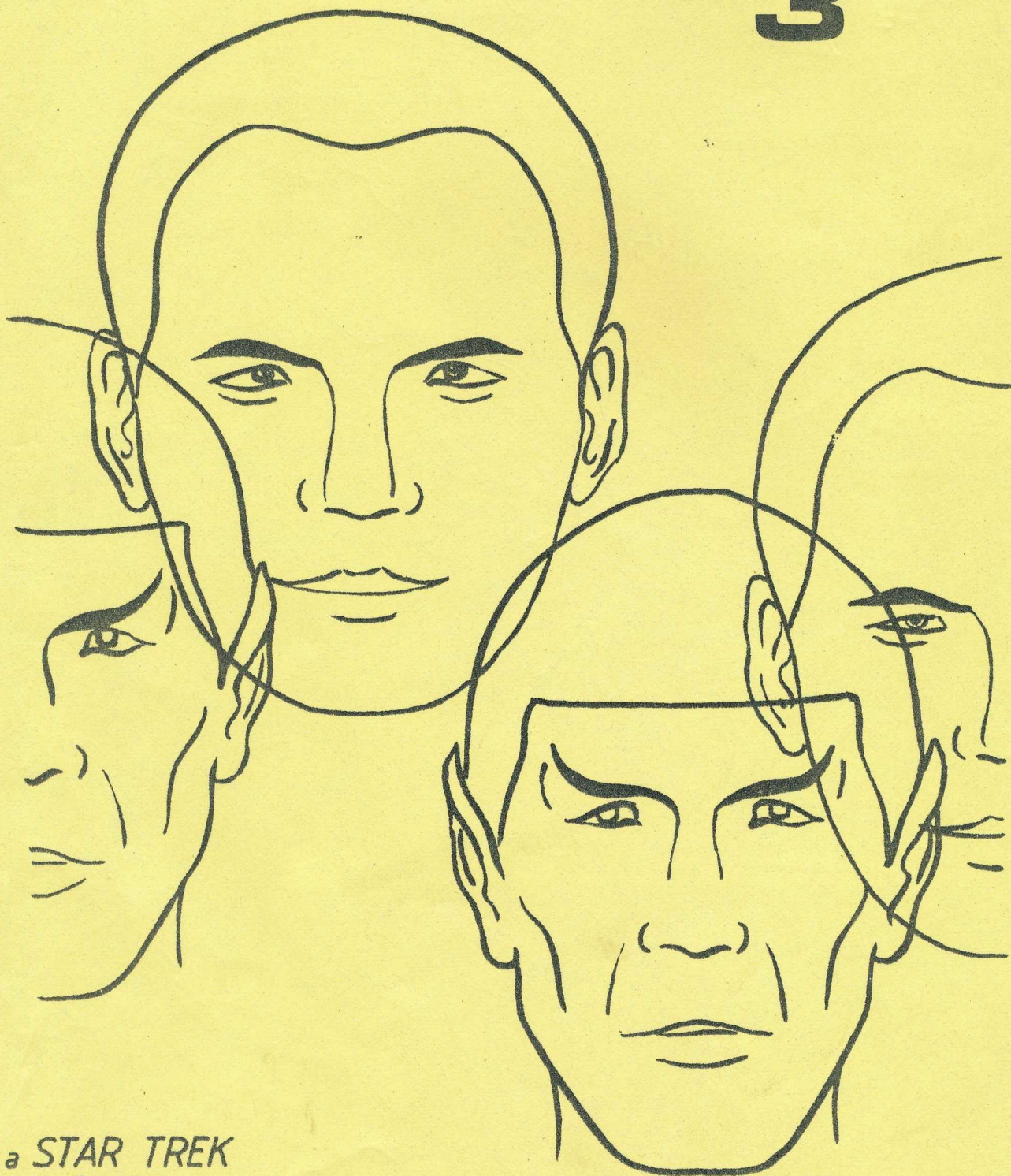


VICE VERSA

an alternate universe story
by Simone Mason

3



a *STAR TREK*
fanzine

V I C E V E R S A III

An Alternate Universe Story

by Simone Mason

Illustrations by Linda Brough & Lesley Smith

Typing: Ann Smith

Proof-reading: Winnifred Leeney

Price : £3.00 inc. p&p UK

£3.25 " " Europe/Surface mail to all countries

£6.25 " " Australia Air Mail Printed Rate

£10.50 " " USA Air Mail Printed Rate plus £1 bank charge

Obtainable from :

Simone Mason,
Seranis, Danehill,
Haywards Heath,
Sussex RH 17 7JQ,
England.

All rights are reserved to the writer and artists. Anyone wishing to reprint any of the material herein is asked to obtain permission in writing first. No attempt is made to supercede any rights held by Paramount, NBC, BBC or any other holders of copyright in Star Trek material.

April 1982

Principal Alien Names used in the story :

Vulcan Officers aboard the Enterprise :

Captain Spock

Lt. Commander Salyk, Science Officer

Lt. Commander Senak, Chief Engineer

Lt. Commander Somek, Communications Officer

Lt. Commander Sirak, Chief Navigator

Dr. Syvik, Chief Medical Officer

Lt. Solek, Chief of Security

Others :

Ambassador Terev (Andorian)

Ambassador Decius (Romulan)

Commander Tal (Romulan)

Admiral Tholev (Andorian)

Commander Gav (Tellarite)

Lt. Commander Thelin (Andorian)

Lt. Tal (Romulan)

VICE VERSA III

'Dress uniform, spit and polish!' grumbled McCoy to himself as he finished dressing in his quarters, 'all because an Ambassador is coming aboard. Just my bad luck Dr. Syvik isn't free and I'm to replace him!'

Still muttering under his breath, McCoy left his cabin and joined the group of officers in the hanger deck. The Captain and his First Officer arrived shortly after the shuttlecraft was announced and the doctor admired the Vulcan's faultless elegance although he would never let him guess. The First Officer stood most correctly by his Captain's side, but one step behind. There was a time when McCoy would have resented bitterly seeing Jim taking second place to a Vulcan. It seemed perfectly natural to him now and he smiled at Kirk, then watched the arrival of the shuttlecraft.

An average height blue-skinned Andorian stepped down, followed by several others. The security guards stood at rigid attention as Spock stepped forward and saluted.

"Welcome aboard, Ambassador Terev."

The Andorian responded with an impeccable Vulcan salute.

"Thank you, Captain Spock. I expect you have been told that you're to assist me in the negotiations with the Romulans."

"Yes, Sir. We shall be at the rendez-vous in approximately 5 days, 4 hours and 35 minutes."

"A very good approximation, Captain. May I introduce my aides and advisers."

A stream of Alien names followed. Spock in turn introduced the senior officers and Terev's gaze on Kirk was not friendly. The Human ignored it and saluted most correctly.

"My First Officer will show you to your quarters, Ambassador," continued Spock.

"I'd prefer another guide," said Terev harshly, "an officer I can respect."

Spock's attitude became distinctly freezing.

"Commander Kirk is my best officer," he stated, his voice cold and severe, "and is entitled to all the respect due to a second in command."

"He's a Human!" protested Terev.

"Have you met Commander Kirk before?" asked Spock.

"No, never."

"Then may I ask on what assumption you base your judgement of his value?"

"I've met Humans before, and I see you've another Human officer, a doctor."

"Dr. McCoy is assistant Chief Medical Officer, replacing his superior at this function. This is a Vulcan/Human crew, Ambassador, and the Human members are entitled to the same consideration as the Vulcans."

"A matter of opinion," replied Terev, "however, this is your ship, Captain, and I am prepared to ignore the Humans if they keep out of my way." He said this as though granting a big favour and Kirk saw McCoy's glare with some worry. The doctor was near bursting point!

"I am sure no-one aboard my ship wishes to create difficulties, Sir. I shall take you to your quarters myself, will that be satisfactory?"

"Yes, of course, Captain, thank you." Terev sounded mollified and followed Spock with his suite.

"Did you hear that overbearing, arrogant..." McCoy started to say to

Kirk as soon as the party had left.

"Yes, Bones," interrupted Kirk, "the Captain feared such an attitude and I was the test case. Now that we know where we stand, keep out of the way."

"With pleasure! What about you though, you're senior officer."

"It's going to be difficult, I know. Spock said it might prove a useful exercise in self control and I think he was right."

"Good luck, Jim, better you than me! I hope the Ambassador's stay won't be prolonged or I might resign."

Kirk laughed. "Resign so soon after your promotion? Who was so proud of being made Assistant Chief Medical....."

"All right, all right, maybe I'd not resign," grinned McCoy, "this is a good ship and I'd miss her."

"And you'd miss her Captain!" thought Kirk as he hastened to his quarters to change into ordinary uniform, "only you'd never admit it!"

He left his cabin for the bridge as soon as he was ready. He was on duty and sat in the Captain's chair in his absence, checking their course and estimated time of arrival. Spock arrived shortly afterwards and Kirk vacated the chair and handed the flight up-date for signing.

"Right on schedule, Captain, we'll be at the rendez-vous in good time."

Spock signed and Kirk leaned on the arm of the command chair, asking in a low voice : "How did you get on with our honoured guest?"

"I believe the Ambassador knows my position," replied Spock. "I told him I would consider any incident occurring in the light of justice, nothing else."

I also hinted that it might be advisable to restrict his movement to the officers' deck and the bridge, and that his suite would benefit from similar restrictions."

"He didn't like that, I bet!" smiled Kirk.

"No, but I pointed out that ship matters were my concern and what I said was law. I do not believe many people stood up to him before, he looked surprised that I dared."

Kirk grinned and heard Spock continue.

"In all fairness, if I restrict our guests' movements, I should also restrict the crew. They must know of the guests' attitude by now, and should be asked to collaborate by avoiding the officers' deck and the bridge, unless specifically ordered to go there."

"Right, I'll pass the word," promised Kirk.

"Will it upset the Humans, Jim?" queried Spock.

"Perhaps, but many must be upset already by the report of Terev's attitude. Leave it to me, I'll talk to them."

Kirk assembled the Human crew and transmitted the Captain's wish, pointing out that a similar suggestion to restrict their movements had also been made to the guests. Nevertheless, signs of anger and resentment were present.

"I see that you're upset by the Captain's restrictions," said the First Officer, going straight to the point."

"Of course, Mr. Kirk," replied Scotty. "This is our ship and what have we done not to be trusted to behave?"

"Nothing," agreed Kirk. "However, consider the Captain's position. He has to avoid nasty incidents, therefore, he takes the necessary steps and asks you to restrict your movements, but he also asked the Andorians to restrict theirs, yet the Ambassador is his superior and could have taken it very badly, even acted

against our Captain. He didn't so far, which is no guarantee for the future. I'm sure none of you want to create an impossible situation for the Captain where he might exercise justice and be punished for it, isn't that so?"

"The Captain is a just man," said McCoy, "he would be on our side if we were right, the Andorians wouldn't like it."

"Put like that it's best if we keep out of the way, for the Captain's sake" added Scotty.

"Thank you, Doctor, Mr. Scott. I know I can count on all of you to make the best of a difficult situation and follow the Captain's wishes."

The Humans filed out in a different mood, one of co-operation, and to avoid the Andorians would really be a pleasure! It wasn't so easy for the Captain, or for the First Officer. Kirk had just gone off duty when Spock called him to his quarters.

"Sit down, Jim, this is informal. I'm concerned about the reception tonight. I cannot avoid giving one for the Ambassador without possible offence. As my First Officer you have to attend."

"Would you rather I didn't, Spock?"

"Your place is at my side and no-one will say otherwise aboard my own ship. It is you I'm concerned about. You may find the reception an ordeal and prefer not to attend, in which case I'll understand and will make excuses for you."

"Thanks Spock, but I'm not afraid of a few Andorians."

"I would not appreciate having to reprimand you for lack of respect or rudeness to the Ambassador. He might provoke you in a way which would give you no ground for excuses."

"I would still like to come, and if it proves an exercise in self control so much the better," smiled Kirk. "I don't want to place you in an awkward position, Spock, and will do my best to keep out of trouble."

"I trust that you will," said Spock with his half-smile. "Thank you for your assistance with the Human crew, I noted their co-operation."

Kirk dressed for the reception with great care. He'd be the only Human there and was determined to be a credit to his race. Besides, he had to avoid trouble for Spock's sake, or the Captain could be placed in a very awkward situation. He joined Spock and his Vulcan colleagues and the Ambassador and his suite arrived a few minutes later. As expected, the Ambassador started making denigrating comments about Humans. Kirk ignored them, but Spock did not.

"Ambassador, do Andorians make a practice of insulting their host?"

"I don't understand!" exclaimed a puzzled Alien.

"I'm half-Human, therefore at least half of your comments apply to me."

"I never....No!" protested the Andorian, upset. "Whatever the circumstances of your birth, Captain Spock, you belong to an outstanding Vulcan family and your brilliant record shows you to be the worthy son of Admiral Sarek. I can assure you that I consider you to be a Vulcan."

"Thank you, Ambassador. It is a pity you seem to have met only unworthy Humans. I agree there are some, but I have found my Human crew to be loyal and trustworthy."

"After they tried to kill you in a most cowardly way when you were defenceless? How can you bear to have a First Officer whose brother was no better than a barbarian and who killed his own flesh and blood?"

Kirk whitened, hurt by the resurrection of the past. He had to leave or he would be trouble for his Captain. Before the Vulcan could speak, he said hastily:

"Captain, do not defend me, what the Ambassador said is true. May I ask your permission to leave before I cause you further embarrassment?"

"Permission denied," stated Spock, his voice sharp and severe. "This is my ship and your place is at my side. Ambassador, unless you apologise to Commander Kirk for your remarks, I will consider them a personal slur and act accordingly."

"I never meant to insult you!" protested Terev.

"Your statement implied that my choice of First Officer was wrong and my judgement at fault, therefore totally illogical. You cannot accuse a Vulcan of illogicality without insulting him. Do you choose to apologise or do I send an official complaint?"

"You wouldn't dare! It's what the Humans call a bluff."

"Vulcans never bluff, Ambassador."

The Andorian took an involuntary step back. Spock's attitude was fearless and determined. The Ambassador was his superior in rank, but only for the negotiations, not when it came to ship matters. Starfleet would uphold Spock, and it wouldn't do the Andorian's reputation any good. Reluctantly, he turned to Kirk.

"I apologise, Commander," he said stiffly.

"Thank you, Sir, no hard feelings," said Kirk with a smile, trying to defreeze the atmosphere and placate the Andorian, for Spock's sake. The Ambassador was surprised by the smile, but made no comment. The Captain changed the subject by asking him about his family, something the Andorians liked to talk about and the worst was over.

The reception finished without further incidents. The Ambassador told Spock he wanted to see him about the coming negotiations the next day, alone.

"Because of classified information, Captain, no other reason," he finished.

Clearly he had learnt his lesson and would leave Kirk alone. They arranged the time and place and the Andorian's parting shot was:

"I respect your views, Captain Spock, although I don't share them, because I respect you. I noticed the absence of Humans in this area of the ship and suppose you asked them to keep away. I trust they will behave."

"Whoever doesn't will take the consequences, Ambassador. May I trust that my honoured guests will follow my advice and remain in this area?"

"We'll co-operate, Captain, you've my word."

This had Kirk go in search of Humans. He found Scotty and Sulu in the recreation room.

"Spread the word, will you? The Andorians have promised to keep to the bridge or the officers' deck. The Captain was clever enough to get their co-operation. If any Human is caught where he shouldn't be, showing the Captain to be wrong by relying on his crew, whoever it is will face sanctions, after which I'll skin him alive!"

"We'll spread the word, Mr. Kirk," promised Sulu, impressed by Kirk's ferocious expression.

Pretty sure that the Humans would keep away, Kirk went to his quarters and changed into his ordinary uniform, then stepped to Spock's cabin next door and went in at his invitation.

"Thank you for your support, Captain, but you took a risk."

"Not really, Jim," assured Spock. "Starfleet doesn't approve of attacks or rudeness against its officers, even Human ones."

"Are all Andorians anti-Human?"

"No, some are and some are not, it's difficult to assess which side has a majority. My father found both support and antagonism from them in Starfleet."

"I'm glad the Ambassador has respect and esteem for you and hope you'll be

able to collaborate with him at the negotiations."

"I want you to attend them, Jim. I value your advice and you were present at the first meeting with the Romulans."

"The Ambassador may not like it."

"That is irrelevant. I will put the request to him at the meeting tomorrow and he'll accept. I presume your visit wasn't meant for an exchange of views alone, am I right?"

Kirk smiled. "It's your fault Spock, you should never have introduced me to that Vulcan game of yours. It makes chess child's play and I'm determined to beat you one day."

Spock brought the game out and Kirk helped him to set it up. The contest of skill was called Kal-Toya and the First Officer was only just mastering the rules, thanks to Spock's patience. Soon the two officers had forgotten all about Andorians and Romulans and were companionably absorbed in the game.

No incident marred the journey. Kirk felt proud of the Human crew, everyone had behaved but then no-one would have wanted to cause trouble to their Captain. The fear of sanctions was secondary to this and the First Officer felt justifiable pride of such an achievement when someone like Sulu for instance had once been a fanatical member of the infamous Party. When the Enterprise arrived at the rendez-vous point, Kirk joined Spock, both in full dress uniform again and said on their way to the transporter:

"Everyone behaved. We've a good ship and a good crew, Spock, but then we've a good Captain."

"And an excellent First Officer," added Spock.

Kirk smiled warmly at the softening of the dark eyes and looked forward to assisting his Captain at the negotiations. Romulans were interesting Aliens, although not to be trusted completely!

The meeting was to take place on the planet where the Romulan colony had been killed by Humans, who had in turn been exterminated by Romulans. It was perhaps not a good omen, thought Kirk as they waited for the Ambassador and his suite, but it was a good strategic place for discussions, easily accessible from both sides without revealing the position of home worlds. After a preliminary contact with the Romulans, the Ambassador and his suite were beamed down, as well as Spock, Kirk, the Science Officer and the Chief Medical Officer. The Security Chief also accompanied them with several guards.

A Romulan Ambassador welcomed them, and his party also included the Romulan Commander Spock had met before. Ambassador Decius and Commander Tal were impressive representatives of their race and met the other party on equal terms, without condescension, which could be a good omen.

The preliminary talk about a possible alliance went smoothly. The Orions were becoming a menace to the Romulans, the Klingons to the Federation. It seemed right to co-operate against enemies. Compensation had been given to the Romulans for their lost colony and Spock's courage in going alone aboard an Alien ship and honouring his word not to pursue her had impressed the Aliens. They were curious about the Federation and keen to join if profitable to both parties. Spock knew from Ambassador Terev that the Federation Council hoped the Romulans would join; they would make invaluable allies against the Klingons. Not only that, it was essential to avoid a Klingon-Romulan alliance if possible! The negotiations started in earnest after a couple of days of general discussions. The two Ambassadors were on friendly terms, as were Spock and Commander Tal. Everything was fine, the Romulans were keen to join the Federation. Then came the stumbling block: Earth.....

When Ambassador Decius looked at the list of planets members of the Federation and saw Earth, he declared bluntly that his people would never collaborate with vicious killers and that there was no point in further talks.

Ambassador Terev looked stunned and speechless, so Spock addressed the Romulan.

"Excellency, I'm at a loss to understand your reaction. You must have known from my Romulan colleague, Commander Tal, that I had a Human First Officer."

"Yes, I knew, but he and I assumed the Federation accepted a few Humans here and there because they had proved worthy. We had no idea Earth actually belonged to the group. I'm sure you'll understand that I cannot feel anything but hate for Humans when my own son and his family were killed on this world."

The Andorian Ambassador had recovered his voice by then and sympathised with the Alien, then went on to explain that Earth was a member, but not on equal terms with other races and no Humans could hold a high position anywhere.

"Commander Kirk is an exception," finished Terev, "but even he would find it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to become Starship Captain."

This mollified the Romulans and Terev went on to say that the tapes sent by the Romulans to the Federation indicated that they would be worthy members, there was no question of restrictions for them, apart from the usual short-term period of adjustment between the different cultures. This meant for instance that a Romulan Commander couldn't be Captain of a Federation vessel, or vice versa, without preliminary training. Terev finished by pointing out that the Romulans had common roots with the Vulcans and Vulcans were highly respected and esteemed.

Kirk had to hand it to the Andorian, he knew his job! The meeting broke for the night with the Romulans going to think things over and consult their Government. A 'yes' was hopeful.

In the privacy of the quarters he shared with Spock for the duration of the talks, Kirk asked that evening:

"Isn't it wrong not to mention the possibility that Earth will become full member if the experiments are a success?"

"I was forbidden by Terev to mention it, and I cannot disobey a direct order."

"No," agreed Kirk, thoughtful. "Besides, ours may be the only successful one, hardly enough to convince anybody."

"Our experiment will not be recognised at once, Jim..."

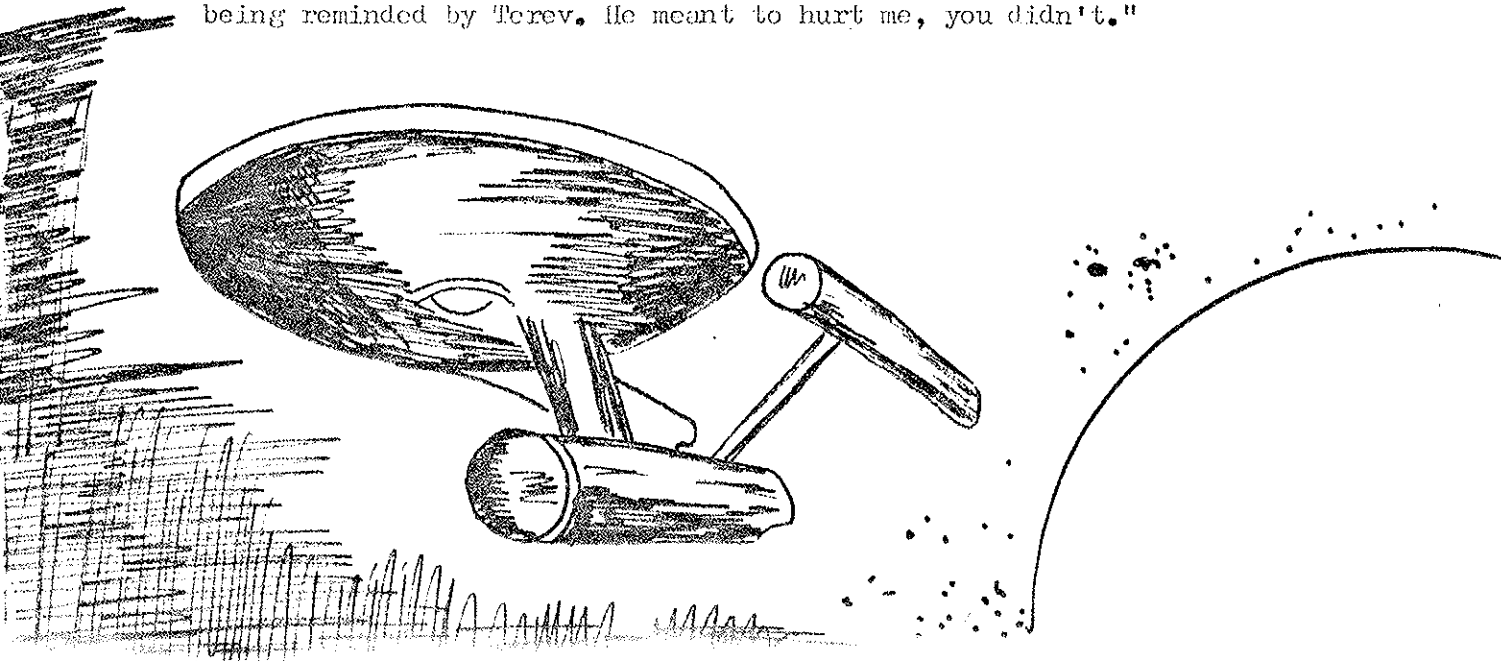
The Vulcan stopped suddenly and Kirk understood why.

"No, not when it nearly cost you your life."

"Jim, I regret bringing back those memories...."

Kirk smiled without embarrassment or annoyance.

"I believe I've laid the ghost of the past, Spock, although I resented being reminded by Terev. He meant to hurt me, you didn't."



Spock had sat at his desk and looked thoughtful in turn.

"I'm not sure it is wise to have the Romulans join the Federation. It could make things worse with Earth."

"Things have always been bad with Earth!" sighed Kirk. "Even I, a Human can understand that it will benefit the Federation if the Romulans join."

"You're a special Human, Jim," said Spock, the hint of a smile in the dark eyes. "However, it is pointless to speculate, the decision is not ours to make."

"So we'll wait and see," concluded Kirk philosophically. "It's unlikely to affect us or the ship, that's the main thing."

Kirk was to remember those words and wonder whether he had tempted fate by saying them!

The Romulans kept away for a couple of days, having private discussions and referring to their government. Kirk didn't mind, he made progress at the Kal-Toya contest!

At last, the Federation group was called to a meeting and Ambassador Decius stated: "I've been instructed by my Government to tell you that we'll be honoured to become members of your Federation."

"The United Federation of Planets is honoured to welcome you," replied Terev, happy at the outcome.

"However, before any final commitment is made, we require certain conditions to be filled, most of them minor, but one is essential."

He paused briefly, then continued:

"We want a firm guarantee that Earth will remain a secondary member and Humans kept out of high positions."

This didn't worry Terev. When he saw that Spock wanted to speak, he threw him a severe glance. Undeterred, the Vulcan addressed Decius.

"Excellency, it is possible that Earth, at some future time, will prove worthy of being a full member. In view of that possibility, don't you agree that your request is excessive?"

"No, Captain, we don't trust Earth people."

"I've Humans as part of my crew and I trust them," stated Spock in spite of threatening looks from Terev.

"Whether you're right or wrong in doing so is your own affair, Captain Spock. We want the condition fulfilled."

"I agree that you have grounds to ask for such a condition, Excellency," said Spock calmly, "It was unfortunate that the only Earth people you met were criminals. Is it logical to assume that because of that one event, all Earth people are criminals?"

"I suppose not, but those criminals could have been sent by their Government for all we know, to take needed riches back to Earth."

"Yet the compensation you received from the Federation was given by the Earth Government, therefore logic indicates...."

"Captain Spock, you will desist," ordered Terev severely, "I will not have you imply that the Romulan Ambassador is illogical."

"I apologise, Excellency," said Spock, his voice as calm and smooth as ever, "such an implication was never in my mind."

The Romulan was watching him with undisguised curiosity.

"I'm sure it wasn't," he agreed. "I respect your judgement, Captain, and understand that you feel you've to stand up for the Humans in your crew. Most commendable."

"May I suggest a compromise?" asked Spock, in spite of Kirk's whispered words:

"Shut up, Spock, don't push your luck!"

The Romulan told him to proceed and Terev could only second it.

"Have the condition you want included in the membership treaty, but add the stipulation that should Earth prove worthy at a future date, and should there be a majority of races in favour, you will not oppose full membership in those circumstances. Let me explain....."

"That's enough!" interrupted a very agitated Terev.

"No, let him speak," ruled Decius.

Terev's warning look that he was digging his own grave didn't deter Spock.

"Thank you, Excellency. I was going to explain that among the many races belonging to the U.F.P., you will find allies also wanting Earth to remain a secondary member, therefore should you feel you have to veto Earth's entry at any time, you would find support and assistance."

"True enough," admitted Terev, "Many people were against Earth's re-admission after the barbaric massacre of all Aliens."

"A race of killers," said the Romulan with disdain. "However, I appreciate Captain Spock's sense of justice. It is possible, although unlikely, that Earth will mend its ways in the far distant future. I will discuss this with my Government and let you know the outcome."

The meeting broke up and Terev turned on Spock.

"Your interference will be reported, Captain. You acted without my authority and without consultation with me. Had the Romulan Ambassador taken offence, you might have killed the negotiations."

"I do not believe the Romulans to be totally devoid of logic, Sir."

"Are you implying that I am?"

"No, Ambassador. I believe it is advisable to obtain the best possible terms for a treaty, but those terms should be in accordance with justice."

"Which can be a matter of opinion. Don't you realise that your championship of Earth could be detrimental to your career? What gives you the right to speak for Earth anyway?"

"Being half-Human, Sir."

"Yes, I can now believe that you are," was Terev's vindictive remark as he turned to go. Just as well he had turned away, or he might have seen Kirk's anger and his step forward to tackle the Andorian and tell him a few home truths for hurting Spock. His Captain stopped him with an iron grip.

"Stop, don't say a word, Jim, it's an order," he whispered, as the Ambassador unconscious of the small incident, stepped out at last. Kirk forgot his anger in his concern for Spock.

"Don't take any notice of him, he was just being objectionable. Can he make trouble for you?"

"Possibly, but not if the Romulans accept my suggestion. Terev will take the credit then."

"Of all the.... You won't stand for it, will you?"

"Who obtained the best terms is not important, Jim. What matters is that they are obtained."

"So you'll let him get away with it?"

"Actually, I doubt that anyone who knows him will believe he asked for that amendment."

"Good!" beamed Kirk, but worry soon made him frown darkly. "You shouldn't have taken such chances, Spock. Earth won't even know and wouldn't be grateful if she knew, I bet!"

"I had to try. Don't you see that it means the end of experiments otherwise? Earth would have no chance and the Party would then feel justified in taking any action."

"God forbid!" Kirk shuddered at the thought. "Let's hope the Romulans agree."

Perhaps because they thought the question would never arise, the Romulans agreed to Spock's amendment. If Terev resented his inability to get at Spock he didn't show it and the talks finished on an amicable note.

Back on the Enterprise now set on the journey to Starfleet HQ, Kirk went to see McCoy to give him an account of recent events.

"About time! Fed up with the company of a computer at last?" was the greeting he received from the doctor.

"If I thought you meant it, Bones, you'd be on the floor begging for mercy by now!"

"Like that, is it? What happened? Is the Captain all right?" asked McCoy, his concern so evident that Kirk smiled at him. He related what had happened and McCoy's concern increased.

"Is the Andorian going to make trouble for our Captain?"

"Let's hope not. There could be trouble anyway, Bones. If the Party emphasizes the Romulans' condition, mentioning the amendment in passing, it will give it new life."

"It will," agreed McCoy darkly. "It's like living on a tight rope!"

"Spock fears that the Romulans will also give new life to the races opposing Earth full membership."

"He could be right. Prospects for Humans are becoming dimmer by the minute."

"Still, it's useless to worry at this stage, we can but wait. See you, Bones, Spock is waiting."

"Look here, Jim Kirk, I hardly see you these days. Can't the Captain spare you for once?"

"Well....." admitted Kirk a little ruefully, "It's me who can't spare him. I'm dead keen on learning a Vulcan game to beat him at it, Kal-Toya."

"Is it like chess?"

"Not really. The boards are patterns of geometrical shapes, and the pieces we move are also geometrical shapes. Players can not only move the pieces, but alter the boards too. Play is three dimensional like chess, but it is far more complicated because of the possible changes to any board at any time....."

"Sounds hell! If you get headaches, it'll serve you right. Good luck at it just the same, and don't become Vulcan with so much Vulcan company!"

Kirk grinned and departed, hastening to Spock's quarters. He was getting the rules straight at last, the contest should become even more 'fascinating' from now on.

Kal-Toya wasn't the two officers' main occupation though. They had their report to Starfleet to make and it provoked an argument, until Spock ruled that his part in the proceedings should be minimised, in deference to Terev who had conducted the talks most efficiently.

The Andorian Ambassador was also sending his reports and recommendations to the Federation Council. By the time the Enterprise arrived at Starbase 1

Romulan membership had already been debated and accepted with a good majority. The acceptance included all conditions and amendments and only the one secured by Spock had brought Vulcan support and that of other planets often relying on Vulcan's lead.

There was no known reaction from the Party yet, but Kirk felt sure that it would come. Spock had talked to his father during the journey and it soon became evident to his First Officer that something was on his mind. Fearing some complaint from the Andorian, he was a little reassured when Spock told him Terev had taken no action. The Vulcan refused to comment further on his preoccupation though, and Kirk didn't press him, respecting his wishes and privacy. Spock would tell him in his own good time.

Meanwhile, leave was being granted to the officers and crew in strict rotation and Kirk beamed down to the Leisure Centre with McCoy and Scotty, after Spock had assured him he could be spared. The Captain would deal with Starfleet HQ and spend some time with his family.

The Leisure Centre provided a wide variety of entertainment and activities to accommodate most Aliens and the three Humans enjoyed their stay. Scotty was pleased to discover some genuine whisky being sold and made the most of it, which meant he overdid it a little. His two friends got him back aboard in good time to get sober and left him to it. Kirk and McCoy had had the occasional drink, but neither were the type to enjoy temporary escapism into drunkenness quite apart from the need for a First Officer and a doctor to set a good example by returning aboard in full possession of their faculties. Kirk found a message on his desk asking him to go to the Captain's quarters and he complied.

He found Spock meditating over steepled fingers and stared at the drawn features. For a fleeting instant, pain appeared in his gaze as it settled on Kirk.

"Spock!... What's wrong? Are you hurt? Why didn't you call be back from leave?"

"It would have served no purpose," said a dead voice.

"At least you wouldn't have been alone to deal with whatever it was! There's a saying that a trouble shared is a trouble halved, so come on, out with it. First shall I call Dr. Syvik? You don't look well."

"I'm perfectly fit, do not disturb the doctor. I was at Starfleet HQ all this time, but achieved little, and Father was unable to assist any longer, at least not directly...."

Spock had a fixed look as though on a nightmarish vision and Kirk understood the extent of his tiredness when he talked apparently at random.

"Has anything happened to Admiral Sarek?" he asked worriedly.

"No... yes... Jim, I wanted to resign... I...."

He shook his head as though to clear it and Kirk was by then frantically worried. What had they done to him? Taken the Enterprise away?

"Spock," he said gently, sitting on the desk and putting a friendly hand on his shoulder, "start at the beginning and tell me what happened."

The soothing care and the friendly touch worked. Spock took a grip on himself and looked up.

"It concerns you, Jim."

"Does it?" exclaimed Kirk, partly relieved. "Then you're still Captain of the Enterprise?"

"Yes, I wanted to resign, but it would have served no purpose, on the contrary."

"The beginning, Spock, please," reminded Kirk softly.

"Yes, Jim. I was called to Starfleet HQ as you know, shortly after we arrived."

"And you've been there all that time? I thought you were with your father."

"I talked to him during the journey and he warned me to expect great difficulties. His term of officer as Head of Starfleet has come to an end. You know that each Admiral is given charge in turn every five years. His successor is an Andorian, Admiral Tholev, who has been against the Enterprise experiment from the start."

"Oh no! Is it being cancelled then?"

"No. A project started by one Admiral cannot be arbitrarily cancelled by his successor without valid reasons. What Admiral Tholev is attempting is to reduce the chances of success to practically nil."

"How?"

"You're no longer to be my First Officer."

Although shattered by the news, Kirk understood why Spock had been so hurt, and how he must have fought the injustice....

"You were to lose your rank of Commander too, but I managed to salvage that much," added Spock.

"What have I done?"

"Nothing, Jim, except be the best First Officer in Starfleet. That is why it is a grave injustice and I would have resigned over the issue, but Father pointed out that if I did, Tholev would have won already."

"He probably hoped you'd resign! Surely there's to be a reason for my demotion though, isn't there?"

"Yes, and a very clever one. If, as Father and I say, the Enterprise experiment is a success, then it should be proved with other Aliens. Therefore an Alien First Officer will be appointed."

"Mr. Salyk perhaps? I don't mind him."

"No. I doubt that it will be a Vulcan, with so many Vulcans aboard already."

"It'd not wreck the experiment," agreed Kirk sadly. "The Enterprise experiment isn't public knowledge though, what official reason will be given for losing my position of First Officer?"

"Simply that the ship should become multi-racial and the position of First Officer being so important shouldn't be combined with other duties."

"I see. I keep my post of Chief Navigator, but lose the other one, trust them to do it that way!"

"An Alien Security Chief will also be appointed, Solek is transferred to another ship. Half the Human crew will be transferred and new Humans taken."

"Half! That's unfair! It should be a quarter only."

"The Admiral was entitled to make this new ruling."

"Anything else? Am I being transferred too or do I stay aboard?"

"You stay, if you want to, as Chief Navigator with Sirak. Because of your rank of Commander, you would be third in the line of command."

Spock's eyes expressed sorrow for a second as he added:

"I regret I could do nothing to prevent this, Jim, and will understand if you wish to leave."

"You kept my rank of Commander, I'll still be a senior officer, therefore able to help. If you're not quitting, why should I? Only a rat would desert a friend in need."

"A rat? I don't see what a rodent has to...."

"Sorry, Spock," grinned Kirk, "one of my Human expressions. What I meant was that with top brass like Tholev on your back you need all the help you can get or this experiment is doomed."

"The chances are not good with all those changes at once."

"We both worked hard at this, Spock, and I'm not going to give in to an Andorian or anyone else without a fight. I'm staying."

A tiny sigh of relief escaped Spock. The First Officer squeezed his shoulder with a smile.

"I should be offended that you doubted me!"

"I did not, Jim, but it was still a relief to hear you say it. Father helped as much as he was able to, his influence is not negligible, but we were only able to achieve minor victories like you keeping your rank and not more than three Alien Officers being introduced at a time. By Aliens, I mean of course the new comers will not be Vulcans, or Humans."

"No, it'd be too easy! Do you know who is being replaced?"

"Solek only so far, apart from the new First Officer. I was also able to have a say in the change of Humans, and managed to keep the most reliable ones aboard."

"Good, Bones and Scotty are staying then, and they'll help. You've not done too badly against such odds, Spock."

"I fought the Admiral and his staff step by step and salvaged what I could. I was unable to salvage what I wanted to keep most."

Kirk swallowed the small lump in his throat.

"You didn't think I would hold it against you, do you? Your father was right, you mustn't resign. Tholev may have won most of the first battle, but we'll make it jolly hard for him to win any more."

"Thank you for your support, Jim, I had not realised the extent of my dependence on you."

"That makes two of us!" grinned Kirk.

"This injustice will also give new life to the Party."

"Why? I'm condemned to death, why should the Party care?... You may be right though, the Party will use me if it serves a purpose. The crew will be upset, but they won't blame you."

"The new Officers could make life unpleasant aboard, although I will attempt to minimise this."

Kirk nodded thoughtfully. Life aboard the Enterprise might not be so pleasant soon!

"There's more," continued Spock, "although it doesn't concern the ship directly. The first Romulan Councillors have taken their seats on the Federation Council and have given new strength to the opposition to Earth, as I feared. They were informed of the experiments and told that at least one had already failed in an administrative branch. Vulcan was unable to stop a resolution proposed by the Romulans to make the existing experiments as stringent as possible."

"In order to make them fail," concluded Kirk. "Bones was right, the prospects for Humans are becoming dimmer by the minute."

"Because of that resolution, Father and I could do little against Tholev's new measures about the Enterprise."

"Stop blaming yourself, Spock, you did what you could, and it wasn't easy, I bet."

"No. I was even threatened to be brought in front of a disciplinary court."

"Why?"

"Admiral Tholev found my logic difficult to overcome and attempted threats. When he saw they had no effect, he desisted."

"Knew he couldn't make them stick I expect."

Kirk made a rapid mental calculation and realised that Spock had been at Starfleet HQ for over two weeks fighting his superiors. Probably never slept or ate! Very gently, he made him get up.

"You're exhausted, come and rest."

The Vulcan didn't resist and let Kirk put him to bed without protest.

"Wouldn't you like some food?"

"No, thank you Jim, you have done enough. I shall have recovered by tomorrow."

"I wish you had called me!" said Kirk a little angrily, rather upset that Spock had lived through that time with the knowledge that he was to lose his First Officer and had refused to share the stress.

"Why cancel your leave to no purpose? There was nothing you could have done."

Except share your pain, thought Kirk, but you kept it to yourself and tried to spare me for as long as possible. He said nothing aloud, just pulled a chair and sat by the bed.

"I'll go when you're asleep," he smiled.

Spock's eyebrow rose, but he didn't protest, which didn't surprise Kirk. With all the protesting the Vulcan had done at Starfleet HQ, he was probably unable to do any more!

It didn't take long for the Captain to fall asleep and Kirk left silently, nearly colliding with Dr. Syvik at the door.

"How is the Captain?" asked the Vulcan.

"So you know! Who else?"

"No-one, Mr. Kirk. Admiral Sarek called me on a private channel and what he told me I kept to myself."

Relieved that no rumours had got to the crew, Kirk led him to his Captain.

"Perhaps you should check him, Doctor. He was under stress for a long time."

"I know." The doctor used his scanner and touched Spock's head briefly. "He will be all right, Mr. Kirk, the stress has eased now."

Because he shared it with me, thought Kirk, I only wish he had done it earlier! The doctor and the First Officer left the Captain to his much needed rest and stopped in front of Kirk's cabin.

"Rest assures that I will not say anything, Mr. Kirk. It is the Captain's duty to inform the crew of events," said Dr. Syvik.

"Thank you, Doctor, I know I can count on you."

"Admiral Sarek gave me this message for his son."

"I'll give it to the Captain when he wakes," promised Kirk, taking the small tape.

Once inside his quarters, Kirk lay on his bed and thought he might have to move soon to another cabin. He would hate to be away from Spock's quarters, so handy for Kal-Toya... Spock's ordeal had stopped him from thinking much about himself, but now the full impact of the loss of his position as First Officer hit him and he felt wave after wave of violent anger submerge him. Hard work and dedication had earned him the post. He had been an asset to his Captain, had worked as hard as Spock for the success of

the experiment. No-one had the right.... He got up and paced his cabin, trying to work off his fury. When it abated a little, hurt replaced it, and resentment against Starfleet Officials who could treat an officer in such a way. He should resign.... Only a second made him quash the possible solution instantly. His Captain needed him now more than ever, to desert him would make Kirk lose all self-respect. It would have helped to confide in McCoy, give vent to the resentment against Aliens, but he mastered the impulse. Although Bones wouldn't talk if asked not to, he might go about with a long face which could arouse suspicion.

Kirk lay on his bed again, feeling better now that he had released hurt, anger and resentment. If he had anything to do with it, the Andorian Admiral would discover that to wreck the Enterprise experiment was impossible! The First Officer's last thoughts as he fell asleep were that it could have been much worse, had he and Spock been separated. As long as they were together, there was hope of surmounting the greatest difficulties; they hadn't done so badly in the past!

The next day he collected Spock's breakfast from the dining area and saw McCoy's immediate concern.

"Is the Captain ill?"

"No, but he tends to forget what he calls 'non-essentials', like food. I'll introduce him to breakfast in bed."

"He'll call it illogical," grinned McCoy.

Kirk buzzed the door, heard the question 'who is it?' and was invited to enter. He was pleased to find that Spock had not been awake for long and was still in bed.

"What is this?" asked the Captain, eying the tray suspiciously.

"Breakfast, Captain... No, stay there!"

He was too late, Spock had got up in a swift movement and protested:

"Jim, I'm not an invalid. There was no reason for you to act as a steward."

"Now, Spock, don't get on your high horse, please." He grinned as the Vulcan looked around the cabin.

"I fail to see a horse anywhere. These Human sayings of yours are odd to say the least."

"Never mind Human sayings, get back into bed and have your breakfast."

"Certainly not. To eat lying down would be most uncomfortable."

"You have to sit up! All right, sit at your desk and eat then, I should have known you wouldn't appreciate breakfast in bed, it's too Human."

Spock settled at the desk after a slight hesitation.

"I do appreciate your gesture in bringing me food, Jim. I am hungry."

Kirk didn't mind that it'd be all the thanks he would get.

"You may have a difficult day ahead of you, Spock, someone had to remind you of 'non-essentials'."

Spock eyes smiled at him and he smiled back.

"However, if I'm to move from the next cabin, don't expect food deliveries in the future."

"I trust you will not feel the need to act as a steward again. You're my First Officer...." He stopped and looked apologetically at Kirk, then continued:

"You will not move from your cabin, there's no need. You're a senior officer entitled to have living quarters on the Officers' deck. The new First Officer can have the cabin on the other side of this one."

"Which is vacant. Hope he will accept it, I'd hate to move," admitted Kirk honestly. "By the way, Dr. Syvik gave me this message for you from your father."

Spock took the small tape and put it aside, clearly to listen to later, so Kirk continued:

"What about the crew? They should be told as soon as possible or they might hear wild rumours from the Starbase personnel."

"It is my intention to inform them today," agreed the Captain. "Issue the order for general assembly in one hour's time, I'll be ready by then."

Neither Humans nor Vulcans suspected anything as they saw their Captain and First Officer come in. Spock faced his crew while Kirk stood a couple of paces behind him. Keeping strictly to facts, the Captain announced Starfleet's changes for the Enterprise in a completely cold and impersonal voice. He made no comment, said nothing of his opposition and read out the names of the Humans to be transferred, as well as Lieutenant Solek of Security. He finished with the simple statement that he trusted his crew to collaborate with him now as they had in the past.

The Humans seemed too stunned to react yet and even the Vulcans looked faintly disturbed. Kirk stepped forward and asked respectfully:

"May I have your permission to say a few words, Captain?"

"Proceed, Mr. Kirk. I trust you will be brief."

Kirk nodded. He would respect Spock's reserve and say nothing of his efforts and struggle.

"All I wish to state is that as far as I'm concerned, I accept the changes. The Captain can be assured of my full co-operation as in the past."

"Thank you, Mr. Kirk." Turning to the assembly, Spock said only :
"Dismissed."

The crew trooped out and Kirk remained behind with his Commanding Officer, whose icy features didn't fool the Human. He guessed how Spock felt responsible for his inability to avoid the injustice to his crew, and the lack of recognition of their achievement by Starfleet.

"They'll understand, Spock," he said gently. "I'll go and listen to some reactions. Will you be in your quarters?"

"No, on the bridge. I will assess any reaction from my officers there."

Reassured that Spock was once again the cool and efficient Vulcan after his temporary weakness the day before, Kirk left for sickbay. He was glad that the Captain hadn't tried to hide from his First Officer; Spock would have hated anyone else to see him then, but Kirk he had welcomed, a rare proof of trust. He found McCoy sitting at his desk frowning darkly at Scotty who didn't look calm.

"Has Starfleet gone stark raving mad?" were Scotty's first words to Kirk. "Do they want a mutiny?"

"They might get one," murmured McCoy, "and who can blame the crew if your devotion to the Captain brings that kind of results."

"We've collaborated with the Vulcans, achieved a unity of purpose I'd never had believed possible at one time," said Scotty, "and what thanks do we get? We lose our First Officer, some of us are transferred away from a ship we like and new Aliens are thrown at us!"

"It won't work, Jim," added McCoy sadly. "The Captain should see that."

Kirk, who had let them vent their anger freely without interference, now reacted. "Do you believe Spock is responsible for all this? He has to obey orders too."

"He can appeal to Admiral Sarek," McCoy pointed out.

"His Father's term of office is over. An Andorian, Admiral Tholev, is in charge."

"I see," said McCoy, now thoughtful.

"If he's anything like the Ambassador who came aboard, God help us!" muttered Scotty, thoughtful too.

"Did the Captain try to fight this?" asked the doctor.

"What do you think?" replied Kirk, giving nothing away.

"The Captain wouldn't have lost his First Officer without a fight, he's a just man, or rather a just Vulcan," stated Scotty.

"He could have resigned as a protest!" remarked McCoy.

"Would you have preferred another Captain?" asked Kirk.

The doctor had been observing his friend and read some of the unsaid things.

"I guess he had a bad time," he sighed, "it's unfair to him too."

"Aye, it is," agreed Scotty, also understanding. "He did a great job with his ship and crew, and for all the thanks he gets, he might as well not have bothered!"

"Are the other Humans blaming him?" asked Kirk.

"I don't think they will after thinking things out for themselves," assured Scotty.

"Your statement that you're staying aboard will help, Jim," added McCoy "but things may get difficult just the same."

"I know, a lot will depend on the new officers."

"And on the new crew," finished Scotty. "You can bet that some will be Party members!"

The prospect of seeing the ghost of the Party resurrected aboard was not pleasant, to say the least. It was rather upsetting to believe they had got rid of an infestation, only to see it brought back and by Starfleet! While the renewal of 25% of the Human crew had been planned, it should have taken place after the experiment was recognised as a success, not before. To change half so quickly and unexpectedly was hard to take. Kirk left his two friends, sharing their subdued and unhappy mood, and went to the bridge. The Captain was absent.

"He's checking auxiliary control, Mr. Kirk, a malfunction has been detected," reported Mr. Salyk, the Science Officer.

Kirk sat in the command chair and wondered if it was for the last time in his capacity of First Officer. He knew he would resent bitterly anyone else being 2nd in command and hoped to be able to hide it, for Spock's sake as much as his own.

"Mr. Kirk," said the Science Officer who had approached, "my fellow officers asked me to convey their regret at your arbitrary demotion. We appreciated your services to the Captain and to the ship and will miss your guidance."

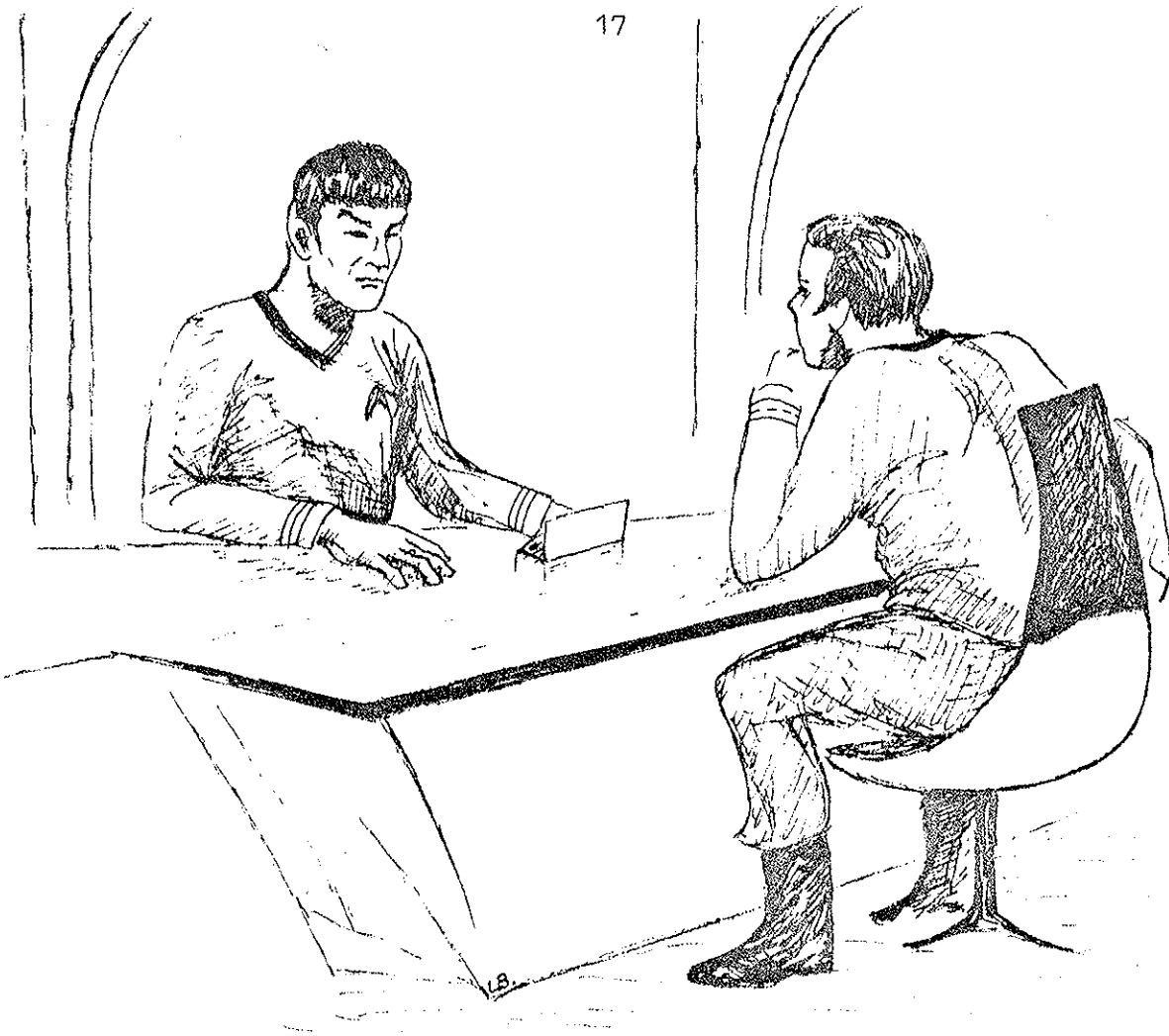
"Thank you, Mr. Salyk," replied Kirk, moved that the Vulcan had managed to convey so much with simple words. "We may have difficult times ahead and I'm sure the Captain can count on all of you."

At least Spock has loyal officers left around him, he reflected, we should prove a match for any newcomer.

The Captain arrived on the bridge then and Kirk was going to vacate the command chair, but he was stopped.

"Stay here, Mr. Kirk, I've to go to my quarters shortly for a communication from Starfleet. What was my crew's reaction?"

Kirk made his report and finished by assuring Spock that the Humans would understand and collaborate.



"Will the new members do so, Mr. Kirk?"

He didn't wait for an answer, knowing only too well that Kirk couldn't give one. A while later, the First Officer was called to Spock's quarters.

"I've been given the names of the new officers, Jim."

"Oh! Let's hear the worst!"

"Worst may be right," admitted Spock calmly. "The First Officer is to be a Tellarite, Commander Gav."

"It would be!" said Kirk through clenched teeth, cursing the new Admiral in charge of Starfleet freely in his mind. It was a well known fact that Tellarites and Humans didn't get on very well. War had nearly broken out a couple of times and the situation was very strained on both sides. To introduce a Tellarite to replace him wouldn't be welcome by any Human.

"The Security Chief is an Andorian, Lieutenant Commander Thelin."

"Is he anti-Human? You said some weren't....."

"I do not know, Jim. His record shows very little contact with Humans up to now."

"He's bound to be if Tholev chose him!"

Spock hesitated. "Thelin is known to me," he said at last. "He's from a high Andorian family who used to visit Vulcan at times and stayed at my home."

"A friend?"

"No, you of all people should know I had no friend until you came aboard."

Some emotion showed only in Kirk's eyes as he continued the conversation about the newcomer.

"What is he like?"

"I've not seen him for several years, but do not believe he would see Humans as equals."

"In other words, he is likely to be arrogant and treat us like dirt," translated Kirk.

"I believe the Humans' name for their Captain was 'His Lordship' at one time," said Spock with a half smile.

"It suited you, still does," teased Kirk, grinning.

Spock's hands had joined and his head rested on steepled fingers.

"To command my ship with so many new Human members and two possibly hostile officers is going to prove extremely difficult."

Kirk nodded, at a loss for words. What had they done to deserve this?

"It might make some Humans join the Party again," added Spock.

"I hope not! We can do with all the help we can get!"

Spock's intercom beeped.

"Captain, there's a call from the Starfleet Personnel Officer for you," announced Somek.

"Put him through to my quarters, Mr. Somek."

The screen lit up, showing the stern features of a Vulcan Officer.

"Captain Spock, I wish to discuss the appointment of a third officer to your ship. Please beam down as soon as possible."

"I don't understand, Sir. No discussion preceeded the appointment of the other two."

"No, there was no need. I'll explain, Captain."

"Very well, Sir, I shall beam down shortly."

Kirk awaited his return with understandable impatience, but it was 5 hours before Spock beamed back.

"Who is the new officer and who is getting the push this time?" asked Kirk tersely.

"The third officer appointed to the Enterprise is a Romulan, Lieutenant Tal, navigator," replied Spock once they were in the privacy of his quarters.

"A Romulan! That's all we needed!" exclaimed Kirk, outraged.

"No-one is leaving to make room for him, he is a trainee. A quota of Romulans is to be integrated into Starfleet. However, they have no knowledge of our ships or training, therefore cannot be senior officers yet."

"That's a blessing anyway. Let's hope he's the last of the bad news. Why were you so long?"

"I obtained permission to choose the Romulan Officer for my ship and consulted Commander Tal. He recommended his son, not because he's his son, but because he's supposed to be an able and efficient navigator."

"Hope it's true. When are you announcing the new arrivals to the crew?"

"Now. Nothing will be gained by delay."

The news was hardly received enthusiastically. Further gloom spread among the Humans and the ones leaving said they might be better off.

News from Earth, which Sarek had communicated to Spock, was not made to lift any gloom. The Party had gone to town on the Romulans' admission to full membership of the Federation when Earth wasn't. Kirk's demotion was also

denounced: a Human had served an Alien Captain faithfully and was demoted instead of promoted as a result. It served him right for betraying his race, maybe he was now seeing the error of his ways and would no longer serve a Vulcan.

When Kirk was next in the rec room, he saw Sulu, Chekov and Uhura and was pleased to find them glad to stay aboard in spite of probable difficulties. It proved that Spock's and his choice of Humans to be kept as crew members had been right, or at least as right as possible. Kirk hadn't been all that sure about Uhura, but Spock had been, which had made him curious. Had his Captain noticed the woman's looks in his direction? They weren't very obvious, in fact recently Uhura had been an exemplary officer. If it was on Party orders.....

Sulu and Chekov left to go on duty and Kirk tackled the subject. He preferred to know one way or the other if possible.

"I'm glad you weren't transferred, Lieutenant. Mr. Somek considers you as one of his best officers."

"I believe I enjoy my work aboard the Enterprise nearly as much as you do, Mr. Kirk."

"Did you know that I suspected you of belonging to the Party at one time?" said Kirk lightly, as though it was a joke.

"Me? Why?"

"You seemed interested in the Captain and....."

"You thought I was bait," finished Uhura with an amused smile. "I can't blame you when so many Humans were prejudiced at the time."

She hesitated only a second before continuing with an honesty which dispelled all Kirk's doubts.

"It's true I was fascinated by the Captain, but I resented it, I always wanted to be a career woman. The Captain understood somehow. He explained how wrong it'd be for me to consider him in any light except as the Captain of the Enterprise, therefore I should concentrate on my work, which was already good. He was kind and gentle, two traits of his character I hadn't suspected. It made me realise how wrong I would be to embarrass him and that he was right, I should stick to my career. I did from then on and found great satisfaction in it."

"Good, you're back to being a career woman."

"Most definitely. The Captain doesn't deserve any more worries, he has enough to deal with."

"No regrets?" queried Kirk gently.

Uhura smiled with a shrug.

"Maybe a few! The fact that the Captain is kind and gentle is hardly off-putting! However, I prefer his esteem and respect to nothing and I'm sure he prefers my own esteem and respect to any emotional link. Self-respect is important to me, so my choice wasn't difficult and I do love my career."

"Best of luck with it, you might make Captain one day!"

"We'll see," laughed Uhura. "Working with Vulcans is very rewarding, I can be friendly without fear of any emotional entanglement."

"I know what you mean, I suppose your Human colleagues expect a woman to need an emotional attachment."

"Yes, many do, such an attitude reminds me of the middle ages! Some are all right though, Sulu and Chekov are nice friends I can talk freely to. We'll try to deal with the new Human crew as best we can, and that's a promise!" She left to go on duty in turn and Kirk felt sure she had told the truth, and was as reliable as Scotty and the others, perhaps even more so. Maybe she would always keep a soft spot for her Vulcan Captain, but she would never let it interfere, a dedicated woman who would be an asset to any ship.

Half the Human crew had started to leave and the next contingent was expected shortly. Spock assembled his senior officers in the briefing room to discuss the problems.

"Each of your sections has a quota of reliable Humans left under your command. I want you to organise the checking of the work done by the newcomers, but the Humans aboard now will do it."

"Yes, that's a good idea, Captain" approved Kirk. "It annoyed the Humans in the past to have their work checked by Aliens."

"Precisely. Work out a rota system, consult the Humans if necessary," instructed Spock.

"Show that you trust them with an important task, it should work," added Kirk.

Lieutenant Solek who was leaving the next day, asked for permission to speak.

"Captain, my last report is on your desk and mentions that some members of the Human crew may have become unreliable. Perhaps Mr. Kirk would care to comment."

"I think 'unreliable' is too strong a word, Mr. Solek. I've been monitoring them carefully with Dr. McCoy's assistance. They're confused, upset, weary of change, but it's all due to recent events. As far as can be ascertained, no-one blames the Captain or the Vulcan Officers."

"I trust your judgement, Mr. Kirk, thank you," said Spock. "The second problem to consider is the new officers. Lieutenant Tal will only be assistant navigator. I rely on Commander Kirk and Lieutenant Commander Sirak to ensure that he understands and conforms to our discipline."

"We'll arrange for one of us to be on duty with him at all times," said Sirak.

"It leaves the First Officer and the Chief of Security, both unknown quantities apart from their probable hostility towards Humans. I know that my senior officers will assist me in trying to avoid any victimization aboard my ship."

"You can be assured of our co-operation, Captain," said Salyk.

"Each of you will keep a very sharp eye on your section, report any sign of unrest to me at once, do not involve security unless forced to do so. If I'm not available, seek out Mr. Kirk, I can trust him to assist any of his colleagues."

"Yes, of course, Captain. I'll help anyone," promised Kirk.

"Captain," Lieutenant Commander Senak, the Chief Engineer, said with a slight hesitation, "Am I to understand that instead of reporting to the First Officer, should you not be available, we're to report to Mr. Kirk?"

"If it is a major crisis, seek me out, or the First Officer. If Humans cause minor problems, seek me out, or Mr. Kirk." Spock specified.

"Use logic, you Vulcans have plenty of it," said Kirk with a smile. "If you think I can help, call me. It might save the Captain or the First Officer having to spend too much time on Human problems."

The senior officers worked on their re-organisation and Kirk was pleased to see close collaboration. Mr. Senak, the Chief Engineer did not hesitate to seek Scotty's help, while Somek of Communications worked with Uhura and Dr. Syvik with McCoy. Sirak and Kirk worked with Sulu and Chekov. Mr. Salyk and his Science Department did not include many Humans, compared to the other sections, so should have few problems. Security being all Vulcan should have none in their ranks. Kirk guessed that Spock was concerned about the Security force, should there be any conflict of loyalty between the Captain and the Security Chief, but he felt pretty sure that the Vulcans would remain loyal to Spock, not because he was a

Vulcan, but because justice would be on his side. He doubted also that the new Officer would care to let such a situation occur!

The new Human members of the crew duly came aboard and were settled in. Kirk had kept a sharp eye on the newcomers, in case he detected any trouble makers, although he knew it was unlikely he would be able to.

It was the turn of the Romulan to come aboard the next day. Kirk and Sirak went to the transporter room to welcome him and Spock made the courteous gesture of going also. The Alien, of average height and quite good looking, wore Starfleet uniform and seemed proud of his blue shirt as he made an impeccable Vulcan salute to Spock.

"Welcome aboard my ship, Mr. Tal," said the Captain.

"Thank you, Sir. Your name is well known among my people and I look forward to belonging to your crew. My father asked me to thank you for the honour to my family."

Kirk was favourably impressed. The Romulan's attitude was most respectful to his Captain and his pleasure at coming aboard the Enterprise genuine. Spock led him to Kirk and Sirak and introduced the newcomer to his superior officers. Tal saluted Sirak, but stared at Kirk in amazement.

"Captain, am I expected to take orders from a Human?" he asked, clearly unable to believe it.

"Yes, if the Human is your superior officer. This is a Vulcan/Human ship, Mr. Tal, didn't you know?"

"No, Sir. I had little time to find out and thought Humans weren't allowed."

"I'm the only Human senior officer, Mr. Tal," said Kirk soothingly, "so all the others will be equal or lesser ranks than yourself."

"I don't want to work under or with Humans," stated Tal firmly.

"In that case there's no place for you aboard my ship," stated Spock equally firmly. "You should ask for a transfer and I will put the request to Starfleet."

"No!...." The Romulan was clearly debating the question in his mind. "Captain Spock, I do wish to serve under your command, but... I'm not sure I can," he finished lamely.

"I appreciate your honesty, Mr. Tal," said Spock, "but your father knew I had Humans aboard my ship."

"I didn't serve aboard my father's ship to avoid the family ties. I was called back from a distant mission to go into Starfleet."

"I see. Do you know Commander Kirk?"

"No, of course not."

"Then how do you know you will not be able to work with him? Will it assist you if I state that Commander Kirk is not only my best officer, but also a personal friend of mine?"

"He's Human!"

"And I'm half-Human." said Spock calmly.

"Yes, I knew that, but you're a Vulcan... Captain, you're a man of honour and I trust you. I will try to serve aboard your ship."

"Thank you, Mr. Tal, I'm honoured by your confidence," replied Spock courteously. "Mr. Kirk or Mr. Sirak will show you to your quarters, I leave it to them."

Spock left and Kirk said to the new officer:

"You can't go wrong if you trust the Captain, Mr. Tal. I expect you'd prefer Mr. Sirak to show you to your quarters. I'll see you on the bridge."

Kirk left in turn and Sirak led the newcomer to the lift.

"Do you like Commander Kirk?" asked Tal curiously.

"I've a great respect and esteem for him," assured Sirak. "He's an agreeable colleague and a most able officer. I never found the fact that he is Human a disadvantage and trust that you will not either."

It was Kirk who gave Tal his first instruction, keeping it completely impersonal and technical and the Romulan accepted it without letting any antagonism show. The other Humans didn't appreciate the new Alien. Sulu reported indignantly to Kirk that he had gone to sit at the navigator's table in the rec room to be friendly and Tal had gone to another table!

"Exactly what you'd have done if a Vulcan had sat at your table in the past," Kirk reminded him. "He has to learn too, give him time."

Sulu recognised the validity of the argument and promised patience, but when the arrival of the new First Officer was announced, Kirk wondered if patience would be enough!

He went to the transporter room to join the Captain and the senior officers awaiting the new arrival. Spock stood in front as usual, and normally Kirk would go to his side. Now he had to leave his Captain alone and join the other officers instead. It hurt. Spock seemed to sense it. His gaze met Kirk's and he saw the softening of the usual stern expression for a second with emotion. His Captain missed having him at his side too and the knowledge lessened the hurt a little.

Commander Gav beamed aboard and clearly thought the welcoming party his due. He was only average height, so had to look up to Spock, but he had wide shoulders, and his stocky appearance showed physical strength. That he was condescending and arrogant was obvious to Kirk from the first, although the Tellarite showed proper respect for his Captain. Spock introduced Kirk first, because he was the only officer aboard with the rank of Commander apart from Gav. The Tellarite looked the Human up and down most rudely and stated:

"I don't want any trouble from you, just because you were First Officer once."

"Mr. Gav," said Spock, in a dangerously cold voice, "you will not behave in this manner aboard my ship. Apologies are in order."

Gav was most astonished. "Captain, he's only Human..."

"Irrelevant, I gave you an order."

The Tellarite swallowed his anger and apologised, but complained to the Captain about being reprimanded in front of other officers.

"Your ill-mannered behaviour was also in front of other officers," replied Spock severely. "The sooner you learn that Humans are my men just as much as Vulcans the better for everyone. I will show you to your quarters."

Unfortunately Spock was called to the bridge then and had to delegate to Kirk. Only by a huge effort did the new First Officer refrain from protest, and he followed Kirk in silence, which suited the Human. The Tellarite stopped at Kirk's cabin and looked at the name incredulously.

"This is my cabin," he thundered.

"Sorry, Commander, yours is there, next to the Captain's," replied Kirk mildly.

"The First Officer always had the cabin on the right side of the Captain's. I'll complain."

Exasperated, Kirk left him and shut himself in his quarters, locking the door, then leaning against it fighting powerless anger. He had a preview of the future, and didn't like it! The very sight of the rude and arrogant officer at the side of the elegant and courteous Spock made his blood boil. How was Spock going to bear it?

Kirk was an honest man however. He knew that he would have resented any First Officer taking his place at Spock's side, so he had to try and adapt, accept, or he might make things worse for Spock, which would be most unfair. The Captain had enough to cope with already....

As he was not on duty, he took off his uniform and dressed in casual clothes. He was getting a book to read, to try and relax, when the door buzzed.

"Who is it?" he shouted, afraid it might be the Tellarite.

"Spock."

He unlocked the door hurriedly with an apologetic smile.

"You didn't sound at all welcoming," said the Captain with a raised eyebrow.

"Sorry, I thought it was someone else."

Spock didn't comment. He knew who he was referring to.

"I trust no further incident will occur," he said as he sat down. "Commander Gav knows I will not tolerate such an attitude towards a fellow officer."

"So you spoke to him and I guess he didn't like it! You can be merciless and your comments would reduce any man to size."

"I'm not sure about a Tellarite," replied Spock without irony.

"I know what you mean," smiled Kirk. "Look, don't make it obvious that we're close or it might antagonise him towards you."

"It might also exacerbate his dislike of you, should he guess how much you mean to me, therefore I didn't mention our friendship. However, I will not change our routine or hide anything. It is the usual time for Kal-Toya, come to my quarters."

Kirk followed without further ado, welcoming the game after having missed several because of recent events.

They were absorbed in the complicated contest when the door buzzed.

"Who is it?" queried Spock.

"Commander Gav, Captain."

"Shall I hide?" asked Kirk.

"Certainly not," said Spock severely. "Why did you suggest such an indignified act?"

"Might save trouble in the long run, but you're right, it's undignified," grinned Kirk.

Spock didn't press him to explain further and invited the Tellarite to enter. The new First Officer saluted most correctly, but was startled by Kirk's presence and couldn't help the exclamation:

"What is he doing here?"

Spock's gaze wasn't friendly and Gav lost all arrogance, rather like a deflated balloon, reflected Kirk with an inward smile; maybe Spock could deal with the Alien.

"Do I understand you to query who I should ask to my private quarters?" asked the icy voice in a tone which was not reassuring.



"No, no, I apologise, Captain," mumbled Gav, "I was surprised...."

"Did you want anything?" Spock cut in.

"Only a few words, Sir, and I'm sorry I interrupted what I see is a contest." Gav regained some assurance to continue. "What I wish to say won't take long."

"Will you leave us, Mr. Kirk? I'll call you if we are able to rescue the game."

Kirk nodded and left, upset at the unwelcome interruption, but a little reassured about the future; Gav was no match for Spock!

He was called back after a short while and asked no question, but Spock volunteered:

"Commander Gav has assured me of his full co-operation to make my ship one of the best in Starfleet."

"He fears you, which may be all to the good."

"I expect his fear is due to the fact that an unfavourable report from me would impair his career," remarked Spock.

"You could be right," agreed Kirk, "only the future will tell."

The future involved welcoming the Andorian Security Chief the next day. Kirk was thankful this was the last newcomer, after which they would settle to normal routine, if possible, and leave for their next mission with a 'mottled' crew. The sight of Gav's presence at Spock's side made Kirk look away. It still hurt, and he cursed himself and his weakness; if he was a Vulcan, he'd have no such trouble! He wasn't, but was determined to show nothing and composed his features into an impassivity similar to the Vulcans' around him, perhaps worse than theirs, a contest of impassivity....

Spock's faintly amused gaze showed that the Captain had guessed his intention. It nearly brought a smile to Kirk's lips, while the hurt vanished. It didn't matter that he wasn't at Spock's side, they understood each other just the same, so why worry?....

Lieutenant Commander Thelin materialised then and Kirk watched the new arrival with apprehension and a faint hope that he mightn't be that bad. The Andorian stepped down and saluted Spock in the usual manner. He was tall, although not as tall as the Captain, and the blue skin made his features rather harsh and cold, perhaps like Vulcans? Yet the Andorians didn't reject emotions. This one looked haughty and arrogant but his attitude to Spock showed respect. Kirk interrupted his thoughts to watch as the Captain welcomed the new officer formally.

"I asked for the honour of serving aboard your ship, Captain," said Thelin unexpectedly.

"Indeed?" Spock's eyebrow had risen in faint surprise. "For what reason?"

"Not because of our families' acquaintance," assured Thelin, "Nevertheless my family conveys her greetings to you and is pleased at my new posting."

"I'm honoured by the greetings of your family," replied Spock courteously, "but please specify."

"May I ask the privilege of explaining in private? Some of it is personal and need not concern anyone else," said Thelin, surveying the assembly with hauteur, as though only Spock was worthy of being talked to. The Captain agreed and introduced the senior officers briefly, then left with the Andorian. Kirk watched them go with a sigh, another officer who thought a lot of himself and looked down on Humans. Thelin had said nothing when Kirk was introduced to him, but the rank of Commander had clearly not been to his liking!

Spock showed Thelin his quarters, then invited him to his own for the required explanation.

"First let me assure you that I do not expect preferential treatment because I'm from a high family, or because we knew each other in the past."

"You wouldn't get it," stated Spock.

"Quite, Captain.... May I call you Spock?"

"I'd prefer our relationship to remain formal and would appreciate honesty. You never led me to believe you had any use for a half-Human."

"That was a childish mistake," said Thelin with unexpected directness.

"The last time we met I was 20 and only just starting to understand."

"Understand what? Explain."

Thelin hesitated, an unusual thing for a self assured and haughty being like him.

"Captain, may I speak to you as equal to equal, which we are in terms of social standing and may I ask for this exchange to remain confidential?"

Spock was clearly puzzled.

"If this is a subterfuge, Thelin, I didn't expect someone of your standing to resort to such practices."

"On my word of honour as a Starfleet Officer and as a member of the Andorian Ruling family, what I'll say will be the truth, it's no subterfuge."

"Very well, proceed, you've my word I'll speak of it to no-one."

"Thank you, Captain." He remained silent for a few seconds, searching for words, then began to speak.

"You were right, I thought I was above you when we were children, because you were half-Human. Then as we grew up, attended school and started our careers, I came to notice that each goal I reached, you had reached before me, and more besides, like your brilliant success at the Vulcan Science Academy. My father remarked that you were a great credit to your family, having succeeded in spite of any obstacle. I won't dwell on childhood, I know and you know what occurred then and I make no excuse. I understand how hurt you were, yet I never saw you break down once and your family could justly be proud of you."

"Come to the point," said Spock with a trace of impatience, "The past is of no interest to me."

"I can understand that, Captain. We Andorians are a harsh race, lacking in charity, with the family concept predominant. Because you brought great honour to your family, you proved worthy of belonging to the Vulcan elite and for that fact alone you won respect from my people."

"I'm now an exile," said Spock coldly.

Thelin brushed it aside.

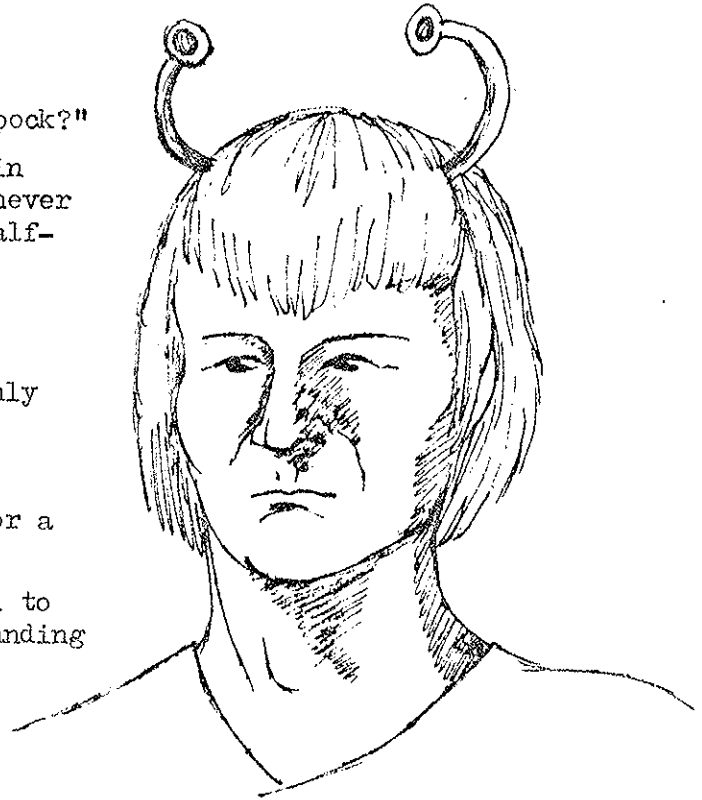
"It doesn't diminish your past achievements and what you did once, you can do again. I'm sure you'll win further honours for your family and see your sentence reduced."

"I still fail to see any explanation of why you joined my ship, or was it because..." Spock didn't finish, thinking that Thelin's family probably knew of the Experiments.

"I know about the Experiments," confirmed Thelin, "and about the Enterprise one."

"And you came aboard to ruin it," finished Spock mildly.

"No, Captain. I came because promotion is likely to be quicker aboard



your ship and I might catch up with you."

"Yes, I can believe the honesty of this reply, but why choose my ship?"

"She's special because of the experiment, therefore serving here will bring greater rewards."

"Or greater risks," Spock pointed out.

"Perhaps, Captain, but again greater risks will bring greater rewards."

"Does that mean you will help or hinder the experiment?"

"Do you really think it will succeed, Captain? I came aboard as Security Chief and will do my job. If Humans misbehave, they'll only have themselves to blame."

"Do you expect them to?" asked the Captain.

Thelin smiled slightly.

"I'll be honest, Captain, I do not like Humans and prefer to ignore the Human species if possible. I'm sure the experiment will fail and see no reason for interference on my part."

"It is acceptable, but such a haughty attitude won't make you popular with my Human crew," remarked Spock.

"Let them think what they like," replied Thelin disdainfully. "I'll deal with any trouble and a Vulcan Security Team under my command should be a deterrent for them."

"Possibly," agreed Spock. "I trust I will appreciate your collaboration, Thelin."

"My loyalty to you is assured, Captain, on my family's honour."

The fact that Thelin accepted Spock using his name and didn't reciprocate was a clear indication that he was genuine. Something was on his mind though and he asked hesitantly: "Did I hear right in the Transporter room? A Human Commander?"

"You heard right. Commander Kirk is Chief Navigator and used to be First Officer. His demotion was due to re-organisation of personnel, not to a disciplinary measure."

"He didn't like it though. He'll go to any length to get his post back, even betray his oath to a Vulcan Captain. I don't think you should put any trust in a Human, and I might prove this to you in the near future, but you never listened to my advice in the past, so you wouldn't now."

"Quite right," agreed Spock. "However, I will listen to any advice about Security. Your record is good, I trust your presence aboard my ship will be beneficial to both of us."

"Thank you, Captain, I'll do my best."

The Andorian saluted and left. He hadn't been gone more than a few minutes when there was a buzz and Kirk entered looking worried.

"Everything all right, Spock? You were closeted with Mr. Thelin for such a long time I wondered if something was wrong...."

"There's nothing wrong, Jim, you tend to worry unnecessarily, a Human failing."

Kirk grinned and asked: "Did you find out if the Andorian is going to be friend or foe?"

"I'm satisfied that Thelin will be an efficient Security Officer," replied Spock briefly. Kirk waited for further comments and saw he would get none. Unbidden the thought of aristocrats sticking together flashed into his mind, but he dismissed it at once. The Captain would give no-one preferential treatment and if the Alien had spoken in confidence, Spock had to respect it.

"I regret I cannot say more, Jim," said the Captain a little apologetically.

"That's all right, I understand," assured Kirk. "I'll find out what he's like soon enough! Have you received the orders for the next mission?"

"Yes, just before Thelin's arrival. I've a last call to make to Starfleet, then we'll be leaving orbit. See you on the bridge, Jim."

Fortunately, the first mission was going to be routine, so Spock and Kirk would be able to keep a sharp watch on the crew and minimise incidents if possible.

When Kirk arrived on the bridge, Gav was in the command chair and deliberately made it swivel to watch him go from the lift to his post at the navigation console. Apart from slightly clenched fists, Kirk showed nothing of his feelings and settled at the controls Sirak had just vacated for him. The Romulan Tal was also on duty.

"I've started Mr. Tal on actual ship handling, Mr. Kirk," reported Sirak. "He needs careful watching at the moment."

"I'll watch him," promised Kirk with a smile at Sirak. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the Romulan turn to throw him an angry glare and sighed. If this hostile attitude persisted, he'd have to hand all the training over to Sirak, it'd be better for all concerned.

After making sure everything was all right and the Romulan's task simple, he remembered his latest check of the navigation console and went to the science station.

"Mr. Salyk, my routine check is satisfactory and can be filed in your data banks."

"Yes, Mr. Kirk, thank you," said Salyk.

The First Officer's voice startled them.

"Mr. Kirk, shouldn't your report be handed to me first?"

Kirk swore under his breath, the more upset because he was in the wrong. He walked to the command chair and handed the report. "I apologise, Sir" he said formally.

"Still thought of yourself as the First Officer," Gav riled. "It won't do, Mr. Kirk, won't do at all and your lapse will be put on record."

Kirk bit his lips not to reply, he didn't think there was any point in arguing. His Vulcan colleague didn't seem to agree.

"Mr. Gav," said Salyk, coming to the command chair, "I accepted Mr. Kirk's report, therefore I'm at fault too for not reminding him you had to see it first, and my lapse should also be put on record."

"Thank you, Mr. Salyk," said Kirk moved, "but it would be unfair and you know it. Navigation is my responsibility, not yours."

"Precisely," snapped Gav, glaring at the Vulcan who remained quite unaffected.

"I beg to disagree," Salyk said formally. "This is a Regulations matter, not...."

"That will do," interrupted Gav, containing his anger. "Mr. Kirk is at fault, no-one else, it's my ruling. Mr. Salyk, go back to your station before you try my patience further."

The Vulcan obeyed, to Kirk's relief. The last thing he wanted was to cause trouble for his colleagues.

"As for you, Mr. Kirk," continued Gav, "I trust you will not take advantage of your Vulcan colleagues who probably don't know Humans as I do. Watch your step and remember that for a senior officer, three lapses are

enough for demotion."

Kirk whitened. If such minor faults were counted, he had no chance. He sensed the disapproval of the officers around him and bit back his protest. He would only make things worse, Gav was hoping for an argument.

Spock came in at that moment and stood in front of the lift surveying the scene for a few seconds, then stepped down and walked to the navigation console, sat and operated controls swiftly. Oh no! thought Kirk in dismay, the ship was off course....

The Captain got up and went to sit in the command chair vacated hastily by the Tellarite.

"Mr. Gav, would you please explain why my ship was 2.65 degrees off course?"

"It was Mr. Kirk's fault, Sir...."

"You were in command, therefore you were at fault," rectified Spock, his voice without inflexion. "It's possible however that others were at fault also, please explain."

Gav started his explanation quickly and Spock cut in:

"I want the facts only, Mr. Gav, not what you thought or any opinion you may have."

The Tellarite swallowed, Spock's cold stare had its usual effect. His report became shorter and more factual. Spock turned to Kirk who had gone to his post hastily to keep an eye on their course.

"Do you confirm, Mr. Kirk?"

"Yes, Captain, I was at fault," admitted Kirk formally.

"And so was I," added Salyk. "As I pointed out to Mr. Gav, Regulations were in cause, not navigation."

"Quite correct, Mr. Salyk," agreed Spock. "Mr. Gav, as you were in command, you're perfectly entitled to put both Mr. Kirk's and Mr. Salyk's errors on record, after which I shall enter your own command deficiency on record."

The Tellarite's grin of triumph vanished abruptly and Kirk stared at the screen to hide his smile. Trust Vulcan logic!

"That's hardly fair, Sir," protested Gav, quite perturbed. "Navigation is Mr. Kirk's responsibility...."

"And you kept him away from it for an unimportant reason. You should get your priorities right, Mr. Gav. Your judgement was at fault, and I trust it will not happen again if I overlook it this once."

"No, Sir, thank you," muttered Gav, rather bewildered to find himself in the position of culprit.

"You may go," said Spock, dismissing his First Officer who was off duty. The Tellarite left without further protest and the tension on the bridge eased considerably. Kirk didn't like it, it meant Spock would feel he had to be on duty 24 hours a day if such incidents were common aboard. From what he had heard from McCoy, several had occurred already. He sensed Tal's gaze on him and the Alien asked in a whisper: "Mr. Kirk, is it in order with you if I speak to the Captain?"

"By all means, go ahead" said Kirk, surprised. The Romulan got up and went to the command chair.

"Captain, I wish to state that if anyone was at fault here, I was. My duty was to maintain the ship on course. I failed to do so."

"I know, Mr. Tal," replied Spock, "but your training is not completed, therefore you cannot be held responsible. It is Starfleet's rule that whoever is in charge is at fault, one of the responsibilities of command as you must know."

"Yes, Sir, I understand and apologise if I spoke out of turn."

Tal went back to his place and Kirk's eyes met Spock's in a look of complete understanding. There was hope where the Romulan was concerned.

"There was no need for you to take any blame, Mr. Tal," said Kirk mildly.

"I'm a Romulan," stated Tal in a cold voice, "and I've my pride, which means that my achievements are mine, but my mistakes are also mine."

Kirk didn't pursue the subject. This was practically the first time Tal had spoken to him outside technical matters. He might be a nice guy, reflected the Chief Navigator, if only he'd forget to treat Humans like a contaminated species!

A call from Engineering disturbed the routine.

"Captain, I regret to have to request your assistance," said Senak's voice. "As a result of a minor incident, several Humans seem hysterical and even Mr. Scott cannot get through to them. Should I call sickbay?"

"I'm on my way," replied Spock getting up.

Kirk wished he could go and help, but he had to stay at his post, he was no longer First Officer and he guessed the hurt would remain for a long time....

"If necessary, I'll send Mr. Sirak to relieve you, Jim," murmured Spock as he went by. Kirk nodded and watched him go with renewed frustration. Just as well Gav had not been on the bridge, or the Tellarite would have accompanied the Captain and a lot of help he would have been! At least Spock could call him if needed, without upsetting the First Officer.

As it turned out, Spock didn't need assistance. His cutting remarks soon put a stop to hysteria and the incident was so silly he had to reprimand the Humans severely. Scotty didn't blame him and wished the new Humans would see the Captain had no choice if he was to maintain discipline.

As the routine journey continued, several incidents occurred and tension could be felt among the crew. Kirk wondered at times if this was still the Enterprise. The new Humans resented all the Aliens above them, Vulcans and the rest. Vulcans were cold beings always right with their logic, Humans hated such types. The Andorian looked at them as though they weren't there, but noticed any infringement of rules quickly enough and was merciless then. The Romulan avoided them like a plague. Kirk felt pretty sure he kept away to avoid confrontation, as a brawl with Humans would hardly meet with Spock's approval. As for the Tellarite, he was fast becoming the proverbial bogeyman and the nickname 'Pig-face' had been given from the start. Gav made no mystery of his dislike and antagonism towards Humans and treated them accordingly, but refrained from any excess when the Captain or a senior officer was present. The worst thing was that the new Humans didn't trust the others because they did not dislike Vulcans and tension was growing between the two groups.

The Vulcan officers disliked the charged atmosphere and as a result appeared colder than ever, because they shut out all the emotions around them. Spock was aware of all this and minimised the unrest by being on duty nearly 24 hours a day, as Kirk had surmised. He couldn't be everywhere at once though, and Kirk being only Chief Navigator could not interfere in other departments, although he was only too happy to help a Vulcan colleague with Human problems. McCoy's and Scotty's report to Kirk about the Humans wasn't encouraging.

"I never met such a prejudiced bunch!" said an irate Scotty. "Whatever the Captain does is wrong and why? because he's a Vulcan devil, they say!"

"I heard that too," muttered McCoy darkly, "and references to 'His Lordship.'"

"We've gone back in time," sighed Kirk, "and I heard it all from you

then."

"We weren't that bad!" protested Scotty.

"You don't remember as I do! Any evidence of Party activity?"

"No, not that we could tell! Sulu has been working on that angle, he knows their methods and detected nothing."

"Good, let's hope it's only prejudice we're dealing with, not fanaticism."

"The Aliens don't help!" swore McCoy. "Gav is an obnoxious so and so asking to be throttled and Thelin looks at us as though we were dirt."

"You complained of the Captain doing just that at one time," Kirk reminded him.

"Did I? Surely not. The Captain's manner is natural to him. Once you are used to it, it doesn't bother you."

"The new comers aren't used to it yet. The fact that the nickname 'His Lordship' has reappeared means they see Spock as the aristocrat above them, but it also means they unconsciously recognise his worth. Time is needed only, I hope."

"Hope you're right," said Scotty. "As far the Romulan, I wish I could give him a good hiding! How can we deal with prejudiced Humans with Aliens like him about?"

"Yet the new Humans don't like Spock or the Vulcans either," Kirk pointed out. "We can't expect results too soon, Scotty, it's early days yet. Keep at it and help Mr. Senak. So far the few problems I've been asked help with by the Vulcan officers haven't been very bad. The Humans made them worse by over-reacting and being silly at times...."

The alarm sounded and Kirk ran to the bridge. Sulu was on duty with Sirak and vacated his chair for Kirk, who noticed his stunned look.

"What is it, Mr. Sulu?" he asked.

The Human didn't have time to answer as the Captain ordered:

"Mr. Somek, please put the message on audio again."

It was Kirk's turn to look stunned as he heard the halting message from the Starship Hood asking for assistance because of a mutiny aboard. It was with great difficulty that he mastered the exclamation "I don't believe it!".

"Any previous record of such an event in Starfleet, Mr. Salyk?" asked Spock.

"None at all, Captain."

"The Hood has a Tellarite Captain I believe."

"Yes, Sir. The crew is multi-racial, with a predominance of Tellarite and Humans."

"Perhaps an unfortunate combination," remarked Spock. "Mr. Salyk, feed the new co-ordinates into the navigation console. Mr. Kirk, maximum speed at once. Mr. Somek, advise the Hood of our estimated time of arrival when Mr. Salyk gives you the information and put any reply on audio."

Orders were obeyed with the usual efficiency and Mr. Somek reported:

"I'm having difficulty establishing contact, Captain."

"Keep trying."

Gav, who had looked as stunned as Kirk by the news, found his voice at last.

"Now we'll have glaring proof of Human treachery...."

"Mr. Gav," interrupted Spock severely, "We know nothing of the situation aboard the Hood. Your deductions are premature and unfounded, please keep them to yourself."

"Yes, Sir, I apologise." replied the First Officer stiffly.

Kirk wished he could find it in him to disagree with Gav's conclusion. It was only too likely that Humans were at the root of the trouble, as usual! There might be attenuating circumstances because of the Tellarites aboard, but to excuse mutiny was impossible, and he didn't envy Spock's task. Besides, it could affect their own crew very badly.... It was depressing to think that the Hood was an experiment which had failed. His dismal thoughts were interrupted by Somek reporting:

"I've established audio-contact, Captain, but cannot get visual contact yet."

The reply to the Enterprise's rescue was enthusiastic.

"Are we glad to hear from you, Enterprise! Vulcans will soon put some order into this chaos..."

"Who is speaking?" asked Spock.

At this moment, visual contact was established and a battered Tellarite faced them on the bridge which was intact but sparsely manned.

"Lieutenant Commander Golt, Chief Navigator and in temporary command. Hurry, Captain Spock, please, or you might find many dead."

"Can you give me some information, Mr. Golt. A mutiny was mentioned."

"Yes, I know it sounds unbelievable. Humans don't like obeying orders, they think they should command, the pitiful snakes...."

"Mr. Golt, I want facts, not meaningless insults."

"Sorry, Captain, you'll get all the facts, believe me. I cannot continue this conversation, having to do several jobs here. Hurry, Captain Spock, we need you."

So it's a Human mutiny, reflected Kirk in utter dismay, trust Human fools to engineer something like this.. or did the Tellarites drive them beyond endurance? If they did, transfer to another ship was a solution preferable to mutiny.... It was going to be a hellish challenge for Spock to arrive at the truth in such a situation and he couldn't even help much....

"You see, I was right, Captain," gloated the First Officer.

"Perhaps, Mr. Gav," replied Spock, non-committal. "I will lead the rescue party myself. Senior officers Gav, Kirk, Salyk, Senak and Thelin will accompany me, with a security force. Dr. Syvik will have sickbay on alert should medical assistance be needed. Mr. Sirak, you have the Con."

Such a wide selection of officers would cover most repairs needed, if any. Kirk got up and handed over to Sulu to join the rescue party when Gav said to Spock:

"Captain, is it wise to take a Human officer?"

"Yes, Mr. Gav. Commander Kirk will know the best way to handle Humans in a difficult situation."

"He should stay," persisted Gav, "or he might help the mutiny."

"In that case it would be most unwise to leave him in command of my ship," replied Spock blandly, "or he might steal it for the rebels."

Sulu burst out laughing and clapped a hand to his mouth hurriedly. Kirk himself couldn't repress a smile and saw the answering gleam in Spock's eyes. Gav would learn sooner or later that he had no chance against Vulcan logic. The truth was, Tellarites loved to argue, for arguments' sake, although Gav never dared to go far with Spock.

They were issued with phasers and Thelin protested at Kirk being handed one by the Captain. "I take full responsibility, Mr. Thelin," stated Spock, "most rules have exception, and Mr. Kirk must be able to

defend himself."

Somek called from the bridge. "I made contact with the Hood, Captain. Their transporter is out of action, thanks to the rebels. Mr. Golt will open the hanger deck's door from the bridge, but isn't sure of the situation in that area."

"We'll exercise caution, thank you, Mr. Somek. Mr. Sirak, let's know when we're at optimum range to use the shuttlecraft."

"Yes, Captain, it should be in approximately 6.4 minutes from now."

The rescue party boarded the two crafts, Spock and Gav taking command of each. Kirk was glad to be aboard the Captain's one which arrived first aboard the Hood and entered the hanger deck without incident. When the second craft had also arrived, the doors closed and they could get out in a matter of seconds.

"Captain," said Thelin stepping forward. "I'll go out first with my men."

"You may accompany me," instructed Spock.

"Captain," insisted Thelin, "Security is my job, your security above anyone else's."

Spock finally agreed to a reconnaissance party while he called Golt to get fresh information. Kirk was favourably impressed by the Andorian's action, but it could be explained by Thelin not wanting the blame if anything happened to Spock. Golt reported that Engineering needed help, so to get there first and assess the situation. Thelin returned shortly and said the way was clear. They reached engineering without meeting anyone, but found a raging battle there, fought with a combination of small hand weapons from the Tellarites and various bits of equipment as projectiles from the Humans, hiding behind machinery or consoles. It wasn't Spock's intention to become involved in a vulgar brawl.

"Mr. Thelin, stay at the door with your men and stun anyone escaping."

"With pleasure, Captzin, but can't we go in and mop up the garbage?"

"No, casualties could occur, which is unnecessary. I'll deal with it."

Kirk understood his plan when they reached the small auxiliary platform shielded by a screen. Two Humans were in occupation and never knew what happened before they succumbed to the nerve pinch. Spock and Senak fed a sleeping gas into the vents and soon the whole battlefield was peaceful.

"You can go in now, Mr. Thelin," said Spock, using his communicator. "Round up the rebels and put them in the brig."

"Yes, Sir. Any chance of some fighting?"

"Mr. Golt said part of auxiliary control was in rebel hands, you may come with us to lend assistance."

The door had to be cut open, but once inside resistance was hopeless against phasers and Kirk felt a twinge of pity for fighters against such odds. Sickbay and other areas were either free of trouble or soon cleared up and they reached the bridge to hear an ultimatum from the cargo hold where the remaining mutineers had taken refuge. They would blow up the ship if attacked.

"We'll see about that," said Thelin grimly. "Let me deal with them, Captain, and they'll regret their threats."

Spock was at the Science station and replied:

"A sleeping gas will do the job, Mr. Thelin, they won't have time to do any harm."

"Captain, I wish you would let me...."

"That's enough, Mr. Thelin, I've no taste for bloodshed. You will have enough work making sure the rebels are all under control and trying to find some answers to this situation by interrogating the prisoners."

Some order was restored at last. The Captain and the First Officer of the Hood were in sickbay, with several senior officers and many security guards. The rebels had had the advantage of surprise and done a lot of damage, although most of it was superficial, but several deaths had to be accounted for : three Tellarites and two Humans. Spock put Gav in command of the Hood while he concentrated on the enquiry. Kirk tried to help by asking McCoy over and they talked to the prisoners, meeting only sullenness or abuse. The Humans interrogated by Thelin were even worse, some prostrated by fear, reported McCoy.

"This is an ugly situation, Jim," said the doctor sombrely. "Something must have triggered it."

"That's what Spock thinks, he was looking into it and interrogating the Captain and senior officers. Come, it's time to attend the meeting to discuss all this. I hope he has some answers."

"So far I've seen no evidence of the Party behind it."

"We'll have to dig deeper to find any, if it's there to find. The fanatics are so clever we may never know."

The briefing room filled up with the Enterprise officers and Kirk found he couldn't approach Spock, Gav and Thelin were talking to him in an aside, and he could guess the theme of the conversation, but he couldn't intrude, not being First Officer any longer. How long would it take him to get used to that? He started when he saw Thelin's gaze on him, staring fixedly as though guessing his thoughts. A gloating smile fled on his lips for a second, then he turned back to Spock. When everyone had arrived the Captain opened the proceedings.

"We'll deal with lesser matters first. Mr. Gav, in your opinion, is the Hood spaceworthy?"

"Yes, Captain, she can reach a Starbase without any difficulty, although some repair will be needed there."

"Thank you. Mr. Salyk, do you confirm?"

The Science Officer gave an exact report of the vessel's status and agreed with Gav, she could travel.

"Mr. Senak, any problem with engines?"

"None, Captain, they sustained no major damage."

"Thank you. Now that we've established the ship's status, we'll consider the crew and recent events. Mr. Thelin, did you get any result from your interrogation of the Human mutineers?"

"Nothing worth mentioning, Captain. I'm sure you've no interest in emotional outbursts or insults."

"None," agreed Spock. "Mr. Kirk, did you elicit any information?"

"No, Captain, they don't trust me, for obvious reasons."

"Dr. McCoy?"

"Negative results, Sir. I'd recommend vigilance, they're desperate enough to try anything."

"Knowing they've little or nothing to lose," finished Kirk. "Captain, were you more successful?"

"I found no reticence from the Captain and his officers. Most of their statements are confirmed by records."

Spock stopped for a few seconds. Kirk understood it meant bad news and the Vulcan was carefully considering the right terms to use.

"I regret to have to say that the situation between Earth and Tellar has deteriorated further."

There must be some kind of curse on us, thought Kirk, one thing wrong after another....

"I knew of this, my father sent me a confidential tape. The Federation Council is trying to salvage the situation and war is not imminent, which is why I didn't mention it. Tension is present however and incidents have occurred. The Hood was called to a small planet in this quadrant to settle a colonists' dispute, inevitably an Earth/Tellarite involvement."

Spock stopped again and Kirk feared the worst.

"I've studied all the records and tapes concerning the colonists with the utmost care," stated the Captain at last, "and my opinion is that faults were on both sides."

"Captain, the Humans started it," protested Gav.

"Agreed, Mr. Gav, but the Tellarites' retaliation was unnecessarily brutal. The Humans caused material damage (the use of a dam was in dispute), but Tellarites took lives."

That makes a change reflected Kirk wryly, for once Humans didn't kill....

"The Captain of the Hood made a report upholding the Tellarites' claim, because the trouble was started by Humans, which meant that an arbitrator would have been sent from Starfleet to look into the matter. However, now that the mutiny has taken place with several deaths aboard, I can only approve the previous recommendation, which means that the planet is lost to the Humans."

Kirk and McCoy looked at each other in dismay, this would give another weapon to the Party, who would conveniently ignore that it was the Humans' fault in the first place, and the last place because of the mutiny.

"Captain," said McCoy, "Can't an arbitrator be sent anyway even if it is pure formality?"

"I'm afraid not, Doctor, my report in favour of the Tellarites and the fact that I'm a Vulcan will automatically give the planet to the Tellarites."

And he'll be blamed for it, and the Vulcans, thought Kirk in frustrated anger, it's so unfair....

"Captain," he asked aloud, showing nothing of his feelings, "Did you discover why the mutiny occurred, or was it only due to the Captain's report?"

"No, I don't think so. Two Humans aboard were related to colonists killed by the Tellarites. I believe they're at the root of the rebellion. What's your opinion, Mr. Kirk?"

"You're probably right. Another factor is that if any Party member was aboard, he or they would have exacerbated the conflict and encouraged the mutiny."

"Of course, they would have blown it up out of all proportion," agreed McCoy.

"Yes, it must have occurred through emotion," said Spock. "Humans have a regrettable tendency to forget facts in a crisis."

"Like they started it," agreed Kirk. He saw the Andorian's surprised gaze on him, probably wondering if his remark was genuine.

"I intend to interrogate one of the possible culprits myself," said Spock.

"Yes, Captain" said Gav with enthusiasm, "Put him through it, make him confess."

Spock's icy glance put a dampener on the enthusiasm.

"Mr. Gav, I shall make it clear that the Tellarites aboard gloating about the Captains' support contributed to the mutiny, the wrong is not all one sided. Mr. Thelin, fetch a Mr. Forkel for interrogation. Bring him here, please."

"Captain, I do not recommend you to do this. The man is violent and may attack you."

"You and everyone else present should be deterrent enough. In the event of an attack, do you consider me no match for a Human?"

"No, no, Captain, he'll be a fool if he tries."

Thelin no longer objected and gave the order for the prisoner to be brought in. One security guard was on each side. Spock dismissed the guards.

"Please sit down, Mr. Forkel," he said courteously, although his features and voice remained expressionless. "I'm Captain Spock of the Starship Enterprise. My officers and I have to ascertain what happened aboard the Hood and report to Starfleet accordingly. I'm sure you'll do your utmost to assist us."

"Go to hell, that's where devils belong!" was the insulting reply.

The Andorian made to get up.

"Sit down, Mr. Thelin," ordered Spock sharply. "Mr. Forkel, I am curious. Where is hell?"

"Eh....."

"You heard, please answer. Where is hell?"

"How should I know?"

"In that case where is the logic of asking me to go there, when you cannot even tell me where it is?"

"You're laughing at me!"

"Vulcans do not laugh, Mr. Forkel."

"No, they wouldn't, stopped by logic no doubt!" riled the Human.

"Dr. McCoy would agree with you," replied Spock calmly.

McCoy grinned at the Captain, which amazed the prisoner.

"However," continued Spock, "I was merely pointing out the futility of your remark. You and your fellow Humans are in a very grave situation. Unless you collaborate, I shall be powerless to help you in any way."

"You're joking! I know, Vulcans don't joke. What is the point of all this? You'll take the part of the Tellarites."

"Captain Spock will take the part of justice," said Kirk, containing his anger. "Vulcans are well known for integrity. You can believe whatever the Captain says."

"You're his stooge, you'd say that!"

"Let's get back to the point," said Spock. "All I want to hear is your version of events, Mr. Forkel, a tape will record it."

The Human shrugged and started a violent diatribe against Tellarites. The fool, thought Kirk, who saw McCoy's anger reflected on his features.

"I asked for facts, not a distasteful emotional outburst," interrupted Spock. "Control yourself and say what happened, no more and no less."

"You're not interested in my feelings, what we had to go through..."

McCoy couldn't stand it. He went to the Human and shook him angrily, to his utter amazement.

"Listen, you fool, what are you aiming at, self-condemnation? The Captain wants to help you, for God's sake, or why do you think he's trying to make you speak like a reasonable being? Do you want to give the impression that Humans are illogical and emotional wrecks? Think, man, think. Use logic for once, it doesn't hurt!"

"You've nothing to lose," added Kirk with a smile at McCoy's fury.



The man gave Kirk and McCoy a look of disgust.

"You're worse than them, traitors....."

"You've ten seconds to start your statement in a coherent manner," advised Spock severely.

"And if I don't?"

"I'll assume all the guilt is on the Humans' side and will report accordingly."

Forkel pulled himself together at last and gave his version.

"We were very upset by the Humans' death on the planet and the Captain upheld his people. Tension was mounting aboard, we couldn't stand the Tellarites arguing and arguing about how an arbitrator was bound to approve the Captain's recommendations and how wrong we were. Then two engineers were killed in cold blood for insubordination, they attacked the Chief Engineer and the First Officer shot them."

"I don't believe it!" exclaimed Kirk, unable to contain his incredulity.

"Let Mr. Forkel finish please, Mr. Kirk."

After a hostile look at the Human, Forkel continued:

"We couldn't let murder go unavenged, submit to a reign of terror, so we armed ourselves as best we could and retaliated. If we had taken the ship over, we might have escaped."

"You killed three Tellarites, why?"

"They killed two Humans, apart from the ones on the planet, why not?"

"The two engineers were killed accidentally, you were misinformed."

"You'd say that!"

"The Captain and the First Officer gave their version, supported by irrefutable evidence, it's the truth," assured Spock. "Did you see the event yourself?"

"No, but I was told by several people how it happened."

Further questioning brought no definite lead as to the origin of the untruth.

"Captain," said Kirk, "someone from the Party is behind it, it has all the marks of the way they operate, creating rumours based on fact, but completely distorted, and taking care not to be traced."

"I agree," said Spock. "The fact that you were misled is an attenuating circumstance, Mr. Forkel, but it doesn't excuse mutiny and murder. I'm afraid you may face a very severe penalty at the Court Martial."

"On your recommendation, Captain?"

"I will state facts, no more and no less, Mr. Forkel."

"I know, feelings count for nothing for you Vulcans, you've no heart and you dare speak of justice!"

Somehow a thin blade appeared in his hand and to throw it at Spock who had got up to conduct the interrogation only took a second. Kirk's reflex action was faster. He threw himself in front of the Vulcan.

"Jim!" shouted Spock, catching his friend's body as it fell against him.

Kirk was clutching his left side and blood ran through his fingers. McCoy was kneeling by his side in seconds and withdrew the knife, then concentrated on the wound, his pouch already open on the floor.

"Don't look like that, Spock!" Kirk tried to smile, "I don't feel bad."

"Doctor?" queried Spock, still holding Kirk while McCoy did what he could.

"He'll be all right, Captain, it's only a flesh wound, if deep. Mind you, he was lucky, his heart was not far from the blade."

"What possessed you to run such a risk, Jim?" asked Spock, anger definitely present in his voice. "Did you expect me to stand still and wait for the blade to strike?"

"I didn't have time to think, sorry," replied Kirk still smiling as his two friends helped him to sit in a chair.

"It's always the same with Humans, emotion comes first and they don't take time to think!"

"I know, Captain, we're hopeless," said McCoy with such a grin that Spock's very stern features relaxed slightly and a half smile appeared in his eyes.

"Jim, you will not take such a risk again, do I make myself clear?" said Spock in a severe tone.

"Yes, Captain, I'll try to obey," replied an unrepentant Human.

A scream startled them and they turned to see Thelin twisting the prisoner's arm to make the weapon fall. In a desperate move, Forkel had managed to get hold of a phaser while everyone looked at Kirk and the group around him.

"That will do, Mr. Thelin," said Spock, "I trust you did not forget my ruling in dealing with the prisoners?"

The Andorian released the Human with disdain.

"I'd not soil my hands with such scum! How he hid that knife is a mystery and I apologise for the risk to you, Captain."

"You warned me...." Spock suddenly ran to Forkel who had fallen on the floor, but he was too late, he had seized the knife and used it on himself.

"I can't stand it any longer," he murmured brokenly, "I've had enough of Aliens and unfeeling monsters...."

McCoy who had rushed to do what he could, got up helplessly. "He's dead, Captain."

Kirk felt pity for the unfortunate victim and knew Spock felt compassion and perhaps guilt at not having prevented the suicide. Thelin felt nothing of the sort and ordered the removal of the body with a shrug.

"This is bad," said Spock at last, "apart from the waste of life."

"The Party will make him a martyr," agreed Kirk, "we've little chance of making the Humans accept the truth now. They'll even say you killed him!"

"Are you sure the records showing evidence about the accident to the engineers weren't faked, Captain?" asked McCoy.

"I'm sure, Doctor, I checked everything myself, after Mr. Salyk did. Do you think Forkel was a party member?"

"No, Captain, he was a dupe of the Party, a tool as were the other Humans aboard the Hood," replied Kirk sadly.

"That's no excuse!" protested Gav, and Thelin nodded to show agreement.

"Captain, mutiny is too serious a crime to recommend clemency," he stated coldly.

"I have to agree," said Spock, his voice flat. "We'll escort the Hood to Starbase 6 which is nearest, to lend assistance."

He helped Kirk to the shuttlecraft. Several Enterprise officers and crew remained aboard the Hood to man the ship, with the help of what crew there was left with Humans in the brig and many Aliens in sickbay.

Kirk was settled in sickbay and had plenty of time to dwell on past events as he recovered. The more he dwelt on them, the gloomier the picture! Spock visited him a couple of times during the few days he was in sickbay, and blamed himself for Forkel's death. It took all the logic Kirk could muster and McCoy too, to make him see that no one could have stopped it, not even a Human. Not that the Captain blamed himself openly, but Kirk guessed at his sombre mood and strangely enough, it was McCoy who finally convinced him.

"Look, Captain, I'm supposed to be a Doctor, a psychologist able to deal with Human problems. If anyone should have guessed at Forkel's suicide wish, I should, not you, an Alien!"

By the time Kirk left sickbay to resume his duties, he wasn't happy at the turn of events. The Humans aboard the Enterprise had heard all that had happened and the ones sent aboard the Hood had talked to the rebels. Because contact with the reliable Humans aboard the Enterprise could be beneficial to the mutineers Spock hadn't stopped visits to the prisoners, but it meant that some of the new Humans also talked to them. As McCoy pointed out, contact between fanatics only brought enhanced fanaticism and milder elements could be converted.

By the time the two ships arrived at Starbase 6, controversy and arguments were numerous and a tense atmosphere prevailed. The one thing which made Kirk smile was Scotty and Sulu's indignation at the prejudice they met, not remembering that they were the same at one time.

Although some Party members were aboard the Hood, they were unable to discover any and Kirk was worried in case too many new Humans listened to the rebels. The Enterprise crew certainly felt very different and no longer united. Most of the new Humans contingent didn't approve Spock's support of the Tellarites and his condemnation of the mutiny. Such sensational news as a mutiny aboard a Starship couldn't be kept a secret, it was soon widely spread. As expected, the Party made a martyr of Forkel, and distorted the facts, showing how the Aliens always supported each other against Humans regardless of justice and Vulcan

integrity was a myth.

When some Humans aboard agreed with the Party's statement, Kirk felt a mixture of anger and sadness, knowing the long hours Spock had spent studying all aspects of the dispute before arriving at the truth. Not a single Party member on Earth knew the facts and few cared about truth. All they wanted was to use events to serve their own ends and stir up anti-Alien feelings. The fact that the Earth Government had outlawed the Party should have reduced its numbers, and it did for a while, but now the Romulan admission first, then the tension with Talar and the colonists and mutiny affair had increased its numbers again. Kirk thought of it as a cancerous growth, always coming back after a temporary retreat. McCoy and Scotty and the other Humans of the old contingent were getting gloomy and depressed, feeling as they were that they were fighting a losing battle. Gav, Thelin and Tal tried their tempers sorely at times, although Tal was only a minor annoyance because he avoided Humans.

Kirk was getting more and more worried. Spock was on duty all of 24 hours a day now, allowing himself no time off to avoid major incidents. With a First Officer who was a hindrance, he had no-one to relieve the heavy burden of command. Kirk did all he could, but his position of Chief Navigator was a handicap and restricted him severely, which increased his frustration and worry.

Once the Hood was safely at Starbase 6, Spock attended the enquiry into the affair, preliminary to the Court-Martial of the culprits. The wide publicity this received was another set back for the Enterprise experiment, how could a Human crew be trusted when it could mutiny? The event was so exceptional that Starfleet was unable to classify it, much as it might have liked to.

Spock's testimony in favour of the Tellarites was even more publicised on Earth and his fairness in putting part of the blame on the Aliens was conveniently ignored by the Party. Kirk was starting to suspect that one or more Party members were aboard the Enterprise, making the situation worse and his suspicion turned into near certainty when he found a brawl in the recreation room between Sulu and Kyle. Kirk tried to separate the two contestants and didn't manage it before Thelin arrived with Security guards. The Andorian made short work of the brawlers and took them to the brig after throwing this disdainful remark to the Humans present:

"You Humans complain of being looked down on by us. How can we do otherwise when you don't even trust each other?"

No-one was able to reply and Kirk felt mortified, humiliated on behalf of his fellow men. The fact that things had come to brawling was a bad omen and Kyle had not been a hot head up to recently. He was one of the newcomers aboard, an Engineer Scotty reported as good, and Kirk felt sure someone from the Party had worked on him to stir up trouble. To discover who it was would prove impossible, Kyle himself wouldn't have realised it. Sulu got a severe telling off by Kirk, and felt sorry when he sensed the same frustration in his navigator as in himself.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Kirk, but I couldn't help it. No matter how reasonably you talk to Kyle and most of the others, it makes no difference, as though they kept hearing other things all the time, it's infuriating!"

"Party members at work?"

"It does look like it," agreed Sulu, "Kyle is not the one, just a tool used to make trouble, any trouble. I knew Kyle before, he was a mild man and treated me as a fanatic... I know I was," smiled Sulu, "but you should have heard him now!"

The Captain, much as he may have regretted it in private, punished the two brawlers severely and without discrimination. Sulu understood Spock had no choice, but it brought him sneers from the crew: he had made

himself a Vulcan champion and where had it got him? Served him right for being a traitor to his race, a despicable turncoat.

After the delay at Starbase 6, the Enterprise started again on her routine mission, the checking of a mining colony in the 4th Quadrant. With the rebels now left behind to face Court Martial, Kirk hoped the crew might settle down to routine and perhaps forget wild talk and avoid brawling! McCoy wasn't so optimistic and feared the day when two factions might appear among the Humans and be at war with each other, which could make the Captain's task of running an efficient ship a hopeless challenge.

Kirk prayed this would never occur and watched the signs of tiredness on his Captain with renewed worry, he should take some time off duty. Besides, he missed Kal-Toya! He had finally convinced the Vulcan to have a game with Dr. Syvik's assistance, but they had only played a few moves when the alarm sounded.

"We're cursed, I know it!" Kirk groaned.

"What do you mean?" asked Spock as they hurried to the bridge.

"A Human saying! No time to explain, Spock, sorry."

"If I get the time at some distant future date, I will compile a dictionary of your Human sayings," said the Vulcan.

"I'll help gladly," grinned Kirk.

They had no time to say any more as they emerged from the lift and settled at their posts. Gav reported that sensors had picked up a large object ahead. After a few seconds, Salyk reported:

"The object is vast and probably a vessel of unknown origin. There's no life aboard."

"Derelict?" queried Spock.

"A possibility, Captain, we're too far at present to pick up further data."

"Increase speed, Mr. Kirk," ordered Spock, "and maintain until we reach optimum range."

The object looked like a ship, visible on the screen now, and Salyk confirmed it was a derelict hull.

"A very unusual design," observed Spock. "Is it safe to go aboard, Mr. Salyk?"

"Further readings are indicated, Captain. I'll let you know in approximately 5.4 minutes, but it should be safe."

Spock got up from the command chair, "I'll organise a boarding party. You've the Con, Mr. Salyk. Mr. Gav, Mr. Kirk, you will accompany me."

Kirk followed with alacrity. The unknown ship could prove interesting, even fascinating, to coin a phrase. Spock called Dr. Syvik and Mr. Senak to join the party as well as Thelin and two security guards. They all met in the changing room to put space suits on and helped each other into them.

"The vessel is safe to board, Captain" reported Salyk by intercom, "and it's very close."

"Switch tractor beams on," ordered Spock, "we're going aboard."

The small distance was soon crossed and they entered through an obvious airlock.

"No atmosphere," reported Gav, "move carefully, debris is everywhere."

They were advancing slowly along the cluttered corridor when Salyk called:

"Captain, return immediately. I repeat, return immediately."

They hastened back to the airlock, hearing Salyk explain: "A sudden crack has appeared in the hull, caused by tractor beams perhaps. The structure is no longer safe."

"We're at the airlock, crossing back now," replied Spock.

Although the unknown ship disintegrated when they arrived back aboard the Enterprise, the party had suffered no mishap so far. They were emerging from the airlock when Spock gave a convulsive gasp, then fell to the floor, his hands clawing at the helmet in a desperate attempt to remove it. Kirk knelt by his side and removed it at once. The Captain's chest heaved in painful spasms and his breathing was uneven and seemed to choke him. Dr. Syvik had his pouch out while Thelin alerted sickbay. The Vulcan selected a hypo and handed the small oxygen mask to Kirk who applied it quickly, while the doctor gave the injection. The patient quietened down then and Kirk removed his own helmet, his breathing just as fast in his anguish.

"What is it, Doctor? Is he all right?" he asked anxiously.

"I hope so, Mr. Kirk, your prompt action was of assistance. Help me to remove the suit before we transfer him to the mobile bed."

"I want that suit" stated Thelin, coming forward. "Clearly a malfunction occurred, perhaps a criminal one."

Oh no! thought Kirk with the awful feeling of reliving a nightmare, no....

"I bet it is, with Humans around," said Gav violently. "They seem determined to kill the Captain."

"I will check the suit myself," said Senak. "You may watch, Mr. Thelin."

Kirk left them to it and accompanied Spock and the doctor. McCoy was waiting anxiously and Kirk sat down and watched their fast and efficient ministrations. Let him be all right, please, he found himself saying in his mind over and over again. He felt weak and hollow, with an awful pressure on him like a weight. He was so afraid... afraid of the possible truth that someone had tried to kill Spock... The thought of going through such a recurring nightmare made him feel sick.

"Are you all right, Jim?" asked McCoy coming towards him at last. "You don't look well...."

"Never mind me!"

"The Captain is in no danger now. I'll let Dr. Syvik explain."

"I should report to the First Officer," remarked the Vulcan, "but as the Captain will recover, a few minutes delay aren't important."

"Thank you, doctor," said Kirk gratefully. "What happened?"

"Do not ask me how or why, it is not my field, but the Captain breathed a toxic gas usually produced by a Rigellian ore called 'Okra'." The doctor stopped for a second, then added: "It is deadly to Vulcans."

"An accident?" he asked without hope.

"A remote possibility, Mr. Kirk, although I believe Mr. Senak should answer this."

"Then it's attempted murder," stated Kirk in a dead voice.

"Which nearly succeeded," said Dr. Syvik. "Had we not returned to the Enterprise so quickly, the Captain would be dead by now."

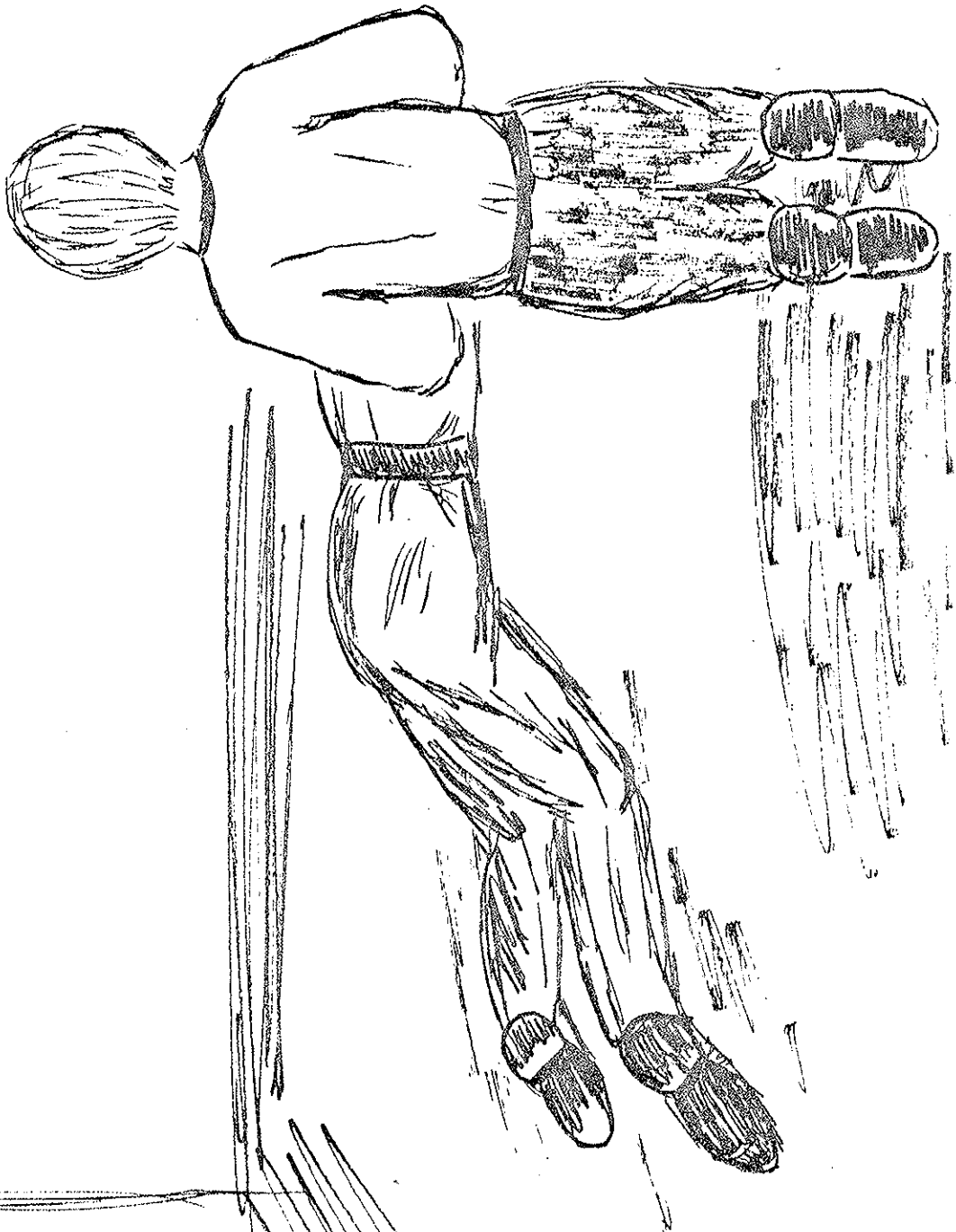
"Because the helmet couldn't have been removed in the absence of atmosphere," finished McCoy.

"Exactly, I must report to the First Officer at once."

Dr. Syvik left and Kirk and McCoy looked at each other with the same forlorn sigh.

"Here we go again," said Kirk at last. "Back to the good old times

L. Smith



when assassins lurked in every shadow."

"The Party?"

"Who else? You must remember how vicious and vindictive they are. They'll claim they're avenging the mutineers and the colonists."

The door opened and Scotty came in at a run. "I don't believe it!"

He stopped at the sight of their defeated attitude, then saw Spock on the bed.

"Then it's true!"

"Yes, it's true," said Kirk savagely. "Pure chance saved the Captain. Why didn't you suspect anything? Did you join the Party again?"

"No! I would never harm the Captain, I swear it," protested Scotty. "I'm sorry I detected no Party member, but I'm known as a defector, like Sulu and the others, so we're not likely to inspire confidence!"

"I know, sorry, Mr. Scott, keep trying just the same."

Scotty left and McCoy checked Spock who suddenly moved and coughed with a slight moan. The doctor used a hypo at once and Kirk was surprised to see him set the bed conditioning to very cool.

"I thought Vulcans like heat."

"Usually yes, but.... Whoever did this is a fiendish monster," explained the doctor in wild anger, "the stuff he breathed was like fire, he must have been in agony, and lucky no permanent damage occurred..... Sorry Jim, you're upset enough as it is."

"No, I'm glad you told me, I won't rest until I lay my hands on that monster. How long before Spock is back on duty?"

"Dr. Syvik will decide, but he may keep him a little longer because he was becoming concerned at the stress on the Captain. Don't fret, Jim, we'll keep him sedated so that he doesn't suffer. He may find it awkward to talk at first except in a whisper, which would make it difficult to command, hence the perhaps enforced rest he might have to take."

"Good, he can do with it."

"Yes, but can the crew do with Gav?"

Kirk had found no answer to that by the time Dr. Syvik returned.

"You should report to the briefing room, Mr. Kirk. Mr. Gav and Mr. Thelin are conducting the inquest into this regrettable affair."

"I look forward to that," said Kirk bitterly. "They'll say I did it!"

"Why you?" queried the doctor.

"Because I'm Human, a member of that cursed species everyone hates the sight of. Do you know doctor, I think I hate Humans too."

"Calm down, Jim," said McCoy severely. "You need a cool head if you want to find the assassin, and a brawl with Gav or Thelin will see you in the brig."

Kirk managed to smile. "I know. Thanks, Bones."

He went to the briefing room where the senior officers assembled and Thelin gave his report.

"To introduce a minute piece of Rigellian ore into the Captain's suit was child's play. As the suits were checked in depth at Starbase 1, it must have been introduced after we left. Anyone could have done it at any time. The fact that it was so well timed to kill the Captain leads me to think it was done just before leaving for the derelict ship. The Captain may be able to assist, he could have seen or sensed something unusual at the time, but I naturally cannot ask him yet."

"Any possibility of an accident, Mr. Thelin?" asked Salyk. "The Rigellian Ore is basically similar to the crystals used..."

"I know, Mr. Salyk," interrupted Thelin, "and Starbase 1 check would have included a test for this, therefore we know it's attempted murder. Any idea as to who the culprit is?"

All eyes turned to Kirk.

"It's plausible to assume that a member of the Party came aboard the ship with the new contingent of Humans," he said coolly enough.

"On the other hand, such a Party member could be found among the so-called reliable Humans," said Thelin. "Party members are expert at play-acting. I propose to interrogate everyone."

"It's your right," said Kirk calmly. "Someone could have seen interference with the Captain's suit and realise only now what it meant."

"Agreed. For instance, an engineer checking a space suit would attract no attention," said Senak.

"I'll look into this," promised Thelin. "One question first however: did any of you help the Captain with his suit?"

All eyes turned to Kirk again.

"I did," he admitted, "at least I checked the fastenings for him."

Thelin gave a thin smile Kirk didn't like.

"Then you've the honour of heading the list of suspects, Mr. Kirk," he gloated.

"Just a moment, Mr. Thelin," said Salyk. "What happened exactly was as follows: I handed the Captain his suit, he took it and put it on, and Mr. Kirk checked the fastenings. Therefore, I must assume I'm also on the list of suspects."

"You're a Vulcan!" protested Thelin.

"And Mr. Kirk is a senior officer whose loyalty to the Captain has never been doubted," stated the Science Officer.

"Therefore, he's not a likely suspect," added Sirak.

"To waste time on him would be illogical," agreed Senak.

"Mainly as he saved the Captain's life only recently," finished Somek.

Kirk looked down to hide his emotion. If only the Humans could hear this, they would realise that Vulcans repayed loyalty with loyalty.....

"Mr. Kirk may have been playing a part all the time," said Gav harshly, "and the Human who threw the knife an accomplice. To trust a Human is foolish, and Mr. Thelin is entitled to conduct his inquest as he wishes."

"Thank you, Mr. Gav, I intend to," said Thelin. "Vulcans are honest and trustworthy, to recognise deceit is difficult for them. I meant it as a compliment," he added hastily, "and I want the man who tried to kill the Captain, whoever he is."

"I hope you find him," said Gav. "I must get back to the bridge and make my report to Starfleet. Let me know if you need assistance."

"Thank you, Sir. I'd like Mr. Kirk to stay behind for questioning."

Everyone left and Kirk faced the Andorian with a promise to himself to keep calm. Clearly Thelin suspected him of some plot, yet he couldn't feel very resentful, because he was pretty sure the Security Chief was genuinely anxious to find the criminal.

"Mr. Thelin," he said gravely, "I want the assassin found as much as you do and will assist your enquiries among the Humans if you wish."

"In order to assist the culprit?"

"You don't trust me, Mr. Thelin, why?"

"I studied your record, and could never trust a man who killed his own brother," was the harsh reply.

"Even if it was to save my Captain?"

"You killed him to shut his mouth, and win the confidence of the Vulcan, a very clever move. I don't know how you tricked Spock, he's the last person to make friends, yet he seems to think a lot of you, a mere Human. It'll be a pleasure if I can prove to him how mistaken he was."

Kirk was starting to understand many things. Thelin being from a high family, Spock should befriend him, not a Human!

"You knew Spock as a child, didn't you?" he said.

"Yes, his family was host to mine when we visited Vulcan."

"Yet you aren't his friend, why?"

He had guessed right, Thelin was angry.

"We're not here to discuss my mistakes, but yours, Mr. Kirk. Your record shows you were on Rigel at one time, therefore you had the opportunity to acquire the ore."

"Maybe," agreed Kirk, "but I didn't. You may search my quarters if you wish."

"Too late now, it wouldn't be there," said Thelin. "However, if you're innocent, you should be able to give me an indication as to which Human is guilty."

"I wish I could, Mr. Thelin, on my word as an officer."

"You may be protecting the culprit."

"Not when that Human tried to kill Spock!" he protested, containing anger with effort.

Thelin looked at him with a frown: "You're ready to betray your own race and you expect me to trust you?" His tone had contempt in it.

"You handled the Captain's suit both before and after, an interesting point," Thelin continued. "Unfortunately, the minute piece of ore needed could easily be hidden." He called the Science Officer by intercom and the Vulcan arrived with a small apparatus he put on the table, then left again.

"Put your hands in that tube" Thelin ordered.

Kirk obeyed, puzzled, and a dial moved into the red.

"It shows you were in proximity of the ore recently," said Thelin, "but as it was in the helmet and you removed it, nothing is proved except that you're clever."

"Or that I'm innocent. If I was guilty, why rush to save the Captain?"

"The plan had failed already, so you avoided suspicion."

Kirk didn't protest. Whatever he said, he wouldn't convince the Andorian and he was becoming weary of the long questioning when Gav interrupted it.

"Well, have you found proof of his guilt yet?" asked the Tellarite.

"No, Mr. Gav, only circumstantial evidence so far."

"You have found the evidence. I ordered Commander Kirk's quarters searched and a piece of Rigelian ore was found there."

"I don't even know what Rigelian ore looks like," he protested, unbelieving.

"You would say that!" mocked Gav. "You can put him in the brig, Mr. Thelin."

"I'm afraid not," replied the Andorian regretfully. "If Mr. Kirk is the would be murderer, he's very clever to have fooled everyone up to now. A clever man wouldn't have kept Rigellian ore in his quarters."

Kirk heaved a sigh of relief and enjoyed Gav's crestfallen face.

"You may go, Mr. Kirk," added the Security Chief, "and I hope to find the culprit before another attempt is made."

"So do I," agreed Kirk.

He left feeling tired out and weary. He hadn't convinced Thelin of his innocence, but the Andorian would be thorough in his interrogation of Humans and might discover something, although his suspicions of everyone could antagonise all the Humans and produce few results.... Too many problems, he couldn't deal with them at present, too tired... He went to sickbay and sat by Spock's bed, putting his head in his hands with lassitude. To have actually been accused of wanting to kill Spock had hurt. Now the future held nothing but fear, the dreadful fear that some day an assassin would succeed....

"Mr. Kirk, I regret to have to ask you to leave," said Dr. Syvik's voice at his side.

"Why?" Kirk flared up. "Do you think I might hurt the Captain too?"

"No, but you're in close proximity. He can sense your thought waves and they must be disturbing because he's restless and trying to overcome sedation."

Kirk got up at once. "I'm sorry, I didn't realise it," he muttered guiltily.

"The occurrence is only due to the Captain's illness. Touch him and attempt to convey reassurance."

"Are you able to do it?" asked McCoy who had also approached.

"Yes, of course I will."

It took him a few seconds to clear his mind of all worries and sense of fatigue and he put his hand to Spock's forehead gently, projecting what reassurance he could muster.

"That will do, you may stop" said Dr. Syvik after a couple of minutes. "Do not worry about the Captain, he will recover shortly."

McCoy accompanied Kirk out of sickbay and handed him a couple of tablets.

"Take them and sleep, you need it and it's your day off."

For once Kirk didn't protest and spent the day in blissful oblivion, McCoy's tablets had been most effective. As he went on duty, he could sense the tension around him to a degree which shook him. The situation was becoming worse to say the least, this wasn't the Enterprise, and felt more like the Hood.... He shied away from the thought and decided to investigate his own department, no-one could stop him there. Sulu was on duty with Sirak and to maintain course for the very distant colony they were bound for was routine he could cope with by himself, which was why Kirk heard Sirak ask him to his private quarters, something he had never done.

"We can talk freely here," said the Vulcan. "I'm very concerned, Mr. Kirk, and I know my colleagues are also. It's becoming difficult to run the ship, although we're all on permanent duty."

"Why? What's going on?"

"You could assess the situation more accurately. Mr. Thelin is conducting his inquest in a manner which could be described as ruthless, but murder is a grave matter and he's perhaps justified."

"Yes, of course, anyone should know that."

"The Humans are upset by the questioning, the suspicion, and resent it. They complain of discrimination and harassment."

"Why are they automatically accused? I'm sure they ask!" riled Kirk. "What do they expect? They should have thought of that before attempting murder."

"Indeed, Mr. Kirk, but in the meantime they've adopted an attitude of non-cooperation. Work entrusted to them takes twice as long, orders are obeyed promptly in appearance, but something goes wrong to delay matters. All departments are affected, we're still on schedule but only just."

"Aren't you getting co-operation from half the Humans?"

"I'm afraid not, with a few exceptions like Mr. Scott and Mr. Sulu and a few others." Sirak admitted reluctantly. "I do not know why, perhaps you could find out."

"I most certainly will," promised Kirk grimly.

He had a quick word with each senior Vulcan officer who confirmed Sirak's story. It didn't make a pretty picture! New rules didn't help, like any group of Humans numbering more than two automatically attracted Security's attention and regular checks of all Human quarters were made all the time, including Kirk's. Thelin had imposed a kind of martial law aboard, in order to discover any plot perhaps? If Kirk had a meeting with his friends in his quarters, it'd be asking for a raid! Where could he have it?.... He went to Dr. Syvik and explained the situation.

"I hate to involve you, Doctor, but I need somewhere to talk to Mr. Scott and Sulu and others without interruption and maybe harassment by Security. May I use McCoy's office?"

"Use mine, it's larger, and I'll move into Dr. McCoy's for the moment." said the Vulcan simply. "Mr. Thelin could try to check McCoy's office again, although I discouraged him once."

"Thank you, Doctor," said Kirk, grateful. He asked Sulu to contact Scotty and the others after making sure Sirak was back on the bridge at his post. While he waited, he went to see Spock. The Captain was still under sedation and a strange machine was over his chest.

"His breathing is painful," explained Dr. Syvik, "and has to be assisted, but he should manage without help by tomorrow."

"Don't let him return to duty too soon, not with the ship as it is."

"I'll do my best, but cannot promise success. You know the Captain."

Kirk nodded. Spock would soon sense the atmosphere aboard his ship and forget minor concerns like his health!

"Everyone is here, Jim" announced McCoy.

Kirk followed the doctor into the office and saw how nervously the Humans looked at the door, and how tired and dispirited they appeared to be.

"We weren't followed, we made sure of that," said Scotty.

Kirk felt as though he was living through a cheap spy story! The Enterprise had actually come down to that... He mastered his anger, it would achieve nothing.

"No-one will come in here, relax" he said soothingly, "and tell me what's going on."

They talked freely one after the other, and the picture which emerged was bleak to say the least. Most of the new Humans were more anti-alien than ever. They thought the colonists and the mutineers justified, and the Captain got what he deserved for supporting the Tellarites. That bit was bad enough, but Gav's open sneers and insulting remarks and Thelin's ruthless interrogations and martial law drove some reliable Humans to anti-Alien feelings, and collaboration with the rest.

"With Aliens like Gav and Thelin about, you can hardly blame them I suppose," said McCoy disgustedly.

"I won't believe Security used torture," protested Kirk, "The Vulcans wouldn't stand for it."

"Mr. Thelin himself interrogated all the Humans," explained Sulu, "and he never touched anyone physically."

"Captain's orders I expect," said Kirk.

"I agree, However, he treated us like criminals he had to make confess to crime and after 4 hours in his office I must admit I felt like committing a crime, killing him!"

"He doesn't believe we've changed and are on his side," added Scotty resentfully. "To him we're all Party members wanting to kill the Captain, we're all equally guilty, the lowest life form aboard!"

"All our past was raked up," said Chekov bitterly, "our allegiance to the Party and all that. I felt guilty all over again, and he saw it. Next thing I knew he was convinced I was the assassin and threw evidence of it endlessly. I nearly confessed to get the ordeal over!"

"His disdain for us Humans is so insulting it puts us at a disadvantage from the start," said Uhura, "and he somehow manages to make us feel like criminals."

"Which we were in the past," admitted Scotty, "and we might as well still be!"

"Who started the non-cooperation campaign?" asked Kirk.

"Who knows?" replied Sulu with a shrug. "Could be anyone. Party members are too clever to be caught that way."

"It's not as effective as they thought," said Scotty. "Vulcans can do without sleep or food for weeks, so the senior officers are minimising the effect."

"Yes, but they can't go on for ever," muttered Kirk darkly.

"This is very bad, Jim," said McCoy. "I was told another fight took place in the recreation room. It may come to two Human factions fighting each other. Such chaos would give another attempt on the Captain's life a good chance of success."

Kirk put a hand to his forehead in a gesture of sheer frustration.

"I know, Security couldn't be everywhere! What can we do?"

"Even the Vulcans don't help," said Scotty miserably. "Their attitudes have become frozen and distant in the extreme."

"That's true, they make it very clear how distasteful all those emotions are to them," Sulu agreed bitterly.

"Because they're feared, they still get obedience to orders," said Chekov "but resentment is building up."

"Gav makes everything twice as bad with his sneers," added Uhura. "Now if he was murdered, it could be any of us!"

"Please don't say that," begged Kirk, "we don't need another murder! Look, don't be fooled by the Vulcans, they do care, only such extreme emotions are an illness to them, you can't blame them for disliking an illness! Thelin is doing his job, not in a nice manner, but murder is not nice, and he wants to find the culprit or it'll reflect badly on him. Gav's planet may fight a war with Earth one day, you can't expect the First Officer to like us any more than we like him."

"That's all very well," said Sulu, "but we've to live with it all."

"I know, but it should ease up as soon as Spock is up and about, or if the

culprit is found, so it may be a simple question of time."

"Let's hope so," said McCoy, "things can't get much worse!"

After a last request to the Humans to help their Vulcan officers as much as possible, the meeting broke up and Dr. Syvik was given his office back.

"I had Mr. Thelin checking up on Dr. McCoy again," reported the Vulcan.

"How did you stop him from coming in to us?" asked Kirk.

"I told him Dr. McCoy was engaged in important work and couldn't be disturbed."

"I thought Vulcans didn't lie," teased Kirk.

"I did not lie," said a faintly indignant Vulcan. "Dr. McCoy was assisting you in solving the Human problem, which is important work."

Kirk grinned to himself as he left, he should have known logic had all the answers! His lighter mood didn't last. He went to the bridge for a spell of duty with the Romulan who ignored him or avoided looking at him when he had to answer a question. As though I didn't have enough problems, thought Kirk, I've to be landed with that young impertinent Alien! I've tried politeness and velvet gloves, to no effect, so I've nothing to lose! Besides, I've had enough of his superior air!

"Mr. Tal," he said harshly, "your conduct towards a superior officer is insulting to say the least. You will address me in the correct manner and be polite enough to look at me when I talk to you."

"Yes, Sir," replied a stunned Romulan, clearly unable to believe his ears.

That's him put in his place, reflected Kirk, feeling much better after the outburst. For the rest of the duty spell, Tal was careful to obey the order, throwing a puzzled look at his commanding officer from time to time. Let him wonder, thought Kirk with an inward smile, maybe that's him sorted out! Should've told him off earlier!

When he retired to his quarters for his off duty period, he tried to think of the future. What was going to happen to the Enterprise under such conditions? The experiment would fail, that was sure. Not only that, Spock might lose his life, and why?..... He switched his viewer on and scanned the news, which did nothing to alleviate his mind. Tellar and Earth were more at loggerheads than ever, and blaming each other in violent and abusive terms. The situation could no longer be kept a secret, it was now official news. The Federation Council had made it clear that a war would mean the immediate expulsion of both planets from the Federation, perhaps in the hope that it would cool tempers. The Party on Earth was most active and was now pinning Forkel's death on Spock and on Vulcan methods of dealing with their enemies. They drove them to suicide!

Kirk switched off in disgust, and the knowledge that many Humans believed it all made him sick. There was Spock desperately trying to help Humans against all odds and what did he get for it? He was made into a monster and they tried to kill him! Was Earth worth his life?.... The answer to that was easy.

As Kirk had feared, Spock left sickbay against doctor's advice. He agreed however, to stay in his quarters for one day while he studied Thelin's reports of the inquest. To Kirk's disappointment, the Captain didn't call him although he saw the Andorian go in once, but then the Security Officer would want to hear the Captain's recollections about the space suit, in case he gave a clue.

The next day Spock called his senior officers to the briefing room. McCoy intercepted Kirk on his way there. "Jim, try not to let him talk too much, it hurts him still, but he won't listen."

"Spock is so stubborn! I doubt that I can do much."

The Captain looked perfectly recovered as he invited the officers to sit down. His voice was affected, but he could be heard easily. Once more, he appeared to be the dignified and elegant officer in charge of his ship, and it would inspire confidence, which was badly needed!

Spock started by thanking Thelin for his work and no-one could blame the Andorian for his lack of success, he had been most thorough. The Captain had to stop to cough for a second and Kirk saw the slight wince and the involuntary clenching of his hands against the pain. Nothing else showed, Spock started speaking again and no-one would have guessed that each word hurt to pronounce. Kirk felt the decision he had reached the day before harden, it was only logical, the thing to do, if only he could convince Spock.... He dismissed the thought to listen to Gav's report to his Captain, which was factual and free of the sneers the Tellarite inflicted on Humans. Each senior officer reported in turn and mentioned the Human problem in similar terms. The Vulcan officers added the admission that they didn't know how to deal with such a problem.

"Mr. Kirk, it's a Human problem, have you any suggestion?" asked Spock.

"I do have one, Captain, but would prefer to give it in private."

Spock hid his surprise as befitted a true Vulcan.

"Very well, come to my quarters in approximately one hour. In the meantime I thank you all for your efforts in dealing with a difficult situation which cannot be allowed to continue. Mr. Thelin, you will stop all interrogations and lift martial law at once."

"Captain, am I to understand that I must stop my inquest?" asked an incredulous Andorian.

"I see no logic in pursuing it," replied Spock. "All it achieves is disruption of my crew, not the discovery of the culprit."

"I need more time..."

"Negative. You will desist and it's an order."

"Very well, Captain," said a stiffly disapproving Security Chief. "Am I allowed to take precautions against a possible recurrence?"

"Yes, Mr. Thelin, with discretion. I'll discuss Security matters with you shortly. What I want you all to remember is that, while it's true there's an assassin aboard, there are also many crew members worthy of trust. If you don't trust them however, why should they trust you? I've no wish to interfere in the running of each of your departments, but I advocate patience and collaboration with any member of your crew. You may find they will collaborate also."

"And if they don't, Captain?" asked Gav.

"We'll come to the problem if or when it arises," replied Spock. "I shall conduct an inspection of the ship in 15 minutes. Dismissed."

Each officer hurried out to warn his subordinates with the exception of Thelin who remained behind to discuss security.

The Captain's inspection was made in complete silence, Spock never said a single word. At the end though, on the bridge, he addressed his crew briefly:

"I made no comment during my inspection because none deserved to be made, apart from the fact that my crew has no longer any pride in the Enterprise. In view of recent events and my enforced absence, I will overlook it this once. My next inspection will take place in three days time, when I will expect my ship and crew to be up to the standards I require or I shall want to know why. That is all."

Kirk at his navigation console smiled to himself. It might do the trick. Most Humans had looked uncomfortable, even ashamed during the inspection, and

no wonder. Spock could convey strong disapproval with a single look.

"You may join me in a few minutes, Mr. Kirk," said the Captain as he left the bridge. Kirk waited for Sirak to replace him before he left the bridge in turn for the Captain's quarters.

He found McCoy glaring at Spock lying on his bed with a combination of helplessness and exasperation, as he repacked his pouch.

"Jim, will you tell the Captain to shut up?" he snapped. "He just had a fit of coughing which was so bad it brought up blood."

"You should take care, Spock," said Kirk, concerned. "I'll leave you to rest."

"No, stay and I'll speak in a whisper, it doesn't hurt then."

Kirk looked at McCoy who shrugged.

"He'll have his own way! Don't let him raise his voice and don't stay too long."

McCoy left and Kirk sat by the bed so that he could hear easily.

"What is your idea, Jim? I'd be glad of any assistance to help my crew."

"My idea is very simple. Give up this experiment, and stop bothering about Humans. Have a ship with a normal crew who will help instead of hinder you."

The Captain was so surprised he was unable to hide it, noticed Kirk.

"I don't understand," said Spock at last, his eyes trying to read Kirk's features. "Why, Jim?"

"You must be fed up with Human problems, and to tell you the truth, so am I. I'm sure you joined Starfleet to discover the unknown, explore the Universe, as I did, not to nursemaid Humans! If Earth is too retarded for the Federation, it's hardly your fault, or mine."

Spock was observing him carefully, the dark eyes probing into his own.

"What do you propose then? Dismissal of the Humans, the Aliens?"

"The obnoxious ones, yes. Call Starfleet and tell Tholev the experiment failed. He'll be so overjoyed he'll let you have whatever you want."

"And then?"

"With a good crew like the one we had before Tholev took over, we'll have gone back in time and be able to function as a ship should. The Enterprise will be the best in Starfleet in no time at all."

"And we shall have failed. How would you live with such a failure, Jim?"

"Easily I promise you," smiled Kirk.

Spock's eyes smiled back, but he shook his head.

"It was a good try, Jim, a good attempt at what you call 'bluff'."

"How do you know?"

"I don't believe we can lie to each other. You want to quit for one reason only, because my life is seriously endangered."

"Isn't that enough?" snapped Kirk, upset by his failure to fool Spock. In a softer voice, he added: "How do you think I could live with the knowledge that my own race killed you and I was unable to prevent it?"

"If you were unable to prevent it, guilt would be illogical," Spock pointed out. "We must continue, Jim, there's no choice and you know it."

"I suppose so," Kirk replied with a complete lack of enthusiasm which

made Spock's eyebrow rise.

"This is not like you, Jim, and I regret... I understand that you no longer feel you share command. Believe me, I miss your assistance."

Kirk nodded. It was hard on Spock as well as himself, and so unjust.

"Have you wondered why the Humans should want Gav as Captain?" asked Spock.

"What? They can't want Gav!"

"Yet he'd be Captain if I died."

"In which case there would be a second mutiny in Starfleet's history! The Party wants to kill you for revenge, apart from having you condemned to death already, and they wouldn't think further than that."

"Unless they killed Gav too and you'd be Captain."

"Me? I'm condemned to death too, and you know it. Why rake all that up?"

"Thelin presented me with this argument, so I'm warning you, should he mention it."

"I see, thanks. I'm his favourite suspect."

"Did he go too far?" asked Spock, his voice rising above a whisper.

"Keep quiet," ordered Kirk. "No, he wasn't that bad and I understand his dislike of me."

"Oh! What do you mean by this cryptic remark?"

"Surely you know! He thinks he should be your friend, not me. He's your equal, I'm not."

"You might be right," said Spock thoughtfully, "in which case I may have remedied the situation without knowing it."

"What are you talking about? Your interview with Thelin?"

"I managed to dissuade him from adopting strong measures like a guard at my door."

"He wanted to know if you had an idea who tried to kill you. Have you?"

To Kirk's utter amazement, Spock looked embarrassed, and afraid?.... It didn't make sense!

"I don't wish to discuss it," replied the Vulcan, his voice rising above a whisper, "please accept it, Jim."

"You mean you know?"

There was definitely fear now in the Captain's eyes.

"Jim, whether I know anything or not is irrelevant, I cannot discuss it with you."

"But you did with Thelin?"

Kirk looked completely mystified and the thought that aristocrats stuck together didn't cross his mind, he was simply baffled, trying to understand.... He suddenly noticed the wild fear in Spock's eyes, was some ghastly Human blackmailing the Captain..?

"Spock, if you know, you must tell me who it is, I'll deal with him."

"I cannot tell you anything," stated Spock, in his near normal voice, "I regret it very much, please don't....."

He fell back on the bed coughing so violently that Kirk got up to call a doctor.

"No, don't!" gasped Spock between painful spasms. Helplessly, Kirk watched the slim frame of the Vulcan racked by the awful cough. When green blood appeared on his lips, in desperation, he seized him and held him soothingly like a child. To his relief, the cough abated and he felt the exhausted

relaxation of the slender body. He laid him back gently on the bed, wiped the blood and whispered:

"Are you sure I shouldn't call the doctor?"

"Yes, Jim," Spock whispered back. "It looks worse than it is, a mere residual effect from the ore."

"Painful though. Don't talk any more, I should have known better!"

He gave him a drink of water and watched the breathing settling back to normal, but he was puzzled anew by the hint of fear in the Vulcan's eyes.

"Anything wrong? I wish you'd tell me, let me help. I'd love to deal with the maniac who tried to kill you."

"I regret I cannot say anything," said Spock in a whisper. "Believe me, Jim, I don't want it this way, but I've no choice. I'll understand if you see it as lack of trust, but it is not that at all."

The fear was there again and Kirk understood at last. Spock was afraid his reticence would upset Kirk, create another lack of communication, another breach. The very fact that the Vulcan had managed to talk about it at such length indicated how concerned he was. He probably hated not being able to tell Kirk, and the fact that he might have if Kirk had been First Officer was no help.

"All right, I won't ask again. I know you'd tell me if you could."

The relief in the Vulcan's gaze was obvious.

"Thank you, Jim, it would have been distasteful to sense another breach....."

"An understatement," grinned Kirk. "You should rest. I'll put a tape of your favourite music on and will leave when you sleep."

He selected the tape and added: "Your lack of comment during the inspection was a good idea, what made you think of it?"

"Actually, Jim, I was finding it too painful to talk."

Kirk grinned and switched the tape on. It didn't take long for sleep to overcome the Vulcan and he left silently.

Once in his quarters, he was puzzled anew. Why on Earth should Spock refuse to talk about the attempt on his life? Refuse to name his murderer if he knew? It didn't make sense! Thelin must have asked that same question, did he get the same answer...?

There was a buzz at his door and McCoy came in. "How is the Captain?" he asked anxiously. Kirk reported the coughing and the doctor swore.

"Give me anyone but a Vulcan as a patient! You're bad enough, Jim, but the Captain... Still I can understand how anxious he was about his ship. The tension has eased a little already, now that Thelin has been stopped and Gav has to watch his step."

"Good, let's hope it gets better, not worse!"

Kirk was pleased to observe the improvement for himself the next day, perhaps the next inspection in 3 days' time was enough to get work done quicker, or maybe a few Humans had returned to sanity and it was their way of thanking the Captain for stopping the endless questioning and harassment. To see gratitude so early was perhaps optimistic, he would wait and see.

When he went to have his lunch, he knew he wouldn't be able to sit at Spock's table, the Captain was on duty. Usually, he sat either with McCoy or Scotty, or with Vulcan senior officers. As luck would have it that day, the only seat available was at a small table already occupied by Thelin. Kirk nearly took the tray to his quarters, then resolved to brave the enemy!

"May I sit at your table, Mr. Thelin?" he asked very politely. "I'm afraid it's the only place left."

"Which is the only reason why you came here," replied the Andorian.

"You're right," admitted Kirk with a smile. "However, I never noticed any desire on your part to sit at my table."

"I find Human company boring and depressing," said the Andorian rudely.

"Many are the times when I'd agree with you," remarked Kirk in a bland voice. "Have you ever heard a Party speech? It's enough to make you wish you were deaf, or to see the orator struck dumb."

"You're not a typical Human, are you, Mr. Kirk?"

"I wouldn't know," grinned Kirk, "Who says I'm not?"

"The Captain."

"Oh! I guess he should know, and he's quite a special Vulcan himself."

"I've to agree," said Thelin, "and the thought of a loose assassin about is not something I relish."

"I can understand that. Did the Captain have any idea who tried to murder him?" he asked casually.

Thelin was visibly surprised.

"You mean he didn't tell you?"

"No, why? Do you know?"

The Andorian's features shut like a mask, becoming as cold as a Vulcan's.

"I only discuss security affairs with the Captain," he said with his usual rudeness.

"Very wise," said Kirk, refusing to be baited, but with the uneasy feeling that Thelin did know more than he did. It was only an impression however, and he had no knowledge of Andorians, so he could be wrong.

During his next off duty time, he considered the question, admitting with his usual honesty that he was a little hurt if Spock could talk to Thelin, but not to himself. However, Spock had never said he knew his murderer, only that he refused to talk about it, which could mean anything. Whatever it was, Spock must have a very logical reason for not telling me, he reflected, he could have lied, but he didn't. I'll respect his honesty and his silence, which won't stop me from keeping an eye on my Captain!

He wasn't the only one. Kirk noticed unobtrusive security patrols on the officers' deck. Wherever the Captain went for any length of time, a security guard or Thelin himself soon appeared, as though casually. It was Sulu who noticed something else and asked Kirk:

"Why is Security keeping a watch on you, Mr. Kirk?"

"On me?"

"Yes, didn't you notice? It's not obvious, but it's there just the same."

"I've no idea," replied a puzzled Kirk, "unless they think I'm the murderer!"

"I shouldn't think anyone but Gav would believe that!"

"Could be because the Party condemned me to death, I suppose."

Spock confirmed it was the reason, and Kirk had to admit it made sense. The Party might want to show that they executed traitors to their race. This meant they were back to square one, with Spock keeping an eye on Kirk and Kirk keeping an eye on Spock.

The promised inspection duly took place on schedule and Spock was able to talk properly by then, but again made no comment. Instead he had the crew assembled and addressed them.

"I'm not at all satisfied with the crew of the Enterprise. I remember a time when pride in the work and in the ship was primordial and the whole crew functioned as a well integrated and efficient unit. What was achieved once can be achieved again, or I'll have to come to the logical conclusion that Humans are as irresponsible and untrustworthy as many Aliens say they are. The answer to the challenge lies with all of you. Finally, let me assure you that suspicion, questions and harassment are things of the past. I do know there's an assassin among you, but to hunt one man down is secondary to the well being of the crew and the running of the ship, therefore the past is best forgotten. That is all, dismissed."

Kirk gave Spock a small nod of approval and watched the crew troop out in a thoughtful silence. Any Party member would try to minimise the speech somehow, but it was obvious many Humans had been impressed. Hopefully, enough would respond and the field would narrow down until Party members could be pinned down. On the other hand, they could play act at being pro-Alien, anything was possible where the Party was concerned!

He joined Spock when only senior officers were left.

"A good speech, Captain, I couldn't have said it better myself."

"Thank you, Mr. Kirk."

"Mr. Thelin and I think it's crazy to stop the hunt for the killer," said Gav stiffly. "He'll strike again."

"Which may give us the chance to catch him," said Spock. "In the meantime, the ship and crew require our whole attention, nothing else. Do I make myself clear, Mr. Thelin?"

"Yes, Sir," replied the Andorian, "your orders will be obeyed."

"What orders are these?" asked Gav. "As First Officer, shouldn't I have been told?"

"Security is Mr. Thelin's department," said Spock. "You may however see a copy of my instructions to him, it's available to all senior officers."

This mollified the Tellarite, but Kirk saw a strange smile on Thelin's lips, as though he was amused by something. He wasn't very familiar with Andorians though and could be imagining it, so he took no notice and followed the officers to the bridge.

On Kirk's instructions, Sulu, Scotty and the others made the most of the Captain's generosity in forgetting his killer for the sake of the ship and crew, and some Humans were won back. Counter-rumours that all the Captain wanted was a good ship to enhance his own prestige naturally started, but on the whole the stop to Thelin's probing was so welcome that the effect was beneficial, and the non-cooperation vanished. It was only a small victory, anti-alien feeling persisted, but had lost some of its impetus and violence.

A few days later, the Enterprise was due to establish orbit around the mining colony to be checked. It was a distant world and the journey had been a long one, which was intended by Starfleet. A long routine journey gave a new crew or as in this case a partly new one time to integrate. The distress call from the Hood and subsequent journey to Starbase 6 had delayed their arrival, it was possible the miners had given them up. Visits from Starships were not frequent in such isolated parts, but a statutory 5 yearly check was required by law.

"This may prove a pleasant stop, Jim," said Spock that evening as they settled to a game of Kal-Toya they were now able to practice occasionally. "According to records, the settlers were pacifist groups from Earth who came out here to escape Human aggressiveness."

"Like the Party," said Kirk. "Might be a good idea to let the crew have leave. A pacifist influence can only be beneficial."

"The crew does need leave. If you go down, take care, Jim."

"And you! Come on, I've got you cornered!"

"Illogical in 3-D, I can move freely."

"This game will drive me crazy by its sheer logic!"

"Contrary to emotion, logic has never driven anyone crazy, to my knowledge," remarked Spock.

His intercom buzzed. "Captain, we'll be establishing orbit in 5.3 minutes," reported Gav.

Kirk followed the Captain out with a groan. "Told you we were cursed! Can't even finish a game in one go!"

"We might be able to if the crew goes on leave."

"I'll look forward to that!"

They emerged from the lift and Spock went to the command chair vacated by Gav while Kirk went to the navigation console, cursing inwardly at the hurt he felt at seeing Gav in his place. Tal got up to let him sit by Sirak.

Orbit was tricky to establish but Kirk and Sirak worked well together and managed it smoothly. Tal was clearly impressed and his attitude since Kirk's telling off much improved, which didn't mean he liked Humans any better.

"Preliminary readings, Mr. Salyk," requested Spock.

The Science Officer read out the usual characteristics of an Earth type world and suddenly stopped for a second, then continued with typical Vulcan calm:

"Captain, this world is inhabited by Humans and Tellarites.

"Explain."

"I cannot, Sir. Records definitely state that this colony is Human."

"Mr. Somek, send a message to Starfleet reporting this new situation. We'll investigate and I would say that care is indicated."

"Indeed, Captain," agreed Salyk. "The latest news indicated that Earth and Tellar could declare war at any moment."

"Message sent, Captain," said Somek. "No answer can be expected within two weeks, we're on our own."

"Please send another message, in code this time, suggesting that it may be indicated to check Earth or Tellarite colonies if possible to discover if similar situations exist. Mr. Salyk, any sign of conflict down there?"

"No, Captain. There's no vessel in orbit, unless it's hiding behind the planet."

"Mr. Somek, contact the colonists. It will be interesting to see who answers."

"Contact established, Captain."

"On audio-visual, please."

The screen showed an elderly Human alone in a normal looking room.

"This is Captain Spock of the Starship Enterprise. Who have I the honour of addressing?"

"My name is Frederic Vander, elected head of our colony. I assume you've come for the five-year check, you're late."

"I apologise for the delay, it was unavoidable. Please explain the Tellarites presence."

"This world is large, we're only a small group of peaceful people, there's room for others."

"A most commendable attitude," said Spock. "This new situation will require meeting the Tellarites also."

"Yes, of course, Captain. Am I right in thinking you're a Vulcan?"

"Correct."

"I've heard many things about your people, Captain, and will ignore the unpleasant ones. Is it true your race is honest and trustworthy?"

"We try to be, Sir,"

"You're most welcome, Captain. Peace, honesty and truth are needed everywhere. Beam down whenever you wish, and take care, our atmosphere can be tricky."

"We'll beam down in approximately 15 minutes, Sir."

Contact was broken and Spock remained silent for a few seconds, staring absently at the screen.

"Mr. Kirk, your opinion," he said at last.

"Same as yours I guess, Captain," replied Kirk. "Something is wrong, Vander's calm was forced and he asked for the help of peace, truth and honesty. He also said take care."

"We'll take care. This world is isolated and rich in ores which would be most useful in a war. Mr. Vander pointed out that we were late, it's possible the Tellarites assumed the check had been made, which would mean the unlikelihood of any interference in whatever plan they had."

"Captain," protested Gav, "are you implying that my people came here as invaders?"

"I'm implying nothing, Mr. Gav, many other possibilities exist, I was merely expressing one. We'll see for ourselves. Mr. Gav, you've the Con...."

"I protest, Captain. If my people are involved, wouldn't I be the most qualified to judge them? You'll take Mr. Kirk for the Humans I expect."

"There's truth in what you say," agreed Spock. "Very well, Mr. Sirak, you've the Con. Mr. Gav, Mr. Kirk, Mr. Salyk and Mr. Senak, you come with me. Doctor Syvik and Dr. McCoy will also accompany us for the medical check. Mr. Thelin, come with 4 security guards, but keep in the background. Officially, you'll be assistants to Mr. Salyk and Mr. Senak for any check on equipment. Phasers will be issued all around."

"Even to Mr. Kirk?" queried the Andorian.

"Yes," said Spock coldly. "As I told you before, your lack of trust in Commander Kirk is totally illogical."

The selected officers followed the Captain out and Kirk caught a look of what he read as hate in Thelin's eyes fixed on him. The Andorian turned away quickly, and Kirk wondered if he had seen right. It had only lasted a few seconds, he could be mistaken. Why should Thelin hate him? Jealousy? It seemed odd if Spock had talked to the Security Chief about his murderer and not to Kirk. Impatiently he refused to dwell on the mystery any longer, perhaps it'd solve itself one day.

The landing party beamed down to the centre of the Human settlement as instructed. Vander was there with several Humans and a group of Tellarites.

The visitors were welcomed by both Humans and Tellarites and taken on a tour of the Human settlement first, then the Tellarite one. Everything seemed normal, no-one wore any weapon and the mining was done by both races. To Spock's questions, the Tellarites answered that they had come so far to avoid becoming involved in any war.

The Captain seemed to accept it all and signalled to Kirk to say nothing as they shared a meal with their hosts, then were given a dwelling for the night. As soon as they were alone, Salyk checked for listening devices. There were none, and Spock sent the guards outside to keep watch while they discussed the situation.

"Things are not what they seem," said Kirk.

"If my people were invaders, they'd have weapons to keep Humans under control," protested Gav.

"I must admit to your argument being logical," said Spock, "and I don't know the answer yet, but there's fear here."

"Great fear," agreed Dr. Syvik. "I did what you asked, Captain, and a mild probing was enough to detect great anxiety among the Humans, but anxiety was also present among the Tellarites."

"To-morrow we do the checking we've come to do, and we watch and listen with the utmost care. If any of you discover an odd fact, no matter how trivial, report to me as soon as convenient."

By lunch time the next day, an odd fact had already emerged: the relatively small number of Humans. Spock sent Salyk back to the ship to check records, under the pretext of getting spares for the miners' equipment. The Science officer beamed down again in the early evening and reported that the Human colony had been much larger at the time of the last check five years earlier.

"I followed your instructions and sensors probed in depth into this planet, Captain," added Salyk. "They revealed the presence of a number of Humans under the largest mine, with a few Tellarites, but I was unable to get exact co-ordinates due to the peculiar atmosphere of this planet."

"Hostages!" exclaimed Kirk.

"The idea had crossed my mind," said Spock.

"It explains the terror of the Humans," agreed McCoy. "Their families are threatened if they let us suspect anything."

"And it explains the fear of the Tellarites, fear of being found out," finished Kirk.

"Exactly," approved Spock. "Now we can take action to remedy this situation."

"Captain," said a worried First Officer, "in spite of appearances, my people may be blameless."

"I doubt it, but they will get the chance to explain. I trust that you will remember your rank of First Officer of the Enterprise, Mr. Gav, and your allegiance to me."

"Yes, Captain, if my people are guilty, I will not interfere."

"Thank you. We'll act as soon as night falls and find the hostages in order to free them."

"Captain, may I try something first?" asked Kirk.

"Specify."

"I could go to Vender and invite him to come for a walk so that we wouldn't be overheard, then ask him the best route to where the hostages are, it would save us time."

"Agreed. Take care, make sure he understands that lives are at stake if he doesn't act naturally."

"May I have a word in private, Captain?"

He drew Spock aside and murmured: "Keep an eye on Gav, he could warn his people."

"He will stay here with us while you are out, and will not get the chance."

I do not believe he would take it in any case."

Kirk hurried out feeling puzzled once again. It had not occurred to him that Spock trusted Gav, yet it was normal for a Captain to trust his First Officer and Gav might be reliable apart from his dislike of Humans, a trait many Aliens shared!

Kirk found Vander at his home and manoeuvred him very skillfully into the open, no-one could be suspicious of two Earthmen going for an evening walk. He took great care not to startle the Human when he got round to the question of the hostages, and managed to convince Vander that they could be freed.

"We've a full contingent of Vulcan security force aboard we can call upon, no Tellarites would stand a chance against them."

"Force is not the way, only a surprise attack might save the hostages," replied Vander. He went on to explain where the hostages were kept in precise terms, and indicated the best way to get to them. Kirk reported back to Spock and found that Senak had obtained a plan of the mine to check its equipment, so it was easy to pinpoint the hiding place in a disused area and the way there.

"Couldn't we just beam the hostages aboard the ship, Captain?" asked McCoy.

"Negative, doctor. The Tellarite guards would hear the transporter beam a few seconds before it operated and have time to kill several Humans. Also, their number is too great to beam up at once. We cannot use sleeping gas either, there are no vents to send it into this area. Mr. Thelin, any suggestions? I do not want to get involved in dangerous fighting which could provoke casualties."

"I'll create a diversion at one door, Captain," replied Thelin, "pretending to be lost and scared, then...."

"Just a minute. Are you sure you can pretend to be scared?"

"I'll do my best," smiled the Andorian, "and why should they suspect a lone Alien? I'll pretend to be hurt, unable to move so that the Tellarite guards come out. My men will deal with them without fuss, you know how effective Vulcans are."

"A good plan," approved Kirk. "The door will remain open and when the guards don't go back, others will come to investigate. Then we dress ourselves as Tellarites and go in to round up anyone left. No-one will know from a distance if we keep our heads down."

"It should work," approved Spock. "Mr. Gav, I will not ask you to act against your people, you may join Vander until we return."

"I'll come with you if I may, Captain, the company of a Human isn't desirable."

"As you wish. It's dark by now, we can leave."

The rescue expedition went without a hitch. They found the disused area and disposed of a couple of outside sentries with ease. Then Thelin went into his act quite convincingly and everything else went according to plan. By early morning the hostages were safely back with their families and the Human settlement was protected by a cordon of Vulcan security guards.

The Captain invited the Tellarite leader to answer the charges laid by Vander, and explain the hostages. It became clear that Spock's speculation had been right. Assuming the check by a starship had already been done, the Tellarites' ship had come to steal valuable ores and made Humans work for them. The arrival of ^{the} Enterprise had been a shock and hostages taken to ensure Human co-operation.

"This may not be any concern of yours, Captain," protested the Tellarite leader, "Tellar and Earth will be at war soon and I conquered this planet."

"Conquest isn't recognised by the Federation Council," replied Spock in his best icy manner, "and Tellar and Earth still belong to the U.F.P. This planet is an Earth colony and you've no right to be here at all unless Mr. Vander invites you."

"Over my dead body," was the Human's answer, short and to the point.

"You've no choice but to leave," Spock advised the Tellarites. "I presume your ship was hiding in orbit when we arrived. You may call her and beam up. Needless to say, the Federation Council will be informed of your ruthless behaviour here which is hardly to Tellar's credit, sanctions may be applied and compensation requested for the Humans."

"We may be at war before then," declared the Tellarite.

"In that case Tellar and Earth will be expelled from the Federation and the affairs of both planets won't be any concern of the Federation or of Starfleet."

The Tellarites were duly evacuated and calm returned to the planet. The Human settlers were peaceful people anxious to lead a quiet life and made no secret of their gratitude to Spock and his officers. Gav was more difficult to include, but was tolerated for the Captain's sake. Spock's request to grant leave to his crew was welcomed by Vander and his people. The Captain and his officers were guests of honour by then, but Gav, Kirk and Thelin beamed back aboard to organise the rota for the crew's leave. Kirk was looking forward to beaming down again to join Spock and McCoy and didn't linger once his duties were over. He was on his way to the transporter when a scream startled him. He was even more startled to find the emergency stairs collapsed on top of the First Officer. Doubting that he could free the Tellarite from the awkward mass of iron by himself, he gave the alarm and knelt by the Alien telling him help was on the way. Gav didn't seem to hear, his gaze was fixed on a bar balancing precariously over his head. Kirk saw this and managed to grab it just before it fell, jarring his arm and shoulder badly. Thelin was the first on the scene.

"Very interesting!" he said ironically. "How did you manage to get him under there, Mr. Kirk?" Kirk was in no mood for sarcasm.

"Get him out, he doesn't look good."

Security guards arrived with engineers and Thelin organised the rescue efficiently. Gav was taken to sickbay.

"The Captain should be told," advised Kirk.

"I will tell him," said Thelin harshly.

Kirk left him to it and had his shoulder seen to. The Vulcan orderly had hardly finished when the door opened and Spock came in. Kirk could have sworn a sigh of relief escaped him.

"Are you all right, Jim?"

"Yes, a slight sprain, that's all," he smiled.

"I told you he wasn't hurt," said Thelin's angry voice behind the Captain. "It's Gav who is hurt, your priority is there, Captain."

"I'm not a doctor," said Spock, helping Kirk to stand, "My presence by Mr. Gav's side will neither help nor hinder his recovery. Go and rest, Jim, I'll look into this."

"His testimony is needed," snapped Thelin impatiently.

"That's true," agreed Kirk, "I'm fine, Spock, really, and want to know what happened."

He followed the two officers and they saw Dr. Syvik by Gav's side.

"He's badly hurt, Captain, but he should recover if no complications set in within the next 12 hours."

"Can he be interrogated?"

"Only for a few minutes, no more."

Spock bent over the Tellarite. "Mr. Gav, do you know what happened? Why did you use the stairs?"

"Lift... out of order," murmured the Alien.

"I see. Anything else you can tell me?"

"No, Captain.... I saw no-one... except Mr. Kirk."

"Yes, he found you and helped you."

"Him? Never!... He's behind it, wants my place...."

Gave became agitated and the doctor stopped all questions, adding:

"If was fortunate you found him so soon, Mr. Kirk. He was losing blood so fast he'd have died soon."

Spock left sickbay with Kirk and Thelin and the Andorian stated:

"The lift was working, Captain, and no 'out of order' sign was on the door. Someone put it there and took it away."

"It could have been anyone," said Kirk, "Gav wasn't liked by any Human."

"Mr. Senak is looking into the possibility of an accident, which is remote," said Spock. "I'll ask some questions myself, Mr. Thelin, while you establish where everyone was when Mr. Gav was hurt. All senior officers in the briefing room in three hours."

The Captain was already there when the senior officers assembled. Senak confirmed it had been no accident, but attempted murder against the First Officer. Kirk repeated the little he had seen. Thelin said each Human had been somewhere else at the time of the incident, except Kirk, if they were to be believed.

"This confirms my theory, Captain," finished the Andorian. "It's obvious the same assassin tried to kill you first, then Mr. Gav. Had he succeeded, Mr. Kirk would be Captain by now."

"How could I be Captain if I was in the brig for murder?" Kirk pointed out. "You'd put me there if you could!"

"Because that's where you belong," said Thelin viciously, "I'm not blind...."

"That will do, Mr. Thelin," interrupted Spock. "Why should Mr. Kirk give the alarm to save the First Officer if he wanted him dead?"

"Perhaps he had to appear to do it to avoid suspicion. A member of the Party would have done the dirty work for his benefit."

"Illogical, when the Party condemned him to death. Whatever happened, I trust your inquest will be more discreet than the last time. I will not have such disruption again, and propose that the leave takes place as scheduled."

"Captain!"

"The crew does need leave and to withdraw it would punish all for the crime of one."

Thelin had to obey and Spock beamed down again with Kirk as soon as he heard that Gav was out of danger. No Human had felt much sympathy for the Tellarite, mainly as he was still accusing Kirk.

The leave started normally and Vander was pleased to have his guests of honour back. Kirk sought McCoy out and reported what had happened, saying as he finished: "I'm starting to wonder if Thelin is behind the attempt on Gav's life to implicate me."

"Far-fetched, isn't it? Don't Aliens stick together?"

"Thelin hates me, he missed his chance to be Spock's friend in childhood and is now too late because of me. He's high born, it's his due to get what he wants."

"Yes, but how would Gav's death help? You'd be First Officer, above him."

"If he could make Spock believe I was the culprit..."

"Don't be silly, the Captain would never believe that!"

"I know that, and you know that, but does Thelin know it?"

"Put like that, it makes some sense," agreed McCoy thoughtfully, "but the way I see it, the same assassin from the Party tried to kill the Captain and Gav, the Captain because he's condemned to death, and Gav because he's of a race threatening war with Earth and a pain in the neck!"

"I agree it's the likely explanation and cannot see Thelin as Spock's assassin, unless he wanted me accused of that too!.... My judgement may be obscured by Thelin's hate. It makes me feel uncomfortable, afraid even."

"He's not a nice adversary. Tell the Captain, he'll get him off your back."

"I'm not so sure..."

"What's the matter with you, Jim? If you doubt the Captain, you must be ill!"

Kirk smiled. "From you, that's rich!"

"I guess it is," grinned McCoy.

As it happened, a confrontation occurred soon. Thelin beamed down to report his lack of success in tracing the would-be murderer and emphasized again how Kirk was the most likely suspect, he'd be First Officer again. Kirk saw red, "What about you?" he snapped.

This clearly shocked the Andorian into silence and Kirk repeated the theory he had told McCoy, but wondered if he had done the right thing. Thelin was shaking with anger.

"You dare accuse me?" he stammered at last. "And of trying to kill the Captain too no doubt? You're vile, far worse than I thought....."

"No worse than you....."

"Silence," ordered Spock, his voice cutting through the exchange like a knife. "I never thought I'd see the day when two of my senior officers would forget all dignity and behave in such a distasteful and illogical manner."

The two culprits had turned towards the Captain and Kirk saw sadness in Spock's eyes.

"I apologise, Captain," said Thelin stiffly.

"I'm sorry, Captain," said Kirk, really contrite.

"I trust this is the end of the matter and that neither of you will repeat such emotional behaviour in the future."

"Captain," asked Thelin, "May I continue with the security measures we discussed?"

"Yes, although they didn't prove very successful."

"I regret it. The special measures might give results one day."

"If they include keeping an eye on me, I wish you wouldn't, it makes me nervous," said Kirk.

"The Captain himself instructed Security to keep an eye on you" said Thelin.

"I know, Spock, make it stop, please, it does make me nervous."

"I regret it," said Spock formally, "but my orders stand."

"And they'll be obeyed," said Thelin with a gloating smile at Kirk. "I'll keep you informed of any progress, Captain."

"I'd suggest that you take some leave, Thelin. I'm aware of the amount of work you had to do. This is a pleasant world and you deserve to enjoy it more than most."

"Thank you, Captain, I will take a few days off."

He saluted and left, clearly mollified by Spock's solicitude, although his last glance at Kirk wasn't friendly.

"Aliens can be difficult," said Kirk awkwardly, "and I'm including myself as Alien. I'm sorry...."

"Please don't mention it again, Jim, I find the whole thing distasteful."

"So do I, and so does Thelin I expect."

"You shouldn't have accused him, I didn't expect this from you."

"Because he's high born and I'm not!" The exclamation escaped Kirk because he was upset by Spock's remark, but he felt even more upset when he sensed the hurt he had inflicted. "I'm sorry," he said dejectedly, "I'm Human after all, and can only behave like one."

"It's not important, Jim. I'm sure many are the times when logic annoys you."

Kirk grinned in relief and they went back to the Kal-Toya contest. Spock had had the game beamed down for his benefit.

The leave proceeded smoothly and Kirk was amused to see the shock of many Humans confronted with other Humans singing the praise of the Vulcans loud and clear. Immediately, rumours started that it was a put up job and the miners had been bought, but Kirk didn't think everyone would believe that, and the fact that the Captain had taken the side of the Humans this time should impress at least a few.

The mines were reputed to be full of beautiful ores and minerals and inspired curiosity. When Gav recovered and beamed down to have some leave too, Vander organised a visit of the largest mine for the visitors. Nearly everyone went, including Spock and his officers, and many crew members. Kirk didn't stay with the senior officers' group, but joined McCoy and Scotty instead.

"Had enough of Aliens?" riled McCoy.

Kirk changed the subject. The words had been accurate enough, because he didn't feel comfortable with Thelin and Gav around, so he avoided them even if Spock was present. The tunnels seemed endless but the sparkling ores and minerals were most attractive in the subdued light.

They arrived near the disused area and several crew members wanted to see the place where the hostages had been kept. Vander obliged and led the visitors there, warning them however, that it was best not to stay too long, because this part of the mine wasn't checked regularly for safety. It was when they started to leave that a small explosion was heard and the roof shook, while rubble and bits of rock fell in places. This made the visitors leave in a hurry without any urging from Vander. They had just reached the open air when the whole area collapsed onto itself in a large crater, quite deep in the middle. To make sure everyone had got out safely, Vander called out the names from his list of the party.

When he called out Kirk's name, there was no answer. McCoy and Scotty looked at each other in bewilderment and anguish, and could only say they thought Kirk wasn't far behind them while they followed the escape route.

It became obvious that their friend had been trapped somewhere in the cave-in.

"He couldn't have survived that!" murmured Vander helplessly.

McCoy searched for Spock with his eyes and saw him standing at the edge of the crater, his back to the group. No-one dared approach him, and a heavy silence fell like a cloak. After a few minutes, Dr. Syvik took a step forward and said:

"Captain, please come...."

"Go away," was all the answer he received, Spock didn't even turn towards him.

The Vulcan doctor signalled to McCoy who came nearer.

"Captain, please...."

"Go away." The voice nearly screamed, then added in a broken whisper: "Please...."

Dr. Syvik signalled to obey and they returned to the settlement in silence. McCoy found himself wiping his eyes furtively and didn't reject the knowledge that his sorrow was not only for Kirk, but also for the proud and lonely Vulcan refusing all help and going through his own private hell alone.....

"Isn't there any chance that Commander Kirk is alive?" he asked Vander.

"I'm afraid not, Doctor, or don't you think I'd have organised rescue at once? The area wasn't reinforced, each tunnel would have collapsed, the whole crater is nothing but a mass of rocks and earth. The few beams would have not been strong enough to support anything. Besides, it would take ages to get to any depth...."

Vander didn't finish and McCoy understood that even if Kirk wasn't dead yet by a miracle, he would be by the time they reached him.

When night came, McCoy sought Dr. Syvik and asked if the Captain was back.

"Leave him be, Dr. McCoy," said the Vulcan.

"We can't leave him there all night!" insisted McCoy.

"Surely you cannot begrudge him these few hours alone with this grief," said Dr. Syvik with a hint of sadness.

"No, but what about the cold? It gets pretty chilly later on."

"He won't be conscious of it. If he's not back by morning, we'll go and get him."

"Spock will be all right," said Thelin in a haughty voice, "he's a Vulcan."

The arrogant Andorian upset McCoy as he remembered Kirk's accusations and the hate he had sensed. Had Thelin killed Kirk? The thought came unbidden to the doctor and he remembered that the Security Chief had been somewhere behind to make sure everyone left quickly. He felt sure Thelin could indeed murder someone he hated, and a mere Human on top of that! Spock would have no friend now, the Andorian could step in.

"So you're rid of the hated Human, Mr. Thelin?" he snapped. "Did you by any chance arrange this accident?"

To his surprise, Thelin merely shrugged.

"Spock is right, Humans are illogical."

"Illogical yourself...."

"That will do, Dr. McCoy, there're limits to the allowances we can make for Human emotions. Please leave," ordered Dr. Syvik.

McCoy obeyed in a dismal frame of mind, cursing Aliens heartily. He sought Vander out to ask if the accident could have been caused. Vander agreed it was a possibility but it was far more likely due to the number of visitors in an



unsafe area, and he blamed himself bitterly for having allowed it.

McCoy joined Scotty and they shared their sorrow in a night of reminiscences of Kirk. By morning, the Captain suddenly appeared, his features a frozen mask in which only the eyes lived, lit by a feverish glow. He sought Vander out and stated in a voice as dead as his features: "I want the cave-in cleared, how long will it take?"

"Captain, why? No-one...."

"Answer the question, please."

"At least 2 weeks constant work, perhaps more."

"If my crew contributes man power, how long?"

"Perhaps one week then, certainly not less."

"Start the work at once."

Vander appealed to Dr. Syvik and the officers nearby.

"What is the point? It'll be work for nothing."

Dr. Syvik had run his scanner over Spock unobtrusively.

"Captain, is this logical? Perhaps if you could tell us why...."

"I want the work done. If no-one wishes to help, I'll do it myself."

He turned away and walked back towards the mine. He would too, thought McCoy, shaken by the deadly resolution in the Vulcan. Thelin was the first to speak.

"I'm going to help him, you people can come or not as you please."

"Just a minute. I'm coming too," said McCoy.

"We'll join you shortly. I'll call the bridge and have assistance beamed down" said Salyk.

Vander no longer protested and he and his people went to work by the side of the others. McCoy reflected that it said a lot for Spock's personality to have made Vulcans join him in an illogical task! He was worried though, and he saw that Dr. Syvik was too. If the search failed, what would it do to Spock?... Scotty worked by his side and said thoughtfully :

"Do you know, doctor, perhaps IDIC works after all. Have you ever seen such a mottled crew collaborating to search for a mere Human?"

"I see what you mean," said McCoy, "Vulcan, Andorian, Tellarite, Human pacifists, Human Party members probably, Human pro-Aliens, a mixed lot indeed!"

"I hope we find him alive," said Sulu, "The Captain never deserved to be hurt, it's unfair."

The work proceeded quite fast thanks to the helpers, who were numerous enough to take it in turns so that no stoppage was needed. The equipment was good. Some workers used an excavator which would automatically stop if life was detected, while others scooped out the excavated material with fast cranes. Each worker had a specific area and kept to it as they dug deeper and deeper. Salyk had tried to use his tricorder, but the peculiar atmosphere of the planet interfered with his readings, and made them unreliable.

It was on the fifth day, when no-one hoped any more, that Scotty's excavator stopped suddenly and emitted a high pitch buzz. He was so surprised he nearly let it go. Spock was there before the buzz stopped and started digging carefully by hand. No-one would have recognised the dignified and elegant Captain of the Enterprise in the dusty and tattered figure whose energy seemed undiminished after all the continuous hard work. A few heavy slabs of rock appeared and several Vulcans helped to move them slowly. A dirty and bloodstained figure was lying underneath. Everyone watched with baited breath as Spock carefully lifted the inert body into his arms and brought him out into the open. McCoy never felt how painfully he was biting his lips in his anguish, Kirk looked dead. It was while the Captain was starting to deposit his burden on a



small stretcher that Kirk's eyes flicked open.

A radiant smile lit up Spock's features. "Jim, you're alive!"

Kirk's eyes were fascinated by the smile, a smile he had never seen before. "Of course I am," he murmured dazedly. "You stubborn Vulcan, I knew you'd find me!"

A dark head hid on his shoulder for a second and Kirk's hand stroked the black hair once while his other hand tried to wipe his own eyes. Spock was soon himself again though as he laid Kirk down gently and let the doctors take over. McCoy saw how the patient who had shut his eyes opened them fast when Spock let go and searched for the Vulcan, then smiled in relief.

"Wondered if it was a dream," he murmured, "I kept seeing Spock in that dark hole."

"How dreadful for you," said McCoy, "I should have thought you had enough to put up with, nightmares were too much!"

Kirk grinned at him and after a last look at Spock, shut his eyes again. He was taken to the colony's hospital first and the doctors were relieved to find that although his body had taken the equivalent of a severe beating and he had slight concussion, he was all right otherwise apart from a broken arm and a badly sprained knee. They kept him under observation for one night as he slept under sedation. When he woke the next day, McCoy saw his eyes searching the room.

"The Captain isn't far," he smiled. "You're invited to stay at his posh house while you recover, if you want to, that is. You might find so much Vulcan company hard to bear!"

"Shut up!" said Kirk with a grin, "and take me there."

"Sheer ingratitude! Can't wait to get away from his devoted doctor, and who for? A cold Vulcan.... who can't half smile when he puts his mind to it!" finished the doctor with a wide grin himself.

"It was nearly worth getting knocked out just to see that smile," said Kirk, "I'll never forget it."

"Just as well, you're not likely to see it often! Here's doctor Syvik, keep quiet while we do our checking, then you can go."

A short while later, Kirk was installed in Vander's guest house Spock was staying at. Vander called to express his joy at his escape from death and his people's good wishes. Then Scotty and Sulu called to make sure he was all right, after which Salyk brought the good wishes of the Vulcan officers.

"Lock the door, please, Spock, that's enough visitors," said Kirk after he had left.

"Are you tired, do you wish to sleep?"

"No, not particularly. All I want to do is relax and know you're here for real, not as a dream in a dark hole!"

"That was my fault, Jim, I kept trying to contact your mind in case you were alive, although I didn't have much hope. I failed completely at first, you were unconscious I expect. Then I thought I could sense something, but it was very vague and uncertain. I wasn't sure it wasn't mere fantasy!"

"Which didn't stop you from digging me out! How did you get so many helpers?"

"I don't know, I started digging and people arrived to help. How did you get so far behind that you were caught in the cave in?"

Kirk's face suddenly darkened. "I'm afraid I was attacked, a sharp blow on the head which knocked me out. All I had done was open the door of a small store room, being curious. I've no idea who did it, I was taken completely by surprise and I was pushed and locked into that small room or rather small cave in seconds. By the time I regained consciousness, the ground shook and the roof collapsed, all I could do was huddle against the wall. I realise that what saved me was those slabs of rock balancing on a boulder, they made a sort of roof over me, although a stone knocked me out again!"

For a second, violent anger appeared in the Vulcan's eyes and he looked away quickly, not fooling Kirk for one second.

"It could have been anyone," said Spock at last. "Nobody took much notice of their companions as they fled for safety. I had seen you join McCoy and Mr. Scott, and didn't worry about you until you were missing."

"The cave in was a good cover for a murder, ideal in fact."

"Agreed, but how did anyone know it would happen?"

The same thought occurred to both, but Spock added: "Vander didn't think the cave in was sabotage, he's looking into it and may get some answers. Have

you any idea at all who could have attacked you?"

Thelin's name came to Kirk's lips, all that hate he had seen... He hesitated, and remained silent.

"Who were you going to name?" asked Spock.

"You'd not believe me if I told you, so forget it."

"You can't mean Thelin!"

"See, you're upset. Forget it I say, I've no idea who it was."

"I'm not upset," corrected Spock, "only puzzled because it's all so illogical, if you could both see it.... However, some of the fault is mine, so we'll say no more."

"No more after such a cryptic remark? Spock, you're infuriating!"

"In that case I must leave, you're not well and I'm disturbing you."

"Come back, you.... Vulcan! I must have dreamed that smile of yours!"

"What smile?" asked Spock, looking uncomfortable. "My memory is rather vague, did I really smile?"

"And how!..... Look, don't worry, no-one can think you're not a Vulcan because of one smile."

"I'm not worried," said Spock thoughtfully, "in fact I always wanted to know if I could smile as a Human would."

There was a knock on the door and two trays were brought to them by Vander's wife and daughter who smiled at them and retired without speaking. Quite naturally, Spock started to cut Kirk's food so that he could eat with one hand. He was still occupied in this manner when another knock sounded.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"Thelin."

"Tell him to go away," said Kirk in a low voice.

"I asked him to report to me."

"Sorry, it's your house."

The Andorian was invited to enter, and stared at Spock settling Kirk to eat, but made no comment.

"Captain, I'm glad you've been spared the loss of Commander Kirk."

"Thank you. Mr. Kirk was attacked and left behind. Did you discover anything suspicious?"

"Yes, Captain, The cave in was caused by a small explosive device taken from the miner's stores. I doubt that a Human from this planet was responsible, it's more likely to be one from the crew on leave."

"I agree. However, the cave in could have made more victims than Mr. Kirk, including the assassin."

"Which bears the earmark of the Party," said Kirk. "Their assassins don't care how many innocent are killed and an assassin's life has no value, he will sacrifice it gladly for the success of his mission."

"He might have hoped to kill the Captain too," said Thelin, "and Mr. Gav."

"Does that mean you don't suspect me any longer?" asked Kirk.

"You could have placed the explosive yourself and miscalculated, but I've to admit you'd have been very clumsy to get caught in those circumstances."

"Thelin, do not pursue this," ordered Spock.

"No, Captain. Let's look at this assassin's aim logically. You, Captain, Mr. Gav and Mr. Kirk have all been victims of attempts. If all three were killed, who would profit from it?"

"Mr. Salyk would be Captain," replied Spock, "and I'll never believe he's an assassin."

"I agree with you, Captain, and never suspected him. This means the attempted murders seem rather pointless."

"To you perhaps," said Kirk, "but not to the Party who is simply carrying out condemnations to death, the Captain's and mine. As for Gav, he's so unpopular that practically any Human could have done it."

"It fits," agreed Spock, "and disruption of my ship would be another added benefit, from the Party's point of view."

"Could the Party know of the experiment and try to ruin it?" asked Thelin.

"It's possible, although according to military intelligence the secret is well kept and the Party still in ignorance."

The Captain saw Kirk's surprise at Thelin's mention of the experiment and added:

"Thelin's family is aware of the experiments, therefore he knows too."

"He could be trying to ruin it," said Kirk thinking aloud.

"Jim, you will stop making such unfounded accusations," said Spock severely, "they're illogical...."

"As all Humans are," interrupted Thelin. "Maybe I asked for it, I suspected him too and didn't understand."

"Understand what?" queried Spock.

"That's he's the brother you always wanted. Your grief showed me clearly what he meant, and I respect you for it, Captain. Family ties, may they occur by birth or by choice, are equally valid."

"If that means you no longer suspect me," said Kirk, "then I won't suspect you either, Mr. Thelin. We'll keep our suspicions for the assassin."

"I'm relieved to see that you seem to have come to your senses, both of you," said Spock with a hint of a smile, "to see two people I trust suspect each other was illogical to say the least."

"I still wonder what you see in a mere Human.... All right, Captain, I'm going."

The Andorian left hurriedly although he smiled at Spock, and his smile could be pleasant, noted Kirk.

"He's not so bad, even if he doesn't like Humans!" he remarked with a grin as Spock cleared the tray.

"His dislike of you was caused by his fear for my safety. He thought I was wrong to trust you and you would take advantage of it to kill me. His jealousy didn't help, you were right in that respect, Jim. He came aboard to bury the past and be friendly towards me. I didn't trust him myself at first on a personal level. I did trust him as an officer, he does have a sense of honour."

"You knew him before and I didn't. I bet he was dreadful to you when you were children?"

"I've no interest in the past," replied Spock gently, indicating he wouldn't say anything against Thelin. Kirk didn't pursue the subject, moved by Spock's usual gentleness and generosity even when it came to someone like the Security Chief.

Kirk admitted to himself that he would no longer dislike the Andorian to such an extent, although his dislike of Humans could be difficult to put up with at times. The Security Chief was clearly loyal to Spock, so he had some merit!

They had finished eating when McCoy came in to check his patient, and asked a little awkwardly if he could speak to Kirk alone. Spock immediately left, saying he had to reassure Vander that he wasn't responsible for the near tragedy of the cave in.

"Why on Earth did you ask him to leave?" asked Kirk, surprised.

"Because what I discovered I prefer to tell you first. It's about your accident. Several people remember seeing Thelin near you during the visit of the mine, so maybe you were right in suspecting him."

"And maybe he was keeping an eye on me, although not very successfully! I'm fed up with all the suspicion, Bones, the Party could be trying to get Thelin and I at each other's throats. I don't remember seeing him at all anyway."

"You must take care and suspect everyone. The assassin has tried three murders, no reason why he should stop!"

"I know, I know, but we're on leave and I intend to enjoy it if possible. Time to worry back aboard."

When all the crew had beamed down in rotation, it was time to leave the hospitable planet and Vander and his people were sad to see them go. Kirk was sad to leave, it had been such a nice change to meet peaceful Humans, free of prejudice!

Orders had arrived from Starfleet to proceed to Quadrant 7 and patrol it to check the veracity of reports about an unknown vessel in the area. Starfleet had also informed Spock that the miners' affair was being helpful. Tellar and Earth were busy over a court case about the compensation from Tellar and it meant that war was forgotten for the time being. The Federation would probably try to make the case drag to give time for tempers to cool as much as possible.

Life aboard the Enterprise settled back to routine, a routine still shadowed by the attempted murders. Thelin and his guards were ever vigilant, in the hope of discovering the assassin or catching him in the act. Kirk couldn't help feeling uncomfortably nervous when he knew death could be just around the corner for either Spock or himself. Perhaps for Gav too, but he couldn't care as much about the Tellarite who had accused him of the attempt on his life because he wanted to be First Officer again.

The crew had settled down to an uneasy truce. The non-cooperation had vanished, but anti-Alien feelings persisted and at least half the crew wasn't reliable, although Spock's help to the Human miners had made the defectors from the old contingent come back to the Captain's side again. Kirk started to wonder if there weren't at least two assassins, one for Spock and one for himself, not a very comfortable thought! The threat of the assassins was like a weight over the ship, and didn't help reduce the tension between the two Human groups, on the contrary. Both tension and arguments increased again. Only the strict discipline imposed by Spock and the Captain's reputation for seeing everything and being everywhere maintained order.

The Enterprise was on her way to Quadrant 7 when Mr. Salyk reported the presence of two Klingon vessels. They were in Federation space.

"They will detect us soon, Captain, their sensor range has improved."

"Maintain the ship well beyond their sensors, Mr. Kirk. Mr. Somek, send an urgent message to Starfleet reporting their presence. Mr. Salyk, can you ascertain the Klingons' purpose?"

"I'm working on it, Captain."

After a few minutes, the Science Officer reported:

"One odd factor is their slow speed, one or both ships could be disabled, unless this is a cover. They might be on a routine spying mission, or they might be attempting a raid on the Vander colony. No other inhabited world would meet their present course."

"Such a raid would constitute an act of war," Kirk pointed out.

"Definitely," Spock agreed. "It's possible that the attempt is being made to provoke a war."

"And if it fails, the Klingon Government will deny any knowledge of the affair" added Kirk.

"Aren't we travelling at present within easy reach of the Romulan Empire?" asked the Captain.

"Yes, Sir," agreed Salyk, "which indicated another possibility. Do you believe the Klingons are aiming at raids on their outposts?"

"If so, it would also be an act of war. They might wish to contact the Romulans for a purpose. Speculations are useless at this stage."

"Captain," called Mr. Somek, "I've a coded message coming in from Starfleet."

Spock took the tape and settled at Salyk's station to listen with an ear plug.

"We're to rendez-vous with Commander Tal and his ship," he announced, "after which we'll challenge the Klingons. Starfleet is concerned about the increased spying and the Romulans have offered assistance."

He gave the co-ordinates for the rendez-vous.

"Are we to fight or frighten them off?" asked Gav.

"We'll avoid a fight if possible, Mr. Gav."

"My father will look forward to meeting Klingons," said Tal who was on duty with Kirk.

"He must be the only one!" exclaimed Kirk. "Klingons are vicious, it's best to avoid them if possible."

"I don't see why, they sound like Humans."

Kirk had no time to retort, Spock's severe gaze and his stern voice made Tal aware he had made a mistake.

"You will confine such opinions to the privacy of your thoughts, Mr. Tal, and apologise at once for your rudeness to a superior officer. A recurrence will bring sanctions."

Tal apologised in haste, while Spock and Kirk exchanged a glance expressing their concern. A combination of Klingon, Romulan and unreliable Humans aboard wasn't a situation any Captain would look forward to.

The rendez-vous with Commander Tal's ship went without a hitch. The Romulan expressed his pleasure at collaborating with Spock and told him he was in charge because he had met Klingons before. Spock thanked him, but stated that he was an ally, not a subordinate.

The two vessels hastened to intercept the Klingons. When challenged, the enemy didn't attempt to escape and didn't attack. One of the Klingon Captains called the Enterprise. He was Commander Korth, who stared at Spock, then at Kirk unbelievably.

"I was sure I had killed you, Captain Spock! And Commander Kirk couldn't have escaped from the disused mine!"

"How or why we survived is irrelevant, Commander. You're in Federation territory, please explain your presence."

"I came to the rescue of my fellow Captain whose ship was accidentally

disabled. This caused her to drift into your space, so I had no choice but to follow."

"Are you able to substantiate your story?"

"Of course, Captain Spock, I'm sure your sensors can detect the truth, repairs are not quite completed yet, but you're welcome to see for yourself. I'm curious about the other ship, a strange design."

"Her Captain is Commander Tal of the Romulan Space Fleet."

"A Romulan? Good, I'm curious to meet one. I heard of the Federation/Romulan alliance and find it very odd. Commander Tal is most welcome to see the damage too."

"And you'd have two valuable hostages," replied Spock. "I'll consider it on the condition that several senior Klingon officers beam aboard the Enterprise at the same time."

"I agree, Captain."

"Very well, I'll consult Commander Tal and will let you know."

Aware that the Romulan had heard the exchange from his ship, Spock invited him aboard to discuss their next move. Commander Tal confessed to being curious of meeting the Klingons.

"The curiosity is mutual, it's now my belief that the Klingons were aiming at your space in order to contact you." said Spock.

"If so, for what purpose?"

"A possibility is that they merely wanted to meet the Federation's new allies."

"If that's the case," said Kirk, "their aim is to cause trouble, perhaps to ruin the Federation/Romulan alliance."

"My collaboration is assured, Captain Spock," stated the Romulan. "Do you believe their story of accidental damage?"

"We might be able to check if damage was self-inflicted by going aboard to see for ourselves. Further speculations are of no value at this stage."

Commander Tal agreed and the two Captains selected the officers to go aboard the Klingon vessel. Spock chose Kirk, Salyk and Senak; between them they would see if any malfunction was genuine. He also asked Lt. Tal to accompany them in deference to his father. Gav was left in charge. Thelin showed concern for Spock's safety, but the Romulan Commander was taking his own Security Chief and the Andorian didn't insist on going; he would be kept busy looking after the Klingon officers.

The exchange of beaming parties took place without incident and Captain Korth received the Enterprise party and the Romulans with as much civility as he could muster, which reinforced the belief that he had wanted to contact the Romulans. He was surprised by their appearance, he had not expected them to look like Vulcans physically, but made no comment at once. The ship's malfunction was explained and the repairs shown to be in progress, after which he invited the visitors to the bridge for discussions.

"You saw that our presence in Federation Territory wasn't intentional, Captain Spock, and that no harm was meant."

Spock, who had had a short deliberation with his senior officers and with Tal, wasn't so sure.

"It's possible that your story is genuine, Commander Korth, but it's also possible that it's a fabricated cover. I'm afraid Klingons aren't known for truthfulness."

"Does that mean you won't accept that our presence is accidental?"

"Whether it is or not is irrelevant. My orders are to escort you to

the edge of Federation space. Any return will be dealt with as an act of war."

"Is it your alliance with the Romulans which makes war desirable now?"

"No, Sir. The Federation doesn't want war, as you know from the past."

"That's why the Federation is soft," said Korth disdainfully. "War makes a race strong, don't you agree, Commander Tal?"

"I might have agreed before meeting Captain Spock. The Romulans aren't a soft race, Commander Korth, you'd find us deadly enemies."

"Which is why I don't understand your reasons for joining the Federation, or is it because you're similar to the Vulcans?"

"We're not similar to the Vulcans except in appearance, Sir, and we joined the Federation because we wanted to," replied Tal stiffly.

"Yet you're similar to us, strong and not afraid of war. You made a mistake, Commander, the Federation is weak. It tolerates races like Earth and Tellar, nearly at war with each other, and a race like the Vulcans will do anything to avoid conflict. When we decide to go to war, you'll find yourself on the losing side."

"I do not think so," replied Tal. "You're making a grave mistake."

"What mistake?"

"You underestimate your enemies. I agree that races like Earth are superfluous, but it changes nothing to the merit of the Federation."

"Do not forget that a common enemy like yourself will make the Federation alliances stronger," added Spock.

"If you want war, you can have it," said Tal defiantly, "You'll be sorry."

"Fine words, Commander. You like war, yet you associate with peace loving people like the Vulcans. It doesn't make sense."

"It does to me," said Tal drily. "Didn't Captain Spock defeat you when you met in the past?"

"So you know about that!"

"And more. As I said before, you're making a grave mistake. To worship peace doesn't mean lack of courage or honour."

The Klingon shrugged impatiently.

"I don't know what the Federation gave you, but if you had asked us also, we might have given more."

"Is that an offer now?"

"If you wish to take it as such."

The Romulan turned towards Spock.

"I thank you for respecting my talk with Commander Korth without interference, Captain Spock. Let's leave now, I've no wish to be insulted further!" Turning back to Korth he added: "Unlike you, Romulans have a sense of honour. You made another mistake, Sir. Now I'll report to my Government that we were right to join the Federation."

"Why?" asked a puzzled Klingon.

"Because we could never trust allies like yourselves. Sooner or later you would betray us if it suited you."

The Klingon hid his dismay at his failure to attract the Romulans to the Klingon side.

"You may be a strong race, Commander, but you won't like association with weak people like Humans."

"I've no intention of associating with them. Earth is a minor problem we'll

get rid of soon. A word of warning, Commander Korth. Any Klingon ship in Romulan territory will be treated as enemy on sight, and captured or destroyed."

"We understand each other, Commander. If we meet in combat one day, we'll have a beautiful war!"

"There's no such thing as a beautiful war," stated Spock sternly, "and a war with the Klingon Empire is unnecessary. Sooner or later your conquests will be so distant that you won't be able to control them. They will turn on you and defeat you."

"And you'll let them do it all," said Korth with contempt. "That day isn't near yet! In your place, Captain Spock, I'd have captured or destroyed enemy ships in Klingon space, as Commander Tal would have done. Your alliance is doomed."

"To destroy your two ships would be illogical," replied Spock calmly, "you couldn't give your report on the Romulans to your Government. I was instructed to tell you that the Federation is running out of patience and might take measures to stop your incursions into its space."

Spock got up to signal the end of the talk and added:

"I see no purpose in further discussions. The repair to the other ship should be complete by now. We'll escort you to the edge of Federation territory."

"How do I know you won't follow us to discover our worlds?"

"You have my word," said Spock simply.

The Klingon stared at him in amazement, unbelieving and puzzled. Commander Tal smiled.

"You can believe Captain Spock's word, Sir, which is more than could be said for yours! So you see, we chose the right allies."

Korth glared at them, but said nothing and the beaming exchange took place again without incident.

Once aboard the Enterprise, Commander Tal commented further:

"I see your point, Captain. Once the Empire is overstretched, revolts will begin and the Federation can help to topple the Klingons with minimum involvement."

"A simple and logical deduction," said Spock.

"I'm starting to see some merit in your logic," Tal agreed. "I wish I could see the logic of involvement with Earth though. While we're escorting the Klingons, may I visit your ship at times and observe the experiment for myself?"

Spock agreed, although it would cause more problems for Security. The Romulans would have to be watched in case of trouble with the crew. Kirk warned his Captain that the Romulan Officer's disdain of Humans and his friendship with the Vulcan officers and with Gav and Thelin would upset the Human crew. Spock agreed, but the visits would only be during the next few days, and he'd try to escort Tal as often as possible, or have a Vulcan officer in attendance. Thanks to those precautions clashes were minimised and peace safeguarded.

As soon as the Klingon ships had been seen out of Federation space, Commander Tal beamed aboard the Enterprise and went to Spock's quarters. Kirk happened to be there and Tal didn't like it, but made no comment. He thanked Spock for his hospitality and continued:

"I don't envy you the task of commanding a Human crew. After what I've seen and my son's report, I trust that the experiment will fail."

"My aim is to make it successful," replied Spock mildly.

"Sorry to disagree with you on this, Captain, but for the good of the

Federation the experiments must fail. I'm glad my son is aboard, he can see for himself what Humans are worth."

"I regret your attitude, Commander. Do you really believe that I'd befriend Commander Kirk if he was worthless?"

"No, he may be an exception, with a few others, which changes nothing."

"You're entitled to your opinion, Commander. Thank you for your assistance with the Klingons."

Spock didn't prolong the argument and escorted the Romulan to the transporter room with Kirk.

"Have a safe journey home," said Kirk politely.

"Live long and prosper," added Spock.

"Thank you, Captain, Commander, my best wishes for your next assignment," replied the Romulan with equal politeness. The fact that he had included Kirk was a hopeful sign, but it was practically certain he had done so in deference to Spock.

The two ships now separated and Spock gave orders to proceed to Quadrant 7 for their original mission.

The Enterprise had just started patrolling Quadrant 7 when the assassin struck again. Kirk was on duty with Sirak when the thought that Spock was hurt appeared in his mind. He was trying to concentrate on it to discover if his imagination was playing tricks when Tal arrived on the bridge and asked if he could talk to him in private. Impatiently, Kirk rebuked him, he wanted no distraction. Tal insisted, refusing to take no for an answer, which was odd after his recent strict obedience. Exasperated, Kirk followed him to the lift.

"It's the Captain, he's hurt and asked me to fetch you," said Tal as soon as the lift doors had closed.

"Why didn't you say so before?" snapped Kirk unreasonably. "Where is he? What happened? Have you called the doctor?"

"No, the Captain doesn't want a doctor. He specifically asked me to find you."

This hardly made sense and Kirk followed Tal in haste. He found Spock in a small store room near Engineering; a metal rack had fallen on top of him. He was struggling to get free and had nearly succeeded when Tal had found him. Refusing assistance, Spock had sent the Romulan for Kirk. It didn't take long for the two officers to free their Captain completely as Kirk gave vent to anger:

"Have you gone mad, Spock? Why didn't you give the alarm and get help at once? This could have been a nasty accident."

"It was no accident," stated Tal, "There was an explosive device near the Captain and I managed to dispose of it in time, but it was a near thing."

"Then the more reason to give the alarm!" said Kirk angrily, as he helped his Captain up. "You've several broken ribs by the look of it, lucky your head was clear. What happened?"

"I came through here on my way to an inspection of Engineering. I sensed someone behind me, but didn't have time to turn before the rack fell and I had other problems when I saw how fast I had to get out before the device exploded."

"Did you see who it was?"

"No, I do not have eyes at the back of my head. Keep at my side, I'll manage to walk unaided. Lieutenant Tal, you may go, and not a word to anyone."

"No, Sir, you can count on me."

Unable to make him change his mind, Kirk had no choice but to walk by Spock, helping him when no-one was about.

"May I hide in your quarters for a while, Jim?"

"If you must. How long can a Starship Captain hide? You're insane!"

He helped him to the bed very gently though, not happy about the Vulcan's obvious discomfort. "You need a doctor, I can'd do much...."

"I know, Jim, call McCoy. Dr. Syvik wouldn't appreciate having to keep this out of records."

"Spock, are you sure you didn't get a bad knock on the head which made you delirious?"

The Captain explained haltingly: "I received strict orders from Starfleet to abandon the experiment if another attempt was made on my life."

Kirk made no further protest and called McCoy on a plausible pretext. He also called Senak and asked him to check the store room where a rack had accidentally fallen. McCoy attended to his patient with the usual grumbles.

"You should be in sickbay, Captain, where I could keep an eye on you."

"How long before I can move normally?"

"At least two days, if you stay flat on your back."

"You know that is impossible, Doctor, I'm on duty in two hours."

McCoy, who had been told of the need to keep quiet, swore profusely, then his anger abated and he sat on the bed.

"Captain, if I were you, I would tell Humans to go to hell in no uncertain terms!"

"So would I," agreed Kirk. "I tried to get Spock to give up, you can guess his answer."

"Between a stubborn Vulcan and a stubborn Human, I'll be old before my time! Now I've to lie to my Chief and Dr. Syvik is no easy Vulcan to lie to."

"I count on you, doctor," said Spock, "and thank you for your assistance."

"I'll come back tonight to check. Take those pills, and don't move fast. Jim, call me if necessary at any time."

The doctor had just left when Senak called by intercom asking for the Captain. The Chief Engineer reported that someone unknown had been manufacturing a bomb in the store room.

"It looks as though the fall of the rack disturbed whoever it was, therefore, he left traces of his occupation."

Spock thanked him and cut the communication before saying to Kirk:

"The device set for me was not a bomb, just a small explosive."

"Which would have been enough to kill you!"

"This attempt on my life may have been an accident," said Spock, "I was in the wrong place at the wrong time."

"And the bomb-maker took advantage of the occasion," finished Kirk. "You may be right, but on the other hand it may have been an ambush by the assassin, knowing you often go through that room for an inspection. He was using the waiting time making a bomb."

Either hypothesis was possible, and they didn't speculate further for the moment, with another problem on their hands. The news of the bomb brought them added worry. If a Party member intended disruption or sabotage with a bomb, casualties could occur apart from a disabled ship. A search for the weapon proved unsuccessful, which wasn't surprising. The ship was large enough to have many hiding places, and the bomb would only be detected if set to explode. Spock called Thelin and ordered all explosives or harmful substances locked up and guarded. He agreed with

Kirk that it was rather like bolting the door after the horse had escaped (to use a Human saying he remembered), but it minimised the danger in that no more explosive could be made.

Kirk wondered if Tal was the culprit, he could have pretended to help Spock, but as the Captain pointed out, there was no logical reason for the Romulan to create havoc aboard the ship.

"What about killing Humans he detests?"

"I don't believe he'd use such methods if he had that aim in mind, because an explosion aboard could kill Vulcans too."

"True enough," admitted Kirk, "so it leaves the Party as usual. Maybe there are two or three assassins all actively intent on murder and destruction!"

It wasn't a pleasant fact to live with, but there was little they could do about it apart from vigilance and precautions. At least Security was reliable. Kirk had further thoughts about Tal though, and when he discovered that McCoy shared his suspicions, he had another discussion with Spock.

"Don't you see? The Romulans want to get rid of Earth, see it thrown out of the Federation. Commander Tal made no mystery of that, and he wants the experiment to fail. What better means than to ask his son to work on ways of wrecking it?"

"Do you mean that Tal made the attempt on my life?"

"Yes, although I agree it's unlikely he was the one making the bomb. Suppose he had noticed that you often go through that room on your way to engineering. He hides, with the explosive ready, attacks you and leaves, then returns again to save you and appear blameless."

"Why save me if he wants to kill me?"

"He might not want to kill you, but he might be happy to make it appear that Humans made another attempt on your life."

"It's plausible," admitted Spock, "but if it was Tal who threw the rack on me, how do you explain the presence of someone making a bomb?"

"Tal may have disturbed the bomb-maker who fled. The Romulan wouldn't have bothered to tidy up. Don't you think Thelin should hear about this? Or will he report the attempt to Starfleet?"

"Not if I ask him to abstain."

"What about Tal?"

"He couldn't contact Starfleet directly, but he might tell his father, which is unimportant if no record of the incident exists aboard."

Spock called the Security Chief who listened to Kirk's arguments against Tal with great attention.

"Well, what do you think?" asked Kirk.

"It's possible that Tal is guilty," agreed Thelin. "Am I to assume he's also behind the first attempt on the Captain's life? And on your life?"

"He could be," said Kirk thoughtfully, "what better way of discrediting Humans?"

"Humans will discredit themselves without help from anyone," said Thelin with his usual disdain. "Captain, am I to arrest Lt. Tal?"

"No. Circumstantial evidence is not proof. To accuse him if he's innocent would be detrimental to our relationship with the Romulans, while the assassin goes free. We'll forget it for the moment. I believe my hypothesis that I disturbed a Party member making a bomb is the likely explanation."

"I agree," said Thelin, "but I understand Mr. Kirk's preference for an Alien to be involved. I'll keep an eye on Tal."

"I trust you will do it in an unobtrusive manner."

"Yes, Captain. I suppose you wish me to adopt the special measures discussed before in another context?"

"Yes, Mr. Thelin. You may go."

The Andorian left and Kirk wondered what he had meant. He saw Spock's uneasiness and reassured him.

"I won't ask questions again! I expect Tal is innocent and the accursed Party behind it all! Rest until you're due on duty or McCoy will be upset."

Spock managed to carry out his duties, although Kirk felt sure the Vulcan officers guessed there was something wrong with their Captain, but they asked no question, respecting Spock's silence about his injury. Thanks to McCoy's care, he recovered quickly and if Dr. Syvik suspected the Human doctor's frequent trips to the Captain's cabin, he said nothing, for which McCoy was thankful. Gav may have suspected something but Spock's manner didn't encourage questions!

The search of Quadrant 7 was proving fruitless when they received a message from the Starship Potemkin.

"Enterprise, we've just picked up a distress call from Planet M.7 which stopped after a short while. We cannot investigate because we're on a class A rescue mission. Can you look into it?"

Spock agreed and the Enterprise hastened towards Planet M.7. Records indicated that this still unnamed world was not inhabited except for a Human survey team doing a preliminary check before applying for a colonisation permit. There would also be a number of colonists to occupy the planet while waiting for the permit if the world proved suitable. This was standard practice, to avoid anyone else putting a claim in also.

"Reduce speed when within sensor range, as a precautionary measure," instructed Spock when they rapidly approached the co-ordinates.

"There are two vessels in orbit, Captain," reported Kirk. "One is an Earth ship, as should be expected, but I'm not familiar with the design of the other."

"Neither am I" said Salyk.

The unknown vessel was shown on the screen as Sirak and Tal arrived on the bridge and the Romulan exclaimed: "I knew it!"

"A Romulan ship?" queried Spock.

"No, Captain, Orion. It means an Orion party is raiding the planet. Take care, Orions are ruthless pirates who will not hesitate to kill."

"I presume it is possible that the strange vessel reported is the Orion ship," said Spock.

"I agree, Captain," replied Tal. "Planet M.7 must have riches."

Salyk checked records and reported that the survey team was investigating the possible presence of dilithium crystals. According to Tal, dilithium crystals attracted Orions like honey attracted bees, only he didn't put it that way. The Earth ship in orbit was a large one. It had to be to transport not only personnel, but a lot of equipment. Kirk reported that it was damaged, but able to maintain orbit.

As soon as the Orion vessel detected the Enterprise, it fled without bothering to pick the landing party up. According to Tal this was in accordance with Orion procedure. The Romulan added that the Orion raiding party might try to steal the Earth ship if they were numerous enough to man it, or to force the Humans to do so.

Spock contacted the Earth ship which proved free of Orions. Captain Allen reported that the Humans on the planet were in trouble, but he couldn't help. His ship was disabled, all the shuttlecraft were on the

planet and the Orions had warned that they would kill as many Humans as possible if he tried to use the transporter. This meant that they might detect a transporter beam, so the rescue party should use shuttlecrafts. Salyk reported that care was indicated, as the planet had a freak atmosphere which interfered with sensors, communications and transporter at times. The landing party included Spock, Gav, Kirk, Thelin, Tal, McCoy, Scotty and Sulu, plus security guards and a selection of unreliable Humans to Kirk's amazement.

"Should the Orion ship return, I want my officers to be able to man the ship with a minimum of internal difficulties if possible," explained Spock in an aside. Kirk agreed it made sense, it was best to have possible assassins or saboteurs away from the ship, not that they could be sure about that.

Salyk was left in charge and the large rescue party boarded the shuttlecrafts and left. The atmosphere proved turbulent, but they landed without incident some distance from the settlement to avoid detection. It had been easy to pin point because very old buildings, some only ruins, indicated that an ancient civilisation had inhabited the world at one time in the distant past.

They made their way to the settlement with precautions which proved unnecessary. Only two Humans were there, preparing a meal. They reported that everyone was mining dilithium crystals for the Orions, Resistance had proved impossible and threats of torture most effective.

As they made their way towards the mine, Tal warned that Orions would kill themselves if cornered, never surrender. However, the rescue party had the element of surprise on its side and the prisoners needed no encouragement to turn against their captors when rescue appeared. The Orions took refuge in the depth of the mine, their victims firing, causing the collapse of a few tunnels, fortunately without casualties. There was no escape for them, so they chose to die, and to provoke havoc and the death of others at the same time if possible.

Dr. Young, the scientist heading the survey team, detected the explosion and guessed the enemy had blown the rock up to allow an underground river to flood the mine. The Orions were killed, and it became a race against time to evacuate the mine and make sure no-one was trapped by the invading water. The situation was aggravated by the fact that the Orions had never allowed the Humans time to take proper safety measures. Some tunnels became unsafe, it was a nightmarish situation between threat of collapse or threat of flooding.

Spock, Kirk and the other officers, as well as the Security guards, patrolled the long tunnels and chambers rescuing trapped people or helping the injured to reach a relatively safe level. Kirk came across Tal, whose leg was trapped under a boulder.

"You should get out and save yourself," said Tal disdainfully. Kirk ignored his words, concentrating on freeing his leg with great difficulty. He then helped him up towards a safer level and they came across Kyle, also trapped. Kirk couldn't free him alone, and was glad to see Tal help without being asked, maybe the Romulan was improving! The Alien assured him they could get out by themselves now, he would help Kyle, so Kirk was free to go back to lend further assistance. He met Spock and several security guards helping Humans, all soaked to the skin. Spock gave rapid orders:

"Jim, stay at this level and organise the evacuation from here to the top. Don't let any Humans get further down, the flood is becoming worse and will gain on us if we don't hurry. I'll deal with it, only Vulcans can assist me."

Kirk didn't protest and obeyed orders, but once the rescue to the top was safely organised, he decided to go down to lend what assistance he could, if only carrying injured people. McCoy whispered to him urgently:

"Don't let the Captain stay down there, Jim,"

"Why do you think I'm going back?"

He saw that Thelin had taken no notice of Spock's orders either, and Scotty

and Sulu were just taking some Humans over from Vulcan security guards when he arrived at the critical level. From the top of the ladders to the lower level, the noise of water could be heard. He saw Spock emerge with a limp Human and ran to help.

"Quickly, Jim, there's another hanging on to the ladder, but the force of the water is becoming lethal."

Kirk pulled the man out and saw Spock disappear again down the ladder. He bent over and recognised Gav as the other victim. The water now ran with a small roar, the current fast and violent. Gav let go of the iron bars at the foot of the ladder when Spock managed to grab him safely, the Alien had no strength left. Kirk immediately guessed that Spock was in difficulty, the force of the river tearing at his body with a violence he could guess at. He looked around wildly to call for help, but nobody was nearby, everyone busy with their own rescue problems. Kirk didn't hesitate, he went down the ladder and managed to grab the Tellarite's arm to pull. Such a dead weight was no joke, nothing happened. He descended further and the water slashed at his legs with a vicious slap which nearly made him cry out. How Spock could hang on further down was a question he didn't like to think about. Gritting his teeth, he got a hold around the shoulders, under the arms, and called out to Spock to push at his signal. This worked, the Tellarite was heaved above the water and Kirk dragged him up slowly as Spock pushed from under. He realised that he was doing most of the work, Spock was becoming weaker. Letting the Alien fall rather roughly on the ground, he went down again fast and seized the Vulcan's wrist. Spock was breathing with difficulty and murmured:

"Go, Jim, I can't....."

"You can, for my sake," snapped Kirk fiercely, "I've got a strong hold on your shoulders now, if you let go, I'll go too."

This had the desired effect, as the Human had surmised. Slowly and painfully, Kirk managed to rob the roaring water of its victim, and the Vulcan helped with all his remaining strength. Thelin appeared at the top of the ladder and was able to assist at the finish. He was soaked himself and looked down at the two officers lying on the ground exhausted.

"I hate to say it, Captain, but we must hurry out of this level too. Can you make it? Everyone is out and I ordered my men out, shall I call some back?"

"Where is Mr. Gav?" asked Spock.

"My men took him, he's safe," replied Thelin, helping Spock and Kirk up. "I can't carry both of you, Captain....."

"I can travel," assured Spock, "what about you, Jim?"

"I'll make it, just lead the way. Mines aren't lucky for us, in future, we should keep clear of them!" replied Kirk with feeling.

Spock's eyebrow rose, but he made no comment and they followed Thelin as fast as they could. When they arrived at the upper level, nearly everyone had been taken out and they were the last to reach the open air. Dr. Young urged further evacuation in case any other disaster occurred at the mine. Helping the injured, they made their way to the settlement it was a relief for everyone to reach. Fortunately, the weather was hot, so there was no danger of anyone catching their death of cold, as McCoy put it.

The large space in the middle of the settlement looked like a holiday camp, with people sitting or lying down everywhere. McCoy reported that all the casualties were minor, there was no need to take anyone to the ship or get medical assistance. Dr. Young and his colleagues approached

Spock and thanked him with a genuine friendliness which gave Kirk some hope for the Humans. This hope was soon to be proved premature.

Spock contacted the Enterprise and heard that the Orion ship had not returned. It was safe to assume she wouldn't. He beamed back aboard to report to Starfleet, leaving the rescue party to recuperate as they shared a meal in the open air with the settlers, in a holiday mood. The disaster at the mine was a serious set back though, and a shuttlecraft had gone back aboard the Earth ship to collect more equipment needed. Kirk and Dr. Young were discussing the situation when one of the settlers approached them with a smile Kirk didn't like. He addressed Dr. Young with undisguised insolence.

"There was no need to thank Captain Spock, Sir, we would have got rid of the Orions soon as we'll get rid of all Aliens and traitors."

"Have you gone mad, Mr. Enberry?" asked an incredulous Dr. Young.

"Look around, you'll see men with Orions arms we stole. Hand over all weapons and communicators or I give the order to shoot."

It was true. A ring of Humans had appeared threateningly. Others looked on with a mocking smile, clearly on the side of the attackers. Kirk was sickened to see some Enterprise crew members wearing that same smile, but Spock couldn't have known it would be unsafe to bring down unreliable Humans. He handed over his phaser and communicator without a word, and the other officers and security guards followed suit.

"What's the meaning of this?" asked Dr. Young. "What do you hope to achieve? Our ship is disabled..."

"The Enterprise isn't," sniggered Enberry. "I gave the order to my men aboard, and a shuttle load has gone to help them. Captain Allen is in custody and a boarding party will seize the starship."

"Your men may encounter some difficulty in their task" said Kirk ironically. "What is the purpose of it all?"

"To get the dilithium crystals we mined back to Earth, they'll give the Party great wealth and open many possibilities."

"You're mad, as I thought!" exclaimed Dr. Young. "You bunch of fanatics wouldn't know what to do with them!"

"We've you and your team to work for us," smiled Enberry.

"I'd rather work for the Orions!"

"You'll change your mind, we've the ways and means," assured Enberry. "Do not expect help from the Enterprise, their transporter should have blown up by now, the Party has reliable agents aboard."

Kirk bit his lips in sheer frustration, it was only too true! Enberry smiled nastily and riled, looking around:

"Some of your crew here are on my side."

McCoy, Scotty and Sulu hastily detached themselves from the Humans and joined Kirk's group. No-one else followed. Hopefully, some people tended to stay on the side of the strongest. Kirk had the feeling that quite a few watched, and waited, undecided, shifting restlessly.

"You won't find so many men aboard the Enterprise on your side," said Kirk.

"There'll be enough to sabotage any resistance and assist my men."

"I apologise, Mr. Kirk," said Dr. Young sadly, "It seems that my colleagues and I were aboard a ship infested by the Party. I wish the Orions had won!"

"You're a traitor to the Human race!" snapped Enberry angrily.

"If the Human race means you," said Kirk, "I'll apply for Alien nationality

at once!"

"Insults from traitors don't bother me," replied Enberry, not rising to the bait. Using Kirk's communicator, he called the Enterprise, asking if the take-over had been successful.

"Yes and no" replied a rather strained Human voice, "We've control of the ship. The transporter was damaged by a bomb to avoid interference, we're repairing it now. Most of the Human traitors are in the brig."

"Then what's wrong?"

"The bridge is sealed off, we can't do anything, it has its own separate life support unit. All we can do is starve them out."

Enberry swore and asked: "Can you operate the ship from auxiliary control?"

"We're checking, we certainly can't move her from here."

"We have an advantage, the hostages down here, and in the brig."

"True, the bridge is listening in, so they know."

"Indeed I do," said Spock's calm voice. "Mr. Enberry, what do you intend to do with my crew?"

"Humans can join us or die. All Aliens will die of course."

"And he calls himself Human," said McCoy in disgust.

"For once I agree with you, Dr. McCoy," said Spock, "I do not believe Mr. Enberry is a credit to your race. However, with my crew at stake, I'm willing to make what you call a deal with you, Mr. Enberry."

"A deal? You must be joking!"

"Vulcans do not joke. I shall let you have my ship if you let my crew have the disabled Earth ship to repair and use to reach a Starbase."

"I already have your ship!"

"Negative. First, my officers and I are Vulcan, you cannot starve us. Second, I've control of the self destruct mechanism and can destroy the Enterprise at any time I choose."

Enberry swore profusely again and asked his stooge aboard to check. The man replied in a strangled voice:

"It's true, he can do as he says."

"Can't you stop him or the process?"

"Wouldn't know where to start! The Vulcan prisoners won't help, they're not easily intimidated."

"If you think I'm going to let you go after this, you're mistaken, Captain Spock!" shouted an infuriated Enberry.

"I never asked for my life," replied Spock in his calm voice. "Let my men go free and I'll be your prisoner."

"Spock, no!" protested Kirk, "he'll kill you!"

"My duty is to my crew and you know it, Jim. Being condemned to death by the Party, I assume Mr. Enberry will be delighted to carry the execution out."

"You bet!" gloated the man. "Anyway, what's to stop me from destroying the Earth ship afterwards?"

"If you do, the Enterprise will blow up also, I've already programmed the master computer to this end."

"You think of everything, you Vulcan devil! How do I know you won't trick me and destroy the ship anyway?"

"You have my word as a Vulcan and as a Starship Captain. If you keep to our agreement, so will I."

"Very well, I agree," said Enberry, not realising how easily he believed the Vulcan.

"One more thing, Commander Kirk will also go aboard the Earth ship," said Spock.

"Never! He's condemned to death also and will share your fate!" protested Enberry.

"In that case...."

"No, Spock, don't change anything on my behalf, please," begged Kirk. "I'd rather die with you than live knowing I belong to a race of assassins."

"Well, Captain, do you agree?" asked Enberry with triumph in his voice.

"I agree," replied Spock tonelessly.

"Then you will go the the Earth ship with your officers and be beamed down at once."

It was only a few minutes later that Spock appeared and joined Kirk with his usual calm dignity. The transporter hummed again and the senior Vulcan officers materialised too.

"We ask the privilege of sharing our Captain's fate," said Salyk coming forward.

"Mr. Salyk, your loyalty is misplaced on this occasion," said Spock severely. "You and your colleagues are needed to operate the Earth ship. Please go at once."

"Beam them back" ordered Enberry indifferently. "As long as I've the Captain and Commander Kirk I don't care."

"I demand the right to stay with the Captain," stated Thelin.

"Might as well join in," said McCoy with a shrug, "what do you think, Scotty?"

"I'm with you, doctor, I prefer to die with Aliens than live with that bunch of monsters!"

"If they're Human, give me Aliens any day," added Sulu.

"Some Humans have a sense of honour, but they're few," said Tal.

He was right, no other Humans protested or made a move. Kirk looked at the Enterprise group with angry contempt, how could they condone murder?

"Your Captain is giving his life for yours, yet not one of you is worth it. Go and serve the Party, you'll get what you deserve by choosing injustice and prejudice."

"No-one listens to a traitor," said Enberry, in anger, as he slashed viciously at Kirk's face with the butt of his weapon. Kirk fell and Enberry was going to strike him again when Spock stepped between the two.

"Where is the merit in striking a fallen enemy?" he asked quietly.

Enberry shrugged and turned away, conscious he wasn't giving a good image.

Spock and McCoy helped Kirk up, he wasn't seriously hurt, although his jaw was badly bruised.

"Mr. Enberry," said Spock severely, "I trust you will honour your agreement and have my officers here beamed up to the Earth ship, or am I to believe a Party member is without honour?"

"Yes, yes, they can be beamed up at once."

Tal, Thelin and his guards stepped forward reluctantly on Spock's order. McCoy refused bluntly to leave, on the pretext that he had patients to see to.

Spock was going to insist when Kyle limped forward and addressed Tnberry:

"When I was in the mine, it was Commander Kirk and a Romulan who saved my life," he said in a challenging tone.

"And it was a Vulcan guard who saved me from drowning," added another man stepping forward also.

"Never saw any Party members rescuing anyone," added a third man, a miner this time, "but I saw Captain Spock and the Vulcans rescuing many Humans and risk their lives for us."

"So why not let them all go free?" said Kyle.

Kirk felt hope rising in him. Clearly some Humans drew the line at murder and the undecided might follow. Tnberry was so surprised that he had remained silent, but he now found his voice again.

"Have you all turned traitors? Captain Spock and Commander Kirk are condemned to death and this will be carried out for all of you to see."

"I don't want to see it!" shouted Kyle with unexpected violence. "I thought the Party acted in a civilised manner. The only people I saw acting in a civilised manner here are the Aliens and the so-called traitors. Are we going to let fanatics kill Captain Spock and Commander Kirk when many of us owe them our lives?"

"Are you going to let barbarians lead you by the nose?" shouted Dr. Young, in turn, addressing the miners. "Get them!"

Tnberry was playing with a phaser, smiling. It was obvious that he thought a few hotheads wouldn't be taken notice of and that he could deal with them easily. He had the shock of his life when, before he had time to react, a large proportion of the Humans attacked the armed men around the place. Kirk sprang at Tnberry and took great delight in knocking him out flat, taking his phaser back. Scotty and Sulu joined in the battle with enthusiasm, while Spock and the Vulcan guards walked through the fighters sending some to sleep as they went along.

In no time at all, about thirty Humans were securely held prisoners. Kirk surveyed them with a beaming smile, and saw Dr. Young rubbing his hands with true enjoyment, his knuckles were sore from the fight.

"Maybe there's hope for us Humans after all," grinned Kirk.

"Maybe there is," agreed the scientist, "I did have serious doubts a moment ago."

"I'm relieved there are no casualties," said Spock. He called the Enterprise and it was Mr. Salyk's voice who answered:

"I was just going to send a rescue party down, Captain."

"What happened? Is the Enterprise safe from rebels?"

"Yes, Captain, but the cells are full."

Kirk laughed and asked: "How did you manage to recapture the ship?"

"I've no merit at all, Mr. Kirk. According to Mr. Chekov and Miss Uhura, it wasn't difficult. With some Humans they pretended to collaborate with the rebels, then invited them to celebrate victory and made them 'blind drunk' as I believe the correct expression is. Dr. Syvik is still treating some in sickbay."

"I never enjoyed myself as much," laughed Uhura. "To break bottles over such dumb heads was a pleasure."

"Then we called the officers back from the Earth ship," continued Chekov, "and were planning to make a surprise visit to a certain Tnberry. I'm sorry to miss that, I'd have enjoyed dealing with him!"

"You may still have that pleasure, Mr. Chekov," said Spock, "Some

prisoners will have to be accommodated aboard our ship. Is the transporter operational, Mr. Salyk?"

"Repairs are almost done, Sir, it won't be long. By the way, the man who made the bomb aboard is the one who tried to blow it up. He did some damage but was most clumsy and died in the attempt."

"So we've got rid of one assassin!" said Kirk.

"Beam Captain Allen down," ordered Spock, "he'll want to get his men back."

An irate middle aged man materialised and immediately glared at some of the prisoners:

"Look at that bunch of fanatical maniacs! Did someone give them a good hiding?"

"I believe Captain Spock sent a few to sleep," grinned Kirk.

"Pleased to meet the Captain of the beautiful Starship," beamed Allen. "Vulcan ship, isn't it? Served my bunch of idiots right for coming up against that! Shall I take them off your hands, Captain?"

"By all means, see that they are put in cells aboard your ship and mine. We'll help you to repair your ship and proceed to Starbase 1."

"Where torture awaits us, but I won't talk," said Emberry proudly.

"Torture is condemned by all Federation races as undignified and degrading," stated Spock.

"Why should you care if I'm undignified and degraded?"

"The indignity and the degradation is in the torturer, not the victim," corrected Spock.

"That makes you properly degraded, Mr. Emberry," beamed Captain Allen, "not that fanatics would understand."

"I expect all Aliens are wonderful to you!" riled Emberry.

"Not at all, I met some downright b.... Aliens, if you'll pardon the language, which doesn't mean all Aliens are bad. I'll get that bunch off your hands, Captain Spock, I'm sure you'll be glad to get rid of such rubbish. As for the sheep who followed them like lambs to the slaughter, I'll recommend clemency if they work hard at repairing the ship."

While Allen and the prisoners were beamed up, Spock approached Kyle and the other Humans and thanked them for their assistance in simple terms. Kirk felt elated, not doubting that the battle was won, the Human crew should be no trouble now, and would come to appreciate some Alien traits like loyalty and honesty, and who knows? logic also.... That was more doubtful, but a sudden thought wiped the smile from his face. Was the assassin among the prisoners or was he or them still at large? Who could be sure with Party men? He was distracted from his thoughts by Gav approaching. The Tellarite behaved oddly. He tore the braid from his sleeves and handed it to Spock.

"Captain, I wish to take my place in a cell with the criminals," he said with unexpected dignity. "I betrayed my oath to you because I had given a previous one to some countrymen on Tellar and because I resented your liking of Humans. You repaid me by saving my life. The sight of the Human fanatics made me realise that similar fanatics exist on Tellar and I do not want to help them any longer. I didn't understand how bad fanatics could be. The ones on Tellar must be just as bad or worse, I don't want any part of them. I didn't like Humans, and it's a shock to discover that I'm no better."

"The existence of a fanatical party on Tellar whose aim was to discredit Humans was suspected," said Spock, "My father sent me a private tape about it."

"Then you guessed I'm the one who tried to kill you, knowing the Human Party would be blamed?"

"I saw you touch the helmet of my space suit before taking your own, and only understood later that you might be the culprit. I had no proof, therefore, only Thelin, as security chief, knew of my suspicions."

"I also tried to kill Mr. Kirk," continued Gav, "again the Human Party would be blamed and I was convinced he had tried to kill me to be First Officer again, something he wanted more than anything."

"I'm sorry you guessed that," said Kirk, "I never held you responsible for my demotion."

"I'll stand court-martial of course," said Gav, "and will lose my rank. What I will ask for is the privilege of serving aboard the Enterprise again, even as simple crewman, I might then be able to explain to any Party member, may they be from Tellar or Earth, how wrong they are. I think I'll feel ashamed of having shared the beliefs of such people for the rest of my life."

"That's too long," said Kirk gently. "We all make mistakes, Mr. Gav, and to confess it as you did required great courage. I also believed Party nonsense at one time, so you weren't the only one to be fooled."

"I was^A devoted and fanatical member," said Sulu, "I even struck the Captain when he was helpless, so there's no reason for you to feel that bad."

"We were all bad," said McCoy gruffly, "so you're in good company, Mr. Gav."

"I'm sure the Captain would say it'd be illogical for us to look down on you," added Scotty.

"This makes me feel even more ashamed," murmured Gav. "Captain, I beg your forgiveness and will not hesitate to denounce the Tellarite Party at my trial."

"This will be of assistance, because I do not believe we had proof before," said Spock. "I will recommend clemency for yourself and for the Humans who turned against the Party. You were brainwashed into believing untruths and had no way of checking for the truth, You'll be welcome aboard my ship at any time in any capacity."

"Thank you, Sir, I'll remember."

"Mr. Thelin, beam up with Mr. Gav, he's to be confined to his quarters for the duration of the journey to Starbase 1."

They watched them dematerialise and Spock turned to Kirk.

"I've great satisfaction in appointing you First Officer again, Jim, and do not believe Admiral Tholev will be able to change it."

"No, not with a loyal crew against all odds," smiled Kirk. "You've done it again, Spock!"

"Not 'I', 'we'," corrected Spock. "Did you know that I bluffed Ehberrry? You taught me that."

"How?"

"When I said the Enterprise would blow up if they fired at the Earth ship. It wasn't true."

"I had my suspicions," grinned Kirk, "but wasn't sure. Glad an Earth trait was of use!"

"You see, Captain, there's not only logic!" exclaimed McCoy.

"Indeed not, Doctor, with you there is hardly any," countered Spock.

"Why, what have I done now?"

"It was hardly logical to wish to stay with Jim and I, doctor, under the pretext that you had patients to attend to. Ehberrry wouldn't have minded killing you as well."

"Not logical, was it? And where was the logic in giving yourself up to save your crew, when it meant you were committing suicide? I call that emotion, Captain."

"Really, doctor, do you have to insult me?"

Kirk started to laugh helplessly. He couldn't stop it when he noticed the astonishment on Dr. McCoy and his colleagues' faces around them.

"I thought Dr. McCoy was devoted to the Captain," said Dr. Young. "You should have heard him worrying when he was still down in the mine."

"I was worrying about Jim," corrected McCoy sharply. "A mere flood can't hurt a computer."

"Watch it, Bones," reprimanded Kirk.

Spock was quite unruffled as he said: "Thank you, Doctor."

Kirk winked at Dr. Young who smiled in understanding. McCoy saw the exchange and glared at Kirk, then let his good nature win and relaxed into a grin.

The next few days were busy ones. The Earth ship had to be repaired and Kirk marvelled at the new spirit of collaboration and acceptance between Aliens and Humans aboard both vessels and on the planet where the miners were being helped to clear away the mine. Kirk also came to like Captain Allen who didn't hesitate to tell tales of how horrible some Aliens he had met had proved to be, but always came up with equally bad or worse things about some Humans he had met. His pet hate was fanatics and he was horrified that his crew had proved to be allied with the Party. His telling off had some members still shaking in their shoes!

Above all, Kirk was overjoyed to be First Officer again and share command with Spock. The Captain nearly smiled at his appreciation of the command chair.

The repairs to the Earth ship finished, the two vessels left Planet M.7 and its inhabitants to the task of re-opening the mine and proceeded to Starbase 1. There was more time for Kal-Toya now when the crew felt united at last. Even Tal and Sulu were seen talking animatedly in the rec room.

However, Kirk sensed some pre-occupation in his Captain and wondered. One evening, after the pleasure of achieving a draw at Kal-Toya, he decided to tackle the subject.

"Is anything on your mind? Can I help?"

"I do not think so. It concerns Thelin actually."

"Look, Spock, you're not thinking of the time when you could tell him about Gav but couldn't tell me, are you? I realise you couldn't betray your First Officer...."

"My main reason in not telling you was to protect you, Jim. Thelin could hide his suspicions, I was afraid that if I told you, you would watch Gav with such insistence and show your feelings so much that he would guess why and kill you."

"You were right, I would have found it difficult to hide what I thought of a First Officer who betrayed his Captain."

"....Besides, Tal might have been the culprit and sabotaged my suit soon after coming aboard for similar reasons. My pre-occupation has nothing to do with that, I knew you'd understand."

"Thanks. Mr. Thelin is a loyal officer, and his attitude towards Humans has slightly improved. Why the concern?"

"I've thought of a plan which might achieve full membership of the Federation for Earth," said Spock slowly.

"Oh!" said Kirk without enthusiasm. "With people like Ebberry about, are you sure it's wise?"

"Jim, have you forgotten it was our aim?"

"No, but I've my doubts."

"Yet you said yourself that the Enterprise experiment was a success, we've a good crew once again."

"I know, but it takes such a long time... However, do you want to tell me your plan? Can I help?"

"No, but Thelin could. I'm not sure I can get his support. I also need Father's support who would in turn have to get the Vulcan Elders' support."

"It depends on many people then. What would Thelin have to do?"

"Get the support of his family and people."

"For what? If you don't tell me, I'll go crazy wondering....."

"I will tell you, you may see flaws I do not see."

Spock explained at length and Kirk listened with increasing attention, then remained silent for a while, a silence Spock respected.

"It might work," he said at last, "and I see your problem. Mr. Thelin is unlikely to be enthusiastic!"

"Exactly. If he agrees, I believe other agreements will be easier to obtain. I'll call him now, you can stay, Jim."

"Wouldn't it be better if I left?"

"No. Thelin has acknowledged what you mean to me, and you're my First Officer. You should stay."

The Andorian arrived a few minutes later and saluted his Captain, then nodded to Kirk, his attitude indicating that he took the Human's presence for granted.

"Sit down, Thelin, this interview is to be off records," said Spock.

"Very well, Captain. Any trouble?"

"No, I need your assistance."

"You have it, need you ask?"

"It wasn't your assistance as Security Officer I was referring to, but your assistance as member of the Andorian ruling family."

This surprised the Andorian: "Please explain."

"Earth is a secondary member of the U.F.P. because it's considered unreliable and retarded and the presence of the Party seems to confirm this. Tellar has been member of the U.F.P. for many years, yet there's a fanatical party there, Gav gave us proof of its existence. Why should Earth be a secondary member?"

"The Tellarite party is against Humans, not against Aliens or the Federation," replied Thelin.

"According to Gav, it's meant to discredit Humans so that they're thrown out of the Federation while Tellar remains a member. This indicates a fanatical prejudice against Aliens, the same prejudice shown by Earth Party members."

"Put like that, you're right," agreed Thelin. "It means Tellar is as bad as Earth, in which case my advice is to throw both out, they're troublemakers."

"That wasn't the idea I had in mind," said Spock mildly while Kirk bit his lips not to smile. "Tellar has been a satisfactory member apart from the trouble with Earth. I believe one of the reasons for this is the fact that Earth isn't a full member, therefore Tellar looks down on Humans and they resent it. Many other Aliens, including Andorians, also look down on Humans, which increases the resentment."

"I see your point," said Thelin. "You mean that if Earth was a full

member, no-one would be justified in looking down on Humans and they might improve."

"Exactly, therefore more co-operation and collaboration between races would be achieved, as well as better understanding."

"You may be right," said the Andorian indifferently. "I don't see the point of all this."

"If Father agrees, we will suggest to the Vulcan Elders that the Federation Council should be pressured into accepting both Tellar and Earth as full members, or neither. If you persuaded your family to support this, it might have a good chance of success."

Thelin was visibly startled. "Now look here, I don't even like Humans! Oh I admit that a few like Commander Kirk here have some merit, but there are also the ones like Mr. Ehberry."

"I'm not condoning Ehberry or the Party," said Kirk gently, "but the very reason why the Party exists is because Earth isn't full member. I do not believe the Party would survive if equality was attained."

"Maybe not, but the fact remains that I don't like Humans!"

"The fact is irrelevant," said Spock. "I'm asking your assistance to remedy an injustice, I'm not asking you to like Humans."

"Just as well! Besides, my family will never agree."

"Maybe not, but you could try."

"As a favour to you?"

"If you wish to see it that way. I'd prefer your intervention to be for the cause of justice."

"Are you so concerned about Earth because your half-Human?"

Spock considered. "It's a possibility," he admitted, "but I do not believe it's a prime factor."

"No, it can't be if you say so, you're too honest, Spock... sorry, Captain, I was thinking of the past, and I believe I owe a few favours to the half-Human, to say nothing of the Vulcan. I'm willing to try, but my request will have my grandfather shout for a doctor to treat a case of insanity in the family."

"Illogical, an officer suffering from insanity wouldn't be allowed to serve in Starfleet."

"I hope they see that! I'll talk to my family when I go on leave."

"You can call your family from here."

"Use the ship's.... It's against the rules!"

"Except in an emergency. I believe we should hurry, I do not know how long Earth and Tellar will resist the urge to go to war."

"Will you call T'Pau?"

"I'll speak to Father first, he'll do the rest."

Thelin suddenly smiled.

"It's not fair, you know! To set your grandmother and my grandfather upon the Federation Council is giving it no chance!"

"The Romulans will prove difficult, and Tellar will oppose Earth membership at first, but might desist if rejection means Tellar is also rejected."

"Don't worry, your grandmother will petrify them, and my grandfather will terrify them! It might be fun to watch."

The Andorian left still smiling to himself.

"His reasons may not be what they should, but Thelin has improved over the years," said Spock.

"He's all right, must be if he likes you!" grinned Kirk.

"Must you reduce everything to emotion, Jim? I believe Thelin esteems and respects me and I esteem and respect him. However, I must prepare for the talk with my father. The Enterprise experiment being a success could help if other experiments have also succeeded. Leave now, Jim, I'll let you know what happens."

"Good luck, Spock, even if you don't believe in it!"

Having heard that Captain Allen had come aboard at Scotty's invitation, he went to engineering where the Scotsman was showing his engines off to the guest with McCoy and Sulu watching with a smile. Afterwards, they went to the rec room for a drink and Kirk, without disclosing what Spock had in mind, brought the conversation round to Earth membership of the Federation. He wasn't surprised to see his friends being only half enthusiastic for full membership, but Captain Allen stated categorically that Earth should be a full member to give worthy Humans the chance to prove themselves.

"This doesn't mean I like the Party, can't stand fanatics," he swore, "and if any man from the Party did reach a high post, it'd be the fault of the other Humans, they should stop him," he concluded. "About time the Aliens had another image of Humans outside fanatical lunatics!"

"You're right, Captain, I agree with you," said Kirk.

"I must get back to my ship. Give my regards to Captain Spock, I won't disturb him. He's quite a Vulcan, wish there were more Aliens like him, and more Humans for that matter!"

When the Captain came on duty, he asked Sarek to have a private channel to Vulcan ready by the time he left the bridge. Kirk made no comment, knowing the reason for the request and that Sarek was on leave on Vulcan. The other officers were surprised, although they were to polite to show it.

"I trust your family isn't unwell, Captain?" asked Salyk.

"My private call is not a family matter," replied Spock.

The Vulcan didn't insist and Kirk saw the Captain hesitate. Thelin arrived then and also asked for a private channel to his home world, with Spock's approval. This naturally increased the curiosity and because only senior officers were present, Spock decided to tell them of his project. Kirk was gratified to see the support he received and Vulcans could be trusted not to gossip.

By the time the two ships arrived at Starbase 1, Spock had heard from Sarek that he agreed to his plan and would discuss it with T'Pol and the Elders, before returning to Starbase 1.

Thelin had a longer job with his family, but his grandfather understood the justice of Spock's argument and saw the whole thing as a challenge for himself and for T'Pol. This appealed to him, so he agreed.

However, Spock had to see to his report to Starfleet and to the prisoners he and Captain Allen had to hand over to the Authorities. He also had to attend Gav's court-martial with Kirk and Thelin. The Tellarite's sincere regret for his crimes and the fact that his near-victims pleaded for clemency on his behalf impressed the judges, as well as his plea to remain aboard the ship. He was reduced to the rank of Ensign and no promotion would be considered for at least two years, a mild sentence Gav was very grateful for. The fact that he had revealed all he could about the fanatical Tellarite Party had also helped, it proved he was no longer one of them and he had given the Federation Council the proof it needed.

Admiral Tholev came aboard the Enterprise for an inspection and tried vainly to find fault. He did find fault with Spock's appointment of Kirk as First Officer though and told the Captain to see him the next day at his office. Kirk was on duty on the bridge while Spock escorted the Andorian off the ship, when Thelin arrived and asked him in a low voice:

"May I use a private channel, Mr. Kirk? Only don't tell the Captain. I want to try and get Tholev off his back. My family can do it, but Spock would be angry if he knew."

"Use all the channels you like," grinned Kirk, "and I won't tell him."

The First Officer relaxed in the command chair with a happy sigh. The ship felt good now. With the absence of tension, Spock and McCoy had started arguing again. Just as well Spock had promised immunity to the doctor or poor McCoy would be on a charge by now!

The next day a rather surprised Spock saw the nomination of Kirk as First Officer ratified by Tholev, who gave no explanations. The Captain didn't hide his pleasure when he told Kirk.

"Tholev must have been fed up with fighting you!" riled Kirk. "Any news about Earth membership?"

"I heard from Father that Vulcan has agreed to pressure the Federation Council along the lines I suggested."

"In that case, from what Thelin said, between your grandmother and his grandfather, it's in the bag!"

"Bag? What bag?"

"Another Human saying!"

They were in Spock's quarters when the buzzer sounded and Scotty came in at Spock's invitation. The Scotsman looked excited.

"I do apologise for disturbing you, Captain, Mr. Kirk."

"You've as much right to my time as anyone else, Mr. Scott. May I be of assistance?" asked Spock.

"Mr. Senak is recommending me for the post of assistant Chief Engineer, to replace his Vulcan assistant who is being promoted and transferred. Will his recommendation have your approval, Captain?"

"Certainly, I trust Mr. Senak's judgement."

"Then it's in the bag!" exclaimed an excited Scotty.

"Another bag?" queried Spock, his eyebrow raised.

Kirk smiled and pushed Scotty out, telling him to go and celebrate with McCoy, he'd join them later.

"Tholev isn't pleased about the apparent success of the Enterprise experiment," reported Spock, "and said that more time and proof were required."

"He'd say that, after trying to wreck it! Don't take any notice, Spock, it's only sour grapes!"

"What do you mean?"

"We'll definitely have to get around to that dictionary!" grinned Kirk.

Sarek called then, telling Spock that the meeting of the Federation Council was to take place shortly, and he could have it transmitted to the ship for the crew to see. Spock agreed and the assembly room was soon filled while Sarek and Uhura saw to the transmission side.

Spock and Kirk joined the crew to watch also and Captain Allen invited himself when he heard about the special meeting to be televised.

"We sure do get to see some V.I.Ps with you as Captain," murmured McCoy, looking in awe at the impressive Council chamber filling rapidly with the various

Councillors and their advisors. As secondary member, Earth only had an Ambassador and his aides. A large computer filled one wall and acted as impartial chairman, calling out for order if the debate became unruly. Any councillor disregarding it could be asked to resign by his colleagues.

T'Pau opened the debate with the thorny question: "Are Tellar and Earth to be asked to withdraw from the Federation, or should they be kept in? If they're kept in, Earth should be on equal terms with Tellar, i.e. a full member."

"Are you trying to say that Tellar is to be put on the same level as Earth?" asked an indignant Tellarite Councillor.

"It is on the same level," stated T'Pau. "Tellar has a fanatical anti-Human Party which is similar to the Earth anti-Alien Party."

"How did you know?"

"A member of that Party attempted to murder my grandson to discredit Earth."

The Tellarite sat down, deflated. The Earth Ambassador got up with a smile:

"Tellar is indeed unworthy of belonging to the U.F.P. if such a crime was committed."

"In that case, Earth is also unworthy. Your Party tortured my grandson."

The Ambassador sat down in turn, also deflated.

A Romulan Councillor stipulated that the Vulcan question had to be seconded. An elderly Andorian seconded it at once, adding:

"I find it a great honour to collaborate with my Vulcan colleague on this difficult issue. The more difficult the debate, the more rewarding the victory." And he surveyed the assembly as though defying anyone to disagree.

Sides were soon taken, and the Romulans found themselves supporting the Tellarites they didn't particularly like, against Earth, and fighting against the Vulcans they liked! The experiments were mentioned, among them the Enterprise one, and about half of them had been a success.

The debate never became unruly, T'Pau saw to that. Her cutting remarks, always logical, soon reduced a fierce opponent to a reluctant agreement. Her great strength lay in the fact that everyone knew Vulcan had nothing to lose or gain over the issue, and she never tried to tamper with the truth, no matter how harsh it might be. Vulcan integrity usually made some races follow ^{the} Vulcan lead, it meant being on the side of justice. T'Pau's Andorian ally enjoyed fighting for its own sake and getting the better of opponents, mainly of Tellarites who could argue endlessly. He didn't let them have the last word, and T'Pau's logic was too much for them; they soon found themselves in the position of having to support Earth membership or vote themselves out of the U.F.P., something they didn't want.

The Romulans gave up then, rather upset by their defeat. The two champions were clever and didn't wish to upset anyone, therefore, they tempered their victory with a concession: Earth would be a full member for 5 years, after which, if found wanting, the situation would be reviewed. It was up to Earth to prove worthy of the honour, the ball was neatly placed into the Humans' camp. The resolution also made war between Tellar and Earth impossible without breaking a major condition of belonging to the U.F.P.

The session had lasted ten hours and no-one aboard the Enterprise had noticed, so engrossed were they in the arguments. An ovation burst out of the Humans at the end, and while no-one except Kirk, Thelin and the Vulcan senior officers knew Spock's exact role, they knew of the experiment now. Kirk saw their emotion and guessed the Captain could ask

anything from now on, he'd get absolute obedience through esteem, respect and liking, not through fear. They might even come to appreciate logic! Spock's expressionless features didn't fool Kirk who put a hand on his shoulder amicably:

"Congratulations, Spock," he murmured, "and thanks for my planet who doesn't even know what she owes you."

"What did I tell you, Captain?" said Thelin on the other side. "My grandfather had a great time, he'll want to thank you for it!"

"There's some point in logic after all, Captain," said McCoy with a beaming smile, "your grandmother is certainly an expert!"

"What puzzled me is how she got Andorian support," said Scotty. "No offence meant, Mr. Thelin, but you don't care for Humans."

Thelin answered with a shrug, quite at ease:

"I'm convinced some Humans have good points, mainly the ones aboard this ship."

This won him many smiles!

"I regret my people's opposition," said Tal without ambiguity, "and hope it'll diminish as they get to know Humans better."

"I hope so, too, Mr. Tal," said Kirk with genuine warmth. "You've proved to be an excellent and responsible navigator, one of my best in fact."

"Thank you, Sir," Tal nearly smiled.

As for Gav, who was now back aboard, he found himself thanked for having contributed to the event by revealing all about the Tellarite party. Kirk was listening with half an ear and watched Spock uneasily. Something was wrong, he guessed at a rigid control giving nothing away, why?..... The Captain granted leave to the Human crew to celebrate on Starbase 1, and Kirk organised it with strict orders for good behaviour and dire threats to anyone who didn't obey!

When the ship was practically deserted except for a skeleton crew to maintain orbit, Kirk went to Spock's quarters. Maybe the Captain was tired.....

"You should go on leave, Spock," he said gently.

"Negative. I've to be at Starfleet HQ in two hours. You go on leave, Jim, there's no need for you to stay aboard."

"What's on your mind? My guess is that you hoped Earth wouldn't win full membership, and that's not logical!"

The Vulcan suddenly looked drawn and listless, as though tired of fighting.

"I'm ashamed, Jim," he murmured, "I never meant you to guess."

"Guess what? Explain."

The Captain opened a drawer of his desk and took out a form already filled.

"This is my recommendation for your promotion to Captain, duly signed. No-one, not even Tholev, can oppose it now. You fully deserve the promotion, Jim, and I had hoped to hide the fact that I'll miss your assistance."

Kirk took the form with a sigh.

"You never told me, of course! Have I a say in the matter?"

"It'd be illogical to refuse to be the first Human Starship Captain, Jim, you're worthy of the honour. I'm sure your ship will become known among the best."

"I'm not old yet, there's plenty of time! Let me think about this, Spock, don't send the form in yet."

"As you wish. Go on leave, you are too tired to decide at the moment."

"You're right," agreed Kirk with some surprise at the lassitude he suddenly felt. "I'll have a few days rest, then will think about the future. Don't do any-

thing until I return."

"You've my word."

Kirk left in a very depressed frame of mind, yet the future had never been so bright! His own ship at last... But the Enterprise is my ship! he thought impatiently, she's mine as much as the Captain's and everyone knows a First Officer is just as important.....

He settled into a luxury hotel, determined to do nothing but sleep for at least a day. Sleep eluded him completely, yet he was tired out after the long stress of the last missions..... He tried strenuous activities like swimming and boating to exhaust himself into sleep, it didn't work. There was no way of escaping the decision he had to make by sleeping! After a few very restless days, and nothing solved, he decided on impulse to see Admiral Sarek, his logic might help. If not, it would do no harm!

His request met with a frosty stare from an Andorian lieutenant, who told him Admiral Sarek was very busy and didn't see anybody just like that, he had to put the reason for his visit in writing.

Kirk looked at the form, filled it quickly and put 'private reasons'. The Andorian assured him it'd be rejected, but reluctantly sent the form through when Kirk pressed him. After all, he had nothing to lose.

Kirk was just as surprised as the Andorian to receive the form back with an invitation to see the Admiral at once.

"Welcome, Commander," said Sarek in his expressionless voice.

"Thank you for seeing me, Sir, and I apologise... It's a private matter, so if you're busy, I can come back another time."

"Unnecessary. Please explain."

Kirk hesitated, he had to avoid emotional display! Trying to be as brief and clear as possible, he explained that although he felt he should accept promotion, he didn't really want it.

"I'm still young, I've plenty of time to be Captain. I've enjoyed working with Spock, and I know he has too, although he wouldn't say it! We complete each other somehow, what one lacks the other has and vice versa. We make a good team if I say so myself, and working together is most rewarding. I hate the idea of giving it up just for the glory of being Captain."

Sarek had listened without interruption and looked a little hesitant, an unusual thing for a Vulcan.

"I'm not sure I understand," he said at last. "Hasn't Spock told you?"

"Told me what?"

"A possible alternative... I see he hasn't, therefore I shouldn't either perhaps."

"Whatever it is, please tell me," begged Kirk.

"Now that Earth is full member of the Federation," explained Sarek, "the integration of Humans into Starfleet is a prime concern. My suggestion of having training ships to that end has been approved. Because of the success of the experiment, the Enterprise is an obvious choice, and the Captain and his officers have proved their worth in dealing with one hostile Human crew at first, then half a hostile crew afterwards, plus several Aliens."

"Why didn't Spock tell me?"

"He didn't want you to feel obliged to stay and assist him, you deserve your own ship. You told him once I believe that you joined the space service to discover the unknown. While the Enterprise will get

interesting and sometimes dangerous missions, she may not get the most challenging ones, because of being a training vessel."

"The challenge would be aboard," said Kirk thoughtfully. "Spock must have wanted the same things I did, discovery, exploration...."

"I believe my son might have preferred a scientific career," said Sarek with a hint of sadness, "a career in Starfleet to work on unknown or new discoveries. However, he's half-Human, it makes him the best officer for this particular work of training multi-racial crews, and he had accepted the logic of it."

At the cost of his dreams, reflected Kirk with a combination of sadness and anger. "Does it mean he'll never get promotion?"

"Not at all, Mr. Kirk. I should think his promotion to Commodore will take place a few years from now. Once the Humans have proved worthy members of the Federation, and are considered as such, then Spock could be promoted to Admiral and be put in charge of specially difficult missions for Starfleet, a branch of the service every Admiral has to go through to prove his worth. I stayed in it by choice for many years myself."

Sarek stopped for a second, then continued with the hint of a smile:

"He'll have a flagship then, and that flagship will need a Captain, or even a Commodore. Your long wait for promotion would be taken into account."

Kirk's eyes had lit up.

"Thank you, Sir," he said, trying to keep the emotion out of his voice.

"Think carefully however, Mr. Kirk. Are you sure you want to continue dealing with a difficult crew and with Alien problems while on a possibly dangerous mission? The pressure, the stress is enormous, although the threat of assassination should be remote now."

"That's a definite improvement!" smiled Kirk. "I can't honestly say I always enjoy a difficult crew and difficult Aliens, but it's a worthy challenge, the success of which brings great satisfaction."

"Agreed, Mr. Kirk, and you're another officer who is best qualified for the job. My son attributes his success to you."

"I was glad to help. If Spock can renounce his dream in order to help Starfleet, I don't see why I can't. The missions haven't exactly been boring up to now!"

"I doubt that they will be apart from a few exceptions."

"Are you sure assassins are unlikely now?"

"The latest news from Earth is that the police raided the Party HQ and any Party activity will be subject to immediate arrest. I believe some fanatics tried to say we might reject Earth in 5 years, but the Humans seem to have understood that it was up to them to remain in the U.F.P."

"About time they realised that!"

"Also, the truth drug we use here at Starfleet can now be adapted for a Human mind (it was too strong before), so any Party member trying to join Starfleet should be detected."

"Good, we can use the drug if we suspect anyone. Thank you for your patience, Sir, I'm sorry I took so long."

"Not at all, Mr. Kirk, I am gratified to have been of assistance."

Kirk left with a much lighter step, there was no need to think any further, his mind was made up, and he could sleep later.....

When he burst into Spock's quarters with typical enthusiasm, the Captain was clearly taken aback.

"You hardly had any leave....."

"It was enough for my purpose. Let me have that form, please."

Spock handed it over, his face betraying nothing. Kirk took the paper and tore it in half in a quick movement.

"And that's settled! Any news of the next mission, or is it too soon?"

"I had a call from Father and I regret he told you, Jim."

"I'm glad he did, and I'll never forgive you for not telling me!"

"In that case why did you tear the form up?"

"A good question I can't answer," Kirk grinned, "but you can. Let's leave it at that, shall we?"

Spock nodded, but his eyes smiled so vividly that Kirk was reminded of the smile in the mine, and his own grin reflected all his affection.

"Wonder what ghastly Humans or Aliens we'll get this time," he said lightly.

"Probably the worst," replied Spock, without irony.

"We must have had the worst!.... Spock don't you ever regret having left a scientific career for Starfleet?"

"No, I believe my work here is more gratifying. I see Father must have told you that scientific research fascinates me. However, I can do some work in that field when I'm off duty, not perhaps as much as I want to. The demands on my time have been heavy recently."

"That's an understatement! Just as well you Vulcans can do without sleep. Does that mean I took up precious time with Kal-Toya? Why didn't you tell me?"

"Both Kal-Toya and scientific research are what you'd call recreation for me, therefore, you may have as many games as you want, duty permitting."

"Thanks, I will!"

"With a First Officer who is an asset, I shall have more spare time in any case."

"True, make me work hard!" joked Kirk.

"You'll be able to go on leave to Earth again, Jim, I'm gratified your exile is over."

"I might enjoy it if the Party is really dead, and I look forward to showing you my world. What about you? It's unfair that you should still be exiled!"

"My Father has indicated that in view of my recent achievements, my sentence might be revised, perhaps even lifted."

"I should think so! Let me know if it's not done and I'll go and harass your grandmother until she agrees to welcome you with open arms."

"I believe you would," said Spock with his half-smile. "I'd also be gratified to show you how beautiful Vulcan is."

"I look forward to that. I already saw a Vulcan sunset and a Vulcan sunrise, and they were very beautiful."

He was watching Spock preparing his desk computer for something.

"What are you doing?"

"It's ready, Jim, shall we start?"

"Start what?"

"The dictionary of Human sayings. It will be most useful for Vulcans."

"Glad to oblige, and I'm sure Bones would love to help, shall I call him?"

"By all means."

The doctor was keen at once.

"I'll give you a good one, Captain, for instance: "might as well be talking to a brick wall."

"Illogical, even a Human couldn't find a logical purpose in talking to a brick wall."

"Don't tell me you expect logic in this too!" said McCoy in mock desperation "its too much. I can't stand it any more!"

"Then apply for a transfer, doctor," advised Spock.

"Is Jim applying for one? He wouldn't to save his life! So why should I? If he can put up with logic, I'll prove I can too if it kills me!"

Kirk grinned and his grin was so genuinely happy that Spock and McCoy looked at him, then at each other.

"Why is the idea of my death so funny?" asked McCoy.

"Logic never killed anyone, doctor," stated Spock.

"That's what you think, Captain! Aboard your ship with so many Vulcans, it could become lethal through a sheer surfeit of it on poor unsuspecting Humans...."

Seeing Spock put a finger to his lips, McCoy stopped and turned. Kirk was asleep, his head lying in his arms on Spock's desk, a contented smile on his lips.

Spock and McCoy laid him on the Captain's bed gently. Kirk woke, but didn't bother to open his eyes, he was too sleepy. As though in a dream, he heard his two friends talk.

"Wonder why he looks so happy," mused McCoy aloud. "I'm sure you know, Captain, only you won't tell me."

"Jim will tell you if he wishes."

"Maybe, but it doesn't matter."

The doctor went to the door, then turned back.

"I wish I knew why, but I like serving aboard your ship, Captain Spock," he said with a grin which gave the lie to the resentment in his voice, before going out.

Kirk's mouth opened in an involuntary grin. He sensed Spock covering him and opened his eyes, seeing the Vulcan settle at his desk to work. As though sensing his gaze, Spock turned and his half-smile appeared, reflected in the dark light of his eyes.

"Sorry I can't keep awake," Kirk murmured drowsily. "Kal-Toya, I'll win one day, if it takes a lifetime!"

"I'm sure you will," answered Spock, "you usually win what you set your mind to."

"And you win even when you don't try to!"

Spock understood he was referring to Kirk staying aboard and the hint of a real smile played on his lips as he said simply:

"Thank you, Jim. Go to sleep now."

Kirk smiled back and drifted into a deep slumber happily. He could sleep now, the future held no fear. Even better, he was pretty sure it held no fear for Spock either!