolifts are now in full operation again. Mr. Scott says he will run further checks if necessary but he is confident of their reliability."

"Thank you, Mr. Sulu. I want a course change for Pritol; increase speed to maximum safe warp."

"Yes, sir," came Sulu's smart reply.

McCoy entered the office and greeted the two men with a cheery smile. "Uhura will be fine. She's recovering nicely after treatment and should be back on duty the day after tomorrow. I'll keep her here overnight, though, just for observation."

Neither Kirk nor Spock had a chance to comment as the sound of 'Red Alert' shrilled through the room.

"Kirk to bridge - what's happening?"

"Sulu here - I don't know, Captain; the alert sounded automatically." There was a pause and they heard Sulu ask Chekov for more information. "Captain, there has been an accident in the Biochem Lab."

"I'm on my way there, Kirk out."

The Captain raced through the door and was followed by Spock and McCoy. They soon reached the area of the lab and were greeted by one of McCoy's researchers.

"Sir, some of the cultures, what do we do?" he asked McCoy.

"All right, Baker, what happened?" asked McCoy, and as it was one of his laboratories Kirk let him handle the questioning.

"I don't exactly know. We were all in there and nowhere near the cultures but suddenly they fell and the vials smashed. Sir, Hoskins and Burroughs are still in there."

"My God," moaned McCoy. He grabbed Kirk's arm as he neared the lab door. "No, Jim, no-one is to go in there."

"But Bones, two of your staff are - "

"I know, Jim, and they are as good as dead."

"Why, Doctor?" asked Spock.

"The cultures in there were of three deadly viruses we have been researching. If they have broken out, there is no way those people can be alive. One of the viruses would kill them; all three together... No, there is nothing we can do, nothing at all." McCoy sadly turned back to the technician. "Were you exposed, Baker?"

"No, Doctor, I was just coming out of the room when it happened. The door slid closed behind me but I heard them calling to me. Sir, it was horrible; I couldn't go back, risk infecting the ship...all I could do was press the alarm."

The man's voice choked and Kirk felt instant sympathy with him, but before he could say anything the lab door opened and out stepped the two technicians, both of whom looked dazed.

Baker was the quickest to react and moved towards his workmates. "How are you still alive?" His voice trembled as he asked the question.

"I don't know," replied the first one out of the lab, Burroughs. "The door closed behind you and we thought we'd bought it, but when we looked at the cultures, the vials were intact."

"But the glass broke - I heard it!" protested Baker.

"We heard it too," continued Hoskins, "but when we examined them there wasn't even a crack."

McCoy and Spock moved into the laboratory to check the cultures and Spock reappeared shortly and confirmed the technicians' report as Kirk drew him to one side.

"Spock, I don't know what is going on, but I want answers. Have you any ideas?"

"Sir, it would be pointless to speculate; all I can say is that whenever we find a fault there seems to be no logical reason for it and we are unable to trace the malfunction. I would suggest it is the result of someone or something interfering with our instrumentation."

"If that's not speculation, what is?" As Spock's eyebrows rose in indignation Kirk continued. "We should be back at Pritol soon; hopefully we will have some answers to our questions by then. I want all section heads in the briefing room in half an hour with any information they consider relevant. Meanwhile, I'll be on the bridge if I am required."

When he returned to the bridge he was greeted by Sulu, who informed him that during his absence Mr. Scott had reported that the shuttle bay had depressurised, according to his instruments.

"What do you mean, 'according to his instruments'?"

"The instrument panel read that the bay doors were opening, all the warning lights came on as if that was happening, but the doors did not open."

"Yet another mystery to be investigated," muttered Kirk. "Thank you, Mr. Sulu. What is our ETA at Pritol?"

"One hour twenty minutes, sir," replied the helmsman.

When Kirk arrived at the briefing room he was surprised to see Uhura present, but she assured him that she felt well enough to attend.

"Mr. Spock, would you please open the discussion," ordered Kirk.

"So far all the incidents reported have been proved to be non-existent with the exception of the communications panel."

"Do you mean that we are all imagining things, Spock?" queried McCoy.

"No, Doctor, the events have happened but the computer does not record them - for example, I do not think Mr. Sulu's experience could have been a hallucination, but according to the record tapes, no such incident occurred."

"Let's establish the 'happenings' so far," stated Kirk. "The first was the Doctor's ring."

"No, Jim, the transporter," McCoy was quick to point out.

"Correction, then. 1) the transporter, 2) the ring, 3) my 'dream' - " At the questioning look from McCoy he briefly outlined his dream. " - 4) the vanishing fuel consumption figures, 5) Uhura's explosion and the failure of the automatic extinguishers, 6) the turbolift, 7) the Biochem Lab, 8) the hangar deck depressurising - are there any more?"

Uhura was the first to respond. "I had a similar dream, Captain. It was shortly after my accident. I thought it was the effect of shock and the pain-killers I had been given, now I am sure it wasn't."

McCoy spoke next. "I overheard Kyle in the rec room telling of a nightmare he had last night that sounds remarkably similar to the Captain's."

When no-one else volunteered any further information the Captain turned to Spock once more.

"I stand by my original theory that these incidents are being caused by someone or something. I am driven to agree with the Captain that whatever it is originates from Pritol as that is where the first incident occurred. I suggest that whatever it is boarded the ship with the Captain and the Doctor, and that is what caused the warning light on the transporter. I feel this is justified as the only time an injury has occurred was when the communications panel exploded, thus preventing any message being received warning us of the presence of the cause of our disturbances."

"I'll buy that, Spock," mused Kirk. "However, how do we locate this 'thing' if we cannot prove that anything has happened? Any suggestions?" He looked round the room hopefully, only to be met with troubled expressions or blank faces.

Finally it was McCoy who spoke. "I think we can rule out anything in Human form. After all, no-one has reported any unusual crew members, and nothing was detected in the transporter room. Even with the nightmares it was only an impression that there was someone there - no-one was seen."

"For once I agree with the Doctor," interrupted Spock.

"I need a drink," commented McCoy.

"Gentlemen, all you are telling me is that 'it' is unrecognisable. I think we can take that as already established. What else can you suggest?" Again Kirk looked round the room but this time Spock responded.

"I have received no impression of an 'intelligence' but it could be shielding its thoughts from me."

"If I did not know better," commented Mr. Scott, "I would suggest we have a ghost. Back home we have a ghost and it moves things around the house and makes noises in the night. It has broken things too."

"I hardly think that is likely, Mr. Scott!" interrupted Kirk. "After all, we are in a Starship, not a mediaeval castle. Besides, I didn't think you believed in such things. I'm surprised at you."

The Captain was even more surprised as Spock entered the discussion again. "Captain, there is evidence that suggests a strong possibility of the existence of spiritual manifestations. Our troubles are not necessarily caused by such a force but the probability cannot be ignored."

"Now I know I'm hearing things," groaned McCoy. "First he agrees with me and then he believes in ghosts - practical joker ghosts, even!"

Before Spock could respond to this the Red Alert sounded. Kirk immediately tried to call the bridge to find out what had happened but received no response. He hurriedly left the briefing room with Spock, Scott and Sulu following closely.

The turbolift seemed to move much slower than usual and it was with great relief that Kirk emerged from the lift, rather astounded to see that there was no unusual activity on the bridge - everything was completely normal. As the others assumed their normal positions, Kirk asked Chekov why the Red Alert had been sounded.

"But Captain," answered the puzzled ensign, "it has not. All is perfectly normal."

"Chalk up another mystery for our list, Spock. What do you make of this one?"

"It would seem, Captain, that whatever it is wanted to end our discussion before we arrived at a solution - indicating intelligence."

"Sir, planet Pritol dead ahead; we shall be entering orbit in five minutes."

"Thank you, Mr. Chekov. Normal approach if you please, Mr. Sulu. Mr. Spock, can you rig up some sort of temporary communications setup until the system is repaired?"

"Yes, Captain, if I boost the power output on our communicators, it should then be possible to receive a signal from the surface on an improved hand unit aboard the ship. However, as the range will be limited, I would recommend we remain in stationary orbit above your location."

"Very well, Mr. Spock, please modify the communicators. Mr. Sulu, orbit as directed by Mr. Spock." He activated the intercom. "Dr. McCoy to the transporter room. Prepare to beam down to Pritol."

By the time the necessary manoeuvres were carried out Spock had finished his adjustments and handed Kirk two of the three communicators he had modified.

"I'm sorry I can't take you with us, the situation still exists, the Pritolians do not like Vulcans." Kirk moved to the door. "I hope I'll have some answers for you soon. You have the con, Mr. Spock."

Kirk and McCoy materialised in the Palace grounds on Pritol's surface. As he had been unable to contact the Regent, Kirk decided it would be best to approach the Palace on foot and not just appear inside. He did not want their motive for returning to be misinterpreted before an explanation could be given. Even so, they were rapidly surrounded by men from the Royal Bodyguard. The Enterprise Captain requested an audience with the Regent and one of the guards, who recognised him from the Reception, left to convey the message.

The Regent arrived and ordered the men away. He seemed extremely relieved to see them. "Captain, Doctor, I am so pleased you have returned, we feared our message had not been received by you."

"It wasn't, sir. Our communications system has been damaged and we have been subjected to a series of unexplained incidents. We have returned because they started as we left your planet and we are hoping you may be able to help us solve the mystery."

"I sincerely hope we can help you. Please, let me take you to our private apartments and explain in comfort." He led them into the Palace and down a long corridor to an area they had not seen before. They entered a large room that was simply furnished, in direct contrast to the opulence of the part they had visited before.

"Please be seated, gentlemen. Can I offer you refreshment?"

"No, thank you, sir. We would prefer some answers." Kirk was trying not to reveal his impatience, not altogether successfully.

"Quite, quite - my apologies. When one of my race dies, that being does not immediately 'cease to be'. There is a short period of awareness that occurs. This is followed by a ceremony performed by our High Priestess, not unlike your own funeral service. Until this occurs the spirit of the deceased is allowed to roam. Unfortunately, the presence of so many alien beings prevented this ceremony taking place for the late King. We thought it could be done when the visitors left. Shortly after your departure, however, we discovered that the late King's spirit had left too. We tried to contact you to warn of the dangers - the King was senile in his last months and it was probable that with aliens such as yourselves he would become malevolent. Has anyone been harmed?"

"There has only been one minor injury," Kirk told him and the Regent smiled gratefully. "Now we know what has happened, how can we get him to leave the Enterprise?"

"We have discussed this while awaiting your return. We doubt that it will be possible for us to make the spirit return to the planet and request that the

ceremony be performed on your vessel. Once this has taken place the spirit will pass on and there should be no further trouble."

"Your Highness, we would be most grateful if you could. Are there any special requirements for this?"

"We only need the presence of my wife and myself, the High Priestess and her two attendants. The service is short and should not interrupt your routine."

"I think there is little routine to disrupt at the moment," sighed McCoy.

"Well, sir, if you will collect the necessary people, the sooner we beam up to the Enterprise and sort this out the better," Kirk added.

The Regent was correct, the ceremony was brief but impressive. Spock was permitted to attend as a courtesy to the Enterprise crew. However, the Vulcan was dubious about this privilege as his nose was more sensitive to the fumes produced by the burning candles and his ears more sensitive to the High Priestess' constant wailing!

With the Enterprise once more en route to Starbase 3, Captain Kirk allowed himself to relax in his command chair. Perhaps now, he thought, I can look forward to an uneventful journey. His reverie was stopped by the approach of his First Officer. "Yes, Mr. Spock?"

"What did you think of the service, Spock?"

"It was certainly a most interesting experience."

"What was?" asked McCoy as he entered the bridge. "The ceremony?"

"Not exactly."

"What do you mean, 'not exactly'?" inquired McCoy as he moved to stand by Kirk's side.

"The interesting experience to which I refer was observing you to be quiet during the event - a happening I have never witnessed before."

The laughter of the bridge crew drowned out any reply McCoy made.

+++++

ONE MORE DUTY by Gladys Oliver

Cruel and wicked mouth,
which swallows without pity ships and stars,
Now gapes at me, horrific, grotesque,
and I feel a perfect dread, an emptiness.
Standing on this ship that is nearly dead,
This fear caresses my heart, and makes
my soul believe
I shall not hear you,
Shall not see you,
Shall not stand with you again.

This utter loneliness on a haunted bridge
That never shall be a part of things again,
Yet has one more duty to perform.

The seconds tick away, and in my mind I
see your face.

Just as I'm snatched away from this hellish place.
Then standing once more together, you and I,
We watch the brave Constellation die.

Doomsday machine, now dead, forlorn...
...I curse the day you were ever born!

+++++

DIPLOMATIC INCIDENT by Meg Wright

Kirk surveyed his laden plate gloomily and picked up a reluctant fork.

"Not even a spot of dressing, Bones?" he grumbled.

"Salad is good for you," McCoy told him heartlessly.

"It was good for me yesterday as well," he complained, listlessly spearing a runaway radish.

"Yesterday it was Arcturian ice-plant," the Doctor reminded him.

"It's still salad. Bones, a man can't work on this little food!"

"You'll manage."

"The safety of the ship depends on the health of her Captain."

"You're healthy."

"But hungry."

"Hungry is healthy for you at the moment. Jim, it's not my fault your weight is up again."

"Was I picking on you? Sorry. But salad is salad is salad...and I'm beginning to long for something hot and filling. Dieting may be good for my weight, but it's boring the hell outa my tastebuds!"

"O.K." The Doctor's face held sympathy. "So you're finding it boring. Tomorrow night I'll get dietetics to order you up something hot and filling. Will that keep you quiet?"

"At least it'll give me something to look forward to. Formal dinners for touchy Ambassadors are not my favourite form of entertainment."

"He's heavy going," McCoy agreed.

It was the longest passage between Benecia and Rigel that Kirk had ever known. Almost, he could have wished for another 'Gothos' to appear suddenly out of nowhere. Almost.

Ambassador Kirswell was a dignified gentleman of the old school, the very old school. He had objected to most things since he'd come aboard; to the yeoman assigned to service his quarters, to the smallness of those quarters, to the lack of an adjacent cabin for his aide (at least the aide had been suitably grateful!) to the heat of his sleeping quarters, the coldness of his day cabin, to the quality of the wine offered, to... At least enumerating the manifold deficiencies the Ambassador had audibly noted would keep him occupied till end of watch and beyond. Job security. He leaned back in the command chair, closing his eyes.

Uhura shot him a sympathetic look. If she had to endure one more fatherly pat, she'd shock that pompous, self-opinionated bore out of his Ambassadorial socks!

The crew of the Enterprise were all grittily setting their teeth. No, all but one.

Spock was at work in the laboratory when McCoy approached him. "Busy?"

The Vulcan eyed him starkly.

McCoy smiled cheerily. "Spock, I...uh...wanted to consult you about your favourite food."

The eyebrows hit an all-time high. "Really, Doctor, I am in the middle of urgent calculations. This is hardly the moment for social enquiries about my eating habits."

"Social enquiries my left foot." McCoy was indignant. "You're not the only one who engages in a little research in the course of his work, you walking

multitronic unit!"

"Why, thank you, Doctor." The voice was more than ordinarily bland. "And now, if you could come to the point with reasonable alacrity, perhaps we could both be getting on with our work instead of only one of us doing so."

McCoy snorted, but decided to ignore him. "I want a list of the most highly-thought-of delicacies Vulcan cuisine has to offer," he said. "In order of your own personal preference."

If it was possible, Spock appeared annoyed. "Surely such a trivial matter..." "Trivial? Do you consider the health and well-being of your Captain trivial?"

"I do not see how there can be any connection between my personal pref..."

"Who's wasting time now?" McCoy said nastily.

"There is no correlation..."

"Spock!" McCoy held out a threatening finger. "Just give me the list!"

A patient sigh. "Kroyberries soaked in hilva. Dried pokel-nuts. Plomik soup. Shabash. Tronka-tree seeds dipped in thusha sauce. Collordons in verblese. Magyana fruit..."

"Slow do , slow down." McCoy was scribbling furiously. "Mag...yan...a f.r.u.i.t... Yes, go on, go on!"

"You asked me to slow down."

"Go on...slower!"

"Really, Doctor, you should be more specific."

"I am being specific. Anything else?"

"Kytac oil."

McCoy shuddered.

"Polyandron leaves, lightly boiled, not baked. Stuffed oolanji. Doctor, you are looking distressingly green."

"I'm in good company. Keep going."

Spock looked confused. "I am not leaving."

"Well, if you can't suggest anything else, I am." He ran a hurried finger down the list and smirked. "That should do very nicely. Get back to your work."

Spock rose from the console, spinning the chair slightly.

"Where are you off to? I thought you said you weren't leaving?"

"Even a Vulcan may change his mind, Doctor. I find I have left something I require in the chemistry lab." He went through the connecting door.

McCoy shrugged. Not like the Vulcan to go out of a room almost at a trot.

The main door slid open. The imposing figure of Ambassador Kirswell filled the vacant space.

"Dr. McCoy?" The booming voice was disapproving. "I would have expected to find you in your sickbay, not in the science section. In my opinion, a Doctor's place is with his patients."

"Ambassador," McCoy bowed gracefully. "My work takes me all over this ship - you'd be surprised. And what are you doing in the science section?"

"I am looking for the First Officer. Your Captain informs me that Mr. Spock is better qualified than he is to explain the failure of the M5 computer. In my opinion, the Captain of a Starship should be better informed, but let that be. It is not my place to make criticisms. I was also informed that Mr. Spock was in

this laboratory. He seems a strangely elusive person; I have been searching for him since yesterday."

Bless those sharp, pointed ears, McCoy thought. Shall I give him away? His darker self prevailed. He pointed to the inner door.

"He's just gone in there."

His breakfast coffee was nectar. Kirk sipped it slowly, savouring every black drop. What he'd do if coffee was fattening... He whipped the depressing thought away.

"Morning, Jim."

"Don't look so hearty, Bones. I'm already feeling peaky!"

"You don't look it. Blooming health describes you this fine morning. Bright eyed and bushy-tailed. No coating on the tongue. No lingering fumes of illicit Saurian brandy..."

"No. And I'll thank you to keep your hands out of my cupboard."

"Tch. Tch. Tch. All for your own good. In my opin..."

Kirk winced. "Don't say that, Bones. If Kirswell gives me his opinion one more time, I'll...I'll get Riley to sing 'I'll take you home again Kathleen' at tonight's concert!"

McCoy winced, too. "There's no need for us all to suffer, Jim. Brace up! The day does have a silver lining. Tomorrow we get to Rigel 4!"

"We've got to get through today first. Where the devil is Spock? I haven't seen him around, except on watch, for days."

"Well." McCoy spread expressive hands. "He's safe on the bridge. You've seen to that, at least."

"Safe?"

"From your friendly Ambassador. He was chasing him all over the ship yesterday. Caught him, too. In the chem.lab." He chuckled, savouring the memory.

"I regret you are mistaken in your information, Doctor." Spock paused by his chair. "I have not yet had the opportunity for any conversation with Ambassador Kirswell."

"But I sent him into the chem lab right after you left!" McCoy exclaimed, abandoning discretion.

"It was unfortunate, then, that I missed him."

"But you..." McCoy blinked. "You can't have missed him. There's no other way out."

Spock's eyebrows crept upwards infinitesimally. "I did not see the Ambassador, Doctor. You must have been mistaken in your belief that you knew my location." He changed the subject. "Captain, I received your message. When you have finished your meal, I shall be ready with the report you requested."

"Oh, yes." Kirk took another, lingering, sip of the coffee. "One more cup and I'll be right with you, Spock."

"That's your fourth already."

"Coffee isn't fattening."

"Too much caffeine..."

"Bones! Lay off. Leave me one simple pleasure. Carry on, Spock. I'll see you in...say a quarter of an hour." He looked across at McCoy. "Something bothering you, Bones?"

"I know he was in the chem lab," McCoy said, glaring at the retreating Vulcan. "Where did he...? By jiminy, the apparatus locker!"

"What apparatus locker?" Really, it was too early in the day for this oblique conversation.

"He must have hidden in it."

"Who?"

"Spock."

"?"

"When the Ambassador missed him." McCoy grinned suddenly. "I'd give six months' pay to have seen him. I thought Spock was the only one who didn't seem to be getting all up-tight on this trip. He must have been dodging him for days. Now, Jim, don't you wish you had over-active, pointed ears and were skinny enough to hide in lockers?"

Kirk ignored the innuendo. "I must be on my way, Bones. Urgent ship's business with Spock. I'll be in my quarters, and I'm not to be disturbed for anything less than a yellow alert."

Urgent ship's business! Well, it wasn't a bad excuse. Maybe he'd start the physicals this morning...

The bridge crew were doing a subtly efficient job at passing the Ambassador over to each other as swiftly as possible. Uhura slipped neatly behind Christine Chapel.

"Don't hide behind me! I've done my turn this evening," Christine informed her firmly.

"Did he pat your...?"

"Certainly not!" Christine said, outraged.

"Well," Uhura said darkly, "he's patted mine once too often already. I'm staying where I am."

It was quite a relief to begin dinner.

Kirk looked at the table appreciatively. Trust Yeoman Landis to make the best use of her not-inconsiderable talent for table decoration. At least there shouldn't be any complaint about that. And the food certainly smelled delicious. He sighed. Only another couple of pounds.

An enormous tureen was set in front of him. "Your special order, Captain."

"Special order?" Kirswell boomed disapprovingly. "In my opinion, Kirk, a good Captain eats what his crew eats and doesn't pander to personal whims."

Kirk cut off the glare at its birth. "I'd be happy to share this with you, Ambassador. Yeoman, serve the Ambassador some."

"No, no. I do not set my tastes above those of your officers. What they eat is good enough for me."

"Why, sir," McCoy put in. "I certainly recommend you try it. One of the greatest Vulcan delicacies..."

Suspicion shot through Kirk's mind. McCoy wouldn't... He watched Travers lift the lid. Yes, he would. The smell was unmistakable. Plomik soup.

Choking down a desire to order McCoy to the brig, he smiled appreciatively.

"Delicious." He was not going to suffer alone. He beckoned Travers. "You must try this, Ambassador. An experience not to be missed."

Travers handed out the two plates, and Kirk lifted a determined spoon. He'd drink it, every drop, and smile through every mouthful, and if Kirswell didn't finish his as well, he had some pleasantly cutting things already floating into his mind. He swallowed the first mouthful, bravely calculating how many more there were to go before he'd finish. Kirswell drank his own first mouthful. A strange expression crossed his face.

"Not to your taste, Ambassador?" Kirk enquired sweetly. "I am surprised. In my opinion, all personnel in privileged positions such as ours should learn to eat and enjoy the favoured dishes of our associate races. Provided, naturally, that they are not poisonous to the Human race."

And just which hare-brained idiot decided this wasn't?

He drank another mouthful.

The over-powering odour had caused other heads to lift now, and startled glances were being passed along the table with the pepper. They'd all begged Spock not to eat another bowlful save in the privacy of his own quarters.

"I knew you would both enjoy it," McCoy said jovially. "Mr. Spock spared me a little of his precious time to suggest what he thought the best that Vulcan had to offer. I picked the highest on his list that the Enterprise could provide."

Spock! He'd manage to avoid a second helping!

"Yeoman, serve Mr. Spock some of this delicious soup," he said. "It would be unkind of us to drink it all, and not leave any for him."

There was a stifled giggle on his left, hastily smothered. He drank another spoonful. Heavens, the stuff would be getting cold if he lingered any longer. Another, hastier one. The giggle was on his right now. He glared down the table, smoothing his features into a bland smile.

Spock was taking the plate, and lifting a bemused eyebrow at Uhura, hastily applying a scented tissue to her nose.

"Enjoying your treat, Mr. Spock?"

The Vulcan looked up from his plate. "It is most pleasant, Captain. And excellently made."

How could he tell?

A giggle welled up in Kirk, and he thrust it down again quickly. Only a few more mouthfuls now, and it would all be gone. Kirswell was slower, but catching up gamely.

A sudden snort of laughter came from the other side of the table. Chekov - of course.

"Something amusing, Mr. Chekov?" Kirk didn't see why he should suffer alone. "Please share the joke with us."

There, it was finished. He laid the spoon down, tidily. The flustered Chekov was stammering unhappily.

"Pavel was just telling me about his Aunt Marushka's pet rabbit," Scott said kindly. "Ye'll have heard the tale, Captain, I daresay, but it wis new tae me. I've never heard o' a rabbit that liked vodka before... Now, if it was scotch, of course..." The table collapsed into grateful laughter.

Kirk caught the look of blank non-comprehension on Spock's face. It nearly finished him. Steadying himself, he rose to his feet.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I'm sure you would all want to join me in wishing Ambassador Kirswell a satisfactory spell of duty on Rigel 4." He took up his glass. "Ambassador Kirswell."

Under control again, the Enterprise crew joined in the toast.

He caught McCoy on his way to bed. "If you ever do that again..."

The blue eyes opened innocently. "You said you wanted something hot and filling, Jim."

"I'll give you something hot and filling," he threatened. "'Something lingering, with boiling oil in it'."

McCoy grinned. "Despots like the Mikado often get their just deserts, Jim. Next time you grumble about your diet, I may just make it stuffed oolanji!"

Kirk dived for his bathroom.

+++++

GOING HOME by Gillian Catchpole

We live beyond the horizon,
Part of a dream, an expression of hope,
A search for understanding
Amidst the confusion of our lives.
Seeking the simplicity that space has in abundance,
Where everything belongs,
Knows just what to do and where it's going
And as we searched we learned,
Treasuring the knowledge that we gained
of places and of people.

Going home.
The expressionless face, the polite goodbye,
Regarded as cold and unfeeling,
But when you have lived and nearly died,
Suffered pain, drew breath, before one man,
Felt glad to be important in another's life,
Shared even your soul with infinite trust,
However formally he decides to part
You can't ever forget he cares.

When the mind is occupied with serious matters
Can still a familiar word from out of the past
Live on my lips, divert my thinking,
Recalling pleasant memories of those I have known
To linger as a sigh.
I accepted the unusual with a welcoming heart,
Having lived with the surprising
Can I now adjust and accept the ordinary?
Back home,
The days are still dawning and ending,
Remaining the same,
Adorned by each season,
Just like I remembered.

+++++

THE FLOWER by Gladys Oliver

I cupped a flower in my hands,
It was light and pure and clean;
Mayhap I held the Universe...
Before Man destroyed the dream.

+++++

REPLACEMENT ROBOT AND RADIATION by Christine F. Leeson

Dr. McCoy studied the instrument panel, a solemn expression on his face. For two days Mr. Spock had been in a coma, dead to the world. What had caused the coma was anybody's guess. Probably some weird Vulcan complaint, thought McCoy, though it was one that he had had no experience of.

"Will he be O.K., Bones?" asked Captain James T. Kirk worriedly.

"I'm afraid I can't say, Jim," replied the Doctor. "The life readings are extremely low, and brain activity is almost non-existent. Once we arrive at the nearest Starbase, the medical teams there may be able to save him."

"We'll be arriving at Starbase 7 in six hours," said Kirk, pacing restlessly up and down the sickbay. "I only hope it won't be too late."

Six hours later, with Spock still barely alive, Mr. Sulu put the Enterprise into orbit around Starbase 7. Kirk, McCoy and Nurse Chapel beamed down with the unconscious First Officer.

Later, when Mr. Spock had been taken to the fully-equipped hospital, Kirk met Commodore Wesley, who was presently based at this Starbase.

"How am I going to run the ship efficiently without a First Officer?" Kirk asked the Commodore after he had been informed that Spock, even if he lived, would not be able to resume his duties for some time.

"I have an idea, Captain," said Wesley. "Although we do not have any men qualified for the position presently stationed here, we do have a famous roboticist, Dr. Theodore Sandstrom."

"I've heard of him," exclaimed Kirk. "Doesn't he design and program androids for special assignments in laboratories, and isn't he the fellow with a bee in his bonnet about androids assuming responsible roles aboard Starships and... Wait a minute! You're not suggesting...?"

"It is our only alternative," said Commodore Wesley. "You will have a male android placed on board your ship - temporarily, of course - in place of Mr. Spock. In fact, we already have a suitable android awaiting you. It will give us a perfect chance to test Dr. Sandstrom's theories."

"I don't think it will go down very well with the crew," said Kirk, remembering the fiasco of the M5, and adding silently, especially Dr. McCoy.

Kirk was right. It did not go down well with the crew. He called Dr. McCoy and Mr. Scott to his quarters and informed them of the situation as soon as he returned to the ship.

"They'll be doing away with Human beings altogether next," growled McCoy. "Them and their darned machines."

"I dinna like the idea," complained Scott, the Chief Engineer. "And I'm no' having any robot poking its way around ma engines."

"Gentlemen, please," said Kirk. "I am no keener on the idea than you are, but there is nothing we can do."

"We could blast its head off wi' our phasers," suggested Scott, "and say it had malfunctioned."

Kirk tried not to smile, and put on his most commanding voice. "Dr. McCoy, Mr. Scott," he said. "Starfleet Command has given orders that this android has to come aboard the ship. We, as the senior crewmembers, must set an example to the rest of the crew by accepting this, and do our utmost to keep the ship functioning at full efficiency. Do I make myself clear?"

McCoy and Scott blushed and submitted. "Yes, sir." "Aye, sir."

Kirk smiled, then became serious again. "I have been informed that Mr. Spock's

condition has not changed. I'll be in a position to tell you more later. That's all, gentlemen."

When Scott and McCoy left, Kirk sat on his bed and buried his face in his hands. I must obey orders, he thought. But how can I accept this mechanical thing in Spock's place? Yet I must at least appear to, for the sake of the ship.

Three hours later, Kirk, his feelings now under control, beamed down to the Starbase at a request from Commodore Wesley. He walked into the Commodore's office looking round curiously, expecting the android to be there.

"The android is going through some last-minute tests in Dr. Sandstrom's laboratory, Captain," remarked Wesley drily, "so there is no point in scrutinising my office as if you expect it to jump out from behind the hatstand."

Kirk had the grace to blush.

"We will proceed to the laboratory," continued Wesley, "where everything should be about ready."

"How is Mr. Spock?" asked Kirk as they left the office.

Wesley shook his head. "No change," he said.

When they arrived at the laboratory, Sandstrom came out to greet them. He was a small, plump person with sandy hair and extraordinary spectacles which covered most of his face (when he hadn't got them deposited in one of his numerous pockets). Why he should want such an archaic artifact as spectacles Kirk couldn't understand.

The Doctor took Kirk and Commodore Wesley into the laboratory where, in the middle of the floor, was a rowing-machine in operation, a device which looked strangely reminiscent of those used in the twentieth century by slimmers and health fanatics. On the machine sat a male figure in a First Officer's uniform. He was rowing hard.

"This is Robot R.S.S. 8, Captain," said Dr. Sandstrom. "He answers to the name of Ross. Ross, this is Captain James T. Kirk."

Ross stopped rowing, got up, and took hold of Kirk's hand. "I'm exceedingly pleased to meet you, Captain Kirk," he said in a low, melodious voice.

"Er...yes. I'm pleased to meet you, er...Mr. Ross," said Kirk taken aback. The android was tall, slim and tanned, with brown wavy hair. He looked somehow more real than the female android Andrea built by Dr. Korby on Exo III.

"Ross is the most advanced android that we have constructed," said Sandstrom. "Special care was taken with his programming. He is fitted with..." The roboticist went on to inform Kirk of the circuits and modules which made up the robot. The Captain, who understood perhaps one word in six of Sandstrom's speech, just stood smiling politely, feeling acutely discomfited.

Wesley, sensing Kirk's embarrassment, said to Sandstrom, when he paused for breath, "The Captain and Ross should be leaving now for their next mission. The data on Ross has been fed into the computer banks of the Enterprise, you know."

"Oh...yes, yes, of course. I'm so glad you've agreed to test Ross for us, Captain Kirk. I know you won't regret it!"

Kirk was not so sure.

Meanwhile, on board the Enterprise, the majority of the crew were openly rebellious; although most of them had been off the ship, they too remembered M5.

"I've a good mind to start a sit-down strike," remarked Crewman Steven Phillips, a member of engineering. Phillips had read the history of Earth avidly and was familiar with the historic trades-union and the methods they used to oppose mechanisation.

"Don't be stupid," said Janice Rand, his current girlfriend (as of the past fortnight). "That would be regarded as mutiny and you'd never be allowed to set foot on a Starship again. It's not worth it."

"Why should a damn good officer like Spock be replaced by a machine? It seems so unfair," finished Phillips lamely.

"It's temporary while Mr. Spock's ill," Rand pointed out patiently.

They were interrupted by a voice over the intercom. "Captain Kirk and the new First Officer are preparing to beam aboard. Everyone report to their stations and prepare to leave orbit."

When Kirk and Ross beamed up to the ship, Kirk noticed the ship's corridors were more crowded than usual. They've all come to gape at the android, thought the Captain - correctly.

When they arrived at the bridge, they were met by a resentful Dr. McCoy. Captain Kirk introduced Ross to the Doctor.

"I've heard a lot about your excellent work, Dr. McCoy," said Ross. "I am honoured to meet you."

McCoy shook hands with the android and muttered something about 'good looking charmers'.

"I beg your pardon, Doctor?" said Ross politely. "I'm afraid I didn't hear you."

"Well, you should listen, then," growled McCoy.

Kirk snapped, "That will do, Doctor! Report back to sickbay immediately."

"Right, Captain," said McCoy. He added pointedly, "You may have forgotten Spock, but I sure haven't." He turned and marched out.

Kirk walked silently to the command seat and wondered how many of the crew shared McCoy's views. I wish Spock were here, he thought.

The new First Officer, Robot R.S.S.8, went over to his place, completely unconscious of the stares and whispers of the bridge personnel.

He's not bad looking, thought Uhura, then remembered what he was and also that he had replaced Spock.

"Captain Kirk," she said, "we are receiving details of our next mission from Commodore Wesley."

The Commodore's face appeared on the screen.

"How is Mr. Spock?" Kirk asked straight away.

"He is still not responding to any external stimuli," said Wesley soberly. "We are feeding him intravenously and he is being constantly monitored." He glanced down. "Here are the details of your next mission.

You will proceed to the Tas, where the colony's computers have all ceased to function for no apparent reason. In addition, all their mechanical devices have failed. When approaching the system shut down all your computers and data-banks. Hopefully this will protect them. Do not proceed into the system; send in a two-manned shuttlecraft. Report back to the Starbase your findings."

"Aye, sir," said Kirk. The screen went blank.

Tas... The only inhabitable planet in the system surrounding the blue-white supergiant Tasa. Kirk looked at the First Officer. "Any ideas what might have caused the situation on Tas?"

"It is possible that a magnetic storm occurred," replied Ross, "causing electrical failure. I will accumulate more data."

Five hours later the Enterprise arrived at the borders of the Tasa system. Kirk sent First Officer Ross and Crewman Steve Phillips into the system. After carrying out all repairs possible, they were on their way back when an urgent bleeping sounded from the shuttlecraft.

A distorted message began to come through in an agonised whisper. "The computer reported a solar storm. Help me - he's killing me. Gone berserk. Radiation. Help..." The communications went dead.

"Come in, shuttlecraft. Report!" snapped Kirk, then, his voice rising, "Come in, shuttlecraft!"

"Captain Kirk." The smooth voice of Ross sounded. "Do not worry about Mr. Phillips. He had an epileptic seizure and when he recovered he was delirious. Please ignore his message."

"An epileptic fit?" said Kirk blankly. "How is he?"

"I'm afraid he is dead."

Janice Rand, standing beside Kirk's chair since the message from Phillips and listening anxiously, gasped, "No!"

Kirk glanced at her, noted the tears, remembered her emotional attachment to Phillips and called Sickbay. "Bones, send someone up to the bridge with a strong sedative. Also - "

"I heard the communication from Ross, Jim," said McCoy quietly. "There is something wrong. Phillips had no history of epilepsy. He wouldn't have been allowed on a Starship if he had! The tendency can be kept well under control with the use of the proper drugs, but there are certain jobs nobody with a history of epilepsy can be allowed to do, for their own safety, and active Starship duty is one of them."

Kirk stood restlessly. "Send two attendants to the hangar bay. As soon as the shuttlecraft docks, collect Phillips' body. I want an autopsy report as soon as possible."

He headed down to the shuttlecraft bay himself, arriving just as the shuttle docked. Ross emerged, carrying the body of Phillips. Kirk looked at it, shocked at the appalling injuries that were evident.

In sickbay, as soon as he saw the body, McCoy exclaimed, "Good lord!" He checked the body quickly. "Fractured arm, two fractured ribs, fractured pelvis... brain damage... This was never the result of an epileptic fit! This was caused by a brutal attack. I've never..."

The intercom sounded. "Dr. McCoy, please report to deck three. There has been an attack."

Kirk and McCoy glanced at each other, and ran. When they arrived, they found a crowd of people gathered around the body of a junior crew member.

"Ensign John Luke," whispered Kirk.

"Stand back, everyone," ordered McCoy abruptly. "Let us through!" He pushed his way back through the crowd, closely followed by the orderleys with the stretcher bearing the unfortunate ensign.

"He has the same type of injuries as Phillips," McCoy finally confirmed. "I suspect that robot is behind this. Nobody else could have attacked Phillips."

"I'm inclined to agree with you," said Kirk. "I think I'd better contact Tas - there hasn't been time yet, but they might be able to throw some light on things."

The Captain proceeded quickly to the bridge, after sending a message to security ordering them to apprehend Ross. When Kirk arrived at the bridge, Lt. Uhura rapidly put him in contact with Tas.

"This is Captain James T. Kirk of the U.S.S. Enterprise. Can you give me

details of the reasons for your computers malfunctioning."

The official who had answered them appeared extremely surprised and said, "Weren't you told? According to your men, a solar storm irrupting from Tasa caused radiation that disrupted our computers and all the other mechanical artifacts, causing them first to function erratically then cease working altogether."

"Did you notice anything strange about the behaviour of our men?"

"Not at first, but after about three hours First Officer Ross began to act rather strangely. When they finished, he refused to wait, but hustled Phillips into the shuttlecraft. Is anything wrong?"

Kirk explained that Ross was an android, and included details on what had happened on the shuttlecraft and then later, aboard the Enterprise.

The official nodded slowly. "I'm very much afraid that the android was affected by the residue of the radiation. If you had explained that he was in fact an android, I could have warned you not to send him here." The man paused, then continued. "If your android follows the pattern of our computers, he will malfunction at first and behave erratically, then after a while he will break down completely and cease functioning at all. Once that happens, there is no more danger."

The man faded from the screen. Kirk then received an urgent message from security, saying they had the android trapped in one of the recreation rooms.

"I'll be right there," said Kirk briskly, and left the bridge. He arrived at the rec room to find three security men standing outside. A forcefield was in operation outside the door. Inarticulate sounds could be heard from inside the room, and the forcefield was deflecting tables and chairs which were being flung at it. Ross looked totally out of control. One of the fuses in his left arm was sparking badly.

Kirk moved past the guards and stood at the door. The forcefield suddenly flickered and failed; Ross took one mighty leap across the room and grabbed hold of Kirk who struggled, to no avail. One of the security men aimed his phaser and fired, but nothing happened. All three rushed at the robot, trying to pull it off the Captain. Ross had his hands around Kirk's throat; then there was a flash and the android's hands dropped limply. Kirk dropped to one knee, gasping for breath, as Ross fell slowly, to lie prone on the floor. Kirk closed his eyes for a moment; then, after ordering the robot to be stored in maintenance, he went to his quarters.

Three days later the Enterprise returned to orbit around Starbase 7. Kirk and McCoy beamed down, to find, to their delight, that Mr. Spock had recovered almost completely and was asking for them, although it was still uncertain what had been wrong with him.

Dr. Sandstrom, undeterred by the failure, set to work to repair and reprogram Ross for laboratory work.

"I thought you were almost as bad as a machine, Spock," remarked McCoy, "but you've never been as much trouble as that android was."

"Thank you, Doctor," said Spock.

"I don't believe it," exclaimed Kirk. "For once you're not arguing!"

McCoy and Spock regarded each other speechlessly.

"Ah," said Kirk. "I get the last word, then."

+++++

Sulu: I just swallowed a bone.

Chekov: Are you choking?

Sulu: No, I'm serious.

+++++

THE MOST LOGICAL COMBINATION by Gladys Oliver

"It was most opportune that you were here."

"Give it time."

"For what?"

"Your gratitude to wear thin."

"Should it?"

"Inevitable. Only he keeps our hatchets buried."

"'Hatchets'?"

"Don't pretend."

"I can assure you..."

"...it's O.K. He's resting easy now, we don't have to act."

"I don't believe I have ever acted."

"Liar!"

"What prompts such an expression?"

"All those times you pretended you didn't care for him...but I know you now!"

"Do you?"

"Thoroughly!"

"I wonder."

Silence. Then...

"He is moving!"

"Don't panic!"

"Is he in pain?"

"He's lucky to be alive!"

"Due to your own prompt actions."

"Couldn't let a good officer die, could we?"

"Sarcasm does not become you."

"Merely using a quote."

"...Words regretted many times..."

"Well, at least I lived long enough to hear that!"

"And that pleases you?"

"Not as much as I'd hoped."

Silence. Then...

"Are you in pain?"

"Slight discomfort."

"I wish I could do more."

"You have done what you can."

"Wish they'd hurry all the same."

"We have our own very capable witch doctor on call."

"Don't joke!"

"Can nothing please you?"

"Sorry."

"So am I."

Silence. Then...

"It's my jealousy."

"Jealousy?"

"A Human emotion."

"Of what are you jealous?"

"...You and him, sometimes."

"Why?"

"I feel...shut out."

"Illogical - and totally unnecessary."

"You are both like one... I envy that."

"Envy?"

"Don't parrot and pussyfoot all I say!"

"I am trying to comprehend. Also, I wish to understand."

"What don't you understand?"

"Your dislike."

"Of whom?"

"Of me."

"Whaddya mean! Dislike? I don't dislike you!"

"Then why this conversation?"

"I'm sorry I started it."

"It is most enlightening."

"Get some rest."

"A very logical suggestion."

Silence. Then...

"You awake?"

"Yes."

"How long?"

"Long enough."

"How do you feel?"

"Awful."

"You took the full force."

"Not quite. You pushed me out of the way."

"Nearly busted your head doing it!"

"How is he?"

"Lie still! He's not that bad, got a thick hide. He's resting, that's all."

"What was wrong between you two?"

"Wrong?"

"Don't pussyfoot... I've been awake some time."

"It wasn't for your ears."

"I gathered that."

"Exactly why did you invite me along on this shore leave anyway?"

"I didn't."

"No?"

"No."

"Then who...?"

"You can thank Sargon that he did."

"He?"

"Of course. Made the suggestion himself...and I was pleased to concur."

"But I thought..."

"Didn't anyone ever tell you that you 'think' too much?"

"But... Why should he want me along?"

"Perhaps because he knows we three belong together...whatever our differences."

"Three?"

"Does it really surprise you that much?"

"... I'm gonna get some rest!"

"Yeah. Good idea - you look suddenly worse than we do."

Silence. Then...

"I didn't mean to wake you."

"I was not asleep."

"He thought you were."

"Yes."

"Are you all right?"

"Yes. And you?"

"Nothing I can't handle. I'm lucky to be here at all."

"I also. His reactions were very attuned to our danger."

"He's resting now... He needs that sleep more than we do."

"He hasn't rested since it happened. I sense his concern over us."

"He tries to hide it."

"A remarkable man."

"A good friend."

"Indeed."

Silence. Then...

"Three to beam up. Sickbay, stand by!"

"Has a nice comforting ring to it, that."

"Indeed. A most logical combination."

"What bit are you referring to?"

"The numeral."

"I'm glad."

"Cut the cackle, you two - it's rest and more rest for the two of you once we're aboard."

"Have you noticed how number three has this tendency towards..."

"I said, rest!!!"

"He is also prone to bullying innocent patients."

"Will you two shut up?"

"Very well." "Anything for peace."

Silence. Then...

"Just why did you invite me?"

"It seemed like a good idea at the time."

"Will you never give me a straight answer?"

"I thought I just did."

"Will you two please stop arguing for just once in your lives?"

"Well, blame him - I only asked a simple question."

"And I answered it."

"But it still doesn't explain anything."

"Does it really require such a deep explanation?"

Silence. Then...

"I suppose not."

"Now can we please get some rest?"

"I suppose so."

"A most logical suggestion."

"You know... I could almost get to like that word."

"I'm glad."

Silence. Then...

"Have you two finally shut up?"

Silence.....

+++++

A CAPTAIN'S THOUGHTS by Susan Meek

Sleek she is,
And beautiful, as she glides through the skies
With easy majesty. A queen of the starways.

More than a vessel
She is a lady
Who craves attention and care
Just as a woman would.

No man that has not desired command
Could understand this. It is something of the spirit
Something in the blood.

I wonder how many envy me her?
The control of this beautiful vessel
The power over 430 lives -
Sometimes an intolerable burden
But one I would not wish to lay down.

Yes, I possess her,
But how more surely
She possesses me!

+++++

ANOTHER ONE by C.E. Hall

Even with her most unenviable reputation, Ensign Weyford always maintained that the whole thing was undoubtedly the creature's fault, not hers. After all, anyone would have been startled by the sudden appearance from behind a rock of a creature resembling, above all, an eight-foot tall kangaroo. It wasn't so much its size, for the Earth-type creature of that form could be quite large, but the fact that it was bright purple, and had huge paws tipped with bright green claws!

But it would make more sense to start the story at the beginning, so that is what I shall do.

Ensign Jamie Morton smiled to herself as she stood waiting in the transporter room for the arrival of the new crew members beaming up from Starbase 6. It would be nice to see Daphne again, and welcome her aboard the ship. She was glad that her off-duty time coincided so neatly with the arrival time of the new staff.

Daphne Weyford was a friend of very long standing. They had gone to school together in the little town of Ada, Oklahoma, and, from an early age, had shared the same ambition - to work on a Starship.

Owing to family problems, Daphne's entry into Starfleet Academy had been delayed several years, and Jamie had graduated and started her career alone. But Daphne's determination had sustained her, and she had succeeded in following her.

I wonder if she's still the same, Jamie thought to herself. But of course she will be, she thought affectionately. She never changes. They'd met once, when Jamie was on a refresher course at the Academy, and she hadn't altered then. Oh, she'd quietened down a bit, matured a little maybe, but she'd still shown the same nature, impulsive, effervescent, generous almost to a fault, but very warm-hearted. It would be nice to have her aboard.

The transporter officer set the dials and moved the levers on his console slowly but steadily into position. The transporter shimmer glowed on the platform and after a few seconds, six figures came into view and solidified.

Standing in the front of the group, an exceptionally tall girl in a blue Science tunic let out a squeal of pleasure as she spotted Jamie. She charged forward, tripped down the steps, dropped a book she was carrying, and almost threw down her travel-bag as she rushed to envelop Jamie in a bear-hug and a shower of greetings.

Jamie smiled. Dear Daphne, she thought. She hasn't changed! Still as lovable as ever, and still as accident-prone. Daphne always complained bitterly that it wasn't her fault - there was just too much of her! That's what made her clumsy. She was big, taller than many a man, and well-built in proportion, though with curves in all the right places.

Jamie extricated herself from the bear-hug, retrieved the fallen book and the dropped bag, found out Daphne's assigned quarters from the officer receiving the new arrivals, and whisked her away, still talking nineteen to the dozen. My, she thought to herself, it sure looks as if things are going to liven up around here.

Daphne settled in remarkably well. In spite of her natural ability to make a fool of herself very easily, she was not stupid. She had worked conscientiously to gain her qualifications, and was good at her particular branch of scientific work. "If it is occasionally marred by the most bizarre and unpredictable mishaps," her superior officer said, "it only serves to keep everyone else on their toes and alert."

She soon became a very popular member of the crew. Her liveliness and natural gaiety made her well-liked, and people soon realised that she was also very obliging when it came to borrowing things or changing awkward shifts. Jamie often chided her for allowing herself to be put-upon, but Daphne just laughed.

"I don't mind," she would say. "If I can help out, I might as well. We've

all got to live together, haven't we?"

It was nearly three weeks after her arrival that Daphne made her first contact with Mr. Spock, and 'contact' is absolutely the right word, for it was an eminently physical encounter, and quite a forceful one at that! Jamie was there and saw it all.

The two of them, plus half-a-dozen others, had just finished a particularly gruelling research session. They were now off-duty, and were hurrying to the nearest rec room, to beat the rush for a much-needed coffee break.

Daphne, having worked well and almost silently for the last three hours, was now babbling light-heartedly to her friends. As the turbolift stopped, she bounced out, still talking, with her head turned back towards her companions.

Before her startled friends had time to shout a warning or pull her back, she had collided with a passing figure in blue uniform. Unprepared for an onslaught by a female battering-ram, Mr. Spock was knocked off balance, staggered backwards a few steps, and collided rather forcibly with the bulkhead. A pile of tapes and a couple of clipboards he had been carrying were broadcast widely over the corridor floor.

Daphne gave one aghast look and flushed a bright red. Then, babbling apologies, she crouched to the floor and began scrabbling to pick up the scattered tapes. Have you ever experienced trying to gather up a pile of flattish plastic objects? Then you know what happens. You pile them up, then if you grip them too tightly, the middle ones shoot out, and you lose half of them again. Of course, this happened to Daphne and flustered her still further. If her friends hadn't recovered quickly from their shock, and come to her aid, she'd never have completed the job.

Mr. Spock, meanwhile, had recovered his equilibrium, both mentally and physically. He'd pushed himself off the wall, and was rubbing the circulation back into fingers temporarily numbed by a sharp blow on the elbow. He accepted the restored clipboards and the pile of tapes, and turned his solemn gaze on the large flustered-looking female before him.

"Ensign," he said stiffly, "I suggest that in future, if you wish to avoid such accidents, you endeavour to look where you are going." Then he strode off on his interrupted business, leaving Daphne spluttering indignantly to her friends.

"Look where I'm going, indeed!" she said angrily. "Cheek!"

"No, no, Daphne," said Jamie, trying to control her almost hysterical laughter. "He meant it quite literally. He always says exactly what he means - you'll get used to that."

Daphne still wasn't mollified. It had been her first close encounter with the Vulcan First Officer and she didn't know much about him yet.

"It was an accident," she muttered. "I suppose he doesn't ever have any?"

"No, he doesn't," laughed Jamie. "You're right about that."

"Hm!" snorted Daphne. "I expect he thinks he's so superior!"

One of the men of the party joined in. "Yes, he does, in a way," he said, "because he is. He's a Vulcan, you see; they're a bit different. But he doesn't trade on his special abilities. You'll find out when you get to know him better."

"I don't think I want any closer contact, thank you," said Daphne. Her sunny nature was re-asserting itself, however, and by the end of the day the incident was forgotten by nearly everyone.

Unfortunately, a medical orderly who'd seen the whole thing made the mistake of relating it to Dr. McCoy as a funny story.

Later, when he sat down with Captain Kirk and Spock for a quick coffee before they went on duty, McCoy couldn't resist indulging in his favourite game of

baiting the solemn Vulcan.

Keeping a straight face, though he couldn't suppress the twinkle in his blue eyes, he questioned Spock.

"What's this I hear, Spock, about you being 'swept off your feet' by one of the new girls?"

"Hey," interrupted Kirk, a grin lighting his face, "what's all this? Have you been 'smitten' at last, Spock?"

Spock threw a glare at the now-smiling doctor. He rose to his feet to make a dignified retreat, and answered icily. "Yes, Captain, I have," he said. "Quite literally. That incredibly clumsy big girl in the Science Department bumped into me, and knocked a pile of tapes from my hand. But I didn't find the incident very enlightening. It merely confirmed my previous impressions about young female Terrans. They are unbelievably immature and gauche."

And with that scathing chauvanistic speech he swept out, leaving McCoy to explain to Kirk what actually happened. Knowing the aloof Vulcan so well, as they both did by now, they found it an amusing story, even if he did not.

Things went fairly smoothly for a while after that. Daphne was pleased to find that her work did not bring her under Mr. Spock's eagle eye, for she felt sure that if he were to come near her, she would immediately become 'all fingers and thumbs' out of sheer nerves. But gradually her confidence grew, she had fewer mishaps anyway, and no-one had any cause for complaint about her work.

Then came the ill-fated trip to the planet, listed as Marcus VI. It was not an unexplored planet. It had been visited before, and designated as uninhabited, but the reports had shown such a variety of interesting and unusual fauna and flora that it had been deemed to merit a more detailed study. Consequently the Enterprise was carefully brought into a convenient parking orbit round the planet, a ground base was set up, and work began, with relays of geologists, biologists and botanists planning and making expeditions from the base camp, and returning there or to the ship to record and correlate findings.

Time and facilities were freely available for all kinds of work, and much very interesting study was being undertaken. Even Sulu, despite the fact that it was not his professional interest but only a hobby, had been allowed several days to do some botanical studies. He was thrilled to do so, and had been amusing and cheering everyone with his infectious enthusiasm.

McCoy, too, had had several days studying medicinal plants and herbs, and soon filled his laboratories with cultures and extracts and various odd experiments dealing with the rare and unusual plants he had found.

Mr. Spock, also, was very occupied with surveys and research. The planet was inclined to be dry and dusty, and rather warm at this season of its cycle. Privately, though he did not express the thought to anyone, he found it remarkably like his home planet Vulcan. He found trudging through the hot dry sand, fanned by a warm breeze under the heavy reddish sky, very nostalgic, and at the same time, rather soothing after the clinically controlled atmosphere of the starship.

He had four good days, setting out early from the camp, and making his way in different directions across the desert area that stretched northward from the established base. He had discovered several desert creatures entirely new to him, and had recorded details. He had found some very interesting rocky outcrops with easily discernable strata of deposit, which had merited investigation.

Today he planned to attempt to get as far as the ridge of rock, with its crown of vegetation, which he had glimpsed the day before. It should be easily within reach if he went directly there, without detour for other research. He hoped that the assistant detailed to help him today would be competent and strong. The ensign who had helped him yesterday, although she was very knowledgeable about desert animal life, had not been very good at desert walking, and they had not covered a great deal of distance.

As he knelt to pack his equipment into a carrying bag, a voice addressed him.

"Reporting for duty, sir," it said. "Ensign Weyford."

He looked up, and then further up. As he rose to stand upright, he found himself gazing, on the same eye-level, at the large female who had almost knocked him for six on their first encounter. A momentary pang of dismay struck him, but he dismissed it resolutely. He must be fair, he told himself, and not pre-judge. He'd had no further encounters with her, and his colleagues' reports on her work had been favourable. Maybe the tales of her being accident-prone were exaggerated. He'd just have to be extra alert, and hope it was one of her better days.

Daphne, too, was having qualms over her assignment. In one way she was excited about it. The chance to work with Mr. Spock was not one to be missed; her friends had told her that! On the other hand, suppose she did something silly and made a fool of herself again. She resolved to concentrate hard, and follow orders implicitly, hoping that her nervousness wouldn't cause any untoward mishaps.

Conscious of the intent gaze of the dark alien eyes on her every move, she went through the routine check of her equipment. It was all there, as she had known it was, and she was able to report 'all present and correct, sir' with much more confidence in her voice.

They set off across the desert. Spock, remembering the difficulties yesterday's ensign had experienced, set a reasonable pace, and was pleasantly surprised to find that Ensign Weyford kept up with him easily. He increased his rate a little, and was gratified to notice that the large girl responded without any sign of strain. Good, he thought to himself, we should cover more ground today.

Daphne was beginning to enjoy herself. Mr. Spock was not talkative, but she had expected that. The sun and the warm breeze were very pleasant, and although trudging through the stretches of sand was a little wearing, the terrain was very flat, and it wasn't too difficult. She gazed with interest at the rocky ridge they were making for. As they got nearer, the varying colours of the rock strata began to show up, and the vegetation crowning the top became more noticeable. There would be a great deal of interesting study to be undertaken there; it was obvious.

Making good speed, they soon neared their objective. Mr. Spock's keen eyes were scanning the cliffs, looking for the best way of ascending the escarpment. The direct approach would not do, for the unusual formation rose sheer from the desert floor, due, no doubt, to some long-ago volcanic upheaval. But from either side the ascent looked easier, and Spock opted for the left-hand approach. Not only did it appear less steep and rocky, but it would afford them more shade from the fiercening sun, and that should make climbing easier.

He began the ascent confidently, moving agilely from one rocky perch to another. He was pleased to find that Ensign Weyford was well able to keep up with him. She cleverly watched each move he made, and copied it carefully, and because of her size, had no difficulty in matching his stride and reach.

It was a very unusual formation that they were climbing. In shape it was roughly similar to a quarter section of a sphere. One flat side rose steep from the desert floor, its layers clearly delineated in varying colours, but as they climbed higher from the extreme edge of it, they could see that the other side was a rounded slope, gradually flattening out to a plain beyond.

Most of this slope was covered with luxuriant vegetation similar to that which covered its top. It was a distinct contrast to the desert they had just crossed, and promised to give them a lot of interesting material to examine and record.

They began to make records of the varying plant forms that they saw, and quickly amassed a lot of data. Daphne kept a particular eye open for any unusual animal life, and was rewarded by the sight of several new to her experience. There was something resembling a furry blue rabbit with black-tipped ears and tail; a squirrel-like creature with a decidedly greenish tinge and bearing a divided, forked tail, and a sweet-looking little mouse-like animal which delighted Daphne by peering at her curiously from behind a branch with its bright red eyes,

and wagging its pink ears and golden whiskers.

She had ventured to comment to Mr. Spock that all the animals here seemed to be exceptionally brightly coloured. He had ceased his own study to look at hers, and had complimented her on the accuracy and skill she had shown in recording the data.

Perhaps her surprise and pleasure at such commendation broke her concentration, or perhaps it was that her long run of security from accidental mishaps was at last petering out, but what happened next took her completely by surprise.

They were nearly at the top of the escarpment on the easier rounded side, and had just negotiated a rather steep rocky section when with a sudden snarling grunt, the creature appeared from behind a rock.

In shape it resembled a large kangaroo, but it was bright purple, its eyes glittered fiercely and it waved large front paws tipped with bright green claws.

Startled, as anyone might have been by such an apparition, Daphne let out a shriek, and involuntarily stepped backwards. She missed her footing on the rocky slope, started to fall, and instinctively grabbed at the nearest support, which was the blue-clad arm of Mr. Spock beside her.

He also had been startled, more by the girl's shriek than by the animal, but had rapidly recovered. Then his arm was clutched in Daphne's panic-stricken grip.

Under normal circumstances, with his rapid reflexes, he might have been able to maintain his balance, but, as on their first encounter, Daphne's size proved a disadvantage, and loose pebbles under his feet completed his undoing. Both fell over backwards, and in a tangle of limbs, rolled and tumbled down the rocky slope that they had climbed so carefully just a few minutes before.

The large purple creature stood for a while watching their erratic progress down the hill. It made no attempt to follow, and when the clattering sounds of their descent had passed, and all was still and quiet again, it lost interest and lumbered away.

Daphne's first sensation, as consciousness slowly came back to her, was that of damp. She seemed to be lying in a puddle. As her memory of where she was returned to her, she found this especially puzzling. It was a particularly dry planet they had been investigating, and she had seen no sign of a stream or river. Cautiously she opened her eyes and found her answer. It was raining, very hard, dripping on her face and in her eyes. That also was very surprising - there had been no warning of such a sudden change in the weather. Mr. Spock hadn't said anything...

Mr. Spock? she remembered suddenly. Where was he? Was he all right? She started to sit up, then slowed her action as violent pain shot through her right leg. Resting on her elbows, she looked carefully around her.

At first she could see nothing but the rocky ground, clothed in bushes and grass, now dripping in the steadily pouring rain. Then as she turned her head as far to the right as she could, she suddenly spotted something showing blue amid all the green.

Brushing the rain from her eyes, she saw that it was an arm, with a slim long-fingered hand, lying on the wet grass. The rest of the form was hidden behind the thick bushes.

She called the Vulcan's name sharply, but there was no movement of the limp hand. He must be hurt, she thought. A sudden panic seized her. What if he were dead?

Concern, both for him and for her own survival, spurred her to action. Moving slowly, for her leg was clearly broken and causing her great pain, she edged herself nearer till she could see more of the supine Vulcan.

He lay sprawled face downwards in the wet grass, unmoving, even when she

repeated his name in urgent tones. His face was turned towards her, and she could see a large bruise darkening on his temple.

Her stretching hand reached the one extended towards her. She slipped her fingers round the wrist, feeling for a pulse. She found one, beating rapidly. In her relief, reassured that he was alive, she tried to get closer, and moving too quickly, knocked her leg against a stone. An agonised pain shot through her, and with a moan, she collapsed limply and lay still, her head pillowed on the Vulcan's outstretched arm.

As Daphne came round once more, her first thought was that she was pleased that it had stopped raining. But her ears told her she was wrong about that. She opened her eyes, to see grey rock above her. Easing herself up on one elbow, she found she was lying in the shelter of an overhang of rock. Beyond it the rain still poured steadily down, pattering rhythmically in the puddles.

As she eased herself into a sitting position, she saw Spock at the end of the shelter, and stared in amazement. What on earth was the Vulcan doing? He was sitting cross-legged, with his back to the rain. One hand was bracing his arm, while the other was holding fast to the edge of the rock. It looked just as if he was attempting to pull it down. His head was bowed to his chest, and turned away from her. What was he doing? Was it some old Vulcan custom? Was something wrong?

Then suddenly something in his unnatural position struck a chord in her memory.

"Mr, Spock," she called.

His head came up, and he turned towards her. The rain that had darkened his clothes had added little to the sleekness of his dark hair. His expression was set and composed, but could not conceal the flicker of pain in his eyes or the pallor of his face.

As he moved over towards her, the awkwardness of his movements, and the unnatural way in which he was holding his arm confirmed Daphne's suspicions.

"I can see what's wrong," she exclaimed. "You've put your shoulder out."

"Correct," replied the Vulcan stiffly. "There are some Vulcan techniques of self-help that I have learned. I was endeavouring to use them."

"I can help, Mr. Spock," said Daphne eagerly. "Last summer, my brother and I were larking about on the beach. He fell off some rocks, and did just the same to his shoulder. He's a medical student, so he had some idea what to do, and he showed me how to help him."

Even as she offered her help so eagerly, Daphne had a sudden spasm of doubt. It had been quite a struggle before she had succeeded in aiding her brother, and he had screamed with the pain she caused him. The sound still haunted her dreams occasionally.

But Spock had already accepted her offer. "Very well, Ensign," he said. "If you can aid me, then I shall be able to do something about your leg."

He helped her to sit up so that her back was braced against the rock behind her. He sat close to her, and fixed one hand in a firm grasp round the toe of his boot. Then he showed her exactly where to place the heel of her hand against his shoulder.

"When I say 'begin', push with all your force," he ordered. She nodded in understanding, and concentrated all her attention. When the order came, she put all her strength into the effort. She felt the tension of the firm muscle under her hand. At first there seemed to be no result, but then she felt the movement and the instant relaxation. As she withdrew her hand she suddenly realised that there had been so sound, no cry of pain as she'd expected. She looked anxiously at the Vulcan. He was nursing his arm, and his head was bent over it, his face hidden from her. He was very still for a moment. Then he lifted his head, and

began to massage his shoulder gently. He turned to meet her anxious eyes.

"Thank you, Ensign," he said. "You did very well." Daphne's eyes glowed with pleasure and pride.

The Vulcan scrambled to his feet, stooping slightly under the rocky overhang. "Now I shall do something about your leg," he said. He stepped out into the rain, returning in a few moments with a long straight branch from a tree. Reaching into the equipment bag lying at the back of the shelter, he found a large bandage, fortunately protected in a plastic cover, and proceeded, with hands strong but surprisingly gentle, to bind the supporting stick to her leg, easing the bone into its proper place.

In spite of his carefulness, the pain almost made Daphne pass out again. She leaned back against the wall, with her eyes closed, and struggled to regain her self-control. She was vaguely aware of Spock rummaging in the bag and busying himself with something, but she could not raise the energy to open her eyes to see what he was doing.

Then a hand lifted hers, and closed her fingers carefully round a small container. She opened her eyes, and found that the Vulcan had prepared some of the self-heating soup that was part of the emergency supplies. It smelt good and she sipped it, grateful for the warmth it engendered.

Spock also held a cup, and eased himself beside her against the wall, to drink it slowly. The companionableness and equalising factor of shared pain gave Daphne encouragement to speak more freely.

"Mr. Spock," she said, "have you summoned assistance?"

"Negative," he replied, a grim expression on his face. "One communicator is damaged beyond repair and, although I have searched, I cannot find the other."

"Oh," said Daphne, rather taken aback, and thought again about the implications of this. "But surely," she protested, "the people from the base camp will come to rescue us?"

"Why should they?" replied Spock. "We will not be overdue for several hours yet."

"But the weather!" said Daphne.

"It is possible," replied Spock, "that its severity is only local, and they are not aware of it. And even if they are, they will assume either that we are taking temporary shelter somewhere, or that we are making our way back normally."

Daphne pondered this to herself. It was true, of course. The people at base camp - or on the ship - would not become concerned about them for some time yet, and even when they did, they would be unable to contact them, and would not know that they were injured and needing help.

She looked sideways at the stern profile, as he gazed out at the steadily falling rain. I wonder what he's thinking, she thought to herself. Probably he's wondering what he's done to be lumbered with me, she mused, suddenly sorry for herself. In spite of all her efforts a muffled sob escaped her. Immediately the dark head swung round, and he surveyed her with a puzzled look.

"Miss Weyford?" he began.

"It's all my fault," she wailed. "If I hadn't been so clumsy... And you haven't said one word of blame."

It was obvious from her face that floods of tears were imminent, and Spock was rather nonplussed. He had problems enough without that. He spoke sharply. "Pull yourself together, Ensign. Remember you are a Starfleet officer, and not a child."

Daphne gasped at the brusque words, but they had the required effect, almost like a sudden slap in the face. She took a deep breath and regained her calm.

Watching her with his dark alien eyes, he nodded approval, and continued more

gently. "We cannot alter what has happened by complaining. It was an accident. You did not intend harm to either of us, and recriminations would be both unjust and a waste of effort, don't you think?"

"Yes; Mr. Spock," agreed Daphne, much calmer now. She sat quietly for a while, and then asked, "What do you think we should do, sir?"

"I am considering the alternatives, Ensign," he replied, once more gazing out of their haven. "We could stay where we are, and wait for rescue operations to find us. But those will not even be started for several hours yet, and we are both in need of medical attention, and very wet. By the time the search begins, it will be both cold and dark. It seems to me that a more practical course would be to attempt to make our way back towards the base camp. It will not be very rapid progress, but at least we will be that much nearer rescue when it is initiated."

The thought that came into Daphne's head frightened her, but she expressed it bravely, although the tremor in her voice betrayed her. "I am the one who cannot travel easily, Mr. Spock," she said. "Should you not leave me and go for help alone?"

The Vulcan looked at her, noting the terror that showed in her widened eyes at the prospect. He realised what it had cost her to make the suggestion, and privately commended her courage. It was an alternative that had occurred to him, but his sense of responsibility had prevailed. It was, after all, her first experience of planetary survey, and it had become a very difficult one, but she was behaving well. To be left, even for a short while, might destroy the self-confidence she had been gradually acquiring.

"No, Ensign, that is not feasible," he said, in a tone which brooked no argument, but also gave no explanation.

He got to his feet again, and started to go out into the downpour. "I must find you a branch for a crutch," he said, "as I shall be unable to carry you."

"I know," said Daphne, the words slipping out before she thought. "My size again. 'Poor old Daphne, it's a pity she's such a big girl'."

The Vulcan stopped short, recognising a hint of desperate bitterness in the words. Did this girl long to be different? Did she yearn to be dainty and petite? Did she feel a need to be small and helpless to inspire care and protectiveness? How sad. Why did Humans not learn to accept themselves for what they were, and take proper pride in it?

He crouched down again and looked her straight in the eyes. "I did not mean that," he said. "I was considering my shoulder injury." He eyed her reflectively and continued, choosing his words carefully. "You know, you should not denigrate yourself in this fashion. Your size gives you strength and endurance that many would envy. For instance, I was exceptionally pleased with how well you kept up with me across the sands this morning." (How long ago that seemed) "And someone tiny, like Ensign K'Moto yesterday, would have been totally unable to help me with my shoulder."

She looked at him. His eyes, dark and alien though they were, were completely sincere and honest. He means it, she thought, and her spirits rose. He stood up and moved off, tossing back another remark as he went.

"You know," he said, "many men are made uncomfortable by the 'helpless little woman' type, especially servicemen who appreciate equal ability in a companion."

Daphne stared after him, amazed. She'd heard so much about this man, how rigid and unfeeling he was. It just wasn't true! He was very understanding indeed. Oh, he might not show it too readily, and would undoubtedly deny it if confronted, but she knew now, and would always regard him in a special light.

Her composure restored, she set to work to repack the equipment bags that lay near her. The contents must have spilled out and lain in the rain, she

decided, for they were all very wet, although most were protected by plastic sachets. She extracted a bandage and used it to dry off the other things as best she could.

The tricorder she had used was badly scratched and dented. She tried the controls, but it wasn't working. However, further investigation suggested that the data already in there might be recovered intact by an expert. Most of the specimens they had collected seemed undamaged, although the plants she had gathered were just a tangled mass. She was still trying to sort them out when Spock returned. He eyed what she was doing with an odd expression. He appreciated that she was making an effort to be helpful, and he didn't want to say anything that might dampen her spirit. At last, choosing his words carefully, he said,

"I do not think we should burden ourselves with any extraneous weight, Ensign."

She looked up, startled. "Oh, but Mr. Spock," she gasped, "it seems a pity to leave all our hard work behind." As he hesitated, she added, "I've divided it between us. Let's try it for a start. If it gets too much we can always discard it later." She was already passing the strap of one bag over her head and shoulder.

He gave in gracefully, and slung the other bag over his sound shoulder. He helped her to her feet and gave her the crutch-like branch he had found.

Daphne put it under her arm and set off bravely. The rain hit her dismally as she left the shelter of the rock, but she squared her strong shoulders resolutely, gritted her teeth, and determined to do her very best.

It took them nearly an hour to get round the bottom of the escarpment, back to the edge of the desert. Spock's excellent sense of direction kept him unerringly on the right course, but he had to make many minor detours so that the going was not too bad for Ensign Weyford. His admiration for the girl had been steadily growing. He looked back at her now. Wet and bedraggled, her shoulders were sagging with tiredness, but she came on resolutely, placing the crutch carefully and swinging her weight along. He made a mental note to file a commendation for her when this was over. She had earned it.

On an impulse he took a few steps back, and putting an arm around her waist, helped her along the last few yards to a big rock, where he eased her down to rest, and sat beside her.

"You're doing extremely well," he told her, and meant it.

She answered with a tired but determined smile. "I believe the rain is letting up at last," she said. She was right. Over the last hour it had gradually decreased, and was now no more than a fine drizzle.

The fact obviously pleased her, so he forebore to comment on the other side of it, which was that the improvement in the weather would also have served to decrease any anxiety about them in the minds of those at the base camp. Still if they could continue at this pace, they would most likely get nearly back before anyone thought them overdue, anyway.

When he thought the girl had rested sufficiently, he helped her to her feet again. Now that there was only the desert to cross, he thought...

He began to step out firmly. He had taken only a few steps when he stopped abruptly. His foot had sunk ankle-deep in mud! Motioning Daphne to wait, he tried a few more experimental steps. The mud deepened. He studied the surface carefully. He had seen this phenomenon once before. A sudden flash flood had swamped a desert surface, producing a stretch of treacherous quicksand that had remained until the water had eventually found a way of escape, and drained away. This was evidently very similar.

He turned back to Daphne and helped her back to the rock. "Sit down again," he ordered. "I need to borrow your crutch."

She did as she was told, and watched as he advanced slowly into the morass,

prodding ahead of him with his long stick. After a few minutes exploration, he turned back, and came to sit down beside her. He seemed deep in thought, so she didn't disturb him, but waited patiently for him to tell her what to do next.

The Vulcan sat silently trying to work out the best course of action. It was difficult. His proddings with the stick had shown him that there was firm ground under the swampy surface. The mud would come no higher than his knees. With the help of the stick he would be able to plod slowly through it. But it was patently impossible for the girl to do the same. She had managed very well up till now, swinging herself along, but that had been on reasonably level smooth ground. She would not be able to drag herself through the mud, or lift her legs over it. What alternative could he find?

His downcast eyes caught sight of the strap across his chest. The canvas equipment bags! If he used them to make some sort of large mat, perhaps he could drag her across the surface of the swamp. He explained the plan to her.

"I'm afraid we'll have to jettison all the equipment and specimens," he said, tipping all the contents of the bags out in a heap on the ground.

"Not the tricorder," she begged, grabbing it from the pile and clutching it to her protectively. "It's got such a lot of interesting data."

"All right," he conceded. "But you must look after it." She nodded, and slipped the strap over her shoulder.

Spock used one of the sharp specimen-cutting tools to rip the two bags open along the sides. This furnished two large pieces of strong canvas, which, placed end to end just about equalled Daphne's height. The fastening straps were in the right place to join them satisfactorily. The handles formed at one end a pulling loop, and at the other a strap that hooked round Daphne's legs to keep the imprudent sledge in place. Some side straps also made loops that she could slide her arms through. She got herself into position, and clutched the tricorder to her. The buckles of the fastenings dug most uncomfortably into the small of her back, but she made no complaint.

Grasping the stick firmly as a prodding-pole, Spock set off. It was not going to be an easy journey. Although he had said nothing, his shoulder was severely bruised, and ached badly. He could not possibly pull with that arm, and even the motion of prodding with the stick would be a strain. And Ensign Weyford was going to be quite a weight to pull. If only she had been tiny like Ensign K'Moto, he thought, and then instantly quelled the thought as being unfair. Hadn't it been he, just a while ago, chiding the girl for blaming herself for her size, and here he was doing just the same.

But later on, as he plodded wearily through the mud, he couldn't keep the thought at bay. He had hoped that the area of morass would not extent far, but he'd been going for over an hour now and it was still the same. The fingers of the hand grasping the pulling loop were numb and dead, his legs felt like leaden weights, and both shoulders ached abominably. He was getting so weary now that his actions had become mechanical. Prod ahead with the stick, drag one foot from the sucking mud, let it sink in a step further, drag the heavy weight a few more inches, and repeat, again, and again, and again.

He could not remember ever having felt so exhausted before. He'd tried to control his fatigue with mental effort, but he was unable to maintain it, and now his head was pounding with a blinding headache. He'd lost count of the number of times he'd slipped and fallen flat in the mud. His uniform was now more sandy-brown than blue, and he must be carrying several more pounds in weight thanks to the mud. One of the strongest thoughts that kept him going was that this very inexperienced girl had shown courage, and he must not let her down. She could not be having a very pleasant ride, but she had made no sound of complaint.

His foot slipped, he lost his balance and went down full length in the mud again with a loud 'plop'. He was so tired, and the sensation was so soft and yielding, that he felt a great temptation just to lie there, and not bother to struggle upright any more. Surely they must be nearly across the morass by now!

He lifted his head, and deciding that his left hand was less muddy than his right, used it to wipe the mud from his eyes and face. As his vision cleared, he strained to see if the base camp was in view yet. Yes - surely those were the outlines of the tents and temporary buildings. He dragged himself up, and plodded on again. He was so busy concentrating on prodding with the stick, and following it with one foot after another, that he missed the flurry of movement near the buildings and the excited shouts.

The first thing that impinged on his consciousness was a series of squelching sounds approaching from in front of him, then hands were all round him, taking the weight of the strap from one hand and the stick from the other, and urging him forward with gentle pulls and pushes.

After a few yards the going became easier, and soon he was standing on firm ground. He found himself gazing into the anxious face of Sulu. The quick-witted young Oriental took one look at the weary Vulcan, assessing instantly his exhaustion. He switched his gaze momentarily to the injured ensign, then whipped out his communicator and called the Enterprise.

By the time that the correct co-ordinates had been fed into the transporter, and the rescued pair, mud and all, had been transported up to the ship, quite a large reception party had gathered. Dr. M'Benga and Nurse Chapel, who were officially on duty, immediately took charge of Ensign Weyford, transferred her to a trolley, and whisked her off to sickbay, leaving Spock to the care of Dr. McCoy, who, although off duty, had heard Sulu's excited call and had come to the transporter room. On the way he had alerted Captain Kirk, also off duty, and now both were surveying their friend and wondering what he had been up to this time.

Spock had wearily descended the few steps of the transporter, dripping mud with every step, and now stood there almost too tired to go any further.

McCoy regarded the Vulcan's bedraggled, mud-caked figure with a barely concealed twinkle of amusement. "First of all," he said, "I think we'd better get you cleaned up."

"I will take a shower," replied Spock.

"No," said McCoy. "I think a bath would be better - a nice comforting soak. You can use the one in sickbay - the one meant for saline baths." He called over two waiting orderlies. "Barnes and Jenkins can help you."

The Vulcan managed to draw his slumped figure to its full height. "I am quite capable of giving myself a bath," he said coldly.

McCoy grinned. "Modesty, Spock?" he queried, and, tired or not, Spock managed to throw him a glare. "No, you'd better let them help you. You see, I work for a very demanding Captain. I should hate having to explain to him that his favourite Vulcan had fallen asleep and drowned himself in a bath. He might take it rather amiss."

Kirk caught the teasing twinkle in the doctor's eye, and joined in. "Yes, indeed I should," he said. "In fact, I might get quite cross, and then there would be trouble."

Spock opened his weary, drooping eyes and gave each a long, hard look. Then, realising that they were indulging in the Human trait of disguising genuine concern with gentle teasing, he gave in gracefully and allowed the orderlies to help him from the room.

A little later, relaxing in the soothing warm water, he ventured a sleepy comment. "I concede that the Doctor might have been right for once," he murmured. "The effect is very soporific."

"Still," Barnes said thoughtfully, "I doubt whether anyone could actually fall asleep and drown, unless they were drugged. Surely the shock of breathing water instead of air, sir, would startle you awake?"

As the only answer he received was a muffled grunt, he gave a sharp look at his patient. The Vulcan was falling asleep. He nodded sharply to Jenkins, who

reached for the fluffy towels hanging on the rail.

"Come on, Mr Spock," he said. "We'd better get you dried and into bed." He eyed the First Officer's lean form. Knowing the Vulcan wasn't listening, he added, "You're on the thin side, I know, but you're no light-weight. I don't fancy carrying you to bed."

Spock managed to rouse himself enough to assist them as they towelled him dry, got him into hospital-blue pyjamas, and led him into a side ward, but as he climbed onto the soft couch and relaxed against the pillow, he could hold out no longer. Before the two orderlies had finished spreading a soft coverlet over him, he was fast asleep:

McCoy met the two orderlies, and received their report about the various bruises they had found on the Vulcan's body. Moving carefully, he approached the bed. He took a quick look at the relaxed face, and switched on the diagnostic scanner. What he saw there satisfied him. Sleep would deal with the immediate fatigue problem, and tomorrow would be soon enough to work out a programme of massage and exercise to ease the pain in the damaged shoulder. He switched off the panel, dimmed the room light to a mere glimmer, and went off to reassure Jim Kirk.

In another room in sickbay, in spite of Nurse Chapel's protests, an over-excited and rather talkative ensign was busy explaining to her friend Jamie just what had happened to her. She babbled on so excitedly that at last Nurse Chapel went for a sedative to calm her down.

Relieved to see that Daphne was all right after her experience, Jamie rose to go, throwing a final crack. "Trust you, Daphne," she laughed. "First planet survey you're on, and you have to push Mr. Spock off a cliff!"

"I wasn't like that," protested Daphne. "It was an accident, and anyway, Mr. Spock was very, very nice about it. He's a very special person, Jamie, and I won't hear a word against him."

Nurse Chapel, standing waiting to see her patient's visitor out, heaved an inward sigh. Oh dear, she thought, gazing at the two young girls. Another devoted fan! How does he do it?

+++++

FOR LEILA by Susan Meek

A heart...

That cared for one who was not her kind.

A love...

That waited patiently through the years of first
rejection.

A spirit...

So different from she who spurned me for logic's
cold ways.

And eyes...

That saw beyond the mask of non-emotion.

A beauty...

That outshone the stars in the summer sky of Paradise

A Paradise she made for me by being there.

And somewhere,

A life that waits, willing to share,

Should I decide some day

That logic is not enough.

+++++

MORE DEADLY THAN THE MALE? by Meg Wright

The devastation was shattering in its completeness; wooden houses collapsed drunkenly, trees uprooted and dying, newly-exposed rocks rearing up towards the pinky-purple sky, gaping fissures yawning wide in the ploughed fields; and over everything the stench of decay and the invisible, intangible threat of disease.

Kirk shook his head in numb disbelief over the sheer size of the problem. It was certainly beyond their power to do more than aid the colonists back to the most basic civilisation in the time available. In only three more days the Enterprise would have to move out whether he liked it or not. He sighed. At these times he raged helplessly over the scarcity of starships available, too few attempting to cover the vast distances, the resulting conflicts that came, when a job had to be left half done because something more urgent landed in his lap, sometimes threatened to harden him too much, forced him to regard each critical situation with a cynicism that troubled him.

He shrugged, mentally castigating himself for wasting time. The immediate urgencies, now that McCoy had beamed the most badly injured aboard, were to oversee the tending of multiple minor wounds, erect new shelters, mend damaged machinery and the colony's ruined radio equipment. Away across the valley he could see the tall figure of his First Officer picking his way across the ruined fields. Obviously Masters had found she could manage alone once Spock had applied his superior Vulcan muscles to moving the largest pieces of fallen masonry from the broken stone hut which housed the primitive dynamo. He smiled at the memory of her excited yelps as she'd caught glimpses of the ancient hardware gleaming dully under its covering layer of dust. The colonists had tended their original machinery with loving care, preserving each precious piece until such time as their technology should advance sufficiently to make replacements simple. They'd nearly made it, too, until this tragedy had come upon them, ruining decades of hard physical labour in two days of cataclysmic seismic release.

Entering the heap of splintered wood and shattered adobe that had once been the colony leader's living quarters, he stepped over the protruding limbs of his Communications Officer, and gingerly inserted his head into the open panel beside hers.

"How is it, Uhura?"

"Bad," she replied laconically. "It'll take at least two days to complete the repairs properly."

"Keep at it."

She took her eyes off the delicate wiring for a moment and eyed him ruefully. "It'd be a lot easier if I could lift the whole section out, but these old AC411 models aren't designed to come apart."

He tried to nod, found it impossible. "Masters has been making similar noises over the power plant," he grinned. "Never thought I'd live to see the day we regretted finding a colony that was too efficient in maintaining everything in good order. I don't think they own anything newer than fifty years old!"

She laughed and returned to the circuitry.

Kirk slid his head carefully out again, banged it painfully on a protruding strut, swore loudly and came upright to find the rising eyebrows of the First Officer beside him. Hiding his amusement, he raised his own.

"More problems, Spock?"

"Apparently there is another settlement on the other major continent, Captain. Mr. Hartswell is concerned about their welfare but also wonders if they are able to help."

"This could hardly have reached them, Spock."

"I did not suggest that it had, Captain. However, it may be desirable to ferry the survivors over there, if the other colony can manage to absorb them. Or

they may be able to offer practical help here, if we bring them back with us. We can only leave a limited number here when we go on to New Canberra."

"You're right. We'll collect a shuttle. McCoy has Kyle working overtime on the transporter at the moment.

A muffled voice spoke at their feet. "If you're going back aboard, sir, I'd be grateful for a second portable micro-welder and a pack of E-shaped armatures. Every time I ask Kyle he's busy with another load of medical or survival supplies, and they have priority."

"We'll get them to you, Lieutenant. Just give Spock a complete list of what you want." He flipped his communicator open. "Two to beam up, Lt...."

"Sir, Medical has priority..."

"I'm aware of that. Spock and I are coming aboard to collect a shuttle. It'll ease the situation down here considerably." He looked over his shoulder. "Ready, Spock?"

Less than half an hour later, he was piloting the shuttle swiftly down into the atmosphere, when Spock looked up from the readouts he was monitoring.

"Brace yourself, Captain, there is an area of...distortion...ahead."

"Distortion?"

"Unknown. The effect may be..."

Dizzily, wrenchingly, reality swung, hung, flipped...

Kirk blinked hard, clearing his dazzled vision. "Good Lord, Spock, what in the nine worlds was that?"

"Some sort of vortex, Captain." He studied the panel closely. "We seem to have navigated through it safely enough; we are still on course."

"Well, that's something. We can't afford to waste any time over the next few days."

"Agreed."

He dropped the shuttle deftly, close to the shattered village. "I'll deliver the things Uhura wanted, Spock. No need for you to come too."

The Vulcan nodded silently, opening the door. Kirk jumped lightly down and scrambled uncomfortably over the tumbled earth to the ruined houses. "Here's the equipment you wanted, Uhura."

"At last. You've taken your time, Jim!"

Kirk looked at her protruding legs in mild surprise. Uhura never called him by his name. He set the package down and turned to go. There were more important matters on hand than enquiry into unusual behaviour.

"Jim!"

Annoyed at the peremptory tone, he turned back, eyebrows rising. She had her head out of the open panel now, and was looking at him with anger and...contempt?

"Just what the hell do you think you are doing in that uniform, Jim?"

Startled, he looked down at himself. "And what uniform should I be wearing, Lieutenant?"

"Lieutenant?" Outrage was written in every line of her as she rose to her feet. "I don't know what you are playing at, Jim," she said dangerously, "but there is no time for games now. You know we have only three days to spare and..."

Kirk didn't hear the rest of it. His brain had now assimilated Uhura's uniform. Starfleet Captain.

She drew out her communicator. "Chief Maxwell, come here please."

"On my way, Captain."

The voice was certainly female, which Kirk's Security Chief was equally certainly not. He spread his hands deprecatingly. "I'm sorry, Uhura, there is some misunderstanding."

"You are mistaken," she said coldly. "I understand only too well. I have thought for some time that you and your Vulcan friend were growing a little... restive. Where is he? In the shuttle?"

"Yes, but..."

She held up an angry hand. "I don't want to hear any more, Jim. I'd prefer you did not condemn yourself to a court martial, although it could still come to that." Her face twisted. "I should be sorry to lose you, you have been an excellent partner." She looked over his shoulder towards the distorted opening that had once been a doorway. "Maxwell, Commander Kirk is under arrest."

Kirk swung round, and found himself staring at a firmly-held phaser in the hand of a greying, middle-aged woman, all muscle and authority. He shrugged mentally. "I'll give no trouble," he said calmly.

The Security Chief eyed his braid and laughed sardonically. "Well now, that's a surprise," she chuckled. "Outside, Commander, where I can keep an eye on you."

"Better tie him to that doorpost." Uhura gave it an experimental heave. "It seems firm enough. We haven't got time to spare to beam him up to the brig, yet, and Spock is still in the shuttle. He must be in the plot, too."

"He's coming over," Maxwell replied. "Must be getting worried about his little friend." She gave Kirk a vicious jab with the phaser. "Captain, if you'd get me that rope from the tree over there..."

Uhura nodded tightly and fetched it. Kirk made no resistance as his hands were neatly strapped behind him. When he judged Spock to be in earshot, he gave a yell.

"Spock! Stay where you are a minute!"

Maxwell's back-handed slap was heavier than he expected, but the Vulcan had stopped.

"Use your phaser," Uhura ordered curtly.

"No!" The word was forced from Kirk.

The Chief's aim was pin-point accurate; clearly Uhura ran a tight ship. He eyed her with respect and said firmly, "That was unnecessary, Captain. I merely wanted to inform Spock of certain facts before he got here."

Enraged, she turned on him. "I don't know yet precisely what your conspiracy entailed, Commander Kirk, but I will know, very soon! Maxwell, call Rand. We'll have to use the mind-link on Spock, so get Chapel to attend to him and bring him over here when he comes round."

"Mind link?"

"Yes. Had you failed to take that into account?"

"It never even occurred to me you could do it," he replied in all honesty. "Uhura, please listen to me. There is no plot, and I am not your Commander Kirk. In my universe, or dimension, or wherever, I am the Captain of the Enterprise."

"In your imagination, maybe. In your wishes, I daresay. In reality, never."

"How are you going to link with Spock?"

She stood and faced him, hands on hips. "Stop playing games, Jim."

"I'm not playing games!" He pushed his anger down. "He's the only telepath on board my ship. Who have you got?"

Doubt flared in her eyes for a brief moment. "You mean you really are..."

"From another dimension, timeline... I don't know. We experienced something in the shuttle." He put all the charm he knew into his smile. "Uhura, don't you remember the I.S.S. Enterprise?"

Her blank eyes clearly showed that she did not, but her ominously stern expression was relaxing its severity a little under the full barrage of his shameless smile. "What is the I.S.S. Enterprise?"

He shook his head. "Obviously it didn't happen to you. A transporter malfunction while we were negotiating with the Halkans."

Her eyes hardened again. "There was no malfunction."

"There was on my ship. It doesn't matter, if it didn't happen to you you won't understand why I mentioned it." He stared across the uneven ground. "Spock seems to be coming round."

They had dragged him none too gently to his feet and were helping him along, Chapel's arm holding his over her shoulders. The stone face showed little as they drew near.

"Captain, are you all right?"

"Captain?" Chapel almost dropped the Vulcan. "Spock, what the hell are you talking about?"

Uhura motioned her to silence and stood in front of the Vulcan. "Your explanation, Spock, and you had better make it swift and credible."

His eyebrow lifted a little as he contemplated the braid on her sleeve. "I would surmise a temporal or spacial distortion vortex," he replied slowly. "We ran into it on our way down."

She made an exasperated sound. "I meant the explanation for your sudden self-promotion to Commander."

"I have held the rank of Commander for over two years."

She drew a deep breath. "You mean you really are both from a different universe?"

Kirk nodded cheerfully. "That's what I've been telling you."

Away to their right the transporter effect was beginning to sparkle.

"Good," said Uhura with satisfaction. "Now we shall know for certain."

The sparkle solidified into a delightful - and familiar - shape. It was T'Pring.

Kirk's expressive face depicted his surprise clearly enough, but the Vulcan's was giving nothing away.

"Security Chief Maxwell tells me you are having problems, Captain." The voice was as melodious - and as cold - as Kirk remembered it from that far-off day in his own world. Plainly that event had ended very differently here.

"I need to know whether these two have some kind of elaborate plot to take over, or whether they really are not our Kirk and Spock," Uhura said succinctly.

"Not ours?"

"They claim to have gone through some kind of vortex in the shuttlecraft."

"I see. I will ascertain the truth."

Kirk accustomed to the deliberate and gentle movements of his friend, was surprised to see her reach for the meld swiftly and without asking permission. There was a long silence, broken only by Uhura's tapping boot and the distant sounds of continuing rescue operations.

Spock crumpled.

Horrified, Kirk dragged at his bonds. "What have you done to him? Let me go to him!"

T'Pring turned her unmoving face to Uhura. "He has lied to you. I suggest you send them both to the brig."

"You must have seen the truth in the link!" Kirk said furiously. "Captain, I don't know why, but she is the one who is lying!"

Uhura's face was hard. "That is a very serious accusation to make about a Vulcan, Kirk. Take them to the beam-up point, Maxwell, and put them both in the brig. We'll deal with them when we have time." She stirred the still figure of the Vulcan with one foot. "When will he come round, T'Pring?"

"Not for a while," the girl replied. "Shall I beam back aboard with them, Captain?"

"No, Lt. Scott could do with some assistance. I was going to send for you." She sighed. "We'll have to send someone else to check on the other colonists now. Better get Lt. Martine and Ensign Barrows. We can't rely on other male members of the crew not being in on this ridiculous conspiracy as well."

"There is no conspiracy!" Kirk yelled in outrage. "Uhura, listen to me!..."

"There is no conspiracy," T'Pring agreed. "The only two involved are our two partners, Captain."

"You couldn't have seen anything like that in Spock's mind," Kirk began, but a sudden doubt made him pause. Was this his Spock? Yes, of course, he still bore Commander's braid on his sleeve.

His tiny pause, however, served to confirm Uhura's suspicions. "Did Spock think he could hide something from T'Pring?" she questioned him. "Kirk, you know Vulcan women must have complete control over their partners. You have been even more stupid than I could have believed possible. Take them away, Maxwell."

Uhura came out from under the console. "Captain?"

Kirk's face displayed bewilderment. "Uhura? What...why...?"

She looked at his sleeve braid and failed to conceal her utter disbelief. "You think I am your Captain?"

"Yes, of course you are. Uhura, is this some kind of test? You know my loyalty. Surely this is no time to put me to the test?"

She gathered her whirling mind. "Tell me everything," she ordered.

"I don't understand."

"You are not in your own universe any more, I guess," she said impatiently. "Just like that time with the Halkans, you remember."

His bewilderment increased.

"We beamed on board another Enterprise." A brief pause. "It didn't happen to you?" A shake of the head. She took a deep breath. "We'd better call Spock. He was in the shuttle with you?"

"Yes."

Uhura flipped open her communicator. "Chief Harbourne, please go and get Commander Spock and ask him to come over. He's in the shuttle."

"Harbourne?"

"The Security Chief."

"What happened to Maxwell?" Kirk's eyes widened. "That was a man's voice!"

"Harbourne is certainly male," she agreed.

"But...no head of department is male."

"Here they are," she said gently. "Our Kirk is Captain of the Enterprise, and Mr. Spock is the First Officer."

His jaw dropped. "Surely T'Pring would never permit that?"

Her own mouth dropped. "T'Pring?"

"Spock's partner."

"Mr. Spock has no...partner."

Kirk put a hand on the console to steady himself, shaking his head. "Something is definitely wrong," he whispered.

When Uhura saw the shyly smiling face of the approaching Vulcan, she was inclined to agree with him.

"What is your position on the Enterprise?" she asked him.

His eyebrow shot up. At least one thing had remained familiar. "Science Officer, of course, Captain..." His voice trailed away.

"Yes," she said sympathetically. "It would appear that my Enterprise has no Captain, and that yours now has two."

The strange Kirk and Spock looked at each other with horrified eyes. "Then it is to be hoped they can convince our Captain of what has taken place," Kirk said, "or there will be serious trouble."

"What do you mean, trouble?"

"No male may hold a senior position in our universe. It is forbidden. They will be suspected of conspiracy."

Uhura eyed him grimly. "Then the sooner we send you two home, the better. We'll see what the Chief Engineer can do for us."

"Mr. Scott?" Kirk asked.

"Yes."

"A competent lieutenant in our world," Spock said, smiling. "But my knowledge may also be of assistance. If I may be permitted...?"

She eyed him steadily - a smiling Vulcan was disconcerting to say the least, but the Spock of the I.S.S. Enterprise had been trustworthy; she made up her mind swiftly.

"We'll be glad to make use of you, Mr. Spock. Get to it!"

Ten hectic minutes later, Spock was at the computers with Scott, and Uhura left with Kirk to make a report to Sulu. "I would have come to you first," she said worriedly, "but I thought we should deal with the problem of returning them first."

Sulu studied Kirk covertly, reflecting how strange it was that one could see immediately that this Kirk was not accustomed to command. The charm was there in full force, the intelligence, the steadiness, but the power was...subdued, somehow, held in check.

"You'd better take over here, Uhura," he said at last. "Chekov and I will take over the job Mr. Spock and the Captain were going to do. You can't leave the radio work, can you?"

She gave a grimace. "Not really. Palmer is good, but she wouldn't be quick enough."

He grinned at her. "Don't you fancy being in command?"

She gave him a friendly punch. "I might just deal with you if I was," she threatened.

A gentle hand touched her arm. "What can I do to help?"

"What would you be doing on your own ship, Mr. Kirk?"

"I was going to the other colony with Spock."

"Well, we can't let you do that. We must have you here ready to send you back as soon as Spock and Scotty have it worked out." She gave a rueful smile. "I'm not exactly used to the idea of giving you orders, Mr. Kirk."

"I can't hang around here doing nothing," he protested.

She grinned. "Your character is not so different, after all. We do need more hands down at the settlement. Care to do a little hefty manual work?"

"I guess somebody has to," he agreed.

A fluttering movement of Spock's hands brought Kirk swinging swiftly round. He went to the recumbent Vulcan and lifted his head gently into his lap.

"Take it easy, Spock, you've been out some time. What did she do to you?"

The dark eyes opened and closed again. "An ancient Vulcan technique, Captain. One that is not used in modern times, except by those dealing with the insane."

"Well, it certainly knocked you out." He helped him to sit up. "Feel up to discussing our problem?" He waved an expressive hand.

Spock took in his surroundings and raised an eyebrow. "Escape from the brig is not a simple matter, Captain."

"It most certainly is not," a cool voice said. "You would be ill advised to try."

Kirk was on his feet. "What's the reason, T'Pring? Why did you do it?"

"I have no intention of discussing this matter with you," she said coolly. "It is Spock I have come to speak to."

"I am the Captain," he said curtly.

"Not on this ship. You have no authority here." She looked behind him to the now standing Vulcan. "Spock, we have much to discuss, you and I."

Spock remained stiffly behind Kirk. "I see no point in discussion, T'Pring. In my universe, your action would have been inexcusable."

"Here it is common enough," she said indifferently. "How else is the female to control?"

"You knew he was not lying," Kirk grated. "Why did you say that he was?"

She gave him a cool, dismissive smile. "My actions are no affair of yours, Commander."

"I am not your Commander Kirk," he said with controlled fury. "I am the Captain of the Enterprise."

"Then I am pleased I do not live in your world." Her voice dripped ice. "I should scarcely feel safe in a world where uncontrolled males are permitted to hold positions of such responsibility. Spock, you may hide behind your friend for the moment, but later, when I have time to spare, I shall come for you."

"T'Pring, wait!"

"She does not seem prepared to listen to us, Captain," Spock said softly.

Kirk swung on him. "You were hiding behind me, Mister," he said grimly. "Just what are you afraid of? What can she do to you?"

Spock surveyed him calmly. "Hiding behind you, Captain?"

"Yes. I could practically feel you breathing down my neck!" Kirk eyes softened. "Spock, this must be a little...strange...to you..."

"I would not have thought it seemed natural to you either, Jim."

Kirk grinned. "You're right. But, by golly, I hope our Uhura gets a command of her own one day. She's quite a girl. Stop changing the subject, Spock. What did T'Pring do to you?"

"She took control of my mind, Captain."

Kirk stared at him in horror. "D'you mean she can make you do what she wants?"

Spock's lips set in a firm line. "Not twice. I shall not be unprepared a second time. Captain, there is someone coming."

Kirk's ears had caught the sound now. "Lie down, Spock. Try and look ill."

He was barely in time to catch him.

He heard a soft exclamation of dismay, heard the forcefield drop, then Christine Chapel was on her knees beside them. The guard swiftly reset the field.

"T'Pring again, Jim? I've told her over and over she'll do this once too often."

"He's all right." Kirk caught her arm. "Christine, are you the C.M.O. here?"

Her eyes looked blankly back. "You know I am, Jim."

"No, I don't. Christine, I am not the James Kirk you know, Spock and I are from a different universe. There, I am the Captain and he is the First Officer." Her eyes widened. "I know, I know. It isn't permitted here."

She shook her head. "You surely can't believe we'd swallow this?" she said incredulously. "What are you hoping to gain from it?" She ran her scanner briefly over Spock. "This unconsciousness is self-induced. Did you hope to escape by such a simple trick?"

"Yes. We want to talk to Uhura."

She rose to her feet, motioning the security guard to let her out. "The Captain will certainly talk to you later, Jim. Don't worry about that."

Kirk made an exasperated sound and bent to Spock. "Aren't you even going to treat him?"

"Treat him?" She reset the field. "I'd like to see T'Pring's face if I so much as touched him," she said bitterly.

Kirk looked at her stiff, retreating back and muttered, "Spock, you sure seem to have the knack of making 'em fall for you, wherever you are!"

"I beg your pardon?" Spock was muzzily raising himself on his elbows.

"Nothing, nothing," Kirk said hastily. "I'm sorry, Spock. That didn't work. I hoped they'd take you to sickbay. We might have been able to make contact with their McCoy - if he's aboard." He put out a hand and helped the Vulcan up. "Any ideas?"

"If I could use the computers..." Spock began.

"Well, you can't!" snapped Kirk. "I thought Vulcans didn't indulge in vain wishes."

"As I was about to say, the calculations would be swifter if I could use the computers," Spock said placidly, "but given sufficient time, I may be able to compute the necessary procedure mentally."

Kirk bowed his head in mock abjection. "Get to it, Spock. How can I help?"

"Can you recall the precise details of the moment we hit the vortex?"

Kirk looked horrified. "Spock, I'm not Vulcan! I don't have eidetic recall."

"I merely wish to check my own memories," Spock said apologetically. "If I may use the meld...?"

"Of course. Carry on."

The gentle fingers touched his face.

Lt. Uhura beamed back aboard at the end of what already seemed an over-long day, and made her way to the bridge. "Palmer, any word from Sulu?"

"Yes. The other colony is quite O.K., and they can spare thirty people to help. Sulu is going to ferry them back during tomorrow."

"Good. With the twenty we can leave behind they should have enough to get them into some kind of stability." She sank into the chair at the library console. "I've done quite well on their radio. It should be complete by tomorrow afternoon. I'll give you a list of spares for beamdown."

Palmer looked at her sympathetically. "Been a long day, hasn't it?"

"You're telling me! And it isn't over yet." She got wearily to her feet. "I hope this Spock is as efficient as ours, otherwise we'll never get them back."

"Never mind, think of the power of being Captain," Palmer grinned.

"Get back to your job," Uhura said shortly. "I'll be in the computer section if I'm wanted. Get all the reports along to me before I go to bed. I'll need some sleep if I'm to get out of this sane."

Palmer nodded. "I'll get them to you."

Kirk was with Spock and Scott, to Uhura's inner dismay. It still felt incredibly unnatural to find him looking to her for guidance...and the look in his eyes when he glanced at her was unnerving as well. Whatever else she had to deal with, she was not prepared to involve herself in that sort of relationship. She'd never be able to look her own Kirk in the eye. She stood firmly beside Scott.

"Aye, we've got the answer," Scott said comfortingly. "Provided they come up with the same one, we're home and dry. They'll have to be at the vortex in twelve hours' time."

"11.941 hours, Scotty," the Vulcan reproved, smiling.

Scott gave Uhura a sideways glance. "A mite more friendly," he said softly, "but otherwise he's much the same, isn't he?"

She chuckled. "I'll take the one we know, thanks, Scotty. Pleasant though these two are, I've had enough of command for a while."

The still figure of the Vulcan did not move once during the long night, but sat staring at a point some light years distant. Kirk dozed fitfully, waking frequently to curse his own helplessness, forcing himself to lie still and not distract Spock. When food was brought in the morning, he again demanded to see Uhura.

Maxwell shook her head. "Don't be ridiculous, Kirk. You know the Captain has to leave here by 4243.9. She hasn't time to waste until we're on our way. Then she'll deal with you."

"Then it may be too late, she may never get her own Kirk back," he said curtly.

She smiled grimly. "It's a good story," she remarked over her shoulder. "You try proving it, otherwise you'll be out of the service for good."

He groaned inwardly, and turned to find Spock's eyes on him.

"You're back with us."

Spock's lack of comment on the inaccuracy of the phrase underlined the seriousness of the situation.

"If I have made no errors, we must re-enter the vortex at 13.29 and 3,4 seconds, ship's time," he said soberly.

"So we have to get out and get a shuttle."

"Precisely."

Kirk's shoulders sagged a little. "If we can get out of here, we'll be doing well," he said sourly.

He was forced to pace the cell vainly for another two hours before any opportunity arose, then as he swung at the turn in his restless pacing, he saw T'Pring arrive on silent feet. He bit back impatient words. Maybe it was as well to let Spock handle this situation. This time the Vulcan made no attempt to hang back, but stepped forward to face her. Their eyes locked in a wordless battle; then she motioned a guard forward to cut off the force field and beckoned Spock to follow her. Kirk quelled a groan of dismay as his First Officer went without apparent protest, leaving him alone in the cell. An hour ticked relentlessly by.

Aboard his own ship, the time was passing with maddening speed, his senior crew driving themselves with proud efficiency, determined to present him with a job as proficient and complete as they would have done were he physically present. At the necessary time, Uhura left her repairs to take a brief farewell.

Kirk bowed over her hand, kissing her fingers gently. "Ma'am, in my own world, you hold a very special position in my life," he said softly. "I owe all that I am to my Uhura's help. Now I owe the regaining of that world to your assistance."

"If our counterparts have also reached the same conclusions," Spock reminded him. He smiled sadly. "From what I hear of your Commander Spock, T'Pring will not wish to let him go."

Uhura crushed her curiosity down sternly. "From all I know of my Commander Spock, he will not submit tamely," she replied. "Nor will my Captain. I wish you both a safe return."

She watched the shuttle lift off and returned reluctantly to her work. The next thirty minutes would be hard to endure.

Had Kirk but known it, Spock's 'battle' with T'Pring had been over within the first few seconds of her arrival. Projecting his own will with a force as great as he had ever used, he had blocked out her attempt to reach him, overcome her resistance and compelled obedience. Following her to her quarters, he had ruthlessly demanded compliance and received it. When the door was safely closed behind them he released her mind again. She looked at him with dawning respect.

"My Spock is not capable of such power."

"I did not realise that I was," he said harshly, "but I will not suffer such domination from you twice. Why did you do it?"

"I desire the Captaincy. With Kirk gone, Uhura would be easy to remove."

"Logical," he agreed grimly. "In my own world, T'Pring was also capable of such flawless logic."

"Was?"

"We are no longer bonded. She gave the challenge."

"You are alone?" She was astounded. "None of our males could function so. Without our control, they become...animals."

"You would find me an unsatisfactory substitute for your own partner. You must release us to return to our own universe."

She smiled coldly. "My purpose will still be fulfilled. Uhura will no longer trust Kirk and will let him go. Then it is but a matter of time."

"What will happen to your James Kirk?"

She shrugged. "Court martial. Dismissal."

Spock experienced a cold, slow anger...and found he had no desire to control it. Lifting his hand he took possession of her mind.

- Control. I demand it. -

Her mind slid away before his, and he sank deeper into the darkness, following where she led, blocking off her retreat until he had her quivering and open before him.

- T'Pring, I do not wish to harm you. See my James Kirk, see what compassion, strength, understanding, tenderness. -

- He is...very whole. -

- Show me the Kirk you know. -

- Tender, laughing, caring. -

- No strength? -

- Yes. Controlled. Surprise. I had not understood. Please me. I beg you. -

- I will release. - He broke the link gently. "This man is worthy of respect, is he not? Even a Vulcan can see that." She nodded unwillingly. "T'Pring, do not break his career for your own selfish ends. I once told my T'Pring that having is not the same as wanting. It is not logical, but it is true. Will the Captainty truly bring you what you desire?"

There was a blazing anger in her eyes. "No. You have shown me another world."

He looked at her with compassion. "This Human emotion called 'love' is powerful, is it not? Seek it out within your own Spock. You may well find that he has much to offer you. The 'animal' I have seen within your mind is lonely, T'Pring. Give him compassion and he will respond. It is not an easy time for us, even with help."

"You have given me much to think about. I will consider deeply."

"We need a shuttle to return to our own world."

She nodded. "I can arrange it." She smiled gravely. "I no longer desire to keep you here...I see no logic in preferring a partner who can...dominate...so wholeheartedly."

"And Kirk? What will you tell your Captain?"

"That I was over-hasty in my judgement. She will be relieved. She is very fond of her partner. Before, I despised her. Now I wish to try and understand. How much time is there left?"

"We must enter the vortex in 21.4 minutes."

"Come, then, there is no time to waste."

Kirk leaped to his feet at their approach, tenseness in every line of his body. T'Pring ordered the guard to lower the force field and led him from the cell. He gave Spock one penetrating look and relaxed.

"Your powers of persuasion don't seem to diminish, Mr. Spock," he murmured.

Spock raised his eyebrows in mild surprise. "Vulcans are logical creatures, Captain, in whatever universe we meet them."

Kirk stifled a grin.

Uhura heard the descending shuttlecraft and extricated herself from the open panel once more. She could hardly bear to watch while the door opened - held her breath to let it out in a long sigh of relief as the figures emerged. This Kirk was decisive of tread, the aura of command unmistakable. She gave him a broad grin of pure relief as he came up to her.

"Well, Captain?" he grinned back.

"I'm handing over with pleasure," she assured him.

He looked around. "Work seems to be progressing well. How's the radio?"

"About another half-hour, sir. Sulu has just brought in the last load of colonists from the other settlement, and we have completed the new shelters. The department heads have their reports ready for you."

"Well done," he said approvingly. "It looks as though they can manage without us, Spock."

"Indeed," the Vulcan said gravely. "Although I believe a certain example may have had some part to play in that."

After Kirk had heard a complete report of events during his temporary absence, he logged a commendation of Uhura's actions. "Thanks to you, Lieutenant, this temporary disruption has not resulted in any delays... Starfleet owes you a lot. And I'll add my thanks to theirs."

She managed to suppress her gratification, pleased her blush did not reveal itself to the world.

He gave her a teasing smile. "I'm going to watch my step from now on," he said softly. "I can feel you treading on my heels already! I'm going down for a last word with Mr. Hartswell; we'll be leaving orbit in half an hour."

The colony leader greeted him with outstretched hand.

"You're a man after my own heart, Captain," he said gratefully. "Someone who isn't afraid to roll his sleeves up and get on with the job. There aren't many Starship Captains who would bother with the actual physical labour. You run a good ship."

"I've got a good crew," Kirk agreed. "You're happy with things now?"

Hartswell shrugged. "As happy as I can be after all this. You've set us on our feet again. We'll get by."

"We'll be back to pick up our crew and the shuttle in three months, all being well. I'll see you then."

"Well." McCoy dumped his coffee on the table. "It'll be nice to take the weight off my aching feet. I hear it's all gone well."

"How are your patients?"

"We've three still aboard. The rest were well enough to send back. These three should be fit enough by the time we get back there again." He leaned forward confidentially. "By the by, I've been so busy I haven't had time to ask anyone, but it's been on my mind all day. How's Spock?"

"He's all right. Why do you ask?"

"Well, I met him in the corridor this morning, and he gave me the biggest, beaming smile I've ever seen." McCoy shuddered dramatically. "Quite spoiled my morning." He caught Kirk's eye. "Seriously, Jim, I have been worried. Is he O.K.?"

"Thank you for your concern, Doctor, I am perfectly well."

Kirk pulled out a chair. "Sit down, Spock. It's been quite a day."

"Well?" McCoy asked impatiently. "What were you grinning your head off

about, Spock?"

Spock gave him an icy look. "You did not see me this morning, Doctor."

"What do you mean, I didn't see you. Large as life and twice as natural, with a smile fit to split titanium!"

"That wasn't Spock," Kirk informed him. "Not our Spock, anyway. Hadn't you heard?"

"Heard what? I've been too busy for any grapevine runours. What's he been up to now?"

"Well..." Kirk leaned back. "It's quite a long story, Bones. It was like this....."

+++++