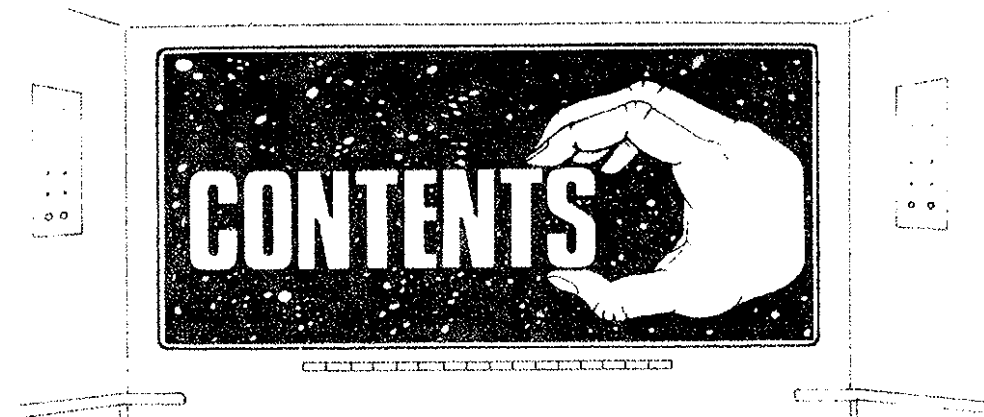




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42

a STAR TREK
fanzine



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Hello, and welcome to Log Entries 42.

One way to avoid post-con depression is to begin to type the stencils for the next issue of Log Entries. This time I was ably assisted by Shah, my Blue Persian cat, who has discovered that my desk makes the ideal sunbathing spot. Unfortunately, a cat's claws do nothing much for a stencil...

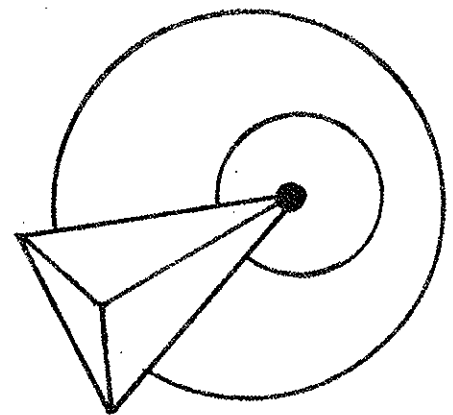
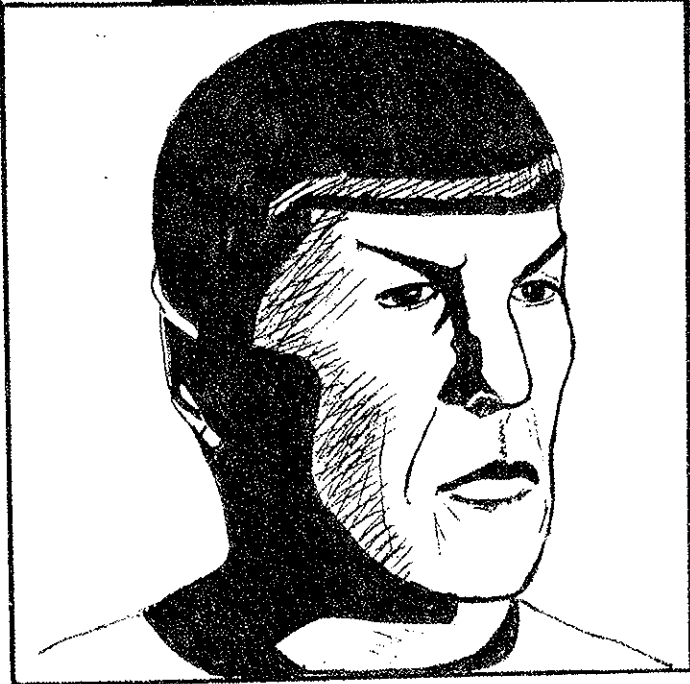
Continuing the animal theme, Shona enjoyed her first con, but was rather disappointed in the failure of her auction bid. Despite Janet's pleas that there's no room under her bed for any more pets, Shona was last heard muttering darkly, "There's always Aucon!"

Enjoy the zine,

Valerie



Ann 8/78



THE PAST LIES BEFORE USby Karen Kirkby and Patricia Keen

Captain's Log, Stardate 7910.14

In orbit around Starbase 18, where we are commencing shore leave for all crew on a ro a basis. Mr. Spock has beamed down with the first group, so despite the presence of Klingons I am not expecting any trouble.

Kirk sat back in his command chair and stretched. He was pleased that Spock had agreed to a period of shore leave; hopefully he would have as nice a time as a Vulcan can have at the convention he was attending. Kirk reflected that Spock had almost seemed enthusiastic about this convention held by the Vulcan scientist Dr. Seten. As the convention concerned new developments in computer science, enthusiasm might well have been expected. It was rumoured that these developments would outshine even the work done by Dr. Richard Daystrom.

Kirk pondered that it was unusual for Klingons to show such interest in the work of a Vulcan scientist. He was rather uneasy about their presence; but owing to the Organian Peace Treaty he had no authority to make them leave. Their mission to the Starbase was to send representatives to the convention, which was being held open for all races. It was almost a travelling circus with eminent scientists setting up lecture sessions in various areas throughout the galaxy.

Kirk distrusted the Klingons intensely, but with Spock actually going to the convention as an honoured guest there was little chance of anything untoward happening that he would not quickly find out about; should the situation be beyond Spock's control he could call for help easily enough. He was no fool, and unlike some of his crewmates he would not attempt anything heroic without first reporting to the ship. Besides, Kirk himself would be on leave in 47 hours' time. Ah yes, his own leave. Kirk looked forward to some rest and relaxation on the Starbase. The Starbase was newly opened, and the Enterprise was the first Federation Starship to enjoy shore leave there. It was reputed to have been designed with some of the best shore leave facilities of any deep space entertainment station.

Kirk had continued to dream for some time when his reverie was interrupted by one of the two Klingon battleclass cruisers quite unexpectedly breaking orbit, and going into warp drive seconds later. It left so rapidly that Kirk was left wondering at the reason for its sudden departure. Still, it evened up the odds in case of trouble. He supposed that the Klingon scientists who were attending the convention would leave on the remaining cruiser. In which case, why had there been two cruisers in the first place? Kirk decided to call up Spock.

When Spock materialised on the main transporter dais on the space station, the transporter chief informed him that Dr. Seten had left him a note. Spock unfolded the carefully sealed letter and glanced at the contents, typed in Vulcan. He noted absently that a type-written note was slightly unusual for his former tutor in computer science - however unusual or not, it would be pleasant to confer with Seten before the opening of the lecture. Turning, he addressed the man at the transporter console:

"Could you direct me to room H95?"

"Certainly, Commander." As the Vulcan left the Chief, Anderson mused that it was unusual to have to direct someone to that as yet incomplete area of the complex.

Spock made his way through the maze of deserted corridors, following the directions Anderson had given him. When he reached an unlit corridor with piles of builders' rubble blocking his path Spock stopped to reconsider the directions Anderson had given him. His computer-like mind rapidly retraced the route and compared it with the directions. Apparently room H95 was somewhere on the other

side of that rubble. Spock began carefully picking his way through the blockage; meditating on what could possibly account for Seten wishing to meet him in such a deserted place. He forced down a growing feeling of apprehension as illogical, and cautiously he cleared the last of the junk with a feline jump and turned the corner. He barely saw the waiting group of Klingons before a phaser beam knocked him senseless.

Kirk turned to Uhura at the communications console. "Contact Mr. Spock for me, please, Lieutenant."

The beautiful ebony lady turned to the console; her fingers worked furiously for a few moments. "Captain, there is no response, although the Transporter Chief informs me that Mr. Spock has not long left the transporter room."

"Try again, please, Lieutenant."

As consciousness slowly returned Spock became aware that there was the sound of engines; Starship engines strangely distorted into a pattern he remembered but did not immediately recognise. He also had the disconcerting impression that he was being watched. He was near to full consciousness when he recognised the sound and realised that he was not on board the Enterprise. That sound came from the engines of a Klingon Battle Cruiser, in which case those watching eyes were not those of Kirk and McCoy, as he had at first assumed. He opened his eyes and found himself looking into the gloating eyes of a Klingon.

"Welcome aboard, Commander Spock - so glad you could join us."

The original Klingon moved and Spock could see the face of the commander of the craft, Kataal. Spock tried to sit up and was not unduly surprised to find himself strapped to the bed - he assumed it was a bed. Further investigation revealed straps across his chest, wrists and ankles. Well, they were taking no chances! The Klingon took hold of Spock's face and turned it towards him.

"You are going to be very useful to the Empire, Vulcan."

Spock made careful use of his unfettered eyebrow. "Indeed. I assume you have grounds to support your statement?"

Kataal smiled, and Spock noted the similarity between the Klingon smile and the Human grimace. "Certainly. You will betray your Human friends simply by the very fact of who and what you are."

Spock decided to try for more information. "Are you averse to informing me of the way in which this supposed betrayal will take place?"

Kataal settled himself on the edge of Spock's bed. "It is our intention to abandon you on Earth."

The Klingon was sitting too close, and Spock found himself gaining fleeting impressions of what the Klingon was thinking - the strongest impression was of the infallibility of the plan. Spock could not see how leaving him on Earth could possibly aid the Klingon Empire. Well, there was no harm in asking. "To what will that avail you?"

"Surely, Mr. Spock, you must realise what the presence of an alien during its Twentieth Century - a particularly sensitive period - would do. It would prove severely disruptive, at the very least. Indeed, it would unmake Earth history as the Federation knows it."

"Why do you need me? A Klingon would be just as effective."

My dear Commander! A Vulcan is a more...shall we say, striking life form to send to the dear Humans. Anyway the presence of a Klingon would forewarn the Humans of a later meeting."

Spock considered the possibilities, and found himself suffering from some nasty precognitions about the possible results of such an act. But then Kataal

was still sitting very close. "What do I have to do during my 'visit'?"

Kataal's smile broadened; he seemed to be enjoying this. "All you have to do is be yourself. Your very presence, or even that of your corpse will cause quite enough of a stir for our purposes. However we intend to keep you alive - a live Vulcan will create a much more interesting display than the simple deposition of your corpse. I am looking forward to watching you trying to avoid attention. But don't worry whatever you manage will be to no avail at all. You will be exposed eventually, you may be sure of that."

Spock endeavoured to stretch. "What makes you so sure I will not commit suicide?"

"I trust you will not attempt anything so foolish; you will most certainly not get any chance on this ship..."

Spock eyed the row of guards watching him.

"... and once on Earth you will doubtless try to keep hidden until your precious Captain Kirk can find you, since the finding of your body - and we would make sure it was found - will be almost as useful for our purposes."

It was then that, whether with the aid of drugs or not he did not know, Spock found himself again slipping into unconsciousness.

As soon as Kirk stepped from the transporter dais onto the Space Station he began his interrogation of the Chief, Anderson. "You say Commander Spock left this station a few minutes before Lieutenant Uhura contacted you?"

"Yes sir," Anderson replied with a nod.

"Do you have any idea where he went?" Kirk continued as he paced towards the transporter console.

As Kirk rounded the edge of the console Anderson replied, "Yes sir. He asked directions to a room in the unfinished area of the station."

"In the unfinished area?" Kirk repeated. "Do you have any idea why he should wish to go to that part of the complex?"

Anderson thought for a moment. "Not directly sir; but it might have been in response to something in the letter from Dr. Seten."

"You say he had a letter...?"

"Yes sir. The letter was left with me by a messenger who requested that I give it to the Commander as soon as he arrived."

Kirk leaned across the console and pushed a button. "Lt. Uhura, will you contact Dr. Seten for me and let me know as soon as you find him. I'm going to make my way to the room Spock was heading for when last seen. Kirk out."

Releasing the button Kirk looked at the Transporter Chief, who gave him instructions on how to find H95.

Kirk left the transporter room at a brisk pace with the two Security guards he had brought with him from the Enterprise. A few moments later he approached the pile of rubble that had temporarily halted Spock. Well, H95 was over the other side of that rubble, so...

Kirk posted one Security guard by the rubble and he and the other guard picked their way carefully through the junk to the other side. Once there it was easy to find the room mentioned. The door swung open easily at Kirk's touch, the undisturbed dust bearing witness to the innocence of the room. Kirk glanced around and closed the door, a sinking feeling in his heart.

As he turned away from the door the Security guard, Sykes, drew his attention to a crumpled letter lying by the builders' rubble. He picked it up and glanced at it; it was typewritten and he could just make out enough characters to realise that the language was Vulcan.

Just then his communicator bleeped; he flicked it open. "Kirk here."

Uhura's voice informed him that she had located Dr. Seten. Kirk asked the young Lieutenant to have the Vulcan meet him in the transporter room, and quickly collecting the other Security guard he made his way there.

When he arrived the doctor was waiting for him. Seten was tall even for a Vulcan, and on the slender side; and for such an eminent scientist and a former tutor of Spock's, the man looked surprisingly young, not that much older than Spock himself. Kirk wondered if the closeness in age was a clue to his First Officer's interest in the man, almost a hint of some friendship between them.

"You wished to see me, Captain?" the Vulcan asked.

"Yes, Doctor. It seems that I am unable to find my First Officer, who was on his way to see you."

Kirk watched Seten, who raised a questioning eyebrow. "Unfortunately, Captain, I do not know his whereabouts. I did not send the letter which Mr.

Anderson informs me he gave to Commander Spock."

Kirk noted a look in his eyes which convinced him that the scientist did not know where Spock was. Was that a hint of concern? he wondered; it was only there for a second - you had to be darned quick with these Vulcans. Still, it fitted in with his theory of friendship. Somehow he trusted this man, Spock's friend.

"I wondered, Doctor, if you could translate this letter for me; it appears to be written in Vulcan."

Seten glanced through its brief contents, and quickly explained its meaning. "It is merely a request for Spock to meet me in H95, in this complex."

Kirk thought for a moment. "Wouldn't Spock consider this rather brief note unusual, Doctor?"

"No," said the Vulcan, "it is not unusual for me to send such brief notes. However, it is extremely rare for me not to write such notes by hand. I am interested, Captain, in the condition of the letter. It seems essentially undamaged. Was it left as evidence of his past presence in the area?"

Kirk shook his head. "No, it was found among some rubble, as if it had been dropped. Spock would not have left a message in such an unobtrusive place. If it had not been for my Security guard's good eyesight, I doubt that it would have been found."

"Nevertheless, I doubt that the Commander would have dropped the note intentionally, Captain; that would have been a most illogical thing to do." Seten handed the note back to Kirk. "I fear there is little more I can do to help, Captain."

"No," said Kirk, "but thank you for your help. You have been most useful."



"Useful, Captain?" Seten raised an inquiring eyebrow.

"Yes," sighed Kirk. "I can't read Vulcan, and I don't know anyone else who can."

The Vulcan bowed his head slightly and left. Kirk punched the communicator.

"Three to beam up, Lieutenant." He had a hunch, and he was going to play it.

Once back on board Kirk made his way to the Bridge. The action he was going to take would make him unpopular, but that sometimes was the lot of a Starship Captain.

When Kirk reached the Bridge he told the duty Communications Officer, Lt. Uhura, to contact all shore leave parties and have them return to the ship immediately "Because we are leaving orbit."

He sank down into his command chair. "Mr. Chekov, plot a course to follow that Klingon ship that broke orbit."

Chekov and Sulu exchanged glances. "Course laid in, Captain."

Uhura turned from her console. "Captain, transporter reports that all crew have returned to the ship except Mr. Spock."

"Thank you, Miss Uhura." Kirk turned at the sound of the turbo lift doors opening. "Mr. Sulu, follow that Klingon ship."

"Yes, Captain."

"Jim," Bones McCoy stepped onto the Bridge, "what the blazes are you playing at? I was just preparing to enjoy my leave with a nice young lady down at the base when I'm called back here on the double; no explanation, not so much as a by-your-leave. Having my atoms scrambled by that infernal machine, and here we are leaving orbit..."

"Bones," Kirk cut in, "we've got trouble."

Spock had a brief impression of being very cold, with a chill wind blowing around him, before there was a severe pain in his stomach and he collapsed. Just before consciousness left entirely he was vaguely aware of something cold and wet beneath him. Then darkness returned.

CHAPTER 2

"Do you realise that this is the third day this van has started?"

"Shut up, Beth - if Cyrano hears you he may start playing up again. Come on, Cyrano - this is one day you must not let us down."

Beth squirmed uncomfortably. "Honestly, Claire! Do you have to talk to all inanimate objects as if they were people? You're only projecting a character into the object - it doesn't have one of its own."

"Now there I disagree with you. Some things and animals definitely display what we might call Human characteristics; but if the truth were known we might be displaying some of their characteristics."

Beth decided to leave the subject well alone; it was best not to encourage Claire's idiosyncracies. "How much further have we got to go?"

There was a brief pause while Claire considered. "Only another two roundabouts, then into the car park behind the Leisure Centre."

Beth nodded. "I must say that I am glad the convention is being held at Slough again - it's so near that we don't have to lose any time travelling."

Claire heartily agreed. "It would have been impossible having to travel too far in this weather. With the slush left after the snow last weekend it's

dangerous enough as it is. Even though the roads have had grit put on them around here, I expect that the sheltered areas of the precinct in Slough will still have some snow left. I hope we don't literally 'slip' into the convention."

Beth winced. "Honestly, your jokes are getting worse. Still, it is unusual having a con at this time of year - but with the premiere of the latest Star Trek film, and Alexander Roy in Britain for the opening night, it was a great idea to have the con just before Christmas so that he could be the guest speaker."

Claire interrupted. "Is the Leisure Centre car park a pay-as-you-enter one or not? I just cannot remember."

Beth shook her head. "No, you just collect a ticket, don't you, and pay on the way out."

It was a few minutes later (after Claire had finally managed to coax a ticket from the machine guarding the entrance to the car park) that she announced, "Well, here we are, folks - which floor shall we park on? The first floor doesn't look full, but I'd rather be higher up."

"Well, this second floor is quite deserted except for the piles of unmelted snow, so this should do fine. Even you could park here without hitting anything."

This comment was followed by a strangled scream from Claire. "Blooming cheek! It was you who scraped that van, remember, in that tiny road in Shepherd's Bush."

Beth sighed. "All right, all right, so you haven't hit anything yet! It was meant to be a joke."

"And you complain about my jokes! Come on, let's collect our bits from the back of the van and then we can get into the Leisure Centre early, get warm, and find out what's going on."

As the two girls carefully collected together the items they needed from the back of the van they became aware of a humming sound coming from the end of the car park, by a particularly large pile of snow. As they watched from their hidden vantage point they could see four pillars of sparkling light which then solidified into men dressed in strange uniforms. The effect was not unlike that of the transporter used in the Star Trek series, and those men - three were dressed in very authentic Klingon costumes and make-up. Two of the 'Klingons' were supporting a man dressed in a blue Star Fleet uniform. The 'Klingon' not supporting the collapsed man gave the 'Star Fleet officer' a heavy blow to the stomach which sent him reeling to the floor. The three 'Klingons' then again dissolved into light particles and disappeared.

However, the man in the blue and black uniform was still there, evidence that what had happened was not a dream. He was lying crumpled at the bottom of the snow pile. The girls decided to investigate, and quietly getting out of the van they made their way to the recumbent figure.

There was no doubt that it looked like a Vulcan - but looks can be deceptive. Claire leaned down to wipe a trickle of green blood from his mouth with a tissue; he certainly felt very warm. She felt the tips of his ears, and yes, they were warm too. She could find no pulse, but there was a strong heartbeat in the upper right-hand quadrant of his abdomen.

Claire was convinced, and looked up at Beth. "Yes, he's real; he's a Vulcan."

Beth could not think of anything to say, so she suggested that they had better put him in the back of the van before anyone else saw him. She realised that anything that could knock out a Vulcan must be fairly severe, and that there was a risk of internal injury, but even so it was imperative that he should be hidden.

Carefully - and with some difficulty, for he was heavy - the girls managed to get him into the back of the van and cover him with an old car rug.

"Now what do we do?" asked Claire, not of anyone in particular, she just felt that the question was so important that it should be asked.

They looked at each other as both came to the same decision. The nearest, safest and warmest place for a real Vulcan would be among the fancy-dressed members who would be attending the convention. Still, there was little that could be done until the tall man came round. It would be quite impossible to move him without help, and that would mean informing other people of his identity. There was no way he could be carried without his helpers realising that he felt extraordinarily hot. They would want to get doctors, and the problem would escalate further. So they had to wait.

As if on cue the slumped figure moved tentatively, and the eyes opened. After a moment they seemed to focus and the man slowly sat up, clearly very dizzy. Then he disdainfully eyed the two old rugs and turned enquiring eyes on the two Earthwomen.

Claire recovered first. "How do you feel?"

Spock turned his gaze to the female who had spoken. "I believe I am essentially undamaged."

Beth and Claire exchanged knowing glances. "Well, there's no doubt about who he is!" remarked Beth.

The result of that comment was a greatly elevated eyebrow and a polite question. "Exactly who do you think I am?"

It was Beth who answered. "Why Commander Spock, can't you remember?"

Spock lay back against the side of the van and tried to consider the logic of the situation. Had the Klingons got it wrong? he wondered. However, the period clothes, the old-fashioned English accents, the strange automobile which he had the vaguest notion was called a van... they all added up to Twentieth Century Earth. If this was a fraud to trick him he greatly doubted that the young women would have let on that they knew of him, for he did not remember ever having seen them before. Spock decided that he needed more information before proceeding further; that data had to come from the women, so...

Beth was the first to give details of herself. "I am 24 years old, and a vegetarian. I am a writer of fictional stories, and I was born in South Wales. I now live in a house in the country with Claire. Before that I studied Metaphysical Philosophy at Cardiff University."

Then it was Claire's turn. "I was born in 1963 in London, and I studied various handicrafts before I went to join Beth as half of a writing team. We now live together outside Slough, with two cats and two dogs."

Beth took over. "Just how much do you know about Twentieth Century England, Mr. Spock?"

Spock considered the facts he had been given and said, "I believed myself to have amassed a certain amount of knowledge about life on 20th Century Earth; however, I did not realise that my father's race had already gained such acceptance."

Claire looked up at him. "Then you have never heard of 'Star Trek'?"

"No," he said, "I have never heard of it."

"Oh, well, it used to be a television programme, but it was stopped in 1968; and now, years after it was supposedly finished, owing to the support of its many fans a second new film has been made. The fans hold conventions, and that is why we have come to Slough so early this morning; a special convention has been arranged to celebrate the opening of the new film, and the fact

that one of the actors is in Britain at the moment to publicise it. The television shows dealt with the adventures of a Starship, the Enterprise, and her crew, including Captain Kirk, Mr. Spock, Dr. McCoy, and several other regular characters. Of course, we never dreamed we would actually meet one of the characters in real life!" Beth finished her summary and watched the Vulcan to see what result her monologue had had.

Spock was quiet for a moment, and then he asked, "What happens at these conventions?"

"Well, there are dealers' rooms, where Star Trek paraphernalia is sold - books, photographs, and various other things. Sometimes there is an auction and a fancy-dress competition. There are also guest speakers - the one today is Alexander Roy, who played the part of Dr. Seten in the latest Star Trek film. Also, some of the television episodes are shown again."

Beth relaxed, and Spock again considered the new data. He also began almost to relax as he realised that disaster might be averted after all. The Klingons couldn't have done their homework properly if they had had access to the period.

He wondered why, if there had been so many fans, all the records of such a successful television series had been lost in his own time. For now, he decided, he would have to rely on the women; the first problem was finding somewhere warm, for he felt desperately cold.

Claire too was beginning to feel cold. "Mr. Spock, it occurred to us that the best thing would be to move you into the convention. I know the Leisure Centre, and there are plenty of rooms there, one of which will have been set aside for anyone feeling unwell. So if we move in there it will be warmer than this van, and with the fancy-dress competition there will almost certainly be little notice taken of you - except perhaps admiration for your 'make-up'."

"An excellent idea, Claire," Spock replied. "I feel well enough to move now, but the cold is becoming quite unbearable."

The three moved away from the van and down into the shopping mall on their way to the Leisure Centre. There were already a number of Star Trek fans around, some in fancy-dress, so that Spock was not particularly conspicuous. Even so, thought Beth, it was strange how at ease she and Claire were with this man they knew to be from another world and another time.

They entered the Centre and moved up the escalator to the pay desk where Claire registered the three of them; then they moved into the mass of fans. It was Claire who saw the sign directing people to the sick room, so she and Beth steered Spock there. Beth went in first, and reported that it was empty; while Spock could be seen it would not be wise to let anyone take his temperature or otherwise examine him lest they become suspicious. The three of them moved thankfully inside and Spock sat down a little wearily, as he realised that he still felt rather weak.

The new Mr. Peter Denning sat down on a chair just inside the door. He had had to register under an assumed name - it would have caused both a stir and disbelief had he used his real one. While Spock rested Beth kept an eye on the door to make sure no-one was coming, and Claire looked through the programme she had acquired. A loudspeaker asked everyone to go to the main hall for the opening ceremony; soon all was quiet as the convention goers ascended into the cavernous hall. Claire's programme mentioned that after the main opening ceremony there would be a showing of 'Journey to Babel'.

"Mr. Spock, there is to be a showing of one of the television Star Trek episodes in the main hall at 11.00a.m. There is going to be a break after the official opening so we can find seats without disturbing too many people. It will give you a chance to find out exactly what the series is about. Also, as it will be dark in there you will be able to relax where you will cause relatively little sensation."

Spock agreed, so when the majority of people left the hall for the short break the three made their way to the back of the auditorium and found themselves an unobtrusive vantage point to one side of the rear raised platform. The Vulcan watched with curiosity as various people returned to their seats, wearing an assortment of Starfleet uniforms, a surfeit of which were apparently Vulcanoid in deference to Alexander Roy.

There were also assorted aliens, and Beth explained that the people with the rather over-long scarves, were fans of Dr. Who - another television show; and those with long boots and rather strange layered clothes were fans of Blake's Seven - 'Sevensers'. Those dressed either in black with masks or in white with elongated light bulbs were fans of a cinematic series 'Star Wars', of which yet another film was being premiered soon after the Star Trek film.

A further loudspeaker announcement and the lights dimmed. As soon as one or two more people rapidly returned to their seats the film began.

Fifty minutes later the lights came on again and it was the lunch break. The trio adjourned to a quiet corner of the coffee bar where they munched bread rolls, cheese salad, ice-cream and hot coffee. Much refreshed they settled down to talk properly for the first time.

"What did you think of 'Journey to Babel', Peter?" Beth asked.

Spock raised an eyebrow, realising that the question had been directed at him, although it was the first time he had been called by his new name.

"I found it most interesting and informative," he commented. "The actress portraying my mother, Amanda, did not quite have my mother's vitality, but the actor portraying my father, Sarek, was quite true to life. I see that your fictional Dr. McCoy has not lost any of his vitriolic sense of humour."

"And what of the Captain?" Beth ventured tentatively.

For the barest fraction of a second it seemed as if Spock was reluctant to reply; then, "In many ways quite lifelike... yes, in many ways; but perhaps lacking some of the natural charisma of the real Kirk. Indeed, this is proving a most interesting experience."

"Do you have any idea how this paralleling of fact and fiction might have occurred, Peter?" asked Claire.

The reply this time was definitely reluctant, an admission, almost. "No, the odds against this happening tend to infinity. It is difficult to believe, but since I am here I must believe it. I have as yet no working theory which could account for such a remarkable phenomenon. Whereas logic suggests that the possibility of such a parallel is almost an impossibility, logic also concurs that the parallel exists - it is an interesting paradox."

Claire and Beth exchanged glances, then Claire looked at the programme for the afternoon. "It says here that at 2.30 p.m. Alexander Roy will be the guest speaker."

Spock raised an eyebrow. "This Alexander Roy..." he hesitated. "He played the part of... Dr. Seten?"

"Yes," Beth agreed. "We were wondering if there was some way to get him to meet you. Claire and I would definitely appreciate the help of a 20th Century man, and as you are both of about the same build, Mr. Roy could be of great help to us."

Spock looked slightly alarmed. "I would prefer as few people as possible to know of my presence. Is this help so necessary for you? Is it not possible that I could fulfill whatever you could expect of me?"

Claire smiled as she replied, "I'm quite certain that you could cope more than adequately; however, if you are to remain here for any length of time you will need more clothes, and warm clothes at that. Neither Beth nor I could help you in that respect, and neither of us are practiced at buying clothes for men anyway. For instance, are you an average size? You are

rather tall for an Earthman, and on the thin side for the 20th century."

Spock had to concede the point if he was to remain on Earth for the time it would take him to build a communicator (if that was possible without attracting the attention of earth's transmitting and receiving network). He was definitely going to need warmer clothes, and at the very least a change of outfit. His Vulcan code of hygiene made the thought of how long he might otherwise have to remain in the same garments uncomfortable at least.

Spock decided he was pleasantly surprised at the logical thought and foresight two such young women were displaying. Having agreed that Alexander Roy could be very useful there was the problem of getting in touch with him in the first place. It was decided that Beth should take a letter to the actor before he was due on stage for the interview.

Alexander Roy fingered the note he had been given and considered whether he should see the young lady or not. Deciding that he had a few moments to spare before he was needed on stage, and that waiting with nothing to do was quite likely to increase his mounting nerves, Alex asked for the young woman who had sent the strange note to be shown into the backstage room where he was waiting.

Beth arrived flushed at seeing her idol and nervous lest he should not believe her strange story, most of which was set out in the letter he had been handed. Ten minutes later she left, having agreed that Alex would join her and her friends in the gallery above the main hall after the interview. There would be a brief time to talk before people again crowded into the hall for the fancy-dress parade. While the parade was in session Alex had to be guest judge, but after that he would beat a quick retreat and meet them on the ground floor by the escalators. Alex made his way to the main hall for his entrance, while Beth went to the gallery to join Claire and Spock.

Once in the gallery there was a brief moment as she tried to find the two of them, but Spock was too tall to hide convincingly in a crowd. She made her way to the front row at the side of the hall and sat down next to Claire.

"He's agreed to the meeting - he's coming up here after the talk.

Spock ignored the rest of the conversation as illogical - they seemed to be discussing what the actor was really like. Fortunately the discussion was very quiet, and his attention was soon centred on the stage where Alexander Roy was being introduced to rapturous applause, which was rapidly followed by the bright lights of photographic flash cubes lighting the tall slender figure on the stage. It was some moments before the noise and flashing lights came to an end and Spock was actually able to see the man's face. Spock realised for the first time the degree of similarity between Human and Vulcan facial features, an interesting quirk of the natural laws.

Beth and Claire were riveted to looking at the stage, Spock noticed; however, he did not notice Claire sneak a look at him to compare him to the man on the stage. The Vulcan gave the impression of being considerably taller, but she would not know if this was actually the case until she saw them together.

Much though Beth and Claire enjoyed listening to Alexander Roy's talk the prospect of meeting him, and of his and Spock's reaction to each other made the waiting almost unendurable.

It was well over an hour and a half later that Alexander Roy was finally able to make his way to the balcony. He had been caught for autographs at the end of his talk. Beth was watching for the actor, so that when he appeared at the top of the stairs she was able to lead him to Claire and Spock. Most of the other people had left the balcony to get drinks during the break.

Both Spock and Claire rose as Beth and Alex joined them. Claire shot Beth a knowing look, then turning to Alex she said, "Mr. Roy, I'm sure you

would like something to drink after your talk; would you like tea or coffee?"

"Coffee, please," the actor replied.

Claire turned to Spock, who bowed his head slightly, then she turned to Beth and glowered again. Beth looked puzzled, and left with Claire to get the drinks - and to find out why she was in such trouble.

"Why did you keep glowering at me like that?"

Claire grinned. "Well, I thought those two had best get acquainted on their own. We would only be an embarrassment to them both."

"I'm afraid I don't follow your logic," announced Beth.

Claire winced. "I just sensed that they needed to be alone."

"Oh," said Beth. "One of your intuitions again." And she sighed.

"And what's wrong with my intuition?" Claire complained. "It's proved very useful before now." Beth chose to ignore the comment and ordered the drinks.

A few moments later, armed with coffee and biscuits, the girls paused at the top of the stairs and looked at the two men already deep in conversation. Both had assumed similar attitudes in their seats, and the hands of whichever man was speaking worked hard to give animation to what he was saying.

Characteristically it was Spock who noticed the girls first. Both men rose to allow Beth and Claire to join them. Alex's delight in meeting a real Vulcan was obvious to them all. Together they sat down, drank their coffee, and decided what to do next. Alex agreed to meet them by the escalators when the majority of the fans had left. It was then that the actor asked the obvious question, which had escaped the attention of both girls.

"Tell me, Mr. Spock - just how did you come to be here?"

Spock looked thoughtful before he replied, "I am not entirely sure. However, I have collated sufficient data to form a reasonable hypothesis. The sequence of events appears to be that I was abducted from Space Station 18 by the Klingons, who held me as a drugged captive aboard their cruiser. I can remember coming to full consciousness aboard, and having the Commander tell me that I was to be left on Earth, where my appearance would cause extreme disturbance and fear in this critical period of Earth's history. Quite why the Klingons chose to place me in Britain is not clear. I also do not have the relevant data to include how these young ladies found me." His gaze turned to Beth and Claire.

"Well," said Beth, "we were in our van sorting out the things we needed to bring into the convention with us when we heard a sound remarkably like that used in The Show for the transporter effect. I don't think either of us believed what was happening." She looked at Claire, who shook her head. "So we kept ourselves hidden and watched."

Beth then related how they had seen the Klingons, and the fallen figure left behind, and had gone to investigate. Having decided that this being was definitely not Human, and was quite probably what he appeared to be, they had moved him into the back of the van until such time as he should come round.

From there Spock was able to fill in the remainder of the story for Alex, who agreed with their decision to tell him.

"I sure would have hated missing this opportunity - it's not every day an actor gets to meet one of the race he helped to create."

Claire chimed in, "I believe I know why Britain was chosen. There have been various problems in the last few years in which Britain was involved. There has been a lot of criticism of our policies from the rest of the world, and there has been a lot of internal tension. It would surely be easier to create a disturbance in a small country rather than a large one like the

United States. And according to what must happen for your Federation to exist this must be the period that sparked off the Eugenics Wars."

Spock agreed, and secretly wished that there was more information available as to the events during this turbulent period of Earth's history. It was unknown just where the Eugenics Wars had officially started, just a few brief mentions of small incidents and various periods of rapid political growth, particularly in some of the developing countries.

At that moment the public address system announced that it was time for the fancy-dress competition, and Alex had to hurry away at top speed as he was needed as a judge. As the lights went out the three remaining watched the fancy-dress competition and commented on the outfits. Beth and Claire argued over which one should win; they were feeling more natural with the strange, yet not so strange man sitting beside them. Their growing relaxation was useful, for they had already mutually agreed that he would have to live with them for some time.

There were a lot of entries in the competition; a great many of them were Vulcan or Romulan in deference to Alexander Roy - the entrants little knew that another, more impressive alien was watching them with mild amusement in his eyes.

At last the competition ended and the winners were chosen. The actual winner was a willowy young girl, tall and fragile looking, almost surrealistic in appearance. She called herself Asteer Pneuma, which Spock translated as being the Greek for Star Spirit, or Spirit of the Stars. She was painted with white body paint except for a white leotard, and from her hands to her feet stretched translucent white membranous wings like those of a bat. On her head she wore a tall golden crest, and she glided around the stage with such grace that you felt as though at any time she might lift into the air and float away on a cloud of fantasy.

The second prize went to an ingenious if rather unrealistic Horta, and the third prize went to a bunch of six children aged from about three to twelve, who squirmed and wriggled their way around the stage in multicoloured tribble costumes.

Then the lights returned and there was a brief announcement about the events of the next day, and how the organisers hoped that everyone had enjoyed themselves. A few more minutes and details later and the hall gradually cleared as people left.

As soon as everyone had gone the trio made their way down the stairs to the ground floor where Alex soon joined them. The Humans quickly donned their coats, and Alex lent Spock a jacket he had been wearing during the day, for which the Vulcan was grateful. Then they made their way back to the car park and the van.

It was some minutes before the obstinate van decided to start, despite various encouraging comments from Claire, who gained some interesting looks from the disbelieving Vulcan for her trouble. At last the van started and they made their way from the car park after negotiating a rather stubborn payment machine at the exit which Claire did not attempt to charm verbally, although Beth almost admonished it out loud. A half-hour's drive from Slough, and they arrived at the small detached house that Beth and Claire called home.

CHAPTER 3

Having reached home they quickly left the cold of the van for the warmth of the house, where they were greeted by two mad dogs and two even crazier cats, who attacked Claire simultaneously the moment she entered.

"Dani and Cephi, leave me alone," she commanded. "Can't you see we have visitors?" She shoved a long-haired tabby cat onto one shoulder and said, "Dani, meet Mr. Spock and Mr. Roy. This," she said, turning to

the two men, "This is Eridani, and this..." she lifted a long-haired blue onto her other shoulder "... is Cephi, or Cephaz."

The saluki, having noticed that there were strangers in the party, skidded to a halt and stood disdainfully watching the proceedings and looking disgustedly at the spaniel that was wagging its tail furiously, hardly allowing the people entrance.

"Brandy, will you move!" growled Claire, pushing her way through the menagerie. "I know you're pleased to see us, but this is ridiculous!"

While Claire removed two cats and a crazy dog from the doorway Beth praised the saluki. "Bramble, darling, who's a beautiful girl? You've got more sense than that silly spaniel and those loco cats, haven't you, poppet?"

Spock, though relieved to be in the warm again, was not quite sure how he should take such an open display of illogical emotion to three badly-trained animals, or why there should be such praise of the one reasonably well-trained dog.

Having finally managed to get into the house the two men found even more signs of Claire's industry. Having removed various home-made

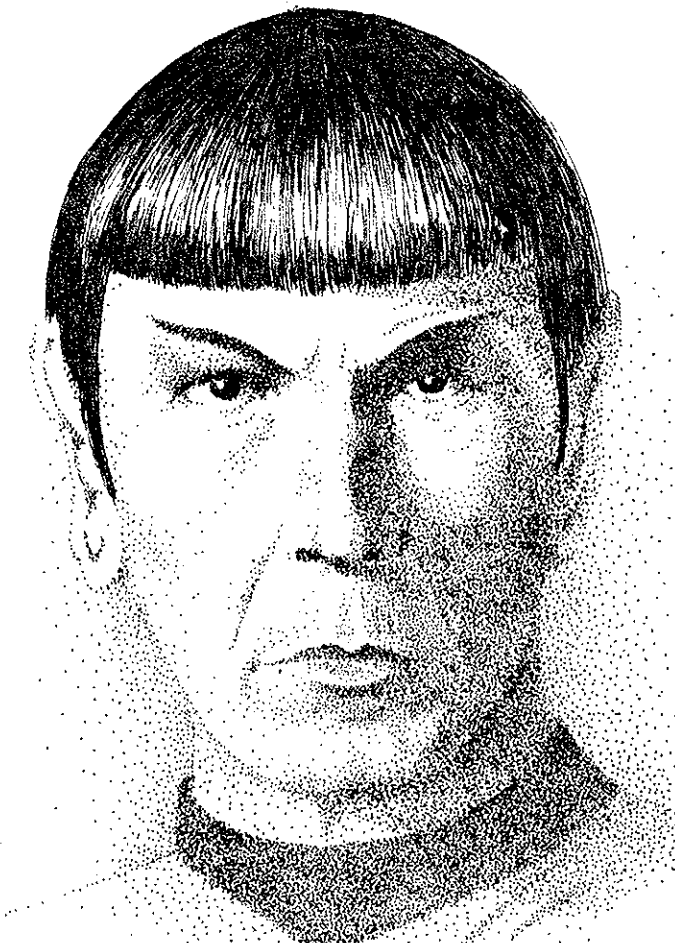
mongcats and tribbles only a rather large toy sehlat remained, apart from various dolls in equally various stages of undress.

"I collect dolls and toys," Claire explained hurriedly, extracting yet another tribble from Brandy. "Brandy, will you let go - you have enough toys of your own without mangling mine."

At last, having rescued most of her toys, and skilfully removed the more indecent dolls, Claire set about making a simple meal and a hot drink, for it was hours since anyone had eaten anything. Beth entertained the guests (much at Claire's expense - she couldn't help being so scatterbrained). The saluki was introduced as Wild Bramble, the grand-daughter of a Cruft's Best of Breed, and the spaniel as Silurian Brandy 111, also related to a Cruft's Champion. Neither of the cats was pedigreed, she explained, and Spock noticed a hint of disdain in her voice.

While they consumed their soup they discussed what they were going to do next. It was decided that Spock would remain at the house, which was far enough away from neighbours for him to be able to move around without attracting attention. It was pointless sending him with Alex, who was staying at an hotel in London - Spock would attract far too much attention there. As the next day would be a continuation of the convention it was decided that they would meet there, as it would be about the only time Spock would be able to move freely among Humans without causing a stir.

Having reached this decision Beth drove Alex to his hotel, and he agreed to look for some suitable warm clothing for Spock. While Beth was away Claire undertook to arrange a room and make up a bed for Spock; having decided



that the Vulcan must be tired after such an adventurous day - although it was very difficult to tell - she insisted that he went to bed immediately and not wait for Beth to return.

After mild resistance Spock went to bed, for he was more tired than he had himself realised. Once alone in his room he removed his top clothing and sank gratefully beneath the old-fashioned sheets and blankets. He found the bed remarkably soft and the room deliciously warm, for the airing cupboard and heating pipes passed through the bedroom, and Claire had thoughtfully left the cupboard door open to heat the room. Lying between the sheets he decided to recall the day's events, but soon realised how tired he was, and as he would undoubtedly have plenty of time later to consider the action he would have to take, Spock very quickly allowed himself to sink into a peaceful sleep. He had been asleep for over an hour before Beth returned.

Claire spent the time of waiting for Beth frantically making the house as tidy as possible. Having feverishly placed most of her clutter into its correct places she finished making the mongcat while contemplating the day's events. She found it very difficult to resist the urge to go and see if Spock was asleep, but she knew enough of Vulcan tradition to know that such an intrusion would be most unwelcome. Nevertheless, the temptation was great, for she hardly believed that the day had not been just a glorious dream. Her natural practicality - despite her appearance of lack of organisation - meant that before Beth had returned Claire had worked out the food that would be needed for the next few weeks, and when Beth finally arrived she had progressed to worrying about how to cater for a Vulcan at Christmas. After a whispered conversation about how little they believed the day's events, the two girls also retired to bed, and were soon fast asleep.

It was just before eight o'clock the next morning that Beth awoke, dressed, and went to see if Claire was awake. Her room was empty and the bed was made, so Beth followed the sound of talking downstairs. Entering the kitchen she found Claire cooking scrambled eggs, and Spock offering to wash up, while Claire refused to let him.

Upon seeing Beth enter Claire commented, "Morning, sleepyhead. I was just going to wake you up - we're leaving in an hour's time." As she was speaking Claire placed a large plate of toast and scrambled egg and a mug of coffee before the bemused Beth, who obediently sat down and began to eat. Spock joined her at the table, for he had already realised that he would have to steer clear of Claire when she was in one of her organising moods. Beth warned him that when Claire was in such a mood everything and everyone was organised, whether they liked it or not.

Having washed up and sorted out what would be needed during the day Claire set out the food and water for the animals. Just before 9:00 a.m. the trio set out again for the convention with Spock wearing the jacket Alex Roy had lent him the previous day.

Some thirty minutes later they turned into the Leisure Centre car park, and with a fond pat to Cyrano's steering wheel Claire switched off his engine.

"Ready, Peter?" Beth asked Spock, he nodded, and the three went in to join the other convention goers.

They spent an interesting morning, which Spock devoted to unobtrusive data gathering. It was lunchtime before Alex was able to join them, bringing some clothing for Spock; he was not able to remain for long as he was in great demand, and furthermore his presence tended to attract attention, so that, having agreed to come to the house two days later he departed.

Beth hastily took the clothes to dump in the van then returned to Spock and Claire. The rest of the afternoon was spent in much the same manner as the morning, with Spock getting to know more about 20th Century Earth, and Claire getting to know rather more about Spock. At 7:00 p.m. events drew to a close at the Centre, and although there was to be a disco-party scheduled

for later at a nearby hotel Claire and Beth decided to go home, as both felt that it was highly improbable that disco dancing was featured among Spock's many accomplishments.

As soon as they arrived home Beth set off to take Bramble and Brandy out for a walk while Claire set to preparing a meal of wholemeal macaroni with courgettes, cauliflower and cheese sauce, to be followed by an apricot crumble featuring her rather special nutty crumble mix.

Spock would have liked to help, but feeling that discretion was the better part of valour he started to explore the bookshelves he had been invited to make use of. He was about to settle down with a copy of the Starfleet Technical Manual when he felt something winding around his ankles, then as he sat down both cats landed simultaneously on his lap vying for his attention. Since both seemed determined he was not to read he proceeded to stroke them both gently while thinking over the events of the last couple of days. Even to someone as logical as he there was something almost unbelievable about what was happening. He would, of course, try to find out all he could about this scantily documented period of history; historians would undoubtedly be glad of anything that might help them understand the background to the Eugenics Wars. At least he would be able to put his enforced and unwelcome stay in the period to some productive use.

Claire peeped in at the door and smiled as she saw him seconded by the two cats. He's a 'pussy person', she thought to herself. Cats always know a 'pussy person'. So she went back to her cooking.

It took Beth about fifty energetic minutes to do her standard four miles with the dogs. When she returned she wiped eight muddy paws before going to see how Claire was getting on. As she had expected everything was about ready, and Claire was simply awaiting her return before putting the finishing touches to the meal.

The three sat down gladly to their evening meal; Claire, although herself a meat eater on occasion, was so used to vegetarian cooking that it came as second nature to her. Spock surveyed the meal with interest and a little apprehension at first, but having sampled it, decided it was good. Having decided he could eat without worrying he began to pay more attention to the two girls, who were discussing their shopping list for Christmas.

"After all, there are only two weeks left in which to get organised," complained Beth.

"All right," Claire soothed. "I know you need a lot of organising, but don't worry - I'll do it."

Beth was about to deliver a tart response when both realised that Spock was listening. They looked at each other, and laughed. Spock smiled inwardly as he realised that McCoy was not the only Human who enjoyed a contrived argument.

"Mr. Spock," Claire began, "is there anything particular that you feel you will need buying tomorrow? Since we don't know how long you will be here, we think it would be best to assume that it will be until Christmas at least; we still have to decide what is to be done."

"I believe that with regard to food I have no special requirements; as you are aware, I do not eat animal flesh, but I have no other restrictions. I may later have need of some electrical equipment, but until I can ascertain precisely what will be needed I am unable to give you a list of requirements."

"And," Beth commented, "you have the added problem of sending a transmission without attracting the attention of the tracking systems already in use on Earth."

"I get the feeling Alex has an idea," said Claire.

"Oh?" asked Beth. "I don't remember him saying anything about it."

"He didn't," replied Claire. "I just got the feeling from the way he spoke that he had an idea."

"Oh, is that all!" groaned Beth. "Another of your intuitions again."

"Yes," agreed Claire, puzzled. "They seem to be getting more frequent."

Spock watched Claire thoughtfully before asking, "How do you celebrate Christmas?" He hoped that neither of the girls' Christmas spirits included the drunken revelry that was let loose upon the Enterprise once a year, and which he always skilfully avoided.

"Well," explained Claire, "we have a fairly quiet Christmas-- a few decorations, plenty of home cooking. We usually rush around like mad during the week up to the holiday, and then we just laze around and enjoy ourselves in peace."

Spock, although relieved to find that Christmas was relatively quiet, was rather alarmed at the prospect of a week of insanity beforehand. He fervently hoped that he would be able to avoid the majority of the hysteria invoked in Humans at this time by one means or another.

Beth continued, "Just before Christmas we take the dogs for a walk around the local lanes and collect as much ivy, mistletoe and holly as we can to decorate the house. Claire makes a wreath for the door from fir cones and leaves which she paints. In the house we have a tree with decorations and lights, and a few home-made decorations around the room."

"And," Claire added, "we spend lots of time cooking traditional dishes and trying new ones."

"That's something we both do," agreed Beth.

"Mr. Spock, according to the show you do not celebrate Christmas, so will you find sharing ours difficult?" Claire asked.

Spock considered for a moment before replying. "I find the methods by which the crew of the Enterprise celebrate Christmas exceedingly illogical. Nevertheless, I am permitted to remain apart from the celebrations, and usually I remain on duty. I hope you will not consider me rude if I do decide to remain apart from your festivities."

Had he allowed his Human side to predominate Spock would doubtless have used haste when he saw the thinly-veiled disappointment on Claire's face. Instead he carefully added that if they felt his presence was necessary he would naturally attend. Spock was not at all sure that he had been wise in wishing to remain apart from their celebrations, but he needed the time to find a method of communicating with the Enterprise, wherever she might be. Carefully watching the relief on Claire's face he decided that she had taken his news relatively well, and hoped that he would not be required to join in too frequently.

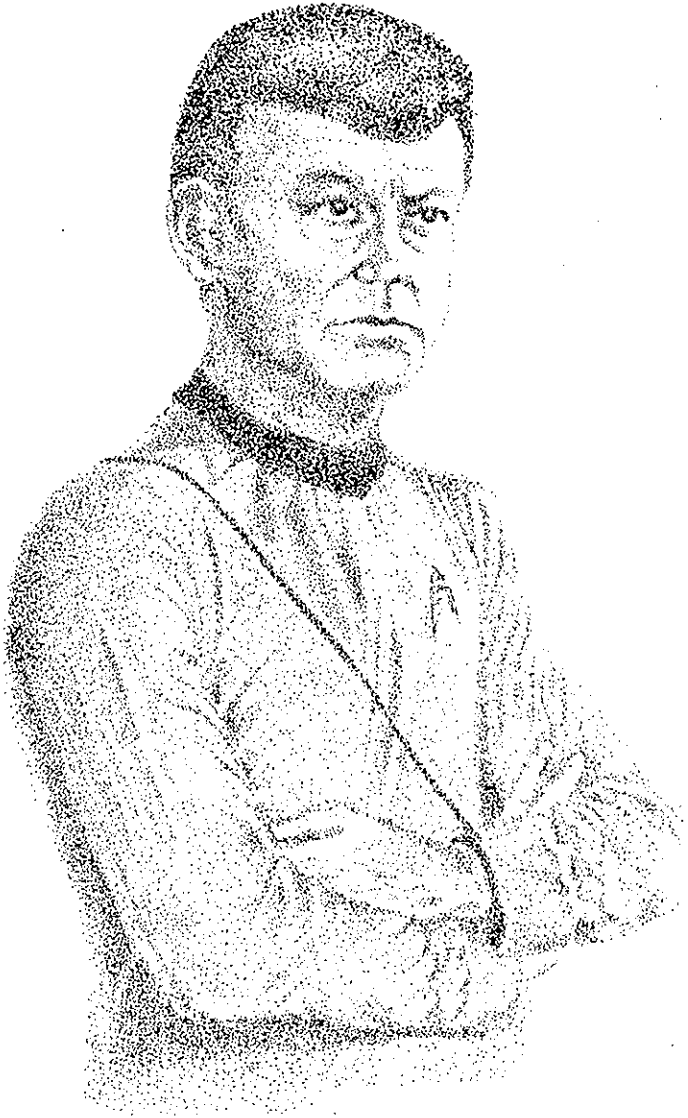
CHAPTER 4

Kirk looked into his glass of Silurian brandy thoughtfully provided by the doctor, who sat opposite him regarding the table intently.

"Why the blazes did that damned Vulcan go wandering off like that?" McCoy complained for the umpteenth time that evening.

Kirk did not reply, but tightened his grasp on his glass. The fluid within seemed to reflect the sombre mood of the two men. Earlier there had been an argument, and then as the seriousness of the situation finally got through to McCoy their mood had changed to its present gloomy nature. The depressed atmosphere in the room was almost tangible to its occupants.

Kirk sighed and drained the remaining liquid from his glass. Glancing at



chronometer he announced, "We'll soon be entering the outskirts of the Sol system."

"Yes," McCoy agreed. "Have you any ideas yet on why that Klingon ship spirited off apparently towards Earth?"

Kirk shook his head, but before he could reply further the intercom buzzed.

"Kirk here," he answered, pressing the engage button.

"Scott here, Captain. That Klingon ship we're tracking just increased speed on a heading to circuit the sun. The computer predicts that they are most probably attempting a time warp."

"Get after them, Scotty - I'm on my way! Kirk out. Let's go, Bones!"

"What do you need me for?" grumbled the doctor.

The expression on Kirk's face explained all too clearly why; he was already missing one friend, the moral support of the other was sorely needed.

"Okay, Jim, I'm coming." The doctor hurriedly drained his glass as he strode for the door; they made their way quickly to the turbo lift.

As they entered the Bridge Scott vacated the command chair and headed for the Engineering console.

"Keep at extreme sensor range, Mr. Sulu," Kirk ordered as he sat down. He looked towards the Science console and the Ansthesian monitoring it. "Let me know the second the Klingons stop backtracking in time, Mr. Xian."

The slender golden giant paused for a moment before replying. "Sensors indicate that they have slowed and are leaving the time slide - now!"

"Pull us just in front of her, Mr. Chekov - we need to get to the opposite side of the planet before she tracks us. Deflector shields up, Mr. Sulu."

A moment later reports began to come in that the Enterprise had made Earth orbit some eighteen days before Christmas 1990. Kirk winced; this was the period just prior to the Eugenics Wars which had so nearly decimated life on the planet. A most touchy period of Earth history to find oneself in. Mr. Xian reported that the Klingons were due to arrive in three days, so Kirk ordered a watch rota to keep a lookout for their arrival and to record all transmissions on the planet in an attempt to gain as much information about that turbulent period as possible. He and McCoy then left the Bridge under the control of Mr. Scott and returned to their quarters to get some rest.

The three days before the Klingons' arrival passed uneventfully and a great deal of information was assimilated which would prove invaluable to the historians in Starfleet. Kirk still found, however, that he didn't have a clue as to why the Klingons should abduct Spock and then return to 20th century Earth with him.

The intercom bleeped. "Kirk here."

"The Klingons have just arrived, sir," Xian replied.

"Thank you, Mr. Xian. Make sure we keep out of sight and monitor what they are doing. I'm on my way. Kirk out."

Kirk pulled on a clean shirt and put the book he had been reading away on the bookshelf. Leaving his quarters, he headed for the Bridge. When he arrived Xian was conferring with Mr. Scott; they both turned when Kirk entered.

"The Klingon ship registered a power surge just now, followed by the probable use of a transporter, sir," Xian announced.

"Could you give approximate coordinates for the beam down point, Mr. Xian?"

"Negative, Captain. For our sensors to give approximate readings we would have needed to come within sensor range of the Klingon craft."

With a groan Kirk sank into his command chair. "Well, do we have any idea what the Klingons transported, and into which area of the planet?"

"The sensors suggest a set down point for the transporter beam somewhere in the northern hemisphere, probably in the North European area. We have no evidence as to what may have been transported, but Mr. Scott and I have been considering the possibility of gaining a sensor reading of life on board the Klingon ship, and of trying to locate any Vulcan life-form readings."

"Aye," Scotty agreed when the Anthesian had finished, "and also the possibility of scanning Earth for Mr. Spock. There canna' be many Vulcan hybrids down there, Captain."

Kirk, who felt that there might be a light at the end of a very bleak tunnel, agreed; and soon the computer and the necessary members of the Bridge crew were busy trying to get sweep readings of the planet, and preparing for a speed reading of the enemy cruiser.

Spock, walking into the living room, had to duck to avoid the mobile that had sprouted from the ceiling in his absence. Recovering his posture he found himself confronted by a dangerous Earth female who was brandishing long sticks with plastic spikes attached, and attempting to push the ends into a tall pole.

Looking up, Claire smiled. "Hello, Mr. Spock." She looked briefly around. "I don't think I've colonised all the chairs yet." Hastily she removed a box of glass baubles so that the Vulcan could sit down.

Spock eyed the pole suspiciously and volunteered bravely to help. Claire looked at the half-built tree and agreed that he could. Spock crouched on the floor and soon discovered that putting plastic branches into a fake fir tree was a surprisingly painful business, so he was prompted to ask,

"On the Enterprise a live tree is kept in cold storage for use as a Christmas tree; it interests me that you, who have easy access to live trees, prefer to use an imitation tree."

Claire laughed. "Oh, Beth would much prefer a real tree," she said, "but I object to the amount of needles a real tree drops."

Spock was surveying the mass of plastic pine needles scattered over the floor when Beth arrived.

"Oh good - you've finished the tree." Beth also regarded the mess on the floor and added, "And you complain that a real tree drops a lot of needles while it's indoors!"

Claire fixed a fairy doll to the top of the tree (much to Spock's amazement - did they still believe in such primitive nonsense?) and replied that at least her poor old plastic tree only dropped needles when you put it

up and took it down, not during all of the holiday. And also the needles were in florets, so they were much easier to pick up than those nasty sharp single needles that fell from real trees.

Carefully stepping back (barely missing some coloured lights and a cat), she surveyed her handiwork and decided it was time to place the tree onto the table. Fortunately Spock was able to lift the badly-balanced tree with ease and the job was completed in record time. Which was just as well, for at that moment the doorbell rang. Spock hurried upstairs, Claire got the decorations under control and filling only three-quarters of the room while Beth and the spaniel answered the door. A few moments later Alex entered the room, and Beth went to find Spock. (For some reason the girls always went to find Spock - they never attempted to yell for him as they did for each other.)

Alex removed his coat and sat down. By the time Spock and Beth returned to the room Claire was standing on a chair tied up in Christmas lights. The two men regarded her precarious position with raised eyebrows. She looked at Alex for a moment and then asked guardedly,

"Alex, do you have any ideas as to how we can safely contact the Enterprise? I know you've visited N.A.S.A."

The slender Human stretched and then steepled his fingers in an action that mirrored the Vulcan's behaviour. "I have got an idea, but it has nothing to do with N.A.S.A." The actor paused before continuing, "The B.B.C. has invited me for an interview concerning the film. Normally I would have turned the idea down; however, if the Enterprise is monitoring communications - which would seem logical - then it would not be impossible for me to give some hint in the broadcast which could guide them here." Alex shrugged his shoulders and looked expectantly at the Vulcan, who considered the possibility fully before replying.

"Presupposing the Captain realised that I had been abducted, and found a method by which to track me to this period of time, then it would seem logical that the Enterprise would mount a full-scale search at extreme sensor range."

Alex nodded, and then asked what sort of signal the Enterprise would be most likely to pick up.

"Wait!" cried Claire, almost falling from her chair in her excitement. "Do the Beeb warn you about what they are going to ask, can you make suggestions of suitable topics for their consideration?"

Alex agreed that it would not be impossible to introduce something new provided he warned the interviewer beforehand.

Claire's excitement was now reaching all the people in the room, and Spock had to syphon out her emotions carefully, but it settled one point in his mind - in a very limited and untrained way Claire had a telepathic talent. Having settled that in his mind Spock listened to what she had to say.

"If you can introduce a topic, then why not speak some Vulcan? From what I've heard there have been attempts to build up a Klingonese language for future films, so why not also build up a Vulcan language? Therefore it should be possible to speak some true Vulcan, and give a grid reference for this area so that the Enterprise knows where to look."

Alex and Spock agreed that Claire's wild idea had possibilities and went off into a quiet (and sane) corner of the room to devise a message, and for Alex to learn to pronounce the tonal language.

Claire continued arranging the final decorations and Beth escaped into the kitchen, as much to get away from the chaos surrounding her as to make a drink. She returned some twenty minutes later with four mugs of cocoa and leaving a tidier kitchen than the one she had entered. Claire had almost finished the decorations, but Spock and Alex were still as busy as ever. Beth quietly placed their mugs down, then went to sit with Claire in the

opposite corner of the room under the Christmas tree. Both girls regarded the two men with cheerful fascination.

When the men had finally finished Alex discovered his now cold cocoa; he drank it hastily, with a barely-repressed shudder, and decided to depart. Beth, Claire and Spock went to the door with him, all agreeing that they would await with interest his interview on Thursday, two days from now.

For them the days passed quietly in conversation both sane and less sane. 22:45 on Thursday night found Alex awaiting his interview with growing trepidation as he inwardly rehearsed his Vulcan phrases and almost prayed to get them right.

CHAPTER 5

Kirk and McCoy sat in Kirk's quarters, a bottle of Silurian brandy between them. Now that the initial activity of the chase was over Kirk was too worried and weary even to talk, despite McCoy's attempts to draw him out. McCoy finally decided that his humour was out of place, and decided to be serious.

"Jim, do you really think they've brought Spock here?"

"I wish I knew, Bones. All I've got to go on is a hunch, and the fact that I can see no possible alternative." He sighed wearily. "Even if he is here, we may not be able to find him until it's too late."

McCoy, who realised that Kirk not only feared for Spock but also carried personal responsibility for the future of his galaxy, was not able to think of anything to say. Instead he simply grasped Kirk's shoulder gently for a moment before picking up his glass and emptying it.

The intercom suddenly interrupted their thoughts. Kirk pressed a switch, and Uhura's face appeared.

"Captain, the computer has picked up a signal in Vulcan giving old-fashioned type grid references for somewhere in southern Old England."

"On my way, Uhura. Kirk out." He went out of the door almost at a run, with McCoy close on his heels praying silently.

As soon as Kirk reached the Bridge he ordered a replay of the message. Alex's voice came over clearly and carefully pronouncing the alien words.

"Thasha shraff k'han imhib ffhan survil-h-sepffoth. Kheer waald d'hot irivinit saash-a-dharma an-tha, ky, hah; ton, ky, shune. Ahabee lhoraatah."

Turning to Uhura Kirk asked for the approximate area of the reference.

"Somewhere in the outer West London district, sir," came the reply.

"Vulcan life-scan as soon as we are within scanning range, Mr. Chekov."

"Aye, Captain." Chekov hovered over his board as, following Kirk's orders, Sulu brought the Enterprise within scanning range.

"Get us some twentieth century outfits, Bones - as soon as we locate him we're going down."

McCoy left, muttering about how the computer would dress him this time.

It was two hours later, however, when Kirk met McCoy in the transporter room. The doctor was relieved that the scanning for Vulcan and then Klingon life-forms had taken so long; it had allowed him time to change the size of the clothes the computer had found for him twice, so that he was now able to boast a reasonable fit.

With futuristic devices carefully concealed, including a medi-kit (McCoy was not going anywhere without a medi-kit) they were ready to leave.

"Good luck, Captain," Scott wished from the transporter control panel.

With a brief nod of his head Kirk acknowledged the comment. "You have the con, Scotty - if those Klingons show up you know what to do."

It was Scott's turn to nod. "Yes, Jim."

Kirk's parting word was, "Energise!" as he and McCoy descended to a field by a brightly-lit house in outer West London. Flipping open his communicator Kirk acknowledged that they were down safely and asked for verification that Spock was in that house. Scotty verified, Kirk closed and concealed his communicator, hoping that the quick transmission had not been picked up by the local R.A.F. bases or Heathrow Airport. Striding up to the door, Kirk knocked.

Inside Claire, Beth and Spock were saying goodbye to Alex, who had raced over after the interview. They were standing in the hallway laughing about Alex's American-Vulcan accent when there was a knock at the door. Spock immediately beat a retreat upstairs while Claire and Alex attempted to quieten two barking dogs and Beth opened the door.

"Captain!"

Later, while reviewing that moment, Kirk was to decide that he would not easily forget the sight that met his eyes that night. In among the festal chaos stood two girls and a man whom Kirk almost recognised, then remembered to be the actor who had spoken the Vulcan message.

"Won't you come in, please?" Beth asked as Claire managed to control an excited Brandy, Bramble having followed Spock upstairs looking for peace and quiet.

Kirk and McCoy moved thankfully into the warmth of the house and Spock, hearing the familiar voices, came downstairs followed by Bramble. Kirk and McCoy both looked delighted to see the Vulcan apparently unharmed.

"Spock, are you all right?" Kirk asked finally.

"Indeed, Captain," he replied, apparently without a flicker of emotion, but Claire was sure she felt a subliminal sensation of pleasure mixed with relief from the Vulcan; however, when she looked at him she could see nothing in his face.

Claire moved back into the living room and the others followed her, Alex no longer in a hurry to leave them and return to his hotel. Beth went into the kitchen to prepare yet another round of drinks, and Kirk, having been assured by Spock that the girls already knew about the Enterprise, took out his communicator to signal Mr. Scott, but he received no reply. Worry flared into his mind that the Klingons might have returned.

On board the Enterprise the sirens wailed a Red Alert as with deflector shields on full the Enterprise left orbit hoping the Klingon vessel had not seen her. Scott was very reluctant to leave without Kirk, but he did not think that the Captain would be in immediate danger, whereas the Enterprise undoubtedly was.

"We're being pursued, Mr. Scott!" Chekov's voice rang out tightly.

"Phaser banks at the ready, Mr. Sulu."

"Aye aye, sir," the helmsman replied, his fingers dancing over the console.

"Close and destroy!" Scott almost surprised himself with the anticipation in his voice, but the Klingon vessel could not be left; too damaged to return to its own time, the damage it could do was unthinkable.

A bright flare lit up the main screen and a brief cheer went up from the Bridge crew.

"Damage report!" Scott requested.

Only minor damage had been sustained, but it would need repairing before the Enterprise could return on warp drive and Scott, not wishing to orbit Earth for any length of time, ordered that repairs should commence where they were.

Despite his worry Kirk was finally persuaded to go to bed since it had grown late; and as Spock had pointed out, there was nothing they could do and they needed rest, so it was logical that they should retire for the night.

Kirk arose after a sleepless night and went downstairs to discover that only McCoy remained in bed. Claire was preparing breakfast, Spock was repairing a rather antiquated looking electrical device, and Beth had taken the two dogs for an early morning walk. The snow had fallen heavily overnight, and it gave the surroundings a tranquil picturesqueness that Kirk found a little strange and rather soothing. It would not, he reflected, be a very unpleasant place to spend Christmas. Indeed, there was something very attractive about the idea, if only he was not so worried about the Enterprise.

He went to sit down in an armchair by the fire but hastily stood up again as a large cat objected to being sat on. Kirk tried to remove it from the chair, and as it dug its claws into the cushions he decided that even tribbles have some good points - they didn't have any. Claws, that is. Having removed the offending animal he sat down to wait for breakfast.

It was about ten minutes later that a dangerously-awake Beth arrived declaring that she was famished. Breakfast arrived simultaneously, and proceeded without the still-sleeping McCoy.

While waiting for her third helping of toast (being up early always made Beth ravenous) Beth took a simple breakfast tray upstairs to McCoy. On opening one eye cautiously McCoy found himself confronted with a hyperactive young lady brandishing a tray of food. With a remarkable resemblance to a whirlwind she disappeared again, and so he absorbed himself in investigating the fare provided.

Peering over the steaming cup of coffee he surveyed the bacon, egg, tomato and fried bread which were quickly consumed, closely followed by toast and thick home-made marmalade, by which time another cup of coffee appeared courtesy of Claire, who informed him that the rest of them were going into the local field for a walk in the snow.

Deciding it was too much of an effort to get ready for the walk in time, McCoy turned over and went back to sleep.

CHAPTER 6

Just as Spock was donning the hooded duffle-coat borrowed from Alex, Kirk received a call from the Enterprise. As he flipped open his communicator Kirk's relief was evident.

"Captain?" Scott queried.

"Yes, Scotty," Kirk replied. "What's been happening?"

"Ah, Captain, just after you and the doctor beamed down those Klingons showed up, so we headed away from Earth's present sensor range and... um... disposed of her. However, we sustained some damage to the warp drive which had to be repaired before we could return."

Kirk nodded in agreement, an absent-minded gesture for obviously Scott was quite unable to see him. "All damage repaired, Scotty?"

"Och no, Captain. We still have some minor repairs to complete, some of them to our deflector shields, so we will have to get out of Earth's sensor

range to complete such repair work. Will you be coming back, Captain?"

Kirk looked around for a moment before looking at Spock, who nodded his agreement. "Er... not just yet, Mr. Scott. We have some interesting further investigations to make."

"I understand, Captain." Scotty's voice smiled despite being disembodied.

"Inform me when all repairs have been completed, Mr. Scott."

"Aye, Captain, and good luck. Scott out."

The transmission ended with Kirk closing his communicator with a self-satisfied expression on his face. "Well," he commented, "I've always fancied a genuine, quiet, twentieth century white Christmas, so I think we will be accepting your kind offer." He smiled at Beth and Claire.

With renewed vigour coats were buttoned, dogs let out and cats shut in, and the party headed for the field in the snow.

For Spock there was pure enjoyment in the brisk walk that followed. Normally he exercised as a logical procedure to keep himself fit and healthy, but being kept in a relatively small area for some time he found difficulty in keeping to the slow pace of the Humans.

However, upon reaching the field they showed an uncomfortable desire to throw rolled balls of snow at each other and the dogs, amidst much laughter. Spock took advantage of their being occupied to scout the field rapidly, apparently attracted to the bushes and wild animal tracks.

Laughter hurt, Kirk decided, and he had to pause for a moment. He noticed to his relief that Spock had found something of interest at the other side of the field, so Kirk was able to spend a few moments reflecting upon the enjoyment that could be gained from two unsophisticated girls and a field of freshly fallen snow.

It all began because Beth had asked him what he knew about twentieth century Christmases. He had mentioned an old game of throwing snowballs that he had read about; he supposed that was history to them as well, but perhaps they had heard about such a game?

He had been rewarded by a well aimed snowball hitting his midriff courtesy of Claire. The snow fight had rapidly ensued until their laughter had exhausted them. Claire was now on her knees in the snow, still laughing, and Beth was chasing a wild spaniel with a snowball. Bramble had decided, however, that the game was too undignified for a saluki, and after digging a hole in the snow set off with an easy, waltz-like lope to follow Spock.

Kirk was beginning to feel cold despite the coat he was wearing, and as his breathing began to steady he became aware of a lump of snow which had slipped down his back from his neck and was now busily melting there. The girls too seemed ready to depart, so Kirk decided to call Spock. He remembered just in time what he had been told, and called, "Peter!" Spock silently reappeared followed by the saluki which seemed to have adopted him, rather to his distaste. The party set off home cheerfully if chillily; the girls started to sing carols, and much to Kirk's surprise he found that he recognised some of them.

By the time they arrived home McCoy had arisen and was sitting in an arm-chair by the fire being sat upon by two cats. This latter seemed to please him as much as Bramble's attention pleased Spock.

"So - you found your way out of bed at last," teased Kirk as he moved closer to the fire to dry out.

McCoy was about to reply, but managed no more than a grunt before Beth placed a cup of coffee in his hand, so he turned his attention to that.

"Anyway," McCoy grumbled, "what day is it here?"

Beth bustled into the room to reply, "It's Christmas Eve today, and Claire and I have got to finish getting things ready for tomorrow."

Spock appeared with a chess set that he had found several days earlier but had been unable to use owing to the relatively low calibre of the girls' play. He and Kirk settled in a corner out of the way to play a game.

McCoy decided - much to Beth's and Claire's despair - that he was an able hand to help them with their preparations. After a while it was decided that he could put mincemeat into the tarts and pierce the pastry lids. As assistant cook he was very proud of the pies that went into the oven, and even prouder of the golden pies that came out some time later.

The remainder of the day passed uneventfully until about 10:50 p.m. when Claire suggested that they should prepare for the Christmas Eve Carol Service. McCoy and Kirk decided to accompany the girls, leaving Spock to look after the animals. So, having wrapped up well, the four set out to walk to the church.

Neither girl went to church often, but as they explained the Christmas Eve service was a quaint little custom that they liked to preserve. When they arrived at the church they found seats at the back of the building, and it was there that Kirk revealed Spock's tricorder, which he discreetly set to record the evening's proceedings.

The service proved to be a fairly 'High' one with plenty of good sound ritual and a beautiful 1644 liturgy which Kirk did not feel he understood. Indeed, he was quite relieved when, after most of the congregation had taken Communion, the final Blessing was pronounced and people began to leave.

Kirk could not help but reflect on how strange the whole ritual seemed in a world that had already reached the moon, and where the depths of space were perhaps closer than most realised possible. He continued thoughtful on the way back, but McCoy's cynical humour quickly put a stop to any serious attempt to reconcile the difficulties.

Christmas Day dawned through a veritable blizzard with flakes of snow swirling past the windows, and it was about 9:00 a.m. before either Kirk or McCoy arose. Spock was already awake, and was reviewing the previous night's revelries. It was, he thought, a strange way to spend an evening, but not really any stranger than the drunken revelry which would probably be found upon the Enterprise at such a time.

By the time they arrived downstairs Kirk and McCoy found the girls already engaged in preparing for lunch, and deciding that discretion was the better part of valour they went to find Spock in the front room.

It was 1:00 p.m. when Claire finally announced that luncheon was ready, a traditional turkey lunch for Kirk, McCoy and Claire, and a cashew nut roast with mushrooms for Spock and Beth, all served with a liberal range of accompaniments. To follow this was a home-made Christmas pudding with brandy sauce, and finally coffee with fruit, nuts and sweetmeats.

All, with the exception of Spock, felt too bloated to move immediately after the meal, so they sat for a while in comfortable, languid discussion before beginning to clear away the things.

Once clear, four sleepy Humans and various animals settled down to record a selection of twentieth century Christmas Day video entertainments, the highlight of which was 'The Queen's Speech', a uniquely British phenomenon.

The one not-so-Human absented himself from such weary proceedings and returned to his room to meditate away from the interruption and uncontrolled thoughts. Instead Spock found himself leaning against the radiator looking out of the window as the snow again began to fall. Resisting the childhood memories which threatened to disturb the peace, the Vulcan just soaked in the quiet and the beauty until he felt fully prepared for meditation. Ignoring

the afternoon tea, it was late evening when he rejoined the other members of the household.

Outside, in the heaviest snowfall of the century, the house was cut off from its neighbours in quiet seclusion. Claire closed the curtains on the cold and inside each settled to warm, comfortable and idyllic non-activity. Not strictly non-activity, for chess games were won and lost, mulled wine simmered and was consumed, and there was a little congenial chatter. Nevertheless, no historic comments were made, no social problems were solved, and gradually all retired to their various sleeping quarters.

It was Beth who surprised herself by being first up the following morning. Having been drowsy all the previous day she had awakened at 3:00 a.m. and had been unable to return to sleep. So it was that it was Beth who heard the first stirrings upstairs, Claire's alarm clock being shut off before it could ring properly. A short time later Claire joined Beth downstairs, soon to be followed by Spock. Somehow the Vulcan had managed to wake up and prepare himself for the day without Beth hearing, no mean achievement considering his heavier weight on exceedingly creaky floorboards. The good doctor, however, was quite the opposite, and could be heard quite distinctly floundering in the bathroom.

As Kirk and McCoy made their way downstairs they were just in time to hear Kirk's communicator buzzing for attention.

"Kirk here. What's up, Scotty?"

"Sorry tae have awakened you, Captain, but we have come across a little problem with which Mr. Spock's help would no' come amiss."

"Nothing serious, I hope?"

"Och no, Captain, as I say. I hope I haven't wakened you."

"No, we were already up," replied Kirk, trying not to smile at McCoy's attempt to stifle a yawn.

Spock briefly queried the nature of the problem requiring his attention. Ascertaining the problem to be one of analysing the answer to a question put to the main computer, he left the room and was transported back to the Enterprise. The remaining Humans settled to breakfast.

CHAPTER 7

Once aboard the Enterprise Spock headed for the main briefing room where he was met by Scott and Uhura. Scott filled him in.

"Lieutenant Uhura was monitoring the historical records of the present period when we came upon the following..." Scott indicated the computer screen. "Computer, give basic outline of life of Claire Brocke, born 1968, Old England, Earth; and Beth Ross, born 1966, Old England, Earth."

"Working," replied the female voice of the computer.

As the biographies appeared on the screen Spock quickly realised the point which had caused the difficulty. Both girls had mysteriously disappeared from their house in December 1990.

Further consultation of Federation records showed that there had been no signs of foul play, and no bodies had ever been found. It appeared that both girls had vanished from the house during the Christmas period. Owing to their pets being well fed and not in any way distressed, the two girls could not have been taken by force, or been very long removed. Aside from a parcel of clothing addressed to Mr. Alexander Roy, a popular twentieth century actor, there was nothing to give any clue to the girls' disappearance.

Spock switched off the computer and began musing over the possibilities of what he had just heard. So, he thought, they disappeared - no trace, and

their animals were happy and cared for.

That left only two logical possibilities - either they were abducted after leaving the house of their own free will, or they left the house itself by some form of transportation beam. There had been no mention of tracks outside the house, and as mention had been made in the police report of how heavy the snow had been that year, some form of track would have been unavoidable, particularly as there had been no subsequent snowfall after the 26th of December. The girls could not have been abducted before the 26th December because the pets would have been suffering.

Teleportation seemed unlikely, so the most probable means of removal had to be a transportation beam of some kind. A transportation beam implied intervention from a technologically more advanced civilisation, either of alien ancestry or from Earth's future.

The Enterprise was from the future, involved with the same two girls at the correct period in time; so had the Klingon intervention merely fulfilled history? Spock collected some more data from the computer and, leaving Scott in control once more, returned to Kirk on the planet's surface.

Kirk awaited Spock's return from the Enterprise with interest. How could the computer give an answer that needed analysing? It was built to explain, not to puzzle.

Kirk met Spock upstairs, in the room the Vulcan had been using for a bedroom. Spock had brought a tricorder with him, and both men perched on the edge of the bed to consider the recording Spock had made of the computer's information. Kirk absent-mindedly fingered the glass dolphin he had removed from the dressing table while awaiting Spock's return.

Carefully replacing the dolphin Kirk looked up at Spock for verification of what he had just seen. Spock was waiting for Kirk's reaction to the news he had brought, and so was studying his friend's face for signs of what he was thinking.

"I checked the girls' adaptability to life in the future before I left," Spock commented as he switched off the tricorder.

Kirk, immediately interested, sought further information. The Human in Spock almost smiled as he replied,

"Both girls show every chance of fitting into the future without inordinate difficulty. Beth should be quite capable of entering Starfleet Academy should she so choose. Claire's aptitude for creative work should enable her to gain a post with the Federation Cultural Commission."

Kirk nodded. "I had noticed myself how easily they could fit into the future. Both are young enough to make the change, and intelligent enough to be able to accept and adapt to the new life."

This view was endorsed by Spock, who added, "Nevertheless, it would be advisable to gain Dr. McCoy's view on their psychological structure and the possible traumatic effects of such a major change in lifestyle. Loss of friends, family... all the recognisable constants of life on which we rely for personal stability and confidence will have to be relearned."

Kirk agreed, and then decided that as they still had several hours before a decision needed to be made, they would endeavour to discover all they could about the situation and its probable effect on both the girls and their future. Spock then left the room and went to inform Dr. McCoy that Kirk wanted to see him.

Spock found McCoy - and a tabby cat - carefully researching the dietary variety of the twentieth century in a cookbook he had borrowed from Claire. Claire herself was in the kitchen amusing herself making some fancy sweets,

while Beth could be heard grooming the two dogs in the back room.

McCoy looked up at the Vulcan's approach and, noting that Spock had changed back into his uniform, murmured, "Back on duty, eh, Spock? I just knew all the hard work of these two young ladies was wasted on you."

A raised eyebrow accompanied Spock's reply. "On the contrary, Doctor. I have found their attention, and the traditional festivity, a most interesting and enlightening experience. However, I am aware that the two young ladies to whom you refer are sufficiently forward-thinking, as their writing shows, to not necessarily be representative of the majority of Humans living on Earth at the present time - a subject which I believe the Captain would like to discuss with you upstairs."

Picking up the tricorder from the table the Vulcan sat down and immersed himself in checking the standard of the recording. McCoy, astonished by Spock's final comment, paused for a moment before putting down both cookbook and cat and leaving the room to find Kirk.

Half an hour later Kirk reappeared, followed some time later by McCoy. The trio agreed to have a conference after they had finished their evening meal. During the meal Spock watched Claire closely, and he was not surprised when she initiated a conversation about life in the future.

It was the first time either girl had shown specific interest in life in the twenty-third century. Previous interest had been confined to wide-ranging questions designed to discover differences in the two life-styles. Now Claire's questions became more probing, requiring specific answers to minor differences in everyday life. Beth soon joined Claire's detailed cross-examination of the three men.

After the meal the men left the room one by one, trying not to make it too obvious that they were gathering for a conference. Beth and Claire, however, were apparently so wrapped up in discussing the future that after refusing all offers of help to clear away they did not even appear to notice their going. Upstairs the Enterprise officers were soon deep in discussion of the psychological data McCoy had acquired during his brief return visit to the Enterprise.

Downstairs, while aiding Beth with the washing up, Claire began to put her thoughts into words. "I do believe something is going to happen."

"I rather thought something had happened, or are your intuitions working in reverse these days?" Beth retorted sarcastically.

Claire shook her head. "No, don't be stupid, this is more important. Something is going to happen. It might well be connected to the events of the past few days, I just don't know. I only know that something special is going to happen - I can't explain further."

"All right, all right, don't get upset. I believe you. But why were you so interested in such minute details of the future?"

Claire's indignation was clearly evident. "You did quite well in the petty question section yourself."

Beth sighed. "I was merely following your lead. Nevertheless, I've never seen you so interested in the future. Is it because they will be returning to their own time soon, and you want to make the most of their remaining time here? Could it be their leaving that is the happening you are worrying about?"

Claire shook her head desperately. "No, it's more than that. Something unique is going to happen, but it's us that it's going to happen to, although their presence may have something to do with it. And the way Mr. Spock kept looking at me during the meal... I got the impression that he was pleased - or at least interested - in my need to know about life in the future. I wish I knew more myself. It might have something to do with their leaving, but in

that case why do I not have any sensation of their absence? It's almost as if they're not going to be absent... or is it that we are?"

"Now you are talking in riddles," Beth complained.

"I can't help it. I'm too confused to explain. If my mind and emotions don't sort themselves out soon I'm going to ask Mr. Spock for help, because I'm sure he's involved... or that he at least knows what's going to happen. I wonder if his knowledge had anything to do with that answer the Enterprise computer gave?"

Dawning comprehension, rapidly followed by apprehension, filled the two girls.

"Maybe it would be a good idea for you to talk to Mr. Spock. Perhaps they have found out something. Do you realise that they are having a conference upstairs at the moment?"

Claire nodded. "Yes. When they split up I'll see if I can get the chance to talk to Mr. Spock alone."

Having decided upon a course of action, and having also completed the washing up, the two girls went their separate ways for the remainder of the afternoon. During the afternoon Spock reappeared and began monitoring the television broadcasts with his tricorder, but before Claire was able to talk to him McCoy blustered in looking for his missing cookbook.

Having found the cookbook he settled with a sigh of pleasure into his adopted seat, rapidly gaining a tabby cat who seemed to feel it her duty to guard either McCoy or the cookbook - it wasn't obvious which. Kirk soon followed the others downstairs and began browsing through some catalogues which both he and McCoy found highly amusing. Naturally both men were careful not to offend the girls, but some of the ancient adverts bordered on the hilarious.

Throughout the evening Claire attempted to speak to Spock, but he proved most elusive, and when he decided to retire for the night she found herself involved in a game of chess with McCoy. It had been a frustrating evening, which had not been improved by Kirk's worrying over his decision to take the girls forward in time. Unfortunately Claire was broadcasting her frustration on a fairly wide emotional band, so although all but Spock were unaware of the cause of their emotional disquiet, they were all affected to an extent which made the evening uncomfortable.

The next day dawned bright and early and Beth remarked that it looked as though the bad weather had finally broken. It was mid-morning when Claire noticed that Spock had gone upstairs, and that Kirk and McCoy were sufficiently involved in a discussion of music with Beth not to drift after her if she followed the Vulcan. Beth nodded her approval of Claire's decision to follow Spock, and affirmed wordlessly that she would try to foil any attempt by the two men to follow Claire. A few moments later Claire found herself outside the door of the Vulcan's room.. She knocked timidly.

Spock was standing looking out of the window at the snow-covered landscape when he heard Claire's knock. Even before he asked her to enter Spock knew exactly who was outside the door, for he had become sufficiently attuned to her to be able to sense her presence.

"Come!" came the reply to her knock. Claire carefully pushed open the door and stepped into the room. The tall Vulcan was standing with his back to her; he was an imposing sight, standing straight, an impregnable fortress of logical thought and mindless adherence to ancient tradition.

As Spock slowly turned towards her he could feel the tension mounting to terror within her. "There is no need to be afraid," he said gently.

Claire looked into his dark eyes and sensed his pride; but his pride was in her, not in himself. A slight smile softened his face as he saw her confusion.

"Your 'intuitions', as you call them, are a primitive form of telepathy. Apparently my presence has, to a certain extent, been magnifying your talent. I realised quite early that you had some kind of talent; indeed, you have been broadcasting your feelings quite widely over the past two days. You need to go to Vulcan for training, if only to make your presence less embarrassing both to yourself and to others."

"Go to Vulcan! That's it, isn't it? Our future lies out there, in your time, doesn't it? We could upset your history if we stayed here."

"It must become your history, too."

As she turned to Spock Claire realised for the first time that he was accepting her as a contemporary, someone he now expected to rise to his imposing standards. Claire returned downstairs to Beth feeling as if, at long last, she had grown up.

Kirk removed his communicator and informed Scott that they would soon be ready to beam up. He did not specify who 'they' were, but Claire's wondering eyes turned towards him and Kirk realised that Spock had done a good job of explaining what was to happen to her. Now it was his turn, and he was just beginning to explain to Beth the significance of the problem when his communicator buzzed for attention.

Kirk flipped the lid open, irritated at being disturbed while trying to explain such a tricky situation, and there was rather more feeling in his response than he had intended.

A slightly startled Lt. Uhura explained that their communications had been tapped at last and that a team of policemen were heading for the house. Summing up the situation quickly Kirk called for the others to join him upstairs.

Quickly placing the parcel of clothes for Alex on the table, Spock shepherded Claire and McCoy upstairs. Before leaving the room he was careful to account for all the futuristic equipment they had brought with them, then he quickly fondled Bramble's head and joined the others.

Kirk had barely finished hurriedly explaining to a confused Beth what was happening when the first knocks on the front door were heard. Having finally grasped the idea that she was leaving the house for ever, Beth rushed downstairs to leave a note for Alex.

By the time the note was written the police were starting to hammer on the door. As it creaked and began to give way Beth rushed upstairs to join the others, still holding her favourite pen. McCoy had his arm around a frightened Claire, who was clutching a tiny china doll.

As Kirk gave the order to energise the police finally broke through the front door and the five upstairs shimmered out of existence.

SHADOWS By Gladys Oliver

Shadows claw my heart, my soul, and
 There is no place where I can go
 To ease my conscience,
 My heart,
 My love...

For these shadows will not end
 Nor cease to be a part of me,
 Since you died in my arms... .. Miramane...

THE LESSON by Linda Hughes

"Come on, Spock, don't be afraid - it won't hurt you."

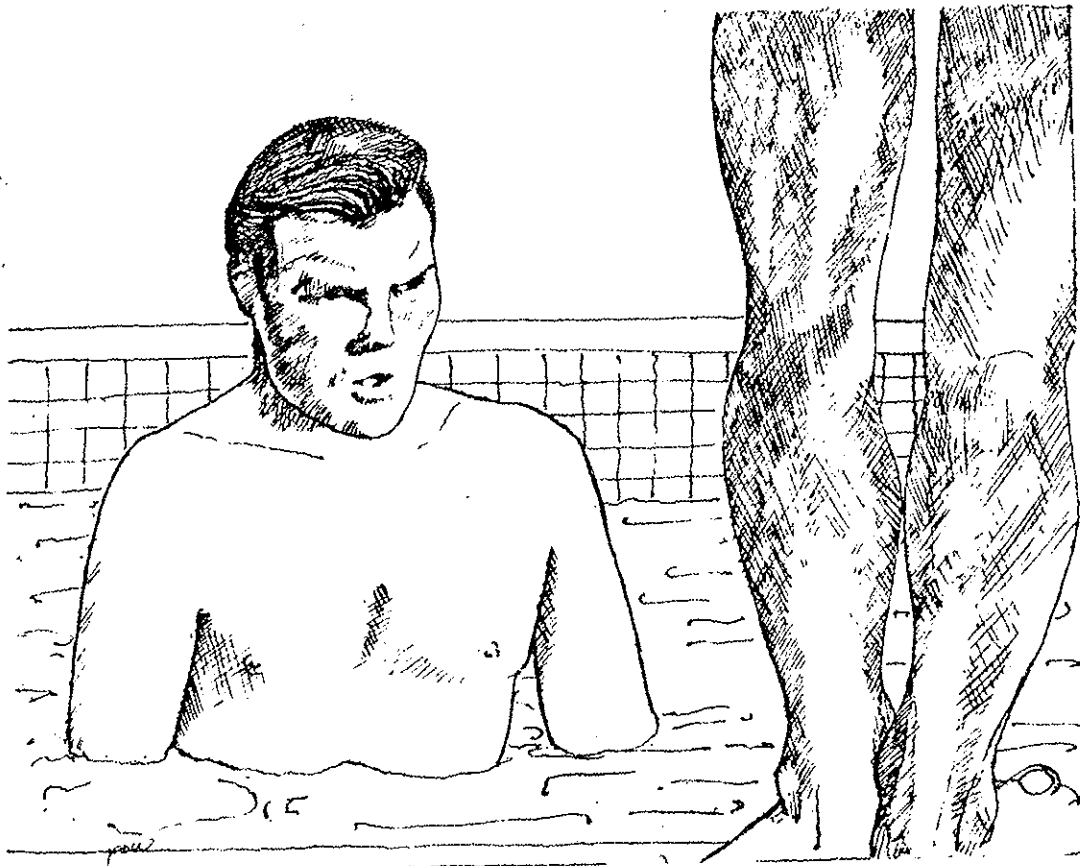
The Vulcan looked apprehensively at his Captain. "Captain, I am not afraid. I merely fail to see the pleasure in immersing oneself entirely in H²O. Besides..."

Kirk laughed. "You don't have to go under completely - well, not at first, anyway. Just hold you head up so that you can breath. Honestly, Spock, you'll love it and it's really quite warm in here."

Captain James T. Kirk stood, knee-deep in water, at the shallow end of the swimming pool aboard the U.S.S. Enterprise.

The ship was on a routine medical check stop-over at one of the smaller Starbases. Some of the crew had requested and been granted shore leave, but as the base was very small and uninteresting most crewmembers had opted to stay aboard and follow their favourite pastimes in the comfort of their own environment. The Chief Helmsman, Lt. Sulu, was firmly ensconced in the library, surrounded by books and tapes - his current occupation the creation of an encyclopaedia on the subject of fencing. He ~~was~~ entirely alone! Mr. Scott, the Chief Engineer, was at that time in the rec room, coffee cup in hand, attempting to figure out why his beloved engines preferred Warp Factor 8 to Warp Factor 15. And so it continued, throughout the whole ship crewmembers were 'doing their own thing' (as the ancient saying goes.)

During the long, uneventful journey to the Starbase Dr. McCoy had decided to sort out a few of the crew records, and it had come to his notice that a



certain Commander currently serving aboard the Enterprise had no commendation for swimming. Feeling that this was most unlike their Mr. Spock, he tackled the Captain on the matter. After an interview with his First Officer the Captain had ascertained that Mr. Spock, being a Vulcan, had never had the necessity - nor indeed the opportunity - to indulge in aquatic sports of any kind.

Realizing that this could be a very dangerous omission from his education, both the Captain and the doctor had decided that this matter should be rectified at the first possible moment.

That moment came approximately one week later, while the ship was locked in orbit around a very small Starbase in a very friendly part of the galaxy, necessitating the presence of neither the Captain nor the First Officer on the Bridge. Kirk had seized the chance to all but drag his Vulcan friend to the ship's swimming pool for his first lesson.

Spock stood on the top step, dubiously eyeing the blue/green water swirling around his ankles.

"Mr. Spock. Will you please get into the water. How the hell do you expect me to teach you to swim with you standing up there."

Spock transferred his gaze to the muscular figure in the pool. "Captain, I have managed perfectly well until now without learning to swim; surely it is illogical to suppose that I could not manage in the future."

Kirk compressed his lips with impatience. "All right, Mr. Spock, if you want it that way I'll make it an order. Now get into this pool and stop evading the issue." The Captain hated to pull rank on his friend, but there were times when it was necessary - and this was one of them.

The Vulcan picked his way gingerly down the steps until he was level with the Human. They walked towards the deep end, until the water was lapping at their chests, then Kirk stopped.

"Right, that's far enough." He placed one hand on the back of Spock's head and the other at the small of his back.

"Now, Spock, I want you to sit down in the water. Push your head back and bring your legs up to the surface, keeping them straight."

Looking somewhat resigned, Spock obeyed. It was not quite as easy as it sounded, but after one or two attempts Spock lay floating on the top of the water, with Kirk holding him up by his head and back.

"Relax, Spock, you're far too stiff." The Vulcan complied, relaxing his muscles gradually.

"That's good, you're doing fine." Gently Kirk lowered his hands from Spock's head and back and took a small step away, saying, "Now move your hands in a circular motion, like this."

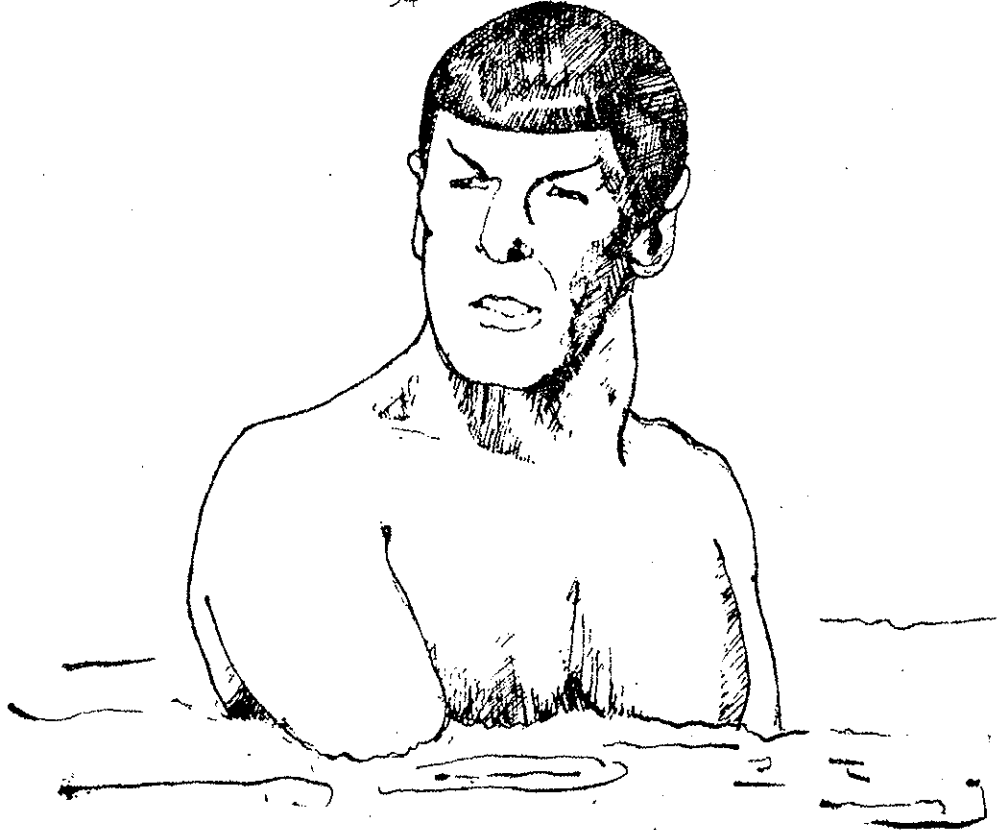
Kirk noticed that Spock seemed to be sinking, but put it down to his over-active imagination - until the unhappy Vulcan disappeared altogether. Kirk dived under the water, wondering what was going on, and Spock did a most unVulcanlike thing. He panicked.

They came up to the surface together, Kirk trying to dodge Spock's flailing arms and legs thrashing the water, and attempting to hold their heads above the surface.

Above the splashing noises he shouted, "Spock, it's all right! Calm down, I'm here."

Then, when he had stopped flailing and was standing upright beside Kirk, "Look, Spock, think about this logically. Would I willingly do anything to hurt you?"

The Vulcan turned an impassive face towards him. "Captain, I did try



to tell you, but you wouldn't listen. Vulcans do not have the same natural water buoyancy that Humans do - it is the reason why I cannot swim."

Kirk's jaw dropped. He hadn't thought about that. Neither had McCoy, it seemed.

"Oh... I see," he murmured after an awkward silence. He was beginning to feel rather foolish standing chest-deep in water holding a very negative conversation with his First Officer. "Well, we'd better leave it for now, then, and see what Bones says when he gets back."

They waded to the steps and moved across to the changing rooms.

* * *

"Why the hell didn't you tell me, Bones?" Kirk was pacing the deck in the doctor's office, doing his 'outraged Captain' act.

"Well, how was I to know he couldn't float?" McCoy grumbled. Kirk had pounced on him as soon as he had stepped down from the transporter pad. He had had a lousy day, and now this on top of everything else.

"You're the doctor, Bones. Didn't it show up in any of your tests?"

McCoy sighed. "Of course not! Water buoyancy is the last thing I'd test a crewman for. It just isn't... necessary." He looked thoughtful for a moment, then glanced up as the Captain spoke again.

"Poor Spock nearly drowned and all because you insisted that he should be taught to swim." Kirk pointed an accusing finger at the doctor. "You made me look a complete idiot."

"Just a moment, Captain." McCoy stood up and faced Kirk. "Don't blame the whole thing on me. You were the one to insist on teaching him... and anyway, I can give him some Hetralix to replace the natural elements," he added, almost as an afterthought.

Kirk stopped pacing. "What!" He thought for a moment, then said, "Well, get him in here and we'll give it another try."

Spock was not particularly keen on the idea, and said so. Kirk was about to pull rank again, but thought better of it.

"Why don't you want to swim, Spock?" he asked in exasperation.

"Because it is not natural for Vulcans to submerge themselves in water, unless they are bathing, Captain." Spock looked deeply into his Captain's eyes. "If you want me to, Jim, I will do my best; but I cannot guarantee the result."

Kirk grinned, rather like a small boy who had just been given the biggest piece of chocolate in the dish. "I understand, Spock. Thank you. Shall we go?"

* * *

The Vulcan was a very fast learner, and it was only a matter of hours before he was out-pacing the Human. Kirk sat at the edge of the pool watching Spock's aquatic prowess as the Vulcan glided easily through the water, his graceful strokes changing now and then as he practiced the breast stroke, crawl, back stroke, butterfly, side stroke, and others, some of which he had invented himself, Kirk was convinced. He stood up as McCoy came into view from around the corner.

"Well, how's our new swimming champion?" the doctor beamed brightly.

"See for yourself. He's brilliant," Kirk smiled.

Spock had decided that the water was too cold, so he heaved himself effortlessly over the side of the pool, to stand near Kirk and McCoy, regarding the latter with a barely civilised glare.

"Doctor, I hope my aquatic achievements are satisfactory to you?"

McCoy opened his mouth to speak, then shut it again rapidly.

Spock walked sedately over to the changing room, looking as if he was wearing an imaginary crown on his head. Kirk chuckled as he watched him go.

"You know, Bones, he's the only person I know who can walk around in swimming clothes, dripping wet, and still look as dignified as an ambassador."

"I know, Jim. He's so stubborn, I swear he could challenge the water not to make him wet... and succeed!"

Spock emerged with a towel draped around his shoulders. "That is illogical, Doctor. Water is hydrogen based, and since the Vulcan body is based on carbon..." He broke off as Kirk burst into uncontrollable laughter. "Jim, I do not see what is so funny about a molecule of hydrogen."

"Oh, Spock!" Kirk gasped, holding his stomach, "You'd make a marvellous comedian."

A winged right eyebrow lifted in reply.

FOR SAM by Katy Deery

I cried a little last night.
The tears I shed for you
With the grief that was held in tight.
I cried a little last night.

In finding those tears I found my release.
I've travelled in a tunnel so dark,
At last at the end I could see the light,
As I cried a little last night.

I have said my last goodbye.
I had hoped that it would ease
The ache that I hid from sight.
It did when I cried last night.

THE KING'S FOOL by Shirley Buck

The coffee cup slid neatly into Captain Kirk's hand before he had a chance to pick it up from the arm of his command chair. Kirk did a double-take, and then looked around to see if anyone else had noticed it, but everyone was busy about their numerous duties. Kirk shook his head. "I must need a break more than I thought." He sipped the coffee thoughtfully. He must have imagined it... surely.

Then came a warning from Spock indicating that they were nearing Romulan space, closely followed by the sighting of a Romulan battle-cruiser. The incident slipped from Kirk's mind.

After exchanging 'pleasantries' with the Romulan commander the Enterprise went on its way, and the rest of the duty period passed without further incident.

Later, though, in the rec room, Kirk stopped off for the inevitable cup of coffee, and went to seat himself next to Dr. McCoy. As he approached the chair slid out for him to sit down. Thinking that the doctor had pushed it out with his foot, Kirk sat down without thinking, only to find that the chair went with him with no effort from anyone. Kirk froze.

"What is it, Jim?" queried McCoy, smiling.

"Weeell, I don't know how to put this without it sounding as if I'm crazy. It really is the damndest thing." And Kirk explained about the two peculiar events of his day.

McCoy listened carefully. "I prescribe a warm nightcap and a good night's sleep - and a good deal less of the strain you've been having lately. You're just tired, and the mind plays strange tricks when it's overtired. Eight hours straight sleep, and you should feel a lot better."

"Thanks, Bones. I expect you're right. I am tired. Roll on the next R and R."

They went on to talk of general things, and it was not long before Kirk took McCoy's advice and settled down for his eight hours sleep.

Kirk got his eight hours uninterrupted sleep, and felt refreshed the next morning. He was somewhat dismayed, however, when he reached the Bridge, to discover that the Duty Officer of the Watch had tried to call him on the intercom twice during the night and had failed to rouse him. Fortunately, it had not been an emergency, just a report of an unidentified object which on closer scan had turned out to be a small cluster of drifting meteorites, well off the path of the Enterprise.

But Kirk was bothered. It could have been important. Usually he was able to snap from sleep to instant awareness as soon as the intercom buzzed. Surely he hadn't been that tired? Or perhaps McCoy had slipped him something to make sure he did have a good night's sleep. But on thinking about it, there had been no opportunity for McCoy to do so.

Twice during the day Kirk felt coffee cups put into his hand as he reached for them. And as he took his lunch tray to a table he thought he felt it grow lighter, as if someone was helping him to carry it.

Altogether, by the end of the day Kirk was not at all happy, and was beginning to wonder if he was fit enough to command in his present state.

Things were to get worse.

Next morning Kirk woke after a restless night, having spent a greater part of it wondering about his mental condition. He showered, and after towelling himself dry, he started to dress. Each article of clothing, which Kirk had left on the bed, placed itself into his hand, one after the other.

By the time Kirk was dressed he was in a slight state of shock, and shaking a little. He sat on the edge of his bed and looked for his boots. His eyes widened in horror as he saw them - dancing!!! Literally tap dancing all on their own. He made a grab for them, but they danced out of reach. He got up and tried to catch them, but they danced over the floor and up the wall.

"Now this really is happening. I know I'm not hallucinating."

The boots danced down the wall and came to a stop just in front of Kirk; they gave a last little tap and lay still.

Kirk looked down at them. "Those damn boots did move." He snapped on the intercom. "Kirk to Spock. Report to my quarters immediately, please."

"Very well, Captain," came Spock's calm voice.

"Kirk to McCoy. Report to my quarters immediately, Bones, with your scanner equipment."

"On my way, Jim."

When Spock and McCoy arrived Kirk explained what had happened. Spock examined the boots carefully, while McCoy checked Kirk over with his scanner.

"Well, Jim, I can find nothing wrong with you. You're as fit as you ever were."

"Captain, I can find nothing unusual about the boots at all. I am at a loss to explain what happened."

"Are you quite sure I'm not hallucinating, Bones? When I saw the boots dancing I was quite sure of what I was seeing. Now I'm beginning to wonder. Should I relinquish command until these happenings have been explained? I don't want to jeopardise the ship or crew in any way, if there is even a remote possibility that I'm seeing things."

"Oh, no, Captain, please do not do that. I am afraid I am to blame for everything."

The three men whirled round to where the voice came from and beheld the oddest figure they had seen in quite some time leaning casually against the wall.

He was humanoid, of medium height and build, with the usual number of eyes, ears (not pointed!), arms and legs. It was his dress which struck them all as odd. He wore purple and yellow striped tights with a long-sleeved jerkin of the same colours, patterned in squares. On his feet he wore emerald green boots with long pointed toes that curled up at the ends; on his head he had a cap with three long points. He carried a short stick with a carved head, like his own, on the end.

"Who are you?" managed Kirk.

"Meriandro, at your service," the stranger said with a deep bow. "And I do offer you my most sincere apologies, Captain Kirk."

"Do you mean to say that you are responsible for all the things that have been happening to me in the last couple of days?" asked Kirk.

"I was only trying to please you - really I was," the little man said unhappily.

"Please me?" Kirk spluttered. "By making me think I was hallucinating and not fit for command? Anyway, what do you want to please me for? I've never seen you before. And how did you get aboard my ship?"

"It's a long story, Captain, and I hardly know where to begin. But please do forgive me for any unhappiness and worry I may have caused you. I truly did not mean you any harm."

"Very well, your apologies are accepted. I must say I am relieved to find I have not been seeing things. But I think I am entitled to an explanation of why you are here, and where you came from."

"Certainly, Captain. I will tell you everything you wish to know. Where I come from? A land called Baylevere, a most delightful place, sir, where laughter and music hold sway."

"There must be more going on than laughter and music," said Kirk, drily.

"But of course, Captain, of course. But we live a most simple life, quite different from the life you lead in this castle. Do you know, to be truthful, I'm not sure exactly what to call these surroundings. It certainly is not like any castle I have visited."

The three officers exchanged glances, but forbore to comment.

Meriandro went on, "Your throne room is not what one would expect, either. Not much room for holding banquets and audiences - and all those flashing lights! Quite made my head spin!"

"Does he mean the Bridge?" said McCoy in a low voice. "What exactly have we got here?"

"Quiet, Bones," said Kirk. "Meriandro, you are aboard a Starship of the Federation, and I should like to know how you got here."

"Starship? Federation? These are all meaningless words to me. As to how I got here... Well, it all started when my King died..." His voice faltered.

"Your King?" questioned Kirk.

"Captain," Spock interrupted, "I think we will find that Meriandro is a Court Jester. On Earth, in the so-called Middle Ages, many of the courts of Europe had Court Jesters, men whose job it was to entertain, to make people laugh - particularly the King."

"I don't know about the place Mr. Spock called Yurop. What terms you people use! But he is quite right. I am a Court Jester. Meriandro, the King's Fool, at your service." He swept a low bow.

"But that doesn't explain how you got here," persisted Kirk.

"I was coming to that, Captain. My King, King Jendera, died. He was like a father to me. He took me under his wing when both my parents died of the sickness, when I was six. He shared his life with me. Who else has a King to confide in? It is lonely to be set in a position high above other men."

Beneath his breath Kirk murmured, "I know."

Meriandro continued without hearing, "For many years I shared his heartaches and his joys, and then... he died. To say I felt sad is meaningless, but it will suffice. I was not wanted in the court of the new King. Such is the life of a Fool. Fools are not expected to be sad, not expected to feel grief when a person they love dies. However it was, I left the court, and not one person said, 'Don't go!'"

There was a silence as Meriandro fought to control his voice. Kirk's face was swept by deep pity. "And then?" he prompted gently.

"And then?" repeated Meriandro bitterly. "And then - nothing. Nothing but a-wandering, ~~wandering~~ through the land watching other people laugh and sing. Nobody wants a Fool who cries. One day I was sitting under a tree, resting before continuing on my endless journey. I was watching the clouds drift by, when one of them seemed to be drifting lower and becoming a silvery colour. I was enveloped in it, and it made me feel happy. The next thing I knew I was in your throne room."

"But we never saw you!" exclaimed Kirk.

"You never looked up." Meriandro smiled, and drifted casually to the ceiling.

"Fascinating! He has the power of levitation," said Spock. "Can all your people do this?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Spock. It is perfectly natural, as is the ability to move objects around." And very gently and carefully a chair moved across the room.

"And the boots dancing around the room was you?" questioned Kirk.

"Oh yes, Captain. I thought only to amuse you."

"You nearly scared the pants off me!"

"It was a trick I used to play on my King sometimes... only he laughed."

"I might have done so too, if I was used to things moving around on their own."

"I understand, Captain. It would be quite a shock if you were not used to such things. I noticed that none of you seem able to move objects around - or levitate either."

"No, none of us can," said Kirk with a grin. "But the delights of being able to do so are not lost on us."

"Then you will take me for your Fool?" exclaimed Meriandro eagerly.

Kirk was taken aback. "Take you for my Fool?" he stammered.

The others looked on in sympathy. How to tell this sad, delightful little man that he wasn't wanted?

But at that moment a silvery cloud enveloped Meriandro. With no chance to even say goodbye, the cloud and Meriandro disappeared.

"Fascinating," murmured Spock.

"Spock, if you say that one more time, I will levitate you flat on the floor!" spluttered McCoy.

Spock raised his eyebrow. "Really, Doctor, for someone of your supposed intelligence, you show a regrettable lack of knowledge. 'Levitate' means to raise the body into the air, not lie it on the ground."

McCoy went purple. "I know that, you... you fool!"

"Fool, Doctor? Surely you jest! It came as no surprise to me that the Captain would not need a Fool. It would seem he already has one."

McCoy was utterly speechless, and looked things not lawful to be uttered.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen, please." Kirk grinned at each in turn. "You are both indispensable to me!"

Spock remained impassive, while McCoy's colour gradually returned to normal.

"What do you think happened to Meriandro, Jim?"

Kirk smiled. "I don't think we need worry about Meriandro. He has his Fairy Godmother looking after him!"

Uhura : I keep seeing spots before my eyes.

Chapel : Have you seen Dr. McCoy?

Uhura : No, only spots.

SHADOW FROM THE PAST by Elizabeth Butler

Oregon Four was not a very prepossessing place. A small planet about the size of Mercury in the Sol system, its surface was predominantly hot, arid desert with a spattering of small, scrubby oases. It was in one of these barely habitable areas that Captain Kirk and Nurse Chapel had spent the last few hours on a routine assignment delivering medical supplies and carrying out supplementary medical checks. Kirk had accompanied the nurse himself for purely personal reasons, the head of the establishment being an old friend from Academy days.

Now, several hours later, he was beginning to doubt the wisdom of his actions. Professor David Avery had insisted that Kirk and Nurse Chapel accompany him on a conducted tour of the base as soon as the nurse had completed the examinations. Within minutes they were bathed in perspiration moving from one section to another. Kirk made a valiant attempt to appear interested in the various labs and experiments being carried out, but couldn't stop a sigh of heartfelt relief escaping him as they emerged from the last unit. David smiled apologetically.

"Sorry, Jim. I know you must be anxious to get out of this heat. We're all so used to it that we don't notice it much now."

Kirk grinned ruefully. "I must admit I shan't be altogether sorry to leave. I feel like someone locked me in an oven."

After exchanging last goodbyes David stepped aside and Kirk flipped open his communicator.

"Kirk to Enterprise."

"Captain. Spock here. Are you ready to beam up?"

Kirk and Christine exchanged relieved glances.

"Yes, Mr. Spock. We are most definitely ready to beam up."

As the familiar transporter sparkle enveloped the starship personnel, Professor Avery raised a hand in farewell, and turned back into the main building.

Stepping off the transporter platform into the welcome coolness of the Enterprise, Kirk waved a farewell to Christine and set off in the direction of the turbolift. As he neared it he stopped abruptly. He closed his eyes, took a deep, steadying breath, and opened them slowly. For a second or two he had clearly seen two turbolift doors. There was certainly only one there now, which was, after all, as it should be.

He shook his head. The heat must have affected him more than he had realised. Shrugging his shoulders, he stepped into the turbolift and made his way to his quarters. After an invigorating shower and a change of clothes he felt almost normal again.

As Spock handed over command he observed mildly, "I trust you encountered nothing untoward down on the planet, Captain."

"No, Mr. Spock. Perfectly routine." He turned to the navigator. "Mr. Chekov, lay in a course for our next port of call. You have the coordinates?"

"Yes, sir," answered Chekov, adjusting dials and punching buttons in sequence. "Course laid in, sir."

"Mr. Sulu, implement course. Ahead warp one."

"Aye aye, sir."

As Kirk turned his chair to face Spock's station, he felt a sudden cold chill down his spine. He could distinctly see two Spocks turning towards him. He fought down a momentary feeling of panic, and raised his hands to

his face. As he slowly removed his fingers, his eyes met the concerned gaze of his First Officer.

"Captain, are you quite well?"

"Of course, Spock. Why shouldn't I be?"

"No particular reason, sir," Spock replied somewhat uncertainly. "I merely thought you looked a little... confused."

Kirk smiled with a lot more reassurance than he felt. "I appreciate your concern, Mr. Spock, but I really am perfectly all right. It was rather hot down there, that's all."

"Yes, sir."

As Spock turned reluctantly back to his console Kirk forced himself to relax. Was it just the effect of the heat? Goodness knows, he'd been in hotter situations dozens of times, but he certainly didn't remember suffering from double vision as a result. He felt fine again, apart from a slight headache, and he made a mental note to check in with McCoy when his duty period ended.

Down in Sickbay Christine Chapel was having her own problems. As she dressed a crewman's injured leg she suddenly grabbed the edge of the examination couch and closed her eyes against an attack of acute vertigo.

"Nurse! Is anything wrong?" The man's voice was anxious.

Christine pulled herself together with an effort and smiled reassuringly. "Don't worry, Ensign, it's nothing. Really," she insisted as he continued to stare concernedly at her. "I'm fine. There. That's it," as she finished dressing his leg. "Take it easy on that leg for a couple of days."

She helped him down from the couch, and with a last uncertain glance at her, the Ensign left.

As the door closed behind him Christine relaxed against her desk feeling vaguely uneasy. That was the second time she's felt giddy since returning from Omegon Four. The attacks had both been very brief, leaving her feeling perfectly normal afterwards, but it was disturbing all the same.

She resolutely turned and started to clear away, and McCoy chose that moment to enter from the inner lab.

"Hi, Christine." He smiled with an inner glee, immediately arousing Christine's suspicions. "I didn't realise you'd got back yet. You didn't find anyone suffering from some diabolical disease down there, did you?"

"Not a one, Doctor. In fact, they were all remarkably healthy, considering the fact that the place is like a furnace."

"Yes, I know," answered McCoy with considerable satisfaction. "I was there myself several years ago. That's why I let you go this time. They had their regular annual physicals several months ago, and as this visit was mainly to deliver supplies and give them a quick once-over, I thought you might appreciate the break in routine."

Christine shot him a baleful glance and remarked icily, "Why, thank you, Doctor. I'm very grateful."

"Thought you might be," rejoined McCoy, with one of his wickedest grins.

Christine turned away to pick up a hypospray she'd been using and, as the room tilted crazily, a needle-sharp pain behind her eyes made her gasp. She was vaguely aware of an arm steadying her, and a voice seemed to be calling her name from a long way off. Fighting back a feeling of nausea she made a supreme effort to keep her voice steady as she murmured, "I'm... all right,

Doctor. Just a little dizzy, that's all."

"That's all!" echoes McCoy. "Christine, you're not usually prone to fainting fits. Has this happened before?"

"Ye...es," answered Christine, a little unwillingly.

"When?" McCoy's voice was sharp with concern. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"It only just started after I beamed up from Omegon Four."

"How often?" persisted McCoy.

"A couple of times. But it was only for a second," she added hastily as McCoy steered her to an examination couch. "Really, Doctor, please don't fuss. I feel fine now. Probably just a touch of the sun, that's all."

"Then it won't hurt to make sure, will it? No arguments," as she opened her mouth for a further protest. "I'M the doctor around here, remember, and I give the orders. Right?"

With a sigh of resignation Christine submitted to the examination.

A few minutes later McCoy stood looking down at her, a slight frown on his face. "Slightly raised temperature and pulse. Not enough to worry about. I can't find anything else."

"I told you I was all right." Christine sat up and swung her legs over the side of the couch. "May I be dismissed now, sir?" she asked demurely.

McCoy grinned and laid his hands on her shoulders. "Okay, but take it easy for a while. And if you have a recurrence of these dizzy spells, let me know immediately."

As Christine got down hurriedly and disappeared into the lab, McCoy turned to find Spock standing in the doorway.

Leaning against his desk he observed nonchalantly, "Funny effect you seem to have on women, Spock. If they're not mooning over you, they're running away from you."

Spock merely raised an eyebrow, refusing to rise to the bait. He looked enquiringly at the doctor. "Is something wrong with Nurse Chapel?"

Something in the tone of his voice stirred McCoy's interest. "Why, Spock, are you worried about her?" he drawled. "I didn't know you cared. And I'm sure Christine doesn't."

"Please, Doctor," Spock cut in quickly before McCoy could get himself launched on one of his 'get at Spock' sessions. "This could be important. Is there something wrong with Nurse Chapel?"

There was definitely an undercurrent of apprehension in Spock's normally inflectionless voice, which McCoy was quick to notice. He looked at Spock for several seconds, then sighed and shrugged.

"Sorry, Spock. Force of habit." He smiled wryly. "You have an uncanny knack of bringing out the worst in me."

As Spock raised his eyebrows, ever so slightly, McCoy continued thoughtfully, "I really don't know what, if anything, is wrong with Christine. She's had several dizzy spells since returning from that last assignment. She insists it's only an effect of the intense heat on Omegon Four. She could well be right. I've been there myself, and believe me, it's no picnic." He glanced up at Spock, and couldn't resist adding, "Anyway, why the sudden interest in Christine's welfare?"

Spock took a deep breath and replied evenly, "It is not specifically Nurse Chapel's welfare that prompts my interest, Doctor, although of course I should not wish her to be ill." He looked challengingly at McCoy and continued, "The fact that Nurse Chapel is feeling unwell disturbs me, because I have noticed similar symptoms in the Captain, that being the reason for my

presence here now. He also insists that nothing is wrong, but on several occasions in the last hour he has appeared momentarily..." he paused fractionally, as if searching for the right word, "... disoriented. In view of the fact that both the Captain and Nurse Chapel have just returned from Omegon Four..."

"I'm 'way ahead of you," McCoy interposed, with an abrupt change of manner. He reached for the wall intercom and punched it sharply.

"Sickbay to Bridge!"

"Yes, Bones."

"Jim, I want you down here immediately!"

"Can't it wait? I'm in the middle of..."

"Captain!" snapped McCoy. "I said immediately. That means now!"

He cut off the intercom before Kirk could argue further, and turned back to face the First Officer.

"No-one else beamed down to the surface, did they?"

Spock shook his head. "No, Doctor. It was a purely routine assignment. Nurse Chapel could quite easily have managed with just a crewman to help carry the supplies. The Captain elected to accompany her himself as the Director is an old friend of his."

McCoy crossed to the lab door through which Christine had vanished. "Nurse Chapel, come back in here a moment, please."

As Christine reappeared the door to Sickbay swooshed open, admitting an irritated Captain Kirk.

"Bones, what's going on?" he demanded impatiently. Then his eyes alighted on Spock. "Spock, what are you doing here?"

He intercepted a glance between Spock and the doctor and looked searchingly at McCoy.

"Captain..." began Spock.

Kirk swung round to face his First Officer, who met his gaze calmly.

"I get it," he said slowly. "Spock, I told you I was all right. There was no need to come running to Bones, just because of a couple of dizzy spells."

Before Spock could reply McCoy cut in, "Let me be the judge of that. Come on, up on the couch."

"What?"

"You heard. Up on the couch."

Kirk took a deep breath and said, very quietly, "Bones, I have work to do. I'm sure you have enough to do without wasting time on unnecessary examinations."

"Oh," countered McCoy, "and when did you gain your medical degree, Doctor Kirk?"

A slow smile spread across Kirk's face, despite his irritation, and McCoy continued quickly, "Jim, we're not ganging up on you, believe me. It's just that Christine has been having similar attacks of vertigo. Since only you and she were on Omegon Four, and these attacks started immediately after your return... You must admit it's a strange coincidence."

Kirk's gaze switched from McCoy to Christine. "You too?"

Christine nodded. "Yes, sir."

"Captain?"

Kirk turned to regard Spock quizzically, sensing his discomfort. "Yes,

Spock. Feeling guilty?"

"Not at all, sir," Spock retorted with dignity. "I felt it my duty to consult Doctor McCoy when I had reason to believe that you, the Captain of a Starship, were suffering from frequent lapses of concentration. I merely wished to apologise for the manner in which I handled the situation. I should have consulted you first..."

"No, Spock. You were quite right. It is I who should be apologising to you." He grinned suddenly, and said with mock formality, "I apologise, Mr. Spock, for my behaviour a few moments ago."

"That's quite all right, sir," said Spock, stiffly. "I understand perfectly."

"Well, now we've got that sorted out," broke in McCoy, "can we please get on? Jim, up on the couch."

Kirk laughed outright. "This is where we came in," he chuckled, climbing up onto the couch obediently.

"Well," sighed McCoy ~~some time~~ later as the four of them sat in his office, "that didn't get us very far, did it?"

The examination had proved as inconclusive as Christine's.

"As far as I can tell, you're both perfectly healthy, apart from that slight rise in pulse rate and temperature."

"So, where do we go from here?" asked Kirk.

McCoy leaned back in his chair and regarded his small but attentive audience. "You tell me. If we face facts, we've got to admit that your symptoms aren't exactly identical. In your case, Jim, you're suffering from double vision. Christine, on the other hand, mentioned nothing about double vision." He looked questioningly at Christine, who slowly shook her head.

"No, Doctor, just dizziness and headaches. Oh, and a strong feeling of nausea after the last attack."

"Perhaps," suggested Spock, "you should start checking the medical records from Omegon Four. Maybe something was overlooked."

Christine was immediately defensive. "Mr. Spock, I carried out those checks myself. There was nothing that could have any bearing on the present situation."

"Nurse Chapel, I did not intend to cast doubt on your ability. I merely remarked that they should be checked. Nothing has come to light from the examinations performed by Dr. McCoy on yourself and the Captain. Since these symptoms have only manifested themselves since the beam-up from the planet, it would seem logical to assume that the cause is something on that planet."

"I hate to admit it, but Spock's right, Christine," put in McCoy. "Fetch the tapes and we'll run through them together."

As Christine departed, slightly mollified, Kirk turned to McCoy. "Bones, if you don't need me for anything further, can I get back to the Bridge?"

"I don't see why not," mused McCoy. "I know where to find you if I need you."

"Thanks, Bones. Come on, Spock - let's go."

Kirk vanished through the door, and as Spock turned to follow McCoy caught his arm and murmured quietly, "Keep an eye on him, will you?"

Spock nodded understandingly and followed Kirk. As the door closed behind him Christine re-entered from the lab and silently handed over the tapes.

McCoy grinned encouragingly and, slipping an arm around her shoulders, said consolingly, "Cheer up, my dear. You must see that we have to check every possible angle."

Christine sighed in resignation. "Very well, Doctor. But you won't find anything. It's all a storm in a teacup. A slight touch of sunstroke."

McCoy was to remember those words when he entered Sickbay the following morning to find it deserted. He poked his head round the lab door to find a couple of nurses checking supplies.

"Have either of you seen Nurse Chapel anywhere?" he queried.

"No, sir," replied one of the girls, looking in his direction. "We were just beginning to wonder where she was ourselves."

A warning bell sounded somewhere at the back of McCoy's mind as he crossed to the intercom and buzzed Christine's room. As the speaker remained ominously silent, the warning bell escalated to a strident alarm. He spun on his heel and left Sickbay at a run.

"Sickbay to Bridge! Sickbay to Bridge!"

McCoy's voice came urgently over the speaker, and Kirk flipped a switch on the arm of his chair.

"Yes, Bones. What is it?"

"Jim! Is that you? How do you feel?"

"Fine, Bones, fine. What's up?"

"Listen, Jim, are you sure? It's important." McCoy's voice was anxious.

"Of course I'm sure. Why the fuss... Wait a minute." A sudden thought struck him. "Christine?"

"Yes, Jim." There was a pause, then, "I think you'd better get down here."

"How long's she been like this?" queried Kirk. He, Spock and McCoy were grouped round a bed in a side ward of Sickbay. Tossing restlessly, her face flushed with fever, lay Christine Chapel.

McCoy sighed, his eyes never leaving his patient. "I have no idea. She was fine last night. When she didn't show up this morning I had a nasty feeling something was wrong, so I went looking for her. This is how I found her."

"Have you any idea what's wrong with her?" asked Spock.

"At this moment, none at all. It could be anything! We checked and double-checked those tapes. Nothing! No-one had as much as a cold."

Kirk looked worriedly from Christine's fever-racked body to McCoy. "Bones, I don't like it. It's just too much of a coincidence." He looked back at Christine. "If we're both suffering from the same thing, how come I feel better today, and she's like this?"

Spock, standing at the foot of the bed, his hands clasped behind his back, speculated, "Maybe it is, after all, just coincidence. As the doctor pointed out, your symptoms weren't identical."

"That doesn't necessarily mean anything, Spock," countered McCoy. "No two people react in exactly the same way, even to a specific illness. Lots of factors are involved - different rates of metabolism, higher levels of resistance..."

"You mean there's a possibility that I could be next?" broke in Kirk.

"I would say so, Jim. Yes. I want to check you over again." He ushered Spock and Kirk out of the room and beckoned a hovering nurse. "Stay with her and let me know if there's any change."

The girl nodded and entered the room.

"Well?" demanded Kirk, as McCoy perched on the edge of the couch. "Anything?"

McCoy took a deep breath. "There's a definite deterioration since yesterday. The reflexes in your arms and legs are a little sluggish."

"What does that mean?"

"I wish I knew." McCoy shook his head in frustration. "Nothing makes sense at the moment."

The two men were silent, each lost in his own thoughts.

"Doctor!" The nurse's voice was sharp with anxiety.

McCoy, with Kirk at his heels, hurried to Christine's bedside. She was lying perfectly still, eyes staring unseeingly, her breath coming in tortured rasps.

After a quick scan with his tricorder McCoy barked to the nurse, "Complete life support! Quickly!"

The girl hurried to obey, and as the welcome hum of the life support mechanism filled the room, the laboured breathing slowly relaxed. McCoy commenced a more detailed examination and Kirk drifted out into Sickbay proper, his brain in a whirl. He sank down into McCoy's chair and leaned his elbows on the desk, his head in his hands. He felt suddenly very weak and scared. The minutes seemed to stretch into eternity, then, at the sound of approaching footsteps, he pulled himself together and looked up.

"Bones, is she...?"

McCoy laid a gentle hand on his shoulder. "She's all right for the moment."

"What the hell happened?" whispered Kirk. "I thought she was dying!"

"She was," McCoy said, very quietly.

"But how? You said she was all right last night. You said..."

"I know what I said," interrupted McCoy. "I don't understand it myself. The symptoms strongly resemble those of a disease that was prevalent on Earth in the 19th and early 20th centuries." He paused. "Have you ever heard of poliomyelitis, Jim?"

"Poliomyelitis?" echoed Kirk. He frowned in concentration. "I seem to have a vague recollection. Wasn't it some sort of paralysing disease?"

"Yes, that's right. It was caused by a virus. Before a preventative was found in the mid 20th century, hundreds of people either died or suffered permanent paralysis."

Kirk was horrified. "Is that what you think this is?"

"I didn't say that, Jim," McCoy broke in quickly. "For heaven's sake, don't get alarmed. For a start, it's progressed much too quickly for it to be polio as we know it. All I said was, the symptoms are similar."

"So what do we do now? Am I suddenly going to collapse like Christine? Isn't there anything you can do?" His voice was rising, and McCoy gripped his shoulders and shook him gently.

"Jim, take it easy, please. Getting worked up isn't going to help."

Kirk closed his eyes and forced himself to relax. "Sorry, Bones. I know you're doing all you can. It's just that..."

"I know, Jim. I know."

Taking a deep breath Kirk got slowly to his feet, brushing a hand across his eyes.

McCoy, noting the gesture, asked quickly, "Are you all right? Headache?"

"Mmmm. A bit. Not enough to worry about." He met McCoy's gaze squarely. "Honestly, I feel okay. If there's nothing more you can do for me now, will it be all right if I get back on duty? I mean, this thing's not infectious, is it?"

McCoy smiled wryly. "If it is, it's a bit late to start worrying about it now. Both you and Christine have had time to contaminate half the ship, judging by the speed of Christine's collapse. If you're sure you feel all right, I don't see any reason why you shouldn't go back to the Bridge. Help take your mind off things."

"You'll let me know if anything...?"

"Of course, Jim."

With a grateful smile Kirk departed, and, as the door closed behind him, McCoy crossed quickly to the intercom and buzzed the Bridge.

"Yes, Doctor."

Spock's calm tones went a long way toward steadying McCoy's overstretched nerves.

"Spock, Jim's on his way up. Can you watch him carefully, without making it too obvious? He's just had a considerable shock. I haven't time to explain right now, he'll be there in a minute. Anyway, he'll probably tell you himself."

"Doctor," reproved Spock mildly, "I'm sure you are aware that your request was unnecessary. I have been keeping a close watch on the Captain since that unfortunate beam-down."

"Yes, I know," sighed McCoy. "I just wanted to reassure myself, that's all."

"I quite understand, Doctor." A slight, but noticeable note of compassion tinged Spock's voice as he continued, "Don't worry, Doctor McCoy. If he shows any further symptoms I will bring him to Sickbay myself."

McCoy breathed a sigh of relief. "Thanks, Spock. I don't know what we'd do without you."

"Indeed, Doctor. I have asked myself that very question hundreds of times."

McCoy smiled to himself as he turned away from the intercom. Trust Spock to put things back into perspective.

As Kirk stepped onto the Bridge Spock rose from the command chair and regarded him clinically. Kirk straightened his shoulders and met Spock's gaze unwaveringly, unspoken understanding passing between them. Temporarily satisfied, Spock returned to his station and Kirk settled into his chair.

"Captain," came Uhura's voice from the communications station. "Message coming in from Starfleet, sir."

"Thank you, Lieutenant. Put it on the main viewer."

"Yes, sir," acknowledged Uhura.

The viewscreen lit up to reveal the craggy features of Commodore Davis. Kirk smiled in recognition. "Hello, Harvey. It's been a long time."

"It's good to see you again too, Jim. We've both come a long way in... how many years has it been?"

"Must be ten, at least," answered Kirk.

"Oh, easily," agreed Davis. "We must get together sometime."

"Yes, I'd like that. But I'm sure there must be a more important reason for this communication than saying hello to an old friend."

"Yes, of course." The Commodore was immediately businesslike. "You remember Commissioner Ferris?"

Kirk glanced across at Spock. How could he forget Ferris? It was on his order that Kirk had had to abandon the search for Spock, McCoy and Scotty a year or so back when their shuttlecraft had crash-landed on a hostile planet. Ferris had been perfectly within his rights, of course, but Kirk could still remember his heartache at the thought of losing his dearest friends, and his deep resentment of Commissioner Ferris's cold-blooded handling of the situation. It was only Spock's last desperate gamble of turning the shuttlecraft itself into a flare by releasing and igniting the fuel that had enabled the Enterprise's sensors to pick them up and pluck them out of the disintegrating vessel by transporter. Kirk had never forgiven Ferris for his near tragic loss.

He returned his attention to the viewscreen as he realised that Davis was waiting for an answer. "Yes, Harvey," he said noncommittally. "I remember Commissioner Ferris." He waited expectantly.

"You are to alter course to Theta Minor to pick up the Commissioner and convey him to Starbase 3, where he is to attend an important Federation conference."

"Theta Minor!" echoed Kirk in disbelief. "Harvey, that's the other side of the quadrant! It'll take us days to get there. Isn't there any other Starship nearer?"

"Jim, if there was, do you think I'd be ordering you to change course? I'm sorry, but you'll have to postpone your present assignment. This conference is important, and Commissioner Ferris's presence, whilst not exactly crucial, could be very advantageous to us."

Kirk sighed resignedly. "Of course, Commodore," he said formally. "I understand."

"Thank you, Captain," returned the Commodore, equally formally. "I felt sure you would. You have eight days in which to pick up the Commissioner and get him to Starbase 3 in time for the conference." Davis grinned suddenly and added, "Good luck, Jim."

"Thanks, Harvey. I think I'm going to need it."

As the image faded from the screen Kirk let out his breath and exploded, "Ferris! That's all we need. As if we hadn't enough problems."

Spock cleared his throat and ventured, "Captain, don't you think you should have acquainted the Commodore with the situation we find ourselves in at the moment?"

"Situation, Spock? What situation? One woman is ill. I fail to see the necessity of informing Starfleet of an unspecified illness affecting one crewmember."

"Two, Captain," reminded Spock quietly, "one of whom is the Captain of this ship."

The two men regarded each other in silence for several seconds, then Kirk's eyes dropped to his clasped hands.

"All right, Spock. Two crewmembers. But I still see no reason to inform Starfleet. Even if I do succumb to whatever is affecting Christine, you are perfectly capable of taking over the Enterprise and completing the mission, as you are very well aware. So is Starfleet."

Spock inclined his head, appeared as if about to make a further comment, then merely nodded, replying, "Thank you, sir."

Kirk turned wearily to Chekov. "Mr. Chekov, you heard that transmission. Alter course setting for Theta Minor and implement immediately."

"Yes, sir."

"Have you ever heard of poliomyelitis, Spock?" asked Kirk as the two of them sat in Kirk's quarters a couple of hours later.

Spock's eyebrows rose as he took in the implications of the question. "I've heard of it, yes," he answered guardedly. "May I ask why?"

"Bones says that Christine's present condition closely resembles case histories he's read on the disease."

"But, surely that was conquered centuries ago?"

"Yes, it was. According to Bones, there hasn't been a case recorded for over 200 years. He stressed that it can't be polio as we know it. The speed of its progress, for one thing. It should take several days to affect anyone as badly as Christine." His voice tailed off and he shuddered, remembering. "Spock, it was so frightening. She couldn't breath. She was literally dying, right there in front of our eyes." He fell silent, rubbing his eyes with clenched fists.

Spock, on constant alert for any recurrence of Kirk's symptoms, moved instinctively closer to him. He betrayed no sign of his very real concern as he said quietly, "Captain, don't you think you ought to rest for a while?"

Kirk smiled weakly at his friend. "Maybe you're right," he agreed. "This damned headache's getting worse."

He got slowly to his feet and would have fallen had not Spock moved quickly to support him. He raised stricken eyes to Spock's face.

"My legs, Spock. My legs feel like lead. I can't seem to move them."

Spock lifted Kirk easily in his arms and carried him over to the bed, laying him down gently. Crossing to the intercom, he said urgently, "Spock to Sickbay!"

"Yes, Spock. What can I do for you?" McCoy asked apprehensively.

"Captain's quarters. Please hurry."

"I'm on my way."

Spock returned to the bed and sat down. Kirk was visibly trembling, and reached out a hand blindly. Spock grasped it firmly in both of his, and spoke gently.

"Easy, Jim. McCoy's on his way."

Kirk's voice was a strangled whisper. "Spock, I'm scared. What the hell's happening?"

McCoy voiced much the same question to Spock a short time later, after having settled Kirk into Sickbay and administering a sedative to calm his nerves.

"I just can't understand it, Spock!" he exploded. "Right now, both of them are displaying classic symptoms of polio. It's impossible!"

"Classic symptoms?" queried Spock.

"Yes. In Jim's case his legs are completely paralysed. The paralysis may stop there, or it could extend upwards until it affects the muscles of the chest, as has happened in Christine's case, with alarming speed. Without complete life support she's dead."

"Are you any nearer to discovering the cause and possible treatment?"

McCoy shrugged his shoulders dispiritedly. "I know exactly what's happening to them, but as to why...and how to stop it... I just don't know."

"We have established," mused Spock, "that whatever is affecting them originated on Omegon Four."

"That," remarked McCoy, "would seem to be the logical assumption."

Spock raised an eyebrow ever so slightly. "Quite," he observed. "However, the point I am endeavouring to make is that maybe we should concentrate our efforts on the point of origin, rather than on the actual disease."

"Point of origin? I'm not quite with you, Spock."

"It's quite simple, Doctor. I intend to return to Omegon Four."

"Return to... But Spock, I've gone through the medical reports with a fine-tooth comb. There was nothing..."

"Nevertheless," Spock interrupted impatiently, "it is the only logical place to look for an answer."

So saying, he swept out of Sickbay, leaving McCoy staring after him in consternation.

As Spock strode purposefully onto the Bridge, Scotty hurriedly vacated the command chair. With a nod of acknowledgement Spock sat down and swivelled round to face Chekov and Sulu.

"Mr. Chekov, Mr. Sulu, change course immediately to heading 347 mark 43."

"Yes, sir," answered Chekov, bending over his console. He looked up after a minute and stared at Spock confusedly.

"Excuse me, sir. I don't understand. Those are the coordinates for Omegon Four."

"I am aware of that, Mr. Chekov."

Chekov looked helplessly across to Uhura, seeking support.

"Mr. Spock, sir," ventured Uhura, "we have orders from Starfleet to proceed immediately to Theta Minor."

Spock could feel several pairs of eyes regarding him questioningly. He looked from Chekov to Uhura.

"Lieutenant, my hearing is excellent, and I was present when the transmission from Starfleet came through. However, something more important has arisen, which necessitates our return to Omegon Four."

Scotty decided to lend support to Chekov and Uhura. "Mr. Spock, what about Commissioner Ferris? He's already got a definite grudge against the Captain, an' if we dinna get him to that conference..." His voice tailed off as the Vulcan slowly rose and surveyed the Bridge.

"Gentlemen," he began coldly, then with a nod to Uhura, "Lieutenant. Commissioner Ferris's feelings toward the Captain are of no consequence at this time. The Captain is not in command."

The Bridge personnel exchanged glances as Spock continued unperturbed. "I see no reason to explain my orders in detail. Suffice it to say that, as from this moment until further notice, I am in command of this ship, and you

will follow my orders without question. Is that clear?"

A chorus of 'Yes, sir's greeted this last as Spock allowed his gaze to rest momentarily on each person, returning ultimately to Chekov.

"Mr. Chekov, I presume you have locked in the coordinates I gave you."

"Yes, sir," mumbled Chekov miserably. His feelings toward Spock were very much akin to hero-worship, and he regretted being, unwittingly, the cause of Spock's having to assert his authority in this manner. He looked up and met those dark, alien eyes, and for a second caught a suggestion of something - compassion, maybe a need to be understood - then it was gone, to be replaced by the familiar Vulcan mask. But Chekov felt a little easier, nonetheless.

Scotty, also, had noticed the momentary relaxation of Spock's impassive face, and drew his own conclusions. If Spock had assumed command then the Captain must either be ill or out of action for some reason, and the return to Omegon Four must be in some way connected with his non-appearance. He turned to Sulu and Chekov.

"You heard Mr. Spock. Let's get under way."

If Spock felt any resentment toward Scotty because of his intervention he gave no indication of it, and resumed his seat.

Scotty raised the matter with McCoy when he was off duty, and received the full story of the mysterious illness affecting the Captain and the Head Nurse.

"So that's the way of it," he breathed as McCoy concluded. "I knew there would be a good reason, but I wonder if Spock realises exactly what he's letting himself in for. Commissioner Ferris is not an easy man to cross."

McCoy had been acquainted with the details of the transmission from Starfleet, and now spoke freely. "I don't suppose Spock gives a damn about Commissioner Ferris. But, to be honest, I have reservations about returning to the research planet. I've double, triple-checked those records, and nothing in them could have any bearing on this case. Still, I can understand his wanting to check every possible avenue. And, I must admit, it does seem the only possible source on the face of it, though I fail to see how." He looked across at Scotty and asked, "How are things on the Bridge now?"

"Coldly polite, I believe would be the best way to put it."

"Poor Spock. Scotty, would you help ease the situation up there? Let the others know about the Captain and Christine, discreetly. Spock'll never try to explain his actions. You know what he's like. He'll just hide behind that Vulcan mask and pretend he doesn't notice people's coldness toward him."

"Aye, Ah'll do that," Scotty promised. "Puir laddie. He doesna' give himself much of a chance, does he?"

"No," sighed McCoy. "I wish he'd unbend a little sometimes. With Jim out of action he'll be even more detached than usual. Anyway, do what you can, please."

"You can rely on me, Leonard."

He was as good as his word, and within a very short space of time the entire Bridge personnel knew of the situation. The atmosphere relaxed noticeably and, although Spock sensed the change, he refrained from comment, assuming, quite rightly, that McCoy was behind it.

The two-day journey back to Omegon Four was uneventful, with Spock dividing his time between the Bridge and Sickbay. Christine was still

totally dependent on life support, but Kirk was beginning to get restless, the paralysis having extended no further than his legs.

"I feel a fraud lying here," he complained to Spock. "Can't you convince Bones that I'm quite capable of sitting in my chair on the Bridge? Strapped in, if necessary. I feel absolutely fine, apart from my legs - and I'm bored!" he finished vehemently.

Spock looked steadily into his eyes. "Jim, I don't think that's a very good idea. We don't know what we're up against. I'll feel much easier if you remain here where Dr. McCoy can keep an eye on you. Please?"

Kirk relented at the entreaty in Spock's voice, and sighed. "Oh, all right. But I warn you, you'd better keep Ferris away from me. It's bad enough lying around doing nothing, without having to put up with him too."

Spock, looking decidedly uncomfortable, rose quickly. "I'm sorry, Jim, I'll have to go. I'm due back on the Bridge."

Kirk grabbed his arm and searched his face. "Oh no you don't! Scotty can hold the fort. Sit down!"

Spock hesitated, then reluctantly complied.

"Now, what's going on?"

"Going on, sir? Nothing."

Kirk looked at him suspiciously. "Spock you're a hopeless liar. As soon as I mentioned Ferris, you couldn't get out of here quick enough. You're up to something, Spock, and I intend to find out what, supposing you stay here all day."

He glared at Spock, still holding onto his arm, and at that moment McCoy walked in.

"Sorry - am I interrupting?" He looked from Spock's unhappy countenance to Kirk's determined expression.

"Bones, do you know what he's up to?"

McCoy looked uncomfortable. "Me? How should I know? You know perfectly well that Spock's mental processes are a closed book to me."

Kirk looked from one to the other. "I don't believe you. One of you is going to enlighten me. Bones, you know it's not good for a patient to have something on his mind. You wouldn't want me to make myself ill with worry, would you?"

McCoy looked helplessly at Spock. "It's no good, Spock. You're going to have to tell him." He turned back to Kirk. "It'll only make you worry more. Are you sure you want to know?"

"Sure I want to know," answered Kirk exasperatedly.

Spock straightened his shoulders and took a deep breath. "Very well, Captain. But I must warn you that there is nothing you can do. While you are confined to Sickbay, I am in command of this ship."

Kirk looked at him warily. "Just get on with it."

"Yes, sir." Without further preamble the Vulcan plunged ahead. "At this moment we are on course for Omegon Four, on my orders. We should be within transporter range in precisely 2.42 hours."

Kirk stared dumbfoundedly at his First Officer, who met his gaze unflinchingly. "Are you out of your mind? Ferris will have you drummed out of the service. He's just waiting for the opportunity to get back at us over the New Paris affair, and you've handed him the opportunity on a plate. I'm ordering you to get back on course to Theta Minor, at top warp speed. Maybe we can still meet the deadline."

Spock turned to regard McCoy. "Doctor McCoy, will you affirm that Captain Kirk is unfit for duty?"

McCoy glared at him. "You know damn well he's unfit for duty!"

"Thank you, Doctor." He faced Kirk again. "Captain, you heard what the doctor said. In the event of your incapacitation, I am in full command of this vessel. I'm sorry, sir, but I cannot accept your orders. This ship remains on its present course."

Kirk regarded him with a mixture of exasperation and compassion. "Spock," he began quietly, "I know why you're doing this, and I appreciate your motives. But you can't throw away your whole career. You are under direct orders from Starfleet to proceed to Theta Minor and pick up Commissioner Ferris. You can't violate such an order for personal reasons. You must see that."

"No, sir, I do not. This is not solely a personal matter." The slight emphasis on the word 'solely' betrayed the fact that for him it was personal, and Kirk felt a warm glow, in spite of his concern.

"We must consider," Spock continued quickly, "the very real possibility that the virus concerned is a mutation of something that the research team have been working on, in which case the lives of all those people are at stake."

"Bones?" queried Kirk.

McCoy nodded. "I must confess that thought had occurred to me, but as nothing showed up in their medical reports I dismissed it. Wrongly, of course, as I have since realised."

"But what about Ferris?" Kirk's voice was tinged with anxiety. "If we don't get him to that conference..."

"Excuse me, Captain, but Commodore Davis did stress that Commissioner Ferris's presence was not essential. Indeed, in my opinion the conference will benefit by his absence," Spock said emphatically.

"Hmmm, I agree," mused Kirk. "But will he see it that way?"

"Very unlikely, but that does not concern me unduly. I will take full responsibility, of course, but in view of the circumstances I have outlined, I feel sure that Starfleet Command cannot fail to see the logic of my actions."

"Well, Spock," drawled McCoy, "I sure hope you're right. The Enterprise wouldn't be the same without you."

Spock raised an eyebrow. "Indeed, Doctor? I didn't know you cared!"

Somewhat taken aback, McCoy stared at Spock, but his expression was as stony as ever. Kirk started to laugh, and McCoy drew himself up to say firmly,

"Come on, Spock - out! Jim's had quite enough excitement for one day, and I insist that he rests."

"Of course, Doctor. I quite agree."

With an admonishing glance at Kirk McCoy shepherded Spock out of the room. When they were out of earshot Spock asked quietly, "How is he?"

"No change. His condition appears to have stabilised. If only I knew exactly what this virus was..."

"We may be able to determine that very shortly, once we reach the planet," Spock reassured him. He walked slowly over to Christine's bed and looked down at her. McCoy followed curiously.

"How is Christine?" he asked softly.

McCoy betrayed none of his surprise at Spock's use of Christine's first name. "As I said before, switch off the life support and she's dead," he said quietly.

Christine moaned slightly and moved her head on the pillow.

"Is she in pain?"

"I'm not sure," sighed McCoy. "She's been like this all the time. I think it's more subconscious fear than pain. I daren't sedate her too much, as I have no idea of the effect any drug will have on the virus. I only wish there was something I could do - get through to her somehow."

Spock was silent for several seconds, then he slowly reached out a hand and laid his fingers on her temple, closing his eyes in concentration. As McCoy looked on in wonder, Christine's muttering gradually ceased and she relaxed into sleep. Without a glance at McCoy, Spock moved away from the bed, turned, and departed.

Well, thought McCoy as he satisfied himself that Christine was indeed sleeping peacefully for the first time since her collapse, it seems our Vulcan friend has feelings after all. He smiled to himself. Oh well, I always knew he had, but it's nice to have your beliefs confirmed.

"Enterprise to Omegon Four. Enterprise to Omegon Four." Uhura tried yet again to raise the research station. "I'm sorry, Mr. Scott." She turned in her seat to face the command chair. "They're not responding."

"Keep trying, Lieutenant."

"Yes, sir."

As Uhura swung back to her board the turbolift doors opened and Spock stepped onto the Bridge.

"Sir," began Scotty, relinquishing command, "we canna establish contact with the planet."

Spock looked across at Uhura, who shook her head and elaborated. "I've been trying for half an hour, sir, on all frequencies. No response at all. Either they have an equipment malfunction, or there's no-one there to answer."

"The latter would seem to be most unlikely, Lieutenant. There were 47 people at that location four days ago. It would seem logical that at least one person is capable of responding to our call." He switched his attention to Scott, who had moved over to his usual station.

"Are we in transporter range yet, Mr. Scott?"

"Not quite, sir."

He flicked on the intercom. "Bridge to Sickbay."

"Yes, Spock," came McCoy's voice.

"Doctor McCoy, we will shortly be within transporter range of the planet. Please gather together any equipment you may need. You will accompany me to the base as soon as we are within range."

As he flicked off the intercom Spock rose and started towards the elevator. "Mr. Scott, you have the con. Please keep trying to raise the base, and inform me the moment we are within range. I shall be in my quarters."

As McCoy entered the transporter room he was surprised to see two Security guards waiting with Spock. Noting his puzzlement, Spock proceeded to explain.

"Purely a precautionary measure, Doctor. Lt. Uhura has not been able to establish contact with the base. I would prefer to be prepared for all eventualities."

"I see. It does seem strange. It's only been four days."

"Precisely. Gentlemen, please take up your positions."

The four men stepped onto the transporter discs and waited.

"Energise."

They materialised just outside the main building, and looked about them. The place appeared deserted. Motioning for caution, Spock led them into the building. The silence was oppressive and, fanning out, the four proceeded to open doors and check all the rooms. There were no signs of a struggle or fighting anywhere; it was just as if everyone had gone out for the day. Drawing a blank, they reconverged in the entrance hall. Spock took out his phaser.

"Doctor McCoy, you stay with me. Gentlemen, proceed with extreme caution and start checking the other buildings."

The two Security guards left, phasers at the ready, and Spock turned to McCoy.

"Doctor, I think we would be well advised to start with the infirmary."

McCoy nodded agreement, and led the way out into the oppressive heat. He paused for a second to get his bearings. "I think it's that building there," he hazarded. "It's some time since I was here." He ran a finger round inside his collar. "I notice the climate hasn't changed," he complained.

"It's almost like home," commented Spock.

McCoy refrained from comment and started towards the building he had indicated. Pushing open the door, a scene of desolation met their eyes. Desks and chairs were stacked haphazardly in a corner to make room for the rows of stretcher trollies ranged round the large room. All were sheeted, outlines of bodies clearly discernable.

"Oh, my God!" muttered McCoy, as he moved to lift one of the sheets. Spock silently joined him and they looked down on the face of a young girl.

"Well, Spock your decision to return appears to be justified."

"Believe me, Doctor, it affords me no pleasure to be proved right." Spock's eyes swept over the rows of trollies. "There are 21 bodies here. That leaves 26 people unaccounted for."

His communicator bleeped and he flipped it open. "Spock here."

"Mr. Spock, sir, this is Lt. Anderson. We're over in the labs. We've found some people, sir."

"Stay there, Lieutenant. We're on our way."

"It all happened so suddenly," Professor Avery explained worriedly. He, Spock and McCoy were seated in a small office adjoining the main lab. "I tried to contact you, but unfortunately we experienced one of our rare electrical storms, and our whole communications system shorted out."

"Have you ascertained the cause of this epidemic?" asked Spock.

"It's not an epidemic, Commander. This disease is not infectious. It is only contracted by direct exposure to the virus."

"Ah, then you do know what it is," put in McCoy.

Professor Avery shifted nervously. "No... not exactly."

"Professor, either you know, or you don't know. Please be more specific," Spock observed patiently.

Avery looked directly at Spock. "I'll try to explain. A few hours after Jim left, one of the technicians in lab 2 complained of feeling giddy.

Within the space of an hour, all of the people working in that lab had collapsed. There was no warning whatever for most of them. They just keeled over. Naturally we isolated the lab at once, but several other people had been in and out of there, including Jim and your nurse. There was virtually nothing we could do for the ten people who had been in the lab all day. At that time we had no idea what we were up against, and they were all dead by morning."

McCoy nodded understandingly. The research base had an adequate infirmary, he knew, but it did not run to sophisticated life support apparatus.

"Anyway, the whole thing escalated after that. People were dropping like flies. I ordered a full investigation, and we eventually traced the cause."

McCoy and Spock exchanged glances and McCoy eagerly submitted, "So you do know the cause?"

"The cause, yes. Unfortunately, I can't put a name to it, and as yet I have no idea how to stop it."

"Let me get this straight," stated McCoy with barely concealed impatience. "You know the cause of the illness, but you don't know what it is? Now, I may appear dumb, but that doesn't make any sense to me. Can you explain it to me, please?"

Avery leaned back in his chair and stared unhappily at the two Starfleet officers. "A small section of my staff," he started, "have been engaged in experiments in virology. They'd managed to isolate certain viruses long thought to be extinct."

"Extinct!" echoed McCoy. "Then my theory that the symptoms resembled polio is valid?"

Avery stared at him in near amazement. "You mean you recognised it? How? There hasn't been a case in over 200 years."

"At one time I was interested in research, and studied old medical records. But I decided that people were more interesting than germs, and concentrated on the Human side of medicine."

"I see," answered Avery. "Congratulations, Dr. McCoy. But I'm afraid it's not as easy as that. You see, the virus had mutated over the centuries, and has become immune to the drugs used to combat it. We have yet to discover something to control it."

"Please excuse my interrupting, Professor," put in Spock, "but may I ask how the virus escaped in the first place?"

"Let me assure you, commander," Avery said defensively, "that there was no negligence involved. My staff are highly trianed, responsible people..."

"I'm sure Mr. Spock didn't mean to imply otherwise, Professor," McCoy hastily interjected, with a quelling glance at Spock. "But obviously we do need to know, as escape it most certainly did."

"Yes, of course. I understand." Avery eyed Spock somewhat uncertainly. Jim had told him a lot about his Vulcan First Officer. He was obviously very fond of him, but Avery, up to now, had not been impressed. Evidently there must be more to him than met the eye, but Avery couldn't help thinking he seemed very cold and unfeeling. Ah well, to each his own. He directed his attention to McCoy.

"Every culture is stored in a sealed container. They're checked periodically to ensure this sort of thing cannot happen." He paused, casting a fleeting glance at Spock, who raised an eyebrow quizzically. "It was purely accidental - nobody's fault," he rushed on. "When the lab staff started collapsing, my first thought was the viruses. We immediately checked the containers, and discovered that the seal on this particular one had perished. We couldn't possibly have foreseen it. It was a manufacturing fault - nothing

to do with my staff," he insisted.

A contemplative silence ensued, broken at last by McCoy. "Have your people made any progress towards finding an antidote, Professor?"

"I'm afraid it's rather negative progress at the moment," Avery admitted. "We've ruled out everything we have that doesn't have any effect. Our facilities are rather limited for extensive study."

"We may be able to help there," offered McCoy. "If we feed the information you've got to the computer on the Enterprise, maybe it can come up with something."

"Right, let's get started," enthused Avery. "I have eleven more people here who have been affected. Luckily the paralysis is confined to the lower limbs. The extent of the disease seems to coincide with the amount of exposure to the virus; the longer the exposure, the worse the effect."

"Would that apply to our two casualties?" questioned Spock. "They were both here for the same amount of time."

"Overall, yes. But Jim spent considerable time with me, and only paid a brief visit to the lab. Your nurse spent almost the ~~entire~~ afternoon there. It was the most central area for people to report to for medical checkups, so we used there rather than the infirmary."

McCoy rose and said briskly, "Well, the sooner we start the better chance we have of saving your people and ours."

"Yes, of course," answered Avery, rising also to lead the way.

As the three materialised in the transporter room of the Enterprise Avery looked around him with interest, never having been on a Starship before.

"I'm sure Jim will be glad to give you a conducted tour as soon as he's up and about again," promised McCoy. "Meanwhile, come and say hello while Spock assails his computer with that lot."

As Spock departed Avery looked after him curiously. "I must confess, I can't see how Jim can be so fond of that fellow. He strikes me as being very supercilious."

"Don't rely too much on first impressions," defended McCoy. "Our Vulcan friend takes a bit of getting used to, but believe me, it's worth taking the trouble." So saying, McCoy led the way to Sickbay.

The next few hours seemed to last forever. The computer churned out several possible antidotes, none of which had any noticeable effect on their samples. After what seemed like aeons, Spock's voice came over the intercom, sounding distinctly hopeful.

"Doctor, I think I might have found what we're looking for. It's an ancient formula dating back to the 20th century. It was abandoned because of dangerous side effects, but it may work on this mutated strain."

"At this stage I'll try anything, Spock," sighed McCoy wearily. "I can try it on Christine first. She'll die anyway if we don't do something soon."

"Well, that's it," said McCoy as he lifted the hypo from Christine's arm. "All we can do now is wait. We know it kills the virus, but what else it might do remains to be seen."

"How long before we know?" queried Kirk. He had insisted on being allowed to sit in a wheelchair, and was now stationed at the bottom of the bed, Spock hovering close by.

"A couple of hours or so. The cure won't be instantaneous, but we should be able to determine any harmful effects by then. You two go and talk to Avery in my office, and I'll stay here. I prefer to monitor Christine's condition myself for the next hour or two."

As the two men left McCoy sat by the bed to commence his vigil. He found himself unconsciously praying, "Please, make it work! It's got to work!"

"Cheer up, everyone," McCoy smiled as he entered his office some time later.

"It worked?" breathed Kirk hopefully.

McCoy gripped his shoulders and grinned. "It worked, Jim. God, what a relief! She's breathing normally by herself. She's still unconscious, but I don't foresee any difficulties. Life signs are rapidly returning to normal."

Kirk stared at him, unable to speak. The relief was overpowering.

Turning to Spock, McCoy said, "Take him back to his room and get him settled into bed. I'll be there in a minute to give him his shot."

Spock nodded, not trusting himself to speak, swallowing the lump in his throat.

As he turned the wheelchair towards the door Avery stammered, "Jim... I... I'm so sorry. I know it was an accident, but it happened at my base. I feel responsible. I'm... I'm sorry."

Kirk managed a weak smile. "It was no-one's fault, David. As you said, just an unfortunate accident. Try to forget it."

The stark misery in Avery's face moved Spock to say quietly, "Professor, none of us are infallible. I would like to apologise if I seemed critical of you earlier. It was not intentional. I was... concerned."

"Of course, Commander. I understand." And he did - now.

As the door closed behind Spock and Kirk, McCoy said briskly, "Well, Professor, I suggest you get back to your base and start administering the antidote."

Avery rose and held out a hand, which McCoy shook. "Thank you, Dr. McCoy. You've saved the lives of 28 people."

"Not me," demurred McCoy. "You should thank Spock and his computer. He did all the real work."

"I will, when I come back for my conducted tour," smiled Avery.

"Yes," McCoy reflected after Avery had departed and he was left alone in Sickbay for the first time since this nightmare began, "We all have a great deal to be thankful to our Mr. Spock for yet again. Let's hope Starfleet and Commissioner Ferris are sufficiently impressed."

He whistled tunelessly as he set off to see his remaining patient.

"Who the hell cares about Ferris, anyway?"

After the fight on Space Station K-7, Kirk was questioning Scotty. "Tell me," he said, "Why did you hit the Klingon over the head with a chair?" Scotty sighed. "Because the table was screwed to the floor, sir," he said regretfully.

LETTER by Ann Flegg
 (From : Letter from T'Pring, Log Entries 20)

I write this letter to thee
 Spock of Vulcan,
 To give the reasons
 Behind the Challenge.
 People say I rejected the hybrid.
 Not so!
 I rejected the life of cold emptiness
 We would have shared,
 For you would not have stayed.
 I would have had your name, your property,
 Nothing more.
 I did not intend to cause you pain.
 I chose your Captain
 So that you would survive the coming fight.
 Your death would have been an illogical waste,
 And it was a logical assumption
 That your Healer would discover a way
 To save thy Captain,
 As he did.
 Stonn is with me always now;
 He has accepted the reasons for my betrayal,
 And our link is strong
 And will endure through the years to come.
 Understand my reasons,
 Spock of Vulcan,
 And judge not too harshly.
 May you find peace
 In the world you have chosen.

PARADISE LOST...AND FOUND by Tina W. Pole

Not one Human to be seen
 Long green grass,
 A quiet stream.
 Sunshine,
 Undisturbed birdsong
 In the balmy breeze
 Of Paradise.

Then,
 Voices.

And beneath booted feet
 The crushing of flowers.
 A stirring of wildlife,
 Feelings of urgency.
 Time to flee,
 For Paradise has been found
 and thus lost.

But wait.

For over the centuries,
 They have learned
 To give, as well as take.
 And although it can never be quite the same
 Perhaps Paradise has not been lost,
 But truly found.
