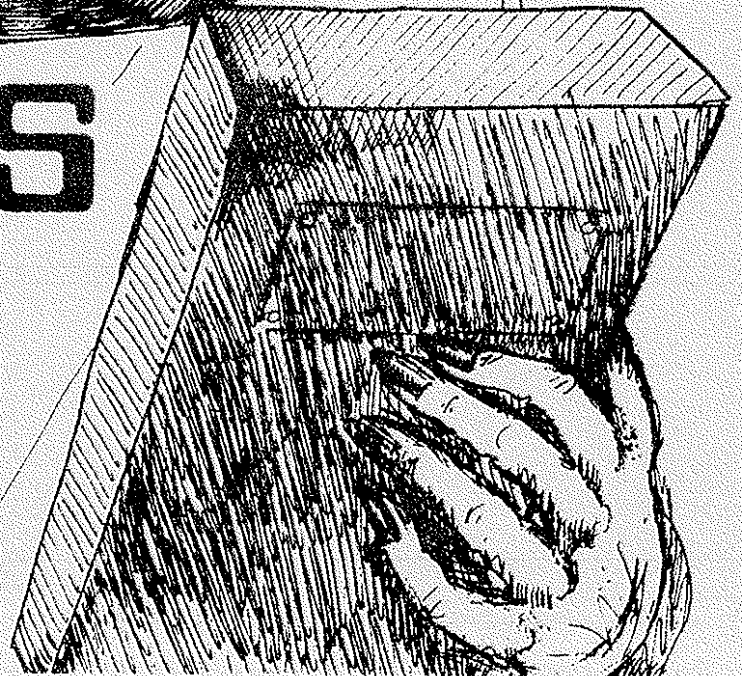




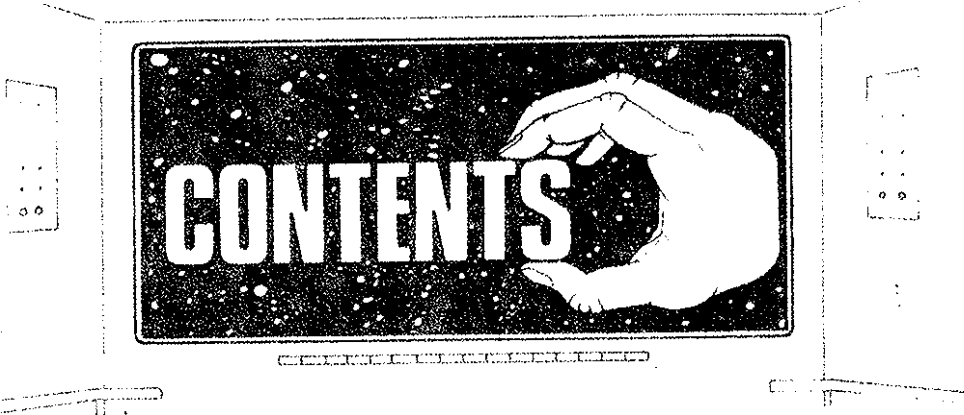
LOG

ENTRIES



a **STAR TREK**
fanzine

39



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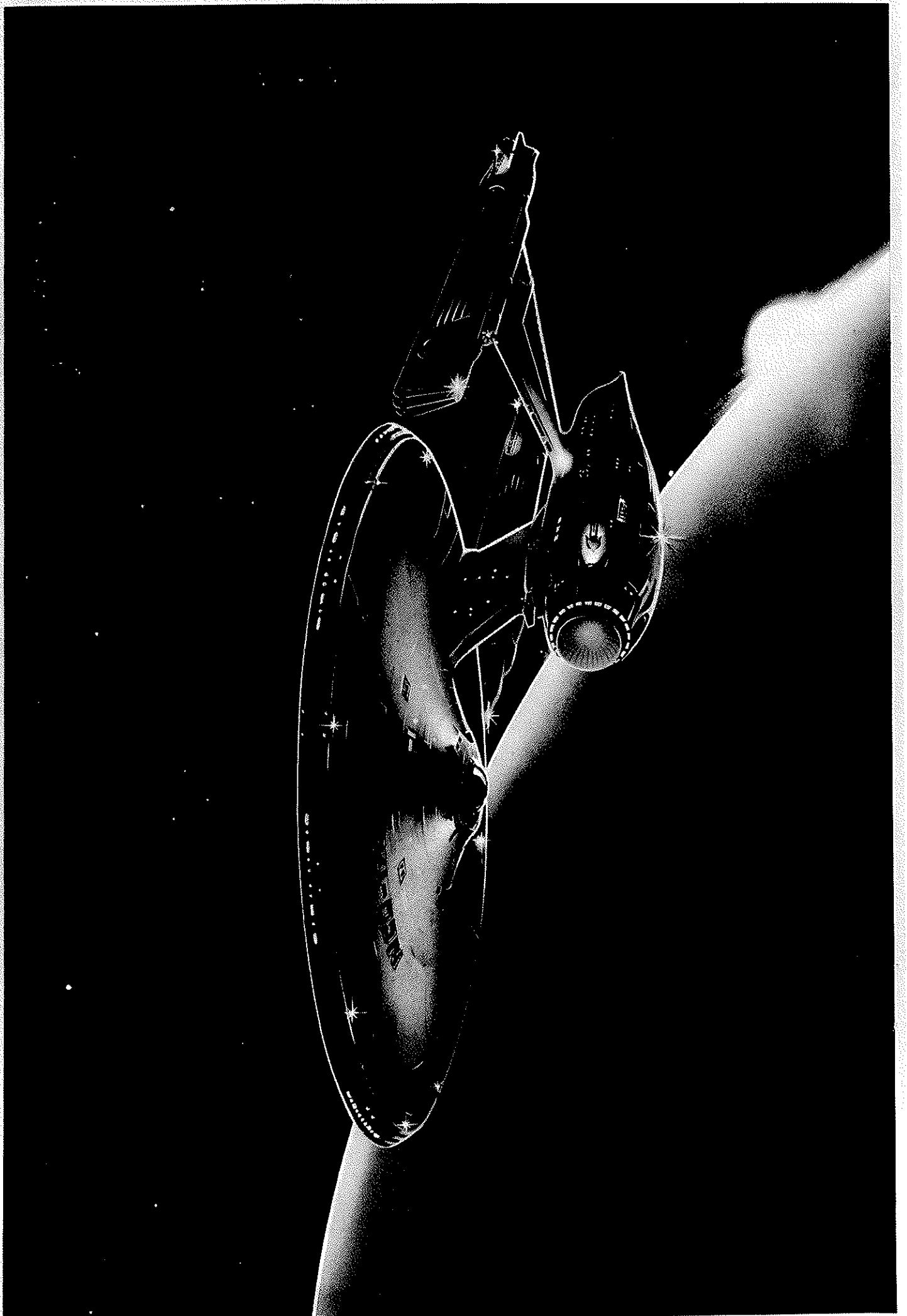
Hello, and welcome to Log Entries 39.

Our longest story in this issue is the rather unusual 'Rainbow Trap', by Judy Miller, which has Chris Chapel as the central character. Good strong stories featuring the minor characters are very welcome - I hope you all enjoy this as much as I did.

So far I've never had the chance to captain a Starship, but having conducted parties of schoolchildren on tours of the library, I can vouch for the fact that Jenny in 'Kirk's Day Off' is very true to life. (So, unfortunately, is Dorrin - I recall a certain little... angel... knocking over the issue trays and scattering four weeks issues all over the floor. Guess who was the lowly junior who had to sort them all out?)

Enjoy the zine.

Valerie



GREEN IS BEAUTIFUL by Chrissie Farr

"Where's that dratted Vulcan?" demanded Dr. McCoy peevishly for the tenth time in as many minutes, as he shifted his weight restlessly from one foot to the other.

"He's not late, Bones," soothed Kirk, "it's just that we're early. We arranged to meet here at 16.30 hours. You know Spock, with his built-in chronometer - he'll be here on the dot."

Still, Kirk couldn't blame McCoy for being impatient - it wasn't every day that the three of them were going to spend their shore leave together, a whole week in the rugged wilderness of the planet Sherwood. From the reports received from the computer banks, it seemed just perfect for camping, fishing and hiking. For once the Enterprise had struck lucky, and her crew would enjoy a well deserved and - most important of all - an uninterrupted spell of Rest and Recreation. Not only was there the most welcome chance to relax and forget, at least for a while, the strenuous responsibilities of command, but he would be able to share it with his two best friends. What made it even more precious was the fact that they had persuaded Spock to join them. McCoy was dubious that he would, but Kirk was convinced that the fresh air and exercise would work wonders for his First Officer. Why, the man was getting a definite stoop from being hunched permanently over his beloved consoles! Kirk gave an involuntary grin of affection as he visualised his correct, ever formal second-in-command 'letting his hair down'.

The subject of his thoughts was at that moment striding purposefully towards the transporter room, silently muttering ancient Vulcan curses under his breath. It was most irrational for a Vulcan to indulge in what amounted to an emotional outburst - albeit a quiet one - but it made him feel better. (He now understood why Humans frequently - the Captain most of all - employed the use of expletives in times of stress.) Yet again he wondered what had prompted him to agree to accompany his Captain and the Doctor on their expedition when he had so much to occupy him on the Enterprise during their stopover. He dwelt briefly on the delights of the mathematical problems awaiting him, the wealth of scientific data clamouring for his attention, and concluded that his long association with Humans had finally driven him mad.

Spock's features softened perceptibly as he recalled the real reason for his acceptance. Captain Kirk had, with boyish excitement, told him of his plans for the forthcoming vacation and had, half hesitantly, almost shyly, invited him to come along. Spock had been about to give his customary polite refusal when he realised that Kirk genuinely wanted his company. To turn him down would have hurt his feelings, and Spock valued their friendship too much to do that. So Spock said yes, and was well rewarded by the look of pleasure in his Captain's eyes, and the warmth of his smile, which had dispelled any doubts in Spock's mind about the rashness of his decision.

That was then; now was a different matter. Since that moment of recklessness Doctor McCoy had taken great pleasure in cornering Spock at every opportunity and recounting long, fishy tales of the ones that invariably 'got away'. Spock felt that he had borne that particular thorn quite well, but this! This was really the last straw! Just wait until he got hold of Doctor McCoy!

As Spock stepped into the transporter room he instinctively braced himself for the Doctor's verbal onslaught. So fully prepared was he

for a battle of words that he was almost taken aback when the conversation ceased abruptly and all eyes were turned on him in utter amazement.

Spock, who had temporarily forgotten what effect his appearance would have on his shipmates, coolly surveyed those present in the room. His brown eyes swept from the Doctor, whose dropped jaw and bulging eyeballs made him look more like a myopic goldfish than a medic, to the Captain, who seemed to be in great pain, holding his hands to his stomach and shaking noticeably, and finally to the Transporter Chief, who was staring determinedly in front of him and turning an interesting shade of blue as he tried desperately not to succumb to the giggles that threatened to engulf him.

Spock nodded, satisfied. He had suspected, but now he knew. Slowly and deliberately he advanced towards the person responsible for his present predicament.

"Well, Doctor?" he asked, his right eyebrow querying as much as the tone of his voice did.

"Well what, Mr. Spock?" bluffed McCoy.

"You know very well what, Doctor McCoy. I take it that this..." he indicated with a sweeping gesture of his hand, "is your pitiful idea of a joke?" asked the Vulcan, making the last word sound positively dirty.

"Me, Spock? As if I'd do anything like that!" McCoy countered, trying to be the outraged, guileless innocent and failing miserably.

"I will ask you once only. WHERE IS MY UNIFORM?" Spock advanced menacingly, a frightening sight to one who was in the wrong.

Captain Kirk determined that it was wise to intervene if he wanted to save his Chief Medical Officer from a fate worse than death. Stepping between the two of them he turned to McCoy and demanded,

"Bones, are you responsible for this prank?"

"Okay, Jim, I give up. I engineered the whole thing. While Spock was in the shower I sneaked in, took his uniform, and left that in its place. Goddam, Spock, it was only meant as a joke! I bet with Scotty that you didn't have a sense of humour, and I was right." Regaining his joviality he gleefully rubbed his hands together in anticipation and continued, "It was worth going to the trouble of getting Stores to reproduce an accurate replica of a period costume. I've won!"

"How much was the stake?" enquired Spock, with more than a hint of mischief on his face.

"Why do you want to know?" asked a suddenly wary Dr. McCoy.

"Come now, Doctor. Vulcans are well known for their curiosity."

"Go on, Bones, tell us. Surely that won't change anything," urged the Captain.

"I'm not so sure. He's up to something," muttered McCoy. "Oh all right. We bet each other fifty credits that Spock wouldn't see the funny side of being dressed in Lincoln Green as Robin Hood for a trip to the planet Sherwood!"

"I am sorry," said Spock softly, not looking in the least bit so, "but you have lost and Mr. Scott has won. You see, I do appreciate your thoughtfulness in having this outfit prepared for me. Not only is green becoming to my complexion, but the style is most flattering for my figure. Then there is the hat - it sets off my ears beautifully, don't you agree?"

With that startling, most unSpocklike statement, the Lincoln Green clad Vulcan hustled his friends onto the dais and gave the order to beam down.

A split second before he disappeared Kirk's last thought on the Enterprise was that if the rest of the week was going to be as crazy as the beginning - then boy, was it going to be one hell of a memorable shore leave!

+++++

AN EASY DECISION

I watch you walk quietly out,
and the silence,
kept back by your presence
comes flooding back.
And the words flung out to hurt,
hang uneasily, in the darkness
of this room.
There are times, I can understand,
and possibly forgive, when in your
over-enthusiasm, you tend to simplify
the situation.
But this time - there is nothing,
nothing that I can say to you.
I'm sorry, I didn't mean to hurt you,
For I have played the role of comforter
far too often.
But do you truly not understand?
Or are you just side-stepping, hoping
if you do, that you will not have to face this,
that it will just go away?

He cares for you...

I whisper this,
knowing that these words alone
have the power
to move mountains,
part the seas,
make all worlds collide.
Oh, what burdens are heaped upon your shoulders.
One more, one more, and this, the most precious
one of all.

He cares for you...

In doing so,
he will ensure that you alone take care.
Yourself - You, who mock the easy way out,
will do this for him.
For this was not an easy decision,
and now, there is no turning back.
Are you ready to accept the charge
he has laid upon you?

He cares for you...

For without you - what would be left?

Jayne Turner.

+++++

McCoy : Do you have trouble making up your mind?

Kirk : Well... yes and no.

PASSENGER by Gladys and Rita Oliver

"First Officer's log, Stardate 8091.80..."

I am able now to review the happenings aboard this vessel over the last forty hours with clear and unclouded logical perception. It is for my own interest that I look back on the curious phenomena we observed and experienced, for at the time of each occurrence my concentration was not at peak efficiency. Also, examining the situation may help me to explain or understand the answer we reached for our most recent problem. The answer was simple, yet profoundly disturbing in its implications.

The first incident, minor in its manifestation yet infinitely disturbing, went almost unnoticed in the securing of all stations from orbit around the planet Beta 4. This, a relatively simple procedure, occupied our attention long enough for the urgency of this first clue to be missed, thereby leaving every officer and crew member of the Enterprise open to a cold and strangely ethereal intruder.

The bridge complement, which included the Captain, Lt. Uhura, Lt. Sulu, Ensign Chekov, Engineer Scott and myself, were each engaged to the full with our respective duties and failed to completely acknowledge the opening and closing of the turbolift doors. This is a common sound to the bridge, and thus went unnoticed except by the Captain, who turned to observe the newcomer to the bridge.

Initially I was unsurprised to hear him questioning me as I continued to scan the receding planet.

"Spock..."

Something in his voice alerted me even as I turned. Like the Captain, I was mildly surprised to see only the bridge complement present. As always, the Captain's first questioning tone turned to one of command.

"Check the lift out, Spock. It came up empty."

I conveyed my surprise to the Captain at this, since the turbolifts are only activated by the human voice or presence. I presumed there was a small malfunction within the circuit, and logged it to be checked at the first opportunity. I did not expect the malfunction entry to be the first of so many...

the rest of the duty period passed with little further incident. Indeed, the efficient functioning of the bridge crew made the departure from Beta 4 seem almost skill-less. It continues to amaze me that these curiously emotional creatures I work with daily can perform with ease and continuity some of the hardest tasks in a starship with a simple, automatic abandon I have seldom seen elsewhere.

However, I am straying from the point, and must concentrate on relating the rest of the unusual occurrences aboard this vessel since our first visit to Beta 4.

Because of the unusual activity in the last forty hours or more, the Captain and I missed our usual training session in the ship's gymnasium; also I must still see to that maintenance repair to the equipment damaged in our last confrontation... albe it none of our doing..."

At that moment the buzzer by his hand let out an insistent bleep. Spock depressed the answer code.

"Spock here."

"Bridge here, sir. The Captain requests you relieve him for an hour or so."

"I shall be there immediately, Lieutenant." He shut off the log tape to 'hold' and left the room, aware that he was not going to finish the story of the past long hours very quickly at this rate.

"First Officer's Log, Stardate 8091.82..."

Recommencing commentary of personal log. It was Lt. Uhura who first complained about the drop in temperature around the bridge in general, and as a matter of course the pressure and heating systems were checked for faults. They proved to be working perfectly. In fact I was comfortable myself, and since I am more susceptible to low temperatures, the Captain suggested that the Lieutenant might be sickening for a cold. (The 'cold' is a curious ailment which seems to sweep amongst the crew leaving behind it trails of red nostrils and uneven tempers.) Miss Uhura replied that she felt well, but then proceeded to look about herself in a worried manner.

We had stopped at Beta 4 to retrieve a data read-out from the Norden Collector left there by a previous Starfleet vessel. Beta 4 is a Federation planet - type M - but infinitely uninviting due to the extreme cold and thin atmosphere. It is useful as a supply depot, and from time to time science parties are engaged in research there. The Enterprise spent 24 hours there so that my science department could collect the latest information from the Norden Computer.

Thus I had sufficient work to keep me occupied at the science station, and because I was preoccupied I was only partially aware that the Captain gave a sudden severe shudder. I took time only to raise a curious brow and cast a quick look at him to determine if he seemed 'off colour'. It was my concern at this point that I, or a member of my party, had contaminated the ship in some manner - it was possible that Miss Uhura and the Captain were exhibiting some of the first symptoms.

However, the Captain merely smiled at me and said, "Someone walked on my grave..." He then returned his attention to his record board and the numerous reports awaiting him.

The Captain has an unplumbed hoard of such illogical sayings which he keeps especially to tantalise my Vulcan curiosity, I am sure. Being unfamiliar with this particular expression, I stopped briefly to enquire its meaning - if any. I learned little at that time, but have since discovered that the Captain felt a sudden chill and depression.

Sharing my fears of a planet-to-ship contamination he apparently reported to McCoy at the end of the duty period, but McCoy could find nothing except signs of the Captain's perfect health. The Captain did, however, retain his feeling of depression, and retired early to his quarters.

It was some two hours later that a distressed call came from the Captain's quarters. Dr. McCoy and I arrived in convoy to find the Captain staring at the wall of his work area. He appeared remarkably in command of himself, but my practiced eyes detected sighs of a physical effort to remain clear headed and thinking in the face of an obvious shock.

The Doctor stole words that might have formed in my mouth. "Jim... what the hell's the matter?"

The Captain turned straight to me, his eyes troubled, but well in command of himself.

"Spock, I want an intruder alert on all decks!" He saw my mild

surprise and interpreted it well. The computer has automatic intruder alert, and had there been an alien presence on board it would have sounded long before then. The Captain, of course, knows this, and would not order a manual check unless something had indeed occurred. He supplied the information with his next words.

"I was working at my desk, and felt chilly again, as I did on the bridge. Having just seen McCoy, I assumed that the thermostat in my cabin was malfunctioning... As I rose to check it I came face to face with a man. He wore outdated uniform coveralls - he did not belong to this ship."

From the way the Captain spoke I gathered it had been a considerable shock to find such a person there. The private quarters are respected; this applies to the Captain's rooms more than anyone's, and I cannot recall his holding interviews in his private quarters except under extreme conditions.

I moved to the communicator and ordered a complete search of all decks. It was negative.

The Captain went back to sickbay with McCoy, who was muttering about faulty equipment that couldn't be relied on to indicate when a Captain was overworked.

I recall I felt irritated at the Doctor, that he could not see the truth of what Jim stated he saw. He was all too ready to lay the blame for the Captain's 'hallucination' at the feet of overwork.

If James Kirk said he saw a naked Vulcan woman performing a Sandurian palm dance as a bareback rider, and looked as he did when we first found him... I would believe him, I think.

I began a slow computer search of the ship myself; it too was negative, as were McCoy's tests, with new equipment, on the Captain.

Two hours later Lt. Uhura was found in a state of shock when the turbolift came to the bridge. She claimed she had felt icy cold hands upon her cheeks and that someone - or something - had called her name as though in pain.

It was a man's voice, and it asked to be taken home...

Once again I checked and rechecked all the circuits and sensors that might in some way affect the conditions within the lift, but as all the times before, the results were negative.

Miss Uhura insisted she was fit to resume her duty, arguing that she needed something to occupy her mind. Indeed, when working she seemed to calm down, but I could tell she still laboured under a strain.

On engaging her in conversation the Captain discovered that she felt very sad since the encounter, to which he replied that he knew exactly how she felt; adding that 'rank has its privileges, but hallucinating is not one of them.' The communications officer appeared brightened by this, but was not completely consoled, for a strange sense of sadness still stayed with her, and in time was felt by the entire bridge crew.

It was shortly after this that Dr. McCoy announced that he had treated a further two cases of shock, and several cases of acute and sudden depression.

The information from the Doctor caused the Captain to call a meeting of the senior officers, but little was gained from the discussion.

We could only re-examine and rearrange the facts available, drawing no conclusion from them. Knowing there was little profit in such circular discussions, and that his officers still had duties to perform, the Captain dismissed us, reminding us that as senior officers we were bound to attempt to reduce the unease amongst the crew.

It was as I was about to leave that the Captain called me back and asked if I would care to join him for a training session in the gym. I had things to attend to, but deferred to the Captain's wish, understanding his need to unwind. I followed him to the gym, aware of the strain he chose to deny he felt - he exuded an aura of depression. What was to be a simple work-out turned into something far more thought-provoking.

Immediately upon entering the gym the Captain commented on the strangely low temperature. He was correct, but had employed it as his usual blind so that he could slip in the first attack - which he did with remarkable alacrity.

As I joined the fray I reminded myself not to use my entire Vulcan strength, since I would undoubtedly harm the Captain if I did. A disabled Captain would be of little use to the ship.

I was soon given cause to question my decision. It seemed to me that the usually fair fighting skills of the Captain had found new, unexplored and surprising depths. He seemed possessed.

I first became aware of a change in attitude when, after the Captain neatly sidestepped a flying kick from me, I felt the heel of a boot connect with my person as I fell at his feet. Amazed, I eyed the Captain suspiciously as I sprang to my feet - he looked remarkably innocent. I decided that Jim Kirk had chosen not to regard Starfleet or ship's rules to our workout, and it seemed logical to adjust my style accordingly. The Captain was aghast - and also flat on his back - after a non-rule book attack on the back of his knees.

He began to speak, but appeared to decide that actions spoke louder than words, for with a mere comment of, "Okay, Spock, if that's how you want it," he launched himself at me with remarkable aggression. It was with some difficulty that I eventually managed to evade his attacks and sought the relative safety of the other side of the gym.

I paused to comment that a simple workout was becoming a rec-room brawl. For my pains I received a kick on the shin from a smiling Captain. I had to admit that along with the burst of pain I felt some admiration for his technique, since I never actually witnessed the act.

For indeed, he had not moved...

As I hesitated the Captain broke into an amused chuckle which culminated in him saying, "Stop stalling, Spock. Get on with it."

It sounded like an order, and so I obeyed.

With one hand I took hold of his arm, with the other I grasped a portion of his clothing. I intended to turn him neatly onto his back; I was somewhat astonished to observe him fly through the air to connect loudly, and no doubt painfully, with the athletic bars, which I am afraid did not stand up to the assault. The Captain, fortunately, fared better, though only a little. He slid down the wall to the floor in stages. My flesh crawled.

He lay stunned for a few moments, while I stood rooted to the spot. I began to stutter my apologies when the Captain barked at me.

"It's not a bloody war, Spock!"

Before I could agree with him he came lithely to his feet, throbbing with aggression. He then further amazed me by beginning to flail wildly at the air.

"Spock!" he cried. "There's someone here!"

I assured him that we were alone, but upon observing his determined expression I began to believe him, and was further convinced as I felt something brush by me, trailing behind it a cold and formidable aura, together with a strange feeling of helplessness.

Immediately the doors to the gym swished open and shut, once again with no apparent activation. I turned to the Captain, and could only agree with his earlier statement.

"Captain... we were not alone here."

Jim came towards me and rested a quick hand upon my shoulder, then turned to the door with frightening urgency.

"I intend to get to the bottom of this, Mr. Spock!"

His tone suggested that I should pity the entity that boarded our vessel unasked.

However, before further investigation could be instigated a call from the bridge occupied our attention. It appeared that whoever or whatever was aboard the ship was determined to route us back to Earth. A computer override, understandably questioned by Mr. Sulu, proved to have been ordered by neither of us. When we tried to rectify the altered course the attempt ended in one or all of us being physically assaulted by this non-physical entity.

As Sulu announced in tones of resignation that we still remained on course for Earth, the Captain responded aggressively; striking the arm of the command chair he declared,

"We are not taking that thing back to Earth!"

Further exclamations were stilled abruptly as a hollow and poignantly empty voice echoed around the bridge.

"Please..."

There was such a strange pain and longing in the voice that we all turned from our duties. Even I failed to be unaffected by the obvious need in the plea.

For several seconds no-one moved until the Captain and I exchanged puzzled glances. It was the Captain who first recovered his composure and demanded of the empty air,

"Who the hell are you?"

In reply the bridge lights flickered and dimmed, and a softly whistling wind seemed to echo around us all. Upon later discussion we discovered that we were all affected similarly by what happened next.

For myself, I felt as though I was back on Beta 4... but instead of standing in the crisp and wintry conditions of the surface I felt I was entombed within the cold hard soil. Never have I felt such a sense of loss and aloneness as I felt then. Although Earth is not the planet of my birth I longed only to be there, to be at rest. I wanted to go home...

A soft sigh from Uhura brought us all back to the present. No-one moved or spoke for a while. Again the Captain was the first to

disturb the silence.

"Mr Sulu, lay in a course for Beta 4... if you can."

I questioned the Captain with my gaze, and his reply was as I would have anticipated.

"We've got to get to the bottom of this, and the answer is back on Beta 4. Mr Sulu, can you set that course?"

Sulu's reply was in the affirmative, and we all returned to our duties awaiting the sight of Beta 4 on our screens.

It was a further 18 hours before we beamed down to the surface of Beta 4. Very little else occurred during this time, and the ship adopted some pretence of normality, but still a blanket of sadness and depression filled the ship.

Only as we prepared to transport down to the planet did we have to acknowledge the presence of our strange passenger once more. The Chief Engineer, Mr. Scott, announced that the transporter console seemed, "determined to pick its own coordinates."

Reluctantly the Captain ordered Mr. Scott to let the unit have its way, and thus we transported down to the surface, presumably at a place where the entity wished us to be.

Although he consented to join us on the planet, Dr. McCoy insisted that we were merely pursuing a wild goose - I would have been of a mind to agree with him had I not experienced the effects of the entity in the gym and on the bridge.

The chosen spot appeared to be little more distinguished than the rest of the barren planet, but off to our left was a deep, scrub-filled gully; being the only landmark we made our way towards it. As we drew nearer we could make out that something was half-buried at the bottom of the gully.

On further inspection we established that it was a small, obsolete craft which, in crashing, had half buried itself.

Feeling, somehow, a strange need for urgency, the Captain quickly called in Mr. Scott to exhume the outmoded craft. Even so, it was another twenty hours before we had freed the entombed vessel.

Although I was greatly employed in learning all I could about the craft, it was the doctor who discovered the major fact that influenced our further actions. On idly examining the dusty and mud-caked exterior of the ship he found a grime-concealed observation port. The first I knew of its existence came with his startled exclamation, "My God, Jim, there's a man in there!"

And indeed, in the airless confines of his coffin ship the pilot was perfectly preserved. No dust or age draped itself about his form. He was, in death, as he had been in life. I regretted his death, for I saw the remains of a brave man.

Then began the complicated task of securing the small vessel aboard the Enterprise. Mr. Scott once more showed his technical ability in bringing it inside the shuttle hangar intact. We did not dare to disturb the delicate equilibrium within the craft. During all this procedure we felt and heard nothing of the strange intruder that had brought us back to Beta 4. Indeed, everything seemed peaceful, as if all problems had been resolved.

From the code numbers inscribed on the small vessel's hull we

quickly learned that it was an Earth vessel, and that the sole passenger must be its Captain, Commander Andrew Inskipp, lost almost ten years previously.

With no real information we could only assume that Captain Inskipp had trouble with his craft, and decided to land on Beta 4 to effect repairs.

Captain Inskipp must have been a remarkable man, for despite the damage to his ship he brought it safely down. It was an unfortunate accident, and therefore doubly tragic that the damaged craft came to rest upon the single entry hatch. Although his courage and skill had saved him, it was inevitable that he should have slowly asphyxiated in his tiny craft. A tragic loss.

One could not fail to be moved or stirred by the courage of the man as one gazed upon his preserved features. He had obviously assessed his situation dispassionately, and settled down to log his final moments in his personal diary, which will no doubt hold the answers to all our questions.

We cannot be sure, however, that it will provide any significant answers to our questions about our somewhat othercal passenger. It is illogical, but somehow satisfying, to assume that his will scornfully denied his death, for since the vessel has lain within our ship there have been no further incidents.

Some will no doubt question the credibility of what has happened aboard this ship, but the crew, her Captain, and even myself - a Vulcan - are left in no doubt whatever. The presence that led us back to Beta 4 was in some manner a manifestation of the will of Captain Inskipp.

Indeed, Captain Kirk is so convinced of that, that he has gone to great lengths to arrange a method whereby the tiny ship may return to Earth. Captain Inskipp is to return via a relay of many and varied vessels to be properly interred. His surviving family will at last know why Andrew Inskipp failed to return - and also that he is returning ten years out of time, because he so wished it...

When the tiny craft finally left the Enterprise the Captain ordered a minute of silence as a sign of respect; as the Federation cargo vessel pulled away the whole bridge complement was arrested for a brief moment by a sudden, half-whispered sigh that gently swept around us all.

"Thank you..."

It was here, then gone, as though imagined. Had I not heard it also, I would think perhaps they had.

I recall that the Captain and the Doctor constructed some witticisms that questioned the compatability of a mind of logic and a belief in ghosts. I refrained from commenting for fear of implicating myself by their convoluted logic. It is some while later now... I still have no answer.

First Officer's private log. Ended Stardate 8091.45."

+++++

Finnegan : Kirk's not as big a fool as he used to be.

McCoy : Oh, you admit he's getting smarter?

Finnegan : No - thinner.

+++++

KIRK'S DAY OFF by Susan C. Broughton and Gail E. Clark

(Dedicated to Jennifer, sister, friend and source of inspiration; and with apologies to two friends, Nic Weston and 'Cass' Castello.)

The starship Enterprise hung in graceful orbit above the Earth, apparently motionless, like some silent, other-worldly bird, remote from humdrum, everyday existence. An outside observer assuming this might have felt deceived had he been able to see into Sick Bay, where at that particular moment an irate James Kirk was unburdening his problems to his chief surgeon.

"Bureaucrats!" he said furiously, knocking a pile of tape cassettes off McCoy's desk with an incautious wave of the hand.

"Do you mind standing still for a moment, Jim?" McCoy asked, scrabbling up the cassettes, with one eye on the more breakable contents of his officer. Engaged in a lengthy catalogue of his woes, the Captain ignored this comment.

"Here we are, half the crew on shore leave, the rest trying to overhaul the new systems now that the trials have shown what really needs to be changed, and first Weston and Castello decide to get married and hold up the proceedings even more - and now this! Some pen-pushing bureaucrat who has never even seen a starship dreams up the idea of showing children round the ship when the cadet tours are on!" Kirk swung round to face McCoy, and narrowly avoided knocking him down. McCoy retreated hastily behind his desk.

"School children!" Kirk said at a volume that Spock could probably hear from the bridge. "Cadets are bad enough, but school children as well!" He leaned wearily back against the wall. "What am I going to do, Bones?"

"Well," McCoy said, casting a professional eye over his Captain, "supposing you let your crew get on with their job and declare a day's holiday for yourself?" With some amusement he watched Kirk's disbelief as he continued, "Spock and the crew are quite capable of handling a few parties of children and cadets as well as their usual duties, and speaking as your friendly neighbourhood doctor, you look as though you badly need a rest."

"A rest," Kirk said blankly, as though the concept was a new invention.

"Just that," McCoy said, dropping the bantering tone as he came round the desk and approached Kirk. "Come on, Jim - I've been watching you for days now. Bad enough to come up against V'Ger when you've been stuck behind a desk for two years, but you've been driving yourself to the limit to get the ship and yourself back in shape during those trials. I'll bet you've hardly had a full night's sleep in weeks. Why not take a day off now you've got the chance?"

"But the ship..." Kirk protested.

McCoy cut him short. "Let Spock look after the ship," he said, adding, "After all, what can happen in a day? Now, supposing I give you something to help you sleep."

Kirk pushed himself off the wall and let go his indrawn breath in a sudden laugh. "Something to help me sleep," he said. "Bones, right now all I need is a flat surface to lie on."

McCoy grinned, reached out, and steered him towards the door. "Now don't you worry about a thing, Jim," he said as Kirk went out. "Just follow doctor's orders and take it easy." The door slid shut on his reassurances, and Kirk turned and headed for the turbolift.

Thirty minutes later Kirk was surveying the chaos in his cabin and wondering if he could spare the time to clear it slightly before going to bed, when the communications panel beeped for attention. Kirk padded barefoot across the littered floor and answered it. The calm features of his First Officer gazed out of the screen at him.

"I am calling to inform you that the first parties of children have been beamed aboard," Spock said. "Did you wish to give any tours of the ship or lectures to any of them yourself?"

Kirk shuddered faintly. "No, Mr. Spock. Pursuant on McCoy's orders I am taking a holiday. Don't call me unless it's extremely urgent." Kirk reached for the cut-off switch and then changed his mind. "Oh, and Spock... uh... what happened to my yeoman?" He indicated the chaos behind him and added somewhat lamely, "My cabin seems to be in something of a mess."

"So I see," Spock said, surveying it with a faint expression of awe. "I believe your yeoman is at present on shore leave - but I could detail someone else..."

"Don't bother," Kirk said. "I'm not expecting any visitors. Have a good day," he added, reaching for the cut-off switch, and was wick-edly delighted to see the pained expression which momentarily flitted across Spock's face before the picture dissolved. Kirk glanced back at the room, decided definitely against tidying it, and padded back to the bed. He slid between the covers, dropping his bath robe on the floor, dimmed the lights, and after a moment's hesitation set the alarm to call him in four hours time. Then he rolled over and composed himself for sleep.

Down in transporter room 5 Lieutenant-Commander Uhura was just greeting a newly arrived party of children when their teacher disengaged herself from the brief security check and cried "Uhura!" in tones of amazed recognition. Uhura glanced up, her eyes widening in surprise and then delight.

"Assima!" she said. "Assima Massiah - why, it must be years since I saw you. I thought you always said you'd never go into teaching." She edged her way out of the group of children and hugged her friend. "You haven't changed a bit - and I'll bet you still turn heads," she added, stepping back to gaze with appreciation at the diaphanous robe Assima was wearing.

The other girl laughed. "Not much point when I'm with this lot," she said, surveying her class. "Are you helping shepherd us around?"

"Yes - and we'd better get started before the next lot arrive," Uhura said. "First stop the bridge." She and Assima began to arrange the group into a reasonably orderly line.

"When are we going to see Captain Kirk?" asked a minute blonde at the end of the line.

Assima turned towards her. "Oh, Jenny - I forgot you were with us." She glanced at Uhura. "She's a bit young to be on this trip really, but she's just got out of hospital and we thought this might be a treat for her - she's missed so much." She turned back to the child. "Jenny, I expect the Captain's very busy and we won't be able to see him. But you'd like to see the bridge, wouldn't you?"

Uhura saw the appealing face clouded by disappointment and did some swift mental calculations.

"I suppose we could go to Kirk's cabin. I know McCoy mentioned he was going to take a rest, but I don't suppose he'd mind, and it is on the way to the bridge."

She was rewarded by a brilliant smile from the face upturned towards her own, and a small hand took hers as she led the way out.

By a process of mental discipline he felt would have amazed Spock, Kirk had just succeeded in pushing all the worries about the wedding, the re-vamped phaser system, and the school parties to the back of his mind, and was drifting off to sleep when the door signal buzzed. Muttering in annoyance he dragged himself out of bed, pulled on his crumpled bath robe and headed for the door. In the darkness he misjudged his surroundings and stubbed his toe on a pile of belongings left in the middle of the floor. Limping painfully he reached the door, and with ideas of avoiding a similar incident on the way back he switched on the lights with one hand while pressing the door release with the other. The door promptly slid back and Kirk found himself standing spot-lit, facing not Spock, but a tall elegant woman and sixteen gaping children.

The words he had framed died on his lips. In the astounded pause which followed he grabbed for the security of his bath robe and looked hastily around for assistance. His gaze met that of Uhura, just as she tried unsuccessfully to disguise her laughter as a cough.

"Uhura..." Kirk said, in what the crew of the Enterprise knew as his dangerous voice.

"Uh, Captain... this is Assima Massiah. We... we were at school together... she's brought her class... They wanted to see the Captain of the Enterprise," Uhura finished rather hurriedly, shaking helplessly with suppressed giggles.

"We don't appear to have chosen a very good time, I'm afraid," Assima said apologetically. "I think we'd better go, children."

Kirk reached for the door control as the teacher turned away, only to be stopped in his tracks as a small voice piped up from somewhere near his knee.

"Is that the Captain?"

He looked down into a small face framed by blonde curls and decided to make the best of a bad situation. "I'm Captain Kirk," he said, and gave her his most magnetic smile. The child was not deceived.

"Why aren't you dressed?" she asked.

"Quiet, Jenny," Assima said, moving to pull the child away. Jenny stuck grimly to her guns.

"You said they wore uniforms. Why is he wearing a bath robe?" she demanded.

Assima glanced anxiously at Uhura as the Captain's door slid shut. The communications officer was leaning against the wall, gasping for breath while silent tears trickled down her cheeks.

"Have we got you into trouble?" Assima asked.

Uhura shook her head. "I don't expect so," she said, straightening up. "Would you want to be reminded of that?" She sighed and wiped her eyes. "I suppose I'd better take you to the bridge."

Assima surveyed the children, still staring wide-eyed at the door. "After this," she said, "anything else will be an anti-climax."

Down on the lower levels Scott was eying a large group of children with an expression of extreme mistrust.

"I canna show sic' a large group around," he said to the teachers

in charge, shaking his head. "Ye ken, there's nae enough space for them all, to say nothing about letting them see the control systems. Can ye not split them up, as it were?"

"Well, I think it should be possible; my student can take round one group and I'll take the other," the teacher said briskly, glancing at her younger colleague. "John, will you take some of the younger ones and one or two others and I'll take the rest - we should be able to make it about equal."

There were a few minutes of organised chaos as the teachers sorted through their group and split it into two near-equal parts, and then Scott led one group away.

"I'll send ye anither guide in a few minutes," he called back to the other teacher as the last child crammed into the turbo-lift.

"All right, now just stay here - all together," the teacher said anxiously, trying to familiarise himself with the group, which was already beginning to stray. It was a relief when the turbo-lift decanted the young engineer Scott had sent as their guide.

"Where are we going first?" the teacher asked, detaching himself from the children, who had begun to move slowly along the corridor in the direction indicated by their guide.

Behind the group one child stood still, studying the locking panel beside a doorway, and momentarily oblivious of the boisterous conversation of his peers. A larger child, also lingering behind the group, slipped up beside him.

"What are you doing over here, half breed?" asked the newcomer.

An expression of annoyance appeared briefly on the smaller child's face at the use of the nickname, but the face he presented when he turned was once again controlled and calm.

"I am endeavouring to decode the locking key on this panel," he said carefully, "and my name is Dorrin."

"Huh - I bet you don't even know where to start," the older child said, ignoring the second half of the statement in favour of pouring scorn on the first.

Stung by the unexpected opposition to his statement Dorrin turned back to the panel. "These three pressed in sequence release the door," he said calmly. "You need only ask the engineer to find if I am correct."

"There's a much easier way of seeing," the older boy said, reaching up a hand to the panel. The other child swung back, startled, as the boy pressed the controls indicated, and the door slid open.

"We were told not to touch any controls," he said, starting towards the door.

Himself rather unnerved by the sudden and silent opening of the door, and seeing Dorrin's move as a threat, the older child jerked away, throwing out his arms and momentarily pushing Dorrin off balance and into the black doorway. Dorrin stumbled, tripped on the slight sill, and fell backwards into darkness. In front of him the door slid smoothly into place.

For a moment the bully stood staring at the bland and innocuous portal, exactly like several hundred others on board the ship. Then he looked round to see if his actions had been observed. In the brief space of the tiny drama the class had already moved out of sight. The boy looked back at the closed doorway.

"Get out of that, brainy," he whispered, and ran to catch up with

the others, a glib lie ready for use when the teacher should note the absence in his group.

As the bridge doors swung open Uhura saw the crew members bracing themselves for another barrage of unanswerable questions. Chekov, in charge of the formal tour of the bridge, stepped forward as the children flocked out of the turbo-lift, and then momentarily lost track of his prepared speech as Assima stepped forward and gave him a dazzling smile. Uhura saw heads turn all around the bridge, and grinned in amusement as she noticed the one head which remained determinedly averted. The brief silence slipped past, and the everyday hum of working conversation began again as Chekov launched bravely into a description of the functions of the various bridge stations. The children, seeing in the young Lieutenant the image of a hero which had been missing in Kirk, hung on his every word. Uhura and Assima separated themselves a little from the group and began a whispered exchange of news.

Jenny was bored. The nice man in the uniform was all very well, but he was talking about things she didn't understand. She began to fidget, twisting her heel into the knobbly surface of the floor, examined her face in a shiny panel on the wall, and finally looked around for something more interesting to do. Her gaze fell on a bank of wall screens a few metres away, each lit with a different and changing pattern of lights. With a surreptitious glance at her companions she edged in that direction.

Assima looked up to check on her class and noticed the small blonde figure making a determined beeline for a console set between the two bridge doors. She was about to intercept when Uhura's light grasp on her arm stopped her. She turned, to see her friend's face alight with laughter as Uhura laid a finger to her lips and shook her head. Puzzled, Assima glanced back at the child, now almost at her goal, and the teacher's gaze flicked to the man sitting at the console, to note with horror the cold profile with its alien features which proclaimed his origin. At that moment Chekov asked for questions from the class, and under cover of the noise Uhura whispered urgently, "Don't do anything. It's all right, really."

Still confused, the teacher looked back at the bridge, noticing that almost all the bridge personnel were casting quick and covert glances towards the console, where Jenny was now leaning up against the officer's chair. The man moved slightly, the dark head turning towards the child, and at that moment the two lines of braid he wore caught the light. Uhura saw her friend's face light in recognition and sudden unholy delight, and leant weakly against the back of a chair as she tried to stifle her laughter.

The first Spock knew of the child's presence was when a small breathy sigh sounded in his right ear, and a light body snuggled up against his right arm. Startled, he turned his head, and Jenny gave him a wide, delighted smile.

"Hallo," she said. "I'm Jenny. Who are you?"

"Spock," the Vulcan said, starting to turn back to his console.

"Is that all?" Jenny asked. Spock looked back, slightly startled.

"Yes," he said.

"Oh," Jenny said thoughtfully. "What are you doing, Spock?"

Spock took a careful breath. "I am at present using exterior scan to..." He stopped, seeing the child's frown.

"What does all this do?" she asked, indicating the science console with a slightly sticky hand.

"It is a science console," Spock said, deciding to start at basics. "Information comes to this station to be processed..."

A small finger ran along the lines of braid on his cuff, and Jenny looked up into his face.

"That's pretty," she said, interrupting the lecture. "Are you an officer?"

"Yes," Spock said, feeling on safe ground. "I am a Commander."

"The Captain doesn't wear a uniform," Jenny confided in a loud whisper. "HE wears a bath robe. I think you're much nicer," she added, leaning heavily against his arm. "Do you like me?"

Spock felt the safe ground abruptly become a morass, but he was saved the attempt at an answer by the arrival of Chekov.

"Uh, do you need any help, sir?" the Lieutenant asked nervously. Spock drew breath to answer, and was again forestalled as Jenny turned on the young officer.

"Go away," she ordered, "or I shall spit at you."

There was a slight pause, and then, almost unconsciously, Spock put out a gentle hand and drew the child back.

"Perhaps, Lieutenant, if you leave it until the group leaves the bridge," he suggested.

"Yes, sir," said Chekov, backing off from the child's cold, blue-eyed stare with alacrity. He turned quickly, caught sight of Uhura's and Assima's silent contortions, and nearly fell down the steps as he headed for the children now grouped around the Captain's chair.

"Nasty man," said Jenny dismissively as she turned back to Spock. She edged a little closer into the protective shelter of his arm. "What are all those buttons on the board for?"

"They are for me to press," Spock said, hastily downgrading explanation to the lowest possible level.

"Yes, but why?" Jenny demanded. Spock pushed blonde curls out of his face and hitched the child round to a slightly more comfortable position as he considered the question.

"So that the screens will give me information," he explained.

"Why do you need it?" she asked, fingering a line of buttons along the base of one panel. Spock pulled her back a little from the panel and up onto his lap. It was suprisingly comfortable. He shifted his arm slightly to stop her falling off.

"I must give the Captain information, so that he can tell the crew what to do," he said.

Jenny considered this. "If you have to tell the Captain what to do, why aren't you the Captain?" she asked finally.

Spock's search for an answer to that piece of logic was interrupted by a call from Security. He shifted forward and flicked the switch. A small hand traced round his shirt insignia. Absently, eyes still on the board, he brought up his other hand and clasped the child's sticky paw.

"Spock here."

"Lieutenant Daniels of Security here, sir. Uh, we seem to have lost a child from one of the school parties."

"Specify," Spock said, the child on his lap momentarily forgotten. The voice which came back over the communications outlet was faintly embarrassed.

"Uh well, the teacher says it's a boy, sir, called Dorrin. He was with a group which got split up, and each half thought he was with the other half. Only, uh, the teacher says she's a bit surprised because the boy doesn't usually run off and hide, or anything. He's, uh, he's part Vulcan, sir," the man finished uncertainly.

Spock's mind flicked briefly over possibilities, considering and discarding them. With no noticeable pause he replied, "It seems unlikely that a Vulcan child would deliberately absent himself from the group. I suggest you check in the last few areas through which the group has passed - it is most likely that the child has merely stopped to examine some feature of the ship's systems which interested him. Call me again if you cannot find him within ten minutes."

"Yes, sir," the security man replied, with considerable relief. "Oh, and sir - Mr. Scott asked if you would come down to Engineering - some problem with the new phaser components, he said."

"Inform him I will come directly," Spock said and released Jenny's hand to switch the communicator off. Almost forgetting the child on his lap he swung the chair around - and became aware of the unusual silence on the bridge, and of the barrage of eyes watching him. Jenny chose that particular moment to twist around, put both arms round his neck, and whisper urgently in his ear.

"Uh, yes," Spock said, momentarily at a loss. He lifted the child down and set her carefully on her feet, turning her towards the right door. "It's over there."

As Jenny headed gratefully in that direction Spock stood up, gave the incredulous bridge crew his best Vulcan stare, and turned to Sulu.

"I shall be in Engineering, Mr. Sulu," he said calmly, and walked stiff-backed out through the turbo-lift doors.

Down on one of the lower decks Dorrin sat in total darkness staring unseeingly towards the now non-existent doorway. It was so unbelievable that anyone should actually shut him in that even when the faint sound of footsteps died away along the corridor he sat waiting for the other boy to return and release him. Only slowly did he come to terms with the fact that he had been left - and even then the situation seemed not to be serious.

Carefully schooled Vulcan control came to his aid. The door was in front of him, the locking panel to the left of the door. He scrambled to his feet, wincing as he put weight on his bruised foot, and limped forward. One hand reached out and he touched the door, ran his hand over its surface until he found the wall, and then hunted methodically along the wall edge until he found the locking panel. With steady concentration he recalled the configuration of the lock outside and confidently pressed the correct combination on the console beneath his hand. Nothing happened. Frowning through the darkness Dorrin traced out the panel controls with both hands, then pressed the studs again. When the second attempt proved as futile as the first he stopped back, considering his predicament, and trying to apply to it the little he had gathered about ship-board practices in the course of his trip. Snatches of information from the introductory talk, given when they boarded, rose to the forefront of his mind, and he sorted through them - and hit on a phrase that would explain the situation. 'With personnel on shore leave,' they had been told, 'life support in many areas of the ship has been cut to a minimum - and certain areas, such as those for cargo

storage and automatic machinery are generally kept without life support facilities all the time, to conserve power.'

Alone in darkness, the youthful Vulcan mind pressed down the rising panic and considered other possibilities. There had, in logic, to be some emergency control for crew members caught in a similar situation, and the boy set himself to find it, moving along the wall in either direction from the door, running one hand up and then down the wall from floor level to the full extent of his upward reach. Almost immediately he found his goal, a panel set to one side of, and above, the locking panel, its base just within reach of his fingertips. Trusting in his greater Vulcan strength he made two attempts to jump upwards and snatch for the release handle, but each time the darkness defeated him and his hand slid uselessly down the slick and empty wall.

When he stopped, panting for breath, he became aware that already the air in the chamber was beginning to taste stale. Trying to breathe more evenly he turned away from the door and moved back into the room, searching for some object which could be pushed up against the door to provide the additional height he needed.

Six paces into the room he ran up against a canister only slightly smaller than himself, and pulled it eagerly towards the door. It was as effective as trying to move the ship itself. Cargo which could be shifted easily by anti-gravs moved not at all under the urgings of even a Vulcan child, and the effort only exhausted Dorrin further, and used up more of his precious air.

No other item of cargo proved to be even slightly more moveable. Desperately the boy stumbled back to the door. Momentarily, Vulcan control was broken, and he pounded his fists on the stubborn panels in a futile and angry gesture as ineffective as all the other attempts at escape - and more shaming to the Vulcan mind. A whimper escaped his lips before hard-won control took over again and brought him sinking to the floor to lean against the door, his lips sealed, but his mind crying out in fear and distress which his training would not permit him to voice.

Kirk relaxed blissfully back into the pillows and shut out of his mind all awareness of his surroundings, accepting subconsciously all the tiny, almost unheard sounds which made up the day-to-day background of his life. He was floating into his own personal Nirvana when the strident call of the door buzzer brought him jerking upright in bed. Furiously scooping up his robe from the floor by his bed he switched on the lights and navigated his way to the door, remembering this time to switch on the communicator inset by the door and inquire the identity of his visitor. The only answer was a heavy sob.

"Who is it?" he snapped again, beginning to lose patience.

"Me," said a feminine voice, and there was another heavy sob.

Despairing of ever getting a sensible answer Kirk activated the door control. The moment the door began to slide open a uniformed female figure hurled itself through and into his arms. Kirk staggered, regained his feet, glanced out into the corridor, and met the glazed expression of a crew member escorting a dozen Starfleet cadets past the Captain's quarters. Freeing one arm, Kirk hastily slammed the door, shut again, cutting a number of personal comments off in mid-word. Then he looked down at the sobbing bundle in his arms, recognising Lieutenant Weston, the ship's bride-to-be. Rather more aware of his state of undress than she was, he put her hastily at arms-length and tried to summon his most paternal attitude. It wasn't easy.

"Now suppose you stop crying and tell me what's happened?" he suggested, after a few minutes had brought no change in her behaviour.

She sniffed loudly, raised a woebegone and tearstained face to his gaze, and in a tone of despair explained, "We've had a terrible argument. The wedding's off." With that she promptly burst into tears again.

Out in the corridor a rather rattled young security man was meeting up with a fellow crew member and a group of dazed cadets.

"Hey, Castello," asked the crewman, "are you looking for Ann Weston?"

"How did you guess?" Castello asked. "We just had a flaming row and she called the whole thing off. Did you see where she went?"

"Uh huh," said the crewman, appearing to derive great amusement from the situation. He jerked a thumb over his shoulder, indicating the corridor leading to the officers' quarters. "Try the Captain's cabin."

Castello looked at him and the grinning cadets with growing suspicion. "The Captain's cabin?" he asked incredulously. "I thought he was supposed to be having a day off?"

"Some people never rest," the crewman said with mock seriousness. Castello pushed past him and started off down the corridor.

"Hey!" one of the cadets called after him. "Is it true what they say about Security?"

"No!" Castello yelled, turning his head to answer, and in doing so walked full tilt into the corner of the corridor. The laughter from the group behind him did nothing to help his annoyance. With a show of determination he didn't feel he pushed himself away from the wall and headed for the Captain's door.

"... and he doesn't want my mother to be at the wedding," Weston added miserably, "so I told him it was all off, and he said that was fine, and I stormed out." She looked up at Kirk, who was now well into his paternal role. "And now I feel absolutely awful!" she finished.

Kirk took a deep breath of relief and put a fatherly arm around her shoulders. "Look, take it from me - everyone has arguments like this before they get married. I'm sure that once you've both calmed down we'll be able to get something sorted out. I'll speak to Castello, if you like." He summoned up an engaging grin. "In a year's time you'll be laughing about this on your anniversary, and I'm willing to bet on that."

She looked up uncertainly, and then slowly began to grin back. "I suppose it is pretty silly when you think about it," she said, starting to laugh. With sudden affection she returned his hug, adding, "Thanks. I feel a lot better now."

Behind Kirk the door slid abruptly open. Kirk swung round, still holding the girl, and came face to face with Castello. With disastrous timing Weston began to giggle.

For one of the few times in his life Kirk found himself with absolutely nothing to say that would be appropriate to the moment, but fortunately Castello saved him the trouble. Surveying Kirk's state of dress, and the unbelievable chaos of the room, he commented expressionlessly,

"I thought they abolished 'droit de seigneur' years ago."

Kirk felt himself go red all over as Weston pulled free of his arm and headed for the door, her giggles now turning into outright laughter. As Castello moved to follow her out she turned in the corridor, executed a graceful and feminine curtsy and added, "Merci, mon seigneur."

Kirk watched as a second astounded group of cadets crossed in front of his doorway, sighed, and consigned his reputation to oblivion.

"Ye ken what I mean, Mr. Spock," Scott said grimly to the First Officer. He indicated a schematic spread out on his desk. "If we run the new system through here we'll need to rip out half the panelling in Engineering to put it in."

"Indeed," Spock agreed. He tapped the chart thoughtfully. "Supposing we institute a simple fail-safe in the present phaser system, however, with a secondary bypass circuit to take effect only when power to the warp drive is cut?"

"Ye mean, leave the circuit intact and add extra circuitry to operate the phasers only when the ship is on impulse?" Scott asked slowly. "It would work better than that full system bypass Decker and I knocked up."

"It also has merits in installation," Spock pointed out. He indicated the schematic. "If the new circuit was taken through here..." The discussion lapsed into technicalities. It was interrupted by a call from Security.

"Lieutenant Chekov here," said Chekov in answer to Spock's identification. "Sir, the boy who was missing from the school party still hasn't been found. Lieutenant Daniels wondered if he might have stopped to fiddle with something, and be lying hurt somewhere."

"Vulcan children do not fiddle," Spock said glacially. "However, the situation is now serious. There is still no clue as to which area he was seen in last?"

"No, sir," Chekov said after a swift, low-voiced discussion with someone out of communicator range.

"Very well," Spock said. "Assuming the child is hurt and unable to respond, institute a full Security search of all areas open to the school parties. Mr. Scott," he added, turning to the Engineer, "the installation of the new phaser circuitry will have to wait. This takes precedence, and since the Enterprise is at present undermanned, Security will have to draw on Engineering and Science staff to provide a complete Security check."

"Aye," Scott agreed. "I'll tell them."

Reaching for his wrist communicator he gave the necessary order, and in a certain innocuous corridor, before a certain innocuous door, a crewman turned regretfully away from his search for a specific batch of components, and headed back to Engineering, his Human senses oblivious both of the faint sounds of movement and the soundless cry for help coming from nearby.

Having failed to reach Kirk on his wrist communicator, and mindful of McCoy's instructions to the Captain, Spock moved to activate the main communicator link with Kirk's quarters. Slowly and unwillingly Kirk sat up again, dragged on his crumpled robe, and then, with a sudden excess of fury, stormed into his office, bruising his shoulder on the edge of the door as he went.

"What the hell is it now!" he shouted, opening the communications link with a blow that almost fractured the panel. The astonished face of his First Officer gazed back at him from the screen.

"Captain, do you feel quite well?" Spock asked with a trace of anxiety.

"Yes," Kirk said wearily, sitting down abruptly on the edge of his desk. "Something wrong, Spock?"

"We appear to have a slight problem," Spock said. "A child is missing from one of the school parties." Seeing the growing 'I told you so' expression on Kirk's face the Vulcan added hastily, "Jim, it is unusual. The child is part Vulcan. It is highly unlikely that he is merely hiding in order to cause alarm. I suspect he may be injured and unable to call for help."

"Have you instituted a Security search?" Kirk asked, his mind quickly turning to the situation at hand.

The Vulcan nodded. "Affirmative," he said, "and I have also directed Engineering and Science to liaise with Security personnel. We are severely undermanned for a Security search of this nature."

Kirk frowned. "Are all our other visitors still scattered over the ship?" he asked.

"At present the tours are still continuing," Spock said.

"All right," Kirk said briskly, "get them all together in the Rec room, and have all the groups do a quick head count to check that no-one else is missing. They can get refreshments while they wait, and it'll give us a chance to search the ship with a few less people underfoot. Oh, and tell the teachers to question their groups again - someone's got to remember where they saw that child last. After all, he must be the most memorable child aboard," Kirk added with a quick grin.

For a moment Spock's face took on a rather curious expression which Kirk could not quite identify. "I would doubt that myself," the Vulcan said obscurely. "I will inform you when the groups are all gathered in the Rec room," he added in his customary tone of voice. "Spock out."

Kirk switched off his screen and watched absently as the picture dissolved back into a copy of his favourite painting. Then he turned and waded back to the bed, throw off the robe, and slid gratefully back between the covers. One groping hand reached up and dimmed the lights, and the Captain of the Enterprise closed his eyes.

On the shelf above his head the digits on his clock flipped to a new configuration, and obedient to mechanical commands the alarm began to ring.

Spock's return to the bridge was almost immediately followed by Kirk's entry. The Vulcan, engaged in conversation with Chekov and Daniels, turned in surprise as the Captain walked over.

"Not all the groups are gathered in Recreation as yet, Captain," Spock said. He looked closely at Kirk and added, "I was under the impression you had decided to remain in your quarters to sleep."

"Yes," Kirk said forbiddingly, and changed the subject. "Any trace of that child yet?"

"We haven't completed the search of all the living quarters yet," Chekov said. "It'll take several hours to search the whole ship thoroughly, and even then we might miss him if he's unconscious or hiding."

"He is not hiding, Lieutenant," Spock said positively. Kirk glanced at him and the Vulcan met his gaze. "It would be totally illogical, Jim. Vulcan children do not even know how to play games of that kind."

"So he must be unconscious, or hurt in some way," Kirk said. "Now what areas..."

He was interrupted by the insistent buzz of the main communications panel. "Kirk here," he said, leaning past the communications officer to speak into the grid.

"Security, Lieutenant Castello here, sir," was the reply. Kirk hoped no-one could see his suddenly burning cheeks. "Sir, there's no sign of the child yet - we've worked through most of the living quarters and we're starting teams on the lower decks," Castello continued.

"And the groups visiting the ship?" Kirk asked.

"All in the Rec room," Castello assured him. "No-one else has turned up missing, and we're just questioning the class now to see if anyone remembers seeing the boy go."

Down on the Rec deck an organised chaos prevailed. Cadets stood around, chatting and drinking coffee, while the children made the most of this unexpected opportunity to eat what they liked. The noise level was incredible.

Over in the far corner the depleted group huddled nervously in the shadow of two Security officers as the teacher went over the questions for the umpteenth time.

"Okay," she said wearily, "this time try and remember. Someone must have seen Dorrin leave the group. At least you must remember which group he originally went with when we split up."

Uncertainly one child put up her hand. "Please, Miss," she said, "he was with Steve last time I saw him."

The teacher turned round. "Finally we're getting somewhere," she said. "Steve, is this true?"

Steve looked up and adopted an air of elaborate unconcern. "Mebbe," he admitted, shrugging. "He was boring."

"Well, if you were with him, why didn't you say so earlier?" the teacher asked furiously. "Where is he now?"

"I dunno," the boy said, and looked back down at his shoes.

The woman stepped forward, swung the boy to face her, and dropped to his level.

"Listen Steve, this is important. It's no joke. Dorrin may be hurt; now where is he?"

In answer Steve yanked free of her grip and stepped away. "I don't know and I don't care!" he shouted, turning to push his way out of the circle. A firm hand dropped on his shoulder, and held him still. The woman straightened up and looked at the Security man.

"I think we should take him to the Captain," Castello said gently.

The woman nodded, tight-lipped. "Take charge here, John," she said to her colleague. "And as for you, young man, you come along this way," she added, and with Castello as a guide she headed for the turbo-lift, dragging a reluctant Steve with her.

On the bridge the negative Security reports were still coming in as the Security teams moved slowly from deck to deck in their almost impossible search. With the knowledge that he was doing all that could be done, but feeling futile and helpless all the same, Kirk was pacing up and down by his chair. Everyone else kept rather silent, and out of his way. It was relief when the turbo-lift decanted Castello and his two charges.

"This little monster seems to have been the last one to see Dorrin," the teacher said without preamble. "The Lieutenant suggested you should question him."

"All right, son, where did you last see him?" Kirk said, trying to keep a reasonable tone of voice.

Steve just looked at the floor. "Dunno," he said finally.

"Well, what was he doing? You must remember when he left the group. And look at me when you're talking to me!"

The anger succeeded where the reasonable approach had not. The boy left off staring at the floor and glanced up at Kirk.

"I don't remember," he said archly.

"Well, maybe forty-eight hours in the brig will help you remember," Kirk said, his precarious hold on his temper slipping fast.

"You wouldn't dare," Steve said scornfully.

Kirk looked round at Chekov. "Lieutenant Chekov, you and Castello are hereby detailed to take the prisoner to the brig," he said, and walked away.

As Castello's large hand closed over his shoulder the first signs of panic showed in Steve's face. He looked wildly around for help, and met only the cold stares of the crew. Castello pulled him towards the turbo-lift doors.

"No!" Steve shrieked, his nerve breaking. "It isn't fair! It was his fault! And he's not even Human! He's only a half-breed!"

Castello stopped in mid-step. For a moment there was total, icy silence on the bridge, and then Kirk whipped round and came up the steps at full speed. Now utterly panicked by the expression on Kirk's face, Steve tried to break away from Castello and avoid the Captain, but he was held fast. Kirk stopped in front of him.

"Where is he?" he snapped in the command tone.

"I don't remember," Steve sobbed. "I locked him in - I thought he could get out. I don't remember where it was, it was just in a corridor somewhere."

Kirk looked down at the boy in disgust. "A boy four years your junior and you locked him in somewhere and left him there," he said coldly.

"I thought he could get out," Steve repeated. "He knew how to get in, I didn't know he wouldn't be able to get out."

"Shall I take him to the brig, sir?" Castello asked as Kirk stepped away.

"No," Kirk said, "just get him off my ship. And if you remember anything else I want to be informed - at once!" he added to Steve. In stony silence the whole bridge complement watched the little group leave.

"All right, Mr. Chekov," Kirk said, swinging round on his Chief Security Officer, "order the Security teams to retrace search procedures in all the sealed areas of the ship - this time assuming that the child is trapped and may be unable to respond."

"But that could take all day," Chekov said, aghast. "With half the crew on shore leave..."

"I don't want excuses, Lieutenant, just get moving!" Kirk snapped.

Chekov swallowed his protests and headed for the Security console - and finally Kirk swung to face Spock. The Vulcan was sitting unnaturally still. With a conscious effort Kirk fought down the edge of his anger and schooled some gentleness into his tone.

"Spock, is there any other approach we've missed?" Kirk hesitated, uncertain of how to proceed. "If it was you," he said finally, "if you were trapped somewhere, what would you do?"

Spock steepled his fingers, turning his mind inwards to consider the problem. He dismissed all the obvious actions which would have led to the finding of the child long ago. He dismissed the actions which were beyond the child's strength and ability. That left only one possible course of action. With absolute certainty he lowered his personal barriers, and reached outwards with his mind.

Alone, in silence and darkness, deprived of hearing and of sight, and aware that he was dying, Vulcan control still held back the useless and shameful tears Dorrin could feel welling up within him. But if physical controls still held, the mental ones did not. With greater and greater desperation Dorrin sent out a mental call for help, and met only the blank wall of untrained minds, closed to his own. To an observer he would have appeared to be unconscious, his breathing slowed to a minimum, his whole being turned and tuned to the mental search. And with hope gone, with nothing left but stubborn determination and the will to live, his mind touched another, open and receptive. Despair, physical distress, the need for comfort and reassurance and rescue, all overflowed into an unending cry for help, flung out to the one mind it could reach.

To the Bridge crew, Spock seemed on the instant to have gone insane. At one moment he was sitting in silent thought at the science console, the next he had stumbled to his feet, gasping for breath, and hurled himself at the turbo-lift doors. The action held them all for one moment of frozen surprise, before Kirk charged forward and joined the Vulcan as the doors slid shut, leaving the rest of the crew standing in baffled silence.

Withing the descending lift Kirk stood momentarily appalled. Spock leaned against the far wall, hands flat to the metal, his whole body shuddering in an agonising effort at control. Uncertainly Kirk stepped forward, caught the slim shoulders, and swung his friend around. Spock stared blindly at him, his pupils dilated as though he stared into darkness, his breathing coming in uneven tearing gasps.

"Spock! What is it? What's happened? Are you ill? Spock!" Kirk shouted, his fear growing when no effort on his part brought the slightest reaction from the Vulcan. Around them the hum of the turbo-lift suddenly slowed and ceased. The door behind Kirk slid open, and Spock lunged forward, knocking Kirk violently aside, cannoned off the corridor wall, and made off down the corridor at a dead run.

Mindful of the dangers of losing Spock while he was in what Kirk could only explain as some state of Vulcan trance, the Captain headed after him - to come up against the Vulcan trying to claw his way mindlessly through a locked door. Kirk caught at Spock's wrists, struggling to pull him away.

"Spock, it's locked," he said. "You can't go in there anyway - there's no life support."

His own words stopped him dead, staring at the door, and at Spock, still battering futilely at the panels. With a sudden and equal desperation Kirk slammed down the correct sequence on the locking panel, and pressed the lever which would hold the door open. The door slid back, and as the child's body tumbled through Spock swayed, released, then buckled into the doorframe and slid on down to the floor.

Already on his knees beside the child, Kirk looked across at the Vulcan in growing alarm, which only abated slightly when he noticed the steady rise and fall of Spock's chest. He glanced back down at Dorrin, rolling the light figure over and into his arms. The boy's face was grey, his lips an unhealthy bluey-green, and his breathing sounded laboured and uncertain. Cradling the limp body against his own, Kirk raised his wrist communicator and switched it on.

"Sick Bay!" he yelled. "Bones!"

Once again the Captain of the Enterprise was pacing restlessly up and down McCoy's office. The door from Sick Bay slid open abruptly, and Kirk spun on his heel and started forward as McCoy came through the doorway.

"Take it easy," McCoy said before Kirk could speak. "They're both all right. No," he added, as Kirk started to go past him, "sit down for a moment. I've got a few questions I want to ask - primarily about Spock. Dorrin's condition I can understand - he's asleep now and breathing normally, but he nearly asphyxiated, and if he'd been fully Human he'd be dead. But what happened to Spock? When I got down there he looked like he'd been polcaxed."

Kirk sat slowly down on the edge of the desk. "I don't really know, Bones," he said after a moment. "I was hoping you could tell me. When it became obvious, back there on the bridge, that the search could take all day, I asked Spock what he'd do in Dorrin's place." Kirk looked up, to meet McCoy's concerned gaze. "He just went crazy, charged off the bridge at top speed and headed straight to the boy. It was telepathy, wasn't it - but why did it affect him like that?"

McCoy turned away from Kirk and began to pace the cabin in his turn. "I imagine," he said, stopping finally to regard Kirk, "that Spock will tell you in his own good time, but would you care to listen to an educated guess?"

"I'd listen to any explanation," Kirk said with sudden violence. "Bones - it scared me. He was unreachable, not ignoring me, just unaware of me."

McCoy nodded. "If my guess is right he would have been unaware, Jim. You know Spock's tendency to lose his sense of identity in the mind meld."

"Of course," Kirk said. "But dammit, Bones, he was on the bridge! The boy was nowhere near..."

"I know," McCoy said. He stopped for a moment to think of a way to phrase his explanation. "Put yourself in Dorrin's place," he went on, "trapped in a sealed compartment, in the dark, with no physical means of communication - and remember that he's half Vulcan, and trained as a Vulcan. He's not going to start screaming, the way a Human child would. He's going to use the only outlet open to him: telepathy. But Vulcans aren't normally receptive to telepathy, they keep automatic defences up against the pressure of other minds."

"And when I asked Spock what he would do..." Kirk began, with comprehension dawning in his eyes.

"He lowered those barriers," McCoy said. "His mind became totally receptive - and what it received was a mental scream, so powerful it was irresistible... and agonising."

McCoy looked across and saw the shock in Kirk's expression. "It wasn't your fault, Jim, and it did save the boy's life. And Spock is fine, all he needs is rest. Talking of rest," he added, with a touch

of acerbity coming into his tone, "you look terrible. I thought I told you to get a few hours sleep! Why don't you ever listen to what I say?"

"Bones," Kirk said dangerously, "if you knew..."

"Here," McCoy said, giving Kirk no chance to finish, "take these pills - and go to bed!"

Kirk drew breath to speak, looked at McCoy, turned, and headed for the door. In the doorway he hesitated, looking back over his shoulder.

"Get out!" McCoy shouted.

Kirk grinned. "Thank you, Bones," he said gently, and the door slid shut behind him.

McCoy turned, grumbling, and headed back into Sick Bay. Dorrin was still asleep, but in the further bed the slim, uniformed figure of the First Officer was propped up on one elbow as the Vulcan looked across at the sleeping child.

"He's going to recover completely," McCoy said, following the Vulcan's gaze. "You should be getting some sleep as well," he added grumpily. "You're both supposed to be asleep."

Spock swung his legs off the edge of the bed and stood up. "It is not sleep which I require, Doctor," he said. "I can rest as efficiently in my quarters as here."

"Well - I suppose so," McCoy conceded grudgingly. "But no going back on duty. Here..." he picked up a hypo, "I'll give you a vitamin shot as well. You're looking what in a Human I'd call peaked."

McCoy approached the Vulcan, and the door into Sick Bay slid open. McCoy saw Spock's eyes widen as his gaze switched to a point beyond McCoy's shoulder, and a clear treble voice said accusingly,

"I've been looking all over for you!"

McCoy jerked round, the hypo temporarily forgotten, to find himself face to face with a diminutive blonde.

"Is he going to give you an injection?" she asked, and McCoy realised that it was not ~~he~~, but Spock, who was being addressed. "I had one of them in hospital," the child continued confidently. "Would you like me to hold your hand?"

Somehow McCoy regained his equilibrium as the little figure pattered forward. "Friend of yours, Spock?" he asked innocently.

"Precisely, Doctor," Spock said solemnly. A small hand slid into his own.

"You can give him the injection now," Jenny said.

McCoy swallowed his comments and brought up the hypo. Spock nodded his thanks and stood up, his hand still firmly clasped. He looked down and met the wide-eyed gaze unflinchingly.

"Why is everything on this ship all control boards and boring stuff like that?" Jenny demanded.

Spock raised an eyebrow at the complaint. "You have not yet been shown the window looking out of the ship?" he asked.

The child's face lit up. "You have windows?" she asked. "Can we go there?"

"Naturally," Spock said. He glanced at McCoy. "I presume, Doctor, that you do not consider a visit to the officers' lounge too unrestful?"

"Uh - no," McCoy said, at a loss for words.

Spock turned and headed for the door, with Jenny in tow. As they reached the door it opened, and Dr. Chapel looked in.

"Doctor, Uhura and her party are here - I wondered how Mr. Spock..." he voice slowly trailed off into silence.

Spock raised an eyebrow at her and stepped past as she moved out of the doorway. McCoy caught a glimpse of Uhura's dumbfounded face in the room beyond.

"My guest and I will be in the officers' lounge when you have finished with the tour, Lieutenant-Commander," Spock said calmly. "Now, if you will excuse us...?" He headed for the door, matching his stride to the shorter steps of the child. As they went out of the further door the treble voice drifted back to them.

"I'm going to marry you when I grow up," Jenny announced.

The silence after they left Sick Bay was eventually broken by McCoy. "Something you wanted to ask me, Christine?" he asked.

"Yes," Chapel said, "but don't bother to answer. I don't think I want to know."

Kirk surveyed his still chaotic cabin, shrugged, and padded over to his bed. He reached out for the wrist communicator on the bedside shelf and noticed the pills McCoy had handed him. For a second he debated taking them, then left them lying there and picked up the communicator.

"Kirk to bridge."

"Bridge - Sulu here."

"Mr. Sulu, I shall be in my quarters for the rest of the day, but don't call me unless..." Kirk paused, trying to think of a disaster which could possibly demand his attention. "Just don't call me," he said finally.

"Understood, sir," Sulu said.

The communicator clicked off and Kirk put it down. Yawning, he sat down on the edge of the bed, put out a hand, and dimmed the lights. As though on cue, the door signal buzzed.

Kirk sat quite still and considered the floor in front of him. "It's a hallucination," he muttered to himself. The signal buzzed again.

Without bothering to switch on the lights Kirk got up and walked slowly across to the door. He was unsurprised when, halfway there, he stubbed his toe on a pair of boots which were lying around. Feeling too tired to swear he completed his journey to the door, reached out, and pressed the communicator switch.

"Who is it now?" he asked wearily.

"Me," said a delighted female voice.

Kirk sighed heavily, straightened up from an examination of his bruised foot, and operated the door control. Lt. Weston erupted through the door in full view of eighteen cadets and five crewmembers. Kirk sighed again and walked back to the bed.

"I'm so happy," Weston was saying. "We had a long talk, and made up, and I got the dress out of the processor, and it looks lovely..."

Kirk reached out, picked up the pills McCoy had given him, and downed them in one. He leaned back and pulled up the covers.

"... and he said he doesn't mind if my mother comes, and he was only teasing," Weston continued, and then hesitated as she noticed Kirk's prone form. "Captain, I'm not disturbing you, am I?" she asked.

"Not at all," Kirk said courteously. "Do go on."

Weston sighed and gazed rapturously at the opposite wall. "Oh Captain," she said, beginning to cry, "Isn't it a wonderful day?"

"Wonderful," Kirk said, closing his eyes and letting her voice fade out of his mind. "A simply wonderful day."

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SHADES OF A DREAM

The sun-rippled shadows
 Sweet fragrances
 Pine, honeysuckle
 My weary mind devours it all
 So hungrily
 My eyes meet with unaccountable
 Beauty
 My soul, worry-torn,
 Is stilled
 The asteroid is far away
 Far from my memory
 Then my memory matters little
 Apprehended by the obelisk
 I care not
 Everything is so peaceful
 And beauty is everywhere
 Miramanees, so noble
 So regal
 Love
 It takes not long to establish
 Our love
 Consummated in marriage in
 A happiness I never dreamed
 Possible
 A child - so happy
 The dreams still invade
 But I find them secondary
 Now
 Storms, winds, terror
 I cannot help for I know not how
 The stones meant for me
 But dear Miramanees sacrifices
 Herself
 Sparkling... friends? Help
 At last
 She dies, my wife
 God, no
 Deflector operational, planet safe
 But not her. Not Miramanees
 She dies... for me
 Can there be anything else for me now?
 Why did you have to leave me ????????

Karen Hayden

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NO TURNING BACK by Elizabeth Butler

The slim dark figure seated at the Library Computer Station of the U.S.S. Enterprise felt more alone than at any time in his life before. His dark eyes moved slowly over the people assembled on the bridge, and he felt a pang of what could only be described as heartache, a feeling he wouldn't ever admit to, but which nevertheless existed.

He could not fail to be affected by the general atmosphere of suppressed excitement on the bridge, but this only served to heighten his feeling of isolation.

The Enterprise was on her way home after five years in deep space, on a journey of exploration to the far-flung reaches of the universe. In a matter of moments the Earth's solar system would be visible to the naked eye, bringing to an end the longest spell of active duty any crew had ever undertaken.

Earth! Home to the entire crew of over four hundred people, returning to families and friends, to start picking up the threads of their former lives.

There was, however, one exception. Mr. Spock, the First Officer of the Enterprise, was not coming home.

In fact, in a literal sense, he had no home. For as far back as his memory could reach, Spock had been intensely aware of the fact that he did not, in truth, 'belong' anywhere. His Vulcan father had broken all tradition by marrying an Earthwoman, with the result that Spock could claim to be neither Vulcan nor Human, but a confusing amalgamation of the two, thus alienating him from both worlds. He had always regarded himself as Vulcan, and indeed in both physical appearance and mental outlook he was, which was why he found the present circumstances so distressing. His normal Vulcan detachment was under considerable strain as he fought to control his rising sense of despair at the imminent loss of his friends.

Friends? Yes, he had to admit to himself that these people were much more to him than mere colleagues.

Uhura, the dark-skinned communications officer, the only female crew member with whom Spock felt completely at ease; an undemanding friendship, enhanced by their mutual interest in music.

Chekov, the volatile young Russian navigator, whom Spock had found to be such an apt and willing pupil in his own field of computer science, albeit a little exuberant for Spock's taste.

Sulu, the Oriental helmsman, a man of diverse interests and talents, including botany and various forms of martial arts, in the latter of which Spock had often participated.

Scotty, the chief engineer, a Scotsman, as his name would imply. Not an easy man to get to know, being almost totally wrapped up in his 'bairns', an affectionate term he used to describe his engines.

Christine Chapel, the head nurse, who really had no business to be on the bridge at all, but no-one was insisting on formalities at this time. As his eyes rested on her briefly Spock felt a rush of compassion for this woman. He was aware of the fact that she was in love with him, a situation doomed to failure from the start, as they both knew he could never reciprocate her love.

His gaze moved to the command chair, where Captain James Kirk was valiantly endeavouring to maintain his professional poise, and, failing utterly, he too being caught up in the general euphoria of homecoming. McCoy, chief medical officer, was not even trying as he leaned over the back of Jim's chair, gripping his shoulder, a huge grin splitting his face.

Yes. For the first time in his life he could look on his fellow crew members as friends.

Spock had never known real friendship before, although he had worked closely with Humans for several years in Starfleet. He had never set out to make friends, in fact quite the reverse. From early childhood he had been raised in the Vulcan tradition of total logic, unhampered by emotion. Being only half Vulcan, he had fought a continual battle within himself against emotion of any kind, determined to subjugate his Human half once and for all.

Entering Starfleet Academy had been a vital factor in this inner conflict, despite the fact that his actions in doing so had caused a rift between himself and his father that had lasted for eighteen years, his father having expected him to follow in his own footsteps at the Vulcan Science Academy. Spock had reasoned that working exclusively with Humans would help him to fully understand Human emotions, thus enabling him to analyse his own feelings and so, finally, eradicate them.

And it had worked, he told himself. For a good many years he had served aboard the Enterprise, safe and secure behind his Vulcan mask. He had a good working relationship with his colleagues; though some thought him rather odd and cold, they nevertheless respected his supreme intelligence and efficiency. Thus, for the first time in his life, he had felt that he really belonged somewhere, that he was needed; and he was, in his own way, content.

That was before the advent of Captain James T. Kirk. This young man had taken over command of the Enterprise a little over five years ago, shortly before the commencement of the five year mission. About the same time the chief medical officer had declared that he was too old to embark on such a mission, and was subsequently replaced by one Dr. Leonard 'Bones' McCoy.

Those two men, Spock reflected, had done more to strip away his carefully-constructed mask of non-emotion than anyone he had met in his entire life.

He let his thoughts drift over the last five years, mentally reliving countless instances when either one or the other of them had got through his defences.

McCoy had employed a straightforward attacking strategy 'to see what makes this fella tick', to use his own words. His acid sarcasm had made Spock rise to the bait with his own brand of barbed wit, resulting in numerous exchanges of often violent argument, at least on McCoy's part. Strangers coming across these two during one of their verbal onslaughts would have been convinced of a feeling of mutual hatred between them. Both Spock and McCoy were aware of this interpretation of their relationship, but neither felt inclined to correct the general misconception, both being content to hide their true feelings behind the constant banter. In reality, each felt a deep sense of loyalty and respect for the other, if not actual friendship.

Kirk was a very different proposition. His was a warm and very outgoing nature dedicated to seeking out and nurturing the finer points of his fellow men. Spock was an unknown quantity, and Jim Kirk determined to employ all of his considerable resources to break through that cold, logical Vulcan exterior to the sensitive, compassionate human being he felt sure lay deeply hidden beneath.

From that very first day of their meeting Spock had recognised that here was a man who represented a very real threat to his self-imposed veneer of cold detachment. There was an affinity between them right from the very start, an affinity which had developed over the years into a close, almost tangible bond of loyalty, friendship - even, Spock felt compelled to acknowledge, love.

Many were the occasions when one had willingly jeopardised his career, and often his life, to save the other; and their close friendship had become a legend in the ranks of Starfleet, being unprecedented between a Vulcan and a Human.

The spontaneous cheer from the bridge crew jolted Spock back to the present, and his eyes involuntarily went to the main viewscreen, where Earth's solar system had at last become visible. The moment he had been secretly dreading for the past few weeks had at last arrived, bringing with it the certain knowledge that his whole lifestyle was going to change drastically.

Spock knew in his heart that regardless of his close relationship with Kirk and McCoy within the confines of the Enterprise, cut off for so long from all they knew, there was no place for him on Earth.

There was a very distinct probability that Captain Kirk would be promoted to the rank of Commodore, even Admiral, in recognition of his services over the last five years. This would in effect mean that he would be confined to the ranks of officialdom and administration, being permanently based at Starfleet Command Headquarters. A great honour, and one which Jim would undoubtedly welcome after the ordeals just past. Spock had tried to visualise himself in a somewhat similar role, but had failed. He was as much an alien on Earth as he had ever been.

No, he would have to make the break now, a decision arrived at after much soul-searching and heartache.

His future stretched before him, bleak and uninviting. There was, of course, the possibility of his being offered the Captaincy of his own Starship, but thoughts of such a contingency filled him with such deep sorrow that he dismissed them abruptly.

He could not envisage serving on a Starship without Jim Kirk by his side.

Spock had pondered long and hard these past few weeks about his future. His life had come full circle, and he was once again the victim of an inner turmoil which threatened to engulf him.

He was still essentially Vulcan, and intensely proud of that fact, but he also had to come to terms with the fact that his Human half was by no means subjugated. In fact, the situation was now far more critical than the circumstances which had compelled him to enter Starfleet all those years ago.

Then, he had never known what it was to care for someone so much that life without them held no meaning, no purpose. His friendship with Jim Kirk was far closer than he would ever admit to. He had allowed himself to become far too dependent on this one man, and the thought frightened him.

Where was his Vulcan logic, his practical, impersonal approach?

Spock had painstakingly come to the conclusion that there was only one possible solution to his dilemma. He had always known that it would come to this in the end, though the thought caused him so much pain that he almost cried out.

His tumultuous Human emotions had escalated far beyond his ability to control them. Returning to Vulcan and undertaking the long, hard trial of Kolinahr was his only hope; the ancient Vulcan tradition of Kolinahr, a long, arduous trial of endurance out in the wastes of the hot, arid Vulcan desert. Long months of solitary meditation, a purging of the soul, and the final extinguishing of all emotions.

The final solution, and one which had taken a great deal of heart

searching to arrive at. Now the decision was made, and he would carry it through with his customary single-mindedness.

There were still several days to endure in the company of these people who had come to mean so much to him, and he would have to call on all his inner reserves to maintain his usual air of calm efficiency.

He caught Jim Kirk's eye and managed a faint half-smile. Kirk grinned back, unwittingly twisting the knife in Spock's heart.

Saying goodbye, especially to Jim, was an ordeal that he could not contemplate. As Kirk turned again to the viewscreen, Spock allowed his gaze to remain on him for several seconds.

No, he could never say goodbye.

He would slip away unobtrusively, after the formalities of debriefing, and make arrangements for his return to Vulcan.

A heavy weight lay on his heart. There would be no turning back.

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STARSHIP CAPTAIN'S LAMENT, or, THAT DAMNED ENTERPRISE

You all do know the Enterprise,
Its length, its width and all its size,
Its Captain brave and all its crew
None of this is very new.

You all know Kirk the wonderboy,
Spock and Scotty and McCoy.
Do you know the General Lee?
She's the one belongs to me.

If you don't it's no surprise.
They only mention the Enterprise.
The Enterprise gets all the fame,
To other Captains that's a shame.

After all, we do our share
And we hardly think it's fair
That Captain Kirk gets all the fuss,
And no-one ever thinks of us.

The Enterprise is always there,
Making treaties with such flair.
Fighting Klingons, oh so brave -
And look at all the GIRLS they save!

They carry diplomats to Babel,
When every ship is just as able
To do it equally as well.
You just watch us give 'em hell!

The Enterprise is always sent.
We think it's time another went.
I'm just an ordinary man,
I do my job as best I can.

I do not have a wonder crew,
My ship's exec. is Human too,
But my ship is just as good,
Or try the Lexington or Hood.

I like Jim Kirk, he's a friend of mine,
And even Vulcans too are fine.
They do monopolise each job that's fun -
Please, oh please, can I have one!

Barbara Wright.

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THE RAINBOW TRAP by J. Miller

Uhura twisted away from the rec room's main serviator and narrowly avoided a collision with a yellow-shirted Ensign. Smiling her apologies, she dashed off to a nearby table, longing for the moment when she could settle down comfortably, stretch out her legs, and sink her teeth into the multi-layered sandwich she had just conjured up from the processors. Collapsing gracefully into a chair, Uhura gazed adoringly at her snack, bid goodbye to her diet (adhered to for all of twenty-four hours) and said with awe, "You know, computers are wonderful things!"

It wasn't spoken with the aim of provoking comment, but when there came no response of any kind, Uhura glanced curiously at her companion. Swallowing her first mouthful, she asked, "What's up, Chris?"

This direct question scored a hit, and Christine Chapel looked up sharply from the depths of her coffee cup.

"Sorry, Uhura. What did you say?"

Uhura smiled. "Just think - I could have said something of mind-shattering import and you might have missed it forever." The humour was lost on Christine, so Uhura good-naturedly repeated, "I asked what was up. You were a million parsecs away."

Christine shrugged her shoulders. "I'm fine. My mind was elsewhere, that's all." Then defensively, "I wasn't being rude."

"I didn't think that, anyway," said Uhura, surprised. Despite her friend's denial, Uhura suspected that she was not being totally honest. Although a little morose of late, it was unlike Christine to be so glum. She was normally the epitome of cheeriness, ready with her sunny smile. Uhura was sure the nurse was the reason why the majority of the male complement aboard the Enterprise were not averse to visiting Sickbay when necessity called for it. Christine was extremely popular, and although her heart was not open to offers, it did not prevent the gentlemen trying. Ah! Uhura's quicksilver brain did a rapid computation. What would be the likeliest thing to give Christine the blues? Or rather, who?

Uhura wondered how to broach the subject. She sympathised with Christine, even though her practical nature often despaired of her, and she knew she had to be tactful. Sipping her coffee, Uhura considered, and unable to think of an opening gambit, decided to jump straight in and keep her fingers crossed she wouldn't make too big a splash.

"Er... how's Spock these days?"

Uhura saw the water closing in over her head. Christine slammed down her coffee cup and sprang to her feet, glowering at the startled Uhura.

"Why does everyone assume...? Why can't people just...? Oh hell!" And Christine stormed out of the rec room, her anger leaving a trail that would have registered on the ship's sensors.

Uhura's sandwich lay forgotten on the plate and her coffee was in peril of enduring the same fate. The lieutenant sat bewildered. Christine was occasionally sensitive over Spock, but the topic had not, as far as Uhura was aware, become taboo. Uhura sighed. Oh, happy lunchbreak!

"Hi, Uhura. What's the matter with Chris? I've just passed her in the corridor and she looks as if she's about to declare war on the entire ship!"

Uhura greeted Sulu distractedly. "Me, maybe, but not the Enterprise. At least, not yet. She was down in the dumps, and I asked her..."

"What?" probed Sulu.

It was Uhura's turn to be on the defensive. "Don't ask 'What?' in that tone! I didn't set out to annoy her; I merely thought her mood might be connected with Spock."

"I see," Sulu said knowingly. He eyes the barely touched sandwich by Uhura's arm with interest. "Do you mean to eat that, or are you saving it for posterity?"

Uhura pushed the plate towards him. She was concerned, thought Sulu; not even a whisper of "Pig!"

"And you asked her...?" Sulu prompted.

"I asked her how Spock was these days," Uhura confessed.

Sulu halted in mid-bite. "Now that is a stupid question! You see him more than Chris! You could tell her the answer!" Resuming his bonus snack, he shook his head accusingly.

"It was said casually - I hoped it'd make her pour out her troubles," explained Uhura.

Sulu was sceptical. "And it was so successful that she marched out of here in high dudgeon, probably never to speak to you again."

Uhura raised her eyebrows in a superb Spockian imitation. "Could you have done better?" When no reply was forthcoming, Uhura sniffed. "Thought not. Well, when I come off duty tonight I'll go and see her, and apologise, and try to do a better job of finding out exactly what is wrong with her - without a single mention of Spock."

"She might have just a touch of the doldrums," said Sulu. "Isn't she due for shore-leave? She could be tired, overdue for relaxation. It happens to us all."

Uhura nodded, but Sulu could tell she wasn't placated. He stood up, brushing breadcrumbs from his shirt. "I wish you luck, anyhow. I don't like to Chris uptight or unhappy. She's had enough sorrow in the past."

At this, Uhura's nod was of complete agreement. She glanced at the cleaned plate. "I suppose now you've eaten my lunch, you're off to tend those weeds of yours in Botany."

Sulu refused to take offence. "Your lunch was freely given, and didn't you tell me you were on a diet? First time I've heard of someone on a diet eating a Starship Special."

"There are all manner of diets," Uhura retorted.

Sulu grinned. "If you say so." Coming close to her he bent his head in order to converse as privately as one could in a rec room. "Talking of shore-leave, you and I are also in line for some when we get to Starbase 21. I've heard they have a couple of specially designed resorts there... Cater for every taste in vacations."

"Really?" said Uhura lightly.

"Really," affirmed Sulu. "I wondered... that is, if you haven't anything else planned... if we could honour one of the resorts with our patronage..."

"The idea merits further consideration," said Uhura loftily. She smiled. "Do you think they'd supply us with Starship Specials?"

Sulu chuckled. "I'd make it a condition of booking."

Watching him as he left the rec room, Uhura knew she would consider the idea very carefully indeed, once she sorted Christine Chapel out.

The object of Uhura's concern was at that moment venting her temper on a junior nurse who had made a simple, but harmless mistake whilst

carrying out an inventory which Christine had set her to do. The junior, newly qualified and on her first space assignment, was visibly quaking, and though her dignity had thus far stemmed her tears, her resolve was crumbling fast.

"I am sorry, Nurse Chapel..."

Christine swept aside the junior's words impatiently. "Sorry? If you had carried out your duties properly, you wouldn't have to apologise! What are they sending us nowadays? We need nurses, not fumbling cretins who probably haven't the foggiest idea which way up you hold a medi-scanner!"

So engrossed was Christine in her tirade that she didn't notice Leonard McCoy come into the room. McCoy was dumbfounded. That didn't sound like the Christine Chapel he knew! Chris was a marvellous nurse, and organised her subordinates precisely and efficiently, but her quest for perfection was always liberally laced with patience and understanding. McCoy had never know her address a greenhorn nurse in this way. It was completely out of character - but there, the Chris Chapel he'd worked with lately was fast becoming a stranger to him. He'd tried to get behind the barrier she'd erected, but she'd resisted all his best efforts. Now it had come to this stage, he was driven to change his tactics. As a rule he would not challenge Chris's authority, but...

"Nurse Travis, you may go," he said, his calm voice in sharp contrast to Chris's.

His Head Nurse spun and faced him defiantly. "Doctor, if you don't mind..."

"In a moment, Nurse Chapel," interrupted McCoy. If looks could kill, he thought, he'd be laid out in the morgue. "Off you go, Nurse Travis. You can take your break now."

The junior's relief was tangible. "Thank you, Doctor," she murmured, and rushed from the room before either of her seniors could change their minds.

When they were alone, McCoy indicated a chair. "Sit down, Chris."

McCoy had the impression Christine would decline heatedly, but she sat and gazed stonily at him. McCoy pulled up another chair and sat opposite her.

"You had no right to usurp my authority!" Christine said furiously. "The girl made an error..."

"A serious error?" McCoy asked.

"No," Christine admitted, "but it was still an error. She has to be taught..."

"By receiving a reprimand that would have done justice to the bellowing of the sternest Academy disciplinarian? Come on, Chris, that isn't your style!" McCoy's voice softened. "What's wrong, Chris?"

"I'm sick and tired of people asking me that question!" Christine snapped.

"If they do, it's only because they're worried about you - as I am," said McCoy.

Christine ignored this statement. Sitting ramrod straight she enquired, "Is this a professional interview, Doctor, to be appended to my record?"

"Chris, stop it! How in hell can I help you if you won't let me near you?"

Visually measuring the distance between their respective chairs

Christine said icily, "You're quite close as it is, Doctor."

"You know what I mean, Chris. And don't keep calling me 'Doctor' as though you're using it as an insult, putting our ranks between us. In the medical field, it isn't even true. You're as qualified as I am."

"How kind of you to recognise my training," said Christine sarcastically. "And if you believe I am as capable as you, then perhaps you will accept my word that nothing is wrong, and let me go."

"I will not," said McCoy emphatically. "I want to help!"

Christine's rigidity and affronted air did not give McCoy much hope that he could. "Okay," he said resignedly, "if you won't let me help, then the only other thing I can do is to dismiss you to your quarters and order you to rest."

"No!" cried Christine. "I refuse to be packaged off to my room like a naughty child. There's work to do..."

"Such as tearing strips off junior nurses?" McCoy asked.

Christine's expression was impenetrable. With a shake of his head McCoy had to own he was at a loss. In a final effort to destroy the barrier, McCoy grasped her shoulders, and with concern marking every word said, "Can't you tell me, Chris? Not as a doctor or a colleague or a senior officer, but as a friend."

"There's nothing to tell!" repeated Christine, but McCoy saw the misery in her eyes before she hastily averted them. Christine shrugged herself free of him and stood. "Will that be all?"

McCoy also rose and pushed back his chair. "It's all you'll permit," he said sadly. "You are to remain off duty until further notice." He lifted a hand to dam the flow of protests. "It's an order. If necessary, I'll have it seconded by the Captain. You understand?"

Christine's nod was her only affirmation and she left the room without another word or backward glance. McCoy resumed his seat, muttering under his breath. How could he get through to Christine? He'd have to tell Jim, of course - any problem involving a crewmember had to be brought to his immediate attention. On that, the Captain was insistent.

Too insistent, McCoy sometimes thought. The collective troubles of over four hundred men and women were a burden to be reckoned with.

But he was digressing. McCoy's reasoning argued that Christine's present disposition had nothing to do with Spock. She had had the odd spell of melancholy over the futility of her unrequited love for the Vulcan, but it had never plummeted her to this deep a depression. A day or so, and Christine was her old self. She was a sensible woman, hardy and resourceful.

That could be it, McCoy deliberated. She'd been too sensible, too hardy and resourceful, and was inwardly rebelling. There'd been the business with Roger Corby - a dreadful blow - and now there were the tensions of unrequited love. Why had she fallen for Spock? The psychiatrist in McCoy told him it was one of the peculiarities of Human nature; the fact that Spock couldn't, or wouldn't, return Christine's feelings made the love safe, albeit hopeless. Christine couldn't be hurt again. She could fantasize and build vain dreams, but because the love wasn't reciprocated she wouldn't suffer the actual pain of having it torn asunder. But analysing Christine's complex feelings for Spock was of no aid to her now. Unfortunately, McCoy did not know what was.

Christine Chapel walked to her quarters with the mechanical movements and homing technique of an automaton. She entered her quarters and threw herself face down on the bed, blocking out the rest of the universe which

had become unbearable for her to live with. Several minutes passed. Christine turned onto her back and stared at the uninspiring ceiling, unshed tears brightening her eyes. Everyone asked her, "What's the matter?" How could she make them believe she didn't know? She hadn't meant to be so abrupt with Len, nor had she with Uhura, but sharpness came naturally to her lately, and she found it impossible to stomp the harsh words that came to her lips. And at the root of it was the terrible depression that had settled upon her and would not be shaken off.

When had it started? A fortnight ago? Must be. Then it had been a mere forerunner of this current black mood. She'd been tired, run down as the oblique medical diagnosis ran, following a month of gruelling hard work which had left no time for the rest essential for a healthy mind and body. When the work load had eased, habit over the past month prevented her from relaxing sufficiently to catch up on her sleep, and her dislike of sedatives had kept her from seeking their refuge. Lying awake for countless hours she had brooded, filling her sleepless mind with regurgitated memories of thwarted dreams and old hurts.

Whilst in this frame of mind she had accompanied the landing party when the Enterprise had called at Della Triax, a planet recently admitted to the Federation. The Human contingent on the planet urgently required certain medical supplies, and McCoy had requested Christine to assist him in their transportation. It was a task any junior could have undertaken, but McCoy had sensed that Christine needed the change of scene, and thought the visit to Della Triax might do the trick.

It had. Once the supplies had been handed over to the administrator of the Human colony, there had been an opportunity to sight-see and explore the capital city's major attractions. She and McCoy had roamed for a couple of hours, stopping to eat at a vast cosmopolitan diner, then they'd strolled through the market in the city's heart. She'd bought several items, including the rainbow-hued cube which now sat on her desk. By the time they'd beamed back to the ship she had picked up considerably.

But on her return to the Enterprise the depression had descended once more, and had intensified. Christine was too good a nurse to think an afternoon's jaunt would be an instant cure, but she had hoped that Della Triax would be the turning point. Instead, the threads of depression wove themselves in her mind, and it had come to this. She had alienated herself from her friends, cut herself off, rejecting their help and comfort.

It was probably a false comfort, anyway. None of them really cared, but they had to maintain the pretence. "Doing their duty." Well, damn the lot of them! She could be as independent as the next woman! She had no ties, no obligations. She no longer had Roger to love, and Spock treated her with the interest he'd spare for a laboratory specimen.

Damn them! Slipping off her boots and loosening her clothing, she tossed and turned until she fell into a fretful doze.

And the glitteringly beautiful, may-coloured box sat stolidly on her desk.

The change of watch came, and as soon as Uhura's relief appeared the Lieutenant nipped smartly into the turbolift, ordering it to take her to Deck 5, where Christine had her quarters.

As the lift sped to its destination Uhura, for the hundredth time in the past few hours, berated herself for her tactlessness in the rec room. Even if Spock were the cause of Chris's blues (though the more Uhura mulled it over the more improbable it became - not even a frustrated love would make Christine act like this) she still shouldn't have blundered in as she did. No wonder Chris had got her hackles up! The

first thing Uhura intended to do was to patch up their friendship, for she didn't want to lose the almost sisterly relationship that had grown between them. And the second thing...? Hopefully, to find out what was really bothering Chris.

Uhura arrived outside Christine's quarters and thumbed the door buzzer. There was no answer. Uhura knew she was there, for she'd checked with McCoy before the end of her duty period. Her curiosity had been aroused by the doctor's tone, although he hadn't dissuaded her from visiting Christine, and it had been further compounded by his request that Kirk call into Sickbay when he was able.

Uhura pressed the door buzzer again, and was rewarded with the same silence. She was about to press a third time when the door comm unit hummed into life and Christine's voice, the strain very apparent, asked, "Yes, who is it?"

"It's Uhura, Chris, bearing an olive branch."

The door remained sealed. From the comm unit came a puzzled, "What? Why?"

The veteran of years of verbal exchanges with Starbases and other Federation installations, with alien powers and emissaries, of decoding computer chatter and star cacophony, Uhura still couldn't purge herself of a weird feeling when talking to a disembodied entity aboard her own ship.

"Because of what happened at lunch," she said at last.

"Forget it, Uhura, please," said Christine.

"Look, why won't you open the door, Chris? We ought to talk..."

"I don't want to talk!" barked Christine. "I just want you and everyone else to leave me the hell alone!" And the comm unit was snapped off.

Uhura looked blankly at the closed door, and sighed, ignorant of the curious glances her brief conversation with Christine had attracted from a passing crewmember. Damn! She couldn't buzz again, it'd only aggravate Christine more, and McCoy was obviously in the picture, so a word in his ear was superfluous. Perhaps Chris needed more time to cool down. Would overnight do? She'd try again in the morning. Rueing her failure, Uhura made her way to her own cabin.

Christine laid her burning cheek against the cool metal of the speaker grid. Would they never let her be? Fussing, prying, invading her privacy - and all carried out with the same fabricated air of solicitude...

She turned, leaned against the wall, a hand massaging the tense muscles in the back of her neck. The bedside chronometer told her she'd been asleep for four hours. Was that all? She felt she could sleep for a lifetime, an eternity...

Her dreams had been subconscious echoes of her waking thoughts, images dark and morbid, and when she'd emerged, unrefreshed, from her sleep moments before, summoned by Uhura's call, she'd felt as though a great weight was upon her. It crushed and suffocated her, being the weight on an immense depression, and if Christine had believed her mood to be black before, it was insignificant compared with what she was experiencing now.

Misery mingled with bitterness, melancholia with anger, numbing weariness with dreadful desolation.

Eternal sleep. What a glorious prospect! No-one to bother or pester her, and above all, no-one to make her unhappy. Her life? What a joke! A meaningless jumble of events and entanglements. Her work? What did that have to offer? A runaround, that's all she was, always assisting others in their work, and supervising juniors who oughtn't to be let out of medical school. She had nothing! Eternal sleep...

Christine shook her head, moving towards the desk. Dangerous thoughts. She mustn't think like this. She picked up the rainbow box, twisting it over and over in her nervously restless hands. Her eyes were unseeing, she was too caught up within herself to be aware of her surroundings. Those dangerous thoughts, once born, grew and thrived at an obscene rate. The depression sank a little heavier upon her. Why would it be so wrong to sleep and not awaken? Christine chuckled bitterly. She'd be doing them a favour! They wouldn't have to 'worry' over her any more. They'd be better off without her. And she? She'd be better off without them.

Well, why not, dammit! What was there to reconsider for? She had no dependents, no person or persons who relied on her. There'd be no one to mourn her. Christine set the box down and covered her face with both hands, blotting out everything for a moment so as to think clearly, carefully, spacing her thoughts against a backdrop swept momentarily clean. There was no reason in going on, that was certain. Give it up now. Don't prolong the misery.

Christine straightened, her arms listless at her sides. The decision was made and it filled her with a strange, indifferent resignation. She gave her quarters a cursory glance. There were no objects, no mementos to bid goodbye to. She turned slowly and left her rooms, the lights in the empty corridor reflected in the tears that had begun to tumble silently over onto her cheeks.

"If only I could get her to talk to me! Get her to tell me how she feels, release a little of what's bottled up inside her! I'd welcome anything, Jim - anything! At least it would be a start."

Kirk was seated on a chair in McCoy's office while the doctor himself took out a degree of the frustration he felt by striding the length of the room. As McCoy's stride was fairly long and his office not over-large, the exercise was completed quickly. Knowing that one man's pacing made another man jumpy, he sat on his chair and willed himself to relax as he sipped at his drink, a glass of which he had poured for Kirk and himself upon the Captain's arrival.

Kirk was engaged in the same practice, cognizant of the fact that he would, as usual, turn a blind eye to how Bones and Scotty each managed to have a cache of the best booze on the ship. He had excused himself from the bridge minutes after Uhura's departure, puzzled as to why McCoy wanted to see him. The doctor wouldn't summon him unless it was important; and Kirk, always on the alert where his ship and crew were concerned, decided to make the visit immediately rather than wait until the end of his watch. Listening to McCoy, Kirk appreciated his anxiety.

"You've no idea what's wrong with her?" asked Kirk.

McCoy gave a vigorous head-shake., "None at all."

Kirk toyed with his glass before tentatively suggesting, "Er... could she be love-lorn?"

McCoy's expression was such that Kirk wished he'd kept his suggestion to himself. "You mean Spock?"

"Well, yes. Oh, come on, Bones, don't look at me like that! It's

the first thing to occur to anyone," said Kirk.

McCoy, reluctantly, conceded this. "Yeah, you're right. I'm sorry, Jim. But it isn't Spock, I'm sure of that." He cocked his head to one side. "And what you and plenty of other people don't realise is that Chris has got over much of her infatuation with Spock. Oh, she still cares. She'd willingly give her all to him if he asked, having had a transformation overnight and become the humanised lover she wants him to be; but I think, in her own way she's accepted the situation for what it is. Poor Chris! Unwittingly she's become the brunt of jokes and idle chatter and the occasional bet of 'will she and Spock...?' or 'won't she and Spock...?' - and don't pretend you didn't know that existed!"

"It exists all right, Bones, I don't deny it, but unless I discover who the amateur bookmaker is I can't stamp it out; and what sort of Captain would I be, anyway, if I acted the heavy on every two-bit illicit activity on this ship?"

McCoy dumbly agreed, and in the ensuing silence Kirk measured the depth of worry on his friend's face. "You think it's serious, don't you, Bones?"

"Yes, Jim, I do. I've come to know Chris pretty well over the four years I've worked with her, both professionally and as a friend, and I'm of the opinion her mental health is a cause for concern."

"You would be able to find out much more with drugs or hypnosis, wouldn't you?"

"Without doubt," said McCoy, "but Chris wouldn't submit to such treatment as things stand, and the alternative..." McCoy's words hung in the air as he drained his glass. He went on, "It'd be a betrayal of the trust between us to treat her by those methods without her consent. It's all very well to say it's for her own good and any action's acceptable if Chris is returned to her old self as a result, but I'd prefer not to treat her without her agreement, even if it isn't whole-hearted. I'll talk to her again and try to obtain her permission before even considering the alternatives."

"In these matters, Bones, you're the expert," said Kirk. "I'm glad you told me. I like Chris enormously, and I respect and admire her too - she's a valuable member of this crew." He finished his drink and set his empty glass next to McCoy's. "What will you do?"

McCoy stood, stretched, and straightened his wayward tunic. "I'll call in at the rec room, get Chris something to eat - I doubt if she's had food or drink for a good while - and take it to her - and I hope I'll fare a damn sight better this time."

"Uhura might be there, Bones," said Kirk, recalling the Lieutenant's contact with McCoy.

"With any luck, she might have made some sort of impression on Christine. If Uhura is there, and she's made any leeway, I'll retire unobtrusively and leave her to it; if she hasn't, it'll be a variation on 'once more into the breach...'"

Kirk rose to his feet and followed McCoy out of his office. "I wish you success, Bones," he said sincerely. "I'd hate to lose Chris, and in this way most of all."

The turbolift deposited Christine within steps of the door giving access to the hangar deck. In the time it had taken her to reach this deck the corridors had been dimmed, and in the artificial peace of the ship's night, only a skeleton crew worked at these levels. Christine encountered not a soul.

Vaguely, distantly, as if it were another person planning her demise, she had chosen her form of suicide. Beyond the door, in the vast hangar deck, stood the shuttlecraft Columbus. It was non-operational, Christine knew. She'd heard Scotty telling McCoy when the Engineer had been obliged to come to Sickbay for pills to combat a blinding headache after hours spent tinkering and labouring and cursing over it. The shuttlecraft needed specialised equipment which even the sophisticated manufacturing units aboard the Enterprise could not provide. Starbase 21, where the ship was due to dock in a week, would have the replacement parts, but until then the Columbus was out of commission.

The hangar deck was pressurised as per standard operating procedure, and Christine opened the door and stepped through, the door sliding shut behind her. She glanced upward to the observation gallery, but only one crewman was visible, and his back was to Christine, a hand waving in gesticulation as he spoke with an unseen companion. Christine skipped nimbly across the deck to the Columbus and entered the open hatchway, that side being hidden from the crewman's line of vision had he chanced to turn and look down.

Christine closed the hatch and paused. Yes, she thought in that other-person fashion, the shuttle would make a fitting tomb. She moved towards the pilot's and co-pilot's seats, the navigation console a gaping hole, inner wiring and circuitry exposed. Christine dangled her fingers over the panel, coming to rest when she saw the dial that controlled the atmosphere inside the Columbus.

Basic compulsory Starfleet identification courses had proven their worth. Christine altered the dial from its normal positioning and set the atmosphere on release. It would take no more than five minutes. Her task done, she went into the passenger section, sat down, and waited to die.

Up in the observation gallery de Vant asked, "What's up?"

Kurtz, his hands on the rail that ran along the wall, his gaze on the deck below, chewed on his bottom lip. "I thought I saw something, that's all."

de Vant came to stand beside him. The brawny Dutchman frowned. "No-one down there," he said. He glanced at Kurtz. "Your eyesight okay?"

Kurtz looked offended. "Perfect," he said succinctly. Strange. Out of the corner of his eye he could have sworn he'd seen a movement below. A flash of blue. But de Vant could be right. Whatever he'd said to the contrary, his eyesight might need checking. He'd been working with Scotty a week ago on the Columbus, using thin beam welders. Admittedly, they'd worn protective goggles, but who knew what damage might have been caused by prolonged use and was only now surfacing? His medical was in three days, but it mightn't be a bad idea to go along to Sickbay before then and have his eyes tested.

Kurtz grinned at de Vant. "Okay, where was I?"

"You were in the bar on Rigel Three with the multi-armed belly dancer and a Kalmorian lady wrestler..."

McCoy, a covered tray in one hand, stood outside Christine Chapel's quarters. It would be great, he thought, if the past few hours of enforced rest had made Christine ready to talk and be helped without resorting to those methods mentioned by Jim. Hypnosis was a permissible aid, but drugs...? He imagined it was the 'old country doctor' in him, or just the cranky old medic, but he abhorred the use of drugs to enable

a psychiatrist to get inside another person's head; it was gross violation. He could understand Spock's reluctance to mind-meld unless the circumstances demanded it, for it was simply not ethical to tamper with another's consciousness. McCoy pressed the door buzzer, mouthing a silent prayer that Christine would not require any treatment other than a sympathetic ear and a broad shoulder.

Getting no response, McCoy buzzed again. Fear clamped over his heart, but he couldn't begin to explain why. He laid the try on the floor and banged on the door. "Christine!" he called. "Cristine!"

Silence. Urgently McCoy used his override, the doors parted, and he hurried in. He searched the limited confines, peering into the bathroom, even into the cupboards built into the bulkheads - crazy, maybe, but McCoy had dealt with disturbed patients before and was all too aware of the odd things they could do. And while McCoy searched he swore at himself in anger. He shouldn't have left her alone!

He went out into the corridor again, looked up and down its length, and brought himself up sharp. Perhaps she wasn't alone! Uhura... Chris could be with her.

McCoy ran the dozen metres to Uhura's quarters and impatiently jabbed at the buzzer. It was a full minute before the Lieutenant answered it.

"Who is it?" The tone was tetchy; McCoy had obviously interrupted her, but he ignored it.

"Uhura, it's McCoy. Is Christine with you?"

He could almost sense the mute query. "Christine? No... She... Wait a minute." The doors opened and McCoy had to take a step inside in order to see Uhura, for she had melted partway into the shadows. Understandably, for she was draped in nothing but a towel, the moisture trickling from her body and saturated hair making neat pools on the floor.

"Isn't she in her cabin?" asked Uhura.

"No - I wondered if she was with you," said McCoy. At any other time the doctor's total lack of interest in her state of undress might have niggled at Uhura's ego, but she was too alarmed by the worry he was exuding to take umbrage.

"I spoke with her not ten minutes ago," said Uhura. "I asked her to let me in, but she wouldn't. She told me to leave her the hell alone, and I did. I didn't want to upset her further." Uhura's fingers twisted in the ends of the towel. "Len, where could she be? I wouldn't have thought the rec room, not in her mood."

"I stopped off at the rec room to grab her some food. She isn't there."

Uhura's rising alarm was mirrored by his own. McCoy walked to the Lieutenant's desk intercom and switched it on. "McCoy to bridge."

The acknowledgement was swift. "Kirk here. What is it, Bones?"

McCoy hesitated. The channel was not private, and the entire bridge crew were within hearing. It would be like publicly proclaiming his Chief Nurse unstable.

Which she very likely was, McCoy reminded himself. "It's Christine, Jim. She's missing from her quarters, and she isn't with Uhura."

A statement of few words, yet Kirk recognised the tension and fear in them. "You want me to put out an alert, Bones?"

Uhura, now at McCoy's shoulder, did not have to speak to convey her support. "Yes, Jim," he said, and heard Kirk order Lt. Palmer, Uhura's relief, to give him general broadcast.

Kurtz drummed his fingers on the wall of the turbolift. With mechanical servitude it waited patiently for its occupant's instructions. His story-telling over (a very short tale, but enough to satisfy de Vant, the connoisseur of reminiscences) Kurtz's intention had been to go to Sickbay for an eye test. One of the night-shift medical staff would see to it - they were always complaining they had precious little to do during these hours. However, his resolve was waning. Some sixth sense, perhaps even what Scotty termed an engineer's 'inner sight' nagged his conscience about checking out the hangar deck. Just in case. It probably was a trick of the light, the retina playing games, but Kurtz felt he had to make sure, to satisfy himself.

"Hangar deck," he commanded, and the lift sped from its mooring, splicing through decks and along shafts.

Kurtz had reached the access door when the Captain's voice filtered from a nearby communications outlet.

"Attention all hands! This is the Captain. All crewmembers are asked to be on the lookout for Head Nurse Christine Chapel. Anyone seeing Nurse Chapel, or knowing of her whereabouts, should report at once, repeat at once, to either myself or Dr. McCoy. Security will be alerted, but crewmembers are asked to make a thorough search of their immediate vicinity. Kirk out."

Kurtz listened to the familiar tone and his forehead creased in puzzlement. What the hell had Christine Chapel been up to to warrant a ship-wide alert? Kurtz knew the pretty blonde nurse from a couple of visits he had made to Sickbay because of injuries sustained in his work.

"Clumsiness?" Christine had remarked amusedly on the second occasion.

"Drawback of the trade," Kurtz had countered.

He'd rather taken to her, had even ventured so far as to - in Old Earth vernacular - 'chat her up', but with no result. What was the fuss about? Suddenly a suspicion clicked into place. Two and two became a 'what if...?' A flash of blue... Kurtz tutted at himself for jumping to rash conclusions, but nevertheless, he hastened his step.

Through the access door... His eyes widened as he saw the closed hatchway of the Columbus. Closed. The last time he'd been here with Scotty, earlier today, both of them lamenting at the shuttle's condition, they had left it open. The navigation system was dead, no injury could be had from the lifeless wires snaking from its innards. Kurtz bounded across to the Columbus, lifted a hand to open the hatch, and stopped. The atmospheric indicator was touching zero.

"Oh God!" breathed Kurtz. The shuttle's interior has all but emptied of oxygen. He couldn't just open the hatch without securing the atmosphere; to have the pressurised clash with the depressurised... He must reverse the air flow first! He adjusted the dial, cursing his stupidly trembling fingers, and blessing Starfleet's ever-handy safety overrides. Some called it an obsession. Not Kurtz!

He found he was holding his breath as the indicator hovered, then climbed. "Up! UP!" he prompted. It reached mid-way mark, past mid-way mark. Kurtz deemed it safe to open the hatch. It slid to, and he hopped inside.

Christine Chapel was slumped in one of the passenger seats. Kurtz tilted her head back. She wasn't breathing. He lowered her to the shuttle's floor, frantically bringing to mind elementary first-aid, and mumbling each step before he actually began mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. All those hours spent practicing on dummies, all the corny, lowd jokes about plastic dolls and 'what an excuse to kiss your favourite girl' -

but you knew it was really serious, knew how important it was to learn... but you never damn well believed you'd put theory into practice.

Let it work! he silently implored. Let it work! He blew deeply into Christine's lungs, watched the rise of her chest, and removed his mouth as the lungs deflated, but it wasn't enough to start her breathing naturally. Again. And again. And again. How long was it before brain damage occurred? Once more. Christine gasped and gagged, and Kurtz groaned with relief. She took in great gulps of air and Kurtz eased her onto her side to assist her breathing. Satisfied she was in no danger of choking Kurtz hauled himself up by means of a chair, and stretching out his hand, slammed it down on the comm switch.

"Bridge!" was all he managed to say.

Christine woke to be dazzled by bright lights. She quickly shut her eyes. Bright lights. Was heaven that garishly illuminated? The idea amused her. She opened her eyes once more, and focused. No, not heaven. This place was too familiar to her. She was back in her own private hell.

Tears flooded her eyes. "Why?" she murmured. "Why didn't they let me die?" A sob convulsed her and her voice rose to a pitch. "Why? Why?"

McCoy was there, and he took firm hold of her, but Christine swatted him away with an eerie strength. She was desperate, she had to finish the job she had started out to do. She didn't want to live, and they had no right, no right whatsoever, to keep her alive! She yelled and screamed as she struck out at those who attempted to restrain her, damning them with every other word; then she felt a slight pressure against her forearm and the contents of the hypospray sent her spinning into oblivion.

When Christine woke again it was with a feeling of unbelievable calm. Her body was relaxed, her mind clear. With the back of a hand she brushed at the strands of hair that had fallen across her forehead in sleep. Lifting the other, she rubbed the heels of both over her eyes, sweeping away the dull edge of slumber. She glanced about the Sickbay and saw McCoy by a cabinet, stacking the medical instruments within. He turned and smiled when he noticed she was awake, a smile gentle and warm and affectionate.

As he advanced towards the bed he said, "I know every quack since the year dot has asked this when his patient wakes, but how are you feeling?"

With a wan smile of her own Christine replied, "To use another expression much favoured by the quacks, I'm as well as can be expected."

It was then she saw the scratches on McCoy's left cheek. A recollection came to her of a woman screaming, hitting out at people and objects... The screams still rang in her ears, it was so real...

The credit dropped. Christine moaned softly and raised her fingertips to McCoy's wounds as the doctor hoisted himself to sit on the edge of her bed.

"Did I do that?" she asked.

McCoy touched the scratches gingerly and knew it was absurd to concoct a story for Christine's benefit. He nodded. "You sure did," he said, and there was a special teasing lilt in his voice. "You're going to have to get those nails filed down a little more, Nurse Chapel." McCoy grinned. "It's the first time I've been struck by a woman strictly in the course of my work, and not through trying anything on!"

Christine couldn't respon to his humour. "Oh Len!" she said. "I'm sorry!"

McCoy patted her hand. "Don't give it another thought. They'll heal soon enough, and my inherent good looks won't be marred a bit." He bent his head conspiratorally. "My main worry was that you'd get to the booze in my office and smash those bottles before I could stop you! You'd have had hell to pay from Scotty if you had!"

Christine had to smile at that. "And all the work he put into programming the drink processors for the finest malt whisky would have been for nothing," she said quietly.

McCoy was stunned. "How did you know...?"

Christine winked. "I promise I'll keep it a secret."

"You don't have to promise. I know you will."

A pause developed between them and lengthened. McCoy could sense Christine's embarrassment and shame, but he didn't want to rush her by asking questions. She had to speak first.

Christine looked away from his blue eyes; they were too knowledgeable, and they pierced too deeply.

"I wanted to die," she said at last. A thought occurred to her. "Who...?"

McCoy intercepted and understood the broken question. "Kurtz," he answered. "A Lieutenant from Engineering, a maintenance specialist..."

"He had a fractured tibia about six months ago," interrupted Christine. She chuckled at herself. "That isn't how I really see my men friends, you know - just as an assortment of bones and sundry anatomical constructions. I can remember Kurtz's face as well. Did he give me the kiss of life?"

"Yes," said McCoy. "He saved your life by doing so."

And he'd received a commendation; Christine would have died but for his quick, efficient action. McCoy was still trying to puzzle out his comment, though, as he left Sickbay having escorted the medical trolley bearing Christine there. "At least I don't need a bloody eye test!"

Christine traced a pattern on the bed-covering with a long, slim finger. "I couldn't see any point in living," she said. "It all seemed so damn worthless."

"Because of anything in particular?" asked McCoy.

Christine shot a warning glance at him. "Don't you dare suggest it was Spock, Len!"

McCoy spread his hands in defence. "I wasn't going to! Don't forget how closely I work with you, Chris, and I know how things are in that respect."

"I'm sorry, Len," said Christine with a sigh.

McCoy grinned. "And will you stop apologising!"

"Oh, I'm sorry, I..." Christine ground to a halt as she realised what she had said. She laughed. "What's a good cure for repetition, Doc?"

"A new dictionary," sad McCoy, dead-pan, and Christine groaned, but not with pain. Maybe he ought to seek a cure for his terrible puns. Gently he encouraged Christine. "Go on."

Christine shook her head as if in mild exasperation. "It wasn't connected with Spock, not really. I thought of him... I thought of

Roger too, but only in the context that they weren't there. I mean, not there to care. No-one cared, I believed, and as there wasn't a single worthwhile thing to carry on for, I decided to opt out." It was spoken oh-so-casually, but McCoy was witness to the quivering of Christine's hands. "I was depressed, and it got too much for me to handle."

"Why didn't you come to me, Chris?" McCoy asked, but not chidingly.

"What's the paradox of mental disturbance?" Christine returned.

McCoy was briefly taken aback by the answering of a question with a question, but he soon twigged Christine's meaning. He nodded. "The individual doesn't consider himself ill."

Christine shrugged. "I just resented the fact that everyone was prying into what didn't concern them. I wanted to be alone."

"Death is an extreme form of solitude," said McCoy.

"It seemed the ideal solution."

"And now?"

Christine smiled reassuringly at McCoy. "Now it seems an extreme form of solitude," she echoed.

McCoy squeezed her hand, pleased and relieved. "Things got out of proportion, Chris. It's happened before in the annals of medicine, and it'll happen again. Sometimes the Human brain isn't capable of coping with the extra load."

"And you don't think I'm a hysterical female, giving vent to the histrionics men always believe to be bubbling below the surface?" queried Christine.

McCoy snorted. "Don't give me that male and female crap! It isn't true. There may be a few uninformed bigots in Starfleet, but there are none on this ship. Women have proven a thousand times over that female inferiority is defunct."

Christine scrubbed at her tired eyes. "I know. I'm still a little sorry for myself."

McCoy caught the tell-tales; weariness, a touch of irritability. "Nonsense! You need rest, that's all. I'm recommending medical leave for you when we get to Starbase 21, and until we do you take it easy aboard this ship. No duty for you - and no protests, either!"

Christine strove to look suitably afraid, but she couldn't - not with this man. "I wouldn't dare protest," she said. "You're a terror when crossed!"

McCoy pinned her with an innocent stare as he rose from the bed, then he suddenly growled, "So be warned!"

"Len, one thing," said Christine. "If I'm to rest, can I do so in my own quarters?" Beneath his gaze, she shifted awkwardly. "It's silly, but I don't feel like being in Sickbay as a patient."

McCoy grinned from ear to ear. "I know exactly how you feel!" he said. "Okay, it's a deal. Get in another hour here, and I'll get someone to fetch your clothes when you wake. Did you know you were walking around in your bare feet?"

"I obviously didn't want to die with my boots on," said Christine, and she didn't hesitate over her joke. She could speak about her attempted suicide without faltering - it was a move in the right direction. "Len, if it's possible, could you ask Uhura to deliver my clothes? There's some aplogising I'd like to do there."

"I'll talk sweet in the Captain's ear," said McCoy, fully aware

the request wouldn't be denied. He leaned over and kissed Christine's pale cheek. "A physician's perk," he explained and retreated to the door before she could query why he didn't adopt the same gesture with his other female charges.

Back in her own quarters Christine could shake off the weird sensation at being attended rather than tending to. There had been a feeling of near-profanity when she'd occupied a bed in Sickbay!

She had learned she'd been asleep for nearly forty-eight hours prior to her talk with McCoy, and following their chat she'd slept for another two before waking to see Uhura's broad smile. Their amends had been made, and Uhura had walked with her to her quarters, stopping a few moments before taking her leave. Uhura had seen the fatigue behind Christine's assumed buoyancy, and so had retired before the nurse became over-taxed. Christine was grateful for her friend's understanding. The fatigue was a nuisance, but it was to be expected, and it did make McCoy's prescription easier to follow.

Christine changed into her nightwear, selected a book from her meagre collection of ancient, cloth-bound volumes, and climbed into bed. McCoy had handed her a sedative upon her discharge from Sickbay to take if she couldn't sleep, but Christine was loathe to down it unless she had to; more, she had a dinner date with McCoy at six, and she didn't relish the prospect of nodding off over her main course because of the draught's after-effects. She'd read for a while, and doze naturally.

A dozen pages later, she laid the book aside, unable to concentrate. She had tried to push her suicide bid to the furthestmost regions of her mind as McCoy had advised, but it kept cropping up, between pages one and two of the book, then pages three and four...

Perhaps she ought to bring her thoughts out into the open instead of locking them inside her. She had talked about it, now it was time to forget, McCoy had said. It was logical - to coin a phrase - but if she was still troubled, surely she shouldn't bottle it up?

She looked at the rainbow box on her desk; it shimmered and sparkled in the overhead light. It was a beautiful ornament. She and McCoy had asked the vendor if the box had any purpose other than to grace a table or shelf. He'd replied that it had none he knew of. He had bought several of the boxes on a planet catering solely for the hedonist. The natives were not interested in making things for a purpose, just so long as they gave pleasure.

Nothing wrong with that, mused Christine. Nothing at all... She yawned and sank further into the cosy bed, her eyes on the box; her thoughts, despite her resolution not to brood, centred around her actions of two days ago...

... Laughter, an evil sound, cruel and without a hint of humour. It reverberated until she thought her head would split with its thunder. She whirled, straining to see through the thick, dank-smelling fog. Fog? Why was there fog in her room? More laughter, louder and even more wicked.

"Who is it?" she asked. She spun as a shadow loomed there, and there, and there... "Please!" she beseeched. "Who is it?"

"It certainly isn't I, Christine."

She turned slowly, afraid of who it would be, yet, perversely, knowing his identity. The laughter dwindled to a low, hollow chuckle, a menacing accompaniment to this confrontation. Christine came face to face with the one who had addressed her.

"Roger," she said flatly, with no trace of question, for it was Corby all right. She had been engaged to him, and you didn't forget a man you had loved.

"You're still alive, Christine," Corby stated.

She frowned. "Of course, Roger."

"They wouldn't let you die, then?"

Christine shook her head. "They didn't want me to die. They care, Roger."

Corby regarded her pityingly. "Care? Are you so blind you can't see through their little game, Christine?"

"Game?" she repeated. "What game? Roger, please don't torment me!"

"Torment you? I'm telling you the truth!" Corby's voice was caressing, loving, just as she remembered it from their years together, during their courtship and engagement. Years of companionship, of application to work, of learning and discovery, and of happiness and joy through the bond forged between them by their respective professions and in their private intimacy. But now, there was also a persuasive note which spoke of a talent in manipulation.

"It's a game, Christine - a pretence, a shield. How would it have looked if they had docked at Starbase 21 with a suicide logged in their records? Hardly a trophy to be carried by the best ship in the fleet! It was necessary to save your life so they could protect their precious image!"

"No!" cried Christine.

"Yes!" reaffirmed Corby. "It's true."

"You're wrong! What kind of a man are you to tell such lies?"

"But I'm not a man, am I?" mocked Corby, and he seemed to ripple, the outlines of his body wavering, becoming fluid; and suddenly all that stood before Christine was an assembly of wires and terminals and cogs and wheels...

She ran, fleeing from the android Corby and his lies. But... were they lies? No, NO! She wouldn't, mustn't, believe him. Wouldn't... mustn't...

She ran, faster and faster. Through the smokey whirls of fog she saw people, faces she recognised. McCoy, Kirk, Uhura, Scotty, Sulu, Chekov... Her friends and colleagues, but as she neared them they turned away, refusing to look at her or heed her calls for help. She brushed past them, but they moved away, hurrying from her as though she was diseased and dangerous to touch.

She couldn't understand! Why wouldn't they help her? Well, she wouldn't plead with them! Probably because they had helped her once they now thought they had fulfilled their obligations and wanted no more to do with her. She was an inconvenience, to be got rid of at the earliest opportunity. She'd not call out again; her pride would forbid it.

She was now running at a breakneck pace, surrounded by the cloying fog, and its odour made her want to retch. Then she stumbled and was sent sprawling face-down on the hard ground, grazing her face and knees. She couldn't get up; she was too weary.

The laughter rumbled around her, assaulting her ears, and she was cold - cold as ice. She pressed her face to the ground, but the foul fog pervaded her nostrils and she coughed on the fumes.

"Christine."

She wouldn't lift her head. He couldn't make her. But he laughed at

her feebleness, and although she exerted every ounce of strength she possessed, she couldn't resist him. Her head was wrenched back and she was forced to gaze at the one who owned that cruel laugh.

Spock!

But Vulcans don't laugh...!

Vulcans don't laugh...!

Don't laugh...!

Christine threw herself up and flung her arms across her face, shaking violently. She drew in a shuddering breath, but her trembling wouldn't cease, and she cowered behind the barricade formed by her arms, scared to look out, scared of what she might see and of the way she knew she would feel. Several minutes passed, and she lowered her arms cautiously, but there was no fog, no demonical laughter. No Corby, no Spock... But oh God! The terror, the loneliness and the misery... they remained. It was exactly as before, the same hellish depression. Christine shook her head, but the renewed morbidity wouldn't be expelled.

She crawled out of the tangle of bedclothes, planting bare feet on the floor. She ought to call Len, ask him to come and help... A wry laugh caught in her throat. Help! They had helped, and where had it left her? Back to square one, back in this godawful depression. Much good their help had been! Roger was right. They didn't really care, they didn't give a damn for her, but they had tricked her. She had been beguiled by their false affection in Sickbay, but here, in her quarters, she couldn't hide from the truth. They shouldn't have bothered to save her. Damn Kurtz and his interference!

She stepped to the mirror and stared bleakly at her reflection, a white, haggard face with eyes ringed by dark smudges. She blotted out her reflection with a palm and winced as a fingernail raked the mirror's surface, the screech magnified ten-fold as the laughter had been...

Vulcans don't laugh...! But Spock had, and at her, ridiculing her for her hopeless love for him. She clenched her hand, wanting to smash the fist into the glass and shatter it, and with it the image it held.

An odd smile curved Christine's lips. The glass. She took the mirror from the wall and dropped it with blank deliberation on the floor. Jagged fragments skidded away in every direction. Christine bent and picked up one of the pieces. She ran the sharp point lightly over the tip of a finger and watched as a bead of blood welled up from the tiny cut. She held the makeshift blade to her wrist, her expression contemplative. She was a nurse, she knew how to cut and where. First this wrist, then the other... It would be simple...

She took a step backwards towards the bed, and the heel caught in the hem of her long nightdress, and she toppled over. Her head hit the edge of the dressing-table stool with a sickening thud, the room became a blur, and she lapsed into unconsciousness; but the shard of glass, poised at her wrist, was flipped up and across by the jerk of her body as she fell, and the first fatal incision was made. A crimson stain began to spread slowly from her limp figure.

McCoy got out of the turbolift and walked towards Christine's quarters, a bounciness in his step that had not been there the last time he'd made this particular journey. Further along the corridor, Uhura was just leaving her quarters and she smiled a greeting at McCoy, meeting him just outside Christine's door. McCoy eyed her appreciatively. She was dressed in an ankle-length gown of a design she often wore when off duty, much to

the delight of her crewmates who enjoyed the variety of colours and prints, and the memories they evoked of home.

"Evening," said McCoy. "I like the dress."

Uhura bowed slightly in acceptance of the compliment and twirled, the brightly-patterned fabric a cascade of colour. "Thank you," she said. "I got my mother to send me the material, then had the computer put this together from an established design."

"Most effective," said McCoy. He scratched the lobe of an ear. "Come to think of it, though, I prefer you in what you wore a couple of days back."

The merest trace of a blush heightened Uhura's soft, dark skin. "So you did notice!"

"My dear," McCoy drawled, "I'm a doctor, and doctors notice everything." He grinned lopsidedly. "Are you going to join me and Chris for dinner?"

Uhura's eyes opened wide. "Do you think you can handle us both?"

"It'll be a pleasure to try!"

Uhura linked her arm in McCoy's. "You've got a double date. Let's got Chris."

For McCoy it was as if someone had maliciously rewound the hands of time, or as if he was suffering from a ghastly *deja vu*. Once again he was buzzing at the door; once again, Christine did not answer.

He glanced at Uhura. "She probably took the sedative I gave her. She's still asleep, I'd bet." He wondered who he was trying to convince, himself or Uhura?

The lieutenant nodded, with little conviction.

McCoy buzzed for the fourth time. The draught hadn't been that potent! Christine should have awakened by now. He didn't want to think the worst - there were alternatives - but he'd be damned if any of those alternatives occurred to him now. He reached past Uhura to activate his override; as soon as the door opened he strode into the room.

Uhura lagged behind suddenly... Frightened? Apprehensive? Perhaps a mixture of both. She heard McCoy's anguished, "Oh no!" and rushed forward, her primary fears discarded. McCoy was crouching beside Christine's motionless, lemon-clad figure, his hands out of view, but the muscles of his arms were taut, as though he was applying pressure. She took another step and saw the floor - and McCoy's hands, glistening wetly with blood. Her hand was already at the intercom as McCoy yelled, "Call Sickbay, Uhura! Fast!"

Spock hovered, uncharacteristically, outside McCoy's office. It was an old joke, and not strictly true, that Spock would only visit Sickbay if it were on an errand of utter necessity, or if chased there by a rabid *le-matya*. Actually, Spock came here more often than the perpetrators of the joke would care to admit.

At this moment, however, Spock could not be sure his visit was a good idea. Humans had the tendency to retire into themselves, seeking within for a salve to their troubles, whether they be born of guilt, grief or indecision. Spock was no stranger to travelling inward, he did so during meditation, but Human isolation of this nature could be unpredictable and often volatile. He had to tread most carefully.

Permission came for him to enter. McCoy sat at his desk, shoulders hunched, stylo hanging from his fingers, but the writing tablet before him was revealingly blank. Spock had been in the company of Humans for too

long not to be aware of the niceties of their relationships, the courtesies they observed. How would Kirk behave now? Or Scott? But he was himself, Spock, Vulcan, and could pretend to be nothing else.

"Doctor."

McCoy glanced up. His eyes were red-rimmed and lustreless through lack of sleep and hours of toil. "Spock," he acknowledged.

Spock moved to stand in front of the desk, adopting his customary posture; feet slightly apart, hands clasped behind his back. It was a posture learned as a child, and never forgotten. He regarded the cup on the desk, filled with a black, cold liquid he suspected had once been a hot, reviving beverage.

"Your coffee is cold, Doctor. Do you wish another?"

That produced a reaction from McCoy, but he hid his startlement well. "Er... no thanks, Spock."

The Vulcan nodded. "How is Nurse Chapel, Doctor?"

McCoy ran his fingers through his hair. "She's alive... barely; but I don't know if she'll pull through, if that was your next question." He turned pained eyes on Spock. "I shouldn't have discharged her from Sickbay."

Spock had anticipated this. Not an hour before, Kirk had spoken to him of his concern over McCoy, and his failure at not having been able to pierce the doctor's armour of guilt. Spock could not imagine how he could succeed where Jim Kirk had failed, but he did understand McCoy better than he was given credit for, and although he would never admit it openly, he held great stock by him, and much warmth. Spock seated himself, his back straight and his hands folded in his lap; one more childhood pose, holding many memories of lectures conducted by Sarek in the wake of childish misdemeanours.

"It was a second suicide attempt?" Spock asked.

"Yeah, there's no doubt. She had obviously fallen, how I'm unsure, and her head was cracked pretty badly, but the slashed wrist was intentional. She meant to kill herself, Spock; she might yet have succeeded." McCoy's fist slammed onto the desk top. "Dammit! Why did I let her go?"

"You had every reason to believe she had lost her suicidal intent, Doctor," placated Spock.

"Lost it?" McCoy was sceptical. "If a person attempts suicide once, it's highly probable they'll try again. But... **but** I did think she'd be okay. She'd been in Sickbay for forty-eight hours, had had a complete rest under supervision, and the scans showed she was relaxed, on an even keel; before leaving Sickbay she even consented to receiving treatment. I'm positive it wasn't the agreement of one who capitulates just to escape their keeper's clutches. She wasn't lying, Spock, and I honestly thought she'd be happier and more content in her quarters." He laughed bitterly. "I say that, yet ask me why I only gave her a single dose of sedative, and didn't trust her with a box of pills."

"You were exercising caution, Doctor."

McCoy's face hardened. "If I felt the need to exercise caution, there must have been a doubt in my mind, and if there was doubt I shouldn't have let her go!" he rasped.

Spock was silent. McCoy was shrouded in worry and guilt, and it would be no mean feat to rid him of it. Self-recrimination was destructive and wasteful, and as a Vulcan he should be unsympathetic to such mental torture, but he did sympathise.

Because he called McCoy 'friend'? Or because he had learned to

tolerate, and often appreciate, Human traits? He had a leaning to the former, but the latter... that was applicable too. How easy it was to dismiss Humans out-of-hand because of their extreme emotionalism and 'hot-headedness' (a particularly misleading colloquialism) but they had survived a turbulent history to accomplish much, and that surely stood them in good stead. Spock had to confess that at times he found Humans disturbing, irrational, illogical, and - yes - irritating, but he would also have to confess that offered the choice, he would not exchange his shipmates or friends for the greatest scientific honour or discovery imaginable. He sympathised, but was sympathy as far as his help could extend?

"You have no grounds on which to blame yourself," said Spock quietly, his gentle voice the oil on the troubled waters of McCoy's remorse.

"No?"

Spock changed his tack. "Doctor, if you were the party on the sidelines, and another occupied your place now, what would be your advice?"

McCoy parried the Vulcan's steady gaze, and gradually his countenance relaxed. A brief flame of amusement lit his eyes.

"I'd tell him he should stop acting like a damn fool."

"Then, Doctor, if I may borrow your words..."

McCoy raised a hand. "No, don't go on, Spock. I get your point, and I wouldn't want you to insult the traditions of your fathers by uttering a well-worn Terran epithet. I'm sorry, Spock, I've been wallowing. I'm worried, and I suppose I'd hoped that by concentrating on the pros and cons of my actions it would take my mind off Christine's condition." He looked to the door dividing his office from the main Sickbay where Christine lay in an Intensive Care Unit. "It isn't working very well."

Spock left McCoy alone with his thoughts for a moment, then asked, "Doctor, why did Miss Chapel try to kill herself initially?"

"Depression. It isn't a common ailment these days, but in its own way it can be as deadly a killer as any disease. Christine was deeply depressed, and couldn't cope. It might be difficult for you to understand - and please don't take that wrongly, Spock - but your mental capabilities and reliance far exceeds that of we fallible Humans; occasionally we can be tipped over the edge, and not be able to climb back. And she was lonely, but that is something you'd know about, isn't it?"

Spock regarded the tips of his highly polished boots, choosing not to reply. McCoy did not press him; this was not the time to needle the First Officer into declaring the handicaps of his dual parentage.

"Spock..." began McCoy, and hesitated. "Spock, has anyone said to you... I mean, have you...?"

Spock's boot tips lost their appeal, and his sudden stiffness masked his discomfiture. "You wish to know, Doctor, if I have been accused of being the cause of Miss Chapel's suicide bid. No, I have not - at least, not directly; and anyhow, I have more respect for Miss Chapel's good sense that these idle theories give credence to."

McCoy grimaced. "People will always speculate. You weren't the cause, Spock. Christine told me..." The Vulcan's eyebrows rose spectacularly, and McCoy elaborated. "She told me because she was determined to quash any of those 'idle theories' you mentioned, that due to the love she had felt..." McCoy saw the emerald tinge on Spock's cheeks. "Hell, I don't mean to embarrass you."

"Embarrassment is a..."

"...Human emotion. Yeah, I know, Spock," said McCoy, and his half-smile was indulgent. "But Christine... well, she was at her lowest ebb,

and suicide seemed the only release for her. Later, when we talked about it in Sickbay, she was over the worst of the depression, I'd swear it. Talking is often the only therapy required, and once the first obstacle was past, I was convinced she was on the mend. I discharged her, and... you know what happened next."

"Miss Chapel was, in your estimation, quite well in Sickbay?"

McCoy shrugged. "She appeared to be fine. Tired, of course, but as I said, there was no sign of her previous acute depression. God knows what went on in her head when she was in her quarters! She must have brooded, and then slipped right back into that black melancholy. Why she didn't contact me, I haven't the faintest idea." McCoy sighed heavily. "Step by step, it was the same as before. Pressing the damn buzzer; getting no answer. Before, though, Christine wasn't in her room; this time she was... I'm a doctor, and shouldn't be affected by what I saw, but the blood..." McCoy shook his head at the memory.

Spock was assimilating his thoughts. "Both suicide attempts were made after Miss Chapel had spent a lengthy period in her quarters," he said almost to himself.

But McCoy had heard. "Both attempts were preceded by a period of isolation, yes," he concurred, then he muttered bleakly, "and on both occasions I sent her to her quarters." He pulled back the sleeve of his tunic and glanced at his wrist chronometer. "I'm going to check on Christine." He pushed the virgin writing tablet into the middle of the desk, amid the pile of paperwork he hadn't had the heart to start on. He made for the door, then halted and looked at Spock. "Thanks."

"Doctor?" Spock quizzed, apparently puzzled.

McCoy smiled, seeing through the masquerade. "That's my boy!" he murmured, and left.

At a slower pace, Spock followed. He stopped just outside the I.C.U., watching as McCoy bravely donned a professional air and bent to examine Christine Chapel. Even Spock, the supposedly unshockable Vulcan, was taken aback by the nurse's pallor and her fragility. The diagnostic panel was no encouragement either, displaying the barest of life signs, and its low beeping was the only sound in the hushed room.

McCoy straightened, and his professional air was distinctly strained. If Spock had been fully Human he would have turned away, but as a Vulcan he couldn't permit himself the weakness. That alien fortitude, however, could not prevent the tightening in his stomach. He couldn't properly identify the contraction, perhaps he did not want to. It was too akin to regret; regret that he couldn't have helped in some way. But how? He could not... care, as Christine had longed for him to do. He was not totally immune to the female gender; there had been too many instances to substantiate any claim he might make that he was; but he wouldn't have been able to respond to Christine even if he were liberated from his Vulcan half - that he was sure of. It was chemistry, maybe, the subtle force which drew two people together, but no matter how he explained it, where Christine Chapel was concerned he could give nothing of himself. The regret lingered, though.

Spock stepped out into the corridor bordering Sickbay. He couldn't free himself of a suspicion over the fact that the suicide attempts had both occurred after Christine had been left alone in her stateroom. Whilst in Sickbay, in the interval between the attempts, Christine had been virtually her normal self. Strange. Spock would not call the suspicion a 'feeling' or an 'intuition', but he did not altogether disregard the merit of these. The Captain was a prime example that intuition did exist and was worthy of analysis, but Spock preferred his suspicion to be labelled as simply that. He was suspicious, his curiosity was aroused, and,

as usual, he could not rest until it was satisfied.

As he neared Christine Chapel's quarters, Spock's conscience troubled him about entering them uninvited. But, he inwardly debated, the one person who could issue the invitation was lying seriously ill in Sickbay, and if he were to seek permission elsewhere - from the Captain, for instance - how could he voice his request? He couldn't put his suspicion into words, for these mental irritants were not based on words but on sensations far less tangible than speech could describe. Spock had to assure himself that if his actions were construed as overstepping the boundaries of etiquette, they were taken with the best of intentions.

As soon as he stood before the door, he felt it.

He had no reason to walk in this direction as a rule; his quarters were situated nearer the turbolift than Christine's, and so this section of corridor never witnessed the light tread of his feet. If he had walked here in the last few weeks he would have experienced this before, but he had obviously been outside its range. It was a tingling at the fringes of his perception; an elusive disturbance which he couldn't quite grasp or pin down, and its origins lay within Christine's cabin.

Spock opened the door, and immediately the tingling was stronger, more defined, no longer elusive. It did not pain him, but it seemed to heighten his awareness strangely. He surveyed the room, a hand at his left temple. His eyes alighted on the box that held pride of place on the desk.

That was it. The focus of these emanations. He advanced, and the tingling grew more acute. Still there was no pain, but Spock was uncomfortable. He was a Vulcan; he had no feelings, he had often said, and he suspected that those who had listened had long since ceased to believe him, but whatever feelings he did own were private. The emanations were making him all too aware of those very private feelings, and it was not something he savoured.

He reached the desk and laid a hand on the box's rainbow surface; he found he was breathing deeply, as though to calm himself. Without preamble and with some irritation he controlled his laboured breathing and tried to master the prickliness that enveloped him as he held the box, and the crawling of his nerves. This box, he thought, was connected with Christine's bids to end her life. He could not completely piece it together, his reasoning was being tampered with by the sensations coursing through him, but without doubt the answer was here.

He had to move the box, take it to Sickbay and place it beneath a protective shield, but that meant he would have to hold it and stay within its power. Already the emotions brought forth by the box were causing him some distress. Things he would rather contain beneath a cover of non-emotion were emerging, and it was decidedly not to his liking.

Inwardly, he scowled. He was not thinking clearly, sensibly! Why take the box out? He should leave it here, post the room off-limits, bring the shield back to this room, and once its effects were nullified, it could be properly investigated.

Spock withdrew his hand from the box and stepped away, eager to be free... and yet... And yet there was a peculiar, unsettling enticement in this sharpening of the senses, like the evil voice of temptation wheedling itself into one's brain, luring with sensual promises...

Spock wrenched himself away and out of the room, deploring his lack of control. In the corridor he rested briefly, the invisible cords to the box broken. Slowly the crawling ceased and the surge of emotion receded, the feelings, the dreams and the uncertainties buried once more inside.

Spock crossed to the nearest wall intercom, and signalling Sickbay, said to McCoy in typical understatement when the doctor came to the comm, "I believe I have found something to interest you..."

Kirk, nose up against the transparent case, said, "It goes to prove yet again that just because a thing is beautiful, it isn't necessarily good."

"I do not think its creators intended the box to be malevolent, Captain," said Spock. "Indeed, as my research has uncovered, its purpose was benign."

Kirk straightened and looked at Spock, his brow furrowed. "How do you mean?"

Spock shifted, transferring his weight from one foot to the other and back, and Kirk was surprised to find that the Vulcan was reluctant to meet his eyes. Fortunately for Spock, the discussion was temporarily put aside, for McCoy entered the laboratory and the smile on his craggy face was evidence that he had been called to the I.C.U. to hear some good news, and not a report to cast a greater shadow over them all.

"Christine?" asked Kirk, aware that it was an irrelevancy, for who else was at present in the I.C.U.'s?

McCoy nodded. "For the log, Captain, she is officially off the danger list."

McCoy's grin was contagious, and Kirk, beaming, gripped the doctor's shoulder, showing his pleasure by the physical gesture even as he spoke of his relief. Spock's face registered nothing, which was a sign to the Doctor and the Captain - who both knew him too well - that he was feeling much.

"I am gratified to hear that," was all Spock said, and Kirk and McCoy traded glances.

McCoy sat down at the desk upon which stood the rainbow box, encased, shielded, impotent. He laid his head in his hands for a few minutes, as though to allow all the pent-up tensions and anxieties of the past days to drain from him before speaking further. When he lowered his hands it was to see Kirk sitting at a crazy angle on the corner of the desk, and Spock standing straight but relaxed.

"She'll be in Sickbay for a long time, of course, but she's going to be all right. I'll keep her sedated for a while, let her rest without interruption." His gaze fell on the box, as colourful as an exotic bird in plumage, and he tapped its cage with a finger.

"At least now we have this under wraps I can be confident her mind will heal. Spock, tell me again. When you brought this damn box in here I was so preoccupied with Christine I didn't quite get all of it. Is this box really to blame?"

"Yes, Doctor, it is," replied Spock. "The box, to put it simply, is an amplifier. It picks up feelings, emotions, and magnifies them; heightens and enhances them. In Nurse Chapel's case, it obviously picked up on her unhappiness and depression, and increased them until they became unbearable. You did mention, Doctor, that Nurse Chapel was not at her best when you and she beamed down to Della Triax."

"That's right. I took Christine to the planet with me because I thought she could do with a change. We'd been working flat-out on those experiments and drug research, and the ship was also producing a spate of minor accidents that kept everyone on their toes. Chris worked harder than most, I'd say; you both know how she throws herself into a job, and bio-chemistry is

her forte. Whilst on Della Triax she seemed better..."

"But," Spock took up McCoy's narrative, "after returning to the Enterprise, her state of mind deteriorated. The box which she had purchased on the planet cultivated the seeds of morbidity still in her thoughts, and it led her to take her own life by suffocation in the damaged Columbus."

"I suppose, then, that while Christine was in Sickbay recovering from that incident, she was much more stable because she was away from the box's influence," interjected Kirk.

"Exactly, Captain," Spock agreed. "And Dr. McCoy, correct in his assumption that Miss Chapel was mentally capable, discharged her to her quarters."

McCoy sighed. "Where she tried to slash her wrists and finish the job she'd started," he said.

Spock inclined his head towards the box. "Naturally, Doctor, it would have taken time for her to recover completely, but this amplifier did not permit it. Nurse Chapel would have pondered on events, and again those morbid thoughts would have been magnified, doubled, trebled - and again, the burden would have been too great for her to bear."

"It's incredible," said McCoy. He frowned. "But why?"

A slanted eyebrow rose. "Why, Doctor?" Spock repeated.

"I know what Bones means, Spock," said Kirk. "Why was the box designed and made to promote these amplifications? What is its purpose?" He smiled. "You were about to explain when Bones came in."

Spock cleared his throat, but he could only procrastinate so long. "Once I discovered the box's properties I contacted Della Triax, and the authorities there in turn contacted the trader who had sold Miss Chapel the box. He was, to our good fortune, still there. He was apparently enjoying excellent sales in many of the towns and cities - his range of wares is quite extensive..."

"Spock..." said Kirk, warningly.

The First Officer, quick-thinking, efficient, prompt to follow orders, could take a hint. "The trader informed us that he had bought several such boxes on a planet deep in the Alliaastia region, a world where catering for pleasure-seekers is an industry in itself..."

"Not uncommon among the spaceways," said Kirk, a memory or two popping into his head of planets he had visited that had similar industries. 'Unpleasant' was an adjective he'd not readily apply to those worlds.

"But what are the boxes for, Spock?" insisted McCoy.

Spock stared at a point just past Kirk's shoulder and just to the right of a visual display unit fixed to the wall. "Referring the matter to the council on the aforementioned planet, I was told that the boxes are utilised in..." Spock floundered, "... in what were euphemistically called on Old Earth, 'houses of ill repute'."

Silence. Kirk and McCoy digested this, glanced at each other, and Kirk asked, "What?"

McCoy caught on a little faster. After all, he did have a chronological advantage over Kirk. "I believe Spock means bordellos, Jim."

Understanding dawned. "I'm beginning to see," said Kirk.

"The boxes are placed in the rooms where... er... business is conducted, to increase the pleasure derived from the experience," concluded Spock, and his eyes dropped from the point on the wall to meet the knowing ones of Kirk and McCoy.

"I can see the... um... logic in it, begging your pardon, Spock," said Kirk, hiding a smile.

"I bet it brings in the credits from the satisfied customers," said McCoy. His expression clouded. "Sadly, our Christine's thoughts were the farthest possible from the type the box's manufacturers had in mind. But the box still carried out its job, catching and amplifying the emotions of the one with whom it was confined. But I didn't feel anything, Spock!"

"You were hardly in the room long enough, Doctor, and your perception is not so attuned that the emanations would have been felt directly," said Spock.

"But you, with your telepathic abilities, were able to sense the box's power once you were in its proximity," said Kirk.

Spock nodded. "It is my regret that I did not chance in that direction a week ago, before this entire business came about. Nurse Chapel would not have suffered as she did."

"How were you to know, Spock?" asked McCoy, and the doctor's eyes were compassionate, as the roles of adviser and advisee were reversed.

"Were many of the boxes sold, Spock?" asked Kirk, thinking of the repercussions those devices would spark off amongst those innocent in their use.

"Fortunately no, Captain. In fact, Nurse Chapel was the first to buy one, and only one other was sold. That box has been traced and procured by the authorities on Della Triax; it had not been responsible for any trouble. I was told it had been concealed, as it was to be a surprise birthday gift."

"One hell of a surprise!" said Kirk. "The boxes ought to be classed as harmful, and not for transportation."

"They are only harmful when used incorrectly, Captain," Spock reminded him. "In much the same way as tribbles." The Vulcan immediately regretted his choice of simile when Kirk shuddered at the mention of those prolific and dreaded creatures. "But I understand warning will be issued with the boxes."

"Good," said McCoy. "We don't want a repetition of Christine's ordeal." He glared at the innocuous-looking box, hating it for the heart-ache it had wrought. He could only be thankful that Christine had survived, and there wouldn't be any after-effects, as far as they could determine.

It would help, of course, for her to know that her acute despondancy and attempts at suicide had been spurred on by external forces. Her mind was not scarred. She need have no fear she was disturbed, or a 'risk'. McCoy knew Christine - she'd bounce back, aided by her friends, and those she owned in abundance. He'd be there, and maybe he could seize the opportunity to get closer to Christine than before.

There was never enough time on this ship! He loved space-faring, but you couldn't get totally away from work; you couldn't just hop into a skimmer and drive someplace, or take the public transport and ride right to the end of the line. McCoy resolved then and there he'd carry out his intentions as soon as he could. And now...

McCoy got up and turned his back on the box, shutting it from his thoughts, and waved towards the door. "I think we ought to celebrate, gentlemen, and don't you excuse yourself, Spock! You're coming for a drink in my office, too!"

As they went out Kirk's voice could be heard. "There's something I've been meaning to ask you about this booze, Bones..."

"Jim, I can't think what you mean..."

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