

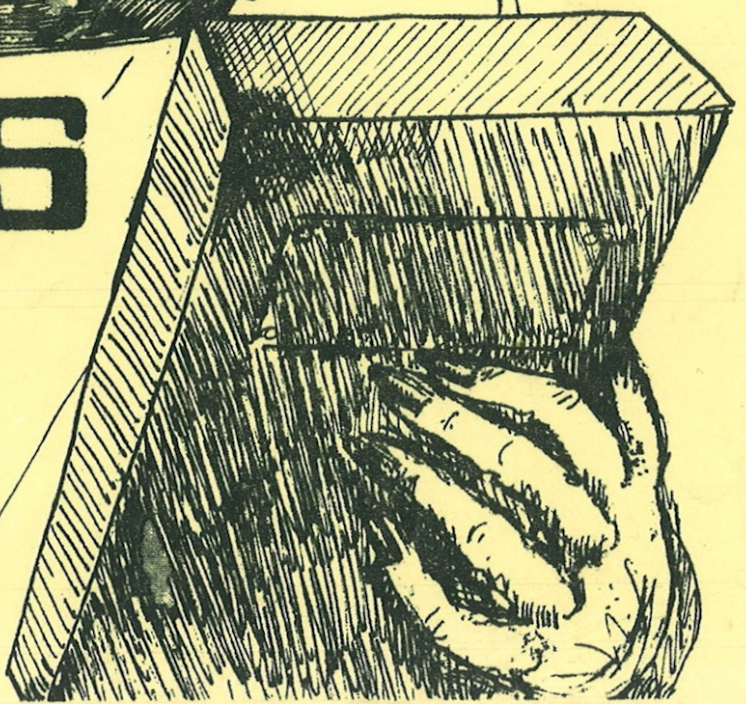


LOG

ENTRIES

40

a **STAR TREK**
fanzine



SHIRLEY BEECHER



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Artwork - Cover, Sandy Sapatka
P 2 - Martin Delaney

Editor - Sheila Clark
Assistant editor - Valerie Piacentini
Typing - Sheila Clark
Proofreading - Valerie Piacentini
Printing - Janet Quarton & James T.
Collating - Sheila's Chain Gang - Frances Abernethy, Lorraine Goodison,
Cory King, Hilde McCabe, Allison Rooney.

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

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Hello everyone, and welcome to Log Entries 40. Log Entries is beginning to feel old - not many zines have put out 40 issues. In fact, the only zine I can think of that is numbered higher is Warped Space, and several of its issues were put out as 'double issues' - one zine but with two numbers; so if you count the number of actual copies of the zine there are, Log Entries has put out more than Warped Space. 40 issues is a lot of words, folks!

You all know by now that STAG has had to cut back sharply on the number of zines put out in order to cut turnover. This means that a lot of stories I have on file will inevitably be delayed in their printing. You also know that Janet, Valerie and I have decided to hand over the editing of STAG's zines to Beth and Sylvia. I've sent the manuscripts submitted to STAG and not yet assigned to zines on to them.

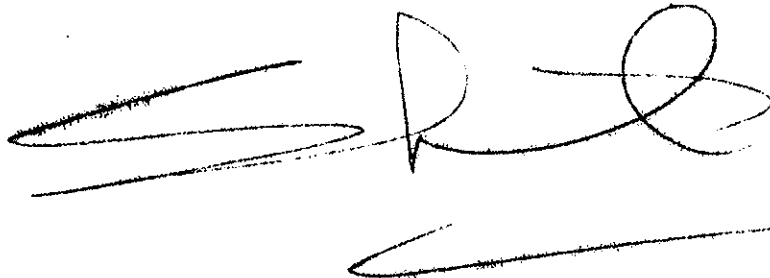
It's always possible, of course, that the VAT level will be raised in the Budget, and this will help Beth and Sylvia get more zines out, if it happens; and there shouldn't be the same problem in 1982, because we won't be running a con to add to the club's turnover.

Currently we have only LE 34 - 39 and Repeat Missions 1 in print. LE 41 is due out the same time as this issue, for the con; LE 42 is due in June, and LE 43 in August, and that will terminate my involvement with STAG's zines.

I've enjoyed my years editing STAG's zines, and appreciated the support and encouragement you, the readers, have given to the writers, artists and myself. I hope you'll give Beth and Sylvia the same support.

December 1980

Peace,





M. DELANEY

VENDETTA by Heather & Sue Hillsden

Captain's Log, Stardate 2810.3. The Enterprise is on a vital mission taking urgently required medical supplies to a geological colony on Rexus IV. An outbreak of Sirellian fever is spreading through the colonists and the anti-toxin aboard the Enterprise must be delivered within 72 hours for it to be effective.

Captain James T. Kirk, the very weary officer in charge of the U.S.S. Enterprise, wore a resigned look on his face as he sat trying to relax on the bridge of the Federation's newest and fastest Starship. Maybe, just maybe, when this mission was over the powers that be would see to it that his crew got some well-earned R & R. They had just returned from an extensive and exhaustive mapping patrol of the outer star systems and shore leave was long overdue. For everybody, he thought ruefully. It was just bad luck, therefore, that caused the Enterprise to be the nearest - and swiftest - craft to Rexus IV. They had rendezvoused with a small scout ship, picked up the necessary supplies and were now on their way to the colony.

Ensign Chekov moved slightly in his seat, trying to ease the cramp out of his leg, when his attention was suddenly drawn to a flashing red light on his navigational console. He punched a few buttons and made a quick, thorough check of his sensors before reporting,

"Captain, long range scanners are picking up readings from a metallic object dead ahead."

Instantly alert, Kirk glanced at the main viewscreen, but could only see star clusters. "Magnification 4, Mr. Chekov." The images on the screen wavered and blurred, finally solidifying into a small, spacebeaten craft hanging motionless against the backdrop of space. Kirk turned to his Bantu communications officer.

"Open a channel to the ship, Lt. Uhura."

"Aye, sir."

His first officer spoke from where he stood hunched over his computer console. "Captain, the computer has identified the vessel as the S.S. Dominion, a class 2 ore freighter currently under the command of a Captain Robert Dehner."

Kirk stared hard at Spock. Surely it couldn't be the same Bob Dehner he had known years ago. He had been a highly respected Starship Captain then, not the sort of semi-competent officer who would be in charge of an ore freighter. His thoughts were interrupted by the excited voice of his young navigator.

"Captain, there is a tremendous build-up of energy on the Dominion."

"Deflector shields up, Mr. Sulu," he ordered and turned to Uhura.

"Hailing frequencies are open, sir," she replied to his unspoken question.

"Thank you, Lieutenant." He pressed a button on his command chair. "This is Captain James T. Kirk of the U.S.S. Enterprise calling the S.S. Dominion. Please acknowledge."

A sudden harsh burst of static almost completely drowned out the reply. "This is Captain Robert Dehner. Any other time I'd say it's a pleasure to hear your voice, Jim, but I'm afraid we're in awful trouble. Our engines went to overload for no apparent reason and are just becoming critical. I'd advise you to get the hell out of here while you can."

Kirk glanced quickly at Spock, who raised one eyebrow in surprise. "Not a chance, Bob," he replied. "How many in your crew?"

"Six, but..."

"Don't argue. Just stand by to be beamed aboard the Enterprise." He switched on another button on his chair. "Bridge to transporter room."

"Transporter room. Lt. Kyle reporting, sir," came back the disembodied voice. "Mr. Kyle, is that ship in transporter range yet?"

"Yes, sir."

"Get a fix on her co-ordinates and prepare to beam six people aboard. Kirk out." He turned to the helmsman. "Lower deflector shields, Mr. Sulu, and the moment those people are aboard I want them back up. Understood?"

"Yes, Captain."

He contacted the transporter room once more. "Lt. Kyle, start bringing those people across. I'm on my way down." He rose just as the Dominion disappeared in a blinding flash. Motioning Spock to join him he took the turbolift to the transporter room, hoping that they had been in time to save the crew of the stricken craft.

The transporter room seemed crowded by the time Kirk and Spock arrived. Apart from Lt. Kyle and his assistant there were the six Dominion crew members, all seeming a bit dazed by their sudden snatch to safety. In the middle of the group stood a short, stocky man in his mid-fifties who had an air of authority. He strode forward and held out his hand.

"Jim!" he exclaimed warmly. "I don't think I've been quite so glad to see anyone in my entire life."

Kirk laughed, returning the firm handshake. "It's good to see you, Bob, and under other circumstances it would have been a pleasure."

A cloud spread across the older man's face at his words.

"What happened?" Kirk asked. Dehner shrugged helplessly and ran a hand through his hair. "I don't know exactly, Jim. All I know for sure is that the engines suddenly went crazy and there was nothing we could do about it. Sue-Ann tried her best but she just didn't have time - things happened too fast."

"Sue-Ann?"

"Lt. Jordan, our engineer."

Kirk's gaze followed the pointing finger, and he almost fell through the floor in surprise. True, the two women had looks that would draw attention in any company, but that wasn't what had hit the Captain like a flood of icy water. It was the fact that he knew one of the two. The older of the pair, Sue-Ann Jordan, was a tall willowy blonde, quite beautiful, with vivid blue eyes and an air of absolute grace. The other girl, younger by at least ten years, was equally pretty but in a dark, petite way. Her deep violet eyes met his and recognition, mixed with something else, flared in them. Before Kirk could say anything Spock's voice drifted across the room.

"Captain, may I point out that we are unable to convey Captain Dehner and his crew to any Federation planet at the moment, as the slightest deviation in our course could mean a fatal delay in reaching Rexus IV."

Nodding slowly to his First Officer Kirk turned to Dehner. "Bob, I'm afraid you are going to have to be my guests for a few days. As Mr. Spock quite rightly pointed out, we do have a vital mission to complete and unfortunately cannot afford the time to drop you off somewhere."

"I understand, Jim. Of course your mission is the immediate problem - but there are a few things about the destruction of the Dominion which I feel you should know."

Kirk stared at his friend, puzzled. "Perhaps it would be better if we went to the briefing room straightaway," he said. "If your First Officer would care to join us, I'll have the rest of your crew shown to the guest quarters." He snapped on the wall communicator and requested two yeomen to escort the rescued crew to their cabins, then he contacted sickbay.

Even through the filter of the communicator, the Chief Medical Officer's voice sounded annoyed. "McCoy here."

"Doctor, I'd like you to meet me in the briefing room. Immediately."

An exasperated sigh was heard. "Is it really necessary, Jim? I'm in the middle of a delicate experiment."

"Well, the opinion of the ship's surgeon is always handy to have. Or would you rather I relied on Mr. Spock's advice alone?"

There was a snort of derision and a few mumbled comments about 'damn Vulcan logic' before McCoy spoke again. "I'm on my way. McCoy out."

Kirk couldn't suppress a smile. He knew his remarks about Spock would bring McCoy running, for the constant 'battle' between the doctor and the First Officer was a source of constant amusement to him. He turned back to Dehner, with the uncomfortable feeling that he was being watched. Two young yeomen were taking the Dominion's crew out, but the small dark-haired girl paused for a moment, her gaze searching Kirk's face for...what? The deep violet eyes held a pleading look, and Kirk nodded in answer to her unspoken question. She glanced round, fearfully, once, then left with the others.

"Now, gentlemen," Kirk said, turning back to the officers. "I suggest we don't keep the good doctor waiting. Otherwise he's liable to head back to sickbay!"

The shared quarters assigned to the female members of Dehner's crew were not over-large, but were adequate for the short time they would be in use. Sue-Ann Jordan lay sprawled on the further of the two single couches. Her companion seemed much more ill-at-ease, constantly walking up and down.

Finally Sue-Ann could stand it no longer. "For goodness sake, Irina, come and sit down! You're making me feel quite dizzy!"

Officer Irina Galliulin ceased her endless pacing and sat stiffly on the bed opposite her superior, her face utterly miserable.

"Oh Sue-Ann, what can I do? Of all the ships to be rescued by it had to be his. I almost wish they'd left me aboard the Dominion," she finished vehemently.

Sue-Ann sat up and subjected her to a long, hard look. "It's not that Captain Kirk, is it? A typical lady-killer if ever I saw one."

Irina laughed, a little half-heartedly. "Oh no, Sue-Ann. It isn't the Captain, but it is one of his crew." Her eyes shone with unshed tears as the face she loved came instantly to mind.

"Would it help to talk about it?" coaxed the engineer gently.

"There's not really much to tell," replied Irina sadly. "We met at the Starfleet Academy and we would have married eventually, but I got involved with a peace movement and dropped out. Pavel found me with one of the movement's contacts one day, a young man. There was a terrible row but Pavel wouldn't listen to my explanations, how I felt then. He just walked out of my life."

"Isn't that always the way?" said Sue-Ann, saddened by the tears which ran unheeded down Irina's cheeks. "Forget about him. We'll be gone from here in a few days and he'll probably never know."

The girl turned her tear-streaked face towards the other. "I can't forget him, Sue-Ann," she sniffed. "I still love him."

"Maybe you do, but does he still care for you?"

"I don't know. I think so. You see, we met briefly about two years ago." She winced, inwardly, at the memory. "But we had to part again. So I just don't know," she finished helplessly.

"Well, maybe you ought to see him if you can," Sue-Ann encouraged. "After

all, the Captain did say that they can't drop us anywhere for a few days, so that should give you enough time to find out." She stood up, stretched lazily, and moved towards the wash unit. "Come on. Let's get your face cleaned up a bit and go and find a mess. I'm starving!"

Irina followed her, a happier look at last washing the dejection from her features.

The five officers seated around the briefing room table wore grim faces, with the possible exception of Spock, who remained his usual impassive self. The revelation by Captain Dehner that the S.S. Dominion was probably deliberately sabotaged had severely shaken the three Enterprise men.

"But if that's true, why?" Kirk could see no obvious reason for the destruction of a comparatively harmless ship.

"She was carrying dilithium crystals, Jim. Does that answer your question?"

The shocked silence that followed his words was broken by Spock. "Sir, I fail to understand why a small unprotected vessel such as yours should be used for the transportation of something that valuable."

"Ever heard of a 'decoy duck', Mr. Spock?" Almost without waiting for a reply, Dehner went on. "It's an old Earth play, a lure. We discovered that there had been a leak in security somewhere along the line so we felt that, in the interests of safety, it would be better to move them on a broken-down old tub that nobody would look at twice. We sent a cruiser and escort out along the pre-arranged route, but it doesn't appear to have fooled anyone."

"Surely you must have some idea who's responsible?" exclaimed Kirk.

"None at all, Jim. Besides the Starfleet echelon, only my crew knew of the change in plan and it was hand-picked and thoroughly checked out. Ask Mr. Warrior - he'd be able to tell you better than I could."

The young lieutenant sitting on Dehner's right cleared his throat. "That's right, sir. I checked them all myself, very carefully. They all had excellent records and commendations. Even Miss Galliulin," he added almost as an after-thought.

Kirk looked at the young officer, his swift appraisal taking in the dark curly hair and thin sallow features and decided he didn't much care for Lt. Warrior. His attitude, in the short time he had been aboard, had irritated Kirk.

"Then I suggest something has been overlooked, Mr. Warrior."

The lieutenant coloured and shifted uncomfortably in his seat. "I assure you, Captain Kirk, that my investigations were thorough." His voice held a note of defiance.

"What I want to know," interrupted McCoy, "is whether we have a saboteur on board the Enterprise. Assuming of course that one of your crew is guilty."

Dehner shot a glance at the doctor, who shrugged non-committally. "Doctor," he began frostily, "I would like to point out that, with one exception, I have worked and travelled with that crew for a good many years. I personally would trust my life to any one of them."

Kirk gave McCoy a chilling glance and turned to Dehner. "I'm sorry about that, Bob, but McCoy is a little outspoken at times. However, what he says is true. If the saboteur is one of your crew, we now have the problem aboard the Enterprise." He paused and looked briefly at Warrior. "And, Mister, I don't like that one little bit."

A look of barely concealed fury flashed across the young lieutenant's face. "I resent the implication," he snarled, jumping to his feet. He turned almost imploringly to his commanding officer. "Captain Dehner, I've served under you for nearly three years now and you're letting this...this Starship Captain treat me as the suspect!"

"Sit down, Ken," soothed Dehner. "That's an exaggeration, and you know it. Besides, Captain Kirk is only doing his duty." Suitably calmed, Warrior sank back in his seat, a scowl darkening his features.

"I apologise if it sounded like an accusation." Kirk took a deep breath, then pointed out, "I have 430 people on this ship, and I'm not going to risk their lives. If anyone tries anything, or even thinks about trying anything, I'll nail him." He glanced around the table, grimly determined to protect the lives entrusted to him. "For the rest of this trip, while I'm not confining anyone to quarters, I would greatly appreciate it if you, Mr. Warrior, and your crew kept strictly to the mess and rec. rooms. I can assure you that at the first opportunity you will all be dropped at the nearest Starbase and the problem will be theirs." He rose to his feet. "Dismissed, gentlemen. Bob, I'd like you to stay - you too, Bones." His last words halted the doctor as he was about to leave. Kirk wanted to discuss, in depth, the individual characters of the Dominion's crew with Dehner to give him some idea of the type of people he was dealing with. As for the doctor, Kirk felt in need of some good sound advice as how to tell a certain young Ensign that a certain young woman he never thought he'd see again was on board, and was likely to stay aboard for several days.

Chekov stepped out of the shower unit, decided to dispense with the warm air dryer, swapped a large towel round his waist. Sorting through his cupboards he threw on the bed clothes to wear as well as a smaller towel.

"It's a good job Sulu is on duty for the next few hours," he mused. "I don't think he would be very pleased if he could see the mess in here now."

With a chuckle he picked up the hand towel and started rubbing his dripping hair vigorously until it was almost dry. Dropping the now wet cloth he stood in front of the mirror and began combing his dark locks. He had hardly begun when the door buzzer sounded.

"Who is it?" he called, putting the comb down and pulling the towel tighter around himself.

"Captain Kirk. I'd like to see you for a moment, please, Ensign."

A look of horror, followed by panic, crossed Chekov's face. What had he done wrong? Then he surveyed the room, his eyes taking in the clothing trailing in a line to the shower, left where he had stepped out of them.

"Er... just a moment, please, Captain," he stammered. He hurriedly scooped up armfuls of damp clothes, and, frantically looking for some hiding place, piled them all into his bedside locker.

The door, on a light spring and not intended for such treatment, refused to shut. Without attempting to straighten things he picked up his boots, which were flung in the far corner, and placed them in front of it, keeping it partially closed. The sodden towel was thrown into the shower and the loose coverall was pulled loosely up over the unmade bed. Satisfied that it looked at least half-way tidy, Chekov took his thumb lock off the door and allowed it to open.

"May I come in now?" inquired Kirk, looking slightly amused at the Russian's attire.

"Yes, of course, sir." Chekov's heart was thumping wildly, for very rarely did the Captain visit his junior officers in their own quarters, and when he did it invariably meant bad news.

"You don't mind if I sit down?" Kirk indicated the rather lumpy bed. "I seem to have caught you at the wrong moment."

"No, not at all, Captain," the Ensign replied to both questions. He backed away slightly, highly embarrassed at his state of undress, and stumbled over his boots. The locker door, freed from restraint, sprang open and a cascade of dirty garments came tumbling out. Kirk, fighting to keep a straight face, pretended to ignore it while the unfortunate Chekov wished he were millions of light years away.

"For heaven's sake, Chekov, sit down and don't look so worried. This is a personal visit, not the prelude to a courtmartial - which, judging by your face, is what you're expecting!" The Russian relaxed slightly and sat on Sulu's bed facing Kirk. He tried to calm down but felt at a distinct disadvantage clad only in a fluffy towel. "That's better," said Kirk.

He thought hard for a moment, wondering what would be the least painful way of telling the tense young officer that a person he thought was gone for good was on board the Enterprise. "What I have to tell you isn't easy. You were on duty when the S.S. Dominion exploded, and so you know we managed to pull her crew to safety." The Captain paused, gathering his thoughts yet again before continuing. "One of them is a certain young lady that I'm sure you'll recall from...Ensign?"

Chekov turned ashen. "Ensign!" Kirk repeated sharply.

Chekov shook himself visibly. "Yes...sir."

"Are you all right?"

"I...I think so, sir. It's just that... Irina?"

"Yes, Chekov." Kirk was troubled by the strange haunted look in the dark, emotion-filled eyes.

"How can she be on a Federation ship?" he whispered in a dazed voice. "She was with that peace movement. How can it be, Captain?"

Kirk shook his head slowly. "I don't know, Ensign. Why don't you ask her?"

The young navigator stared at his superior, obviously afraid of what such a reunion might bring. "You mean go and see her?" he said at last.

"Well, that does seem the best thing to do, Chekov. Things might get worse if you try to avoid her. After all, we can't drop them off yet, and I can't confine them to their quarters - and also, I don't want my officers performing their duties at less than peak efficiency."

"Of course, Captain," Chekov agreed. He sighed. "It would be nice to see her again."

Kirk stood up and patted his shoulder gently. "If I were you I wouldn't think about it for too long. She's a very attractive girl. And - " he glanced quickly around the room, " - I should get a new housekeeper before anyone else comes visiting."

Chekov looked up in time to see the brief smile flit across the Captain's face. "Yes, sir," he acknowledged hastily, feeling a little less downcast. "I will."

"Good luck, then, Ensign." With that Kirk turned and left, leaving a slightly bemused Russian clutching a towel to his middle and wondering what to do next.

The young, fair-haired technician swore heatedly as the red warning light, flashing angrily on the panel in front of him, refused to remain dormant. As far as he could tell all systems were functioning normally and, by all accounts, the light shouldn't have been flashing. It wasn't interfering with the smooth running of the ship and had it not been for the fact that the troublesome equipment was in the engineering computer room and the Chief Engineer was a stickler for perfection, he would have left it.

He straightened and wiped the perspiration from his face as a voice, thick with Scottish brogue, drifted up from the lower deck. "Peters! Where are ye, man?" Chief Engineer Montgomery Scott came up the stairs and stepped into the semi-dark room. "Have ye discovered the fault yet?"

"No, sir," replied Peters. "But I'll check all the systems again in case I've overlooked anything."

Scott smiled to himself. "I'm sure you haven't, laddie, but if you need any

help I'll be in my office and Dominguez is in the tool crib."

"Thank you, sir, but I think I can manage."

"Good man," Scotty praised, and left the technician to begin again the laborious task of checking all the systems adjacent to the trouble. For almost twenty minutes the fair head was bent, in total concentration, over assorted muddles of wiring and printed circuits.

He glanced up suddenly, for no apparent reason. The hair on the back of his neck was prickling and he had the uncomfortable sensation of being watched. However, there was nothing to be seen or heard, so he turned back to his job. A figure leaped from cover, wielding a heavy wrench, and brought it crashing down on the unsuspecting Ensign's head. It was very fortunate that Peters was moving forward and away from his attacker when the blow fell. He gave a soft groan and pitched forward, paralysed with shock and only half conscious. Through half-closed eyes the image of a figure deftly crossing wires etched itself on his memory before the dark mists came rolling in and he knew no more.

On the bridge, Jim Kirk sat easily in the command chair, a smile playing about his lips. Apart from the tragedy with the S.S. Dominion all was going well and the Enterprise was speeding smoothly towards Rexus IV. Maybe he'd even find time on this trip to get to know that pretty blonde engineer, Sue-Ann Jordan. His thoughts were rudely interrupted when the Enterprise gave a drunken lurch and suddenly accelerated. Scrambling back into his chair Kirk glanced swiftly around at the bridge crew picking themselves up and returning to their positions. He hit the communications button.

"Bridge to engineering. Scotty, what the hell's going on down there?"

There was a short delay before the Chief Engineer's irate voice came back. "I dinna ken, Captain, but I'm trying to find out." He was interrupted by an excited voice in the background, then Scotty was back. "I think you'd better get down here, Captain. We've just found Peters and he's been hurt pretty bad."

Kirk glanced across at Spock, who raised one eyebrow. "All right, I'm on my way. Kirk out." He moved towards the turbolift doors, then swung round as they swished open. "Status report, Mr. Sulu."

The helmsman glanced down at the console in front of him. "Speed increasing to warp 9, sir." He looked at the Captain, a worried frown creasing his forehead. "Sir, the ship won't hold together for long at this speed."

Kirk nodded, and, motioning Spock to join him, made his way to engineering.

They were met by a worried and angry Scotty. "Whoever it was knew what he was doing," he exclaimed fiercely. "They've bypassed both the manual and automatic controls, so we can't stop the ship, and we can't touch the computer wiring either."

Kirk shot him a glance as he led them into the computer room. "Why not?"

"There's some kind of device wired into the system. It seems to be a bomb or something like it." In the room, Ensign Roderiguez knelt by the side of the unconscious Peters, who still lay in a crumpled heap as neither Scott nor his assistants had wanted to risk moving the injured man. Spock moved across to the computer panel, where a cover lay open exposing to view a small oblong box which was definitely not part of the Enterprise's original components. He paused in his examination as hurried footsteps indicated the arrival of Dr. McCoy and his medical team, then went back to studying the device.

McCoy moved swiftly to the injured man and expertly ran his medical scanner over the prostrate man.

"How bad it is, Bones?" Kirk asked, concern in his voice.

"He's actually very lucky Jim." The doctor gently parted blood-matted hair on the left side of Peters' head, revealing a long deep wound. "If that blow had been any harder you'd have had a murderer running loose on the ship."

"How long before he's able to talk, Bones? I've got to know who did this."

"It's hard to say, Jim. Provided there is no skull fracture he should come round naturally in a few hours. He'll be very sore for a few days and will certainly suffer from concussion. On the other hand, if there is a fracture..." He paused, not wishing to be too pessimistic.

"Well, let me know when he can be questioned." Leaving McCoy to supervise the removal of the man to sickbay, Kirk joined Spock who was still crouched in front of the open panel. "Well?"

"It is as Mr. Scott thought, Captain. A highly sophisticated, extremely sensitive device. Not powerful enough to cause severe damage, but of sufficient force to destroy the impulse and navigational units completely."

"Meaning, Mr. Spock?"

"Meaning, Captain, that if it is left alone the Enterprise will continue to travel at warp 9 until she breaks apart from the vibration."

Kirk drew a quick breath, thinking of the 430 crew members in his charge, as well as the sixty or so colonists on Rexus IV who desperately needed the anti-toxin that the Enterprise carried.

"There must be something we can do, Spock."

"Indeed there is, Captain. However it would mean the device would have to be deactivated first, and I calculate the odds against my being successful are 96.837 to 1 against."

Kirk stared hard at his first officer, his friend, weighing up the two choices he had and coming up with the same answer each time. The logical answer.

"Very well, Spock," he said at last. "But be careful. I've have Scotty send in any tools you may need."

Kirk turned away towards the door. He was almost there when there was a loud explosion and he was flung almost through the opening. Appalled, he stumbled back into the smoke-filled room, coughing and choking, eyes streaming.

Falling to his hands and knees he groped in the grey dimness until his searching fingers met soft velvety material. Grasping the fallen Vulcan under the armpits he cautiously backed out. It seemed eons before strong willing hands took his burden and he could breathe clear air once more. He leaned gratefully on Scott's shoulder. "Get McCoy back here," he gasped, waving his hand towards the still form beside which Dominguez knelt.

"He's already here, Captain," returned Scott as the doors swished open to admit a very concerned McCoy. He came in.

"Are you all right, Jim? What happened?" He placed a firm hand on Kirk's shoulder and peered anxiously into his smoke-streaked face.

"I'm okay, Bones. Help Spock."

As McCoy moved to examine Spock the wall intercom bleeped. "Bridge to Captain Kirk."

Leaving Scott, Kirk thumbed the channel open. "Kirk here. What's happening, Sulu?"

"I'm not sure, sir." The helmsman sounded puzzled. "Our speed suddenly dropped from warp 9 and is still decreasing. Now at warp 6."

The worried voice of Ensign Yeates, standing in for the off-duty Chekov, cut in. "Captain, all our navigational circuits have gone haywire. The ship doesn't respond."

Kirk shot an anxious glance across to Scotty, who shook his head slowly.

"It's just as I thought, Captain. Aye, he's a cunning devil all right. The way this has been rigged, it could only go two ways."

Kirk looked slightly baffled. "What do you mean?"

Before Scott could expand on his speculations, two medical orderlies arrived and under McCoy's supervision loaded the unconscious first officer onto a stretcher. Kirk placed a restraining hand on the doctor's arm as he was about to follow the little party up to sickbay. "How is he, Bones?"

McCoy snorted. "He's got the constitution of an ox." Then he became serious. "Considering how near he was to the explosion, he's come off quite lightly. Apart from some nasty burns the only damage is to his left shoulder. I'll have to run a full check, of course, but I think it's broken."

Kirk groaned. Of all the unfortunate things to happen, now, when he needed his first officer more than ever. "Okay, Bones. Let me know when he comes round." Knowing that Spock was in capable hands he turned back to the Chief Engineer. "What were you saying about two ways, Scotty?"

"Well, ye see, Captain, if that device had been left alone the ship would have carried on gaining speed until she couldna' stand the strain any longer, and then she'd have ripped apart."

Kirk felt an icy chill run up his spine as he tried to visualise such utter destruction. "And the other way?" he prompted.

Scotty glanced back into the computer room from which wisps of grey smoke still drifted. Dominguez was quenching the last of the smouldering wires with the C.T.C. extinguisher. A faint noxious smell floated out, to be quickly dispelled by the air conditioning system.

"Aye, the other way, and that's what really puzzles me. Whoever planted it knew we wouldn't just sit around and wait for the ship to break up. They must have realised we'd find some way to deactivate it."

"Meaning what other little surprises are in store for us?"

The intercom sounded again, interrupting his train of thought. "Bridge to Captain Kirk."

"Kirk here. What is it, Mr. Sulu?"

"Captain, our speed is now steady at warp 2."

"Take her down to warp 1 and hold her there. I'm on my way. Kirk out." He moved to the door then checked at a sudden thought. "Scotty, how long will it take to repair the damage?"

"Wi' a wee slice of luck the best I could probably do is about six hours."

Kirk nodded acknowledgement and headed for the bridge.

Captain's Log, supplemental. Our mission to Rexus IV has been interrupted by an unforeseen occurrence. The ore freighter, S.S. Dominion, secretly transporting dilithium crystals, has been destroyed by an act of sabotage. We have on board the crew, one of whom we now know to be the saboteur. An attempt has been made to destroy the Enterprise, which has resulted in injuries to Technician Peters and First Officer Spock. We are now orbiting a small class M planet while repairs are carried out to the navigational computer.

Kirk switched off his recorder and looked around the bridge. They had been circling the dull, unassuming little planet for nearly an hour now and he was feeling extremely edgy. He turned to his communications officer.

"Lt. Uhura, put a call through to Captain Dehner's quarters. Have him meet

me in sickbay.

"Aye, sir," she replied. Leaving Sulu in temporary command he made his exit.

Ensign Pavel Chekov was feeling decidedly nervous as he stood outside the door of the cabin assigned to Sue-Ann and Irina. He had thought about the Captain's words for a long time and had reached the conclusion that Kirk's advice was sound. But deciding on something and doing it were two entirely different matters. Taking a deep breath he raised his hand to the buzzer but before he could touch it the door swished open to reveal a tall blonde vision that regarded him with some amusement.

"Well, Ensign," she asked, noting his status. "What can I do for you?"

Chekov swallowed hard. "Please, is it possible to see Irina?"

Realisation dawned on Sue-Ann immediately, and she gave him a scathing look. "Ah - the famous Pavel, I presume?"

The 'famous Pavel' was beginning to wish he was somewhere else when a small dark figure appeared beside Sue-Ann.

"Who is..." Her voice trailed off with a gasp. "Pavel!" she cried, and flung herself into his arms. Chekov, finding his hands full of sobbing female, looked embarrassed and glanced helplessly at Sue-Ann.

"Oh, no," she laughed. "She's your girl. You sort it out. I'm going to chase me a Starship Captain." Then she was gone.

Chekov disentangled Irina's arms from his neck and led her over to the bed. He sat down beside her, still grasping her hands. She looked up at him, violet eyes brimming with tears, and smiled. He smiled back at her and pulled her closer to him.

Their lips touched, briefly at first, then more passionately as old memories flared to life. They parted, Irina's face flushed with happiness, and she reached up to brush back the stray dark lock of hair that had fallen across Chekov's forehead. "Oh, Pavel," she murmured. "I was so afraid when I found out you were still here."

"Why, Irina? You never need to be afraid of me."

She snuggled closer, as though scared of losing him again. "I don't know," she admitted. "I really don't know."

Chekov smoothed down her silky hair and tenderly wiped away her tears. "It doesn't matter any more. All that matters is that you are with me now." They sat together in silence for a long time, neither wishing to speak and break the spell.

"Tell me, Irina," Chekov said at last. "How did you come to be on board the Dominion? I mean, after Dr. Sevrin and..." He broke off, unsure of how to go on.

"It's all right, Pavel," she laughed. "I realise now how foolish I was. I must have been, to give you up for them." Her eyes, shining with love, travelled across his face, drinking in every detail.

"But what happened?" Chekov wanted to know.

"Well, after we left Eden I was sent back to Starbase. I started thinking and realised that you were right - I could only find my 'paradise' by working for it. The only job I really knew was communications, so I completed my degree and was initially assigned to the U.S.S. Lincoln. Then they needed special crew for the Dominion and I was chosen. That's about all, really."

Chekov gave a contented sigh. He had Irina again and that was all he really cared about. "Perhaps you can get a transfer to the Enterprise as assistant communications officer." He stood up suddenly and paced around the room. "Or maybe I can get a transfer to where-ever you're assigned next." He stepped in front of her and pulled her quickly to her feet.

"Whatever happens," he stated vehemently, "nothing will part us again."

"Oh, Pavel," Irina said, her fingers laced behind his neck. "If only it were that easy! But suppose one of us can't get a transfer?" She looked away sadly.

Chekov put his hand under her chin and gently turned her face towards him. "They would have to consider it for man and wife," he said simply.

"What?" She stared at him, disbelief etched in every line of her face.

"Will you marry me, Irina?" he asked softly.

Suddenly Irina was laughing and crying at the same time. "Yes. Oh, yes, Pavel. I will." She kissed him, long and hard, leaving him panting slightly. "I love you Pavel Andreivitch."

"I love you too, my beautiful Irina." He held her close, hardly daring to believe it was all true, afraid that it was just another of his dreams and that any moment he would awaken in the darkness of his quarters.

"What would you say to a cup of coffee?" he whispered into her ear.

"I'd love it," she replied, gazing up at him, adoration sparkling in her eyes.

"Come on, then - I know just the place." Taking her by the hand he led her out into the corridor. Arm in arm they walked to the recreation room, seemingly nothing able to penetrate the blissful aura around them.

Captain Kirk was feeling slightly calmer when he strode into sickbay a few hours later. The repairs were going along smoothly and there had been no more attempts at sabotage, although he hadn't really expected any. Security had been tightened throughout the ship, especially in areas of likely targets, yet painstaking searches and investigations had failed to uncover any clues whatsoever.

McCoy didn't look up as Kirk came in. "I might have known you couldn't keep away very long."

"How is Spock?" Kirk ignored McCoy's words, knowing how much concern he felt for the Vulcan. The doctor rose and led the Captain into the partitioned area of sickbay. The Vulcan lay propped up on the bed nearest the door, looking unusually pale and with his left arm held immobile in a sling.

Across the room directly opposite the first officer lay Ensign Peters. The blond technician was still unconscious, but it was a drug induced unconsciousness and he rested peacefully.

"Maybe you can persuade him to stay here for a few days and rest that shoulder."

Kirk smiled, for he knew how much Spock hated enforced rest. He could see that there were going to be a couple of interesting days in sickbay, for he also knew how much the doctor and the first officer needled each other.

"Well, Spock, getting restless already?"

The Vulcan raised an eyebrow in a familiar gesture and gave McCoy a chilling look. "Captain, the doctor informs me that the shoulder is merely strained, and as it no longer pains me I fail to see who I cannot be allowed to recover in the privacy of my own quarters.

Kirk shook his head disapprovingly. "I'm afraid McCoy's word is law down here, Spock. You should realise it by now."

Spock closed his eyes wearily and settled back slightly. The shoulder was giving him more pain than he cared to admit, but both the Captain and McCoy realised that anyway.

At that moment Bob Dehner entered and, catching sight of Kirk, moved across to join them. He avoided looking directly at Spock, and it was obvious he felt some guilt for his injuries.

"Ah, Bob, I'm glad you came. I know it's going to be hard for you to believe,

but it has been proved. One of your crew must be the saboteur. I'm sorry." Kirk looked helplessly at his old friend, trying to imagine how he would feel in Dehner's place but failing.

The older Captain seemed to have aged ten years. "What can I say, Jim? I know these people, and it's so hard to believe."

The younger man squeezed the other's shoulder. "I know. But we're going to need your help. This person is a threat to the Federation and must be stopped. No matter what."

Dehner sat wearily on a nearby couch, staring at his hands tightly clasped before him. "What can I do?" All the fight seemed to have left him.

Kirk glanced at McCoy, who stood quietly in the background. "Is Spock able to stand up to some research?"

McCoy snorted derisively. "Don't ask me," he grumbled. "I'm only the doctor."

Kirk laughed. "All right, then. Spock, perhaps you and Captain Dehner could run his crew through the computer again and see if you can come up with anything. Any little thing out of the ordinary. It could give us the clue we're looking for."

"Of course, Captain."

"If you find anything at all, I'll be on the bridge. Oh, and Spock - try to comply with McCoy's wishes. The sooner I have my first officer back, fully fit, the happier I'll be."

Before the Vulcan could think of a suitable reply, Kirk turned on his heel and left.

It was design rather than accident that led Kirk to the red room where Chekov and Irina sat drinking coffee. Neither heard the Captain approach, and both seemed oblivious of his presence until he cleared his throat.

"May I sit down or is this a private conversation?"

Chekov scrambled hastily to his feet, as nervous as a scalded cat. "Captain Kirk!" he exclaimed. "I didn't see you come in. Yes, sit down."

Kirk laughed. He nodded to Irina. "Hello again, Miss Galliulin. Judging from your face you're enjoying this stay better than the last."

Irina gave him a dazzling smile and blushed slightly. "Oh yes, Captain," she breathed. "I am."

Kirk and Chekov seated themselves, Kirk glancing from one young person to the other, noting their nervousness but unable to guess what caused it. Finally he could stand it no longer. "Well, Ensign?" he prompted.

The Russian frowned. "Captain?"

"I know you well enough to know when you're up to something."

Irina laughed gaily and reached across to hold the navigator's hand. "The Captain should be the first to know, Pavel."

Chekov glanced at his Captain, then at the girl he loved. His usual buoyancy was subdued and his mouth felt dry. He swallowed. "Captain," he began slowly. "I...we...that is, Irina and I, we want to get married."

Kirk wasn't greatly surprised. He recalled how Chekov had behaved when he had met Irina two years ago, and how, when in the clutches of delirium, he had called her name.+

"Congratulations, Ensign, and you too, Miss Galliulin. I wish you every happiness."

+ 'Yesterday's Dreams' by H & S Hillsden, Log Entries 26, now out of print.

Chekov glanced nervously at the Captain, then to Irina, and back to Kirk. He was unsure how to phrase his next question. "Captain, when we are married would it be possible for Irina to transfer to the Enterprise?" Once started he rushed on before he lost his nerve. "Otherwise I will have to apply for a transfer, and she's very good at communications. She's got a full degree."

Kirk laughed again. "Chekov, calm down. Believe me, I'll do my best to push through any transfer request from Miss Galliulin." He smiled at the delighted looks on the couple's faces. "Besides, I don't want to lose my best navigator, do I?" He decided that he could at least discount Irina from his list of suspects, for unless he missed his guess she and Chekov were so much in love that it was highly improbable that she would do anything to jeopardise their happiness. Which still left him with one hell of a problem. Who, out of the remaining five crew, all of whom had been with Dehner for years, was the saboteur? He could probably forget about Bob Dehner too, for he was a died-in-the-wool, first and always Federation man and Starship Captain. If Kirk went by his own choice Lt. Warrior would be locked in the brig, but he had to admit to himself that that was a biased opinion stemming from a personal dislike of the man. Perhaps he could learn something from Irina.

"Miss Galliulin, I don't wish to spoil your happy moment but you may be able to help me."

"I will try, Captain," she said. "What did you want?"

"Only a little information. You may or may not know that Captain Dehner thinks the destruction of the Dominion was no accident." A gasp from Irina showed that she hadn't known. Chekov, too, looked amazed.

"You mean she was sabotaged, Captain?" he said, aghast.

"That is just what I do mean, Ensign, and everything points to it being one of the crew."

The Russian was immediately on the defensive, a challenging tone in his voice. "You cannot suspect my Irina?"

"No, Ensign, I don't. But maybe she can help find the person."

Irina shook her head. "There is no-one who would do such a thing. Lt. Warrior is a little hot-tempered at times but he could never be a traitor. Alun... I mean Crewman Evans is such a kind, hard-working person who wouldn't hurt a fly, and you surely can't suspect Captain Dehner?" Her voice held disbelief as he suddenly averted his gaze. "You did suspect him, didn't you, as you also suspected me?"

"That's true, I did." He looked at her in surprise. "You're very perceptive, Miss Galliulin."

"Not at all, Captain. You are a good officer, and you care about your crew and your ship above all else. Such a man would suspect anyone, even his most trusted friend, until circumstances said otherwise."

Chekov stared at the girl feeling puzzled. There was a clarity of understanding in her now that he was just beginning to realise, and he felt extremely proud and happy that she had chosen to share her life with him. Kirk raised an eyebrow in acknowledgement of her assessment of him.

"However," he said, "you have overlooked someone. Sue-Ann Jordan."

"You must be joking. Sue-Ann is as close to me as a sister. A nicer person and finer officer you couldn't wish to meet. She is a tremendous person despite her problems."

"What problems?"

"About three years ago her parents and her husband were killed in an attack on a scientific colony on Danus LL."

Kirk remembered the incident well. The Danus II colony was working on the borders of Federation and Klingon territory but were safe from attack while a

Federation battle cruiser patrolled the area. Then the cruiser had been lured away by a fake distress signal, allowing Klingon ships to attack and totally wipe out the colony.

"I see," he said slowly. "So she could feel bitter about that."

"What has that to do with the Dominion, Captain?" Chekov was feeling a little left out of the conversation. "I mean, why blow up an ore ship?"

"She was carrying dilithium crystals, Pavel," Irina told him. "Enough to run the Starships for about a year."

"But that could cripple the Federation, couldn't it, Captain?" The Ensign was shocked.

"It is a serious loss, Ensign, but fortunately not sufficient to cause a great deal of alarm. However, unless the person is found, next time we may not be so lucky. We know he is capable of violence."

"What do you mean?" asked the navigator.

"You mean you haven't heard what happened in engineering?" At the negative response Kirk continued, "Ensign Peters was attacked and knocked unconscious and Mr. Spock was injured in an explosion that wrecked the navigational computers."

"Is Mr. Spock all right, sir?" There was genuine concern in the Russian's question, for he owed a great deal to the cool, unemotional Vulcan. Spock had spent a vast amount of his own time helping Chekov improve his scientific and navigational capabilities. Next to the Captain, Spock commanded more respect and loyalty from the impressionable young navigator than anyone else on the ship.

"A little bruised and sore, Ensign. Nothing more." Kirk smiled to himself, for he knew how the Russian felt towards the First Officer. "In fact, he is working with Captain Dehner on this problem of the saboteur."

At that precise moment the intercom shrilled. "Captain Kirk to sickbay. Captain Kirk to sickbay."

Making his excuses, Kirk moved across and thumbed it open. "Kirk here. I'm on my way. Out."

Taking leave of the young couple about to plan a future together, Kirk walked out of the room straight into Sue-Ann Jordan. Stepping back slightly to regain her composure, she regarded him coolly, her blue eyes flashing from under long dark lashes.

"I'm sure there are other ways of meeting, Captain Kirk, that are slightly less painful."

Kirk laughed and put all his charm into the smile he gave her. "It seems to have had the desired effect, Miss Jordan," he returned. "Perhaps we might even have time to get better acquainted."

"Who knows, Captain. Perhaps we might." She brushed past him, leaving a faint smell of musk clinging to his nostrils. He watched her move across to where Irina and Chekov sat, then the doors swished shut, obscuring his view. Squaring his shoulders purposefully, he carried on to see what required his attention in sickbay.

Sue-Ann sat in the vacant chair next to Chekov. "Hi," she said gaily. "I see our two little love-birds are getting along nicely."

Chekov flushed and looked embarrassed.

"Don't tease, Sue-Ann," Irina laughed. "And, might I introduce you to my fiancee."

"Well! I could say this is a surprise, but it isn't."

They sat discussing what was happening for a few minutes, then Chekov decided to get some more coffee for them all. While he was at the food console, Irina turned a smiling face to Sue-Ann. "Isn't it wonderful?" she exclaimed. "Pavel

and I getting married... Will you be our Matron of Honour?"

"I'd love to. But tell me, what did Captain Kirk want?"

A cloud of uncertainty passed across the younger girl's features. "I'm not really sure. He said the Dominion had been sabotaged and that it must be one of the crew. Then he asked me about the rest of the crew."

Sue-Ann frowned thoughtfully. "Sabotaged, you say? Was there anything else?"

"Well, he did ask if anybody had a grudge against the Federation, but I told him that no-one would dream of doing anything against it. I...er...I also mentioned about your family on Danus II. I hope it wasn't wrong."

The blonde engineer turned slightly pale at these words and clutched the edge of the table tightly. "That's all right, Irina," she said softly. "It's on the records, so he would have found out sooner or later."

The dark-haired girl breathed a sigh of relief but felt a little upset at having stirred up painful memories for her friend. "I'm sorry, Sue-Ann. It must be awful for you to remember."

Without another word, Sue-Ann stood and almost ran from the room, nearly knocking Chekov over as he returned with the coffee. He turned a quizzical face to Irina as he put the beakers on the table.

"What happened?"

"Oh, Pavel, it's all my fault," she cried. "I reminded her about her husband being killed, and her parents. Think how she must feel."

He sat and gently placed a comforting arm around her shoulders. "Don't cry, my Irina. Be happy. The pain will pass for her, you'll see."

"I hope so, Pavel."

"Now come on," he coaxed. "Drink your coffee and then we must find Sulu and tell him the good news." He smiled at her, and she couldn't help but smile back. She couldn't be unhappy for long, she decided, not with him at her side.

The corridor outside rec room 3 was almost deserted, and for that Sue-Ann Jordan was grateful. She paused, leaning against the wall for a few moments, her head bowed in angry sorrow as she relived in her mind the events of the past. Suddenly her head jerked up and a sly smile played about her perfect lips. Straightening, she walked resolutely to the turbolift and made her way down to the engineering level. In the outer workshop area two crewmen, a lieutenant and an ensign, were busy huddled over some piece of machinery. Hearing footsteps approach, they looked up and were startled to see the tall blonde woman watching them with some interest.

"You boys seem to be extremely busy," she said in her most charming manner. "Maybe I could come back some other time."

"Oh, we're not busy, ma'am," returned the lieutenant, a tall dark-haired man of obviously Latin-American descent. "What can I do for you?"

"The name's Sue-Ann and I was Chief Engineer on the Dominion." She smiled at him seductively, with just a hint of promise in her eyes. "I thought maybe while I was here it would be a good chance to see the engineroom of the famous Enterprise."

The man dropped his tools onto the bench and a look of pride came to his face. "You can finish here on your own, can't you, Tom?" The tone of his voice suggested that an affirmative answer was required.

"Sure, Mario."

"In that case I can show this young lady round our domain." He motioned Sue-Ann forward and led her into the main engineering section. It wasn't very often he got the chance to talk to someone outside the Enterprise crew and he

wasn't going to miss the opportunity with this beautiful stranger.

"Mario," Sue-Ann mused. "Isn't that Italian?"

"It's actually Spanish-Mexican," he corrected. "The other half is Ortego."

"Mario Ortego. That has a nice friendly sound to it." The subtle suggestions in her voice weren't lost on him but he remained stubbornly impervious to them. For the moment.

"This is what drives the ship," he said, changing the subject and pointing to a spherical device in the centre of the room. It pulsed with energy and at the top of it two exquisitely formed dark crystals rested in indentations conforming to their many-faceted sides exactly.

"Yes," Sue-Ann acknowledged. "Dilithium crystals. I realise what they are, but your warp engines are far superior to anything I've worked with. On the Dominion we only used the one crystal to power the ship, and carried two spares."

The man ran his fingers through his curly black hair and gave a deep sigh. "Usually we also carry two spares, but while we were out in deep space we had a few problems with the engines and the crystals were destroyed. These are our spares."

"Really?" Sue-Ann paused a moment as she digested the lieutenant's words. This was just the chance she was looking for, a chance to disable and destroy the giant Starship once and for all. These thoughts she kept to herself.

The problem was how to divert the attention of Ortego and the other man long enough to allow her access to the dilithium crystals. At that moment fate lent her a hand in the most unlikely form. The murmur of voices in the outer area attracted her attention and she looked up to see Lt. Ken Warrior striding towards them. There was a look of jealousy on his face as he shot a dark glance at the tall crewman by her side.

"What are you doing, Sue-Ann?" he demanded.

"Nothing much," she replied, edging just a fraction closer to Ortego.

"I've been looking all over the ship for you. I haven't had a chance to see you on your own for a long time."

"Maybe I don't want to see you. You're not my keeper, Ken."

The crewman tensed, for Warrior suddenly reached out and grabbed the woman's arm. "So you prefer the company of these people to me, do you?" he sneered.

"Let go of me." Sue-Ann struggled but couldn't break the vice-like grip. "You're hurting me."

"You heard what the lady said, Mister." Ortega placed a hand firmly on Warrior's shoulder. "Let go of her."

"This is none of your business!" Warrior snarled.

"I don't know about the Dominion, but on the Enterprise we don't take too kindly to anyone abusing a lady," Ortega pushed Warrior, sending him staggering backwards.

With a cry of rage Warrior swung a punch which caught Ortega on the jaw. The Enterprise crewman was almost knocked to the ground by the surprise attack, but recovered swiftly and lashed out in defence. Warrior ducked, the blow caught his shoulder and he fell back against a console. Putting a hand out to steady himself, he felt his questing fingers touch something hard and cold. Ortega turned away just as Sue-Ann screamed at him. He spun round in time to see Warrior coming at him, a wrench clasped in his hand. At the sound of the woman's scream, Tom Quinn came dashing in and stared, dumbfounded, at the struggling men, one wielding a deadly weapon. Realising that the fight was beyond his powers to stop, he ran out again to the intercom and called for a security team.

Sue-Ann saw her chance. With Quinn out of the way, the two men were too concerned with the fight to notice her. Moving swiftly she removed the dilithium

crystals and tucked them into a small concealed pocket of her uniform. She sidled towards the door, constantly watching the struggling men. So concerned with the fight was she that she failed to hear the security team arrive until one brushed past her. He grabbed Warrior from behind, pinning his arms in a powerful grip and she saw another grasp Ortega as she backed out of the door.

"What are you doing here, Lieutenant?" The voice made her jump and she realised the words were directed at her. "The Captain has made this off limits to unauthorised personnel."

"Captain Kirk has given me permission to study the engines," she replied, thinking fast.

"Then you won't mind if I check, Lt....?"

"Jordan. Sue-Ann Jordan."

The guard turned to the intercom, taking his eyes off her for just a fraction of a second, but that was all she needed. Remembering her unarmed combat training, with the hard edge of her hand she struck him a paralysing blow to the base of the spine and another to the neck. The man crumpled to the floor, unconscious. She leaned down and took the phaser from his belt holster and, with one cursory backward glance to be certain she hadn't been spotted, hurried from the area.

Kirk was about to leave sickbay when the call came from engineering. "Kirk here. What is it, Scotty?"

"We're in trouble, Captain," came back the irate voice of Montgomery Scott.

"Explain."

"The dilithium crystals are gone."

There was a stunned silence as Kirk took in the statement. "Gone?" he ejaculated.

"Aye, Captain. Gone. Stolen. Taken. Whatever you like to call it, we're helpless without them."

"How long have we got?"

"About twelve hours, then our orbit will start to decay. We'll be burnt to a crisp when we enter the planet's outer atmospheric layers."

"Did anybody see who was responsible?"

There was an angry snort from the other end. "Aye, that they did. It was Lt. Jordan, Captain," Scotty said. "She started a fight and snatched the crystals during the commotion."

Kirk was visibly shaken. He tried to visualise the tall blonde committing such an act of violence upon Ensign Peters and, to a lesser extent, the explosion that injured Spock, but it was difficult.

"Are you sure?"

"Positive, Captain. The security teams have checked her quarters and she's not there."

"Okay, Scotty. Have all your men check out the engineering levels and report to me immediately you find anything."

"Very good, sir. Oh, by the way, she's armed. She knocked out a security guard and took his phaser."

"Thanks for the warning, Scotty. Kirk out." He switched channels and ordered security to check out the ship from top to bottom. The woman had to be found quickly, for she held in her hands the lives of over 430 persons on the Enterprise as well as fully sixty men, women and children on Rexus IV. Without the dilithium crystals they were completely helpless and at the mercy of someone who was either a cold-blooded killer or a very sick person who badly needed help. Kirk wasn't

overjoyed at either prospect.

Back now in her quarters, Sue-Ann paced up and down like a caged animal. The dilithium crystals were safely locked in a small receptacle and the phaser felt reassuring and comfortable in her palm. A hard smile played about her lips as she thought that at last she was about to really damage the Federation by destroying its most prestigious vessel, the U.S.S. Enterprise. She whirled suddenly, the phaser ready for use, as footsteps sounded outside the door. Irina and Chekov entered, laughing merrily, then froze at the sight of the woman levelling the weapon at them.

"What are you doing, Sue-Ann?" gasped Irina, edging slightly nearer Chekov. "What's wrong?"

"Don't, Irina, please don't," Sue-Ann pleaded. "I don't want to hurt you, but I will if I have to."

"Why, Sue-Ann? What have I done to you?" The girl moved slowly towards her, while Chekov, hardly daring to breathe, watched the phaser.

"It's not you, Irina. It's the Federation." There was loathing in the engineer's voice as she spoke. "It took from me everything that mattered. My parents, my David, everything. Now they are going to pay!" The phaser now pointed almost at the floor and, seeing this, Chekov rushed at the woman. Irina screamed as, with a strength born of fear and anger, Sue-Ann flung the Russian to one side, sending him crashing against the wall with numbing force. He lay winded and Irina fell to her knees beside him, ignoring Sue-Ann as she snatched up a small container and fled from the room.

"Pavel, are you hurt?" the girl cried. He shook his head slowly, forcing himself to his feet.

"I'm all right, Irina. But what made her do that?"

"I don't know," she said, still clinging to his arm. "She looked...strange. She didn't seem like the same person."

"I must tell the Captain," he stated. "I'm sorry, Irina, but she must be stopped before she kills somebody. She needs help."

"What do you mean, Pavel?"

Chekov stared at the girl, amazed. Either she could not - or would not - see the obvious. "Sue-Ann must be the one who destroyed the Dominion."

"No! I don't believe it!"

"But Irina, she must be. She is an engineer, so she would be able to rig the engines to overload, and she has a reason to hate the Federation."

Irina turned her face up to his, her violet eyes brimming with tears. "But she's my friend, Pavel."

"I know, Irina, I know," he said gently. He pressed the intercom.

"Chekov to Captain Kirk."

"Kirk here. What is it, Ensign?"

"It's Miss Jordan, sir. She has just attacked us in her quarters."

"What happened?"

"I'm not sure, sir. When we came in, she turned a phaser on us. She said something about making the Federation pay. What did she mean?"

There was a muffled curse from the other end, followed by a short silence. Then - "Where is she now?" the Captain asked.

"I don't know..." The Ensign's reply was interrupted by another voice.

"Captain Kirk, this is security officer Danvers." There was a note of urgency in his words. "We had the emergency signal from the transporter room,

and when we arrived we found the transporter chief phaser-stunned. The transporter had been operated."

"I'm on my way. Kirk out." He cut communications and Chekov was left with an ominous silence.

"That must have been Sue-Ann, Pavel. She would have nowhere else to run."

"I know," he said.

"What will the Captain do?"

"He will beam down and find her, then bring her back."

"I must go with him," she said. "Sue-Ann knows me, she trusts me." She moved towards the door.

"You can't know that, Irina," he said, grasping her by the shoulders and swinging her round to face him. "As she is at the moment she might not trust anyone. Besides, you heard what she said. She didn't want to hurt you but she would if she had to. I won't risk that."

Irina smiled at him gently, then kissed him tenderly. "I promise you I won't take any chances, but I must try to help. She is my friend. Please try to understand."

Chekov shrugged helplessly and melted before those penetrating violet eyes. "Very well," he consented. "But I'm coming with you."

They arrived at the transporter room just ahead of Dr. McCoy. Kirk and Bob Dehner were already there with a security guard - Danvers. Lt. Kyle was leaning groggily against the console with another crewman hovering anxiously in the background.

"What are you doing, Ensign?" Kirk asked as he spotted Chekov and Irina coming through the doors.

"Captain, are you going down after Sue-Ann?"

"I am, Miss Galliulin. We must recover those dilithium crystals."

"Then let me come with you," she begged, clutching at his arm. "She'll listen to me."

"I cannot allow you..."

He was interrupted by Bob Dehner. "It's true what she says, Jim. They were close, so it's possible Sue-Ann would listen to her."

"Please, Captain."

Kirk couldn't really refuse under the circumstances. "I see no option but to agree, Miss Galliulin. However," he added, eyeing Chakov, "it looks as though you are going to have an escort."

"Thank you." They stepped onto the transporter pad, along with Dehner and McCoy.

"Lt. Kyle, beam us down then call Mr. Carson to relieve you."

"I'm all right, sir."

"Very well. Energise." Six forms shimmered and sparkled, then disappeared completely. They reappeared almost instantly on the surface of the cold, barren planet which had no name, only a classification number.

"Fan out," Kirk ordered. "She can't have gone very far, and remember I want her and the dilithium crystals undamaged."

The landing party paired up and moved off in three different directions. The area that Kirk and Dehner were covering was hilly and cut by ravines. Boulders of different sizes littered the floors of these, evidence of landslides or earth subsidences over the centuries.

"I just can't understand it, Jim," Dehner was saying. She's never given me cause to doubt her. It seems strange that she should turn just like that."

"It's probably been... What was that?" Kirk's words were accompanied by the clattering of stones as something moved amongst the boulders ahead of them. They crept forward, keeping themselves concealed, and caught the glimpse of a splash of red in front of them. They followed her silently until they ran out of cover near the base of an overhanging cliff. She turned suddenly and, catching sight of them, snapped off a quick shot. Wild though it was it was almost accurate, gouging out a long furrow beside Kirk's foot. The two Captains beat a hasty retreat, flinging themselves behind the safety of a large rocky outcrop. The woman glanced frantically around, as though searching for something.

"Miss Jordan," called Kirk. "Please put down the phaser. We don't want to hurt you."

"No!" she screamed back. "I'm going to make you pay for all the suffering you've caused!"

Kirk glanced at Dehner. "We're going to have to stun her, Bob. She's got that weapon set on kill; I doubt it's possible to reason with her."

Before Dehner could reply scrambling footsteps announced the arrival of Chekov and Irina. They dropped down beside the two men.

"I heard what you said, Captain Kirk," began Irina. "Please let me try to talk to her first."

"I can't allow that, Miss Galliulin. She has already tried to kill Captain Dehner and myself."

"But..."

"No buts. It's out of the question, and that's final."

Irina turned to Chekov, but he shook his head slowly.

"Miss Jordan," Kirk called again. "I'll give you one last chance." He flinched instinctively as another shot chipped splinters of rock off just above his head.

"Sue-Ann. Don't shoot. It's me." They looked up to see Irina walking slowly towards the woman.

"No, Irina," Chekov breathed, and made as if to go after her.

"Wait, Ensign," Kirk whispered, grasping his shoulder and pulling him back down. "Look."

Sue-Ann still held the phaser levelled at Irina, but there was now a sorrowful look etched on her lovely face. "Why did you have to come, Irina?" she cried. "I don't want to hurt you."

"I want to help you, Sue-Ann," she said gently. "We all do." She motioned to the three men who came forward but slightly to one side. The engineer now swung her phaser round to cover them and they froze in their tracks. The woman's finger tightened on the trigger.

"No, Sue-Ann," the dark girl gasped.

"They must pay, Irina. They must." She was sobbing now, tears of anger and frustration. Kirk moved slowly forward.

"Believe me, Miss Jordan, we mean you no harm," he said. "But you must return those dilithium crystals to me." The tears stopped and a look of fury and triumph passed across her face.

"So you want your precious crystals, Captain," she sneered. "Then you and your Starship can wander off into the galaxy and more innocent people can be murdered."

Kirk cursed himself inwardly for his bad timing, for while she held the

phaser he had no wish to antagonise her further. But he recovered quickly. "We need to get to Rexus IV to save lives there."

"I don't believe you!"

"You're wrong, Sue-Ann," Irina pleaded. "The Federation protects people. What happened on Danus was no fault of theirs. It was the Klingons. You know that."

"No. It was the Federation. They should have stayed and fought." A frown creased the blonde's forehead and the phaser sagged downwards. Kirk, noting this, decided that this was the best time to move. He threw himself across the few feet that separated him from the woman. Sue-Ann acted instantly, the phaser coming up to meet the Captain's rush. With a super-human effort Kirk flung out his arm, knocking her hand up. The phaser went off, the shot striking the cliff above them. There was an ominous crack as the rocky overhang began to crumble.

"Irina!" Chekov shouted and made a desperate grab for the girl. Irina was also moving forward, to Sue-Ann, and, with a despairing cry, pushed her out of the way of the falling rocks. But that last gallant effort took just a few seconds too long. A large rock caught Irina a glancing blow, knocking her to the ground; she screamed once as the remainder came down on her almost burying her completely. Chekov gave an incoherent cry as he too was sent crashing to the ground and there was a sudden sharp pain in his ankle as a huge boulder fell, pinning his legs. Then quite suddenly the rumbling stopped and there was just grey, choking dust hanging in the air. Kirk glanced to where Bob Dehner was helping a shaken Sue-Ann to her feet, then he moved swiftly across to the navigator. He was trying, unsuccessfully, to move the rock from his legs.

"Captain. Irina." The Russian's voice was filled with anguish. "She's underneath that."

"I know, but let's see about getting you free first. Bob, give me a hand here."

With Dehner's help Chekov was freed, but when he tried to stand his right ankle gave way beneath him. Supported by Kirk, he moved across to where Irina was buried and began frantically tearing at the rocks. Just then, McCoy and Danvers appeared, attracted by the noise.

"Bones, take a look at Chekov's ankle. Danvers, lend a hand with these rocks."

McCoy unslung his medical kit and went over to the Russian. "What happened, Jim?" he asked.

"I'll tell you later," replied Kirk. "Right now, Irina Galliulin is buried under here."

With the four working as fast as they could it wasn't long before Irina was released. Chekov, who wouldn't stop to allow McCoy to treat his injury, was immediately at her side. "Oh, Irina," he murmured, wiping away the blood trickling from between her lips, "why did you do it? Why?"

The girl's eyes flickered open and focused on the face floating above her. "Pavel?" Her hand reached up to caress his cheek, damp with unashamed tears.

"Don't talk." He glanced at McCoy, who was running his scanner across her, his face grim.

"It hurts so much, Pavel," she moaned.

The doctor was rummaging in his kit. "I can give her something to ease the pain, Jim, but I must get her back to sickbay right now."

"How bad is it?" Kirk asked, looking sadly at the ensign still cradling the girl in his arms as McCoy administered a pain-killing injection.

"Pretty bad, Jim. There's a lot of internal bleeding as well as the injuries."

The Captain flipped open his communicator. "Kirk to Enterprise."

"Enterprise. Scott here, Captain."

"Beam us up, Scotty, and have an emergency medical team standing by in the transporter room. Kirk out."

They took their positions, Chekov holding the girl he loved. Despite his injury he would allow no-one else to carry her and the pain in his leg faded to nothing beside the agonising ache in his heart.

When they materialised in the transporter room, Spock was waiting for them, the white sling in sharp contrast to the blue of his shirt.

"Lt. Danvers," Kirk ordered as he stepped off the transporter pad. "Take Miss Jordan to her quarters and confine her there."

"Aye, sir." The man gently took her by the arm and led her away. Sue-Ann offered no resistance; she seemed a broken person.

The medical team moved forward and took the now unconscious Irina from Chekov's arms and laid her on the stretcher. With McCoy issuing orders she was wheeled out. The Russian stepped forward and would have fallen if Kirk had not caught him.

"Easy, Ensign. She's in good hands now." He placed a strong, supporting arm round Chekov's shoulder. "Come on. Let's get that ankle seen to."

Spock came up to the Captain. "It would seem you were successful in apprehending the saboteur, Captain. However, we do need those crystals."

"Of course, Spock." Kirk held out the container that Sue-Ann had surrendered without protest, and the Vulcan took it carefully. "How are the repairs?"

"They are near completion, Captain."

"Good. As soon as they're done, let's get out of here. We still have the anti-toxin to deliver."

Satisfied that the ship was out of danger and in the capable hands of his first officer, Kirk led the silent, unresisting navigator down to sickbay. McCoy was already working on Irina as Kirk eased the Russian onto a diagnostic couch. Dr. M'Benga came across and ran a scanner over Chekov's leg.

"How's McCoy doing?" Kirk asked.

"Well, it's touch and go," M'Benga said, switching off the scanner. "Frankly, I don't think she's going to make it."

"No!" Chekov hissed savagely. "She can't die!"

M'Benga looked at the young navigator, startled, and realised he had said the wrong thing. "If anyone can save her, McCoy can," he said reassuringly. "Now let's see what we can do for you." He reached for a hypo spray. "I'm going to give you something to ease the pain and to make you sleep." He adjusted the setting on the hypo and shot the contents into the Ensign's arm. "Now don't go away. I'll be back in a moment."

Kirk glanced to where McCoy was still working, then back to the Russian. Chekov lay with his eyes closed, his fists clenched tightly at his sides. Sensing Kirk's gaze on him he looked up. "Captain, she can't die. Not now." His voice sounded drowsy, and his eyelids drooped slightly.

"I know, Ensign, I know." Kirk squeezed his shoulder sympathetically. "We'll just have to wait and see."

"We were going to be married, after all this time. She was so happy and alive." His voice faded and Kirk looked down to see that his eyes were closed again, and his breathing was deep and even.

"Rest easy, Chekov," he said softly as M'Benga returned.

"Good, he's asleep," said the negro doctor.

"How is he?"

"Well, his ankle is badly bruised and twisted, but it should be okay." He

paused. "I'm afraid I upset him when I spoke about the girl."

"They were to be married." Kirk spoke softly, looking down at the sleeping Ensign.

"I'm sorry. I didn't know."

"No, of course not. Call me when McCoy's finished, will you? I'll be in Cabin 461."

"Yes, Captain, I will."

Leaving M'Benga expertly dealing with Chekov's ankle, Kirk went to Irina's quarters. A security guard standing before the door moved aside to allow him to enter. At the sound of the door swishing open, Sue-Ann, who had been sitting quietly on her bed, jumped to her feet and backed against the wall.

"Sit down, Miss Jordan," Kirk invited, standing just inside the door.

She moved back to the bed and sat down stiffly. He came over to sit opposite her. "I suppose," he said, "that the best question to ask would be, 'Why?'"

Sue-Ann snatched nervously at the bedspread in front of her. "I really don't think you would understand, Captain."

"Try me," he prompted.

"I was an only child, Captain. My parents gave me everything and in return I loved them more than you could ever know. We moved to Danus II when I was eighteen. That's when I met my husband. He was so different from anybody else I had ever known... We were married four years later." She closed her eyes and tears trickled down her cheeks at the painful reminder.

"Go on," Kirk coaxed gently.

"About three years ago I left to continue my engineer's training at a nearby Starbase. While I was away, Klingons attacked the colony and the people were all killed. The Starship that was supposed to be protecting the area was off chasing phantom enemies."

"The ship picked up an emergency distress signal. Unfortunately, it was later found to be false," Kirk said quietly. "At the time, the Commanding Officer acted as he should, as he had been trained to. If he'd ignored it and it had been genuine hundreds of lives could have been lost."

Sue-Ann flushed angrily. "Hundreds of lives were lost! But I should have known you would condone his actions," she cried. "You Starship Captains are all alike!"

Kirk stood. "No, Miss Jordan, we're not all alike," he said curtly. "But we do have our duties to perform, and mine is to turn you over to the proper authorities as soon as our mission is completed. You have waged a personal vendetta against the Federation, endangering the lives of - and injuring - innocent people, and you will be dealt with accordingly."

He turned and made to walk out, but was brought up short by her voice. "Captain, what about Irina? Will she be all right?"

Kirk rounded on her, disbelief in his face. "You should have thought about that before. What does it matter to you?" he exploded. "You can't stand anything to do with the Federation, and Irina's a Federation officer!"

She went across to him, hands clasped in front of her chin. "Please. I must know."

"She's in a critical condition. Doesn't it bother you that you have probably denied those young people the happiness you yourself once had?" Without waiting for a reply he walked out, leaving her staring stupidly at the closed doors.

Out in the corridor, Kirk paused for a moment pondering over the circumstances that could drive a woman to such actions.

"Bridge to Captain Kirk." Spock's voice filtered through the intercom just down the corridor, shaking him out of his reverie. He hurried to it.

"Kirk here. What is it, Spock?"

"Captain, the repairs are now completed and the navigational computers are fully operational."

"Good, take us out of orbit, Mr. Spock. Set course for Rexus, ahead warp factor 4."

"Acknowledged. Spock out."

Before returning to the bridge Kirk decided to call in on sickbay to find out how things were going. On his way down he had a few moments to go over the situation calmly and logically, but he still couldn't come up with a reasonable answer. He could only guess that Sue-Ann was not quite sane.

McCoy was seated at his desk in the outer office when Kirk arrived. He had a clipboard in front of him which he studied carefully; then he momentarily rested his head on his hands.

"Bones," Kirk said softly.

The doctor started, and turned a weary face towards the Captain. "I've done all I can, Jim," he said, anticipating the question.

"What about Chekov?" Kirk asked, walking across to the glass partition and looking in. On the couch just in front of him the Ensign lay, seemingly asleep but showing signs of waking. Opposite him the still form of Irina was watched over by Christine Chapel. Even Kirk could see how dangerously low her vital signs were on the panel above her head. "Does he know how bad she is?"

McCoy came and stood by his shoulder. "No. He's been asleep all the time. It's tragic, don't you think, after all they've been through, apart for so long, that this should happen now?" He looked at Kirk. "She's dying, Jim, and there's nothing I can do about it."

"I should be the one to tell him," Kirk stated quietly. He closed his eyes briefly, wondering how to put the heart-breaking news.

"He's almost awake, Jim. Perhaps now would be the best time."

Squaring his shoulders resolutely, hating to be the one to shatter a dream, Kirk moved in to stand by Chekov's restless form. Muttering something in Russian, the Ensign stirred in waking, causing a light-weight sheet which had been placed over him to slip to the floor. Bending, Kirk retrieved it and, on straightening, saw Chekov's eyes flicker open and focus on him.

"Captain Kirk?" queried a drowsy voice.

"Yes, Chekov." He sat on the next bed and waited for the Ensign to become fully aware of his surroundings.

"Where is Irina?" He tried to sit up but quickly lay down again as a wave of nausea passed over him. A frown creased his forehead as he remembered the rock-slide.

"She's here." Kirk wondered just how to tell the young navigator that she was dying. Words seemed so inadequate to express feelings at a time like this.

"Can I see her, please?" He struggled up again, making it this time with Kirk's help. He was about to swing his legs off the bed when the Captain laid a restraining hand on his arm.

"Ensign, she has been hurt very badly. McCoy has done all he can."

Chekov stared at him, his eyes wide with disbelief and horror. His knuckles grew white as he gripped the edge of the bed tightly, afraid to let go. "...at d...do you mean?" he stammered hoarsely.

Kirk averted his gaze, unable to meet the terrible look in those dark,

expressive eyes. He looked across at the unconscious figure of Irina and felt a twinge of regret. Two young lives cruelly disrupted, destroyed by the selfish hand of another. It was such a tragic waste.

"M'Benga was right, Chekov. She's dying." His voice was toneless as he said it, the words leaving a bitter taste in his mouth.

"No," Chekov whispered. "You must be wrong." His heart cried out a harsh denial of the inevitable fact, but he saw the look on Kirk's face and knew it was true.

"I'm sorry. I wish with all my heart that I was wrong."

"How long?"

"McCoy doesn't know. It could be hours, it could be minutes."

"I want to stay with her until..." Chekov's voice choked off, unable to finish the sentence. Something caught in his throat, threatening to overwhelm him if he said any more.

"Of course."

Leaning heavily on Kirk, Chekov hobbled across the room and seated himself in the chair tactfully vacated by the sombre Christine Chapel, who by now knew the whole story. Giving the young ensign's shoulder a compassionate squeeze, Kirk quietly followed her out.

Chekov moved forward and brushed a stray lock of dark damp hair from Irina's forehead, ignoring the tears that fell unashamed onto the bed.

"I'm sorry, my Irina," he murmured, holding her hand tightly. "I should have stopped you." He closed his eyes, recalling all the good things that had happened to them, and the things they had planned for the future. The girl moved slightly and moaned, and Chekov started guiltily, unaware that almost twenty minutes had passed. Pain-filled violet eyes focused with some difficulty on the face hovering scant inches from her.

"Pavel." It was barely audible, but her lips formed the one word he would know anywhere.

"I am here, my Irina."

She sighed softly, and reached up to touch her fingers to his lips. "I am glad you are safe, Pavel. It will make death easier."

Chekov stared at her, shocked.

"Don't try to deny it, Pavel Andreivitch," she said quietly. "I still know when you are lying to me. Oh!" She gave a small cry of pain as a sudden bout of coughing wracked her slender body. "Please hold me," she whispered as the spasm subsided. He gathered the girl in his arms, afraid to speak, afraid that he would break down.

"I love you, Pavel." She bit her lip as another wave of agony swept through her.

"I love you too, my beautiful Irina."

"Don't leave me, Pavel. I don't want to die alone."

"You shan't," he promised, and kissed her gently, sadly. The dark girl smiled softly at him, then closed her eyes slowly. She slipped into a deep coma and died in his arms shortly after.

Kirk re-entered sickbay, having visited the bridge and turned command over to Scotty, having made certain that Spock was resting in his quarters. He stared at the little scene through the glass partition.

"Bones?"

The doctor shook his head, never taking his eyes off Irina's vital signs. Even as he made to speak all the readings dropped to zero.

"Damn," McCoy swore softly as he watched the Ensign studying the indicator board in stunned disbelief. Kirk followed the doctor as he went across to Chekov, who didn't look at them, didn't seem to realise they were there.

"Ensign," the Captain said softly. Chekov raised his head, shock mirrored in his eyes, his features pale and tense.

"She's dead, Captain. Why?" There was anguish in his voice.

Kirk shook his head slowly. "I don't know. I'm sorry."

"Come on," McCoy said gently, leading the Russian away. Kirk laid the light sheet over Irina and followed as McCoy eased Chekov onto a couch. He still seemed too shocked to realise fully what had happened, and Kirk couldn't help but feel for him. They left him lying quietly, staring at the ceiling.

McCoy sat wearily at his desk and thumbed through some papers. "She has no next of kin," he said, almost to himself. "Chekov's going to be the only one to grieve for her."

Kirk perched on the edge of the desk. "I wouldn't be too sure of that. The other members of Bob Dehner's crew liked her; she'll be missed."

"I suppose you're right. But I can't help wondering - would we have lost a navigator, or gained a communications officer?"

Kirk rose and shrugged. "We'll never know, Bones. We'll never know."

As he turned to leave, McCoy's question stopped him. "Why did she do it, Jim? What was the reason?"

"Revenge, Bones. Revenge for something she blames the Federation for - the death of her husband and her parents."

"She must have incredible strength to hit Peters the way she did. I wouldn't have thought it possible."

"One thing I learned young, Bones - never underestimate a woman. They can be as cunning as animals." He glanced quickly once more through the glass. "In the meantime, I'd better go and take over from Scotty before he thinks we've all deserted him. And Bones, would you check on Spock's shoulder - if it's not too bad I'd rather have him on the bridge." The work of a Starship Captain was never done, and right now he had supplies to deliver to a colony that was relying on him. The time for grieving and retribution would come later, but right now his responsibility was to the people on Rexus IV.

Three days later the Enterprise was on her way to Starbase 12. The anti-toxin had been delivered and the Sirellian Fever was now under control. Kirk glanced around the bridge. Spock was at his console, still not quite fit but stubbornly refusing to remain in his cabin. The bridge doors swished open. Ensign Chekov stood nervously at the handrail.

"Captain, I'm reporting for duty."

Kirk stared at him hard. He had changed in the last few days, this young navigator. He seemed older and more mature somehow. "Very well, Ensign," he said, trying not to show how pleased he was. "If you feel up to it."

"Yes, Captain, I do. I would rather be at my post than left alone to remember." He moved to his seat, just vacated by Ensign Yeates. Kirk stared at the stiff back, knowing that despite his words, painful memories must still be running through his mind. But he was glad that Chekov was showing his inner strength in a tragic situation that would have broken many young men.

"Lt. Uhura," Kirk said at length, "notify Starfleet that we will be making an unscheduled stop at Starbase 12 to drop off five people."

"Aye, sir."

Kirk eased back in his chair and felt his muscles protest. It had been a rough mission, in more ways than one, and he was glad to be finished with it. He could look forward to at least one week's R & R, and he began to plan just how he would spend it...

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KIRK'S MEDITATION by Jean Wallsgrove

Captain James T. Kirk stood with a rapt look on his face, a mixture of pleasure awe and pride, gazing as one in love might do. But the object of his attention was not a woman (except in the way that all ships, since the days of sail, had been regarded - in the female sense).

He was gazing at a sleek, white and beautiful Starship, the U.S.S. Enterprise, huge, magnificent - and his. Suddenly he felt overwhelmed, as a great wave of emotion overcame him. A mist of tears blurred his vision, but he fought them back.

Captain Kirk was one of the finest officers in Starfleet, and to him had been given this, his first and greatest of all commands. A five-year voyage of discovery into the unknown, the vast void of space - where up until now no man had ever ventured.

The mission he and his crew were embarking upon was to seek out new planets and civilisations, facing dangers that at that time were beyond the comprehension or knowledge of mankind.

His blood raced with the white-hot excitement of such a journey, a trek, a star trek of unbelievable magnitude, and he was the chosen one who would lead the greatest exploration since Columbus sailed to find the new world...

His crew! As he turned away with great difficulty from the awesome sight of the Enterprise, his thoughts turned to his crew - what of them?

His main worry, if that was the right word, was his executive and science officer, Mr. Spock.

Spock was a Vulcan - or at least part Vulcan, for his mother was a Earthwoman, a fact that brought Spock no comfort. His Human half was a part of himself for which he felt only shame and abhorrence, an inner conflict between his Human emotions and the complete lack of all feeling which was the Vulcan way of life. Total and complete surrender to logic as the only way of existence, a conflicting mixture indeed for one man.

Spock was a fine officer and Kirk was pleased to accept him as such, and leave the rest for time to reveal. How, he wondered, would his Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Leonard McCoy, respond to this man of logic?

Dr. McCoy, 'Bones' as Kirk called him, was a dedicated medical man and skilled surgeon, a man of feeling and compassion, so different in every way. Kirk smiled, amused by his thoughts of how these two might respond to each other's beliefs.

There was however one man that could be predictable in most circumstances, a very important man as far as the ship was concerned, for he was in control of those mighty and intricate engines, the very heart and life of the Enterprise. Chief Engineer Montgomery Scott, a solid, dependable man and like many a Scot before him, a fine engineer. He knew every inch of the often temperamental engines, like the back of his hand.

These and many others, who for five years would depend on him, James Kirk, to be their leader, friend and adviser and even their judge. To be both understanding and ruthless, whatever the occasion or their behaviour demanded of him. On his shoulders alone depended the success of their mission, and no one was more aware of it than he.

Now all was in readiness; back at Starfleet Command everyone was holding their breath. The great moment had finally arrived. What would the next five years bring, how many fine young men and women would never again return to the glorious welcome home so far in the future - only time and fate would disclose.

But there was one thing Kirk knew and believed with all his heart, that whatever dangers lay ahead, he would not change places with any other - for filled with the confidence of his age, training and ability, his only wish was that the departure time would come swiftly.

He gazed above, once again he smiled. Soon - very soon - he would be up there, in the inky blackness of space, leaving Earth far behind, on his way to the stars - and beyond.

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AND WHO IS THE MORE EXPENDABLE
BETWEEN US?

by Jayne Turner.

And yet again
You lie within.
Protected - Cocooned
Within this web of Human kindness and concern.
As with great skill he strives to mend again
Your broken body.
Where flashing lights detail with no reprieve
Your every rasping breath...

And I
And I again stride forth
With calm facade in place
While deep within...
Just barely leashed and tamed,
Hot anger burns.

Again and yet again
Your life is threatened.
You did not see, how could you see?
A sharp-honed knife
With winging swiftness
Thrown towards you.

I saw - I saw you fall.
As in so many countless
Dark and broken dreams
Of mine, so many times.
And have again stood powerless - stood helpless
Before you.

As then and yet again.
I've thought with all my soul and mind
This time - No more!
Such well worn phrases I have said
Of who is the more expendable between us...
But here again you lie,
Torn between the fragile line of life and death.

And here stand I
With barely concealed weariness
Beside you...

This time - No more!

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SCOTTY: Doctor, my hand won't stop shaking.

MCCOY: Do you drink a lot?

SCOTTY: No, I spill most of it.

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RETURN by Meg Wright

An Alternate Universe story

"You did what?" Uhura gazed unbelievably at her second-in-command.

"I gave them a shuttle." T'Pring would not meet her eyes. "I saw...Spock... again this morning. They really were not our partners, as they claimed. I was too hasty in my judgement in that first meld. I saw only the feeling for command. I am sorry."

Uhura regarded her sternly. "Rather a lame story, don't you think, Commander? Let's have the truth this time. Are you in the plot with them?"

"There was no plot. The other shuttle - our own - should be coming through the vortex any minute now. I can show you on the sensors." She went to the library console. "You see, here." She pointed. "There, it is about to happen now, and if our partners have made the same deductions in the universe they went to, then the occupants of the emerging shuttle will be our partners, wearing their own uniforms."

Uhura blinked in surprise as the shuttle on the screen winked out and into existence again. "Then there really is a way through to another universe there?"

"At the present moment, yes. It may not last. Theoretically, the probability has been known for years, but this is the first time an interdimensional cross-over has been experienced in our world. The mathematics of it will be fascinating. I will set Spock to working it out when he returns, though doubtless he will have had to do some work on it already in order for them to be here at all."

Uhura flicked open a communications circuit. "Enterprise to shuttle."

"Uhura? Nice to hear your voice again," Kirk answered teasingly. "I've missed you!"

"Don't play the fool," she said dangerously. "You and Spock are both confined to quarters when you get back aboard. I'll see you later." She thumbed the intercom. "Maxwell, escort the two gentlemen in the shuttle, whoever they claim to be, to their quarters and set a guard on them." She swung round to face T'Pring again. "You seem to have been convinced of their innocence very quickly."

This time, T'Pring did meet her eyes. "In a longer meld I had to be, Captain. The Spock that was here this morning had no wife."

"No wife?" Uhura was shocked to her soul. "But no Vulcan may leave his planet if he is unbonded, once he has reached maturity."

"Not in their universe." She gave a little shudder. "No, I do not like to think of all that power unchecked, either, Captain. That Spock would have been a very dangerous man to have on board, and I believe that James Kirk would have been almost as unsafe."

Uhura gave an unladylike snort of disbelief. "Human males are gentle," she said icily.

"Conditioning has made them so," T'Pring reminded her. "It was not the case a hundred years ago when our races first made contact. Remember your Earth history, Captain."

Uhura gave a little grimace of distaste. "That is long over. We have learned a lot from you Vulcans."

"Yes. But not in their universe. I will be open with you, Captain. When I saw Spock this morning he...dominated my mind, so easily, too. If he had wanted to stay, I could not have prevented it."

Uhura gave her a horrified stare. "In that case, I can only hope that the reversal has been successful. Let's go and see."

Maxwell was waiting outside her door. "Captain, they are back in their own uniforms again." She gave a derisive laugh. "Don't seem to have the courage of their convictions, do they?"

Uhura gave her an icy glare. "It is just possible, Maxwell, that Commander T'Pring was mistaken earlier. Those two really may have been from another universe as they claimed. Bring Spock here, we will see them together."

"T'Pring mistaken?" Maxwell said unbelievably. "That would be the first time, Captain. You're not going to fall for that, are you?"

"Maxwell, I gave you an order. Fetch Spock!" When the ramrod back had retreated along the corridor she turned a commandatorial glare on T'Pring. "If you are right this time," she said pointedly, "then I want a fuller account of your 'mistake'." She swept into her quarters.

Kirk rose to his feet, smiling cheerfully. When he saw the expression on her face, the smile faded.

"It really is me this time," he said softly. "I thought from what they said about him there that you would see at once he wasn't me!"

"I was busy," Uhura said curtly. "I hardly saw him."

The door slid open and Maxwell gestured to Spock to precede her. He went to stand beside Kirk and together they faced their Captain.

"Well?" Her tone was challenging.

"You did not realise what happened?" Kirk asked her. His glance shifted to T'Pring. "You must have known that the other Spock was not your husband, Commander. One meld would have shown you that. Their Spock has no wife."

"I was hasty in my original judgement," she said coolly. "I saw a feeling for command in his mind. I thought there had been some plot made between the pair of you, and I subdued him swiftly with the kroyshuka."

Spock winced, looking down at his boots. "Explain to them, Spock," T'Pring ordered.

"It is a technique to block a mind," he said reluctantly. "It will have left him...mindless...for up to a month or more."

"That you didn't," Maxwell said indignantly. "He was certainly in full possession of his senses when I saw him this morning."

"Because he was not our Spock," T'Pring told them. "I can control this one." She glanced disdainfully at the Security Chief. "Do you really think we ought to have kept a male Vulcan on board this ship that I could not control? When I found, this morning, that the kroyshuka had been unsuccessful, I knew he was not my husband, and I sent him and his friend, the Captain of their Enterprise, back to their own world, and now we have our own partners back."

"His mind was not affected?" Spock said unbelievably.

"Only temporarily," she answered curtly, unwilling to tell him more.

He assimilated the full implications of this, but kept silent. He knew his partner well enough to guess she was holding plenty back.

"You have the full scientific data?" Uhura asked T'Pring. "Starfleet will be interested to hear of this phenomenon."

"Yes." She looked at her husband. "I can provide the mathematics for this universe - can you remember your procedures, Spock? Or did they do the work for you?"

"I worked on it," he answered placidly, "with the full co-operation of their Chief Engineer, Mr. Scott."

"Are all their section heads male?" Uhura asked, scandalised.

"No." Kirk grinned at her. "Their Uhura was Chief Communications Officer."

"Captain," Maxwell interrupted her, "are you really going to believe this story?"

"The data is all there for you to see," T'Pring told her icily, "if you can understand it."

"I'm no scientist..." Maxwell began.

"Then I suggest you leave the decisions to those of us that do understand," Uhura said coldly. "Spock, I shall want a full report from you. Please let me have it as soon as possible. Dismissed."

As the door closed, she turned to her partner, a speculative gleam in her eye. "And their Uhura?" she asked.

Kirk's hazel eyes glinted at her. "Quite a lady," he said teasingly, "same as mine is." He moved forward and took her in his arms. "I missed you," he said softly.

"You had her to console you," She twisted free.

He shook his head. "She was not the Captain's partner." His eyes twinkled. "In fact, she was a little nervous of me when she found out about your position in my life. But she was clearly the same capable person that you are - she took command when she had to, and gave me orders, too, although she admitted it felt strange."

"You did not want to stay - to be the Captain of the Enterprise?"

He took a long look at her. "That's the trouble with denying people something, isn't it?" he said quietly. "You never can really believe whether they want it or not if they say they don't."

"That's not an answer."

"It's the only one you'll get," he replied curtly. He took her shoulders, swinging her to face him. "Uhura, if my loyalty over the last three years has been questionable, you can end our contract - find another partner."

She choked down rising anger. "I have trusted you."

"Then continue to do so." He turned away from her. "If we men wanted to take over, make no mistake, we would do so. We are physically stronger, after all, and you don't have us under quite such perfect control as the Vulcans do their partners. However, equality is slowly coming; I have no wish to hurry the process."

She nodded. "You have yourself well under control," she conceded.

"Then be content with that. I've never tried to hide what I am from you. I am as capable of command as you are, but I serve you willingly - because you are worthy of respect. In their world, they treat the sexes equally, so it can be done. You are well aware that it is only since we encountered the Vulcans that Human women have taken over authority. What has been reversed once could be again, and I do not want that to happen. I see no reason why women and men cannot work as equals."

"But Vulcan males are not safe..."

"Their Spock is unpartnered. None of their women seemed to go in dread of being raped. If it comes to that, have you ever seen our Spock any other than gentle?"

"He is half-Human after all." She gave a shrug. "His mother was the principal influence in his childhood."

"Yes, and she is Human." She looked at him blankly. "Don't you understand? Neither Spock nor his father has been subjected to Vulcan mind control for many years. I've often thought it was unnecessarily cruel to bond Spock to a Vulcan woman. She treats him with quite unwarranted harshness, you know. She not only told him she had used this...kroyshuka on a man she believed to be him, but she made him explain it to us. A deliberate attempt to humiliate him in front of us."

She looked at him oddly. "You think a great deal of Spock, don't you?"

"I don't like the way he is treated," he replied curtly. "He has one of the best scientific brains I know, he is gentle and compassionate, and T'Pring treats him like an idiot child. Did you realise that more than half the work which she takes full credit for is actually done by him?"

"T'Pring wouldn't be that dishonest." She was shocked.

"No?" His tone was hard. "Do you know how often a Vulcan male undergoes this 'pon farr'?"

"It is not a matter they discuss..."

"Once every seven years."

"Seven...years?" He nodded. "But...Spock is shut away every few months..." Her voice trailed away. "You mean he is doing the work T'Pring claims to have done then?"

"You catch on quickly," he said approvingly. "Yes, that's exactly what I do mean."

"But...how do you know?"

"I asked him."

"But they don't talk about this."

He smiled at her grimly. "I'm a very determined person when I want something, Uhura. Remember?"

Her eyes softened. "Yes, I do remember. I'm still not sure I should have forgiven you for sweeping me off my feet the way you did!"

He took her back in his arms. "I've never regretted it for an instant," he said arrogantly, bending his head to hers.

Spock followed T'Pring back to their quarters and stood by the closing door, eyeing her steadily. She looked back at him, her face unreadable.

"Well?" She controlled her impatience.

"T'Pring, the kroyshuka is not a technique to employ except as a last resort," he said firmly. "What you did was unforgiveable."

She shrugged. "It did not affect him for long."

"Why did you do it?" As she made no reply, he stepped forward and took her shoulders. "T'Pring, you must have known instantly it was not me. Why did you do it?"

"I do not have to explain my reasons to you," she said coldly.

He regarded her sadly. "You saw a swift route to the Captaincy, did you not?"

She drew in a sharp, angry breath and opened her mouth to reply. He laid his fingers across her lips. "Don't lie, T'Pring. The next time you meld with me, I shall see the truth in your mind."

"But I shall block your mouth from speaking it," she answered triumphantly.

He shook his head. "The truth will still be in my head. You cannot make me forget it. Do you wish to diminish my respect for you still further?"

Her eyes snapped with anger. "Do I need your respect, half-breed?" she snapped.

"You dislike my Human half because it resists your control," he said tiredly, "not for any other reason. You blocked it off during the pon farr, you would not permit it to temper my Vulcan nature to make the time easier for us both. You were determined to despise me."

She dropped her eyes before his. "There is work to be done," she said shortly. "The Captain requires a report on this incident. Please get on with it at once."

His shoulders drooped wearily. "I have it straight in my mind. I have but to set it out."

"Then get on with that, and leave me alone."

The door clicked shut sharply. Spock gave a rueful smile, wondering how it was that T'Pring seemed to manage to affect the mechanical closing of the door to resemble a slam, then he shrugged mentally, realising it was his own subjective impression that made it seem that way, rather than any actual physical difference in the sound. Not logical. He set to work. After only a moment or two the door buzzer sounded. Spock was momentarily surprised. It was unusual for anyone to come to their quarters, T'Pring had made it clear to everyone that visitors were unwelcome. However, a second's thought told him who it must be. There was only one person on board who attempted contact of any sort with him since his marriage.

"Come."

Kirk grinned at him from the doorway. "I saw her leave and knew you were alone," he said reassuringly. "Busy?"

"I have a report to make for the Captain," he replied. "It should be done tonight."

"How long will it take you?"

"About another twenty minutes."

"Good. How about a game of chess later? T'Pring is on duty tonight, isn't she?" Spock nodded, ashamed that this too-perceptive Human should openly admit his understanding of his humiliating dependence on his wife's good temper.

"Then you'll play?"

"If you wish it."

Kirk came right into the room, allowing the door to close. "Spock, if I'm ever intruding you'll say so, won't you?"

Spock smiled shyly. "You do not intrude, Jim."

"She doesn't make life too easy for you though, does she?"

Spock looked down at his desk surface, biting his lip. Kirk came closer and laid a fleeting hand on his shoulder. "If you ever want to talk about it, I'll be around," he said gently.

Spock could not trust himself to look up. His emotional control was ragged at the best of times, and this caring Human saw too deeply for his inner comfort. Wretchedly he drew his shields up tightly and raised his head.

"There is nothing to talk about," he said harshly, the Vulcan mask well in place.

"No?" Kirk gave the tiniest of headshakes. "You don't fool me, Mister," he said softly. "I'll see you in the rec room in half an hour."

Surely that click of the door was softer? Spock applied himself firmly to his work.

Kirk moved his bishop and gave Spock a sly grin as he did so. "Mate in three moves," he challenged.

Spock raised a questioning eyebrow, studying the pieces. "Only if you have overlooked this pawn," he said eventually, moving it.

Kirk laughed ruefully. "I had, of course, but one of these days I'm going to beat you!"

"Your game has improved," Spock said. "It is no longer so easy to win as it was. If you continue to improve at the same rate, you will achieve your first victory within the next month."

"As soon as that?" Kirk tried to keep a straight face. "Care to give me any odds?" he added airily. "I'd like to back myself. Sulu's running a book on it."

Spock looked disapproving. "Gambling is hardly a sensible way to employ one's money," he commented.

"It all depends on the odds," Kirk assured him. "What do you rate mine at?"

Spock gave the matter a moment's thought. "Approximately 9 to 2 on," he said at last.

"What do you base that on?" Uhura's voice interrupted them. "Mind if I watch the game while I drink my coffee?"

Kirk pulled a chair forward, studying her face. "It's been a hectic day for you, hasn't it?" he sympathised. "I suppose our counterparts were too busy working out how to get back to be of any help. At least their Spock will have been. If their Kirk's maths are as lousy as mine he'd have been better off at the labouring work I've been doing!"

"They were in the brig," Uhura said shortly. She caught Kirk's startled look and added apologetically, "T'Pring said it was you two originally. She let them go this morning once she'd realised it wasn't you after all."

"Didn't they have access to the computers?" Kirk asked in astonishment. "Uhura, they must have done. They came through at exactly the right moment or we'd none of us got back. No-one could work out maths like that in their heads, could they, Spock?"

"Given sufficient time it would be possible."

"You mean you could do it?" Uhura asked incredulously.

"It would take many hours," he replied diffidently, "but I believe I could do it. I enjoy working out such things mentally, but they are very time-consuming, and computers are a far more practical method."

She eyed him with a new respect. "I'll bear that in mind, it might be a useful asset some time. Why have you never told us what you can do?"

"The situation has never arisen, Captain," he said uncomfortably. To draw attention from himself he moved his queen abruptly, too late seeing that he had made an error of such gross ineptitude that he cringed inwardly at his own stupidity.

Kirk saw his chance immediately, but paused, keeping his hands carefully round his coffee cup. If he took it and won the game here and now, he would expose Spock to the ribbing that would certainly be given him by any of the few interested spectators gathered round them. He came to a decision. With adroit clumsiness he missed the edge of the table with his coffee cup, and jumping up to avoid the stream of hot coffee, knocked the table sharply, scattering the chess pieces from the upper levels into the spreading pool on the table's surface.

"Clumsy ass," he said tolerantly. "Sorry, Spock but it must have been your game. I couldn't see any way out of the corner you were backing me into."

Spock opened his mouth to explain the foolishness of his last move, but Kirk anticipated his honesty and kicked him so sharply on the shin he was momentarily distracted and the opportunity passed. Later, as they walked companionably back to their quarters, he broached the subject.

"You should have won that game, Jim."

"I know." Kirk grinned at him. "Look here, Spock, you've got to stop selling yourself short. Just because one person doesn't think too much of you, doesn't mean that the rest of us can't see what you really are. You made a stupid move because you were distracted by Uhura realising that you're not an idiot make-weight,

he re on sufferance. You had a good career here in Starfleet before it became necessary for you to marry." He stopped outside his own cabin, studying Spock's face intently, then he smiled broadly. "I know you too well to believe that you spend half the time too churned-up over your matrimonial affairs to concentrate on ship's business. You know I made it my business to find out exactly how often you're affected, and now I've told Uhura."

"You should not have done so," Spock said through stiff lips.

"Listen a bit more," Kirk told him. "Uhura tells me that T'Pring let those two go because that Spock dominated her mind. She's not as strong as she's made you believe. Fight for yourself a little, my Vulcan friend." He patted his shoulder. "I'm on your side, never forget that!"

Spock looked at the closing door with startled eyes, moving on to his own door along the corridor when he realised he had been standing like a statue an unconscionable length of time, and would be drawing attention to himself in precisely the way he tried to avoid. He walked with his customary economical stride, outwardly calm as ever, inwardly encountering an emotional turmoil of an intensity that staggered him.

Relieved to find the cabin empty, he switched off the lighting and went to the firepot glowing steadily on its shelf. He settled himself before it and retreated deeply into meditation, searching his mind in a way he had been unable to since his marriage two years ago. The process calmed and steadied him, and he realised with a sudden shock that the inhibition he had previously felt against such a penetrating self-examination was not of his own making, but had been planted in his mind by T'Pring during those early, shattering days of the marriage he had desperately hoped to avoid by his Human blood, but that his basically Vulcan physical inheritance had driven him to against his will. He studied that time remorselessly, recalling each event with appalling clarity; T'Pring's barely concealed contempt of him, her ruthless and uncompromising rejection of the affection his Humanity had tentatively offered, her clinical detachment from the fires that burned in him. She had given him nothing but the use of herself, no pretence at answering passion, no tenderness; no tempering of his physical strength by her calming mind-touch. She had allowed him to use her, to hurt her unnecessarily, and had later gloried in his shame over her bruises. It had been ugly and brutal, and he had never until now been able to see that it had not been his fault that it was so. With understanding, compassion, it could have been the time of mutual rapture it should be. He thought back to his own childhood, to the times when Sarek's temper had shortened and he had been sent away for several days. The home had always been so full of peace and gentleness on his return that he had never minded going. His mother had never developed any telepathic ability, so it was not the lack of the mind-touch supposed to control the male that had caused his own savagery. It had been T'Pring herself who had caused his tenuous control to snap completely. Now he recognised the cold fact it would not occur again. With a deep sense of shame he saw that for two long years he had played her game, her way. He would do so no longer.

He rose to his feet, stretching cramped muscles. Before the day was over, he would have the truth from T'Pring if he had to drag it from her mind as ruthlessly as a pre-Reform Vulcan would have done. Kaiidth! He was a half-breed, and his mother had taught him to be proud of his Humanity. He would use it to the full. He went to the bathroom, showered, drew on a Vulcan robe and went back to the outer cabin to await his wife.

T'Pring completed her final duties and went off watch, feeling strangely reluctant to face her husband. She was aware that she had frequently displeased him in the past, but he had never before openly showed his displeasure as he had earlier today. She gave herself an inward admonitory shake as she walked through the emptying night-time corridors. Spock would be asleep, or feigning it, as he usually was. By tomorrow the tiny frisson of fear that remained from her experience with the unbonded Spock of the other world would have faded. Besides, her own Spock was under her control. There was nothing to be afraid of.

Their quarters were in darkness save for the glowing firepot, and she put out a hand to activate the lights, then gave an involuntary gasp of fright as her wrist was firmly held.

"Spock? Is that you?"

"Of course it is I."

"Then release me." The fingers tightened. "Release me!" she ordered sharply.

"I don't believe I wish to," he replied lazily.

"I shall enforce it." She raised her free hand to initiate the meld, but he moved even more swiftly and caught that wrist also. "Spock, how dare you? Let me go!"

He swept her hands down and behind her back, clipping her close to him. She struggled ineffectually against his strength for a moment, and then abandoned herself to the logic of the situation and stood still.

"You have dominated me too long," Spock said softly. "Your control is supposed to be exercised during the pon farr, T'Pring, and not abused by using it to degrade me at other times." She gave a tiny laugh of contempt. "I am serious," he said even more quietly. "I will not endure such domination at any other time, and even then, you will be gentle."

Her eyes searched the dim light ineffectually. "Have you gone mad?" She drew her breath in. "It isn't...the vortex has not affected...?"

"No. But I have meditated deeply tonight, T'Pring, and learned a lot about myself, and about you. You could have had my trust, T'Pring, even that emotion Humans call love and Vulcans pretend not to understand. You chose instead to try and make me into your puppet, but you forgot that I was not trained in childhood to accept this."

"T'Pau was right," T'Pring suddenly whispered fiercely. "She warned me..." She broke off.

"Yes." Comprehension flooded him. "You saw me as an easy route to command, did you not? You thought you could build on my early years in Starfleet, before I reached sexual maturity. Nothing is ever that easy, T'Pring, as T'Pau knew very well. She also knew that my Human heritage would present problems."

"You have given me no problems," she said coldly. "From the beginning you have been ridiculously easy to control."

"For one reason only!" He said it quietly still, but there was a dangerous edge to his voice all the same. "I believed my Human half repulsed you so I kept it hidden out of respect for you. You have lost my respect, T'Pring, and now you will have to deal with the part of me you cannot subdue."

"This is madness." She struggled against his hands. "Our marriage will be ended by the Elders if I lose control...you know it. Where is your career in Starfleet then?"

"No." His tone was harsh. "You admitted openly before the Captain and her partner that you used the kroyshuka on someone you believed to be me. I do not believe you would care to have to admit it before the Vulcan Elders." He let her go abruptly, turning aside. With a swift, feline movement, she pounced, reaching for the meld.

He permitted it, raising his shields high, allowing her to enter only where he would have her, sending the tendrils of his mind deep into hers as he had never done before. She gave a wordless cry as she found herself defenceless. His mind sought and found her memories of the other Spock, seeing his power and realising it lay latent in his own mind. He ruthlessly studied the whole of that experience as it lay in her memory and then withdrew once more. Then he activated the lights and stood looking down at her. She hid her face in her hands, cowering away from him.

"So, you even lied to him? You felt no wish to learn more of what I had to offer you, you abandoned your plan simply because you were afraid of him and preferred to have me back to deal with." She shook her head mutely. "Don't compound the earlier lies with more," he said roughly. "I have seen the truth in your mind, and I've removed the blocks you set in mine. T'Pring, from now on you will have to be very careful what you do. Don't give me any cause to suspect you of further plots against Jim Kirk or the Captain."

"You are even more Human than I thought," she spat at him contemptuously.

"You chose me as your partner," he reminded her wearily. "Now you will have to take me as I am. I no longer yield to your control."

"I am still your superior officer," she retorted icily.

"I will continue to obey legitimate orders," he replied calmly. "I see no logic in altering the situation openly. I am sufficiently Vulcan to wish to keep our private differences private. But don't underestimate me any longer."

He went into the sleeping area, leaving her alone. He lay quietly, staring at the bulkhead, unsleeping, listening to her movements as she showered and prepared for bed. When at last she lay beside him, he put out a tentative hand to hers.

"T'Pring!" He whispered her name softly. "We have a lot to offer each other, you and I. Do you really despise this...Human feeling? It can be most rewarding."

"I am a full Vulcan, Spock," she reminded him.

He turned his head to smile at her wistfully. "So is my father, T'Pring, but he loves my mother. The Vulcans call it need, this yearning of one mind for another, and we can experience this need for each other if we search for it. Let us begin again, and make our marriage work."

"It seems I have no choice," she said reluctantly.

"I will not force you against your will," he said gently. "T'Pring, you have seen, surely you have seen, that does not lead to mutual respect?"

She met his eyes for a moment, and then lowered hers. "You make me feel ashamed, Spock."

"I do not wish you to feel shame," he whispered. "I wish us both to be content."

She could not look at him still, for the emotional experience of the long day had shaken her and she felt a need to control, to withdraw. She felt him shift on the bed and thought he was turning aside to sleep, but then a feather-light pressure of his mouth on hers brought her eyes swiftly open with shock. He released her at once, but did not move away.

Startled, she said, "This touching of mouths is not Vulcan, Spock."

His mouth curved in a smile. "No, it is not, but it is pleasant, I assure you."

"You have kissed others?"

"Yes. Before our marriage. Maybe I should have kissed you before." He kissed her again, holding her head so that she could not pull away. The experience was...not unpleasant, and she felt herself relaxing under his touch. At last he drew away again. "All things Human are not so bad, are they?" he enquired, teasingly.

She gathered her spinning senses. "No, they are not." She pulled his head down to hers.

In the morning they looked at each other with new eyes, each aware of newly-awakened sensitivity. Before they left their quarters, T'Pring held out her fingers in the Vulcan gesture of affection.

"There has opened yet another new world," she said softly. "I have learned much of new worlds recently."

He smiled at her. "I, too, have learned much. There and I together can be a formidable pairing, T'Pring."

With surprise she acknowledged it to be so, and her mind considered the possibilities with Spock working beside her, supporting her, instead of passively remaining in the background. He shook his head at her, warningly.

"T'Pring, such thoughts are unworthy."

"You were reading my thoughts?" she said indignantly.

"I did not need to touch your mind, your eyes told me what you were thinking. Even together, I doubt whether we are yet quite the force to be reckoned with that our Captain and her partner are. Do not underestimate either of them, T'Pring, and particularly not Jim Kirk!"

"He is a male." She dismissed him.

He laughed. "I am male, T'Pring. Would you dismiss me that lightly now? And I am only half Human. Jim is no half-breed, and Uhura is the youngest woman ever to be made Captain. It is a privilege to serve such a pair, and as Vulcans, we should give them our loyalty."

"Spock, I cannot abandon my ambitions so quickly," she protested. Seeing the withdrawal in his eyes she said swiftly, "I will make no plots, I give you my word."

"There is plenty of time," he reminded her. "They will grow old while we are still in our prime, remember. There is no hurry. Come, t'ky'ta, I am hungry, even if you are not."

He followed her from the room.

Later that morning while they were working together in the laboratory, the intercom bleeped.

"T'Pring, will you send your husband to the sickbay, please. I need to give both him and Mr. Kirk a check-up."

T'Pring controlled her exasperation. "Dr. Chapel, my husband is in perfect health."

"Unfortunately, Commander, your opinion of his condition will not satisfy Starfleet requirements. I need to examine him myself. Will you please send him along?"

"As soon as he is free, yes."

"T'Pring, I need to see him now." Chapel's voice was dripping ice. "McCoy is here as well, he'll be quite safe."

Spock's hand was laid swiftly on his wife's mouth. "I will be there in five minutes, Doctor," he said calmly, and broke the circuit.

"That woman!" There was little evidence of control in T'Pring's voice.

"She is only doing her job," Spock said soothingly.

"Taking an undue interest in you is not her job," she replied coldly. "Just because she was foolish enough to make McCoy her partner simply so that he could get away from Earth when her own promised partner disappeared, does not mean she can consider you her property."

"Dr. Chapel is never less than professional in her dealings with me," he said placidly.

"You know she thinks she's 'in love' with you," she accused him.

"I thought you didn't understand such emotions," he teased.

"If Chapel is to be believed, I'm seething with emotions I'm frightened to show," she said disdainfully.

He laughed. "You can show them to me." He touched her fingers lightly. "T'Pring, I must go."

"I suppose it is necessary," she conceded. As the door began to open she called him back. "Spock, I do trust you."

"Thank you," he said gravely.

McCoy gave him a smile and a wink as he entered sickbay. "Off the lead for five minutes?" he whispered conspiratorially.

Spock's answering smile was a little edgy. Why had he never noticed before how the Human friends he had made before his marriage seemed to sympathise with his present predicament? He must have been living in a daze the last two years, been given no time to think, notice or understand. He made no reply and submitted to the medical in silence.

"Well, you seem perfectly healthy," Chapel said grudgingly at last.

"You should be pleased, Doctor." He pulled his shirt back over his head. "Is Jim all right?"

"Yes." She began recalibrating the instruments, eyeing him speculatively. "Your counterparts were very like you," she commented. "Medically, I should think you are exactly alike."

"I wish I'd seen them," McCoy said regretfully. "I was all tied up with the colonists and didn't have a moment to spare. What was their world like, Spock?"

"Different," he said succinctly. "Very different."

"You must tell me about it some time!" He gave him another wink.

Chapel gave an exclamation of disgust. "If you two men wish to indulge in childish fantasies, kindly go and do it elsewhere, and not in my sickbay."

"Yes, ma'am," McCoy said smartly, and tucking his arm into Spock's, swept him out into the corridor. "Time for a coffee, Spock?"

"That would be pleasant, Doctor, yes." For a brief moment he felt the impulse to call T'Pring to join them, then realised in another flood of comprehension that this was exactly what he would have done before, and that the friendly cup of coffee would have become a stiffly formal encounter, giving no pleasure to anybody. T'Pring had certainly had him well-trained. He felt a sense of self-disgust flow and ebb again. The days of his subservience were over now, and he would not let them return.

They collected their coffee and, seeing Kirk sitting alone at a table, went to join him. He grinned at them both.

"Quite like old times to see you two together," he commented. "Nice to find you coming to join the Human race again, Spock."

Spock smiled. "Well, half of me is with you, anyway, Jim!"

McCoy groaned. "I'd forgotten the awful jokes you used to make, Spock. Still, I guess it's worth it now you seem to be noticing us again. Your trip through whatever-it-was into wherever you went seems to have done you a lot of good. Just what the doctor would have ordered if only the doctor had a twisted enough mind to think of it in the first place...I think!"

Spock winced. "Really, Doctor. The convolutions of that remark are quite unnecessarily sigmoidal, I suggest you ingeminate it more clearly."

McCoy stared at him. "Can I have that in plain, non-Vulcan English?"

Spock stared back, dead-pan. "I believe that is what I said, Doctor!"

Kirk gave an enormous crack of laughter that brought heads up all round the room. Still spluttering, he said, "The Enterprise has its cross-talk comedians again." He got up. "I've got work to do, even if you two haven't."

Spock rose also. "I believe we are on watch together, Jim."

"Yes." A warm smile crinkled the corners of the hazel eyes as they left the rec room together. "You know, McCoy's right. This has done you a lot of good, hasn't it?"

Spock waited until they had reached the privacy of the turbolift before he replied. "I have learned a great deal about myself in the last couple of days, Jim." He smiled shyly. "And about T'Pring also. I believe our relationship can be as rewarding as the one you share with the Captain."

Kirk grinned. "Going to be treading on our heels, are you?"

Spock shook his head somberly. "Not if I have anything to say in the matter."

Kirk looked at him in surprise and dawning respect. "I thought she was the one who kept you under control," he remarked.

"Her presence is necessary," Spock said evenly, "but I do have myself under better control than I thought." As the car slowed down, he added, "Thank you for not losing as much faith in me as I had in myself."

Kirk prevented the doors from opening. "You and T'Pring will make a great team, Spock. Your abilities are greatly appreciated by Uhura, I know."

"And by you?"

"She is the Captain, Spock," Kirk pointed out, amused.

"Yes," the Vulcan conceded, "but I, too, am not blind to the capabilities of my friend!"

Kirk gave him a tiny, knowing wink, and let the doors slide open.

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HALF-LIFE by Susan Week

Before you reached me
There was nothing
Only a kind of void;
A half-life.

Logic...alienates
And others did not come to show
The alien any other way.
It was always...enough.

Till you accepted without question
I never knew
Feeling. The willingness to share.
To love. To die for another.
The value of it. Or that I was only half alive before.

Let me always be with you
To learn, to grow
To help, and temper your feeling with reason.

And live while you live.
For without you, there is only a half-life;
No more.

+++++

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

+++++

TRIBBLE PLANET by Judy Miller

Cyrano Jones was not a happy man. He was known for his ebullient wheeling and dealing throughout the salubrious (and not so salubrious) trading posts of the galaxy, yet, at this precise moment, he was as far from that jolly image as it was possible to be. And as he brooded over his sad predicament, he bent down and picked up his thousandth tribble of that day, adding it to the growing mound in the middle of the bar.

With a sigh, Cyrano sat down on the nearest chair. There had to be an easier way than this! he thought. He couldn't go on like this, day after day, week after week, month after month, picking up tribbles, one by one, and even when he had them all together he would still be obliged to find them a home. Where? he might ask. Where?! What was more, it wasn't just a matter of months, was it? Spock had said it would take seventeen point nine years, and Vulcans weren't renowned for their sense of humour. Seventeen point nine years. Cyrano had only been at his unenviable task for three days and that was three days too long. He'd cleared the corridors outside (the tribbles had become a hazard to pedestrians) and now he was endeavouring to clear the bar where it had all begun. Mournfully, he picked up another tribble and tossed it, albeit gently, into the mound. Honestly, he did like the little...devils, but right now he was cursing the day he'd ever landed upon that far distant world and found them there, trilling and wriggling and looking to be the greatest export since Orion slave girls.

Kirk was a true sadist, to be sure, although Lurry was running a strong contender for Cyrano's 'least liked man of the year' award. As if setting him to this task wasn't sufficient punishment for his minor misdemeanours, Lurry had delivered another planet-shaker that very morning. Summoned to the Manager's office, Cyrano had foolishly believed that Lurry had seen the light and was about to free him from the fetters of space station K-7. Instead -

Lurry: Were you aware that your ship's 'vehicle trading tax' expired yesterday?

Cyrano: Of course! Never has it been my intention to evade the payment of Federation taxes!

Lurry: (Distressingly insincere, Cyrano thought) As if I'd think that, Jones! So you are quite prepared to renew the tax, in readiness for that wonderful day when this station is free of tribbles and you are a free man?

Cyrano: How can I renew it? I am but an impoverished trader, impoverished and without a credit to my name, mark you (repeated to strike a sympathetic chord in Lurry with no notable success) and how can I reverse my financial status when you are forcing me to clear up the tribbles, leaving me unable to earn a veritable crust?

Lurry: No way out then, is there? Your ship will remain our property until you've completed your job and can then earn enough to renew your tax.

Cyrano: How will I be able to earn anything when my stock has been confiscated?

Lurry: Returned to your suppliers whom you neglected to pay...

Cyrano: A mere oversight. But if I have no stock, how can I make a single credit?

Lurry: (With a smile like a starving predator) You've got seventeen point nine years to work it out!

No, Cyrano was not a happy man. It appeared that for him there was not a scrap of justice left in the entire universe.

There were not many things more frightening than a furious Klingon, at least, none that sprang immediately to Korax's mind; and perhaps 'furious' was not the correct word. 'Crazed' would be more apt.

"This is impossible!" raged Koloth. "How many of those disgusting fuzzy things do you say are in the engineroom?"

It wasn't a question as such, but Korax, fearful of agitating his commander more than was necessary, decided it might be wiser to answer. Clearing his throat, he replied, "We can only make an approximation, but we suspect it is in the region of..."

"No!" Koloth cut him off. "I don't want to know!" He advanced towards his executive aide and waved a finger in front of Korax's nose. "All I know is that there are tribbles in the engineroom which should not be there." His voice had diminished to a whisper, which Korax found more alarming than all his previous ranting, a fury that had not abated since they had discovered their engineroom was occupied by something other than regulation equipment. "I do not want them there, Korax, and if you wish to return home in the same intact condition in which you left, I would suggest you go and get rid of them. All of them. Each and every one."

Korax was not a nervous man, but he found the finger wagging before his nose very unsettling. He swallowed. "I will need help, Captain."

Koloth's face was livid with suffused rage. "Then get help!"

"It may be difficult."

"Difficult?" echoed Koloth lightly, softly, dangerously.

Korax shifted from one foot to the other and back again. "No-one wishes to enter the engineroom."

Koloth had taken as much as he could. Firstly, his mission had gone disastrously wrong and he knew there would be a far from pleasant reception awaiting him on his home base, and now there was a distinct possibility his ship would be over-run by an army of revolting little animals that made his flesh creep. No, Koloth was not a happy man.

"Korax, get rid of them. Use every bit of imagination you possess, use every shred of Klingon ingenuity and authority you have, employ every strategy you have ever learned...use the threat of public execution, but get those tribbles off my ship!!!"

With Koloth's temper bordering on cyclonic proportions, Korax beat a hasty but dignified retreat. Out in the corridor stood an assembly of officers and crew-members.

Korax was grave. "He wants them off the ship."

"We heard," said an officer sagely.

"And how do you propose to accomplish this feat?" sneered Kron, the head of engineering.

"We must place the tribbles on an anti-grav trolley; one of the large trolleys you use for moving heavy equipment, Kron," answered Korax. "Then they can be disposed of easily."

"You state the obvious," said Kale. He was a giant of a Klingon; broad-shouldered, replete with bulging muscles, a fearsome scowl permanently tacked onto his wide, squat features. He was still trying to live down the fact that having found himself wading in a sea of tribbles in the engineroom, it had been his scream of horror that had alerted the entire ship. "Toll me, who will do it?"

"I will find someone," said Korax confidently. Well, almost confidently.

"And then? What will you once you have those beasts together?" asked Kron.

"One thing at a time!" snapped Korax.

"But who will undertake this task?" Kale insisted. "None of the engineering technicians will go in there, and neither will anyone else, I'll wager!"

"We shall see," muttered Korax.

"And you, will you lead this mission?" Karn demanded, jabbing a finger into Korax's chest.

Korax pinned Karn with a withering stare. "I issue orders, I do not carry them out."

At the rear of the assembly, a crewman turned to another and whispered in Klingonese, the gist of which, when translated loosely into Terran, was, "I told you he was chicken, too."

"Excuse me, but are these tribbles with you or are they making their own way through life?"

Cyrano twisted in the direction of the voice, not unduly surprised to discover that there was yet one more person who seemed intent on quashing him. Lonely is the man who hasn't a friend, he thought; to help him clear away tribbles, or lend him a thousand credits.

The speaker was a tall angular Human, dressed in a dark, old-style flight-suit, an outfit Cyrano recognised as the trademark of the independent freighter lines. He ought to recognise it. It had been he who bought a job lot of the suits a few years ago when the exotic merchandise trade was going through a bad patch, and had subsequently sold them to just about every freighter owner operating in the known universe.

"I beg your pardon, sir?" asked Cyrano politely. Always be polite, courteous and understanding, his mother had told him whilst rocking the infant Cyrano on her knee. The older Cyrano had puzzled on how she had the nerve to tell him to be understanding when she had burdened him with a name like 'Cyrano'. She might have liked romantic French characters out of ancient lore, but had there really been any need to take the fancy quite so far?

"These tribbles," said the newcomer. "Are they yours?"

"I suppose they are," admitted Cyrano reluctantly.

"You bet they are!" yelled the bartender. "And they've all but ruined my business! People can hardly move in here for them; on the table, on the chairs, on the floor...! I want them out, Jones! O.U.T. Out! And before my clientele forgets what alcohol tastes like!"

Cyrano lifted his shoulders in a gesture of abject despair. "Dear friend, I would if I could, but I am only a humble trader against a multitude of tribbles. Couldn't you find some compassion in your soul...and help me?"

"And you do have one customer," reminded the newcomer.

The bartender grimaced. "With respect, sir, one customer isn't going to save me from bankruptcy."

"Well, you can bring this customer a drink, and also one for the humble trader here."

Cyrano's smile was a full moon rising. "You are a man after my own heart, friend, a charitable angel in my hour of need."

The newcomer brushed away a golden-haired tribble from the chair opposite Cyrano, nudging away more tribbles with the tips of his boots. The bartender brought their drinks, grudgingly gave Cyrano his, and stalked away, muttering dark imprecations to himself.

"Vern Elleck, Captain of the freighter Olan," came the introduction.

"Cyrano Jones," the trader replied and pumped the extended hand. He raised the glass to his lips and sensuously savoured the feel of the fiery liquid as it travelled the length of his throat. He sighed contentedly. "That was most welcome. You have my thanks, Captain."

"And you have me intrigued," said Elleck. "Correct me if I'm wrong, but are you supposed to be picking up all those tribbles?" He gave a low whistle as Cyrano sadly nodded. "And why are there so many? I know about tribbles and have heard they're prolific, but this...!"

"There was a slight misunderstanding, as can so easily happen. A few tribbles which were overfed by kindly but ignorant pet-lovers, and now you have a hundred, a thousand..." Cyrano gazed ruefully around, "...a million tribbles."

Elleck made a clicking noise with his tongue. "It's going to take years to get them all together."

"Seventeen point nine to be exact."

"That was a rapid computation," said Elleck admiringly.

Cyrano lifted an eyebrow in a somewhat familiar mannerism. "I have a friend who's a mathematician."

"Tell me, then, how did you come to land this job?" prompted Elleck, and Cyrano, who needed no prompting bar a couple of drinks - and Elleck was a generous host - poured out the whole unhappy tale, naturally omitting any detail that cast a shadow upon his character.

Elleck was a good listener, but he was also shrewd. He hadn't become one of the highest paid freighter captains for nothing. He was a pleasant companion and enjoyed the colourfully-sketched stories at which Cyrano excelled, but he was, first and foremost, a business man. He was not entirely swayed to stand in Cyrano's defence, but neither did he dismiss him altogether. In fact, for all his perceptiveness, Vern Elleck made one fatal blunder. He began to like Cyrano Jones.

"Maybe tribbles aren't as harmless as we would be led to believe," said Elleck as Cyrano wound up his story, finishing with the impounding of his vessel.

"Maybe," agreed Cyrano. "You've come across them before, you say?"

"Yes. A salesman had them in his stock on Elvinae 4. I came through there on my way back from the Alva system. I've been trying to drum up business there for months, but they just won't budge when it comes to selling me cargo."

Cyrano rubbed his chin thoughtfully. A cog spun into action in the devious depths of his brain, and following sudden insight came sudden inspiration. His expression was sympathetic. "I had the same trouble when I first dabbled in a little dealing there." He smiled. "The natives do come round in time, though."

The line was cast, the bait taken. "You've traded there?" asked Elleck.

Cyrano laughed heartily. "Tell me one place I haven't!" He leaned back in his chair and patted his paunch, the alcohol flowing warmly. "I'm very well known there." Well it wasn't a lie, Cyrano appeased his conscience.

"You have contacts?"

Cyrano winked conspiratorially. "Very good contacts!"

Elleck pondered briefly. There might be repercussions, but he'd be mad to let such an opportunity slip by. "No word of a lie, Jones?" he queried.

Cyrano looked hurt that he should be doubted. "No word of a lie, Captain Elleck. What I have told you is the truth."

The Captain looked around at the pulsating, trilling tribbles, stretching as far as the eye could see. He chewed on his bottom lip. "I have a six-man crew and the most sophisticated cargo-loading equipment available. I have also charted a number of uninhabited planets during my travels."

"Go on," encouraged Cyrano.

"If I gave you the help you need to gather up the tribbles, load them aboard my freighter and transport them to one of those worlds, would you in turn introduce me to your contacts? You'd get a share of any profits, of course,

which would enable you to get your ship back and also buy yourself some new stock." Elleck gave Cyrano a half smile. "What do you say?"

The answering grin very nearly split Cyrano's face in two. He stood up, straightened his tunic, polished his palm on his right trouser leg and offered the same hand to Elleck. "My dear sir, you have yourself a deal!"

Most civilisations, wherever they may be located, have their famous families; 'houses' whose members regularly appear in the annals of history. Their exploits are well recorded, and rightly so, for they have, in all probability, shaped the structure of modern life, their heroics being judged by the standards peculiar to their own worlds.

Klingon was no exception. Their standards were, of course, militaristic, and the acts which won their initiators places in the history texts were usually acts of war or aggression. To be remembered forever was a distinction every Klingon strove to attain and if that glory was consistent throughout the generation, the greater the achievement.

Kris was from such a family. His father, his father's father, and the paternal head of a dozen generations before that, had all been Klingon heroes. Kris, as the only male offspring of the present line, had the awesome burden of proving himself as good as, if not better than, his illustrious father. He was progressing nicely, in that he had risen to Lieutenant at a relatively tender age. What was really needed, though, was for Kris to accomplish a supposedly impossible task, to succeed where others had failed, and then he would draw alongside his father's reputation, soon to pull ahead. Kris could not refuse any mission, lest he ruin the chances of likely fame; he could not hesitate to follow any command, for fear others might think him pitiful and weak.

Knowing this, and knowing that Kris knew this, Korax sought out the young officer and took him to one side. "The job of removing the alien pestilence from our cruiser has fallen to you, Lieutenant. It is a singular honour and one you should accept with pride."

Kris stood straight, his chin (sporting its as yet wispy growth) jutting out. Not a doubt entered his eyes, yet he had to admit to a vague suspicion regarding this affair. He had heard the scream which had permeated the ship. He had heard the stories surrounding these furry mini-monstrosities. He had seen...fear (should he think it of a Klingon, even in his private thoughts?)...in the faces of officers who hadn't quailed beneath any previous terrors. What was it about the tribbles that engendered such horror? Were the stories true? Kris had never seen a tribble let alone been within arm's length of one, but the very mention of them made him oddly nauseous. But these were traitorous thoughts and must cease. He had been given a mission for which his Captain and the executive officer deemed him fit. Would he refuse it? Would he shirk his duty? No!

"Thank you, sir, I am greatly honoured. I vow to do my utmost to rid our ship of this infestation."

Korax smiled. "Well done, Lieutenant," he said. Stupid boy! he thought. "This way, Kris!"

Kris felt an uncomfortable tingle run down his spine and experienced the cramp of revulsion in his stomach. It took a mammoth effort to keep the expression of loathing from his face, but he had to maintain an impassive visage, for Korax and the rest of the officers were watching through the observation panel in the door of the engineroom. One man would work more effectively than two, Korax had said. No chance of getting in another's way, he explained. One man and one alone, and he had been chosen. An honour, truly an honour... Kris repeated it to himself again and again, hoping the litany would halt his shuddering. He'd been permitted to wear a suit, of the type used for ventures out into the void, and this, fortunately, negated much of the revulsion and the shrill cries of the

tribbles as he, a Klingon, walked among them. Several times he wanted to flee, but he couldn't - it would be cowardice. "Strength, warrior might, and courage," he told himself, reciting the family motto, and he did have the support of his fellow officers. They were with him, wholeheartedly, in spirit...

"I wager four thousand yabats he doesn't finish the job," said Kale.

"Four thousand, five hundred," said Korax. He might be in disgrace if Kris failed, but at least he'd be wealthy and in disgrace.

"Five thousand and half my share of the riches of the next world we plunder," said Kron.

"Six thousand yabats...that he succeeds," said Kreel, the navigation officer.

"Done!" said Kale, with a bellow of laughter. "Kreel, you are about to lose a fortune!"

Slowly but surely the brave Lt. Kris battled on. He swept the tribbles onto a trolley, using a long-handled metallic broom; to actually have to touch the beasts, even though gloved, was asking too much. It was a laborious job, but Kris stuck at it, mindful of the consequences if he did not. It was becoming increasingly difficult, though, for the revulsion was stronger now, curling his stomach into a tight ball. It wouldn't be long now, he told himself, and he toiled harder. Harder and faster...

Kreel grinned wickedly. Turning to Kale, he said smugly, "Shall I give you my account code now or later?"

Cyrano Jones rubbed his hands in glee. On the viewscreen, Deep Space Station K-7 rapidly receded until it became a mere pinprick amid a plethora of other pinpricks. He was free! He need only return to the space station to collect his ship and what a glorious day that would be! There were a few obstacles to overcome, but Cyrano Jones never worried unnecessarily over details. Oh, the joy he'd felt when he informed Lurry he would have no more trouble over tribbles. Lurry's initial reaction had been disbelief, then incredulity when he realised Jones spoke the truth. Seventeen point nine years' work condensed into one week! Unbelievable, but Jones had done it - aided and abetted, he'd learned, but there had been nothing to say Jones had to work alone. Lurry had simply believed no-one would come forward to help him. The manager had a nagging idea something was wrong, somewhere, but he couldn't prove anything, and anyway, he thought philosophically, as long as he was rid of Jones, what was there to be bothered about?

"It'll take a week to reach LM304," said Elleck, seated behind Cyrano. "It's a fertile world, there'll be plenty of vegetation there for them. To tell the truth, I can't understand why the Federation hasn't claimed and colonised it, the soil's perfect for farming. Still, they haven't, which makes it ideal for our purpose. The planet seemed to be the best of the batch for the little beggars. I wouldn't have wanted them to perish on an inhospitable world. Once we arrive, we'll beam them down and then make all speed for the Alva system." Elleck slapped Cyrano on the shoulder. "Jones, you can't imagine how pleased my boss will be when I take him all that lovely, valuable cargo!"

Cyrano joined in with the merry laughter and it needed a person with an ability to pick out certain inflections to detect the nervous edge his giggle carried.

On the bridge of the Klingon cruiser, Korax leaned across the science officer's station and traced a finger along the star map displayed on the viewer.

"The planet is code-named P677, Sir," said Klaran, the chief scientist.

"And you are quite sure it is uninhabited?"

Klaran nodded emphatically. "Yes, Sir. Despite its fertility and its equable climate, which should produce high-yield crops, it has not been colonised. It boasts no mineral deposits, certainly nothing of material value to Klingon. For that reason, it has not been explored further by our fleet."

Korax straightened. "Excellent," he murmured.

"Sir?" queried Klaran, but Korax was too engrossed in his own thoughts to concern himself with others' questions.

He stepped across to the navigation post where Kreeel was sitting, hard-pressed to hide a grin as he gave more consideration to how he would spend his newly-acquired riches than to his duties. At Korax's approach, however, Kreeel snapped to an attentive posture. His fortune would avail him little if Korax confined him to quarters for negligence.

"Plot a course for P677. Klaran will give you the co-ordinates."

"Immediately, sir."

Korax moved on to the Captain's chair where he settled himself, once again in temporary command. Koloth was still closeted in his cabin, attempting to explain to the Klingon High Council why Sherman's Planet would never be theirs. Unfortunately for Koloth, the High Council had not been content to wait until the cruiser docked; it had given him even less time to formulate his excuses and apologies, though he was undoubtedly passing as much blame as possible onto the even more unfortunate Darwin. Korax smiled. At least he would have one item with which to please his Captain. The tribbles, confined safely to the transporter pads in the equipment loading room, would shortly be gone, thanks to Lt. Kris. Korax had told the young man he would be suitably lauded for his deed once they arrived home, perhaps even a decoration. The cruiser's physician had said he was sure the news had done much to improve the Lieutenant's mental and physical condition; a week, five days maybe, and Kris might even be able to leave his bed.

Korax nipped smartly out of the chair as Koloth strode through the entryway onto the bridge, his face the colour of a Klingon sky on a bad, bad day. The Captain sat and cupped his chin in the palm of his right hand, his eyes fierce slits as he stared at the central viewscreen. "Report," he said succinctly.

Korax matched his commander's mood. Standing rigidly to attention, he replied, "The tribbles are in the Number Two transporter room."

Despite the thundrous cloud that hung slap-bang above his head, the Captain was sufficiently astonished to shoot Korax an amazed glance. "All of them?"

"Yes, Sir!"

Koloth shook his head wonderingly. "That, Korax, is the most welcome news I have heard since we began this accursed mission."

"I thought it would meet with your approval, Sir," said Korax.

Kreeel, still at his post, had to admire Korax's slyness. He hadn't won any yabats, but he could still worm his way onto the right side of Koloth. That was providing, of course, that Koloth was still on the right side...

"And now?" probed Koloth.

"I did not think it wise to destroy the tribbles, Sir." Korax paused until Koloth nodded in agreement. "We have deduced that the Enterprise put the tribbles here. No-one else would have committed such a foul act. It would not be unlike them to ask one day as to the fate of the tribbles and they would, of course, denounce the slaughter."

Koloth chuckled bitterly. "No doubt they could explain just why they beamed the tribbles aboard our ship in the first place!" One day, James Kirk, he thought, I shall be delighted to attend your hour of reckoning!... "Go on, Korax."

"There was also the problem of leaving the tribbles on a populated world where they would undoubtedly disturb the ecological balance and so cause another dispute between Klingon and the Federation..."

"Korax," said Koloth quietly, "I have been engaged in a long, long discussion with the High Council. I am not prepared to sit here and endure the same with you! Get on with it!"

"Yes, Sir! My apologies!" Korax turned and ordered Klaran to place on the main viewscreen the star map that had been displayed on the officer's own viewer a short while before. Klaran did so and Korax pointed a finger towards the left-hand quadrant of the map. "You will note the planet coded as P677. It is an uninhabited world, but it is fertile and abundant in natural vegetation. The tribbles may be left there without fear that they will die, but their presence will result in harm to no-one. I have taken the liberty of setting course for the planet, Sir. I trust this meets with your approval?"

Koloth's smile was grudging. "It does, Korax. You have done well." As his executive aide inwardly preened himself at this praise, Koloth leaned towards the helmsman. "Make it maximum speed, Kiron. I want those tribbles off this ship as soon as possible!"

The freighter Olan slid into a neat orbit around the planet LM304, an artificial satellite graceful for all her bulk. Elleck oversaw the manoeuvre, then rose from his seat, crooking a finger at Cyrano. "Come on, Jones, this is your moment!"

Elleck positively crackled with cheer, and small wonder. Before him lay the wealth of the Alva system, bountiful cargos and excessive profits. He was a most contented man, and so should Cyrano have been, with the knowledge he would soon be free of his encumbrance. But whilst his liberation was near, so too was an unpleasant task. Cyrano tagged along behind Elleck and if his step was a mite unenthusiastic, there was no-one behind him to notice.

Once in the transporter room, Elleck indicated that Cyrano should stand at the operating console. The first consignment of tribbles to be beamed down were on the platform, piled high, their squeaking and shrilling a threat to the eardrums. During the course of the trip, they had spent the time with their relations in the cargo hold; a furry, undulating mass. The crewmen who had minded them had been warned not to feed their charges. Elleck couldn't see the fun in having to transport down double the number of tribbles that he had started with. The Captain checked that everything was in order and then turned to Cyrano.

"Want to beam them down, Jones?" he asked.

Cyrano declined the offer with a shake of his head. "Sweaty palms," he explained. "Grease in the works."

Elleck shrugged. "It's your decision." He came to stand beside Cyrano and activated the controls. Cyrano Jones, quiet and pensive, watched the first thousand of the biggest yet most lovable nuisances ever sparkle, fade and vanish from his life.

The Klingon cruiser entered orbit around the planet P677, having been delayed for a time by a ship that their sensors revealed was in the vicinity. The ship had now left orbit and the cruiser hurried to take its place. Aboard the vessel, the pace became frenzied; everyone, from the Captain to the lowliest technician, wished to dump their unwanted load and be off.

Korax supervised the transportation of the tribbles while Koloth, edgy and ill-humoured, remained on the bridge. Finally the Captain stood and after a few minutes spent in restless pacing, he marched to the entryway, where he paused. "I shall be in the Number One transporter room, where I will speak to Korax. Klaran, you are in command until either one of us returns to the bridge."

"Yes, Sir," answered the Science Officer.

Koloth strode to his destination, acknowledging the salutes of his crew with curt nods and gruff mumblings. This last week had succeeded in keeping his temper at breaking point. All occurrences, all actions, be they correct or incorrect, had been irritants. The strain of his failed mission, his wrangles with the High Council, the nearness of the tribbles, the seeming slowness in getting here to this planet where they could be disposed of, had all taken their toll on Koloth.

He felt like a caged animal, and he was experiencing twinges of claustrophobia, which was so unusual for him it was disturbing. He knew what was required. How did the Humans phrase it? 'A breath of fresh air'? Yes, that was it. It appeared it had not proven beneficial to Kirk, but, who could tell, a Human custom might work wonders for a Klingon.

Koloth reached the Number One transporter room and summoned Korax to the intercom. His aide answered with a promptness that was always in evidence when even the Captain was on the line.

"Korax, I am beaming down to the planet. I intend to take a breath of fresh air." Koloth uttered the words with relish.

Korax's puzzlement was in every syllable. "A what, Sir?"

"Look up your basic Terran terminology, Korax; your education needs to improve. Are the tribbles gone?"

"Yes, Sir. I was about to return to the bridge."

"Very well. Give the technician here the co-ordinates to which you beamed the tribbles. I wish to be as far from them as possible. I shall not be long; prepare to leave orbit the moment I am back on board."

Korax's assent came and with it the co-ordinates. Koloth shuddered as he thought of the tribbles. Those horrid creatures! He had encountered many abominations during his career, but they, surely, were the worst!

"I have set the controls for a point well away from the co-ordinates supplied by First Officer Korax, Sir," said the technician. "Are you ready, Sir?"

"Yes," said Koloth, and then he was lost in the golden transporter beam.

The planet was indeed lush. It was not in a Klingon's nature to appreciate the aesthetic, but Koloth had to smile at the sight of such verdant loveliness. He walked a little way and breathed in the warm scented air. Yes, this strange Human custom was worth pursuing, he decided. Perhaps Kirk had been doing it all wrong...

Koloth halted at a glade and sat down on the grass, resting his back against the broad body of a tree. He closed his eyes and let his mind drift, recapturing memories of yesteryear, of Klingon, of past missions, more successful than his last. Pleasant thoughts, where those odious creatures could not intrude. If he chose, he could conjure up the very smell of them, the sound of their persistent, annoying trilling, the steady thrum of their movements as they wriggled towards their goal...

Koloth's eyes sprang open. He had a vivid imagination, he knew, but this was beyond the magic of the mind. Suddenly, an icy tremor ran through him. No, it could not be! He wanted to stand, to turn, to bear witness to what his senses told him, but what he could not bring himself to believe. He shut his eyes once more. It was a nightmare, that was it! This past week had been just too much for him to take. Too, too much... But Koloth had to open his eyes again, for this was no figment of his weary brain. He stood, he turned, and he saw, but he still could not quite accept it. There must have been a million tribbles before him, a short distance away but advancing with terrifying determination. There seemed to be far more than had been in their engine room; there were almost as many as had been on the space station. Had they increased their number already? Would there be twice as many by the time they reached him...? No, for he would not be here! He would be gone... With a trembling hand, Koloth grasped his communicating device, rooted to the spot through sheer terror.

"Beam me up!" he yelled. They were nearly upon him...!!

"Sir, is there an emergency...?"

"BEAM ME UP!!!"

Where one hysterical Klingon had stood a moment before, a hoard of hungry

tribbles, who had not been fed at all during their week on the freighter Olan, stormed by...

And that same Klingon jumped off the transporter platform and to the shocked surprise of the technicians rushed out into the corridor, screaming blood-lust for a certain individual named Korax...

LM304 (or P677, depending upon your ancestry) was a blue-green blot on the viewscreen, its landmasses and mountain ranges merging into a hazy sameness as distance separated it from the Clan. Elleck tapped Hollance, the helmsman, on the shoulder and as the crewman swung round, the captain cast a nod at the screen. "That planet has just heralded our entrance into the realm of the rich."

Hollance grinned. "Have you told Rondel yet?" he asked, referring to the owner of the Olan.

Elleck shook his head. "No." He chuckled. "I thought it'd be a nice surprise for him!"

Behind Elleck and to his right, Cyrano Jones nervously wrung his hands and his forehead wrinkled in acute anxiety. It couldn't be put off any longer! The time had arrived...and he faced it with dread. Perhaps Elleck would understand... Perhaps Cyrano could make him see that he had had no choice... Perhaps... Perhaps Vulcan would hold its first National Orgy. Somehow Cyrano didn't think Elleck would be sympathetic to his dilemma. Well, it was true he had contacts in the Alva system, and it was most certainly true that he was well known - too well known, in fact. Oh, it had all been so ridiculous really! Such a simple upset, blown up out of all proportion. That's why he had, quite understandably, forgotten to tell Elleck that whilst he had contacts, he couldn't actually get in touch with them, for the governing body of the Alva system had, five years ago, banned him - forbidden him ever to set foot on Alvanian soil again. He hadn't really been to blame! After all, how was he supposed to have known the Alvanians had an in-bred allergy to Antarean Fire-water? And as for the Fire-water getting into the domestic water supply on two of those planets, it had been such a foolish accident, and not his fault - not directly, anyway - but the government hadn't heeded his protests or his appeals to be allowed to stay. Cyrano still couldn't believe the rumpus they had caused. Luckily the Alva planets were not members of the Federation, and so the incident hadn't reached the ears of the official recorders, but that, alas, was of no use to him now. He just didn't know how to begin...

While Cyrano mulled over how he should begin his confession, deep in the bowels of the freighter, in the crewmen's quarters, a technician sat on his bunk and unwrapped a small package of food which he had procured from the processors. Laying the package on one knee, Sellan reached over and picked up a sable brown tribble from the coverlet.

"Poor little thing," he murmured. "Forgotten about, were you? Left on your own?"

Sellan had found the tribble an hour ago, trapped between the bulkhead and a piece of machinery in the cargo hold. Apparently it had strayed from the rest and got itself wedged where it couldn't be seen, not until Sellan had spied it, led to investigate by a low mournful whimpering. Sellan had slipped the tribble into his coverall's main pocket and brought it here to his cabin.

Sellan was something of a loner. He was good at his job and was not anti-social, but he didn't join in with the idle gossip and chatter that abounded in the lounge, and thus he knew next to nothing about tribbles. He couldn't understand all the fuss about them. He had only heard Elleck tell those crewmen who had minded the tribbles not to feed them, which seemed to Sellan to be exceedingly cruel.

He stroked the soft fur of his adopted pet and listened to its gentle purr.

Where was the harm in these creatures? And as for starving them...!

He held out a tasty tidbit and watched the tribble devour it. "There you are," he said. "Eat up; there's plenty more where that came from..."

CONQUERED by Susan Meek

I once set out to conquer you
To gain command, exert control.
Instead I found a partnership,
Two halves that came to make a whole.

I knew your strength exceeded mine,
But I had to be the one to lead.
In doing so, I found a trust,
That nothing else can supercede.

I sought to gain your loyalty,
Applied myself unto the task
But what was given back to me
Was more than I ever could have asked.

I tried to teach you Human ways
But found a lesson to be learned
That beauty in difference lies
And now the tables have been turned.

The one who once sought to possess
Is now himself in willing chains.
I lead, but because you allow.
No thought of submission now remains.

I conquered, but was conquered too.
The victory is quite complete.
Who could have known the joy that lay
In the special form of this defeat?
