

# **SOME KIND OF MAGIC**

by Shirley Buck

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Dr. McCoy looked across at his new assistant, Dr. Alix Warner. She seemed to be settling in well and was proving to be a definite asset to the Enterprise Sick Bay. McCoy had been upset when Dr. M'Benga had left the ship. Oh, he had been glad that M'Benga had got his promotion, he deserved it. But M'Benga was well versed in Vulcan physiology and was of stalwart support to McCoy whenever Spock was injured or ill.

McCoy couldn't believe his luck when he saw from Alix' record that she had actually worked in a Vulcan hospital. She seemed a calm, competent woman and McCoy had taken to her immediately.

At the moment she was finishing an examination of a young female Ensign who had complained of a painful shoulder joint.

"It's nothing serious, Ensign. But you'll need to come in for an injection on the next two mornings. I'm sure you'll find it will have cleared up completely by then."

Alix gave the Ensign a warm smile, as she went out. Alix came across to McCoy.

"Well, that's the last of the Sick Parade this morning. Nothing too startling there!"

"That's the way I like it. But you can bet your bottom dollar it won't last!"

Alix looked at him questioningly.

"We're in orbit around some new planet, and the Captain, First Officer and a security guard have beamed down. Now my troubles will really start."

"Why, what do you mean Leonard?"

"As sure as God made little green apples, one of them will be injured and need patching up. Those two have taken years off my life, I can tell you. They seem to think I'm some sort of miracle worker. Wave a magic wand and they're fit and well again." McCoy sighed. "I wish it were that simple."

"You really worry about the Captain and Mr. Spock, don't you?"

McCoy grinned. "I guess I do. It's become a sort of habit."

Alix was at a loss to understand the apparent depth of McCoy's worry. Privately, she thought it very foolhardy for the Captain and First Officer both to beam down on the same landing party. What sort of Captain was he - a glory seeker or a foolhardy man. Neither seemed likely. Alix had heard of the almost legendary Captain Kirk - youngest Starship Captain in the Fleet. Alix was inclined to distrust living legends. When she was posted to the Enterprise, she wasn't sure if she was pleased, honoured or dismayed. Still, she mustn't judge without knowledge and she hadn't, as yet, met either the Captain or Mr. Spock.

"I'll check the drugs list now, shall I, Leonard?"

"Well, we are the eager beaver. Sit down and have a coffee first. I usually have one after Sick Parade. Let's make the most of the peacefulness while it lasts."

McCoy leaned back in his chair and clasped his hands behind his head, and watched as Alix punched up two coffees and brought them to his desk. She sat down opposite him. She was not a beauty in the accepted sense of the word, her nose was a little too large and her mouth a little too wide, but she had clear, gray eyes which reflected her warm and happy nature. Her mouth turned up slightly at the corner and there were small laugh lines around her eyes.

/And she sure has got a good figure,/ thought McCoy, appreciatively.

"You're fitting in well, Alix."

"Thank you. I still feel the 'new girl', really."

"That'll soon pass. It doesn't take long on the Enterprise. Are you getting acquainted with everyone O.K.?"

"Well, I can't say I've met everyone on the Enterprise yet, but a goodly few! The notable exceptions being Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock."

"Yeah. Well, they keep away from Sick Bay. They say I fuss too much. A mother hen, yet!"

"Somehow, I don't see you as a mother hen. Just a very good doctor."

"Flattery, my dear, will get you anywhere!!"

They both laughed.

"Have you heard the result of your physiotherapy exam, yet?" asked McCoy.

"Oh, I meant to tell you, Leonard. I heard only this morning. I've passed my practical with flying colours, I'm told. My theory papers were O.K. too."

McCoy was pleased.

"I'm delighted, Alix. I'm sure you'll find it a real asset with some of the injuries this crew comes up with!"

"I can imagine. I felt the need for it during my nine months on the destroyer, 'Achilles', that's why I took the crash course, while I was aboard."

"How long have you been in Starfleet, now?"

Alix laughed.

"Exactly 11 months and 1 week. And I love every minute of it!"

"Yeah, it does seem to get a hold on you, doesn't it?"

At that moment the intercom buzzed.

"McCoy here."

"Doctor?" It was Uhura's voice and she sounded worried. "I've just had a signal from the landing party. The Captain has just been injured and they request a stretcher party in the transporter room at the double."

"Dammit to hell!" ground out McCoy. "I just knew something of this sort would happen. O.K. Uhura. I'm on my way."

McCoy stabbed at the intercom.

"Medics! Stretcher party to the transporter room at the double."

He swung round and grabbed up his emergency medikit, catching sight of Alix, who had risen to her feet.

"Make preparations for emergency surgery. I don't know what I'm going to find."

Without waiting for a reply, he was out of the door at a run.

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McCoy was still running as he entered the transporter room, with the medics close behind him, trailing the stretcher trolley. As they entered, Scotty was just activating the beam-up.

A small group materialized on the pad. Spock was sitting supporting his unconscious Captain in his arms. The two security guards knelt beside them and slowly stood up as the beam tingled out.

Gently Spock lifted the Captain in his arms and McCoy saw a patch of blood and a tear in Kirk's trousers, just above the right hip. His right leg dangled in a peculiar way. McCoy's stomach lurched.

/What had he got to try and patch up, now? Dear God, would these two never learn to be careful?/

Equally gently, Spock laid Kirk onto the stretcher and watched as McCoy ran a diagnostic scanner over the Captain's inert body.

"O.K. Spock. What happened?"

Spock was as calm and concise as ever, but his worry showed in his eyes, which never left Kirk as he lay on the stretcher.

"We were climbing a low hill to get a clearer view of the terrain. The Captain stepped on a loose rock. He slipped and fell down the cliffside. His fall was broken by a large shrub."

"I suppose we can be grateful that it was only a small hill?" grunted McCoy, sarcastically.

As always, Spock ignored the sarcasm.

"Indeed, Doctor. However, there were no higher hills in the area....."

"If there had been, Jim would have climbed that one instead. I know! Let's get him to Sick Bay."

\* \* \* \* \*

Alix was standing in the middle of the Sick Bay. The few preparations needed were done and now she awaited the arrival of Dr. McCoy and the landing party. The doors swished open, and suddenly the Sick Bay seemed full of people and ordered chaos. Alix had her first glimpse of Captain Kirk, as he was transferred gently from stretcher to diagnostic bed.

She was amazed to see how young he was, not a bit as she had expected him to be. His handsome face was pale and there was a bruise darkening his right temple. Dirt streaks ran down his right cheek and mingled with the blood from a scratch on his chin.

"Alix. Monitor his consciousness levels. I want to know as soon as he begins to come round."

"Yes, Doctor."

Spock hovered near. McCoy glanced up at him.

"It's O.K., Spock. He's going to be alright. This time! He's got concussion and some damage to the sciatic nerve, but nothing that time and a little help from the medical profession won't put right."

McCoy's sharp tone concealed the relief he felt that the injuries Kirk had sustained were not too serious. As he spoke, McCoy cut the fabric from around the wound near Kirk's hip. It revealed the broken off sliver of wood that had penetrated the flesh near the pelvic bone. It was this that had caused the damage to the sciatic nerve.

"He's beginning to come round, Doctor."

"Thank the Lord for that!"

Kirk's eyelids fluttered and opened. He stared upwards in a dazed, disorientated way. He tried to move, but pain shot through his skull, making him groan slightly. He could feel a deep, pulsating pain in his right side.

"Bones?" he said, weakly.

"Right here, Jim. You're going to be alright."

"The Enterprise...?"

"You're in Sick Bay. And your ship is fine."

Kirk's expression relaxed slightly and then a troubled frown appeared.

"Spock? Spock, is he alright?"

"I am here, Captain. Quite uninjured."

And Spock moved to where Kirk could see him. Kirk relaxed visibly.

"What happened?"

"You slipped and fell on the hill we were climbing."

"Did I? I can't seem to remember."

Kirk lifted his hand to his aching head.

"You've got concussion, Jim," said McCoy. "You must have bumped your head as you fell. Your fall was broken by a large bush, but a sliver from a branch has damaged your sciatic nerve."

Kirk's hand moved towards the pain in his side, but McCoy caught it before it reached there.

"Easy, Jim. I haven't taken the sliver out yet. Just hold still while I do it, before it does any more damage."

McCoy sprayed the area with anaesthetic and gently removed the piece of wood from the wound. It revealed a razor sharp point. They were lucky it had done no further damage than it had. McCoy dropped the sliver into a small dish that Alix held out.

"Analysis as soon as you can, Doctor. I don't want Jim having blood poisoning on top of this."

"Yes, Doctor."

And with a last look at the Captain, Alix hurried out of the room. McCoy sprayed a general anti-toxin into the wound and covered it with a light dressing. He gave Kirk an encouraging grin.

"Now, Jim, I want to examine your right leg to see how much damage has been done."

Kirk's eyes widened and he stared up at McCoy.

"Bones! I can't move my leg!"

"Easy now, Jim. It's usual with this sort of injury and it's usually only temporary."

Gently McCoy removed Kirk's right boot and exposed his leg to the knee.

"Now tell me if you feel anything."

Slowly McCoy moved his hand over Kirk's foot. Kirk's face was taut with anxiety.

"There! I can feel something there," he said, as McCoy's fingers ran along the inner sole of his foot.

"Good, Jim, good," murmured McCoy encouragingly. "What about here?"

He ran his hand slowly over the heel and upwards towards the calf. As his fingers reached the calf muscle, Kirk could again register sensation. McCoy smiled slightly.

"You're going to be O.K., Jim. It might take a week or two, but I'm pretty sure you've sustained no permanent injury. You're going to have to spend a few days in bed, with some physiotherapy. Our physiotherapist has sprained her wrist and is out of action for a few days, but Alix will be able to do it for you. We'll soon have you on your feet again."

Kirk gave a slight smile, "Thanks, Bones."

"It's all part of the service," smiled McCoy. "I just wish you wouldn't avail yourself of it so often. Now, we'll just clean you up and get you comfortable. Then you can sleep."

"Thanks, Bones," Kirk answered again, closing his eyes.

Turning to the waiting medics, McCoy said, "Let's get him into bed. He needs rest more than anything right now."

Kirk's eyes opened again and he gave a faint grin. "I believe you're right!"

"He admits I'm right!"

Spock raised an eyebrow. "He is in no position to argue, Doctor."

"Leave the Sick Bay, Spock!"

"Willingly, Doctor. It is not a place I wish to frequent regularly and I am just on my way to the Bridge."

Kirk gave a quiet sigh. Now he knew there was nothing to worry about. Spock and Bones were arguing again.

\* \* \* \* \*

As Alix walked across to the Medical Labs., Christine Chapel came hurriedly through the Sick Bay door, with a worried look on her face. Alix gave her a smile.

"Hello, Chris. I thought you were off duty."

Christine gave a sheepish grin.

"Well, er.....I....yes, I was, but I heard there had been an accident with the landing party. I - I thought I might be of help."

Alix gave her a look of sympathy. She had only been on the ship a week, but already she knew Christine's feelings for Spock. Although her own experiences had not been similar she understood to a certain extent how Chris must feel. She still remembered clearly how she had felt about Bertil Sipinen. She thought her feelings had been returned, until he had told her he was marrying someone else. It had taken her quite a while to recover, her feelings were so bruised and hurt. But she could recall, even now, how long it had taken for her to stop thinking of Bertil's welfare. Somehow,

Chris' look of anxiety and concern had brought back memories to Alix she had thought forgotten.

"How....how is everything?" asked Christine in what she hoped was an easy manner.

"Well, Spock and the security guards are uninjured." Alix could sense the relief that Christine felt at her words.

"And the Captain?"

"Well, he has concussion and some damage to the sciatic nerve caused by this little 'nasty' here." Alix gestured with the dish containing the blood-stained twig.

"I have to run some anti-toxin tests for Leonard. We don't want to take any risks with infection, if it can be avoided."

Christine grimaced at the twig.

"I'll give you a hand."

"I could use the help."

\* \* \* \* \*

While they were running the tests, the two women had an opportunity to talk. Christine was eager to hear of Alix' experiences in the Vulcan hospital where she had worked.

"They are quite different from Earth hospitals. There are no wards. Vulcans, as you know, are very private people and do not like others to see their suffering. So there are just one-bed rooms."

"I think the thing that struck me most was the silence. Most of the patients seemed to spend a lot of their time in healing trances at various levels, so everything was quiet and calm. Even with visitors, the same quiet was always noticeable. If they were husband and wife they would often mind meld. It was a bit uncanny and took a bit of getting used to.

The worst thing was when a patient was coming round from a deep healing trance and needed to be brought back quickly. It seemed to be so violent after all the calm and peace. I don't think I ever got used to it, although I came to accept it".

She gave a grin. "I could hit with the best of them!"

"I know what you mean." said Christine. "I had to do the same for Mr. Spock once. I really did try when he asked me to hit him, but I only managed a couple of feeble smacks. M'Benga's full blooded slaps came as rather a shock to me."

"I know what you mean. How do you get along with Mr. Spock?"

Christine blushed slightly.

"I'd like to be able to say 'very well', but Mr. Spock can be very aloof. He always seems to be at his most Vulcan with me. I sometimes feel that the only person who ever sees his human side is the Captain. Even after his consciousness was housed in my body for a while...."

"What?" Alix was incredulous.

Chris smiled. "Well, we do get to see some pretty odd things out here in deep space."

And she proceeded to tell Alix about the finding of Sargon, Thalassa and Henoch and the events that followed.

"I thought it would be wonderful to be so close to Spock. That we would have some sort of permanent link with one another."

"And you didn't?" questioned Alix in surprise. "I must admit I would have thought so, too."

"No. He raised some pretty formidable barriers that I was unable to overcome. It was like being locked out of my own body. Once he returned to his own body, it was just as if he had never been in mine."

"I am sorry, Chris. It must be very hard for you."

"Oh, I get along." said Christine with a bright, forced smile and then changed the subject.

"I think that just about finishes the tests, Alix."

"Yes. And all of them negative, thank goodness. I'll go and inform Leonard."

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Kirk was woken the next morning by a high-pitched whistling and a series of metallic thuds. His head pounded and his side ached. He tried to sit up to see what the noise was and as he did so, something knocked heavily against the end of the bed, causing his head to pound even more and a wicked stab of pain to tear through his side.

Kirk groaned. /What the devil was going on?/

At that moment an apologetic medic came in.

"I am sorry, Captain," he said, bending down near the foot of Kirk's bed. "The cleaner has been playing up lately. I think its programming is out of sync." He stood up, holding a round metal object with a large, flat pad at its base.

"It's designed to miss all the beds, but somehow it seems to have hit every one this morning." The medic gave a grin. "I'll get the engineers to have a look at it."

"I would be obliged if you would," said Kirk, as he lay back against his pillows, trying to ease his aching head.

A few minutes later the doors swished open to reveal a bright and breezy nurse, carrying the sonic washer.

"Good morning, Captain. And how are you feeling this morning?"

Kirk opened his mouth to reply, but the nurse never gave him a chance.

"I've come to get you clean and comfortable for the day." And she proceeded to run the sonic washer over him, chattering all the while.

She was gentle and efficient and fifteen minutes later, in clean pyjamas, washed and shaved, Kirk felt as if a hurricane had been let loose in the Sick Bay. His head ached abominably and he was decidedly bad tempered. He lay back again and tried to relax, but no sooner had he closed his eyes than McCoy came in, armed with a hypo.

"Well, Jim, how are you feeling this morning?" he said, looking at the diagnostic display.

Kirk eyed him grumpily.

"Not in the best of health, Bones. My head aches, my side hurts and hell, it's noisy in here!"

McCoy laughed.

"Yeah. That cleaner is a damn nuisance. Three times it's gone wrong in the last week."

"And who's the chattering nurse that descended on me?"

"Nurse Farrell. She's a good kid."

"But very wearing first thing in the morning!"

McCoy looked at him sympathetically. "Especially when your head hurts. O.K., I have a couple of things here that will help," and McCoy pressed the hypo against Kirk's arm.

"Now, just relax and rest. Alix will be along later to work on your leg. How does it feel?"

"Kind of odd. Heavy and almost as if it wasn't there. And there are sharp pains shooting down it."

"Well, Alix will help that. The fact that you can feel the pain this morning is a good sign. Try not to worry, Jim. We'll have you out of here before you know it."

Kirk gave a smile. "Thanks, Bones."

McCoy grinned in reply and walked quietly out of the room. Kirk relaxed and the pains eased as the injection that McCoy had given took effect. But a few minutes later the doors opened again and Nurse Farrell came in, carrying his breakfast tray.

"Well now, Captain. Time for breakfast," she said, cheerily.

"I don't want any breakfast, thank you."

"Oh, we can't have that, Captain. You must keep your strength up."

"To hell with my strength," Kirk almost snarled, under his breath.

"Nurse," he said more loudly. "I do not want anything at the moment. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Captain. But I really feel..."

"Nurse! Will you please take that breakfast tray and go!"

Taken aback by his tone, Nurse Farrell left hastily.

It was Alix' luck that she decided to make Captain Kirk's leg therapy her first job of the day. It wasn't ten minutes after Nurse Farrell had left that Alix went into Kirk's room. It was just too much!

"Am I never to be left alone," roared Kirk at the hapless Alix. "I was woken this morning by that damned cleaner and I've been constantly disturbed ever since. What do you want?"

Alix was calm and concise.

"I have come to give you some therapy for your leg."

"Well, I don't want any therapy."

"I'm afraid that is beside the point, Captain. Your leg needs to be worked on and I'm afraid I'm the one who has to do it. I'm sorry that you have been so constantly disturbed."

But Kirk was not to be mollified.

"I suppose I shall have a continuous stream of people in here all day, monitoring my every move!"

"Oh, no, Captain. We all have better things to do with our time."

Kirk's mouth opened and closed. He couldn't think of a thing to say.

"Now," said Alix briskly. "The sooner I start, the sooner I'll be finished and then you can rest."

"I should be so lucky!" said Kirk, sourly.

He sat with his arms crossed and a scowl on his face, as Alix twitched up the cover, rolled up his trouser leg and proceeded with her therapy.

\* \* \* \* \*

The next eight days that Kirk was forced to remain in the Sick Bay were highly uncomfortable ones for Alix. She always seemed to pick a time that caught Kirk in an unco-operative mood. He was never a model patient as McCoy pointed out to her, but this time Kirk seemed to take a perverse delight in being completely unhelpful. He obviously regarded her visits as something he had to endure, and it was true the exercises she did with him, did cause him pain. Alix was sympathetic, but knew the exercises were essential to the full recovery of his leg. Each day saw an improvement and, in spite of Kirk's bad temper, Alix felt a satisfaction in the success of her therapy.

As for Kirk, he always hated being in Sick Bay, and this time, for the first few days, there was a deep nagging doubt that he might not regain the use of his leg, in spite of what McCoy and Alix said to reassure him.

As the concussion cleared and the nerve in his hip began to heal, bringing more feeling to his leg each day, he began to chaff at his lack of ability to get around. He wanted desperately to be back on the Bridge. Reports from Spock and Scotty just weren't enough. Somehow, he always seemed to take his frustrations out on Alix. She seemed to take it all in her stride, although there were a couple of occasions when Kirk had a distinct feeling that she would have liked to tell her Captain exactly what she thought of him.

Altogether it was a relief all round when McCoy gave his permission for Kirk to leave Sick Bay and resume restricted duties.

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Alix entered the 'Beauty Complex' after her shift had ended. She enjoyed coming here, it was so different to the rest of the ship. The starkly beautiful and functional Starship was left behind at the door, and inside it was like a small piece of a luxury spaceliner. At one time or another, everyone, from the Captain down, made their way there for anything from a haircut to what was laughingly called 'a complete overhaul'.

There were saunas, solariums, a jacuzzi, hairstyling and massage parlours, as well as an area set aside for people to relax after using the facilities. It was a well frequented place and difficult to find a time when it more or less empty. And Alix felt she needed to relax in a quiet place; she felt tired and tense. Working in a Starship was not as easy as she had thought it would be. After the smallness of the 'Achilles', the sheer size of the Enterprise had been daunting at first. To make matters even more difficult for her, the first meeting with the Captain had not been as smooth as she would have liked. The week he had spent in Sick Bay had been one of the most difficult that Alix had ever spent. It was the support and sympathy that she had had from Leonard McCoy which had carried her through.

The Captain had returned each day for a further week for physiotherapy, but it was plain he was preoccupied with problems that had occurred with his ship. He was more co-operative, but was almost silent with an abstracted air. Alix did not care to break in on his thoughts with general small talk, so the sessions had been mainly silent affairs.

Then the past few days had been so busy with the running of the regular crew physicals, Alix felt she had not had a moment to call her own. But she did feel that she had met most of the crew and with the general routine, had begun to settle down.

She felt a leisurely sauna at a quiet time followed by a hair styling might relax her for the night. She quickly slipped off her clothes and entered the sauna, carrying the towelling robe she used to relax in afterwards. The sauna cabin was empty apart from one figure lying on the top rack.

Uhura opened one eye. "Hi, Alix!"

"Why, hello, Uhura. I didn't expect to find anyone here just now."

Uhura laughed. "Trying to escape from the madding crowd, eh? Me, too. Mind you, it's always difficult to find a really quiet time."

"I suppose so."

Alix flopped down on a lower rack and gave a long sigh.

"Finding Starship life a bit of a strain, Alix?" Uhura asked.

"Yes, I suppose I am," said Alix with a slight smile. "I love it all the same."

"We all feel that way, I guess. All the hardship, the hard work, the shocks, the worry. If we didn't love it, we wouldn't be here. And it's a good ship! That makes a big difference. Still with a Captain like ours, it just has to be a good ship."

"You get on alright with him, Uhura?" asked Alix.

"Of course," Uhura was emphatic. "He runs a tight ship and a stronger, more understanding Captain you wouldn't find. He's one of a kind. Oh..." Uhura gave a laugh. "You got rather a rough time from him in Sick Bay, didn't you? I'd almost forgotten."

"How did you know?"

"Alix, believe me, nothing, but nothing, goes on aboard this ship without everyone finding out. Anyway, don't take it too much to heart. You've seen Captain Kirk at his worst. Now, the only way is up."

"Ummmmmm," Alix sounded unconvinced.

"The Captain hates it in Sick Bay. He hates to feel that he is not able to command his ship at full efficiency. And let me tell you that there is nothing more important to the Captain than the Enterprise. This ship is his life."

"Not one of the oldtime sailing ship captains, surely?"

"I don't know about that. All I know is that the Enterprise comes first, last and always."

Uhura sat up, the perspiration running in tiny rivulets down her dusky body.

"Well I think I've had enough. I'll have a cold shower and Sandy Harding to style my hair. She always seems to programme it better than I can."

"I plan a hair style too. Shall I see you for a coffee in the lounge, later on?"

"That'll be great." Uhura picked up her robe and left Alix to simmer alone in the sauna.

Half an hour later, both women sat in sea green chairs in the lounge, the stylers in place on their heads.

"I hear the 20th Century Film Society has a new film to show later today," said Uhura.

"20th Century Film Society?" echoed Alix, puzzled.

"Haven't you heard about it?"

Alix shook her head.

"During the middle 20th Century on Earth, they had what they called the Golden Age of Films."

At Alix' blank look, Uhura explained.

"They didn't have videos then, just film or movies that were shown in special movie houses. Well, the Enterprise has it's own club on board. Has about 70 members, I believe. They try and get hold of those old movies. It takes some doing, too. They're so rare now and very difficult to obtain. They have a John Bond movie, just come in with the latest mail. Big event!!" Uhura pondered. "Now, is it John or is it James? Well, anyway, they're showing it tonight. Do you want to come along? If we hurry we should get in for the start."

"It sounds a great idea, but if you don't mind I'll give it a miss this time. I really am tired. Hot milk and an early night is what the Doctor ordered." Alix grinned.

Uhura grinned back.

"Well, you'll have an opportunity to see it again.....and again....and again!! Honestly Alix, they show the films they have so often, it's like a sing-a-long! The audience just joins in with the dialogue."

Both women laughed.

"No wonder a new one is such a big event."

"Think of all the new dialogue they'll have to learn."

They giggled helplessly at the thought and the seeds of a new friendship were sown.

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Alix walked along the corridor on her way to her quarters. The early night she had promised herself was a little later than she had planned, and she was in a hurry to get to her cabin and settle down for the night.

Fate, in the guise of Captain Kirk, had other plans.

He had just come off duty and was on his way to a rec room for a coffee before retiring to his cabin. He saw Alix walking towards him and on the spur of the moment, he stopped her.

"Hello, Dr. Warner."

"Captain." Alix was cool, unsure what his attitude was likely to be.

"How are you settling in on the Enterprise?" His voice was kind, concerned.

"Why.....quite well, thank you."

"Now, that could mean anything at all. Do you think you are going to like it aboard? Or is that going to remain your secret?" He tilted his head slightly, to one side and his charming smile beamed at her.

Alix couldn't help it. She smiled back.

"I love it, already," she replied honestly.

Kirk's smile became even wider.

"Look, will you have a coffee with me? Please?" he added quickly, as he saw Alix begin to shake her head. "I really gave you a rough ride in Sick Bay. Your first week, too. I'm sorry. Have a coffee with me to show there are no hard feelings."

Kirk looked contrite and Alix knew it would be churlish to refuse.

"Thank you. That would be very nice."

And they walked along the corridor together to the nearest rec room. As they approached, they could see a notice on the door: 'Closed. 20th Century Film Society Meeting'.

Kirk swung round to Alix.

"Well, it looks as if we shall have to find another rec room," he paused.

"I wonder what they're showing tonight."

He put the door on manual and opened it a fraction. A voice echoed from inside the rec room.

"Do you expect me to talk, Goldfinger?"

"No, Mr. Bond. I expect you to die!"

Kirk let the door shut.

"Well, I didn't recognise that one," he grinned at Alix.

"Uhura told me they were showing a new James Bond movie this evening," Alix responded, as they entered the turbo lift on their way to another rec room.

"I didn't realise they had a new one. Not to worry, we'll all have ample opportunity to see it. I might have guessed it was a new one - the audience wasn't joining in!"

Alix laughed. She was seeing a completely different Captain to the one who had made her life so uncomfortable during his week in Sick Bay.

They reached the rec room and punched up two coffees. As they seated themselves at a table, Kirk continued the conversation.

"The Film Society is quite a popular and flourishing concern. Most people like to attend at least one showing of a particular film. I enjoy them enormously. Sheer escapism really. But none the worse for that."

"I shall have to make a point of going to one. I hadn't heard of them before Uhura mentioned it."

"I asked them once if they could get me a Clark Gable movie. Someone I once....knew mentioned it."

Alix was intrigued by the play of emotion over Kirk's expressive face. He gave a slight smile as he continued.

"They asked me which one I wanted. Apparently he made quite a considerable number. I had no idea which one, so I just said the most famous one. They came up with something called "Gone with the Wind". Four hours long!! You may well laugh," he said ruefully, as he saw the smile on Alix' face. "Having asked for it, I felt obliged to sit through it. It had been so difficult to even get hold of a copy." Kirk gave another laugh. "I've never wished so hard for an urgent call to the Bridge! And one never came!"

"I take it you didn't like it?" asked Alix.

"I quite enjoyed the first part of it, but it was such a long film and it quickly became maudlin and melodramatic. Not my sort of film at all. I'd like to have given that Scarlett whatever a damn good thrashing!"

Alix laughed out loud.

"I've read the book. And like you I enjoyed the first half enormously, but the deaths did get a little out of hand at the end."

"I didn't realise it was a book. That's one I shall steer clear of." Kirk shook his head with a wry grin. "Do you read much?"

"Not as much as I would like. My mother was a great reader. Our house was full of real books, rather than the usual tapes. There's something really satisfying about holding and reading a real book."

"I agree with you. I have a few in my cabin - not as many as I would like - but they're all well thumbed."

"I think my mother felt the same way. She had books on all sorts of subjects, as well as many novels. She was most interested in ancient Rome."

Kirk shook his head in disbelief.

"My mother was as well. I could never seem to share it somehow. I always felt the Greeks were more interesting, and I have a deep and abiding respect for Alexander the Great. A most fascinating character."

"I've read a little about him and always felt he was a man ahead of his time. But mother was always going on about Nero, Claudius, Tiberius...."

She looked at Kirk, startled, as he spluttered over his coffee.

"Are you alright?" Alix asked, but Kirk merely nodded speechless.

"She got really carried away with it all," continued Alix with a sigh. "Even to the extent of naming me after an Emperor's daughter."

She gave Kirk another look as he began to laugh.

"I don't see what's so funny," she exclaimed.

Kirk tried to keep a straight face.

"What did she call you?" he asked.

"I don't think I shall tell you. You're obviously predisposed to laugh at it," Alix said, indignantly.

"I promise. No laughing!" Kirk held up both his hands.

"O.K." she said, somewhat mollified. "Well, actually, my second name is Octavia."

"And my second name is Tiberius! And if you tell a living soul....." And Kirk grinned at her.

Alix started at him, open-mouthed.

"Really?"

"Really."

Suddenly, they both started to laugh. It was so unexpected, and suddenly Alix felt more relaxed in Kirk's company than she had since she had come aboard the Enterprise.

\* \* \* \* \*

A 48 hour stopover at Starbase 6 for essential supplies to be unloaded aboard the Enterprise, also provided an opportunity for members of the crew to indulge in a little rest and relaxation. Uhura and Alix decided to go on a shopping expedition together, as their shore leave hours coincided.

The two women spent several hours looking around the many and varied shops on the base. The wide variety of merchandise offered for sale was an indication of the many worlds who belonged to the Federation. For Alix, her first stopover since she had come aboard the Enterprise, it was like exploring Aladdin's cave and quite a few of her credits were spent before Uhura called a halt, with a laugh.

"You've spent enough, Alix. Come on, we'll find a place to sit down and have a drink."

She glanced at the time piece on the wall. "We've a couple of hours before we have to be on board again. And I know a quiet, little place where they sell the most gorgeous cream cakes! No good for our figures, Alix! But so delicious."

Uhura and Alix laughed.

"It sounds great Uhura. Take me anywhere away from these shops or I shan't have a credit left. And I'll need an extra room to store it all." She glanced down at the large bag she was carrying, bulging with packages.

Quickly they threaded their way through the crowded walkways and finally turned down a narrow corridor that seemed off the beaten track. There were few people around and Uhura stopped in front of a small oval door.

"Here we are," she said in triumph. "It must be 3 years since I've been here, but I didn't think I had forgotten the way."

The shop was small, with small oval windows and from the doorway came a delicious odour of freshly baked bread.

"It's a long time since I smelled home baked bread," said Alix. "I'd almost forgotten it. Do they really bake their own or is it a synthesized smell?"

"Oh, no. They really bake their own. Bread, pasties, pies, cakes of all sorts. Mainly to order I believe. They don't get that much passing trade. Fresh food is an acquired taste out in space. Come on, let's go in."

The door slid open as they approached and the two women entered. There were several tables with chairs scattered around and a counter along the back of the shop. Everything seemed made of natural materials - wooden chairs and tables, highly polished, straw table mats, linen table cloths. The pictures on the cream coloured walls were of Terran country scenery. There were even fresh flowers on each table.

A small, rotund little man, enveloped in a large white apron came bustling in and ushered them to a table near one of the oval windows.

"How nice to see you. Do sit down." He produced a menu for each of them, hand-written on white card.

"I don't know what to have, Uhura. I think I'll leave the choice to you."

"O.K." Uhura smiled up at the little man. "I think we'll have fresh brewed coffee with cream, and an assortment of your cakes. I, for one, am going to make a pig of myself."

The man grinned at her in delight. "You have obviously been here before?"

"Yes, I have. It was about two years ago, but I still remember your cakes."

It wasn't long before the coffee and a large plate of cream cakes were on the table and the two women relaxed and settled down for a good long talk, that shipboard life rarely allowed them.

Alix bit into a large cream filled chocolate eclair.

"Mmmmmmm," she murmured. "Delicious. I'm glad you remembered this place, Uhura."

Uhura, her mouth full of a large bit of a cream shell, merely nodded her agreement and lifted her eyes to the ceiling.

A little later, the plate of cakes was empty and Uhura and Alix were very conscious that they had eaten too much.

"I feel we ought to go for a jog or something," said Uhura. "But I can't muster the inclination or the energy."

"Neither can I," agreed Alix. "We finally find a place where we can walk or jog and we've eaten so many cakes we can't do it. That's the one thing I miss, being out in space," added Alix reflectively. "Not being able to go for long walks. I used to love walking in the countryside near my home." She gave a reminiscent sigh. "It didn't matter what the weather was like, I'd be out walking on the hills whenever I got a chance."

"You're not sorry you joined Starfleet, though, are you, Alix?" Uhura asked.

"Good heavens, no!" Alix replied at once. "Once I'd been bitten by the space bug there was no looking back."

"When was that? Did you always want to go into space?"

"Oh, no. I've always wanted to be a Doctor. It was a sort of family tradition, really. Mum was a paediatrician, although she only runs a small consultancy now. Dad used to be in medical research and he was a top man in his field. But he loves people and research is a rather lonely occupation. He has always had a deep compassion and caring attitude towards people. I suppose that's how I would sum him up. A caring man. Anyway, he decided to change his job and become a hospital administrator. That's where he met mum. I grew up in a home that was always full of people, mostly involved in the medical profession. Space was rarely mentioned except in the context of a particularly puzzling case, usually when the patient was from another world. I always found them really fascinating. That's why when I grew up, I specialised in alien medicine. It wasn't until I had the opportunity to study on Vulcan and to travel there that space really got to me. That was quite a

trip!" Alix gave a laugh. "In more ways than one. I was 19. My first trip into deep space and I fell in love."

Alix paused with a faraway look in her eyes.

"Who was he?"

"His name was Bertil Sipinen. He was of Swedish descent, tall, blond and terribly handsome. He was going out to the same Vulcan hospital as I was, as a doctor. We were practically inseparable on board ship. I thought it would be the same on Vulcan. And at first it was, but only a month after we arrived he announced his engagement to someone else. I had no inkling at all. It came out of the blue. I was devastated."

Uhura nodded in sympathy.

"Is that the reason you don't want children?"

"Good heavens, no. I got over Bertil long ago. I have two young brothers, 12 and 14 years younger than me. I used to have to help look after them. I don't think I ever had much of a mothering instinct and what little I had, Jamie and Chuck finally quashed. No, I don't want kids. At the moment I have all I could ask for. Doing the work I love and travelling in space with a great group of people. I feel I've found my home. Does that sound strange, Uhura?"

"No, Alix," Uhura gave a smile. "I fully understand how you feel. I think most of us on the Enterprise feel the same. It's part of what makes her so special. And speaking of the Enterprise, I think we had better be going."

Alix called for the bill and the two women began to gather up their belongings. The proprietor came out from behind the counter to usher the women from the shop, when something caught Uhura's eye.

"Hey, look at that!"

From behind the counter had strolled a large tabby cat with beautiful green eyes. Trailing behind her were three kittens, each a miniature edition of their mother.

"Oh, aren't they gorgeous," exclaimed Uhura.

Both women bent down and called to the kittens who came gambolling over to them. The mother sat down and proceeded to clean her whiskers. The proprietor turned to look at the cats.

"Babylonia, you naughty cat. I've told you not to bring the kittens into the shop."

Babylonia continued to clean her whiskers.

"I'm sorry," the proprietor apologised. "She knows they have to go and she parades them before all the customers in the hopes, I suppose, that someone will take them."

The women looked up horrified.

"You're not going to kill them?"

"No, no. Oh, no! It's just that she shouldn't have had this litter. I can't have more than one cat on the premises. And somehow she knows this and is trying to find good homes for them. She'll have to be sterilised after this. Cats are strictly limited on a Starbase, as you must know."

Alix looked at Uhura. "Let's take one."

"What, back to the ship?"

"Why not?"

"Well - they are kind of cute." Uhura picked one up and was lost. She looked at Alix over the kitten's head.

"What would the Captain say?"

"The Captain wouldn't know. I could keep him hidden for a while then Leonard could tell the Captain. Once we're out in space, he wouldn't be able to do anything. I'm sure I could get round Leonard. He's such a sucker for animals. Like you! And me!"

The women grinned at one another and made the arrangements with the proprietor. Then, with the kitten safely in a small cloth bag, they made their way back to the beam up point.

\* \* \* \* \*

Alix was right. It didn't take her long to talk McCoy round. She had dumped the kitten into his hands before he had a chance to protest. The kitten had gazed up at McCoy for a moment with large green eyes and then began to lick his hand. As McCoy stroked him, he began to purr. Like Uhura before him the decision had been made. He looked across at Alix.

"Whatever possessed you to bring him back? The Captain is bound to find out sooner or later."

"Will he really object that much?"

"Well, I don't know. We've never had a cat on board before. You'd better keep him hidden for the time being until I get round to telling Jim." McCoy gave a snort. "Women! They always are suckers for animals! Anyway, I'd better check the little devil over. I don't want to have to turn my Sick Bay into a home for sick cats. What are you going to call him?"

"Tiberius! But I'll call him 'Tibs' for short," said Alix with a mischievous grin.

McCoy shook his head. "How did you find out?"

"The Captain told me."

"He what? Well, that's a surprise. It's something he likes to keep quiet about."

"I can understand better than you, why he feels that way."

McCoy looked puzzled.

"Now, Leonard, you've seen my file. You know what my full name is."

Now it was McCoy's turn to grin.

"Oh yeah. I almost forgot. Alexandra Octavia Warner. God, what a mouthful. I wonder at some parents' choice in names!"

Alix gave a grin.

"Well, my cat is going to be called Tiberius!"

McCoy looked resigned.

"On your head be it. I wouldn't be in your shoes when the Captain finds out."

They both bent over the kitten, chuckling.

\* \* \* \* \*

But Tiberius wasn't the only thing that had been carried aboard the Enterprise from Starbase 6. It took several weeks to show itself and it was infinitely more lethal than Tiberius.

For the Bridge crew it was a quiet watch. They were in one of the less frequented areas of the galaxy where very little seemed to happen, but where one always had to be on the alert for the unexpected.

Sulu and Chekov were discussing the film that had been shown the night before by the 20th Century Film Society - "The Sea Hawk".

"You know that Queen Elizabeth I was a Russian, don't you?" asked Chekov.

"How d'you make that out?" queried Sulu.

"Sister to the Czar of Russia, of course. If things had gone differently all English people would be speaking Russian now. And a lot better for it," he concluded with a grin.

"You're mad," said Sulu, returning his grin. "It was a good film though. Errol Flynn can certainly use a sword." And Sulu made a few passes in the air with an imaginary sword.

"Now who's mad?" queried Chekov.

The two men continued to grin, but returned their attention to the consoles in front of them.

"Strike! Strike for the shores of Dover!" Sulu began to sing softly. It was the song from "The Sea Hawk." And Sulu sang a little louder as he warmed to the theme.

"Mr. Sulu," came the amused voice from the Command Chair. "We are not striking for Dover, nor are we likely to. Kindly keep your mind on the job."

"Sorry, Captain." Sulu gave Chekov a sheepish grin.

Kirk swung round at a slight sound from the Science Console. Spock was sitting in his chair, his hand pressed to his temple.

"Mr. Spock? Are you alright?" There was concern in Kirk's voice.

"Yes, Captain. A slight dizziness which I'm sure will pass in a moment." Spock did not look round as he spoke. The nauseous feeling in his stomach increased and the Bridge seemed to be whirling in a blurr before his eyes.

Kirk came up to Spock, looking into his face. His First Officer always had a greenish hue to his skin, but his pallor now was not normal. It was so unusual for Spock to admit to even a momentary dizziness that Kirk knew Spock was feeling much worse than he admitted. He certainly didn't look well.

"Report to Sick Bay, Mr. Spock. And that's an order!"

"Yes, sir."

Kirk was surprised at his quick acquiescence. Spock stood up, swaying slightly. He grabbed the back of the chair for support as the Bridge tilted and swung before his eyes. A sheen of perspiration appeared on his face.

"Can you make it to Sick Bay, Spock? Or shall I call the medics?"

"I shall be quite alright, Captain," and Spock made his way carefully to the turbo-lift.

Kirk continued to stare after him. He thumbed the intercom button.

"Kirk to Sick Bay."

"McCoy here."

"Spock is on his way to you. He doesn't look at all well. Keep me posted."

"Yes, Captain."

Kirk broke the connection and returned thoughtfully to his chair. There was no doubt about it, the Vulcan was ill. But what could it be? Kirk continued with the watch, but there was a nagging worry at the back of his mind.

\* \* \* \* \*

Down in Sick Bay, McCoy was just completing his first examination of Spock and he had a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach. He hoped to God he was wrong and it wasn't what he thought it was. Deep in thought he pressed the intercom and asked Alix to join him. It took a few minutes for Alix to arrive.

"Anything wrong, Leonard?"

"I'd like you to examine Spock here and give me your diagnosis."

"What, Doctor? Doubting your own ability at last?" came the caustic tone of Spock.

But McCoy was too worried to respond to Spock's remark.

"I just want a second opinion."

"I should be grateful if you would bring me a bowl before you do anything else, as I fear I am going to be sick."

Spock spoke in a very matter-of-fact way, but neither doctor was deceived. Alix ran for the bowl and McCoy came to stand close to the bed. The vomiting was prolonged and left him shaking and sweating. Gently McCoy laid him back on the bed and Alix bathed his face.

Spock lay quietly as Alix made her examination. Her face became serious. Spock looked at her.

"You would not make a very good poker player, Dr. Warner. It's serious?"

Alix managed a smile.

"Can't say yet, for sure, Mr. Spock. We'll have to run some tests. The best thing you can do, is lie quietly and try and relax."

Spock merely raised his eyebrow, as the two doctors left.

The doors slid shut and McCoy turned to Alix.

"Well, what are you thinking?"

"I'm thinking morphonucleitis," Alix said quietly.

McCoy looked at the floor, despair on his face.

"That's what I think too."



"We'll have to run some more tests to be absolutely sure. Where in hell did he pick it up?"

"Starbase 6. Has to be. The incubation period ties in. Have you seen cases before, Alix?"

"Yes, while I was on Vulcan."

"Did they live?"

"One did. Two died," said Alix, in a low voice.

McCoy's shoulders sagged. "I'd better get Jim down here. He's got to be told."

\* \* \* \* \*

The doors slid open and Kirk came in at the double.

"O.K. Bones. Let's have it."

"Morphonuclitis."

"What in hell is that?"

"It's the Vulcan equivalent of poliomyelitis," Alix replied.

"God." Kirk sank down onto the edge of McCoy's desk and crossed his arms. He stared at the floor for a moment.

Then he lifted his head. "Prognosis?"

"Not too good, Jim. A lot depends on how severely he has it and how well he can self heal."

Alix continued, "For the first few days he will be vomiting, with a high fever, sore throat, painful limbs. The paralysis comes later, sometimes mildly, sometimes severely. The trouble is that by then the body is weak, especially if his heart and lungs are affected."

"Is there no medication you can give him?"

"Only to alleviate the symptoms a little. Tranquilizers, painkillers." McCoy spoke in a low voice. "We can only wait and see."

Kirk grabbed McCoy's arm in a vice like grip.

"Do you mean we just have to watch Spock suffer and we can do nothing to help him?"

"Jim, we'll do everything we can. Alix has had experience of the disease while she was on Vulcan. We're lucky to have her."

Kirk swung round to face her. "What are his chances?"

There was tautness in Kirk's face, an overpowering anxiety that he refused to give way to. Alix looked him squarely in the eyes. It was hard to have to tell this man the truth. He obviously cared so much; but she knew she could do no other.

"He has about a 60% chance of survival."

The words were spoken quietly and firmly and Kirk could feel the sympathy behind her words as she continued.

"It might be higher - his Terran half might make a difference, but it's one I cannot predict. I have only cared for full Vulcans."

"And if he survives?"

"The chances are high that he will be disabled in some way." Alix' heart was wrung with compassion as she saw the look on Kirk's face. "In medicine Captain, things are never certain. Mr. Spock might well have strengths I know nothing about."

Kirk gave her a searching look. "O.K. Can I see him?"

"Of course, Jim," McCoy answered. "He knows what the situation is. He's had a mild sedative, but not enough to send him to sleep. He'd probably welcome your company." He paused. "Jim, we'll do what we can."

Kirk gave a slight smile. "I know, Bones. Thanks."

\* \* \* \* \*

The next two weeks were harrowing for everyone. Especially for Spock, as each day the progression of the illness made itself felt. The vomiting

gradually ceased, but the pain increased in his head and neck, and then his limbs developed uncontrollable tremors, the forerunners of paralysis. He found difficulty in raising his head, and his legs and arms felt weak and heavy. Through it all, Spock maintained an unperturbable demeanour, apparently ignoring the progressive reliance he had to place in others.

Christine Chapel was rarely out of Sick Bay. In Spock's room, she presented a calm and cheery face, nursing Spock with the minimum of fuss. But more than once Alix found her shedding quiet tears in a corner where she thought she could not be seen. There was nothing Alix could say to reassure her.

For Alix and McCoy it was a time of great worry, as they read any papers on the illness they could get their hands on. They ran innumerable tests, tried various medications and constantly monitored Spock's condition. One or other of them were always on duty, sometimes both. But still Spock deteriorated. They felt helpless, but refused to stop fighting.

And Kirk. His deep concern and worry for Spock showed in small ways. Seeing him perform his duties as a Starship Captain, no-one would guess his friend and First Officer was seriously ill. But each morning, and after his day's watch on the Bridge was finished, he would call in for a cheery word with Spock. But there were lines of strain around his mouth and his frequent smiles rarely reached his eyes.

He kept everyone going with his encouragement and his belief that Spock would recover. But sometimes, Alix would surprise an unguarded look in his eyes which betrayed his surface optimism. He was desperately worried about Spock and Alix knew he kept a tight rein on his movements to prevent himself being constantly in the Sick Bay or on the intercom to check on Spock's progress.

\* \* \* \* \*

Kirk prowled the night darkened ship, he couldn't seem to rest or sleep tonight. Usually a quiet walk along the corridors of the Enterprise, listening to the almost silent humming of her engines and he was able to fall into an untroubled sleep - but not tonight. And Kirk knew why. His First Officer still lay in Sick Bay, his limbs heavy and useless, unable to feed himself or look after himself in any way.

Kirk could imagine the humiliation that Spock must feel - he had always been such a private person. But he bore it all with stoicism. Kirk was glad that so far none of Spock's vital organs had been affected and Bones and Alix seemed to think that the paralysis would spread no further. But would he get better? Kirk's stomach churned at the thought of life aboard the Enterprise without Spock; and what was worse, knowing that Spock was facing a living death. Kirk shook his head. That was not going to happen!!

Without knowing quite how, Kirk found himself outside the Sick Bay. Three a.m. was not a good time for visiting, but Kirk couldn't resist going in. He found Alix sitting quietly watching the viewer, reading a tape that had recently been received from Vulcan. She looked up as the door swished open.

"Why, hello, Captain."

"Hi, Alix. Sorry to intrude on you at this time of night." He gave a rueful smile. "Couldn't sleep."

Alix gave him a warm answering smile. "I understand. There's no change in Spock's condition. But at least he seems to be stabilised. We'll just have to wait and see if he can pull himself out of it."

"Is there nothing we can do?"

"I only wish there were." Alix pushed the hair back from her eyes tiredly. "Do you want a coffee?"

"That would be welcome. Let me get them."

Kirk crossed to the dispenser and punched up two hot, black coffees. He carried them across to the viewer and pulling up a chair, sat down beside her.

"What have you got there?"

Alix sipped her coffee. "Nothing of any real help to us. It seems that in the majority of cases of those who have recovered, the patients have mind melded with someone close to them. The report says that it is difficult to assess exactly how it helped, but felt that this aspect needed further study," she sighed. "It's not of any real help. It's so difficult just to stand helplessly by and not be able to do anything."

Kirk laid a hand on her arm.

"I know you and Bones are doing all you can." He looked around.

"Is McCoy sleeping at last?"

Alix managed a smile.

"Yes, I finally persuaded him he had to rest or he would be joining Spock in Sick Bay," she looked at her watch. "He's been sleeping about five hours now."

"He needs it. You look tired too. When did you sleep last?"

"I had several hours last night, Sir." Alix replied. "And as a doctor, may I enquire when you last had some sleep?"

Kirk had the grace to blush, slightly.

"Oh, I got an hour or so last night, too. Without Spock, there's quite a lot of extra work. And it's got to be done sometime."

"And it's hard to sleep when you're worried." Alix smiled in sympathy.

"What do you really think, Alix? Is he going to make it?"

"Yes, Captain. I'm sure he's going to live. His heart and lungs have not been affected, and the paralysis seems to have limited itself mainly to his limbs. What worries me is if he has the ability to heal himself. He must be desperately tired. I feel that this is the time when a mind meld would be most beneficial, if he had someone to meld with."

Kirk pulled at his lip, got up and walked across the room. He turned and looked at Alix.

"Can I go in and see him?"

"Of course."

Quietly they both entered the room that Spock was in. Kirk silently stood at the foot of the bed. Watching Spock as he lay asleep, it was almost possible to believe there was nothing wrong with him. Kirk could see by the monitor screen that Spock's condition had stabilised. He looked across at Alix as she stood near the head of the bed, her fingers feeling for Spock's pulse.

"Alix!" Kirk spoke suddenly. "I'm going to try and meld with Spock."

"What!?" Alix could hardly believe her ears. "The Vulcan mind meld is something only achieved properly between Vulcans."

"Spock has melded with me on several occasions. He has also melded with others."

"But that's not the same thing as a healing meld. I can't let you do it, Captain."

"I'm not taking no for an answer Alix. I know, somehow, that it will work for Spock and I. He is the nearest I have to a brother since Sam died and I'm damned sure we're closer than Sam and I ever were. I've got to try and help him."

Alix looked at Spock and then at Kirk, helplessly.

"Captain, please. I can't guarantee anything. I just don't know."

"Will it do him any harm?"

Alix looked confused. "I - I don't know. I don't think so. But I don't know what effect it will have on you."

"Don't worry about me. It's Spock we're concerned with."

"Your welfare is also my responsibility. I just can't..."

"Dammit, Alix. You've got to let me try! He's my First Officer and he's my friend. I just can't leave him like this and not even try!"

Kirk's voice rose and Spock's eyes opened as the sound of his Captain's voice penetrated his slumber.

"Captain?" Spock's voice was low and husky.

Immediately, Kirk was at his side, clasping one hand in both of his.

"Spock. Listen to me. Alix has read that patients suffering from morphonuclitis have been helped by molding with someone close to them. Alix also thinks that this would be a beneficial time to try."

"Captain....."

Alix made to speak, but a look from Kirk silenced her.

"Are you willing to try, Spock?"

"I don't know, Captain. I am unwilling to put you at risk unnecessarily."

"I will decide that, Spock."

He looked warningly at Alix, who said nothing.

"I am unable to place my fingers in the correct position to meld, Jim."

"Don't worry about that, Spock. I know where they have to be and I can place them correctly. Alix will hold them in place for you."

Alix opened her mouth to speak and then closed it again. There was no way she could overrule the Captain now. And her medical curiosity was aroused. Quietly she walked around to Kirk's side of the bed.

Calmly and gently Kirk placed Spock's fingers across his face and gestured for Alix to hold them in place. Then Kirk placed his fingers on Spock's face and concentrated.

Slowly, but surely, Kirk's mind entered Spock's.

//I'm so tired, Jim. So very tired//

//Lean on me, Spock, take my strength. Let me support you. Let me help//

\* \* \* \* \*

For many minutes Alix watched almost in awe. Something beyond her experience was taking place and she was at a loss to describe what was happening. But she became aware that Kirk's face was getting paler and sweat was beginning to run down his face. She could see him trembling slightly and her worries began to overwhelm her. She could do nothing, not even call McCoy!

And then, Spock's fingers began to slip on Kirk's face. Alix gently let his hand slide down onto the bed. Already his life signs looked stronger.

But Kirk hadn't moved. Gently she removed his hand from Spock's face and almost immediately his legs began to buckle. Quickly she managed to help him to the next bed. He collapsed onto it, his eyes closed. She swung his legs up onto the bed and covered him with a blanket. He was white and sweating and seemed to be shaking all over. She turned the diagnostic panel on and wasn't surprised when it registered that Kirk was suffering from extreme exhaustion.

It was an hour or so later that McCoy appeared in the Sick Bay to find Alix sitting tensely beside Spock's bed.

"What's happened?" he questioned.

Then he saw Kirk on the other bed.

"Good God! What's been going on while I've been asleep?"

Quickly Alix told him what had happened, adding, "I can't really believe it happened, but just look at those signs," and she gestured at the panel over Spock's bed. "I think the Captain must have given all he could and more. It certainly helped Mr. Spock. But the Captain is very weak."

"Yeah, I can see that," grunted McCoy, moving to Kirk's bed. "Why didn't you call me?"

"There wasn't time. Captain Kirk just went ahead with it. There was nothing I could do to stop him."

"Yeah, that sounds like Jim alright." He looked at the diagnostic panel above Kirk's head. "There's not a lot we can do until he wakes. Sleep is the best thing for him at the moment."

He turned back to Spock. "How long has he been like this?"

Alix looked at her watch.

"Nearly an hour now. We'll just have to sit and wait."

McCoy pulled up a chair and joined Alix in her vigil.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was several hours later that Spock began to come out of the healing trance. Immediately, McCoy jerked him to a sitting position and delivered several remarkably hard slaps to each side of Spock's face.

Alix gasped. She would never get used to this violent end to the healing trance. Her eyes widened with shock as Spock's hand came up and held McCoy's wrist. The movement was weak, but it was deliberate.

"Thank you, Doctor McCoy. That is quite sufficient."

"You can move your arms, Spock!" was McCoy's delighted comment.

"So it would seem, Doctor. I also have use of my legs again."

He swung them over the side of the bed. "I feel decidedly weak, but that will pass."

"Spock!" A low, but decidedly delighted voice came from the next bed.

They all turned to look at the Captain, who lay smiling and watching Spock's movements.

"Jim, how are you feeling?" McCoy was immediately at his side.

Kirk gave a light wave of his hand.

"Apart from feeling as if I could sleep for a week, I feel fine." He looked across at Spock. "And you Spock?"

"Very well, Captain. It will be only a matter of two days before I am fully recovered."

Spock's voice was deep and his and Kirk's eyes met and locked. There was no further need of words. That look said it all, for both of them.

\* \* \* \* \*

Both men were confined to Sick Bay the following day. Spock for rest and physiotherapy and Kirk for complete rest. If either had had any say in the matter, both would have been on the Bridge. But McCoy overruled them both - two days at least, in Sick Bay.

For Spock, it meant several workouts during the day with the physiotherapist. Kirk was kept as quiet as possible and encouraged to sleep, which he did for most of the day. However, late afternoon he woke to find Spock awake in the bed next to him and two large green eyes surveying him from the end of the bed.

"What is that?"

"That, Captain, is a cat."

"I damn well know it's a cat, Spock. What I mean is, what is it doing on my ship? Whose is it?"

"Unknown, Captain. I certainly haven't seen the cat since I've been in Sick Bay."

As Kirk sat up, the cat slowly walked up the bed and sat near his elbow, still staring at Kirk with his large green eyes glowing. Kirk put out his hand and began to scratch him behind the ears. The cat began to purr.

"Well, he's obviously tame, someone must have brought him aboard."

At that moment Alix entered the room quietly, looking somewhat flustered. She stopped aghast when she saw Tibs sitting on the Captain's bed.

Kirk looked at her.

"Well, Dr. Warner?" he questioned.

"Um..... er....."

"You seem at a loss for words. Does the cat belong to you?"

"Yes, sir. I'm afraid he does. I'm sorry. This is the first time he has ever come in here."

"And I sincerely hope the last." Kirk's voice was stern.

But at the stricken look on Alix's face Kirk relented. He gave her a smile.

"I don't mind on the ship. But you should have let me know. Just make sure you keep him out of Sick Bay."

"Yes, Captain. Tibs, come here. At once."

The cat jumped off the bed and padded slowly across to Alix. Swiftly she picked him up and tucked him under her arm.

"By the way," said Kirk, as Alix was about to leave the room. "What did you call him?"

"I believe he answered to the name of Tibs." Spock answered before Alix had a chance to reply.

"Tibs, eh?" Kirk gave Alix a strange look. "Is that short for anything?" Alix' courage failed her.

"No, Captain," she gulped. "Just Tibs."

And clutching the cat, she hastily left the room before any more awkward questions came her way.

\* \* \* \* \*

Alix looked at her reflection in the mirror, not displeased with her appearance. She was no great beauty, that was for sure. Nose a little too large, mouth a little too wide, but she knew that this evening she looked her best. Her dark wavy hair gleamed softly in the light, curving to her shoulders and framing her face. Her softly clinging dress accentuated her good figure and the silvery pink of the fabric flattered her face and caused her eyes to shine like grey crystal.

Giving one last pat to her hair, she picked up the present from the table and with a slight smile of anticipation she headed for the door.

Several months had passed since Spock's illness and it was McCoy's birthday. For the past two weeks Alix, Chris and McCoy had been planning a party to celebrate the occasion. Soft lights and sweet music, McCoy had called for, with plenty of food and drink. Earlier in the day, Alix and Chris had spent several hours preparing one of the smaller rec rooms for this evening's event. They had been helped by several of the Sick Bay staff, but McCoy had not been allowed near the room. Although he tried to pass all the fuss off, Alix knew he was pleased by the amount of excitement that the party was generating. It was obvious that Dr. Leonard McCoy was a very popular man aboard the Enterprise.

To Alix' surprise even Mr. Spock had agreed to look in for a while. During his illness, Alix had become fully aware of just how close Kirk, Spock and McCoy were. She had never forgotten the scene in the Sick Bay when Spock had come out of the healing trance. So little had been said, but so much was understood without the need for words. She had been and still was impressed by the deep caring they all showed for one another in subtle, unobvious ways. Somehow, knowing how much they cared for one another had strengthened her own feelings towards the three men. She had never known such friendships before and began to understand a little why the Enterprise was such a special ship.

Alix and Chris entered the rec room at about the same time, the first to arrive, as they had planned. Everything was in readiness for the party. Their work during the day had transformed the room from a functional crew rest room into a dimly lit night club atmosphere. Chris turned the music on and the atmosphere was complete.

At that moment, McCoy entered the room, a wide grin on his face. He looked different from his usual work-a-day self. Gone was the blue top and black trousers. Instead, he wore a lime green silk shirt, open at the neck and slim fitting brown trousers.

"My two favourite girls," he said, giving them both a hug. They responded by giving him a birthday kiss on the cheek and handing him his gifts.

"You shouldn't have," McCoy said, with another grin. "But I'm glad you did. Shall I open them now or later?"

Before they had a chance to reply, the first guests started to arrive and the gifts were put reluctantly down onto the table to be opened later. All through the evening the pile of gifts grew and that night McCoy had a whale of a time opening them up.

The room quickly filled and Alix was suddenly aware of how many friends she had made during her months on the Enterprise. When she wasn't talking, she was dancing and the hours seemed to fly by.

More and more people arrived, certainly more than were invited, but nobody minded. McCoy was having a ball and must have danced with every woman in the room at least twice. Captain Kirk arrived, still in uniform, straight from the Bridge. He was immediately ployed with drinks and became the centre of a circle of people. Even so, it wasn't too long before he too, was dancing. It was turning into quite a party.

Alix spied Mr. Spock standing on the fringe, watching the proceedings with an expressionless face. She walked across to him, unperturbed by the slightly aloof manner he projected.

"I'm pleased to see you here, Mr. Spock."

"Indeed, Dr. Warner? I do not feel that my presence is contributing to the festivities."

"Nevertheless, I know that Dr. McCoy is pleased that you decided to come."

Spock raised an eyebrow, but made no reply.

Knowing the Vulcan aversion to small talk, Alix asked him about some tests that he was running for the Medical Section and soon they were deep in a technical discussion about the possible results.

"Sorry to interrupt, Mr. Spock," said a voice, "But I wondered whether Dr. Warner might care to dance?" Lt. Kyle looked from one to the other with a smile.

"Of course. I was just leaving."

Before Alix could reply, Spock had bowed slightly and paced slowly from the room.

"Well, I know he doesn't like these affairs," said Lt. Kyle unapologetically. "In fact, I've never known him stay as long as this. Now, how about that dance?"

Alix shrugged her shoulders. She felt sorry that Spock had left, but she couldn't go and forcibly drag him back. She smiled at Kyle.

"O.K., I'd love to."

For the next hour Alix was swept around the floor by various partners, including McCoy. At last, breathless and a little tired, she got herself a drink and headed for a dark, quiet corner, where she could relax in an armchair on her own for a few minutes. Happily she watched the people dancing, talking, flirting. Drink had been flowing and everyone seemed to be in a warm, mellow mood. Alix sighed in content. How lucky she was to be on such a ship. To think that at first she had been apprehensive about accepting the position. She watched McCoy as he stood in a small circle of friends, talking and laughing, his arm hung casually over a pretty yeoman's shoulder. What a delightful man he was.

On the other side of the room from McCoy, the Captain too, was surveying the room. It was a good party, he thought. After his shift had ended, there was nothing he felt less like doing than attending a party, but not wishing to disappoint Bones he had come anyway. Now he was glad he had made the effort. He always enjoyed meeting his crew on a social level. To be the Captain and be able to mix socially, while still commanding the respect he had to have, was a difficult line to walk, but it was something he had learned early. He could never really relax on these occasions, but he always managed to enjoy himself in spite of this.

Now, alone for a moment, his glance travelled around the room, seeking a quiet place to sit for a few moments before finally leaving the party. He saw Alix' face, her eyes shining like stars as she watched the party, unaware that she herself was being watched. Almost before he was aware of what he was doing, he was threading his way through the dancers to her side.

"Hi, mind if I join you?" he asked with a flash of his famous smile.

Delighted, for what reason Alix didn't stop to identify, she smiled.

"Of course, Captain. Are you escaping from the dancing, too?"

Casually, Kirk sat on the arm of Alix' chair and laid his arm along the top.

"And the heat...and the noise...and the chatter!!"

He laughed down at her. As he looked into Alix' grey eyes he realised,

perhaps for the first time, what an attractive woman she was. A warmth of personality emanated from her and the enjoyment of the evening showed in her face.

She looked up into Kirk's downturned hazel eyes. It was strange, she had never realised before what charisma this man possessed. He was handsome, certainly, but it went beyond just that.

For a moment, a timeless second, they gazed deep into each others eyes, each hesitant about what they read there. Longing to say what could not be put into words, Kirk cleared his throat quickly. "Can I get you a drink, Alix?"

Unconsciously, she realised that it was the first time he had called her by her first name. She continued to stare up at him. He smiled slightly.

"Alix, do you want another drink?"

It seemed to Alix that she had been in another world, alone with the Captain and she came back with a start as he repeated the question.

"Er...no...no, thank you." She gave a little laugh to cover her feeling of some embarrassment. "I think I have had quite enough. I don't want a hangover in the morning." She shook her head, her hair brushing his hand and her perfume reaching his nostrils.

"Is that likely?" Kirk asked, bending a little closer.

"If I had any more, I think it would. At the moment I feel just pleasantly mellow."

"Well, that makes two of us."

And they smiled at one another.

For the next half an hour they continued to talk quietly to one another and McCoy seeing them from across the room, allowed himself a private grin. There was no mistaking the signs those two were giving off! Subtle body language could speak louder than words. He was not surprised to see that Kirk and Alix had gone the next time he looked in their direction.

Kirk and Alix walked slowly along the darkened corridors of the Enterprise on their way to the observation deck.

"I love to walk on my ship at this time of night," said Kirk, softly.

"I feel more aware of her, somehow. Almost an entity that I can communicate with." He looked quizzically at Alix. "Does that sound ridiculous to you?"

Alix shook her head, as she looked at him, seeing a side of him she had never seen before.

"No," she answered quietly. "Not ridiculous at all. She's a very special ship. Perhaps your feeling for her is part of the reason why."

"I'd like to think so. Have you been to the observation deck before?"

"No, I haven't. Leonard is always threatening to show me 'the star filled wonders of space', as he laughingly puts it. But we just haven't got around to it," she laughed. "Life can be very busy on a Starship, can't it?"

Kirk laughed with her.

"Yeah. I think I could go along with that."

As they stepped onto the observation deck, Kirk activated the shutter, which silently slid back, revealing indeed, 'the star filled wonders of space'. Alix was silent, gazing in awe at the multitude of stars, shining clear and bright and filling the deck with soft radiance.

They were both silent for several minutes as they watched the stars move slowly through the heavens. Each was acutely aware of the other, and at last Kirk placed his hand hesitantly on Alix' shoulder, turning her slightly to face him.

"Alix?"

At his touch, a shiver of pleasure ran through her and as she turned, she reached her hand up to touch his face. For a few seconds, they stood like statues carved from silver starlight. Then slowly Kirk bent to kiss Alix on the lips. She closed her eyes against the dizzying sensation that swept through her. Her lips opened and her arms went round his neck.

Kirk kissed her, wanting never to let go. He could feel her body, pressed to his, trembling slightly as she returned the kisses. For long moments they



belonged only to each other. The ship, the stars, space, nothing existed for them, but each other. Then rather breathlessly, Kirk drew away slightly, still holding Alix in his arms. He looked down at her.

"Shall we go to my cabin?" he asked. He spoke softly, reluctant to break the spell that was over them.

Alix nodded, unable to find her voice and she laid her head against his, drinking in the masculine smell of his body. His lips brushed her hair and his desire for her was strong. Reluctantly they drew apart and walked side by side to the turbo lift. Close but not touching, they made their way to Kirk's cabin.

\* \* \* \* \*

Kirk kissed her quickly on the cheek, as the door shut behind them. He gave her a reassuring smile, as he walked over to the intercom.

"Kirk to Bridge."

"Bridge here, sir."

"Anything to report?"

"No, sir. Everything quiet."

"Very good. I shall be in my cabin. Kirk out."

Turning from the intercom, he slowly let his eyes wander over Alix, desire for her apparent in his face. She hadn't moved and was still standing by the door, watching him as he moved across the room towards her. He placed his hands on her shoulders, a smile of pleasure lighting up his face.

"Now, where were we?"

Alix looked deep into his eyes, her desire for him equalling his for her.

"Remind me," she said, softly.

Kirk's arms went round her and gently he drew her close. His lips found hers and again they were locked together in a timeless place meant only for the two of them. Their bodies pressed close together, trembled with desire. Both were reluctant to lose this cherished moment and almost unable to quite understand how it came about.

Without releasing her, Kirk's hands began to explore Alix' body. Alix closed her eyes, as sensations of delight began to pour over her. He sought for the fastening of her gown and slowly eased the silken folds from her body, dropping it in a heap on the floor.

"You're beautiful, Alix." Kirk murmured, his lips against her hair. He sat down on the bed and pulling her towards him, he cradled her in his arms. She smiled at him, kissing his eyes, his nose, his mouth. She slipped her hands beneath the gold tunic, running her fingers provocatively over his chest. Quickly, Kirk pulled the tunic off and it joined Alix' dress on the floor.

Slowly and thoroughly Kirk kissed Alix as she had never been kissed before. For them both, their world of the Enterprise ceased to exist. Deep fulfilment and satisfaction and a sweet, wild passion neither had experienced before came to both of them. It was a night neither of them would forget.

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Alix awoke several hours later. Kirk's head was cradled into her shoulder and his arm lay heavily across her body. For a few moments she gazed at his sleeping face. She remembered vividly the events of the night. Never had she been so overwhelmed, her passions so aroused, as by the man who was Jim Kirk. But something else had awoken too. Something she was afraid to put a name to. There could be no deep involvement. As Captain, he couldn't afford the luxury, even if he felt the same as she. She must stop her feelings before they truly started. She must not allow a repetition of the night's events to occur. A man such as Kirk might have anyone he chose; and as Captain 'one night stands' were probably all he indulged in aboard ship. Whatever way, she stood to be the loser.

She looked down at Kirk again and gently pushed back the lock of hair dropping over his forehead. Just for a few moments she allowed herself the luxury of gazing at him. Then she quickly slipped from his embrace. He turned and murmured in his sleep. Quickly she dressed, trying to bring some sort of order to her hair and face. Then she returned to the bed and sitting on the edge, she shook Kirk gently.

His eyes opened and focussed on her face and he smiled such a sweet smile that Alix' heart turned over.

"Hi," he murmured.

"Jim, I must go. It won't be long before the shift changes."

Kirk sat up and put his arms round her.

"Just one more kiss." And without waiting for an answer he kissed her fully on the mouth.

Alix could feel her defences falling and quickly pulled away from him.

"I really must go."

Kirk released her, slightly puzzled.

"Good night, Alix," he said softly.

Alix, absolutely speechless, hurried from the cabin.

After she had gone, Kirk lay reflectively in bed. What a wonderful night. He couldn't believe it had really happened. Alix had been everything he had ever wanted in a woman, almost as if she had been made especially for him.

Kirk sat up in bed abruptly. No! It was no use to think like that. And what about the way she had left him? It was almost as if she didn't want to stay. Perhaps it had not been for her what it had been for him. Kirk sighed slightly. It was no use going over it all again, there was only one mistress in his life and that was the Enterprise. He would never give her up. He didn't really want it any other way. But just occasionally...temptation could be very sweet.

With a smile, he flung the cover back and headed for the shower. A new day was just beginning on the Enterprise and her Captain was eager to be back on the Bridge.

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In the months that followed, Alix would sometimes wonder what had made her go to Kirk's cabin that night. At first it had been hard to stop thinking of him and what had happened, but as time went by, she had pushed the memories to the back of her mind. Her life was full and busy on the Enterprise. And as for her relationship with Kirk, it was as if that night had never happened. She saw him occasionally, mainly in the line of duty and he was friendly enough, but it was also obvious that he was completely involved in what he wanted and did best - commanding a starship. And there was no doubt that what Uhura had said was true. He was one of a kind.

And so life aboard the Enterprise went on, it's crew members' lives continuing with the ups and downs, scares and alarms, good times and bad, that went with life on a starship.

It was unfortunate for Alix that she went down with 'flu just as the Enterprise entered the Tellon Star System to pick up Petri of Troyius and Elaan, the Dohlman of Elas. All the excitement, worry and work to find the antidote for Elaan's tears were, perforce, relayed to her second-hand.

It was on her third day in bed that Uhura came to visit her after her shift had ended for the day and she was obviously very put out.

"Whatever's happened, Uhura?" Alix questioned, seeing the look of anger on her friend's face.

"The Dohlman of Elas," Uhura almost spat out the name. "A more arrogant, unpleasant bitch it has never been my misfortune to come into contact with. And I haven't even met her yet. Do you know, she has actually stabbed Petri? Stabbed him in the back?"

"Stabbed him?" Alix was amazed. "Is he alright? How bad is it?"

"Bad enough! Dr. McCoy says he'll be in Sick Bay at least a week. She could have killed him and she didn't give a damn! As for the Captain, I haven't seen him so angry in quite a while. Oh, he didn't show it in front of Petri and the others, but when we left Sick Bay, he really exploded. She's really been giving him the run around since she came aboard. He's been called from the Bridge I don't know how many times, to sort out the problems she's caused.

She even complained about my quarters. Said they weren't good enough for her. What more does she want on a starship? It's not a luxury liner. The Captain has put the ship on impulse power, so he has time to reason with her before we reach Troyius. I don't envy him the job."

Alix lay back on her pillows.

"I can't believe all this is happening! What did she stab Petri for?" Alix was incredulous. "What kind of woman is she?"

"Your guess is as good as mine. I can only say, I shall be glad when she's off the ship. And I'm sure the Captain must feel the same way. Would you believe they all had to kneel when Elaan came aboard the Enterprise? Even the Captain."

"Yes, Leonard told me about that. He says he's keeping well out of the way, while she's aboard."

"Well, I don't blame him," responded Uhura. "Then she has those three enormous guards following her around and standing guard over her. Slaves more like, the way she treats them.

She's upset Scotty and the engineering crew, with her arrogant ways. She treats the ship as if it were hers. What did we ever do to get handed this assignment?" Uhura gave a sigh. "Sorry to bend your ear, honey. I just had to talk to someone about it all. How are you feeling? I didn't even ask."

Alix smiled.

"I feel a great deal better than I did yesterday. I shall be up tomorrow, although I doubt if Leonard will let me into Sick Bay."

"Well, rest as much as you can. You never know what will happen with the Dohlman on board! I'll see you tomorrow. 'Night."

"Good night, Uhura. Thanks for calling in."

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The next day Alix was up and about in her cabin, but still felt surprisingly tired. She had been right, McCoy wouldn't let her back on duty and after a brief call in the morning, she heard nothing from him for the rest of the day.

It was mid afternoon that the ship went on red alert. Alix decided to ignore McCoy's instructions and went to Sick Bay. She found McCoy and Chris Chapel frantically busy over slides and tests.

"I thought I told you to stay in your cabin, Alix."

"I wondered what was going on."

"How the hell should I know what's going on. No-one ever tells the Ship's Surgeon till it's all over. All I know is that I'm trying to find an antidote to Elaan's tears."

Alix was bewildered. "Elaan's tears? An antidote? I don't understand."

McCoy came and put his arm around her.

"Look Alix. Be a good girl. Go back to your cabin. I'll come and explain it all to you later. Right now, Chris and I are too busy to stop."

"Can't I help, Leonard?"

"Not now. I don't want you fainting on me, as you almost did a couple days ago."

"I feel much better now."

"Tomorrow, Alix!" McCoy's voice was firm. "Now go!"

He turned back to his tests.

Alix hesitated a moment and then walked through to the other room to pick up a book she had left on her desk. Then slowly she made her way along the corridor to the turbo lift.

The doors swished shut behind a short, dark-haired, extremely attractive woman, just as she reached them. Perhaps attractive was the wrong word. She was stunning, sensational almost. Her eyes, dark and glowing, were heavily outlined to match the colour of her hair. Her lips were full and sensual, but the expression on her face was arrogant and sullen. She paid no attention to Alix as she stepped out of the way, but by the very way she walked and held herself, there was no doubt in Alix' mind that this was the Dohlman of Elas. And Alix didn't like her.

Was it just that she was biased by what Uhura had said, and the fact that Elaan had obviously upset Leonard McCoy. Alix was inclined to think it was more than that. The physical presence of the Dohlman emanated an aura of arrogance, hardness and something impossible to describe, but it was something that Alix didn't like.

She watched as the diminutive figure, clad in a glittering yellow dress stalked along the corridor and turned into Sick Bay.

What was she doing going to Sick Bay? Alix was half inclined to go back, but feeling that by now Leonard had enough to cope with, she reluctantly entered the turbo lift and made her way back to her cabin.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was Uhura again who gave Alix all the details of what had happened during the day. She visited Alix when her shift had ended and, Alix, almost biting her nails with the frustration of not knowing what was going on, was delighted to see her. The ship had been rocked by the heavy attack during the afternoon and Alix felt completely helpless. But within the hour the red alert had stopped and Alix could tell the Enterprise was engaging low warp drive.

But she was horrified by what Uhura had to tell her. Elaan's tears contained some sort of biochemical substance which acted like a very strong love potion on any man who touched the Dohlman's tears. What was worse was that the effect didn't wear off, men were her slaves forever. And so far as any of them knew there was no known cure.

"I don't know how she did it, but somehow she managed to let her tears touch the Captain. Early this afternoon, I tried to reach Captain Kirk urgently. I had discovered someone contacting the Klingon ship from on board the Enterprise. It took him a while to answer and when he did, he sounded odd, kind of dazed. Not like the Captain at all. He did all the right things, gave the right orders on the intercom, but he still sounded - different.

It wasn't until later that we found out that he had been infected by Elaan's tears. I could believe it, too, when he finally appeared on the Bridge. He looked stunned and shaken, it seemed to take him a few minutes to realise where he was."

"Oh, God," breathed Alix. "What an awful thing to happen, especially to someone like the Captain."

"That's just how I feel, honey," responded Uhura. "Mind, Mr. Spock hardly left his side. Those two are really close."

Alix nodded, remembering the time in Sick Bay, when Spock had been so ill. Their support for one another never faltered.

"Anyway," continued Uhura. "The Enterprise was all set to warp out when Scotty told the Bridge about the bomb."

"The bomb!" echoed Alix. Things had really been happening while she had been confined to her cabin.

"Yeah. Apparently Kryton, one of her guards, had planted a bomb which would explode as soon as warp drive was engaged. Well, the Captain dealt with that, no trouble. And then the Dohlman appears on the Bridge and really throws the Captain through a loop. He couldn't take his eyes from her. But

Mr. Spock was right there, suggesting that the Bridge was not the place for the Dohlman. I thought the Captain was going to throw the book at him. And the worst part was the calculating expression on Elaan's face as she watched them. Honestly, Alix, I felt like slapping the look on her face."

"What happened?"

"Well, Captain Kirk seemed to catch himself up. He thanked Mr. Spock and escorted Elaan from the Bridge."

"She went to Sick Bay. I saw her on the way there."

"Yeah, but she didn't stay there long. Back she came, this time dressed, if you can call it that, in a slinky blue number, designed to turn any man on, let alone the Captain. A front and a back, held together with two bows. And very obviously wearing nothing underneath."

But by this time the Enterprise is in real trouble. And beyond asking her to leave the Bridge again - the Captain's attention is all for his ship. Even when Mr. Spock discovered Elaan was wearing dilithium crystals....."

"What!?" cried Alix. "This is more like a fantasy story."

"But all true, honey. She was honest to goodness wearing dilithium crystals. They're common stones on her planet called radins, according to Elaan. Anyhow, when Mr. Spock discovered them, the Captain removed them from round her neck without a second thought. I reckon having the Enterprise in danger was an antidote in itself."

"What? Do you think the Captain's cured then?"

"I would guess so. He certainly seemed more himself afterwards."

"So the effects of the tears don't last forever, then?"

"It would appear not," replied Uhura. "And I thank the great bird of the galaxy for it."

Somehow the knowledge that Kirk was no longer under the Dohlman's spell made Alix feel a whole lot easier, although she couldn't explain exactly why. All she knew was that she would be very glad when Elaan left the Enterprise in three days' time.

\* \* \* \* \*

Kirk left the transporter room, almost sick with despair. Petri had been right, the effect of the Dohlman's tears didn't wear off. It had almost torn him apart to see Elaan's quivering mouth and tear filled eyes as she had shimmered away in the transporter beam.

And yet with another part of his mind, he disliked her intensely. He hated the way she tried to manipulate him to achieve her own ends. He could not believe that a mind could contemplate the destruction of a planet just to satisfy her own selfish needs. He had seen in her face the calculation, the hardness, the pure self interest. Since he had wiped away Elaan's tears, he had been filled with an almost consuming flame of passion for her. He could think clearly of nothing else, but of touching her, holding her, making love to her. Kirk almost laughed at the expression. Love had nothing to do with his feelings for Elaan. Overwhelming, uncontrollable lust that seemed to brook no other feelings at all, would be a better way to describe what he felt. The only time that he had been able to function properly was when the Enterprise was in danger. His ship was safe now, although badly in need of repair. The warp drive unit needed a complete overhaul and now that Elaan was on Troyius he could make for the nearest Starbase.

Meanwhile, he still had to deal with his feelings for Elaan. The last three days while Elaan had been aboard had been hard. He had tried to project to everyone, but particularly to Spock, that he had indeed got over the Dohlman's tears. But during those three days he had visited Elaan's cabin several times. Drawn there almost against his will, but somehow almost running to get there.

Now she was gone and he wanted so much to forget, to have things as they were before Elaan had arrived. Slowly he made his way back to the Bridge. Perhaps distance would lessen the effect of the tears. As he sat down in his

command chair, he heard McCoy's delighted voice tell Spock that he had found the antidote. And he also heard Spock's quiet denial of Kirk's need for it. Kirk almost smiled. He had managed to convince his Vulcan friend, after all. Kirk's heart lightened somewhat at McCoy's statement. If the effect of the tears didn't wear off - there was an antidote.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was a week later when Kirk finally made his way to Sick Bay. A week when he had tried unsuccessfully to get over the effect of the Dohlman's tears. A week when frustration, lust and longing for Elaan had fought within him, destroying his concentration, spoiling the enjoyment he had always felt in command of the Enterprise.

McCoy was surprised to see him and even more surprised when Kirk told him what he wanted.

"I thought you'd got over it, Jim. Spock said...."

"I know what Spock said," replied Kirk, sitting dejectedly in a chair. "I have tried to fight it. Hide it. But I've got to have some help, Bones. It just isn't getting any easier."

"Of course, Jim. I understand. I've the antidote here." McCoy went to the medicine cabinet and selected a small bottle. "But I can't guarantee results. And I can't predict side effects. From all the tests we have run it should work, quite quickly with few side effects. But...."

"I don't care," responded Kirk. "I've got to try something. I don't want to be like this forever."

"Well, I'll give you some now. And one more in four hours' time. It's after the second lot that I would expect any side effects. I want you to spend the night in Sick Bay just so we can keep an eye on you."

"Do you want me to stay here now?" asked Kirk. "I've got my shift to complete."

"No, Jim," said McCoy, pressing the hypo against Kirk's upper arm. "Finish your shift. Have a meal, then come to Sick Bay. It's only a precaution. I don't really expect much in the way of side effects. Alix will be on duty at 10. Do you mind? I can easily change my shift."

"No, no, Bones," Kirk gave him a smile. "I shall probably sleep knowing that something is being done."

McCoy gave him a quizzical look.

"Not been sleeping well, either? I guessed as much. Those marks under your eyes don't come with eight good hours sleep a night."

"Now, Bones. When do I ever sleep for eight hours."

McCoy grinned.

"Well, I grant you, not often, but it's obvious you've not been sleeping well lately."

"I'll make up for it tonight."

\* \* \* \* \*

Kirk reported to Sick Bay while McCoy was still on duty. Even after one injection the intensity of his feelings had lessened and he was tired, so tired. Quickly, he settled down in the empty bed. McCoy gave him another injection, turned on the monitor and lowered the lights.

"We'll monitor you from the other room. O.K., Jim?"

"That's fine with me. 'Night, Bones."

"Night, Jim. Pleasant dreams."

But Kirk had anything but pleasant dreams. He woke, startled and sweating and feeling distinctly nauseous. He slowly sat up in bed, his head swimming and as he did so, Alix entered the room.

"You feeling unwell?" she asked.

"Yeah. I guess so." He began to look a little desperate. "In fact, I think I'm going to be sick!"

And sick he decidedly was. After it was over he lay back on his pillows,

pale and sweating. Alix gently wiped his face with a damp cloth.

He smiled at her.

"I guess it will be worth it, if the antidote works."

"I think it will. We've run several kinds of tests and the results were pretty conclusive. The only thing we couldn't really predict was the effects it might produce in the human body."

"Do you think there are likely to be other ones? Oh God. I think I'm going to throw up again."

Kirk was sick several more times during the next half hour. Each time, Alix supported him, gently bathing his face, pushing the hair back off his forehead. Finally, the attacks faded away, leaving Kirk feeling slightly weak, but more relaxed than he had felt since the Dohlman had come aboard. The intense feelings he had suffered about her had faded to a dull ache at the back of his mind.

Kirk smiled up at Alix.

"Do you think I can expect anything else in the way of side effects?"

Alix smiled back, her heart missing a beat as she looked at his pale face, with the large, luminous hazel eyes watching her. She forced herself to look at the diagnostic panel and took his pulse.

"No, I think you've passed the worst of it. I'll give you one more injection in about an hour."

Kirk gave a groan.

"No, no!" Alix laughed. "It shouldn't cause you to be sick again. But it should just about finish off the virus for good. How are you feeling now?"

"Despite the sickness, I'm feeling better than I've felt in quite a while."

"Good," said Alix. "I knew Leonard would come up with the right answer."

Kirk grinned in reply.

"He usually does. I don't know what I'd do without him on the Enterprise. He's a friend as well as a colleague. And the Captain needs a friend now and again. Command is essentially a lonely business."

"And I would guess, you wouldn't change your life even if you could."

"You're right," laughed Kirk. "The Enterprise means a lot to me. I still remember the feelings of awe and inadequacy I felt when I came aboard her. It took me quite a while to come to terms with being a Starship Captain and I couldn't let it show. If you command, you can't afford any chink in the armour."

He gave a rueful smile. "Spock helped a great deal."

"I think your friendship is almost as legendary as the ship."

"Legendary? I wouldn't use that word. But Spock has laid his life on the line for me on more than one occasion."

"And you for him," added Alix, quietly.

"Part of being a Captain," replied Kirk, matter of factly.

"Is it? It seemed to me that when Mr. Spock had morphonucleitis you did a whole lot more than was called for in the line of duty."

Kirk blushed slightly, but obviously didn't want to talk about it.

"How are you getting on with Bones?"

"He's marvellous. I love working with him, he's such a warm, generous man. I like to think we have a good relationship going. I've learnt such a lot from him about so many things, it's hard to believe I've known him less than a year."

"He thinks a lot of you, too. He told me once, you're like the younger sister he never had."

Alix flushed with pleasure.

"I'm so glad he feels that way. Thank you for telling me."

Kirk smiled.

"My pleasure, Alix. Sit and talk to me for a while. I'm feeling wide awake. I'll never get to sleep at the moment."

So Alix fetched a chair and they talked of "Shoes and ships and sealing wax and cabbages and kings".

In the darkened Sick Bay they came to know more about one another. Each

found the other easy to talk to and they spoke of things they had never spoken of to anyone else. For the Captain of the Enterprise it was a rare treat to be able to talk about the inconsequential as well as the important things. They laughed a great deal and were closer in different ways that they had been the night of McCoy's birthday party. And that was a night neither of them mentioned.

\* \* \* \* \*

The following day, Kirk left Sick Bay, having been checked and passed by McCoy as being completely over the virus of the Dohlman's tears. And Kirk felt as if he were over it. Not a pang for Elaan remained.

The problem he had now was with his ship. Scotty was desperately worried about the effect the untreated dilithium crystals were having on his engines, and in the end Kirk was forced to order the ship on to impulse power. Now they all faced the slow journey back to the nearest Starbase with Scotty worrying all the way.

Kirk, anxious about any further Klingon activity in the area, kept the ship on its toes. He knew that the crippled Starship was virtually a sitting target and he was as worried as Scotty. Sensor scans were continuously monitored to the fullest range. Uhura was kept busy trying to pick up any messages that might come from a ship in the area. And Kirk allowed no-one a moment of relaxation at any post on the Bridge.

Kirk, in fact, very rarely left the Bridge. Neither did Mr. Spock. The ship was of paramount importance and he regretted any time he had to spend away from the Bridge. Scotty, meantime, was carefully nursing his engines, anxious for nothing else to go wrong with them. He gave Kirk an hourly report on their condition, and as Sulu flippantly remarked, it was surprising that bulletins regarding their state weren't broadcast to the whole ship. The Captain was not amused.

Slowly the days passed and it was an exhausted crew that counted the last few days to the Starbase. They were three days out and during a brief off-duty period most of the Bridge crew managed to find their way down to the Beauty Complex, for one reason or another. Jacuzzis, saunas and solaria were great relaxers and afterwards they had all grouped themselves together in the lounge. Even Alix and McCoy managed to make their way there.

Conspicuous by their absence were the Captain and First Officer.

Sitting, talking and drinking coffee, they were all anticipating the R and R that was coming up. The Enterprise engines would need a complete overhaul which would take at least five weeks and the Captain had ordered R and R for all hands. They were relishing the prospect. Uhura and several of her communications people were planning a group holiday on Dervalan, a vacation planet near the Starbase. There was something for everyone on Dervalan. It was a large planet, with three enormous land masses, of wide climatic variations. The vacation organisation had thought of just about everything to please just about everyone who wanted a holiday.

Uhura's party had rented a small group of villas near the sea, but backed by some of the finest mountain scenery on the planet. The villas were completely self contained and had everything for an active and live-it-up holiday. Alix had been asked to join the group and had happily accepted. It seemed an ideal way to spend the time, after the confines of the ship.

Turning to McCoy, Uhura asked him if he would like to come along, too.

"Well, hell, I appreciate the invitation, but my plans are already made."

"What are you doing?" asked Uhura.

"Jim and I have rented this cabin in the hills. It sounds just great. It's completely on its own, beside a lake with great fishing I'm told. Beautiful scenery and no stress - just what the doctor ordered for a tired Starship Captain - and for the doctor!"

"Sounds a bit too quiet for me," rejoined Uhura. "Still everyone to his own taste. Which reminds me, is Mr. Spock going with you?"

"No, no. Spock never does see the point of running up and down on green



grass as a way of relaxin'. He's going to stay on the Starbase and do a project on some damn thing I don't even understand the title of. But he's happy."

"It certainly sounds like Mistair Spock," chimed in Chekov. "Me, I prefer the sound of Uhura's holiday. Can anyone join in?"

"The more the merrier, Pavel. Are you coming?"

"I'd like to very much."

"What about you, Sulu?"

"Count me in, it sounds great."

"Now, let me see," Uhura counted on her fingers. "That brings the total to 21. Sounds like a good number for a good holiday."

At that moment a streak of green eyed fur flashed across the room and landed on Alix' lap.

"Tibs, you great lump! What are you doing here?!" exclaimed Alix.

Gently she stroked his fur and Tibs curled up on her lap and began to purr.

"Well, he certainly knows who to go to," said Sulu, reaching out a hand to Tibs. Instantly the purr stopped and Tibs sat upright, eyeing Sulu warily.

"Sorry, Sulu. He's like that with everyone except me," said Alix.

"You're right there, Alix. He won't even come to me," said McCoy.

"Where does he live?" asked Uhura. "I haven't seen him since the day we brought him aboard."

"I really don't know," confessed Alix. "He prowls the ship most of the time, I think. I see him just now and then."

"Who feeds him?" asked Chekov.

"I suppose someone must. He's grown so and he looks so healthy. But he rarely touches what I put down for him."

"Perhaps he catches mice."

"Are there mice on a Starship?" asked Alix.

"Your guess is as good as mine. I've never seen any."

"Perhaps that's because Tibs catches them all," laughed Chekov.

"That's why he's so big and healthy."

"What does the Captain think about him?" asked Uhura.

"Oh, I don't think he minds. He just told me to keep him out of Sick Bay."

"Talk of the devil...." muttered Sulu, with a grin.

Kirk had just strolled in from the hair salon.

"That's the first time I've seen the Captain off the Bridge in a week," exclaimed McCoy. "Hey, Jim, come and join us."

As Kirk walked towards them, Tibs jumped down from Alix' lap and walked up to Kirk, purring loudly as he rubbed himself against Kirk's boots. Without a thought Kirk bent down and picked him up, stroking his fur. Tibs purred even louder. Alix stared at him, open mouthed. "I don't believe it," she murmured.

"What don't you believe, Dr. Warner?" queried Kirk with a grin.

"He's never allowed anyone to pick him up, except me."

"Really! But then, I think Tibs and I have something in common. Wouldn't you agree?" He watched her quizzically.

Alix had the grace to blush.

"I really don't know what you mean, Captain."

"Oh, I think you do. However, we won't go into it here."

Uhura handed Kirk a coffee. "Is this something we can all know about?" she asked.

"Well, no, Uhura. I don't think it is. Shall we just say, a private joke. Thanks for the coffee."

He sat down on the edge of a chair, setting Tibs down on the floor beside him where Tibs promptly went to sleep.

"Captain, I was wondering if you'd mind if we held a small party in the Officer's Mess tomorrow night," said Uhura.

"I think that would be O.K. We're pretty close to the Starbase now. I don't anticipate any trouble." He made a face. "Famous last words! No, go

ahead, Uhura. I hope you enjoy yourselves." He smiled, glancing round at everyone.

"But Captain, surely you'll come as well. We do expect you, Sir." She smiled engagingly at him.

"How could I resist such an invitation," he grinned back. "I'll certainly look in." He stood up. "And now, I really must get back to the Bridge."

"I should have thought a visit to your cabin and a sleep would be more appropriate," mumbled McCoy.

"Don't lecture, Bones. I'm fine."

And Kirk strode quickly from the room before McCoy had a chance to say another word.

"I'll be damn glad when we get to Dervalan," exclaimed McCoy to Alix, as the others started to plan their party. "That is one very tired man. Not that he'll ever admit it. He'll keep on till he drops, and then pick himself up and start over. I've seen him do it, more than once."

"Well, it's only another couple of days. And that cabin sounds really ideal for you both," responded Alix.

"Yeah, the sooner we're there, the better I'll like it."

\* \* \* \* \*

It was late into the night. The party in the Officer's Mess was a swinging success. Now everyone was tired, but mellow. And no-one wanted to break the party up.

"Come on, Uhura. Sing for us."

"Yeah, come on. Sing 'Beyond Antares'."

"I'm sure you're all fed up with hearing that one," grinned Uhura.

But she didn't need much persuasion. And before long she had sung 'Beyond Antares', as well as several others.

"What about that song from the spy film we saw last week?" asked Chekov. "You said at the time that you liked it."

"Oh, you mean 'The Spy Who Loved Me'?"

"Yes, that's the one. The song from that."

There were several murmurs of assent and Uhura perched herself on a stool and smiled around at everyone.

"I think we need the lights a little lower for this one."

Obligingly, someone lowered the lights.

Alix sitting towards the back of the room, had not really listened to the words of the song before. But as Uhura began to sing, a feeling of restiveness came over her. The night she had spent with Kirk on McCoy's Birthday came back to her with renewed clarity, as if it had happened only yesterday. Her body reacted to the memories and she longed to be in his arms again. She could see him from where she sat. He stood, arms folded, leaning against a table, his face in profile. There was a slight smile on his face as he watched and listened to Uhura. To Alix it was almost unbearable just to sit there and watch him. Her whole being ached for him. She realised with sudden surprise that she had always loved him, from the first moment she had seen the youthful, somehow vulnerable expression on his face as he had been brought into the Sick Bay unconscious, just after she had arrived aboard the Enterprise.

She knew now, why she had gone so willingly to his cabin that night, and why she had tried to deny the feeling she had for him. She knew only too well that her love for him would never be returned. His love had already been committed, long before she knew him - to the Enterprise. No woman could ever replace the shining mistress in his heart. And Alix didn't want to be hurt again. But now, she realised, it was already too late. Her love for Kirk had already happened and she could do nothing to change it. And as she listened to the words of the song, she knew the magic Kirk possessed, for her, would never wear off.

Uhura's voice sang the words with great feeling and a sexy smile on her face, that made most of the men there hot under the collar! -

"And nobody does it better,  
The" sometimes I wish someone would.  
Nobody does it quite the way you do,  
Why d'you have to be so good.

The way that you hold me,  
Whenever you hold me,  
There's some kind of magic inside you,  
That keeps me from running,  
But just keep it coming,  
How d'you learn to do the things you do?

And nobody does it better,  
Makes me feel sad for the rest.  
Nobody does it half as good as you,  
Baby, baby. Darlin' you're the best!"

As the applause broke out at the end of the song, Alix could bear it no longer. With one last look at Kirk as he smiled and clapped along with the rest, she made her way noiselessly from the room. She hurried along the corridor, not knowing which way she went. She only wanted to escape the memories which clutched at her every step. Almost panic-stricken, she entered a door and found herself on the observation deck where she had been with Kirk that fateful night.

She activated the button which opened the shutter and the glory of space filled the room. The sight brought a measure of calm to her soul. She pressed her hands against her burning cheeks. It was just as well that they reached the Starbase the day after tomorrow. Then she wouldn't see Kirk for several weeks. Perhaps in that time she would be able to sort herself out. Besides, it was probably only the mood of the party and the mellowness of all concerned that had brought forth this reaction. After all, it was only a song! But the words were so appropriate!! Alix took a deep breath. A few weeks on Dervalan would be all she needed.

But deep within herself, she knew her feelings for Kirk were as deeply committed as Kirk's were for the Enterprise. And there was no changing for either of them.

\* \* \* \* \*

Kirk handed the Enterprise over to the Docking Crew with a mixture of relief and regret. Relief that they had all made it safely to the Starbase and that his ship would soon be restored to her usual efficiency. Regret that for the next few weeks he would no longer be 'home'.

However, there was the vacation on Dervalan to look forward to and finally Kirk admitted to himself just how exhausted he was. The cabin in the hills sounded idyllic - no command decisions, no pressure, no stress. And knowing that in only a few weeks he would be back aboard the Enterprise.

He walked slowly back to his cabin, changed out of his uniform and picked up his luggage, he then made his way to the transporter room. He must be one of the last of the Enterprise crew to leave the ship. Even the transporter operator was a member of the Docking Crew. McCoy was to meet him there, but when Kirk entered, McCoy hadn't yet arrived. And it was a further fifteen minutes before he finally got there, out of breath, with a harrassed expression on his face, and with Uhura following behind.

"What the devil's going on? I thought you and your party had gone, Uhura?"

"I'm the last one, Captain."



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"Look Jim. Something has come up. I just got word through. It came in only moments before Uhura finally closed the board down. Joanna's getting married. In two weeks' time." McCoy couldn't keep the worry and delight out of his voice.

"Bones, that's great news."

"Thing is, Jim, I'll have to leave straight away to get back in time. Uhura's been burning subspace to find out connections and times. If I catch the transport that leaves in three hours, I can pick up the connections and get there with two days to spare."

"That's O.K., Bones. One thing you can't miss is your own daughter's wedding."

"I feel real bad about letting you down over the vacation tho'."

"Bones, really. It's O.K. All the things we weren't going to do, I can still not do on my own. You're right. I do need some rest and quiet. I'll go to the cabin and have myself a real lazy time."

"You could always join our group at the villas, Captain. We'd love to have you."

"Thank you, Uhura. There, you see Bones, no problem at all."

Finally McCoy permitted himself to smile for the first time.

"If you're really sure...."

"I'm sure. Have you confirmed the bookings, Uhura?"

"Not yet, Captain. But it will just take a call. I can do it from here."

"Do that then. Come on, Bones. Let's go planetside and have a drink to celebrate before you have to catch the transport."

\* \* \* \* \*

Several hours later Kirk was on his way to the cabin. He and McCoy had had several drinks together and then Kirk had seen him off on the transport. He had picked up the Dervalan shuttle from the next transport bay.

Central Control on Dervalan was a rather grandiose title for the village that greeted all vacationers to the planet. The efficiency was hidden behind a facade of 'back woodsy' type houses, making the newcomer relax almost immediately in pleasant natural surroundings. The booking centre was in the middle of the village and all the flivvers were housed underground beneath the centre. Then down the street were various shops and restaurants of all kinds. Kirk checked in and in a very short time he was given the keys to the cabin and shown to his flivver. The back was loaded with enough supplies for a couple of weeks. The guide gave him the automatic control settings and wished him a pleasant time. Touching the auto button, Kirk settled back as the flivver began to drive to the cabin. It was nice to be able to sit back and watch the scenery, but before long Kirk had drifted off to sleep. He was woken by a soft beeping and opening his eyes he saw that he was at the cabin.

The sun was low in the west and long fingers of sunlight lay across the grass and touched the verandah that ran along the front of the cabin.

Mountains piled up in the background, the highest with a white topped crest. But here in the sheltered hollow, it was warm and tranquil. The lake shone golden in the setting sun and the small golden beach was just a short climb down from the grassy slope before the cabin.

Kirk got out of the flivver and stood for a moment, listening to the wind in the trees and the song of the birds singing their evening chorus. He gave a deep sigh - it was all even better than he had imagined. He missed McCoy though and although he didn't begrudge him his trip back to Earth, he knew that the loneliness he always felt on the ship would also be with him here. Even so, he couldn't really see himself joining Uhura's group. Somehow the thought of a large group was even more unpalatable. Anyhow, he couldn't relax in the company of so many of his crew.

Taking his luggage from the flivver, Kirk walked up to the cabin and unlocked the door. Inside it was spotlessly clean and comfortably furnished. A living area looked out on the lake and there were two bedrooms, a kitchen and a bathroom complex. There were video, audio and book tapes, as well as several shelves of real books. And, Kirk noted in the kitchen, that as well as the usual cooking facilities there was also a food dispenser with a wide programme of dishes to choose from. He gave a half-smile - at least he wouldn't go hungry.

\* \* \* \* \*

Later that evening, Kirk sat on the verandah, a drink in his hand and listened to the soft noises of the night. Above, the stars glowed with a clear crystal light; a myriad of them. Being much nearer the centre of the galaxy than Earth, the stars were closer, brighter and more numerous. Kirk gazed upwards, entranced as always by the sight. He belonged among the stars. His life was out there, with his ship. He warmed as he thought of the Enterprise. Sometimes, he might need a beach to walk on, but always he would return to her. She demanded much, but he was prepared to give his all for her and for his crew, even if it meant there were things he might have to do without, that other men had. His was one of the loneliest of jobs, but he did not regret his decision. But just now he could only wish that McCoy could have made the vacation.

Kirk knew he needed rest and quiet, after the past few months, but he would have welcomed some company. Sighing a little, he got up and walked inside. He felt that a few days alone here at the cabin would be all that he could take. After that he would probably return to the Enterprise, even if he did get in the way of the engineers.

In fact he stood it for five days and then decided to go into Dervalan's centre to see what arrangements he could make to get back to the Enterprise. After parking his flivver, he walked up the ramp towards Central Control. Admiring a well shaped pair of legs in a very brief pair of shorts, Kirk's eyes moved upwards, delighting in the very attractive figure that met his gaze. As his eyes reached the face, his widest smile broke out.

"Alix," he exclaimed. "I didn't expect to see you here."

An equally delighted smile crossed her face as she walked towards him.

"Captain Kirk, I didn't expect to see you, either."

"What are you doing here?"

"Escaping!"

Kirk gave a laugh. "Escaping?" he queried.

Alix grinned ruefully. "That sounds ungrateful and it's not strictly true. It's just that Uhura's holiday is so hectic. No-one seems to let up for a minute. It's a continuous 'live-it-up' party. I suppose I could keep it up, but all I want is a bit of peace and quiet from time to time. Coming here seemed the only way I could get away from it."

Kirk laughed again.

"I've heard about Uhura's 'holidays' before. She has the most tremendous energy."

"You can say that again. I didn't realise just how much energy she had, or how little I had. Actually everyone else is really having a ball. And I have enjoyed myself, really. It's just that I could do with a change of pace. A little less frenetic and frantic. We were lucky to get a couple of hours sleep a night. I'm exhausted!" Alix laughed. "What about you, Captain? How is your holiday?"

Kirk grinned in return. "Just the opposite of yours. So quiet, I'm practically talking to the trees."

"Of course, Leonard wasn't able to go with you, was he? I'd forgotten. So you've come in for a bit of company then?" Alix questioned.

Kirk hesitated.

"No...no. Actually I can't stand the quietness any longer. I've come

in to make arrangements to go back to the Enterprise."

"Captain! You can't go back after only five days. You certainly need a longer break than that. The Enterprise will be fine without you for a while longer. Besides what would you do once you were back aboard?"

Kirk gave one of his rueful smiles.

"Probably just get in the way, if the truth is told, but it's home."

Alix smiled sympathetically, but as a doctor she knew how much pressure he had been under lately and how much he needed a break from his ship.

"Surely there must be some other alternative?"

Kirk looked at her speculatively.

"Well, something else has just occurred to me. Let's go and have a coffee while I tell you about it."

\* \* \* \* \*

It was seven hours later that Alix arrived at the cabin. Kirk's idea had appealed to Alix and she had only hesitated because of her feelings for him. But when he really wanted something, very few could stand against him. It wasn't long before she had agreed to move her things and come and stay at his cabin. She could use the quiet and he could use the company or so they agreed.

While Alix had returned to pick up her things and tell Uhura of her change of plans, Kirk had done a little shopping and returned to the cabin to get things ready. So when Alix arrived, dinner by candlelight was ready on the verandah.

"Why Captain, this is a real surprise." Alix looked in amazement at the table laid and ready, and sniffed at the delicious smell coming from the kitchen.

"I think Jim would be more appropriate here, Alix. 'Captain' is rather formal."

"O.K. Jim. It all looks and smells great." She accepted a glass of wine that Kirk had just poured for her.

"What you mean is, you didn't know I could do it."

They both laughed.

"Well, just wait until you've had the meal before you say anymore."

The meal, in fact, was delicious and Alix was amazed at how good a cook Kirk was.

"Where did you learn to cook?" Alix asked.

"My mom insisted that boys or not we should both be able to take care of ourselves with regard to food. Sam and I were both good cooks by the time we were 12. I haven't cooked much for years. I quite enjoyed doing it. Much better than cooking just for myself."

Alix smiled at him.

"I really enjoyed the meal. In fact it's the best meal I've had in quite a while. Thank you."

"You're welcome. It's lovely having you here, Alix."

She continued to smile across at him, her eyes glowing like crystals in the candle light.

"It's good to be here. It really is quiet here, isn't it?"

Kirk nodded slowly.

"It really is." He stood up.

"Would you like to walk down to the lake? It's lovely down there by starlight."

"I'd love to. What about clearing the table?"

Kirk gave a dismissive wave of his hand.

"Later."

Slowly they walked side by side down the slope to the lakeside.

Kirk glanced sideways at Alix, remembering suddenly and vividly the night of McCoy's party. He wanted to take her in his arms, hold her close, kiss her. She was so close to him, and yet so far away. It seemed as if their night together had never happened. It had never been mentioned between them again.

And Kirk wondered how Alix felt about him and how she remembered that night.

Alix was very aware of Kirk close beside her and regretted that she had agreed to come down to the lake. Her senses were heightened by the wine and the closeness of Kirk; seeing his face, so obviously admiring, opposite her at the table, his hazel eyes gleaming large and luminous in the candlelight, had stirred her feelings deeply. His attractiveness and maleness were almost overpowering.

They stood for a while looking at the stars, and the reflection of them in the lake. Suddenly they were ill at ease, not knowing what to say to each other. Both so aware of the closeness of the other, but also unsure.

At last Alix spoke.

"I think I'll turn in, Jim, if you don't mind. I really am tired."

"Of course, Alix. I'll show you your room."

They walked back up the pathway and Kirk lifted her case from the flivver and carried it into the cabin. He opened the door and put the suitcase inside her room.

"Thank you, Jim."

They paused in the doorway, looking at each other.

"Good night," Alix said finally.

Kirk swallowed.

"Good night, Alix. Sleep well."

Alix closed the door and Kirk walked across to his own room, knowing he would get little sleep that night. His feelings for her had returned as strongly as when they had slept together on the Enterprise. He walked back to her door, his hand went to knock, but stopped. Perhaps she didn't feel that way about him. Perhaps she only wanted the peace and quiet as she had said and it was only his imagination that had made him feel she was attracted to him. Certainly she had done nothing to encourage him this evening. Perhaps the whole idea had been a mistake. Kirk sighed and his hand fell to his side. Slowly he walked back to his room and closed the door.

\* \* \* \* \*

Kirk gave a loud knock on Alix' door.

"Alix? Are you coming for a swim?"

There was no answer.

"Kirk gave another loud knock and called again.

"Alix. I'm going for a swim. Are you coming?"

There was a muffled groan.

"What time is it?"

"It's 6.30."

There was another groan.

"You must be kidding! Go away!"

Kirk grinned. "Come on. It'll do you good."

"No, it won't. Go away!"

Kirk grinned again and shrugged his bare shoulders. Clad only in swimming trunks, with a towel slung over his shoulder, he made his way down to the lake. He had slept little during the night, his body aching for Alix. Perhaps he had been wrong to invite her to stay. He knew he couldn't keep these feelings hidden forever. Their night on board the Enterprise had seemed so perfect, he had wanted it to happen again and again. But as Captain he couldn't afford to let a relationship like that develop. And on board ship it had been easier to push the memories to the back of his mind.

Now with no Enterprise and five days of loneliness, those memories couldn't be pushed away. Swiftly he plunged into the lake, the coldness making him gasp. He swam out towards the centre of the lake putting all his energy into it. Breathless, he trod water and then flipped over onto his back. It was a good place here and it was what he needed after the hard pace and command decisions he was constantly called on to make. He wanted



Alix here, but he wanted her not just as a companion, but as his loving partner. He would have to find out which she wanted.

His mind made up, he swam slowly back to the tiny cove and after towel-ling down he walked back to the cabin.

\* \* \* \* \*

Alix awoke to the delicious smell of coffee. She blinked at the bright light in her room as the sun flooded in and then saw Kirk standing beside her bed, looking down at her with a smile on his face.

"Come on, lazybones! It's nearly nine o'clock. I've brought you some coffee."

Alix glanced at the table beside her bed. There were two cups of coffee she noticed. She sat up, still sleepy, her hair tousled and to Kirk, looking absolutely irresistible. He sat on the bed beside her and leaning forward he gently kissed her lips.

"Good morning," he said softly and with a smile quirking the corner of his mouth.

Alix' eyes opened wide and before she realised, she had run her hand gently down the side of his face, something she had wanted to do for a long time.

"Good morning," she answered. "Did I dream it, or did you go for a swim?"

Kirk smiled.

"I went for a swim. You should have come. It's very invigorating."

"Hm-mm-mm." Alix merely looked at him. The clear hazel eyes, the special smile that Kirk had, the lock of hair falling over his forehead. Without even thinking, she leaned forward and kissed him. She felt his arms go around her, as he responded to her kiss. Time stood still as they kissed long and passionately, and they were locked in their own special place they had found that night on the Enterprise. Finally they drew apart a little, to look at one another, shaken by the depths of their feelings.

"Alix..." Kirk's voice was husky.

Alix smiled at him and lifted her mouth to his.

\* \* \* \* \*

Later in the kitchen, they prepared breakfast together. All doubts of each other had been swept away. They were two people very much in love. Kirk, away from the ship, was able to give freely and Alix, almost unable to believe that her feelings for him were returned, gave as freely to him.

Trying to fry bacon and eggs Alix found was quite difficult when Kirk was just behind her, kissing the nape of her neck and sliding his arms around her waist.

"Stop it!" she commanded, giving his roving hand a sharp slap.

"No," he answered smiling, and he pulled her round towards him and gave her a sweet kiss.

Alix gave a mock groan. Her legs always felt weak when he kissed her like that and she could do nothing about it, except to want more and more kisses.

"Carry on like that and burnt bacon and eggs will be served for breakfast," she told him.

Holding both hands up, palm outwards, he exclaimed, laughing, "O.K., no more, I promise. Well, not until after breakfast anyway." He moved away from her, but leaned against the doorway, watching her as she busied herself getting their breakfast.

"Well, are you just going to stand there or are you going to make yourself useful?" Alix asked severely, but there was a loving note in her voice, that belied the severity.

"I'll make myself useful, ma'am," Kirk responded contritely.

Alix grinned. "Well, take these things to the table, please."

But as Kirk passed Alix neither of them could resist a quick kiss in passing.

The rest of the day passed like a dream for them both. It was as though they couldn't bear to be apart for a moment, unsure that what they felt for each other was really true. In the afternoon they went down to the small sandy cove to swim and sunbathe. Alix was unwilling to actually swim, the lake was so cold. But Kirk plunged in unhesitatingly and came up spluttering.

"Come on, Alix. It's great once you're in."

Alix swirled the water with her foot.

"No. I think I'll just stay at the edge."

Kirk's eyes glinted with mischief and he began to splash her. Alix shrieked as the cold water hit her.

"You beast....."

But Kirk continued to splash her and Alix gave in and dived in after him. She came up next to him as he stood laughing. Quickly, she kicked his legs from under him and he flopped backwards with a splash. He came up spluttering again and it was Alix' turn to laugh. Kirk joined in the laughter and they were suddenly in each others' arms and kissing again. Suddenly, Alix pulled away and gave another shriek.

"You.....you...."

Kirk was laughing and holding in his hand the top half of her bikini.

"Give it back!"

Kirk shook his head slowly.

"No, you look utterly adorable just the way you are."

Alix placed her hands on her hips.

"Jim, give it back..."

For an answer Kirk waded back to the beach and stood at the edge, looking at her.

"Come and get it." His head tilted slightly to one side, he smiled at her, as she waded towards him. She knew she wasn't going to get the top back, but she really didn't care. Kirk threw the top back up the beach and held his arms out to her. Without hesitation she walked straight into them. He kissed her deeply and as her legs went weak again, he picked her up in his arms and carried her back to where they had spread their towels.

"It does have advantages being in such an out of the way spot," he murmured. "A beach is not only to walk on."

\* \* \* \* \*

The following day was chilly and overcast and they decided to hike into the hills. Wearing warm clothes and hiking boots, with Kirk carrying a rucksack with food for the day, they set out hand in hand. Dervalan was a beautiful planet, very reminiscent of Earth in many ways. Kirk and Alix enjoyed the freedom to go where they liked without the restrictions imposed by the metal hull of the Enterprise. It was a time to talk and confide in each other.

"You never mentioned how you felt after Bones' birthday party. You went so quickly, I wondered if you regretted coming back to my cabin."

"Oh, Jim, if only you knew. I knew, even then, how deeply I loved you. How could I stay and tell you that. You're the Captain of the Enterprise and I thought I was just a woman who happened to be available."

Kirk shook his head. "Although I didn't want to admit it, even to myself, that night was very special to me. I've never felt that way about anyone before."

"You never told me that. You never gave me any indication that the night meant anything at all," said Alix.

"What was I to think? I woke remembering holding you in my arms after the most wonderful experience I have ever had, and you were dressed and

seemed to be escaping from me as quickly as possible! I could only guess it wasn't as wonderful for you as it had been for me."

"Oh, my love," cried Alix, kissing him on the lips. "Nothing could have been further from the truth. I just didn't trust myself to stay. It was so special for me, too. I just didn't want to let myself get too involved again, but it was too late."

"Again?" asked Kirk.

Alix told him about her love affair with Bertil Sipinen, adding, "Only now, I wonder what all the fuss was about. It seems so trivial. After that night I could think only of you. It was so hard to see you and wonder where I had failed that night. It had all been so perfect."

Kirk held her in his arms, looking down at her.

"And it was perfect my love. Never doubt that. Besides, I couldn't allow myself the luxury of letting it happen again on board ship, even though I wanted to. I very much wanted to."

He squeezed her hand gently.

"And what about when we go back. The situation will not have changed, Jim."

"Let's think about that later. We have four weeks ahead of us, that belongs just to us. Let's enjoy the freedom we have now."

Before Alix had a chance to reply, Kirk let go of Alix' hand and bounded ahead.

"Hey! There's a tree for climbing, if ever I saw one."

He quickly shinned up it and stood on a broad branch high above and laughed down at Alix. She could only laugh back - he looked just like a mischievous small boy.

"Do you plan to stay up there?" she asked.

"No," he replied as he made his way down. "I just wanted to do it. It's been a long time since I last climbed a tree, just for the hell of it." He smiled reminiscently. "Do you know, it reminds me of the time I found Spock hanging upside down from the branch of a tree with his girl watching him."

Alix was amazed.

"Mr. Spock did that!?"

Kirk nodded.

"I don't think I could ever picture him doing that."

"I was somewhat amazed myself. I found out afterwards the reason for it." And Kirk told Alix of the happenings on Omicron Ceti III. Alix was fascinated, but with a sense of unease, foreboding. She wasn't sure what stirred in the depths of her mind. Even though Kirk didn't say it, it was obvious just how much he cared for his ship. If it hadn't been for those deep feelings, the spores' effect would not have worn off and Kirk wouldn't be here now. Alix tried to shake away her fears. It never did to think or plan too much in the future. She put her arms around Kirk and held her face up to be kissed and he was only too ready to oblige.

They had started on their way back to the cabin when it began to rain. They quickened their steps, but they had a fair way to go. The rain poured steadily down and Kirk and Alix got wetter and wetter. By the time they reached the cabin they were soaked to the skin.

"You go and have a hot shower, Alix. I'll get the fire going and follow you in."

"Is that a promise?"

Kirk grinned up at her, as he knelt before the fireplace, his hair wet and water dripping down his face.

"That's a promise!"

It was later that they sat in front of the fire, warm and cosy. They had showered and changed into dry clothes and had a meal by the fire. Now they sat together on the sofa, Kirk with his arm around Alix, both feeling tired after the day's hike, but reluctant to move from the warm glow of the fire.

It was a moment of deep contentment for them both - an idyllic time, that comes all too rarely. The joy of being together, with no other concerns, or worries at that moment. A time to take pleasure in each other's company with no-one else to interrupt.

"I'm glad that McCoy was called to Earth, now," Kirk said, brushing his lips across Alix' hair.

"Yes. It wouldn't be quite the same if Leonard was here, would it?"

"It certainly wouldn't."

"I've always loved sitting in front of a fire like this," Alix murmured drowsily. "But it's never been this good before."

She gave his hand a squeeze and looked into his face.

"I love you, Jim."

"And I love you, Alix."

She turned slightly towards him and ran her fingers through his hair, pushing the lock of hair back off his forehead.

"I'd like to hold time still, to keep this moment for ever," said Alix quietly.

"Mmmmmmm," Kirk murmured. He ran his hand along the side of her face, feeling the curling strands of her hair against his hand. He wanted nothing more, at that moment, than to be here, close to Alix, looking at her, watching the expressive eyes as she spoke soft words of love. Her love wrapped him warm and close and his love for her was just as warm, just as wonderful.

They sat together, quietly content until the fire began to fade. The rain and wind beat against the windows, making them both feel that they were in a small, cosy world of their own. It was an evening that would long stay in both their memories.

\* \* \* \* \*

The days slipped by, bringing happiness, contentment and relaxation to both Kirk and Alix. It was a time like no other for Kirk. Always since he had first gone to the Academy, his life had been full and busy, with no time to form deep personal relationships with anyone, particularly a woman. It had only been since his time on the Enterprise that he had known the deep, true friendship that had developed between Spock and himself and in a different way, with McCoy. Kirk wondered now how he had managed without them to confide in and support him. Being a Starship Captain must be one of the most difficult jobs there were and to have two such friends there when he needed them was something few Starship Captains could have. And though the three of them had spent several R and R's together, there had never been a vacation like this one.

It was true, that Kirk needed women, he was the first to admit it, but most of his relationships had been just that - a need for a woman. There had only been two women who had captured his heart before Alix and both had ended in tragedy. Tragedy that had taken Kirk a long time to recover from. Even now, images of Edith and Miranabee haunted his dreams occasionally. But both of these women knew nothing of his life aboard a Starship, understood nothing of his feelings for the Enterprise. They had been, literally, worlds apart.

In Alix he had found someone he could love, who understood his life aboard the Enterprise, who had her own work to which she was deeply committed, also aboard his ship. Perhaps this time, living in the same world, committed to the same things, understanding each other's lives, perhaps this time it would work.

But life on Dervalan was uncomplicated. There were just the two of them with time to devote only to each other. It was a wonderful time that could not last. Much as Kirk longed for a deeply loving relationship with a woman and as much as he believed that, at this time, he had found what he truly wanted, the Enterprise was still there. Pushed now, to the back of his mind.

he was able to give everything to Alix and believe that he always would. But they would get back to the Enterprise, and that demanding silver mistress would claim him as her own yet again.

For Alix, the problem was different. She loved Kirk as she had never loved anyone else before. She loved him, before and beyond anything in her life. Her love affair with Bertil had been like a schoolgirl crush compared with her love for Kirk. She tried to live only for the moment and push the thought of the time when they must return to the Enterprise to the back of her mind. But she knew that the relationship between them would have to change once they were back on board. She knew how much Kirk cared for his ship and his crew. It was that caring that had made Kirk the Starship Captain he was. Would his love for her change that caring in some subtle, indefinable way? She couldn't bear for that to happen. She loved him as he was, for what he was. Would her presence on the ship make a difference to Kirk's attitudes and responses. Was it conceited to think the answer might be yes? Alix didn't know, but she knew that when they returned to the ship, it was she who would have to decide whether she could stay aboard the Enterprise and accept a different relationship with Kirk. And if it was fair to put Kirk in a position where he was trying to make their relationship work while still maintaining the command of his ship and crew at their best efficiency. Even she didn't fully recognise the extent of the feeling between Kirk and his ship.

But a few days before they were due to return, she noticed a certain restlessness about Kirk. He seemed unable to sit still for long, but not doing anything when he got up. Several evenings she found him gazing at the stars, a faraway look in his eyes. And although she questioned him, he brushed the questions away, giving her a hug to reassure her. But Alix was not reassured and her uneasiness grew as the days ticked by to their return to the Enterprise.

Then one night as Alix lay, unable to sleep, beside Kirk, he began to move restlessly and to murmur in his sleep. She sat up, her hand moving to his arm to wake him, but stopped as the words he was saying became clear.

"No! Oh, God, no!" His tone was heartbroken. "Please, please, for God's sake, don't take her away from me. She's mine, I tell you. She's mine. The Enterprise is mine!"

\* \* \* \* \*

Two days later, they were back on board the Enterprise. As Alix entered Sick Bay, on her return, McCoy was there to greet her.

"Hi, Alix. It's great to see you."

He gave her a warm, friendly hug.

"Hi, Leonard. How did your daughter's wedding go?"

"It was great, just great."

"Come and sit down and tell me all about it, before the rush starts."

Punching up two coffees, McCoy sat down at his desk and leaned back in his chair.

He smiled reminiscently.

"Joanna made a really beautiful bride. I'm glad she went for an old traditional 'white' wedding. It really seemed somethin' special. Howard is just great."

"That's your new son-in-law."

"Well, yes. I guess it is at that." McCoy's smile grew wide as the new idea sunk in. "They are one very happy couple. I just hope it lasts." McCoy's smile faded a little as unhappy memories intruded.

"You got there in time then?"

"Hell, yes. I had three days to spare and was able to spend most of the time with Joanna. It was the longest time I'd spent with her in several

years. I tell you, I was really proud to take her down the aisle. She told me, it was one dream she had that she didn't think would come true. That I would be there to give her away. She's a darlin' girl. I'm just glad that I was able to make it. I only hope that Jim didn't find it too lonely out at the cabin on his own."

Alix blushed slightly.

"Well, no, he didn't. You see, I spent most of the time with him."

"Hell," McCoy laughed aloud. "I might have guessed you two would get together eventually. I trust you both had a great time."

"Yes. It was wonderful." Alix' eyes glowed like stars. But I've a tough decision to make, which is just tearing me apart." Her eyes flooded with tears, which she tried to blink back.

McCoy came round to her.

"Tell me, Alix."

The warmth and understanding in his tone was too much for Alix.

"Oh, Leonard, I love him so much." Alix' voice was choked with tears.

"Is that so very bad?" asked McCoy gently.

"I don't know. It feels pretty awful right now." Alix was openly crying now.

"What's the problem? Can you tell me?"

"Leonard, he cares for me a great deal. And that just makes things harder. How can I stay aboard the Enterprise with the way things are between us?"

McCoy's face grew more serious as he realised even before Alix said any more what she was going to say.

"If I stay, I will become a burden to him. Someone who will interfere with his life on the ship. I'd try hard not to, but I love him so much. I couldn't always stay in the background. When I first came aboard, you told me how much you worried about Jim and Spock. Now I know just how you feel. I'd die a little every time he went into a dangerous situation. I can't even be sure I wouldn't plead with him not to go. And I know I would always be second to the Enterprise and after being first with him for these weeks, I don't know whether I could accept that.

And if I go? Oh, God. Never to see him again, never to have him close to me. Never to see his face light up when he sees me. To have to leave the Enterprise - she's become my home too. Oh, Leonard, what am I going to do?"

There was nothing McCoy could say. He held her close, comforting and soothing her as best he could. His heart bled for both Alix and Kirk. It was a decision only Alix could make. She loved Kirk too much to increase the pressures he already had to almost breaking point. He wondered if Jim knew just how much this woman loved him and just how much she was prepared to give up for him. But then Jim had had to make some pretty tough decisions and the memory of Edith slipped into his mind. God! What a mess human relationships could be.

McCoy's heart ached at the thought of what these two people would have to go through. He was pretty sure what Alix was going to do.

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Two days later Kirk, too, knew what Alix' decision was. He found her letter of resignation from Starfleet on his desk. It was not unexpected. She had come to him the night before and told him of her plans. He had tried so hard to talk her out of it. To have found Alix, to love her as he did, and then to lose her again, was like opening old, deep wounds. For a while he felt he couldn't bear it yet again. But she had said one thing with which he couldn't argue.

"Jim, there's always the Enterprise for you. Listen to her, she's yours. She's something you have to hang on to."

It wasn't until later that he wondered what Alix was going to hang on to. She had said that she was going to take up medicine on some out of the way planet where her services were needed badly, where her life would be full. But he would never forget the haunted look in Alix' eyes as she left his cabin that night.

He picked up the letter of resignation she had left on his desk, and read it through. Then picked up a pen and signed his approval. It felt like betrayal.

His door swished open. Tibs strutted in, his green eyes gleaming. He made straight for Kirk and rubbed himself against his legs. Kirk gave a smile and bent to pick Tibs up.

"Hi, Tiberius," he murmured, as he gently stroked the cat. "I knew she'd called you that."

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