

**ScoTpress**

**WHEN the**

**SUN**

**SHINES**

**by**

**Karen Hayden**

**a STAR TREK  
fanzine**

WHEN THE SUN SHINES

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

You can't see it with your eyes, hold it in your hands, but  
like the wind that covers our land, strong enough to rule  
the heart of any man - this thing called love.

It can let you up, never let you down, take your world and  
turn it all around; ever since time, nothing's ever been  
found that's stronger than love.

From the song 'A Thing Called Love'  
written by Hubbard.

In 'One Last Wish Fulfilled', Spock contracted a disease long thought extinct.  
Terminally ill, he asked Kirk to kill him rather than let him suffer a long-drawn-  
out end; Kirk did so, then took the body back to Vulcan to be cremated. While  
he was still on Vulcan, he was adopted as Sarek's son.

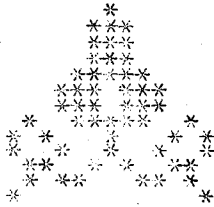
Then he returned to the Enterprise, to fulfil his last promise to Spock - to live  
life to the full, for both of them.

Shortly after, Kirk was very seriously injured by a trap set by Orions; and  
Spock's spirit came to help him. It seemed that, even dead, Spock would not  
leave Kirk's side...

## WHEN THE SUN SHINES

by

Karen Hayden



Captain James T. Kirk awoke from a restless sleep, his thoughts jumbled after a somewhat realistic dream, and reached out for the one person whom he hoped to see beside that bed more than anyone else in the universe - but he was not there, and as he regained full awareness of his surroundings and situation he realised anew that he never would be again. There were no gentle features framed by beloved pointed ears awaiting his gaze, no sublime smile of understanding and support. Instead there were only painful memories of what had happened to that unique person at his, Kirk's, hands. The outstretched hand was brought quickly back to be rubbed over tired eyes, and to be run through the golden hair in angry frustration; and, the other hand balled into a tight fist, a tiny tear escaped from beneath closed eyelids.

Suddenly the door opened to admit Doctor Leonard McCoy, his aim to check on his difficult but special patient after his instruments had told him that he had awoken once again. Kirk didn't move, but his hand quickly wiped away the tear before he would open his eyes to meet the brilliant blue ones of his friend.

"Well, Jim, had a good rest?" McCoy's joking manner eased the tension a little, but it made Kirk feel no better, and a bitter "No!" was all he would say.

McCoy frowned as Kirk turned away, dismissing him. But the doctor refused to be baited, instead fussing over his monitor panel above the bed and saying, "You know, I can't do anything about those dreams, except keep you tranquilised..." Kirk turned angry eyes on him, daring him to try it. "... but I know you wouldn't want that. Sometimes it helps to talk things out."

"Not now, and... not with you."

Hurt, Bones went to leave, but Kirk's hand reached out and clasped him on the arm, and he turned pleading eyes towards his friend.

"I'm sorry, Bones. I didn't mean that the way it sounded. It's just that... Hell, I can't talk to anyone right now! It's..."

"No need to apologies - or explain. I do understand. But if you can't talk to me, then why not try yourself?" He reached over and pushed the personal screen across in front of Kirk, adjusting it so that his Captain wouldn't have to try and move. "You could always make a personal log..." Before Kirk could answer Bones took one last look at the screen above the bed, then, satisfied, he simply added, "If you want me for anything, just holler!" and he walked from the room, an "I'll see you're not disturbed" hanging in the air behind him.

Jim found a smile crossing his lips. Bones did understand, and it was unfair of him not to give him more credit. He had made such an effort, and had gone through so much - and even now it was Bones helping Jim when it should have been the other way around. He allowed his hazel eyes to roam around the small room that Bones had put him into, but he didn't see the pale lemon walls or the equipment upon the shelves and cupboards. All he could see were the reds and browns and greys and yellows of Vulcan, and all he could think of was that funeral ceremony... when he had said his final farewells...

He flicked a few buttons beneath the screen and turned it in - and then he sighed as he realised that Bones was right. Wincing as he forced himself to sit a little more erect he began to speak, hesitantly and quietly at first, but slowly he grew in confidence and the therapy began to work its magic upon his tortured soul.

"Captain's personal log.

It has been... half a lifetime since Spock... left me. I can still hardly believe that he is gone, that he won't just walk through

that door at any moment, hands behind his back in that oh-so-familiar pose of his, or with a chessboard under his arm and a teasing challenge in his eye. I feel... numb. As if a part of me had... gone with him, and I doubt that I will ever feel any different, for I suppose in all senses a part of me did go with him, and will always be with him - till we are re-united. //Stop it, Jim! McCoy would have a fit if he heard you talking like that!// How could I ever feel any different? How could I ever really begin to live my life to the full again, as I used to before... with him at my side? I'm not even sure if I'll ever live fully again, after this damned 'accident' - or whether I want to..."

Kirk closed his eyes and allowed his head to fall back against the pillow as he became immersed in his memories.

"I still feel guilty over what I... had... to do for him. Despite the fact that it was what he wanted... I still can't help but think that perhaps I could have done something more, something different... After all, McCoy has come up with miracles before, for us, for the ship. And yet, what could I have done? He was dying, nothing could be done - in this universe - to help him. He'd made sure in his usual efficient way that nothing could save him. And when he asked me to allow him to die in dignity before he lost his intellect, his control, before his very brain became affected, could I have refused him? I was his friend, always will be - I had to use the strength that special friendship had given me to end his agony and give him peace. So why do I reproach myself now? Maybe it's because I love him, and miss him so much..."

Kirk switched off the tape, allowing a sob to escape his throat, grateful that he was alone and that he hadn't succumbed and told all to Bones. There were no tears now, just the dry, racking sobs that left him exhausted and panting with reaction. He gritted his teeth, forcing fatigue away, making himself continue with what he had set himself to do, knowing it would help in the long run. He switched the tape back on, keeping his hands clasped tightly together in his lap.

"I shall never forget that tape he left for me. He said so many things... They meant so much... If only we'd been able to tell each other how we really felt face to face, before it was too late. But at least he did know how special he was to me, and I know now that he felt the same way. We may not have admitted it to each other... but I suppose we didn't really have to.

At least I did partially keep my promise later on, and began to enjoy my life again, and live it as fully as I could without him beside me. I tried to live it for both of us, but there was so much missing, the magic was gone. I did my best, but maybe my best isn't good enough any more...

As the days passed I felt the change, I felt stronger, and I realised that he was not truly dead, at least, not in the 'normal' sense of the word. I knew that he was near me all the time, that he was a part of my every action and thought, and that he would never leave me - as he promised me he wouldn't. Even as I laid him to rest upon those winds of his homeland I felt him near, and I drew some semblance of comfort from that nearness. I think I was able to convey some of that comfort to Sarek and Amanda - and maybe even Bones. I hope so... They had all gone through so much...

"It meant so much to me to be accepted into Spock's family as a son. And to have that IDIC given to me afterwards - Spock's IDIC... It helped so much, and it still does help now."

Kirk's hand went involuntarily to his neck and tightly grasped hold of the IDIC, which he always wore, and which was now pitted and scarred after his accident.

"Ah Bones... If only you could believe me and have the same confidence in Spock. He doesn't see the... logic..." His breath caught on the word "... in my belief that Spock IS with me in all things at all times. I hope he can find his own answer now. I need his understanding so much, not that well-intentioned ridicule of his. This... accident... won't have helped. There's me going on that Spock will protect me, and then this happens. Even I did feel some doubt

because Spock's promised protection failed, but then again I always did expect too much of him. I almost wish that I had died, and then we'd be together now..."

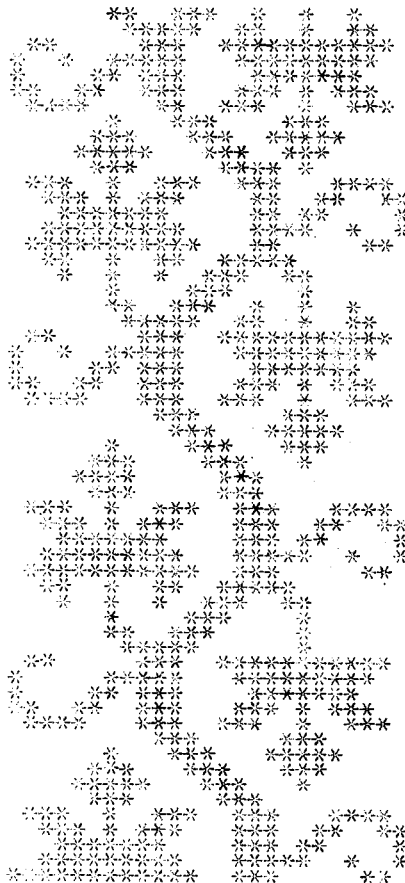
Angry at himself for letting negativity creep into his intentions he stretched his abused body, allowing the pain to snap him out of it.

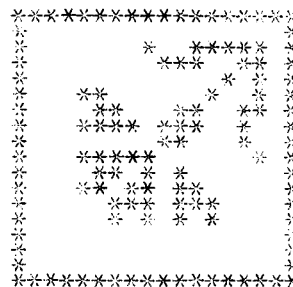
"No! Death is NOT the answer! It would mean a shattering of the promise that I made to Spock - and I will never do that. I have to go on living for BOTH of us - until I know the right time has come for me to join him.

"It did hurt when Chekov took over his science station, even though I recommended him for the post. And when Sulu assumed the position of First Officer... But he would want the Enterprise to go on, for life goes on, and it is better that strangers have not taken his place. And when I get out of here we WILL carry on with life, my friend - I promise you that!"

Kirk switched off the recorder for the final time, and then looked around Sickbay one more time. This time he simply saw the pale lemon of the walls and the equipment upon the shelves and cupboards - nothing else - as if the voice thoughts which had been troubling his every waking and sleeping moment had been exorcised, at least for the present. He sighed contentedly, and settled down for some much-needed sleep, knowing that this time he wouldn't be plagued by the dreams.

But before he finally closed his eyes he pressed the 'erase' button on the recorder.





The sun shone today.  
It was the first time in a long while  
That I had even noticed it.  
Its brilliant rays of life-filled warmth  
Bathed me in their scarlet splendour...  
And I smiled.

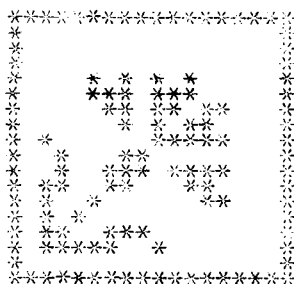
Realisation hit me like a storm  
That amidst my grief and sorrow  
Life carried on, anew,  
And my own life had to continue too,  
In his memory, and for my peace of mind.  
It was what he had wanted.

When we first met he had never noticed  
The simple beauty of a setting sun,  
Had never been able to see  
What freedom lay upon a breeze,  
Had never been able to appreciate a peaceful, wooded valley -  
Or a beach. It took time...

But eventually he came to love it all  
As I did.  
Shore leaves shared, in growing love  
And understanding, one of the other.  
Shared, strengthened, appreciated beyond belief.  
And I even saw, because of him, what I had not seen before.

Then one day, which turned to nightmare;  
Savoured life, turned to pain-wracked torture;  
And an inevitable, eventual demise  
Caused by illness long though dead!  
It gripped his soul, tore his life from him - with my help...  
And I had to watch him die!

My grief overwhelmed me. Guilt, too,  
For I had been unable to help him, had been unable to save him.  
That moment we had both feared  
Occurred in a moment of time, so simply, so quickly....  
How can life go on? I'd thought...  
But for him I vowed to wait for the sun to shine again.



Days wore on into weeks in a journey that was almost intolerable to the free spirit of the man who was Captain. It was a journey of inevitability, for despite all the help that the spirit-healer that Doctor Leonard McCoy had witnessed had given him, the injuries that James T. Kirk's body had sustained needed an excess of skill and dedication from the entire medical team to heal. Those injuries should have caused death, so severe had they been, but that dark shadow had not been allowed to fall - and it would not fall, until the time was right. The Vulcan, Spock, had ensured that then, and would ensure it in future days. That knowledge had given McCoy, the senior medical officer on board the Starship Enterprise, the strength he had needed to cope with what his training had said was impossible.

The doctor now stood where he had stood a myriad times since that accident on the planet where the Orions had laid their trap - the trap that Kirk had unwittingly triggered - at the side of the bed where his Captain lay in the main section of his Sickbay.

The young man's sandy hair was slightly matted with the now-characteristic perspiration, the familiar lock of hair seemingly attached forever to his brow. Below that lock the hazel eyes were bright, full of life, and held the same question that they had held each day: 'When can I get out of this bed?!'

McCoy looked at the many bruises, cuts and scars still evident upon the handsome face. They seemed all the more apparent against the white of the pillow, and though they served only as a partial reminder, now, of the real injuries that had been sustained, Bones found them more and more difficult to bear. He was also finding it more and more difficult to withstand that open pleading in his friend's eyes; each day there was a tightening of the apprehensive knot which held his soul within its grasp. One day Kirk would again be fully well, and would again return to the duty that was his life, to face the ultimate danger.

Bones feared that day more and more, for he had already lost one part of his life, one friend who could not be replaced, and he didn't think he could survive if he lost the other one, named Kirk. He now believed, as Jim did, that his Captain would never be truly alone, but he still feared the day when the accident would turn to death, and Spock would be helpless to prevent it...

Finally, he allowed his brilliant blue eyes to fall to meet the hazel ones, and he knew instinctively what Kirk's first question would be. He was proven correct.

"Today, Bones?"

The catch in Kirk's breath had long since disappeared, for Bones had successfully repaired the rib-cage which had been smashed. It had taken four long operations to systematically graft new bones to replace those which had burst like shrapnel into the lung tissue. The lungs themselves had been laser-sealed, and would function normally once more, though there was a good deal of inevitable scarring of the tissue. The spleen and liver had been replaced, the transplants having been made on the very day of the 'accident', before the spirit-healer had even appeared. The haemorrhaging had been the greatest danger on that day - and that had been something that Bones himself had been unable to stop fully. It had taken the skill - or had it been just the presence? - of the spirit-healer to bring about the cessation of that.

What caused Bones more concern than he could quite clearly define was the fact that the injured arm had stiffened considerably, despite the fact that all evidence by both instrumental and personal examination proved that it had fully healed. And the legs, which had been broken in seven different places, would need a great deal more physiotherapy than Kirk would necessarily allow them. So far he had only walked around Sickbay - admittedly he had made good progress, but he still tired quickly - too easily after the six weeks of almost total bed rest that he had undergone. McCoy was worried.

But the day had to come eventually when the break from Sickbay would have to



be made, for Jim's psychological - if not totally for his physical - good. And that day, McCoy admitted to himself, would be today. He bent to mop Jim's brow, but resisted an impulse to brush the lock of hair away. Finally he spoke.

"Morning, Jim." Indicating the towel he added, "You need a new wabher!"

Smiling, Jim retorted easily, through long practice over the weeks he'd spent in the ship's hospital. "That, Doctor, is frustration! And if I don't get out of here soon, I may well flood the whole ship!"

He made to raise his right arm, but winced as the stiffness pervaded his senses. Ignoring it, as Bones pretended to do, he used his left hand instead to rub the newly-gathered droplets away, and to push his hair from his eyes. Bones had to restrain a smile as he watched the lock of hair return immediately to its familiar place upon the young Captain's brow.

"Now, are you going to answer my question or not?"

That tone was unmistakable. It was the Captain talking, and today he wanted



positive actions, positive answers, and not excuses to keep him confined. He had already stayed cooped up longer than at any other time before, and despite the fact that Sulu, newly appointed First Officer, had come in each day with status reports, Kirk was not satisfied. He craved to be back in charge, back where he belonged, back at the helm of his ship.

Another smile briefly touched his lips as he recalled the message he had received from Starfleet only two weeks before, officially notifying him that Sulu had been given Spock's old position. It had been full of praise, full of encouragement, but pointedly devoid of any mention of the Vulcan - and Jim had found himself pitying the poor souls of Starfleet, for they were barren of any light in their lives.

Bones, still beside him, still pondering on the command tone imposed so authoritatively, wondered why Jim had found it appropriate to allow a smile to crease his lips, having imposed that tone. The wonder lasted scant seconds - it had to have been a thought, somehow connected with or about Spock. It always was. Whenever Kirk's expression had changed suddenly during the past few weeks of full awareness, Bones hadn't had to ask why. He had come to know only too well. On occasion it had been as if Jim was in a different world entirely. He forced himself to close the random thoughts, then, and to concentrate on the reply he would have to make to Jim's question.

"Jim, I'm releasing you from Sickbay. But you're to stay in your cabin, and not even attempt to go up to that Bridge of yours for at least three days more."

"But, Bones..."

"No buts, Jim. No arguments. I mean that. And in those three days you'd better spend plenty of time in Physio. and the gym. If you don't get your legs in better condition than they are right now, then I can't pass you as fit for duty - and..." he hesitated for a moment, then forced himself on "... I'll have to make a report to Starfleet."

McCoy gauged Jim's reaction carefully, fully expecting an explosion. He'd been hesitant to broach that subject initially, but he knew - or at least hoped - that drastic measures would bring about drastic results. No explosion resulted, however. Instead of the words of recrimination that the doctor had anticipated all that Kirk said was,

"Don't worry, Bones. I'm fine. I'll be back at work on no time. Come on, now..." He waved his hand. "Get my clothes!"

While Kirk dressed Bones retreated to his office to brood. Jim had accepted what he had said all too easily, and that was not like the Kirk he knew. Regret was already beginning to form for the decision he had made to release Kirk, but he knew that no other decision had been possible.

He paced the length of his office, then stood facing the open door. It wasn't long before Kirk was framed in it - just as Spock had been all those long weeks before. Bones felt his breath catch in his throat. Jim looked exactly as he should look. He'd lost a little weight, but it looked good on him, and to all intents and purposes he was healthy. Dressed in the familiar gold of command, balanced lightly on the balls of his feet, one hand on his hip, the other - the stiffened one - up against the door jamb, the charming smile on his lips, he looked every inch the Captain they all knew so well.

"Well, Bones, how do I look?"

"Great. Just fine. It'll do the crew good to see you like that."

It was a totally honest answer. Morale had been low since the accident, since Spock's death, and they needed to know their Captain was well again, was once again leading them as they wanted him to do. The whole ship needed this. And Bones even began to believe it himself as he saw the look of confident optimism upon Jim's face.

"Right, then. I'll be off." He turned as swiftly as he was able, an amiable, "I'll see you later, Bones" hanging in the air behind him.

Bones could do no more than call a few words after him. "Just remember what I said, Jim!"

For several seconds after his Captain had gone Bones remained where he was, unable to face the Sickbay which held so many painful memories for him, but which still seemed to possess his very soul. He hoped with all his heart that Spock would keep the promises he had made - would be able to keep them. He hadn't told Jim that on three separate occasions Kirk had woken screaming Spock's name, and that for several long seconds nothing would calm him - nothing until the moment when Kirk seemed to realise that Spock was nearby. Bones feared for what could occur during those seconds when Spock obviously could not be where he wanted to be.

It felt good, walking the corridors of his ship once more. It had been a long time since he'd been able to do this, and he had missed it all - the ship itself, the crew, the everyday activity that was all a part of ship-board life, the atmosphere, the noise. It was all a part of his life, and without it there was no meaning to his existence. But he also felt that the magic the ship and the life he had led when Spock was at his side was gone, never to be replaced, and he knew things could never be the same again.

Acknowledging the friendly, relieved greetings from his crew, he savoured the deck beneath his feet, but that very thought brought bitterness rising. He cursed his legs, which would not heal; he limped now, and it was not natural. Until they were fully healed he would not admit they were his, and at the same time could not fully accept that he was Captain.

Rebellion swelled within him, and he searched his own mind for a way of going his own way, of being alone with his anger and indecision. Too much had happened in too short a time - Spock's death, then his own very near death. And the corridors brought back the memories all too realistically. The confinement in Sickbay, which had exceeded all others, had caused his free soul to feel restricted, and he had to be... somewhere else, now.

He halted, causing stares, as he searched the deck for somewhere to go. He ran his hand through his hair, then made the decision that had been the only one to make. There was only one place on board ship which would give him the semblance of freedom he needed...

He propelled his rapidly stiffening limbs in the direction of the turbo-lift, but instead of instructing it to go to Deck 5, and his quarters, he sent it on its way to the Observation Deck. McCoy would be displeased - that was an understatement, he'd be boiling mad! - but Kirk hoped McCoy knew him as well as he thought he did... and hoped he'd understand.

Immediately on his entrance Kirk felt the tension of all those weeks of confinement ebb away, to leave him feeling totally unrestricted, allowing his very soul to feel free again. It was in that freedom that his mind became active in retrospect.

Ever since he had regained consciousness he had felt as if someone had been standing next to him, as if he had had an invisible sentry standing guard over him. That vague realisation had caused him to feel at ease, peaceful, safe... not alone. He couldn't quite define what that presence was at first, or why he felt sure that it was something tangible and not imagination, but he was certain of what he felt. It had been many days, during which the awareness had become enhanced, and full realisation had returned to him, before he had begun to believe that it was... Spock.

It was then that he had remembered the conversation he had had with Bones, soon after he had regained consciousness. Bones had told him of Spock's visit, and how it had been Spock himself who had saved his, Kirk's, life.

It had been difficult for Jim to accept at first, but in time acceptance had come, for it only substantiated Spock's promise. The Vulcan had told him categorically that he would not allow his friend and brother to join him in death until the time was right, and had made sure, himself, that that would be the case. It was then, also, that James Kirk realised with a certainty that was unbeatable, knew with a certainty that surpassed the certainty he had had before the accident, that Spock was not dead in the normal sense of the word, but rather that he had only exchanged his corporeal body for a spiritual one, and that he, Kirk, still had him at his side, despite the fact that he could not be seen.

He remembered the words that Edith had spoken to him all those years before. 'At your side, as if he has always been there, and always will.' It was strangely gratifying, and somehow indicative of what Edith had been, that her words had been proven to be correct - in every way.

He reached out trembling fingers to touch the panel before him. Those memories had brought the characteristic pain of guilt that he always felt when he thought of what he'd had to do to the woman he had loved so very dearly. All he could do was remember the millions who had lived because of Edith's death, and drawn some comfort from that knowledge.

The sight before him was somehow magnetic in its intensity. It was as if the scene was drawing him towards it, attracting him as it always did. Looking at that vast infinity he suddenly thought that it was possible that Spock himself could be out there - somewhere. The winds of Vulcan could quite possibly have left the planet's restrictions and begun to wander the velvet vastness, taking Spock with them. Perhaps he had been able to reach the stars again... and perhaps that was why he seemed so much nearer now than before...

The cramping stiffness in his legs eventually caused Jim to seek solace in one of the luxurious couches placed strategically along the entire length of the Observation Deck. That stiffness had begun as soon as he'd begun to walk the decks, but he had forced himself to ignore it, to push it to the back of his mind. Now, however, it was becoming painfully distracting, and he knew he'd have to rest a while. He cursed himself for his own weakness. He allowed his abused body to sink into the soft comfort, and arranged his legs straight out in front of him to allow them some relief as he rubbed his thighs ~~scently~~. Seconds passed, and finally the discomfort dissipated enough to allow him to think of what lay ahead. He allowed his head to drop onto his hand, as if in resignation to that future time, and sighed, a self-mocking smile upon his lips. Soon he was asleep.

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Uncharacteristic panic had gripped the Vulcan Spock when he had entered Sickbay to find Jim gone. That same panic had driven him to the cabin which was his Captain's, only to find that too unoccupied. He had explored all alternatives, systematically surveying Bridge, Engineering, even the laboratories. Eventually, he admitted to himself that there was but one place aboard ship where the man he sought could be. In seconds he too was before the observation panel which showed all infinity to whosoever sought it. The stars received but a cursory glance, however - it was to the golden head, bowed now in peaceful sleep, that the dark eyes were drawn.

Spock drew a deep breath. He was still unable to get used to the fact that he could no longer actually draw that life-giving gas named oxygen into his lungs; his breaths were now nothing but reflexive actions which refused to die from his senses. He sighed, also, at the sight of the one man special to him. He had wondered what he would have done if he had never been able to see Jim again, if only occasionally, and had ended up rejecting the thought, afraid in case the thought became a fact. He was grateful that he could see Jim, that he could make his presence known, that he could now feel the emotions he had waited all his life to feel. Fear, love, hope, all pervaded his senses since his 'death', and he found it increasingly difficult to accept that fact. He had

never believed that death could be like this; had never deemed it necessary to give himself the time needed to allow his logic to assimilate the odds of such possibilities. He had never contemplated death at all, until the disease had made it necessary, and then it had been to enable him to aid that precious golden soul, now before him, to accept what was to come, and what he had been asked to do.

When the winds of the Vulcan soil, abounding in the region of the mountains where the Ker Hay had taken place, had claimed him, just as ancient tradition had always told would happen, he had felt his disembodied self rise on scarlet wings as if he had floated on a gossamer cloud of gentle, myriad particles of... existence. He had risen slowly until he had looked down on that golden head standing so proudly before him, Spock's, end; until he could see his parents, standing just behind Jim, who were maintaining all that Vulcan was. None who had been present had allowed their grief to mar the tradition of a million Vulcan souls. Bones had stood as the pillar at Jim's side, as he always had been and always would be. He had bravely witnessed what had transpired, and his strength had been unequalled. Spock felt proud at the recollections of what had taken place for and because of him - and because of his death he was able to feel gratitude, and an overwhelming love for those he loved, and who loved him.

It was a long time, however, before Spock realised the full potential of what he now was. Corporeality was non-existent; instead the essence of what he had been in life, and always would be, had transcended into a dimension beyond the sight of those who still lived - he could see, but not be seen. It seemed as if he had existed in non-existence for what seemed aeons, floating, fluctuating, drifting, coalescing into one part, one whole, then splitting into a million separate parts, and all the time what was his intellect cried out, "Jim!"

His intellect itself had caused him to break through from that indefinable dimension into the reality of life once more, because of the bond which connected him intangibly to that one man named Kirk, because of his strength of will. The first time he had attempted the transition he hadn't been strong enough to sustain the connection between one dimension and the other. He had fought to warn the Enterprise Captain of the trap the Orions had set for him, but he'd succeeded only in giving Kirk an intuitive 'feeling' that Spock was near, and had not succeeded in giving him the real warning of danger.

Failure. And Jim had almost died. The knowledge that he had almost had to witness helplessly the end of his bond-mate's life had caused him pain, excruciating pain which had ripped him asunder, and he had been thrust back into the dark dimension of total sleep. The Vulcan would not accept that, however, and had fought. He'd refused to say goodbye to what he most cared for, despite the fact that he had welcomed death sooner than was completely necessary. But, he admitted to himself, he had accepted death as he had out of love for that man, the other half of him, believing that ultimately acceptance would come for both of them, and less pain.

But he had erred in his logic, and now that he had found a method of joining Kirk once more he would not give it up, he would fight until the fight left him. Eventually success had been his - but only because of the extremity of the circumstances. James Kirk had been at the brink of the end of his life. Promises which had been made had been put aside because of the nearness of what Jim wanted - if he allowed himself to die then he could join Spock again. It was so tempting, and his subconscious was evaluating the possibility of letting go of the strands of life. Spock did not want that, and the Vulcan believed that it was not what Kirk really wanted, for the Human loved life too much, and had promised to live that life for Spock in the Vulcan's absence. He had promised, and Spock knew that Kirk wanted to keep that promise - so Spock had aided him through extreme force of will, and in doing so had established a semi-permanent link between separate dimensions. Kirk would live, because of him.

But, failure again, in one most important factor. Though McCoy had been able to see him in that one instant in Sickbay, though the doctor had witnessed

some of what had happened, Spock had never been able to make himself visible to the one man who mattered. He had established by now that the link between them was as strong as they had both believed it would be, but to the Vulcan it was not enough. Though Jim knew that he was never totally alone, that he, Spock, was always nearby, Spock knew that in time Jim would feel as he himself did, that because the ultimate separation had occurred, that which they had always feared so greatly, their respective souls would call out for reprieve from their loneliness and enforced grief. It was more than either life-force could tolerate....

The rambling thoughts, repeated thoughts of a million times, travelled through the essence of Spock's mind as he stood before the Enterprise Captain, savouring all that the man was, savouring the very sight of him. A lot had happened in the past weeks, and it was difficult for him to accept it all. As the days had passed to weeks he had fought harder and harder against that all-encompassing blackness which beckoned him - that blackness named death. And he had vowed not to accept it.

It was difficult even for him to understand. He was dead in the sense that he no longer lived, yet he would not truly die, would not make the total transition, until he had let go of what had been; until the ties of life were severed; until he accepted what had to be. But the Vulcan was not prepared to accept any part of 'what had to be'. He had had to leave his life, but he would never sever the ties that formed part of what he was. He was determined that he would never truly leave James T. Kirk.

His fingers crept forward, ghostly tentacles reaching out to caress the free, living soul of that one unique man. Just one touch. One touch to reassure himself that Kirk was no dream... As his fingers drew near the fragile link grew weaker, and he was drawn away, to leave a small breeze to flutter the oh-so-familiar lock of hair upon the forehead of the gold-clad Human.

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The nap had been a brief one - he had been woken by his scream. Kirk knew that he called for Spock, and that knowledge unnerved him. It confused him, too, for he didn't really know why he had needed to call out. There had been no dream... surely what he had sensed had been totally real...

Despite the shock of waking so suddenly, he felt much better, much refreshed, so he pulled himself to his feet. There was a strange atmosphere around him now, one which had not been there - before. Without any doubt he seemed to know what had caused it. Spock. He was still pondering his certainty as he headed for his beloved Bridge, where he really belonged.

The turbolift seemed to take forever, and during its interminable journey Kirk thought, rather hesitantly, of what McCoy would say when he found out that he had disobeyed his direct medical orders. He couldn't help a mischievous smile from dancing across his lips as the doors finally dilated at his destination.

For a few moments he stood there, surveying that which he loved so much. Sulu sat in his command chair, all other personnel were at their respective stations, hard at work. The First Officer turned to see who had entered, and rose immediately to vacate the command seat for his Captain. He smiled broadly, evidently pleased to see him.

Kirk descended the steps, waving his hand to allow Sulu to reseal himself. "It's okay, Mr. Sulu. I shouldn't be here at all, really. Just popped up to see how things are going." The mischievous smile flashed once more, and Sulu could easily interpret what Kirk did not say. It was so typical of his Captain to disobey medical orders to visit the heart of his ship, if only for a few minutes.

Jim looked around him once more. He felt no thrill at being back on the Bridge - there seemed to be no real reason to take the centre seat. He felt now

as he had felt just after Spock had actually died - without the Vulcan at his side there was no thrill of command, the glow had gone from his life. He sighed heavily, and with an effort turned back to Sulu and tried to concentrate.

"Ships's status, Mr. Sulu?"

"All normal, sir. Everything's just fine. We're on a routine mission at present - star-mapping. Nothing to worry about." He put special emphasis on that last sentence, and Jim met his eyes, nodding in acceptance and understanding.

"I'll endeavour to keep myself from doing that." Turning towards the science station he acknowledged Chekov's greeting. His new science-blue uniform was adorned with Lieutenant's stripes, and it was nice to see, rewarding... yet the sight of him brought memories flooding back to the mind of the young Captain. It would take a long time to adjust to seeing Chekov standing there instead of ...Spock.

"Carry on, Mr. Sulu. Please keep me posted."

"Aye, sir."

Sulu watched his Captain ascend the steps and hesitate beside Uhura's station. Something was not right with their world, quite yet.

Uhura smiled up at Kirk. "I'm so glad to see that you have lost your limp, sir."

"Wha...?" Kirk's hand went involuntarily to his knees, which had been so stiff not so very long ago, and realised that she was correct. He smiled. "Ah yes. It seems I've had some special help - again."

The true significance of his words was lost on Uhura, but he knew what he meant, and believed. "Well, I'd better be off and obey the good doctor's instructions. Thank you." He turned back to his Bridge. "Thank you, ladies and gentlemen."

There were acknowledgements from all around, and he exited the Bridge with a buoyant heart.

//It was Spock! That feeling on the Observation Deck...!// It was that thought which echoed and re-echoed through his mind as he journeyed to his cabin. He wasn't quite sure how, but it was a fact that his limp was gone, that he was whole again.

For a few seconds he hesitated outside his cabin, savouring the emotions which swept through him as he thought of what awaited him inside. It was so long since he had been inside his 'home' within his ship. Would the idlomputt still be turning?

Fears were groundless. As soon as the door slid aside he was bathed in its scarlet glow, and he found himself smiling in relief. Spock's ritual, eternal light of life still shone with all its former glory; it was a real part of Spock, as was the IDIC that he always wore. Insitinctively his hand went to his neck, touching the chain lovingly. The glow which bathed him seemed to give him added, renewed strength to that which he had received on the Bridge, and he suddenly felt very confident, very optimistic, as if he knew that as long as that idlomputt shone forth, as long as he wore the IDIC, then there was life.

On impulse he drew the IDIC from beneath his shirt and held it between his fingers. It was pitted and scarred, further evidence of the injuries that his body had received in the cave-in. His body had been as scarred as the IDIC, was still scarred in places. He contemplated, momentarily, trying to talk Bones into leaving the remaining scars alone and not giving him the restorative surgery as was planned, so that he would have a constant reminder of the impetuousness which had almost cost him his life again... But he knew that Bones would never agree to that, and he also knew that he needed no physical reminder. He was who and what he was, and would not, and could not, change. Spock wouldn't want that now, hadn't wanted it before, and that renewed knowledge gave him added incentive,

somehow, to do as Bones had bade him, despite the fact that the limp had disappeared. Grabbing a towel he impulsively headed for the turbolift, his destination the gym, his intent a long, exhausting swim.



"You are a restless soul, entity-Spock. You must accept your new existence, else the true properties of it will never be yours. Release those in the outer life, allow the ties that bind you there to sever along with the heartbeat that drove you onward - before."

"Illogical it may be, but I shall never do as you bid me. When the... end, my end, approached, I was able to accept it, to say goodbye to... life, to leave the other...half of me, because of what we were and because of the circumstances. It caused us both unaccountable... pain, but we endured it for each other. But now I realise that I cannot exist for... eternity... as I am now, without him who means so much to me."

The light which had appeared before the Vulcan when the voice itself had first spoken to him grew brighter, more incandescent, and it bathed Spock in a sublime glow, causing a peaceful feeling of tranquillity to flow through him. But its obvious purpose of stilling his inner being was unsuccessful, as was Spock's attempt to see within the light, to learn to whom the voice belonged - that voice which was so calm, so full of patient acceptance.

It did not surprise Spock himself that his answer had been charged with emotion, for ever since he had breathed his last breath of life within the arms of that special individual named Kirk, he had felt all that he had been unable to feel throughout his life - before. All sensations were now more well-defined than he had ever thought possible, particularly when he succeeded in breaking through the all-too-tangible barrier that separated him from the existence for which he craved. And he gave thanks for that new-found emotion.

But this new emotion did not seem to aid his predicament any. He felt dejected and totally helpless. Finally he sighed, a long shuddering sigh of dejected desperation and dropped his hands, which he had slowly raised upwards as if begging for an acceptable explanation, down by his sides.

"Entity-Spock, if you continue with your attempts to penetrate that which you think of as a barrier you could affect the structure of this area, and that from which you came. You could remain a transcendental being, what Humans call a 'ghost'; you could cause yourself to become entangled within existence itself, and become forever separated from the entity-Kirk. You and he are coextensive, your souls are coessential..." The voice faltered, as if contemplating the true significance of its own words, as if pondering on the relevant inferences. "There have been few of the countless numbers who have joined me who have been as you two are. The entity-Hephæstion, countless Earth-centuries ago, was of the same constitution as you, until he re-joined with the entity-Alexander."

Another pause, in which Spock was sure the voice had actually sighed, as if remembering the two men of history with fondness. "Your case must be studied, perhaps reconsidered..."

Spock had listened in stunned silence, but finally found his voice. "I must know... I need to know to whom this... voice... belongs. I need to have a definite... reference and area from where I can assimilate what is occurring to me. Help me."

There was no hesitation before the answer came. "If your... situation... is to be reconsidered, there are some things you cannot know. I am called by many names throughout the galaxy. On Earth I have been called Hermes, Gabriel, Mercury. In your planet's prehistory I was known as Seyhalla."

Silence fell. Spock, in a state of disorientation, stood erect and brought his hands together before him, steepled; his face was strained in concentration. Seyhalla. He who was said to have been entrusted with the



protection of what the planet Vulcan was. Not the substance, precisely, but what comprised it as a planet. Seyhalla had never been credited with the creation of Vulcan souls themselves, for there were far too many legends which gave that responsibility to providers, seeders, just as on other planets they had encountered. They were said to have arrived at the red planet with no moon, and had seeded the peoples there to form their own unique culture of which Spock was - or had been - a part. It had taken countless centuries and generations, but in time success had been theirs. That disease from which he had died was said to date from those early days in history, as if it had been left behind on purpose as a test, an ultimate trial which had to be overcome to achieve worthiness to survive and become part of a whole in the universe. But Seyhalla, it was said, had remained behind and watched over all, even in modern times.

Seyhalla. The Guardian.

The very thought left the Vulcan shivering with apprehensive self-doubt. Had the transition from what had been to what was now left him totally insane? No. Impossible. He knew his faculties were fully with him. Insanity was far from the realm of his being.

But then all that was left was... acceptance. There were no other possible explanations for the situation he found himself in, and there was no logical reason for him to be told a lie. He no longer lived, yet he still existed, within a realm of silver-lighted translucence, and he could still move, think, speak. Unexplainable, yet strangely explainable... Only one being could be attributed with the circumstances which were now all-too-real.

He seemed to know, too, that though there would be some initial doubt and questioning, even Jim would accept what was occurring - eventually, as long as he himself was with him. And that was where the analogy of situations halted, for Jim was not with him, and Spock could never be anywhere near accepting his situation until Jim was once more at his side... and he wished no death for Kirk.

It was a vicious circle from which there seemed no escape. As he sank to his knees he found himself wishing fervently for a compromise solution.

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Well-muscled arms cut through the water with strong strokes as the Enterprise Captain revelled in his ability to swim as well as he had always done. Swimming hadn't been part of his therapy during his internment in Sickbay, and he had forgotten just how good it was to plough through the water in a semblance of total freedom that the open air would have given him - or space itself.

He knew full well why McCoy had prevented him from swimming. Still unsure of his friend's mental state following Spock's death, and the accident, Bones had known how easy it would have been for Kirk to dive to the bottom of the pool - and not come back up. It would have been so simple, so easy during those first few weeks, and the doctor would not take that risk. Later, when he had become more confident as to how Kirk really felt, he had suggested it, but the Captain had never been keen. Not until now.

Grabbing hold of the side of the pool Kirk hauled himself out of the water and sat, dripping, at the side of the pool, intuitively sensing that McCoy stood at the door.

Soaking hair dripping into his eyes, he looked mischievous, impossibly young and vulnerable, and Bones stood for a few moments to savour the sight of his friend. He could see the scars on Jim's back, and knew how much worse the ones on his chest and abdomen were, a stark reminder of what had happened. He noticed how much darker the unruly locks looked whilst wet, offsetting the stark vulnerability by a more mature aura. He marvelled once more at the multi-facets of the man, how his expression could change so quickly and easily, betraying what he tried to hide, so often portraying his inner soul to an extent that was

sometimes unnerving. Those hazel eyes, so communicative and expressive, yet also holding a life of their own with pain and secrets hidden... And there had been plenty of pain for the young man to endure.

Bones winced at the memories of all that had happened during his friend's short lifetime, during past missions and during ordinary shipboard life. Life itself had led eventually to the demise of the other half of Kirk, of the part of him which had been so unique, a part of him which had lived and breathed independently of him but which had been joined to him and he to the other in an inextricably beautiful and fragile way. That other part of Kirk named Spock. That beautiful man named Spock.

Perceptive as always, Jim finally called to him, disrupting his thoughts, and Bones was grateful in more ways than one. Kirk hadn't turned, yet he had known who was behind him. Bones wondered if he still felt Spock around him like that, but put the thought from his mind for the present, knowing that in was the matter of Kirk's health which had drawn him to this part of their ship. He had received a full report from the Bridge, as was inevitable, and there were matters which had to be discussed, clarified.

"I was wondering how long it would take you to find me, Bones," Jim looked at his friend sideways, smiling.

McCoy moved up behind his Captain, deliberately staying away from the poolside. "I knew you wouldn't be in your cabin - and the Observation Deck was deserted." He said nothing else, but nothing else was needed. In those few words McCoy had proved beyond doubt just how well he knew his friend.

Kirk stared at him, catching the blue glint in his eyes, the glint that showed that Bones meant business. Holding onto the poolside tightly Kirk spoke, very quietly.

"You knew I wouldn't listen to you, about taking things easy, about staying away from the Bridge."

"I know you. It was a threat I never expected to be heeded - though I did mean it. But it looks like it was an idle one now..." He gestured towards Jim's legs. "From what Uhura was telling me, there's nothing wrong with your legs... now." McCoy halted to gauge Jim's reaction.

Kirk ran a hand across his face, pushing his hair back out of his eyes. The old familiar look returned immediately, and he scowled.

"The old pins seem fine now, Bones. I told you there was nothing to worry about." But Kirk's enforced joviality bounced off still waters and onto deaf ears.

"Come and get a robe on, Jim. Let's talk." Bones pointed across to the loungers at one side of the deserted pool area and walked on across.

Knowing that he couldn't avoid the confrontation, Jim pulled his legs from the water, sitting for an instant with one knee under his chin, his arms wrapped around it, staring at the blue-clad retreating back. As he replaced the IDIC, which he'd carefully left at the poolside, around his neck, he remembered a time, some months before, when he had shared just such a moment with Spock; he could clearly see the tall, lithe frame of his Vulcan Science Officer...

He shook his head to rid himself of the image, sending water droplets flying everywhere, and shaking his hair back from his eyes. Memories could wait for private moments in his cabin. Right now Bones wanted his attention, and deserved it. He got fully to his feet and walked over.

The short white robe that Kirk pulled around himself suited him, and as he sat there among the deep, comfortable cushions, his muscles glistening with the water under the subdued lighting, he looked the picture of health. Bones hurriedly opened the discussion.

"When you left Sickbay you were limping - badly! Now, if you've got a

new near-miracle cure hidden away, Captain, I want to hear about it. If not, then I want to know what happened between then and now - or whether it was all a put-on..."

Bones' face was deadpan, and Kirk felt momentarily disorientated, unsure of what to say. Then he looked his friend straight in the eye, and took a deep breath before speaking.

"I don't know what happened, Bones. I fell asleep on the Observation Deck before going up to the Bridge. When I woke up the limp had gone, and I felt perfectly okay - no limp, no aches and pains, no nausea..."

"You've been feeling nauseous?"

Kirk smirked guiltily. "It wasn't that bad... Didn't think it was worth bothering you about."

McCoy scowled, then began mumbling to himself. "... psychosomatic symptoms ... possible psychical connotations..."

"Bones! For heaven's sake! If you think I'm going crazy, then say so!"

"Easy, Jim, easy! You know me... Like to work things out, out loud. I'm not saying you're directly to blame, but the limp may have been psychosomatic. My threat, and your own wish to be... 'normal'... again may have rid you of it. It might have been you, yourself, who created it in the first place. According to all medical indications the limp should have healed weeks ago - and my instruments registered no abnormalities whatsoever."

"You didn't tell me that!"

"Are you surprised?"

Kirk shook his head, and dropped his hand, which had compulsively gripped Bones' arm. "What about these psychic... psychical connotations, then?"

Bones took a deep breath. "It has to do with Spock. I can't help you there, Jim, except by talking with you about him, and what... happened. We can try and convince each other that he really is dead, that we no longer have him with us, but only we can convince ourselves. And I don't think you've accepted it, or what you did for him, as fully as you profess to have - hence the limp."

Kirk looked long and hard at his companion, full realisation dawning, and he felt his eyes fill. He dropped his head onto his hands, fighting the tears and the feeling of utter despair, as Bones slipped his arm protectively around his shoulders.

Words came with difficulty, but they did come - eventually. "I was so sure I could cope, Bones... especially after the... the funeral." Kirk brought his head slowly upwards and stared straight in front of him, not really seeing the pool at all.

"But I feel so... so empty inside, as though I've lost a part of me that I never knew I had - till now..." He found what it took to look into the face of the older man beside him. "I'm sorry... You do understand, don't you?"

"Need you really ask?"

Jim smiled briefly, and shook his head. "I didn't think it would be like this, Bones, so empty ... so lonely..." Words seemed to be coming easier by the minute, and Bones didn't interrupt, sure that talk would be necessary therapy for both of them.

"It's not that I doubt that what I did for him was right. It's what he wanted, and that's enough for my peace of mind - or it should be... I just can't help thinking that you could have come up with something to help him if we'd just waited a little longer..."

Bones gripped Jim's shoulders tightly, pulling him around, forcing him to face him. "There was nothing that could have been done, Jim! Spock's condition was

hopeless, do you hear? Hopeless! Don't you think I'd have stopped you if there'd been one chance in all the universe that we could have saved him? I knew what he wanted, what he intended to do - I told you that. Spock and I knew each other too well to hide such a thing. It was against my better judgement, against all I've lived by, against all the medical ethics in the book, but I had to allow it - because it was what he wanted, and what had to be.

"Hang it, Jim, he was my friend too, and I can't get used to the idea that he is dead, that he won't be back, either. But you're also my friend, and I knew how you feel, and I understand... I know how painful it must be to have lost your brother for a second time..."

Kirk's eyes softened as new understanding dawned of the true depth to this man McCoy, the real perception that was his.

"Bones, they say that time heals, but I don't think there's enough time in all creation for us, is there?"

There was no answer, but there was understanding and acknowledgement in the deep blue eyes.

"What confuses me, and hurts even more, is the fact that I seem to go through... stages. There was acceptance at first, right up until the funeral... but then the doubts began to creep into my soul. When I can't sense him near me, I... panic... and I wonder. It's like he can't be with me all the time, as if he keeps getting... drawn away... I know that the bond between us is as strong as ever, but I still panic!"

"Jim, we can't know the circumstances in which Spock now... exists. To know he is near most of the time has to be enough, for neither of us can guarantee anything else. You must be content. There can be no turning back now."

"Bones..." Jim swallowed, and clenched his hands before him. "There is the Guardian. I've thought of that often during the past few weeks. I sent Spock on that mission to Addressa 7; it was my fault he was infected by that disease in the first place. We could go through there, stop all of it happening ... stop him dying..."

Bones' face showed fear, both for his friend and for the suggestion that had been voiced, for the very real danger. Jim placed his hand over Bones'.

"Don't worry, my friend. I've thought of that - and I've rejected the thought. I know the risks to all. But the Guardian of Forever is still fact. How do I know that in some future instance I won't take that risk no matter what the cost?"

There was no hesitation. "Because you're James T. Kirk. And because of that fact I know you would never put personal gain above the safety of other lives and existences. You loved Edith..." Kirk winced and looked away."... as you love Spock, yet you sacrificed her to enable those who deserved to live to do so."

Kirk nodded, knowing the truth when he heard it, knowing that Dr. Leonard McCoy was stating fact - and he visibly stilled his heavy breathing. Unsteadily he rose to his feet.

Bones remained where he was, but uttered one last poignant sentence. "You must remember your promise, Jim - for both your sakes, and mine - and your ship's."

Kirk's back stiffened at that, and he pulled his shoulders fully erect as he tied his robe tightly around him. "I think I'll turn in now, get some rest. I'll see you later, Bones." He walked to the exit, then stopped to turn his hazel eyes staring penetratingly at McCoy. "Thank you, my friend."

Then he was gone, and the pool area became instantly a lonely and empty place.

McCoy was left with many troubled thoughts; would this capacity for

sympathetic lesions to the body and even the soul of the Enterprise Captain, caused by Spock's death, ultimately affect his ability to command?

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The transition seemed harder this time, the barrier more powerful in its entire composition. Spock felt panic rise on waves within him, Human emotions near the surface of his being, thought patterns ensconced within translucent parodies of normality.

He did manage to break through its confines for one brief moment to spy his two friends together in the deserted pool area of his beloved ship, as if a magnet had drawn him to them. The visit was brief of necessity, but he could sense that all was not right with Kirk. The Enterprise Captain's soul was troubled, he was not at peace, and he, Spock, was the cause. The Vulcan felt a pull within him, a tightening of muscles, a pain which gripped his inner self and twisted. He heard snatches of conversation, and became reassured that Jim Kirk did not regret that he had aided his friend to leave his corporeal life, but that he did deeply regret the fact that Spock had had to go at all.

With sudden realisation Spock could tell that Kirk felt exactly as he did himself, that neither could survive as they were, without the other...

But what could be done? The barrier was strengthening, and his opportunities to return to what meant most to him were lessening. He had been pulled back abruptly as Kirk had left the pool, the fragile link between what had been and what was now severed once again, to leave him floating in the nothingness which was his ad infinitum until acceptance of what had happened to him, and release of what he had left behind should come.

One further attempt to return proved useless that night, and he had to content himself with the knowledge that his attempt to rid his other half of his physical lesion had succeeded. He still couldn't understand how he had achieved what was a potential miracle, but he accepted it, and was grateful.

As the Vulcan's mind screamed at him that his other half was truly that, he was being observed by the owner of the voice, he who called himself Seyhalla; his dilemma had been noted, and plans had begun to be formulated.

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His cabin held a strange atmosphere, one not unlike that which had pervaded the Observation Deck when he had woken from slumber, and James Kirk shuddered at the memory; shuddered, because he knew that Spock had been there, but he had not been able to see him.

The hazel eyes surveyed the area which held his sole belongings in the life that he held within his grasp, the area known as home. It was unchanged, except for the idlomputt, from that to which he had first moved when he took command of his lady Enterprise. The Vulcan lamp was the one light left in his life now - or so it seemed at times. The room reminded him of the time Pones had told him of Spock's illness - and of its results.

Memories. They would never die. Vivid, real, almost so solid within his mind that he often felt he could touch them as they cascaded unceasingly over the segments of his brain. He knew he didn't want them to fade and die, but he knew that he had to control them, keep them deeply hidden, else the command of his beloved ship would suffer, his very life would fail, and fall from his grasp - and all of Spock's carefully laid plans, all the logic, all the promises he had made would be worthless, without meaning, totally devoid of what the Vulcan had hoped for.

In an attempt to quell the doubt and relax himself enough for sleep, he showered quickly, throwing the discarded swimming trunks into a corner. Then he dimmed the lights and sank into the bed, hoping that there would be no

recurrence of the dreams which had plagued him during certain times of his recuperation; dreams in which he saw giant hands pressing lethal hyposprays against defenceless shoulders, in which a pleading voice - Spock's - begged him not to do it, only to find it too late to prevent the ultimate separation. Too late... Always too late...

As Kirk finally felt his heavy lids fall for the sleep he craved he vaguely wondered what McCoy would say if he knew about the dreams...

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Floating, cascading fluids careening through defenceless tissues, dissipating life itself. Pain, mild but definable. Greyness, indefinable, but solid in its composition, closing in and engulfing until breath forced itself away. Breathless panic. Tears. Pleading, stretching arms, aimed, helpless. Prominent eyes, deep and brown and emotion-filled. Colours, swirling, parting, joining, parting. A face - angular features, handsome leanness, arching eyebrows, exquisitely elegant pointed ears, dark, dark hair...

"Spock!!!"

Kirk sat up in his bed, still calling the name of that other half of himself. He was bathed in sweat, the bed-clothes clinging to him, tangled around him. He dragged the sheet from around his body and stepped into the centre of his room, turning around in his vulnerable nakedness, arms outstretched, begging, pleading for the appearance of - Spock.

But the Vulcan's attempt at contact had failed again, abysmally, though Kirk would never have understood it as that. He had been pulled back once more, in a clear panic and in terror, tears streaming down a face which had not known those salty drops since childhood. As he watched the pathetic figure of Kirk in his grief-filled vulnerability the Vulcan cried his name, too, in his own hopeless gesture of finality.

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Had it been a dream? It had been so very different from all the others, yet it had been so vivid, so real. The figure of... Spock... had been unmistakable, though disfigured to some extent, and distorted. It had been him, and the Vulcan had been in panicked terror, that was obvious; and that fact frightened Jim even more than the thought of Spock's death had, or the fact that he had been the one who had operated the fatal hypospray.

Tears fell from the hazel eyes which had not wept since the time on Vulcan, at the Sha'Loom. But these tears were not the tears of grief they had been then; these were tears of desperation, of frustrated helplessness, for the perceptive Captain could suddenly tell that Spock was not at peace as he and Bones had believed him to be, as even Sarek and Amanda had said he would be after the performance of the Kha'Hay. No, there had been no peace within those deep brown eyes, no contentment within that soul. Only discontent, and a weary, futile attempt at reaching out.

Instinctively Jim knew that what he had seen had not been nightmare, not imagination. He was certain that it had been an anguished portrayal of what Spock was actually feeling and enduring, wherever he was, whatever spiritual state his soul was in.

It did not strike the Human as strange, however, that Spock's ordinary, corporeal body had been portrayed upon the windows of his mind, despite the fact that that body itself no longer existed. It had seemed so natural that acceptance had come immediately; although the physical Vulcan had been captured by the phantom fingers of the wind on Spock's home planet, he knew full well that the essence of Spock, what Spock was, his spirit, was alive and free. Kirk realised that now, as he had realised it at the funeral ceremony, yet the understanding and acceptance of that fact made the meaning of his dream, his vision, no more lucid.

Unashamedly, Kirk thought of McCoy. He knew the surgeon would help him see things more clearly, would help now, as he had helped all those weeks ago; but as his finger reached for the intercom button his mind brought back the vision of McCoy's grief-wracked face, understanding dawning as he, Kirk, ran from the room after the last breath had left Spock's body, and he realised anew that Bones was missing Spock as much as he was, that both of them were finding adjustment to their new lives without their special Vulcan to be more difficult than they had ever imagined it would be. Guilt edged its way into the Captain's being. He hadn't really spent much time with McCoy, had acted selfishly, just as he had done after Spock's death, when he had shut Bones out with his own grief. Surely Bones, too, was beginning to feel that life held less magic now, less significance, less meaning. He was about to ask McCoy for his help again, but he was confident that the talk that would result would help them both, as the talk at the pool had done. This new phenomenon would be faced together, as they had faced so much before... He completed his movement.

"Kirk to Sickbay." He instinctively knew where the good doctor would be.

"McCoy here. What can I do for you, Jim?"

"Still awake, Bones?" Jim felt a smile play over his lips - Bones did feel the same way, and he sounded as tired as he felt.

"Yeah. Too much on my mind, I guess."

"Feel like a chat? I've just had the strangest... dream. Need to discuss it..."

"I'm on my way."

Contact was broken, and despite his concern Kirk couldn't help feeling a certain contentment in the knowledge that together they would be able to do something. But one thought haunted James Kirk's mind as he waited for the doctor's arrival - if Spock was troubled, in pain, in a state of turmoil, then why hadn't the Vulcan told him through the link? Admittedly it was characteristic of Spock to withhold any such admittance from his friend and brother to spare him pain or worry, just as he'd done when his death was so near. But it could also mean that the help they had been able to afford each other to a certain extent directly after the Vulcan's death was no longer possible. Perhaps something was preventing Spock from maintaining the link as he had hoped he would be able to do, was preventing him from being near Jim as much as they had both hoped and planned for...

Jim shuddered from the fear the thoughts caused him, and paced the cabin's length, his hands clutched together in front of him, his eyes searching the room as if searching for an answer. His gaze came to rest on the idlomputt and he kept it there. He was still pacing when Bones buzzed the door and walked in.

For a moment McCoy stood at the door, transfixed, staring at his friend, attempting to gauge his Captain's emotional and psychological condition. Then he coughed quietly, attracting Jim's attention, for his entrance had gone unnoticed.

Kirk jumped. It was so uncharacteristic that McCoy took a step backwards, at first even thinking that perhaps he had entered the wrong room. But no, those hazel eyes could belong only to one unique man in this universe, and that lock of hair, straying over the young forehead which was creased with concern, could have belonged to none other.

"B...Bones. Thanks for coming."

McCoy's professional eye could see that Kirk was agitated, worried, and for a frightening moment he saw a breakdown very near the surface of the man. He could see command slipping away from James Kirk, just as a feather could slip away on a balmy breeze.

"Came as quickly as I could, Jim. But before we talk, don't you think you should put something on before you catch your dea... catch a cold?"

Kirk looked down at his nakedness and smirked. "Had a lot on my mind..." He reached for the same white robe he had worn at the pool. It would still be damp, but Bones refrained from comment, knowing that it was a compromise which would have to serve at present. And anything was better than nothing to keep him warm - and to hide the scarred memories upon his chest and abdomen.

Automatically Kirk reached for the bottle of brandy on top of his dresser, but the sleeve of his robe caught on a glass, knocking it to the floor to smash, shattering the lengthening silence. Jim clutched at the cupboard's edge, holding it till the knuckles of his hands turned white, and they shook as the whole young body shook, uncontrollably.

Bones moved quickly to his side, and looked at the young man's profile in horror. He had believed they'd made a breakthrough at the poolside, had felt sure that the conversation had helped, but something had happened between then and now, something to batter that newly-formed belief and confidence into pieces like the shattered glass. And Bones knew he had to reach Kirk and discover what that something was - and soon!

He hesitated for less than a minute before placing one arm around the tense shoulders and one hand on the shaking arm to guide Kirk gently to the bed. It was as if he was guiding a frightened child after a nightmare... Then McCoy remembered the dream Kirk had mentioned, knowing professionally exactly what an effect dreams could have on an individual - particularly one as perceptive, as emotional, as caring as Kirk - and if it had anything to do with Spock...

Bones poured the brandy, giving Kirk a glass and saying, "Drink up, Jim. It'll do wonders. Doctor's orders." He took a quick sip of the amber liquid himself before drawing a deep breath and finally broaching the subject, deciding it was best to diverge at the deep end.

"Tell me, Jim. The dream... and how you feel about it."

Kirk appeared visibly relieved that Bones had taken the initiative, and he drew himself upwards on the bed and began to talk.

It didn't take long for Kirk to recount what had happened, and the resultant trauma which had wracked him as he began to fear the worst - that the bond had somehow been weakened, or even broken.

"Jim, I feel certain that if the bond between you had been broken you would have known - you would have felt something."

"But Bones, why didn't he tell me? Why didn't I know that something was wrong before now?" He didn't raise his eyes to meet Bones'; instead he continued playing with the glass he held, turning it around and around as he had done during the account of his dream.

"I don't know, Jim. I just don't know." Bones pulled up a chair and sat down in front of Kirk, forcing him to look directly at him. "Jim, none of us knows what it is like to die. If, as we believe and hope, you simply pass from one existence to another, then there is bound to be a certain amount of fear during that... transition. There is bound to be uncertainty, and fear of the unknown, fear at having to leave behind what you know and love, and enter somewhere that you know nothing of. Despite Spock's logic, his scientific knowledge, he is bound to feel disorientated, out of synchronisation with... existence. He may have been able to contact you in your subconscious, during sleep, and give himself the reassurance for which he must crave, by your description of him.

"All we can do is speculate. And speculation is unreliable at the best of times, Jim. And even all that speculation may be unfounded, for you must also face the fact that it might have been simply a dream, a figment of your imagination, a result of your self-doubt and uncertainty earlier."

"No!" Kirk's fist slammed down onto the bed. "I know, Bones. It was Spock. It was no dream. It was him. Just as I know it was him on the Observation Deck!"



"Jim, you didn't mention this before. Did you see him?"

"No. But I sensed he'd been there while I'd been sleeping..."

"And you believe he was the one who rid you of the limp?"

Kirk nodded and stared more closely at his friend, asking for understanding and acceptance now more than ever before. Bones said no more, instead choosing to watch his commanding officer as Kirk rose to his feet and began to pace once more.

"I'm the one who's bonded, remember? I know when something is real - and why shouldn't he be able to contact me? I managed it when you all thought me dead in the spacial interphase of Tholian space."

Bones' eyes were soft as he finally spoke, his voice quiet. "I did say it was possible, Jim, but when you contacted Spock and the rest of us then you weren't dead. And you've got to remember that, Jim! Spock is dead!" He rose to his feet then, and placed his hands on Jim's shoulders, stopping the pacing, and looked deep into the hazel eyes. "Spock is dead!"

Jim shook his head for a moment but then brought his arms up to embrace the older man, and Bones allowed his hands to slip around the neck of that oh-so-vulnerable Kirk. When they finally broke the embrace both men stood facing each other, and felt strangely at peace within themselves, and with the world at large. They'd succeeded in reminding each other, yet again, of that one undeniable factor, had reminded themselves that there would be no miracles for them, no rescue from the grave itself. Spock was dead. And death was... death. Final. Unbeatable. Inevitable.

Kirk moved to sit behind his desk, and the doctor took the seat opposite him. They began to talk again, amiably this time. It was getting to be a habit of necessity for both of them.

"You know, Bones, I've heard a lot about seances, and mediums, and the like. You know - the ability to reach and talk with the dead..."

"Jim..." It was a warning.

"I know, I know. Impractical, unreliable, unrealistic... and totally illogical."

Both men smiled then at the familiar word, and the atmosphere lightened.

"I'm glad you came. You helped me put things into perspective, and helped me face reality - again. Thankk you."

"That works both ways, Jim. I think I'll sleep easier at nights now, too."

Eyes meeting, they reached across the desk and gripped hands fiercely, and when the grip was broken both men were smiling openly.

"McCoy sighed. "Non omnis moriar."

"What...?" Kirk looked astounded.

"Non omnis moriar. It's an old Latin phrase I seem to remember from somewhere. I shall not..."

"... wholly die."

"Yes. How did you know?"

"I know it from the Academy. Funny you should know it too - and relate it to this instance. It came to my mind at the end of that servive in the Sha'Loom. Do you remember?"

"Can we ever forget?"

Jim shook his head in resignation.

"It seems to fit Spock completely. It encompasses what he was - and still is. Remember it, Jim. Whenever you feel that seed of doubt begin to grow,

remember that Spock will never wholly die."

"Contradictions, Bones?"

McCoy looked a little guilty, knowing exactly what Kirk was referring to. "You know me... I had to reach you, somehow. Now I've succeeded we can face... other things."

Kirk nodded, understanding evident in his expression and bearing. He rose to his feet as McCoy himself did.

"Back to the grindstone. There's never any rest for the wicked. I'm sure there's someone somewhere with a cold who needs to see me... I keep telling them I'm a surgeon and not a GP, but you know how things are..."

Jim smiled. Things seemed so normal again.

Bones stopped at the door. "Don't go overdoing things on that Bridge of yours. I'll see you later."

As the door closed behind him Bones smiled happily. It had been a devious way of telling Jim that he could return to the duty that was his life, but he was convinced after their long talk that the breakdown or collapse he'd initially feared was still far away, under control. He had enjoyed seeing the expression on his friend's face as his words had penetrated his mind. Command was still Kirk's. And Bones was pleased. His Captain would have to be observed, for doubt such as he had had that night affected him profoundly, but in time a real solution would be found.

Within his cabin James Kirk stared at the closed door disbelievingly for a few seconds as Bones' words penetrated his clouded brain. Then he realised the true significance of what had been said, and a broad grin spread across his features. It would be so good to get back to where he belonged - he felt more enthusiastic now, as if his lack of enthusiasm on his previous visit had been the product of dreams, or more appropriately, nightmares.

Knowing that no more sleep would come to him that night he headed for the shower, after first laying out a clean uniform. He took a few brief moments to caress the golden fabric, to allow his fingers to wander over the Enterprise insignia on the chest and the command stripes on the arm, a deep feeling of contentment within his heart.

In less than ten minutes he was on his way to the Bridge.

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Seyhalla had watched and noted all that had occurred to the restless entity-Spock, and also to the corporeal entities who still lived and loved and breathed. The universal plan was in danger of being ruptured, those same plans which had kept the order of all things, all that had taken place in all of history. A plan formulated out of necessity, whose existence was paramount to all future-life. One entity, because of ties and a bond so strong that they could not be severed even by cessation of life itself threatened all, just as one entity had risked all in another time-sphere, in another century long ago in Earth's history. That entity-Hepaestion. Their names were different, but their souls were the same.

Memory of interminability allowed Seyhalla to think back through centuries on an Earth time-scale and remember the only other truly bonded, mutually beloved entities that he had encountered. Countless entities, and yet... only the very few who held a true depth of feeling for each other, an unrivalled love, an intensity which surpassed all else, unequalled in all history, in all creation.

Seyalla allowed his windows of vision to focus clearly upon the male humanoid before him, whose eyes were tear-filled, whose face betrayed uncharacteristic pain, torment, hurt. It was the sight of those dark, deep eyes that made the decision from which came the project that would ultimately stem the rupture of that same plan, and formulate a new one.

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A pristine scenario met the scarlet rays of the Vulcan sun. The sand seemed to glow with its own distinctive hue as it encroached upon the regal peace of Shi'Kahr. The buildings woke gracefully from a night's occupancy, and the opening of each door presented the beginning of a new day.

Sarek drew the rust-coloured robe around him and looked towards the distant sunrise. Though he denied all emotions, all feelings, he did in fact 'feel' something when he saw the sun which gave his planet life rise from its sleep into the life-force-day. The scarlet orb, the colour of a Human's blood, reminded him - illogical as it was - of the life his son had led... both his sons. He remembered all too well how things had been, and he had to be careful not to tell Amanda, his wife, of his memories and their implications.

He prised his eyes from the sight before him and sought the sandy-coloured dwellings which were placed at discreet intervals from each other, privacy being the thing his people prized above all. The buildings, some low and humble in appearance, others as large and impressive as his own house, each functional and logically constructed to fit its inhabitants' use and need, spread outwards, onwards, into the city.

He had not made the journey into Shi'Kahr since tradition had been observed and the ritual death ceremony had been carried out for Spock. The building in which that ceremony had taken place, the Khi'Lahr, dominated the city, its turrets towering to the red sky, its symbolism more than apparent, its sheer immensity a sign of the import the Vulcan people gave to their dead.

A sigh escaped the pursed lips of the dignified Ambassador as he made the decision to walk to his destination instead of taking his shuttle as was the norm. Memories would not bring back the past. And grief was illogical - he had told Amanda that so many times - especially as Spock's life had been worthwhile, more than fruitful. He had proved his worth, had made his family and people proud of him and what he stood for, had been a credit to the life he had chosen to lead, had proved himself to be Vulcan and more than Vulcan. His life had not been wasted and so, though his death was regretted above all, there should be no grief for the very fact that his life had been worthwhile.

But Sarek did grieve. He grieved for his son, though he tried to mask it from his partner in marriage. He believed he had succeeded in masking it behind the Vulcan facade he maintained for everyone's benefit but his own; but as the weeks had passed he had begun to feel that the Vulcan principles and disciplines he had lived his whole life by, and believed in as his people believed in them, had begun to slip from his grasp - he began to find them more and more difficult to control.

He grieved for the eighteen years he had lost, the wasted years when he and Spock had not spoken as father and son. He grieved for James Kirk, for the very great loss he had to endure. Inwardly he smiled at the thought of the handsome young man he had accepted into his family as a son, and to whom he had reverently presented the IDIC which had been Spock's own. He hoped he would see him again soon.

Sarek physically shook himself from the reverie he found himself engaging in, which threatened his very control. A neighbour, Sukah, stepped from his house, and averted his eyes instantly at the sight of Sarek's shaking body. Noticing, Sarek bowed in deference and continued on his way.

The night before he had received a message requesting his presence at the Vulcan Science Academy. Sarat himself, Master of all sciences on this planet, had made it known that Sarek's presence was much needed. The ambassador had no idea what the nature of the urgency was, but the summons could not be ignored.

It was a long walk, during which Sarek thought of Sarat's father, a man whom he had admired in his childhood, he who was named Sakar. All the universe had praised him as a genius, but because of his new and revolutionary ideas many of his own people had spurned him, rejected his postulations - and he had ultimately died long before his time.

Sarat himself mirrored his father's personality and he, too, had presented different theories and ideas which had also been questioned in his time, but things had changed, acceptance came more easily now than in his father's time - and Sarat had survived. Finally, Sarek arrived outside the Academy, precisely on time. He stood for a few moments outside the ruby red/sand coloured building, his mind returning to the day when Spock had visited him here, to tell him that his vocation in life was to be Starfleet, and not to study at his father's side as had happened in past generations. Sarek knew that at that time he had displayed the human trait of stubbornness and rejected Spock's own right as an individual to choose his own path, because of his own disappointment. He should have accepted that decision of his son's, in the spirit of IDIC, and those eighteen years would not have been wasted... But if that decision had not been made, if Spock had followed his teaching as Sarek had followed the teaching of his own father, then perhaps he would still be alive...

Sarek chastised himself severely. Such thoughts were not worthy of Spock's name. His son had made his choice freely, and it had been the most difficult of all - and he had succeeded in all he had aimed to do. And to wish for a change of the past would mean that his son would never have met that unique man, Kirk - and that, in itself, was unthinkable, knowing as he did how much those two men had meant - did mean - to each other.

The Ambassador mounted the steps of the majestic building and took the corridor to the left of the main hall, his goal the laboratory of the Master of All Sciences. He passed no-one as he walked quickly down the long, long passageway. The walls were composed of an igneous rock and were fissured by outcrops of zirconium, the golden metallic element which seemed to possess a light all of its own. This was the only form of decoration in the purely functional building, for decoration for its sake was considered wasteful by many, and therefore totally illogical.

Sarat's laboratory door was wide open and Sarek could see the tall, distinguished man standing with his back to him. He was alone, and obviously deeply engrossed in something. It would have been unforgivable to enter unannounced, and grossly ignorant to knock, so Sarek stood patiently in the doorway, and waited to be noticed.

A few minutes passed, then as if Sarat had sensed Sarek's presence he called him in without even turning round. His voice was gentle, quiet, but very deep. His hair was touched with grey but his face was still youthful, belying his true age, which could never have been estimated. He had been intent on a computer terminal, but the screen was blank when Sarek drew near - it was obvious that whatever information had been displayed there, he was not to know of it.

"Ambassador Sarek, there is much to tell you and little time to tell it in. Come, sir, with me." The older man bent over to palm a locking device on his desk and the door closed obediently, its glass dimmed by a translucent screen. Sarek wondered at the necessity for such secrecy, for no-one would have dared to disturb the Master at work, but he said nothing and walked to the proffered chair, placed strategically near a water-dispenser and another computer terminal. They sat down simultaneously, but did not look at each other for several seconds, as if each was deep in private thoughts.

Finally, Sarat looked up. "Sarek, I am about to tell you something that only two people other than myself know. It will have far-reaching consequences, and as you will be directly involved, you must be fully conversant with the details and procedures - and you must be perfectly willing to participate before we can proceed." He stopped for a brief moment while Sarek digested the words which had been uttered. The Ambassador had questions, many of them, but knew it illogical to waste time by asking them now. He knew it best to allow the Master to continue, to learn all that he had to learn in that manner.

He took a deep breath. "Please. Please continue."

"Ambassador, we have been experimenting, long before your son died, with the possibility of averting death - in certain cases; cases where intelligence,

ingenuity, worthiness, whose credit and meaning to those who knew them and were close to them, whose credit and meaning to the Universe merited such procedures, such risks. There were so few people in all the galaxy whom we researched who had such qualities as to merit our taking the steps to conquer death for them. But the few we did find became a part of our future plans. We took blood, tissue, brain samples from them, together with their brain-wave patterns and general bodily function readings, and these, together, were carefully stored in secret by us, until the time came for us to use them - if that time ever did come, for we also determined that we would use this procedure only on those of the selected group who died from misadventure instead of living a normal life span.

"The procedure is not unlike that of cloning. We literally regenerate the person involved from the cells, samples and readings that we have taken. That person, though already dead, can live again." He breathed deeply, hesitating slightly. "That procedure is not, now, simply an experiment in a laboratory, but a fact. We have established that it can work - we believe that it will."

Sarek raised his hand to halt the flow of words. He was beginning to understand the inherent implications, but would jump to no conclusions. "These samples, the readings, they were taken without the knowledge of the people involved?"

Sarat nodded. "They were. It was more than necessary that no-one know of this, as you must surely understand. The required samples were easily obtained during routine medical examinations."

Sarat obviously expected more questions to follow, but Sarek had no words, no control to enable him to speak. He was a scientist himself, and of some repute, and knew full well that the procedure that Sarat spoke of was possible in theory - but he knew, too, how dangerous such a procedure would be in the hands of the wrong person. Godhood. The power over life and death more inherent than in any other respect. Virtual immortality available to the highest bidder... He did not know if he liked what he was hearing.

"Sarek, I see it in your face. You try to mask it, but you cannot - and I understand. You have already surmised what I am about to say." He paused, his hands clasped together before him. "But I must say it anyway, for the record, and to clarify it for you in your own mind. Ambassador Sarek, your son Spock was one of the people chosen. We chose only three in all the time we searched, in all the time we have been experimenting, researching. In all of eighteen Vulcan seasons, we found only three worthy. Of those three, only your son has felt the hand of death; only he has journeyed from the Sha'Loom into the realm of the Kree'Chah."

The Master's voice was calm and his face controlled, but Sarek's hands were clenched behind his back, out of sight, in an effort to control as he rose slowly to his feet and faced the Master. Their eyes met, unflinching; the deep, warm brown ones of Sarek, the almost black ones of Sarat.

"Are you telling me, High Scientist, that my son can live again? That you have the power, the ability, to allow him to live again, to breathe again, to speak, to walk, to be again?" Logic was thrown to the wind, it seemed. Sarek's phrases, questions, held no semblance of it. But there was no recrimination in Sarat's face, only understanding. He had known what the revelation would cost the Ambassador, and had taken the precaution of dimming the glass in his doorway to avoid accidental witnessing of the inevitable display of emotion from the Ambassador. But there had been no easy way of telling him. Suddenly, Sarek realised what he had been displaying and pulled himself rigidly upright.

"I ask forgiveness."

"Sarek, there is nothing to forgive. I know what this means to you, how this must sound, but I would not have told you if it were not possible. Your co-operation is required, and your acceptance and agreement to what would occur."

"I don't know... Spock is dead. Everyone knows that. How would people outside Vulcan react, how could they accept your plans? How do you propose to tell Starfleet? How do we accept it? And what of Spock himself?"

"We have considered all you say, of course. The questions are not fully answerable. We fear that if we perform this procedure, then it can only occur once. We dare not allow ourselves the danger of becoming gods. When people learn that it can never occur again, acceptance will come. As for Starfleet, they have already declared that they have lost the best scientist within their ranks. They would be informed of what had occurred...afterwards, and I have been led to believe that they would accept him back with...what do the Humans say? With open arms! He is valuable to them and to those who know him within their realms." His face clouded them. "As for you, I cannot say. Your choice, your decision, is in your heart. I am an old man, Sarek, and as I age, my belief in the Vulcan way which cost my father his life begins to ebb. It becomes more difficult to maintain control and discipline but I also seem to get more perceptive... I can see the pain you carry, the grief you feel at your son's death, the great loss you have had to endure. I think I know what your answer will be - but it must come from you alone; whether from your brain or from your heart, the choice must be yours alone."

Sarek paced the room, his eyes opening and closing as he allowed his mind to correlate the data given him, to weigh up alternatives, to consider all possibilities. "Spock would be the same? Your...procedure...would not change him, or cause him pain or distress, or..."

"No. No pain, no distress. He would be the Spock he has always been. We have records of every facet of him. His memory will be intact, though he will know nothing of his death - that aspect will have a nightmare-like quality for him. His personality will be the same, as will his will, his very being. You, and all who knew of his death, will always know, of course, but that can surely be endured to have him alive once more. The memories will fade in time, after all..."

"I...It is...I..." Words would not come, and in embarrassment Sarek turned away. "Can I discuss this with anyone?" He thought of Amanda, James.

"No. No-one. You understand? If you refuse this, it can never be offered again, and you must vow to tell no-one of it. If you accept, then no-one can know of it until it is done."

His back still to Sarat, Sarek was able to hide the torture on his face, the moisture which clung precariously to his lashes. He had never cried in his life, not even when Spock had died - for he was Vulcan. But now? Now he had a decision to make which would affect more than the lives of himself, of Spock, of Amanda, of James... It would surely affect the whole Universe directly - or indirectly.

What of Spock? If he were at peace, as all the principles of Sha'Loom predicted, then would it not be a disruption of Spock's soul to do anything, to interfere? But if he were not at peace, if he grieved for James as James grieved for him, then he must be existing in the same pain and eternal torment that Sarek himself was experiencing at that moment. Was there really a choice? Could he say no to the only chance they would ever have of retrieving his son 'from the grave', of reuniting James and Spock once more, the two souls that needed to be together, of giving Amanda back her reason to live - and he himself, too? He considered, reconsidered, while Sarat waited patiently, silently, behind him, awaiting his decision - either way.

Slowly the moisture dried without running down the cheeks - Sarek's control was sufficient to prevent that - and with the clearing of vision came the clearing of a way through the storm, it seemed. He made the only decision that was possible for him, though he knew the results for himself would be catastrophic. How would the masters react to this knowledge, how would the authorities react, how would the power behind all things react? But that mattered not; it could be considered at another time. He knew only one thing now, and he was prepared to risk all he believed in to achieve it. He turned back to face Sarat, and the old man stood up immediately, responsive to the Ambassador's every word.

"My High Scientist, Sarat; I accept your proposal to 'retrieve' my son for me. I accept the risks, I accept whatever repercussions may come about. I want

Spock to live again."

Sarat came as close to a smile as was possible for him, and drew closer to Sarek. He seemed more than relieved. "The work will begin immediately. Will you assist us?"

"You honour me. I will be glad to assist such a project."

Both men performed the revered Vulcan salute to each other, showing each other the respect both deserved. Then they turned to their task.

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Seyhalla watched all that occurred on the insignificant speck in the universe that was Vulcan, and smiled. All was going according to his plan, and he was pleased. All was proceeding exactly as he had anticipated.

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Spock was unsure of himself or how he felt. He was engulfed in a blackness which defied description; he was trapped by the very thing which, according to all Vulcan traditions, would give him his ultimate freedom - his death. He had cried real tears, he had screamed in desperation, he had sunk into the depths of maudlin depression, he had shown...emotion. His logic told him he was no longer Vulcan, that he had failed his family, his beliefs, his people. His heart told him that it did not matter, for all that had occurred since he had...died...had been because of James Kirk, and there was no shame in not wanting to be separated from that unique individual.

Though he was kept separate and apart, he remained alert and watchful, and could not help but notice the shimmering of the air about him, the distinct glow which appeared as if from nowhere, and he prepared himself, knowing that these occurrences preceded 'the voice'.

"Entity-Spock, you have succeeded in giving me reason to change the plan of all things. Because of the ties that bind you to the man James Kirk, because of the fact that you do not accept what has occurred... I must allow you to live again."

Spock did not believe the words he heard, could not believe them. It could not be possible... The fulfillment of his greatest wish... To live again... It was not logical - he was dead!

Seyhalla proceeded with his revelation. "I have seeded the idea and it has taken root. Your planet's scientists believe the procedure they are working on to be theirs, their idea, their work alone. But they are wrong; I allowed them to think that and believe it so that the normal course of their lives could continue unabated."

With faltering words and a voice barely discernable above the catches in his breath, Spock spoke. "M...my people are allowing me to...live...again? It is possible?"

"It is."

"But...all of history will change if I live once more. I am...was...a part of all things, and my death must have been...planned. Jim..." He choked on his name. "Jim could not go back through time to save me because the risk was too great. He could not take the chance that all would change if I were to live again."

"Entity-Spock, I control history! If I deem it necessary for it to change, then I can allow it with no danger to what would have been had you accepted your death and remained here, eventually to pass on to the next sphere."

"But my family...Jim...Starfleet... How will they accept my sudden reappearance from the grave? All know that I am dead!"

"It will be accepted in time. You will have to work for the life I am returning to you. You must convince all who knew you that you are Spock, that you are no imposter. Your father will help you, for he himself is aiding the procedure which allows you to live once more. He works at this moment on the 'examples' of your corporeal body that they have available."

Spock felt compassion well up within him. He knew only too well what such a step would cost his father, how much Sarek would have to endure to find acceptance within his own heart. But this was proof above all else that Sarek did love him, and that he regretted what had occurred during Spock's childhood and youth, the wasted years when he had first joined Starfleet. Sarek wanted to make amends and he would use this method, the only one offered him, if it would mean that Spock would live again.

The Vulcan felt his lungs expand within him, though he knew that they could not inhale air as yet. It was a gesture of acceptance within himself. He wanted to live, to breathe, to see, to talk again. He wanted to be able to stand at Jim's side once more, to be close to him, to love him.

Jim! He would have to bear so much. The pain of indecision. The torture of not knowing if it was indeed Spock alive again. There would be inevitable doubt - and Spock did not know if he could cope with that, or the rejection that might come. Kirk might convince himself that an imposter had claimed himself to be Spock, that an android or a shape-changer was playing a cruel trick on him...

Seyhalla read his thoughts, and could see the worried doubt upon his face. "James Kirk must be the first to meet you. Your father must have him there when you begin to live again. There will be four Earth-time periods known as days available to you. If there is not complete acceptance from him by the end of that period, then you must truly die, and none will know of your return to life except a few scientists who can never tell any other of the 'experiment' and will think it had gone abysmally wrong. This chance will be your only one. Do not waste it, entity-Spock."

Spock felt fear. Fear of what was to occur. Fear at the uncertainty. Fear of failure. He had confidence in Kirk, that that other half of him would be perceptive enough to know the truth, but he could not know what would happen when Jim saw him again - living, breathing, alive! He sank downwards, cross-legged, hands steepled before him, and retreated into a semblance of meditative peace.

And he waited.

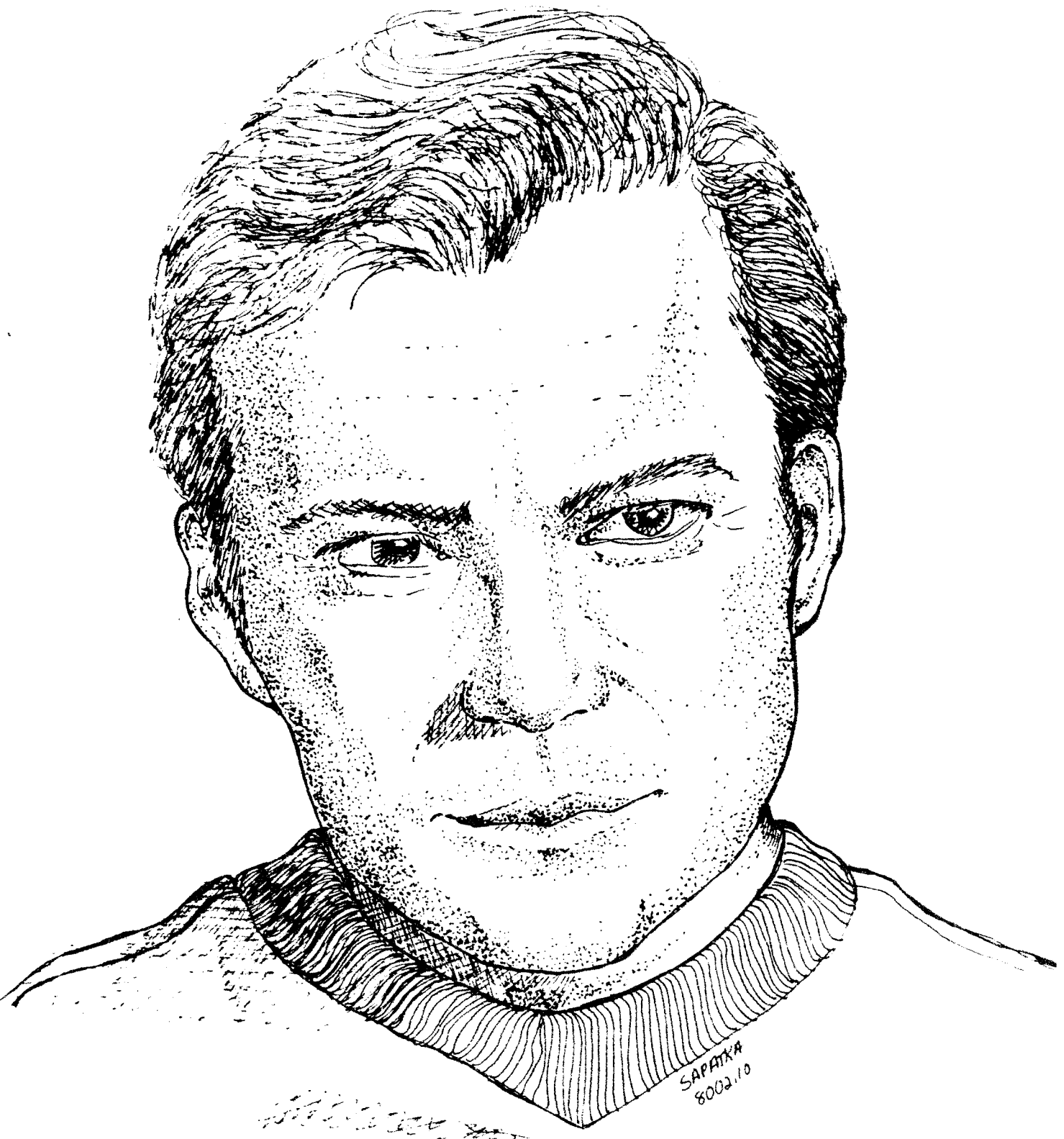
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The experiments were going well. As each day passed, certainty of total and complete success became more sure, and the scientists grew more agitated as 'the time' drew near.

Sarek had remained at the Academy for one Vulcan season, giving all the help he could, giving all his ability and skill to the success of their venture. Amanda had been told only that he was involved in important scientific research and would return to his home when he was able. She did not suspect the nature of the research, and calmly accepted the news, for it was not the first time he had stayed at the Academy during a period of research. He had eventually returned to her side at the end of the season and became withdrawn, spending most of his time in private meditation, afraid of what he might allow to show, or divulge to Amanda. She grew concerned as time went by, fearing her husband to be suffering from a recurrence of the affliction which had seized him during their journey to Babel on board the Enterprise. She contemplated summoning the Vulcan Healer Slam, but finally decided against it, knowing that Sarek could not be truly ill, and knowing how displeased he would be at such an act by herself. She continued to worry...but to wait.

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The Starship Enterprise was on a purely routine mission, a 'milk run'; their present task was to transport some medical supplies from Starbase 12 to the newly established colony planet on Pollux 4. It had been set up several months after the Enterprise had first visited there and encountered the 'god' Apollo. A beautiful planet, essentially harmless, with a Class M classification, it had been decided not to waste its potential.

Captain Kirk sat in his command chair and reminisced on what they had had to do on the planet which was their eventual goal. He had always regretted having to destroy what had essentially proved to be the last of the Greek gods...but Apollo had asked for something they had been unable to give him, and Kirk had had to choose between Apollo - and his crew. As always, his ship and his crew had come first.

All was proceeding uneventfully, and according to plan, and they were all able to relax a little.

Kirk had been in a very positive frame of mind since his talk with McCoy in his cabin after his nightmare. He shivered at the memory of it, but it had not recurred, and he'd begun to lose his feelings of doubt and concern. He was feeling fully fit once more, and had even taken time to visit sickbay to have the scarring removed from his chest, abdomen and back. He was really feeling 'like a new man', as Bones had said, after the minor operation. He had begun to accept the fact that Spock was no longer with him in person, but thought he could no longer detect his presence tangibly, he still knew that his friend and brother was near him always.

Even so, despite the acceptance, he still missed Spock desperately, and could not bring himself to live his life as he used to...before. He had ceased to mix with his crew as he used to, instead choosing to spend most of his spare time in his cabin. He even ate there more than he used the mess - but McCoy had ceased to worry. He knew that it was something they would all have to accept. Kirk was the same Captain he had always been; still commanded the same respect, admiration and even adoration from some quarters. He got on well with his crew and the ship was still a happy one, but there was something missing - something that few could tangibly define, but all could sense it. Only McCoy knew that it was Spock's absence which was the cause, and he refused to mention it to discuss it with anyone now. He just hoped that Spock would not consider Kirk's action a breach of 'the promise'.

But at least Kirk did still agree to join him occasionally for a drink or a meal. Their friendship was as close as ever, as it had always been, and each helped the other through each day with a friendly word or smile, or just silent companionship. They still had each other.

Kirk looked down at the chronometer before him. Only ten minutes until the end of the watch - well, everything was running smoothly, and it was a Captain's prerogative to 'knock off' early now and then. He had promised to join McCoy for dinner, and he was hungry. He smiled to himself, and turned towards his new First Officer, Lt.-Commander Sulu, glad that it was not a stranger who was carrying Spock's rank, doing his job.

"Mr. Sulu, you have the con. I'll be in my quarters if I'm needed."

"Yes, sir." As Sulu approached the command chair he whispered, "Enjoy your meal, Captain." He flashed his infectious grin at his commanding officer, and Kirk could not help but return it. It felt good, he realised, to smile. He didn't seem to do it too much these days.

"Thank you, Mr. Sulu. I will." He took the steps two at a time, and disappeared through the turbolift doors, a definite bounce to his step.

Uhura watched him go, and sighed in contentment. It was good to see her Captain smiling again, to see his hazel eyes light up again. She turned back to her communications board, happy.

Kirk arrived at his cabin before McCoy, so he took the liberty of ordering food for both of them and poured two Saurian brandies ready for the doctor's

arrival. Then he pulled his command yellow shirt off and, in an attempt to relax, lay on his bunk, one hand behind his head, and nibbled at a sandwich as he concentrated on a book he had begun the night before. It was a book about Alexander the Great. Kirk had always admired the man, and loved to read of his exploits and achievements, often wishing that he could somehow emulate him and what he had been.

He was so deeply engrossed that he did not even notice when McCoy entered, and for a moment the doctor didn't disturb him. It was always a great source of joy for McCoy to see his friend so relaxed, deeply involved in one of the recreations he loved most - reading a real book - away from the pressure and responsibility of command.

But he was hungry, and with a quiet cough attracted Kirk's attention. "Are we going to eat? Or is this great meal you've ordered just for decoration?"

Kirk hadn't even noticed the aroma floating from the food dispenser. Hurriedly but very carefully he replaced his book on its shelf and walked over to his desk where McCoy had already taken a deep gulp of his drink.

"That was good. I needed that."

"Bad day, Bones?" Kirk couldn't help smiling in amusement at his friend's face.

"Nah, not really. There's nothing to do, so I'm bored, to put it bluntly. I'm almost wishing for a nice skirmish with some Klingons, but I don't think you'd appreciate that right now." McCoy studied his friend's reaction.

"No, I wouldn't!" And it's not like you to wish for it." Kirk refrained from further comment by picking up his fork and taking a mouthful of the orange-coloured delicacy. He silently gave thanks that he was off the diet that McCoy kept imposing on him. "Someone really ought to invent interesting, tasty food without calories, Bones!"

McCoy laughed, grateful that the mood had lightened. "Now where is your sense of adventure, my friend? Look at the challenge you have to meet when you face each new diet! All that lettuce sitting there, awaiting your service..."

Kirk scowled at him and looked once more at his plate.

"Look at you, eating that kirbasj again! Give you a week, and you'll be pounds over again, and back on a diet."

"I know. I know, but I like this stuff. Allow me some fun in life, Bones!"

They both laughed at that, glad that they were still able to appreciate the age-old joke. They were interrupted by the intercom. The Captain sighed, but he still had a smile on his face when he acknowledged the call. Wiping his mouth on his napkin, he said, "Yes, Lieutenant? What can I do for you?"

"Captain, I've just received a message for you from Vulcan Space Central."

Kirk's back stiffened and the smile disappeared as memories returned. Neither man had heard from, or contacted, Vulcan since Spock's funeral. McCoy stood up, throwing his own napkin onto his plate, and moved to stand by Kirk's side, silently supportive.

"Relay it, Lieutenant."

The intercom crackled with the distance and interference of ordinary space, but the distinctive voice of Ambassador Sarek was easily recognisable. "James, I would consider it an honour if you would make the journey to Vulcan for a time to visit myself and my wife. I have an issue of great importance to discuss with you."

Kirk looked up at his friend, apprehension clearly evident. "Ambassador, it is good to hear from you. Of course I will come if I can, but we are on a mission at present, and I am not at all sure what our orders will be after we have completed it. I may not be able to secure adequate leave for some time." Kirk's hands were clasped tightly together on the desk in front of him, his face thoughtful.

"I have already made arrangements with Starfleet Command. There is a Vulcan scientist presently on Pollux 4 who requires transportation back to Vulcan. Your ship has been given that mission."

His eyes raising in surprise, Kirk answered, "Very well, sir. I shall see you on our arrival... Ah, the Lady Amanda - she is well?"

"She has accepted what occurred, and looks forward to your visit."

"I'm glad... I will see you soon, sir. Live long, and prosper."

"Live long and prosper, our son."

For several seconds Kirk was completely silent and McCoy allowed him his private contemplation without interruption. Finally Kirk turned to his companion. "T'Pau has as much influence now as she did when she cleared us with Starfleet that last time."

"Influence is one thing, but it must be more than just influence. Tying up a Starship to transport one scientist halfway round the galaxy... What's wrong, Jim?" He had noticed a haunted look in Kirk's eyes.

"What? Oh, nothing. It's just...I don't relish the idea of having another Vulcan on board this ship. That's all." Trying to hide his pain by mock humour, he added, "Ridiculous, isn't it?"

"Jim..."

"No, it's all right, Bones. Don't worry. It's a son's duty to do as his father bids him. Isn't that right? And Sarek is the father that I lost so long ago... So - I'll cope." He pulled himself upright, and changed the subject quickly. "Another drink?"

McCoy nodded enthusiastically and reached for the bottle, but he couldn't help a seed of worry taking root within his soul.

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The medical supplies delivered safely, Captain James Kirk now stood in the transporter room waiting for the arrival of the Vulcan scientist. He could not know that the scientist was one of those involved in the experiments on the planet Vulcan which would eventually give him back his reason to live, which would return his other half to him. But as the Vulcan materialised Kirk could immediately tell that he was a High Master. His bearing and stature belied his youthful appearance, and his clothes were those never worn by any other than those who had attained the ultimate pinnacle of their field. The ruby-red robe reached almost to the floor and the embroidery around cuffs and hem consisted of entwined IDICs.

Kirk bowed to him and the Vulcan gave the time-honoured Vulcan salute. "Captain, I thank you for taking me...home. I am Salem."

"Captain James T. Kirk. Welcome aboard the Starship Enterprise. You honour us with your presence. We come to serve." Kirk used the same inflection Spock had used when he had welcomed his own father aboard the ship on their journey to Babel. This time the Vulcan bowed.

"I know of you, Captain. You wear the IDIC of Spock of Vulcan. You are the adopted son of Sarek himself. The honour is mine."

Kirk's face coloured and he felt at a loss for words, feeling great pride. He finally turned towards Sulu and motioned him forwards. "My First Officer, sir. He will show you to your quarters. If you will excuse me, I must supervise the course changes on the brige."

"Of course."

As the Vulcan left, Kirk could not help but wonder how a Master such as this had come to know of him, a relatively insignificant Starship commander. It was further proof of just how much Spock meant to his people and to his planet. Kirk

pulled his shoulders up and his shirt down, pride swelling within him. He was known as Sarek's son, and had been accepted within the realms of Vulcan as friend and brother of Spock!

"Carry on, Mr. Kyle."

The transporter chief had been staring at his captain, having heard the Vulcan's words, and started guiltily. He hadn't known of his commanding officer's informal adoption into the family of Sarek, none of the crew had - but now that he did know, he too felt proud.

Kirk left the room and headed for the bridge, a smile on his face, knowing that the facts that Kyle had heard would soon travel along the grapevine of the ship.

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The journey wore on, and Kirk approached the cabin that the Master occupied many times, but each time he felt apprehension and fear grip him and retreated quickly. Salem knew of Kirk's abortive attempts to speak to him, and understood why he could not bring himself to carry through his intent. He had hoped to speak with the young captain of the Enterprise who had become legend, and who had been the cause of so many broken traditions on his planet. But he soon realised that his wish would not be fulfilled, so instead he observed the Captain visually or by word of mouth from members of the crew. From what he saw and learned he was well pleased. Convinced that acceptance would be paramount when Kirk was shown that Spock was alive once more, he was able to relax into meditation for the remainder of their journey. He could see that Kirk knew Spock so well, loved him so deeply, missed him so greatly that whilst he would not jump to rash conclusions in his need, he would recognise reality when he saw it and accept Spock for what and who he was.

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Spock was prevented from witnessing the experiments or making any further attempts to rejoin Kirk. He was forced to prepare himself for transition back into the reality of life. He had to be prepared to endure much pain of body, soul and mind. He had to be prepared for what was to come, wholly and without fear. It took time, but eventually Spock managed to achieve a semblance of calmness and control, and knew the time was near. There was no further contact from Seyhalla; he simply felt himself being pulled backwards, backwards, felt his vision blur, felt blackness encroach. And then he felt nothing...until...

...he awoke on a table in a long, low room. Its walls were opaque and colourless, the floor black and smooth. The ceiling reflected the colour of the sheet which covered his naked body. He did not know where he was. But he breathed... In the far reaches of his subconscious he seemed to remember being somewhere where he had been unable to breathe or move or see - but it all had a nightmarish quality, and he wasn't at all sure whether it had been reality of just a macabre, surrealist dream. But he knew relief that he could breathe, so filled his lungs with the life-giving gas. He felt pleasure that he could see, so he blinked his eyes, too, revelling in the very ability to perform these actions.

There was weakness in his body that he couldn't explain either, and he felt uncharacteristic panic at the realisation. He could not move at all, so simply relaxed his muscles and allowed his thoughts to wander through the disorientation he felt, allowing his eyes to wander around him. He searched the walls; saw nothing recognisable until he encountered the observation panel...and behind it the face of his father.

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Sarek stood before the observation panel, flanked on either side, though out of sight of Spock, by Sarat and the other member of the trio, Sepek. He met

the eyes of his son but could not understand the mixture of open confusion and pure jubilation that he saw there. He turned away towards the High Scientist himself.

"You have achieved success in what you aimed to do, Scientist Sarat. My son...lives." He swallowed the bile which had risen in his throat, forced the nausea he felt to disappear. "What you did must have been logical...you are Vulcan and live your life by its principles... My mind, however, is not... functioning...as it should. I cannot acknowledge true logic; I once said that you do not thank it... However, I thank you now."

Sarat acknowledged the words with a bow. "Spock will be deranged for a time. The procedure had been a great trauma on his body and his mind. Talk with him. Explain what has occurred. Convince him of the right of what we did... The Enterprise will be here in 3.7 hours. He must be prepared to meet Captain Kirk when he arrives. Salem is on board and has notified me that everything is proceeding as we had hoped it would; but Spock must accept before we can expect the Captain to."

Sarek nodded understanding.

"If you would meet your other son on his arrival, Sarek, it may help. Perhaps in your home? It holds an air of familiarity for him, and he will feel more at ease within surroundings he is already acquainted with."

Again a nod of affirmation came from Sarek. He was unable to utter anything audible, and left as soon as it was polite to do so. His goal was the recovery room to which Spock's stretched body had been taken.

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Both Vulcans faced each other across the room, each revelling in the very joy of seeing each other again. Spock did not know why or how, but he sensed that they had not been together for some great time. There was open warmth, even love, in the eyes of the older man, and he made no attempt to hide it.

"Spock... I cannot tell you how good it is to see you..." He breathed deeply. "What I have to tell you will be difficult in the extreme to understand. But trust in me, believe me. I tell you the truth of ages, impossible as it may seem to you. There is no intention to confuse you further."

Spock struggled with control, tried desperately to urge his vocal chords to work. He partially succeeded. "I...remember...nothing. I sense...that I have not been...with you...in a long time...but that, in itself...is not unusual. Have I been...ill? How...did I get...here?"

Sarek approached his son, touched fingertip to fingertip in a gesture of affection that he had used only towards his wife in as long as Spock could remember. "Spock...you left this life some seasons ago... You died, my son. Your breath left your body...your life ceased..."

Spock's face portrayed exactly what that statement meant to him. Incredulity and disbelief were apparent. But the expression on his father's face substantiated Sarek's earlier claim that he would tell Spock nothing but the truth. In helpless silence he listened to all his father had to tell him.

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The Enterprise glistened like a thousand suns, her silver-grey hull ablaze in the red light from Vulcan's sun. She represented all that Sarek had thought of as he had watched that sun rise that morning. She was like a free bird flying the currents of space-waves, searching for and finding, to most intents and purposes, freedom, acceptance, understanding.

Her Captain, however, was not on the bridge. Instead, he had chosen to watch their orbital manoeuvres from the privacy of his cabin. It wasn't an exact duplication of what had occurred when he had returned Spock to the land

from whence he had come, for then they had been within the confines of Sarek's shuttle, but remembering the complicated manoeuvres that Scotty had supervised and which his crew had performed then brought only pain, and he did not want to show that pain to his crew. He had kept that time from conscious thought ever since leaving Vulcan after the services. Now he was forced to think of it, and partially hoped that he would not remember too well. Much as he longed to visit his adoptive parents once more and visit the planet which would bring Spock really close to him once more, Vulcan held too many memories, presented too much of what could never be again...

In an attempt to break the dangerous thoughts he flicked the intercom on, calling the bridge. "Is everything proceeding normally, Mr. Sulu?"

"Perfectly, sir. You will be able to beam down as soon as you are ready. Vulcan Space Central has given us clearance - I was just about to inform you."

"Very well. You have the con until I return."

He turned from the screen and the heartbreaking sight on it, then made the decision to visit sickbay...

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"O.K., Rogers. That's fine. You'll be a bit stiff for a few days - remember not to get so enthusiastic in the gym in future."

Rogers smiled and seemed about to say something, but noticed his Captain standing just inside the door, and decided he should leave. "Thank you, Doctor. Afternoon, Captain."

Kirk nodded. "Rogers."

The door closed behind the ensign and Kirk gestured McCoy into the office. "Can I have a word, Bones?"

"Sure, Jim." McCoy could well guess what this visit was all about. "Christine, see I'm not disturbed." He didn't wait for an answer.

Kirk was more tense than McCoy had seen him in a long time. His muscles were bunched, his hands clasped tightly behind his back and he faced McCoy with the look of determination he rarely had except when he was making supreme command decisions.

McCoy sat down, knowing that an attempt at facing Kirk down would be useless. "Yes, Jim."

"Bones...I wanted to explain to you...to ask you..." He seemed lost for words, and as he fought to find them his shoulders slumped dejectedly, his determination creeping from him. "Bones, I've got a funny feeling about this visit." He sank down into the chair and stared at his friend. "I can't explain it or define it. I just feel...uncomfortable about it all."

"Jim, don't worry. We'll face whatever this is about together."

"No!" The hazel eyes sparkled and shone, resolved. "I feel...as if I need to do this alone. I think I can cope better, somehow. I know it isn't fair on you, and you probably can't understand why I feel this way...I can't either! Logic tells me your presence at my side is what I need...yet my brain screams out to go alone." He jumped to his feet, and paced the short length of the office. McCoy stepped in front of him and grasped his shoulders, forcing Kirk to meet his eyes.

"I'd like to be with you; I'd like to say I can help, but if that's the way you want it...then fine. I do understand. He's your father now, anyway, not mine."

"You have the same invitation to return that I do!" His voice was vehement.

"I know. I know. Maybe, when you've finished your...discussion, I could pop down... Take it easy, Jim. Go slow. Take one step at a time. And remember..."

he smiled. "...I'm here if you need me."

"Thanks, Bones. Thanks. See you in a while." Kiri smiled and nodded, then with a wave of his hand he strode from the office, every bit the Starship Commander.

Salem was already waiting for him in the transporter room, and on his entrance Kirk bowed respectfully to the High Scientist. Again the bow was returned by the Vulcan salute, and Kirk could not help smiling to himself. It was a very great honour to be acknowledged in such a way by such a man.

Approaching the transporter platform, Kirk gestured Salem to ascend it ahead of him, then turned towards the transporter chief. "Mr. Kyle, I gather the transporter is focused on the Space Central?"

"That is what was requested, sir."

"Any messages for me?"

"No, sir. None."

Kirk's brow furrowed. It was strange that Sarek had not contacted him again on their arrival, told him where he wanted them to meet. Well, no matter. Solutions would not be found by further hesitations. He ascended the steps himself, and stood beside the Vulcan. "Energise."

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As soon as materialisation was complete, James Kirk was immediately approached by a young Vulcan male. "Captain Kirk, welcome to our planet Vulcan. I have been instructed to show you to a shuttle, sir. It has been preprogrammed, and will take you to Ambassador Sarek's home."

Knowing that questions were useless, he simply nodded and followed the young man from the transporter terminal. He noticed that Salem had already left, and thought that odd, but all this cloak and dagger stuff was even odder.

The shuttle looked like the same one they had all used on their last visit, and Kirk had to fight hard to stop the memories engulfing him once more. As he entered the craft, the young Vulcan bowed and left without a word. Kirk shrugged in acceptance, not surprised at anything any more. He settled himself into the operator's seat, and as soon as he had done so, the vehicle rose silently into the air.

The route it took did not give him a view of the Khi'Lahr, and he gave thanks for that small mercy. He knew he could never have maintained control if he had had to look at that again, especially without McCoy at his side. It took only a few minutes to reach his destination, and it gave him a strange sense of satisfaction to see the house unchanged - as were the ageless mountains in the distance. The range seemed to stretch endlessly into infinity, across the planet and beyond. The same fingers of creation reaching for the vast realms of space above them that he remembered, reaching proudly, honourably, for the stars. They were beautiful, regal, as befitted what they symbolised.

Kirk waited before entering the house. He waited and watched and listened, and waited... But the wind that he awaited, that he hoped to experience, did not blow. The wind which was Spock, as he had realised it was, did not disturb the peaceful air around him - and Kirk felt panic rise within him. The wind always blew in this area of Vulcan; the wind that had held the essence of what had remained of Spock, his friend and brother; the wind that had captured each individual ash upon its filigree fingers...what had happened to the wind? Kirk rushed into the house.

There was no-one at home; only a taped message awaited him, informing him that Sarek would be late, having been detained over a subject of much importance. He turned around, searching the room, savouring its familiarity, then wandered through the living area, inevitably ending up in the office/library of Sarek, hoping desperately that his presence in this room would quell the panic...



One wall was lined with real books, a preference of Amanda's, and a luxury that Sarek allowed her. Kirk ran his fingers across them, revelling in the feel of the leather bindings. He was surprised to come across an ancient copy of a poetry book by an unknown author named Patience Strong. Kirk had never heard of her, had never known of Amanda's love of poetry, so, intrigued, he picked it up and sat down to read some of it while he awaited Sarek's arrival. As he read and savoured the words, he came across one particular poem which seemed to say so very much to him... Without quite realising it he began to read it out loud.

"But Regrets Remain..."

"Two little words come haunting when we live the past again. Time blunts the edges of our sorrows, but regrets remain - for all the good intentions that were never carried through - the many things we might have said - the things we meant to do!

"Too late...too late to utter the kind word left unsaid. Too late to write that letter, for we can't bring back the dead. The only thing that we can do is try to do our best - for someone else we love and thus put the mind at rest... Then when come the partings and we stand at memory's gate - the heart will not be tortured by those little words: Too late."

Kirk felt the salty drops force their way from between his closed lids as he thought back on the time past. Had he forgotten to tell Spock all he had wanted to? Had he really shown the Vulcan just how much he had meant to him? Had he been the pillar that Bones needed? Too late. Simple words, and yet they held so much depth of truth, and memories were held entwined within them which he had not been able to face before. Can't bring back the dead... Truth...

Suddenly he realised the presence of Sarek at the door. He hadn't entered because of his respect for his son's privacy, and had averted his eyes at the sight of the tears. Kirk rose to his feet and relaxed, relieved that his father had finally arrived.

"James. I surmised that this would be where I would find you." Intuitively, Sarek dimmed the lights as he entered the room. "May I ask what you were reading, our son?"

"A book of poetry, sir. An ancient collection, written in the mid-twentieth century on Earth." His voice was surprisingly steady, and he realised that it was Sarek's calming influence which had achieved that.

"Ah, yes. One of my wife's books."

Kirk replaced the book carefully, then turned once more towards the Vulcan. "The Lady Amanda is well?"

"She is. However, she has had to visit relatives in Kha'lehom. She will be gone but a few days, and will see you on her return."

Suspicion grew. Kirk remembered how Sarek had professed Amanda's enthusiasm for seeing him as soon as possible after his arrival. He could not understand why she had not postponed her trip until he had at least arrived. But he said nothing, content to allow Sarek the privilege of broaching the subject of his summons to Vulcan.

Sarek studied the hazel eyes which held so much emotion, so much depth, knowing that his explanation was transparent. But he could say no more - and regretted that fact deeply. He saw the questions pass over the expressive face and admired the man even more for being able to control his curiosity. He deserved clarification.

"Come, James. Sit. There is much to tell you."

Kirk did so, and placed his elbows upon the wide arms of the ancient chair, his hands clenched together beneath his chin. Sarek sat opposite him, but kept his head bowed, unable to meet those penetrating eyes until he had his own mind fully under control. Eventually he felt confident enough to speak, slowly, calculatingly.

"I am not fully informed with how your life has been since...we last met, but I do know that life for you is not as it used to be, and cannot be..."

"Is it that obvious? Or that surprising?"

"No, not surprising at all. It is exactly as I had expected... I can read your inner self as easily as I thought I could..." He paused, unsure of how to go on. Patiently, Kirk waited, but he had begun to feel even more suspicious now, even more concerned at the turn of events.

"James, I had hoped to find an easy of broaching this subject I am about to discuss...but there is no easy way, no easy course available - for either of us. Please be assured that I tell you the whole and complete truth, and ask you to believe it. It will be more than difficult for you to accept, but everything depends on your willing acceptance of it." He sat forward, his face growing more impassive, even more controlled. "Things can be as they used to be, once more. The other half of you that you crave so badly can once more be at your side. The pain, the grief, the loneliness, can be dispelled. Spock lives."

It took several seconds for Sarek's words to penetrate Kirk's numbed brain, but then he jumped to his feet, his fingers clenched until his nails dug into his palms, drawing blood. His eyes blazed, anger and consternation burning within them. He somehow kept his voice calm, but it held a threat which caused the Ambassador's heart to sink. The Vulcan's original words forgotten, he stormed,

"I had not thought Vulcans capable of sinking to such depths! You... It is a cruel, heartless joke you play on me! Spock is dead! I killed him! Remember?"

There was a vivid picture within his mind of the cremation service, of the ashes which were Spock, of the physical Spock being carried away on the wind of Vulcan. He shivered. Facing Sarek accusingly he could not help but raise his voice. "I felt pride because I was known as your son - but that pride is gone! I hear your words and cannot believe them, cannot believe that you spoke them..." His voice choked, and he felt the tears flow once more. This time he did not try to hide them. He practically whimpered as he staggered to the door of the library, where he turned, accusingly. "Spock is dead. Dead. He can never live again - never! Dead...dead...dead..."

Sarek stood now, helpless, unsure of what to do. He had made a gross miscalculation with the reaction of a Human. He had failed with Kirk as he had failed with his own son, and he felt guilt. He could do nothing but stare at Kirk's retreating back...and as he stared he made the decision that he should have made before, despite the instructions that Sarat had given him as to the procedure to follow. He should have followed his own true depth of feeling, that same feeling that he denied having, and known from the beginning what Kirk's reaction would be. He reached for the intercom.

"Vulcan Space Central - get me the senior medical officer on board the U.S.S. Enterprise."

Seconds passed, then - "Dr. McCoy here."

"Doctor, it is I, Ambassador Sarek."

"Ambassador, how nice to hear from you..." But then McCoy's voice took on the urgency which was so usual when he feared for Kirk's safety. "There's nothing wrong with Jim, is there?"

Sarek hesitated, then replied precisely. "There is nothing physical, Doctor. But he requires help that I am unable to give him; he requires your help, the help of a friend. Will you come?"

"Immediately."

"Meet me at the Science Academy. I must explain the situation to you, and also show you why your visit is such a necessity at this time."

"I shall be there in less than five minutes, sir." Contact was broken, and

Sarek moved quickly to his personal transporter chamber, which he used only in the extremest of circumstances.

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Seyhalla, who arranged all things, who had made Spock's 're-life' possible, watched in mute fascination. He had not directly envisaged the occurrences he was witnessing, but, he realised, he really should have anticipated them. And he was not surprised at all by the turn of events. If there had not been any doubt and outrage at the mere suggestion of this impossible thing, then Kirk would not have been worthy of his name, nor of his brother's life. Seyhalla believed that acceptance would come eventually, that the whole four days that he had allowed for the passage of 'inevitability' would not be needed. But he would have to watch and learn from the feelings that ran so deeply in the soul of Kirk himself, and remember for future times. He only hoped that the subject named Kirk would not hurt himself...

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Sarat was displeased when Sarek informed him of what had already occurred, and what would occur afterwards, but he acknowledged the need to allow McCoy to know of what had happened. He left the room, knowing that there was nothing more that he could do.

Sarek met McCoy as he had promised, and having shown the doctor into a private room, proceeded to explain all that had happened.

McCoy's reaction was not the same as Kirk's, though he did feel the same torment of not knowing for sure just what to believe; he too felt pain, even anger, at what he felt was deceit. But he was a scientist and having heard the principles and procedures of the experiment which had taken place, understood and even believed to a certain extent. Some familiar scepticism still reigned, but he believed that the principles were possible, that Sarek, being the scientist of repute that he was, would not lie, would not deceive, and he realised the real pain that it had caused Sarek to have to describe all that had occurred to him. With a sudden rush of realisation, his mind screamed out that there was a miracle, a rescue from the grave. Death could be beaten - for them.

"And Jim? Where is he now?"

"I do not know."

McCoy felt lines of worry crinkle his forehead. "What of Spock himself? Does he know?"

Sarek nodded. "It was necessary to tell him, for he had to accept it all himself before others could even begin to. His primary concern, as it always was, is James, but he understood the need to take his return slowly, to allow acceptance from everyone to come naturally. He freely agreed to await the result of my meeting with James - here. But I fear his reaction when he learns how James reacted."

"Is it possible for me to see him? To prove to myself beyond all doubt... and to prepare myself for the future. I need to talk to him, examine him...and even touch him, if he'll allow it. I have to know myself that this is not some nightmare that I am living."

Sarek's eyes were soft as he answered. "I understand. Come. There is an observation panel which can be used; you can see him without his seeing you, before the actual meeting. It may help you. When you are satisfied, then the meeting can take place."

McCoy somehow found the semblance of a smile and forced it to his lips, but his inner self was engulfed with indecision and doubt, though he fought it valiantly. He found himself fighting the nausea he felt, and he began to wonder at his own sanity for the ~~near-immediate~~ acceptance and understanding he had displayed. He somehow knew that to explain it to anyone else would have been

impossible - he would have been committed instantly, and he couldn't help wondering if that could still happen to all of them... All knew of the need both he and Jim had to have their friend alive once more - they both wanted it, both knew it was impossible - yet now he had been told that it was possible and he had believed it, because his scientific abilities had enabled him to be objective and see facts where they were undeniable. He hoped for all their sakes that he was correct...

The panel slipped back into the wall and McCoy took a deep, deep breath to steel himself, to prepare himself. Then he forced himself to look downwards...

Spock sat at the desk, a chess-set before him. His black hair combed immaculately as always haloed his pointed ears and his oh-so-familiar face, and the sight caused McCoy to feel the sting of tears behind his eyes. But he had to be sure. And so he watched carefully. Spock's hands were steepled before him, and though his eyes stared at the chess set, McCoy somehow knew that he did not see it.

"The poor devil - he's worried sick about Jim, even in his condition..."

As he watched, Spock rose to his feet, unsteadily, and paced the floor. The gait was his, the stance his... Spock had stopped, and was staring at the door, his hands behind his back. He wore his Enterprise Science Officer's uniform, and McCoy could not help but wonder where Sarek had got hold of one. He looked as he had always looked.

"Oh, Spock - it has to be you. It's a miracle, and I don't quite know how to explain it to myself... But Sarek believes it... I believe it! Christ, it's good to see you!"

Quite suddenly, Spock spun round and stared directly at the observation panel. He definitely could not see McCoy, but he had evidently sensed the doctor's presence or had read his thoughts... Whatever was the cause, Spock certainly knew McCoy was there, and McCoy felt strangely comforted by that knowledge. The Vulcan raised his hand slowly in the traditional salute, his face softening for the first time since McCoy had looked upon him in that sterile room below. Then Spock turned back to face the door, to await McCoy's entrance.

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"Spock - what can I say?"

"You could say...welcome back."

McCoy rushed forward, arms outstretched, and grasped Spock's arms tightly. "Welcome back, my friend. Welcome back!" McCoy's blue eyes shone. "Hell, you'd think I could find something more to say at a time...like this..."

Spock's expression betrayed all he wished to keep within himself; his eyes warm and misted. "It was what I had most wished to hear...Bones. His lips were pursed to prevent the smile he would have so liked to display and his cheeks were flushed with a darker green. McCoy smiled a smile that would have done justice to Kirk himself.

"Doctor - Jim? There is something wrong, for you are not meant to be here."

McCoy sighed. The perception of the Vulcan was uncanny, and he knew full well that it had been Kirk's presence which had been most required, and not his. He looked quickly behind him, but Sarek was not there.

"Spock, Jim... Jim could not accept what he was told. He rejected it... and he's now missing..."

The Vulcan stiffened, his body tense in readiness for...for what? He knew he would have to rely on others to smooth the way for his return, and for his friend and brother. But he rebelled against that fact more than anything else he had ever had to accept. He wanted to be at Kirk's side, to help him, to guide him. It was his task, and none other's, to see Kirk and explain things to him.



"McCoy - he must be found! I must find him."

"Not you, Spock. That's impossible, and you know it."

"His life may be endangered by the degree of irrationality he is having to endure at this time. He will feel...as I felt when I first...died. Memory is not clear at this moment, but I can perceive most of what happened. I remember how I felt; I remember how helpless I felt when Jim was so badly injured... I know how Jim feels now, what he is enduring..."

McCoy started. "He's been saying all along that you've been right at his side..."

"It was difficult, but I had to fight...I could not leave him..."

As he talked, memory returned. A time limit. Four days. Another death his reward for failure. "Fones, you must help me; I do not have much time."

McCoy did not fully understand the statement for he naturally felt that they now had all the time in the world, but he wasted no time with questions. He could well see the urgency which had caused Spock to grip his shoulders, and stare into his own bright blue eyes. In reply he grabbed hold of his medi-scanner, and Spock's eyes widened in question.

"I'm sorry, Spock - but I must have more proof than that of my eyes. Starfleet will require it...and so will Jim. I must be absolutely, completely sure before I can even think of going after Jim. He'll come to no harm on Vulcan - and I have a pretty good idea of where he'll be, anyway. Come on, my friend. Sit down. Let's get it over with."

McCoy took the readings, quickly but precisely and efficiently, tricorder in hand to make an accurate recording and corroborate his findings.

Pulse - 212 beats per minute.

Blood pressure - 80/40, practically non-existent as it was supposed to be.

Blood composition based on copper. T-negative. Some Human blood elements.

Temperature/respiration - 91/61

Height - 6 feet.

The details reeled on and on, and Spock accepted the examination with his customary dignity and calm, but his eyes betrayed his anxiety, and McCoy tried not to look at them, tried not to be influenced by the pain in them. Eventually, he straightened, and turned the instruments off, laying them aside. He looked at Spock finally, and spoke.

"Mr. Spock, you are in excellent physical condition."

"You are content?"

McCoy nodded, to Spock's evident relief. "There can be no doubt. No-one could duplicate the unique properties in your blood; the unique combination of both Human and Vulcan blood elements. And all the other readings agree. You are Spock."

Hiding his relief - for he had feared that something would show up on McCoy's sensors that should not be there, despite all the tests that the Vulcans themselves had carried out - he rose to his feet.

"Then the time has come. Jim must be found - and I will wait no longer."

"Spock, you must! For his sanity, for his peace of mind, you must give me time. Much as I would like to have you with me, I must do this alone." The words were much the same as Kirk himself had uttered before he had beamed down to Vulcan, and McCoy shivered at the memory. "I have proof now, and he trusts me. Won't you trust me also? As you did before... Let me talk to him, explain it all to him. Then I shall bring him here to you. I swear it."

"Very well, McCoy. As I trusted you before, then I shall do so again. As I

entrusted you with the task of saving Jim pain - before, then I entrust that task to you once more... But I entreat you, Bones - do not take too long..."

McCoy nodded and left quickly.

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McCoy did not know how he knew, but he could somehow sense that Kirk would go to the last place where he and Spock had been...together; the high plateau of scarlet and brown rocks atop the scarlet mountains which they had climbed, the plateau where the Kha'Hay had taken place.

The walk did not seem to take long for he was deep in thought the whole time. As he stood at the base of the steps which had been carved into the mountainside he halted to wipe the sweat from his brow, and to allow the thoughts of times past to filter over and around him. Times that the trio had spent together, the shore-leaves shared; the crises; the happy times, and sad. They had lived each day in the shadow of death, knowing that the black cloud could cover any of them at any time. They had faced that fact and had endured it when it had in fact occurred. But thought partial acceptance had come to James T. Kirk, he had still fought Spock's death in his subconscious, had denied it, rejected it. So when, now, in a sudden burst of revelation, he had been told that Spock did in fact live again, when he had been offered exactly that which he had most hoped for, he had had to fight against the very idea, else lose the battle he had fought so long, and sink into the depths of his subconscious, into the grip of insanity.

McCoy the psychologist accepted the analysis and attempted to find a course of action to break through the miasma Kirk would be in.

McCoy the humanist and friend screamed contempt at whatever deities existed for allowing such tragedy to occur to all of them in the first place.

McCoy the doctor realised how totally unethical what had happened really was and began to wonder at the repercussions.

McCoy the scientist gave thanks for the breakthrough, though he also mourned for the fact that it could never be allowed to happen again...

He had reached the plateau. It spread out before him, unchanged, the scarlet and brown rocks interspersed with sand of grey and yellow. It was as his eyes acknowledged the sight that met them that he realised the absence of the wind - knew why it no longer blew. It no more held the free spirit of Spock, so it had retreated to another part of the scarlet planet, awaiting the next soul to join with it. Jim would have to be made to realise that too...

The altar, onto which had been placed the Ker'Hay containing the ashes of Spock's physical self, stood in the exact centre of the plateau, exactly as before, and it was beside this that McCoy spotted the kneeling, gold-clad figure of Captain James T. Kirk.

McCoy approached quietly, slowly, wanting to ensure that he would not startle his friend. There was no sound, nothing to indicate that Kirk was conscious of his presence at all.

"It's quiet here, isn't it?"

Surprisingly, Kirk did not start or jump at the sound of McCoy's voice; instead, he simply raised his head to look into McCoy's face, not at all surprised to see him there. The expression on that face caused McCoy to refrain from making any further comment. Kirk's face was the same as it had been at that dreadful moment when McCoy entered the private room to find Spock and Kirk in the embrace of death. It was tearless; not entirely sane.

"There's no wind, Bones...why has the wind stopped blowing? The wind was all that was left of him...except for the memories...but now...now...it's gone..."

There could be no hedging, no beating about the bush. Kirk had asked a direct question; he would expect a direct answer. He deserved one, and needed

one... There was little to be done but to tell him the honest truth - and hope. McCoy bent down, gripped Kirk's elbows and pulled him to his feet, gently, supportive. But Kirk refused to face him. Instead, he focused his hazel eyes on the wet-looking, obsidian-like rock face on the right hand side of the plateau, that same rock face from whence came the wind that had carried the ashes of Spock away.

"Jim, look at me! Look at me, dammit!"

With his eyes glazed, Kirk pulled them away from the tri-dimensional image of the Vulcan IDIC, exactly the same as the one he always now wore.

"Oh, Bones... Sorry... I guess...my mind was elsewhere..."

"Jim, listen to me. Carefully. JIM!"

"O.K., O.K! There's no need to shout."

Fear gripped McCoy's very soul. Kirk simply was not Kirk at that moment. He had retreated from the meagre factors that had been presented to him; had run as he had run from Spock's death bed.

"Jim, the wind doesn't blow because it no longer contains Spock. Jim, Spock is alive."

Wild-eyed, Kirk pulled away from McCoy's grasp. "Not you, too! Sarek tried to tell me some wild tale like that. It's not true! I killed him! Remember? I killed Spock!" Without thinking, he lashed out at McCoy, his anger, his fear, his confusion taking control. His right fist shot forwards and connected viciously with McCoy's chin. Because of his utter surprise, the doctor found himself sprawled in the grey sand. For a moment he lay there, staring up at his friend. Kirk stared down as if he had only just realised what he had done. First regret then guilt showed on his face and he began to turn away, embarrassed.

Rubbing his chin, McCoy said, "That's quite a right hook you've got there. Now we've got that over with, can we really talk?"

Kirk turned back, a guilty smile creeping across his face, obviously more himself, as if he'd just snapped out of the clutches of a nightmare.

"Come on, Captain. Help me up!" McCoy reached up his hand, and with a relieved sigh Kirk took it and pulled. McCoy climbed to his feet.

"I'm sorry. What the hell did I do that for? Bones, what do I do? What do I believe?"

Again McCoy thought of how like a young defenceless boy Kirk looked when in pain or distress. He felt as if he ought to reach out and hug him, pull him close and protect him from all danger and strife. But that could not be. Reality had to be faced before the hurt could be taken away - and Spock had said that time was short.

McCoy walked a little way from Kirk, in the hope that he would follow, but it seemed as if Kirk was attached to the altar by some inexplicable force, and could not - or would not - move from its vicinity. Looking back, he saw the smile again on the young Captain's face.

"Now what's so funny?"

"You. You've got sand all over you..." Then the smile disappeared. "It's about time I started acting like the Starship Captain I profess to be. Come on, my friend. Tell me what I have to know..."

Minutes passed into an hour and more as McCoy related all that had happened since he had beamed down to Vulcan from their beloved ship. "Jim, there are too many facts available to us to disbelieve this. I've checked and double checked. I've questioned and questioned again. There is no other answer. Due to the scientific expertise of a very small number of Vulcans, Spock lives again. He's returned to us, Jim. He lives."

James Kirk looked at his friend, his eyes glazed once more, but this time



with the moisture of tears. He wrung his hands together before him, holding them at his waist, as if he could wring some semblance of reassurance from his flesh himself. He walked from side to side of the altar, near which he still remained, his feet dragging through the sand. Reaching up to push the lock of hair from his eyes, he seemed to find his voice.

"It's like some unbelievable, fantastic nightmare. Almost as if the time since Spock...died, since his...funeral...had never happened. Are you sure this is real, Bones? I'm not in the throes of a feverish hallucination, about to wake up and find it all a dream?"

"It's real, Jim. Reason has returned for the passing of each day. Impossible as it may seem to us now, we have to accept it now for Spock's sake. He lives, Jim, and he's alone. He's had to face this without us at his side - and he needs us!"

As if suddenly waking from the nightmare he still half believed himself to be in, Kirk turned towards his friend. "Yes, there's no time to lose. We must move quickly...go to him... It will be...wonderful to see him again. Can't imagine what it will be like...so long..."

McCoy smiled, content in the knowledge that his task had been successful. He was about to direct his friend towards the steps that would lead them back downwards, down towards where Spock was awaiting them, when he saw the flash of blue against the scarlet rocks. Looking quickly to his left, he saw Spock. The Vulcan was walking towards them, arms at his sides, his face schooled into control. McCoy nodded to him, reassuring him that all would now be well, and moved silently aside, out of the way of the meeting of the brothers.

"Jim."

The name was almost whispered, and at first Kirk thought he had imagined it just as he had before, as he had thought he had heard it on the wind. But then he suddenly realised that there was no wind - and he swung around, alert, searching...and his eyes found the one sight in all the universe that he had wanted to see again, but had never thought he could; Spock. Alive, breathing, vibrant, unique, walking towards him across the sand of his birth. Brother, friend, companion - the other half of him.

"SPOCK!!!!"

Kirk ran as if his very life depended on it and enfolded Spock in gentle, protective arms, holding him tightly as if afraid that the vision would fade and disappear. "Spock..."

They hugged each other, Kirk's tears of happiness staining the science blue of Spock's uniform shirt. He was exactly as he had been before the illness had struck him; exactly as Kirk had known him and loved him. And somehow, because of the implicit trust he had in McCoy, because of the belief he had in himself, that he knew Spock as none other did, he began to lose all doubt - and believe. Here was Spock, here before him in the flesh, alive, breathing. There was no question...

Spock pushed him away slightly and looked deep into the hazel eyes he knew and loved so much. "Jim, it is I. I know it, Bones believes it, as does my father. But I understand what doubt must be present within your heart. I understand and accept it. There are many possibilities, many alternatives aside from those with which you have been presented. Give yourself time. We have plenty of that left to us now."

Kirk looked at him, revelled in the sight of him, gave thanks and praised the very air around him for what he felt. "Spock, I don't need time. There was doubt and vehement screaming out to my understanding and sanity. But you gave McCoy a trust - before - and I gave him one a long time ago. I believe him. I know he speaks the truth when he tells me what he believes and has been told." He paused for breath and to wipe the tears from his eyes. "Spock, others will doubt, and I have no idea how we will convince Starfleet and the entire galaxy

that you do live again. But we shall do it! We have each other again, and none of us will risk that now that we have another chance. If we cannot find acceptance within the realms of what we knew before, then we will search the galaxies until we do find acceptance - but we will do it together!"

He hugged Spock again, then, this time drawing McCoy into the precious, unique triad. There on the plateau where they had all said farewell to each other they stood again, together, united against all adversity, convinced that there was nothing now that they could not face and endure.

Spock suddenly looked down the mountain. "My mother - she does not know yet. My father is awaiting her return, but I fear for her reaction..."

McCoy winced at the memory of when Sarek had used almost the very same words not so very long ago.

"Don't worry, Spock. We'll help her, and you, accept what is to come. I think you'll find her more perceptive than you think." Kirk smiled his happiest smile.

"Jim - I love you."

A little surprised at the sudden revelation of pure emotion, Kirk glanced at McCoy, but quickly turned his eyes to meet Spock's.

"I tell you now, to your person, for I left it too late...before. A recorded message was the only way to tell you my true...feelings. Not now. It was not adequate then, and too much has passed since then. Now I must tell you personally."

"Oh, Spock! That's one of the most wonderful things I have ever heard. And I love you. I love you more than the brother I lost so long ago. I love you as the other half of me. You are my life!" Kirk grew stern. "And if you ever leave again - then I go with you!"

There were no arguments, simply silent exchanges of affirmative nods, silent acknowledgements.

Kirk stood between his friends, his hands on a shoulder of each. "Gentlemen, a new future, a new life awaits us. Whatever faces us, we'll face it together. The sun has shone again!"

Spock looked sideways at his Captain - his friend. "It is a beautiful sun."

Kirk looked at him, and they both understood without explanation the true meaning behind the few simple words.

And as they walked away, leaving the plateau of the Kha'Hay, the merest hint of a breeze blew for a brief second in farewell.

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