



CONTACT 31

CONTACT

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DEDICATION

This issue is dedicated to the *U.S.S. ENTERPRISE*, giant, silver starship of the future, where a very special relationship was formed and grew, and to her twentieth century counterpart, the U.S. Space Shuttle, *ENTERPRISE* - a first step toward that future.

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COSMOS



**CONSIDER THE INFINITE JOY
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TO REACH WITH MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING
ALIEN RACES FROM FAR-FLUNG
CORNERS OF THE UNIVERSE—
TOUCH WITH LOVE.**



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IV

Editors' Page

CONTACT celebrated its first birthday a few months ago. Now, just a little over a year and three issues after its birth, its editors still wonder at the changes it has made in our lives.

Most of them are very positive and satisfying, a few are frustrating, but probably the single most important facet of fanzine publishing that we have found is the vast amount of new friends and acquaintances we have made.

If we may, without getting too schmaltzy, or boring the reader too much, we'd like to use this part of the EDITOR'S PAGE for some overdue acknowledgements and to express some personal thanks.

In the beginning, *CONTACT* was a two-woman production, and although we have managed to retain the personal touch on everything that concerns the zine, a lot of the work, mail, etc., outgrew the capabilities of two people. Fortunately, in the past year while *CONTACT* was growing, we managed to acquire a group of close, personal friends whom we affectionately call our "staff". These people, talented in their own rights, have become the backbone of *CONTACT*. Their dedication, willingness to give time and effort in unglamorous jobs - stuffing envelopes, collating, critiquing stories, lugging boxfuls of zines to the Post Awful, filing, proof-reading, and many more "little" things - have made this issue possible. They are as necessary as the generous contributors (and most of the staff are that, too) who share their talents with us. Our thanks, now, in alphabetical order because we love them all equally:

MARTHA J. BONDS--author of *NOTHING GOLD CAN STAY* and several future stories. For the endless three-way phone calls debating the K/S Relationship for better perspective, for zine-hauling, for editing, proof-reading, for countless other coolie activities - we thank you; and, to RODNEY BONDS for an endurance record in patience while his wife gave her time to *CONTACT* instead of him, our gratitude.

KATHY BURNS--our resident teen-age member, who never missed a collating party. For putting our songs to music and entertaining us with her talents, for designing the *CONTACT* jewelry, for enthusiasm and hard work - Thanks, Kathy.

SUSAN DORSEY--author of *THE FIRST STEP*. For all the trips from Hagerstown to help with collating C.II, C.I Reprint, *THE MIRAGE*, and C.III (Count *THOSE* trips around the table!), for letting us use Leonard as a model (We won't say for what, but thanks to you, too, Leonard, for that), for critiques and story writing, our sincerest thanks.

PETE KAUP--writer, poet and our unofficial "Captain" (Maybe we should say, slave-driver). One of the best people to have at a collating party, a dealer's table, or a work session. She cracks the whip (gently) when we have a tendency to goof-off, and organizes everything (and everyone) with efficiency. For dedication, enthusiasm and energy - we thank you, Pete.

PAT STALL--artist extraordinaire and "little old lady" of the group (That's her description, not ours. Everyone should have such a talented and active "little old lady"!). For fulfilling the hopeful requests (would you believe, pleading?) for illos despite an impossible personal schedule, for her understanding of grammar and spelling, for all the "coolie labor", for answering mail that precisely dealt with artwork, for hostessing so many of our impromptu parties - our grateful thanks.

Last, but not least, to RUSS, ROBIN, RUSTY AND RENEE, to JONATHAN and DAVID - for patience above and beyond the call of duty with "our kinds of madness".

To our readers, thanks for giving us this opportunity to express our feelings to those who are close to us. They are a group of people with varied ages, occupations, and backgrounds, much as we have found throughout fandom, but all joined by the common interest in Trek and in particular, the K/S Relationship. As Kirk and Spock reached out to many civilizations, they, too, found diversified cultures, but they also learned that in most instances there was some level on which they could communicate and make contact.

Mankind, as portrayed by 20th century Earth, is on the threshold of new discoveries and new horizons. As we reach beyond our planet toward other worlds, we must be prepared to accept the unknown and perhaps the unusual. Where is there a better place to start than in our own circle of fandom? Working together toward a common goal, whether organizing a convention, heading a letter campaign, or publishing a fanzine, can be an experience of blending diverse ideas and talents.

In this issue of *CONTACT* we have attempted to look at the diverse sides of the Kirk/Spock Relationship. The poetess, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, said, "*How do I love thee? Let me count the ways...*" If we accept that Kirk and Spock do indeed love and respect each other, then the expression of that emotion must, as in any relationship, be manifold. We hope we have herein explored at least a few of those aspects - the relationship under stress, the new discovery of it, a psychoanalysis of what it is to each participant, the implied sexual attraction, the base animal need for contact, the possibility of separation by death, the physical hurt-comfort, and the joy of a long overdue reunion. Hopefully, we will touch on what sparks your individual fantasy. If not, stay with us, we'll get to it eventually.

Several people have asked us, "How long can you continue a zine with such a limited theme without it becoming redundant?" Limited? Hardly! With two very interesting and complex characters, the exploration of what constitutes their relationship seems endless. Certainly, the different ways to create stories to show the many sides is a challenge - one that we, and our many creators eagerly accept.

As with any meaningful relationship, outside factors often have a decided influence upon it, and with each issue we will also attempt to explore one of these factors. In C.II we touched on the part McCoy plays; in this issue we will see through several poems, songs and stories how the Enterprise contributes to the total effect. In C.IV...well, wait and see. Maybe you have some of your own ideas about what you think influences the relationship and makes it what it is.

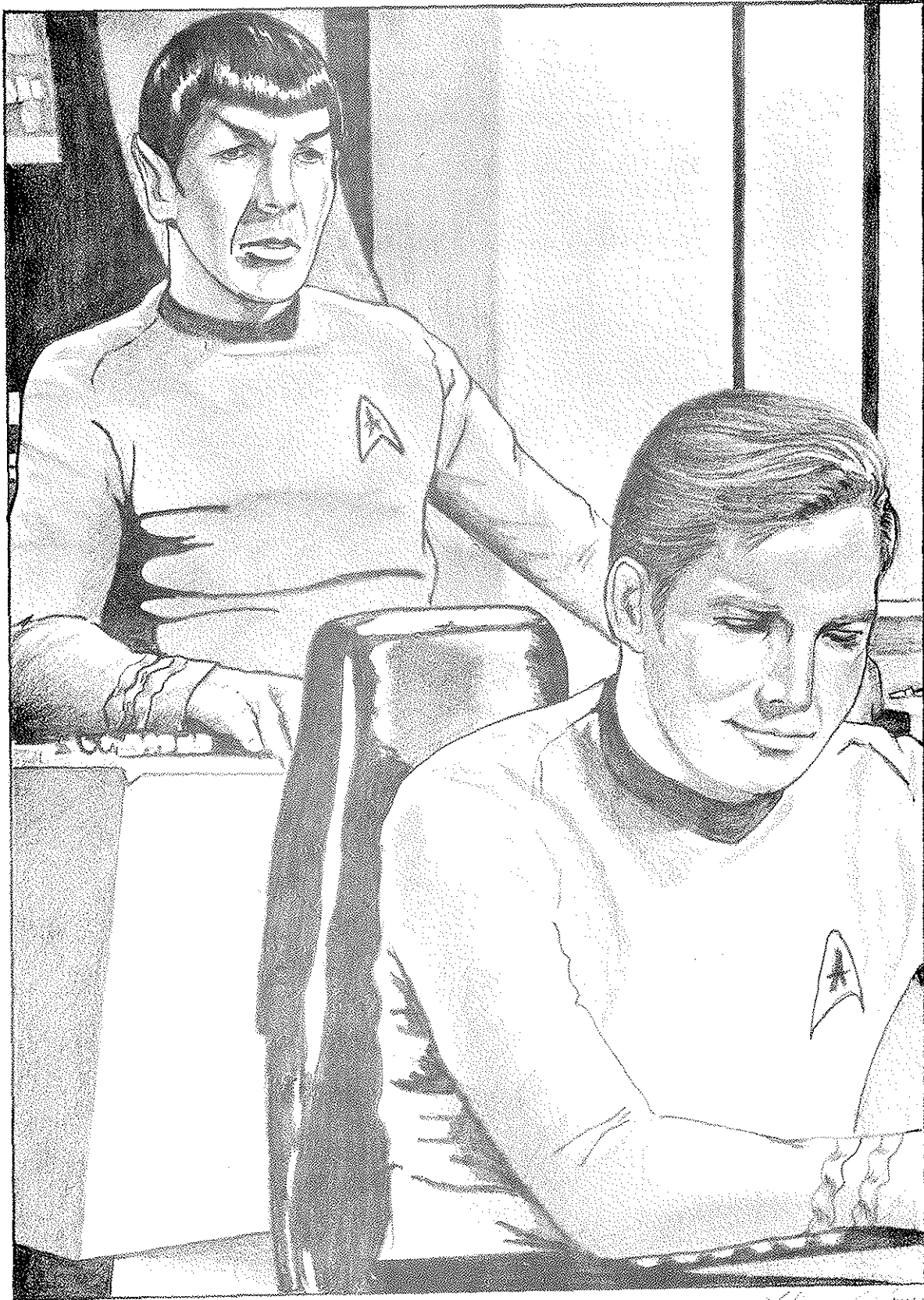
At present, C.IV is tentatively scheduled for late June or early July, to

be ready for PHILLY-CON. Keep your fingers crossed and send us a S A S E. for notification of the price when it will be ready. We've had many requests to reprint I & II, but haven't any plans to do so in the near future. Timewise, it's just not possible. The amount of record keeping, correspondence, order filling and general "grub" work involved cuts too deeply into the limited time we have to spend on producing a new issue, and our first love - writing. So, we'll just have to say no to requests to reprint - at least in any foreseeable future. Sorry. Maybe you can get someone to loan you their copies.

Well, this has turned into the longest Editors' Page for *CONTACT* to date. Hopefully, we've managed to clear up some questions about our zine, but maybe we've just become victims of the old adage, "*Never ask a writer (or orator) to say anything in 10 words that he can say in 100!*"

WE ARE ONE...WE REACH,

Dev and Nancy



Steve Lubner '92

THEN TO PIECE THE BROKEN CHAIN

BY

NANCY KIPPAX & BEVERLY VOLKER

*Where Love once has breathed, Pride dieth;
So I struggled, but in vain,
First to keep the links together,
Then to piece the broken chain.*

--FIDELIS-- A. A. PROCTOR

"The Admiral is ready to see you now, Captain Kirk."

The Enterprise commander, irritated at being kept waiting, rose quickly from the chair. All he knew was that his ship had been called in from patrol, he and Spock ordered to beam down to the Starbase to receive a special assignment of high priority. Upon their arrival, Spock had been spirited away to meet with Starfleet officials, while Kirk had been left in Admiral DuVal's anteroom.

He entered the rectangular office and formally greeted the older man.

"Captain James T. Kirk. You wished to see me, sir?"

DuVal stood to acknowledge his visitor. He was a short, balding man with puffy cheeks and a twinkle in his eyes. On the surface, Ralt DuVal seemed to be a teddy bear, merry and soft-spoken. Under the facade, however, was the steel coil of the man who had once commanded the successful attack force against the Romulan Empire, an exacting officer who took no nonsense from any being.

"Sit down, Captain," he instructed. "Sorry to have kept you waiting. Red tape - you understand." He flashed an apologetic smile.

Kirk relaxed under the Admiral's influence and settled in the indicated chair. Ralt DuVal had that effect on one, he decided in silent admiration.

"What do you know of the Y'bleitians?" DuVal asked abruptly.

Kirk was appropriately puzzled. "Y'bleitia is in the same solar system as Vulcan, isn't it?" At DuVal's curt nod, he went on. "They're not members of the Federation - never wanted to entangle with 'lesser species'. Government by a monarchy, chief ruler is the Szant, and his sons are the Stewards," Kirk clipped off, feeling like he was back at the academy undergoing oral exams.

"Correct," the Admiral agreed. "A very secluded people, though technically advanced, Captain Kirk; extremely formal and orderly. Their planet is a mineralogical treasure chest of untapped wealth. The Federation has been negotiating for mining rights since I was at the academy."

Kirk nodded. "I've heard there's been some progress in that area recently."

"Thanks to our friends on Vulcan, Prel, the Chief Steward, has been a guest here, and talk has been extremely favorable."

"What do the Vulcans have to do with it?"

"Friendly neighbors. Y'bleitia has maintained relations with Vulcan for centuries. They're the only representatives Prel will deal with. And we're not going to complain if this thing has results!"

Kirk eyed his superior steadily. "So, where does the Enterprise come in, Admiral?"

Ralt DuVal smiled wryly. He admired a man who came quickly to the point. Obviously all the reports he'd read on James Kirk were true, and he was favorably impressed.

"Prel needs a ride home." He deliberately oversimplified.

Kirk sensed what was coming. "And we've been chosen to play taxi. But why the Enterprise? We weren't even in this sector. There's more, Admiral?" He made it a question.

DuVal leaned back in his chair to better gauge Kirk's reaction. "He will travel only on a Starship commanded by a Vulcan."

Kirk's reaction was surprise, followed by understanding. "Spock..." he said slowly.

"That's right, Captain. For this mission, in the interests of diplomacy, Starfleet's giving command of the Enterprise to Commander Spock. He has the rank and the ability to command."

"I see," Kirk nodded thoughtfully, letting the implications of the plan sink in.

"I know it's an awkward situation for you, Kirk. In many cases, we could not expect this transition to be successful. But Starfleet's aware of the exemplary working relationship between you and your First Officer. We're confident that you two will have no difficulties on this mission."

Kirk shifted in his chair. "I agree. But what will my function be?" His mind was already racing ahead with half-formed plans.

"That's really up to your discretion. You know the personnel requirements of your ship."

Kirk considered. With Spock in command, Chekov would be manning the computer console. That left the post of navigator vacant. Kirk had always enjoyed navigation, but did he want a post on the bridge?

DuVal was speaking. "The trip will take approximately 10 days travel time, and we don't anticipate any problems. Commander Spock has already been informed of the situation and received his orders. The Enterprise is

scheduled to warp out at 0600 tomorrow. Prel will beam aboard at 0500."

Kirk smiled. "Sounds like an interesting assignment, Admiral. I'm sure the Enterprise won't let you down."

"Good." They rose, and DuVal became formal. "Captain Kirk - you are hereby temporarily relieved of command, as per Starfleet order AY-216. Command will resume upon arrival at Y'bleitia." He held out a hand to the younger man. "Have a good trip, Mister Kirk," he added softly.

Spock was waiting when Kirk arrived at the base transporter room, and the Vulcan seemed uneasy.

"Captain," he greeted him.

Kirk smiled wryly. "Improper use of nomenclature, sir," he corrected.

The Vulcan raised an eyebrow but offered no objection. Kirk began instructing the transporter officer on their co-ordinates, then halted mid-sentence and turned to Spock.

"I'm sorry, sir. I forgot for a moment."

A feeling akin to wonder filled the Vulcan. He had the distinct impression that Kirk was enjoying this. "Carry on," he said shortly.

Back in their own transporter room, Kirk voiced the question he had been considering. "Spock, have you given any thought to what job I'll be performing?"

Spock was thoughtful. "With Ensign Chekov assuming my former duties, the navigation console will be vacated," he offered.

Kirk nodded his approval, aware that the Vulcan knew he would rather be at the hub of activity than shunted away to one of the other sections of the ship. "Good. You know, I think I'm going to enjoy this trip, Spock. No command responsibilities, no pressures...She'll be in good hands and I can just relax and take it easy," he remarked lightly. A small smile played around Spock's mouth.

"Will you make the necessary announcement to the crew?" he asked. In answer, Kirk walked over to the wall communicator and told Uhura to patch him through ship-wide.

The next morning, Spock requested Kirk and Scott accompany him to the transporter room for Prel's arrival. As the officers entered, all eyes fell on Jim Kirk, whose uniform had been adjusted by the ship's stores to coincide with his present position. The two humans ignored the stares and stood apart from the Vulcan as the Y'bleitian Steward shimmered into form.

Prel was tall, almost 7 feet. He was totally hairless and, generally

speaking, humanoid. He had arms, legs, eyes, nose and mouth in all the right places, although everything seemed extremely elongated. But the curious thing about the Y'bleitian race was their lack of skeletal structure. Their core was essentially cartilage, without joints, giving them the flexibility of a rubber toy.

Spock extended both arms straight out, bending his palms up flat. Prel did likewise, pressing soft, dry palms against Vulcan firmness.

"Blessings and felicities," Prel intoned solemnly in a deep, rumbling voice.

The Vulcan dropped his arms, then raised one hand in his own Vulcan salute. "Live long and prosper, Steward. I am Spock, in command of the Enterprise. We are at your service."

Scotty leaned over to Kirk and said, sotto voice, "Where did Mr. Spock pick up all that about the greeting?"

Kirk grinned with admiration. "While he was waiting for me, he spent the time at the Starbase library boning up on Y'bleitian customs."

Scotty nodded knowingly. "Aye. 'Tis like Spock."

"It's like a good commander, Scotty," Kirk reproved mildly. He expected his crew, especially his officers, to accord Spock the same degree of respect that they showed him.

The Vulcan was introducing them. "Our navigator, James Kirk, and our Chief Engineer, Montgomery Scott."

The Steward's eyes flicked over them lightly but he did not address the humans.

"Are there no other Vulcans on board?" he asked Spock.

"I am the only one of my race on the Enterprise."



"How difficult and demeaning it must seem for one of your origin to be surrounded by inferior species. How do you stand it, Captain?"

"We learn to make adjustments in Starfleet, Steward, and there *are* compensations."

"But, working with aliens..." Prel was not convinced.

"The Federation believes all races can work together."

The Y'bleitian sniffed. "Yes, it seems some of my people are beginning to think that way, also. However..." he looked down at Kirk and Scott from his seven foot height, "I find the possibility extremely doubtful." He turned as Spock instructed the honor guard to escort him to his quarters, carefully avoiding contact with the humans as though he thought they might be contagious.

As Prel left, Kirk breathed a sigh of relief. Talk about racial snobbery! He was glad Spock had the job of contending with that one.

They were three days out on their uneventful journey. Spock entered the bridge and stepped over to the command chair. He still retained a curious sensation of unreality as each duty shift began.

"Status, Mr. Sulu?" he asked.

"Course unchanged, sir. Moving along at Warp 6 on original course set for Y'bleitia."

"Sir," Kirk put in, "there's a meteorite ahead. No present danger, but I recommend a diversion course of 3.26 degrees to avoid impact." It was a minor, routine matter and Spock observed.

"I see. Very well. Lay in diversionary course."

"Laid in," Kirk confirmed, flicking a switch.

Spock eyed him lightly. Keeping his voice low, he commented, "Mr. Kirk, you would make an excellent First Officer."

Kirk looked up in surprise, then grinned at the Vulcan's dry humor. The two officers regarded each other with mutual affection. It was satisfying, Kirk mused, how well this experiment was working out. He was relieved to be free of the usual burdens, knowing that his ship was in excellent hands, and it was interesting to observe Spock in a command situation.

McCoy chose that moment to enter the bridge. The doctor had been strangely absent for the past several days, after a few unsuccessful attempts at heckling his new commander.

Spock greeted the doctor. "Is there something we can do for you, Doctor McCoy?"

McCoy repressed a grin. "Well, that depends on what you mean by 'something', Spock." *I'll try*, he thought as Jim's warning echoed in his mind.

Last night over a glass of brandy, Kirk had chastized McCoy's lack of loyalty. He felt that the doctor was treating Spock unfairly, and while McCoy admitted the whole affair was no fault of Spock's, still the situation was awkward and unhealthy. Jim Kirk should be in command, not the Vulcan - damn Starfleet, anyway! But Jim had made him promise to make an effort to support Spock, so he'd try - even if it killed him.

"How are you making out with the Steward, Spock?" McCoy asked kindly. He knew Spock was the only one on board with whom the Y'bleitian would communicate. Between his other duties the Vulcan had been serving as host to their honored guest.

"Our conversations have been most refreshing and illuminating, Doctor," Spock replied, mildly surprised at McCoy's interest. "I find many cultural similarities between our people."

"It figures." McCoy's sounded too sarcastic, saying in one breath what he thought of the Y'bleitians *and* the Vulcans. Catching his mistake, he mentally kicked himself. *There I go again*, he thought.

"Assuming original course," Kirk called out, in an attempt to smooth over an awkward moment. Spock took the cue to change the subject.

"Doctor, if you have no further questions--" He left it unfinished, indicating an end to the discussion.

McCoy frowned and grabbed the arm of Spock's chair. "Damn it, Spock! It's only natural. When someone dislikes you, you dislike them! Prel's made it obvious he thinks of us as inferior."

Spock met his gaze. "Really, Doctor? I was under the assumption you humans believed in something you called tolerance."

Kirk felt McCoy's discomfort. *Bones walked right into that one*, he thought ruefully.

Spock's intercom beeped, breaking the tension on the bridge.

"Scott here, Captain," came the voice. Force of habit brought Kirk's head around as Spock inquired what Scotty wanted.

"Somethin's wrong down here, and I don'na just what it is. There appears to be a growin' imbalance between the matter-antimatter reactors. I've got a team workin' on it ri't now, but I thought ye'd be wantin' to know how we may be in for some trouble."

Spock frowned. "Strange. Were not those engines just overhauled, Mr. Scott?"

"Aye, Mr. Spock, that they were. I saw to the job meself," he defended.

"Very well. Keep me informed. Spock out." The Vulcan appeared lost in thought for a moment, pondering the nuances of Scott's report. Then, seeing the concern in Kirk's face, he shrugged.

"I don't know, Jim. Perhaps nothing," he answered to the unasked question.

It was more than 36 hours before they received more definitive information. When Scotty's call was put through to Spock, Jim Kirk was grateful for the interruption. The two officers were in the Y'bleitian's quarters, Jim having been talked into spending his off-duty hours there that evening as part of Spock's plan to cultivate Human/Y'bleitian fellowship. Kirk thought his friend had finally taken on something more than even he could accomplish this time and, now, after an agonizing half-hour of the insufferable Prel's company, the human was firmly convinced of that theory. Whatever Spock was trying to do, it certainly wasn't working!

Kirk sat slightly apart from the other two, who were animatedly debating an obscure aspect of philosophical doctrine, when the Chief Engineer's voice cut into their dialogue. As Spock excused himself, Prel looked thoughtfully at Kirk.

"You Terrans are fortunate to have such a wise man in command of your vessel, correct, Kirk?"

Kirk shifted in his chair, startled at being addressed at last. "I've admired Spock for years, Steward," he answered truthfully.

Prel nodded. "I understand," he mused in wonder, "there are some Federation Starships which are commanded by members of *your* species. What folly!"

Kirk's chin went up. "Starfleet picks men from *every* race to command, Steward. In the Federation, we've learned that racial prejudice is a myth. Each culture has its values and distinguishing characteristics. It is only in the blending of those similarities and differences that a coherent whole can be formed."

Prel listened impatiently to his words. "Yes, Kirk, I've heard that before, but--"

"Excuse me, Prel," Spock interrupted. "I regret we must take our leave now. Our presence is required elsewhere."

The Steward looked miffed. "Well, if you must..."

Kirk turned questioning eyes on Spock, but the Vulcan's face told him nothing. He stood and they bade the Steward a good evening.

Grateful for the excuse to be free of the Y'bleitian, Kirk followed Spock eagerly. Prel seemed disgruntled to have them go, but in Kirk's opinion it had been just in the nick of time. Wordlessly, he and Spock headed for the main control room in the Engineering section.

The normally ebullent Scotsman was looking glum and anxious as they arrived.

"Mr. Spock - we've got real trouble on our hands," he said in greeting. Leading them into the engine room, he pointed out the small section which was a mass of burned, fused metal and synthetic circuitry. Even Kirk understood the significance; it placed a tremendous strain on the reactors and the dilithium processors. Spock examined it closely.

"Sabotage?"

Scotty shrugged. "We can't be sure 'til we run some tests. It may have been a natural overload, or it may, like you say, be caused by external forces. But regardless of what caused it, we aren't goin' verra fast or verra far 'til we get 'er fixed!"

"Can we safely reach Y'bleitia without stopping for repairs?" Spock asked.

The question startled Kirk, to whom there was no obvious choice but to pull in to the nearest base for repairs. To operate the ship with this kind of handicap was foolhardy and dangerous.

Scott was surprised, too. His answer came slowly. "Well, Ah dinna... Ah can't really say, sir. I wouldn't recommend it."

Kirk was scanning the sector map. "There's a space station about three days travel away, map co-ordinates G-27, SR-38. We should be able to make that without any trouble, shouldn't we, Scotty?"

"Aye, Capt..." He broke off, embarrassed. Spock lifted an eyebrow but gave no other indication of acknowledging Scotty's faux pas.

"Gentleman," Spock began, "the hour is late and no more is going to be accomplished by this debate. Mr. Scott, correlate the information I have requested and have a report prepared by morning. I shall be in my quarters assimilating data. We'll take this up tomorrow at 0900 in the briefing room, at which time I will make a decision based on the available facts. Clear heads make clear thoughts. Good night."

As Spock exited, Kirk stared after him uneasily. He didn't know what the Vulcan had in his mind, but he didn't think he was going to agree.

McCoy plucked absently at his wrist braid. Scotty's technical explanation may as well have been delivered in Vegan for all he could understand. As a doctor, he left the mechanics of the ship to its engineers. But people -- now, there was something in which he had considerable experience. The signs of tension in the room were obvious. Take Jim, for example. The captain-turned-navigator was practically sitting on the edge of his chair. And Spock - well, of course he gave the usual outward appearance of serenity, but McCoy knew the Vulcan well enough to recognize the signs of an inner conflict.

Scotty finished speaking and McCoy wondered what the problem was. They

had engine trouble. So, they diverted to a space station for repairs. What was so complicated about that?

Spock sat silently for a moment, fingers steepled in front of him. Then he said slowly, "I find it curious that recently overhauled machinery chose this precise time to give out."

Kirk cleared his throat. "Even saying it *was* sabotage - and we have no evidence one way or the other - we can't continue on to Y'bleitia without stopping for repairs."

Spock looked over at him sharply. "No one has conclusively stated we could *not* reach Y'bleitia."

The control in Kirk was transparent. "It's a gamble, Spock! You can't gamble with the ship and the lives of the crew!"

"I do not gamble. I have calculated the risks involved..." Spock began. There was a silent plea for trust in his eyes, but Kirk chose to ignore it. All the familiar instincts came to the fore; he was in command again.

"I won't let you jeopardize my ship," he stated quietly. "We're going to the space station for repairs. Lieutenant Sulu, plot a course for K-22, Warp--"

"*Mister* Kirk." Spock's icy voice cut Kirk off effectively. "I am in command of this vessel, as per Starfleet orders."

Kirk turned slowly to meet Spock's eyes. He couldn't believe that the Vulcan would attempt to override him on this. A feeling of betrayal hit him with a stunning force. They stood motionless, the entire room a tableau of shock and incredulity.

Agitated, McCoy suddenly rose. "Spock, you're not serious! Jim's still the captain of the Enterprise, regardless of what Starfleet says!"

"Doctor--" Spock began, warning.

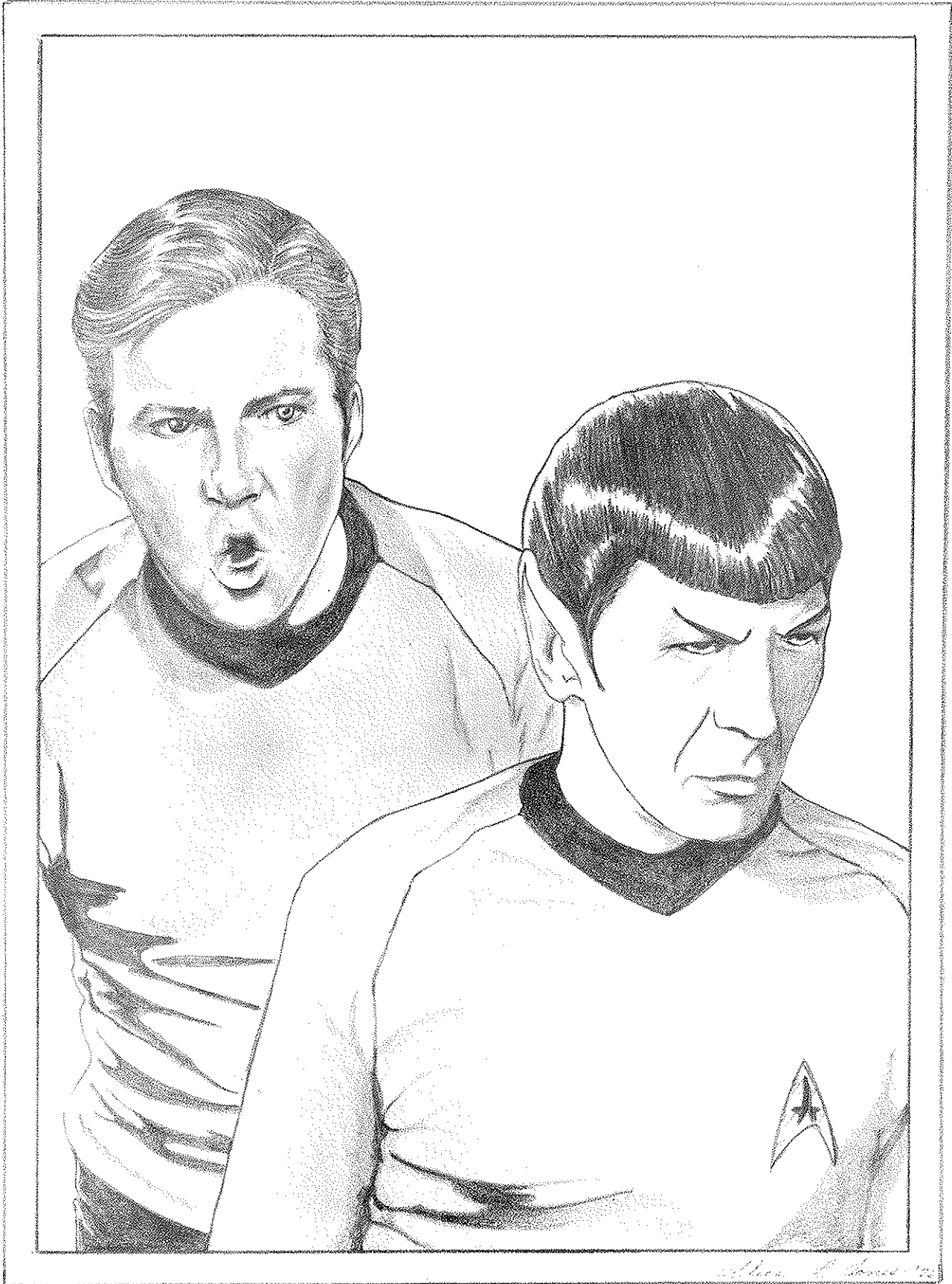
"You were only put in command for diplomatic reasons. You can't presume the authority for--"

"Bones!" Kirk's voice silenced him as the Vulcan's could not. For an instant he and Spock were unified again, fighting on the same side, then the illusion evaporated. Kirk could see the uncertainty and confusion on the faces of his officers. He stilled his own turbulent emotions, knowing it was unwise to allow them to become involved, and turned to Spock.

"May I have a word with you in private?" The request was delivered as an ultimatum.

"Not at this time." The agony in the Vulcan's eyes did not reach his voice. "I will discuss it with you later, if you wish. For now, I have made my decision and have work to do..."

All the pent-up fury exploded in a vicious burst from Kirk. "Not so



fast, Mister! This is *my* ship you're taking your calculated risks with, and I'll know the reasons why - *now* - or have you on report!"

A slight pause, then Spock acquiesced stiffly. "Very well. Come."

They left the briefing room and proceeded wordlessly to another room down the corridor. As Kirk took a seat, he wondered abstractly if he'd have gotten so worked up if the conflict had involved anyone but Spock. His anger had cooled and he was beginning to feel a twinge of regret at having lost his temper. Somehow, Spock was the last person he would expect to cross him. As Spock took a seat across from him, Kirk spoke in a gentle voice, confident that they could reach an understanding.

"All right, Spock. What's this all about? What's going on that you're not telling?"

"I am not endeavoring to hide anything," the Vulcan objected. "I do not believe I have given that impression."

"Then explain. Why must we get to Y'bleitia in such a hurry? Why not stop for repairs?"

"Jim, this mission is of vital importance to the Federation. The Steward's safe return is our primary responsibility. If someone has been tampering with the ship, it suggests there are forces at work against the successful completion of our appointed task. I do not think it wise to take a chance of failing to deliver Prel safely."

"If the ship gives out, Prel will die along with the rest of us," Kirk countered.

"I have examined the matter and concluded we can make it without incurring harm," Spock explained patiently. "The odds against our not completing the trip safely are--"

"Even Scotty can't make that conclusion, and he's the authority! Spock..." Kirk broke off, frustrated by his friend's implacable stubbornness. He stood and began pacing the room, trying to calm his rising temper. "All right. Prel's safety is at stake here, but so is your ship and your crew. You cannot logically jeopardize them for one man."

The unruffled voice came again. Stubborn. "I do not consider them in jeopardy." Then, coming to Kirk's side, he added quietly, "Jim, can't you understand? We're wasting valuable time. I've explained my reasons to you, I've correlated all available data and based my conclusion on that. If it differs from yours, I'm...sorry, but the decision *is* mine."

The total helplessness of his situation intensified the rage in Kirk. He was unable to take a back seat to anyone where his vessel was concerned, regardless of Starfleet orders. He could almost forget that this man was his friend, his loyal officer. Right now, Spock was only an obstacle in the path to obtaining what he was certain was right for the Enterprise. His voice was hard, the words dropping like sparks in the electrified room.

"The decision is not entirely yours, Spock. We have until tomorrow

to veer off for Station K-22. You have until then to change your mind. If not--" he pointed a finger at the Vulcan, "--I'll notify Starfleet of your actions and assume command." He turned and left without waiting for a reply.

As the door closed behind Kirk, Spock took an uncertain step forward, wanting to follow, to call out. The stoic expression evaporated, replaced by a wounded, puzzled look. He had asked for understanding, for support, but it had not been forthcoming. He could not explain Kirk's resentment and anger at his command decision, and there was no where he could turn for advice or explanation. His duty was clear, though. Resolutions must be fulfilled. Orders must be carried out. He drew himself erect, clenching his hands tightly.

The next 24 hours moved in slow motion. Even when Kirk was off duty, as now, his presence was felt by every restless member of the bridge crew. Spock divided his time between the bridge and Engineering, and if heads had gotten together they'd have wondered when the Vulcan stopped to rest.

As he entered the bridge, Spock called to Sulu, "Lieutenant, Mr. Scott and I have agreed to try Warp 8. Stand by to increase power."

The doors at his back whished open, and Spock knew who it was without turning. He went on. "Increase speed...now."

"Warp factor 7...Warp factor 8...Acheived, sir," Sulu reported, glancing uneasily over Spock's shoulder.

"Spock..."

He turned then to see his Captain's taut figure, the icy control with which Kirk masked his emotion. Understanding and appreciating the effort Kirk was willing to make to keep their differences from the rest of the crew, Spock stepped to the turbolift.

"Come," he said shortly.

Where they went didn't matter. It turned out to be a deserted observation deck two levels down. A peculiar sense of foreboding filled Spock. He was torn between his loyalty and admiration and something more that was so difficult to admit he felt for this man, and the burden of responsibility which had been placed on him by Starfleet. It was more than a question of who was right and who was wrong. If the whole fabric of their relationship rested on who gave the orders and who followed them, it said very little for James Kirk and himself. Spock needed the support and trust of a friend more than ever, but he felt the unbreechable chasms stretching between them like a palpable, living thing.

He turned to meet Kirk's level gaze and drew the dignity of command about him. His duty was clear and he could allow no one, not even James Kirk, to stand in the way of his executing what he believed was the only correct course of action. Kirk, himself, had taught Spock too well what it took to command a starship. *For that, Captain, I salute you,* he thought grimly.

Kirk, restlessly kept in watchful suspense all day, was ready to play his last card. He had given Spock every opportunity, had tried every way possible to work with him on this decision. Realizing that it was all for nothing, he had steeled himself for the inevitable. He pushed aside any hesitation he felt, angered by Spock's seeming betrayal, unable to see any justification to the Vulcan's determination to jeopardize the ship. The time for reasoning was past.

"You obviously haven't changed your mind," Kirk said, a deadly calm in his voice.

One final time, Spock tried. "Jim, why can't you trust my judgement in this matter?"

"Because, you're being unreasonable. Starfleet's given you command and it's gone to your head!" Kirk lashed out, too frustrated to consider what he was accusing.

"Is that what you believe?"

"What else can I believe? You leave me no choice." There was an ache deep inside, but he ignored it and went on. "I wasn't making an empty threat yesterday, Spock. Since you refuse to take this ship to a repair station, I'm assuming command."

"On whose authority?" Spock challenged.

"My own, damn it! Starfleet's, if necessary." There could be no reply from Starfleet in time to do their present situation any good, and they both knew it. It was a personal confrontation, with each of them unwilling to bend. The bluff hung heavy in the air.

Spock's voice was quiet yet hard. "You *have* no authority on this ship, Mister Kirk. I am in command, and you can follow no other course but to abide by my decisions or I'll have you confined to quarters." They were, perhaps, the hardest words he'd ever had to say. Kirk was forcing him into an unretreatable position, removing all options, making him deliberately cruel.

Kirk recoiled as though struck, and the action brought a fresh wave of pain to Spock. He knew he had inflicted hurt and the wound cut deep into him as well.

It was all going too fast, Kirk thought. Was this the man whom he had called friend? Was this his loyal First Officer -- the man he had trusted above all? A sense of unreality surfaced, making the scene take on a ghastly, nightmarish quality. They were saying the words, acting out the scene, without really being a part of it. It was as if some angry super-being had them in its control and were forcing them to play along.

"*No authority*, Spock? How many of the crew do you think would take your orders over mine? We'll see about authority, *Mister Spock!*"

The Vulcan closed the space between them in one swift stride. "What you're talking about is mutiny," he said, his voice dangerously low.

"Call it whatever name you wish. I won't let you destroy my ship." As he made a motion to leave, Spock blocked his path with an outstretched arm.

"Consider yourself relieved of duty and confined to quarters." This madness had to end, had to be stopped - now, before it went any further. Later, after they had both had time to reflect upon it, perhaps an agreement could be reached. Kirk glared at him, still unbelieving that Spock would go this far. The Vulcan added, "Do not make me call a security guard to enforce it."

With a sickening lurch, Kirk realized that Spock meant it, and may heaven help them all. Subdued for the moment, he spoke quietly, through tight lips.

"All right, Spock. You've won -- for now. But when this is over -- if we make it -- you'd better be ready to prove your actions beyond a shadow of a doubt, because I'll have you up on charges. Count on it. You want command, you've got it. Totally." Summoning a reserve of dignity, Kirk walked stiffly to the turbolift.

The Vulcan stood alone, more alone than ever before, feeling the emptiness so acutely that it was like a physical pain in his middle. He felt as though someone had ripped him asunder, leaving him scattered over the deck. Clinically, he marvelled at these humans and their violent emotions. How awkward and troublesome such feelings must be. Logic and order must always take precedence. Logic and order, his mind echoed like a litany. Drawing a deep, tremulous breath, he struggled for control, and with difficulty drew his mask back in place. As he headed for the bridge, only the most perceptive observer would notice the look of pain in his eyes, the bunched-up muscles at the nape of his neck which belied his calm exterior. Only one man on the ship could recognize the signs of torment in Spock, and he was confined to quarters.

The Enterprise limped on to Y'bleitia. In the next 48 hours her commander narrowly averted several major disasters, compensating for their lack of power by turning off non-essential systems and unused decks. All communications were out except for the inter-ship system. When the navigational controls died they switched to auxiliary control. Estimated arrival time was still three days away.

Kirk remained in his quarters and followed the events on his intercom as they occurred. He was frustrated by the lack of activity but determined not to interfere. There was nothing he could do, now, that Spock wasn't doing. It was too late for the repair stop, and the Science Officer could handle things without his help. Kirk had not felt so at odds with his own ship since Daystrom's M-5 had been installed. Only this time, he wasn't being replaced by a machine, but by a flesh and blood being. Spock. My God, it hurt. With a persistent ache, the separation cut deep into his soul.

At last, determined to intercede, McCoy came to his cabin. The doctor avoided the main issue for a few minutes with some small talk designed to make Kirk relax, but the Captain would have no part of it. Finally, in his own roundabout fashion, McCoy came to the point.

"Jim, why are you staying here? It's not like you to sulk."

"I've been confined to quarters, Doctor. Relieved of duty." Kirk's voice was hard. McCoy waved his hand in denial.

"Nonsense. Spock would welcome your return to duty. He needs you, Jim."

Kirk stared at the wall. "He's doing all right, Bones. Considering."

The doctor sat down heavily. "I'm worried about him, Jim." Kirk looked curious; the doctor went on. "He's pushing himself. I don't think he's slept or even rested since this whole thing began. The crew is pretty tense and I've heard some dangerous rumbling. And, on top of it all, Prel somehow caught word of what's happening and now he's on Spock's back, too. Our Vulcan's no superman, despite what we sometimes think, Jim. Too much more



pressure and he's going to crack!" Kirk was silent. He hadn't realized...

McCoy tried another approach. "Jim, if not for Spock's sake, think of the ship. You've got to present a united front for the crew. This isn't right. The two of you belong together."

Kirk nodded slowly. He suddenly saw the validity of McCoy's argument with a clarity that seemed to have been hidden from him recently. Too many emotions had clouded his vision and now he didn't like what he was forced to face. "I'll think about it, Bones," he promised. He needed time to work this new revelation out in his mind.

After the doctor left, Kirk sat quietly for a while, a sense of guilt flooding him. For the first time in two days he activated his viewscreen

and dialed the bridge. The form of Lieutenant Hendley, the night communications officer, filled the screen. Kirk swept the viewer around the bridge until he found the Vulcan standing at the library console with his back to the screen. As Spock turned around, Kirk drew in his breath sharply. McCoy was right -- he looked terrible. There were lines of fatigue and tension etched on his face, and his shoulders drooped with the weight of the pressure he was under -- a pressure that did not come from the problem with the ship alone. Kirk absorbed the tension into his own system with a unique empathy the two men shared.

With a swift movement, Kirk blanked out the screen, balling his fingers into a fist. An overwhelming urge to comfort and support consumed him. *Trust me*, Spock had said, but Kirk had been unable to give him what he'd asked for. Did it really matter which of them was right and which was wrong? Shouldn't they be more concerned with finding a common solution?

Loyalty, that's all Spock had asked of him, the same degree of loyalty the Vulcan gave him at every step he took. *I've been wrong at times*, Kirk thought with a stab, *who hasn't? But I could always count on Spock to stand beside me. The one time he asks the same from me, I let him down.*

Self-recrimination wouldn't help, he realized. His steps determined, he headed for the bridge.

Upon his arrival, Hendley greeted him. Spock was no longer there; Kirk inquired about him.

"Mr. Scott called the Commander to Engineering. There's been an emergency failure. Mr. Spock's helping with the repairs," he informed Kirk.

Lieutenant Zolinsky stopped Kirk as he started to leave the bridge.

"Captain Kirk...are we going to reach Y'bleitia safely?" she pleaded. "Can't you do something?"

Kirk looked at her coldly. "I have every confidence that Mr. Spock is doing everything possible, Lieutenant."

"Yes, but..." Hendley's voice cut her off. He'd been listening to a call and he suddenly snapped on the intercom.

"Bridge to Sickbay. Medical team to Engineering."

McCoy's voice came through. "McCoy here. What's the problem, Hendley?"

"Sir, Mr. Spock has been injured in an explosion."

"On my way." Kirk heard McCoy's words as if from a great distance. Panic, to a man trained not to panic, came as a subtle shock. Externally controlled, Kirk's mind could only absorb the surface details as he found himself rushing through the ship to Engineering.

The medical team was already there and McCoy had Spock strapped to a cart. The Vulcan was still, his face and tunic covered with a gray ash from the explosion. Green blood trickled from a small slash across his temple.

McCoy could tell Kirk nothing; he was intent on getting Spock to Sickbay. As they propelled the cart out of the room, Kirk followed slowly. His last conversation with Spock echoed dully in his ears. The accusations, the innuendoes he had flung at Spock in his anger filled him with remorse and shame. All of the things he'd finally realized in his quarters came back to him with renewed force. *Spock...my friend, forgive me. Let there be a chance for me to tell you I'm sorry.*

Things could not be left unspoken. Chasms could not be left to widen, not in their situation, not when the threat of destruction was constantly at the door.

He waited impatiently in Sickbay's outer office while McCoy and his team cared for Spock in the examining area. At last, McCoy joined Kirk. He smiled at his anxious friend, satisfied with the situation.

"Well, Spock's all right, no serious damage, just a few cuts and bruises. He had the breath knocked out of him by the blast. He'll be regaining consciousness in a few minutes."

Kirk felt himself go weak with relief. *There would be a chance, after all.* "Thanks, Bones," he said softly.

McCoy nodded, knowing anything he might say now would be superfluous. Jim realized what was happening at last, and that was all that mattered.

Kirk left the doctor's office and went into the cubicle where Spock was sleeping. He cast a cursory glance at the panel above the bed, the stable readings reassuring him that Spock was, indeed, all right. The Vulcan looked so pale and vulnerable, his chest rising and falling evenly. Kirk sat on the edge of the bed, earnestly studying every feature with grateful appreciation. He marvelled at the dark lashes and brows against the pale, almost translucent skin, the graceful sweep of the alien ears, all so familiar and all so new in the rebirth of affection. *This very special part of me,* Kirk thought. *Neither of us really is any good without the other.* He'd almost allowed his pride and Spock's stubbornness to tear them apart. A tender smile crossed his face.

Spock's eyes opened and he made a feeble attempt to rise. Kirk put his hands gently but firmly on his shoulders to prevent the movement.

"Easy, 'Captain'," Kirk chided softly.

The Vulcan seemed disoriented for a moment; he focused with difficulty. Although his body demanded rest, he shook off the lethargy as the words, the touch, penetrated the recesses of his consciousness.

"Jim..." he mumbled, then, "Captain," more forcefully as the nightmare of the past few days evaporated. "What..."

"Don't try to talk," Kirk cautioned, letting his hand move down Spock's arm. The Vulcan sighed, then regarded Kirk curiously, unsure of the other's attitude.

"I am...all right," Spock said.

"Good. There's something I want to tell you. Spock, I'm sorry. I realize now that I was wrong not to give you the loyalty you asked for. We should be working together, not apart."

Spock met his eyes, knowing the words did not come easy for Kirk. Thoughtfully, he replied, "And I, Captain...I was, perhaps, too arbitrary in my decisions. Only a fool does not take advice."

"It doesn't matter. Don't you see, Spock? The issue isn't whether you were right or I was right...what matters is what almost happened to *us*. Each of us needs the other. Without that...what good is all the rest?"

Spock nodded slowly. A warm sensation spread through him, healing, relaxing, in the security of his Captain's presence. "I *do* need you, Jim," he said almost shyly.

"And I, you," Kirk assured. In that quiet moment they laid aside their differences as insignificant and formed a union to stand together against whatever lay ahead. A tight, cohesive bond that brushed aside the past few days and enabled them to go forward tightened around the two, giving each peace and strength. The broken chain was not only pieced, it was reinforced.

There was an old Earth philosophy that a relationship was like a rope, with a knot on either end representing the two people. As quarrels and differences arose and the rope was severed, it could only be repaired by tying the broken ends together. In doing so, the rope was shortened, bringing the knotted ends closer together. Sometimes, they believed, the tearing apart only made stronger that which was originally good.

During the silence, they found their hands clasped firmly, fist entwined in fist. As the reality of the world around them intruded, they remembered the explosion, the ship, the myriad details of duty and responsibility.

"How much damage was done?" Spock asked suddenly, confident that Kirk would follow his thoughts.

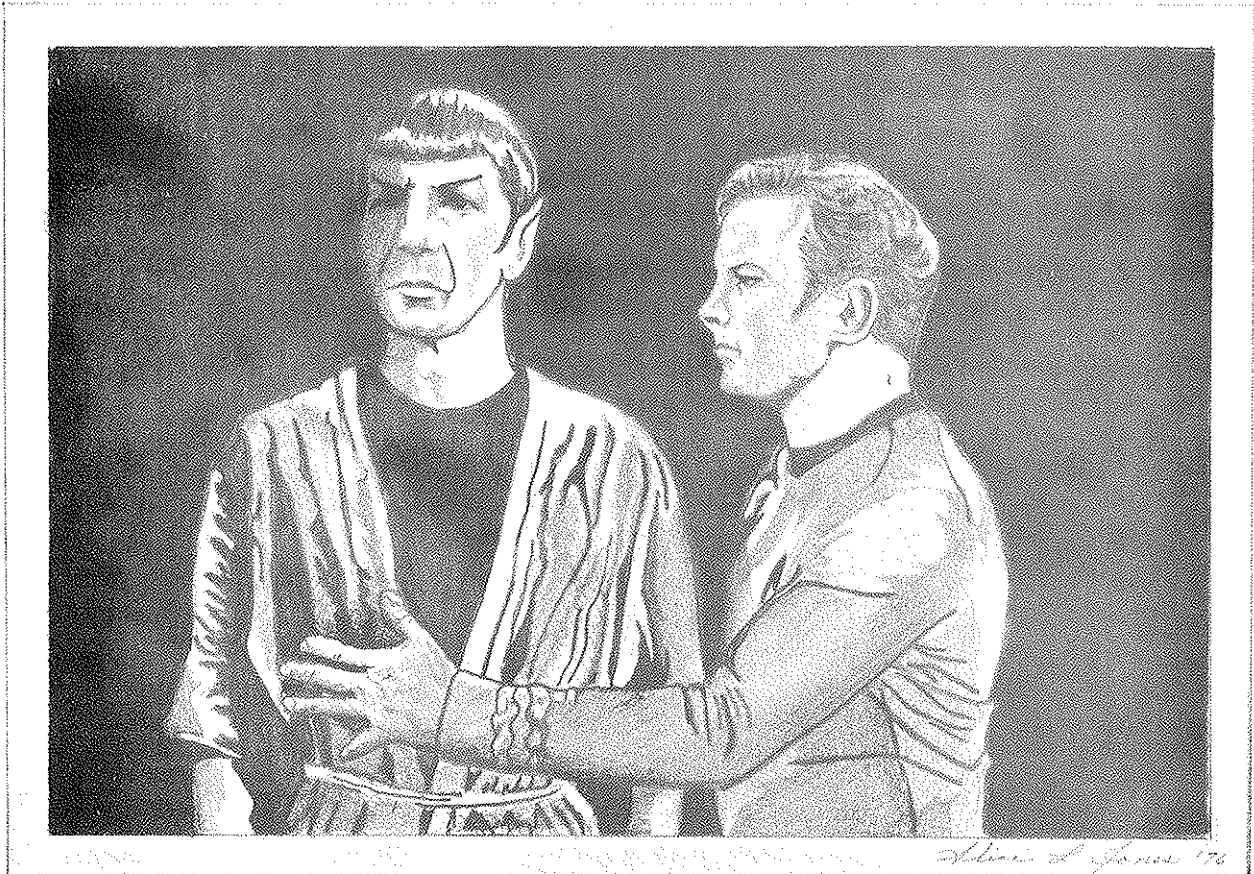
Kirk moved to the intercom and called Engineering. He and Spock listened to the report that the damage had been repaired, but the situation was still critical.

McCoy entered, frowning at the activity. "Spock, what in blazes are you doing? I prescribed rest for this patient, Jim!" he berated them. The Vulcan stood with Kirk's help.

"Doctor, I have a ship to run. I am not injured, and must resume my duties," he told him.

McCoy opened his mouth to protest, but a warning look from Kirk stilled his voice. Kirk obviously felt it was wiser for Spock to assume duty than to rest, and although he couldn't totally agree, he could understand Kirk's reasoning. For Spock to turn command over now would be to admit defeat.

"All right," McCoy said gruffly, as Spock slipped his shirt on. "But, take it easy."



Together, Kirk and Spock left Sickbay.

As they entered the Y'bleitian solar system, they were still approximately 20 hours from their destination, and the Enterprise was shuddering in the attempt to continue on course. The crew was honed to a fever pitch of anxiety, Engineering was trying all kinds of untested techniques to keep her moving, and the people on the bridge were silent and tense.

Spock, looking weary, presided over all developments with a quietness that worried Jim Kirk. He knew the Vulcan was beginning to wonder if he had been right to push the ship to such extreme limits, and he could empathize with that familiar feeling of uncertainty over making the right decision. Kirk exuded confidence and calm everywhere he went, and the crew never realized it was all a bluff. Between Spock's technical skills and Kirk's psychological ones, they held the ship and crew together, taking one hour at a time.

They were just outside Y'bleitian orbit, mere hours away from success, when the call came from Scotty.

"That tears it, Mr. Spock," he cried. "That gimcrack booster just gave out, and the whole system's smoking. We're finished. Ah kin do nothin' more!"

Spock raced to the engine room, but when he returned, the look on his face told Kirk that Scotty's dour appraisal was accurate.

With a last, sickening lurch, the Enterprise ground to a halt.

Recovering from the jolt, Kirk moved to Spock's side as the Vulcan spoke steadily and evenly.

"We have approximately 10 hours-23 minutes of life support left...Ms. Uhura, send out a distress signal relating our co-ordinates. There is a possibility it will be picked up by a Y'bleitian patrol craft. We may have to send the crew down in the shuttlecrafts by relay, theoreticably enlisting aid from the Y'bleitians. Mr. Chekov, set up a team to study that, determining time factors and rate of drift." As the officers moved to carry out his orders, Spock turned to Kirk. "Jim, would you take the con? I must," a look of pain crossed his face, "...I must inform the Steward what emergency plans are being put into effect and endeavor to enlist the aid of his people."

"Spock..." Kirk said softly, putting his heart in the word, "...don't blame yourself. You've done everything possible."

The Vulcan looked bleak. "Except stop for repairs," he intoned, moving away. Sulu's sudden gasp of exclamation brought their heads around.

"Sir! Something's got us in a tractor beam!" As he spoke, they felt the tugging of the ship under their feet. Spock moved urgently to the console.

"Analysis?" he queried briskly.

The helmsman's voice shook with emotion. "It appears to be a long-range emmission from Y'bleitia, Captain. It's...it's guiding us into orbit!"

While a team of Y'bleitian engineers beamed up to the Enterprise with the appropriate replacement parts per Scotty's instructions, Spock, Kirk and Prel beamed down to the Capital using the Szant's personal transporter.

The wizened old man greeted his son warmly, then exchanged the same formal greeting with Spock that Kirk had observed upon Prel's arrival.

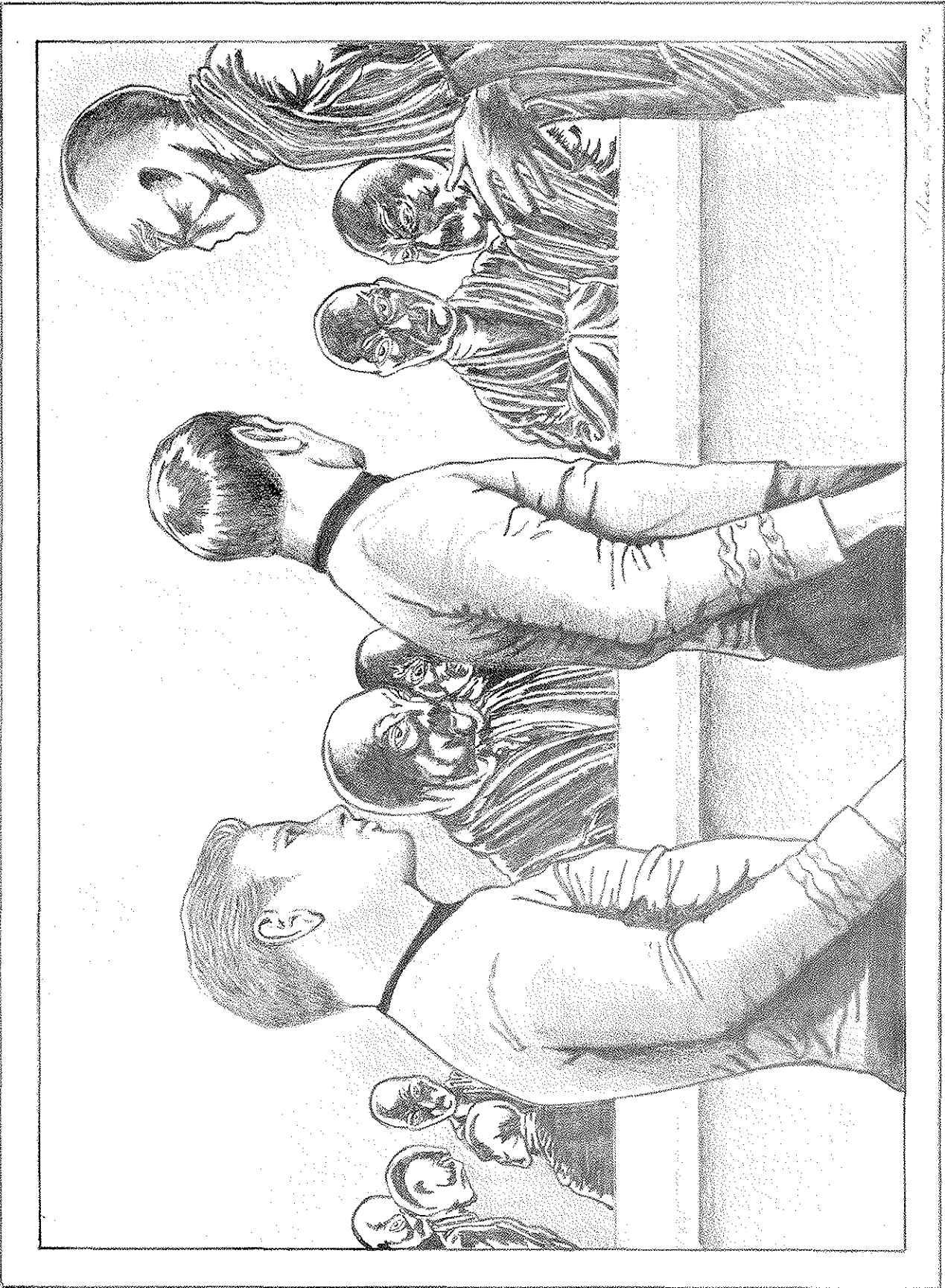
"Captain Spock, the people of Y'bleitia are eternally grateful to you. We have scanned the skies most anxiously for your arrival."

"We are fortunate you were so observant, and are in your debt," Spock replied, lowering his head deferentially.

The Szant went on. "It was indeed a brave and wise thing you did to risk harm to your vessel. We are only too proud to be of service."

There was an undercurrent here which Kirk found baffling. "Excuse me, but at the risk of sounding ungrateful, how did you know we'd have trouble with the ship?"

The Szant looked surprised. "Didn't you know?" he asked. At their questioning looks, he explained. "The Klingon enemy had sabotaged your engines. There was an assassin at Space Station K-22 who planned to murder my son. The Federation discovered the plot, but not until two days ago. Had you



stopped for repairs as the Klingon enemy assumed, the attempt would surely have been successful."

As the Szant spoke, his words made the whole scheme painfully clear. What better way to destroy Federation/Y'bleitian relations than to have the leader's son murdered while under Federation protection?

"Well, your Excellency," Kirk said, bringing the point into focus, "it looks like the Federation has been right about a number of things." He smiled.

The Szant nodded slowly. "It would seem so, Mr. Kirk, it certainly would seem so." His gaze acknowledged the human for the first time.

A sense of contentment, of a job well done, filled James Kirk as he and Spock resumed their normal stations on the bridge. He motioned Spock to his chair.

"Well, Mr. Spock, it appears you were right to bypass the space station. This thing will undoubtedly be construed as a victory by the Federation," he said lightly.

The taut lines around Spock's mouth did not relax. "No, Captain, I miscalculated. Had it not been for the Y'bleitian's vigilance, we would not have made it safely."

Kirk studied him carefully. "Spock, that's what's known as the lack of absolutes. In any command decision there is no perfect right or perfect wrong. You do the best you can, and then pray it turns out. Command is not a science." The Vulcan was thoughtful, considering Kirk's words. The Captain sat up straight, and looked sternly at his First Officer.

"Mr. Spock, consider yourself relieved of duty."

Spock looked up warily, with a lack of comprehension. "Sir?" he asked.

Kirk stood and propelled him forcefully toward the turbolift. "Rest, Spock. For the next 48 hours you're off duty. Get some sleep before you collapse."

Spock nodded gratefully, relieved. "Yes, sir. That would be most welcomed," he admitted.

Kirk watched as he left the bridge. What he'd told Spock was true. There were no absolutes in command, and very few in life. Yet, whatever the situation, they managed to learn something new, or have an old ideal reinforced. Spock would understand his words in time, he knew. Despite anything else, one of the few absolutes that he and Spock had was their need for each other.

Satisfied, Kirk resumed his post.

A FLOWER IN THE DESERT

--Martha J. Bonds

She loved you,
And yet you are alone.
Too soon the battle ends
And she is gone.
Only a brief fragrance remains
To linger in your mind.
The thirst,
A burning loneliness.
A flower dies.
I have known such a thirst.
On the hot sands of Vulcan,
Under cool leaves of other worlds,
I have known the
Aching thirst you feel.
Yet loneliness is not the only word
Whose meaning has been written in my book.
Forget...



Abyss by *Jeanne Powers*

Spock had the definite impression that he was falling. He stared about dazedly, trying to get a bearing on where he was, but what was passing was only a blur. He was about to close his eyes again when he caught a glimpse of something above and to the right of him.

"Jim," he whispered, more to himself than to his friend. The Captain, too, was falling, but he wasn't aware of Spock; his eyes were tightly shut and his arms were almost straight out from his sides. "JIM!" Spock said again, but more loudly.

The Captain opened his eyes and looked about a bit blankly, as though trying to focus on something. He finally saw the Vulcan with something akin to amazement and said a bit uncertainly, "Spock? Is that you?"

"Yes, Jim!" On an impulse, he reached out his hand to Kirk. It was illogical, but right now he felt an overpowering need for physical contact. When their hands finally touched, Spock realized with a faint shock how cold his hands were...yet, he had not felt cold at all.

"Spock...where are we?" Kirk asked faintly.

"I am afraid I have no idea, Captain..." He closed his eyes in an effort to think. "I can't seem to remember..."

Spock felt a sudden jerk on his arm. Startled, he opened his eyes. Captain James T. Kirk was no longer there.

He called out, but there was no answer. He tried to twist his head around to look for Kirk, but was nearly overcome by a wave of nausea. His head started spinning, and then he lost consciousness.

**

The first thing Spock was aware of was that he had stopped falling and seemed to be lying on a bed. The nausea had abated somewhat, but he still felt dizzy. Vaguely, as from a great distance, he heard voices speaking softly.

"Who is it?" a feminine voice murmured.

"I know him. It's Spock," a masculine voice - somehow very

familiar - replied. "Hey, Spock...can you hear me?"

Spock found his voice. "Yes...Jim...where's Jim?"

"He's not here," the voice said soothingly, "but don't worry. Everything will be all right. Rest now."

"But...Jim..." Spock protested weakly.

"Everything will be all right," the voice repeated. "It just takes time."

Spock managed at last to focus on the speaker. It was Gary Mitchell.

**

Dr. McCoy dropped into a chair, exhausted. He rubbed his eyes in an effort to relieve the stinging desire to sleep there. Then, resignedly, he picked up the casualty list and stared at it. Faintly, he could hear voices nearby and realized that it was Uhura and M'Benga. He tried not to listen, but the words filtered through anyway.

"The Captain is recovering nicely - he's sleeping now. I don't mind telling you that we were really worried for a while. We came close to losing him. Mr. Spock--"

Spock. McCoy felt the word go through him like a knife. How was he going to tell Jim?

"Doctor?" McCoy looked up. M'Benga had somehow entered the room without notice. "The Captain is awake now. He's asking to see you."

McCoy rose slowly, trying to draw himself together. This was the moment he had been dreading, but there was no escape from it. How to explain? Death is seldom logical...What an appropriate way to put it. He sighed and moved toward the door.



*Never and always
touching
and
touched*

Pat Mast

The First Step

by Susan Dorsey

Captain James T. Kirk of the Starship Enterprise headed down the corridor toward his quarters. He was tired and irritable and he knew it. Just as the door slid back, McCoy caught up with him.

"Jim, may I talk to you for a minute?"

"Now what?" Kirk snapped.

"Jim!..."

"I'm sorry, Bones. I seem to be short on patience lately." Kirk looked rueful. "What's the problem?"

Kirk threw himself down on the bed as McCoy turned the desk chair around and sat facing him.

"Jim," McCoy took time to consider his next words, "Are you and Spock in the process of a major disagreement?"

Kirk sat up, surprised. "No. Why do you ask that? Oh, we had a flare-up over Vulcan-Federation philosophy a couple of days ago, but... it was over as soon as it started."

"Are you sure of that? Spock hasn't been out of his cabin except for his duty tours for the past two days. I don't think he's eating and, of course, he won't talk to me except to say he's quite all right." McCoy's voice unconsciously took on the cool tone of the Vulcan.

Kirk rubbed his forehead and looked thoughtful. McCoy pressed his advantage.

"Besides that, Jim, you haven't exactly been a shining ray of light yourself the past couple of days. You've been as nervous as a long-tailed cat in a room full of rocking chairs." As his drawl became more evident, Kirk had to grin.

"Okay, okay, I'll talk with him. If there is trouble between us, I'll straighten it out."

McCoy looked serious. "Jim, I think there has to be. Not only are both of you being affected, but I can't conceive of any situation having this affect on Spock unless it was connected with you. Anyone else he'd just -- " The doctor shrugged and stood up, one brow lifted. As the door opened, he said, "You'd better have that talk soon, Captain."

Kirk lay back on the bed and frowned. What had started the argument? He couldn't remember. Tempers had flared, most unusual for Spock - and then they had settled back to their game of chess, himself quiet, Spock withdrawn behind a wall of cool politeness.

Something inside of Kirk hurt, as he realized that Spock had stayed behind that wall. He had been civil when duty forced them together, but had kept to himself the rest of the time. There were no shared quiet moments. It had been a long time since the Vulcan had felt the need to put a barrier between them. It suddenly came to him that for the first time in months he felt completely alone. What had happened between him and his First Officer? He didn't know, but he meant to find out.

He got up and went along the corridor to Spock's cabin.

Kirk paused outside the door -- then touched the buzzer. He had the illogical feeling that Spock knew he was there -- and didn't want to see him. For what seemed an eternity, there was no response, then Spock said, "Come."

The Vulcan got up from the bed and came to attention as Kirk entered. The heat and gloom seemed more oppressive than usual.

"Captain?" To Kirk, who knew him so well, the tension was evident.

"At ease, Commander." Kirk matched the formality Spock had adopted. Spock relaxed slightly and sat down on the bed, as Kirk took a seat on the edge of the desk.

"Mr. Spock, McCoy asked me...to talk with you. Do we have a problem? We must, Spock." Spock looked startled, both eyebrows up. "Whatever it is, I'd like to straighten it out. We can't go on forever this way." Spock looked at the floor, refusing to meet Kirk's eyes.

"No, Captain, we cannot, as you say, go on this way indefinitely. Therefore, tomorrow you will have my request for a transfer, effective immediately."

Kirk sat absolutely still, stunned. He'd expected stubbornness or an argument, but this..."A transfer! Spock!" He leaned forward and gripped his First Officer's shoulders. "What's happening to us?"

He felt dizzy -- waves of emotion washed over him. He recognized it as emanating from Spock -- warmth, understanding, compassion, love, overwhelming physical desire and above all, deep shame. Through the contact between them the emotions became his own as well.

"This is what is happening between us, Captain." Spock's voice was ragged with stress. "I have been aware of the developing bond for some time - but I felt I could control our minds and keep you unaware of the situation. I did not wish...to leave...the ENTERPRISE," his voice dropped to a whisper, "...and you. Over our game three nights ago our minds touched; I realized I was no longer in control. I covered that incident with anger, but I knew I could not allow contact between us to continue. I have spent the past two days trying to decide how and what



"I did not wish to leave the Enterprise.....and you."

to tell you. Now, because of your interference, you know. Jim...please go." Spock's voice broke.

Kirk, in a daze of emotion and pain, dropped his hands from his friend's shoulders and walked to the door. As it slid closed, the words, *Jim, I am sorry*, formed in his mind.

In the corridor, he literally ran into McCoy.

"Jim! What's wrong? What happened to you?" Kirk, still in shock, raised his hand and waved McCoy and his scanner away.

"Nothing, Bones, just leave me alone." The doctor followed him to his quarters and stood with arms crossed as Kirk dropped on the bed, face to the wall.

"It's Spock, isn't it? More of a problem than you thought?"

"Look, Bones," Kirk drew a deep breath to steady his voice, "I won't talk about it, even with you. I can't. There is nothing I can do for Spock, or for myself. He'll be leaving the ship as soon as possible."

"Jim..." McCoy's voice was even, "...stop to consider." Kirk turned and met the bright blue eyes. He recognized that the doctor was aware of the feelings involved and probably had been for some time. There was no judgement in the gaze, only compassion and friendship.

"Think about it before you make a hasty decision or allow Spock to... How do *you* feel? How about *him*? What will life be like for either of you, alone? Jim, it may be the only logical solution for both of you in the life you have chosen.

"Sure, there are people who won't understand, but are they important? This is a private thing - between you and Spock only." McCoy stopped; he'd done his best. He turned and left Kirk alone with his thoughts.

Kirk consciously relaxed and thought back over his years on the ENTERPRISE with Spock. The mutual respect, the tolerance, the developing friendship, the joys, pain and dangers...their minds always so close - yes, and the love - the feeling that went deeper than being brothers.

He could see how it had happened -- the shared ideals, responsibilities, mutual trust and respect deepening into something more, solidified by the mind melds they had entered into over the years. Differences had combined into unity -- they were irrevocably joined, two halves of a whole -- together and complete, or separate and alone.

Kirk saw with a flash of insight that he needed and wanted that Bond with this very special person, wanted it so badly, it was a physical ache. He could accept the altered relationship physically, emotionally and psychologically, but what about Spock? Would he be able to accept these feelings in himself toward another man, especially his commanding officer, even if it were his best friend? It would seem not. *McCoy was right, as usual*, mused Kirk. *Spock and I do have a problem, and I'm not sure how we're going to arrive at a solution.*



The doctor stood with arms crossed. "It's Spock, isn't it?"

He would have liked to discuss his feelings and get the doctor's support, but he saw that any factual knowledge of what was happening would place the doctor in the unevitable position of either lying for his friends or exposing them. Kirk knew without a doubt which road Bones would take, but he refused to put this responsibility on him. He and Spock would have to find the way themselves, and sitting here wasn't going to solve anything.

He hesitated at the Vulcan's door, then touched it. It opened under his hand and he walked in, locking it behind him.

The room was illuminated only by the faint glow from the firepot. Kirk stood quietly until his senses became accustomed to the atmosphere. Then he moved to the bed where Spock lay face down.

"You may as well turn over, Spock - you're not asleep."

"Captain, I requested that you leave earlier. I thought from that experience you would have realized the folly of our being in close proximity to each other. Please go..." Spock spoke from between clenched teeth.

"No, Spock."

"Jim, please," the deep voice was so full of pain.

"Spock, your way won't work! This is one emotional crisis you're going to have to solve by facing, not by pushing it into your subconscious and pretending it's not there, that you feel no emotion..." Spock sat up, looking annoyed as well as upset. "Yes, I understand you very well," Kirk continued, his voice level and determined. "Rejecting all emotion has worked for you many times in the past, but not this time. Remember, there are two of us to consider, two of us involved. Remember, we shared those feelings."

Spock stared at the floor. "Jim, I would give anything if we..."

"Spock, look at me!"

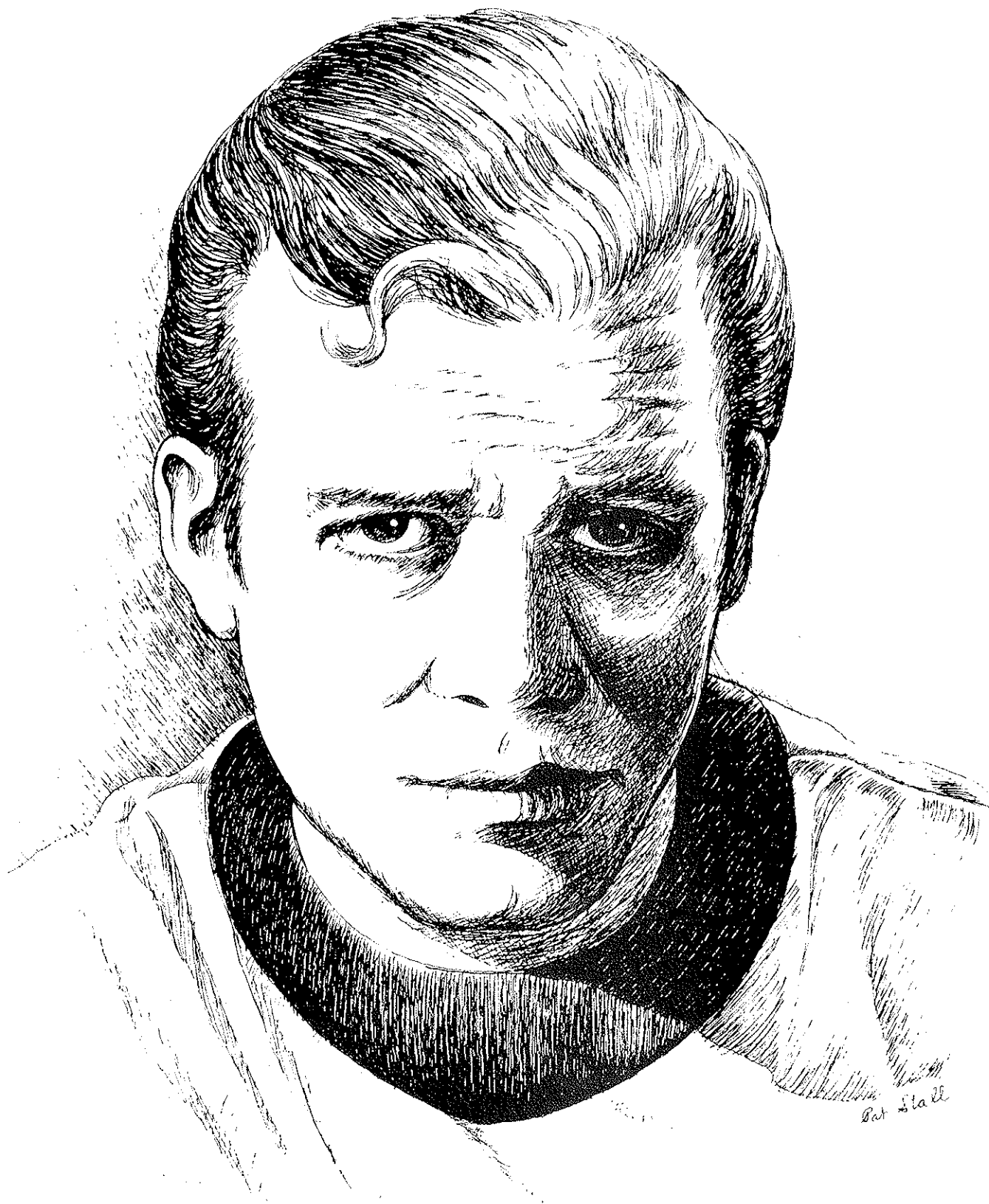
"I cannot. I am too ashamed of what I have allowed to occur between us. I am a Vulcan. I should have been able to control--"

Kirk drew Spock's eyes by force of personality and locked gazes with him. "My friend, shame is a personal, private judgement of failure, passed on self by self. It's usually harsh and undeserved. I don't want any part of it.

"Spock, I am not ashamed of the emotions we shared earlier," Kirk's voice held something Spock couldn't immediately identify, "nor am I ashamed of the feeling, the bond, behind it. I'm sorry that you are, but I do understand. Your cultural backgrounds are different from mine - Vulcan requires much of you. I thought if I came back, maybe..." He turned away. "I'm sorry I put you through this, Commander."

Before he reached the door, Spock was at his side. He had recognized the hurt of rejection and loneliness in Kirk's voice.

"Jim, you do not understand."



"I'm sorry I put you through this, Commander."

"Yes, I do. What we had meant different things to each of us. I knew from the beginning, but I thought our differences were resolvable. Of course, I didn't count on this." Kirk shook his head tiredly. He slumped against the wall, suddenly aware of total emotional and physical exhaustion. Spock lifted him gently and laid him on the bed. He rested his hand on his Captain's head and said quietly, "Rest no, Jim. Sleep..." As Kirk relaxed, the Vulcan stood watch at his side until he slept.

Spock moved to his desk and sat down, considering the total situation. He had meant to leave the ship with no explanations, thus sparing Kirk the guilt and shame associated with the relationship and himself his friend's disgust at the involvement.

This was no longer possible. Not only did Jim know; he had experienced the feelings. Spock allowed his mind to be diverted momentarily. Something would have to be done about Kirk's developing telepathy. Soon he would not be able to compensate. No human non-telepath would have been able to receive emotions that intensely through his mental guards without a full bonding. He brought his mind back to the more immediate problem.

He had never admitted, even to himself, how deep the commitment between him and this human went. He remembered the hurt in Jim's eyes...he had not realized the burden of pain his original course of action would cause. Now that it was forced on him, he saw that total honesty was the only reasonable solution for them, no matter what the cost and no matter what the outcome. Having made this decision, he laid his head on the desk, eyes closed.

Spock reluctantly reached within himself to examine his feelings for James Kirk, his Captain and his friend. Time passed unnoticed. What did he feel? Loyalty to a commanding officer? Respect for courage and intelligence? In his own mind, he knew these were rationalizations. He did have emotions, his Vulcan as well as his human half.

Kirk had reached out to him years ago with an offer of something he had never before experienced, companionship. At some point, he had come the required distance. Tolerance had developed into respect and trust; friendship had deepened into...love, then the bonding...

This bond, Spock realized, was the natural, logical conclusion in a chain of events. He should have foreseen it and taken steps to prevent it, but he had not. It was simply a reversal of the usual bonding procedure. Bonding - minds joined - development of respect, trust and love, as knowledge of each other increased. For the first time in his life, Spock admitted to himself that logic might not be the answer.

What now? He raised his head and glanced at Kirk, apparently sleeping peacefully. He had two alternatives - neither having a desirable outcome. If he left the ENTERPRISE, even though his bonding with Kirk was incomplete, he would not be able to form a bond with another and would die in his next Pon Farr.

If he chose this solution, Jim would not be harmed. With tranquilizers and the sexual outlets open to him as a human male, he would be able to handle the backlash of the Pon Farr with little difficulty.

Action, however, must be immediate. For Jim's sake, the bond must not be allowed to deepen and become complete, for he would not be able to survive a bondmate's death in a total bond situation, without mental training and support which he would not have.

The other alternative would be to stay and allow the bonding to become complete. At Spock's next Pon Farr, Jim would be forced by his mind and body into the relationship, but when it ended, what? He could not face Jim after such an occurrence. Physical and emotional damage to the human was quite probable. Also, the problems of being joined would be almost insurmountable, unless each were totally committed to the other.

Spock shook himself mentally; no matter what he wanted he would not be responsible for degrading Jim, allowing him to degrade himself, or be forced into an unwanted relationship. But, was it unwanted?

He allowed his head to rest on his folded arms. The Vulcan saw clearly, perhaps for the first time, what was between them. *Starfleet oath is the only authority higher than him that I recognize.* He was mildly surprised at himself for the admission.

Jim had said, "Vulcan demands much of you." It was true, but not in the sense his Captain understood. *I require myself to be Vulcan, Spock thought, but neither Vulcan or it's customs mean as much to me as he does; yet I am unable to tell him so. Does he know? I would give everything I own...my life...anything except my personal integrity for him - and I believe, no...I know, he would do the same for me.* This, however, was an exceptional situation.

Bonding among Vulcan males was not common, but it was not considered a serious deviation. Privacy was respected and, as in all things, difference was considered virtue. There were even methods to contribute to the genetic pool. However, humans, even in the 23rd century, reacted quite strongly to this relationship. Probably his Captain also had strong negative feelings, even though he had claimed not to be ashamed...his sexuality was very strong...

Spock drowsed and his mind wandered. What would it be like to run his hands over Jim's body and feel response...

"You could find out; it might prove...fascinating." The voice was gentle and half teasing.

Spock lifted his head, a faint flush on his cheeks, and stared at Kirk, who was regarding him quizzically from the bed.

"I've been receiving your thoughts for some time. I'm sorry, Spock. I know how you value privacy, but I don't know how to shut you out."

Spock paled. "Jim, the question of how to avoid this is now academic and irrelevant. You and I are held in a forced meld with the beginning of Pon Farr not far away. I can do nothing to break it. You must stun me - now - then channel a force field across the door. Only then will you be safe from me. McCoy will help you with the after affects." He dropped his head in his hands.



"He reached toward Spock, then stopped, his face flushing."

Pushed almost to his limit by the past few hours, Kirk came to stand in front of him.

"Mister, I know from your thoughts what will happen to you and to me if I do as you say. I also understand your feelings even if I don't agree with some of them. But, Spock," Kirk choked, "would you rather die than share yourself with me...be one with me? Is the idea that repulsive?"

"Look at me! If you want, I'll go, but I can't do what you ask. I can't hurt you."

Kirk's body was trembling as well as his voice. "I know you want this too - I feel it. Is your Vulcan pride so important to you..."

Spock raised his head, face wet. "No, -Jim, it is not, but you are. Within a week I will be deep in Pon Farr - there will be no stopping, no control. It is a madness you have seen...What will happen? The crew... Are you sure you understand what will, out of necessity, take place?"

"Yes, I understand, and I am prepared to accept and share it with you." Kirk's voice had steadied. "Before the time comes, we will be away from the ENTERPRISE, just you and I. Whatever occurs will be between the two of us only."

"I...need...you." Spock's voice was only a whisper, shame gone from his being.

"No, Spock. *We* need," corrected his Captain, the promise of all things in his voice.

It had been building for a long time - Now its time had come. They watched each other, breath coming faster. The words, *We need*, hung in the air between them.

Kirk's familiar smile started in his eyes and spread to his lips and was reflected in his friend's face. He reached toward Spock, then stopped; his face flushing.

"It is permitted, Jim, if this is what you truly desire." Spock's voice came deep and barely controlled.

"And you, Spock. What do you want?"

Gazes locked and held - Kirk's clear and unafraid, Spock's liquid and telling. In answer, Spock placed his hands precisely on either side of his Captain's face. Kirk's hands rose to a corresponding position on the Vulcan's head.

He felt a gentle warmth as the Vulcan's mind touched his; then fragments of colors, scenes, thoughts and feelings as their minds moved closer.

/Fear! What will he see?/ DO NOT BE AFRAID. THE SAME THINGS THAT MADE ME LOVE YOU AND BROUGHT US TOGETHER. / Uncertainty. I have never known another's touch or how to give love./ YOU WILL LEARN AND SO WILL



Spock placed his hands precisely on his Captain's face.....

I -- TOGETHER./

They felt pain, tears, regret for lost years, relief, pleasure, passion. Joy! They looked deep within the other and what they saw pleased them.

/ ARE YOU HAPPY?/ Yes, now that we are one./ WILL THIS CLOSENESS ALWAYS LAST? BE THIS REAL, THIS SWEET? / Yes, Jim. It is forever./

Seperate, now whole. A bond to be severed only by death, if then. This was right. No more loneliness or unshared pain. Someone who would always understand.

The world faded, leaving only them, a feeling of deep peace, contentment, desire for each other and in their minds the words of the age-old Vulcan ritual:

*"Parted from me...and never parted.
Never and always...touching and touched..."*

CORUNDUM

In my hand
lie two smooth stones,
alien and alike as we;

lucid sapphire, friend:
burning-glass of intellect,
faithful as morning;

deephearted ruby,
lover: fire of my kindling,
burning unconsumed;

each mirrors each,
gives back the true image
turned and returned again;

ever touching, always touched,
never parted: one substance
and one life.

...Jane Aumerle

NOTHING GOLD CAN STAY

By Martha J. Bonds

*Nature's first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold.
Her early leaf's a flower;
But only so an hour.
Then leaf subsides to leaf.
So Eden sank to grief,
So dawn goes down to day.
Nothing gold can stay.*

---Robert Frost

James Kirk jolted to wakefulness in the cold dark of his quarters. His eyes peered anxiously, seeking the familiar shapes of furniture about him. He reached out and turned up the lights and sighed with relief. The dream was gone, at least temporarily.

This time it had been harder to pull himself back to reality. The now-familiar reverie had claimed him and, like one hypnotized, the spell was difficult for him to break. Each time the dream returned he became more and more convinced of the awful truth that it seemed to foretell.

Kirk rubbed a hand through his already tousled hair and threw back the cover. He got to his feet and went to sit at his desk. The firm coolness of the chair between him drew him back from the haunting nightmare.

He had never believed in dreams, he told himself matter-of-factly. They were simply ghosts that floated into one's conscious mind during sleep. The events in a dream never really came true, at least, not exactly as the dream portrayed them.

He was not even sure he had believed in interpreting the symbols in a dream. An old story stirred in his memory. The dream of an ancient Pharaoh in which seven fat cows were consumed by seven gaunt ones had prophesied seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine in biblical Egypt. An interesting fable, he thought, but of course his dream was nothing like it.

It had been somewhat frightening, though. He shivered as he remembered the ENTERPRISE blasted by bursts of energy from some enemy force, he and Spock, side by side, seeking to contact the attacker to stop the destructive blows of the alien weapon. Then, with a terrific grinding sound of metal, the great ship was wrenched apart, the nacelles separated from the saucer, each section drifting through space until another energy beam slashed into



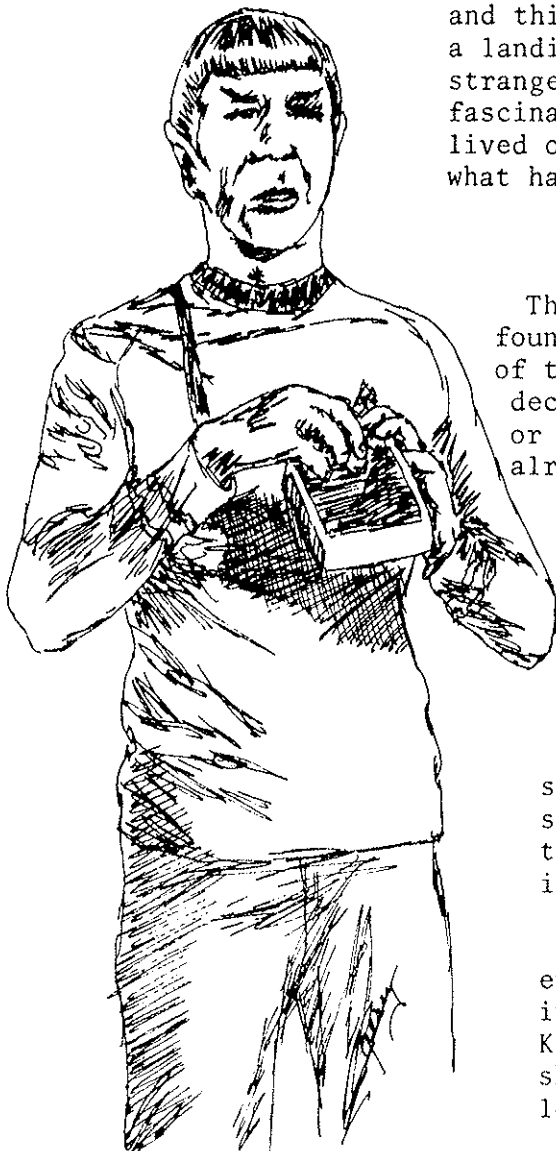
the bridge, neatly cutting the saucer in half like a knife through butter, and he found himself floating, endlessly alone, through his once-beloved stars.

It was not symbolic, but all too possible, Kirk realized. He could lose his ship to superior weaponry some day. If the dream ever did approach reality, though, he hoped the ending would come true, and that he would die with the ENTERPRISE, rather than face the rest of his life knowing he had lost her. Resolutely, Kirk put the dream from his mind. He reached for the tape on the planet they were investigating.

Yesterday's survey team had found evidence of a highly advanced civilization which had disappeared entirely. The tape displayed the vast ruins of a city no one had occupied for thousands of years. Records indicated that the society had vanished at the height of its development, leaving colossal structures and a great technology behind. The survey tape ended with the notation that one building housed a still active energy source.

In the briefing room, it had been decided that investigation of the

structure would yield the only possible clue as to the disappearance of the society, and this morning Kirk would beam down with a landing party. Now he sat, watching the strange, dust-covered buildings in fascination. What kind of people had lived on the planet, he wondered, and what had ended their existence?



The scientific party and the Captain found themselves in a large open area of the city. As far as they could see, decaying buildings towered around them or lay in broken rubble. Spock had already activated his tricorder.

"No evidence of natural disaster or disease," he reported. "The decay seems to have occurred over the passage of time and not as a result of war or other phenomena."

"Let's check out that energy source," Kirk directed. He and Spock started toward the building, while the four historians continued to investigate the other ruins.

The building that held the energy source stood silent and golden in the planet's morning sunshine. Kirk stared at it, thinking that it showed the scars of time to a much lesser degree than the other structures.

"Is this building as old as the others, Spock?" he asked.

Spock was already scanning it. "Captain, it is at least one thousand years older than the rest of the buildings in this city. Perhaps this inscription will tell its purpose."

"Can you translate it?" Kirk asked. He regarded the unusual symbols with more than simple curiosity. There was a compelling nature about this place, something that drew him to it, almost a craving to know what kind of people had created it.

In a few moments, Spock had deciphered some of the symbols. "It is a verse, Captain," and he read:

*"Into the endless whirlwind come,
For here all understanding swirls,*

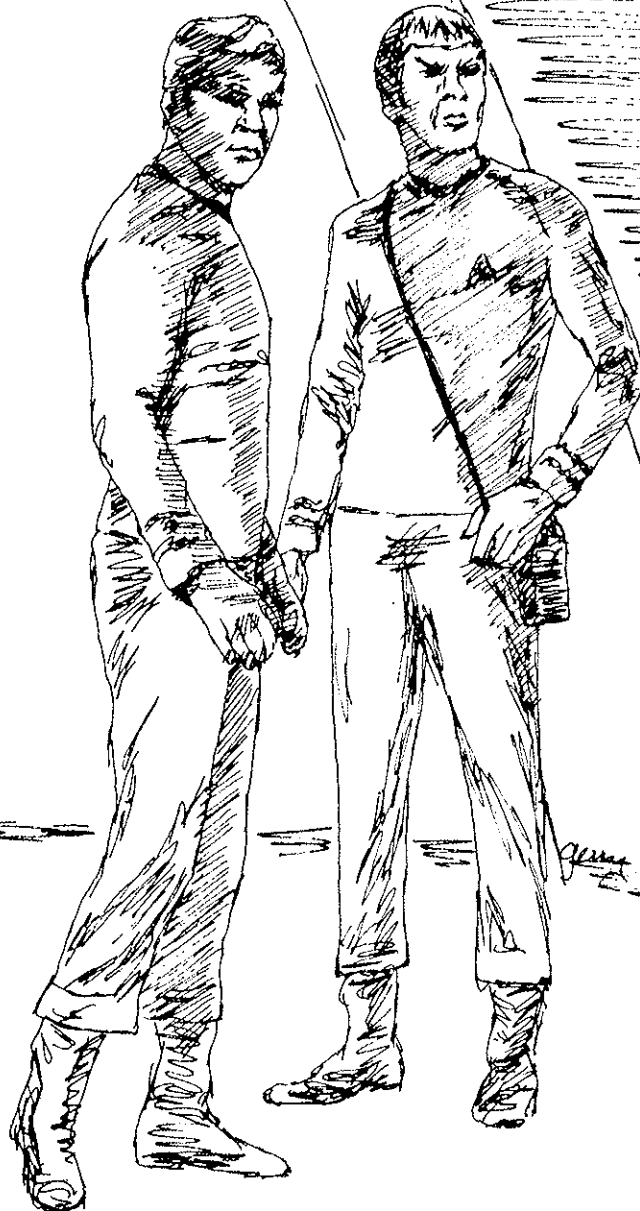
*All the past and every silver future
Forever held, until, unlocked,
It shall be whispered in your ear."*

" 'All the past and every silver future'," Kirk repeated softly. "Some sort of time machine, perhaps?"

"Possible, Captain. The energy within the structure is of a nature not unlike that which we found on the Guardian's planet."

"Then it should reveal what happened to the society that built it."

Together, Kirk and Spock entered through the huge door of the golden building. They found themselves inside a great hall. A distant, pulsing hum spoke of the enormous energy harnessed within the structure, but Spock found his tricorder jammed, making readings impossible.



Along the distant walls, rows of machinery stood, gleaming and clean as though they had just been dusted. Indeed, the interior of the ancient building appeared to have been built only days ago, instead of centuries.

The two officers stepped cautiously into the center of the room. Relying on their own senses instead of the equipment made study impossible. Suddenly, the humming increased, and the bright lights dimmed. Kirk peered into the dark, seeking -- what? Did he expect to find someone turning down the lights and activating machinery?

The consuming curiosity he felt was relieved by the euphoric balm of the humming. Kirk was floating in a warm, familiar world. He looked up into a summer sky filled with clouds of sunshine. Feeling carefree and small, he skipped barefoot through cool grass and climbed a gnarled tree. Then, he was laughing as he looked up and watched the clouds above him. He kept climbing and tried to reach the clouds.

He could not touch the soft, white forms that floated in the sky. They were so far away and he was so small, so alone. Suddenly, the scene was no longer warm and familiar. Determinedly, he shook his head, trying to remember the great building they had entered, his mission, his duty, the reality of the present.

Kirk felt a tingling in his legs and discovered he had fallen to the metallic floor of the room. He was lying with his arms outstretched and for a moment his conscious mind was fuzzy. Then he realized what must have happened. He'd been reliving a part of his childhood. He stood up and looked around for Spock.

The Vulcan had moved to a corner of the room, and when Kirk called he did not respond. The Captain hurried over to the huddled form.

"Spock," he repeated, touching his first officer's shoulder. He shook his slightly and after a moment, the brown eyes raised. There was a look of pain in them that was quickly replaced with relief when he saw the Captain. "Are you all right, Spock?" Kirk questioned anxiously.

"I believe I have suffered no damage, Captain." Spock stood, acquiring again his usual stoic expression. "The energy within this structure is extremely volatile. Apparently, when he crossed the threshold, we 'unlocked' the past as described in the verse I translated. I found myself reliving a time long past, when I was a child on Vulcan."

"I saw myself as a little boy, climbing my favorite tree on my Grandfather's farm," Kirk said. "At first, the sensation was quite pleasant, but then I felt a strange loneliness come over me." He paused. "I don't remember ever feeling that way as a child."

Spock did not answer immediately. "Perhaps you did know some loneliness, Captain, but forgot it over the passage of time. The memory I encountered was an exact replay of one of my first school days."

Spock did not elaborate and Kirk knew better than to question him further. A Vulcan child did not laughingly climb trees, and one that was half Human *had* encountered childhood loneliness. Instead, Kirk asked his

science officer how the effect had worked on them.

"These computers must reach into the mind of anyone entering the building. They select a memory and through the hypnotic humming we heard, create a trance. Then, the scene is replayed, just as we lived it."

"Why do you suppose a building like this was created? Surely not for scientific research."

"The rather mysterious message of the verse on the plaque outside would indicate otherwise, Captain," Spock concurred. "Perhaps the inhabitants came here to be entertained by their own past."

"Do you think we'll have more such visions?"

"Yes. And we must guard against losing ourselves to the replay of memory, if it should occur."

"That shouldn't be too difficult," Kirk said. "I was able to pull myself back to the present, just by remembering our mission to investigate here."

"Yes, but childhood memories tend to be short fragments of scenes in Humans. I was not returned to the present until you touched me."

"Then I suggest we stay close together, in case either of us experiences any difficulty, Spock."

The two started again toward the row of machines, but before they had walked far, the humming increased again and each found himself floating into his past.

Jim stood under a starry sky, feeling happy. The dance had been wonderful, and Julie seemed to really like him. He had kissed her goodnight and was walking home. Then the vague, lonely feeling intruded again. It was stronger this time, and there was something more. Dimly, he knew why he was lonely. He felt as though he had lost something, someone. No, that wasn't quite it. There was someone he had not yet found.

He forced himself back to the present, to remember the strange alien building they were walking through. Then a new sound came to his ears over the soft humming of the machinery.

It was Spock, seated again on the floor, and speaking quietly to someone he thought he saw.

"No, father. You do not understand. I am different here and alone. I must leave..."

"Spock, come back!" the Captain said in a commanding tone as he touched him.

Momentarily, the Vulcan's eyes lost their vacant look. "Captain," he breathed, "my control over the phenomenon is not...what it should be."

The past...overwhelms. The...emptiness..."

His voice softened to a whisper and Kirk feared he was retreating into another memory. He jerked Spock to his feet, his fingers holding his arms fiercely. "Mister Spock, we must investigate! You have orders to follow! Mister Spock!"

The Vulcan swayed, almost falling from the Captain's grip. Kirk pulled him close, still calling to him. "Spock, come back. I need you with me," he begged.

Finally, Spock drew in a long breath. He still sagged against his Captain's chest, but he knew where he was. Then he stood back, and looked into Kirk's hazel eyes.

"Thank you, Captain. I could not...pull away from the memory."

"What was it, Spock?" Kirk inquired gently. "Maybe it would help if you talked about it."

"I was trying to explain to my father why I had chosen Starfleet over the Vulcan Science Academy. He did not understand..."

"You felt...alone on Vulcan."

Spock nodded. "Yes, as though something was missing from my life. I knew it was illogical, but I was immature."

"No, Spock, I understand. That's what I felt, too," Kirk began, then he stopped. Surely it was only coincidence that they had both felt the strange loneliness. "What should we do?"



"We must get out of this room, Captain. Each memory grows stronger, forcing more emotion from me. Already my control is failing. You are used to dealing with emotions, and have less difficulty remembering the times of pain, but soon the pressure will build in you, also, and I fear that we will both be overwhelmed by our own past lives."

Kirk reached around and pulled out his communicator, but when he flipped up the grid, the device was silent. "Must be jammed, like the tricorder," he mused. They would have to walk out of the building on their own. "How can I help you, Spock?"

"I have been considering," the Vulcan began, once more his precise logic coming to the fore. "When you touched me, I was able to return to the present."

Kirk understood at once. If they touched each other as they walked, their hold on reality would be strengthened. He reached out and put his arm around Spock's waist. The Vulcan laid his arm across his Captain's shoulders. Thus linked, the two men set out together again.

They walked. Slowly at first, they walked in the direction they had come, back toward the huge door. Apparently, their trips into the past had confused their sense of direction. They could not find the exit. As far as they could see, there was only the room and the endless row of gleaming machinery.

They spoke very little, each intent on setting one foot before the other, each concentrating only on the present and his hold on his companion. At length, Kirk wondered how long they had been walking, and he asked Spock.

The Vulcan did not answer. Even as Kirk glanced at the vacant brown eyes, the memory claimed him as well, and they floated together into the past.

But this time the ache of loneliness did not come. They were together, their physical and mental selves touching, and the memory was one they shared. Instead of emptiness, they knew joy, and great peace.

The bridge of the Enterprise hummed with pleasant efficiency. Kirk was comfortable in the soft leather of his chair, bathed in the confidence of command. Spock, bending over his scanners, knew the calm that only work could give him. He stood and walked to stand beside his Captain. Together, the Human and Vulcan stared out at the panorama of stars.

All time-sense stopped in the endless whirlwind. How long they walked, neither knew nor cared. The missions, chess games, meals they shared, swirled continuously before their eyes. All the past, the comfortable, companionable, pleasant days unfolded like a golden flower. The insistent whisper of days gone by drew them onward through the ancient building.

"Don't you think you should consult me about that?" Kirk said, suppressing a grin.

"JIM!" The smile burst across Spock's face as he reached out and held his Captain. The feel of Kirk's muscles under his hands assured him Jim wasn't dead, that he hadn't killed him after all....



... "You have just declared Jim dead," McCoy's voice burst into Spock's mind. No, the doctor must not know. Do not express the hurt, the loneliness. Deny.

The ship faded away, and Kirk, alone in interphase, knew nothing but the endless stars. He was alone.

"Jim." And rescued hazel eyes locked with relieved brown ones. Spock had not left him...

....Life support was gone. Shields failing. The amoeba creature sucked all energy from the tiny shuttle. Spock knew he would die alone. Then, the tractor beam! Jim had not left him!

A golden building stood shining in the morning sun. "All the past and every silver future," Kirk repeated.

They were walking, entwined together, one in purpose, thought and memory.

A last reverie stirred. A woman's voice, soft and full of knowing, "You, by his side, as if you've always been there and always...."

The words were drowned in a new, louder noise. The golden euphoria fell away and in a silver burst of fire and ice, the humming increased to a shrill sound like a scream.

James Kirk was dreaming. And his ship, torn to pieces by an alien beam, dropped away beneath him. He fell through the stars, down, down, and alone.

A cry was wrenched from him, but was strangled in his throat as a sight more terrible than the destruction of the ship met his eyes. It was Spock, sinking away from him, alone and distant in the empty grief of space.

He flung out his hands, reaching, seeking the solid warmth he knew had to be there. "SPOCK!" He shouted the name again and again. The room, the building, the mission to investigate. Reality! "SPOCK!"

He opened his eyes, almost fearing he would find himself alone. But Spock was there, a few feet away, lying face down on the floor. Kirk, too weak to stand, crawled to him.

"Spock, are you all right?"

The first officer did not move. Jim reached out, laid a hand on his thin shoulder. The touch seemed to electrify Spock. He curled into a tight mass, covering his face in his arm.

"No. Not alone. Not forever alone!" The usual placidity had disappeared from the deep voice, leaving only a frightened wail.

Kirk leaned closer to Spock. "You're not alone, Spock. I'm here." He touched the dark hair gently, but still Spock shrank away. "It's Jim," Kirk tried again, but the Vulcan would not, or could not, respond.

Kirk felt a desperation unusual to his commanding nature. He eased back on his heels and considered the problem. The terrifying image of the future for himself and Spock had seemed all too real. Now he understood what his dream had actually symbolized. It was not only the ship's destruction that frightened him, but the thought that the bond with his Vulcan friend might be severed.

He *had* known a loneliness in his younger days. Now Spock had become



a part of him, his alter ego, the other half of himself. To lose Spock would be the most devastating loss of all. And someday, he knew with sickening assurance, it would happen.

He looked down at the shivering blue-uniformed shoulders. He could say the words, express the emotions of need, of love. But Spock, to whom the feelings were just as dear, could not voice them openly. And now that they had surfaced, the fear of loss had reduced him to a terrified child.

As long as he was conscious, the Vulcan would continue to be assaulted by the vision of the future the alien machines had conjured. Kirk tried his phaser, set on stun, but the jamming effect made it useless. Regretfully, he turned the weapon in his hand, raised it over Spock, and crashed the butt of it into the cowering Vulcan's head. It took three blows, and brought green blood, but at last Spock's form collapsed into senselessness. Kirk tenderly lifted his friend into his arms and looked around. He saw the giant door several meters away and hurried toward it.

"He'll be coming around soon, Jim." McCoy adjusted the bandage carefully,

then switched off the diagnostic indicator above the bed.

"Are you sure I didn't cause a concussion?" Kirk asked.

"You hit him pretty hard, but he'll only have a headache," McCoy soothed. Although he'd only been told the cursory details of what had happened to the Captain and Spock, he realized it had had a traumatic effect on both of them. "You did the right thing, Jim," the doctor added quietly.

Kirk looked up and managed a small grin. "Thanks, Bones. I think I'll sit with him for a while, anyway."

"Okay. Let me know if either of you need anything."

McCoy had been gone only a few minutes when Spock's eyes fluttered open.

"Jim?"

"Right here, Spock." Kirk placed a comforting hand over the Vulcan's trembling one. Immediately, Spock clutched at it, as a drowning man grasps for a lifeline.

Kirk returned a reassuring pressure. At last, he whispered, "We're back home, you know."

Spock took in their surroundings. "Sickbay?"

"I had to clout you with the butt of my phaser and carry you out of the memory room."

Spock closed his eyes, then opened them. "It wasn't the memories that... disturbed me."

"I know. It was hard for me to realize that life won't always be this way," Kirk sighed and looked away. "I guess nothing lasts."

"Change must be accepted as logical," Spock said in a monotone, as if reciting a childhood rule.

"But logic doesn't make acceptance easy," Kirk answered.

Now Spock looked directly at his Captain. "No." The quiet filled the chamber and left no room for words.

"I still wonder what kind of beings created that place," Kirk mused finally.

"They are gone. We shall never know," Spock answered softly.

Just then, the wall intercom beeped, and Kirk went to answer it.

"Uhura here, sir," came the Lieutenant's efficient voice. "The survey reports are finally correlated."

"Okay, Uhura. Let me have the details," Kirk answered, his tone weary.



"The lost people called themselves Ozandans. We translated some literature, historical works and the plaques on various monuments. They all show the same philosophy. The Ozandans thought they had created the most perfect civilization in the galaxy, one that would last forever. It's ironic that all their scrolls proclaim the glory of buildings lying now in dust and ruins."

Kirk gently switched off the intercom and turned to Spock. "She's right, you know. It is ironic."

The Vulcan nodded. "They probably created the memory building to entertain themselves. They must have been devastated when they learned they would not endure." His dark eyes took on a far away look, and Kirk knew he was struggling to repress the fear of losing the friendship they so carelessly had taken for granted.

Kirk walked back to the bed. "We didn't really learn anything we didn't know before, Spock."

The Vulcan gazed silently at his Captain, drinking in the calm assurance of the man he knew so well. Loyalty, duty, friendship, even love, these things made up their reality. He was truly back home, no longer floating through his lonely past or falling into a terrible, empty future.

Kirk reached out, pulled the blanket closer about him. "You're tired," he murmured. "Sleep, now."

Spock closed his eyes. "Yes, Captain."



FRIENDSHIP is like love at its best: not blind but sympathetically all-seeing; a support which does not wait for understanding; an act of faith which does not need, but always has, reason.

LOUIS UNTERMAYER



TO JIM

My friend, I will accept you
Weak or strong.
If you need my hand,
I am here to lift you up.
I will demand of you
Only your best.

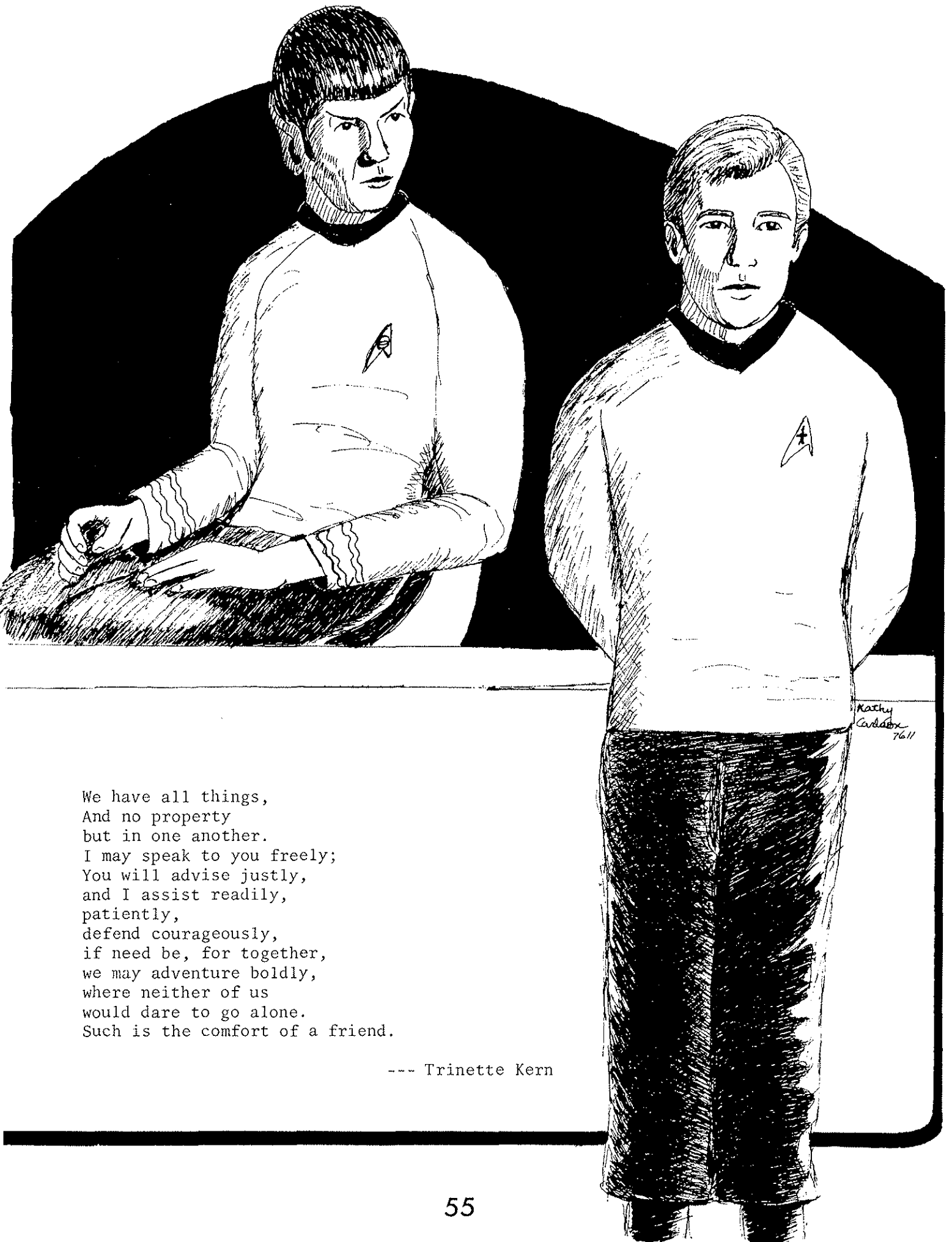
If you will try to understand
My inmost thoughts,
I will try to share your laughter,
Comfort your tears;
I will offer my faith for your doubts,
My courage for your fears.

There will be an ebb and flow.
We shall know both days bright with rapture,
And days dark with impending storm;
But I can welcome each day
Because of memories
Of how it was before,
While holding a torch for you,
So that you might blaze trails
With me at your side.

It matters little what comes,
My friend.
The cares will be light,
If shared.
In the cold of adversity,
Hearts will be warmed
By the light of our friendship.

In you, Jim Kirk,
I have found a twin in soul,
to sympathize with everything
I may not feel,
and share love and aversions,
imagined or real.

When two are as we are,
one cannot know happiness
without the other,
but neither of us
can be miserable alone;
because we'll take turns
in pain as well as pleasure,
relieving one another
in the most adverse conditions.



We have all things,
And no property
but in one another.
I may speak to you freely;
You will advise justly,
and I assist readily,
patiently,
defend courageously,
if need be, for together,
we may adventure boldly,
where neither of us
would dare to go alone.
Such is the comfort of a friend.

--- Trinetten Kern

FEU D'AMITIÉ

BY NANCY KIPPAX

"Captain, it appears that the hostilities have ceased for the moment."

Kirk's eyes scanned the horizon from his perch on the rocky promontory. The scene was disturbingly quiescent.

"What is your evaluation, Mr. Spock?" he asked. "Why would they suddenly withdraw when they have us so effectively boxed in here?"

"They have not withdrawn, sir. They are still there." Spock's voice was tinged with uneasiness.

Kirk hopped down and went to stand beside the Vulcan. "Of course. We can't escape from here, can we? It's what we call a 'Mexican stand-off'." There was an odd bitterness to the new Captain's voice, and his First Officer glanced over at him curiously. "If we try to move, they attack. They're prepared to wait us out. Fine mess, right, Mr. Spock?"

"Your analysis of the situation seems accurate, Captain. They *do* seem to have an advantage."

Kirk paced like a caged tiger. "It's all my fault! If we hadn't rushed down here...if I hadn't chosen this particular path...if..."

"You could not have foreseen this eventuality," Spock stated factually.

"Perhaps not, but--" Kirk interrupted himself. "Never mind. How long before the Enterprise returns?"

"It may be several hours, possibly longer. The maneuvers are somewhat erratic."

The Captain glanced overhead at the brilliant white sun climbing toward its zenith. He was already feeling the debilitating effects of its rays. Frustrated, he sank down on a boulder.

Responsibility. Who needed it? The loneliness of his command lay heavily on his shoulders. There was no one to relate to, no one to advise him, no one to decide...no one but himself to take the blame for whatever misfortunes befell his ship or his crew.

He'd recently accepted the position as Captain of the Enterprise with an eagerness at the challenge. He'd felt qualified and confident. It was a good crew, top-notch senior officers, everything a commander could dream of. He was honored he'd been chosen. Yet, here he was, faced with an unsolvable dilemma, forced into a situation of his own making, on a dustball planet



light years away from home, with only his strange, alien First Officer as companion. It was ironic, indeed, that the Vulcan had chosen to accompany him, and more ironic that he'd allowed him to come.

The time went slowly, only the sun and the heat marking its passage. Spock remained on watch, unnecessary though the task was. The monstrous native beings remained in a casual ring around them, their primitive smell permeating the thick, stale air.

Efforts at communicating with the ship remained futile. Kirk cursed the sudden meteor barrage which had forced his ship to abandon orbit. He thought about the crewman in Sickbay, hanging on to life until he could return with the precious cache of Erlash. *If* he returned.

He leaned his back against the rock wall and took a deep, unsatisfying breath of the heavy air. His knees were beginning to feel weak, but he resisted the urge to sit down.

"How long has it been?"

With a final glance at the valley below, Spock left his post and joined Kirk. "Nearly six hours, sir. The temperature is just over 120° and rising. You should sit down, Captain."

Kirk thought he detected a note of concern in the even voice. It was nothing new; the Vulcan had often seemed to exhibit a curious solicitude. Duty and loyalty were high among his many admirable qualities, yet Kirk found himself aching for something more than just loyalty.

Despite his First Officer's objection, Kirk paced nervously. "We should have investigated this place more thoroughly. I was wrong to rush down here without a more complete survey. Every minute we delay means death for more members of the crew."

"Your self-flagellation is unjustified, sir. You had no other choice. At the time, it seemed the logical decision."

"Men are dying, Mr. Spock! Doesn't that mean anything to you?"

"Doctor Piper is doing everything possible. As soon as we return with the Erlash for the serum..."

"*If* we arrive with it! *If* we get out of here alive!"

The Vulcan was silent, and Kirk wondered what thoughts were running through his alien mind. Was he sorry he'd accompanied his Captain? Sorry he'd volunteered for this mission?

Suddenly, Kirk stumbled, his vision blurring and distorting the landscape. Heat from the hard packed earth stung his cheek and palms; he recoiled, willing his sluggish muscles to obey. A firm pressure on his elbow assisted him to his feet, guided him to the small spot of shade against the cliff face, forced him to sit.

"Just sit quietly. Try not to move unless necessary." Spock was panting

heavily himself. His Vulcan body was more acclimated to withstand high temperatures, but even on Vulcan the natives did not go on the desert at midday.

For a few minutes they rested, side by side, neither making an effort at speech. Kirk finally broke the silence.

"I'm sorry I got you into this, Mr. Spock. You should have stayed on the ship. Why did you volunteer to join me, anyway?" Spock didn't answer at first. He was torn between telling the truth or hiding behind the barrier of non-emotionalism. He finally chose a path halfway between the two.

"It is part of my duty as your First Officer to see that no harm befalls you, Captain."

Kirk misunderstood. "And you were afraid I would get myself in trouble? You didn't trust me to take the necessary precautions!" Spock didn't reply; he didn't have to, Kirk thought. Kirk dragged himself to his feet and walked a few steps away.

"It is not a matter of trust," the Vulcan spoke finally at Kirk's back. "I do not believe you should have beamed down yourself for the Erlash extract. There is no logic in jeopardizing your life when there are others to whom you could delegate the task."

It was all so silly, Kirk thought. *I put my life on the line, so, he does too.* A sudden dawning broke over him. He turned slowly to face Spock. "Then, perversely, is it logical that you, also, take the unnecessary risk?" He felt on the verge of getting through to the core of something very important, but the meaning still eluded him. He felt so weak...his head ached abominably...Where was his ship? Why hadn't she returned yet?

He felt himself swaying; he tried to take a deep breath but the air scorched his lungs. His mouth felt gritty and he'd have bartered anything he owned for a cup of cool, clear water.

Wearily, he returned to the tiny patch of shade and sank down. He talked, partly because he wanted to know, partly to keep his mind from the intolerable heat.

"I know what you think, Spock. Captain Pike wouldn't have gotten into this, would he? He would have...delegated the job, as you said. But that's not my way - it's not me. I wouldn't ask another man to do something I wouldn't do myself."

"I know that, sir. It *is* difficult for me to comprehend, but I try." Kirk saw a slight, tolerant smile play around the Vulcan's mouth. He smiled back, hesitantly at first, then more readily.

"Yes, I guess you *do* try."

Once more Spock retreated behind his private barrier. "Shall I attempt to raise the ship again, Captain?" Kirk nodded; the Vulcan tried unsuccessfully.

The sun remained high as the hours dragged on, the temperature was a

constant 135°. Kirk must have lost consciousness for a time; when he revived there was a blue canopy above him. For a moment he thought it was sky, then he realized it was a blue tunic crudely stretched between two boulders to form an awning. The Vulcan, seated nearby, was shirtless.

"Don't be stupid," he grated through cracked lips. "You'll burn unmercifully in this sun!"

Spock came to his side, his movements slow. "Vulcan skin is more used to the heat, Captain. How do you feel?"

"Like I'm being baked alive. You wouldn't happen to have some water with you, would you?"

"The Enterprise should be here soon, Jim. Try to relax."

"You were right to...come along, Spock. At least you can...you can get the drug up to the ship..." He was too sick to notice that Spock was sitting in such a way that his body shielded Kirk's from the glare of the sun.

"Never ask someone else to do what you can do yourself," the Vulcan replied gently. He reached over and pushed Kirk's sweat-plastered hair from his forehead.

As Kirk's eyes met his, he forced himself to speak again. "Captain, when you said earlier that you believed I did not trust you, I...that was not the reason I came with you..." He faltered.

In that moment, Kirk saw. He understood what had eluded him. It was not duty alone which compelled his First Officer to risk his neck for his new Captain. The Vulcan cared, damn him, and he could not bring himself to say the words.

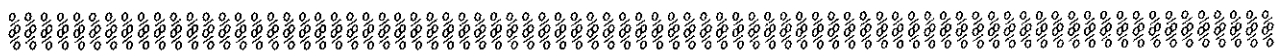
"I know that, Spock," he said quietly. "And I'm glad you're here."

Some invisible power reached out and enveloped them in its web, making the moment precious as complete understanding flowed between them. They were more than two officers who happened to be assigned to the same ship, and suddenly neither of them felt the naked loneliness - of command, of alienation. The knowledge was so all consuming that the Vulcan in Spock momentarily tried to draw away, to escape the emotional closeness. But Kirk held him firmly with a tremendous surge of will, even cementing the contact with a physical touch as he gripped Spock's arm.

Their newfound peace was shattered by the familiar whistle of the communicator.

"Our ship..." Kirk said, struggling to sit up. Spock nodded, pulled the box from his belt, hesitated, then handed it deferentially over to his Captain.

Kirk smiled weakly. "Let's go home, Spock." Then, flipping the grid, "Kirk to Enterprise -"



BEGINNINGS

What infinite moment was it?
What diminutive particle
Out of all time and eternity
That first I gazed upon the unknown
And felt familiar?
What endless second when I knew
That somehow our paths
Were destined, not to cross
Like two ships passing in the night
Through dismal uncharted seas,
But set to run upon parallel courses
Side by side
So that if one of us should come upon
Some unsurmountable obstacle
That temporarily obscurs the goal
There would be a secondary road.
I trusted you
And knew security in not being alone.
I beheld a unity of seperate, yet combined strength
That would flow along synchronous planes
And last lifetimes.
This was no chance encounter.
The fates had so ordained.
My soul had wings and you shared my flight.
Yet, I cannot remember
What infinite moment it was.

-- Beverly Volker



When The Time Comes

By Beverly Volker

AUTHOR'S NOTE: When I wrote the first vignette, WHEN THE TIME COMES, it was intended to be an independent piece of work, deliberately left in the air. But, as stories sometimes have a way of doing, this one wouldn't leave me alone. Several people told me there must be a sequel to it, so, I sat down to write one. From there on, I had no control over the consequences. NOT YET TIME emerged virtually unbidden. For better readability, we decided they needed to be presented together, thus the "twin vignette" format.

The shadows of light and dark, tinged by the red glow of the tiny flame, lent an eerie background to Spock's cabin. The Vulcan sat in semi-darkness with his fingers steepled in front of him, his face drawn in concentration, eyes vacant and haunted. Outwardly, he appeared calm; a man in deep meditation. Inside, he was a seething cauldron of emotion and pain, his mind summoning all his Vulcan powers to help him cope with the realities he'd been forced to face.

The nightmare began earlier that day when he was called to Sickbay by the ship's Chief Surgeon. Spock had known something was wrong with one look at McCoy's face. Knowing the doctor's tendency toward over-reaction, it might have been nothing more serious than an outbreak of diarrhea among the crew. Spock marvelled at how unprepared he had been for what McCoy told him.

McCoy's face had twisted in anguish as he explained that he had just gotten the results of a medical examination he'd run on the Captain. He'd been a little concerned about Jim lately. Kirk had seemed excessively fatigued, had not been eating well, and his complexion was pale and colorless. Bones had ordered a physical. Now, as he looked at Spock, he crumpled, finally choking on the words.

"It's Ectoneuralitis, Spock," he rasped.

Spock felt his own color drain from his face, and his insides suddenly tightened.

"You are absolutely sure?" He had to ask.

McCoy nodded, burying his face in his hands. "Yes, I'm sure -- My God, if only I weren't!"

Ectoneuralitis: a rare and deadly disease. It came to humans after they'd achieved space flight. Only one in ten thousand ever contracted it, and there was no cure. It attacked the central nervous system. Death

usually came in about six months, but the victim became incapacitated long before that, as various vital parts of the body ceased functioning. The disease, once started, usually moved quickly, making the patient's last several months a nightmare of pain and helplessness, until death was a welcomed relief.

Spock had seen only one case in his life, and he had hoped he would never see another. It had been a professor at the Academy, a man the young Spock had admired and respected. He had been a virile, intelligent man when the disease had suddenly struck. Spock had gone to visit him at the infirmary just before he had died. The horror still burned in his memory. A mindless, agonized shell of a man, the professor had lain helpless, his body kept functioning by machines -- a respirator when his breathing had become too difficult, a dialysis machine when his kidneys had failed, a blood circulator to help his heart, tubes to feed him. Spock had left, shaken, and offered a prayer to whatever Deity this man professed to end his suffering.

And now, was this the same fate for his friend? He felt his heart cringe at the thought.

McCoy was speaking, imploring. "Spock, what should we do? Jim won't want to face the kind of future this holds for him. If I tell him, I'm afraid...Spock, he'd prefer suicide to this!"

"It is hopeless?" Spock asked. "There is no chance for a cure?"

"Of course, science is working on one," McCoy told him, "but they are nowhere near finding an answer in time -- for Jim."

Spock could listen to no more; he was too close to losing control. He needed time to adjust, to put his thoughts in order. He had left





Sickbay and returned to his cabin, sitting down heavily at his desk.

That was four hours ago. At least outwardly he was somewhat calmer now. He had thought over and over of his professor, substituting Jim's face on the emaciated form. His dearest friend, doomed to the same destiny.

He thought of the vital Starship Captain, physically fit, with an easy smile and quick wit. The man on the bridge, vulnerable, yet commanding, eliciting respect and admiration and devotion from his crew.

He thought of the friend who had taught him more about himself than any other. The man who could touch him with a look that said, 'I understand -- I care'. James Kirk. Could he bear to lose him? Could he face all the emptiness ahead, all the loneliness he had thought was behind him since they met and learned to share each other's lives? They had shared the joys, the pains of living. Could he watch him suffer?

Spock flicked the switch on his intercom. McCoy's face appeared.

"You must tell him, Doctor," Spock said, one conflict resolved. "It would be unfair to keep it from him. I will come."

McCoy nodded. "I know," he said sadly. "I've decided that, too."

The Captain had arrived in Sickbay just moments before Spock. He looked around as the Vulcan entered.

Knowing Jim's condition now, Spock was keenly aware of his appearance. He was appalled to see how thin he had become, how sunken his eyes were and how weary he seemed to be. He was amazed that he had not really noticed before. The twinkle was still in his voice as he spoke.

"Well, Spock, between you and the gloomy doctor here, I expect you're about to predict a super-nova or something."

"Not exactly, Jim," McCoy said quietly.

Kirk sensed the apprehension in his voice. A twinge of premonition made the hairs on the back of his neck bristle. He looked expectantly at the doctor. "What is it, Bones?"

"I have the results of those tests we took the other day," McCoy began. Then, suddenly, he spoke impersonally, as though he were announcing a bad tooth. "You have Ectoneuralitis, Jim."

Kirk's mouth fell open; he felt his knees go weak. He was hearing the words, but they made no sense. Sounds falling on the ears, noises of another place - another time - another person. Denial set in.



"You're not serious! You must be wrong. Okay, maybe I'm a little overworked, run-down..."

McCoy shook his head firmly, willing his hands to stop their trembling. "There's no mistake," he choked. "There's *no mistake!*" He turned away, unable to look at his friend.

Spock stood by silently, supportive. Vulcan discipline coalesced against the onslaught of agony. Kirk turned to face him, his eyes beseeching, imploring, asking for help without words.

"Jim..." Spock began, swallowing hard. The Captain turned back to the doctor.

"How long, Doctor?" he asked with a deliberate hardness in his voice.

McCoy's eyes filled, begging for mercy. "Jim, I don't know..." he began, but Kirk cut him off.

"Just tell me how long before I become a vegetable!" He wheeled and strode out of the room, leaving the emptiness to echo between his two friends.

The agony of acceptance set in, as Kirk stumbled blindly back to his quarters. The ship, the crew, were dim forms at the edge of his vision. Instinct directed his feet along the proper corridors, his mind numb with shock. Part of him did not want to believe McCoy's diagnosis, even now, yet another part knew there could be no error. McCoy would have triple-checked before informing him.

That left the question: What now? Could he accept such an eventuality? He could not envision himself helpless, wired to machines, incapable of speech, thought, movement...His mind broke away from the harse image. He reached his cabin and slumped on his bed, willing blackness to cover the horrible thoughts.

The Captain's room was dark when Spock rang the buzzer. Receiving no reply from within, Spock hesitated, then opened the door.

Kirk was lying on the bed, and Spock thought at first he might be asleep. He crossed the room quietly and looked down at his Captain.

"Yes, Spock, what is it?" came the voice from the bed.

"Are you all right, Jim?" Spock asked.

"Yes."

"Can I do anything?"

"*NO!*"

Spock didn't know what to say next, what to do, how to let his friend know that he was here to offer any help he could -- that he *had* to offer. He pulled a chair over and sat next to the bed. The Captain turned and looked

at him sharply

"What are you doing?" he demanded. "What do you want? Just go away and leave me alone!"

Wounded, Spock rose. He had intruded. So little he knew about humans, after all. He had felt Jim would need support, comfort, and what he really wanted was to be alone. Spock started to leave when a ragged cry from the sleeping alcove implored him.

"Spock! Don't go -- I'm sorry. I didn't mean that -- please -- don't leave me..."

Spock turned quickly and reached for the Captain, kneeling beside the bed. His fingers gripped the other's hand, and Kirk hung on tightly. Almost violently, Kirk threw his other arm across his eyes.

"Oh, God, Spock, what a way to die." His voice cracked. "What a future to face. It's not being afraid to die. If it were only that, I could stand it. It's knowing what I'll become before then."

Spock slid an arm under Kirk's shoulders and, lifting him slightly, drew him close in an embrace of pain and frustration.

"I know," he crooned, "I know." He searched his mind helplessly for the solution he had sought all afternoon, but there was no Vulcan technique that could give comfort at a time like this.

In a little while, Kirk was calmer. He sat up on the side of the bed. Spock rose from his knees and sat beside him. The Captain spoke softly.

"Spock, I want you to help me. When the time comes ... promise me."

Spock did not understand at first what it was he could do for Kirk, but the Captain went on.

"Spock, let me die with dignity. At the first signs...when I become -- helpless..."

As Spock understood what it was Kirk was asking, he felt a shudder of revulsion creep through him. He looked away. "Jim...I cannot."

Kirk grabbed him by the shoulders and spun him around. "Spock, please... you're the only one I can depend on. Bones won't do it; as a doctor, he's sworn to keep me functioning as long as he can. Spock - it has to be you. You're my friend...please."

Spock lowered his eyes, his muscles quivering. "Jim, surely you must know what you ask is impossible. As a Vulcan, life is sacred to me."

"Life without dignity?" Kirk asked.

Spock sat silently, every nerve in his body taut. What Jim was asking was more than his mind could bear, yet Jim was his friend...

"I promise," he said softly. "When the time comes..."

Kirk pulled him close.



+++++

*A FRIEND IS A PERSON WITH WHOM I MAY BE SINCERE.
BEFORE HIM, I MAY THINK ALOUD.*

Ralph Waldo Emerson



Not Yet Time

By Beverly Volker

"No!" Spock jerked suddenly upright, trembling, drenched in sweat, bolted awake by the nightmare that was not a nightmare.

"No! Jim -- no! You can't..." raced through his mind, then sharply came the Vulcan word to stop.

"KROYKA!"

Spock was out of bed, bounding toward the door in one movement. There was no need to take time to dress; lately he had been sleeping fully clothed to be instantly ready for any call he might receive during the night.

He reached the Captain's quarters only minutes after he had been wakened by the subconscious signal. He did not wait to push the buzzer for admittance but slid the door open himself. The unconscious form of James Kirk, sprawled like a disarrayed ragdoll across his bed, confirmed what the Vulcan already knew, what urgency had directed him there. His hand pushed the button on the intercom on Kirk's desk even before he approached the Captain.

"Sickbay," he spoke into the machine. "Medical emergency...to the Captain's cabin at once!"

Without waiting for a reply, he was at Kirk's side.



His fingers went to the wrists for a pulse and drew back at once -- sticky, wet. An old-fashioned method, crude but sufficient. A sharp object, the tool, lay unnoticed on the floor where Kirk had dropped it.

The Vulcan was lifting the Captain from the bed, blood soaking into his already wet tunic, when the medical team arrived. Spock released his burden to their care. Efficient. Starship personnel were trained to be efficient. He glanced at the chronometer. Only minutes had passed since he'd wakened... perhaps there was still time...

McCoy was administering treatment even as the stretcher was being propelled toward Sickbay. No time to think, no time to ask why. Why...a thousand reasons and only one. Automatic. All the skills, all the training. Mechanical movements that text books and experience had taught him. Life saving techniques applied in an emergency situation. He was a doctor. This was his field. Life saving...

When all the skills had been used, all the techniques had been applied, the life readings still failed to register. McCoy did a very unprofessional thing. He grasped the lifeless body of James Kirk by the shoulders and shook him, calling his name.

"Jim...Jim! Wake up!..." It was as if, when all else had failed, the desperate sound of a friend's pleading could rouse the inanimate form.

A strong hand gripped him gently on the shoulder and he realized that Spock had been in the room all the time.

"That will not help, Doctor." The voice was calm, controlled. "The Captain is dead."

Christine Chapel entered and scanned the life-form readings. Tears slid noiselessly down her face. McCoy's shoulders slumped then, as Spock released his grip.

"We were too late, Spock. Too late," he intoned. "There was nothing I could do."

"I understand," Spock responded automatically. McCoy looked sharply at the Vulcan. Perhaps, he decided, the reality hasn't hit him yet. When it does...

"Spock," he began, feeling a calm suddenly replace the terror of a few minutes earlier, "if we could have anticipated this - should have, perhaps - but there seemed to be more time..."

"The Captain is a very determined man, Doctor. *Was* a very determined man. We could not have prevented this, once he had decided upon his course of action."

"Maybe. But if we'd told him about the experiments --"

"The Captain is dead," Spock cut in quickly. "There is much that needs to be done. I shall notify Starfleet and inform the crew. As of now, I am in temporary command of the Enterprise. You will prepare the...body..."



His voice seemed to falter, but he quickly mastered it. The cacophony of turbulent emotions was stilled by Vulcan control. Spock's whole frame seemed to tremble with the effort to suppress and channel his grief. He struggled valiantly to maintain his outward composure. He knew he must escape the confines of Sickbay, he must be alone before he committed an unspeakable breach of discipline. "I will be in my quarters assimilating the data for presentation. And Doctor, have maintenance dispatch a crew to clean the Captain's quarters and secure."

He turned and left without looking at Kirk. McCoy felt himself waver and caught hold of the bed. He had read the anguish and pain on Spock's face, seen the Vulcan's attempted stoicism. There was an ache deep within him for this man who could not - would not - cry. *All right, Spock, he thought. We'll do this your way...for awhile.* Then he looked down at the still figure. The slashed wrists were thin, at the ends of thin arms. The face, peaceful now, was gaunt and colorless with hollows where full cheeks had once been. The twinkling hazel eyes, closed now forever, were circled by rims of black. It would have gotten worse. At least now it was over. *Over. Oh, Jim...Oh, God!* McCoy hung his head and sobbed.

In his quarters, Spock methodically prepared a tape logging the past events. It was necessary to record the proper chain of happenings concerning the death of a Starfleet Captain. *Too late...Too late...* McCoy would be preparing a similar medical log. The circumstances were somewhat unusual. Suicide. *No, Jim...no!* There would very likely be an investigation. Routine, yet necessary and the records must be in order. *No time...no more time. 'Spock,*

when the time comes...' He heard the crew when they arrived down the hall to police the Captain's quarters. He remembered seeing the room. The bed was full of blood. Jim Kirk, sprawled across it, lifeless, arms dangling, dripping blood on the floor. The sharp object, the death weapon, laying there; it had served its purpose. Kirk had done his job well. He was a very efficient Captain. *Kroyka!*

Soon the crew would know. Word spread quickly through the curved corridors. The next shift, Spock's shift, would be coming on duty on the bridge soon. He must make a formal statement. Necessary for morale. They were a good crew - Starfleet's finest. His crew now, his ship. *'It is my duty to inform you that Captain James T. Kirk died tonight at...'* Jim!

((A tousled lock of light brown hair fell persistantly on his forehead, and the hazel eyes sparkled with puzzlement. The Captain swung around in the command chair easily, to face his First Officer.

"Data, Mr. Spock?" he queried.

"Sensor reading indicate...Captain...Sensor readings... indicate..."))

The disposal of the body would be McCoy's job. He no doubt had the taped instructions containing the Captain's last wishes. Spock would check with him. There would be no need for an autopsy. The cause of death was obvious. James Kirk had slashed the main arteries in both his wrists with a sharp object. The wounds were self-inflicted. By the time the act had been discovered it had been too late to save him. Too late. *No more time. The time has come. Not yet! No...Jim...not yet.*

(("Yes, my Vulcan friend," the familiar voice drummed silently in his head. "I could not ask you to do it. I could not put that burden on your hands. I realized that, later, after I had a chance to think more clearly about it. Taking a life is abhorant to you. Taking my life would have been impossible. You should not live with that. I could not let you. So, I had to do it myself. While there was still time."

"No! You have taken my Captain from me. There was still time."

"No hope, Spock. You know that. McCoy said it, too."

"But you don't know...there were experiments..."))

Spock suddenly thought he was going mad. The voices pounded inside his head. Useless arguments. The Captain was dead. Very well, Vulcan. We shall face this. He remembered the cleansing catharsis of the children on Triachus IV. He realized that he, too, had to face the reality of Jim's death. He was a Vulcan. He must conquer this within his own mind, must reason it out to a logical conclusion if he were to command...this ship...his ship...Jim's ship...*Jim is dead!*

Jim Kirk, the man on the bridge, the Captain. Even the dubious Vulcan

had learned to respect him, learned to trust him. The crew adored him, they would follow him to the ends of the galaxy and beyond on just his word.

Was he a god? No - just a man. Vulnerable, needing. A friend. Friend.. more than that. My Captain...the other half of me. The half I show to no one. Humor and gentleness combined with strength. *Jim is dead! No! It is not time!*

Then the illness came, draining his strength but not his spirit. Unexpected, swift, incurable. Ectoneuralitis. 'We must tell him, Doctor. He will become a vegetable before he dies as his body functions cease one by one. A painful, agonizing death.

'I'm afraid he'd consider suicide to that kind of future,' Bones had predicted.

No cure! Why didn't we prevent it? Why didn't we realize it was coming?

'Spock, you must promise me...at the first signs...when I begin to become...helpless...Spock, please...you're the only one...promise me...when the time comes...'

(("No! It is not yet time! It cannot be! The experiments-- a cure -- possibly. Don't tell the Captain yet, not until we're sure. No need to give him false hope."

"There is no hope."

"There is always hope."

"Not this time. Not for me."

"That is illogical."

"It is too late...too late."

"No, Jim! No! I need you -- Jim, please!"))

S P O C K ! ! !

Spock felt himself being pulled from a deep, cavernous, black void, climbing, crawling through the abyss toward reality. His whole body shook racked. He heard his name again.

"Spock...Spock! Snap out of it!"

The Vulcan opened his eyes to meet a pair of piercing hazel ones. They were sunken into deep, dark hollows and the light brown hair was tousled from sleep. Two thin hands were gripping him on the shoulders.

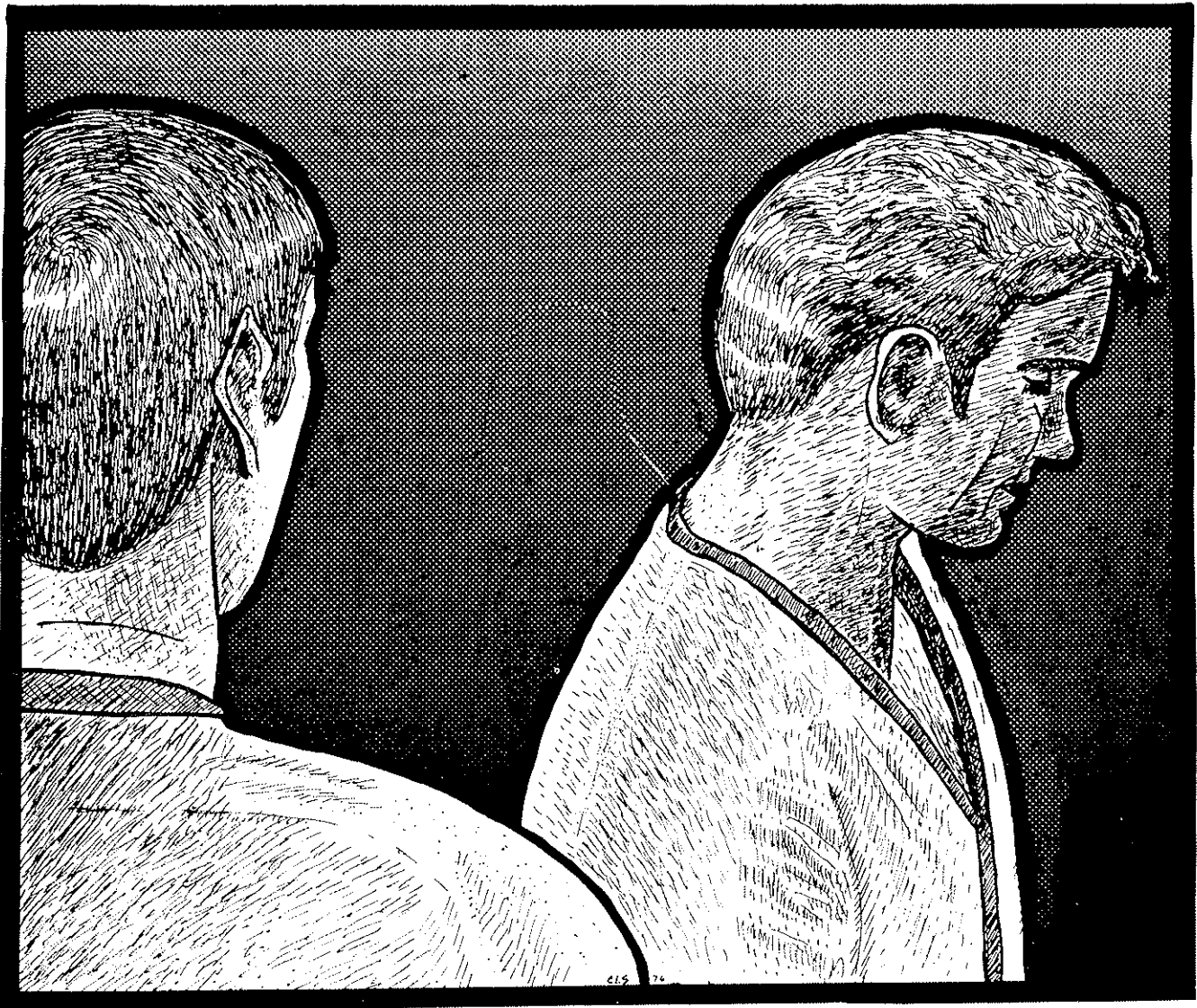
"Spock, wake up. You were having a nightmare." The Captain was looking concerned. He loosened his hold as he saw the Vulcan returning to awareness.

Spock was instantly awake. He sat upright.

"Captain..."

"Yes, Spock." Kirk smiled at him. "Are you all right?"

Spock nodded, then said urgently, "Captain - Dr. McCoy just received a communication from the Excalibur. They have made contact with the inhabitants of a planet in the Draconis system. On one of their survey parties, they discovered a vast amount of medical knowledge, including the cure for a disease that sounds very much like Ectoneuralitis. They have sent us the data and the doctor is running experiments to see if it is indeed the same..."



Kirk looked incredulous, as Spock continued. "We had not planned to tell you, Jim, until we were certain. It would give you false hopes. But..." Spock suddenly felt himself grow weak with the realization of what was happening. Jim Kirk was not dead! He stopped suddenly.

Jim!

Kirk's eyes filled with tears. "Spock, do you know what you're saying -- what you're telling me? There may be a chance. I may live. Spock, I don't

want to die!"

They clutched each other for a few minutes. There was still hope. The time had not yet come. Perhaps it wouldn't for a long time. They separated slowly.

"Captain...why did you come? I was having a nightmare. Did I cry out?"

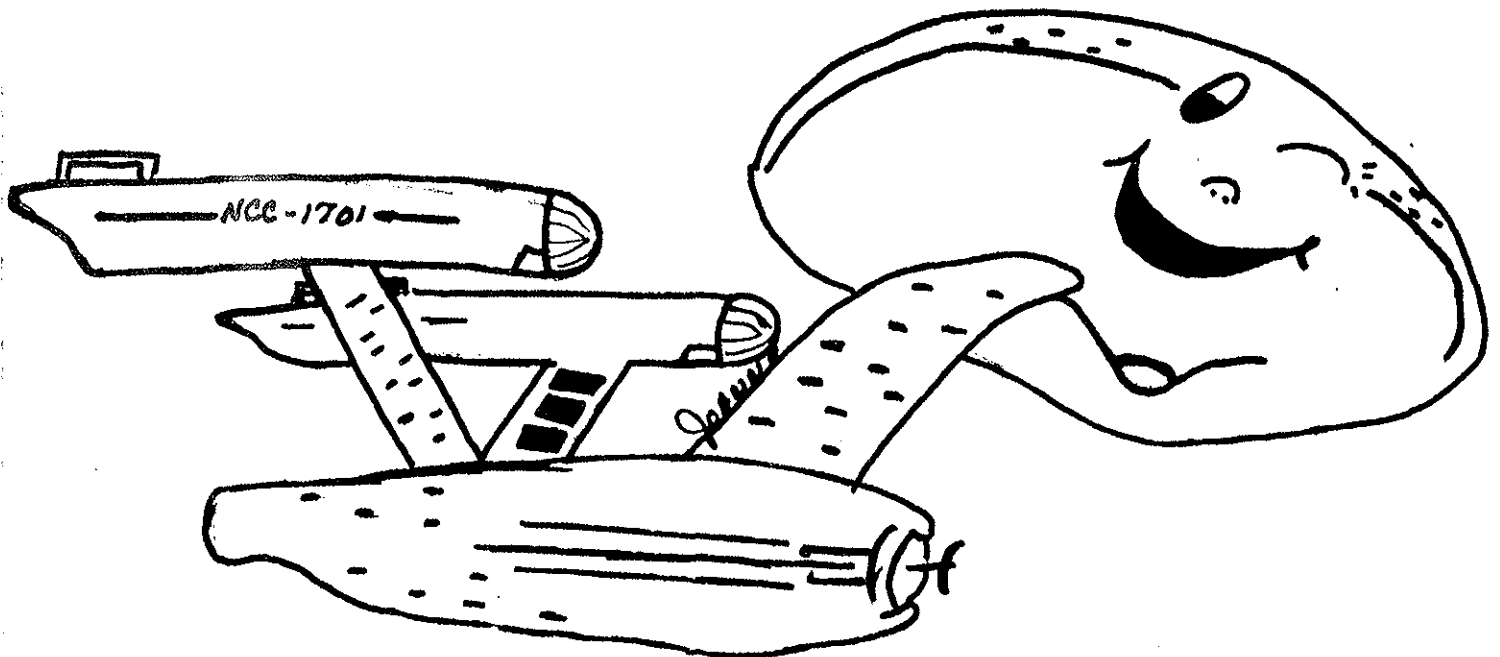
"No, Spock...I don't know. I just...knew you were." Kirk looked bewildered. "I don't understand it, but try to get some sleep now. In the morning I want to see those experiments that Bones is doing. Will you be all right?"

"Yes, Jim. And you?"

"I'll be all right. Good night, Spock."

Back in his quarters, Kirk wondered to himself what had caused him to suddenly rush to Spock's cabin. He hugged himself joyfully -- then he stooped to pick up the sharp, surgical knife from the floor where he had dropped it. He would not need it tonight...not now. *There was still time....*

#####



**HOW MANY SHIPS DO YOU KNOW
THAT HAVE A KIRK & SPOCK ?**

• • • WRITING CONTEST #2 THE WINNERS! • • •

Below is the scene we printed last issue with a challenge to our readers to write a story around it. Once again, we received many excellent entries and, if anything, the winners were harder to choose. We had endless round-robin debates, and finally selected the following two as the best examples. They are strikingly different in theme, and yet each manages to fit the scene perfectly - another example of the blending of diversities.

It's a great thrill for us to see these bizarre snatches take on meaning, because, truly, we don't know where they're going to lead. Our heartiest thanks go to all of you who entered and provided us with such a wealth of pleasant reading.

Without further ado, here are the winning interpretations of this scene:

Spock held onto the Captain for a full five minutes before he permitted himself the luxury of movement. His hands, paper-white, bit into Kirk's flesh with a vice-like grip. Out there, he knew, lurked certain death. And here...who could be certain of anything anymore?

Kirk stirred suddenly, an almost spasmodic reaction that triggered alarm in the Vulcan's normally stoic face.

"Captain - please..." he entreated desperately.

"I know, Spock." Kirk's voice was toneless, weary.

Spock could sense a new feeling, a rising panic that threatened to destroy his last precarious hold on reason. He was not sure he could control his own voice.

"Jim, you must believe...we must, or else..." he paused, helplessly. What words could he possibly use to convince his friend?

Kirk peered into the hawk-like face, now so close to his own, and almost managed a rueful smile. It was all so incongruous, he reflected; this Vulcan struggling so - he never gives up. Overcome with affection for his companion, Kirk buried his face against Spock's shoulder.



THE TEST

by SHEILA CLARK

Kirk relaxed; the automatic, unconscious relaxation of a tension so habitual that he was wholly unaware of its existence. While the ship was in orbit around a Federation planet - albeit a very recent member planet - nothing unexpected was likely to happen. They had arrived four days earlier than scheduled; for four days he could put to the back of his mind his ever-present concern for the welfare of his ship and his crew. He glanced back at the communications station.

"Contact the planet, Uhura," he ordered. "Report our arrival and request permission for shore leave facilities for the crew."

"Aye, sir."

It was, however, some minutes before there was any response. Kirk was beginning to think that some catastrophe had overtaken the entire planet before Uhura looked round.

"One of the Drennan ruling council is acknowledging, Captain."

"On the viewscreen, Lieutenant."

Two people appeared on the screen, a man and a woman. It was she who spoke. "You are early, Captain Kirk. We did not expect you for some days."

There seemed to be a degree of constraint in her voice. Strange.

"My apologies if our early arrival is inconvenient to you," Kirk said slowly.

"It is merely... a little embarrassing that our Council Head is currently unavailable. We - " the speaker indicated her companion, " - do not have the authority to grant shore leave facilities for your crew at the moment."

"I see." The woman was not a good liar. What she was saying might be the truth - but it was not the whole truth. She was concealing something. But if he let her think that he was fooled..."Don't worry about it, it isn't vital. Would you ask your Council Head to contact me as soon as possible?"

"Of course, Captain." Was that a note of relief in her voice?

"Are you in contact with Ensign Bronna?" Kirk went on. Although his new crewman still had four days of his embarkation leave to enjoy, Kirk wanted to say 'hello' at least.

"I regret... Ensign Bronna is also unavailable. Since he does not become a member of your crew for another four days, he is... out of contact with us. They will both get in touch with you... three days from now. It is unlikely to be possible before that." The voice was quietly apologetic but firm.

Mentally, Kirk shrugged, surer than ever that the woman was covering up something, but what she said was true. Their new Ensign was still on leave and not expecting them; and the Council Head was certain to have engagements for this period. He couldn't insist on seeing either.

"Very well," he said resignedly. "I'll expect to hear from them both in three days. Kirk out."

However, much to Kirk's surprise, the Council Head made contact little more than an hour later. Kirk, expecting the man to be elderly, was startled to find that he was young. He looked to be little more than twenty.

"I am Fordda, Council Head of Dren," he said quietly. "You are welcome, Captain Kirk."

"Thank you, sir."

"I would be honored if you would beam down to visit me. There is a small matter that I wish to discuss with you."

"Certainly, sir. Whenever you say."

"What better time than the present? Also... I believe that your second in command is a Vulcan?"

"Commander Spock. Yes."

"He will also be most welcome."

Kirk glanced over to the library computer, his lips twitching involuntarily at the sight of Spock's raised eyebrow. "We'll be right down, sir. Kirk out."

**

They were greeted by Fordda and another man who stood inconspicuously in the background until Fordda invited them to be seated and then came forward to offer them drinks. When Spock hesitated, the man murmured, "Our drinks are not alcoholic, Mr. Spock."

As they sipped the honey-sweet drink, Kirk said, "I understand that Ensign Bronna is currently unavailable, sir?"

"I am afraid that is correct, Captain. Indeed, it is about that that I wished to see you," Fordda admitted. "Ensign Bronna wishes - naturally - to undertake his test of manhood before he leaves Dren. The test begins in three hours, and takes two days. Until it is over, it would be against custom for him to be disturbed in his mental preparations. Indeed, to disturb him might cause his death during the course of the test."

"So far, none other of our people have chosen to join your Starfleet. When Bronna reports back to us his judgement of your strength and moral character, we will have more facts on which to judge whether or not we are betraying our beliefs by doing so. I am not speaking personally, Captain, you realize...?"

"Yes, sir," Kirk replied quietly. He had already been warned that the Drennans considered themselves superior to most other races.

"However, I feel that Bronna has the right to know that his senior officers also are men, and since you have arrived early... to succeed in this test, without prior mental preparation, you would indeed prove to my people that Starfleet chooses its senior officers carefully and well. I ask you both to undertake our test of manhood."

Kirk and Spock looked at each other. It was phrased as a request... but both knew that for practical purposes, it was an order. They had no alternative but to agree.

**

They stood with the other aspirants to 'manhood' - in all, eighteen men and, strangely, five girls. All twenty-three were dressed alike, in grey tunics and breeches. The native Drennans wore lacing sandals; Kirk and Spock were allowed to retain their boots. Which of the men was their new Ensign, they had no idea.

Fordda faced the group. "You have forty-eight hours to cross the Wastelands," he said in what was clearly a ritual preparatory announcement. "You may go singly or in pairs. Any who take longer than the allotted time fail this test, but may try again. The Mountain of Maturity is your guide, to direct you on your way. Have you any questions?" He was looking directly at Kirk and Spock as he spoke. It was not surprising; the others probably had a fair notion of what

they were facing. Kirk remained silent. He had a faint suspicion that ignorance might be preferable to foreknowledge of what they had to face.

Each aspirant - or pair of aspirants - left at ten minute intervals, disappearing quickly among the tall grass and twiggy shrubs of the Wastelands. Most of them went in pairs, Kirk was relieved to note. If he and Spock had been the only two who chose to go in company, it might have given a bad impression. As it was, only three - two men and one girl - chose to go alone.

Kirk and Spock were the last to leave. As he gave them the signal to begin, Fordda said quietly, "Good luck." As he had said it to none of the others, the phrase echoed in their ears with a slightly ominous ring.

At first, everything seemed peaceful. They made their way easily through the lush wilderness, Spock's acute sense of direction guiding him unerringly even where they could not see the mountain that was their goal, and Kirk content to rely on his friend's judgement. They maintained a steady pace, unsure of the exact distance involved but knowing that it was probably fully fifty miles. The mountain had looked a long way off.

When at last they paused to rest, they had covered several miles without incident.

"It seems a strangely easy test," Kirk said as he relaxed. "Even though we're going to have to feed ourselves 'off the land', so to speak, there must be more to it than this."

"Indeed, Captain. Fordda certainly gave the impression that we would require events to favour us," Spock agreed.

"So we'd better not let ourselves be lulled into a false sense of security." Even as he spoke, Kirk realized that his friend had not wholly relaxed, as he had. Trust Spock, he thought, suddenly glad that the Vulcan was with him.

They allowed themselves ten minutes, then went on, still without incident. Slowly the light began to fade. In the half-light, they stopped where a huge rock provided a little shelter. They had not found either the water they had hoped for or a fruit-bearing tree. But forty-eight hours of hunger and thirst also seemed a surprisingly easy test, even on top of a lengthy walk, and both were convinced that there must be other hardships still to face.

"I'll take the first watch," Kirk said. Spock nodded and curled up, immediately asleep.

The Human sat fighting drowsiness, helped by the growing hunger about which he could do nothing. The moonless night was silent except for the soft hushing rustle of the leaves and branches of the surrounding bushes. Somewhere, a long way off, a night-bird called once; and then the peace of the night returned. Kirk drew a long, deep breath, absorbing the quiet and restfulness that surrounded him.

Abruptly, the silence was shattered by a nearby scream of pure terror, cut off short. Spock sat upright, instantly awake, while Kirk stared into the darkness, trying to identify where the scream had come from. It was too dark to investigate, however. Both knew that if they went blundering in search of...whatever it was...they could easily stumble into extreme danger.

Both remained alert for some minutes, but the silence had resumed. Spock lay down again, to fall asleep as easily as if there had been no alarm.

Whether it was the scream that started his imagination working, Kirk never knew. He began to feel a degree of apprehension, straining his eyes in the darkness as he waited for the approach of a danger that he was suddenly sure was there. The apprehension deepened into fear.

Something out there was watching him...

Spock stirred and sat up again. The lurking danger seemed to recede a little.

"Is something wrong, Captain?"

"I'm...not sure. I keep feeling that we're being watched."

Spock looked around, his keen eyes with their perfect night vision seeing more than Kirk's in the faint starlight. Bushes...grass...rocks...

"I can't see anything," he said slowly.

"Neither can I. But I can *feel* it," Kirk replied.

Spock concentrated. "I can sense nothing," he said. "But I shall be doubly watchful. You get some sleep now, Jim. We must still have a long way to go."

Kirk lay down, sure that he wouldn't sleep; and opened his eyes to daylight. He became aware of the fear immediately - and as he looked at Spock, he realized that the Vulcan now also sensed it, although perhaps not so acutely.

He stretched and scrambled to his feet. "We might as well move on now," he said. The sooner they moved, the sooner they would reach what he had unconsciously come to regard as safety.

Half a mile away, they found the screamer. One of the men who had started alone lay there. He had found a tree with fruit, for he was still clutching an apple-like fruit in one hand, but he hadn't had time to begin eating it. He sprawled there, dead, his body unmarked but his face twisted into a grimace of utter terror. The bush he had raided - the only one with fruit that they had seen - was only yards from him. It was as if the tree had in some way managed to punish the man for picking the fruit by killing him. Kirk and Spock looked at each other.

There was nothing they could do for the victim. The ground was rock-hard, the stones they might have used to cover him firmly set in it. They couldn't even bury him.

As they went on, almost instinctively they moved closer together, knowing now that the fear was not imaginary. It was real, whatever caused it, and it could kill, even though whatever caused it did not seem to want the bodies for prey. A small grey animal - the first they had seen - ran through the trees in front of them, heading toward another of the fruit-bearing trees. Suddenly it stopped short, reared up on its hind legs, and fell. Between it and the tree there was a flicker of...movement? Almost a distortion of the bushes as if waves of hot air were rising in front of them. Yet it was not hot enough for the air to be heated to that extent.

The animal was dead, too. They left it and went on, still experiencing fear that - for Kirk - was rapidly deepening into terror.

They were surrounded by heat-haze distortions now. Spock paused once to look at one of them, his interest in the phenomenon momentarily overcoming his fear. Kirk caught at his arm.

"Come on, Spock!"

The sensation of being watched deepened. Distrust washed over them, intensifying the causeless dread. Kirk felt, now, as if he was wading through a sea of it, a sticky, syrupy sea that hampered him in his urgent need to escape from the nameless, unseen danger. Spock, less acutely affected, watched his Captain anxiously, wondering how long Kirk could possibly control his terror, knowing that even he dared not relax his control for a moment. Even now, he could hear voices...voices out of the past.

"Earther!...uncontrolled, emotional Earther! You'll never be a true Vulcan..." The taunts increased in cruelty. Words he had long forgotten echoed in his ears, battering at his self-control, recalling the agony of pain and loneliness that had tortured his childhood and early adulthood, breaking down his resistance...The interruption to his train of thought as they came on another body was very welcome.

They looked down at the dead girl. Bruises on her neck showed where she had been strangled, presumably by her companion who lay, face contorted in horror and fear, a few yards further on.

"What killed her?" Kirk asked, his voice shaking, as they looked at the second dead girl. But he already knew. Fear had driven her to kill her companion - and then she herself had been killed by the terror, even as the man had been. What horror had she seen - or sensed, he wondered with revulsion.

The bushes nearly shimmered violently. A fresh wave of panic hit him - so overwhelming that he forgot Spock, forgot the test, forgot everything and began running. He had to escape. From what, he didn't even know.

Spock overtook him and caught him. Kirk struggled to release himself but the Vulcan's superior strength told, and he held Kirk firm. A certain instinct told him that this was how the strangled girl had died, trying to stop her panic-stricken friend.

"Jim!"

"Let me go!"

Spock glanced quickly round. A shadow among the rocks caught his eye; he dragged Kirk over to it. He was right. It was a narrow cave. Perhaps in here Kirk might feel less threatened, and regain some measure of control. Spock pulled his friend into the cave.

Predictably, the fear lessened abruptly.

"Relax, Jim," he murmured soothingly. "Relax..."

Slowly the tension left the Human. He looked at Spock.

"What...caused that?"

"I do not know. But unless we can control it, make ourselves believe it will not harm us, the fear will surely kill us. I noticed that there is a shimmer in the air when the fear is the strongest - if that is meaningful, perhaps in here we will gain a brief respite. There is a draught blowing through the cave and it appears to run in the correct direction. I suggest that we follow it."

They set off through the darkness, hands clasped, feeling their way along the walls. The blackness pressed on them claustrophobically.

Abruptly, a fresh wave of primitive terror hit Kirk. He whimpered, jerked his hand free of Spock's and began a stumbling run back the way they had come. Desperately, Spock followed.

There was light ahead and a mass of fallen rock on the ground. The cave must fork - this was not the way they had entered! The roof had fallen in here, leaving a deep, narrow canyon. Spock began to overhaul Kirk, now that he could see his way, noticing with a sudden fear that was wholly of his own mind that there was a great gaping hole ahead, directly in Kirk's path. Urgently, Spock lunged forward.

"Jim!"

He caught Kirk desperately, just at the edge of the hole, and they fell heavily, to lie only inches from the drop, Spock holding the still struggling Kirk firmly. Slowly the Human's struggles lessened as Spock's rigidly maintained calmness penetrated the sea of terror that threatened to destroy him. Unmoving, the Vulcan stared, unseeing, across the gap to the open countryside beyond.

Spock held on to the Captain for a full five minutes before he permitted himself the luxury of movement. His hands, paper-white, bit into Kirk's flesh with a vice-like grip. Out there, he knew, lurked certain death. And here... who could be certain of anything any more?

Kirk stirred suddenly, an almost spasmodic reaction that triggered alarm in the Vulcan's normally stoic face.

"Captain - please..." he entreated desperately.

"I know, Spock." Kirk's voice was toneless, weary.

Spock could sense a new feeling, a rising panic, that threatened to destroy his last precarious hold on reason. He was not sure he could control his own voice.

"Jim, you must believe...we must or else..." He paused helplessly. What words could he possibly use to convince his friend?

Kirk peered into the hawk-like face, now so close to his own, and almost managed a rueful smile. It was all so incongruous, he reflected - this Vulcan struggling so - he never gives up. Overcome with affection for his companion, Kirk buried his face against Spock's shoulder.

The gesture strengthened Spock's failing control. With a sudden conviction that this was the way to fight the fear, Spock raised one hand to hold Kirk's head gently, firmly, against his shoulder. After a few minutes, Kirk found himself completely relaxed, the panic merely an unpleasant memory - and Spock knew, with a certainty that surpassed knowledge, that as long as this man lived, he would never need to fear loneliness again.

Memory of the test returned to them, and with it the realization that to succeed - to survive at all - they had to go out there again...and face the killing fear that someone - or something - would undoubtedly continue to fling at them.

"We must believe it cannot harm us," Spock repeated quietly. "Also...it seems to be powerless when faced with...friendship. If we can hold thoughts of friendship foremost in our minds, we may yet succeed."

"I'll try, Spock." Inwardly, Kirk knew he could feel no friendship for the invisible entities that killed...but his affection for the Vulcan might suffice. He must hold that firmly in his mind.

They scrambled to their feet and headed back through the cave, holding on to each other. They hadn't gone far when both became aware of a nagging apprehension.

"It cannot harm us," Spock said reassuringly. Kirk nodded, even though he knew the Vulcan wouldn't see him. Inwardly he thought, *Spock...my friend. What would I do without you?* The incipient panic faded.

There was daylight ahead again. They walked out of the cave into an evening sunlight. Long shadows lay on the ground. Had so long passed? Kirk was suddenly acutely aware that it was during the previous night that their troubles had begun. Spock seemed to read his mind.

"You should rest, Captain. Sleep. I am well able to watch all night. But even if I were not, we have seen nothing that could harm us."

"I can take my turn on watch - "

"Jim, you are more likely than I to be affected by the conditions. Asleep, you will not be aware of them. Please, rest properly. We have only a few hours of walking time to complete the test, and we do not know how far we still have to go. If you are unrested, tense from fighting the fear all night, we don't have a chance. Please Jim," he repeated, seeing that Kirk was unconvinced. "For my sake, if not your own."

"All right," Kirk agreed wearily.

They settled down among rocks just outside the cave. There was not sufficient room for Kirk to lie down, so he slept sitting up. Slowly he slipped sideways until his head rested on Spock's shoulder. The Vulcan found himself absorbing comfort from the touch. Slowly the night passed.

Spock shook the Captain awake at first light. There was no point in delaying. They set off at once. The fear was still present, Kirk found...but it was faint and fading fast. Soon it was gone.

Almost three hours later they walked out from among the

THE STARS GO DOWN

by CHERYL RICE

*There is no death! The stars go down
To rise upon some other shore,
And bright in heaven's jeweled crown
They shine forevermore.*

-- J. L. M.

Spock held onto the Captain for a full five minutes before he permitted himself the luxury of movement. His hands, paper-white, bit into Kirk's flesh with a vice-like grip. Out there, he knew, lurked certain death. And here...who could be certain of anything anymore?

Kirk stirred suddenly, an almost spasmodic reaction that triggered alarm in the Vulcan's normally stoic face.

"Captain - please..." he entreated desperately.

"I know, Spock." Kirk's voice was toneless, weary.

Spock could sense a new feeling, a rising panic that threatened to destroy his precarious hold on reason. He was not sure he could control his own voice.

"Jim, you must believe...we must, or else..." he paused, helplessly. What words could he possibly use to convince his friend?

Kirk peered into the hawk-like face, now so close to his own, and almost managed a rueful smile. It was all so incongruous, he reflected - this Vulcan struggling so - he never gives up. Overcome with affection for his companion, Kirk buried his face against Spock's shoulder.

But the moment passed, as all moments must, and the knowledge of their situation returned to the wounded human. That knowledge - that Death was prowling nearby, behind the pitiful barricade Spock had erected to slow its progress. That knowledge - the his left arm and leg were permanently damaged from some sort of radiation burrs. That knowledge - that the two of them had less than an hour to live.

And it had all started so innocently. Two days earlier the Enterprise, on a normal patrol run, had been attracted by an unusual source of radio emanations. The signals were of a strength thought impossible for any source but a large star. Finding nothing but a small G-type sun and what looked like a small planet in the vicinity, the Captain and crew of the starship came to the conclusion that a full investigation was in order. Landing parties had beamed to the planet's surface...a seemingly uninhabited globe just slightly larger than Earth's moon. Although it had a conventional oxygen-nitrogen atmosphere, science teams soon discovered that what looked like rock was merely a shell over incredible masses of some sort of machinery. While the Enterprise stayed in orbit around the planetoid and the main computer was fed all available knowledge, messages were relayed to Starfleet Command and all wondered who had made the machinery and why.

Then They came...then it was known.

Without warning a giant rent was torn in the fabric of space/time between the sun and the artificial planet and in they came. Huge ships of unknown design poured into the system, manned by creatures so strange, so terrible...The Enterprise was attacked and damaged but managed to escape.

bushes into cultivated land. Many Drennans were waiting, including some of those who had also crossed the Wastelands.

They looked at each other, knowing that they had succeeded. But that was of less importance than the knowledge that in some subtle fashion their friendship had deepened even more during those hours of terror. A wordless message of affection passed between them as their eyes met.

Then they turned as Fordda came forward to acknowledge that they were indeed men.

Kirk, caught on the planet with several other members of the crew, had succeeded in getting a final order to his gallant ship..."Do not attempt rescue...go and warn, go and warn!"

The invaders, who seemed unable to travel far from their entry point, turned their attention to the stranded humans. After playing cat and mouse for a while they pounced on the group. Within a day, Kirk, Spock and two others were the only remaining survivors.

Then the questioning...Kirk's stomach lurched once more at the thought. The captives had not been tortured, or even mistreated...but the questioners...Even though their means of communication had seemed primitive to the Captain, the aliens had shown evidence of great intelligence and perseverance. Kirk could still see them in his mind's eye. Giant beings, at least eight feet in diameter, ever changing in appearance. The flesh melting and flowing to form new grotesque outlines. The inquisition had accomplished nothing. Spock and Kirk told nothing but they received the impression that the invaders meant to stay. To open the rift and bring in vast numbers of their kind to take over the galaxy. The Starfleet officers never really knew from where these refugees from a nightmare had come...another universe, the past or the future...not that it really mattered.

Finally after the questioning ended, the matter of what to do with their prisoners came up. Several of the aliens seemed to favor vivisection, others keeping them as pets or killing them out of hand.

While the discussion, such as it was, raged, the Enterprise personnel were held in relatively comfortable quarters under only minimal guard. Clearly their captors had underestimated their capability for causing trouble.

Spock had gone into a state of deep concentration and in a short while had come up with a plan which, though it would definitely cause their own deaths, might also destroy the invaders.

The plan was simplicity itself...if they could make their way to the engine room of the ship they were on, the fuel supply could be exploded - which would vaporize the ship. Even more important, the explosion would set off a chain of similar events in the surrounding ships and with luck might even close the portal through which the invaders had entered the galaxy.

To a certain extent the plan succeeded. The two other crew members had been killed by the radiation weapons of the aliens and Kirk had been seriously wounded. But still he and Spock had managed to find the engine room, the location of which the Vulcan had discovered from simply asking one of the gelatinous beings earlier, and then by the simple expedient of jamming the heavy door with some pieces of machinery, they had gained themselves some time to work on the engines.

Kirk had helped as much as his failing strength would allow. Meanwhile the aliens had finally discovered their danger and were attacking the barricaded door. Trying desperately to gain time for themselves, the invaders began

bombarding the engine room with all the types of radiation at their disposal...some of which had caused hallucinations in the Captain. He had screamed in agony and terror and had rushed Spock, begging him to cease his activity. For the human believed that they were on the Enterprise and were in the process of destroying their own ship. Spock had nerve-pinned his friend into unconsciousness and then sat with him on the floor, holding the human as tenderly as a child, waiting for its effect to wear off.

The Vulcan had done all in his power. Now all he could do was wait...hoping against hope that the aliens could not breach their defenses before the engines overloaded.

Kirk had finally regained control of his mind and emotions. "How much longer do we have?"

Spock looked into his other half's eyes with concern. "Are you all right, Captain? Do you remember where we are?"

"Yes, of course. As to how 'right' I am...long as I'm like this I'm fine." He managed a wry smile, full of affection. "Is everything ready? Will the door hold?"

"I believe so..." There was a companionable silence while neither seemed to find words necessary. Finally Spock, shifting position slightly, went on to explain. "If I understood their schematics correctly, the overload on their main engines will soon induce massive strain on their..."

Kirk interrupted wearily. "That is great...but how long do we have? Seconds, minutes?"

The Vulcan answered as calmly as if they were discussing the time that would have to pass before the next mealtime instead of the time that would be passing before their deaths. "I would estimate, and this is not as precise as I would wish, anywhere from 5 to 37 minutes from now. If I had been able to obtain more explicit diagrams of the engines..."

Kirk moved slightly, trying to find a more comfortable position. And a more pleasant topic of discussion. Somehow in these last few minutes...there were some things that needed to be said. Now was no time for hiding honest emotion behind a Vulcan mask or idle chatter. He had seen the look in Spock's eyes and knew the feeling was mutual. Suddenly he noticed the absence of pain in his disabled extremities.

"Spock, did you do something? My arm doesn't hurt anymore..."

"Yes, Jim, it's a Vulcan technique, a form of mind-meld. It seemed unnecessary for you to suffer further. I merely transferred some of the pain to my mind, where it was easily controlled."

Kirk squeezed the blue-sleeved arm of his friend with his good hand in silent thanks. Then another thought struck. "When I came to...what did you mean by 'we must believe'? What?"

"That what we are doing is right, that our deaths have meaning." Spock, who had been listening for new sounds coming from the other side of the barricaded door, turned to look down at the familiar, beloved face so near to him. Drinking in, once more, the personality behind those golden-brown eyes. "You were screaming that it was a trick, that I was killing you to take over the Enterprise. I tried to explain, but..."

Kirk rubbed his chin in a characteristic gesture. "But you knew that I didn't really believe that. It was whatever the radiation was doing..."

The Vulcan nodded in agreement. "Yes I knew, logically. But the thought of our dying with you still believing that suddenly became too much to bear."

"Please don't apologize for feeling that way."

"I had no intention of doing so - in the situation." The two looked at each other in perfect understanding.

"Well, it will soon be over." Kirk seemed to be

talking to himself. "After all the struggle, all the years. Did you ever think we would end up like this, my friend?"

Spock permitted himself another luxury - a rare smile. "I had surmised it might, Jim, if we were lucky."

"Lucky!" The human tried to sit up, then abandoned the attempt as stabbing pains in his back reminded him of other injuries. "You call all of this lucky?"

"It will be quick and painless. And we are together."

Kirk blinked in surprise. "Does it mean that much to you?"

Spock nodded gravely, all Vulcan caution tossed to the winds.

The Captain thought for a timeless moment, then grinned for a second a youth again. "I know what you mean. I've often wondered how I would ever go on if anything happened to you. But you know, I have a feeling...a hunch. Do you suppose all this was meant to be?"

"Do you mean by some sort of deity?"

"Oh, that, or by Fate. Whatever you want to call it. From the moment we met...remember?"

"Yes, indeed."

"It was like we each found what we had needed to make ourselves whole. It was almost miraculous. I've had other good friends before, but you were different. It was like we had known each other before...in another life or another time." He broke off as he noticed the Vulcan didn't seem to be listening. "Maybe I'm being silly, sentimental."

Spock reached down to hold his friend again securely in a tender embrace. "Not at all. It is as good an explanation for our relationship as any. It is regrettable that it has taken these circumstances for us to be able to verbalize our feelings. It is also regrettable that the door is now giving way."

Kirk turned to look at the buckling door in dismay, then into the eyes so near. They were dark as a starless night sky and full of emotion. Their gazes locked and became the last thing these two particular men saw as Spock's earlier prediction came true, a bit ahead of time. The engines quite effectively destroyed themselves and all surrounding space. Within seconds their bodies were returned to the abyss from which they had come.

ANOTHER TIME, ANOTHER PLACE, ANOTHER KIRK, ANOTHER SPOCK,
ANOTHER TIME, ANOTHER PLACE, ANOTHER.....

On the bridge of the Enterprise at the conclusion of a successful mission.

Captain Kirk: I had a feeling...

Spock: A feeling is not much to go on.

Captain Kirk: Sometimes a feeling, Mr. Spock, is all we humans have to go on.

Spock: Captain, you almost make me believe in luck.

Captain Kirk: Why, Mr. Spock, you almost make me believe in miracles.



...and, oh, yes...we did select one additional winner, for her brief, but powerful interpretation of the contest scene. This is our talented artist's first attempt at fiction, and we think you'll agree with us that she shows definite promise in this field, as well.

UNTITLED

by Pat Stall

Spock held onto the Captain for a full five minutes before he permitted himself the luxury of movement. His hands, paper-white, bit into Kirk's flesh with a vice-like grip. Out there, he knew, lurked certain death. And here...who could be sure of anything anymore?

Kirk stirred suddenly, an almost spasmodic reaction that triggered alarm in the Vulcan's normally stoic face.

"Captain--please..." he entreated desperately.

"I know, Spock." Kirk's voice was toneless, weary.

Spock could sense a new feeling, a rising panic that threatened to destroy his last precarious hold on reason. He was not sure he could control his own voice.

"Jim, you must believe...we must, or else..." he paused, helplessly. What words could he possibly use to convince his friend?

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Finally, the Vulcan broke, and a scream born of unbearable pain and desperation escaped from his now uncontrolled countenance. "Captain," he pleaded, "you're standing on my foot!"

If man could mount to heaven and survey the mighty universe, his admiration of its beauties would be much diminished unless he had a friend to share in his pleasure.

CICERO



...and now...

WRITING CONTEST #3

Below is a simple story extract conceived, with no forethought, in the fiendish minds of the editors. We challenge you to sharpen your wits and your pencils. Build a story around this scene and send us the results. Next issue we will publish the best we receive. Our winner(s) will receive a free copy of that issue.

CONTEST RULES:

1. *Entries must be no longer than 5 pages, single-spaced and typed.*
2. *The scene itself must be part of your story - beginning, middle, or end is up to you.*
3. *Winners will be chosen on the basis of originality, clarity, and adherence to the theme of CONTACT.*
4. *Deadline date for submissions is MAY 31st, 1977. Remember - if you want your manuscript returned, be sure to include return postage.*

GOOD LUCK!!

Kirk laughed delightedly as Spock entered. "Come and see," he grinned at his First Officer. "Bet you couldn't do that if you tried."

"Indeed?" The Vulcan's expression was non-committal, but his tone was quizzical. It was enough that this whole incident had been somewhat of an enigma, but the Captain seemed to be actually enjoying the situation. "Captain, I fail to understand why you feel I should become involved."

Kirk grinned again. He hadn't had so much fun in a long while, and sharing that joy with his friend had doubled the pleasure.

"Because I want you to be involved." He tried to explain. "Because it... pleases me."

Spock sighed. If it had been anyone but James Kirk he would have dismissed the whole thing. But this man, his Captain - he knew he would do as he asked no matter how illogical it seemed.

"Captain, I am not sure that Starfleet would approve..." he attempted one last feeble protest.

"Spock," Kirk spoke patiently, "will you just stop worrying about who will or will not approve and at least come see this?"

The Vulcan nodded. He knew he had lost. As he approached the Captain's side, his only thought was of relief that at least McCoy was not here.

THE MELD
By BEVERLY VOLKER

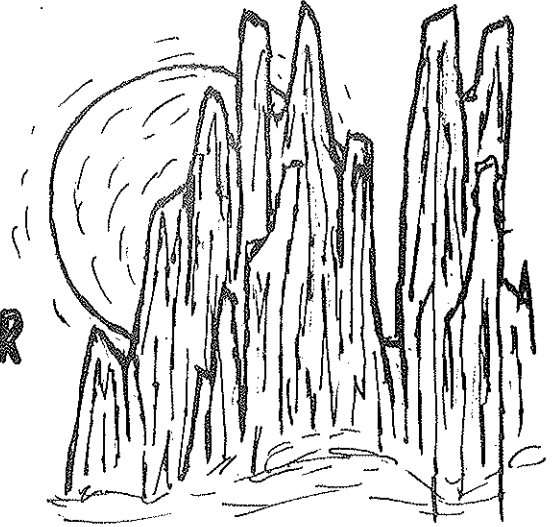
UNDERSTAND THE SOLITUDE
OF SHADOWS OF THE MIND
SEEK, TO GRASP SOME THREAD
OF LIFE WITH LONELINESS ENTWINED.
NIGHTMARE'S CONJURED IMAGES
OF DESOLATION FIND
IS NOW--I COME--TAKE HEED MY VOICE

TO TOUCH THE EMPTY HOLOCAUST
A SOLITARY SOUL
TO OFFER SHARING, STRIVING FOR
ATTAINMENT OF A GOAL
TOGETHER NOW, NO LONGER LOST
TWO HALVES COMPLETE THE WHOLE
WE ARE ONE--WE REACH--WE HAVE NO CHOICE



BORN OF THE SUN

BY JOHANNA CANTOR



It was beautiful here, high on the cliffs overlooking the ancient harbor of T'Ar. In this place all the elements of Vulcan seemed to meet and merge, just as the heat and sand and delicately colored desert flora combined with the rhythmic beat of waves on the shore far below. Kirk stood still, letting the quietude seep through him as he read and reread the inscription on the huge lintel.

"...born of the sun, they traveled a short while toward the sun, and left the vivid air signed with their honor."

Typical of the Vulcans to choose a fragment of Terran poetry for their new pantheon -- this generation's monument to the idea of the IDIC -- works of art, commissioned and dedicated, then left open for the entire galaxy to enjoy.

Kirk walked up the steps and into the cool peristyle. Most of the memorials were statues, beautifully carved of the Silin stone, depicting either the person honored or some incident from the person's life. He stood for a long time in front of a montage honoring T'Bat of Kaltor. It puzzled him, until he realized that all the figures had the same face. T'Bat sat at the feet of Swan, the great Vulcan biochemist who had been her teacher. She stood touching two fingers to the fingers of her consort. She nursed a baby, and presented a child for the Kahswan. She worked in her laboratory and finally, at the focal point of the group, presented to a group of emaciated Rigellians the findings which had ended famine on that planet.

Kirk wandered around, luxuriating in the leisure which made it possible to open himself to the experience of these artworks. He studied a fresco dedicated to the Lawgiver of Aurelia, and a mosaic commemorating the Andorian Shril. His eye attuned to larger works, he almost walked by a small abstract tapestry. Then a vaguely familiar combination of symbols caught his eye. He moved closer to study the dedication, and realized that it bore the name of Spock's kinsystem.

He sat down in front of the tapestry, letting his eye grow used to the form. As he looked, a figure emerged from the colors -- a woman standing on a platform next to an antique piano, her slender body infused with the vitality of a communication. Memory swirled around Kirk, and the present receded.

He sat lost in memory until Vulcan's sister planet rose in the evening sky. Then he came to himself with a start. He had promised to meet Spock half an hour ago. Spock would be--

"Captain?"

"Here I am, Mr. Spock. I'm sorry, I lost track of time."

"There is no urgency, Captain." Spock walked over to him, studying his captain.

"That's a beautiful piece of work, Mr. Spock. You designed it, didn't you?"

"Yes." Spock hesitated. "Forgive me, Jim. Had I known you were coming here, I would have warned you."

"It's all right. It's all very long ago, and far away."

They walked out together. Kirk was quiet, and Spock respected his reserve. But he might be surprised, Kirk thought, to know that his friend was no longer thinking of Edith Keeler, but of his first officer. *He was so patient with me, Kirk remembered. Even when I was grossly out of line...*

"Our last bit of information was obtained at the expense of thirty hours' work," Spock protested.

Kirk's conscience pricked. He should have been helping rewire the burned out circuits instead of hanging around the kitchen -- and Edith, but he was in no condition to apologize. "I must know whether she lives or dies, Spock. I must know what to do!"

Spock settled down to the work. Kirk paced savagely, longing to break into that Vulcan placidity. Spock had already accepted the possibility that Edith Keeler might die -- regrettable, no doubt, but a logical possibility. To him, Kirk's agony was neurotic -- mere thrashing in the face of fate. It seemed so unfair! Kirk slammed out the door.

Left alone, Spock looked after him for a moment. Indeed, it could be hard to be human. If he could place his fingers in a certain way and surround the pain...But he had no right to intrude. His own pain, the loss of comradeship, he thrust aside. It could be dealt with later. Now there was work to finish.

"We've simply got to find McCoy," Kirk said tightly.

"He must come here," Spock pointed out. "It is the only way he can make contact with Ms. Keeler."

"Miss, Spock. You've got to remember that that word still has a

vowel."

"Yes sir." Spock was woodenly correct, and Kirk felt a twinge of shame. He'd called Spock down at least a dozen times in as many hours. He must stop taking it out on the man in front of him. But it was more than that. Ever since that episode on the stairs, Spock had been watchful and reserved. He couldn't really think Kirk would sacrifice the future for one woman. Kirk swallowed the *why not?* that rose in his chest and wrenched himself back to the issue at hand.

"You're sure the obituary you saw was undated?"

"The obituary was dated, Captain. But it gave no time of death."

"Then we simply can't afford to leave here. How much money do you have?"

"Twenty cents."

"I have fifty. We have to eat. And we'll owe two dollars for the room Friday. Damn it, it's laughable! The future of the Earth at stake, and I have to worry about the rent for this crumbling, rickety..."

He ranted on. Spock stood, hands clasped behind him, outwardly respectful, inwardly analytic. The Captain might simply be "griping"-- that odd method of ventilation so deeply ingrained in Human custom. But he might be breaking down. Only an expert in Human psychology could be sure, and Spock made no claims to expertise in that area. Again, he resolved to stop the captain, if need be, when the time arrived. That it would mean the end of a cherished friendship, Spock had no doubt, but duty was clear.

The Captain stopped, choking in frustration. Spock could not decide whether to try to console him logically -- a method not always as successful as one might wish -- or to leave him alone to get a grip on himself. Perhaps that would be best. "Will you excuse me, Captain?"

It was the wrong choice. Kirk seemed to shrink into himself. Then he turned his back, fighting for control. Spock hesitated, then turned to go.

"Spock."

"Here, Captain."

They stood in silence for several moments. Then Kirk took a deep breath. "I'm sorry, Mr. Spock."

"Quite all right, Captain."

"I don't know what's the matter with me here. It's driving me crazy -- washing dishes and stoking furnaces and digging ditches. And all the time waiting --" Kirk broke off, ashamed.

"An understandable reaction, Captain."

"This isn't exactly what you're used to either."



"All labor has dignity."

"Not washing dishes when you're trained in science, and mathematics, and xenobiology, and -- oh, hell."

"Interesting. Ms. Murphy was making the same complaint yesterday."

"Ms. Murphy? Oh. Edith's friend?"

"Yes. She is a hospital dietician, but the institution she worked for discharged its married female employees when it was forced to cut back. So she is keeping house for her husband and his brothers. I suppose one would feel a sense of waste."

"Don't you feel that way, Spock? So far from your work?"

"My work is here, Captain."

"Building the computer? I suppose so."

Spock let it go at that. "Would you care to--"

A light rap on the door interrupted him, and he turned to open it. It was Ms. Keeler, dressed in her work clothes. "Mr. Halvorsen, the man you worked for Monday, wants the two of you again tomorrow afternoon. Can you catch the noon bus?"

"Fine." Kirk answered for both automatically. "What are you doing?"

"I have to help Jimmy with the soup."

"Give it a miss and come for a walk with me."

"I can't, Jim."

"I will help with the soup," Spock volunteered.

"That's kind of you, Mr. Spock, but--"

"I am happy to serve," Spock said formally. The captain was already getting his jacket.

Kirk returned from the walk more miserable than ever, but determined simply to accept. He'd talk with Spock about it now. He felt the need of the Vulcan's gentle serenity. That might make amends, too -- he'd really treated his friend rather badly. But exhaustion caught up with Kirk. He fell asleep before Spock returned, and slept late into the morning. He hunted around the mission then, but there was no sign of Spock.

At a few minutes before noon, Kirk was at the bus stop, worrying. If Spock didn't make the bus, he'd have to be in serious trouble.

"Your name James T. Kirk?"

"Yes." Kirk turned to face the stocky man who had spoken.

"Gotta message for you. From Mr. Spock. He said you'd give me a nickel." Kirk shelled out. "Mr. Spock said you go ahead and take the bus. He'll meet you at the job."

Kirk caught the bus, both apprehensive and annoyed. Spock wasn't at the site. Then, a few minutes before one, a limousine pulled up. Spock climbed out, thanked the driver, and hurried over to the group.

"Where have you been?"

"A job, Captain. I--"

"Time!" The group scattered for assignment.

The work kept Kirk busy without really occupying his mind. It was easy enough to resolve to accept the situation, but it was hard to relate to unborn millions, and all too easy to relate to one vital, intelligent -- stop it. When they finally were allowed a break, he was in the deepest depression he could recall. It took all the energy he could muster to make his way over to Spock.

The Vulcan was sitting in the shade, his attention turned inward. A twinge of alarm shot through Kirk's depression. "You okay?"

"Yes, sir."

Kirk dropped on one knee. "You don't look it."

"I have a headache. It is not---"

"Why?"

"I was playing the piano for a young lady with a singularly penetrating soprano."

"What? No, never mind, I heard you. How did you get on to that?"

"Ms. Keeler asked me if I would take the place of an accompanist who resigned yesterday, rather suddenly, I would judge. The lady is a friend of hers. She had an audition this morning, and wished to rehearse beforehand. Her -- is 'backer' a word?"

"Yes."

"Her backer promised me five dollars and a ride here."

"Did you get the money?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, that certainly solves our immediate problem."

"So I thought."

"How did Edith know you play?"

"I played for the mission services last Sunday."

"Mr. Spock, your talents--"

"Time!" They seperated again.

When six o'clock came, Kirk lost no time getting back to Spock. The Vulcan insisted he was all right, but Kirk, who had had time to remember how rarely he admitted to minor ailments, could not feel reassured. He sat beside Spock on the way back, cursing the joggling of the bus. In many ways, this period was unbearably primitive. When they finally reached their corner, he said, "You go back to the room and rest. I'll go pick up some food." Spock pulled a bill from his pocket, handed it to Kirk, and left without argument.

The store was crowded -- these distribution systems were unimaginably inefficient, but finally Kirk got his food and started toward the mission. His pace quickened as he rounded the corner.

"Jim! Jim Kirk!" It was Edith, calling from the window of their room. "Come quickly! Mr. Spock is ill!"

Panic coursed through Kirk as he raced for the house. Edith was holding the front door open for him, and he burst in.

"He won't let me touch him, but I felt his pulse, and--"

Kirk continued past her, to their room. Spock was sitting in the chair, very erect. "There is no cause for alarm, Captain," he said.

Kirk panted to catch his breath.

"Jim, you've got to make him see a doctor. He almost fainted."

"Captain, I am all right. I regret that you were alarmed. There was no necessity."

"What's wrong?"

"Some men from the bus tried to rob me. I got away from them, and back here, but I was struck over the head. It made me dizzy, but it is not serious."

"Why didn't you tell me you'd been hit?" Edith moved toward Spock quickly. "Here, let me see."

"No!" Spock clasped both hands to his head, holding his cap on. Swiftly, Kirk moved between them and placed his hands on Spock's shoulders. Spock put a hand on Kirk's arm, as if to steady himself, but then he pulled away. Kirk, who hadn't known whether to be pleased or scared, gave him a quick pat, and turned to Edith.

"I'll take care of him."

"But, Jim..."

Kirk rose and gently pushed her toward the door. He thanked her, then closed the door and locked it. Then he crossed swiftly to Spock. "Let me see that." Spock took hold of the cap. "Wait. Is it bleeding?"

"Yes."

"Then don't try to take your cap off. I'll get some water."

He was back in moments, feeling himself for the first time in days. Nothing was important now except Spock's condition. Gently, he soaked the blood-matted cap off and bathed the wound. Spock was right. It was not serious.

"Ouch," he said sympathetically. "Here, lie down." He settled Spock, cursing the unyielding mats these people slept on, and folded a wet cloth for a compress.

"All right?"

"Yes, sir. Thank you."

"It was a mistake to separate. They probably saw you giving me the money. I'm sorry."

"No great harm done, Captain."

Kirk nodded, swallowing the remnants of his panic. If Spock had been seriously injured... "Get some rest." He made it an order and Spock obeyed, taking deep breaths and letting them out rhythmically in a relaxation exercise. Kirk sat down.

Spock was almost asleep when a gentle rapping at the door made him start. Kirk swore again under his breath. "Who is it?"

"Edith."

Spock stiffened. "Take it easy," Kirk said. "She can be trusted--"

"Captain, no!"

"--not to barge in." Kirk allowed an edge to creep into his voice, but then he rested a hand on Spock's shoulder. "Just a minute," he called. He took a quick survey of the room, and arranged the compress so it covered the exposed ear. "Just lie still," he said as he picked up the bowl of water and carried it to the table. There he opened a small vein in his wrist and allowed it to bleed until the water was the proper color. Then he crossed to the door.

Edith stood patiently, holding bandages, antiseptic, and a brandy flask. He took them from her and thanked her sweetly, still blocking the door.

"How is he?"



"Better."

"Jim, I know a doctor who would trust you for the fee. He's very good."

"Thank you, Edith. But it's not necessary."

"You're not a doctor."

"Spock says he's okay. He knows."

"He might be trying to keep you from worrying."

"That's possible, but he wouldn't lie. He never does."

"Never?"

"M-m"

"That must be rather a problem."

"Sometimes."

They grinned at each other, then Edith frowned. "Jim, seriously, don't take this too lightly. I don't want to alarm you, but I felt his pulse when he first got back here. It was incredibly fast. I think--"

"Hm," Kirk interrupted. He crossed to his silent officer, picked up a wrist, and counted professionally, ignoring the faint, rapid beat. "It's normal now," he announced. "Probably he was agitated. Good night, Edith. And thank you again for your help." He crossed to the door, shut it firmly, and returned to Spock.

"You, Captain, are an accomplished liar."

"Nonsense, Mr. Spock. I hardly said a word that wasn't true. Now get some rest."

The next morning, Spock declared himself quite recovered.

"No, you're not."

"Captain, I assure you--"

"No. A human would be feeling very rocky. So you pretend. It gives us the perfect excuse for hanging around here. You're sick, and I don't want to leave you. And thanks to your musical talent, we don't have to go out to work. We can be sure to be here when McCoy arrives. Now get back to bed."

Again, there was the gentle rapping. "I brought you an ice bag," Edith said.

"An ice bag?"

She looked at him in surprise. "It's for Mr. Spock." She handed it to

Kirk, who took it over to Spock. The Vulcan eyed it uncertainly.

"You hold it against your head," Edith persisted. "It's good for relieving a headache."

Spock put the bag against his head, winced, and handed it back to Kirk. "Thank you. But I believe that, on the whole, I would rather have the headache."

Edith kept a straight face as she accepted the ice bag, but her eyes danced. Kirk watched her, knowing that Spock's air of dispassionate judgement entertained her as much as it did him. Strange how much they responded to the same things. If only -- forget it.

"Want anything, Mr. Spock?"

"Thank you, no."

"Okay. I'll be back as soon as I've eaten."

"Understood, Captain." Kirk nodded. Spock did understand, of course. He always did. He managed a quick grin, then followed Edith out the door. Maybe she'd be free to go out tonight....

Kirk looked around him in surprise. They were in the city proper. Apparently they'd walked down. Spock was at his side -- supportive, but quiet. "Sorry, Mr. Spock. I was wool gathering."

"Of course, Captain."

"That tapestry is beautiful. What does the title mean?"

"I believe the closest translation would be 'prophet'."

"Prophet. Yes. Mr. Spock?"

"Yes, Captain?"

"It must have cost you a year's pay."

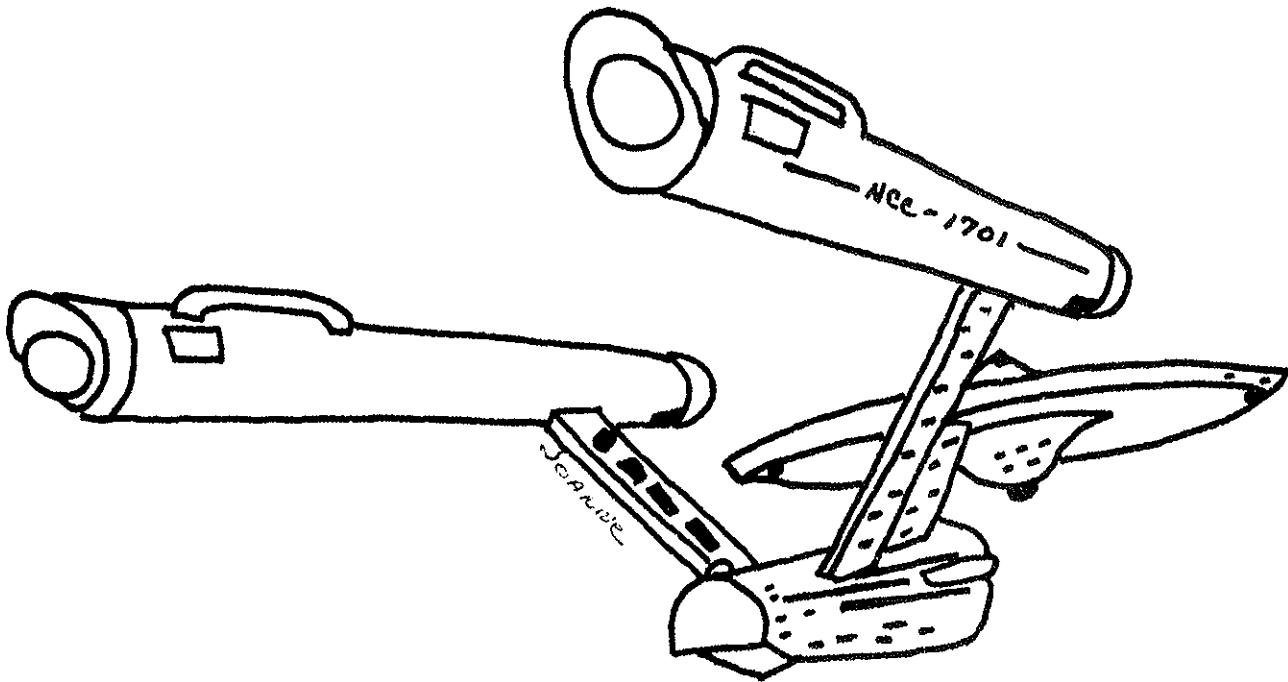
Spock did not reply, and Kirk felt him stiffen. He smiled under cover of darkness. After all these years, the Vulcan was still afraid of intruding. "I don't know if it is permitted to ask, Spock. But, may I go halves with you?"

"I would be honored."

They were in the gardens now, and Amanda and Sarek stood in the doorway, watching for them. Amanda saw them, and she ran toward Kirk. "Jim, are you all right?"

"I'm fine, Amanda. I'm sorry I--"

"Now, that doesn't matter a bit. You're here to enjoy your leave." She drew his arm through hers. "But you come on in, now. It's past time you had something to eat."

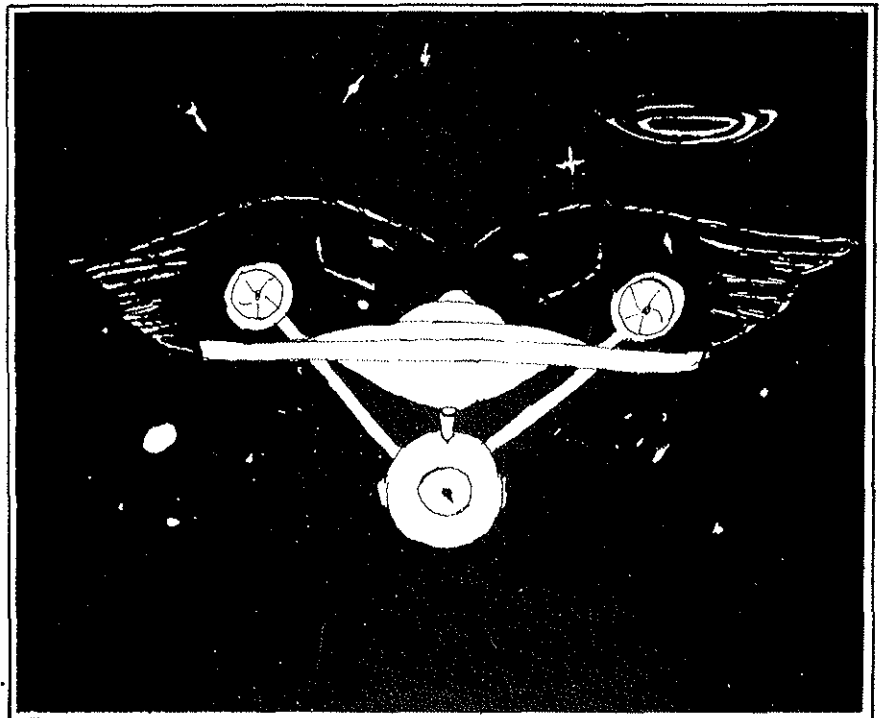


I AM A TREKAHOLIC!! IN CASE OF AN EMERGENCY
 CALL CAPT. KIRK OR MR. SPOCK.....
 ON SECOND THOUGHT CALL THEM BOTH!!!!

ENTERPRISE

*I heard a sound
 Like the haunting notes of
 Melancholy wind chimes
 That sing alone with
 No one to hear.
 Then the sky held its breath
 As passed above
 A silver bird that
 Hurtled silently
 And but caressed me with
 Its glinting precious form.
 I stood alone upon my world
 No longer.
 I was free to float and touch
 Like wind chimes,
 Free to seek and see
 A universe of others
 Ever changing, ever still
 And boldly growing
 With the twinkling silver stars.*

--- Martha J. Bonds





Kathy Carlson 7611

TOPE OF REFLECTION

*The image I see is not my own
The eyes too dark
The face too thin
Yet I am reflected within.*

*The surface throws it back
Intellect reason logic
Command and commanding
I am reflected within.*

*The image seems indestructable
All act on his orders
Am I he is he me
Still I am reflected within.*

--Pete Kaup

ON COMPANIONSHIP...

*I do not count my life so much in days
served aboard this ship
As in his heartbeats.
He has shared every day with me.
I have grown strong in his companionship.*

--Trinette Kern



Kathy Carlson 7611

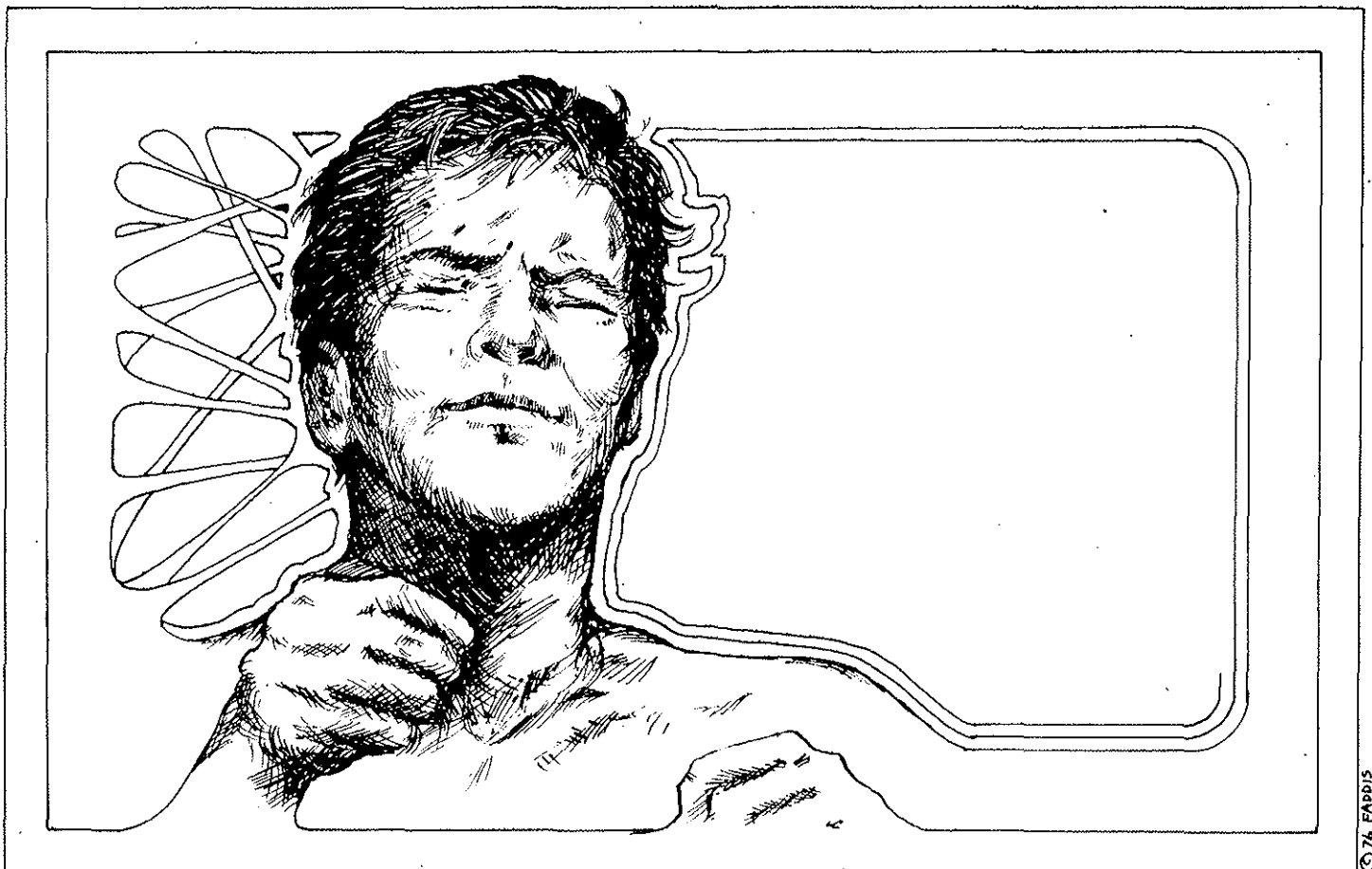
THE SPIDER'S WEB

"You know, Spock, sometimes you are really a..." *Ah, no.* Kirk made a gesture of resignation as his voice trailed off. What's the use? After all, Spock was a Vulcan, and the Vulcans' idea of fun was...was so uninspiringly logical! He had to smile at his own choice of words. Well, they even defy description...

The Enterprise was a tired ship, as only a long, routine mission could make it, and they were all looking forward to a well-deserved R & R on the planet Siklos.

Finally, a shore leave, thought Kirk, hardly covering a yawn, and I'll be damned if I won't find a way to lure Spock into a break on the planet. After all, I bet he, too, needs a 'beach to walk on' once in a while...

Turning to his First Officer with his formal "Captain" look, he remarked, "Siklos is a most intriguing planet, Mr. Spock. Even though the two earlier Federation probes found no intelligent life there, some unmistakable signs indicate the existence of highly developed life forms. I would like you to assign your best qualified research team to survey Siklos -- and, hmnn, of course I would not want to deprive you of your well deserved shore leave...which, if I'm correct, includes a lengthy



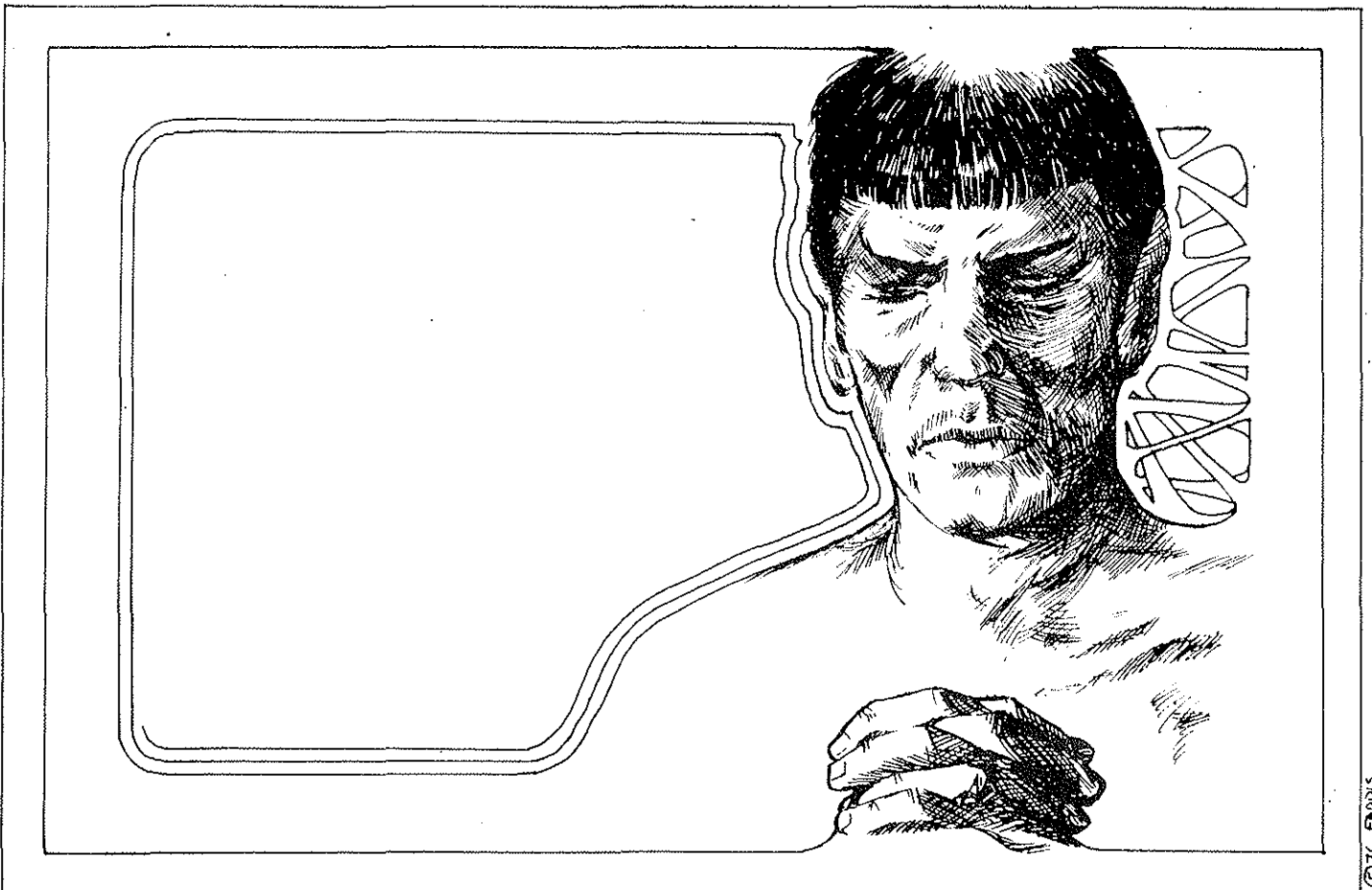
BY SUSAN K. JAMES

meditation right here onboard and some 'fascinating' debates with your favorite computer." There, he just blew it. But then, that half-smile sneaking up in the corners of his mouth was a dead give-away, anyway... After all those years, Spock just knew him too well.

They beamed down with the first group. Solid ground under his feet, green meadows, the smell of living things. It was like Earth...except for the dark blue skies hanging above them like a ceremonial canopy stretched out as a special welcome to greet them. While Kirk disappeared in the tent hastily set up by his yeoman, Spock waited for him outside, somewhat lost, shifting his weight from foot to foot, gazing around. As the Captain emerged again wearing a leisurely non-protocol outfit and a broad smile, Spock noticed a suspicious looking, unidentified round object under his arm. He was afraid to ask.

"Spock, do you like to play soccer?" Kirk asked casually, looking from the corner of his eyes for Spock's surprised response that was certain to follow.

"I beg your pardon, Sir, did you say 'soccer'?" Spock simply could not believe his ears. "Why would I engage in this most disfunctional of



of habits, kicking a ball around with no apparent purpose, becoming exhausted and dirty in the process?"

"Because, Mr. Spock, it does serve a definite function: it releases tension and entertains us mere humans. C'mon, old buddy, let's try it, just the two of us," answered Kirk, laughing full-heartedly.

Spock was not quite sure just how proper a soccer game would be for a Vulcan but, after all, Kirk was the Captain. Balking, he followed him to the open field and watched Kirk demonstrate several times how to handle the ball. Finally he passed it to Spock. Spock placed the ball with scientific precision in front of him and calculating instantly the physical factors entering the empirical equation, he kicked the ball. The round, brown leather ball soared way, way up into the dark blue sky, noisily cutting the air in its way and travelling a long, graceful arch, it landed far away among the trees. Standing still for a moment with open-mouthed amazement, Kirk finally regained his composure and, still grinning, he started to trot toward the general direction of the ball's disappearance. Spock followed.

They were deep into the dark, moist forrest searching for the ball when a huge net fell over them, covering them both. Within a few seconds, still struggling to free themselves, they lost consciousness.

"Today's experiment, students, involves two inferior beings captured recently," said the older Siklon standing in front of his class. Pointing to the illustrations on the board he continued. "As you will observe in the laboratory, the two creatures, a Human and a Vulcan, are quite primitive and highly pliable. They were given a xelarochlorite derivative, causing partial amnesia and a general breakdown of spacial and time orientation. Remember, the purpose of the exercise is control through non-violent means, exploring such variables as strength of resistance, limits of endurance and suggestive power." Followed by the young Siklons, he stepped out of the lecture hall and headed toward the lab.

Total whiteness greeted Kirk's eyes. The place was completely round, padded to block any sound, with no corners, no walls, no shapes, no cracks, and white. It was true; white was the absolute lack of color, more depressingly blinding than black. His eyes, eagerly searching for an anchor, a point of reference, could find nothing to hold on to. Objective, physical reality started to dissolve around him, making him ill at ease, confused...This place...a cage?...was there any way out of it? Where was he, and *why*?...And what was he doing here?

Nausea rose in his throat and he had to close his eyes for a minute to fight it back. The room was spinning around him and with a final, desperate effort of his drugged, disoriented mind, he tried to hold on to the mental pictures that still carried some semblance of reason and reality. Yes...he remembered being captured, but he had not been harmed and his captors had chosen not to show themselves. His last memory was a high-flying, defiant brown ball, but...*where was Spock?* The creeping

uneasiness crescendoed into a scream of anguish as he realized that his First Officer was missing.

The strange electrodes connected to his temples. He could not move at all. His immediate response was violently physical; thousands of years of combined human and Vulcan heritage, a hatred of bondage, rebelled in him as he savagely tried to tear himself away from the constraints. Immobilized, his freedom lost, Spock was in a panic. He was paralyzed, his mind sending repeated messages of movement to his disobeying extremities. Looking around himself, he saw that the electrodes were connected to a large, computer-like machine, busily blinking and clinking with activity. Slowly relaxing, he turned his attention inward and realized that an incredible thing was taking place inside his head; it was constantly being filled with contradictory, illogical input. The computer, that most logical servant of all, was feeding his brain with a continuous, unstoppable and irresistible flow of garbled, illogical, confusing information. Slowly, with his resistance weakened, he felt his synapses becoming overloaded. His grey cells cried out for order and sanity, his logical mind rebelling, until it finally escaped into the blank refuge of self-imposed unconsciousness.

Standing behind the energy divider that rendered them invisible, the Siklon professor pointed to the Human in the laboratory cage, with scientific excitement. The subject, stripped of his clothes, was on all fours, feverishly crawling around in the shapeless room, desperately searching for its non-existent corners. He had lost touch entirely with the physical environment around him. There was no color, shape, light or thing that could have given him an objective, external point of reference to reflect back upon himself. As his perception of the outside world rapidly disintegrated, so did the more delicate inner fabric of his psyche.

"Notice if you will, gentlemen," said the Siklon in the measured tone of tutoring, "the Human's frantic, seemingly aimless movements. Even though only a few days have passed, his self-identity has already been gravely damaged. With his senses deprived of their primary stimuli of the physical world around him, he is searching for another external source of affirmation for his own existence: the social one."

The students nodded knowingly, some taking notes, some taping the professor's words, others just standing there watching the creature of their experiment.

First, he tried to hold on to memories, to familiar cognitions and affections, to smells, sounds and faces of days gone by. But the drugs, the growing weakness and the total loneliness had finally reached him, claiming the last of his conscious self-awareness.

A world lost around him...It was so cold and strange and impersonal. The cold had been seeping into his soul for days, poisoning it, rapidly rusting the layers of the self until it was ready to crumble. He felt no pain, no discomfort, not even fear. He felt nothing...except for that huge, gaping hole in the center of his being. He did not know who or

where he was. And like a blind, newborn puppy, disoriented and alien to the world, he was searching for a solid point, touch, warmth, sound... searching for an identity.

"And now, to the next phase of our laboratory test," announced the Siklon as his assistants, holding Spock by his arms and feet, carried him over to the white cage and placed his still unconscious, limp body on the floor.

The monotony of white had been broken. There was a strange, black and blue heap somewhere in the middle of that nauseating, colorless, empty jungle. Instinctively attracted by the shape, the human started to crawl toward the motionless object, cautiously, sideways, whimpering all the while with indecisiveness and fear. With an ever-slowing approach he finally stopped dead in his tracks and curled up shivering, quietly observing the other's figure at length. A long time passed in that timeless capsule of existence and then the human's body moved again. Straightening from the curve of fear, propelled by the driving need of curiosity, his hand reached out and gently, hesitantly touched that other on the floor.

Warmth...warmth and movement. That, that somehow felt familiar. Finally, something familiar! A rhythm, up and down, up and down...a rhythm of life under that strange, blue colored...thing?

He pulled closer, still kneeling in a defensive position, ready to spring to escape any moment. But his hand, reaching out again, was less shaky, less hesitant. It gently touched the rough fabric of the shirt, moving up slowly to the black neckline, stopping for a second before progressing to the strong jaw, the sharp facial lines. His fingers tenderly followed the contours of the skull, outlining with his forefinger the upward elegance of the pointed ears, arrested momentarily by the soft velvet of the black hair.

Softness...warm, furlike softness, electric sparkles passing through his hand from that rich, shiny source of sensation. His fingers dug into Spock's hair repeatedly, pulling and sinking and playing in the sea of black waves, so soft, sleek and changing under his touch - still, the first solid point of reference in a world of identity lost. The message, transmitted from his touch-seeking fingertips to his mind, his soul, his whole being, spoke of a reality - warm, breathing and confirmable - outside himself. And slowly his whimpering quieted, the shaking calmed, the tense muscles relaxed and the fear disappeared from his alert, narrow-pupiled eyes.

Spock's mind, hopelessly flooded with the garbled, illogical information, was still shut down as his last defense against insanity. But his flesh responded to that touch; a tentative, trembling, warm touch calling him back to consciousness with the gentle summon of another's need.



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His body stiffened in surprise at the unprecedented intimacy. Vulcans are not tactile, they detest physical contact...but, did *he*? His mother, those first years...She had always tried to hold him, hug and kiss him, comfort him with caressing arms and then...then he learned to push her away, ashamed, yet torn inside. And, she learned too...The child inside him, still longing, touch-starved, cold and lonely - the deserted, oppressed human part of him - or was it the Vulcan, too?

Slowly, painfully, he opened his eyes. The glaring whiteness blinded him for a moment and he was scanning the figure kneeling in front of him as he tried to focus his blinking, strained eyes. There was something in the head, the face, the shape of the mouth...that man...he *knew* him.

The naked figure beside him moved closer, giving a fast, puzzled look as the Vulcan's body finally responded to his exploring hand by a slight motion of his head, an almost unnoticeable change in his breathing. Spock's muscles, first reacting with an instinctive spasm of rejection to the touch, were slowly relaxing now, a flow of unknown sensations rushing through them like strong, sweet, aged wine. Unaccustomed to that rich and potent flow, the touching, stroking hands made his body drunk, flying high in the ecstasy of physical closeness and joy. Like millions of little, busily crawling fireflies, the warmth marched through his body, invaded his head, the endless stream of tiny lanterns causing an explosion of light in his mind, releasing it from the numbing hum of the deadly computer.

A flicker of recognition darkened the black eyes. In the frozen landscape of his mind there stood an image, upright, erect and overpowering, and the image had a face, dear, precious and much-loved (*...how inappropriate for a true Vulcan!*) -- and that face was the mirror reflection of the figure in front of him. It was he, the human...*His human*...In his brain, vacant, exhausted and faintly searching for a focal point to reactivate, reorganize its damaged circuits, there was only one word echoing...A name, spelled out in fiery letters; getting stronger and more demanding, commanding the tired, aimless cells of his mind, increasing to a mute cry: Jim, Jim, *Jim*, *JIM*...!

What was that next to him, that living statue of needful warmth *//Jim//* ...a trembling human getting, in a touchingly awkward way, closer and closer to his motionless body? Control, control of the mind, he must regain it *//Jim//* he *must*, for...Willpower, a tool, a power to *will*, to *control* ('...*your mind should be under your control*'...*who had said that in the long-ago, long-forgotten never-time he tried to remember?...his Father?*) Where was his logic when he needed it most for, for...

He raised a hand and placed his thumb on his cheek, the other four fingers on his temple. The sudden movement startled the human, but he would have to deal with it later. Now he had to concentrate, as he had learned on Vulcan, eons ago.

Under the symbolic triangle of his hand he commanded his thoughts to gather. Touching the different functional nerve centers one by one, reconnecting them with the driving force of his will, he used one of the rarest, most complicated methods of Vulcan to regain control and return his own mind to logical, effective consciousness. The new, tenuously built net almost collapsed, sinking repeatedly under the harsh illogic of a

meaningless reality, but -- fingers desperately pressing on his temple, demanding -- he maintained the net, chanting continuously, monotonously, as he did, "I must, I must, *for Jim I must!*" And in this, he found his own reality. Love, that most unique trait of humans, gave the driving force of motivation to the Vulcan Spock, motivation needed for enlisting all his knowledge, logic and techniques...in the service of love. His magnificent mind found its focal point, as his human part came to terms with the Vulcan one. And Spock became whole...

He sat up and the human beside him retreated again, unsettled by the sudden move. As he reached for the other he could feel the muscles harden under his hand, a wing of doubt sweep through the hazel eyes. Putting both arms around Kirk's shoulders, he pulled the reluctant body close to his. How little did he know...Oh, the feeling was familiar to him, though often denied. But its expression...how could he convey this feeling in a simple, basic, universal way understandable to that confused, flesh and blood symbol of despair? How could he get through to Jim?

Reaching down to the dark, forbidden memories of childhood, his arms softened into a round bed of embrace, hugging the other in an eternal circle that had no beginning, no end; gently rocking, stroking the frightened, rigid body, pressing it reassuringly until it slowly relaxed, melded into the shape of the receiving arms. He pulled down Kirk's exhausted body, all the while reinforcing him with small pats and strokes, holding him snugly tight, sharing with him the warmth and heartbeat of life. And Kirk, just before falling asleep, gave him that first and greatest reward of love: a shy, childlike, bright-eyed smile...

The instructor was confused. The experiment was a success -- or was it? As hypothesized, illogic broke the Vulcan just as isolation did the Human. But then -- and that was the most fascinating scientific aspect of this anything but routine test -- then the two, when placed together, managed somehow to invalidate it all. Sitting now in the middle of their cage, sharing the few pieces of clothing that had covered the Vulcan before, they sat there defiantly, clear-eyed and conscious, a rebellious spirit written all over their faces as they held each other closely.

Touching each other, there seemed to be a visible flow of strength around them, engulfing the two, and fireproofing the wall of mutual protectiveness around them. The Human raised his chin high in almost arrogant daring, the Vulcan kept his down in cold determination. Their faces softened only for a minute as, once in a while, their eyes locked in an inexplicable bond.

Fascinating...that bond, he had never heard about it, there was no recorded evidence of it in the renowned halls of the learned Academia. The bond, that was the key...it must have been. Oh well, he would have all the time in the world to analyze it in the quiet calm of his study from the detailed tapes he had kept. But later -- that would come later. As for now, equilibrium had to be restored. After all, his scientific ethics would not allow him to hurt, to really hurt any living creature...

The Enterprise was still in orbit around the planet as the search continued, with growing desperation, for the mysteriously missing Captain and First Officer.

Beaming down again to the general area of their disappearance, McCoy was not too hopeful. As the excited shouts of one of the search party sounded, he rushed over with a heavy heart, expecting tragedy. Instead, he found the two figures sprawled on the grass, still groggy from some unknown drug, exhausted, starved and physically run down, but otherwise unharmed. Their lifesigns were all normal and they greeted the Doctor with tired smiles of recognition. There was only one thing -- even in the dazed, drug-induced state they were in, they kept rigidly, anxiously clinging to each other, holding hands...

|||||

"THE ENTERPRISE SONG"

WORDS: BEVERLY VOLKER

MUSIC: KATHY BURNS

The musical score is written on a grand staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The time signature is 3/4. The lyrics are written below the notes, with chord symbols (Am, Dm, F, C, D, G) placed above the staff. The lyrics are: "The Hope of man-kind is with-in - her crew - The Hope - that man finds all his dreams come true - Where one-can live in peace with every- - race A- board this silver sau- cer out in space - Why do they die for her - and pledge-their all? in her de- fense - and at - her call Is it for the one- who on the bridge-com-mands or is it - for the things for -which he - stands - Her mis-sions".

are peace-ful - and her men- are bold - As Ar - thurs-
 Knights in the days of old It seems they would called - her
 " Ca - me - lot of the Skies " But she wears the - name of "Star - ship
 En - ter - prise " Hum - - - -
 She holds the fu - ture - that all men - can see
 of worlds - u - nit - ed through the gal - ax - y And
 bright - er vi - sions still can - seek - ex - plore to bold - ly
 go where none have - gone be - fore As long as there's a
 hope A dream - A prayer - There - - is a place for
 her - out there - As man shall strive to hope to dream - to rise
 this then - is the fu - ture of the En - ter - prise This
 then is the fu - ture of the - En - ter - prise

Difference Is A Virtue

by MARION DOUGALL



S. L. ANDERSON '76

The following story originally appeared in the English fanzine, LOG ENTRIES, a S.T.A.G. publication. We wish to thank the editors, Janet Quarton and Sheila Clark, as well as the author, for their kind permission to reprint on this side of the Atlantic.

The Enterprise was in turmoil, physically and mentally. The ship was severely damaged, and it seemed possible that they would have to wait for assistance before they could move.

Worse, their heart and soul, the Captain, was dying. No one knew quite what had happened, but rumor and counter-rumor ran along the corridors as they labored to repair, renew, just to keep holding on, keep the life within them. But each of them was distracted from time to time, as whispers spread.

In Sickbay, the three men were silent, for different reasons. Captain Kirk lay stiff, unmoving, his eyes open, but seeing nothing. The hum of life support proved that he was alive, but he looked dead, and his mind was gone.

McCoy stirred; his hand went out to shut off the life support, but Spock's hand grasped his wrist.

"No, Doctor."

"He's dead, Spock."

"I do not believe it."

McCoy took refuge in anger. "He's dead, you didn't get him down here quick enough. It's not like you to refuse to face the truth."

Spock lifted his head. "I had the ship to see to first, Doctor. But I do not believe that he is dead."

The mention of the ship reminded him. He moved to the intercom on the wall, and asked for intra-craft. His next words boomed out all over the ship. The crew lifted its collective head to listen. Insensibly, the familiar voice comforted them, made them realize that they were not alone.

"The Captain is still alive, barely. He has very little chance, but he will expect you to continue doing his duty. As soon as we know definitely, you will be told."

He clicked off and turned back to the bed. McCoy watched him compassionately. "What happened, Spock?"

"The details are unclear. We came across a supposedly derelict craft. As we hailed it, it aimed a -- psychic weapon at us. Each of us had a sudden hatred for the ship, and wanted to do as much damage to her as we could. Only the Captain and I seemed to be unaffected. He - resisted wholly, the beam focused on him, and - burned his mind out. I was able

to subdue Mr. Sulu and turn the phasers on the craft. It was destroyed, but for a few moments I had to sustain life support manually, until the crew fought free of the influence. Only then was I free to attend to the Captain."

McCoy put a hand on his shoulder, gently. "You made the right choice, Spock. What he would have wanted. But you must accept that he is dead."

Spock moved away, turning to face the wall. "I cannot accept it, Doctor. I did not feel him die."

"Can you explain?"

The Vulcan's back stiffened, and for a moment McCoy thought that he wouldn't answer, but after a while Spock went on, coldly, evenly.

"I am a Vulcan. I would feel - Jim's death halfway across the Galaxy. I did not. He was overwhelmed, but he did not surrender his basic integrity."

"But you said that his brain was burnt out?"

"Mind and body do not make up the whole being, Doctor. If I could somehow re-activate his mind..."

"Could you use the mind-meld?"

McCoy heard the bitterness clearly. "No, Doctor. I am crippled, how could I bring back a whole mind? I do not have his capacity for emotion, affection, humor. If I could pass my ability to meld to you, it might be possible."

McCoy turned away in turn. "Don't be a fool, Spock. You're closer to Jim than anyone in the universe. He trusts you completely. Me, I'm liable to go off half-cocked, get mad at nothing, make a decision with my heart, not my head, and often the wrong one. I guess that's my life story; I always made the wrong choice. If I'd been on the bridge, I'd have tried to save Jim first, and let the ship die."

Spock's voice was very gentle now. "No, Bones, you would not. You would have done what you knew he would have wished, as I did. And you are far closer to him, in many ways. I have seen you and he often, sharing a joke I cannot share, sharing distress, sharing."

"Jealous, Spock?"

"I think not. Merely aware that I cannot give what you give to him."

They both went to the bed, looking at the still figure of their friend.

"How are we going to get on without him, Spock?"

"We will doubtless continue to exist."

"Exist, maybe; is that living?"

"I existed for many years - before he reached out to me."

McCoy looked up, seeing the Vulcan through a screen of tears. He forced himself into painful confession.

"Spock, I have been jealous of you and Jim. I don't know why. I can see now that it never mattered. We're different, and he saw and valued different things in us."

"To a Vulcan, difference is a virtue," Spock observed absently, his attention on the pale face on the pillow. Somehow his own words rang strangely in his ears. He lifted his gaze, to meet McCoy's gaze.

"Could we bring him back together, Spock?"

"I do not know. It is impossible in a normal meld, and I do not think that we could achieve Harlis together, even for Jim."

"Why not?"

"It means total melding; you would know all of me, and I all of you, and so we would know all of Jim, if we could find him. It is almost impossible to accept oneself, Doctor, and we would have to accept each other, our visions of life, our philosophies, our pettiness...and there are many things in me that I am ashamed of."

McCoy felt cold with fright, but he forced himself to speak.

"All of us have a lot to be ashamed of. I'm willing to try, for Jim."

Spock turned away; his voice was unaccustomedly hoarse.

"If - Jim knew us as we are, would he accept us, or reject us?"

McCoy was filled with sudden love for Spock. He leaned across the bed, and with gentle fingers turned the Vulcan's face toward him.

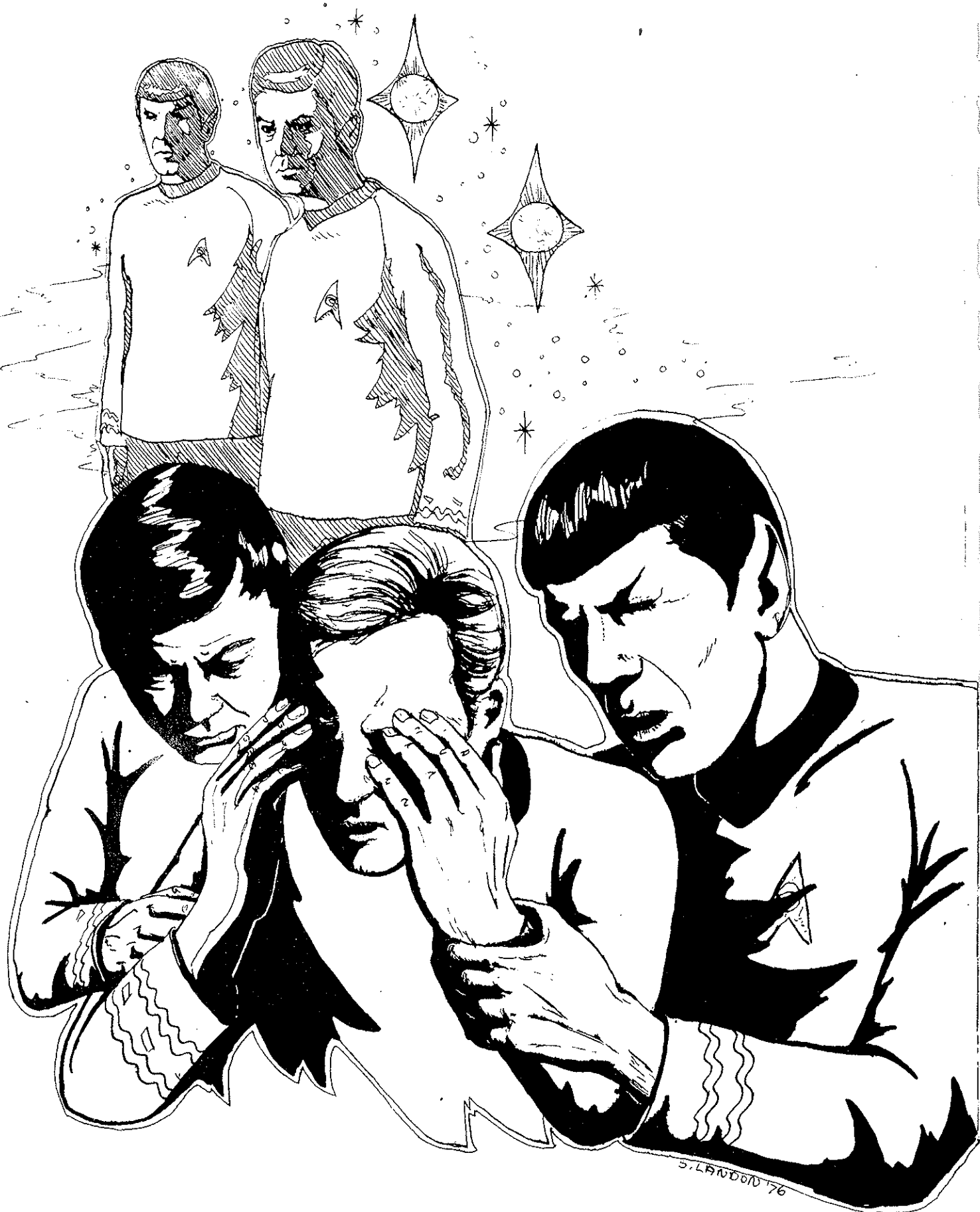
"Spock, can you really conceive of anything in Jim that might make you reject him?"

The Vulcan considered. "No." After a pause, he continued, forcing the words out through rebel lips. "Nor in you, Bones."

The Doctor nodded. "I feel the same, and I'm sure that Jim will. What do we have to do?"

Spock took hold of Kirk's hand, and stretched his other across the bed. McCoy copied him, and began to feel a strange presence in his mind. He shut off his repugnance, reminding himself firmly that this was Spock, and tried to come closer.

Suddenly, they were struggling in a maelstrom of memories and feelings - McCoy's first girl - Spock's pain at being tormented by his schoolmates - a mindless hatred and anger, mixed with painful lust - tenderness for his newborn daughter, so fragile - love - fear - hurt - joy - they swirled dizzily together, but each was aware of the other's hand in his, and each was steadied by the joint memories of Jim, seeing



him now in stereoscopic vision. They were no longer sure which was which, but it didn't matter, and they knew it. They surveyed their joint lives together, each gently helping the other's wounds, or their own wounds, each knowing that the moments of shame were right, that they had blundered, forsaken their standards, but also knowing that they had learned from their mistakes.

Gradually they became one entity, sustained by the knowledge that they were crippled, lost, without their third, and they set out to find him.

There were so many places, galaxies of suns, and crevices in rocks. They were still looking at the universe with different eyes; one saw a daisy here, and the other a hideous monster, then a cold, dead star that to the other was a light fluctuating in a different spectrum. But all the time they drifted, through strange and familiar scenes, they knew that they were drawing closer to their goal. Their emptiness was seeking the one who could fill them, and now they found him.

He lay withdrawn, curled up tightly, rejecting the outside world, but he was living. They held him in their shared embrace, gently soothing him, calling, calling, until he woke slightly, and surveyed them sleepily, then smiled, and flowed into their grasp. Again, they shared a kaleidoscope of experiences - the joy of diving into an ice cold stream - the beauty of a mathematical equation - the horror of sharing a bed, a life, with hatred - the fear of being alone - the burden of duty. This halted them.

"The ship." Which one had said it? It didn't matter. Their ship; they must find it, return to their duties; they swirled for a moment in bewilderment, then found it, and hung in nothingness, considering.

Here, they were whole, one person; there, they were divided, separate. Could they go back to the loneliness? They knew that they had no choice. With a sigh, they separated, drew apart, found their rightful shells, and opened dull eyes on their universe.

Their hands fell away, and McCoy moved to shut off the unnecessary life support, as Spock walked unsteadily to the intercom.

"The Captain will live, will recover fully. Spock out."

He collapsed, sliding down the wall to the floor. Kirk and McCoy ran to him. He opened startled eyes.

"I have no strength left."

Kirk lifted him, and put him on the bed he had just vacated. "I'm not surprised, you were supplying energy for both of us. Just sleep now; we'll need you to repair the ship."

Spock nodded and looked at him frankly, waiting to see if - if these so warm humans were still prepared to accept him. Their smiles reassured him. He smiled back, faintly. Kirk laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Difference is a virtue, remember?"

Spock leaned his cheek against the hand for a moment, then dropped over the edge into sleep.

Kirk laid his other hand on McCoy's shoulder.

"Thanks, Bones."

He paused, but there was nothing else to be said. They went about their duties knowing that nothing else was needed.

"YOU'RE MY HOME, ENTERPRISE"

words by: Martha J. Bonds
melody: John Denver's "Take Me Home, Country Roads"

((As performed by the OMICRON CETI III, at BI-CENTENNIAL 10
on September 5, 1976 in New York))

Almost heaven, silver starship,
Lovely lady, never ending star trip.
Life is out there, on a distant star,
Man's final frontier, never go too far.

CHORUS:

Enterprise, you're my home,
On your bridge, I belong.
Lovely lady, silver starship,
You're my home, Enterprise.

And the friendship, formed within her,
Man and Vulcan, bonded forever.
Storms and battles dazzle in the sky,
Still we travel onward, Enterprise and I.

CHORUS

I hear her voice and the wanderlust it calls me,
Though I am reminded of the Earth far away,
But travelin' through the stars I need no beach to walk on
Anyway... anyway...

CHORUS

PHASE III

BY

BEVERLY VOLKER AND NANCY KIPPAX

SYNOPSIS: THE CHARACTERS

ADMIRAL JAMES T. KIRK: Recently widowed from his beloved Areel, Kirk responds with mixed emotions to an invitation to attend the decommissioning ceremonies of his former vessel, the Enterprise. The ship that had been his home, his mistress, his very life, had become a painful subject. Nearly thirty years had passed since he had left her - and he had left to keep from destroying her. Could he, now, face those almost forgotten memories? He had believed he had loved Lt. Tarra St. John, and felt he had destroyed her - he and Spock. The schism that had formed between them, fired by their own guilt and grief, had become intolerable, and in all the years they had not resolved it. Now, faced with the present, he knew what he had to do - what he wanted to do. He journeyed to Starbase 15 for a long overdue reunion with Spock, and later, with the rest of his former crew.

AMBASSADOR SPOCK: When he left the Enterprise nearly 30 years ago, the Vulcan First Officer had been a broken man. He had been unable to cope with the conflict of unaccustomed emotions. Spock had lost Tarra, the woman to whom he could not admit what he felt, and by this omission he had been responsible for her death. He had lost Jim Kirk. Their own private agonies had kept them apart. His one solace was the tiny son waiting for him on Vulcan - his son and Tarra's. Even that had not worked. However, time has a way of healing, and Spock had finally found peace. Married to T'Pania, the father of two more children, Spock, at last, had learned to accept himself. Now, with equal ambivalence, he, too, accepts Starfleet's invitation. He is eager to lay aside the last of the old ghosts in a reunion with Jim Kirk.

CAPTAIN STACK of the USS ENCOUNTER: The dubious honor of transporting the former Enterprise officers to the ceremonies on Starbase 15 has fallen on the ship commanded by the son of Spock and Tarra St. John. The austere young captain, born on the Enterprise and raised on Vulcan, does not anticipate a meeting with his father or his family, nor with James Kirk, and he is relieved to learn that they have obtained their own transportation.

T'PRETT: Adolescent daughter of Spock and T'Pania. When her plans to witness the reunion between her father and Admiral Kirk are thwarted, the capricious girl requisitions a shuttlecraft from Starbase 15 to rendezvous with the USS Encounter. She is chagrined at the apparent rebuff from her half-brother Captain, but delighted at meeting all of Spock's former crewmates, including Dr. Leonard McCoy.

DOCTOR LEONARD MCCOY: Semi-retired, Bones has been living on the same base as Kirk. His reaction to the invitation is apprehensive, but once he learns of Kirk's determination to meet with Spock, he approaches the reunion with his usual enthusiasm. Traveling aboard the Encounter, he is puzzled by the attitude of Captain Stack, whom he remembers as the child, Theron St. John. The arrival of T'Prett is a delightful surprise, and McCoy's southern charm wins the confidence of this most unusual Vulcan girl. When T'Prett confesses that she hardly knows her brother, McCoy decides the time has come to reveal the story of Kirk and Spock and Tarra St. John. Afterwards, McCoy is surprised at T'Prett's reaction to the young Spock of his narrative. "I think you will find my father considerably changed," she warns.

PETER KIRK: First Officer of the Encounter, and the only person that Stack calls friend. Raised by Jim and Areel, Peter finds that the same chemistry that existed between Spock and Kirk is there between Stack and himself.

SELIK: Son of Spock and T'Pania, married to T'Pleish, they await the birth of their first child. Selik displays a rather un-Vulcan resentment of his older half-brother.

AND THE FORMER ENTERPRISE OFFICERS: Ret. Capt. Uhura and her husband, delegate B'Hustain; shipping magnate Montgomery Scott and his lovely young wife, Heather; Drs. Christine Chapel Henry and Tyrone Henry, husband and wife medical team and founders of the Chapel-Henry Institute; Governor Sulu of the Federation Colony, New Japan.



THE REUNION

CHAPTER 3

THE REUNION

I.

In the black void of space, the U.S.S. Encounter silently warped her way toward Starbase 15. On board, her distinguished passengers were once again united to pay homage to a legend, to lay tribute to a "grand old lady" in the finest Starfleet tradition.

At their destination, the U.S.S. Enterprise was already in place, awaiting the final tribute, like a majestic matriarch presiding over her family's reunion. She waited, silver and gleaming, for the sands of time to set her free and give her peace.

Miles below the two who had loved her and carried her to the heights of achievement prepared to greet each other after many years of separate existence.

Two men, twin souls, divided by time and space, yet never were they truly apart. Now, each had come with the inner conviction that he could banish the painful memory of Tarra St. John, certain that the other would feel the same. The invisible cord which bound them tightened and grew stronger.

Admiral James T. Kirk, alone in the Vulcan ambassador's suite, stood eagerly as the door swished open. Having prepared himself for this moment and feeling that preparation now slip away, he was unable to move or speak, as his anxious eyes beheld his former First Officer. Kirk could only think how much he loved this man. Closer than a brother, dearer than a friend, Spock was still a very special part of him, and the years of loneliness and separation melted into oblivion.

Spock, also, had prepared himself for this meeting; he had, in fact, just returned from meditating on the eventuality. Yet, he had not anticipated it at this precise moment, and he was caught unaware, as he stepped into his room. He halted abruptly, as his eyes met those of his former Captain. Jim Kirk. A little heavier, perhaps, his hair laced with grey, but he was still the same man who had touched Spock as no other had done. The Vulcan hesitated and for once did not attempt to fight the wave of emotion which engulfed him.

For a long, silent moment they stared at each other, so overwhelmed they could do nothing but try to comprehend the reality of this time and place. At last, Spock moved quickly and crossed the room with giant strides toward his friend. He extended a hand to grasp Kirk's, then impulsively pulled him into a tight embrace.

They stood holding each other, letting the closeness of physical contact calm their shaking bodies, wanting to laugh and cry at the same time. Silent tears slipped from two sets of eyes, as two cheeks pressed together and the wetness merged, blended and became one.

In a moment, they were calmer. They parted slowly, and Kirk spoke first, his voice husky.

"Spock. I had to come...I had to see you."

Spock nodded. "I know, Jim. I knew you would." His face lit with a delighted smile, and the strangeness of it unsettled Kirk's precarious attempt at composure.

Kirk was speechless, unsure how to proceed, what to say to this man whom he knew so well, yet hardly seemed to know at all. Spock--holding him, shedding tears, smiling, was so different. He was struck by the enormity of the years they had been apart. Did it matter? Should it?

Spock understood, and in an attempt to put Kirk at ease, he composed his face into its normal, passive expression. When he spoke, his voice was carefully neutral.

"You are looking well, Capt...Admiral." He lowered his eyes, irritated with himself for the careless slip of his tongue. He looked up when he heard Kirk's joyful laugh, and they acknowledged their own awkwardness with good humor. As Kirk laughed again, Spock's eyebrow arched in the familiar way that was not quite a smile.

"Ah, Spock," Kirk sighed, becoming more relaxed, "the years have mellowed you."

"And you, Jim."

Kirk nodded. "Time has a way of slipping by. We find ourselves caught up in our appointed course, and suddenly something happens to change it. The invitation -- it threw me for a while. All at once, all those years just... slipped away, and I was reliving our days on the Enterprise."

"Indeed," Spock agreed, amused by Kirk's tumbled words expressing thoughts so similar to his own. "I, too, was sharply reminded of life aboard the ship. They were rewarding years."

"The years since then have been rewarding, too, Spock -- in a different way, perhaps, but I can look back with a sense of accomplishment."

Once more Spock's face was illumined by a slight, understanding smile. He recognized that Kirk was attempting to reassure him that he was truly all right, and it gave him a contented sense of peace.

"I can see that, Jim. I have also found satisfaction in many endeavors."

"I met your wife and daughter when I arrived..."

Spock flashed him a look that was a mixture of exasperation and almost human parental pride. "Ah, yes, T'Prett is patiently enduring the pains of adolescence."

"She's delightful," Kirk put in impulsively. He knew that was no way to refer to a young Vulcan lady, but it was, nevertheless, true.

Spock laid his hand lightly on Kirk's arm. "Come, sit down," he requested.

Kirk sat facing Spock and rested his arm along the back of the sofa cushion. He realized they were both avoiding the main issue, each unwilling to bring a note of sadness to mar their present happiness, but it must be said. He suddenly plunged ahead.

"Spock, how did we let it happen? How did we let so many years pass, without settling what came between us?" he asked sadly.

Spock paused, then answered with equal sobriety, "I believe it was the circumstances of our lives that kept us apart...nothing more." It was true. The hurt, the pain, had passed long ago. There had been no conscious reason why the years had slipped away.

Kirk met his eyes, and his own filled with tears. His thoughts were much the same, and he tried to express them. "There were many times when I wanted to see you, needed to...to share some small joy, some personal tragedy. Hardly a day has passed that I haven't wondered about you...how you were...if you had found peace and happiness."

Spock was touched and very near an emotional display which he still would have found appalling. "Jim...that is in the past now, and we are together again...my friend." He lowered his eyes, his own vision blurring. The nearness of this man, the one person in all the galaxy who could evoke such feelings within him, compelled him to go on. He took a deep breath and exhaled it slowly. "My life with T'Pania," he explained, "my feeling for her, has enabled me to admit what I was once incapable of expressing. I can acknowledge, now, my love for Tarra."

Kirk looked incredulous at the ease with which the Vulcan spoke her name. Spock continued. "It is too late, regrettably, but it is a fact I cannot change."

"And unchangable facts must be accepted," Kirk added ruefully. "I know, Spock, I've learned that, too." Just as Spock could concede his love, Jim Kirk could resolve his lack of it. He had never really loved Tarra St. John, not in the way he had believed at the time. His feeling for Areel had far surpassed the pity and sense of responsibility he had felt toward Spock's assistant. He went on, "We both - no, all three of us made mistakes...bad ones."

"It was the way we were, Jim."

"Yes, that's true. And the pain does ease with time, doesn't it? Bones helped me to see that, too."

Spock raised an eyebrow in what was more than a passing interest. "Doctor McCoy?" he asked. "Have you seen him?"

Kirk grinned at Spock's reaction. "Very often. We live at the same Starbase. He'll be here soon. He's traveling aboard the Encounter with my nephew, Peter...and your son." Kirk expected the same look of parental pride he had seen when he'd spoken of T'Prett. He was puzzled, therefore, at the dark look which crossed Spock's face. "What is it, Spock?" he asked in concern, aware that he had touched a sensitive point with Spock and wanting to help.

The Vulcan spoke with regret. "If there have been pleasures and contentment in the past years, there have also been disappointments. The Captain of the Encounter, Stack, has been one of them."

"Disappointment in your son?" Kirk asked, disbelieving.

"Not in *him*," Spock answered, "in our relationship with each other." He shook his head, a subtle dismissal of the subject. He was anxious to share this time of togetherness with Kirk, unwilling to allow anything to spoil their newfound joy. "I will tell you of it...in time. For now, let us speak of other matters."

They talked, then, in easy conversation. The past dissolved in the urgency to share almost thirty years of living. At times their voices were wrought with emotion, as each realized how much of the other's life he had missed. Kirk spoke of his marriage to Areel and of her recent tragic death, which once again, had left him alone. Spock's face filled with compassion, and Kirk knew that he was no longer alone. He talked of Peter, of how he had taken the boy to live with him after he left the Enterprise, and of how Areel had filled the role of mother after their marriage. No, there had been no children of their own. There hadn't seemed a need at the time - they had Peter. He was like their own son, and they had been content. Still, it would have been nice...His eyes glowed with pride when he told of Peter's decision to enter Starfleet Academy. He hadn't used his influence as an Admiral, either, not that he would have. The boy had achieved everything on his own merit.

Spock told Kirk of his bonding to T'Pania, their marriage and the comfort it had given him, and of his second son, Selik. His expression registered exuberance when he spoke of T'Prett, and Kirk knew he'd been right in his first impression. She *was* very special to her father. Spock related how he had decided to accept the Ambassador's post when Sarek retired. Yes, Sarek and Amanda were both well and quite active for their ages. They were here for the ceremony, and they would be pleased to see James Kirk again.

They talked of McCoy, and Spock expressed a great desire to see his old friend. He had corresponded with the doctor for a while after his departure from the Enterprise. Kirk was surprised at that. In all the years, Bones had never mentioned hearing from Spock. Still, as the demands upon Spock and McCoy had increased, they had let their communications slide, and it had been many years since they had heard from each other.

"You mentioned that Dr. McCoy is traveling aboard the Encounter," Spock said thoughtfully. "Did you also say, with Peter? Is he, too, traveling to the ceremony?"

Kirk was a bit puzzled by his friend's question, then it occurred to him that Spock must not know.

"Peter is assigned to the Encounter," he told him. "He holds the rank of Commander. Spock, he's Captain Stack's First Officer." Spock lifted an eyebrow in astonishment. "You didn't know?" Kirk made it a question. Spock shook his head sadly.

"I have not communicated with Stack since he left Vulcan for Starfleet

Academy. My mother hears from him on infrequent occasions and is usually inclined to report to me of his progress. If he told her of Peter's assignment, she neglected to inform me, and that, I think, is most unlikely."

"Peter thinks very highly of him. I think they are friends."

"Good. I am pleased that Stack has such a friend." He smiled slightly, his concern over Stack evident. Kirk reached over and laid a hand on his arm, the ache transmitting from one to the other. He wanted to understand.

"Spock, what happened?" he asked, his voice gentle. "You said when you left the Enterprise that you were returning to Vulcan because your son needed you. I thought - hoped - that during those years when we were apart, you at least had Ther...Stack." Kirk could think of the Encounter's Captain, whom he had never met, as Stack. However, the young, part-Vulcan boy who belonged to Tarra St. John would always be Theron.

"I found, when I returned, that I was not able to give Stack that which he needed," Spock confessed. "When I had come to terms with myself, it was too late for him, another unchangeable fact I have learned to accept, Jim." He felt he should explain more; he wanted to do so, but it was too difficult.

Kirk sensed the pain behind the words and knew the hurt must go deeper than Spock would admit. There would be time to talk more of it later, and he knew they would. Right now, he, too, was reluctant to speak of anything that would mar the joy of their reunion. Whatever surprises and problems the following days would hold, they would meet them together - James T. Kirk and Spock of Vulcan. It was right, once more.

Together they wondered what the rest of the former crew would be like. They had both heard, sadly, of Pavel Chekov's tragic death. He had been a most outstanding officer.

They would be seeing the rest of their friends at the reception the next evening and, of course, at the decommissioning ceremony, which would be held aboard their old ship. Spock told Kirk of seeing the Enterprise in orbit as he had approached the starbase. A persistent touch of allegiance to that vessel crept into his voice. Kirk looked away, suddenly filled with a compelling desire to go aboard his ship one last time, to see her before the wreckers worked their ultimate destruction. They would all be there again, he knew, his crew, his friends. He smiled wistfully.

Still they talked, losing all track of passing time. They spoke sometimes with excitement, sometimes with humor, sometimes with sadness, but always with an urgency to share.

Their concentration was abruptly shattered by the sound of the apartment door swishing open. T'Pania entered, her Vulcan exterior giving little hint of an underlying anxiety.

"Forgive me for the intrusion, Spock." She nodded toward Kirk. "I am growing concerned for our daughter. She left to explore the installation, shortly after we arrived at your parents' room. That has been 5.6 time units ago, and she has not returned nor informed me of her whereabouts. Because of her innate curiosity, she may have encountered unforeseen difficulties."

Spock spoke with gentleness to his wife, attempting to offer reassurance. "I will investigate Kirsha's disappearance. Our daughter is most self-reliant, you know." He turned to Kirk. "It seems I must locate our errant child."

"I'll come with you," Kirk told him quickly, reluctant to be parted from Spock even for a short time, now that he had found him again.

"I had hoped you would, Admiral," Spock told him with mock formality. His fingers met his wife's with a firm pressure, his touch lingering a shade longer than usual. Her eyes met his, searching. Then she nodded, satisfied, as he let his hand drop and followed Kirk through the door.

T'Pania watched as they left together. Her concern for T'Prett was momentarily abated by the joy they emitted. She knew instinctively that Spock was complete for the first time since she'd known him. She knew also that James Kirk was the reason. That fact gave her a sense of peace, and she regretted her impulse to keep Spock away from the ceremonies. All of her efforts to give Spock the contentment he sought had been fulfilled today by his human friend. There was no jealousy within her, only a deep sense of gratitude.

It was not difficult for the Ambassador from Vulcan and a Starfleet Admiral to obtain information on a Federation Starbase. Very shortly they learned of T'Prett's act of requisitioning a shuttlecraft to rendezvous with the Encounter. They also learned that the starship's ETA was still 10 time units away and that it would assume orbit early the next morning, Base Time. Spock, irritated but trying not to show it, called T'Pania and assured her their daughter would be arriving in the morning. Kirk grinned, thinking that if T'Prett were a human child, she would most certainly receive more than a scolding the next morning. He wondered what form of discipline the Vulcans would impart.

Since it was quite late and he and Spock hadn't eaten, Kirk suggested a late supper at the port restaurant. He was hungry, but more important, he hoped for an opportunity to relieve the tight lines of concern on Spock's face. If T'Prett were on the Encounter, she was in good hands. Peter and McCoy were there...and Stack.

After the meal, they sat talking until they began to get reproachful looks from the attendants who wished to close. Kirk looked sadly across the table at his friend.

"Spock, I don't want to say good night. I know it's late and it's been quite a day. Tomorrow will be filled, too, seeing the rest of the crew and Peter and Stack. It's just that after so long, this night will most likely be the only time we'll have alone together." He broke off, embarrassed.

"I, too, find myself most reluctant to end it," Spock confessed, "but I do believe we are expected to leave this place." He glanced at the impatient attendants, then the two rose, slowly, to leave.

"Where shall we go...?" Spock asked. Kirk suddenly recalled a dim memory out of the long-ago past -- Edith Keeler's voice, "...*Captain. Even when he*

doesn't say it, he does."

"My quarters?" Kirk suggested.

"If you wish."

"Your wife, will she mind?"

"T'Pania is a Vulcan; she understands. This time belongs to us, Jim."

Later, when they had talked themselves into exhaustion, Spock rose stiffly from the chair he had been occupying and crossed to the couch where Kirk had finally succumbed to sleep. As he pulled a blanket over the still form, he let his hand rest gently on the Admiral's shoulder.

"Jim," he mouthed silently, "at last." Now, the pain was totally gone, the seams mended, his life complete. Tears slipped unnoticed down his face. He moved slowly to the other couch in the room and there he slept, peacefully.

II.

T'Prett followed Peter Kirk down the hall and into the turbolift. The man made no attempt at conversation, and T'Prett took the opportunity to study him curiously. He was very uncomfortable and seemed displeased with her. That was illogical. She could not explain it, so she disregarded him and let her thoughts turn to her meeting with Stack.

Her brother was somewhat of an enigma to her, as she'd indicated to Doctor McCoy. Her only memories of him were from a child's point of view. His visits had always brought a note of discord to her family's placid existence. She could remember her father's drawn face persisting for days after Stack's departures. Her mother would grow quieter, more pre-occupied.

T'Prett had absorbed impressions from the people around her, being too young at the time to form her own opinion of the tall, brooding, young man. Her father, she knew, cared very much for Stack, despite the awkwardness between them. For her father's sake, T'Prett was prepared to accept him. Her mother seemed perplexed, uneasy in his company. Of course, her brother Selik made no secret of his disdain and contempt for the eldest son of Spock, whom, he felt, had no rightful place in their family.

Just as T'Prett had reached the age of independent opinion, Stack had entered the Starfleet Academy, and visits to his family had ceased. She heard of him through her grandparents, but he had remained separate and apart, never really a member of their household.

Now, she was to meet him again, and she could not deny the interest that consumed her. She was acutely aware of the facts which Doctor McCoy had just told her of the young Theron St. John. She was able to separate the human sentimentality from the logical progression of events, but she found it difficult to follow the proper chain of thought.

The car came to a stop, and she glanced over at Peter Kirk again and found his eyes on her. She met his stare without flinching, one tilted brow lifting slightly in challenge. To her surprise, he smiled at her and took her arm as they stepped onto the bridge of the Encounter.

The bridge. All thoughts of her brother momentarily vanished as she beheld the excitement of the central and crucial heart of the great starship. There was a sense of controlled power, of well-oiled machinery, of large and small parts all working together in harmony to produce the feeling of effortless function. T'Prett was impressed; her eyes scanned the stations, from the row of computer banks to the navigation consoles. Men and women went about their jobs with hardly a glance in her direction, and she was grateful for the anonymity, for it allowed her to digest the sights and sounds unobserved.

In the center of her panorama, a figure seated with his back to her chose that moment to stand. Her attention was drawn to him as he turned to greet her. Stack. Yes, he was as she remembered him, yet seeming so different, so distinctly apart in this strange setting. He was the man who controlled all of this, he was the Captain, and he wore the command aura with a sense of pride and dignity.

He came forward with an easy, cat-like grace, his features molded into an inflexible mask. T'Prett took the opportunity to study him carefully, analyzing him as though she had never seen him before.

He was almost as tall as her father and as leanly muscled. His dark hair was cut in the Vulcan mode, but fuller and longer than the rest of the Xtmprsqzntwlfed men. It wasn't as straight as her father's; more like her grandfather's, she reflected. As he drew closer, she studied his face. His features, if taken individually, were her father's, from the long, straight nose to the dark, penetrating, hooded eyes. Yet, the total effect was different, softer somehow, despite the fine angles, and somehow less Vulcan... more human looking.

Stack halted at the base of the steps to the turbolift and looked up at her, raising his hand in the ritual Vulcan greeting.

"Live long and prosper, T'Prett of Vulcan. The Encounter is honored by your presence." The words, spoken graciously, lacked warmth, and T'Prett chilled slightly. She could almost read his unspoken thought: *"And what are YOU doing here?"*

She lifted her chin and returned his greeting with equal coolness. "Captain, it is I who am honored by your hospitality." She heard Peter Kirk clear his throat noisily at her side. Her brother glanced quickly at his First Officer, his eyebrow quirking. The interplay seemed to dissolve some of the tension. Stack looked back at her with a little more tolerance.

"Would you care to see the bridge?" he offered.

"I can *see* the bridge, Captain. I would appreciate a tour, however," she answered with feigned asperity, her eyes twinkling.

Peter stepped forward. "Captain, if you wish, I shall..."

"No, Mr. Kirk, that won't be necessary. I shall conduct the bridge tour myself," Stack cut in, his eyes locked sternly on T'Prett's face. She nodded solemnly and assumed a neutral stance at his side.

In a few moments, she found herself once again caught up in the web of awe. She forgot her curiosity over Stack and concentrated on observing the facts he was pointing out, as they moved around the bridge. Stack introduced his crew to her and explained the duties and functions of each station himself, although in a few instances, he allowed his officers to speak for themselves. He was an excellent guide, and T'Prett found herself responding with enthusiasm. Her questions, probably routine to him, were answered patiently and completely. There was a strange sort of understanding between them; they found themselves speaking in a form of shorthand, peculiar only to members of the same species.

The only familiar face she saw was that of Dr. Alexander Harper, Chief Medical Officer, whom she'd met earlier in the Sickbay complex. The young, human physician greeted her warmly.

"We meet again. Have you had the chance to see everything you wanted?" he asked.

"Yes, Doctor. Now I have. I am...extremely impressed."

"The Encounter's a good ship," he told her, "with a good man at the helm." Stack had moved off to consult his navigator; T'Prett watched, appraising the stranger who was her brother.

"Of course," she answered. "Stack is Vulcan."

Grinning at the doctor, Peter Kirk joined them. "I'm about ready for some shore leave. How about you?"

"The sooner the better, Peter. Ever been to Starbase 15 before?"

Peter nodded. "Once, and there's this little place outside the main complex that I know that has the best..." Harper interrupted, clearing his throat and unobtrusively nodded toward T'Prett. Peter caught on. "Oh! Well, remind me to tell you about it," he concluded.

The subject was changed, but T'Prett had caught the flicker of understanding that had passed unspoken between the two humans. It was strange to her, a subtlety that Vulcans did not seem to possess, but it was fascinating. She would have to learn more of this unusual characteristic.

She would have been pleased to remain on the bridge to watch as the Encounter assumed orbit, but the senior officers seemed to think differently. As Peter Kirk moved to his station at the communications console, Dr. Harper offered to escort her from the bridge. Stack seemed to have forgotten her presence, as he bent over the instrumentation, so there was no need for farewells. She was beginning to feel out of place anyway, an outsider in this organized, efficient area, and somehow that gave her a moment of regret.

The young girl's eager mind had absorbed so much in the past several hours that she was becoming a bit dazzled. Nothing in her secluded life had

prepared her for this glimpse of Starfleet service. That, by itself, would have been enough, but in addition, she had met her father's former crewmembers, learned the story of Stack's birth, and then had seen her brother after so many years. Her father would be pleased that she had talked with Stack, anxious for news of his oldest son....

Her father. She was suddenly struck with the recollection that her parents were not aware of her location. The time had gone so quickly, and there had been no opportunity to notify them....

III.

A jumble of confused and blurred images assailed Kirk's senses when he awoke. He felt sore and cramped, and he realized he'd fallen asleep on a very narrow couch. The events of the previous day were recalled in a rush, and he shifted slightly, flexing stiff muscles. Someone had thrown a blanket over him.

Spock! He swung his legs to the floor and looked around. Across the room, the Vulcan was lying on his back on a twin couch. His eyes were closed, his face peaceful as he slept. Kirk felt a surge of profound joy and contentment.

He crossed to Spock's side, then rested on the outswept arm of the couch.

Had it really been all those years? he wondered. He was struck by the ease and familiarity of the Vulcan's presence. It seemed only yesterday that they had been together on the Enterprise. How had he ever managed to let all those years come between them? Why had he never taken the time to get in touch? He ached for those lost years, those wasted, incomplete years. Areel, Peter, McCoy...none of them had been able to fill that very special niche in himself. Each was special and he loved them very deeply, but there had always been that one place which none of them had reached.

He studied his friend closely in this unguarded moment. Spock had aged, he observed, although not as obviously as a human. Still, there were telltale signs of advancing age, and Kirk found them curiously appealing. He had never pictured Spock as looking any different from the way he had looked on the ship, and it had never occurred to him that the years were passing on Vulcan, also.

Spock sighed softly, turning his head in his sleep. There is something extremely vulnerable about someone sleeping, Kirk mused, and a wave of tenderness washed over him. He remembered how just yesterday he had been feeling nervous and wary about facing Spock again. His thoughts returned to their conversation the night before.

He was glad that Spock had found happiness and still marvelled at the changes that had come over him, at the human-ness which the Vulcan now permitted himself. T'Pania must be a very special woman.

Abruptly, Spock's eyes opened and he looked directly at Kirk, as though he had sensed his presence there, even in sleep. A slow, easy smile formed on

his face. Kirk grinned back.

"Good morning. I must say, I've had more comfortable beds," he winced, rubbing his shoulder.

Spock raised himself on his elbows. "No doubt you have. However, considering the hour, and the circumstances..."

"Yes. Expediency often dictates the most logical course of action," Kirk teased.

Spock raised one condescending eyebrow and sat up fluidly, looking no worse for his night on the couch. Kirk frowned enviously and slumped down beside him. Absently, he rubbed again at the offending shoulder.

Spock shifted, looking at him curiously. Kirk felt compelled to explain. "I pulled a muscle the other day during my workout. It's still acting up."

"Hmnn...turn around." Kirk did as he was told, turning his back to Spock, and he felt the Vulcan's fingers lightly explore his shoulder blade, then a firm, gentle pressure, a kneading sensation, as Spock expertly massaged the strained muscle.

"Now, that's *good*," he grunted in appreciation. "I'll have to tell Bones to sign you on at the clinic," he grinned.

"Doctor McCoy would no doubt have wishes to the contrary," Spock said evenly, and Kirk heard, rather than saw, the accompanying smile.

The dull throb was gone, replaced by a warmth radiating across his back, and Kirk revelled in it, feeling relaxed and renewed.

"Yes, that's much better." Then, another thought came to mind. "What time will the Encounter be assuming orbit?"

Spock's hand ceased its motion, but rested briefly on Kirk's shoulder before he let it drop. "We have approximately one hour, thirty-two minutes, if they are on schedule."

Kirk nodded and turned around to face his friend again. "I'll come with you, if you don't mind. I want to try to locate McCoy."

Spock nodded. "Naturally; in that case, I would advise that we be on our way."

The Starbase Control Center was a crowded, bustling place, and the two men made their way hastily through the throng to the main transporter bank. Kirk matched Spock's long strides, noting the look of grim displeasure on his friend's face.

"I'm sure someone from the ship will give T'Prett an escort, Spock," he said, attempting to ease the unspoken worry. Spock turned his searching eyes from the crowd and looked at Kirk, a slight smile playing about his lips. They

both halted their steps, and Spock's chest heaved with a silent sigh. There was no sign of a young Vulcan female.

Kirk looked about. The platforms were still; no materialization was taking place at the moment.

"Are you sure this is the right bank?" Starbase 15 was one of the larger ports; there were a total of 8 transporter banks at various spots in the complex. They had been informed that the Encounter would be using this one but Kirk didn't see any of the familiar passengers he had expected to be arriving.

Spock pursed his lips in consternation. It wasn't practical to remain standing here; already they had been jostled several times by people in a hurry on their way to or from somewhere. Touching Kirk's arm to assure his attention, Spock wended his way over to the information panel against the wall. He punched out a series of buttons, and absorbed the read-out intently.

"The Encounter's complement beamed down exactly 5.25 minutes ago," he reported.

Kirk folded his fists on his hips. "Wouldn't you know it -- one time a starship arrives early..." He let the sentence go unfinished, his eyes searching the Vulcan's impassive face. "Perhaps she left a message?" he added hopefully. He could understand Spock's concern. A base port was not the most savory of places for a young girl. All sorts of traders, merchants and space bums used the port. It was a sailor's delight, but not the kind of place for an unchaperoned youngster. "C'mon. We can't just stay here," he told Spock gently. The Vulcan nodded, and followed Kirk toward the main information desk.

It was Kirk who saw her first. She was standing by a large column, hands clasped behind her back, and she appeared to be reading an inscription on the marble. He turned back and grabbed Spock's arm.

"There! Isn't that her?" Spock looked, and it appeared as though a light had been turned on in his eyes. Then he set his jaw grimly and went toward her.

"T'Prett," he said quietly, his voice carrying over the noise of the crowd. She spun to face them, her expression startled, then relieved, and finally, abashed. Kirk, watching, was amazed at the subtle play of emotions on her Vulcan features.

As Spock neared her, she cast her eyes down under his penetrating gaze, her back stiffening at what she knew was to come. Her father regarded her sternly, communicating his displeasure without uttering a word, and Kirk found himself almost feeling sorry for the errant daughter.

T'Prett looked up at last and met his look levelly. "Father, I..." she began. She was saved the discomfort of further speech by another voice, coming from behind her, as a fourth figure moved into place.

"Well, T'Prett, it's all arranged, honey. We'll have an aircar in 'bout 15 minutes, and we can..." Kirk and Spock looked up as one at the familiar southern drawl; they had been so preoccupied with T'Prett that they hadn't even seen him approach.

"Doctor McCoy!" Spock's voice was incredulous, his face a study in controlled joy. T'Prett and even Kirk were forgotten as the two old friends greeted each other.

McCoy's lips moved wordlessly, then he took two hasty strides and closed the gap between them. "Spock! Damn, it's good to see you again!"

"I, too, am pleased," Spock said formally, yet the words carried an intense intimacy which belied their Vulcan coolness. "You are looking well, Doctor."

"And you...you haven't changed a bit," McCoy countered, his voice husky. "My God, Spock..." He was unable to go on, as the years fell away and he relived the joys and triumphs which had united them aboard the Enterprise. *Spock. His friend.* With all his faults, with all his idiosyncrasies, still the respect and admiration for the man had not dimmed with the years.

"Changed? All things change, Doctor. It is a fact of existence." Spock's eyes twinkled, and McCoy saw that T'Prett had been right. Her father *had* made peace with himself. The man standing before him was a whole, integrated person, no longer at war with his human half. It was good. McCoy nodded, communicating approval and acceptance.

Kirk came to stand beside them and laid a hand on each man's shoulder. "Now it feels right, doesn't it, Spock?" he asked softly. He went on, not expecting a reply. "Bones, how was the trip?"

McCoy's soft blue eyes crinkled. "Just marvelous! You should see all the others! Just you wait, both of you..." The sudden implication of his last words struck him... *'both of you'*...How very simple to slip back into the old pattern -- thinking of them as one. Together again, truly. He smiled, a bit self-consciously at Kirk, then looked over at Spock, rejoicing in their joy. Happiness comes in many odd ways and places, he reflected. The three of them were an island apart in this sea of people on a busy base port. He hadn't known it was possible for one heart to contain so much love as his did at this moment.

Suddenly, McCoy recalled Spock's daughter, and he glanced in her direction. She was watching them with a curious intentness, her quick mind absorbing the impressions they cast off, like a sponge soaking up water. Spock followed McCoy's gaze and beckoned his daughter to come. T'Prett moved closer, with a slight hesitation. Spock turned to her.

"T'Prett, you have much explaining to do to your mother and me, do you not?" he reprimanded sternly.

"Yes, Father." She decided that now was not the moment for a defense.

Spock looked back at McCoy. "Doctor, it appears you have taken charge of my daughter's welfare. I am grateful."

"The pleasure's all mine, Spock, but I must say, I'm a bit surprised at you, allowing the child to go off on her own like that. You ought to know better; you know what these spaceports are like!" McCoy growled testily.

"Had I known, Doctor, she would never have boarded the Encounter."

"Well, I still say you should keep a closer eye on her. Fine thing, when a girl her age..."

"Bones! Spock!" Kirk cut in, laughing despite himself. *Now* it felt normal. Would these two never learn? They both turned to him, McCoy grinning impishly, and even Spock wearing that familiar half-smile on his lips. Kirk shook his head and ignored them; he stepped over to T'Prett and offered his arm.

"I believe the doctor said there was an aircar coming. Shall we wait outside, where the air is a bit cooler?" he asked gallantly. She wavered, glancing at her father, and Kirk tucked her hand in his arm. "Pay them no attention, T'Prett. They may go on for hours like that. I've seen it. Why, would you believe, one time..." His voice trailed off as they moved ahead. McCoy and Spock looked at each other, then hastily followed them out.

IV.

Christine Henry patted her hair into place and stepped back from the mirror. Across the room, her husband sat regarding her appreciatively.

"That outfit does you justice, Chris. Or should I say, you do that outfit justice?" he complimented gently.

She turned, smiling. "Why, thank you, Ty."

He crossed to her, took her in his arms and tenderly kissed her forehead. He wasn't a tall man, only about an inch more in height than she was, but his bearing made him appear larger. His reddish brown hair was beginning to grey, giving him a dignity, despite his boyish features. The wide mustache he favored was a shade lighter than his hair, and his complexion, like hers now, was ruddy from exposure to the elements.

"You're still a handsome woman, dear," he murmured. She marvelled, even after all these years, at how well he seemed to know her, and was able to read her emotions. She patted his arm fondly.

"You know, it's strange...to go back, to remember what it was like...what I was like then." Abruptly, she changed the subject. "Do you think we should put in a call to the girls?"

"They're all right. Don't fuss so. My sister will take good care of them." They were too old to need a babysitter, but too young to be left alone. Bethel, at 16, was quite a woman, and Juliana, 13, certainly didn't think herself a child.

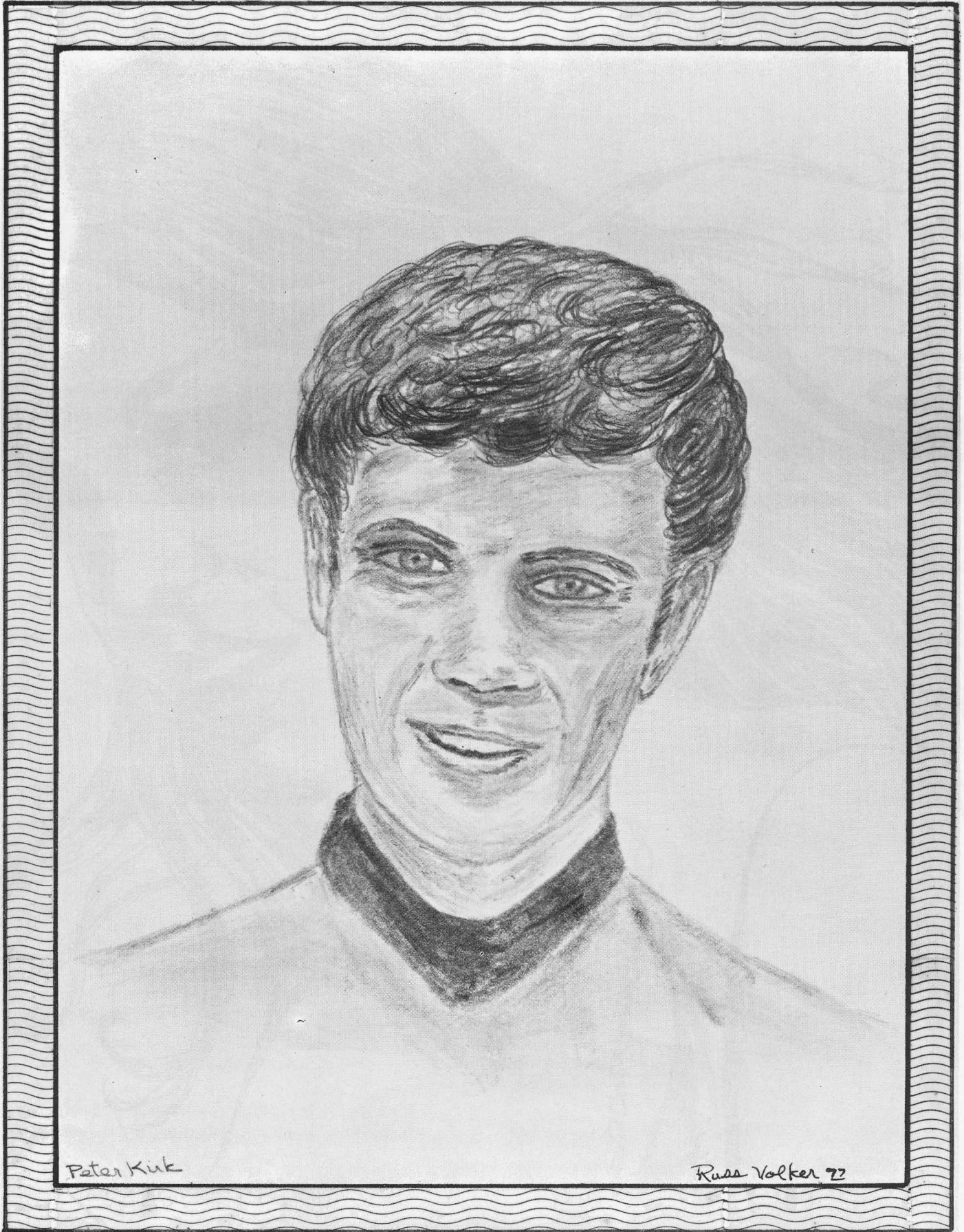
"I know that. I just meant...to let them know we arrived safely."

He considered. "Perhaps tomorrow. Let's just enjoy tonight."

"You're looking forward to all this, aren't you?" she asked, with mild



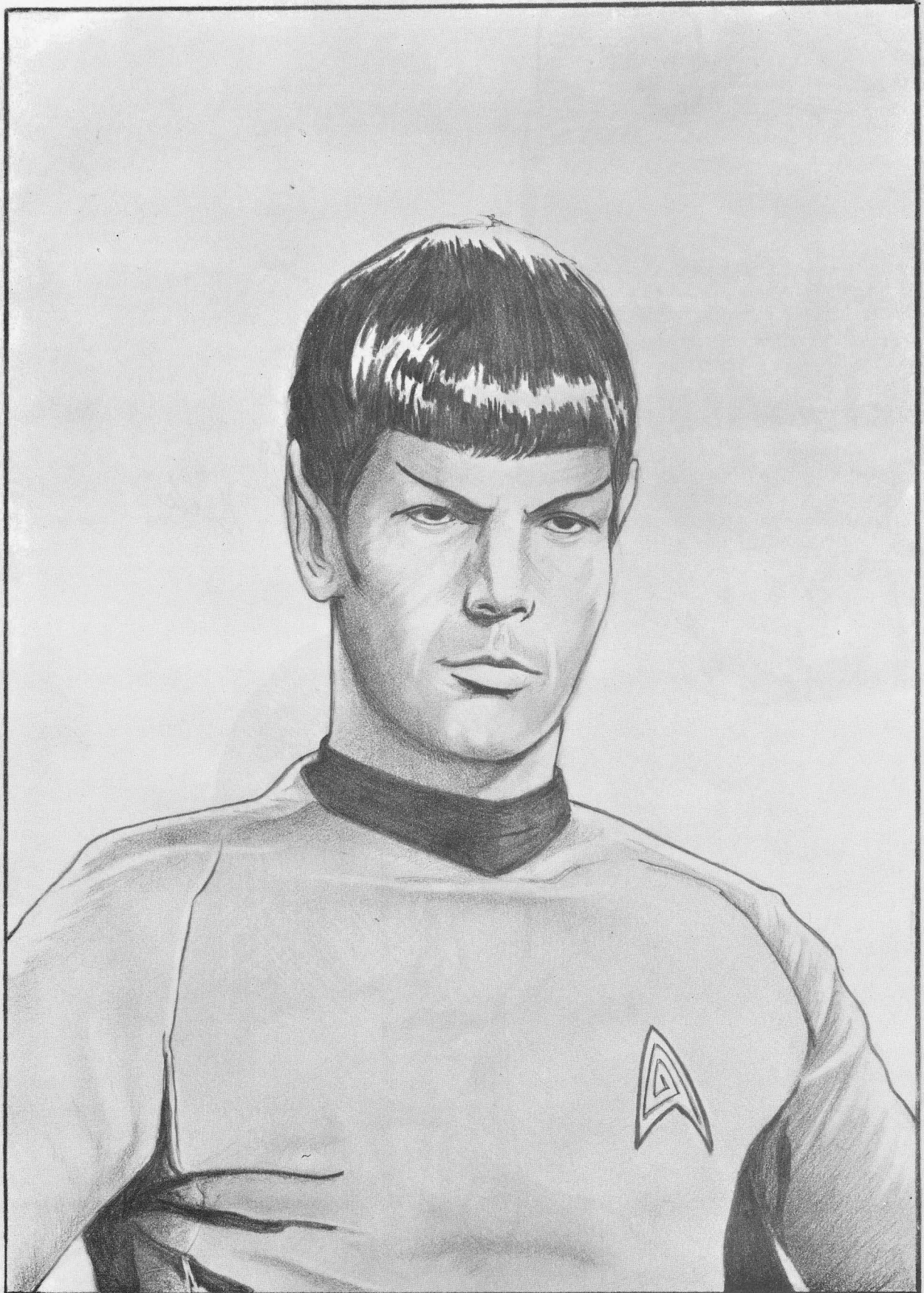
T'PRETT



Peter Kuk

Russ Volker '77

TRETT



Captain Spock

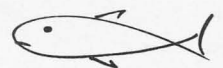
Alice L. Jones '76



Admiral
James
T. Kirk



T'Pol



surprise.

"Why not? They're a grand group of people. That Scotty's quite a character...and McCoy...do you think we may be able to persuade him to come into the Foundation, Chris? We could use him."

She laughed at his enthusiasm and disregarded his question. "You haven't even met them all, yet. I'm glad that Admiral Kirk will be there. The whole thing would seem empty without him." A shadow crossed her face as she remembered her last year on the Enterprise, after Kirk had left. Captain Locke hadn't been too bad, but he was succeeded by Captain DeMantis, and things just went downhill after that.

"And your Mr. Spock. Will I like him, too, Chris?" he asked lightly.

"No doubt you will," she replied seriously to his teasing. "One can't help but respect Spock. I do hope he's found happiness. His daughter seems delightful."

"Ah, yes, T'Prett. She reminds me a little of Beth -- same serious nature."

"Dr. Henry! We're going to be late if we keep this up!" Christine interrupted. "Are you ready?"

"I've been waiting for you."

"Then, let's go." Christine took his arm and they left the suite.

.....

"Montgomery...you'd better put that stuff away now and come get ready."

Montgomery Scott looked up from the blueprints he was studying and grinned sheepishly at his young wife. Heather was already dressed for the reception, looking more lovely than ever, and a fresh wave of tenderness washed over him.

"Aach, me poor bairn...have I been neglectin' you ag'in?"

She sat on his desk. "You never neglect me, darling. You just leave me to my own devices." She glanced curiously at the diagrams. "Is that the new ship design?"

"Aye. See here...the engine is 20% smaller, increasing the cargo hold over here..." he pointed out the details to her, his enthusiasm growing.

She nodded, her hair falling against her cheeks. After patient study, she was able to understand a little of what her husband talked about and was proud of her knowledge. It made one more thing which they could share.

" 'Twould be nice, Montgomery, if your ships needed no engine at all," she teased.

"Don't laugh, lass! Ye know, I once had an opportunity to see a diagram of a *starship* engine the size of a walnut! But the alien technology was far

too advanced for us to have understood."

"Was this when you were with Starfleet?" she asked, curious.

"Aye. On the Enterprise, as a matter of fact. There were these three aliens..." He broke off, dismissing it. "Niver mind. It's too long to get into now." The incident was still clear in his mind, though. All of his memories of the Enterprise were quite vivid. It had been a grand adventure.

Picking up his thoughts, Heather said quietly, "Why did you decide to leave Starfleet, Scotty?"

He smiled impishly. "To be able to meet you, me darlin'!" It had ceased to be a grand adventure, he recalled dismally. Ten months after Kirk had left the Enterprise, Scotty had also transferred. The new Captain had no respect for his ship, had worked the poor engines to death and gave no consideration to the advice of his Chief Engineer. Successive ships had been boring and unchallenging. After five years of discontent, Montgomery Scott had retired with twenty years service. Starfleet had offered him a command of his own to induce him to stay in the service, but that wasn't what he'd wanted, either.

"Go on with you...go get ready. I'll put these things away," Heather offered, giving him a nudge.

As she folded and stored the blueprints, she smiled to herself. She was glad she had been able to talk her husband into making this trip. He worked so hard; he needed this relaxation. She knew she couldn't get him away from business entirely, not even for this trip, but it was better than the 12-hour days he put in back on Orion.

Some of the tension which she had felt about this trip had dissipated on board the Encounter. Scotty's friends had all been so sweet and charming. But tonight would be different. Heather chewed her lip nervously, thinking of the formal Starfleet reception, complete with military brass, ambassadors and various dignitaries. She had performed at similar functions, in her short career as a dancer, but she'd never been a guest at one.

She wandered into the bedroom where her husband was dressing. How elegant he looked in his new suit trimmed with the Scott tarleton weave.

"Scotty...are you sure I look all right?" she asked dubiously.

"You'll be the bonniest lass at the ball, me dear. Don't be sellin' yourself short, Mrs. Scott," he told her sternly.

She smiled at his ferocity, and he turned back to his mirror.

"What do you think of Spock's daughter?" he asked. "What a darlin'."

"Yes, she is. Can't say I cared much for that other Vulcan, though, that Captain Stack. Such a cold one," she replied thoughtfully.

"Now, don't be judgin' the lad, Heather. 'Tisn't an easy job he's got, commandin' a Starship. Not many man have the knack for it."

"Like your Captain Kirk," she remarked lightly. She had heard so much about the man that she was eager to meet him, to see if he were all that Scotty said.

"Aye. But young Stack's got the feel of a good officer. One look at his engine room will tell you that." He chuckled, wryly. "You might say that he was *born* to a starship."

"That's right - he was the baby born on the Enterprise, wasn't he - the one for whom you designed the sensorcrib?"

Scotty nodded, remembering the infant Theron, with his pretty little mother. Such a shame. He spoke slowly. "McCoy told me that Jim went to visit Spock yesterday. Perhaps the years have allowed them to forget the tragedy of Tarra St. John. I hope so, Heather."

He sat on the side of the bed, remembering the last time he'd seen Spock. The Vulcan had looked so all alone up there on the Transporter pad. There had been only Leonard McCoy and himself to bid Spock farewell. Afterwards, he and the doctor drank too much Saurian brandy, and Scotty had been set on going to Kirk and telling him off, for once feeling that the Captain had been wrong, but McCoy had been sober enough to hold him back, thank goodness.

He spoke aloud. "Kirk never was the same after Spock left. They had been so close..." he trailed off, sighing at his gloomy memories. He realized Heather had sat beside him and rested her head on his arm.

He squeezed her affectionately. "Well, c'mon, Mrs. Scott. Let's go find the party!"

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Sulu groaned and rolled over. A glance at the chronometer indicated that it was time to get up and get ready for the reception, but, first things first.

He reached over and softly ran his finger down Tani's cheek. The girl stirred, blinked sleepily, then smiled at him with smug satisfaction.

"Hello again," she murmured.

"Hello, yourself." He was glad that Mitzi had recommended he look up her friend, Tani Collins, but he was beginning to regret tying up his afternoon this way. Now he'd have twice as much to do tomorrow. He sat up.

"I'm running late. I've got to get moving," he explained with regret.

"Will I see you tomorrow?"

He considered. "I'm not sure. I've got a pretty tight schedule." Too bad he had to combine business with the pleasure of this trip. The reception and the ceremony tomorrow would be enjoyable affairs, but he had colony business to attend to while he was here. There were supplies to purchase, people to see, orders to fill. He sighed. "I'll give you a call, honey."

She accepted his statement and lay back against the pillow.

"It must be exciting to be in charge of a whole colony."

"Exciting? I suppose. It's interesting - a challenge. That's what I enjoy."

"More interesting than being in Starfleet?"

His mouth tightened. "Safer." She looked confused; he attempted to explain. "Look, Tani, I just lost a very close friend this year...a guy who served with me on the Enterprise...Commodore Pavel Chekov. His ship was lost at the edge of the galaxy."

"I'm sorry."

He broke the tension with a forced chuckle. "I guess I just love life too much. Oh, don't misunderstand, I enjoyed my years in Starfleet, especially when I served with Captain Kirk. He's an Admiral now, you know."

"Yes, I've heard of him. That was supposed to have been *some* crew he had."

Sulu chuckled again, easily this time, fond memories coming to mind. "I haven't seen him since he left the Enterprise. Pav used to talk about him. They had kept in touch, of course, both being in the service. Pav always said..." He broke off, shaking his head, his smile fading.

"Hey, look, I understand." She put her hand on his arm with affection.

"I should have expected this." Sulu spoke more for his own benefit than for hers. "Naturally this trip would bring it all into focus." The weight of colony responsibility kept his mind from his sense of loss most of the time, but he still found it difficult to believe that Pav wouldn't be stopping by any more for their familiar talks and recreation. He'd never really had any close relationships with anyone, male or female. He'd always been filled with too much of a sense of today, of things to be done, to form any alliances. He hadn't even realized how much he had come to depend on his friendship with Pav until it had been too late to appreciate it. People close to him, his staff and friends on New Japan, kept telling him he ought to slow down, to take time to enjoy life a little, but he just wasn't made that way. He couldn't change his lifestyle overnight, he found, even if he really wanted to.

Tiring of Starfleet, he'd gone to New Japan as a colonist and been placed in a position as agricultural advisor. He had thrived in the job, giving it his customary eagerness and enthusiasm, and raised the colony's standards by 60%. Government had always interested him, and he began by accepting a councilor's seat, then worked his way up to a point where he'd felt he had enough support to run for Governor. It had been an easy election; he was the popular candidate, and he had held that office now for nearly five years. He was happy, he told himself, wasn't he?

Tani returned from the bathroom and dressed to leave. He grinned at her, putting his gloomy thoughts aside. "I'll try to make time for dinner tomorrow, honey."

"It's fine with me, Sulu. Be a good boy...have fun at the reception," she remarked lightly, kissing the tip of his nose.

She left the room and Sulu proceeded to get ready for the party.

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"I just came to let you know I was leaving and to tell you to have a good time tonight." The young Swahili stood in the doorway to Uhura's room.

"You could still change your mind and come with us, Cachem," she smiled at her stepson.

He shook his head. "An evening of protocol and military brass is not my idea of entertainment. I'm going to look up a little place that Peter Kirk told me about. He says they have a combo there that really *sounds*." He held up a musical instrument. "Maybe I can join them for a session." Uhura grinned at him and he kissed her lightly on the cheek.

"Don't worry. I'll be in attendance and properly impressed at the ceremony tomorrow morning."

As the young man left, B'Hustain joined his wife from the other room of their suite. "Was that Cachem I heard?" he asked. Uhura nodded. "I still think he ought to be going with us tonight."

"Now, B'Hustain," Uhura coaxed, "when you were his age, would you have enjoyed a military ball with your parents?"

"I suppose not," he admitted. "Where *is* he going?"

"To a place Peter Kirk told him about. They have a combo that...*sounds*."

B'Hustain rolled his eyes in good-natured exasperation. "Music! It's all that boy has in his head."

"Well," Uhura smiled, "I remember a time when my head was full of music."

"I don't believe that. Any woman who serves aboard a starship, makes a name for herself in the Federation, and finally has a command of her own, has to have more in her head than music." He took her in his arms. "You've been good for Cachem...and me, too. After his mother died, I felt lost, without purpose. Then I met you."

"You didn't look lost," Uhura objected. "In fact, I was quite impressed by the very important passenger my ship was assigned to transport to the Quarter Conference."

"Important to the Federation, perhaps, but very lonely. Uhura, do you ever regret giving up your command, your career in Starfleet, to become my wife?"

She wrinkled her nose. "Of course not. I told you then, I'd had enough of star-hopping. It was exciting and a challenge, but not something I wanted to spend my *whole* life doing. Besides, being your wife has been exciting, too."

"This reunion - decommissioning...even though the Enterprise was not the ship you commanded, it was very special to you. I can see that, and meeting your former crewmates, I can see it was special to them, too."

Uhura sighed, remembering. "Yes, it had a kind of...chemistry, you might say...between us that I never experienced on another ship. At least that was true while Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock were in command. Funny..." she reflected, half to herself, "how I always think of them as one. They were different, individuals, and yet that's how it was."

B'Hustain interrupted her thoughts. "I'm looking forward to meeting both of them. Admiral Kirk has quite a reputation in Starfleet and, of course, the Ambassador's achievements are well known in the diplomatic corps."

"I wonder if they'll have changed. Captain Kirk was always so exuberant, so full of confidence, and Spock was just the opposite - very profound and unreachable and yet underneath I always suspected there was more. Tarra St. John knew it was there, too, that's why she..." Uhura trailed off, recalling the tragedy that had befallen her friend, had in fact, eventually touched all of them. She freed herself from her husband's embrace and crossed to the mirror. The reflection that stared back at her was trim, attractive in her flowing, red ball ensemble.

"Have I changed?" she asked, worried. "Am I very different from the young communications officer I used to be?" B'Hustain came to stand behind her.

"If you have changed, my dear, it can only have been for the better. You are, indeed, a remarkable woman, an asset to me, to my career. How can I tell you how important you are, how much I admire you..." he crooned, kissing her neck, his hands caressing.

"Stop this," she teased, her mood once again becoming festive, "or we'll forget where we're supposed to be, and I think if we don't hurry, we'll be late for the reception." She gently but firmly disentangled herself from him. "Behave yourself for now...and later..." she promised. Later...but first there was a reunion to attend.

V.

The magic of reality swirled amid colored lights and subtly shifting scenes mechanically projected on the walls of the Grand Ballroom. Musicians from all across the Federation blended their exotic instruments into a conglomerate orchestra, displaying their expertise by producing a background of pleasantly rhythmic melodies.

Starfleet uniforms, many with several rows of braid on the sleeves, were in abundance, yet among the crowd there was no absence of civilian costumes representing the varied cultures of the United Federation of Planets. This was an 'Official Reception', service-style, twenty-third century, to carry on a tradition as old as the military itself: the decommissioning of a vessel. The Starship Enterprise, *NCC-1701*, would soon take her place beside the gallant clipperships and battleships of Old Earth's Naval history and their early counterparts from distant planets. She would reach her final berth among the vessels that had become legends, with oft-told tales of heroic missions and of the crews that sailed them.

The reunion that had begun half a galaxy away on the Starship Encounter continued. Gaiety was the mood of the evening, feather-touched with glimpses of nostalgia, as memories and emotions were rekindled. An undercurrent of awareness of the present, of the purpose for this gathering, of the impending ceremonies in the morning, was held in check by the handful of former Enterprise officers who were collectively drawn by the camaraderie of shared experiences. For this fragment of time, twenty-five years of separate existence would dissipate. Tonight's joy would be in their unity, whatever tomorrow's divergent paths may hold.

McCoy stood, philosophically observing his friends and remembering the words of a lonely, alien girl on a frozen, arctic planet. 'We can't go back.' *And would we want to if we could,* he wondered. *Perhaps...*

Scotty accepted a glass from one of the circulating waiters and turned to Uhura and Christine.

"Well, ladies, here's to Past, Present and Future."

McCoy cleared his throat. "What Scotty means is, that's as good an excuse as any for a drink." The Scotsman chuckled, letting the barb go by.

"Aye. As well you know, Doctor."

"Can't say as I blame him, Doc," Sulu put in. "I think this stuff gets weaker every year."

"Or your tolerance gets higher, Sulu," Christine teased. They all laughed easily, a kindred sharing laughter. The gentle strains of the orchestra filled in the passive silence, then abruptly Uhura turned toward the doorway, as something caught her eye.

"Look. Here they come!"

He arrived then, this man who had been foremost in their thoughts since the invitations had come. It was not a grand entry heralding a conquering hero. It was, in fact, barely noted at all, save for this cloistered group honed to a fine degree of expectancy. For them, the rest of the room faded, conversation halted, attention focused on that one man.

He was dignified, commanding in his Admiral's braid, shouldering the mantle of years of experience. He carried himself erect naturally, with military precision. Yet, he somehow managed to convey the impression of a small boy beholding the wonder of Christmas morning. The authoritative bearing melded in harmonious union with an impish delight. The Admiral looked insufferably pleased with himself.

He had come alone, apparently, although it was not certain, for he was so closely followed by the Vulcan contingent that he might have indeed been accompanied by them.

They were an impressive group, at least to the casual onlooker - Sarek, the human Amanda, and the Vulcan woman, T'Pol. Yet, to the former Enterprise officers, they were obliterated by the one tall, slim Vulcan who entered beside and perhaps half a step behind Kirk.

Spock appeared not to have changed at all. Closer scrutiny would reveal the subtle differences the years had wrought, but for this moment, except for the lack of the familiar blue uniform, he might just have stepped off the turbolift on his way to his station on the bridge.

Kirk grinned suddenly as he located the group that had been his crew, and his face lit with recognition. He turned, nodded to Spock, then headed in their direction. The Vulcan moved swiftly at his side. Together they approached their friends. Together -- as it had been, was now...a litany of restoration.

Uhura broke away from the rest and greeted them first.

"Now the party can begin. Jim! How have you been?" His eyes twinkled and he took both her hands in his.

"Uhura. We miss you at Starfleet." She smiled, pressing his hands. Then she released him and turned slightly.

"And Mr. Spock. You've been in my thoughts." The Vulcan nodded.

Kirk spoke to each of them, with his typical enthusiasm and genuine interest, and they responded, individually, to his ever charismatic personality. They met as equals now, or so it would seem, for all could count the measure of their achievements by the stations they now held. Yet, the awe and respect they still felt for this man could not be denied.

Beside him, Spock became a visual extension of the repaired symmetry. The Vulcan's subdued demeanor indicated that the veneer was in position, the ebullient human-ness of earlier meetings concealed by the stoic facade of his race. It was as it should be, always had been. Kirk smiling amiably, Spock, quiet and attentive.

The intimacy once shared and long-ago buried, now surfaced in conversation that was both eager and comfortable. They were bound by a past that was an integral part of what each had become, a bond of remembered dreams and anticipated goals forged in the fires of adventure and nurtured in accepted loyalty and trust. *A starship runs on loyalty.* That lovely, silver lady that had warped her way into their souls, could still evoke a devotion that summoned them to a gathering on her behalf, transcending time and distance. More than an expertly designed piece of machinery, the Enterprise had been a living, breathing entity, filled with the spirit and essence of those who served aboard her. One by one, she adopted the multi-faceted characteristics of her crew, until she evolved into her own personality. They had fallen in love with her - the man on the bridge and the man in the engine room, the science officer, the doctor and nurse, the communications officer and the helmsman.

"Aye, the Enterprise was a lovely lady, indeed," Scott was reminiscing, "the finest starship in the fleet."

"Scotty's never-ending love affair with the Enterprise," McCoy teased, "there'll never be another like her."

"At least not for him," Kirk added.

"Oh, ho," Scott retorted, "I'm rememberin' a certain Captain who seemed

to think that the Enterprise belonged to him." Kirk's eyes grew wistful.

"She *was* special, wasn't she? We...all felt it, knew it..."

McCoy nodded. "They don't build them that way anymore, Jim."

"Doctor, you are a sentimentalist," Spock told him. "Starfleet is still producing highly efficient and excellently designed vessels with advances that..." McCoy groaned.

"Oh, knock it off, Spock," he cut in. "You're not fooling anyone. You were just as attached to the Enterprise as the rest of us. Seems I remember..."

"Doctor McCoy, my personal attachment for the Enterprise does not alter the fact that Starfleet *is* still constructing superior vessels with increased capabilities," Spock teased slightly.

Scott nodded. "The engineer aboard the Encounter was talkin' about a new fleet of advanced starships, if that's what you're referrin' to, Mr. Spock. He said they'd be the ultimate in up-to-date technology." The Scotsman's face beamed with delight over his favorite subject.

"The Zenith ships," Kirk explained, "are the next phase in Starfleet's program. They are a group of six superior starships especially designed to go farther, travel faster, engage in more scientific research, extend the reaches of the Federation farther than any other vessels have previously done. They'll be manned by a crew selectively chosen for their abilities and capabilities. They will engage in high risk missions, but the element of risk will be minimized by pre-training and testing."

"Sounds like you know a lot about it, Admiral," Uhura wondered.

"I've been working with the program, screening personnel, some psycho-testing. As a matter of fact, the Encounter will be one of the six ships. She was built for that purpose and work will begin to modify her engines and computer banks."

"Then Captain Stack will be in command of one of those ships," Christine enthused. Kirk threw a glance at Spock.

"None of the personnel is definite, yet. All the testing has to be completed," he explained. "Of course, Starfleet would like to keep the crews as much intact as possible."

News of the Zenith ships was exciting to these interested and informed people, but they talked of other things, too. There was so much catching up to do, so much sharing. However, protocol and obligations demanded that they pay their respects to the various officials and dignitaries in attendance. Reluctantly, they separated, mingling with the crowd, engaging in courteous conversations, yet, their consciousness kept drifting toward each other. Their eyes would meet, sparkle with the recognition and understanding born of an indefinable tie that bound them together. Seven individuals, functioning separately, yet for this time-out-of-time, part of a greater whole, not unlike the cryptic creatures of Deneva.

Spock was involved in what appeared to be an informative discussion with one of the representatives from a newly admitted Federation planet. Kirk, for the moment unattached, located a vacant chair and claimed it for a brief respite. McCoy noticed the action from across the room, grabbed two lethal-looking drinks from a waiter and headed in his friend's direction. He came to stand beside Kirk's chair, handing him one of the glasses.

"Something to relax the tonsils while relaxing the feet," he quipped. "Having a good time, Jim?" Kirk grinned up at him.

"It's quite a party, isn't it, Bones?" He raised his glass. "To Reunions."

"It's a good thing they don't happen too often," McCoy retorted gruffly, touching his glass to Kirk's.

Just then, Spock approached them. He had finished his conversation and apparently had some information he wished to convey. He stood opposite McCoy, looking down at Kirk.

"Admiral, are you aware that Starfleet plans to establish a military base on the new Federation planet, Holos?" he asked, coming right to the point. McCoy shook his head.

"Spock, do you still always talk business at a party? Haven't you learned yet to relax?"

"Being a Federation Ambassador, I have *learned*, Doctor, that at official functions of this type, it is usually beneficial to mix business with your so-called pleasure." Kirk ignored the banter between his two friends to answer Spock's question.

"I have heard some talk of it," he said, "but nothing final."

"Holos' representative indicated that his people are somewhat upset by the plans."

"Hmnn, that could affect diplomatic relations," Kirk mused. "I think Uhura mentioned that she and her husband had been out to Holos recently." He leaned forward to call her attention. The Bantu woman was seated alone against the wall, just to his right.

"Uhura," he alerted, "you were recently on Holos. What feelings did the inhabitants communicate about Starfleet's proposed military base?"

"They're not pleased about it, Admiral," she answered. "They are afraid that infiltration of service personnel and equipment will alter their lifestyle. It's basically an agricultural planet." Sulu, who had been standing slightly in front of Kirk, overheard the conversation and turned to face him.

"A military establishment would also mean weapons," he put in. "The inhabitants have lived in a peaceful state for quite a while. They see the base as making them a prime target for any hostile nations that wander their way."

"But the base is not intended for that purpose," Kirk explained, "and the

installation of weapons would merely be a precaution, a means of protection."

Montgomery Scott joined the group. "Aye, that may be, but as soon as the base is available, starships will be visitin' and those giant vessels are verra formidable to the wee crafts now engaged in trade with Holos," he put in. Kirk was unconvinced.

"Scotty, you know as well as I do the advantages Holos would gain by having the availability of the starships," he began.

"Unless, Admiral," Spock interrupted smoothly, "Starfleet has other plans for a military base on Holos." Kirk looked up sharply.

"Such as?" he asked. "I don't understand. Explain."

"Yes, Spock, get to the point," McCoy demanded.

"The point, gentlemen," Spock explained, "is that the proposed establishment of a new military base on Holos coincides with the initiation of the fleet's new Zenith ships."

"You think there's a connection?" Kirk asked.

"Possibly. Holos *is* on the outer rim of Federation territory, and one of the farthest points of contact that we have toward the edge of the galaxy."

"Then Holos could be the planned command base of the Zenith ships," McCoy concluded, catching on to Spock's implications.

"Holos has requested admittance to the Federation before, Doctor, as far back as when Sarek was ambassador. In the light of current events, the sudden interest in that planet does seem rather indicative of some motivation."

"Well, if Holos is intended as the command base for the Zenith ships," Kirk said rising, "their potential must be far greater than any of us anticipate."

"Aye, Admiral, they are going to be some mighty ships," Scott put in wistfully. "What I wouldn't do for a crack at one of their engines." Kirk grinned at the engineer's still obvious love for anything mechanical.

"Well, who knows, Scotty, you may get a chance someday." Scott beamed.

"Now, there's a thought...Excuse me, gentlemen," he said, his eye roving across the room, "I think it's about time I rescued me darlin' Heather from Commodore Harkins. She's been polite to him long enough." He headed away. Sulu, too, turned back to the group he had been conversing with, and B'Hustain arrived to claim Uhura's attention.

"Sure looks like Starfleet's planning something really big this time," McCoy told Kirk and Spock. "Would be nice to be young and part of it, eh?" He didn't wait for an answer. "There's Christine. I wanted to ask her about that experiment she mentioned working on..." He drifted off toward his former nurse. Kirk turned to meet Spock's eyes. There was concern in them.

"What is it, Spock?" he asked, sensitive to his friend's moods.

"The personnel on the Zenith ships...they will have to meet some very specialized requirements."

"It's going to be tough."

"Jim," Spock suddenly asked earnestly, "do you think Stack has the qualifications? Can he make it?" Kirk shrugged.

"I don't know, my friend." A shadow seemed to cross the festive moment. "I'm just not sure." Their gazes touched and acknowledged the shared apprehension. The look coalesced into mutual support, at once understood and eagerly accepted. Kirk relaxed and Spock drew a long breath.

The lights and music and faces of the room swirled about them in a kaleidoscope of sensations. The perimeter of stimuli faded until only one impression survived and focused on the incredibility of the situation.

Admiral James T. Kirk had said farewell to his Enterprise twenty-five years ago. He had expected never again to see his crew as one. Yet, tonight the impossible had happened. The years had slipped away and they had been rejoined by a common allegiance. Tomorrow he would say goodbye for a second and final time. Tomorrow there would be new horizons to seek.

Tonight -- the Captain of the Enterprise nudged his First Officer.

"C'mon, Spock. We're wasting time standing here. Let's go find the action!"

IV.

It was late afternoon aboard the Encounter, although it was morning below on Starbase 15. A huge complement from the honorary escort ship were beaming directly to the Enterprise for the decommissioning ceremony. The event had been anticipated by many of the crew who had come to know and respect the passengers they had transported.

Commander Peter Kirk was in his quarters, arranging the uncomfortable neckline of his dress uniform. He smoothed the fabric into place and began a cursory flick of the brush through his never-tidy copper hair. For the thousandth time in his Starfleet career, he cursed the ironic circumstances which paired his section's regulation red tunic with that naturally clashing tint of his hair.

He was looking forward to the ceremony with more enthusiasm than the rest of the crew. It gave him the opportunity to be with Jim again. He hadn't seen his uncle in over two years, and he knew they'd have a wealth of catching up to do.

Peter paused, laying the brush down thoughtfully. This would no doubt be a difficult time for James Kirk. They were destroying his ship, the Enterprise. That ship was part of his own past as well. He remembered her from when he was a child, in those horrible, uncertain days after his parents' death. Even now, he could recall his uncle's gentleness, his understanding and strength at the

time. What must all of this nostalgia be doing to Jim?

He can handle it, Peter reflected. Uncle Jim could take almost anything. Peter recalled the message tapes he'd received after Areel had been killed. Jim had grieved, but he had accepted her death with unswerving fortitude. Peter regretted not being able to be with him at that time. Stack had tried to arrange it, but obligations precluded his granting Peter the necessary leave.

His thoughts halted at the reference to Stack. His Captain could be very obtuse at times. Now, for instance. Stack was unequivocally refusing to attend the decommissioning ceremony. It bothered Peter; he couldn't accept it.

The cabin buzzer sounded. He knew who it was before the doors swished open. "Come on in."

He was greeted pleasantly by the Encounter's Chief Surgeon and his friend, Alexander Harper. Peter flashed him a lopsided grin. "Hi, Doc. I'm almost ready. Pull up a chair."

The doctor eased his lithe frame into a seat, leaned back and regarded Peter speculatively.

"Hmmm...seems the Encounter will be well represented today."

Peter grimaced. "Not as well as she should be. Has the Captain reconsidered?" Harper shook his head.

"If he had, I'm sure you'd know about it, Pete."

"It's not right, Doc. He has an obligation to attend. Why can't he understand that?"

"Go easy, Peter," his friend cautioned. "Remember, Stack's priorities are different from yours. Sometimes you tend to forget he's a Vulcan. Acceptable behavior varies from culture to culture."

"Courtesy doesn't. Besides, we're talking about a Starfleet function. The service requires specific protocol...especially right now."

Doc hesitated, forming his argument carefully. "Look, Pete, I can appreciate your concern, but do you really think Stack is prepared --" The bleep of the intercom cut into his speech.

"Doctor Harper -- emergency in Sickbay."

The physician punched the speaker. "What is it, Lieutenant?"

"Sir, Ensign Carter's had a convulsion. Dr. Trayman wants a consultation."

"Be right there. Harper out." He sighed. "Go ahead, Pete. I'll meet you in the transporter room."

Kirk watched him leave, then picked up the package he was taking to Jim. It was a collection of things which he thought his uncle would enjoy: mementoes

from exotic worlds visited. Doc't arguments echoed in his mind, but gave him no peace. Doc didn't understand what this mission was doing to Stack - not completely. Peter, though, knew the pressure his captain was feeling at this time, and that his self-enforced isolation was his way of raising a shield against the emotions he fought so hard to deny.

He left the cabin and headed down the corridor toward the transporter room. As he approached the Captain's quarters, he hesitated, then impulsively rang the buzzer.

The door slid aside and he was greeted with a clipped, "Come," from within. The room was dim except for the light at the desk where the Captain sat, studying a report in his viewer. He was seemingly engrossed in his task, fingers steepled before him, eyebrows drawn together in concentration. He looked up, flicking off the screen as Peter entered.

"Mister Kirk. I thought you would have beamed aboard the Enterprise by this time."

"I'm on my way now. I stopped to ask if you might not reconsider your decision not to attend."

The Captain shook his head. "I'm afraid that is impossible."

Peter had expected that. Frustration at the Vulcan's stubbornness welled up in him and he forgot for a moment that the friend seated before him was also his commanding officer.

"Why is it impossible?" he demanded. "This is an official Starfleet function. The Encounter was especially selected for the duty. How will it look if her Captain refuses to attend?"

Stack didn't answer. He rose and crossed the room, standing with his back to the human. His turmoil was apparent and Peter cursed Starfleet for putting his friend in this position. Stack's absence at the ceremony would be noted by those who mattered. Part of a starship captain's duty, no matter how routine it seemed, was to maintain good diplomatic relations. Some of the Federation's highest officials would be present. His own father was the Federation ambassador from Vulcan and a former Starfleet Commander...

Peter approached his friend and spoke quietly. "I understand. I know you didn't want this assignment, but Starfleet didn't give you a choice. You know how important this could be. There will be others there besides your father..."

"And your uncle." Stack turned to face him, the pain visible on his usually expressionless face. Peter's face echoed his Captain's sadness.

"It really hurts that much, doesn't it?"

"Pain is a relative thing." Stack's voice was husky. "On Vulcan, we learn to control it, both the physical and the emotional. It is...our way."

"Damn Spock!" Peter spat angrily.

The Vulcan lifted an eyebrow in surprise at Peter's uncharacteristic outburst. "No, Peter. My father can no more help being what he is than I can be other than what I am. We are both victims of our circumstances. And, if our ways cannot meet, it is unfortunate, but nevertheless unalterable." He looked fondly at the one man in the universe for whom he could admit friendship. "Do not suffer so for me. You and Admiral Kirk are very close. It is a thing in which you should rejoice."

"I owe my uncle a lot, and he of all people *should* understand..."

"This is a very significant time for him - the dismantling of his ship." Stack's eyes wandered to encompass his cabin as though beneath that dark exterior he could relate to his human counterpart's attachment for a ship he had commanded. James Kirk. Stack had admired him as a child and then found disillusionment in that admiration. He had found disillusionment in many things, so that only the present held reality, only this time and this ship. Vulcan and its people were far away. Yet that was not entirely true. Part of Vulcan was very close, below on the starbase his ship was orbiting. Part of Vulcan was there, and part of the past, a painful past...He felt the touch of a hand on his arm.

"I've got to be going now, Stack. You'll be all right?" Soft hazel eyes, filled with compassion, met the Vulcan's deep brown ones. They showed resignation and understanding acceptance of his decision. "Doc and I will represent the Encounter for you."

Stack nodded, drawing a deep breath. "Very well." Peter squeezed his arm with a firm pressure, then turned. Stack watched his First Officer leave, then stood clenching his fists tightly. In his mind, he repeated the litany over and over, "*I am a Vulcan...I can control...my emotions...I am...a... VULCAN!*"

VII.

Admiral James T. Kirk stepped on the platform of the base transporter. Rubbing the sleep from his eyes, he reflected that morning was a hell of a time to hold the ceremony -- especially after the reception last night.

He had arrived early for the ceremony because he wanted a few last minutes aboard by himself, before the others started arriving. A desire to see her again, alone, to bid his private farewells to the ship he had once commanded, was the last thought in his mind as the dematerialization was commenced.

The process was over, and he stood in the now-deserted main transporter room of the U.S.S. Enterprise. Moving slowly, he drifted aimlessly through the vessel, a sense of pride in her filling his heart. She had made it here under her own steam. After all those years in drydock, she had responded beautifully when Starfleet sent a team of engineers aboard to overhaul the engines and re-program the computers, and she hummed again with a spaceworthiness that would have made any Captain proud.

She was old, she was obsolete; her computers and sensor devices were archaic compared to what the fleet had today. She bore the battle scars of countless campaigns, and there had come a time when it became less costly to place her in mothballs than to continue the necessary repairs and refinements to keep her operating.

Yet, she was still operable, he thought with triumph. She had been built and engineered well; as a matter of fact, she was the last of her class to go. All the others were gone now, either lost in action or scrapped years ago: the Potemkin, the Constellation, the Hood...all gone now.

As he moved through the empty, ghost-like ship, a twinge of nostalgia crept over him. Here was Sickbay, where McCoy had presided like an avenging angel over his crew...the Hangar Deck - how many times had he sent out the shuttlecrafts from here...these corridors, where he had walked every day on his way to duty -- so familiar, yet so strangely still and deathly silent.

The only sign of activity was in the main auditorium, where a group of junior officers were setting up the chairs and speakers' platforms, readying the room for the approaching ceremony. They were laughing, joking, shouting back and forth as they worked, their youth and high spirits causing Kirk to smile. Upon seeing him, however, they grew silent and came to attention with the dignity his rank deserved.

"Carry on," he waved them off cheerfully. They resumed their tasks with slightly less ebullience, and one young man approached him hesitantly.

"Aren't you Admiral Kirk?" he asked. At Kirk's friendly nod of admission, he went on. "You were one of the Enterprise captains, weren't you, sir?"

"Yes, Ensign. Many years ago."

Relaxing under the kindly eyes, the young man beamed conspiratorily. "Gee, sir, it must have been rough back then, piloting a ship with such limited capabilities."

Kirk reacted with surprise. Difficult? Limited? He considered his junior thoughtfully. "You were with the crew that brought her here?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

Kirk threw him a knowing look. "Safe trip?"

"Well, yes, but..."

"She's not such a dinosaur, Ensign," he cut him off sharply. "Not at all."

As he left the hall, he wondered bitterly why he'd felt the compulsion to defend her like that. The young man had been right, but there was still a sense of loyalty he couldn't deny. Without conscious thought, he entered the turbolift and gave the old command.

"Bridge." The familiar whine and hum of operation reverberated in his ears. Like everything else he'd encountered, from the chemical stains on the sickbay benches to the arrangement of tables in the rec rooms, the unchanged

noise of the turbolift assailed his senses, flooding his mind with memories.

Stepping out of the turbolift, he was struck afresh by the silent, derelict condition of the bridge. In his mind's eye it was a noisy, busy, bustling place, the hub of activity, the seat of command. Kirk smiled wryly as his mind supplied the missing elements: Uhura, turning from her station with a smile on her lips and a twinkle in her eye; Scotty, his hearty brogue and laughter echoing through the ship; Sulu and Chekov, alert and ready for any crisis at the navigation board; and Spock, over at the computer console, observing the formal manners he always displayed on the bridge. What was that old saying, Kirk mused, "...the smell of the greasepaint, the roar of the crowds..."

He moved around the deck, taking note of some of the improvements which had been added after he left. Stepping down into the well, he stood by the command chair and his fingers played over the buttons on the armrest; there were two more there that he didn't recognize.

Gingerly he sat down, feeling as he did so, the mantle of responsibility envelop him. He sat there a long time, letting his mind roam freely over the rewarding years of his Captaincy, the dangers and joys he'd experienced from this chair.

He hadn't wanted another ship after the Enterprise. There had been offers, but somehow he knew there would never be another command for him. It was more than a piece of machinery, this vessel. It was the spirit, the camaraderie of the finest Starfleet had to offer. It was to this he was saying farewell today -- a memory of glory, of unity without cynicism or malice.

"...Don't let it be forgot...that once there was a spot...for one brief shining moment..."

A sudden noise brought his head around, the long-forgotten sound still eliciting the correct response from him. The turbolift doors whished open, and he smiled fondly at the elegantly dressed Vulcan.

"Jim..." Spock said softly, surpressing an urge to say, instead, *Captain*.

Kirk turned back to the viewscreen. He needed to give no explanation for his presence on the bridge, nor did he require any reason why Spock had known where to find him.

"I must be getting old, Spock," he said lightly.

The Vulcan moved down into the well, standing at the human's side with a poignant familiarity.

"No," he countered slowly. "It is a most natural reaction to recall past events with a mixture of pleasure and sadness. I understand," he finished gravely.

Kirk met his eyes in mute testimony, then he moved to the navigations console.

"Did you know she came here under her own power, Spock? After all these years, she may be obsolete, but she's still spaceworthy!"

Spock's eyebrow rose. "Indeed?" He went to the science station, curiously exploring with fingers and eyes. "There have been some changes," he stated flatly.

"All things change," Kirk echoed, with a tone Spock couldn't comprehend. The Vulcan eyed him thoughtfully.

"Have you ever considered returning to active duty, Jim?"

Kirk shrugged indifferently. "There was a time -- but then I had Areel and Peter with me, and my priorities changed. Now...I'm alone again, but space exploration is better left to the younger men."

Spock nodded. Jim Kirk would feel that way. "I came to inform you that the guests are arriving. Your nephew was asking for you." Spock rose and went towards the turbolift.

Kirk smiled. "I'm happy Peter could make it. Did Stack --" The Vulcan's negative reply felled his words. There was a look of hurt on Spock's face, and Kirk moved to his side. They'd both known Stack would not attend the ceremony, but the foreknowledge offered little defense against the disappointment. They would deal with Stack later, he knew.

Taking a last look at the soon-to-be-dismantled bridge, he and Spock stepped into the turbolift together.

The hall was crowded and noisy, and the two men were greeted with animation from many quarters as they moved to their seats, Spock to sit with his family, and Kirk, between Peter and McCoy.

In a few moments, a hush fell over the assemblage as the first speaker, Rear Admiral Leslie Winkins, mounted the dais.

He was not an excellent public speaker, and Kirk listened tediously as he detailed the exploits and honors of the Enterprise and her varied crews and commanders during the time she had been in active service. To benefit the junior officers, he launched into a descriptive narrative of the ways of space flight and Starfleet at that moment in the history of the Federation. Kirk soon found his attention wandering.

He was snapped back as he heard Winkins say, "...a man who commanded her during those turbulent years. Admiral James T. Kirk -- " All heads swivelled in his direction--"...Would you care to make a few remarks, Admiral?" As the audience hailed the offer with applause, Kirk rose uncertainly. He had not expected to be called on to speak, but he met the challenge with unswerving confidence.

Kirk mounted the dais and shook hands with Winkins, who then backed up and took a seat. Kirk stood silently, looking about him as his audience settled down and then, smiling fondly, he said softly, "She really *is* a 'grand old lady', isn't she?"

The crowd stirred under his gentle voice, their eyes riveted on him.

"Those of us here who served aboard her know the story that Admiral Winkins has recounted this afternoon. We know the pride, the sense of accomplishment we felt in being the galaxy's far-flung ambassadors of peace and good will.

"We had our share of problems - but the Enterprise was more than just her missions. The Enterprise that we knew cannot be recorded on memory tapes or stored in data banks. She lives on, and will continue to live on, in our hearts and minds, an intangible thing that will always be a part of those of us who proudly served on her.

"We fought on the final frontier, yet the battle is still being waged -- it hasn't ended. The new ships are more sophisticated, their machinery more polished, but courageous young men and women, like many of you here today from the Encounter, have inherited the torch which we passed down. In the language of your computers, Starfleet has entered *Phase II* of its programming.

"We are making improvements, we are moving ahead, but victory - victory in this battle against the unknown - has yet to be won. Men and women still die in space; Commodore Pavel Chekov, in command of the U.S.S. Trojan, perished just a short while ago. He was an ensign aboard the Enterprise, later a brilliant commander, and yet his life, like so many before him, was given in the relentless struggle to conquer the unknowns of space.

"Peace is our mission and was our mission then. To support, aid, advise and befriend, was then and is now, our common destiny.

"So, sing no sad songs for the Enterprise. Go boldly forth, secure in the knowledge that you were a part of that destiny or that you are now willing to carry on that dream.

"Our hope, the hope of mankind, rests now on the young shoulders in this room. Man can find his goal, his challenge out there, now as then, as they continue the work we started. Let us go forward, my friends....Thank you."

As the crowd moved to their feet, their emotions and force erupted into a thunderous ovation. Vice Admiral Jensen turned to Admiral Tomas.

"It's a damn shame that man won't accept another command - look at the power he still exerts over them."

The short, dark Tomas nodded. "I know. I'll bet there's not a soul in the place who wouldn't follow him to the gates of hell and back."

Kirk passed the Vulcan party on his way back to his seat. He and Spock exchanged a look of understanding and elation. They could go forward now, as well. Kirk caught the eye of Spock's lovely daughter and smiled at her. There was a gleam in her eye which Kirk suspected she inherited from her father. Perhaps Stack would not be Spock's only child to enter the space service.

Then he was back at his seat, and Peter impulsively threw an arm around him, and hugged. Kirk returned the affection warmly, proud, so proud of his dead brother's son.

It was over; the rest was anti-climax, and tomorrow they would begin

the dismantling of the Enterprise.

"...Don't let it be forgot...that once there was a spot...for one brief shining moment...that was known as Camelot!..."

VIII.

The Starship Encounter, in orbit, could be seen from the observation deck viewscreen of the Enterprise. Jim Kirk caught his breath at the awesome sight, silver and sleek against the star-dotted blackness.

"She's beautiful, isn't she?" Peter asked proudly. Kirk nodded, sharing his nephew's feeling. "I wish you could come aboard, Jim." Kirk sighed.

"Perhaps your Captain Stack has had enough of visiting brass by this time," he answered tactfully, not needing to explain his true reluctance to tour Peter's ship. They both knew that Stack preferred not to see James Kirk, and neither wanted to cause the young Captain any unnecessary discomfort. He was going to have enough problems with all the psycho-testing and probing he had facing him.

"I know Stack understands that I'd like you to see the ship. He's very proud of her, too, though he won't admit it, of course." Peter grinned. "You ought to know the feeling."

"Your uncle knows all about feelings," a voice from behind quipped. "Now this Vulcan here could use some lessons in that department." Peter and Kirk turned to face McCoy and Spock. Kirk watched, surprised, as Peter suddenly stiffened, glaring at Spock as he approached. The young man's voice was ice.

"Very astute, Doctor -- and very correct." He turned to his uncle. "I've got to get back to the ship, Jim. I'll see you again before we leave. We'll be in orbit for several more days." He was obviously quite anxious to get away now that Spock had arrived. Kirk was confused by Peter's behavior toward the Vulcan.

"Peter, what is this..." he began, but Spock, sensing Kirk's anguish, interrupted.

"Have I offended you, Commander?" he asked directly.

"Offended me? No, nothing so civilized, Ambassador. It's my Captain I'm concerned about. You see, he didn't attend a function where his presence was expected today, because of you. He has some other problems that he has to live with, because of you, and if that affects his chances to command a Zenith ship, if he loses the Encounter...well, I care very much about that and about him. But you wouldn't understand, would you, Mr. Spock? Messing up people's lives seems to be your specialty." He threw a glance at Kirk, then turned and angrily strode away, leaving the three older men speechless at his outburst. After a few seconds, Kirk broke the awkward silence.

"Spock, I'm sorry," he said miserably. "I don't understand."

The Vulcan let out his breath. "Do not apologize, Jim. Your nephew is apparently a man who speaks his mind." Kirk shook his head.

"It's not like Peter to be rude."

"I perceive that your earlier observation was correct. Commander Kirk does indeed seem to think very highly of Stack." Spock turned to McCoy. "You were on the Encounter, Doctor. In your professional opinion, could there be a basis for Peter's fears? Does the Captain seem disturbed?" McCoy considered before answering.

"It's hard to say, Spock. I was only with him for a short time. I didn't have a chance to observe him at any great length. For the most part, he seemed perfectly adjusted, in command of the ship and himself. If he seemed a little ...detached, I credited that to his Vulcan upbringing. Anyway, Peter and that Doctor Harper seemed to relate well to him. Yet, there were moments when he seemed a little tense - on edge, you know?" He shook his head. "I'm not sure. I couldn't put my finger on it, but there was something about his attitude that bothered me..." Spock turned to Kirk.

"Jim, could this adversely affect Stack's chances to command a Zenith ship?"

"The requirements are exacting and difficult, because the missions will be. The slightest imbalance in emotional or psychological stability, something that would not even be worth mentioning in a commander of an ordinary starship, could make the difference in his ability to cope with the demands of a Zenith ship. I've seen some of Stack's records, and frankly, there are some items in them that make me uncomfortable by their implications," Kirk said sadly. He tried to be gentle. He knew this was hurting his friend more than the Vulcan would ever admit, and the pain was reciprocal. "I'm not the psychiatrists, Spock. I won't be making the final decisions, but I do know this: if Stack has any difficulties at all, they will show up in the analysis, and, yes, they will affect his changes." Spock sighed and made his decision.

"Then it seems, my friends, that the time has come for a meeting between my son and me."

"Spock, it could be that I also contributed in some way to Stack's problems. If I can be of help..." Kirk offered.

"Maybe I can offer some objective views..." McCoy began. At Spock's incredulous upswept eyebrow, he amended, "I only meant..." Spock cut him off.

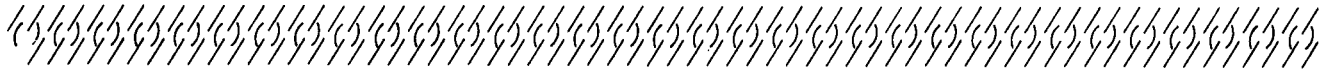
"Your help will be most appreciated, Jim...and yours, Bones." He smiled at McCoy.

In the next few days, the rest of the former Enterprise crew would be gone, returned to their individual destinies. The good-byes would be tearful, the intentions to meet again sincere, but in a few weeks the reunion would be just a memory. Yet, for James Kirk, Spock, and Leonard McCoy, there was something that still had to be done. The career of someone very important to all of them depended on their ability to correct mistakes they had made 25 years ago.

Captain Stack would have to be able to reconcile his existence, to understand

his place in Spock's life and to learn the motivations that precipitated the acts of the past. It was a tall order, but the responsibility for it rested in very capable hands.

TO BE CONTINUED...



Reunion

Together.

A warm embrace

And two bright smiles that

Banish what is past.

The fatigue and the pain

And all time's interfering broken dreams

Are gone.

Now only love remains.

It builds and thrills

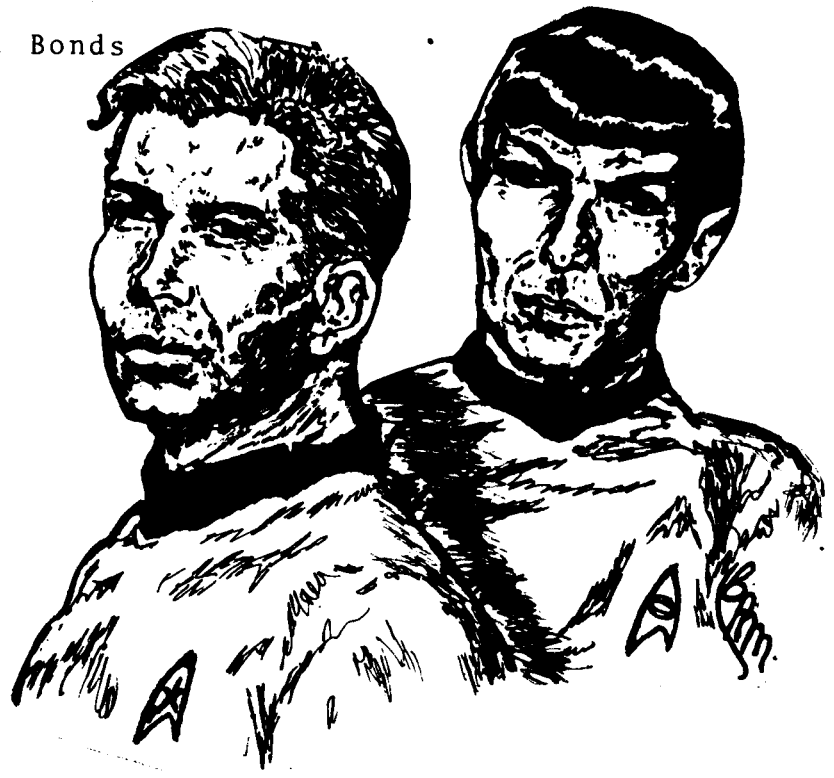
To overpower all,


To refresh even the stars

In the gentle rain of

Reunion.

--Martha J. Bonds

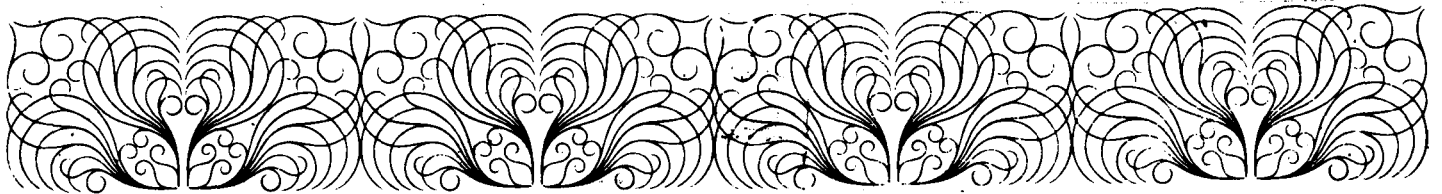




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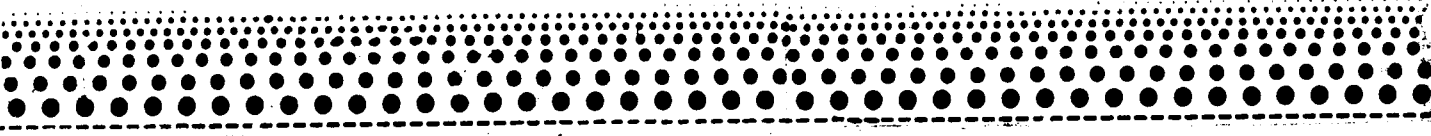
CONTACT has also reached out to the other side of the Atlantic, and the following publications are part of the result. In each instance, when writing for information, enclose an IRC, available from your post office, in lieu of an SASE.

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My soul preached to me, my brother, and taught me much. And your soul has preached and taught as much to you. For you and I are one, and there is no variance between us save that I urgently declare that which is in my inner self, while you keep as a secret that which is within you. But in your secrecy there is a sort of virtue.

KAHLIL GIBRAN



*THE LANGUAGE OF FRIENDSHIP IS NOT WORDS, BUT MEANINGS.
IT IS AN INTELLIGENCE ABOVE LANGUAGE.*

Thoreau

REASONS

If being myself
Brings out the best in you
And makes you achieve heights
You never thought possible
Just because you knew I expected it of you,

If my presence
Can spur you into action
And make you take positive steps
Toward an ultimate, desired goal
Just because you wouldn't procrastinate with me,

If our friendship
Is the foundation upon which
You build the ivory towers
That turn daydreams into realities
Just because knowing I care gives you the courage,

Then I count my life well spent
And the reasons for my existence worthwhile.
For such effects are reciprocal
Between Thee and Me.

--*Beverly Volker*

