

NEW BEGINNINGS

by Shirley Buck

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CHAPTER ONE

Doctor Alix Warner walked across the gardens of the Chapelwain Hospital. The wind blowing directly from the snow-covered mountains of the High Himalayas, swirled coldly around her legs, causing her to shiver and walk more quickly towards the main building.

She had just said goodbye to her patient, who had spent four and a half months under her care, recovering from an alien disease, contracted while he had been visiting a little known planet. The constant care he had required had tired Alix more than she had thought and all she wanted now was a few days rest in her own small villa within the hospital grounds.

Chapelwain Hospital was a complex of buildings which spread out over a large area of meadowland overlooking the Kali Gandaki river. It was the only habitation for many miles and the main means of entry was by the transporter housed in the building Alix had just left behind.

Its isolation was one of the many benefits of the hospital; for it was here that some of the most severely injured and seriously ill people were brought. Chapelwain had a unique system of caring for its patients, and although only an experiment sixteen years ago, it was now established as a hospital with an unusual way of caring for the people who came there. For as each patient was accepted into the hospital, they were assigned their own doctor. Not unusual at first glance, but each qualified doctor was also a qualified surgeon, nurse and physiotherapist. The patients were looked after on a one to one basis and the doctor did everything for them, providing a background of care which in itself helped the patient towards recovery. The system demanded a great deal from its doctors in time, energy and knowledge, but the results were rewarding. Many of the patients who would not have recovered if they had gone to an ordinary hospital with the more usual standards of care, now left Chapelwain as healthy as they had been before accident or disease had stricken them down.

Alix clutched her pale blue doctor's coat around her, as the wind blew even colder and soughed through the branches of the conifer trees that lined the sides of the valley. She pushed open the door to the main hospital, glad of the warmth that encircled her. Now she had only to vacate the room next door to where her previous patient had stayed and go back to her villa. She looked forward to the days she had alone, pursuing whatever interest or hobby she cared to, until her next patient arrived. It had not always been so.

When she had left the Enterprise and resigned from Starfleet thirteen years ago, she had wanted only to work unceasingly at something so demanding that it would give her no time to dwell on the past. Chapelwain had seemed the ideal answer. She had been accepted on the staff of the hospital and had had to cope with two intensive courses on nursing and surgery at the same time. After an arduous two years study, she had become a resident doctor and had

accepted her first patient. The work had proved demanding and fulfilling and Alix had never regretted her decision to come to Chapelwain. But it had been hard to shut the door on her life on the Enterprise, on the many friends she had made while aboard. But most of all, her memories of the love she had for a certain Starship Captain. She had loved James Kirk before and beyond anything else in her life, loved him deeply and unselfishly, loved him enough to give him what she believed he truly wanted more than life itself. For James Kirk had a deep and abiding love too - a love that was demanding of everything he could give, a love he never wanted to lose - the Enterprise.

** So Alix resigned, sure that if she had stayed aboard the Enterprise, it would have made life unbearably difficult for its Captain, and that eventually the relationship they had would shatter like brittle glass. It had been the most difficult decision she had ever had to make in her life and it had been even harder to live with, in the months that followed. Dreams and memories would force their way unbidden in to her mind - the night of McCoy's birthday party; the night James Kirk had been recovering in Sickbay from the antidote to the Dohlman's tears; and the few short weeks they had spent together on Dervalan.

The Chapelwain had been the incentive to make her go on. It had been a haven and a retreat. Now it was her way of life. Her love for James Kirk was buried deep beneath the protective layers of the years that had passed.

Even as she entered the main building, her pager buzzed, a quiet persistent sound that brooked no denial. Quickly Alix made for the nearest telephone.

"Doctor Warner. You wanted me?"

The nurse's voice at the other end of the telephone was crisp.

"Yes, Doctor Warner. We have a new patient for you. He is in room eleven."

"There must be some mistake. I'm not due for another patient for at least another week," Alix protested. "I've only just this second returned from seeing my last patient to the transporter."

"I'm sorry, Doctor. There is no mistake. The patient has come in unexpectedly and there are no other doctors free."

Alix sighed.

"Very well, Nurse. Room eleven you said?"

"That's right, Doctor."

"I'll go straight there."

"Thank you, Doctor. Nurse Mattrim is with the patient and has his full medical notes. I'll log you in."

Alix replaced the receiver and began to walk slowly along the corridor. She felt tired and not at all like taking on a new patient, with all the intensive care, sleepless nights and sheer hard work that it entailed. But there was no choice. It was all part of the life of Chapelwain Hospital.

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Room eleven was bright and cheery, with a large window overlooking the fast flowing Kali Gandaki River. The Gandaki valley here was wide, with the river rushing headlong to reach the greener country lower down. Forests of conifers

** For the story of Alix and Kirk aboard the Enterprise, see Star Gate I, published by the William Shatner Fellowship, London Group.

covered the lower sides of the valley, but higher up, above the tree line, the rocks showed themselves, purple and deep blue in the distance. And on the far peaks, snow lay white and sparkling in the clear, crystal air.

As Alix entered, a nurse rose from a chair beside the high bed on which the patient lay.

"He's resting quietly," she told Alix. "Heavily sedated, of course - but I guess that's because of the journey, short though it was."

She picked up a folder and handed it to Alix.

"Poor man, he's had a rough time. These are his medical notes. It's not just his physical injuries, mentally he's very distressed."

"Thank you, Amy. I'll call you if I need you." She held the door open, anxious for the nurse to leave. Amy Mattrim would spend the next half hour chatting if given the chance. "Will you arrange for my things to be moved from 25b to the room next door. I haven't had time to organise things yet."

"Of course, Doctor Warner. I'll get on to it straightaway. Is there anything else I can do?"

"Not at the moment, Amy. Thank you." Alix shut the door firmly behind her and leaned against it for a moment, looking at the figure on the bed for the first time. His head was turned slightly away from her and all she could see was the side of his face, badly bruised and swollen, and a hand, heavily bandaged lying on the coverlet.

There was something familiar about the figure lying there and Alix' heartbeat quickened slightly. She placed the folder which Amy had given her on to a small table near the door and walked slowly towards the bed.

Alix' heart seemed to stop beating for a moment as she stood looking down into the face of James Kirk. She sank down onto a chair, staring in utter disbelief, as he lay there, eyes closed, breathing very softly. It had been thirteen years since she had last seen him; a young, vibrant man then, full of confidence and charm. A man she had fallen deeply in love with because of his caring, his compassion and because of a chemistry that couldn't be denied. As she looked at him now, she realised that the magic had spanned the years effortlessly and she loved him as much as she ever had.

The years had taken their toll and there were lines on his face that hadn't been there before and his hair, darker and longer than she remembered had a faint sprinkling of grey. At that moment, a shaft of late afternoon sunlight entered the room and shone full on Kirk's face. It revealed the basic change in him; it was a face showing pain and unhappiness; a face reflecting some inner hurt of the person within, which had nothing to do with the accident that had happened so recently.

The right side of his face was discoloured with heavy bruising and swelling and finally Alix realised that she hadn't even looked at his notes to see how badly injured he was.

Kirk's notes did not make for happy reading. An automatic distress beacon from an apparently unknown and uninhabited planet had alerted a passing spaceship. They had sent down a small shuttle and found Kirk lying on the ground near a crashed two man cruiser. He had sustained multiple injuries to his right side when the cruiser had crashed and he had been thrown clear. He had a fractured leg, several broken bones in his hand and severe concussion. There were indications of

pressure to the right optic nerve which could affect the sight of his eye; his whole right side was severely bruised and two badly fractured ribs had caused damage to his right lung and there was internal bleeding, that the doctor aboard the Ariadne had been unable to stop. The doctor reported that Kirk had been delirious when they found him and had obviously been there for a couple of days. The doctor felt he was lucky to be alive. During the first few hours aboard the ship, Kirk had kept muttering words in his delirium, which no one could understand. Once he regained consciousness, he had been very distressed, trying desperately to remember something of great importance to him. The concussion had caused amnesia and Kirk could recall nothing of the events leading up to the accident. He became more and more distraught at his inability to remember and his general condition began to deteriorate. At last, alarmed for his life, the doctor had contacted Chapelwain Hospital while still in deep space, requesting that Kirk be accepted as an emergency. Permission had been granted and Kirk had been taken directly there as soon as the ship was within transporter range.

Alix read the notes with growing concern. It seemed obvious to her that the key to Kirk's recovery were the events he couldn't remember. His physical injuries, although severe, should heal completely, but until the amnesia lifted he would find the road to recovery hard indeed.

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Gradually over the next forty eight hours, Alix gradually reduced the amount of sedation Kirk was given. His drug induced sleep became lighter and he began to feel the pain of his injuries. He moved restlessly, trying to escape the constant pain, murmuring incoherently as he did so. Alix set up an intravenous drip for liquid nourishment and with regular injections of cell rejuvenators, it was all she could do for him until he regained consciousness.

For hour after hour, Alix sat beside Kirk's bedside, watching his condition closely. She held his left hand in her own hands, almost willing him to improve. It was towards evening on the second day that Kirk finally opened his eyes. He gave a low moan, as the pain from his battered body hit him. His eyes were unfocussed and dazed.

"Jim," Alix spoke softly. "Jim. You're alright now. You're safe." She held his hand firmly.

Kirk didn't take in what she said. He didn't seem to see her. His lips formed a word, but no sound came. Alix glanced up at the diagnostic panel above his bed. All the readings were beginning to edge upward, pulse rate, heart rate, blood pressure and pain level.

"Jim. Tell me what's the matter. What are you worried about?"

Her voice penetrated this time and when he answered there was despair in his voice.

"I don't know. Oh god, I don't know."

"You were in a crash. Your cruiser crashed somehow, but you were thrown clear. You were alone. They found you by the automatic distress beacon."

"No no" Kirk's voice was the barest whisper.

"It's true, Jim. Believe me! I wouldn't lie to you."

Gently she stroked his cheek, trying to make some sort of contact with him. He moved his head restlessly and a shadow of pain crossed his face.

"Not alone I couldn't be alone" his voice faded into a dazed murmur. "Don't leave me alone," he pleaded.

"You're not alone, Jim. I'm here, my love."

"I can't remember," he continued, as if he hadn't heard her. "It's something so important so important oh god, why can't I remember?" His voice was almost a sob.

Alix glanced again at the diagnostic panel; the readings were still moving higher. She bit her lip. He was so distressed and if it went on, she realised his condition would deteriorate again. Yet, she didn't want to put him on heavy sedation once more. Quickly, she prepared a mild tranquiliser hoping this would calm him a little. She pressed the hypo against his arm. Kirk seemed startled at the sound and he looked directly at her in puzzlement. Gradually, the readings began to drop a little. Kirk gave a small sigh and closed his eyes. He seemed to slip into a light sleep, then he murmured one word.

"Spock."

* * * * *

Alix stared down at Kirk, the hypo still in her hand. Could this be the answer to what was troubling him? She remembered vividly the night in Sickbay when Spock had been so ill. Kirk had melded with Spock, giving him all the strength he had, exhausting himself to help his friend. Alix had been awed by the caring the two had shared. Suppose something had happened to Spock that Kirk couldn't remember

The reaction that Kirk was having would indicate that it was a possibility. But how could she find out?

"If Leonard McCoy were here, he would know what to do."

The thought crept unbidden into her mind. She could see his kindly, blue eyes twinkling at her, as clearly as if she had seen him only yesterday. He had always been a tower of strength in the Sickbay and despite his worry and concern seemed instinctively to know what to do.

Decisively, Alix stood up. Replacing the hypo on the tray she checked the life signs on the diagnostic panel. Kirk seemed to be sleeping peacefully, his condition stabilised for the moment. Quietly, she walked through to her room, closing the door behind her. She switched on the diagnostic monitor which was linked to the one above Kirk's bed; then she lifted the receiver and put a call through to Starfleet Command.

It was almost an hour before Admiral Nogura returned the call. She had explained everything to his personal aide, Captain Curtis, who had said she would do everything possible to help.

Alix picked up the receiver.

"Doctor Warner?"

"Admiral Nogura. Thank you so much for ringing me back."

"Quite alright. You have problems, I understand. How is Jim Kirk?"

"Not as well as I would like. He was rescued from a little known planet in the Marilion system

where he had apparently crashed about a week ago. His physical injuries are severe, but should heal well. He is, however, deeply troubled mentally. He has had concussion, which has caused amnesia. He can't remember any of the events leading up to the accident and this is causing him a great deal of distress. So much so, that I feel it is hindering his physical recovery. He seems very concerned about Mr. Spock. I wondered if you knew anything that might throw some light on the matter. Could you perhaps put me in touch with Mr. Spock and also Doctor McCoy?"

"Mmmmm." Nogura was obviously thinking deeply. "It is a very awkward time to contact anyone. The summer semester ended only ten days ago. I know Admiral Kirk and Captain Spock went on vacation then, but whether they went together or not, I'm afraid I don't know."

Alix was silent for a moment. It was strange to hear Kirk called Admiral so matter of factly. But she pushed all the thoughts that clamoured for her attention to the back of her mind. Time later to think about them.

"Is there anyone who might know what their plans were? What about Doctor McCoy?"

"Oh, undoubtedly McCoy would know. But he has left Headquarters as well. Hold on a minute. Captain Curtis has something."

Alix could hear the murmur of voices in the background and then Nogura came back on the line.

"Doctor Warner. Apparently, Doctor McCoy is doing a lecture tour of the Alpha Centauri colonies. We think we can locate him fairly quickly and get him to contact you direct. In the meantime, we'll do all we can here, to find the whereabouts of Captain Spock. I'll get a full report from the ship that rescued Admiral Kirk. But I do know that a full search was made in the area where he was found. He was quite alone."

"Thank you, Admiral. I appreciate your help. Anything you find that may be of help in the case, I'd be grateful to know about."

"Of course, Doctor Warner. Let me know how Admiral Kirk progresses."

"I will, Admiral. And thank you again."

Alix replaced the receiver and sank down on to a chair. Of course, she knew that Jim Kirk no longer commanded the Enterprise. It would have been difficult to ignore the fact. Captain James T. Kirk and the Enterprise were legendary and when he had accepted promotion and a job that bound him to Earth, the event had been widely covered by the media.

Up until that time Alix had always listened for news of Kirk; she enjoyed in a vicarious way, any news that was reported about the Enterprise. After the end of the five year mission and Kirk had joined Starfleet Headquarters in San Francisco, Alix allowed herself to hope that maybe he would try and contact her. Many times she had contemplated getting in touch with Kirk, but always at the back of her mind was his total commitment to Starfleet. Even if he didn't have the Enterprise, she didn't know whether he would be willing to enter a fully committed relationship. And after the pain and hurt she had suffered when she had left the Enterprise, she couldn't face the possibility of going through it all again. If he had come to her, it would have

been different. But as the months passed and she heard nothing from him, she knew that he hadn't changed.

When V'ger arrived near Earth with all the danger and alarm that had come with it, the publicity Kirk received was unavoidable. Alix allowed herself the luxury of watching the news reports, just to catch glimpses of him. Older now, the unhappiness and bitterness of those years away from the Enterprise had shown in his face. Alix realised how hard it must have been for him to come to terms with the totally different life he now led. The V'ger incident must have seemed like a heaven sent opportunity to be amongst the stars again. But seeing him again, like that, had hurt Alix too, and she realised that she must put him out of her mind completely. Once she heard that he had gone on another three year mission on the Enterprise, it had been easier for her to push thoughts of him aside and forget the past, by immersing herself in the present, at the Chapelwain.

But what of Spock? Somehow she had always pictured Spock at Kirk's side; they had always belonged together - Captain and First Officer - friends. Surely that friendship would continue, regardless of the circumstances. It was reasonable to suppose that the two men had planned a vacation together. But where was Spock now? Had he been with Kirk at the time of the crash? If so, what had happened to him? The more Alix thought about it, the more likely it seemed that Spock was at the heart of the problems Kirk was experiencing. Somehow, the answers had to be found and Alix hoped that McCoy would contact her soon. Surely he would be able to help.

She walked through to Kirk's room, turning on a low light and drawing the curtains against the night. While she had been on the telephone, Amy had brought her evening meal in, and she sat down in front of the warm, glowing fire, to eat it.

She had just finished when Kirk began to stir and she crossed quickly to his bedside. His eyes flickered open and focused for the first time on her face. There was a puzzled frown on his face and he stared at her. She couldn't help but smile at the dawning recognition she saw there.

"Alix," he finally whispered, huskily. "Is it really you?"

"Yes, Jim, it's really me. You've been in a bad accident and I'm looking after you." She clasped his hand firmly.

"Accident? I can't remember"

His pulse, heart rate and blood pressure began to rise again.

"Jim, please," pleaded Alix. "Don't think about that now. Just be here with me. Do you remember the time we spent on Dervalan?" She searched desperately for something to hold his attention, trying to avoid having to give him further tranquillisers. "The log cabin we stayed at?"

Kirk's eyes fixed on her face.

"Yes yes that was a good time. I often thought of it, on the Enterprise, after you'd left." The lines of his face deepened as he remembered his ship, his shining silver lady, no longer his to command. His eyes closed for a moment.

"Jim, we could have some good times here. The scenery is wonderful, the air so clear. Once you feel better we can explore a little, like we did on Dervalan."

Kirk's eyes opened, looking at her again.

"Yes I'd like that," his voice was weak and there was a hopelessness in his eyes that frightened Alix.

* * * * *

Alix disconnected the intravenous drip for the last time that evening. She raised the head of the bed so that Kirk was able to sit up and she brought him the first solid meal he had had since his accident. Being propped up and able to see something more than just the ceiling above his head, had cheered Kirk and Alix sat beside his bed talking about anything and everything. He lay back on his pillows watching her face as she talked, trying to concentrate on what she was saying and ignore the fears that battered at his mind, threatening to overwhelm him.

But even just the effort of sitting up, tired him. He fought against the tiredness, not wanting to lapse back into his own thoughts, but Alix was quick to realise that he needed to rest again and she quickly and quietly prepared him for sleep. She finally lowered the headrest and removed a pillow and turned the light low.

"Good night, Jim," she murmured softly, as she leant over him.

His eyes opened for a moment.

"I'm glad you're here, Alix. I feel so alone. Why should I feel so alone?"

"I don't know, Jim. But I'll always be here. I'll never be further away than the next room."

"Thank you, Alix."

Alix smiled, bent forward and kissed him gently on the lips. He gave her a smile that touched her heart with its sadness.

She was woken late in the night by the soft bleeping of the monitor alarm in the room adjoining Kirk's. Glancing quickly at the screen above her head, she saw that Kirk's readings were moving upwards and he was experiencing some sort of nightmare. Quickly she walked through the communicating door.

Kirk was moving restlessly and muttering incomprehensible words. He was drenched in perspiration and hurriedly Alix moved to his side. She took his hand in hers.

"Too fast fast going too fast Spock too fast."

"Jim, wake up." She shook him gently. "Jim ..."

Suddenly his eyes flew open and he stared up at her, dazed and disorientated. His grip tightened on her hand and he ran his tongue over his lips.

Alix glanced up at the readings and she saw with relief that they were dropping.

"It was a bad dream ... I can't remember what"

"Try not to worry, Jim. Everything will be alright."

She sat down beside him and held his hand, murmuring words of comfort. Gradually his condition stabilized and he dropped into a light sleep. Alix sat down beside him and held his hand for the rest of the night.

CHAPTER TWO

Two mornings later, Alix sat by the window in Kirk's room, writing up his notes for the operation he had to have to relieve the pressure on his right eye. Kirk, himself, was propped up in bed. He looked pale and tired, although the swelling and bruising to his face had gone down considerably. He was in low spirits; his injuries were causing him a great deal of pain, the sight of his right eye was poor and he was still suffering from amnesia.

"Do you think this operation will restore my sight, Alix?" he now asked.

"Alix put down her notes and crossed to his bed.

"I'm absolutely sure, Jim," she said, taking his hand in hers. "Please try not to worry. Your sight will soon be as good as it ever was."

Kirk stared ahead of him, moodily.

"I wish you could say the same for my memory."

"That will come back too. You have to give yourself time. Don't push yourself so hard, trying to remember. Sooner or later something will trigger the memories that are locked in your mind."

"But it's something terribly important"

"You can't be sure of that."

"I'm sure," Kirk's tone was firm.

"When Leonard gets in touch with us, he's sure to be able to help."

"Mmmmm." Kirk sounded non committal.

The telephone buzzed quietly and Alix turned to answer it.

"Doctor Warner. I have a gentleman in reception who wishes to see you. His name is Doctor McCoy."

"What!? Oh, that's marvellous. Tell him I'll be right along."

Replacing the receiver, Alix turned to Kirk, her eyes alight with joy.

"Jim, Leonard is waiting in reception."

A smile turned up the corners of Kirk's mouth.

"Bones? Here? Really?" There was no mistaking the pleasure in Kirk's voice.

"Yes he is. I'll go and collect him straight away."

* * * * *

Kirk listened as Alix' quick footsteps faded along the corridor. It was the first time she had left him alone since he regained consciousness, here at the Chapelwain and for a moment a feeling of panic and apprehension threatened to overwhelm him. He was frightened of being alone and he didn't know why. It had never bothered him before ... before what? Alix said he had been found alone beside a wrecked cruiser, but he had no recollection of anything at all, just this fear of being alone.

His left hand clenched the bedcovers in an effort to control the panic he felt and he tried to concentrate on the view of the Gandaki valley and the Himalayas from his window, but he couldn't see anything clearly. The sight of his right eye was so blurred now, he could only see things a couple of

inches away from his face. His stomach churned nauseatingly when he thought of the possibility of becoming blind. His head ached badly, throbbing as if drums were beating inside his skull. The whole of his right side seemed as if it was on fire. In fact, everything seemed worse to Kirk now that Alix had left the room. It was as if she kept away some of the pain and fear by her mere presence. It seemed to Kirk that he was being unreasonable in relying so much on Alix, not realising how ill he was. His view of everything was distorted by the pain and trauma he was enduring.

He only wished he could remember what had happened to him. A whole week of his life had been ripped from him, changing him into a weak, desperate man, frightened to be alone, trying always to remember something that constantly eluded him. He had tried so hard to remember the events which had changed the course of his life. He felt that by knowing he could perhaps overcome his feelings of fear. And he knew it was important. Very important. He tried to push the memory back to his last day at the Academy. He could remember standing on the campus, the sun hot on his back, surrounded by some of his cadets. He had wished all a happy vacation and started to walk away from them, towards nothing. His recollection stopped there and however hard he tried, he could remember nothing of what followed. But there came into his mind, like fragments of a dream, images that made no sense. His fingers pushing buttons; flashing lights, accompanied by a feeling of horror. What did it all mean?

Frustrated, Kirk shook his head and immediately regretted it, as a severe jolt pierced his skull and the room darkened and swayed. He lay back on his pillows, feeling weak enough to cry like a child who can't have what it wants. Perhaps Bones would be able to help. He had always been a tower of strength to Kirk in all the years they had known one another and Kirk was glad that he was here now. Surely he would be able to shed some light on what had happened. He must have broken off his lecture tour of the Alpha Centauri colonies to come here. Kirk caught his breath. He had remembered where Bones had been without any effort at all. Perhaps Alix was right after all and his memory would return.

All he needed was Spock to be here too and he was sure he would remember everything. But where was he? It was so unlike Spock not to be where Kirk needed him and now he desperately needed Spock's calm, supporting presence. But suppose something had happened to Spock? Was that what he couldn't remember? Had his mind stopped remembering something too awful to contemplate? Kirk felt sick. That must be what it was. A cold shudder ran through his body and a feeling of panic settled in the pit of his stomach. Oh, god! Why couldn't he remember?

* * * * *

The tall, slim figure of Doctor McCoy turned towards her as Alix entered the reception area.

"Leonard."

"Alix!"

McCoy engulfed her in a bear-like hug and planted a kiss on her cheek.

"It sure is good to see you, Alix."

"It's wonderful to see you, Leonard." She hugged him close for a moment, almost unable to believe he was really here. Then she pulled back to look at him properly.

"You haven't changed a bit!"

"Neither have you, Alix. Still the girl who always brightened my Sickbay."

Alix grinned up at him, feeling at home and secure, just as she had always felt on the Enterprise, all those years ago.

"I don't believe a word you say, but I love hearing it anyway." She linked her arm through his. "I'll take you straight along to see Jim. I know he is anxious to see you. How do you come to be here? I was expecting you to ring?"

"I heard from Nogura's office that Jim had been badly hurt in an accident; and that a Doctor Warner needed to contact me urgently." He gave her a quizzical smile. "What else could I do? Although I did think the name was a coincidence - until I asked at reception for your full name. It's the best thing that could happen for Jim, your being here."

Alix squeezed his arm.

"Thanks, Leonard."

"How is Jim?" questioned McCoy. His tone was anxious and concerned and Alix could see the worry in his eyes.

"He's not well, Leonard. I'm very concerned about him." Alix detailed Kirk's injuries for McCoy, emphasising how distressed Kirk was about the amnesia. McCoy listened closely, knowing the patient even better than Alix. He shook his head when Alix had finished.

"What we need is some sort of trigger. Something that will touch those deep-seated memories and bring them to the surface. If only we know what it was."

"What about Mr. Spock? Where is he? Would he be able to help?"

A frown settled on McCoy's face.

"That's the worrying thing about all of this. Jim and Spock were hiring a small cruiser to go to Vulcan for a couple of weeks together. He should have been with Jim when they crashed"

"But Nogura rang me yesterday to say that the ship which had rescued Jim had searched the whole area. There was no trace of anyone else at all. They were puzzled, because they didn't think Jim would have been able to set the distress beacon. The captain ordered a scan of the surface and found nothing. They concluded that Jim must have been more aware at the time of the crash than they had supposed."

"It's a puzzle, alright and until Jim regains his memory we won't find an answer. As far as Nogura is aware no-one knows where Spock is. Everyone seemed to think he was going on vacation with Jim."

They reached the door to Kirk's room and Alix ushered McCoy inside.

"Bones." Kirk's voice was slightly unsteady. "I'm so glad you're here." He stretched out his hand towards McCoy and quickly the doctor crossed the room and grasped the outstretched hand in both of his.

"Jim." He shook his head, speechless for a moment. "Now I know why I should never let you out of my sight. Have you seen yourself? No, don't answer that. It's just as well you can't."

Kirk gave a grin.

"That bad, huh!"

McCoy grinned in return.

"You'll never get Alix to look at you again!"

"Like to bet on that, Bones?"

"I'm not a betting man. And somehow I feel I'd lose this one." He smiled across at Alix, who blushed slightly and straightened the already straight bed-cover.

McCoy pulled up a chair and sat down beside the bed.

"How are you feeling, Jim?"

"About as bad as I look, Bones," replied Kirk, a faint smile touching his lips. "I can cope with it all except the amnesia. I can't remember anything at all about the accident. A whole week of my life has just gone."

"So Alix told me. But it will come back. Loss of memory is a normal effect of severe concussion. You just have to give it time."

Kirk glanced at Alix with a rueful smile.

"Just what Alix has told me."

"Then believe her, Jim. Relax a little."

"How can I, Bones? I have to know what happened during that week. I know it's important. It must be something to do with Spock. Why isn't he here?"

"We can't locate him at the moment. But I bet he'll pop out of the woodwork sometime soon," said McCoy reassuringly.

"I hope you're right," replied Kirk. "I just wish I could remember."

"I know, Jim."

"I've nearly driven myself mad trying to remember. It's like a thick black curtain that I can't get hold of. I try and try and nothing happens." There was a note of desperation in Kirk's voice. "It's just not there anymore. A whole week of my life has disappeared and I don't know where. I thought you'd have the answer, Bones."

"I'm a doctor, not a miracle worker, Jim." He gave Kirk a smile. "But let's see what the three of us can put together between us. What's the last thing you can remember?" McCoy's tone was gently and understanding.

Kirk leaned back on his pillows and his fingers curled around Alix' hand, as it rested on the bed. She glanced at him with a comforting smile and squeezed his hand. Kirk felt at ease suddenly. If anyone could help him regain his memory Bones and Alix would do it.

"I can remember standing on the campus, talking to some of the cadets. It was hot and sunny and then I started to walk away from them....." Kirk stopped. "That's it. Until I woke up here at the Chapelwain, I can't remember anything else."

"Well, I can tell you, you were walking towards me. I'd just come out of the main building to see you and Spock off and I waited for you to come across."

"Where were we going? And why hasn't Spock contacted me? He should know by now that I've been injured."

McCoy was silent and Alix kept her gaze on her hand locked within Kirk's grip.

"Bones!" Kirk's voice was quiet. "Tell me what happened. I've got to know. Something's happened to Spock, hasn't it?"

"I don't know, Jim."

"Don't lie to me, Bones. I want to know the truth."

"I'm not lying, Jim. No-one seems to know what has happened to Spock. I came to the Transporter Centre to see you and Spock off. Your plans were to go to San Francisco Headquarters and rent a two man cruiser to take you to Vulcan. You and Spock were going to visit his parents for a couple of weeks for a quiet holiday."

Kirk looked quite desperate.

"I don't remember that at all. Did we reach Vulcan? Have you contacted them?"

"Of course, Jim. Neither of you ever reached Vulcan"

"Then what happened to Spock? Did we rent the cruiser?"

"Well, you rented the cruiser. The rental firm only remember you coming in to pick up the keys. But you were alone. And let's face it, Spock's not that easy to forget."

"But he must have been with me. I'm not likely to have gone to Vulcan without him, am I? Oh, god, what happened to him? Why can't I remember? Something has happened to him, that's why I can't remember. My mind has shut off all memory of it. That's it, isn't it, Bones? Isn't it?" Kirk was almost shouting and all the readings began to move upwards.

"Jim, calm down." remonstrated McCoy. "You're doing yourself no good. We don't know that anything has happened to Spock. Your plans might have changed while you were in San Francisco."

"Something has happened to him," repeated Kirk stubbornly. "Can you remember anything else at all, Jim?" asked McCoy.

Kirk closed his eyes for a moment, trying to concentrate.

"I was looking down at my hands. I was pressing switch after switch. Everything was vibrating that's all. It doesn't mean anything. It might just be a dream. I don't even know where I was supposed to be."

Suddenly Alix spoke. Kirk's words had somehow tied in with what he had been murmuring in his nightmare the other night.

"You were with Spock and you were going fast too fast. You called to Spock we're"

".....going too fast. If we don't slow her down, we'll crash...." Kirk's memory came flooding back. His voice was taut, his hand gripped Alix' hand tightly, his eyes closed.

McCoy looked at Alix and his lips formed the word 'How?' Alix shook her head.

"I could see the land going by so fast that everything was blurred. Spock said he could slow her down with one more orbit. We had tried to engage the retro rockets but they were inoperative. I tried all the switches again, but there was no response. We cut the engines and hoped the final orbit would slow us enough. The ship bucked and vibrated as Spock and I tried to keep her on a steady heading. We managed to hold her together for another orbit and we slowed her down." Kirk was beginning to tremble, his voice low and shaky. "But not enough"

There was silence for a moment. Kirk was shaking from head to foot, perspiration was pouring off him. All his life signs were going haywire. Alix reached for the hypo reading to give Kirk a tranquiliser. McCoy shook his head and stopped her hand.

"Wait a moment."

He leaned close to Kirk.

"Jim, what happened next?" he asked gently.

Kirk opened his eyes, but seemed not to see either of them.

"I was lying on the ground. I hurt, badly. Spock made me comfortable, gave me some water. He said he had set the distress beacon and he was going to get help. I didn't want him to leave. I didn't want to be left alone. How could he leave. How could he go and get help for me when he was injured, too. Badly injured. His face ... it was covered in blood

Kirk gave a shuddering moan and lost consciousness.

* * * * *

Kirk had only been unconscious for a short while and when he came round, the memories he had thought completely lost had returned. He knew now what had been so important to him. Spock had been hurt in the crash. Kirk could see his face so clearly now, he wondered how he could ever have forgotten. The Vulcan's face had been unusually pale with a darkening bruise on his forehead, but worst of all was the gash that ran across Spock's right cheek from the base of his nose disappearing into his hairline above the pointed ear. Green blood welled from the gash, covering the lower half of Spock's face.

But Spock's concern, as always had not been for himself, but for Kirk. It appeared he had picked up life form readings a few miles away, just as they were coming in to land. After making Kirk as comfortable as possible and setting the distress beacon, Spock had left to try and get help.

It was the last time Kirk had seen him. The hours that followed were desperate indeed for Kirk, as he waited alone for the return of his friend. As the hours slipped by, he became more and more certain that something had happened to Spock. Alone, unable to move, a fever beginning to rack his body, Kirk grew frightened for Spock's life.

As the fever increased, Kirk began to imagine he could see Spock, covered in blood, hovering at the edge of the clearing. He called to him, wanting to help him, but the vision only called back to him.

"You're alone, quite alone - you'll always be alone."

When the rescue ship arrived, setting down just at the point where he thought he could see Spock, Kirk was convinced that it was just a further hallucination sent to torment him. The three men who came out of the shuttle didn't seem real to him. They shimmered in and out of focus, and when he tried to talk to them they couldn't seem to understand what he said. Reality faded away and he could remember very little of his time aboard the Ariadne.

When Kirk had told Alix and McCoy all he could remember, he had been exhausted, hardly able to speak. But there had been a sense of relief within him. Now he knew what the problem was and something could be done about it. The frightened, lost feeling had gone and Kirk felt able to cope with Spock's disappearance, though as the discovery had been for him.

Alix had given him a tranquiliser then, telling him to rest. Later the three of them would make what plans were necessary. He gave Alix a tired, grateful smile and slipped quickly into sleep.

CHAPTER THREE

Later that afternoon, Alix and McCoy sat talking in the room adjoining Kirk's where he lay sleeping, recovering from the trauma of the morning.

"What do you think Spock's chances are?" asked Alix.

"Well, not good. That's for sure," replied McCoy. "If he was on that planet I would have thought the Ariadne's sensors would have picked up some trace of him whether he was alive or dead. He couldn't have got that far if he was as badly injured as Jim thinks. It all seems more of a puzzle than it was before."

"This has hit Jim, badly," said Alix quietly.

"That's for sure, but I think that now he's regained his memory, in spite of what those memories are, he will cope with whatever he has to."

"I'm sure you're right, Leonard, but he has a hard time ahead of him."

"But he'll come out on top. Jim is a survivor. Somehow he always manages to beat the odds." He paused, reflectively for a moment. "And I wouldn't mind betting that somehow Spock will turn up when we least expect it. I'm sure Jim believes he will and I guess I do, too. Spock's a survivor, too."

"I hope you're right."

They were silent for a moment and then McCoy leaned across to Alix and rested his hand gently on her arm.

"I guess things are pretty tough for you too. Seeing Jim like this, after all these years. You still care for him, don't you?"

"Is it that obvious?"

"Only to someone who knows you both. How has it been for you, these years since you left the Enterprise?"

"Hard," Alix gave a rueful smile. "Harder than I thought it would be. I don't know what I would have done, if I hadn't been accepted here at the Chapelwain. It helped me to get things in to perspective, although it has never changed my feelings for Jim. Now I wonder if I made the right decision after all?"

"What makes you say that?" asked McCoy.

"He lost the Enterprise, didn't he?" replied Alix.

"What if I'd stayed and made my life the Enterprise, too? Maybe now"

"Alix," interrupted McCoy, gently. "What's done is done. If you want my honest opinion, I don't think there was anything else you could have done. Jim was different then. The Enterprise filled his life to the exclusion of all else. You realised that and did what you had to do. I don't think you could have made it work. Not when you were up against the Enterprise."

"That ship has a lot to answer for," rejoined Alix.

"I used to curse the Enterprise sometimes. I almost felt she had a spirit and a will of her own."

"She sure made Jim feel that way," said McCoy. "Now, things are different. Jim's changed. He's older, less confident in his own ability, unwilling to try and get back into space, in case he fails. I don't think he realises it, himself. But he sure needs something more than he's got right now."

"What happened, Leonard? Why did he accept a desk job?"

I never thought he would do that?"

"I never really understood why. I tried to persuade him against it, but he wouldn't listen. Maybe it had something to do with Spock going back to Vulcan and taking the Kolinahr that did it. I don't know. But it damn near killed Jim - the boredom, the set routine. He's not the man for that kind of job. After two and a half years, an emergency came up and Jim used it to get the Enterprise back. How he did it, I'll never know, but it's the first time a Captain ever regained command of his ship."

"What happened? I only ever heard the news reports."

McCoy related in detail all the events that had led up to the V'ger revelation and Alix listened fascinated.

"Why did they give him another three year mission?" she asked when McCoy had finally finished. "I would have thought they would have made him bring her back."

"No, that's the strangest part of all. Perhaps it was the fact that Kirk and Spock were together again. Whatever the reasons, Jim was in his element; the years just dropped away from him. We had some pretty hair raising experiences along the way, but we survived. Jim has some kind of magic that gets everyone through."

McCoy gave a reminiscent smile.

"Then we had to come back, the party was over. They gave Jim Head of Training and put the Enterprise on standby service, which means she is virtually used only for training runs. I think that hurt Jim as much as losing the captaincy of her did."

"I knew something had affected him deeply. There's hurt and unhappiness in his face, which never used to be there."

"He's certainly changed since he was grounded, though he tries to insist he's enjoying the challenge of it all. The only challenge Jim needs is to be in command of a ship again." McCoy shook his head. "Nobody seems to realise that his destiny is out in space. You knew that and practically destroyed your life to let him be free to continue that destiny. I think that what you did was one of the bravest things I ever saw."

"I didn't feel brave. I just felt terribly alone, as if half myself had gone."

There was silence for a few moments and McCoy gave her arm a gentle squeeze of understanding.

"So what do we do now?" asked Alix, changing the subject. "Jim's not going to accept the word of a commercial spaceship captain that Spock wasn't on Aros."

"I'll contact Nogura and see if I can get him to assign a starship in the area to scan the planet. Jim will accept nothing less. Knowing him, he'd be aboard the ship himself, if he could."

"Well, that's out of the question at the moment," responded Alix. "Though no doubt he will try. I must admit I'd rather he was fighting to make things happen than just lying there, worrying about something he couldn't remember."

* * * * *

The following morning, Kirk was running a temperature; he was flushed and sweating and his head ached abominably.

But all he could think of was that he had to find Spock. Ignoring the fact that McCoy had already spoken to Starfleet, Kirk insisted that Alix get him a line through to Admiral Nogura.

"Jim, you're going to have to rest. I can't even think of operating on your eye while you have a temperature."

"How can I rest when Spock is somewhere out there, alone and hurt."

"The quicker you recover, the quicker you can do something about it."

"By then, it will be too late. I've got to do something now. You don't believe he's still alive, do you? You don't think it's worth doing anything. Well, Alix, I know better. Spock is alive. Somewhere. Now get me Nogura."

"Leonard has already spoken to Starfleet. They are doing all they can"

"Bullshit! Get me Nogura. I'll light a fire under him" Kirk abruptly ran out of steam and fell back weakly on his pillows. "O.K. So you're right. I need to rest. But let me speak to Nogura, then I'll rest, I promise."

He gave her one of his smiles. Alix sighed.

"O.K., Jim. I'll get Nogura and then you will rest. I have to get that temperature down. I want to operate on your eye as soon as possible."

"I know. But I can't rest until I've done all in my power to find Spock."

It only took a few minutes to get Nogura on the line.

"Hey, Jim. It's great to hear you. How are you?"

"I'm O.K., Heicho. But I'm concerned about Spock."

"Leonard McCoy was talking to me earlier about you regaining your memory. Look, Jim. Captain Sylvester scanned the whole planet, and made a thorough search of the area where you were found. There was no trace of Spock."

"How can you rely on the findings of a captain of a commercial spaceship. You have to send a Starfleet vessel there to scan the area properly."

"Jim! It's been nearly two weeks. It's hardly likely that Spock would still be alive"

"You're talking rubbish. Of course, Spock is alive. He's a fully trained, very capable Starfleet Officer. Besides which, he's Vulcan. He's as tough as they come. He's also alive."

"You can't be sure of that. Leonard McCoy tells me he was injured."

"Spock said it was only minor."

"But you didn't think that. I'll be honest with you, Jim. I haven't any vessel available in the area at the present. I'm not able to send a starship halfway across the galaxy to scan a planet that has already been scanned."

"But not properly. Not with the sophisticated equipment we have in Starfleet. Nogura, you've got to do something."

Alix could see Kirk was getting distressed; his breathing was fast and once again he was sweating profusely. She could see his hand shaking as he held the telephone.

"I understand how you feel, Jim. But you have to face the facts. Spock is more than likely dead."

A shudder ran through Kirk's body.

"You bastard!" he ground out. "You know no such thing. You just don't want to try and find him. Why not? You must

have some reason."

"The report I had from the Ariadne is quite categorical. I have it in front of me. A party of six searched the surrounding area and found no trace of Spock. Nothing."

"Then they didn't look properly."

"Jim. Let it go"

"Like hell!! Spock was there with me. There should have been some trace of him. If they found nothing, then they couldn't have looked properly. My god, Spock was bleeding heavily. There would have been traces of blood, maybe a foot print; some sort of trail! These commercial spaceship crews aren't trained like Starfleet. They could well have missed something vital."

"Look, Jim. I'll tell you what I'll do. The Lexington will be in the area in two weeks time. I'll divert her to Aros to do a full scan of the entire planet, as well as search the area of the crash."

Kirk made no reply for a moment. He felt too ill and weak to continue, but his will power and his determination to do all he could for Spock, drove him on.

"Two weeks? Is that the best you can do, Nogura?"

"Yes, Jim. I'm afraid it is. What do you say?"

"What can I say? But so help me, if Spock is found dead, you'll wish you'd never been born."

Kirk slammed the telephone down and looked helplessly at Alix.

"If I could get my hands on that son-of-a-bitch."

"What happened?"

"He won't scan the planet again for another two weeks."

"But why?"

"No Starfleet vessel in the immediate area." He leaned back on the pillows, all the fight gone out of him. "God, what am I going to do?"

He felt a hypo hiss against his arm. He looked down sharply and then up at Alix.

"What's that?"

"Something to help you rest and bring down your temperature. I know you're worried, Jim, but you can't do anything more at the moment. Just do as I say for the next few days and let me try and get you on your feet. I am your doctor after all," she smiled at him.

He took her hand in his and shook it gently.

"You know you're more than that to me, Alix."

She bent and kissed his forehead.

"Then do as I say. Please."

* * * * *

The days that followed were hard for Kirk, Alix and McCoy. Kirk proved to be a difficult patient, reminding Alix and McCoy of the times he had spent in the Sickbay aboard the Enterprise. The concussion was still causing him bad headaches, which were aggravated by the operation Alix performed on his right eye. She had been right and the operation had been a complete success and when the bandages came off, Kirk could see as clearly as he had done before the accident.

His right hand was proving to be more troublesome. The middle finger had been particularly badly broken and it

wasn't healing as it should. Alix operated on it again, resetting it, in the hope of putting it right.

His right side still pained him considerably; the whole side of his body a massive rainbow of colours. Still, physically he was making good progress, but his anxiety about Spock wasn't helping him mentally. The concussion and worry, as well as the operations he had undergone left him feeling depressed and moody. It was only to be expected, but Alix and McCoy wanted to do all they could to alleviate the problems that Kirk had.

One morning, McCoy announced he was returning to San Francisco.

"Perhaps, if I'm there, harrying them all the time, they might instigate a search that much sooner. Nothing like a spot of harassment to get things moving."

"Would you do that, Bones?"

"Of course, Jim. I feel as helpless as you do. I think I will be of more help trying to stir up some action in San Francisco than here." He grinned at Alix. "I think your doctor is more than adequate to look after you and pamper to your every whim!"

Kirk grinned at them both.

"I shall have to think up some special whims to have pampered," he said.

"Don't give him any more ideas, Leonard," said Alix. "I have enough problems with him as it is."

"O.K., O.K.," smiled McCoy. "I'm going now, anyway."

"Do what you can, Bones," said Kirk, quietly and seriously.

"You can count on that, Jim. I'll be in touch real soon."

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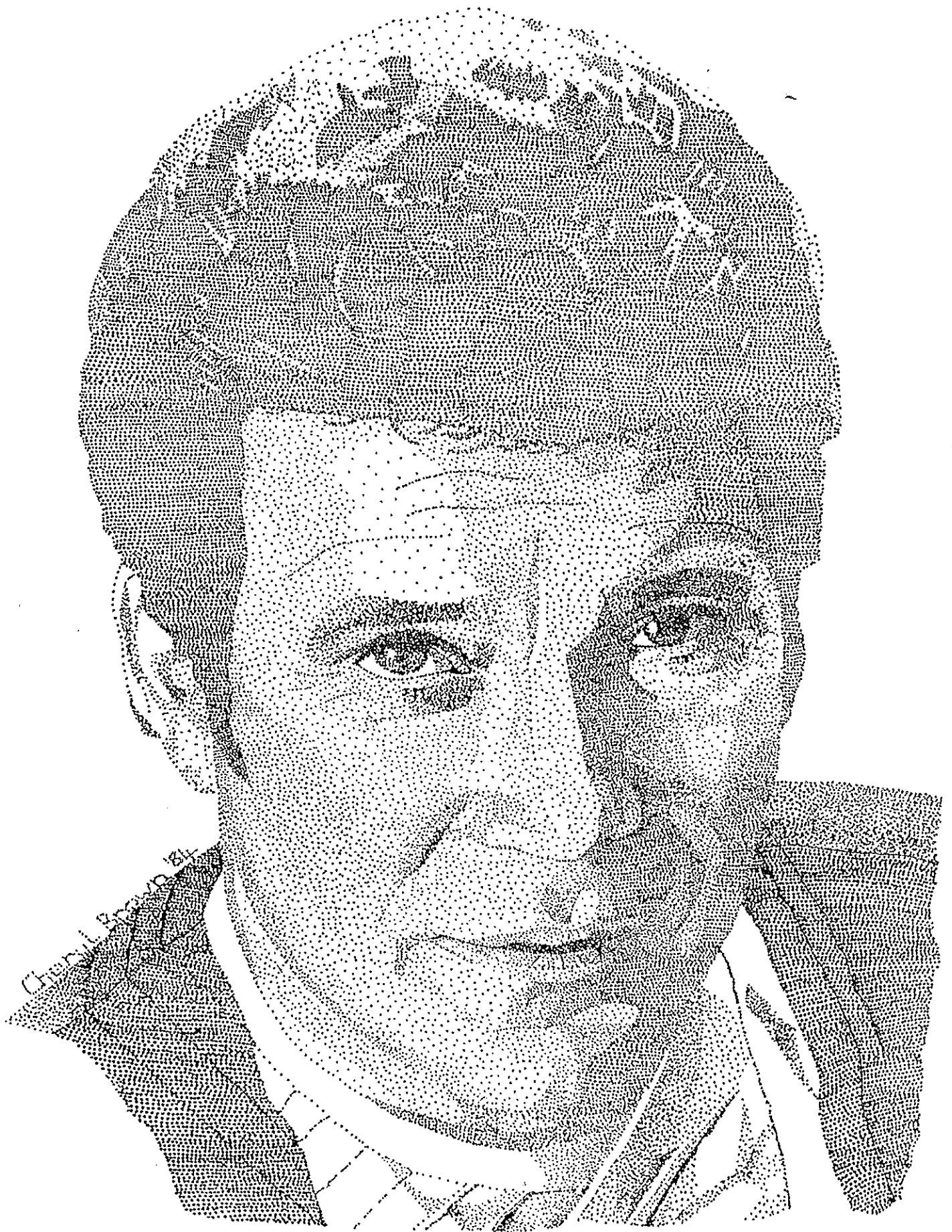
In the days that followed, try as he might, Kirk could think of little else except the possibility of finding Spock alive. Somehow, he just couldn't believe his Vulcan friend was dead. The uncertainty of his fate was hard to tolerate, especially when Kirk was still so weak. He became morose, hardly speaking for hours at a time; he was off hand, almost rude to Alix. Knowing how worried he was about Spock, Alix tolerated everything good naturedly. She understood that uncertainty was worse than knowing for sure what had happened.

After three days of almost total silence from Kirk, Alix had had enough. She decided to try and divert his thoughts from the constant groove of worry, into which they had fallen and suggested he visit her villa and have a meal there away from the hospital.

To her surprise, Kirk agreed readily, obviously glad to have something else to think about. He had been up for a little while each day and still tired easily. So Alix arranged for the small, hospital air car to pick Kirk up and take him to the villa.

Leaving Kirk to dress and ready himself for the visit, Alix went to prepare the meal and make sure everything was ready. It was a warm, comfortable place, reminiscent in some ways of the cabin they had shared on Dervalan and Alix looked forward to the evening ahead and sharing some time with Kirk away from the hospital.

When she returned, she found Kirk sitting beside the bed,



obviously looking forward to a change of surroundings. He greeted Alix with a smile and the brooding expression had gone from his face.

It didn't take long to get to Alix' villa and she quickly settled Kirk in a comfortable chair near the fire. He sighed and leaned his head back.

"How are you feeling, Jim?" Alix asked, as she brought him a coffee, setting it down on a table beside him.

"I didn't think I could get so tired, so quickly," he smiled at her. "But it's good to be out of that room for a while."

"That's what I thought," responded Alix. "As for being tired, well, it is early days yet. And I know you are still having a lot of bad headaches."

Kirk pulled a face.

"I never seem to be free of them at the moment. It's the concussion, isn't it?"

"Yes, I'm afraid it is. And having to operate on your eye will have aggravated things for a while. They will improve in time. The constant stress you're putting yourself under doesn't help."

He grinned at her ruefully.

"That obvious, huh?"

"Are you kidding? You've been like a bear with a sore head for days."

She came quickly to his side and knelt beside his chair.

"I do understand, Jim. It's a rotten situation. The sooner it is resolved the better. Let's hope Leonard can hurry things along a bit."

"Do you think they'll find Spock?" Kirk asked.

Alix was serious, looking steadily in to his face.

"Jim, in your heart, you're sure Spock is alive. I know what you and Spock meant to one another; how close you have always been. If you're sure he is alive, then I'm sure too. Somehow, someday, you'll find him."

Kirk leaned forward and putting a hand on each side of her face, he very gently and tenderly kissed her.

"Doctor Warner. I love you very much."

Alix looked deeply into his clear, hazel eyes, unable to speak. After so many years, without any hope of ever seeing him again, to have Kirk here beside her, telling her he loved her, was almost too much for her. She swallowed the lump in her throat and held tightly onto his hands, almost as if to reassure herself he was really there.

Kirk could feel her trembling slightly as she leaned against him. He stood up and pulled her to her feet.

"Let's sit here on the sofa, where we can both be comfortable."

They sat down, side by side, and Kirk put his arm around Alix and she rested her head on his shoulder.

"Do you remember Dervalan?" asked Alix, after a few minutes of silence.

"Mmmmmmm," Kirk murmured, his fingers gently stroking her hair. "It was kind of like this. It seems so long ago now."

"It was a long time ago, Jim," responded Alix. "Too long, perhaps."

"Was it very hard, after you left the Enterprise?" asked Kirk.

"Yes, it was. Harder than I ever thought it would be. I left so much of myself behind. I had so many friends, so many memories. I even left Tiberius."

"I grew very fond of Tiberius. I knew you'd called him that."

Alix grinned.

"What happened to him?"

"Ensign Yeverton, who worked in Engineering took him onto his next ship, when the Enterprise finished her five year mission. I missed that damn cat!"

He kissed her cheek.

"I'm sorry you were the one who was forced to give up so much, Alix. It was completely selfish of me to allow you to do it. I felt I had betrayed you when I signed your letter of resignation."

"It was the only thing to do, Jim. Four hundred and thirty people depended on you for their lives. I couldn't interfere with that. And I thought I would, if I stayed."

"But why, Alix?"

"Oh, Jim. Surely you understand!"

"I thought I did then, but now I'm not so sure. You didn't want to get too involved with a starship captain who had already made Starfleet his life, is that it?"

Alix turned to look at him.

"Jim, I loved you so much. It wasn't a question of not wanting to get involved. I already was too involved right from the moment I first saw you. I loved you so much, I couldn't bear to think of you going into danger. I felt I would interfere with your command. I didn't know if I would have enough self control to stop myself from asking you not to go."

Kirk closed his eyes, feeling he didn't deserve the kind of love he seemed to get from those closest to him. Spock, McCoy and now Alix. He must have been blind not to realise it all those years ago.

"When I was promoted to Head of Training, I wanted to get in touch with you again. But I felt I'd left it too long," said Kirk.

"Don't you mean you thought of me when you no longer commanded the Enterprise?" Alix said gently.

Kirk winced slightly, but was honest enough to acknowledge the truth.

"I loved the Enterprise more than life itself, when I commanded her. I couldn't help myself. She was the fulfilment of all the dreams I'd ever had."

"I understand," Alix said. "Perhaps one of the reasons I left was because I didn't want to take second place to a ship. But I'm sorry you lost her."

"Are you Alix? Are you really?"

"For you, Jim, yes, I really am. For myself, I honestly don't know." She looked at him, her eyes big and starry. "That depends."

"On what?" But Kirk didn't need an answer. His arm tightened around her, drawing her close. His lips came down onto hers and the sweetness she had never thought to feel again filled her being.

Breathless, they both pulled apart slightly, almost dizzy with the feelings the kiss had evoked.

"Alix?" Kirk's voice was rough with desire. "Is it too late to start again?"

Her kiss was his answer.

* * * * *

It was an opportunity to start again that neither of them thought could have happened. Their relationship was different now, because both of them had changed over the years. Both had lost something they loved and had learnt that life does go on, however difficult that life can be.

For Kirk, loneliness was something that had come with command, it was something he had learnt to deal with early. That loneliness was mitigated by the fulfilment of his command of the Enterprise. The life and death decisions he had to make constantly with over four hundred people reliant on him, had more than filled his life. When he was promoted to Head of Training, the emptiness in his life that the Enterprise had left, had been hard to fill and one which, quite honestly, he never thought he would fill again. It had hurt unbearably. It had hurt even more when they had taken the Enterprise off the long haul mission list and put her down for short haul and training missions only. The major overhaul she had had was not enough to keep her at the forefront of the fleet and Kirk felt her days of active service were numbered. Somehow the thought made him more aware of his own age and mortality.

He was surrounded on all sides by the young cadets, full of fire and enthusiasm, anxious to seize the galaxy and shape it the way they wanted. In some of them he could see himself as he used to be and it was a sobering experience. He began to feel that travelling the galaxy was a game for the young.

As for Alix, the years without Kirk had been more difficult than she would have thought possible. The life at the Chapelwain was hard work; demanding, rewarding and fulfilling; and Alix was glad that it was so. For the Chapelwain had been her life line, something to hang onto when she missed Kirk so desperately at first. Gradually, as time went by, her memories had become less painful and she could relegate them to the back of her mind most of the time. But there was always part of her heart that would belong to Jim Kirk.

Now that he had come back into her life, she realised that her feelings for him were as deep as they ever had been. She wasn't sure how she was going to face the future, because now he was with her once more, she knew she couldn't stand to lose him again.

At first, their physical relationship had been difficult to resume. With the accident and his injuries, Kirk found things exhausting and embarrassing, but Alix was understanding and loving, giving him confidence when it was badly needed. The difficulties they experienced brought them closer together as their love for each other became stronger and deeper.

CHAPTER FOUR

It was ten days after McCoy left that he was finally able to ring with the news they had all been waiting for. The Lexington had returned to the planet, Aros; had completed a minute and thorough scan of the whole planet and had searched a wide area around the crash site. They had found nothing. The whole area had been hit by a heavy dust storm and there was little trace of anything except the crashed cruiser itself. The scan had revealed nothing at all, not even a trace of the life forms that Spock had noted on his scanner as they had come into land.

Kirk had been devastated. He had gone down with an appalling headache, unable to see clearly, unable to stand or walk properly and finally he had been violently sick. He hated himself for the physical reaction he was having, but was powerless to do anything about it. Alix had sat with him constantly and he clung to her hand as if to a lifeline.

McCoy had rung again later, deeply upset about Spock and very concerned about Kirk. He was unable to get away to the Chapelwain but Alix was aware of his constant concern and support.

The day following the news, Kirk felt physically much better. The headache was still there, but was of more manageable proportions.

"I've got to get back to Starfleet," he announced that morning. "There's something wrong with the Lexington's findings. There must have been some trace of Spock. They would surely have found his body if nothing else. And I still don't believe he's dead!"

"What do you think could have happened?" questioned Alix. Kirk gave a tired sigh.

"I wish I knew. Out there anything can happen and usually does. Spock is very resourceful - if there was any chance of survival at all, he would make it. I just can't understand why the Lexington found nothing. It's the uncertainty of it all which is so hard to take. I'll go back to San Francisco and get transport to Aros"

"And do what, Jim? The Lexington was very thorough. We heard that from both Leonard and Nogura. What could you do, that they couldn't?"

"I don't know. But something. Anything rather than just sit here, doing nothing."

"I know how you feel, but you're not ready to go back yet. You'd never manage a journey of any length. And I'm not prepared to sign you off from the hospital. You're not well enough."

"Really? Well, I reckon I could get along tolerably well thank you!"

"Jim, you can't walk far. Your leg is healing well, but it needs physiotherapy as well as rest. You still tire easily; and what do you expect? You've been through a hell of an ordeal. You've got to give yourself time to recover."

"My leg will get stronger the more I use it. I'll be alright, I tell you. You're worse than McCoy for fussing over me like a mother hen!"

"Fussing, am I? Do you really think that yesterday's reaction was typical of how Admiral Kirk deals with any crisis that comes along?"

Kirk glared at her.

"It was a shock!"

"Good God, Jim. I know it was a shock, but you have never had a reaction like that before. That concussion hasn't healed yet and your general condition is still low. I'm sorry Jim. It will be another two or three weeks before I can sign your release."

"Two or three weeks!!" Kirk exploded. "I can't stay here that long. You can't keep me here, Alix. If I want to leave, I'll damn well leave. You won't stop me."

"And how far would you get? Starfleet wouldn't accept you back without my written consent. You couldn't pilot anything small on your own. You know that. Jim, please! I do understand, but you've got to be sensible. Going off half demented will only get you killed and that won't find Spock, will it?"

Kirk stared at her defiantly. And Alix thought how like a little boy he looked. One who knows he has lost the argument but is not ready to admit it.

"I'll do all I can to get you out of here as quickly as I can," continued Alix. "I'll step up the physiotherapy, give you more cell rejuvenators." She put her head on one side and looked at him quizzically. "If you cooperate, it will be quicker."

Kirk finally gave a rueful smile.

"O.K., Doctor. You win. This time. But get me out of here soon."

"Yes, sir!" Alix gave an inward sigh of relief. This was more like the Kirk she knew.

* * * * *

As the days went by, both Kirk and Alix could see the improvement in his condition. All the singlemindedness, guts and determination that Kirk possessed came to the fore and it was almost as if he was willing himself better.

Alix was delighted with his progress. She got him out into the fresh, mountain air as much as possible and gradually he was able to walk further and enjoy the outings they had.

As each day went by, Kirk became more convinced than ever that Spock was alive. Somehow he knew he would sense that final break if Spock had died. There wasn't that sense of finality. From all his years of experience out there, Kirk knew that the weird and wonderful could always be true.

And in Alix, he had someone with whom to share his worries, his concern and the tentative plans he was making. She knew Spock and liked him immensely. She had seen at first hand the amount of love and caring that Kirk and Spock shared and so could appreciate fully just what Kirk was going through. She was able to encourage and help on bad days; share and enjoy the good days; and always, she was beside him encouraging and supporting. Their love deepened during this time, and Kirk was happy to have Alix at his side.

Two and a half weeks after they had heard of the Lexington's findings, Alix was prepared to sign him off from the Chapelwain Hospital. He still walked with a slight limp but that would disappear completely. His right hand had healed very well despite Alix' initial misgivings. He had total use of his hand and it was only the middle finger

which was slightly deformed. The frequency of his headaches had lessened and he was feeling fit and well.

One afternoon, Alix and Kirk went for a walk along the Kali Gandaki river. Near the hospital it ran fast over pebble beds and rocky falls. The white water was exhilarating to watch and listen to; the air from the Himalayas clear and cold. Slowly they walked along, hand in hand, talking. Inevitably the subject turned to Spock.

"It took me a while to get used to Spock. His reserve was very difficult to overcome," said Kirk.

"And I think you were the only one who really got through that reserve."

"Maybe," mused Kirk. "But after V'ger he was different. What he learned from V'ger seemed to affect his whole attitude to life. He was more at peace with himself. I think he realised then, that emotions were not things to dread, but to accept gratefully. More of his human side showed, especially to me. I think we have grown closer because of it. Certainly, I feel closer to Spock than I ever did with my brother, Sam. It's a good feeling to have someone like that, beside you in some of the tough situations we've faced together."

Suddenly he stopped and turned and face Alix, holding her by the shoulders.

"You do like Spock, don't you?" he asked.

Alix laughed.

"Oh, Jim. Of course I do. I think the relationship you have with Spock is very special and one to be treasured. The human heart is capable of infinite love and I think you, Jim, prove that to be true, very, very well."

Kirk hugged her close and rejoiced that he had found her again and amazed that he had ever allowed her to escape. He vowed in his heart that he wouldn't let it happen again.

Alix shivered slightly.

"It's cold. Let's go back."

"Is that the only reason you want to go back," asked Kirk with an impish grin. "Sure there's no ulterior motive?"

His arms tightened around her, holding her close. He looked into her large grey eyes and saw there, all the love she felt for him. Tenderly, he kissed her and for a moment there was nothing in the universe except the two of them.

* * * * *

Later they lay side by side in the large, comfortable bed in Alix' villa. The problems that Kirk had experienced when they had first resumed their physical relationship had been resolved and now their times together were exciting and satisfying. Alix ran a hand over the fading bruises on his right side.

"I look a little less colourful than I did a few weeks ago," murmured Kirk, sleepy and contented.

"I must admit, I've rarely seen bruising like it. There were colours there, I didn't know existed." Alix smiled in to his face. "Seriously though, you were lucky not to have been killed."

"I guess so." He was silent for a moment. "Alix, what are we going to do about the future? I love you so much, I don't want to lose you again. And yet"

"And yet, you don't feel ready to settle down?"

Kirk grinned.

"Something like that. And do you really want to leave the Chapelwain?"

"Oh, Jim. Let's face it, neither of us is the type to settle down to live ordinary lives, raise kids and grow roses." She shook her head. "And, no, I don't think I could give up my life at the Chapelwain. We both need the demands our jobs require of us. But now that we've been given a chance, let's not lose one another again. I don't think I could bear it."

"Nor could I, Alix. It's you who have helped me so much these past weeks. I don't know what I'd do without you." He kissed her gently.

"The Chapelwain and San Francisco are not far away from each other on the transporter. We'll be able to see one another regularly. And with the visicom we can at least see one another almost every day."

"'Seeing' on the visicom isn't my idea of being with you," responded Kirk, running his hand down her back. He kissed her again, his lips trailing over her skin until he reached her breast. Alix shivered as flames of delight began to flow through her body. His hands began to caress her and she clung to him, dizzy with the passion he was able to arouse in her. Slowly, her hands began to move softly and erotically over his body and he moaned slightly. He lifted his head, looking at her with eyes bright with desire and passion. He crushed her close, pressing his mouth down hard on hers, his tongue teasing her lips apart.

It was at that moment that the visicom in the next room buzzed.

"Damn and blast," muttered Kirk. "Let's ignore it."

"I can't, Jim," murmured Alix, against his lips. "It might be important."

She tried to wriggle out of his arms, but he held on to her tightly, trying to keep the feelings which had filled him moments before.

"Jim!"

"Give me a kiss first!" demanded Kirk.

"Jim, please."

The visicom buzzed again.

Kirk groaned.

"O.K., O.K., but give me a kiss first."

She relaxed against him and kissed him warmly, then she slipped out of his arms. Pulling on a long, velvet robe, she hurried into the next room. At a more leisurely pace, Kirk pulled on his pants and jumper.

"Oh my god!" Kirk sensed rather than heard Alix' words.

"Jim! Oh god, Jim. Come here!!"

Startled by the emotion in Alix' words, Kirk walked quickly into the room where she was. She was facing him, her back to the visicom, blocking what was on the small screen.

"What is it, Alix?" he asked.

"It's a priority one call for you."

"For me?" he questioned.

As he came level with her, he could see her face white with shock. Then he looked over her shoulder at the visicom.

It was Spock.

Spock, with a livid green scar that stretched from the base of his nose to his ear. But Spock, most definitely alive.

It was only a few hours later that Spock arrived at the Chapelwain, where he was met by Kirk and Alix. Sitting now in the living room of Alix' villa, Kirk still couldn't believe that Spock was really there. He gazed at the Vulcan in unconcealed joy, all the worry of the past weeks forgotten.

"How did it all happen? How did you get here?" questioned Kirk.

"I was able to reactivate the distress beacon, which was picked up by a transport ship, the Heidelberg. It was, fortunately, on its way to Earth. Her Captain was able to put me in contact with Admiral Nogura, who told me how you had been picked up too and that you were recovering from your injuries here at the Chapelwain. I trust you are recovering well, Jim?"

"Yes, I feel fine. Thanks to my own special doctor here," and gave Alix' hand a squeeze.

"I must admit to a certain amount of surprise at finding Doctor Warner in charge of the case."

"It was pure coincidence, Spock. Or fate, kismet; call it what you want. I'm just glad it worked out this way." He shook his head as he looked at Spock. "Do you know, I still can't believe you're really here, Spock."

"So you have said before, Jim. I assure you I am not a figment of your imagination."

Kirk grinned delightedly.

"And am I glad about that. After the findings of the Lexington, I was badly worried. I couldn't think what had happened to you."

"But he knew you were alive, somewhere, somehow," said Alix.

Spock raised an eyebrow at Kirk, who looked rather sheepish.

"Indeed, Admiral?"

"Indeed, Captain Spock. In fact, I was planning to be on my way to Starfleet Headquarters tomorrow to see if I could find some way to get to Aros to look for you. But, come on, Spock, tell us exactly what happened."

"Can you remember anything of the crash?" asked Spock.

"Most of it. I clearly remember you leaning over me, your face covered in blood telling me you were alright."

"As indeed I was. The cut healed quickly."

"But not well, Spock," broke in Alix. "That's a scar of sizeable proportions."

"All you need is a black eye patch and you could sail under the Jolly Roger," said Kirk with a grin.

"I fail to see why I should want to sail under Roger, whoever he might be. And why I should wish to wear an eye patch."

Kirk and Alix looked at one another for a moment, then both started to laugh, holding on to one another in delight at Spock's literal interpretation of Kirk's remark. Spock regarded them both with a raised eyebrow, but there was a hint of humour in his eyes.

Kirk tried to get control of himself.

"I'm sorry, Spock. It's just that the scar gives you a piratical look," he started to laugh again at the look of indignation that spread over Spock's face. "Oh, Spock. It's good to be with you again," and he touched Spock's arm lightly as if to reassure himself that Spock was real.

"You could do something about the scar, couldn't you, Alix?" asked Kirk.

"Of course, I'd only be too happy to do it. That is, if you want to get rid of it, Spock."

Spock fingered the scar lightly.

"Thank you, Alix. It would be more comfortable without it."

"I can make arrangements as soon as you like."

"Well, that's settled," said Kirk. "Now, please tell us what happened to you when you were on Aros. I just can't understand how the Lexington failed to find you."

* * * * *

Spock had manned the sensors right up until the moment of impact and had picked up some humanoid life form readings towards the northwest of their position, near a low range of hills. There had been no indication of a highly developed civilisation, just a reading which indicated a small group of people.

The crash itself had not been as severe as Kirk had thought from his memories of the incident. The escape hatch had opened and both men had been ejected clear of the cruiser, ensuring that they wouldn't be caught in any fire which may have started as a result of the crash. Spock had landed in a patch of shrubbery which had broken his fall; but his face had been ripped open by a branch with a razor sharp edge when it had whipped by his face. Kirk had been unlucky, landing heavily on a rocky outcrop, several metres away from Spock.

Spock had done all he could to tend Kirk's wounds and to make him comfortable, but knew that Kirk needed help badly. Despite his misgivings at leaving Kirk alone, Spock decided to try and obtain help from the group of humanoids he had picked up on the sensors. He had bent over him, trying to reassure him, unaware of the appearance he presented. He left Kirk in the shade of a lone tree, with water nearby and the distress beacon activated, promising to be only a few hours.

In fact, the journey had taken longer than Spock had anticipated, because of the rocky and uneven ground he had to traverse. When he finally arrived at the spot his tricorder indicated to be the correct one, night had fallen.

There had been a group of small leather tents grouped around a central fire, which had obviously been used for cooking. There was no sign of the humanoids. Spock had hesitated, unsure whether to search further or to return to Kirk. Even as he stood there, he was seized from behind and hustled into the centre of the small camp.

It was obvious that the creatures had heard his approach and hidden, with the express purpose of taking him captive. The two who held him, pushed him into the centre of the camp, while the others gathered around to look at him. They were of average height, generally smaller than Spock, with an upright carriage, hands like a human, with appposable thumbs and very large, intelligent eyes. They were covered with a dense short fur, which appeared to be almost black. Their noses, almost snoutlike, in appearance, twitched constantly and their shell shaped ears, swivelled in all directions, as if intent on picking up any sound, loud or soft which might occur.

They conversed in soft, sibilant voices and were evidently extremely curious about what they had caught. One or two of the bolder ones had stepped forward, touching Spock's face, puzzled by his lack of fur. But they were gentle and it was quite clear that they meant him no harm. It was equally clear that they intended he should have no opportunity to injure them either.

Spock had tried to talk to them, but although they were surprised at the sounds he made, they did not seem to understand that he was trying to communicate with them. With his hands firmly held behind his back, sign language was out of the question.

Quickly, the creatures had broken camp, packing their tents and equipment into large satchel like bags, which they carried on their backs. Then they had led the way up the low hill behind the camp, forcing Spock to go with them. At the thought of Kirk, helpless and injured, Spock had tried desperately to escape, but with very little fuss, they had bound him hand and foot and carried him in their midst; and struggle as he might, there was no chance of escape.

They entered a small cave on the hillside, just beyond where they had camped and from there they began to climb down a long, sloping tunnel into the bowels of the earth. Despite his uncomfortable position, Spock had been careful to note the way they went, knowing that somehow he had to escape and find his way back to Kirk.

It was soon obvious that they were going into an underground city of sizeable proportions. But it was a city unlike anything Spock had seen before. It put him in mind of a huge rabbit warren. Small openings on each side could be seen, which led into what could only have been the homes of the Arosian creatures. Some of the openings had doors and some were merely hung with a curtain, made of the same material as the tents. More creatures, similar to the ones who had captured him, appeared and all were curious to see the Vulcan in their midst. It became quite clear that none of them had ever seen anyone who remotely resembled Spock before. Once they had seen him, however, they soon lost interest and returned to their various activities. They were busy, contented creatures and Spock knew he had nothing to fear from them.

Spock continued to concentrate on picking out landmarks for himself along the way, but everything was so poorly lighted that it was very difficult for him to see anything clearly.

The next thirty six hours took on the aspects of a night mare to Spock. During that time he was given no opportunity to be alone. They had placed him in a featureless room with one door which had a small hole in it, through which the Arosians could watch him. There was an almost continuous stream of people during those hours, just coming to peer at him as if he were an animal in a zoo. Spock knew any attempt to escape would be foiled by the sheer number of people he could hear outside the door.

All he could think of was Kirk, left alone at the site of the crash. For all Spock knew Kirk could be dead by now. To be incarcerated against his will, peered at and talked about when all he wanted to do was to return to Kirk was hard indeed.

It was during this time that Spock began to feel unwell;

his head ached, he started to shiver and his limbs felt heavy and weak. By using the Vulcan techniques he knew so well, he was able to shut his mind to his physical condition and concentrate instead on ways of escaping.

It seemed at the end of those thirty six hours that the novelty of his presence had worn off and all became quiet outside the door. Spock listened carefully and looked through the small hole in the door. It appeared he had been left with just two guards outside his door. He called to them, beckoning them with his hand and their natural curiosity did the rest. As soon as they opened the door, Spock was able to overpower them with a Vulcan neck pinch. It all seemed so incredibly easy and so he took even more care as he quietly left the room and made his way along the tunnel.

He hadn't gone far, when the feelings of illness he had experienced before came back overwhelmingly. He staggered as his legs became shaky and his vision blurry. He felt so hot it seemed as if his body was on fire. He tried to keep going, the thought of Kirk always before him, but all too soon, even his Vulcan strength gave out and he collapsed unconscious on the dry earth of the tunnel.

How long he was ill, he could never afterwards find out, but he estimated it must have been almost two weeks before he finally became aware, once more, of his surroundings. The Arosians must have found him and taken him back to the same room he had escaped from. They had obviously taken care of him well and had treated him for whatever had ailed him, as best they could.

He had felt so weak at first, that every movement had been an effort, but during the next week his strength had gradually returned. During this time, he had been able to gain limited understanding of the Arosians and they of him.

But Spock's overwhelming concern had been for Kirk. As soon as he could struggle to his feet, Spock had indicated to the Arosians that he must leave. They seemed to accept this quite happily and even provided him with food. They escorted him to the mouth of the cave where he had entered nearly four weeks ago; then the Arosians had turned and gone back to their city beneath the ground without a backward glance. It seemed that their natural curiosity only extended to things they could see; they lacked the imagination to look further than the immediate circle of their knowledge to what might lie beyond.

The return journey to the crashed cruiser was long and difficult. Spock was still weak and had to rest frequently, but the thought of Kirk drove him on. When he reached the cruiser, his worst fears were realised. Kirk was no longer there.

Spock sank to the ground in utter despair. What had happened to his friend? Had he somehow managed to crawl away in his delirium or had some creature captured him, just as Spock had himself been caught? What made everything seem worse was the fact that a dust storm had obliterated all traces of Kirk and anything else which might have been in the area. The next few days were spent searching the surrounding countryside for any evidence of Kirk, but there was nothing. Spock, however, did find the distress beacon and was able to reactivate it. Knowing that Aros was on one of the busier shipping lanes to Earth, Spock hoped that a passing ship would pick up the signal and come and investigate.

In the meantime, there was little he could do except wait, as patiently as possible. Never one to imagine too vividly the endless possibilities of past or future events, Spock nevertheless could not help but worry about Kirk. Unable to tell whether Kirk had been rescued by friends or enemies; or whether he was still somewhere on the planet, Spock contemplated returning to the Arosian city and trying to enlist their help. But always the strong possibility of rescue and more definite news of Kirk, kept him at the site of the crash.

It had in fact been less than three weeks when the Heidelberg had picked up the signal from the distress beacon and sent a shuttle down to investigate.

* * * * *

There was silence when Spock finished talking. There was much that had obviously been left unsaid, but both men understood what the other had gone through during the preceding weeks.

"Did you see any more of the Arosian creatures?" asked Alix.

"No. I saw no further trace of them at all. They were very gentle caring creatures whose main concern was their home and family. They were curious at first, but soon lost interest and then when I became ill they cared for me, as one would a treasured animal."

"What do you think the illness was?"

"I would guess at some common sickness, that the Arosians are more or less immune to, but one which is very virulent to other species. A little like the Earth type cold or measles. Tribes of primitives were decimated by these diseases when they had their first contact with them."

"But why didn't the Lexington's sensors pick up the readings on the underground city?" asked Kirk.

"I believe that the crust of the planet is a protective shield which sensors cannot penetrate. The Arosians are safe from prying eyes and have developed in their own way. The group which I picked up on my sensors, were a small hunting party, staying on the surface for a short while and then returning to the underground city."

"What do you suppose they were hunting?" said Kirk.

"Maybe small animals to supplement their diets; maybe just various fruits, herbs, edible nuts. I never enquired too closely into the content of the food which they gave me. I felt that as I had no choice in what I ate, it was better not to know."

"Very wise, Mr. Spock," grinned Kirk. There was a silence for a moment, as they thought about the planet and its creatures. "I suppose there has never been any reason to investigate Aros too thoroughly before. It has no mineral wealth and it is not a planet which would provide good shore leave facilities."

"Indeed, Jim. It is not the most hospitable planet on which to spend a vacation. I was hit by several dust storms during my sojourn at the crash site. It was a great relief when the Heidelberg arrived!"

Kirk smiled quietly at his friend.

"I can imagine, Mr. Spock."

Alix applied for and received permission to operate on Spock. Kirk was officially signed off the list of Chapelwain Hospital and he moved into Alix' villa, while Spock took over Kirk's old room in the hospital.

Two days later, Alix performed the first operation on Spock's scarred face. For a couple of days there was swelling and heavy bruising and Kirk couldn't resist pulling Spock's leg just a little. Spock seemed to enjoy Kirk's gentle teasing. Alix loved seeing them together and to realise how much their relationship had developed and matured. They were friends of the highest calibre and Alix was happy to see it. It was a rare and lovely friendship.

But it seemed for a while, that Spock was concerned about the relationship which had resumed between Kirk and Alix. He questioned her, rather diffidently, about it one day as she changed the light dressing on his face.

"Do you mind me asking what your plans are for the future, Alix?" asked Spock.

"Not at all," responded Alix. "I'm remaining at the Chapelwain."

"You will still be seeing Jim, though?"

"Of course, Spock. I couldn't bear to lose him again. And if he is in San Francisco, it will be easy enough to see one another."

"Do you think it a wise decision?"

"Spock. For thirteen years I tried to forget him; tried to get him out of my heart and out of my mind. But the magic wouldn't go away." She smiled down at Spock. "I'm afraid I shall never change, Spock. I love him."

"I know you do, Alix. And Jim loves you too. I can see that both of you are 'suited'. Is that the right word?"

"It'll do, Spock. I know what you mean. And I'm glad you think so."

"However," continued Spock. "I believe Jim's first, best destiny is among the stars, commanding a starship. And I will do everything I can to see him achieve that destiny again."

"Don't you think I know that, Spock. I won't try to fetter him to Earth. I love him as he is, not as he would be if I tried to change him. I know what the loss of the command of the Enterprise means to him, although he rarely mentions her. But that command had to go some day. He is trying to make another life here on Earth. I don't think it's the right decision and obviously, neither do you. But I can't force him to anything, but I will be here whenever he needs me. I couldn't relive those thirteen years again."

Spock was silent for a moment.

"I believe Jim is fortunate to have found you, Alix."

Alix couldn't speak for the lump in her throat.

A week later the second operation was successfully completed by Alix and no sign of that livid scar on Spock's face remained.

CHAPTER FIVE

A few days later, Kirk and Spock had to return to the Academy. There was much to be done before the new semester started.

Having found one another again, Kirk and Alix found it hard to say good bye. There were many memories of their new found happiness at the Chapelwain; and for Alix those memories would surround her every day; for Kirk it was leaving someone infinitely precious, someone who had become a part of himself and he no longer wanted to be without her.

Within a month, however, Alix was able to visit in San Francisco. She arrived late on the Friday evening and the intervening weeks just disappeared as if they had never been, when Kirk met her at the Transporter Centre. They drove straight to his apartment and Alix fell instantly in love with the beautiful room that was the heart of the place. The lights of San Francisco twinkled below and it seemed as if they were perched halfway to the stars. Alix knew why Kirk had chosen it.

They sat up until the early hours of the morning, talking, happy to be together, to be close, to be able to touch one another after the weeks of separation.

The following day, they drove out of the city into the peace of the country side. They parked the aircar and walked for miles, savouring the joy of being together. They lunched at a small restaurant they found and afterwards continued their walk until the sun began to fall towards the horizon. Tired, but content they returned to the apartment.

The day had been hot, but as night fell, an autumn chill made the apartment cold and Kirk lit the fire. Not bothering to turn on the lights they sat together watching the flames twist and dance, casting patterns everywhere in the room. Kirk turned to Alix, his eyes, large and luminous in the fire light; gently he kissed her.

"I've missed you, Alix. Much more than I ever expected to."

"I'm glad," responded Alix, softly. "I've missed you too. I kept expecting to find you at the villa, everytime I returned there."

He took her in his arms, kissing her more deeply. His hand began to undo the buttons of her blouse; Alix gave a small sigh of anticipation. Kirk smiled at her, one of his very special smiles.

"I love you, Alix," he murmured against her lips.

Slowly, Kirk began to undress Alix, delighting in her body, as the reflections from the flames played over her skin. Finally, she stood before him, trembling slightly with desire. His hands ran over her breasts, her waist and her hips, loving the feel of her soft, silky skin. She put her arms around his neck.

"You're not being fair, Jim," she breathed, with a slight quiver in her voice.

Kirk grinned down at her.

"What are you going to do about it?" he asked huskily.

Alix smiled and touching her lips gently to his, began to undo the fastenings of his tunic. He closed his eyes, passion beginning to flood through him. He kissed her deeply, aware only of the sensations Alix's hands aroused in him. They stood for a moment, holding each other very close, feeling

the tide of their love and desire, rising with every passing moment. Then Kirk pulled her gently down on to the rug before the fire.

* * * * *

Later they lay, sated and content, the firelight flickering over them. Alix propped herself up on one elbow, looking down at Kirk as he lay, curled slightly on his side, facing her. Lovingly she ran her finger down the side of his face. He smiled slightly and opened his eyes to look at her.

"There was a song I used to love when I was on the Enterprise," said Alix, dreamily. "I remember Uhura singing it one evening at a party. It suited you so well, it was almost impossible for me to look at you, without remembering the night of McCoy's birthday party. And it's just as appropriate today."

"Mmmn," Kirk's tone was non committal. "I'd like to know what the song is before I make any comment."

Alix chuckled and Kirk smiled again at her happiness.

"It was called 'Nobody Does It Better!'"

Kirk sat up, grinning and put his arms around her.

"You little"

"I thought you'd be flattered!" Alix said in mock surprise.

"I'm just so damned glad you're here with me! As for being flattered, well, let's just say - it work's two ways."

The kiss they enjoyed was loving and tender.

"When will you be able to come and stay again?" asked Kirk, after a while.

Alix sighed.

"Jim, I just don't know. I have a new patient on Monday and from the notes I have read, it will be an intensive care case for about two and a half months."

"Two and a half months!! Surely, I'll be able to see you during that time?"

"I really don't know," replied Alix, obviously as unhappy at the prospect as Kirk himself. "When I have intensive care patients, I very rarely get any time to myself. You know that, Jim. You were an intensive care patient yourself."

He gave her a hug.

"I envy him already."

"Actually, the patient is a middle aged lady," laughed Alix. "No handsome Admiral to steal my heart away this time. But I have a plan in mind that I wanted to ask you about. By the time I finish with this patient, it will be almost Christmas. Mum and Dad love to have family Christmases at their home in Connecticut. I haven't been able to have a Christmas with them for about five years and I would dearly love to spend it with them this year. But more than anything, I want to spend Christmas with you."

Kirk watched her as she spoke, a slight smile lifting the side of his mouth and his head to one side.

"And?" he questioned.

"Jim, don't look at me like that. I can't concentrate."

"How am I looking?" he asked in genuine puzzlement.

"If only you knew" Alix drew a deep breath.

"Anyway, what I thought was ... would you like to spend Christmas in Connecticut with me?" She looked at him, almost

anxiously, hoping desperately that he would want to come.

"Well," he said consideringly. Then he looked at her serious face and knew he couldn't tease her. "I'd love to come, Alix. I shall be able to get away for about ten days. It would be wonderful to spend that time with you." His arms circled her and she rested her head against his chest. "What about your parents though. Will they mind me coming?"

"Of course, they won't," replied Alix. "In fact, when I spoke to them, they wondered if Spock and Leonard might like to come as well."

"They sound gluttons for punishment," laughed Kirk.

"I'll certainly ask them both. Bones mentioned something about spending Christmas with Joanna, though. The new baby is due mid December and he's anxious to spend some time with his new grandchild. Spock is unlikely to return to Vulcan, I would have thought. He treats Christmas as a chance to catch up with any private projects he may have."

"What have you done in the past at Christmas time?" asked Alix.

"Since Mom died six years ago, I usually spend Christmas here. Spock usually comes round on Christmas Day." Kirk laughed. "He comes to keep me company. Although I get several invitations from various colleagues and cadets, I never like to intrude on other people's family Christmases."

"Have you no family left at all now?"

Kirk pulled a face.

"Very few. I believe there are some cousins of mine somewhere, but we have never kept in touch. Peter is stationed on some godforsaken planet. He's following in Sam's footsteps!! And making a success of it." He grinned down at her. "I know I shall enjoy this Christmas."

"I'm so glad you want to come. It will be something to look forward to over the next few months."

Kirk looked down at her head snuggled against his shoulder and realised anew how much she meant to him.

"Would you like a drink?" he asked.

"Mmmm. That would be nice."

Alix watched him, as he rose and walked across to the drinks trolley. All traces of his injuries had disappeared from his body now and he looked strong and fit. She still couldn't quite believe that Jim Kirk had really entered her life again and wanted her with him. Perhaps sometimes dreams did come true!

Slowly he walked back with a glass in each hand. Kneeling he gave her one of the glasses.

"Here's to Christmas!" he said softly.

* * * * *

After Kirk had taken Alix to the Transporter Centre, he returned to his apartment, finding it lonely now without her warm and loving presence. The last couple of days spent with Alix had made Kirk realise how much he needed her. His life since he had given up command of the Enterprise was different. The Academy was no substitute for his beloved ship, although he had tried to convince himself that it was so. He had known that he wouldn't be able to be an active duty Captain forever and when the post at the Academy had been offered, he had believed it was the right time to make the change and didn't try for another command posting.

But as McCoy had always said, shore duty wasn't for him but he had only realised it when he thought it was too late. McCoy was constantly pushing him, to try and get another command post, but now Kirk was unsure; unsure of himself and his ability to command a Starship. He told himself that his time in space had been the fulfilment of all his dreams and all his ambitions. He had been lucky, a Starship Captain, who with his ship, had become a legend. Now he had to accept that he was getting older and must make way for young, enthusiastic people who wanted to make their mark, just as he had done.

Kirk poured himself a drink and wandered over to the large window, looking up at the stars. Somehow, space was in his blood, just like the sailing captain of old and the sea. He only had to look up at those bright, twinkling points of light and he wanted to be out there, once again. And in his heart, he knew he would never change.

But he loved Alix and missed her badly when she was at the Chapelwain. He would have liked to have her with him all the time, but realised she was the kind of woman who needed the demands of a difficult job. It was one of the reasons he loved her so much and after the time he had spent as her patient at the Chapelwain, he knew just how good a doctor she was. They were very alike in a lot of ways and perhaps that was why they understood each other so well. Now that she had come back into his life, he knew he would never let her go again.

* * * * *

Alix and Kirk arrived at Hartford, Connecticut the day before Christmas Eve. Although Spock had been asked to come, he had politely declined the invitation. The Vulcan Embassy in San Francisco was holding a special Science seminar during the Christmas break. They had invited several tutors from the Vulcan Academy of Science to take part and had been most anxious for Spock to lecture to them on his wider experience of alien cultures. Spock had been unwilling to commit himself to it, until he realised that Kirk would not be alone over Christmas. Kirk knew that Spock would be happier attending such a seminar than sharing a religious festival that had no meaning for him, with several Humans who he didn't know.

And as Kirk had foreseen, McCoy had gone to Joanna's for Christmas. His new grandson, Paul, had been born ten days before and he had departed from the Academy, loaded down with presents for his family.

Kirk had felt a certain amount of envy for him. He had no close relatives and most of the time it didn't matter. But at Christmas, a time for families to get together, there was a feeling of loneliness and hurt at what he was missing. Early in his Starfleet career he had made the conscious decision not to marry, realising that his deep commitment to his job would destroy any chance of lasting happiness. He had never regretted that decision - until these last few years. He looked at Alix, excited and vibrant beside him and a feeling of happiness and elation swept through him. He pulled her close and gave her a kiss on the cheek. Surprised for a moment, she looked up at him with a smile.

"I'm so glad you invited me for Christmas," he murmured. "It's wonderful to be with you again."

"I know you're going to love it here," Alix replied. "And my family are so looking forward to meeting you."

"I believe this is one of your family now," said Kirk with a smile, as a tall young man, who bore a remarkable resemblance to Alix, came towards them.

Alix turned and a wide smile lit her face.

"Jamie!" she called and ran to meet him.

"Alix!" The young man swept her up in a bear-like hug. "It's good to see you."

"I'm so glad you were able to come and meet us." With her arm linked through her brother's, she led him over to where Kirk waited. "Jamie, this is Jim Kirk. Jim, this is my youngest brother, Jamie."

The two men shook hands, liking one another immediately.

"I've got the air car, outside. It shouldn't take us long to get home. Although the snow is quite deep in places. They forecast more for Christmas too. Mom has been stocking up with food, as if for a seige!"

Alix laughed, as they made their way towards where the aircar was parked.

"That's nothing new. She always has too much food anyway - just in case. She has no intention of letting anyone starve."

"That sounds just like my mom. Her larder was always a joy to any boy's hungry stomach. I've never tasted better food. Somehow reconstituted food was never the same."

"Well, I guess you'll be getting some really special food this Christmas," laughed Jamie. "Mom's determined to impress Admiral Kirk one way or another."

"I sure hope you're all not going to think of me as Admiral Kirk. I left that title behind in San Francisco!" Kirk smiled. "The name here is Jim."

"It's just as well they never shortened your name to Jamie as they did my brother here."

"Here's the aircar," said Jamie and began loading the luggage in the back. "Climb in."

The journey from Hartford to Alix' parents home outside of Litchfield wasn't very far, but the countryside was beautiful all the way. It was a land of rolling hills and pastoral meadows, with clusters of trees here and there. Occasionally they would pass through small villages; clapboard houses and the inevitable village church stood quiet and peaceful in the still, cold air. Everything was touched with a light blanket of snow and sparkled in the pale sun which shone from a hard, blue sky.

Soon they turned into a short drive, which led to a large, rambling house with lawns on every side. It too was made of clapboard and had a large, green front door, now adorned with a holly wreath tied by a scarlet bow. Lawns and shrubbery abounded and although the beauty of the gardens was shrouded by the mantle of snow, the whole place looked like a scene from an old fashioned Christmas card. Kirk fell in love with it immediately.

Jamie drew up at the front door and honked the horn of the car. As Kirk and Alix began to get out, the front door opened and a couple came on to the step.

"Mom! Dad!" Alix hugged her parents joyfully, in turn and then drew Kirk forward.

"Jim, I'd like you to meet my parents. Mom, Dad this is Jim Kirk."

"I'm delighted to meet you both," said Kirk, as he shook hands with them. "Thank you so much for inviting me to your home for Christmas. I've been looking forward to it for weeks."

"It's our pleasure. We've been looking forward to meeting you," Louise Warner said, obviously in a flutter of excitement. "We've seen you often on the viewer."

"Now, Louise, he doesn't want to be reminded of that here, I'm sure," said John. "Right, Jim?"

"Right, sir. As I was telling Jamie, I left my title back in San Francisco."

"Good. Good. And forget the sir. I'm John to my friends and this is Louise. Now, come along in. You must be cold after your journey."

John led the way in and Louise hurried to get coffee and cookies.

* * * * *

Louise and John had moved into their home ten years ago, when they had given up their respective jobs at a large New York teaching hospital. Louise had been a paediatrician and John the hospital administrator. Now, Louise was a part time consultant at Hartford Hospital, while John sat on the Board of Governors of several hospitals in the area. Their interests were wide and their lives were full.

They loved their home and delighted in having their family to stay. As well as Alix, Jamie and Kirk, their other son Chuck and his wife, Eugenie and two year old daughter Elise, had come for a holiday as well. Louise couldn't have been happier at having all her family together, and that happiness was reflected in everyone else's faces that evening, as they sat around the log fire in the living room.

They sat, drinking the hot punch that was John's speciality at Christmas time, relaxed and content. Kirk fitted into the family scene easily and he felt as though he had known them all a long time.

A large, black cat stalked into the room, his green eyes gleaming, as he made his way to the rug in front of the fire, where he sat, delicately cleaning his face.

"Nero is a cat that walks alone," commented John.

Kirk's eyes widened at the name.

"Nero?" he questioned, with a slight chuckle in his voice.

"That's Mom," said Jamie. "She has the most diabolical taste in names." He looked across at Louise with a grin.

"Not at all, Jamie," she replied serenely. "Nero is a perfectly good name for a cat."

"Julius isn't," muttered Chuck.

"Have you another cat, then?" asked Kirk.

There were wide grins on everyone's face and Alix was frankly laughing.

"What have I said?" he asked.

"Would you mind if I told them your middle name?" asked Alix, still chuckling.

Kirk pulled a face.

"Do you have to?"

"It would be appreciated."

"I'm sure." But somehow, Kirk didn't mind this family knowing.

"Well, do tell us," said Louise.

"Jim's middle name is Tiberius," announced Alix.

Jamie and Chuck hooted with laughter, while John and Eugenie chuckled. Louise looked amazed. Kirk was slightly put out.

"I didn't think it was that funny!"

"You will, Jim, when you hear what our names are." Jamie could hardly speak with laughter.

"You've all got very nice names. I think Jim's mother must have had very good taste."

"Oh, Mom!" came a chorus of three voices.

"Will someone please tell me what the joke is - apart from my name, that is?" demanded Kirk.

"Would you believe Charles Julius?" said Chuck.

"And James Apollonius!"

For a moment there was silence as Kirk looked at each of them in turn, digesting the names. He looked at Alix.

"And you're Alexandra Octavia." Kirk began to chuckle. He looked at Louise. "How could you do it, Louise?"

"I think they are very regal names. I don't know why you find them so amusing," said Louise with dignity.

Now everyone was laughing.

"They're not amusing when you have to live with them," spluttered Chuck. "It's just the thought that there is some one else with your taste in names."

As the laughter subsided, Nero walked sedately across to Kirk, his eyes large and glowing. He studied Kirk for a moment and then leapt nimbly onto Kirk's knee, where he curled up quietly.

"Well, I've never seen him do that before," exclaimed John.

Kirk gently stroked the cat's fur.

The sight of Nero sitting on Kirk's knee, took Alix back many years to a time on the Enterprise when another cat who walked alone, had responded to Kirk.

"He reminds me of Tibs," said Alix. "Jim was the only one Tibs would go to."

Kirk smiled.

"Not only did Alix bring a cat aboard the Enterprise without my knowledge, but she even called him Tiberius."

"That sounds like Alix," said Chuck. "What did your crew think?"

"My crew didn't know my middle name and I'm glad to say that Alix had the grace to call him Tibs." He turned to Alix. "No one knew his full name, did they?"

Alix gave a mischievous grin.

"Only Leonard and he knew your name anyway."

"Tibs liked it on board then?" asked Chuck.

"Well, we assumed so. He certainly looked healthy - what we saw of him anyway," said Alix. "We don't really know where he spent most of the time."

"At least that was preferable to the tribbles," laughed Kirk. "They got everywhere."

"I remember hearing about them on the media," said Louise. "They sounded really sweet."

"Uhhmm. I don't know about sweet," replied Kirk.

"There were too many of them. They practically over ran the ship. I was glad to get rid of them, even if the way Scotty did it was rather unorthodox."

"How did you get rid of them?" asked Jamie. "They

never did say in any of the reports I read."

"My Chief Engineer beamed them aboard the departing Klingon ship, where I would imagine they nearly drove the Klingons mad," replied Kirk. "I felt sorry for the tribbles."

"Did you ever hear what happened to the tribbles?" asked Louise.

"I never did have time to really find out, but there was scuttlebutt going around that the Klingons beamed them all down onto the nearest planet, which fortunately had no life forms of its own."

"Well, it certainly will by now," said John.

"That's for sure."

"You must have had some interesting experiences out in space," continued John. "It's something I've always wanted to do, travel in deep space, but I've never got any further than the Mars Colony."

"Deep space is different to anything I've ever experienced," replied Kirk, serious now. "It gets into your blood. Perhaps you were wise, John, never to go outside our own solar system."

"You don't mean that seriously, do you, Jim?" exclaimed Jamie.

"I guess not," Kirk gave a grin. "Those years on the Enterprise were pretty special. It's just that commanding a starship is a difficult act to follow. I guess I haven't got used to living with my feet firmly on the ground."

Alix squeezed his hand.

"You'll get out there again, Jim."

"I hope so."

He smiled down at her and kissed the top of her head. Then he looked across at John.

"What about another glass of punch, John?"

* * * * *

Kirk and Alix were sharing a room at the front of the house, looking towards the Housatonic River. Alone, together, for the first time since their weekend in San Francisco, they stood for a moment in the circle of each other's arms, appreciating the warmth and closeness they always felt when they were together.

"Eugenie was very quiet," commented Kirk.

"She's a very quiet person, generally, but once you get to know her, she is very sweet," replied Alix as she began to remove her make up. "I sometimes wonder how she and Chuck ever got together, they're so different in temperament. Yet they seem to get on amazingly well. Besides, Jeannie is a little in awe of you."

"Of me?" said Kirk, surprised. He removed his tunic and placed it over the back of a chair, then sat down to take off his boots.

"Yes, in fact she told me once she had a crush on you when she was twelve."

Kirk laughed. "How did she even know me?"

"Oh, there used to be quite a bit about you in the media," replied Alix, as she brushed her hair. "She collected everything about you for ages. She thought you were wonderful."

Kirk was embarrassed.

"Surely she has got over it by now? I don't think I could cope with her silence, knowing what she was thinking about me."

Alix laughed.

"Oh, it's quite alright, she has completely recovered. The only man in her life now, is Chuck. But there is still that little bit of awe left. You'll have to put up with that."

"I think I can manage a bit of awe," said Kirk, with a laugh and as he passed Alix, he dropped a light kiss on her head.

Soon, Kirk was comfortably ensconced in the large double bed, flicking through a magazine as he waited for Alix to finish in the bathroom. When she came out, Kirk caught his breath at her loveliness. The low light from the bedside lamps, reflected glints in her hair and eyes and the golden gauze of her nightdress scarcely hid the beauty of her body. Kirk's eyes darkened as he looked at her and all the longing he had for her over the past couple of months swept over him.

"Come here!!" he commanded, huskily.

And Alix came eagerly to sit beside him on the bed. He took her in his arms, smelling the delicate, erotic perfume she wore. His head began to spin a little as he kissed her deeply and felt her respond to him. Their love for one another had only strengthened with their separation and each only wanted to give the other pleasure and express their love in a physical way.

It seemed that hours had passed while they remained in a world which contained nothing but themselves. Because both wanted to give rather than take, their passion reached heights that they had never believed possible.

At last, they lay quiet and filled with a blissful ecstasy that they always knew in each other's arms.

* * * * *

The following morning, the sky was dark and lowering and a keen wind blew, heralding more snow.

"What are you all planning for today?" asked Louise, at breakfast time. She looked at her grand-daughter. "Ellie stop throwing your food about."

Eugenie picked the spoon up off the floor, where Ellie had thrown it.

"I thought I'd take Ellie out of your way, Mom," she said. "Unless you would like me to help in the kitchen."

"Well, I would, dear, really," replied Louise. "There is quite a bit to do. Chuck, you can go and build Ellie a snowman or take her for a ride on that old toboggan of yours and Jamie's. Jamie you could go with him."

"What a way to spend Christmas Eve," said Jamie in a mournful voice.

"It's a quite delightful way to spend Christmas Eve," said Louise. "Unless of course, you would like to do some cooking for me?"

"No, Mom," said Jamie, hastily. "I'd like to go with Chuck and give Ellie a ride. It sounds just great."

Kirk hid a smile.

"Now John," continued Louise. "You're working in the study this morning, aren't you?"

"Why is it, I get the feeling that you want us all out

of the way, my love."

"Probably because that's exactly what I want."

"I shall be in the study, of course," said John resignedly.

"Now what about you two?" Louise looked at Alix and Kirk.

"I'm going into Hartford," replied Alix.

"I'll come with you," said Kirk.

"I'm sorry, Jim. I must go in on my own. I've a special present I have to pick up."

"Can't I help. I'd really rather come with you." Kirk glanced out of the window. "It looks like more snow and I'm not happy about you driving alone."

"Don't fuss, Jim," said Alix gently. "I'll be fine. I've done this journey loads of time."

"I think Jim's right. I'd rather he went with you," said John.

"Oh, Dad. Don't you start. I'm going in on my own and that's final. No more arguments."

"When I hear that tone. I give in gracefully," commented John to Kirk. "Her mother uses that same expression and I've never won yet!"

As Alix collected her things, Kirk saw her to the car. He took her in his arms and kissed her.

"Take care, Alix. Be back as soon as you can. It wouldn't be any fun to be caught in a blizzard."

"I know, Jim. I'll be careful I want to see your face when you see what I'm bringing home."

A smile of anticipation crossed Kirk's face.

"What is it?" he asked.

Alix kissed his nose.

"You'll find out later," she said and got into the car.

"See you later."

* * * * *

Kirk had spent the morning with Chuck and Jamie, entertaining Ellie. They had taken her for a long walk along the country lanes, taking it in turns to pull the toboggan on which Ellie rode so happily. But before they had gone far, snow had started again and they had returned to the house.

By lunch time the snow was coming down in a swirl of large feathery flakes, covering everything in an even deeper blanket. Kirk began to be concerned for Alix's safety.

"Surely she should be back by now?" he said, as they all sat down for lunch.

"I would have thought so, but knowing Alix she has probably bumped into someone she hasn't seen in a while and forgotten the time!" responded John. "I shouldn't worry."

"I guess you're right. But the roads are going to be appalling and I wouldn't have thought the visibility would be good."

"I must admit that I expected Alix back in time for lunch," said Louise. "She only had to pick something up. It shouldn't have taken her that long."

"We'll hear from her soon, if she is held up anywhere," said John comfortingly.

But as the time ticked by, everyone began to get worried about Alix. The conditions were bad. The snow was

still coming down, but not so heavily as before. Kirk wandered into the large living room and stood staring out of the window as the light began to fade into early winter twilight. He could hear Ellie screaming and banging a wooden pull along toy she had, which had obviously got stuck.

"Ellie, stop that screaming," Jeannie's voice was sharp.

"No, no, no," shouted Ellie, banging even harder, as the toy remained steadfastly stuck under one of the chairs in the hall.

"Let me get it out for you," commanded Jeannie. "And stop that noise!"

Ellie began to wail. "Stuck," she said.

"I know it's stuck and I'm trying to free it for you. However did you get into this position anyway?"

"What the hell is going on?" It was Chuck's voice. "Can't I get a bit of peace and quiet without that child screaming about something?"

"It's the first time she's screamed today," Jeannie was exasperated. "And you've been dozing under that paper for an hour."

"No, I haven't. How could I possibly sleep with all this racket going on. Just listen to Jamie's hi-fi. He sounds as if he has got the whole Philharmonic Orchestra up there."

At that moment, Louise came out of the kitchen, wiping her hands on a towel.

"It's a wonder we're not all going mad with all this noise going on. Ellie stop that noise at once. Jeannie, take her in the kitchen, there are some cookies for her. It's time she had her tea, anyway."

She walked to the front door and opened it, looking for some sign on Alix. "It's still snowing," she said unnecessarily. "And listen to that noise!" She came to the bottom of the stairs. "Jamie! Jamie! Turn that music down!" She began to stomp up the stairs. "Listen to it. It's on so loud, he can't even hear me. It's a wonder he doesn't shake the house from its foundations."

Kirk, sitting silently on the window seat, knew how they all felt. There was nothing any of them could do but wait and that was the worst thing of all. He couldn't even take the other car and go look for her, as there were three different ways she could come. Everyone was getting edgy.

He heard Jamie stamping down the stairs.

"For God's sake, Mom. Don't keep on. I've turned the damn thing off now, anyway. I'll give Dave a ring and go and see him. Perhaps that will get me out of your hair."

"You can't go out in this weather," exclaimed Louise.

"It's bad enough that Alix hasn't come back yet, without you rushing off into the blizzard."

Jamie ignored her and picked up the telephone.

"Would you believe it," he exclaimed in disgust. "The damned phone is out of order."

"What?" Kirk asked, as he came into the hall. "Perhaps that's why we haven't heard from Alix. She has probably tried to ring, but couldn't get through."

He knew he was clutching at straws, but he was so worried about her and had imagined her in all sorts of trouble in the snow.

Louise looked relieved as Kirk spoke.

"You're right Jim. She would have rung, if she had been

held up, but if the lines are down, she couldn't have done."

At that moment, the front door opened and Alix came in.

"We've been worried about you," said Louise.

"I'm so sorry. I got delayed. The present I went to collect wasn't ready and I had to wait till two o'clock before I could pick it up." Alix kissed her mother on the cheek, and slipped her arm through Kirk's.

"You must be frozen," Louise. "Jamie, go and put the car away."

"Yes, Mom."

"I tried several times to ring you, but I couldn't get through," said Alix.

"The phones are out of order," replied Kirk.

John poured her a stiff drink. "You could do with that, my girl. In fact, I think we all could." He smiled around at everyone and began to pour.

Alix sat down on the couch near the fire and Kirk sat beside her, glad of her closeness.

"I saw them mending the wires as I came along." Alix sipped gratefully at her drink. "I knew you would all be worried, but there was nothing I could do. I had to wait for the present." She smiled at Kirk. "It will be worth it all, when you see what it is, Jim."

"I hope so, Alix," he smiled at her. "At the moment, I'm just glad you are back safely."

"I'd agree with that," said John, drinking deeply from his glass. "Now that we are all safely home, once more, we can relax and enjoy the Christmas festivities."

But Kirk didn't forget how he had felt when he thought that Alix might be hurt or even dead in a crash in the snow. He began to understand a little of what Alix had tried to explain to him once, about how she couldn't have borne seeing him going into danger and wondering if he would ever return.

* * * * *

Christmas morning came and everyone settled in the living room after breakfast to open their presents. Kirk sat in a large arm chair, with Alix at his feet. Quietly she put a small heavy parcel in his hand.

"Is this what you went to Hartford for?" asked Kirk.

Alix nodded her head.

Kirk weighed it in his hand, as he tried to guess its contents. There was a look of boyish anticipation on his face as he began to undo the wrappings. It was a small crystal block, sparkling and catching the light as he turned it in his hand, but as he looked into the centre of the crystal he could see the Enterprise. It was a perfect model of the ship in every detail; and somehow whichever way he looked at it, it seemed to be moving against a background of deepest space. Kirk was enchanted with it.

"Alix, it's wonderful!" Kirk couldn't take his gaze from the crystal. "You couldn't have given me anything I would have liked more. It's really my ship flying in space again." He leaned forward and kissed the top of her head softly. "Thank you, so much."

But it was the expression on Kirk's face, more than anything that he said, that made her realise how much he liked it. She watched him now as he turned the crystal block this way

and that, looking at the Enterprise from different angles, his mind in another time and another place.

He had slipped back many years to another Christmas, when he was only six years old. His father had been home - unusual in itself, as he was a navigator on a commercial space liner and got home infrequently. That Christmas had been the most wonderful of Kirk's childhood. His mother had been overjoyed to have her husband home and their love and happiness at being together had filled the house.

Kirk's father had given him a special present, one which had changed his life. It had been a model of the latest Starfleet ship. The first ship to have stardrive and the forerunner of the Heavy Battlecruiser Class that the Enterprise would belong to. The model ship had been beautiful and his father had told his young son of the special people who would serve on those ships. Kirk had listened, spellbound, holding the model carefully in his hand. It was then that the ambition to become a Captain of one of these Stardrive ships had been born; an ambition which had carried him through all the hardship, hard work and heartbreak that comes when one fights to obtain something which is wanted desperately.

Kirk smiled to himself at the memory of that Christmas and at the memory of those glorious years aboard the best ship in the Fleet. He knew that those years when he had commanded the Enterprise were the most exciting and fulfilling of his life. He had realised his ambition and his only regret had been that his father had died before he had reached his goal.

Now he put his arm around Alix, as he held the crystal as carefully as he had held that model ship, so many years ago. Where did one go from the top. It seemed that at the moment, it was only downwards, but one never knew what was around the next bend in the road.

* * * * *

It was late afternoon two days later that a summons came that could not be refused. John Warner answered the telephone and when he returned to the living room where the family were relaxing, he looked serious.

"There's been an accident, near Pete Gregory's place outside Cornwall Bridge," he told them all. "Just where the road bends to the right before Cornwall Bridge, a tree was blown down last night. Snow covered it completely, so Pete said. Some fool came around the corner too fast and ran straight into it. It's a bit of a mess. Within minutes six more cars have run one into the other. Pete says it looks like a battlefield."

"Oh, my god," it was a quiet murmur from Kirk.

"Pete says he needs some help getting the victims free. A lot of them are trapped. Ambulances and road rescue services are having a hard time getting through, as conditions are worse towards Hartford. He wondered if we could help."

Alix and Kirk stood up immediately.

"Of course, we must go. Have they got a doctor on the scene at all?" asked Alix, as she went to get her medikit.

"No, Pete was really pleased that you were here. He said most of the trapped are injured and he doesn't know whether

they should be moved or not."

"It might be a question of moving them anyway, or they might die of exposure, before the ambulances arrive." said Kirk grimly. "Is there any chance they could get a helicopter out?"

"Conditions are too bad around the heliport. They'll get nothing off the ground tonight," replied John.

Jamie went to get the large air car out, while Chuck piled spades, wrenches and torches near the door. Louise arrived with a large pile of blankets. She then went to find all the medical equipment that was in the house.

Quickly the car was loaded up and Alix, Kirk Jamie and Chuck got in.

"Take care, now," called Louise from the doorway, as they drove up onto the road. "We don't want anymore casualties."

Jamie handled the aircar superbly, knowing instinctively when he could pick up speed and when caution was needed. It wasn't long before they could see lights ahead and Jamie swung the car off the road, just before they reached the site of the crash.

It was like a scene from a nightmare. Wreckage was strewn over a wide area and in the darkness it was difficult to see who was trapped in the cars. Pete Gregory came over to them.

"I'm sure glad you came, Alix. We haven't a doctor here. We don't know which of the injured to move and how. What I need you to do is to look at each person still trapped and then tell us what to do."

"Of course. But with the temperature so low, we might have to move them regardless of their conditions. When do you expect the ambulances?"

Pete shrugged his shoulders.

"Your guess is as good as mine, Alix. What I've done is to get everyone we can into the nearest houses, where at least they'll be warm. It's the ones that are still in their cars that I'm worried about."

"Well, let me have a look at them. Jim, come and give me a hand."

Together, they walked over to the nearest car. For the next hour, they worked frantically to get the victims free. Some of them were trapped in their seats. They had to be careful that they didn't cause more injury as they got them out. But it was with an intense feeling of satisfaction that the last person was freed and taken to the warmth of the nearest house. And Alix knew that there was no one there who he thought might die, despite their injuries and exposure to the sub-zero temperatures. She and Kirk went into Pete's house, to see what could be done to help, while they waited for the ambulances to arrive.

* * * * *

It was almost midnight before Alix, Kirk and the two brothers were finally able to make their way home. Once the ambulances arrived, Alix was busy instructing the ambulance men about each casualty and so didn't notice that Kirk had been hurt. To be honest, he didn't really notice the injury himself, except as a minor inconvenience as he helped to move the stretchers. He had caught his forearm on a piece of twisted metal and ripped a jagged tear in his arm from elbow

to wrist. The blood on the sleeve of his coat could have come from some of the injured and it wasn't until they finally reached home that Alix noticed how white Kirk was.

"Are you O.K., Jim?" she asked.

He swayed slightly as he tried to take his coat off.

"I think I caught my arm on a piece of metal."

"Let me have a look," demanded Alix. Gently she eased the sleeve of the coat over his arm. "I thought this was blood from the man with the badly cut shoulder. You were holding him steady for quite a while."

She helped Kirk into the kitchen and made him sit down while she cut away his shirt from the wound.

"For god's sake, Jim, why didn't you tell me?" said Alix, when she saw the long, jagged gash. "You've lost quite a bit of blood and you need a tetanus injection. The wound could be infected."

Kirk gave a half smile, feeling too shaky and weak to argue with her.

"I'm a fool," was all he said.

"Mmm." Alix shook her head over him. Quickly she cleaned and covered the cut and gave him the necessary injection.

"I ought to really take you to the hospital to have it checked over."

"Alix, it's not that bad. I'm not going to hospital. I've had worse than this. A good night's sleep is all I need."

"If the weather wasn't so awful, I'd insist. But I think you're right. You stay in bed for twenty four hours," Alix commanded.

"Gladly," said Kirk, giving Alix a mischievous look.

"You know very well what I mean," said Alix with a grin.

"Come on. You need some rest."

She helped Kirk to his feet and supported him upstairs.

* * * * *

Within a couple of days Kirk was feeling fine again. The rest of the holiday slipped by quickly and all too soon. Kirk and Alix had to return to their respective jobs, knowing that it would be weeks before they saw one another again.

CHAPTER SIX

It was well over a year after the accident that Kirk went on a three week training mission on the Enterprise, accompanied by all the old Bridge crew of the ship. It was something he had looked forward to, as a welcome break from the routine of Academy life. Perhaps they would evoke some of the memories of bygone days. But the days they were to be reminded of were not the ones they had anticipated. It was Khan who strode once more onto the scene to make his mark upon the Enterprise, her Captain and her crew.

Alix was working with a patient at the Chapelwain, but had been able to plan a break of several days to coincide

with the return of the Enterprise. She was looking forward to seeing Kirk so much. Because the times they shared were not frequent, it was all the more special when they were able to be together.

She beamed across to San Francisco in two carefully timed stages and then travelled from the beam down control in central San Francisco to Kirk's apartment by air car. She mused on the anomaly of it taking her longer to travel down town, than it had taken to transport from the Chapelwain to the city.

It was the day before Kirk was due in and she let herself into his apartment late in the evening. She always loved coming to Kirk's apartment; even when he was not there, she somehow felt close to him. She lit the fire and ordered the food they would require for the next few days, then she unpacked and settled herself in, anticipating how soon it would be till she was with Kirk again. She hadn't been this happy since their time together on Dervalan and she appreciated it all the more, after the thirteen years of loneliness and longing she had endured. She still felt like pinching herself now and then, just to make sure it was really happening and not just part of a lovely dream.

The following morning, she rang through to Starfleet to check on the arrival time of the Enterprise in Space Dock. The official who answered sounded rather abrupt and told her that he had no idea when the Enterprise was due. It certainly wasn't that day and he had no further information to give her. Alix came off the phone feeling slightly annoyed by his attitude, and puzzled at the outcome of what should have been a straightforward request. It was unlike Starfleet to be quite so unhelpful. She stood for a moment, deep in thought, staring out at the wide panorama of the Golden Gate Bridge and San Francisco Bay.

There was no one she knew who would be able to help her or tell her if anything unusual was going on. All the Enterprise members she knew were back on board the ship. Then she remembered Chris Chapel, or rather, Chris Maitland, as she was now. Christine had married several years previously and now had two young sons to contend with and loving every minute of it. She, Kirk and McCoy had gone to dinner with Chris and her husband, Todd, a few months ago. Alix decided to give her a ring.

"Hi, Chris. It's Alix."

"Alix!" How nice to hear you. How is everything?"

"Just fine. I'm at Jim's apartment at the moment, waiting for him. He was supposed to be due in today. But when I rang Starfleet to find out when the Enterprise was coming in, the man was quite offhand and would tell me nothing. Have you any idea if anything is going on?"

There was a moment's silence on the other end of the telephone and Alix got a horrible sinking feeling in her stomach.

"Chris, if you know anything, you've got to tell me."

"Alix, it's all scuttlebutt anyway. I don't know anything for sure."

"Tell me anyway."

"The Enterprise has been in a space battle. There have been quite a few lives lost." Chris took a deep breath to keep her voice steady. "Including the Captain."

"Oh, my god!" All the strength left Alix's legs and she

sat down abruptly on a nearby chair. "Jim!"

"Alix. I'm sorry." Chris' voice was distressed. "It's not Jim Kirk, it's Spock!"

Alix closed her eyes, as a wave of relief flooded over her, followed by the awful realisation of what Chris had said.

'Spock dead. Oh dear god, not that. How on earth would Kirk cope with the loss of his dearest friend?'

"How did it happen? Where's the Enterprise now?" All Alix wanted, was to be with Kirk, knowing how much he would need her.

"I don't know anymore than that. There are rumours flying around each contradicting the other, until you don't know what to believe. But I'm pretty sure what I've told you is true."

"Chris, how on earth" Alix broke off, the news really beginning to sink in. "Have you any idea when the Enterprise will be coming in? I've got to see Jim and I've only got six days leave."

"I'm sorry, Alix, but at the moment I've no idea. As soon as I hear anything I'll ring you at the apartment."

"Thank you, Chris. I'd really appreciate that. Have you heard if Leonard is O.K.?"

"Nothing specific, which supposes that he is still alive. I wish I knew more. I can't believe Spock is dead. And yet that seems to be the only definite thing that anyone knows." Chris sounded close to tears and Alix remembered how much Chris had loved Spock, all those years ago.

"Chris, I'm sorry." There didn't seem to be anything else to say.

"Thanks, Alix." Chris sounded husky. "Look, why don't you come round here. It's better not to have to wait alone."

"Thanks. I'd like to. In about an hour."

"That'll be fine. I'll see you then."

* * * * *

Over the next three days, Alix and Chris spent quite a lot of time together. Alix' visits were enlivened by Pete and Matt, Chris' sons and in their own way, they helped the two women over the long wait. Chris rang various people, but she could find out no more than she already knew.

It was on the fourth day, that Chris got a telephone call telling her that the Enterprise was due in later that day. She asked for and was given passes in to Space Dock, to see the starship come in. She invited Alix to go with her.

Alix and Chris made their way to the restaurant overlooking the space docking area. Even as they arrived, the space doors opened and they were able to glimpse a view of the stars beyond. It was some fifteen minutes later when the Enterprise came into view, slipping gracefully through the doors and slowly progressing to the docking area assigned to her.

Alix caught her breath as she saw Kirk's ship, sleek and beautiful, realising anew, one of the reasons why Kirk loved that ship so. As the Enterprise came closer, she gasped as she saw the mighty scars of battle along her sides and knew just how much Kirk must be hurting at the damage done to his ship. There was a hush over the restaurant as the majestic Enterprise slowed to a stop just beyond the

window. People seemed awed by the damage she had sustained and there was pride too. Pride in the legend of Kirk and the Enterprise.

Alix could feel tears pricking at the back of her eyes and a hard lump in her throat.

"I've got to see Jim," she whispered to Chris.

"Let's see what we can do," responded Chris. The two women left the restaurant to try and find some way to contact Admiral Kirk.

But their efforts were in vain. Chris did everything she could, but security on both the Enterprise and her crew was far stricter than anything Chris had ever known. It would be twelve hours at least before the crew would be returning to Earth and there was nothing they could do to see any of the crew before then.

Finally, Alix and Chris beamed back to San Francisco, Chris to pick up her boys and Alix to await Kirk's return in his apartment.

* * * * *

It was early the next morning that Alix heard the door to the apartment open. She had been sitting by the fire, unable to sleep, waiting for Kirk to return.

He came in, lines of grief, worry and tiredness on his face. He walked slowly into Alix's arms without a word, holding her tightly, resting his head on hers. She held him close, knowing there was nothing she could say that would help.

They stood for several minutes, Kirk needing the silent love and support that Alix gave him. Then he drew back a little and gave her a light kiss.

"Do you feel like talking?" asked Alix.

"In a while. I sure could use a coffee right now."

"I'll get you one."

Alix slipped out of his arms and as she left the room she saw him sink tiredly into a chair before the fire, gazing sightlessly into the flames.

She was back in moments, with two coffees, and placing them on a low table, she sat down on the stool beside his chair, watching him with concern. He leaned forward to kiss her again, taking her hands in his for a moment. Then he picked up a cup of coffee, looking down at it, deep in memories that were almost too painful to be borne.

At last he looked up, setting his cup aside, untouched.

"You know what happened?" he questioned.

"A little. About Spock."

"He died to save the ship. A massive dose of radiation. He couldn't even see me at the end. I couldn't touch him, to help him, to comfort him. The plexiglass wall of the radiation chamber was between us," he paused. "I thought there would never be any barriers between us again." His voice broke and he closed his eyes against the tears that threatened. "Oh god! I think it was the most terrible moment of my life."

His arms went around Alix and she held him close, as the grief he had been unable to give way to before, broke through his defences. Alix cried with him. She cried for the death of Spock and for the end of the special

beautiful friendship the two men had shared. And she cried for Jim Kirk.

* * * * *

It was only later that Kirk was able to tell her the rest of what had happened on that ill fated trip.

"The voyage was doomed from the start. I lost so many young cadets during the battle. They were not ready for that sort of fight. I should never have let it happen. And I've lost my dearest friend. He sacrificed himself to save the ship and to save the crew." He was silent for a moment, remembering. "And Bones is sick, somehow. I found him in Spock's cabin muttering things about getting home to Mount Seleya. He was in a state of near collapse. At the time, I put it down to stress caused by the death of Spock and all those young cadets maimed and killed, that Bones had to deal with, during and after the battle. Now, I'm not so sure."

"Why do you say that?" asked Alix.

"It's something about the way he spoke. It didn't sound like the Bones I've known for so many years. At one time, I swear to god, he sounded almost like Spock. It was horrible." Kirk shook his head.

"How is he now, Jim?" Alix sounded anxious.

Kirk tightened his arm around her, giving her a reassuring kiss. He knew how much Alix cared for McCoy.

"He's resting comfortably at home for the moment. We can go to see him tomorrow, if you'd like. I'm sure he'd appreciate a visit from us. The doctors have pumped him full of tranquilisers and told him to rest. I hope it helps."

"I hope so too," rejoined Alix. "And I'd love to see him tomorrow."

"Everything seems to be falling apart around my ears. I feel like throwing in the towel." Kirk's voice was low.

Alix took his hand in hers.

"You won't ever do that, Jim. Although you might feel like it, sometimes. You're not the sort to give up, whatever the odds."

He leant his head against hers.

"I'm glad you're here, Alix. I don't think I could face being alone just now."

There was silence for a few moments.

"I'm seriously thinking of resigning from Starfleet," Kirk continued.

"I can understand why you feel like that now. But don't do anything in a hurry. Give yourself time to consider. Don't do something you might regret later."

"I don't think I'd regret it. The last few years haven't been the happiest I've spent. The bureaucracy! The red tape! I sometimes feel as if I'm in a cage and I can't get out. When I was Captain of the Enterprise, my actual contact with Starfleet Headquarters was minimal, but now I'm stationed at Headquarters, I'm bound by all the tradition of an ancient service. They tell me the way things have to be done, because it's tradition. It doesn't matter if it's right or efficient or necessary. Just do it. What I say or think doesn't seem to count for much. And without Spock, it all seems curiously unimportant."

"Do you know what happened when Admiral Morrow came

aboard to greet the crew and announce shore leave? He told me in front of my officers, that the Enterprise is to be decommissioned. She is too old to be repaired. I thought Scotty was going to explode when he heard." Kirk thumped his hand on the arm of the chair. "There is no reason for the Enterprise to be scrapped! But then she doesn't have the latest transwarp drive. The pride of the fleet is now the Excelsior, looking more like a pregnant guppy than a ship!"

Alix couldn't help a giggle and Kirk looked down at her, a smile tugging at the corners of his mouth.

"Well, she does," he said.

"I agree, Jim," returned Alix. "It's the first thing I thought of when I saw her in Space Dock."

"When did you see her there?"

"Yesterday. Chris and I got passes to see the Enterprise come in."

"Well, why on earth didn't you come and see me?"

"Officialdom decreed otherwise. Chris tried everything she could, but noone was allowed to see the crew of the Enterprise until they returned to Earth."

Kirk exploded.

"There! Do you see what I mean. Bureaucracy gone mad. I'm sick to death of it all. Perhaps I'm too old to be in Starfleet too. Perhaps they should decommission me as well. A fitting end to a Starfleet career. They scrapped the ship and her captain."

"Don't talk like that, Jim. You know it's not true."

"Isn't it? I wonder." He was silent and then a small smile lit his face. "One good thing did come out of the trip, which had nothing to do with Starfleet at all."

Alix looked at him enquiringly.

"My son, David," said Kirk and there was pride in his voice.

"Your son?" Alix was startled.

"Yes. You've heard me mention Carole Marcus?"

"Yes, I have. But you never mentioned a son."

"It was all over many years ago, Alix," he said, kissing her lightly on the nose. "David is now twenty three and Carole never meant half as much to me as you do. I knew she had a son, but she wanted me to have nothing to do with him, never see him, or have any say in his life at all. I don't know what she told him, but my first introduction to David was him trying to kill me."

"Oh, Jim, no!" Alix couldn't bear the hurt in Kirk's voice. This man had suffered so much already. She longed to comfort him, but there were no words that would help.

Kirk stared into the fire, his face drawn and tired.

"Oh, it didn't last and I like to think he understands me a little better now. But I feel I have lost so many years with David." He looked at Alix, seeing the steadfast true love she always had for him. "And with you, my love. Was it all worth it?"

"You have to believe so. What has passed can't be changed and to regret the past will only bring misery in the future. Let's try and look ahead to better times. Now that David has come into your life, you can get to know one another. I'm sure that he must be very proud to have you as his father."

Kirk continued to stare into the fire, remembering that

very precious moment David and he had shared, when his son had come to his cabin to try and comfort him.

His hand searched for and found Alix' hand and gripped it tightly. Perhaps with Alix and David he could start again. And Alix was right. It was no use regretting the past, but it was hard at present to open the door to the future. He was too heartsick and hurt to try, for the moment. But soon, perhaps, he would find out what was waiting for him. For now, all he wanted was to be with Alix, to rest in her loving and soothing presence, to try and recover a little from the death of his dearest friend.

* * * * *

Alix and Kirk visited McCoy the following morning and found him more rested and rational than the last time Kirk had seen him. He vowed he was alright, but Alix was secretly shocked by McCoy's appearance. He seemed to have aged ten years his face lined and gaunt. And there was a haunted look in his eyes. They only stayed a short while, as it was obvious that McCoy was still very tired.

Kirk took Alix to a small quiet restaurant just around the corner from his apartment. They sat for a long time over the meal, discussing all the events which had happened; trying to come to terms with the new order of things without Spock.

"I don't know what I'll do," said Kirk, at last, folding and unfolding the edge of the serviette. "I can't see myself staying on at the Academy without Spock. I've always had him at my side, except for those two years when he was studying with the Masters of Gol." Kirk sighed and closed his eyes for a moment. "They were hard years to get through without him. Now" his voice trailed off.

Alix reached across, covering his hand with hers. "Have you no ideas?"

"At the moment, none. What about you?"

"Nothing, beyond the fact that I don't want to continue to live half a world away from you, anymore."

Kirk looked up in surprise.

"Do you mean, you could give up the Chapelwain?"

"If it meant being with you all the time, I could. And that's what I want, to be with you, always."

He kissed the tips of her fingers.

"I think I love you, Alix."

Alix laughed.

"Only think, Admiral?"

He smiled then, one of his very special smiles.

"I know I love you. And I want you beside me always. Do you really have to go back to the Chapelwain tonight?"

"I'm afraid so, Jim. My week is up and my patient will be arriving. It should only be a short stay case. I'll ask for extended leave. I have quite a bit owing to me. I should be back in two or three weeks time."

"Perhaps, by then, things will seem a little more clear to me ... and for us."

He leant his elbows on the table, pressing her fingers against his mouth.

"Doctor Alexandra Octavia Warner, I don't know what I'd do without you."

"Admiral James Tiberius Kirk, the feeling is entirely

mutual."

"Alix," Kirk was serious now. "Will you marry me?"

Alix's eyes were starry, as she gazed at Kirk.

"Yes, Jim. There's nothing I want more."

* * * * *

Back at the Chapelwain, Alix looked forward eagerly to being with Jim again. She spoke to him at least once a day, trying to support and comfort him during the grief he felt for the death of his friend. But when she rang on the fourth day, there was no reply. She rang several times, thinking he had gone to visit McCoy or called in at Starfleet or merely gone for a walk. By evening she was concerned and rang McCoy's house to see if they were spending the day together but there was no reply there either. She tried Uhura's number and, in desperation, Scotty's, but there was no reply from either number.

She left it until the following morning and rang Kirk's number again, letting it ring for several minutes, but there was still no reply. She replaced the receiver, wondering what to do next, knowing she had to return to her patient, in a few minutes. As she sat there, the telephone rang and Alix snatched it up.

"Is that Doctor Warner?" It was a woman's voice and Alix' heart sank with disappointment.

"Yes, it is."

"Hi Alix. It's Chris Maitland."

"I was just thinking of ringing you and saying 'help'."

"You've heard then?"

"Heard? Heard what? What's happened? I've been trying to get hold of Jim since yesterday."

"Jim Kirk has stolen the Enterprise out of Space Dock."

"Oh, my god!" Alix sat down abruptly. "When? Why?"

"Last night. Apparently he had a visit from Sarek."

They found out that before Spock died, he was able to pass on his life essence - his katra - to Leonard McCoy. That's why Leonard has been acting so strangely."

"I don't understand, Chris," said Alix. "His katra is with Leonard? Do you mean Spock's mind is sharing Leonard's body?"

"Yes, I guess that's it. It does seem incredible. But these things can happen. I know."

"Yes, of course." Alix remembered Chris telling her about the time that Spock's consciousness had been housed within Chris. "So what has that to do with Jim stealing the Enterprise?"

"Well, it seems there is a possibility that Spock's body is on Genesis. Jim Kirk has taken McCoy and some of the Enterprise Bridge Crew to try and rescue Spock's body, and **take it** and McCoy to Vulcan. Once there, it's all part of Vulcan mysticism. Sarek will do all he can."

Alix closed her eyes for a moment, thinking of all that Kirk had already suffered. What if after all this, nothing could be done. It just seemed so incredible. Kirk was risking an awful lot for a mere chance. Alix could only hope and pray.

"How did you find out all this, Chris?" asked Alix.

"Uhura has just rung me. Jim asked her to ring so that I could tell you. He knew you'd be worried."

Alix glowed. In spite of all the things that had been going on, he'd found time to think of her.

"Well, thanks for telling me, Chris."

"Oh, there's one more little item. They crippled the pregnant guppy before they went, so they couldn't be followed."

"What??"

"She ground to a halt outside Space Dock. Captain Styles was not amused. Uhura said it was the most interesting language she'd heard over the space waves in years."

Alix began to laugh a little hysterically. It was all just too fantastic to take in.

"I'd better go. I'll let you know as soon as I hear anything."

"I'd appreciate it."

It was only after Alix put the receiver down, that the full implications of what Kirk had done, began to hit her.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The U.S.S. Potemkin was in flight from Vulcan, warping quickly on her way to bring Admiral James T. Kirk to his Court Martial on Earth, under cabin arrest. The crew of the Potemkin were quiet and subdued, unable to quite decide where their loyalties lay. Bound always by the ties of Starfleet Command they obeyed every order given to the letter.

Also aboard the Potemkin were Captain Spock, Doctor McCoy and the other members of the Enterprise Bridge crew who had gone on the rescue mission to Genesis. All except Spock were confined to their quarters. For all the difference it made to him, Spock might have been confined to quarters, too.

As a concession, the officers from the Enterprise were allowed to dine together every evening. Each was taken to the Officer's Mess under escort and security men remained in the room at all times. It was irksome for all of them, but particularly so for Kirk and Spock, who had had very little time together to talk since Mount Seleya. They both had much to say to one another, to plan and to discuss, but little could be said in front of security guards and with the atmosphere of constraint that seemed, inevitably, to pervade each meal.

The journey was hard for all of them, but hardest of all for Kirk. During the day, he paced the small cabin for hour after hour, his mind in a turmoil, as he tried desperately to come to terms with what had happened. It was almost uncanny to sit down to a meal and see Spock sitting opposite him, calmly eating. He could remember so vividly Spock's death aboard the Enterprise so short a time ago; and Kirk's mind couldn't quite take in the incredible thing which had happened.

But he had lost so much too; his ship and his son. He felt he would never get over the heartbreak of those losses. He remembered how he had pleaded with Admiral Morrow for permission to try and save Spock after Sarek had visited



him. Kirk knew there was no real reason why he shouldn't have been granted permission. Maybe, if he had been able to command the Enterprise with a full crew, things might have turned out differently. His son, David, might still be alive and he might never have had to destroy the Enterprise.

Possibilities of what might have been, crowded his mind. He remembered what Alix had said, 'to regret the past will only bring misery to the future'. His mind accepted the truth of the words, but his heart refused to let the memories go. Of one thing he was sure; he was glad he had destroyed the Enterprise. If she had had to go, at least he had been the one to decide when and how. She had not been reduced to so much scrap by Starfleet engineers. The Enterprise had gone in a blaze of glory and with purpose. It had been a good way to go. But for her Captain, it was hard to realise that he would no longer travel the stars aboard her.

And his son, David! Kirk had known him such a short time. It seemed so unfair that his young life should be taken by a brutal Klingon, who killed without feeling. Kirk remembered David's face as they watched the evolving Genesis planet, triumphant in the part he had played in the building of a new world. He had died on that new world, his body split into a million pieces in the planet's death throes.

It was all so senseless! And rightly or wrongly, Kirk put part of the blame on Starfleet for the tragedy of Genesis. A fully crewed, able Starship would have been more than a match for the twelve man, bird-of-prey, Klingon ship.

And the one person who could make sense of the whole mess, who gave some meaning to what they had gone through, was Spock. And Starfleet denied them the right to talk together privately and to somehow come to terms with all they had undergone.

Kirk had walked to the door at one point, determined to see Spock. The door had slid open, revealing guards, who came strictly to attention.

"Yes, Admiral? Is there anything I can get you?"

"I'd like to see Captain Spock."

"I'm afraid that's not allowed, sir."

Kirk had stood for a moment.

"I see," he said finally and allowed the door to slide shut.

It was not what he wanted to do. He had wanted to smash his fist into each man's face and run along the corridor to where he knew Spock would be; silent, brooding, meditating. In sheer frustration, Kirk banged his clenched fists down hard on the desk, making pens and pencils rattle in their container.

Spock had not needed to come with Kirk and the others. The court-martial order was for the ones who had stolen the Enterprise, violated the order of trespass around Genesis and blown up a Federation starship. But Spock had not wished to remain on Vulcan, he had wished only to be with the friends who had risked everything for him.

It had seemed an agonizingly long seven days to get to Earth, despite the warp speed of the starship. As Kirk stepped off the Potemkin, he knew in his heart he would never board another Federation starship in his life. It was a very grim Admiral Kirk, who was escorted directly to his apartment.

* * * * *

After four weeks of worry over Kirk, not knowing whether he was alive or dead, Alix received a call from Chris Maitland. The Potemkin was bringing Kirk and the others home for court-martial.

Shocked by the news, Alix knew there was only one place she could be and that was San Francisco at Kirk's side. Much as she hated to do it, she had gone to the Administrator of the Chapelwain, Duncan McKay, and explained that it was imperative that she go to San Francisco immediately. She had never requested to be withdrawn from a case in all the years she had been there, and when Alix had explained the reason why, McKay had made the appropriate arrangements. She had arrived in San Francisco the day the Potemkin was due in and she went directly to Kirk's apartment. Two Starfleet security guards stood outside the door and challenged her as she approached.

"I'm Doctor Warner. I usually stay here whenever I'm in San Francisco."

The guard consulted a list.

"I'm sorry, Doctor. The apartment is listed as occupied solely by Admiral Kirk. No one else is allowed in."

"Where is Admiral Kirk?"

"I'm afraid I can't tell you that."

"At least tell me if he is inside," exclaimed Alix.

"Not yet," was all the guard said, and that with a furtive look at his companion.

"You mean, he will be coming here?"

"I'm not at liberty to say, m'am. It would be better if you left."

"And just where am I supposed to go? I live here when I'm in San Francisco."

"I'm sorry. My orders are to let no one in, unless authorised."

"Where can I get authorisation?" Alix was becoming angry and upset. Her eyes big and grey, bright with unshed tears.

The guard shifted uncomfortably.

"I ... you can't get authorisation. When Admiral Kirk arrives he will be under house arrest. No one will be allowed to see him, except the defence lawyers. I'm sorry, m'am. There's nothing I can do. I've already told you more than I should."

Alix looked down at her feet, for one awful moment, absolutely devoid of any thought at all. Tears slid down her cheeks, and she brushed them away. She swallowed past the lump in her throat and managed a smile.

"Thank you for your help," she managed. Picking up her bag, she walked back down the way she had come.

Alix didn't know where to go or what to do. All she wanted was to be with Jim Kirk again. It was a longing that was almost physical in its intensity. And there seemed nothing she could do. Even if she waited until Kirk arrived, he would be under escort and she wouldn't be able to speak to him. It would be painful and embarrassing for both of them.

She found herself outside the apartment block, standing on the pavement. She knew she should try and find somewhere to stay, but her mind was numb. The possibilities of what Kirk would have to endure during the court-martial and might happen to him afterwards, chased each other through her mind. All her bright hopes for the future lay in ashes at her feet. If only she knew what had happened, to have some way

of judging what the outcome might be, but all Chris had been able to find out was that Kirk was coming back to face a Court-Martial; and the day on which the Potemkin was arriving.

An aircar suddenly swerved in and stopped a few metres past her. She scarcely noticed and it wasn't until a tall, slim figure stood beside her, that she looked up.

"Doctor Warner."

A pair of warm, brown eyes regarded her with compassion.

"Do you need any help, Doctor Warner?"

Then Alix did something she had never done in her life before. She fainted dead away. Spock, looking acutely embarrassed caught her before she fell and carried her into the waiting aircar.

* * * * *

Spock had taken Alix to his apartment. Realising that she must have been turned away from Kirk's apartment, he made arrangements with his housekeeper for Alix to stay with him.

It took quite a while to recover from the shock of seeing Spock, alive and apparently well. It was something she hadn't believed possible. At the time Chris told her, she had felt unable to accept that anything so fantastic could be possible. To be suddenly confronted with the living proof had been a little hard to take. Spock had explained as much as he knew to Alix, of the events which had led up to his 'rebirth' at Mount Seleya. He told her, too, of the death of David and the destruction of the Enterprise. Alix wept, unable to stop herself, although she knew how distressing it must be to Spock. But her feelings for Kirk and what he had endured, and was still enduring were too great.

"I've got to see him, Spock. To talk to him. He'll need someone right now."

"I know, Alix. Only too well. But Starfleet will not allow even me to see him."

"When is the court-martial to be?"

"In two weeks time."

"Will that give the defence time to build a case for Jim?"

"It is hard to say. Starfleet feel that Jim hasn't got a case. For the good of the service they want to keep the Court Martial as quiet as possible."

"But how can they? Jim has always been an almost legendary character to most people."

"That is why Starfleet want to 'hush it up', I believe the term is. It is not the way heroes are expected to behave."

"Whatever the circumstances."

"Whatever the circumstances," repeated Spock, quietly.

"What do you think the outcome will be?" asked Alix.

"It is hard to judge. It is a situation that has never happened before."

"I can believe that, Spock!" Alix managed a small smile.

"The old Earth saying 'we must wait and see' seems appropriate at this time."

"But hardly reassuring."

"Indeed no. But the whole situation is such that no assurance can be given."

If Alix had not known him better, she would have said

that Spock was not worried about Kirk or about the outcome of the court-martial. But she was able to read the expressions in his eyes, not as well as Jim Kirk could do so, but at least enough to realise that he was as deeply worried and concerned as she was herself.

* * * * *

Kirk sat back and rubbed his eyes with the heels of his hands. He had been watching the screen for a couple of hours and his eyes felt sore and heavy. And the headache he'd had for the last two days had worsened.

He stood up and moved to look out at the panoramic view of San Francisco Bay from his living room window. Dusk was approaching and lights were beginning to sparkle all over the city. Kirk hardly saw them. Try as he might he could never push the reality of his present situation away for very long. He had been watching a video recording which the Bridge crew of the Enterprise had given him at the end of the five year mission. It contained snippets of ordinary day to day routine of the Bridge; nothing of any importance and so it had been easy to obtain permission from Starfleet to give the recordings to Kirk. But to Kirk they were infinitely precious, showing him the life he had loved so much.

For the last couple of hours, Kirk had been lost in the past, reliving again the feeling of being Captain of the Enterprise. Now, as he gazed out over the Bay, he wished he hadn't allowed himself the indulgence. Reality seemed that much harder to face and he knew that the charges Starfleet had brought against him, would bring the severest penalties. The humiliation which he knew was to come would destroy the happiness which the memories of life aboard the Enterprise brought; tarnished by the ignominy of the end of his Starfleet career. For he knew that whatever happened, he no longer wished to continue to serve in Starfleet. He knew that no one in Starfleet would understand why he had had to do what he did. There would be pointing fingers and whispering behind his back about the Starship Captain who had broken so many rules. They would never know just how dear a friend Spock was and always would be.

'I am and always shall be, your friend.'

Spock's words came back to him now, warm and comforting and Kirk wished so much that the two of them might have some time together, now most especially. It was hard to know that the friend he had accepted and grieved for as dead, was now alive and well, and to be unable to see or even speak to him.

Kirk turned his back on the view and walked slowly to the fire, holding out his hands, absentmindedly, to the flames. He knew that whatever Starfleet threw at him, they would never be able to hurt him as he had been hurt by the loss of his ship and his son.

When he had realised, through Sarek, that there was a chance that Spock could be saved, there had been no hesitation in his mind. He had to try! But he had reckoned without the possibility of losing both the Enterprise and David. It had been a dear price indeed to pay and there was little to be gained by contemplating what his decision might have been if he had known what he stood

to lose and gain.

David had been so young, so full of fire and enthusiasm; Kirk had been able to see something of himself in David and it had been a unique experience for him. After Spock had died and David had come to him to offer comfort, Kirk and David had become very close, very quickly. They had spent many hours together just talking, sharing experiences and learning to know and appreciate one another. All too soon that time had ended and David had returned to the Genesis planet he had helped to create.

The flames of the fire blurred slightly as Kirk watched them and he blinked hard, then turned and went to pour himself a drink. The video was still in the machine and he went to put the treasured tape away. But he couldn't resist one last look at the tape.

The Bridge of the Enterprise appeared on the screen again and he watched it for a few moments, reliving again each scene it showed. The turbo lift doors opened and Doctor Alix Warner walked onto the Bridge. It was the only time that Alix appeared on the tape and Kirk wondered if it had been put in deliberately. She stood uncertainly, for a moment at the barrier, looking down at the Captain.

Kirk pressed the freeze/augment button, as a brief close-up of Alix's face appeared on the screen. Kirk stared at it, seeing for the first time, how very vulnerable she had been then. He had never noticed it at the time. Vulnerable, because of the depth of feeling she had for him and he could see it in her eyes as her face filled the screen. He shook his head slightly, unable to believe how blind he had been then. It was only recently that he had realised the sacrifice she made for him, and for the relationship the two of them had so briefly shared. Because of that sacrifice, they had the love which they shared together now.

The last year with Alix had been the happiest that Kirk had known since he had left the Enterprise and it now seemed a long time since he had last seen her. He wanted desperately to see her again, to hold her close and feel her warm and loving, beside him. Physically and emotionally, he needed her badly, right now.

Kirk damned Starfleet bureaucracy which did not permit visitors at all, now that he was under house arrest. What possible knowledge could Alix have about any of the events in question? He knew from his defence lawyers that Alix had been trying to see him; but Starfleet resolutely refused all permission.

Reluctantly, Kirk took out the tape and replaced it in the container. The loneliness of command had never been like this - unable to talk or to see anyone. He knew that his special friends and colleagues, who had gone so willingly with him to rescue Spock, were suffering the same treatment. And Kirk felt an enormous sense of guilt that his actions might well have caused the end of their Starfleet careers too. He had done all he could when giving his evidence to his lawyers, to exonerate all of them from any blame, but who knew what Starfleet would do, once the court-martial started.

There was nothing further Kirk could do now, except wait. And each day, the waiting was worse, the tension

harder to take and the loneliness more lonely than the emptiness of space itself.

* * * * *

In Spock's apartment, Alix was helping the housekeeper, Mrs. Gudron, prepare the vegetables for the evening meal. Mrs. Gudron, was the younger cousin of Amanda and was very like her in many ways. Her husband had died several years ago, about the time that Spock had acquired the apartment. At Amanda's suggestion, she had become his housekeeper; keeping the apartment just as he liked it and preparing his meals. The job itself was not arduous, but Mrs. Gudron brought to it the most welcome attitude of all, silent understanding of her employer. She stayed very much in the background and, in fact; they saw very little of one another.

In the days following Alix' arrival, the two women had got to know one another reasonably well. Alix wanted to keep busy all the time, to try and distract her thoughts from the well worn groove into which they slipped all too easily; and helping Mrs. Gudron kept her occupied for a while at least.

She also visited Chris Maitland and her two boys regularly, finding in their young, demanding companionship a certain amount of distraction. But it was all too easy to find her thoughts back with Jim Kirk and the fact that he was awaiting court-martial.

Once the meal was prepared, Alix walked back to the living room area to await Spock's return. She had seen very little of him since she had been in San Francisco, as he was doing everything within his power to help Kirk's defence lawyers. He was able to tell her little of what was going on, but Alix was astute enough to realise that Spock was very worried about the outcome of the court-martial and the fate of his friend.

At first, Alix had thought that the only outcome would be for Kirk to be dishonourably discharged from the service. And her imagination had pictured the scene again and again with awful clarity. She saw Kirk standing before the crew of the Enterprise, staring straight ahead, mouth grimly shut, as the insignia of his rank, his medals and Starfleet badges were stripped from his uniform. The expression of desolation on his face, which she pictured there, filled her with misery. But finally, when she spoke to Spock about her fears, he was able to tell her that cowardice was the only reason men were dishonourably discharged from the service. Alix was only slightly reassured, however, as the alternative which Spock presented, would be just as humiliating to a man like Jim Kirk - reduced in rank, and pushed into a low grade job and forgotten. Alix could hardly bear to think about it. After all the honour and prestige that Kirk had brought to Starfleet, it all seemed so unfair.

She wandered aimlessly around the room, her mind with Kirk and of how much he was having to endure alone. If only she could see him, just for a short while, she felt it would help them both; if there was only some way she could contact him. She had tried phoning him, but his telephone was monitored and the person who answered would not put her

obtain

through. Spock had tried to/special permission for Alix to see Kirk, but so far Starfleet had refused.

Dusk began to enter the room, but Alix didn't switch on the lights; instead she sat down in a chair near the fire, her arms around her knees, looking into the depths of the flames. It seemed years since the evening when she had last seen Kirk. She could see his face so clearly in her mind. He was tired and strained from all he had suffered, but his hazel eyes had gleamed with a quiet happiness when she had said she would marry him.

Abruptly Alix got up. Somehow she was going to see Kirk. She knew that if she and Kirk were already married, Starfleet would have no option, but to let her visit him. It was Starfleet red tape again and Alix had had enough. Hastily, she pulled on her coat and called to Mrs. Gudron that she was going out and didn't know when she would be back.

* * * * *

Seeing Kirk had proved easier than she had thought possible after all. There had been one guard on duty outside Kirk's apartment and he had come to attention as she walked up to him.

"I've come to see Admiral Kirk."

"Could I see your authorisation, m'am?"

"I'm afraid I haven't a pass."

"I'm sorry then, M'am. I can't let you in."

"But I need to see him. It really is most important."

The young security guard looked uncomfortable.

"I'm sorry, m'am," he repeated.

Alix looked at him, her large grey eyes, filling with tears against her will. She so desperately needed to see Kirk.

"I've just got to see him. Just for a few minutes. I can assure you I have no plans to help him escape."

"I'm sure you haven't, m'am. But I can't let you in."

"Ensign. Haven't you ever loved somebody so much, that you'd do anything for them?"

The young man blushed slightly.

"Well, yes, m'am, I do. But"

"Well, that's how I feel about Admiral Kirk. I haven't seen him for several weeks and I'm not likely to be able to talk to him till after the court-martial. I just need desperately to see him. Please, Ensign."

The guard looked up and down the corridor.

"Well, I do have to patrol this area," he admitted.

"But I don't know anything. And I haven't seen you. But, please, don't be long."

Alix couldn't say a word, but the look she gave him was payment enough. He turned and paced slowly down the corridor. Alix placed her finger on the bell.

The door to Kirk's apartment opened and for one long, silent moment, Kirk and Alix just stared at one another, their look saying everything.

"Alix," said Kirk, huskily, at last. "How did you manage it?" He put his arm around her and drew her inside. As the door slid shut, he took her in his arms and kissed her. They clung to one another as if they would never let go.

"I can't believe you're here," said Kirk. "I've wanted so much to see you, Alix."

"I talked to the guard. He's turning a blind eye, but I can't stay long."

Kirk gave a short laugh.

"I'd give him a few days in the brig, if he were one of my men. But as it is" and Kirk kissed her again.

At last, Alix stood back a little and looked into his eyes. She saw there the terrific strain he was under and ran her finger slowly down the side of his face.

"How are you," she asked, softly.

"As well as can be expected under the circumstances, I think the phrase is," he replied.

"I'm sorry about David."

A shadow crossed Kirk's face.

"I still can't quite believe it's happened," he said, quietly.

They stood within the circle of each other's arms, drawing comfort from their closeness. There was so much to say, and no time to say it in.

"How's Spock?" asked Kirk at last.

"He's well. I'm staying at his apartment at the moment. I don't see much of him. He's spending most of his time with your lawyers. I see quite a bit of Chris and her boys."

He held her close.

"I'm glad you're not alone, Alix." There was a wealth of feeling in Kirk's voice and Alix could feel the tears threatening to flood her eyes as she realised just how tough these days alone were for Kirk.

There was a soft tapping at the door.

"I've got to go," said Alix.

For a few more precious seconds they clung together, then Alix pulled away and looked into his eyes.

"I love you, Jim," she said quietly.

"I love you, Alix." He held her hands tightly. "We'll be together soon, somehow, I promise."

A quick kiss and then Alix left the apartment, with Kirk staring sightlessly at the spot where she had been. It wasn't until Alix was outside the apartment block, that she realised that tears were pouring down her face.

* * * * *

It was the day before the court-martial was to start that Sarek arrived at Spock's apartment. Spock and Alix had just finished an evening meal and both were surprised to see him. Sarek wasted no time on preliminaries.

"I have spent the whole day at Starfleet Command with both defence and the prosecution lawyers, as well as the officers of the higher echelons."

"Indeed?" Spock's reply was non-committal, but Alix detected a gleam of hope in his eyes.

"I brought with me, letters of marque for the purchase of the Enterprise by the Council of Vulcan Elders. We needed the ship to instigate a search for your body, Spock. The letters of marque are dated the day the Enterprise arrived back on Earth. I also brought a letter of request,

asking Admiral Kirk to do all in his power to find my son and bring him to Mount Seleya. The Enterprise was placed at his disposal."

Spock sat down abruptly. The relief he felt was clear in his face. His voice betrayed nothing, however.

"And was this letter of the same date?"

"Of course. How could it be otherwise?"

Spock closed his eyes for a moment and then looked up at his father, who watched him with gentle understanding.

"This means"

"It means, my son, that Admiral Kirk can only be charged with violating a Federation Restriction Order. A reprimand at the most."

Alix made a choked sound and moved to the window, pressing a handkerchief hard against her mouth to suppress the sobs of relief that threatened.

"What about the Excelsior?" asked Spock.

Sarek looked him straight in the eye.

"She suffered from a most unfortunate malfunction."

A look of understanding passed between them.

"Does Admiral Kirk know?"

"I believe his defence lawyers are on their way to his apartment now, with the news."

Spock stood up.

"How can I thank you, father?"

"Thanks are unnecessary, although your mother still seems to enjoy the custom." A small smile lit Sarek's features as he read the relief in Spock's face.

"Admiral Kirk lost much in his quest to find you and to return you to us. That he should be court-martialled and disgraced for it was unthinkable. We, on Vulcan, owe him a debt, which we were anxious to repay. It was the logical thing to do."

"Indeed, father," There was joy in Spock's tone.

They both looked across at Alix, who was still staring unseeingly out of the window. Spock and Sarek moved to stand each side of her, in a moment of silent support. She turned to face them, her face still stained with the tears she had shed.

"I, too, would like to say thank you, on behalf of Jim Kirk and myself. It may be illogical, Sarek, but at the moment, I don't feel at all logical." Her voice shook slightly and tears formed again in her eyes.

"It will not be long before you are able to see Admiral Kirk again," said Sarek, with understanding. "The court-martial for both Admiral Kirk and the members of the crew involved, will now be a mere formality. And now, I must leave. I have much still to do before tomorrow. I came only to inform Spock of what had happened. I am glad that you were here so that you know as well. Live Long and Prosper, Doctor Warner."

Alix' hand came up in a perfect Vulcan salute.

"Peace and long life, Ambassador Sarek."

* * * * *

Sarek was right, the court-martial was a formality. What went on behind the scenes, Kirk, Alix and Spock never did find out, but it was obvious that a great deal of pressure had been brought to bear on both Starfleet Command and the Federation by the Vulcan Council of Elders.

Kirk was given a formal reprimand for leading his crew in to a forbidden zone and the court offered him their condolences on the death of his son. Kirk stood impassive throughout. His face was drawn and pale and it was apparent to all that he had been under a great deal of strain. He gave a slight smile in the direction of McCoy and his Bridge crew, seated in the front of the court, as they announced that all charges against them had been dropped.

When the court was dismissed, Kirk was surrounded by a throng of people, but he hardly appeared to see them. His eyes were on Alix and Spock who stood waiting for him, at the back of the court. They were joined a moment later by McCoy. Kirk shook hands and said the appropriate words to all the well-wishers who crowded around. Then he walked quickly to the three people who waited for him. For a moment they looked at one another in silence, then Kirk took Alix' hand in his, holding it tightly.

"Let's go," was all he said.

* * * * *

After the court-martial, Kirk, Alix, Spock and McCoy had spent many hours together discussing the future.

McCoy, tired, feeling his years more than a little, after the events leading to the trauma of Mount Seleya, had surprised them all by announcing he was retiring. He planned to live in a small house near his daughter, where he could see her and his grandchildren regularly.

"I've had my time out in space. Now I want to enjoy my family a little. I'm too old and too worn out to go traipsing across the galaxy, looking for adventure. I could use a little peace for a while."

Spock, too, had surprised them, as he explained what had happened after he had regained his katra.

"I spent many hours with the Vulcan Doctors. It seems that there is some problem with the synapses of my brain. Most of the time, they will function well, but the doctors believe that occasionally they will fail, to carry the brain messages efficiently. I could well suffer from 'black-outs', I believe the term is, when under extreme pressure. They recommend I leave Starfleet and take up a less stressful occupation. And of course, it is extremely unlikely that Starfleet would continue to let me serve in the Fleet knowing of this disability. Until I know what plans you have in mind, Jim, I am unsure as to how to proceed."

Kirk smiled and there was an air of excitement about him. He glanced at Alix.

"Alix and I have been talking about that. To be honest, after all that has happened, I am reluctant to continue in Starfleet. If it hadn't been for your father's intervention, Spock, who knows where I'd be now." He glanced again at Alix, sitting close beside him. "I don't think I'd be enjoying the happiness I have now. It's certainly

no thanks to Starfleet. They'd have nailed me to the wall if they could."

"I don't believe that to be strictly true, Jim. There were many people who were in complete support of what you did," said Spock.

"And many who weren't. However, that's beside the point. Our idea is to set up a small company - a consultancy on technical and medical matters, to members of the United Federation of Planets. Between us, we have a considerable amount of experience covering a wide area of knowledge. We'd need an administrative office here in San Francisco as a base. We'd also need a small star cruiser.

"Initially, of course, we'd have to go looking for business, but I don't think I'm being immodest when I say that our names are reasonably well known." He sat forward in his chair, his hands clasped tightly in front of him.

"Just think, Spock, Bones. We'd be out there, in space again! Together! No red tape to worry about. We could make it work."

There was an eagerness and excitement in every line of his body. It was something he knew he wanted to do, desperately. He looked seriously at Spock and McCoy.

"Jim. I think it's a great idea. It's the ideal solution. It's what you do best. I'd be real happy to help co-ordinate things here in San Francisco, but to go rattling around the galaxy again; quite honestly, Jim. I've had enough."

"I was rather counting on you, Bones."

"Jim, just take a look at the lady who's sitting beside you. That's one of the best damn doctors I know. And I kind of get the feeling she's going with you. Am I right?"

Kirk and Alix grinned at one another.

"Just try and hold me back, Leonard," responded Alix. "I've never wanted to do anything in the world as much as I want to be involved in this with Jim."

"There's your answer, Jim. I'll do all I can for you this end. I know you can make a success of it."

Kirk smiled

"Thanks, Bones," he said quietly. Then he turned to Spock, who had been silent, deep in thought. "Well, Spock. What about you?" There was a tenseness in Kirk as he waited for the Vulcan's reply.

"I approve, Jim. I am only surprised that I did not think of the idea myself. Of course, there will much planning to be done, but I do not foresee any problems that will prove unsurmountable."

A wide grin had spread over Kirk's face at Spock's words. He glanced at Alix and there was excitement and happiness in the look they exchanged. The idea was going to work.

* * * * *

The next few weeks flew by as the planning, organisation recruitment and purchase of everything necessary to setting up a small but viable company went ahead. Alix couldn't remember seeing Kirk so happy since they had first met on the Enterprise. He was in his element and delighted in the freedom from the restrictions which he had begun to find so irksome. And always, before him was the prospect of flying

amongst the stars again, with Alix and Spock.

The friendship between Kirk and Spock had always been special, but since the happenings leading up to the events at Mount Seleya, that specialness had deepened. They were both aware of what they had lost and the miracle which had brought them together again, despite all the odds, was something neither of them could quite believe.

Alix loved to see them together, working on the plans for their company. And she had been right, the heart was capable of infinite love. Never did Alix feel in competition with Spock. She knew that Kirk loved them both deeply in very different ways. And Kirk needed both of them close beside him, always.
