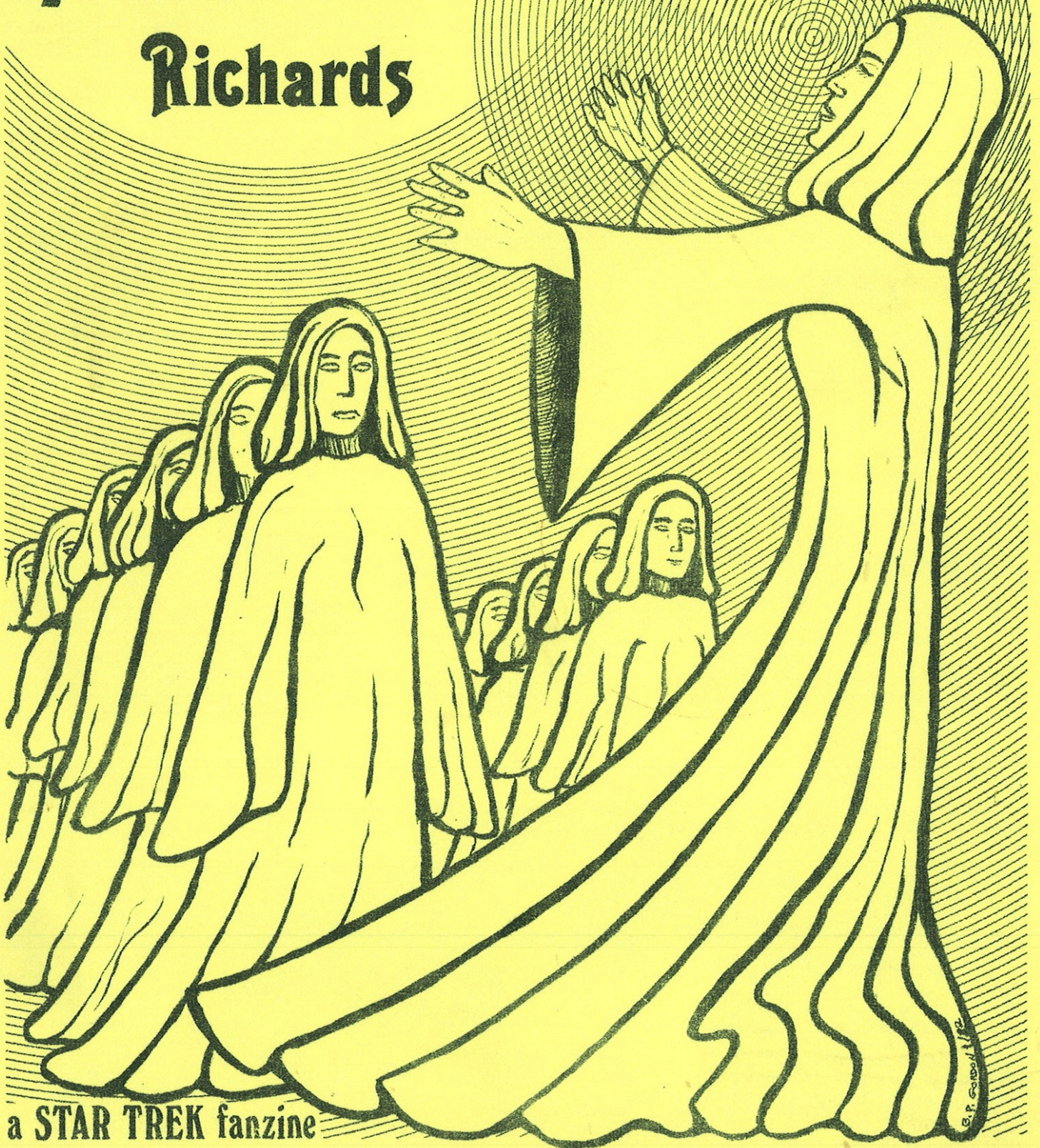


# HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS

by Vicki

Richards

Scotpress



a STAR TREK fanzine

E. P. GARDNER 1982

HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS

by

VICKI RICHARDS

illustrated by

BARBARA GORDON

A ScoTpress publication

Editors - Sheila Clark, Valerie Piacentini

Typing - Sheila Clark

Proofreading - Sheila's Chain Gang

Printing - Janet Quarton & James T.

Collating - Sheila's Chain Gang - Hilde McCabe, Cory King, Lorraine Goodison,  
Frances Abernethy, Allison Rooney

Distracting - Shona (what's so fascinating about all that paper?)

Home Is Where the Heart Is is available from

Sheila Clark

6 Craigmill Cottages

Strathmartine

by Dundee

Scotland.

(C) ScoTpress. All rights reserved to the writer and artist. Anyone wishing to reprint any of the material herein is asked to obtain permission in writing first. It is understood that this applies only to original material herein, and that no attempt is made to supersede any rights held by Paramount, NBC, BBC or any other holders of copyright in STAR TREK material.

April 1982

ScoTpress - Sheila Clark, Valerie Piacentini, Janet Quarton & Shona.

## HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS

In the heart of the efficiently-run, well-organised and highly advanced centre of medical technology that is the sickbay of the U.S.S. Enterprise, the pride of Starfleet, Dr. Leonard McCoy was deep in the task of checking and storing vital medical supplies; a task which he always found both repetitive and mildly irritating, as it took him away from the more interesting aspects of his work, such as actually dealing with live patients; but a task which he felt was nevertheless too important to trust to anyone else, even Nurse Chapel. That was quite nonsense, of course; he knew it, and she knew it, as did all the other members of the Enterprise's Medical Department; but they let their Chief carry on in his conscientious way as usual, knowing that when Dr. McCoy stopped worrying about the minutest of details to do with the care of his patients, then it would be time for everyone else to start worrying.

But the knowledge that his head nurse was perfectly capable of carrying out the job (as well as practically every other function in sickbay, for that matter) was not enough to convince him to assign the boring task to another; it would take nothing short of a summons to the Bridge to get him away from it, as increasingly grumpy as it was making him. When that call did come, he somewhat reluctantly (although he knew that Spock would no doubt point out that it was illogical, if he had been present at that moment) handed over to Chapel, and left for the nearest turbolift.

Yet he was not above breathing a sigh of relief as his sickbay doors swooshed to behind him; a momentary feeling which was quickly replaced by curiosity, more than a little tinged with concern, as to what exactly it was had prompted Jim Kirk to call him to the Bridge.

The turbolift arrived, and McCoy stepped out onto the Bridge. Spock was standing by the right-hand side of the command chair, and was looking, along with the occupant of the chair, at the main viewscreen which at that moment was showing a picture of what was obviously a class M planet; its blue and white colouring reminded him for a moment of Earth. Stepping down, McCoy took up his habitual position to the left of his Captain and friend.

"Glad you could get here so quickly, Bones," said Kirk, smiling a greeting. "You weren't doing anything important?"

McCoy looked sharply at him. Kirk knew perfectly well what he had been doing. He noticed Spock raise an eyebrow, but the Vulcan said nothing. Spock knew what McCoy thought of checking medical supplies, too.

Right; if they were going to pull his leg, he was going to join in.

"No, nothing important, Jim," he smiled pleasantly back, "why, what is it? Something you and Spock can't handle on your own?"

Spock opened his mouth to say something, then didn't. It was then McCoy started to get a little worried. If Spock wasn't going to respond to his little joke, then something was definitely up. Promptly, McCoy forgot all about his supplies.

"Actually, we would be glad of your opinion," said Kirk, all trace of friendly jibing gone; the Starship Captain had taken over again.

"About what?" replied the ship's surgeon. "I know that planet isn't any in the Aldebaran System, where we were supposed to be headed. I take it we've had a course change for some reason?"

"A logical deduction, Doctor," said Spock in his usual serious manner. And then it was his turn to get a sharp look from the ship's surgeon. Ignoring it, Spock continued with his explanation.

"As you said, Doctor, we were en route to the Aldebaran System, as our orders stated. When we were nearing this sector, Lt. Uhura began to receive a faint, but definite, distress signal."

"From this planet? It's not one I recognise," interrupted McCoy. "Are there injuries down there?"

"There may be, but of that we are not yet certain," replied the Vulcan. "The distress signal is indeed coming from the planet below us, which has not yet been officially named by the Federation, but bears simply the serial number of MSL 689. The planet has not yet been named because, although it is known to be inhabited by a race of humanoids, their culture has not yet evolved sufficiently to resist contamination from other cultures. The Prime Directive therefore applies fully here."

"I begin to see the problem," said McCoy thoughtfully. "So somebody's had to make a forced landing there? And now we've answered the distress signal, it's up to us to get them, and their ship, out of there before they're discovered by the natives?"

"It's not as simple as that, Bones," replied Kirk, shaking his head. "Spock discovered that the signal they're using is of a type which went out of use fifteen years ago."

"Indeed," said Spock before the by now intrigued McCoy could say anything about that piece of information, "and it is my belief that that same signal is completely automatic, and has been transmitting for some years."

"About fifteen?"

"Fourteen point eight five, to be more precise, Doctor. That is assuming I am correct in my supposition as to which vessel it is which is sending the signal."

McCoy looked at the view of the planet again, then back at Spock. If the Vulcan put it like that, the likelihood of his being wrong was infinitesimal.

"Go on, Spock."

The First Officer also turned his attention to the viewscreen and folded his arms before speaking. "Almost twenty years ago, a survey vessel left a Federation outpost. The mission of her crew was much the same as that of the Enterprise. Her mission was to contact new worlds, discover new civilisations, make new allies for the Federation. Because she was smaller, had a crew of only twelve, and certainly did not have the engines of the Enterprise, her range was naturally much more limited."

"How come, Spock?" interrupted McCoy again. "The Federation had Starships then - not the Enterprise, but Starships all the same."

"You are correct, Doctor," answered Spock, ignoring the interruption. "This - expedition - was not official. It consisted of a group of enthusiastic individuals who believed they could accomplish more in their small ship than the Federation with all its resources, merely because of their enthusiasm and dedication."

Kirk glanced at the Vulcan, amused. "Not logical, Spock? I suppose it wasn't. But then, throughout the history of the human race - no, throughout the history of the galaxy - there have been individuals who have thought they could solve any problem, go anywhere and do anything by little more than the power of their faith in themselves. The odd thing is, you know, that they often succeeded."

"True, Captain, I must admit that has been the case on many occasions. Even on Vulcan such things have happened. But it would seem that in this particular instance, the Humans in question did not succeed, at least, not completely."

"Because they've been stuck on this planet for fifteen years?" said McCoy. "I suppose that would count as a failure. But you still haven't told me who they are." McCoy's curiosity was thoroughly aroused by now, and he was becoming a little impatient for Spock to get to the point.

"If I am correct, Doctor," replied the Vulcan patiently, "the signal we are receiving is coming from a vessel named 'Discovery', a privately-owned survey vessel, which left the Earth colony on the planet which now houses Starbase IV nineteen years and eleven months ago."

"Yes, of course - I think I remember it now. It was named after Captain Scott's ship wasn't it?" McCoy nodded thoughtfully. "I remember, at the time

the party of scientists who manned her were thought of as well-intentioned eccentrics."

"So now you know as much about them as we do, Bones," said Kirk, looking back at the screen once more. "The question is - do we go down there and get them out, breaking the Prime Directive in the meantime, or do we not go, assuming that after all this time they will either be dead, or will have found a way to survive on the planet."

"You can't just leave them there, Jim!" McCoy knew he didn't really have to ask, but the dedicated healer inside him made him speak out on behalf of any survivors down on the planet below them.

"May I point out, Captain," advised Spock, "that the likelihood of their having lived on that planet for almost fifteen years without having made contact with any of the native humanoids is very remote. In all probability, any damage to their developing culture by contact with alien beings has already been done. Our beaming down there is unlikely to cause further harm."

"Yes, Spock - but suppose they haven't made contact, or suppose they all died in the crash? The natives would have found the wreckage, but that wouldn't have damaged their culture as much as our suddenly appearing down there would." Kirk knew that if he had to break the Prime Directive, then he would. After all, it wouldn't be the first time. But he had to be sure.

"Captain," Spock went on calmly, "the fact that the distress signal is still transmitting after all these years indicates that the craft was not too badly damaged on impact. Therefore it follows that at least some of her crew must have survived, at least for some space of time. General Order Number One was not completely in effect at that time, and they were not, after all, a Federation ship. I estimate the chances of at least one or two members of her crew having made contact with the native civilisation to be at least eighty percent."

Kirk looked from Spock to McCoy, and drummed his fingers on the arm of his chair. Then he stood.

"Mr. Sulu," he said with sudden decisiveness, "until Mr. Scott arrives on the Bridge, you have the con."

The helmsman nodded, replied with an "Aye, sir," and Spock and McCoy waited in anticipation.

"Gentlemen," said their Captain, "I suggest we organise a landing party immediately."

Kirk wasn't sure about breaking the Prime Directive; not one hundred percent sure, anyway. As he stood in the transporter room waiting for the other members of the landing party to arrive for beaming down, he reminded himself that he hadn't been completely sure on those other occasions when he had been forced to go against the non-interference policy of Starfleet, a policy with which he, as a Starship Captain as well as an individual, agreed, at least in most instances. Those times when circumstances had conspired to give him no choice but to violate the Prime Directive, it had turned out that he had made the correct decision, and Starfleet had agreed with the things he had done. But just because he had been right then, didn't automatically mean that he was right now, and as he stood talking to Kyle he wished that Spock and the others would come, that they could get down to the planet and get on with it before the doubts started niggling too much.

The doors opened, and the rest of the landing party entered, all together. Spock and McCoy were both in the landing party, and so was Nurse Chapel. It was an obvious step to take for another member of the Enterprise's Medical Department to beam down as well as McCoy; they had no idea what they would come across, and even in the days of advanced medical technology, two pairs of hands were better than one. Apart from that, Chapel had long been interested in the long-term psychological effects of being marooned on an alien world, unable to make contact

with the natives for one reason or another. She wasn't the only scientist in Starfleet with such an interest, of course, but first-hand experience such as this gave her the opportunity to finish her paper on those particular psychological effects before those others did, and perhaps win the prize offered by the Federation Science Council on the subject. Nurse Chapel was not without ambition.

Ensign Chekov was to be another member of the party. He had expressed an interest in going, and Kirk was always willing to give his junior officers, especially those he considered to be most promising, experience in making contact with alien life forms, and with the million different unexpected things that could happen when beaming down to an unknown world. After all, that was one of the main reasons they were all travelling through space in the first place.

The sixth and last member of the landing party was Lt. Samuels, a long-serving and very experienced member of the Starship's security department, who arrived just a few seconds behind the others. When he had arrived, the six members of the landing party stepped onto the transporter platform, and took up positions of readiness.

Kyle moved the controls with well-practised hands, and six figures twinkled musically into dissolution.

They rematerialised on a small, grassy hillock overlooked by a small clump of very earthlike trees. A small stream ran merrily through the valley bottom before them. Gentle, rolling green hills framed the valley, and a sun, older than Sol - though not as old as Vulcan's sun - shone down on them with the kind of light which on Earth would have indicated the start of spring. It was altogether a pleasant place, and for a fleeting moment Kirk experienced a strong sense of homesickness. Not that it lasted for more than a millionth of a second; James Kirk knew where his real home was; aboard a ship known as the Enterprise.

No sooner had they finished materialising and had taken in the scene around them, than Spock was scanning in a 360° area with his tricorder.

"Report, Spock?" Kirk knew his Science Officer would know all there was to know about the planet, and all Starfleet knew about the native society.

The Vulcan looked up from his tricorder for a moment. "As you can see, Captain, this planet is class M - very similar to Earth, at least, very similar to Earth in the period of your history which you refer to as the Neolithic or New Stone Age. As I told you briefly before, the natives are at the same stage of their development - approximately - as the Humans of Earth were at the corresponding time in your history."

"Stone Age, eh?" Samuels the security guard whistled in surprise. "Now that really is interesting."

"As interesting as it may be, Samuels - we must avoid contact with those natives at all costs. You all know that." Kirk was gratified at the nodding of heads that went on around him. He had a good crew, and some of his best people were here with him now. It was at times like this he was very glad that he had them. "What about the distress signal, Spock? Are you getting any reading?"

Spock nodded. He had only been waiting for his companions to stop their conversation before making his announcement. But over the years he had come to know that it was sometimes best to let them carry on with their tendency to talk about things other than the immediate problem at hand in moments of crisis; and he had admitted to himself long ago that in some cases, their ways seemed to work as well as the Vulcan ways. Not that he would admit that publicly, of course.

"I have pinpointed the direction from where the signal is being transmitted, Captain." He pointed over to his left. "It is not far; Lt. Kyle has performed as efficiently as usual."

With Spock in the lead, the landing party make its way down from the hillock and into the valley. Once there, they made their way along the bank of the

stream. Before long, they came to a place where a small but deep defile led its way backwards into a gap between two of the tall hills. Spock indicated that the readings originated somewhere in the defile, and with phasers set on stun the party entered the defile, not at all sure of what they were likely to find.

The place was dark with huge, overhanging trees, and it was Chekov who commented that if the craft for which they were looking had made a crash landing here, then any of the crew would have been lucky to survive. Not far ahead, they suddenly noticed a place where the tops of the trees were a little ragged; as if several years ago a spacecraft had indeed crashed down through them. And then they noticed it; partly hidden, with a framework of bushes and fallen trees; a shape which could not be natural, and which could not have been constructed by the primitive natives of the planet. They had found the Discovery.

Cautiously they made their way towards the fallen ship, with Spock taking continuous tricorder readings to ensure no unsuspecting native was anywhere nearby. And then they were all standing there, for a moment silent in admiration at the spirit which made humankind venture out into space; out into any unknown territory, against all the odds, determined always that if the universe held secrets, they would find them out.

Quickly they made an examination; the Discovery was deserted, and appeared to have been so for a long time; several years, in fact. Spock's supposition about the distress signal being automatic was correct; the Vulcan located the mechanism which had been faithfully transmitting the message to unhearing ears for the last fifteen turns, and switched it off. If the Enterprise couldn't find the survivors, presuming there were still any left alive, then it was highly unlikely that anyone else could. They would report the signal to Starfleet, and that would be that. It had been nothing less than a quirk of fate which had made Uhura intercept the signal; ships didn't go anywhere near the planet due to the Prime Directive, and the method of transmission had been so archaic, not to mention weak, that it was a wonder the communications officer had picked it up at all. But then, Uhura was Uhura.

They completed their hasty, but thorough, examination, and gathered together outside the fallen craft.

"Well, Spock - what have we found?" Kirk addressed his First Officer primarily, knowing that if there was anything to find, Spock would have found it; though of course his question applied to all other members of the landing party as well, as they all knew.

"We have found, Captain," said the Vulcan thoughtfully, "as I expected, that the Discovery crashed onto this planet almost fifteen years ago. In fact, it seems they made a forced landing; for although the craft is badly damaged, the damage is not so severe as to be consistent with a wholly uncontrolled crash. It seems therefore that several members of the crew did, after all, survive. At least one did, certainly - the automatic distress signal had been switched on manually."

"Yes - and somebody would have had to have got rid of any bodies." Samuels pointed out the obvious.

"So what do we do now, Captain?" asked Chapel. "Search the surrounding area?"

"We do, Nurse Chapel," Kirk told her. "Okay, everyone - fan out. Standard procedure."

Methodically, they searched around the fallen craft. It was not long before McCoy found what he had been both expecting and hoping he wouldn't find. A call on his communicator quickly brought the others over to where he was. Together they stood and looked at the seven mounds of earth at their feet.

"So five at least did survive," said Chapel grimly, refusing to let the



B. P. GORDON 1/82



situation shake her professional cool, especially in the presence of the First Officer.

"Indeed, Nurse Chapel," said that same First Officer, "and probability now suggests that the survivors would have moved away from this place. For the sake of their morale they would not have stayed here after they realised no-one was going to answer their distress signal, at least, not soon."

"I think I agree with you there, Spock," said McCoy, without even a hint of irony, "but it seems likely that they would have returned here from time to time, either to pick up things they might need, or to see if the impossible had happened, and someone had heard their signal."

"They couldn't really have expected that," put in Chekov. "They must surely have known that it would probably not be heard."

"Well - now the impossible has happened, and we're here," said Kirk decisively, "and it's our job to find them, and take them away from here, hoping that in the past fifteen years they haven't done too much damage to the native culture."

"Where do we start looking?" asked Samuels. "It's a big planet, and I heard Kyle saying that the natives' readings are so similar to Terran that our sensors couldn't distinguish between them at this range."

"As I pointed out before," answered Spock, "it is extremely unlikely that in the intervening period between the time of the Discovery's crash-landing and now, that at least some of the survivors would not have made contact with the natives. In fact, when they realised help was not coming, they would most probably have tried to befriend them; the Prime Directive was not in full force at that time, after all. I therefore suggest that our only course of action is to begin our search near to one of the native villages, or at least as near to one as we can safely go without being discovered."

"And if we detect any sign that the Discovery's crew have been there, we might as well just march straight in and find them?" said Kirk. "I hate to think what damage that might do. But as you say, Spock - we really don't have that much choice."

Although the Enterprise's sensors had been unable to locate the whereabouts of the survivors, there was no problem in their pinpointing the location of the nearest native village. It was a hike of several miles over rough terrain, and Kirk had decided against their being transported back to the Enterprise then beamed back down to the planet's surface near to the village. For one thing, he didn't think the sight of six aliens materialising out of thin air was exactly likely to put any unsuspecting native at ease, and for another, they might well miss some clue as to what had happened to the survivors on their way there. And as rough as the terrain might be, the landing party was a fit bunch, and they made fairly good time.

The gentleness of the landscape at their original beam-down point had quickly been replaced by rugged, mountainous country on their march towards the nearest village, and as they went on, each of them became more and more aware of the similarity between that planet and Earth as it had been in the corresponding period of its history. They were in the process of crossing a high, windswept patch of moorland, when Spock's keen eyes spotted something which made him halt and scan the horizon more closely.

"Fascinating," was the one word he spoke, quietly, as if to himself.

Kirk heard him and turned around, halting his march. The rest of the landing party also stopped.

"What is it, Spock?"

"A truly interesting and curious sight, Captain, and one which I am sure you will have seen before." The Vulcan raised his arm and pointed upwards

towards where the highest point of the moor joined the skyline. There, pointing up into the sky like jagged teeth was a circle of tall stones.

Kirk was the first to recover from the momentary silence with which the sight had afflicted them. "Well, Spock - you did say Neolithic," remarked the Captain, shaking his head a little in something bordering on amazement. Kirk had seen many strange things in the galaxy, and had seen many examples of parallel development on planets in solar systems millions of light-years apart; but the sight of the tall, silent stones here on this primitive world, a sight which could well have been taken straight out of the prehistory of his own home planet, was an occurrence likely to make any Terran shake his head in wonder.

"A stone circle - here, of all places." McCoy sounded almost as fascinated as Spock. "It's like one I once saw on a visit to Europe."

"In Russia we have them also," put in Chekov, privately hoping that Captain Kirk would decide they ought to examine the monoliths more closely. "There are many such relics still scattered about the Earth."

"That is correct, Mr. Chekov," said Spock. "I have always found it interesting that so many of so-called primitive man's stone monuments and sacred sites have survived to the present century, when so much of Earth's intervening history has not been so well preserved."

"Indeed, Mr. Spock," said Kirk, "and now I suggest that we go up there and look at those stones more closely. I dare say you will welcome the opportunity to examine them, and satisfy your curiosity?" Kirk wasn't saying it, but his own curiosity was aroused at least as much as his Vulcan friend's.

Spock raised an eyebrow, but said merely, "Agreed, Captain. Shall we proceed?"

"After you, Mr. Spock."

Before long the six members of the landing party stood at the summit of the moor, under the towering heights of the grey stones, which stood a good few feet taller than even Spock. While the Vulcan took tricorder readings, the others just stood and looked, experiencing a sensation bordering on awe; something seasoned travellers such as they felt only rarely. Kirk wondered if it was something in the race memory of each of them that was making them feel like that. Then he noticed that Spock had walked to the edge of the circle, and was looking downhill towards something. Kirk walked over to him, leaving the others still looking at the stones.

"What is it, Spock?"

For answer, Spock pointed downhill. "Look, Captain - more stones. I rather expected that."

Kirk looked in the direction the Vulcan was indicating. There, in the distant hollow at the foot of the moor, were more of the grey stone slabs. Kirk remembered something from his school history lessons; he remembered such monuments on Earth were supposed to have run in straight lines between others.

"I've heard the theories about these places, Spock," he said, "but we haven't really time to think about them now. It isn't helping us find any of the Discovery's crew who might still be alive. It's time we were moving on."

"Actually, according to our co-ordinates for the nearest village," Spock went on, "we shall have to march in a direct line between here and those distant stones in order to reach it. I expect to find more monoliths on our route there."

Kirk was just about to call for the other four members of the landing party and give the order for them to continue on towards the village when his communicator beeped. He flipped it open.

"Kirk to Enterprise - what is it, Mr. Scott?"

"There's an ion storm brewing, Captain." The voice of the Chief Engineer sounded concerned, and there was a small amount of interference with the transmission. "It's getting stronger verra quickly, and in a few more hours, we won't be able to use the transporter because of it. You'd better beam back up soon, Captain."

Kirk looked at Spock meaningfully. They both knew that being stranded on an alien planet for the duration of an ion storm might well be a very unpleasant experience for all of them; especially if the natives turned out to be hostile.

"Very well, Scotty," Kirk said. "There's only a few hours of daylight left anyway. Call us again either at nightfall, or half an hour before the safety margin for the transporter runs out, whichever comes sooner. Then we'll beam back aboard and the Enterprise can leave orbit until the storm's over."

"Aye, Captain - but it's going to be a nasty storm, sure enough. I'll be glad when you're all back aboard."

"So will I, Mr. Scott. Kirk out."

They reached the foot of the moor, and the second stone circle, within an hour, and continued on a straight line in the direction of the village. Not that they could hope to do much that evening, but if they could just reach the outskirts before night fell or before the ion storm grew too fierce, they might be able to detect signs of the presence of any of the survivors; or alternatively they might not, and would then have to search elsewhere when they could get back. And there was the chance, small as it was, that they might find something on their way there.

They passed several more of the ancient stone markers; mainly single monoliths standing like sentinels in the fields; several small groupings of stones which they didn't recognise as anything in particular, and which seemed to be of a design peculiar to that world; eventually, not long before nightfall, they came to a lonely place where two mighty stones stood, covered with another. Cautiously, they approached it. A few minutes previously, Spock had warned that his tricorder was picking up faint humanoid readings; they were still far enough away as to be coming from the native village, still over a mile distant, but there was no point in taking chances at this stage of the proceedings.

The five Humans and the Vulcan walked up to the stones, which were partially hidden by a group of tall evergreen trees, and stood before it. Spock aimed his tricorder at it, but the others just stood and looked.

Kirk once again had the strange feeling that there was something about these stones; something more than imagination or curiosity, that was affecting the Terran members of the landing party. He must have a word with Spock about it.

But there was yet something else; a sudden familiarity impressed itself upon him, and a flash of insight. His face clouded momentarily, as if a memory troubled him. He turned to find Spock looking closely at him, the dark alien eyes clearly showing concern.

"You know, Spock," Kirk began by way of explanation to his friend, "I've just realised - these stones are really very similar to the Obelisk the Preservers left on the Amerind planet."

"Interesting, Captain." Spock was thoughtful; he knew now what the memory was which had troubled Kirk; still the loss of Miramanee grieved his Captain and friend. "And there is more than a small probability that you are correct. It would be an extremely logical explanation of why so many of these ancient stone constructions are scattered around the galaxy. It would explain much."

Kirk nodded, and sighed inwardly. Very rarely did he think of something before Spock did; but then, maybe he had more reason to remember the Preservers' Obelisk than the Vulcan. Walking over to the nearby stones, he laid his hands upon the nearest one.



B.P. GORDON/182

"What was their purpose here, though?" Kirk thought this particular construct looked like a drawing he'd seen somewhere.

"This looks like a - burial chamber." Chapel was feeling distinctly uneasy; she thought it had something to do with the stones, but it wasn't entirely that; maybe the ion storm? Amyhow, she couldn't quite keep the momentary hesitation out of the sentence. She saw Spock looking at her, and immediately felt worse.

"Such arrangements were used on Neolithic Earth for that purpose," said Spock, unaware that the ship's Nurse was certain that his glance had conveyed disapproval at Human weakness, when in fact the First Officer had been a little surprised at her perception, "although it is doubtful that was their only purpose..." Spock was prevented from continuing his explanation by the insistent bleeping of Kirk's communicator. The call from the Chief Engineer was due; it was almost nightfall, and if Spock's calculations were correct, the safety margin for using the transporter was likely to run out very soon.

"Kirk here," answered the Captain, flipping open his communicator, yet still looking at the stones. "Time to come home, Scotty?"

"Aye, sir," the voice of the acting commander of the Enterprise replied, its concern coming through the increased static clearly. Kirk had to smile; he knew how relieved Scotty would be when he returned to the ship, and command, and Scotty could get back to his beloved engines.

"Ye'll have tae beam up right away, Captain," Scotty went on. "I can't guarantee it'll be safe for much longer."

"All right, Scotty. Give us five minutes, then we'll beam up. Kirk out."

Kirk turned to the landing party. "Well, gentlemen, Nurse Chapel. It looks like we'll have to come back tomorrow. We'll just finish examining this area, then we'll beam back aboard and put Mr. Scott's mind at rest."

Kirk wanted the extra five minutes mainly so that Spock could finish taking any tricorder readings he hadn't yet completed; it was unlikely that any other Federation personnel would be on that particular planet's surface for quite a while to come, and any information they could gather would therefore be very valuable. Out of the corner of his eyes, he noticed that McCoy had wandered out of the clump of trees, and appeared to be looking at the view. He had called Chapel and Samuels over to see whatever it was he was looking at. Turning his attention back to the cromlech, as Spock had called it, he saw that Chekov was as engrossed in the examination of the enigmatic stones as Spock was. Grinning at the young ensign's enthusiasm, he was just about to start a conversation with Spock when the Vulcan looked up from his tricorder, a faint look of - puzzlement? - on his face. Kirk started to worry.

"Something wrong, Spock?"

Spock turned in a full circle, aiming his tricorder in front of him. "I'm getting very confused readings, Captain. It happened before, to a lesser extent, at the other monoliths, but it has suddenly become much stronger. There is some kind of field at work here; it was as if the polarity of the stones suddenly changed. Such happenings are recorded, but this is far more than that. I do not entirely understand what is taking place here, unless the tricorder is not registering completely accurately."

Then Kirk really did begin to worry.

"Right - in that case we're beaming up immediately. I'm taking no chances until we know exactly what it is we're dealing with." Kirk began to take out his communicator, then halted in the process of flipping it open. McCoy, Chapel and Samuels were nowhere to be seen.

Christine Chapel had found an object nearby which looked like some kind of native artifact; an object appearing to be a sophisticated tool, more advanced than they would have expected for that time period, and interesting enough to

warrant Chapel and McCoy moving off to examine it, even though beam-up was imminent; it might well prove of value to the Starship's Science Department. Samuels, ever the vigilant Security Officer, had gone off after them, concerned that the two of them, but especially his friend Christine, should be protected while on this unknown world, certainly while in the presence of the strange, brooding stones.

But Jim Kirk didn't know that; all he knew was that he was about to give the order for Scotty to beam them up, checked to see they were all present, and found they weren't. What had happened to them?

Then Kirk heard the sound of McCoy's voice. They were merely out of sight behind the clump of trees. Kirk shook himself mentally and almost laughed out loud at the fears he had had. He was feeling distinctly jumpy, that was for sure. What with the strangeness of the planet and the fact that the approaching darkness was casting very peculiar shadows around the place, he would be very glad to get back to the normality of the Enterprise.

"Captain - I'm still getting very strange readings." Spock was still involved with figuring out exactly what the strange field was and how it operated. "It is as if... Jim - I've managed to recalibrate the tricorder to compensate, and there are humanoid life forms very near. Data suggests they are..."

Spock's warning came moments too late, and was interrupted by a cry, faint and almost surprised-sounding, from the direction in which they knew their three crewmates had been.

Kirk was horrified. His fears had substance after all. "That was Bones!" he almost yelled at Spock. "Come on!"

He didn't need to tell Spock or Chekov to set their phasers to stun, but he did anyway as they ran the few yards to where they knew their friends had last been. But they hadn't run fast enough; when, moments later, they arrived at the spot, they found no McCoy, Chapel or Samuels; they found only three phasers, communicators and two medikits lying discarded on the ground in the company of a strange spear-like weapon. In the gathering darkness the hardware looked strangely forlorn; Kirk wish then, not for the first time, that he had Spock's ability to view the situation completely dispassionately. His imagination was beginning to get to him, and now he was almost certain that it had something to do with the stones. But the only person apart from the Vulcan he would want to discuss his psychological state with was at that moment in the hands of possibly dangerous, and certainly hostile, natives, and for that moment he couldn't do a damned thing about it.

And, as always happened in moments of crises, another one occurred; a communicator bleeped.

"Scott to Captain Kirk - are ye there, Captain?" The Scot's voice was insistent, though barely audible. Although it seemed hardly possible, at that instant of discovering three of his crew, including one of his two dearest friends, were prisoners, Kirk had actually forgotten about the ion storm.

"I'm here, Scotty, but three of us aren't. We've had some trouble here - Dr. McCoy, Nurse Chapel and Lt. Samuels have been taken prisoner by the natives."

Scott's voice was silent for a few seconds. "But Captain - I daren't stay in orbit any longer - the storm is getting too strong."

Time for another command decision. Kirk barely hesitated. "All right, Scotty - take her out of orbit and ride out the storm. Come back for us when you can. Kirk out." Kirk knew he had just given his Chief Engineer a lot more to worry about, but of one thing he was certain; Scotty would look after the Enterprise, as he had done on many occasions in the past, and that was one worry, at least, off Kirk's mind.

Spock was examining the native spear. He stood and faced Kirk.

"This spear is obviously a native artifact, Captain, and I have no doubt

that others like it were used to capture Dr. McCoy and the others. Its tip is impregnated with a strong tranquillizer - that is why we heard very little noise. It appears the natives wished to make them prisoners, not to kill them." Spock chose his words carefully, hoping to reassure Kirk.

"You're sure it's not fatal?" Kirk didn't sound very reassured.

"According to tricorder analysis, it would merely have rendered them unconscious."

"But the spears would have to hit them to knock them out. At least they didn't kill them, if you're right, Spock. What's puzzling me is, why didn't they take us too?"

"Perhaps there weren't enough of them, Keptin," Chekov joined the conversation. It seemed they were in for an unpleasant night, marooned on the strange world, and Chekov was beginning to wish he was back at the navigation console of the Enterprise. An ion storm was certainly preferable to the mess they had suddenly found themselves in. But if any two people could get them out of that mess, it was the Captain and Mr. Spock. He just wished they had a full security team with them as well.

"Well, gentlemen," said Kirk. "It seems we're in for an evening walk. If we're to have any hope of catching them, we'll have to start right away. Any idea why they didn't take those pieces of equipment, Spock?"

"Yes, Captain - superstition is the most likely answer. The natives were most probably frightened of them." A good thing, too, thought the Vulcan. Apart from the destructive power of the phasers in curious hands, the damage which could be done to the native culture if any of them managed to discover how to operate any of the devices would have been potentially enormous. What Spock wasn't telling Kirk was that the odds against their succeeding in finding their colleagues in the now almost complete darkness were astronomical; he had the idea that Kirk already knew.

While Kirk did know perfectly well exactly what their chances were, there was still something on their side to be reckoned with; Human stubbornness. With a quiet order to begin, Kirk strode off into the darkness. The Vulcan and the Ensign followed at his heels.

The task was almost impossible without the resources of the Enterprise to help them, and they spent a fruitless hour searching the immediate area in the darkness, with the wind whistling angrily around them and cold drops of rain falling on them from time to time. The weather of the planet seemed to be conspiring against them as well, and dark clouds obscured the planet's one moon, scudding along wildly, echoing the furies of the ion storm taking place far above them.

Their only real hope of finding where the missing three members of the landing party had been taken was that their captors had taken them to the nearby native village. If the natives had hidden them in some secret place, their chances of finding them were virtually nil; if they were in the village, then at least they stood some chance of locating them. The trouble was, they still had the Prime Directive to contend with, and if they were forced to rush the natives and phaser-stun them in order to save the lives of McCoy, Chapel and Samuels, they wouldn't exactly be obeying it. But if Kirk was left with no alternative, that was exactly what he was going to have to order. If the Enterprise had been still in orbit, he might have considered ordering Scotty to stun the entire village with the ship's phasers. Then they could simply have gone in and brought out an unconscious McCoy and company, with the natives being none the wiser as to how it had all happened. Unfortunately, the Enterprise was not in orbit, and that option wasn't open to him. They could always have waited until she returned, of course, but Kirk wasn't at all sure that the hostile-seeming primitives would treat his friends and crew members too kindly, and he wasn't prepared to risk their safety by waiting.

And so they had scouted around the outskirts of the village, searching for any signs of the three, but had found it an impossible task in the darkness. After an hour they found themselves crouched behind a bush as near to the village as they dared. It was beginning to look as if the native culture was about to be seriously disrupted.

The village was really no more than a cluster of primitive wooden huts, built on a circular design, at the foot of a rocky outcrop of the nearby mountains. Spock suspected that from the geological configurations, it was almost certain that there would be caves near the village; he told Kirk, adding that it was a likely place for the natives to hold any prisoners.

"This is not going to be easy," said Kirk quietly, shaking his head grimly in the darkness. "We can try to sneak into the village without being seen, but they're sure to have guards of some kind, especially if they have got Bones and the others in there. And once we're in, we'll have the problem of getting out with them; we don't know how badly injured they are, or even if they'll still be unconscious from the effects of those spears."

"And once having effected a rescue, we will then have the problem of remaining free and undetected by the natives, who undoubtedly know every inch of the terrain, until such time as it is possible for the Enterprise to return. According to my calculations, that should not be for at least another thirty hours." Spock knew that the odds against their all returning to the Enterprise safely were very high indeed, and growing with every moment they all remained on the planet's surface. It was indeed fortunate that he had been chosen as a member of the landing party; riding out an ion storm was well within Mr. Scott's capabilities, and if it had been he, and not the Chief Engineer, who had been left in charge of the Enterprise, and the Captain had come to this planet without him, then the odds against his safe return to the ship would have been even higher.

"Thirty hours is a long time, Mr. Spock." Chekov didn't like it at all. "Can't you tell if Dr. McCoy and the others are in the village, sir?"

"No, Mr. Chekov," said the First Officer. "As I explained before, the readings of the natives are so similar to those of Terrans, that it is almost impossible to tell the difference between them at this distance, and would be even if the tricorder mechanism had not been slightly disrupted by the strange forces present at the monoliths. Apart from that, this light is so bad that the readings on the tricorder are impossible even for Vulcan eyes. Even I need some light to see by, Mr. Chekov."

The truth of Spock's statement was clear; the moon, which had been less than half full, had dropped below the horizon, and the night had become so dark that the only light anywhere around was the pinpricks of illumination coming from the native village. It was no wonder that Spock couldn't see the tricorder.

"We have no alternatives, gentlemen," said Kirk thoughtfully, in a tone of voice which told Spock that he had already decided which to choose. "Either we wait until morning, when we will be better able to see where we are going; or we will attempt to enter the village now, when the darkness will both hinder us as well help to hide us. I don't think it's a good idea to give those natives any more time in which to harm Bones and the others than we're forced to." And that was understating it; with every second that had passed since his friends' capture, Kirk's fears for their safety had been growing as rapidly as the violence of the storm above. Spock was right about his already having reached a decision.

"We'll go now," he continued decisively. "We'll get as close to the outlying houses as we can, then see how best to proceed from there. If anyone sees us, stun them immediately. Make sure your..."

But Kirk didn't have a chance to say what they had to make sure of; a muffled thump sounded in the darkness behind him, followed by a thud as someone fell over. He whipped round to see - barely - the prone figure of Chekov on the ground, and could just make out several dark shapes struggling with Spock. He began to get to his feet, to go and help, when something hit him from behind; a



sharp pain was in his back, and inexplicably he suddenly lost the use of his legs. He fell heavily to the ground, and was just vaguely aware of Spock falling beside him before his mind went blank and he sank into oblivion.

McCoy was having trouble with his thinking; he couldn't quite pinpoint what it was, it was too much effort. It was something like something he remembered from somewhere - that was it - it was like patients had been supposed to feel when they were coming round from those old-fashioned anaesthetics they used a couple of hundred years ago.

After what seemed an immeasurable amount of time later, his mind began to try to work again. Painfully and with increased determination his will tried to clear his thoughts of the strange fog which had been clouding them. What had he been thinking? Something about anaesthetics. That was it. That was what he felt like. But why? Where was he? In a little while, when he felt better and his mind was clearer, he would try to open his eyes. But not just yet - he was so tired, and his dreams kept blocking out his efforts to think straight. Suddenly it just didn't seem worth it. McCoy sank back into unconsciousness again.

Now he was angry with himself. How could he just lie there when they were all in danger? But he couldn't remember what danger. If only he could think straight. Painfully he dragged his thoughts up from the stupor which enveloped them. Then he remembered the stones. He had been there with friends. But who? Of course - Jim and Spock. Then they had...of course! The prehistoric men had come and thrown spears at them, and... He couldn't remember after that! A sickening feeling gripped him - he had to remember! But the effort was too much. With a terrible sensation of failure, McCoy went back to sleep.

This time he was going to wake up or die trying. With an effort of will far stronger than he had known he possessed, McCoy forced down the rising panic beginning to swamp him and concentrated. Using a strength beyond what seemed humanly possible, McCoy opened his eyes.

He had opened them, and now he just lay there, unable for the moment to do anything more. But although he was as yet unable to move, inside himself he knew he had won a great triumph; he was awake, his eyes were open, and his mind was clear.

Now he really could remember what had happened, at least to the point where the stone age men had attacked them and stabbed them with those spears impregnated with tranquillizer; that was all if had been, of course, though at the time he had not expected to wake up again. Inside himself he almost laughed, recalling the terror he had felt when unable to waken; a tranquillizer, nothing more, but a very powerful one nevertheless, and a very crude one, which went a long way to explaining the very unpleasant side effects.

Directing his rapidly clearing mind to attempt to remember further, McCoy thought he recalled that only he, Chapel and Samuels had been taken prisoner; Jim and Spock, and Chekov, had remained free. But for how long? And were they even now searching for them with a full security team? But of course, that was impossible; the ion storm probably wouldn't be over yet, and they would be on the Enterprise in the relative safety of open space; that was, unless he had been out for a lot longer than he thought. And where was he, anyway? And where was Christine, and Samuels?

After a time he discovered he could move his head a little. It was time he tried to find out just what his situation was. Painfully and clumsily, as if his brain didn't know how to operate his muscles properly, McCoy turned his head to the side.

He was in a dimly-lit chamber, whose rocky roof told him that he was either underground, or at the very least in a cave of some sort. He supposed vaguely that that fitted in with cave men. But what didn't fit in was the collection of fairly modern-looking scientific equipment filling the chamber. He tried to sit up.

That was impossible; not only did he not yet have full control of his body, he found he was restrained, fastened to the slab-like construction he had been lying on. Suddenly he was aware of vague memories of an interrogation. He didn't know how, but somehow he had to escape; find Christine and Samuels; get back to the Enterprise. Something was going on here that Jim had to know about. Then McCoy's eyes regained their proper focus long enough for him to see that he was not alone in the chamber; at the other side of the room, on what he supposed to be a similar construction to the one on which he was lying, was the form of Nurse Chapel, and from the way she was breathing, McCoy deduced she was in the same state of unconsciousness he himself had been in up to a few minutes ago. Straining his neck, McCoy looked further round the room. At the far end was Samuels, also restrained on a slab, also in much the same condition as Chapel. So they were both all right. McCoy breathed a sigh of relief.

Then he began to wonder about the spear wounds. It just showed how much that tranquillizer, whatever, had affected him for him not to have thought about that the second he regained consciousness. Berating himself mentally, he suddenly realised that the spear-wound in his own shoulder was not hurting as much as it ought to have been, and it didn't seem to be bleeding either. From what he could see, the wounds that Chapel and Samuels had received seemed to be no worse than his own; there were no tell-take red stains on his companions' uniforms, none that he could see, anyway, and that surely indicated that they had been treated. It seemed reasonable to assume that the natives, however primitive, once having captured them by use of the spears, would know how to stop them dying from the resultant wounds. Otherwise their use of the crude tranquillizer would have been meaningless.

But why had they captured them? And where exactly was he? But any further questions forming in McCoy's mind were sharply interrupted by two things; the sudden movement of Nurse Chapel's head, and the sound of approaching footsteps.

Chapel's lifted head just managed to face McCoy, and from her silent expression he could tell she had been going through much the same thought processes as he. That was only to be expected, of course, and even at that moment Samuels was undoubtedly going through the same struggle to regain consciousness. And it seemed to McCoy that he and Chapel had regained their senses just in time to get a good look at whoever was imprisoning them, and maybe find out some answers.

At the end of the chamber, an unseen door creaked open. It sounded heavy, and wooden, with ill-fitting hinges; incongruous against the scientific equipment which blocked the door from McCoy's line of sight. Several sets of footsteps sounded, approaching steadily, and he was then confronted with a sight he had begun to expect to see; his jailers, apparently, consisted of a small party of the roughly-clothed cave men types, accompanied by an aging, but still alert and straight, man who could only be Terran, and who seemed to be leading the party. The man wore a rather tattered-looking white overall; an equally aging relic of his life before he was stranded on the planet; but one he wore with pride that was obvious to McCoy, as if the man clung almost desperately to the tangible evidence of his former scientific profession. To the Enterprise's Medical Officer, the man didn't look entirely sane, and what was worse, the natives clearly regarded him as some kind of superior being. It seemed that once again Spock had been right. It looked as if contamination of the planet's native culture had already begun; it looked like it had begun a long time ago.

With an expression of distaste mingled with something that looked a little like hidden fear to McCoy, the man approached the slab where he lay and stood haughtily in front of him, hands behind his back in an unwitting parody of the Vulcan's stance - how McCoy would have welcomed his friend at that moment - and glared coldly at him. Behind him the natives gathered, looking equally inhospitable, and downright edgy. For a split second, McCoy had the strange idea that maybe the natives were a little scared of this man.

"So - you are conscious. It is well," said the man in a voice as cold as his face, and sounding as if he didn't think it was well at all. "Perhaps now



I shall be able to get some satisfactory answers to my questions."

"I was rather hoping you would be able to give me some answers," replied McCoy wryly. "Though of course I'll answer anything I can. But first - I must ask that you allow me to examine my colleagues. I am a medical officer, and I must ensure the spear-wounds they received have been treated adequately, as I am sure they have been - but nevertheless, surely it would do no harm to allow me to put my mind at rest?"

"I had gathered," said the man, "that you are a Federation Officer. The style of uniform has not changed so much in fifteen years as to make it unrecognisable to me. But a medical officer, a scientist? Now that is interesting."

"You must be one of the survivors of the Discovery," remarked McCoy. "We picked up your distress signal, and came to see if anyone from your ship was still alive after all this time. Our ship is in orbit above this planet - we will take you, and any other survivors, or your crew, back home, or anywhere else in the galaxy you might want to go." The bit about the Enterprise being in orbit couldn't be true, of course, as McCoy knew very well; but he badly needed something to bargain with, and the prospect of rescue from this isolated world had to mean something to this man. Strangely, McCoy had the feeling it didn't.

"You lie," said the man suddenly, with an oddly gloating expression. "Your ship is not in orbit - my sensors would have picked it up. I knew you were coming, of course - did you really think I would have been so foolish as to leave all my scientific equipment on the Discovery? I have more marvels here than you suspect. The Federation never did know exactly what we took with us."

"Listen - for the moment let's forget about all that. Please will you let me examine my colleagues?" McCoy was insistent. "I'll tell you anything I can."

"Anything? I hardly believe that a Federation Officer would trade secrets so lightly. Liars and fools your kind may be, but they do not easily turn traitor."

"Traitor? What are you talking about? I don't know any secrets! I'm a doctor - Dr. Leonard McCoy, Chief Medical Officer of the U.S.S. Enterprise. We've come to rescue you, dammit!" That was a mistake. McCoy should never have raised his voice to the man, he realised immediately. The cave men murmured angrily, and stepped towards the Enterprise officer. It was clear they wouldn't allow any disrespect to be shown to the man they regarded as their leader, and the man's paranoia was just about strong enough for him to derive some kind of twisted pleasure from allowing the natives to kill him if they felt like it.

"Look - I mean - we came to help you, you and any fellow survivors. We don't want anything - just to help you." McCoy used a more reasonable tone. He had seen the fear on Chapel's watching face. He had others to consider here beside himself.

"Survivors!" snapped the man angrily. "There are no other survivors! And I have no desire to leave this world. If I had known that ridiculous automatic signal was still transmitting, I would have gone and destroyed it! Leave this world, indeed! Rescue? Ha!" The man sneered at McCoy as if he had just made one of the most ridiculous statements in the universe. "I think it is about time I told you who you are dealing with. I am Dr. Andrew Davidson. The Dr. Andrew Davidson. Tell me, Doctor McCoy - can you give me one good reason why I should leave the planet I rule? This world was given to me by providence to rule, and I shall not desert it. The planet of Adan is mine!"

With that he made a dramatic exit from the chamber, the natives following him closely, their employment as personal bodyguard now quite apparent. The chamber door creaked heavily as it was closed, and the sound of heavy bolts being fastened followed. The extent of Davidson's paranoia was rapidly becoming clear to McCoy. They were dealing with a man who believed he had been given this Prime Directive planet to rule by divine right; it was only too possible he even

thought he was some kind of god. McCoy groaned out loud.

"Dr. McCoy! Are you all right?" Chapel was struggling to move, finding it as impossible as McCoy had done.

"Yes, Christine," answered McCoy almost absently; all sorts of dreadful ideas had just started to flicker through his mind. "The question is - are you? How do you feel?" Ever the dedicated medical man, McCoy dragged his thoughts from the fate which probably awaited them all and back to the more immediate, important concerns such as the physical condition of his Head Nurse and the as yet unconscious Samuels.

"I'm okay - I think," replied Christine rather uncertainly. "I still feel groggy - it was some kind of tranquilliser they used on us, wasn't it? Ugh! It makes me glad I wasn't around to experience those awful old-fashioned anaesthetics they used to use a couple of centuries ago."

"I feel the same way myself," replied McCoy with feeling. "But how's your spear-wound? And can you see how Samuels is? You're at a better angle to see him than I am."

Chapel looked quickly at Samuels. The security man was a special friend of hers; he had been on the Enterprise almost as long as she had, and over the years they had got to know each other fairly well. It would be awful if... But no, he seemed to be all right, just still under the influence of whatever had been in the spear-tips. That brought her back to McCoy's other question. Oddly, she couldn't feel the wound in her shoulder much, and she assumed that McCoy's and Samuels' wounds had been treated, much as hers had. But Christine, once awake, had assessed the situation as rapidly as McCoy had, and it seemed to her odd that the unbalanced Dr. Davidson would take so much trouble to patch them up when circumstances seemed to show that their captors didn't exactly intend to let them go free and unharmed. It was...illogical. Her mental choice of word made her think suddenly of Spock. McCoy wasn't the only one in the chamber to wish for the sudden appearance of the Vulcan.

Any answer Christine had been about to give on her observation of Samuels' condition was interrupted by a low moan from the security man himself. Samuels was coming round. After going through the same dreadful mental struggle as both McCoy and Christine had, he slowly and painfully turned over to face his companions.

"My head!" he exclaimed without preamble. "Where are we? Are you all right, Christine? And you, Doctor?"

McCoy couldn't do much else, so he raised an eyebrow. He was aware that Samuels and Christine knew each other well, and that his Head Nurse regarded the steady security man as a friend, but in a moment of insight McCoy realised something Chapel herself hadn't; Samuels regarded her as more than 'just a friend'. He had a nasty feeling things might be going to get even more complicated, if that was possible.

"We're both all right, Lieutenant," answered McCoy gravely. "For the moment, at least. Though I don't know how long that's likely to last. We had a visitor - several visitors - while you were still out, Samuels, and from what we were told, I gather we're in for something of an interrogation, and I don't think it's going to be very pleasant."

"But surely the Captain and Mr. Spock will be looking for us?" said Christine. She, like McCoy, had quickly understood the seriousness of the situation, and she appreciated McCoy's straightforwardness in speaking out. Then she too remembered the ion storm. "Oh, of course. The storm. The Enterprise will still be riding it out. We're alone here, aren't we?"

"For the moment, Christine - but don't worry, you know they'll be back the second they can. We just have to stall for time." McCoy knew Christine understood the situation just as well as he did. Fancy telling her not to worry! But then, he had to say something, and besides, it was true; if they could just

stall for time, sooner or later the storm would be over and Jim and Spock would be looking for them. McCoy didn't think much of Davidson's chances of keeping them prisoner when that happened.

"Hey - I just remembered something else." Samuels had fully recovered his senses now. "You said interrogation, Dr. McCoy - I think we've already had one. Me, at least. I'm sure I can vaguely remember being questioned, and not very kindly either. I don't know what about, though. Do you remember anything, Christine?"

McCoy had been right. There was a definite softening in the tone of voice Samuels used when addressing Chapel. She, however, didn't notice.

"Wait a minute - I think I can." Chapel thought hard. "I'm sure I can recall something like that, but it's disjointed, a bit like a confused dream; but then, it would be."

"The fact that all three of us have got the same impression makes me believe we were questioned while still partly unconscious, though I wouldn't have thought the natives had the knowledge to do that at their stage of development." McCoy frowned. "God knows how that Davidson has been messing about with their culture. It's no wonder they seem to regard him as some kind of god, if he's been demonstrating some of the 'miracles' technology can produce. Trouble is, I think he believes he is one."

"Yes - I noticed that too, and I didn't like the things he said about the Discovery carrying things the Federation didn't know about. Do you think he meant it, or was it just another delusion?" Christine was liking the situation less and less, but she'd be damned if she was going to let it destroy her usual calm manner. If they were going to die, she was going to remain as unemotional about it as she could. What was she thinking about? They weren't going to die! The Captain and Spock would get here before then, she knew. Firmly she pushed disheartening thoughts away.

"What I want to know is, what have they been questioning us about?" Samuels, the trained security man, thought over the possibilities. It was the sort of situation he ought to understand better than Dr. McCoy or Christine, but yet he couldn't see any obvious answer, apart from the fact that this Davidson seemed to be mad, according to what the other two said, and therefore it wasn't likely to make much sense anyway. He looked at Christine. She looked pale, and he had the idea that the leather straps which bound her to the stone slab were even tighter than the ones which bound him. It hurt him to look. For a long, long time - years, really, he had known and liked Christine Chapel, a great deal. He had worked with her on occasion, having been detailed, as one of Chief Baillie's senior men, to guard any of the various assorted belligerents, Klingons and the like, who at one time or another had been in custody on the Enterprise and who had been in need, from one reason or another, of the ministrations of the Starship's Medical Department. He had worked with Christine Chapel, and he had got to know her and respect her. She was the best Head Nurse in Starfleet, of that there was no doubt, and that was one of the reasons why he, a lowly security lieutenant, had never told her that his feelings for her were anything more than friendship.

In reality, that was probably a load of nonsense. He was highly thought of by his superiors, he knew, and it was quite possible that one day he would head a security department of his own. And any member of the Enterprise crew was envied by the rest of Starfleet. No, he had to admit to himself that the real reason why he had never spoken to her of his true feelings was because he was afraid she wouldn't want him, and his confession of love for her might do no more than spoil - permanently - what was a very good friendship, and that would be a terrible thing to happen. No, Samuels had decided long ago that the best course of action he could take would be to say nothing, and just carry on being Christine's friend.

Samuels knew, as did everyone on the Enterprise who had been there any length

of time, of Christine's supposed feelings towards the Vulcan First Officer, and although he also knew that her feelings would never be returned, still her love for Mr. Spock was yet another reason why he, Samuels, would never speak out about his regard for her. And try as he might, he couldn't feel the slightest amount of antagonism towards the perfectly innocent Vulcan; he, like everyone else on the ship who had had anything much to do with him, simply liked and respected Mr. Spock too much for that. Samuels sighed quietly to himself. Sometimes he thought he was too patient to be true, or maybe he was just cowardly. Anyway, whatever he was, there was nothing to stop him from showing how he felt towards Christine by doing his utmost to protect her in this situation, however grim it became.

How grim their situation was to become was soon to become apparent. The three captives had only a few more minutes in which to discuss their position, during which time they had come up with absolutely no ideas as to its solution, when the sound of returning footsteps was heard. Heavily and ominously the footsteps approached, and once more the heavy wooden door to their prison was swung open with a creaking noise.

The strange Dr. Davidson had returned, accompanied by his bodyguard as before. He came over to where McCoy lay restrained, and stood for a moment looking down at him. The wild look in his eyes belied the forced calmness of his face, and his expression made McCoy cringe inwardly. This is it, thought the Starship surgeon. We've had it now.

"Well, well, Doctor McCoy," said Davidson, scathingly emphasising the title as if McCoy's qualifications bothered him just a little. "It is time, I have decided, for this nonsense to stop. It is quite clear to me that you are all spies, trained in the resistance of sophisticated interrogation techniques, which is why you did not answer my questioning while you were unconscious. Your resistance to my previous humane methods has, I must admit, angered me a little. Therefore I have decided it is time for me to use more...unsophisticated...techniques. And on this planet, what I decide is law."

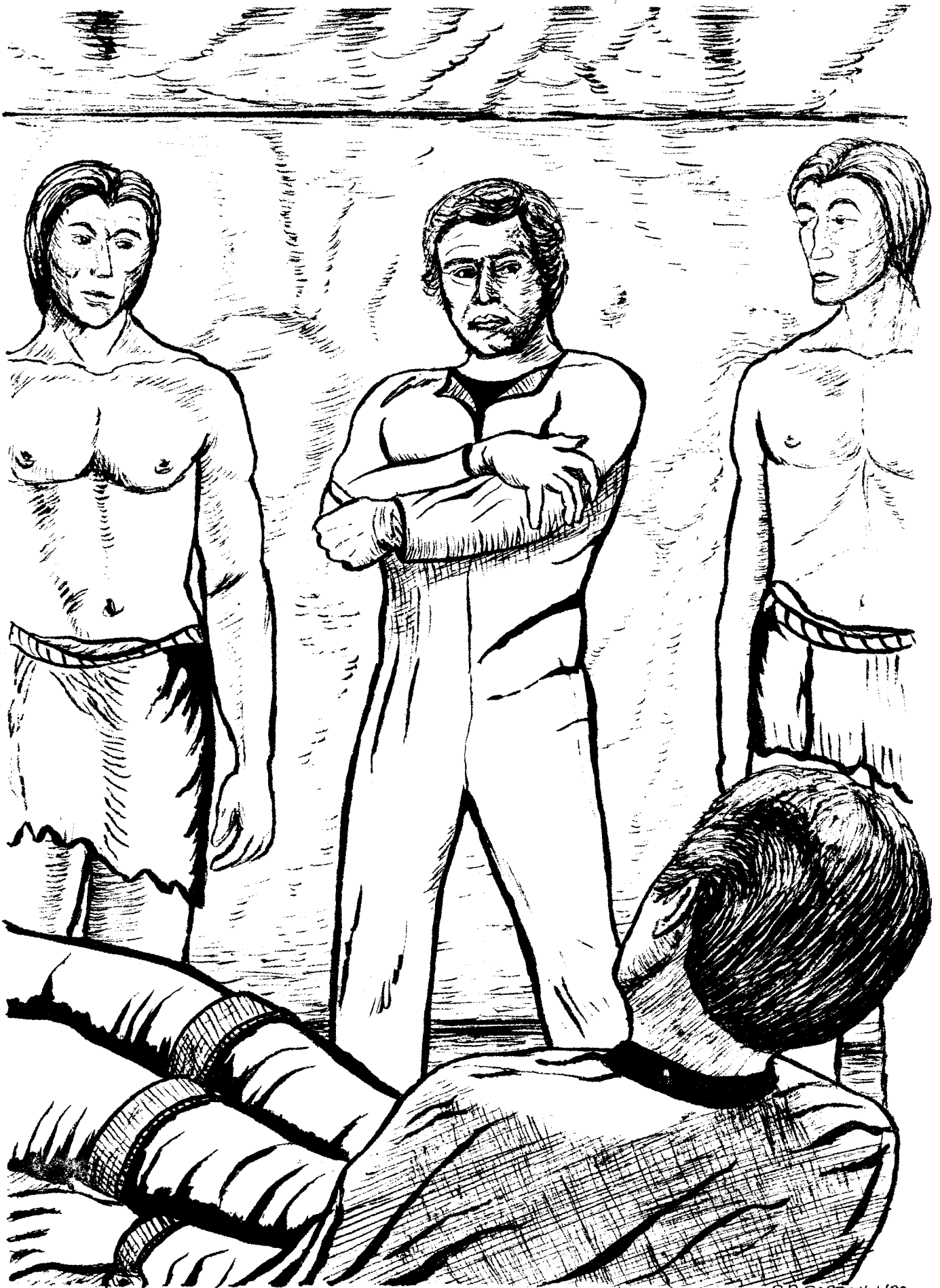
"We didn't tell you anything you might have thought we knew because we don't know anything such as you imagine!" McCoy tried one last, desperate plea to the man's better nature, although he didn't really expect it to work - he seriously doubted if Davidson indeed had a better nature. "We are not spies. We are Federation personnel sent to this planet to rescue you, to take you home!"

McCoy had said the wrong thing. "Home? Home?" Davidson almost spat out the word, his previously controlled features twisting dreadfully. "That place I was born is not, and never has been, my home. Those fools on Earth wouldn't listen to my ideas; they conspired against me until at last I was forced to leave Earth and seek out a world where the inhabitants would appreciate my talents and listen to my wisdom; and I have found it!" Davidson whirled to face the natives who stood silently behind him, as if hanging on his every word. The man looked more insane than ever. "It was destiny decreed that the Discovery should be forced to land here. It was destiny which brought me to this world, to Adan, the planet which was given to me to rule. My world - mine, do you hear me?"

If there were any doubts remaining in McCoy's mind as to Davidson's sanity, they had just been extinguished. What was coming next was not going to be pleasant.

"You will have all, no doubt, been trained to resist torture to the point of death," Davidson went on in a voice which made McCoy shiver inwardly. "And as I said, my advanced techniques for probing your minds proved ineffective earlier. I did, however, learn several interesting things while my apparatus was probing your thoughts."

McCoy's mind whirled. It suddenly came to him that his previous feelings of near panic and confusion, not to mention helplessness and disorientation, had not, after all, been entirely caused by the antiquated tranquilliser; his sensations while struggling to come round had also been due, probably more so, to





the effects of the mind-probing techniques the unstable Davidson had used on them. He shuddered as he thought of some machine probing his mind, his soul. No wonder he had felt as he did. He thought of Spock's reluctance to use the mind meld unless circumstances gave no choice, of the Vulcan's absolute respect for privacy. He wondered what Spock would make of this. But what had Davidson learned that could possibly aid him? Suddenly McCoy knew with certainty what it was, and the thought made his skin creep.

"I have learned," Davidson went on, still glaring down at McCoy, "that the members of your ship's crew are extremely loyal to one another. It is apparent that physical torture would not work against any of you. But against one of you?" Davidson suddenly whirled and looked at Chapel, his eyes bright with madness. McCoy was feeling more sickened by the second.

"Therefore, I have decided this," Davidson was gloating. "Unless either you, McCoy, or you, lieutenant, tell me what I want to know immediately, this young lady here will be put to death. Slowly and painfully. Do I make myself clear?"

"Perfectly." McCoy fought with himself to remain calm. He couldn't afford to let this man see how he felt. "But what guarantee have we that we would be safe then? And anyway - I've already told you. We don't know anything."

"You lie, Doctor - I expected no more. The decision is made." Davidson turned to the natives. "Take this woman to the chamber of fear!"

The natives released Chapel, and helped her to sit up. They were not rough, and McCoy, oddly, had the impression that if they had not been so completely under Davidson's control, and so in awe of him, they would not have been half so hostile. They made the still shaky Christine stand up. She drew herself to her full height, determined at all costs not to show these people how terrified she was.

"But you can't!" McCoy made one last try. "No matter how you torture any of us, we can't tell you what we don't know. And if you harm any of us, when the Enterprise comes back your life won't be worth living!"

"Now, doctor, that is more like it. Threats, however ineffective, I can understand." Davidson was grinning cruelly, as if McCoy's outburst had made him feel stronger. "But your threats tell me only that you are hiding something. And I am not worried about your ship." His tone of voice conveyed the contempt he held for Starships and their Captains in general. "Take this woman to the chamber of fear now! When they hear her cries, then they will speak!"

Christine Chapel spoke then, in a voice held steady by the power of will alone. "If I cry out - don't do or say anything," she said in a tone so even as to do justice to a Vulcan. "Please, Leonard - besides, it wouldn't do any good."

McCoy knew what she meant. She didn't mean for him not to give any secrets away, which was what Davidson thought she meant; Christine's plea to him was for him not to try to go in her place, sacrificing his life for her, which she knew he was only too likely to do. But wasn't that exactly what she was doing for them? He had to do something, whatever Christine said.

"No, Leonard." She had been reading his thoughts.

McCoy shook his head helplessly. He knew what it was like trying to dissuade her once her mind was made up.

"But Chris, I..." McCoy was about to make the gesture she didn't want him to, even though he feared his desperate offer might only result in he and Samuels being dragged off to watch Christine's torment, such was Davidson's warped temperament; but he was interrupted.

"You're not a scientist, Davidson - you're just a coward!" said Samuels suddenly. Christine had only asked Dr. McCoy to do nothing, not he. And if she did ask him, he was still going to do it anyway. She might never know how he felt now, but if he could save her, it would be worth it. He had guessed that a

straightforward offer of substituting himself in Christine's place might not be accepted; but if he could just anger Davidson enough - insult him, maybe - it might work.

"You're a coward, Davidson," Samuels said again, his voice filled with disgust. "You're taking Nurse Chapel because you're too afraid to take one of us!"

Davidson spun round to glare at Samuels, his lip trembling with rage.

Samuels drove the message home. "The only reason the Federation wouldn't listen to your ideas was because they're no damn' good! You're a fool - a coward and a fool!"

That did it. Davidson strode to Samuels, and <sup>stood</sup> menacingly above him, hardly able to control himself. "Guards - take this one instead! We shall see who is the coward, and the fool!"

Christine stood aghast, taken by surprise. She had half expected Lecna'd to try something like this, but Samuels? She couldn't let him, she couldn't let either of them....!"

"No - Samuels - you can't!" she cried, and in the middle of it all thought how crazy it was that this man was trying to give up his life for her, and she didn't even call him by his first name.

"No, Peter - don't!" She tried again, more quietly.

But her use of his first name only served to strengthen his determination. Apologetically, almost, he smiled at her, offering no resistance as the natives released his bonds and helped him to stand. Without a word he allowed them to lead him from the chamber, halting only momentarily in front of Christine. He looked as if he was going to say something, then he just grinned weakly, as if having thought better of it, and marched from the chamber without looking back. Unable to move, McCoy watched as the natives secured Christine to the slab once more, and then left, leaving the Chief Medical Officer and the Head Nurse of the Enterprise staring wordlessly at each other, even McCoy at a loss for something to say. And at the back of their minds all the time they thought of Samuels' plight, each of them wondering how long it would be before their turn came.

There was some disorientation as Spock felt himself beginning to come round, but with the use of some simple control techniques it was only a matter of minutes before he sat up, completely returned to consciousness and with his mind almost as clear as normal.

Quickly he took in his surroundings. He was in a darkened room, lit only by flickering candlelight. As his eyes became more accustomed to the gloom, he saw that the room was in fact a large, roundish wooden hut with a roof of thatch, all of which was naturally in keeping with the culture of the planet.

Spock turned, searching the darkness. Seeing what he was looking for, he carefully raised himself up off the bed on which he had been lying and stood up. He experienced a momentary sensation of dizziness but ignored it, being intent on reaching the other side of the room where two figures lay sleeping on two more beds.

Bending over Kirk, Spock assured himself that his Captain was as unharmed as he, and was merely as yet unconscious. Having satisfied himself of that, he then examined Chekov. His tricorder had been by his side when he awoke, and with it he had been able to make certain that none of them had taken serious harm, either from the tranquilliser or from the spear wounds, which had really been no more than a pin-prick, and which were now healing well on all three of them. It appeared that someone had been taking the trouble to treat them.

Through one of the small round windows of the hut, a faint greyness could be seen. It heralded the coming of dawn; they had spent the entire night comatose. Spock went over to the window and looked out, but all he could see

were several huts, similar in design to the one in which he, Jim and Chekov were, and a rather larger hut in the middle of the village. There were no signs of movement; it seemed that the village was asleep.

Quietly he walked to a wooden chair which stood against one of the wooden walls of the hut, from where the sleeping figures of the other two Enterprise men could be observed. He sat on it, placed the tricorder at his side, steepled his fingers, and began to ask himself several questions. Why had their captors posted no guards? In fact, why had they treated them more like guests than prisoners, obviously doing their best to make them comfortable? The method of their capture, and the capture of McCoy and the others, hadn't led him to believe the natives held particularly friendly intentions towards them. He considered leaving the hut, and making a search for the other three, but then abandoned the idea. He did not believe they were anywhere near. From the limited view he had had from the window, they did not even appear to be in the same village as the one outside which he, Jim and Chekov had been captured. And he couldn't risk leaving the hut just in case he was wrong in his assumption that the natives had completely reversed their earlier hostility towards them. He couldn't risk the natives returning while he wasn't there to protect his unconscious friends. Kirk groaned quietly in his drug-induced sleep, and that finally decided Spock. He would have to postpone any action until later, when he planned to ask the natives a great many questions indeed.

With infinite patience, Spock settled down to wait.

It was a full two hours later, and the grey light of early morning was streaming into the hut, when Kirk awoke to find Spock bending over him, a concerned look in his eyes. Kirk smiled in spite of himself.

"I'm all right, Spock - quit worrying."

Spock didn't even bother to deny it. Instead, he helped Kirk to sit up, then went to assist Chekov, who was also showing signs of imminent recovery.

Kirk slowly looked around the hut, moving his head very gingerly, not wishing to bring on a recurrence of the unpleasant sensations his brain had experienced while he had struggled to regain control of his senses. His eyes examined the hut; his mind came to much the same conclusions that Spock had. Carefully he got up off the bed, and went to where Chekov was slowly coming round. He helped Spock to aid the young Ensign to sit up, then had to sit down rather quickly on the edge of the bed, narrowly missing the Russian's feet. The exertion had made him feel very dizzy, and almost on the verge of passing out again. With a wave of his hand he dismissed the Vulcan's unspoken comments.

"I'm all right, Spock, I told you," he said, then grinned to soften it. "And by the looks of things, so are you and Chekov. The question is, are McCoy, Chapel and Samuels all right, and where are they? It seems very strange the natives haven't put them in the same place as us."

"From what little I have been able to discover, we do not appear to be in the same village outside which we were captured at all." Spock refrained from saying anything about Kirk's physical condition at that moment. "In fact, the natives who took us prisoner seem to have shown a completely different attitude towards us than those who captured Dr. McCoy and the others. They have treated us more as guests than prisoners, as far as I can tell from our circumstances."

"But Mr. Spock - does that mean these natives are enemies of the ones who captured the Doctor and Nurse Chapel?" The swimming sensation in his head obviously wasn't affecting Chekov's thought processes too much.

"That thought had occurred to me, Ensign," Spock agreed. "It would be a logical assumption; I..." Spock broke off in mid-sentence, and signalled to Kirk and Chekov that someone was approaching. His Vulcan hearing had detected footsteps nearing the hut.

There seemed little point in attempting to hide. Spock stood to one side

of Chekov's bed; Kirk stood at the other. The young Ensign sat there, struggling to clear his head of the last few wisps of disorientation. They were prepared for most things, and if they had expected something unusual to occur, they were not to be disappointed.

The door of the hut opened, and framed in the early morning light stood a group of several figures, the leader of which was an attractive woman of no more than forty, who was dressed in what could only be a rather aged, and outdated, Federation uniform. Not that this was unusual in itself; they had known all along that some of the Discovery's crew had been women, and they had ascertained that at least five of the crew had still been alive after the craft had crash-landed fifteen years previously. What the three Enterprise officers had not expected, after their earlier encounter with the natives of this world, was the appearance of the group of men and women who accompanied her. These were no ignorant savages, as those who had captured McCoy, Chapel and Samuels had appeared to be; these were intelligent beings, as intelligent as any Earth had produced. Their intelligence was written in their bearing, their expressions, and the wisdom in their eyes. Spock began to berate himself mentally for having so compared the planet to Earth that he had not foreseen the logical development of other, more advanced native groups than the first they had encountered. Not for the first time, Spock experienced a faint suspicion that here on this world some force was at work which was affecting his thought processes. Until they could discover what it was, or until such time as the Enterprise was able to return, they would all have to be very careful, and hope they could rescue their missing colleagues in the meantime. He must mention it to Jim at the first opportunity.

But for the moment, Spock decided to take the initiative away from their hosts. The woman, and her companions, stepped through the open doorway and walked towards them. Before anyone else could speak, Spock did.

"You are Dr. Lorraine Owen, I presume?" The Vulcan's words were not a question, and his thorough study aboard the Enterprise of what records the Federation possessed of the Discovery's crew was rewarded by a look of astonishment from Kirk, quickly suppressed. Kirk had not expected even Spock to know that.

But Kirk was not as astonished as the lady herself, or the people with her. Confirmation that they could understand and speak English came from the murmur of interest which passed through them.

With a look of extreme puzzlement on her face, accompanied by a manner which would stand no nonsense, Lorraine Owen spoke, in a voice which was both commanding and surprisingly gentle.

"That is indeed my name," she admitted, nodding her head a little, "though I confess how you came to know it is beyond me. May I ask who you are?"

Kirk stepped in. "I am Captain James T. Kirk of the Federation Starship Enterprise. This gentleman is my First Officer and Science Officer, Mr. Spock. This other officer is Ensign Chekov, ship's Navigator. And I am sure that Mr. Spock had familiarised himself with the identities of the Discovery's crew. That is how he knows your name." It hadn't taken Kirk long to work that out.

"Now that is interesting. I wasn't aware that the Federation had that much information on us." Dr. Owen folded her arms. "Although I suppose that one of their number suddenly running off in a strange craft would be of interest to them." Dr. Owen looked slightly amused.

"Indeed. The records show that one Dr. Lorraine Owen, 25, newly qualified as a Federation scientist specialising mainly in computers, overstayed her leave and was then found to have left Earth aboard the private vessel Discovery, destination unknown. Apart from the fact that the other female members of the crew were older than you, the fact that you are wearing an outdated Federation uniform led me to deduce your identity." Although Spock's main concern was for the safety of their three missing friends, he could not deny a certain amount of



curiosity as to what had actually happened to the Discovery; a question historians and other interested parties had been asking for the last fifteen years.

"I suppose this uniform is outdated," replied the lady. "I haven't actually worn it for years. I put it on today in your honour." The words were spoken without a hint of irony. Then suddenly her features broke into a grin, and she shook her head as she laughed good-naturedly. "I had wondered," she went on, still laughing, "why the Mountain People hadn't taken you three prisoner when they took your companions - but now I do understand. Oh, dear!" Dr. Owen obviously thought something extremely funny, and from the few sniggers here and there, so did the natives accompanying her.

"Can we share the joke? I could do with one." James Kirk was becoming impatient.

Lorraine Owen stopped laughing, though she still smiled. "I'm sorry - I suppose it isn't at all funny from your point of view, but you see - it's Mr. Spock here. The Mountain People are very superstitious, and, as naturally they haven't seen a Vulcan before, the sight of those ears would have been enough to send them into a near panic. There's a - um - character in the mythology of their planet whose description Mr. Spock fills exactly!"

The accompanying natives also seemed to find this rather amusing, and even Kirk couldn't quite prevent a small smile from creeping onto his face. Spock himself, however, merely raised an eyebrow noncommittally. The thought crossed his mind that Dr. McCoy would have something to say about that if he heard about it. When he hears about it, Spock corrected himself mentally. Although he didn't show it outwardly, he admitted privately that he was equally as concerned about their missing friend as Jim Kirk was. About Nurse Chapel and Samuels, too. They had to get to them soon. But first there were those questions he had to ask.

"In that case, Dr. Owen, it is fortunate that I was accompanying Captain Kirk and Ensign Chekov, or else we should all have been captured," Spock pointed out. "But I have many questions to ask you, all of which are important. The most important one, however, is - are the natives who captured our colleagues dangerous? They are obviously hostile, but their use of a tranquilliser similar to yours to capture them indicates that they did not intend to kill them, at least not immediately. The question is, for how long are they likely to remain unharmed?"

Kirk didn't say anything, being content to allow Spock to ask the pertinent questions. Lorraine Owen's expression changed to one of concern and, shaking her head, she walked across the room and stood just in front of Spock and Kirk, who still stood to either side of the sitting Chekov. The natives waited by the door, as yet not speaking to any of the three Enterprise officers directly, but quite clearly listening. Spock noted that these particular inhabitants of the planet didn't show any sign of apprehension at his alien appearance.

"Your friends," Dr. Owen began, "are in some danger, I am afraid, but not from the natives themselves. They are in danger from the man who controls the Mountain People, as that particular tribe call themselves, mainly because they live at the feet of the mountains, and they hunt and roam the peaks constantly. No, it is the man who controls them who is the danger. He is not sane, and he regards himself as a god. Unfortunately, so do the Mountain People; they are very impressionable, and he has led them for twelve years now. His every word is law to that tribe. I am sorry to say that he is one of my former colleagues, one of the crew of the Discovery. He is a scientist, and a very, very clever man, which makes him all the more dangerous. His name is Dr. Andrew Davidson, and he is not to be tangled with lightly."

Kirk felt a sudden stab of fear for McCoy's safety. He had always felt his friend to be in grave danger, but in the hands of a madman... He exchanged glances with Spock, and saw from his eyes that his Vulcan friend shared his concern. But what could they do? Without the Enterprise they had only a handful of phasers between them, and if they tried to rescue their friends by force,

there was no telling what a man who thought he was a god might do. It didn't look good at all.

"But this Davidson would surely recognise them as Starship personnel?" Kirk had some questions of his own. "What could he possibly want to hold them prisoner for?"

"As I told you, Captain Kirk, the man is not sane." Dr. Owen didn't sound optimistic, and the tone of her voice sent a chill through his spine. "To his twisted way of thinking, your three people will be spies, sent by the Federation to overthrow his rule of this world. I know Davidson; believe me, that is how he would think. After the Discovery crashed, there were still five of us left alive. Now there are only three - myself, our ship's communications officer, John Hedges, and Davidson. The other two died during the first two years we spent here. Hedges and I have always believed Davidson to be responsible."

"If he's that dangerous, and the Mountain People obey him as implicitly as you say," Kirk broke in, an anxious tone to his words, "then we really must attempt to rescue our friends as soon as we can; one of them is Dr. McCoy, the Enterprise's Chief Medical Officer, another, Nurse Chapel, the Head Nurse. The third, Samuels, is a senior security man. They are all important members of my ship's crew, but more than that; Dr. McCoy is one of my dearest friends."

Lorraine Owen shook her head sympathetically. "Then indeed I do understand how you feel. But surely, with the resources of your ship, it should be relatively simple to effect a rescue? Those of my friends from this village who were watching the Mountain People's village, those who brought you here, did so because they feared you also would have been taken prisoner had you stayed in that place much longer. From what I have been able to teach them over the years, they were able to recognise you as aliens and, apart from their own interest, assumed that I, and Hedges, would wish to speak with you. Those are the main reasons why they did as they did. They were afraid that had they come upon you in the darkness, your surprise would have been such that you would have fought them before they could explain their intentions. Such a disturbance would have resulted in the capture of you all, and knowing the ways of the Mountain People - or, I should say, the ways the Mountain People have developed under Davidson's guidance - my friends had no desire for that to happen. But one thing has puzzled me increasingly as the time has worn on. Why have your people not yet come for you? Your Starship has had ample time for its sensors to pinpoint you."

It was Spock who answered. "The Enterprise is not in orbit above your planet. Due to the proximity of an ion storm of considerable violence, the acting commander had no choice but to take her out into open space, there to wait out the storm in safety. Due to the untimely capture of our colleagues, we had no choice but to stay and search for them. The Enterprise will be unable to return until at least tomorrow morning."

"Then the situation is more grave than I thought." Dr. Owen got up, and quickly crossed the room, taking a bag from one of the natives. Opening it, she took out their phasers and communicators, plus those which belonged to the three others, and handed them back to Kirk, Spock and Chekov. "I apologise for having taken these, but it was necessary that I did until I had a chance to talk with you, explain things. The most important thing now is that we sit down and work out a plan as to how we can try to rescue your friends. I feel tempted to say we ought to wait until your ship returns, but I do not think we dare to wait that long."

"I agree, Dr. Owen," said Kirk, giving her one of his smiles. They needed her help, and the help of the natives, badly. Besides, he liked her. "And I understand about the phasers. But it isn't that simple. Even if the Enterprise was in orbit right now, we couldn't just go marching in there. It would be against the Prime Directive, and could do untold damage."

"The Prime Directive?"

"General Order No. One, The Prime Directive, was brought into operation

after the Discovery left on its journey," Spock explained, having not even raised an eyebrow at the smile Kirk had given Dr. Owen. He knew the effect the Captain's smiles had been known to have on certain occasions, and they did seem to work, illogical as it might be.

"The Prime Directive," Kirk went on, still smiling, "is one of the most important laws of the Federation. As Spock said, it did not come fully into force until after you and your ship had left on your journey. It states that no-one from any Federation planet, Starship personnel or otherwise, may trespass on a world protected by the Directive. It is applied to worlds such as this one, where the native development is not sufficiently advanced as to be unharmed by alien contact. The chance of culture contamination in such instances is very high. That is why it was a difficult decision to leave the Enterprise to search for any survivors from the Discovery in the first place. But although the decision of whether or not circumstances are serious enough to take the step of breaking the Prime Directive is a hard one, Starship Captains have been known to do it on occasion."

Lorraine Owen looked at him as if she knew he had been one of them. "And are you now wishing you had not come down here after all?" she said, her hands on her hips. As he opened his mouth to protest, she waved her hand at him. "No, no, Captain Kirk - you are not a man like that. I can tell you are not. And I can certainly appreciate the wisdom of this Prime Directive. The effects of our presence on Adan are only too clear to see."

"Adan - that is the name of this world?" enquired Spock politely. He knew, as Kirk did, that this woman's co-operation could be vital if they were to rescue McCoy and the others. "And what effects do you refer to?"

And then, for the first time, Dr. Owen showed signs of strain. Tiredly, she sank into a chair, and sighed. But it was only for a moment. Almost immediately the determined, clear-sighted individual she was came through to the surface again.

"I refer, Mr. Spock," she said in a quiet thought kindly voice, as steady as the Vulcan's, "to the way in which two separate tribes native to Adan have taken us Terrans to be their leaders. Davidson leads the Mountain People by fear, and Hedges and I lead the people here, who call themselves Adan's Children - for yes, that is the name of this world - by the spirit of friendship and co-operation. Oh, we do not call ourselves leaders as such, but advisers, helpers; but leaders is what we really are. There have been many times when I have felt great sorrow for the changes we have brought about on this world. And yet I have always told myself that from the first moment we made contact with the natives, there could have been no other outcome. Oh yes; your Prime Directive is a wise law. It has occurred to me in the past that perhaps the Federation was not so foolish as we who left in the Discovery thought at the time. But I was young, and fired with ambition; to see the stars, unaided by any but ourselves; to make such discoveries! And for a while we did, until our ship, crippled by a storm such as the one your great ship now rides out with ease, was forced to crash-land on this world. We who survived were lucky to escape with our lives. But our journey to the stars was ended." For a moment she sat and stared in front of her, as if seeing anew the dream which had made her, a young scientist, leave her duties and board the Discovery.

Kirk did not interrupt her for a moment. For the first time, he thought he could understand a little of what had made them all go off in that small ship all those years ago.

When he did speak his voice was gentle. "But now you can continue that journey, Lorraine," he said, using her name for the first time. "When we have found McCoy and the other, then you, and Hedges, and Davidson if we can reason with him - or even if we can't - can leave this planet with us and return to Earth, or wherever you want to go."

"And the Federation would show us all forgiveness?" Lorraine Owen was



looking past him, staring into space almost, as if she had not really heard what he had said. Yet to Spock it seemed that her gaze held something more than disbelief. Dr. Owen sighed quietly again, and looked Kirk full in the face. This time she smiled back. "Yes - the Federation would forgive. I have known that for years. The times I have thought us all fools for going off as we did... Sometimes I think a kind of madness must have come upon us all." Suddenly she stood up, determined, and looking every inch the leader she had said that in reality she was. "And on Davidson," she continued grimly, "it really was a madness. Come, gentlemen; time is wasting and with each passing moment the lives of your friends are in greater danger. We have plans to make. Elen - please ask the others to bring refreshment so that we may eat while we talk. Gentlemen?"

With that, she went and sat at the circular table set alongside a wall of the hut, inviting the three Enterprise men to join her. The tall native woman she had addressed as Elen left the hut with the other natives, but within five minutes she had returned with three others, carrying trays of food which they placed in front of Kirk, Spock and Chekov on the table. Spock noted that among the other things she and Hedges had taught Adan's Children during their fifteen years' enforced stay on that world, they must have taught them something of Vulcan culture, for of the dishes which had been placed in front of him, not one contained any meat, while the same could not be said of the dishes given to the Captain and Chekov. Spock nodded in silent appreciation. It appeared that the effect of Dr. Owen's and Hedges' contact with the natives was quite different from that which had occurred when the unstable Dr. Davidson had assumed the leadership of the Mountain People.

Over the next hour Spock learned that his suspicions were more than justified. He, Kirk and Chekov sat eating, silent in the main but at times asking questions, while Lorraine Owen told them many things; of their time on Adan, the things that had occurred during that time, and of the storm which had caused the crash-landing of the Discovery fifteen years before.

When their ship had crashed, she told them, they had indeed been glad simply to be still alive, for seven of their number had either died during the impact or soon after, due to the injuries received. One of those who had died on impact had been the Discovery's Medical Officer. For a while, weeks it seemed, they had stayed by the site of the crash, hoping someone would pick up the automatic distress signal they had set in operation, not very hopeful of its being picked up; they knew only too well that the planet on which they had crashed was not in an area frequented by many vessels. When it became clear that they were not going to be rescued, the five who had survived decided they had better try to make contact with the native humanoids their sensors told them lived on the planet; their rations could not last indefinitely, and apart from that, winter was coming on. If they were to make a permanent home on that planet, they had thought it best to begin as soon as possible.

And so they had made contact with the natives, with two tribes who called themselves Adan's Children and the Mountain People. These two tribes, while having certain similarities of culture, nevertheless didn't trust each other completely. Yet they were at peace, and traded; they simply didn't mix unless they had to. So, preferring more than anything the situation of the village of those who called themselves Adan's Children, they had taken up residence with them taking what equipment from their ship was still usable, and Adan's Children, being both open-minded and greatly intelligent, had learned from them many things, and they had all spent the first eighteen months on Adan very successfully.

It was at that point that Spock enquired about the stones.

Surprisingly, Dr. Owen could not give a completely clear answer as to the stones. She remarked how she, too, with all the survivors of the Discovery, had been somewhat taken aback at first sight of the monoliths, the stone circles, the cromlechs. The similarity between Adan and Neolithic Earth was striking, and when she and the others had settled with Adan's Children, they had done their best to find out exactly what was the purpose of the stones, and their secret. But although their purpose, at least on the surface, was easy enough to discover,

their secret was not, and as Davidson, on his decampment to the village of the Mountain People, had taken with him most of the scientific equipment which had survived the Discovery's crash, she had Hedges had had very little opportunity to find out more.

Their function seemed to be, as she and the other Terrans had suspected, primarily a religious one. At various times of the year, the natives - of all tribes - would gather at one or another of the sites, and would hold their rites there. The stones also seemed to be used at different times in what would once have been termed a 'magical' way; they were used for healing, and other such purposes.

Yet all this was easy to comprehend, except for the 'magic'; what was not easy to understand was the incredible power which seemed to emanate from the stones at certain times. She had thought at first, as Earth's scientists once had, that it was something to do with Adan's magnetic field; but apparently it was not. It was something far greater, more powerful, which defied understanding. And understanding had been made more difficult by the fact that while she and Hedges, and Davidson, did, in effect lead the natives of the two tribes they had encountered since coming to Adan, both Adan's Children and the Mountain People considered it taboo for the Terrans to visit any of the sacred sites, and as a result, the Terrans had had very little opportunity for investigation.

Returning to her tale, Lorraine told them how, after eighteen months, two of their fellow survivors had been found dead one morning, and although they could not prove it, both she and Hedges, and most of Adan's Children, suspected Davidson. His paranoia, which had been mild at first, had been steadily growing since the crash, and they had all been very concerned about him, both for his sake and for the sake of the natives. Their fears had been proved well-founded, and his guilt also, when he had stolen, with the help of some of the Mountain People who at that time still at times frequented the village of Adan's Children, almost all their scientific equipment, and esconced himself in the Mountain Peoples' village, calling himself their leader, and worse, the Ruler of Adan, acting as if he were a god, and turning the impressionable Mountain People into savage fighters. From that time forward, a state of war had existed between the two tribes, with Adan's Children spending most of their time defending themselves from the frequent attacks the Mountain People would make on them.

"It is indeed fortunate," said Spock, steepling his fingers in front of him, "that the Mountain People who captured Dr. McCoy, Nurse Chapel and Lt. Samuels were so superstitious that they left their phasers behind for us to recover. If that had not been the case, the situation would have been extremely difficult."

"Yes, Mr. Spock, it would have been," replied Dr. Owen. "And I have been thankful many times that by our ethics at the time of leaving, we on the Discovery carried no weapons. If that had not been the case, I do not think we could have lasted out this long. Spears are not as destructive as phasers, thank God!"

But while all this explaining had been going on, necessary as it might be, time was passing. Kirk began to say something about deciding on a plan; he had hardly begun to speak when Lorraine Owen finished it for him.

Wearily almost, she sighed again, and spread her hands out on the table in front of her. "Yes, Captain Kirk, you are right," she said, as if he had spoken. "We have a plan to discuss; decisions to make. Decisions that should have been made long ago if I had had courage enough."

"I should have thought," said the Vulcan in his even tone, and taking them all - except Kirk - by surprise with his understanding, "that you were not lacking in that particular quality, Dr. Owen."

Two hours later, Dr. Lorraine Owen had realised that the three men, especially the Captain and the Vulcan, with whom she had been discussing the matter

of life and death as they sat around the table in the small hut, were some of the most interesting people she had met in her entire life; before coming to Adan or since. Although most of their conversation had concerned the various possibilities (or rather, impossibilities) of rescuing their friends from Davidson's clutches, she had nevertheless managed to gain a fair amount of information concerning life outside the isolation of Adan, of life within the teeming, vibrant Federation culture as it now was, and from Spock, who she found both interesting and also unusually sympathetic; quite unlike what she had expected of a Vulcan. Not that anything he said indicated that, of course; it was just something about him she couldn't quite put her finger on. Perhaps it was something to do with the obvious esteem and affection in which both Captain Kirk and the Ensign held him. And he was also clearly far more intelligent than any other being she had ever come across (she had never met an Organian). No, she decided; Davidson the God would definitely not like Mr. Spock, as he did not like anyone who showed the slightest sign of possessing more intelligence than he. Privately she and Hedges had often thought that had been the main reason why Davidson had done away with their two murdered colleagues. No, she told herself again, Davidson would not like Mr. Spock - or the Captain either, for that matter - but she thought that the Davidson he had once been, all those years ago when she had first met him, would have done, as she did. It was a terrible thing what paranoia could do to a human being.

They had not decided on a definite plan, each one they had considered having been discarded for some reason or another as unsuitable or just plain dangerous, when Hedges returned to the village from an expedition he had been on with some of the natives, hopefully to try and make peaceful contact with some of the other tribes who lived on Adan. He had been away for some weeks, and his expedition had been unsuccessful; they had simply been unable to locate any fellow inhabitants of his adopted world. So it had been a rather disgruntled and depressed Hedges who had been given word of the visitors from one of the village guards. His depression had vanished instantly, almost as quickly as it took him to cover the distance to the visitors' hut. He entered, beaming all over his face, not caring that he probably looked very stupid. The isolation on Adan had become very hard for Hedges.

They made their introductions, and within a space of minutes, Hedges found himself as drawn to the Starship Captain and the Vulcan - as well as the young Ensign - as Lorraine was. Dreadful as it undoubtedly was that three others were in the unkind hands of that fool Davidson, and dangerous as it was going to be attempting to rescue them, Hedges nevertheless had great difficulty in suppressing his excitement at the prospect of the Enterprise's return when the ion storm was over. To be back in circulation again! To see all those places he had never thought to see again! And such advances had been made during the fifteen years' enforced stay on Adan - Mr. Spock was undoubtedly an expert in all branches of computer science; computers had been Hedges' subject, as they had been Lorraine's, and a few questions to the Vulcan had been enough to whet his appetite for examining the Starship's computers; not to mention the multitude of scientific and other discoveries which had been made during his long absence from the Federation worlds. It had been many years since he had come to terms with the fact that he had made a mistake becoming one of the Discovery's crew; but that didn't matter now; what did matter to Hedges was that within a short space of time, he would be leaving Adan, and who knew what discoveries he might make himself once he had the chance again? But Hedges was not an unsympathetic, or a callous, person, no matter how hard the isolation had been for him; he willingly turned his thoughts to solving the problem of how to rescue the three captured Starship officers.

Yet with the combined brainpower of Kirk, Spock, Chekov, Lorraine and Hedges, still they could not decide on a plan which would guarantee that they could rescue McCoy and the others without causing them further danger. Both Lorraine and Hedges had pointed out that Davidson's fear of the rule of Adan's being taken from him (not that he had ever had it in reality) was such that he might well have the prisoners put to death at the first sign of a rescue attempt. Kirk pointed out that if they didn't do something soon, however risky, they

might well be too late to save them anyway. He didn't add that he was praying it wasn't too late already.

They had long abandoned all thoughts of obeying the Prime Directive; there was no need any longer; culture contamination of Adan had taken place within the first few years of the Discovery's survivors' stay on the planet, and it was unlikely that anything they might now do would make the situation any worse. Spock had suggested that it was their duty, as Federation personnel, to attempt to amend matters, if that were possible, after McCoy, Chapel and Samuels had been rescued, of course. Kirk couldn't quite see how that might be achieved; but then, he wasn't worrying about that just then.

They did not have enough people trained in the use of phasers to attempt to stun enough of the Mountain People to bring out McCoy and the others without fear of retaliation, for although spears were not as powerful as phasers, they were as deadly, and the natives of Adan, of all tribes, were extremely skilled in their use. Training some of Adan's Children to use the phasers was out of the question; they just didn't have the time to teach the admittedly intelligent natives how to use the potentially destructive weapons safely, and a frontal or a surprise attack on the village, whether accompanied by spear-wielding Adan's Children or not, was doomed to failure because there was no way they would have time to overcome all resistance before Davidson could either, at worst, put their friends to death, or, at best, hold them hostage - and that situation could well prove the ruin of them all. The return of the Enterprise was still a good eighteen hours away.

Eventually Kirk's patience ran out, and he told both Dr. Owen and Dr. Hedges, as politely as his anxiety would allow, that with or without help, he and his men would make an attempt immediately, as no better solution was likely to be found.

It was then that a quiet voice from the corner of the room spoke up. From time to time, one or another of the natives had come into the room to listen to their discussion; they had not added anything to the conversation; they had merely stood there, listening quietly. But now, when one of them did speak, it was worth listening to; it was the woman Elen who made them all prick up their ears.

"I have an idea," she said simply, in her strange, accented speech. The five sitting at the table turned and looked at her speculatively, hopefully. "If you had a means of surprise, you might succeed in - what do you call it - stunning them all. You do have that means; Mr. Spock. You have already seen how the Mountain People were so afraid of his appearance that they did not attempt to capture him, or you two who were near him at that moment. Once they saw him, they abandoned their mission to capture you all; they simply took the ones they could, and escaped as quickly as possible. Believe me, they would have been completely terrified. The Mountain People are immature, and very superstitious, as you have been told. Even I, of Adan's Children, who no longer believe in such things, experienced a strange sensation when I saw Mr. Spock for the first time."

"But - but what is it about Mr. Spock they are so scared of?" Chekov found it very odd, and a little amusing, that anyone could be so afraid of the Science Officer. He had forgotten how in awe of him he had been when he first boarded the Enterprise, but even that had not been superstitious awe.

"Let me explain," Lorraine Owen volunteered. "There is a...character... in Adan's mythology who bears a great resemblance to Mr. Spock, indeed, to any Vulcan. This character has no name, but is feared more than any other of the strange beasts and monsters the natives of Adan have imagined for themselves. This character in whose likeness you walk, Mr. Spock," and here she turned and grinned at Spock, "is the stealer of spirits, the personification of evil, who wields the power of the stones by his will. Naturally, as you're the first Vulcan they've seen, one look at you was enough to scare them half out of their wits."

"Are you suggesting," said Kirk, "that Spock just walks in there, scares them silly just by looking at them, and while they're all hiding, we rush in, stun everyone in sight, and bring out Bones and the others before they know what's happening?" At any other time, Kirk would have found the situation amusing, especially the expression on Spock's face; his eyebrows were about to disappear into his hair; but he felt not the slightest inclination to smile at that moment. He looked grimly at Lorraine and Elen, still standing at the edge of the room, demanding an answer with his eyes.

"Yes," said Elen.

Lorraine nodded slowly. No-one else said anything.

"You know," said Kirk, "it might just work."

It took them another two hours to cross the rough country between the village of Adan's Children and the village of the Mountain People, mainly due to the fact that they dared not let the latter know they were coming. As a precaution, experienced scouts were sent on ahead, reporting back only when they were certain it was safe to proceed; the Mountain People had spies everywhere, it seemed. Although this was standard procedure for Adan's Children, developed over the years they had found it necessary to keep the Mountain People under close observation, and although it was undoubtedly a sensible precaution, nevertheless it slowed their progress considerably, and Kirk was inwardly becoming very impatient at the time it was taking them to cross what was after all only a few miles. As usual, however, he refused to allow his impatience to show, or affect him in any way; a Starship Captain couldn't afford to. Instead, he occupied himself by observing the native warriors of Adan's Children who had volunteered to accompany them. He talked to several, and they all struck him as Elen had done; as intelligent beings, who would no doubt have made a very good job of running Adan if outsiders hadn't interfered. Yet intelligent and sensible or not, Kirk couldn't help noticing how one or the other of them would give Spock some very strange looks when they thought the Vulcan wasn't observing them. Spock himself didn't seem to notice, or seemed to be refusing to notice, and that in itself was a circumstance so unusual that Kirk couldn't help but be a little amused, even in the situation they were in. And when one or the other of the natives spoke to Spock on occasion, it was with a deference not heard when they addressed anyone else; superstition dies hard, Kirk told himself, even among rational people.

But it was that very superstition they were all relying on, and Kirk only hoped that the fear the natives of the Mountain People had exhibited of Spock before, if indeed that was what it had been made them not capture the three of them when they had taken the others, was still as powerful as before. Yet if it was possible for Adan's Children to unlearn the fear of superstition, then surely it was possible for the Mountain People also, especially if they were more afraid of the 'god' who led them, as they believed him to be. It was a gamble, but as Kirk had pointed out to them all before, they had no choice. And as Spock had said to him after leaving the village, there had been many other times when they had taken gambles which had paid off. But Kirk knew his Vulcan friend had only said it to make him feel better; how many times had Spock said he didn't believe in luck?

Eventually they reached the village, and after Adan's Children had successfully and quietly dealt with the Mountain People's guards by the skilful use of the spears impregnated with tranquillizer that both tribes employed, Kirk, Spock and Chekov, accompanied by Lorraine Owen, Hedges, Elen and several other of Adan's Children who were not concealed, as the rest were, around the outskirts of the village, found themselves in very nearly the same spot they had been in when the scouts had found them the night before. Lorraine pointed out to them that it was not habitual for the Mountain People to use the tranquillizer, as Adan's Children did; they were more likely to use a very deadly poison. Kirk remarked that they would keep it in mind.

Spock turned to look at Kirk, his face as calm as ever, although he knew it

was just as likely that a fear-crazed native would throw a poisoned spear at him as run away. But he mentioned nothing of that; instead, he merely said to Kirk, "Ready, Jim?"

Kirk nodded. He too had no illusions as to the dangers they were facing. But both he and Spock knew McCoy was in there somewhere. He needed their help.

Kirk gave a pre-arranged signal, which was passed from one of Adan's Children to another, until within a matter of sixty seconds every one of them knew that the attempt was about to be made. Not as simple as communicators, perhaps, but hopefully as efficient.

Silently, Spock stood, his phaser in his hand, set to a heavy stun position. Just as silently, he began to walk towards the nearest, cutlying huts of the village, with Kirk and the others following as closely behind as they dared without being seen.

Miraculously, no-one saw Spock as he continued on his steady approach to the village. But surely it could not be long before they spotted him, and no-one knew what would happen then. Without a pause he continued, his Vulcan eyes and ears alert to the slightest movement or sound.

Either the Mountain People did not mount a very good guard, or else they were not expecting trouble, for the resistance they had expected to meet just wasn't there. Had Davidson's belief in his unassailability spread to the natives he dominated?

Apparently it had, for suddenly in Spock's path was a group of laughing, chattering natives, sitting in a circle, playing a game of what looked to Spock like a variation on Terran poker, completely oblivious of his presence, or even more, of the possibility of attack, which on the surface was more likely to occur.

But it was a random factor in their favour, and as McCoy would have said, not a gift horse to be looked in the mouth. Taking advantage of the element of surprise, Spock walked silently up to the Mountain People, still with Kirk and the others following as closely as they dared. If the reaction wasn't immediately the one he wanted, Spock was ready to stun the lot of them.

The natives didn't hear his cat-like footsteps, and he was able to get within a few feet of them without their noticing anything at all was happening. They were so engrossed in their game that Spock had no alternative but to attract their attention in some way.

"Excuse me," said Spock quietly.

The reaction was almost instantaneous and very satisfying, if somewhat startling to watch for anyone who didn't know what to expect. As of one, the heads of all the natives in the circle turned to see who the intruder was; and as of one, their faces were filled with a look of such horror that Chekov, watching from the cover of a nearby bush, was hard put to it to stifle a laugh.

Though he was ready with his phaser, Spock didn't need to use it, for immediately they noticed him, the natives sprang to their feet, abandoning their card school, and rushed off in all directions at once, shouting unintelligibly at the tops of their voices. But you didn't have to understand their language to guess at the nature of what they were shouting; the Mountain People sounded completely terror-stricken. It seemed Elen's plan was working.

And it was working far better than they could have hoped; instead of running to the caves to hide, the Mountain People seemed to be running out of the village, pausing only long enough to shout a warning to their nearest and dearest. It didn't look as if Spock was going to have to show his face to any of the others; the very mention of his presence seemed to be enough to empty the village.

A group of fleeing Mountain People stumbled upon Kirk, Chekov and some of Adan's Children, and whether they suspected a plot of some kind, or just wanted to get away, they began to fight.



The Mountain People were fierce fighters, and their fierceness was lent added strength by their terror of the tall Vulcan. But Adan's Children had had many years' experience of resisting them, and although a few isolated incidents of violent scuffles occurred, they were quickly suppressed, mainly because the Mountain People appeared to be more concerned about getting away from the village than fighting seriously.

Several times Kirk's and Chekov's bright blue phaser beams stabbed out, and several times assailants fell surprised and unconscious to the ground. Once a spear almost pierced Kirk, and only a shouted warning from Chekov and a quick spin round saved him. He thanked the good sense that had told him he was better off with his phaser than with any number of the native weapons that had been offered him.

The fighting was soon over, and mainly due to the panic among the Mountain People, every one of the rescue party had escaped without as much as a scratch; a few bruises, perhaps, but no-one had been touched by the deadly spear-tips of the Mountain People; indeed, the only serious casualties had been among their number, and five of the fleeing natives lay dead, a result of their trying to kill those of Adan's Children they had come across during their flight; the latter had acted instinctively, and the outcome had been unavoidable.

Having watched the initial results of his appearance in the village only long enough to ascertain that his companions were not in any more danger than they had anticipated, Spock turned and continued towards his objective; the caves where they believed McCoy and the others were being held.

With his usual resolution and calmness, the Vulcan walked on, with Kirk and Chekov, when the outcry had died down a little, once more following close behind him.

It was bordering on a miracle, Kirk thought to himself, that they didn't encounter any more resistance as they made their way through the very centre of the sprawling village. As they went on as quickly as they dared, Kirk tried to cheer himself up with the thought of what McCoy was going to say when he heard about the effect just the sight of Spock had had on the natives. It was funny, but it didn't seem to work; he was just as worried as ever.

Spock, ten or twelve feet ahead, halted. Turning, he beckoned them to join him.

"Spock?" Kirk spoke his name as a question. For answer, the Vulcan looked towards the cliffs, and the mouth of the main cave, from which they were now not more than fifty feet distant.

"More natives, Captain," replied Spock at his most toneless. "It would seem they are hiding just inside the mouth of the main cave. I caught a glimpse of one of them, waiting with a spear. And the tricorder confirms it."

Kirk nodded. He would have trusted the Vulcan's eyesight without the confirmation of Spock's ever-present science tricorder.

"We couldn't have expected to get into the caves without some sort of resistance," he said grimly. "And at least it proves there's something or someone in there they don't want us to find." He looked Spock in the eyes. "Sorry, Spock, but you're going to have to do your bogey-man act again; and I have the nasty feeling that this time it might just be a little bit harder."

Spock inclined his head in agreement. With Adan's Children, Lorraine Owen and Hedges grouped behind them, Spock, Kirk and Chekov walked on once more, towards the cave mouth and McCoy. As they grew nearer, Kirk began to experience a definite sense of unease; something more than the unseen, watchful eyes of the Mountain People inside the cave. Then he knew what it was; a scream, unmistakably a scream of a Human in great pain, came from within the dark recesses of the cave. Kirk halted and stiffened momentarily, then continued grimly and even more determinedly. That cry could only have come from McCoy or Samuels, and God knew what was being done to them to make either of them yell like that.



Then, without warning, a mere fifteen feet from the entrance, they were halted by the sight of the Mountain People filing out of the entrance, and lining up in front of it, two ranks deep, their spears at the ready and a look of abject fear on the faces of all of them. Kirk had the distinct impression that they were no more afraid of the tall Vulcan than they were of the white-coated figure who stood at their rear, a wild light in his eyes. It looked like they were in for a fight, and a nasty one. Very well; they would damn' well give them one!

But before he could give the order to advance, for it was clear there could be no thought of trying to talk these characters out of fighting, Davidson spoke. He spoke as a man who gave no thought to the possibility of defeat; as a man who thought he was more than a man, and invincible.

"So. The fools have come." Davidson uttered the words with complete contempt, and his manner only served to convince the three Enterprise men that Lorraine Owen's assessment of his state of mind was accurate.

He seemed to be waiting for someone to say something. Kirk wasn't going to disappoint him, and somehow he didn't think this was an occasion when diplomacy was going to be either appropriate or effective.

"Yes, we've come," said the Starship Captain at his most commanding. "But it is not we who are the fools, Davidson. We came here to rescue you, and for reward you take my colleagues prisoner. Where are my officers?" Kirk gave Davidson a glare sufficient to make a Gorn flinch. "If they are harmed in any way, do not expect me, or the Federation, to be lenient. Whatever you may think, you are not immune from us. I say again, no, I demand - where are my officers?"

Kirk's words seemed to enrage Davidson even further, which was just what he had hoped for; if he could push Davidson over the edge of his control into blind fury, he might not be able to direct his natives when battle came; a cool head was needed for decisions of that nature, and Kirk didn't intend to allow Davidson to have one.

Davidson spluttered and ~~was~~ apparently unable to speak for a few seconds through sheer rage at this impudence. When he did finally manage to get something out, his face had turned quite purple. Spock noticed the unease with which the Mountain People regarded their leader; it was clear to the Vulcan that Davidson had not been a kind master; his rage was a thing they feared greatly. But how greatly? How much would it take to persuade them to come over to their side? It was a tactic he and Kirk had discussed, and from the way the Captain was handling Davidson, it seemed to Spock that such an occurrence, as well as being a logical solution, was becoming more likely with each passing second. It had long been Spock's opinion that his friend's ability to read people was one of his greatest strengths.

"Your officers," spat out Davidson, his voice several decibels higher, "are in a place where they can do no damage to my world, as you will be very soon. How dare you come here and speak of the Federation to me! They did not recognise my talents when they had the opportunity, and now think I will run back to them just because they send a pathetic little Starship Captain to beg me to return? Not to mention the peculiar company they have sent you in." Davidson looked at Spock pointedly. The latter studiously ignored him.

"Will you return?" Kirk tried another tack, but expected the result he got.

"You dare ask me that?" Davidson was on the point of exploding. "You think I do not know why you are here, you fools? You have been sent by these parasitical masters of yours to find out my secrets, to steal the great discoveries I have made while on this world which I have chosen to aid. Such is the way the Federation has always made its living."

"Mr. Davidson; that is neither true, nor logical." Spock stood at Kirk's side, at his most dignified, and it seemed to Kirk that even the mad Davidson had to listen to Spock's words with respect; such was the effect the Vulcan always had on people.

"Surely a scientist such as yourself can see," continued Spock calmly, "that during the time you have been here, many new discoveries have been made, and it is most unlikely that you can have made many advances with your limited equipment here. Why, therefore, should the Federation send us here for that reason? And surely you can also see that during these years the Federation has grown, become wiser - perhaps now you could find a place where you feel you belong, somewhere among the myriad advanced civilisations? We came, as the Captain said, to rescue you. And one thing is certain; you cannot stay here. Can you not see the damage which the Terran presence has done to the culture of Adan?"

Spock had been explaining in his usual logical manner, attempting to make Davidson see the truth of his words. But rationality was not Davidson's strong point at that moment, and where Kirk had almost succeeded with his demands, Spock definitely succeeded with his common sense. Davidson stood for a moment as if he couldn't believe his ears that someone should dare to speak such words to him, then he almost literally exploded into action, such was his rage.

"You - you - Vulcan!" he almost screamed, his emphasis on the last word making clear what he thought of Spock. "You come here and insult me? Me, one of the greatest scientists this galaxy has ever known, the ruler of Adan, the God of these people? For these crimes you shall pay, and pay now!" Davidson was over the edge, and so angry he had lost the power to think clearly. With a cry that sounded less than Human, he ordered the Mountain People to attack. For a moment it seemed that they hesitated, but then their fear of their master proved the greater and they were all plunged into battle.

The Mountain People fought fiercely, and with a fear born of desperation; but Adan's Children fought equally fiercely, with the strength of knowing that their danger from the other tribe was almost over, for once the great Starship returned, as they had been told it would, then the last of Davidson's power would be gone.

But the Mountain People knew nothing of the Starship, save that Davidson had told them not to fear the strangers, that they had no powers, not even the pointed-eared one. This they did not quite believe, especially when the strangers began sending bright blue beams from their hands, beams which put to sleep any they touched. Yet still they fought on, with perhaps a little less heart than before, for no matter how many miracles Davidson had worked with the machines he hid in the cave, none of them matched the power these three from the stars displayed.

They were winning, slowly but surely, Kirk knew, but too slowly; the person who had given that scream they had heard before had been near the point of no return, and precious minutes had passed since then. Spock and Chekov knew it too, and though Adan's Children fought fiercely and with great skill, they could not hope to match the determination and experience of the Enterprise men; time and again their phasers fired, and time and again more natives fell unconscious to the ground. The fighting was not without cost to both sides, however, and before long several of the natives, of both tribes, lay fallen, victims of each other's spears, with more joining their number every few seconds. And when it seemed to Kirk that the battle was decisively turning their way, there came a moment when Spock had to use the Vulcan nerve-pinch to dispatch a native who came close to spearing Kirk. Several other Mountain People were nearby and saw what Spock did. They stood motionless, unable to understand what the Vulcan had done, their earlier fear of him returning no matter what Davidson had told them. As one they threw their spears to the ground, quickly to be joined by others. Spock sensed it was not merely fear; they had no real heart left for the fight. He turned to Kirk to suggest that the time was right for them to attempt to enter the cave, but he wasn't given the chance to speak. At that instant, cutting through the sounds of the dying battle with a piercing horror that no clash of weapons could drown, came the scream again. This time the pain and hopelessness in that sound were greater than before, and to those who heard it there could be no mistaking the fact that they had just heard the last cry that person would ever make.

The last few spasmodic scuffles ended at that cry, almost as if it had been a signal. Natives of both tribes stood, letting their weapons fall to the ground, looking as if they didn't quite know what to do next; Davidson stood there also, not knowing where to run, or if to run, unable to comprehend that his plans could have been ruined; and in the middle of it all stood James Kirk, a look of sudden despair on his face, which to all but the Vulcan appeared as a look of anger.

"Gentlemen," said Kirk, the quiet voice of the Starship Captain at its most warning for any who should dare oppose him. "It seems we may go in."

And no-one did dare oppose them as first Kirk, with Spock and Chekov close behind, walked quickly through the crowd of fallen and dazed natives towards the nearby mouth of the cave. Behind them, Lorraine, Hedges and some of the natives had the good sense to secure the still unmoving Davidson with some rope; but for the time being, Kirk, Spock and Chekov had other business in hand. Through the dark mouth of the cave they went, and on into the passageways beyond, not knowing, and hardly daring to think, what they might find.

It seemed like an age since Samuels had been taken away, yet McCoy knew it could only be a couple of hours at the most; he was so tightly secured he couldn't quite manage to see his wrist chronometer, so he couldn't tell how long it was likely to be before the Enterprise returned, either. He knew that once the Starship did come back, Jim and Spock would never leave the planet until they had found them, but the question was, would they be in time? Whatever happened, it was becoming apparent to him that it was unlikely Samuels would survive; McCoy didn't know how far from their chamber the 'chamber of fear' as Davidson had called it, was; but it was near enough for them to have heard the dreadful cries coming from there. And McCoy knew also that Samuels was a trained, experienced security officer; for him to shout out like that, the pain must be unimaginable.

McCoy realised, and guessed that Christine did too, that once Davidson had finished with Samuels, he would start on one of them. Davidson's excuse for the interrogation, that he believed they were part of some Federation plot against him, was only part of it, although the deranged man had deluded himself to believe it; McCoy realised that part of it was also the fact that Davidson seemed actually to enjoy causing pain. Such was the nature of their captor, and neither McCoy nor Chapel was under any illusions that if the Enterprise did not return within a very short time, there would be none of them left alive to be rescued. Even as he thought, and tried not to think, such thoughts, a part of McCoy's mind felt great sorrow at what effect it would have on his two friends when they finally did arrive, and found them all dead. He could only comfort himself with the thought that it was not either of them facing death at that moment.

Although the two of them tried to make irrelevant conversation in a futile attempt to take their minds off things, McCoy and Chapel could not help but notice that the intermittent cries coming from the chamber of fear were becoming louder and more desperate; and then came a very loud cry, so loud that if anyone had been within half a mile, they could not fail to have heard it. McCoy stiffened, and couldn't help trying to sit up even though he knew it was useless; he didn't need to be a trained Medical Officer to know that the person who had made that noise was very near the end.

"Oh Leonard - just listen to him. And there's nothing we can do." Chapel sounded despairing, and such a thing was so uncharacteristic that it underlined the gravity of their predicament.

McCoy didn't answer. There was nothing he could say.

For a while no more sounds came, and it seemed to the two of them that Samuels' torment must be over, one way or the other. In silence McCoy and Chapel waited for their captors to come for them, knowing that the moment could not be far away, and finding they no longer had the heart to even make an attempt to say anything.

And then there came another cry, louder than any before, and so soul-chilling

that McCoy and Chapel had no doubt that they had heard the sound of Samuels' death. Christine couldn't help herself; a single tear found its way out of her eye, and she looked helplessly at McCoy. The latter didn't know what to say; he felt exactly the same as she.

For several long moments - it could have been seconds, or minutes - neither of them was sure of the passage of time in that place - there was silence again. And then came the distant sound of footsteps; of people running; McCoy found he was holding his breath, and yet somehow those footsteps didn't sound like the natives' had before.

"They're coming, Leonard!" Christine couldn't help stating the obvious.

"If they've only come for one of us, I'm going, Christine, and no arguing!" McCoy was insistent. He might not be able to do much in their present situation, but that much he could do.

The footsteps grew louder, and hesitated slightly several times; almost as if their owners were looking for something. McCoy stopped holding his breath, and caught it; from outside the door he thought he had just heard a voice that he had never thought he would hear again. But he couldn't be sure. Then he heard it again, and he was sure.

"In here, Spock." Kirk's voice sounded urgent, and more than a little concerned.

McCoy almost shouted with joy. "Jim, Spock - we're here!" he yelled at the top of his voice.

The door was thrown open, and through it came Kirk, Spock and Chekov, their phasers in their hands and relief showing clearly on their faces; even, suspected McCoy, on Spock's, although the Vulcan's features were as carefully composed as usual. Quickly Kirk strode over to him, and with only minor difficulty found the mechanism for releasing the straps which bound him to the slab. Likewise, Spock released Christine, who found it difficult to thank him without breaking down completely; but that, she would not do, and certainly not in present company.

But there was still no time for banter, or for saying what they really felt; it wasn't necessary, anyway. Kirk's expression of thankfulness said it all. But there was still another member of the Enterprise crew who had not been accounted for.

"Where's Samuels, Bones?" Kirk's enquiry was spoken in the tone of one who doesn't expect to hear good news.

"Come on," McCoy said grimly. "I'll show you."

Walking carefully, a little uncertain of his balance, McCoy led them from the chamber. Chekov tried to help Christine, but she was determined to proceed unaided. At the door of the chamber they halted, and McCoy and she looked at each other, trying to decide from which direction Samuels' cries had come. They came to a decision without speaking, and at the same moment began to head down the passageway which led to the left. No more than fifteen yards on, they came to another door, as heavy and difficult to open as the one they had just come out of. There were no marks on the door to identify it; no words or signs; but the three heavy bolts on it were enough to inform them that this was indeed the chamber of fear to which Samuels had been brought.

The door was heavy, but it took no more than a few seconds for Kirk and Spock to release the bolts and open it. No native guards were there to deny them entry, and the chamber was in darkness.

But not for long. It took Spock no more time than it took for the others to become accustomed to the darkness to locate a switch situated on the wall nearby. He activated it, and the dark chamber was flooded with light. It seemed that one of Davidson's lesser 'miracles' had been to provide electric light in the underground passageways and caverns. But neither Spock nor anyone else made



B.P. GORDON 1/82

comment on the fact; their eyes were focused on a limp figure in the centre of the cavern.

For the chamber of fear was a vast cavern, whose walls were lined with many instruments of torture; some of recognisable design; some of more dubious origin whose uses they did not care to imagine. And there in the centre lay Samuels, unmoving, face down. As one, they began to move towards him.

Suddenly McCoy was in front of them, holding his hand up for them to halt.

"No," he said in a voice that would not be argued with. "I'm the surgeon. I'll go."

So McCoy went on alone, and descended the slightly sloping floor of the cavern to where Samuels lay. Dropping to one knee, McCoy examined the security man. He was there for a few seconds only, then stood, and even from that distance Kirk could discern the shake of his head.

Grimly, McCoy returned. He didn't have to tell them what he had found.

"I know, Bones." Kirk sighed tiredly. "He's dead, isn't he."

McCoy nodded. "He is, and a good thing I went alone. It's not a pretty sight."

Christine Chapel clapped her hands to her face and turned away. Samuels had been a friend of hers; a good friend, and she knew she had not paid him the attention he deserved; certainly she had made excuses not to spend shore leave time with him on the occasions he had asked, with no better excuse than pressure of work. She did that, she knew; she let her work become so important to her that nothing else mattered. And now she had lost a friend, a good friend, and she could never tell him how much she really liked him.

And as McCoy watched her, and saw a solitary tear escape the cover of her hands, he knew he must never tell her how much Samuels had really cared for her. He resolved never to tell her, not knowing that she already knew.

"We'll send a team down for him when the Enterprise returns," said Kirk, more from the need to say something at that moment than anything else.

"When the Enterprise returns?" McCoy was puzzled, and didn't attempt to hide it. "But then, where did you three come from? And how in heaven's name did you get past the natives? And where are they, come to think of it? And how...?"

"Later, Bones, later." Kirk managed a wan smile. "It's sort of a long story..."

Spock coughed, and Kirk could have sworn his throat was perfectly clear.

Actually, Kirk did his best to explain as the five of them walked along the passageway towards the exit from the cave system; and by the time they saw daylight, McCoy and Chapel had gathered the basics of what had been happening to Kirk, Spock and Chekov while they had been prisoners.

But from what Kirk had managed to tell them in the short space of time it took to walk to the exit, McCoy couldn't quite understand the scene that greeted them; outside the cave entrance, standing where the battle had been fought, were Lorraine Owen and Hedges, and, a short distance away, Davidson, who by now seemed completely oblivious of events around him. And although none of them was being ill-treated in any way, it was quite apparent from the attitude of both tribes, and from the direction in which they were pointing their spears, that the three were prisoners. Kirk took a step from the cave mouth, and found a spear held half an inch from his throat. As he turned and glared at the native who held the spear, a voice spoke. It was Elen.

"Forgive us, Captain Kirk," she said in a manner of authority. "We wish you no ill, but it is time for the people of this world to take back its rule

from outworlders. And it is not we who shall decide your fate. But if you have no evil in your hearts, you need have no fear. The old ways still hold true here; the stones shall decide."

"They've joined together, Keptin!" exclaimed Chekov. "This is terrible!"

"It rather looks that way," muttered Kirk.

"Sounds like some kind of ancient rite, Jim." McCoy didn't sound too cheerful either.

"I have heard of these things, Keptin." Chekov shook his head worriedly. "We are in worse trouble than before."

"The expression, Ensign," said Spock, turning his head slightly sideways, "is 'out of the frying pan, into the fire'."

This time it was McCoy who raised the eyebrow, but somehow he couldn't quite think of any suitable remarks to make.

It was soon clear how much in the hands of the natives they were; as soon as they came out of the cave mouth they were disarmed, with the threat that Owen, Hedges and Davidson would be killed immediately if they did not hand over their phasers without trouble. Spock's tricorder was also taken, and even McCoy's medikit. The natives did not trust anything they had brought with them; they had seen the destructive power of the phasers, and that was enough for them.

Those of the Mountain People who had fled from the village had gradually begun to come back, and once they learned what the situation was, they gladly joined the other natives, although their apprehension of the Vulcan was still present, if not as great as it had been once they were told that he was really another alien, and not the evil power they feared. Word had also quickly passed to the village of Adan's Children, and they, too, began to arrive in the village of the Mountain People.

The natives spoke in their own tongues, and although the two tribes did not speak the same language, they evidently understood each other without difficulty; it appeared to Spock that an innate ability to learn languages easily existed in the inhabitants of Adan; not to mention the apparent ease with which they forgot their former conflicts in order to make their preparations to deal with the 'outworlders', as Elen had referred to them.

Preparations of some kind did seem to be in progress, though exactly of what nature was impossible to tell for anyone who did not understand what they were saying. Not for the first time, Kirk wished they had used translators on this planetfall, but at the time, it hadn't seemed necessary. Twice he tried to ask Lorraine what they were saying, and twice he was rewarded by a spear-point jabbing his back, none too gently; it seemed the natives didn't want their prisoners conversing.

But whatever preparations they were making seemed to take for ever, and by the time it looked like they had finished, and everyone who was coming from the other village had arrived, it was not far from dusk. Spock, Kirk and Chekov knew that when the morning came, the Enterprise would come with it; but would the morning come too late for them? They had not had a chance to tell McCoy and Chapel how long it was likely to be before Scotty came back for them; but then, at that stage of the proceedings, it didn't really make much difference.

Finally the natives were ready. It looked that way, anyway, for they gradually all stopped whatever they were doing, became completely silent and still. It was as if they were waiting for something. And waiting for something they were; from out of the cave mouth appeared a line of figures attired in flowing robes of varying colours. They walked sedately towards them, with the bearing of those who know they carry great importance. As they neared the prisoners, Kirk was able to tell that beneath the flowing robe of the leader, her features partially hidden by the hood of her robe, was Elen. The watching Enterprise

officers needed no translators to tell them that these people were some kind of priests and priestesses, and that Elen was their leader. Kirk began to suspect that all the time Lorraine and Hedges had lived in that village, Elen had been in control all the time; she had allowed them to live there, believing they were 'guiding' the natives, and all the time what had been happening was that the natives had continued to go their own way, but had gained immense knowledge of the galaxy from their guests, knowledge that otherwise they might not have gained for a few thousand years.

As Elen halted in front of them, Kirk was aware, as if for the first time, of her dignity and nobility; it was as if she had kept hidden until now her natural wisdom and position as leader of her tribe. With a flash of insight Kirk realised that in another time, in another place, she would have been a fine Starship Captain.

With a few words she informed them that now they would leave and make their way to the stones, where a decision as to their fates would be made. Without further explanation they set off, and in a long line, with spear-wielding natives to front and back of them, they made their way in ceremonial procession to the place where they would know what their future, if any, was to be.

Although it seemed longer, they had not really been marching for a great length of time when they arrived at their destination. The sun had long gone down, and the time of the twilight beginning to fade into night was passing, when they came suddenly into a hidden valley; a bowl in the hills large enough only to contain the number of people necessary for the purpose for which it was used. In the centre of the small round valley stood more stones; another strange copy of many sites on ancient Earth; but as they gradually approached the tall stones looming eerily through the growing darkness, it was clear to all of them that here was a sacred site more important than those they had seen before; if he had been allowed to speak, Spock could have told them that this was clear from the more intricate design of the two concentric circles, and the two avenues of stone which led away from them, and also from the fact that most of the other sites were situated on hilltops, and seemed to lead in a straight line to the one which they were now approaching. But Spock had no need to speak for his Terran companions to know this; for each of them felt, with every step they took, a growing sense of the power the stones held; and all of them felt also, even the Vulcan who could not deny at that moment the part of him which owed its ancestry to Earth, a growing sense of awe, and try to ignore it or rationalise it as they would, every single one of them knew that on ancient Earth, millenia ago, their distant ancestors must have felt very much the same.

It wasn't fear, exactly; no, it wasn't that, Kirk told himself as he and his seven fellow prisoners were secured to a huge stone pillar in the centre of the enclosure; it was more a feeling of intense anticipation; as if they were waiting for some event of great import, although they didn't know what. And he could well understand the obvious reverence the natives held for this place; it showed in their attitude, in their bearing, and although he was a child of the twenty-third century from a planet light-years away, still, he really could understand it; somehow the place just made you feel like that.

The pillar was so huge that the eight of them, standing in a circle around it, had to stretch a little for their hands to be tied to each other. None of them resisted; apart from being a useless exercise, all of them had the feeling that the sooner this ordeal was over, the better, whichever way it turned out. Apart from Davidson, that was. Since the battle, he had neither spoken nor even acted as if he was aware of anyone's presence, but had had to be led along, for all the world like a zombie. And then the ceremony began, and each of them knew that by the time it was over, they would have no doubt as to their fate.

The ceremony was as intricate and meticulously ordered as the stones themselves; it seemed that almost the entire adult population of both villages took part. They chanted in strange, high-pitched voices; they marched in a circle, in and out of the stones in what looked like a pattern which had been repeated many, many times over the centuries, so much a tradition, steeped in lore it seemed. To the prisoners it was largely incomprehensible, but as the rite went



on, they were in no doubt that the ceremony owed little to folklore - at least, to that part of folklore where the truth has been distorted; these people knew what they were doing, and why, and how; and always Elen was there, directing them all; not that they needed much direction; it seemed to the watchers that every single native there knew their part off by heart, down to the last intricate step and chant.

If it had not been for the danger they were all in, Kirk would have found it interesting, and Chekov, McCoy and Chapel also. Spock did find it interesting, and although he refrained from murmuring 'fascinating', as conversation was obviously still not allowed, he could not refrain from heartily wishing for his tricorder at that moment; something very, very odd was happening, and he knew that if he could only record it, much knowledge could be gained; but he could not, and he suspected that he was experiencing something bordering on disappointment; but then he glanced sideways, and saw the expression on Jim Kirk's face, and he told himself that if at such a moment an emotion was going to surface, there were worthier ones than disappointment. And few worthier than friendship. But Spock knew he had no need to acknowledge that feeling; it was always there, and as much an accepted and welcome part of himself as his Vulcan tranquillity.

The night wore on, and still the chanting and the eerie dancing continued. Adan's one moon bathed then all in a ghostly light as it sank towards the horizon, making the stones loom larger and more ominous.

At times Kirk thought he had fallen asleep, that time had passed without his being aware of it, and he felt that this had been true of his friends also. He had glanced to either side of him from time to time, at McCoy and Spock who were tied to each of his hands, and at certain moments had been sure that somehow his friends had not been there, as if for fleeting seconds their souls were sleeping, or simply not there. It gave him a creepy feeling, and he tried not to think about it.

McCoy and Spock had felt it also, and while the Vulcan vaguely identified the sensation that some force was probing his mind, subtly, so that all he was aware of was a momentary lapse of consciousness, he was more concerned with the fact that at long last the ceremony seemed to be reaching some crisis point. The dancing was more intense, likewise the chanting. The sense of nearby, unknown power was a tangible thing. He glanced at Kirk, who smiled back grimly. He knew it too.

Though it was now in the early hours, and night was at its strongest, still the bowl in the hills was lit with a weird silvery light, and in that light the prisoners watched helplessly as the natives danced through the ancient rite, weaving in and out of the stones, calling power forth. Faster and faster they went now, seemingly unconscious of how they moved, of the strange words they sang, so taken over by the rite were they. And suddenly, when the sense of present power was so strong they thought surely something must materialise, Elen gave a great, unearthly cry, and in that split second, all chanting and movement ceased, and there was a great, all-powerful silence.

Slowly she moved, standing tall and proud, her arms outstretched to the dark sky above. She seemed more than a mortal woman then, more by far, and it was with a jolt that Kirk realised that the power they felt was here and now; it had entered Elen herself, and she was the power.

Spock could sense it more than any other being there, save Elen herself. It was a power which was part telepathic, part energy, part something he simply didn't understand; a power incomprehensible in its strength, but a power he couldn't make contact with, no matter how hard he tried; his probing mind found nothing but a solid, impenetrable wall of an unknown force. But that which Spock could sense was still of value; he could sense that Elen was asking the power questions, questions about them; but he could not hear the answers.

Kirk was facing Elen, and he could sense that his fellow prisoners were all waiting, holding their breath, for the decision that was about to be made. And Starship Captain or no, he could only feel a great sense of awe for the presence



which stood only a short way in front of him.

And then it was gone. It was gone, and Elen was Elen again. The natives started to chatter to each other speculatively, and each of them felt somehow relieved; but it was not a relief born of hope; merely a thankfulness that that awesome power had gone, and they no longer had to bear its proximity.

But it seemed a decision had been made. Without the power she had so recently possessed, but just as regally, Elen held up her arms once more and called for silence.

"Answers have been given," she said simply to the natives in her strange, accented voice. The power of the stones has spoken, and its words are just. Adan shall once more be for the people of Adan."

Uh-oh, thought Kirk. Here it comes.

As if she sensed his thoughts, Elen smiled suddenly. "Have no fear for your people, Captain Kirk," she said almost gently, "for I have been told you will fear for them more than for yourself. Do not doubt that the judgement of the stones is just. It has been decreed that the rule of Adan shall pass once more to the people of this world; but for you and your gentle friends," and she smiled at Spock as she spoke, "there shall be mercy. When your ship returns, you shall leave aboard here, in peace and safety."

Kirk felt he should thank her, but somehow he knew she didn't want that.

"For my friends Lorraine and Dr. Hedges, the same judgement applies also," Elen continued, walking around the stone column, facing those upon whom she was giving justice, finally stopping opposite the blank-faced Davidson. "But for this scum, whose heart is blacker than the stormiest night, judgement shall be given to his own kind." Elen walked round the stone, and faced Kirk once more. "Take him with you, James Kirk, and let your people deal with him as they will. As long as his presence is removed from Adan, the stones are content."

Kirk looked at her in wonder, marvelling that on so primitive a world, such a judgement should have been made. "Elen," he said gently, "thank you. The stones are indeed just."

"Yes," she said, looking him straight in the eye, but no longer smiling, rather, looking tired and drained. "You speak the truth, and have much wisdom. You will be released. Now."

Quickly the natives did release them, and as they stood there, rubbing their wrists, they suddenly became aware that the dawn was upon them, that faint streaks of light were in the sky, and the world of Adan was no longer covered by darkness. Inexplicably, Elen produced a communicator and held it out to Kirk. As if on cue, it beeped. Kirk took it.

"Kirk to Enterprise. Come in, Scotty."

"Scott to Captain Kirk," came the familiar tones of the Chief Engineer. "It's sure a relief to hear you, Captain."

"Not half as much of a relief as it is to hear you, Scotty," Kirk murmured, almost to himself.

"Captain?"

"Never mind, Scotty - it's a long story." He was just about to give the order to be beamed up when he felt Lorraine Owen's hand on his arm.

"Captain - a moment. I have something to ask Elen."

But Elen knew already. "If you alone wish to stay and live with us in peace, then you alone will be permitted this, in recognition of your service to Adan, and your friendship these long years past."

"Thank you," Lorraine said simply. "Then I will stay."

Kirk started to say something about the Prime Directive, about how many

wonders she had missed during the last fifteen years, but then he heard Spock quietly telling him that to her Adan had become home, that she must be allowed to stay.

"Very well," said Kirk, smiling at his Vulcan friend in understanding. "She shall stay. Seven to beam up, Mr. Scott. Kirk out."

Jim Kirk flicked a switch and ended the log recording, turned around and leaned against the edge of his desk. He folded his arms, grinned at his two friends, and gave an audible sigh of relief.

"Well," he said, "that's that...or nearly, at least. And when we drop off our inquisitive Dr. Hedges at the nearest Starbase, things should begin to get back to normal."

Spock didn't bother to mention that it had been his observation over the years that 'normality' never seemed to last for any length of time on the Enterprise, that was if, by 'normality', the Captain meant the absence of anything out of the ordinary; indeed Spock doubted that Jim Kirk would really be happy if nothing interesting happened. Instead, he looked up at Kirk from where he sat, cross-legged in a chair, and said,

"Yes, Captain; Dr. Hedges certainly does seem to be interested in our computers, indeed by the whole ship."

"Interested! I'll say he's interested!" laughed McCoy suddenly, almost losing his balance on the arm of another of Kirk's cabin chairs in the process. "He's hardly been away from those damn' computers since he came on board - he's almost as bad as you, Spock. And when he went down to Engineering and started asking Scotty so many questions that he nearly drove him mad, I almost died laughing - I've never seen Scotty so unsettled!"

"Mmm, I must have a talk with Hedges," observed Kirk. "I can't have him giving all my senior officers nervous breakdowns. But then, Hedges is only trying to make up for the fifteen years he's been away. Somehow I don't think he's going to have much difficulty in rejoining the Federation's scientific community."

"No - he will soon catch up," admitted Spock thoughtfully. He didn't tell them that he himself had had to leave his library computer station in the middle of some private research because Hedges had pestered him so much it had actually begun to make him a little edgy. "But I wonder about Adan. How long will it take for that world to recover from the last fifteen years?"

"Well, now Davidson's safe in sickbay, I can't see it will take the natives that long to readjust," said McCoy. "They were a pretty intelligent bunch, especially Adan's Children, and they have Lorraine Owen to help them still."

"If they need her help," added Kirk. "I thought that outside influence was just what they didn't want for a while. But with the remains of the Discovery and its equipment safely in the cargo hold, and destined for examination by Starfleet, as well as our report on Adan, I don't see we can do much else."

"True, Captain," answered Spock, "and naturally we must be grateful that the situation has been resolved as successfully as it has been. Dr. McCoy and Nurse Chapel could easily have shared the fate of Lt. Samuels. By the way, Doctor, how is Davidson? I was not present when you gave the Captain your report, if you remember."

McCoy paused before answering. He had insisted on being on the detail that went to recover Samuels' body before they left Adan, and although he had seen death many times before, it still affected him as much as the first time.

But he did not show it. After a pause of a second or two, he answered Spock. "Davidson is badly disturbed mentally, Spock. But I've no doubt he can be cured in time. At the moment he's keeping my staff busy; he's recovered consciousness, is very indignant at having been taken away from his planet, and

is threatening the entire crew with legal action and worse once he tells Starfleet of all the terrible crimes we've committed against him."

"Then he's certainly changed his tune about Starfleet," said Kirk. "It was the Federation who were the tyrants before; oh well, at least he can't do any more harm now, except for giving a few people in sickbay headaches with his nonsense."

Spock steepled his fingers in front of him. "No, and he will also learn how merciful the Federation really is; he will not be punished, merely rehabilitated, though I doubt he will recognize the irony of the situation; an irony underlined by the fact that all his scientific equipment, which he was so afraid of our 'stealing', was obsolete years ago. But I doubt that Adan will ever recover entirely from the influence of the Discovery's crew; I do not think the people of that world will ever be content to be a completely primitive society again."

"Depends on what you mean by 'primitive', Spock," replied Kirk. "They could show us a thing or two; look at those stones, for instance; that was some kind of energy they called up. But as for their not being content, I can well understand that; once you've learned there are other worlds out there, other people, wonders to discover, it's impossible to be content until you've got out there; from what I know of the people of Adan, they're going to want to reach the stars a few thousand years before their time."

"Neolithic Man probably had the same thoughts," said Spock seriously. "It seems most unlikely that, given the Human instinct to wish to understand the unknown, at least some ancient Terrans did not wonder on those lines; it is certain that Stone Age Man was not as 'primitive' as was once thought."

"So you reckon that we'll soon have Stone Age humanoids from Adan at loose in the Federation, do you, Spock?" Somehow McCoy found that amusing, though he didn't know why; the natives of Adan were a sight less odd than some of the completely integrated member races. "But you may be right; once the cultural advice team that the Federation is bound to send there to try and repair some of the damage done to the society's development arrives, they might just decide they want to take a great leap into the twenty-third century; then again, they might just tell them to go away and leave them alone - but somehow I don't think so. Either way, it's unlikely the Prime Directive will ever be applied to that world again."

"Indeed, Doctor," said Spock thoughtfully. "And there is much the Federation could gain from contact with Adan. Those stones, for instance; the power released during that ceremony was of a nature I have never before encountered; and of an intensity greater than present knowledge can explain. I have several ideas on that subject, including the speculation that the stones may have been left by the Preservers, as the Captain also suggested. But that, as well as ideas on the nature of their power, will only be confirmed or denied by the Federation lifting General Order No. One in Adan's case, and by the natives' allowing a scientific research team in to study the stones at one of their ceremonies. And it seems likely that the natives, even if they do eventually join the Federation, will still wish to keep their sacred sites secret, and will refuse to allow such a team in. I believe we are the only outworlders to come into contact with that strange force, and will remain so for the foreseeable future. So the power of the stones will probably remain a secret for at least a few years more. If only I had had my tricorder."

"Spock," said McCoy disbelievingly, standing up and shaking his head in incredulity, "do you mean to tell me that when we were all thinking the end had come, all you were thinking about was a tricorder? Sometimes I think you're a lost cause, Spock." McCoy began to move towards the door. "But for the moment I've got other things to think about. Medical supplies, for one. I'll see you two later." The cabin doors swooshed open and he was about to leave, but instead turned round to face Spock again.

"I wondered at the time about Lorraine Owen choosing to stay on Adan,

Spock," said the Doctor quietly, "but I think you'd understand her decision, wouldn't you." McCoy didn't wait for a reply, but grinned a farewell at his two friends, and hurried off in the direction of sickbay, muttering something about supplies and how nothing ever got done when he wasn't there. That wasn't true, of course, but with the little job of checking supplies still facing him, he had to have something to mutter about, didn't he?

Kirk and Spock remained in Kirk's cabin, silent for a few moments. Although Kirk had a good idea what McCoy had meant, in the end he asked quietly, "What was Bones talking about, Spock?"

And although the Vulcan had a good idea that Kirk knew, he answered.

"I believe Dr. McCoy, in referring to Dr. Owen's decision to remain on Adan instead of returning to the mainstream of Federation life, was pointing out that I can understand why someone should wish to live, not on their home planet, but in a place where they have found many things of value," said Spock. He stood up then; it was time he and Kirk were returning to the bridge. "Things such as friendship. As your Earth saying goes, Jim: 'home is where the heart is'."

And with that, Spock walked out of the cabin, leaving Kirk to follow. Kirk did, grinning all the time he walked to the bridge at his Vulcan friend's side, in reply to the unseen smile which he alone knew was really there.

\*\*\*\*\*

What is in their hearts? What should we do with them?  
 - Seven of them are good, and kind, and only want to help.  
 They fear, of course; they fear the unknown;  
 The Captain fears most for his crew, his friends,  
 And for the Starship even now returning for him.  
 He only came to find the ones  
 Who came here fifteen years ago, truly regretting  
 The harm that has been done. The Healer loves all men,  
 Wishes to help all men. The Nurse  
 Grieves for the one who died, regretting  
 That she could not reciprocate  
 The love he had for her. The other Starship officer  
 Is young, enthusiastic, wishes all men well.  
 The man Hedges  
 Wishes to leave; his greatest love is given to machines.  
 You know he has been restless here. The woman Owen  
 Loves this world deeply. She always tried to serve it  
 And her adopted people. She does not wish to leave,  
 And she alone may stay, if she requests it.  
 The Vulcan hides his feelings well, but is the gentlest  
 Of all of them. He loves his friends more deeply  
 Than they can realise, although they know he loves them,  
 As they love him.  
 The other one, the evil one; his mind is filled  
 Only with thoughts of his own importance.  
 His fellows think him mad, and insane minds  
 Are not responsible for the things they do.  
 The Healer thinks  
 He can be cured. To that end  
 They all shall leave when the ship returns -  
 All but the evil one, in friendship. He too  
 May go, though not in friendship, with his own kind  
 Decreeing his punishment - for they will indeed  
 Deal with him, and what they consider  
 His crimes.  
 Adan's World is for Adan's People - they alone  
 Will rule here now.

Sheila Clark

\*\*\*\*\*

