CONTACT



VOLUME II

MAY 1976

CONTACT

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DEDICATION

THIS ISSUE is dedicated to DR. LEONARD MCCOY for the special contribution he brings to the Kirk/Spock Relationship, and to DEFOREST KELLEY for making "Bones" such an integral part of the triad.

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C O N T A C T

Devotion to your logic -
   there are times when ever I
Have failed to understand it -
   no matter how I try.

   Obsession, Human feelings -
      times I cannot comprehend
   The purpose of your actions -
      even though you are my friend.

I reach for you, though sometimes -
   I seek, and only find
Inadequate expression
   insufficient to my kind.

   I sometimes fail to reach the goals -
      emotions often see,
   And Human thoughts ... yes, even yours -
      are mysteries to me.

At times we need an outlet -
   someone to stand apart,
And understand your logic -
   while feeling with my heart.

   A catalyst ingredient -
      through which our souls can meet,
   The CONTACT strengthened by this bond -
      is even more complete.

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EDITORS² UPDATE

February 1979

Don't panic -- CONTACT 5/6 is on the way. With luck, you'll have it in your hands this spring ('79). Remember, we said "with luck!"

In the years since we first published this issue, fandom in general and fan-fiction in particular,has seen many changes. Several of the contributors to this zine are no longer actively involved. The Kirk/Spock relationship has matured and taken off in new and varied directions. Stories are becoming more complex, art is more sophisticated, and zines are getting better and more professional. For every zine that goes out of print, new ones make their debut.

As editors and writers participating in a continuing publication, we have endeavored to grow and improve each successive issue of CONTACT, to bring you the best of talents currently available for your enjoyment. Yet we feel also -- and apparently you agree, judging by your many letters and personal requests -- that much of the earlier fan fiction, poetry and art was of such good quality that it seemed a shame that it was no longer in circulation, being shared with those who missed it the first time around. The decision to reprint was predicated upon this feeling. (Also because of the bomb threats we were getting!) Thus, you may find some noticeable differences in this publication when compared to our more current efforts. However, rather than change anything, we wanted to bring you CONTACT 2 exactly the way it was in 1976.

One thing we feel is necessary to mention. Phase II, Chapter 2 - Tarra, included herein, is being re-written along with the other early chapters of Phase II, and will be available in the future in an updated, more complete Phase II Collected. Be patient with us on this one, it may be a while.

In regard to zines more currently available, the following are recommended as very worthy of your attention. S.A.S.E. to the addresses listed for price and availability:

PASTAK
Carolyn Venino
74 Palisade Ave.
Jersey City, NJ 07306

STAR CANTICLE
Dotty Barry
P.O. Box 921
Claremont, CA 91711

MATTER/ANTIMATTER
Tiberius Press(Sandra Gent)
1908 Rambling La.
Brandon, FL 33511

IDIC
Leslye Lilker
61 Union Pl.
Lynbrook, NY 11563

GALACTIC DISCOURSE
Laurie Huff
208 W. Crow
Eureka, IL 61530

STARDATE: UNKNOWN
Gerry Downes
3925 W. 79th
Anchorage, AK 99502

DEATH DANCE
(a novella by Diane King)
Pulsar Press (Carol Frisbie)
518 S. Abingdon
Arlington, VA 22204

NOME
(age statement required)
Victoria Clark
445 E. 86th St.
New York, NY 10028

NAKED TIMES
(age statement required)
Pon Farr Press
10885 Parkdale Ave.
San Diego, CA 92126

GUARDIAN
Linda Deneroff
or Cynthia Levine
c/o 140 Broadway, C-6
Lynbrook, NY 11563

ARCHIVES
Yeoman Press
5442 Valles Ave.
Bronx, NY 10471

THRUST
(Age statement required)
Pulsar Press(Carol Frisbie)
518 S. Abingdon
Arlington, VA 22204

And last, but not least, we highly recommend the second record album by the Omicron Ceti III, ONLY STARS CAN LAST. Featuring the musical talents of Martha and Rodney Bonds, Kathy Burns and Russ Volker, it will include the title song, Changes, Realms of Gold, Star Lady, Once Again, and many more. Originally scheduled for February, the album was slightly delayed by the timely appearance of Ian Thomas Bonds, born New Year's Day.

Meanwhile, a cassette tape will be offered, OMICRON CETI III AND FRIENDS. It will feature songs by the group which are not performed on the album, as well as some favorites by the Gemini People, Leslye Lilker, Jean Stevenson and others. S.A.S.E. for record and/or cassette to:

Martha J. Bonds
5405 Yorkwood Road
Baltimore, MD 21239

We are also planning a special edition of CONTACT -- THE COMPLETE RACK, by J. Emily Vance. We will reprint the popular (infamous?) novella, The Rack, which originally appeared in CONTACT 4, its sequel, All the King's Horses...All the King's Men, published in the now out-of print zine, THE FARTHEST STAR, plus J. Emily Vance's newest agony, Prequel -- which takes place before The Rack begins! In addition, there will be a special section of Reader's Creative Responses, some new artwork along with the original, and a few other surprises. S.A.S.E. to: Harmony Press, 5657 Utrecht Rd. Baltimore, MD 21206.

Finally, we'd like to remind you that if you don't have a S.A.S.E. with us for CONTACT 5, it is the only way we have of letting you know when it's available. If you've already sent one, it's on file and you'll be getting your flyer when we mail them. Our sincerest thanks to all of you for your continued interest and support of CONTACT -- the ORIGINAL zine based on the Kirk/Spock relationship.

WE ARE ONE...WE REACH,

Bev and Nancy

Beverly Volker
5657 Utrecht Rd.
Baltimore, MD 21206

Nancy Kippax
44 Gemini Court
Baltimore, MD 21237

SPOCK: "Captain -- Sensors indicate there are two contacts now."

-- The Ultimate Computer --

EDITORS' PAGE

CONTACT reaches out and touches -- with a thought, a word, an act. CONTACT says, "I know you're there. I care about you; what you think, how you feel, who you are." CONTACT can be a subtle exchange, a quiet sharing or an electric spark.

---OUR MISSION -- TO SEEK OUT AND CONTACT---

Since the publication of our first issue, we have been touched by Trek fans from every section of the country. Letters have come from California, Maine, Florida, Texas, the Midwest... From outside the continuous states we heard from Alaska, and from the countries of Australia and England. There have been many diverse opinions and varied comments, but all have had one thing in common: An unbounded enthusiasm for the "special contact" this zine is all about, the Kirk/Spock relationship.

We are overwhelmed and awed by the response, but what could be more fun and exciting than CONTACT with so many who share our interest?

CONTACT has brought us new friends and our communications outgrew a folder, then an accordian file, and spilled over into a file cabinet. We ran out of zines and still the orders came... and the LoC's and the submissions. It has been a singularly fantastic experience. You the many Trek friends have made it so. Our special thanks this issue go to friends like Michael Amsden of Orange, Texas, for her invaluable editorial assistance in the preparation of "Tarra", and to Connie Faddis, who met an outrageous request for a McCoy/Kirk/Spock story to be submitted "yesterday". And also to Carol Frisbie, for extreme enthusiasm and guidance every step of the way.

Star Trek reached out and touched. All over this planet of ours, Star Trek made CONTACT. The bold men of the Enterprise sought to reach out and touch many forms of life. Their mission was one of peace and friendship. But we have seen something still more; how two beings of such different and distant cultures could delight in that difference and bridge the distance with complete harmony, trust and love.

It is upon this premise that CONTACT was founded, and toward this goal that it strives. It's continued success depends upon the integrity of that goal, and the dedication of its creators and readers toward acheiving it.

WE ARE ONE ... WE REACH!

Bev and Nancy

THE EDITORS



THE THIRD WHEEL

BY C.R. FADDIS

A fist of sorrow, a grieved lonliness, closed tightly in Doctor McCoy's chest as he eased himself down on the edge of his bed in his quarters, and it wouldn't let go. He was tired, and he ached mightily. It had been a wearing week, interminable days when they did not know whether the new serum would work at all, long days when they did not know that though it had saved his life, it had not left Jim Kirk a mindless, brain-damaged shell. That the serum had prevented death at all was miraculous; Vegan choriomeningitis was, or had been, a virulent, invariably fatal disease. In those days of anguished waiting, of the not-knowing, McCoy had felt a new closeness grow between himself and the Vulcan First Officer, though it had remained unspoken and unexpressed. It had been Jim's crisis that had drawn them together, generated by their different but equally dynamic attachments to the captain of their ship who had become their dearest friend.

McCoy stared down at his clenched fists, and deliberately flexed them. It was no use. He should shower and get some sleep, Lord knew he needed it. But the fist in his chest would not let go, and it made it hard to move. He frowned and pondered his open, sweaty hands.

The closeness, brief though it had been, had filled some empty place in his soul that he had not wanted to acknowledge before, and now it had dissipated in his grasp like water in the desert. The gushing flood of joy at Kirk's first coherent words had filled him with an ecstacy of relief, but when the joy had peaked and subsided, the bond with Spock was gone.

Obnoxious, constipated Vulcan. It's as though this week never happened for him, now that it's all over. Damn him. And Jim's resting, he'll be flat on his back for at least another week before he'll feel up to much of anything, let alone any palling around.

He shook himself mentally and yanked his tunic off over his head, not fussing with the closure. He wanted to get on with the shower, but found himself gazing down sightlessly at the crumpled blue shirt as though it contained some magical message or council that would sooth his inner strife.

It's not fair to relate any of this to Jim. It's not his fault.

Still, he could not forget that when Jim had awakened, his eyes had first sought Spock, had visually embraced the Vulcan, had delighted in the reunion. It was natural that he should remember Spock's sacrifices and ministrations, for Jim had still been lucid when the Vulcan had risked his own life to get Kirk back to the ship in time to try the serum. It was impossible that in his week of coma, Jim could have known the effort and anguish that the doctor had expended. And so, when Jim had regained his senses, it was to be expected that his focus would be on Spock, and though he had also acknowledged McCoy in grateful tones and touches, there was a two-way tension between Kirk and the Vulcan that had left McCoy feeling awkward, abandoned, unwanted, unneeded.

I'm the doctor, my concern is professional; they don't expect me to let myself get involved, they don't have time for a doctor with feelings.

Hold on a minute. I'm just feelin' sorry for myself. I'm tired, and it's been a devil of a long week, and things are all out of proportion.

They love each other, though. There's no room in that for me. It's between the two of them, and it's none of my business, I'm used to bein' alone by now, aren't I?

Good God.

A part of him screamed. A part wept. A part smouldered.

Determinedly, he pushed up and strode into the bathroom, stripping for the shower. He turned up the ultrasonics all the way, wishing that the tiny tingling vibrations could scrub and massage him right through his skin down into his soul, wherever it was. He was weary. Weary. He leaned his head, resting it on the backs of his hands, against the stall's partition and waited for the sonics to soothe him, but the blasted unit had been acting up lately, and he had put off reporting it to Maintanence, hating to have anyone poking around in his quarters, the few cubic meters he could call his own on the ship. Straightening, he banged the controls angrily. Blasted machine! You couldn't depend on anything around here. The level stayed low, barely a tickle. He smashed it with a balled fist, and the level climbed. He felt chilled, so he turned up the infrared source, too, and sat back lethargically on the fold-down seat, trying to sort out and stow his feelings away.

The tingling lulled him. He closed his eyes and soaked in the silence like a sponge.

I'm tired, jus' tired. Always buttin' into things where I don't belong, no wonder I end up disappointed. How long have I

been on this tinplated taxi? Almost a year 'n a half. And I've known Jim almost six. And in one and a half years, Spock means more to Jim than I do. I don't know what they have between them, how it can be anything like what two Humans can have, like what Jim and I have. Or used to have. Damnation.

What can I do? I dunno if there's room in me for Spock too. Threesomes never work anyway. You get pulled in too many directions.

The sonics were starting to sting a bit, but he ignored it. The turmoil in his soul consumed his attention.

It might be best if I backed off. Maybe even transferred, though that'd be harder in the long run. Spock needs someone like Jim more than I do, Lord knows. I can get along, always have, I don't need much. Maybe Jim can help Spock. Somebody's got to drag him out of that shell, or his Human half may be the death of him, Vulcan control or no Vulcan control. He won't let me help him. The only time we can be close is when it's over Jim, when Jim's in trouble and needs both of us.

The stinging was becoming bothersome. Not opening his eyes, he fumbled for the controls again and turned them down, then settled back again, enthralled in his thought-flow.

The first time me 'n Spock ever had much of anything substantial to say to each other, it was the time the transporter split Jim into halves, and then we were opponents. On Miri's world, Jim told me Spock was takin' care of me while I was out cold after testin' the antitoxin, and I thought for a while that maybe there was hope for Spock, maybe we should try to be friends. But he held me off. He always holds me off. He gives me the crawling bejeebies the way he just turns people off like that. But I know there's more 'n transistors in there somewhere -- he's taken big risks for some folks -- for Captain Pike and for Jim, mostly. But he can't relate to me except through Jim, and maybe only because of Jim, 'cause maybe he thinks Jim expects it of him.

If that's so, Jim-boy, you aren't doing us any favors. I don't want that from Spock, not that way. I don't want charity, dammit.

Wait a minute. Charity from a Vulcan? -- my brains must be scrambled.

His nose was running, and he wiped it mindlessly, reaching for the shower controls again, since the thing didn't seem to want to turn down. It was stuck again, and he gave it another impatient smack.

His teeth vibrated, and a sharp stab of pain skewered his head. He opened his eyes, and saw blood on his hand where he had wiped his nose.

The sonics! He beat at the dials again, but suddenly his arms were quivering, with no strength at all. He went to stand up, and his legs folded under him. The world reeled away dizzily.

Gotta get out! Cerebral hemorrhage. Vascular implosion.

He couldn't see. Sudden clouds of blood flooded his eyes. He tasted salt, choked on the gushing fountain at the back of his throat. His arms, his legs, they fumbled distantly, reality contracted to violent pulsing agony that was exploding his skull.

Crawl. . . door. . .

Time lost meaning. He crawled, or thought he crawled, toward the door. He couldn't think. He couldn't move. Needles of piercing cold drove into his veins, and he shuddered and inched forward impossibly, hopelessly....

Confused motion invaded the pain, distant sensations, a jumbled rush that was bundling him away from agony. Somehow, the torture had stopped, been shut away, and garbled shouts about engineering and emergency and sick bay thundered through his failing awareness. Haste was swaddling him in cloth and warmth. With shaking arms he snuggled around the spare shoulders of his rescuer, and gave in to the roiling clouds of unconsciousness.

*****

"Easy does it," a remote voice warned out of the darkness, and he couldn't place the voice, it had a strange resonance in his ears. Who was that? M'Benga? McCoy opened his eyes, alarmed, and shut them instantly, blinded by the overhead glare.

"I told you not to do that," Dr. M'Benga chastised. "I'll turn the light lower in a moment, when I'm finished examining you. Can you hear me clearly?"

McCoy opened his lips and was chagrined to find them dry and stiff, his jaw and tongue a little numb and lazy.

"I hear ya," he managed, and coughed, his throat dehydrated. " 'M thirsty."

"In a moment."

M'Benga was poking around at his ears.

"That looks good. Your eardrums should function normally again, without scar tissue. I'll conduct more thorough tests later, when you're stronger. For now, I think we can expect your hearing and eyesight to return to normal in a few days. You'll have some trouble speaking and using your right limbs for a while, as you sustained brain damage affecting locomotor control on your right side. The surgery went fine, though, and you'll have full use again in a week or so."

"Can I . . . open my eyes yet?"

"Yes, one second. All right. Get some rest now, and I'll see you later."

McCoy blinked carefully, but the glare was down to a tolerable glow. Without looking around he knew he was in the intensive care ward in the back of sickbay. A glass of water appeared by his shoulder, and he turned his head blearily to find himself looking into a long Vulcan face.

"Spock?" he whispered.

"Do not tax yourself, Doctor," Spock said, and put a hand under McCoy's neck to help him rise up enough to drink.

When he pushed up, McCoy found his left hand imprisoned under a warm weight he'd not noticed at first, and he gaped over at the hand wrapped around his fingers, at the tousled, sleeping form of Jim Kirk, lying on his own bed, which had been unbolted from the deck and pushed over to meet McCoy's bed.

What's going on here?

"He wished to be with you when you awoke," Spock explained. "As this room is private, there was no need to deny his request. However, he fell asleep. I shall wake him if you wish."

McCoy shook his head, and was careful not to move his hand. He drank down the water Spock held, sputtering a bit as the harsh wetness shocked his parched throat. Spock let him back down, and McCoy shut his eyes, trying to wrestle his confusion into some order. It occured to him that someone had gotten him out of the sonics, or he would surely be dead. And he knew with a shock who it had been.

"It was you," he breathed, not opening his eyes to face the Vulcan. "You found me."

"Affirmative," Spock said, keeping his voice soft so as not to wake the captain. "Your shower facility was in disrepair, and showed some abuse. Apparently its safety device was rendered inoperative. Constitution-class starships are the Federation's most efficient vehicular design, but the personnel-engineering has been shown to be flawed. Having a hygenic facility with a potential to cause damage to its users is dangerous and criminal,

despite safety features, for as you have most graphically discovered, safety features do not always function reliably. Mr. Scott has entered a full report in the Engineering log. Accidents like yours have occurred on other vessels, and the design of the shower facility should be altered to prevent future occurrences."

He saved me. He saved my life, and he just brought me water, and he lifted my head to help me drink it, and he's embarrassed. He's hidin' it behind that old logical professional facade, but Jesus Lord, he's embarrassed!

Spock carried the drinking glass back to the ward's bathroom, and McCoy turned his head to gaze over at Jim. Kirk's hand on his was heavy and warm. It gave McCoy a new and welcome peacefulness, a delicious sense of recovered security. If they hadn't been in a private ward, Jim wouldn't -- couldn't -- have done this, but it warmed McCoy that Jim would even have thought of it, had known how much that simple, innocent act of human intimacy would mean to McCoy, how it would comfort him.

Another image, an impression of warmth, nagged at McCoy's memory, and he remembered the frantic embrace in which he had been carried, sick and dizzy with pain, out of the murderous tenacity of the sonics. Though the memory was muddled, there had been more than dispassionate concern in that embrace, he would swear to it.

Spock returned and busied himself lowering the lights to a yet more comfortable glow.

What on earth was he doing in my quarters in the first place?

The Vulcan wandered back to McCoy's side.

"Is there anything else I can do for you, Doctor? I must return to my watch shortly, but if I can be of assistance?"

"Tell me why," McCoy said softly, daring to look up into the dark eyes.

Spock seemed confused.

"You were endangered," he said. "I heard the abnormal ultrasonics. It was my duty to render you aid." The voice was fully Vulcan, fully emotionless, but something fled behind the eyes, a hesitant something that dreaded discovery.

No, I won't press it. But I do want to know one more thing.

"I meant," McCoy rasped with difficulty, "why were you in my quarters?"

It couldn't have been that he was by chance, passing by. Spock's quarters were in the other direction from the turbolifts.

He'd come there deliberately.

The timid something behind his eyes cowered, and for a moment McCoy regretted having pressed the Vulcan even that far, but then resolution steadied there, and Spock answered calmly, though he shifted his gaze. McCoy followed the gaze to its focus. It rested on his own and Kirk's joined hands.

"I was. . . concerned at your state of mind following Jim's recovery. I noted your unusual silence, the ill humour with which you addressed Ms. Quartell and Ms. Chapel, and that you had left an opened bottle of brandy on your desk in your office."

"You were concerned?" McCoy mouthed.

"We have experienced difficulties in. . . appreciating. . . each other's differences and sililarities before. However," he added, and his voice dropped to a hoarse whisper, "I wish to learn from thee."

McCoy's startled eyes locked with Spock's. With an unaccustomed bewilderment, the doctor reached a hesitant hand toward the Vulcan. Hot dry fingers curled tightly around his.

His lips trembled, but he said it: "And I from thee."

Spock nodded once, put McCoy's hand down on the sheet gently, and strode out of the ward.

For a long time, McCoy gazed up at the dimmed lights, and concentrated on the lingering warmth of Spock's touch. McCoy's other hand was still enfolded in Jim's unconscious grasp, and he pondered. He was tired, already, and his thoughts were jumbling, but he kept tumbling over in his mind his image of Spock's gaze, so longing, riveted on Jim's and McCoy's own hands, and he thought with a deep, drowsy satisfaction:

Well, what d'ya know. It wasn't charity at all.

Friendship is, strictly speaking, reciprocal benevolence, which inclines each party to be solicitous for the welfare of the other as for his own. This equality of affection is created and preserved by a similarity of disposition and manners.

PLATO

N I V A R
THE TWO SIDES OF ONE

by Gerry Downes

To feel, to experience emotions--
fear, anger, hatred, love--
To have all these is to be--
human.

Yet they are not enough;
intuition, however inspired,
Is not the sole basis for decision.
There must be reason, information,
and yes, I admit it, LOGIC.

I have learned to value
this part of myself,
the part that I have seen in you.
I think the other sides of me
are also hidden inside you.

We are no longer two.
We are one.

Pragmatism, facts, correlate
hypotheses, and reason,
Clear and perfect, unblurred
by any fault.

They do not always lead me
to a correct conclusion--
I know that is illogical.
But neither is it logical
to ignore or deny, FEELING.

There is a flame that flickers,
with humor, warmth, affection--
I have let you see it sometimes.
It is reflected in your eyes--
mirroring what shines from mine.

Were we ever two?
We are one.





THE QUEST

by Beverly Volker

Begin
Searching
Then failing.
Start over
Seek out
And fail again
Begin once more.
For what do you search?
Myself.
Where do you look?
In the faces of others.
How will you know when you have found
that which you seek?
By a word
A touch
A look
By another face
Seeking
Searching
Across the vast time and space
we come together
whole and complete
How shall you call this other?
I shall call him friend.

ODE TO A FRIEND

by Joanne Bennett

To be a friend
Without words . . .
To help me in my needs
I turn to you
You understand
You show me by your deeds.

Across the voids, I feel your touch
Your mind reaches out to me
Flesh does not touch flesh
But we are together.

What would you have me do?
I cannot show emotion
I feel so alone
Yet you understand
You are there
With no word spoken
We are one.





BY

NANCY KIPPAX

Kirk flicked open his communicator. "Enterprise, Kirk here - come in." The only reply he received was static. He shot a look at the impenetrable face of his First Officer. Closing the device, he frowned. "They must have had to leave orbit, Spock. I guess we're stuck here for a while."

"It would seem so, Captain. Shall I continue the investigation?"

"Yes, go ahead, but don't go too far off. We don't know when that storm's going to hit."

"Understood." Spock left his side and made his way through the grove.

There were some planets, Jim thought, that struck you right off as being bad. You beamed down and automatically got a funny feeling in the pit of your stomach. This world they were on now, with its yellow skies and black grass and trees, was without a doubt, one of those places. Add to that the fact that the passenger they were supposed to pick up never showed up, and a totally unexpected storm in the atmosphere had forced their ship away, and you came up with a pretty negative picture.

A sudden booming sound sent his eyes upward. Thunder? Could the storm be entering that fast? He wondered what rain was like in this place, but there was no time for speculation as a sudden torrential downpour began. Kirk moved quickly in the direction Spock had headed. They must seek shelter fast.

The Captain had gone only a short way before he heard Spock calling to him. Then there was a sound, a thump, followed by a strangled cry. The rain was so heavy and the skies so black, he couldn't see two feet in front of him. A wind had come up, driving the water against his skin like bullets, and Jim raised his hand to shield his eyes against the force of the gale.

Managing to get to his communicator, Kirk fumbled with the controls until he got a fix on Spock's life form, a few yards to the right. Using the device as a beacon, he closed the gap between them, alternately shouting Spock's name and wondering why he got no reply, that alarm bell in his head triggering a warning.

After what seemed like an eternity, he reached the spot where Spock was. He tried to penetrate the dark, sheeting

rain, but could see nothing. Then his toe caught on something and he stumbled, almost falling. Crouching down, he drew his face close to that which had tripped him. It was a tricorder strap and an icy chill, colder than the rain against his skin, ran up his spine. He groped around on all fours, his hands darting out in all directions, probing, seeking, until finally his fingers found what they sought.

Spock lay crumpled at the base of a cliff. With a groan of anguish, Kirk drew his own body closer, instinctively giving protection, sheilding Spock from the force of the storm, or against whatever or whoever had sent the Vulcan plumeting down the sheer slope headfirst. Spock was, he knew, too sure-footed and cautious to have stumbled.

Kirk realized they could not remain here, although the cliff afforded a slight surcease of the wind and rain. A little further off, he saw what seemed to be a niche, or shallow cave in the face of the cliff, but he couldn't be sure in this gloom. He started to rise, to investigate, but checked himself. If he left, he may not be able to find his way back, he realized. Nor could he leave Spock unprotected, for the past events had done little to inspire confidence in this place. Unmindful of the concern for his own safety, Kirk realized he must take Spock with him.

First he tried to pull the Vulcan up and walk, but the force of the wind was too strong, and the rain stung his unprotected eyes making sight impossible. He finally settled on a half crawl, dragging and pushing the unconcious body of his friend along, his nerves tensing in sustained anticipation; feeling so exposed here in the open.

Muscles straining, sheer determination kept him going, one inch at a time, until finally he realized they'd made it. With a last spurt of energy, he heaved Spock's body into the cave, then rolled in after him, too spent to do anything but lay still, panting from exertion.

The Captain lay there only long enough to catch his breath. It would be so easy, he thought, to just succumb and let his mind release the agony of tortured muscles. To just drift into oblivion....He shook his head to clear it and looked around him.

The cave only went back a few feet, just a hollowed out niche, really. It was still dark, still cold, but at least they were out of that wind and rain. He turned to Spock.

Fingers probed deftly, gently, as if the still figure could feel. Nothing seemed broken. The pulse was there, although Jim couldn't tell if it was normal for a Vulcan. He reached behind Spock's head, and his fingers came away sticky and wet, the light green clearly visable even in the dim light. Carefully turning him over, Jim examined the wound at the base of Spock's skull, cleaning away the blood and dirt as best he could.

A sense of uselessness filled him. Why was Spock so still and why didn't he regain conciousness? Something McCoy'd told him once sprung to mind...Something about Vulcans and their unique self-healing techniques. Was that what Spock was doing now or had the fall knocked his senses from him before he could set his mind to self-healing? 'I don't know!' Kirk swore.

In either case, there was little he could do right now for his friend. Arranging Spock as comfortably as he could, he sat down a few steps away with his back against the wall, and in a few moments he had slipped into the oblivion he had earlier fought against; a blessed curtain falling over his troubled mind.

A sound awakened him sometime later. He was instantly aware of his situation and his eyes darted to where Spock lay. The Vulcan was no longer still. His entire body shook, the tremors coming from deep within. His eyes were open, but unfocused and unseeing. Jim knelt beside him.

"It's all right, Spock. I'm here..." he calmed, touching his friend easily for assurance. The voice that answered him was quivering and hoarse.

"Cold....so cold....Where am I....How...Jim!...must find..." The mutterings became unintelligible and Kirk suspected he was speaking Vulcan. He was deep in delirium, and Jim didn't know why he wasn't using his Vulcan mental powers to help himself.

Spock was going into shock, and at least that Jim understood. Glancing around, he found a boulder and he used that to elevate Spock's feet, grimly hoping that his first-aid measures were applicable to the alien physiology. He sought in vain for something to keep him warm, but there was nothing he could use. Remembering his phaser, he set it on heat, but for some reason the device failed to function.

Spock's trembling had increased, and his arms thrashed out wildly in his delirium. Kneeling again, Jim grabbed his arms and began chaffing him, working quickly to get warmth into the quivering limbs. He worked over his entire body, taking satisfaction as the tremors abated and Spock seemed more at peace.

As the Vulcan lapsed into total unconciousness again, Kirk found his own strength ebbing. But this time he was taking no chances. Stretching out full length beside his friend, he drew the still trembling body into his arms, pressing his own warmth against Spock.

"Hang on, Spock...take it easy," he crooned, more he knew for his own benefit than Spock's. At last, exhausted, he slept.

When conciousness finally returned to him again, Kirk awoke with a start and blinked. Around him, daylight streamed



into the little cave and the silence was soothing. He suddenly saw Spock, sitting with his back against the wall of the cave, regarding him curiously. Unable to disguise the delight he felt at seeing his First Officer concious and apparently well again, Kirk smiled broadly.

"Well, Mr. Spock, you're looking better now." Spock appeared confused.

"Better, Jim? What happened? I seem to be having some difficulty remembering..." He trailed off, and Kirk eyed him sharply.

"You took a fall in that storm, Spock. You hurt your head; perhaps that explains your temporary confusion," he explained, his tone soothing. The Vulcan nodded slowly.

"That seems likely. There is much which bewilders me," he admitted reluctantly. Kirk forced a look of reassurance to mask his own worry.

"Yes, I'm sure," he placated. "Anyway, now that the storm is over, I think we'd better get in touch with the ship and get out of here." He got up and moved outside the cave.

An attempt at communication was useless. Kirk bit his lip in annoyance. "They're still out of range," he swore, cursing the luck that put them in this predicament.

It had started off routinely enough, but then, didn't they all, he thought grimly. The Federation had a research scientist here on a grant, an archeologist, Dr. Lee Chin. The doctor had sent out a request to be picked up and transported back to civilization, even though there was still three months until the grant ran out. Since the Enterprise was the nearest vessel, would they... Kirk had sworn and interrupted their patrol to go play taxi.

However, when they arrived and tried to contact Dr. Chin, they received no response. Spock warned that a massive storm in the area may be interfering with communications. Ordering Scotty to get the ship out of range once the storm entered the area, the Captain beamed down with Mr. Spock to the co-ordinates Dr. Chin had given Starfleet.

Now, there was still no sign of Lee Chin, and the Captain and his injured First Officer were marooned here until the Enterprise could return. Angry, Kirk nudged a stone on the path with the toe of his boot. To his astonishment, the stone rose above his head, spun a moment, then flew at his shoulder with such force it knocked him sideways.

Clutching his throbbing arm, he turned to Spock in surprise.

"Did you see that?" he asked, seeking confirmation that his senses were not betraying him. The Vulcan nodded slowly, a frown on the placid features.

"Most unusual, Captain," he commented in confusion.

Kirk looked at him sharply, then knelt down by the erstwhile stone, now lying unobtrusively at his feet. "Take a reading, Spock," he urged gently.

Spock appeared to mentally shake himself awake, and stooping, ran the tricorder over the object. Kirk waited impatiently, as Spock slowly analysed his findings. Spock, who usually gave clipped and precise computations, said at long last, "It appears to be just an ordinary stone, Jim."

Kirk helped the Vulcan to his feet. Taking Spock's arm, they rose together. The stone had upset him, but much more unsettling was Spock's strange behavior. Realizing that something was very wrong with Spock, he led his First Officer wordlessly down the path to the beam-down point.

As they approached, Kirk was startled to see a slim young woman awaiting them. She turned to face them and he was struck by her Afro-Asian beauty. Dark skin, delicate Asian features and a statuesque carriage hinted boldly at a unique blend of parentage.

Her long, jet black hair was piled loosely atop her head, and the servicable scientist's coveralls could not disguise the classic lines of her. Jim greeted her warmly.

"I'm Captain James T. Kirk of the Starship Enterprise. This is my Science Officer, Cmdr. Spock." She seemed relieved to see them.

"Captain -- Commander -- I'm so glad to meet you. I'm sorry I wasn't here when you arrived, but my equipment predicted the storm, and quite frankly, I've learned not to leave my shelter under any circumstances during such a time." A faint note of hysteria had crept into her voice.

"Then you are Dr. Lee Chin?" Kirk asked in surprise. Somehow, this was not how he'd pictured their potential passenger.

Laughter bubbled up in her at the expression on his face, but she surpressed it. "That's right. I'm sorry. Can we get going, Captain? I'm really rather anxious to leave this place."

Kirk reflected grimly that he could understand her haste if she sensed the same foreboding he felt. "I'm afraid that's impossible, Doctor," he replied with proper regret. "Our ship has moved out of transporter range to avoid the storm. We'll just have to wait." He saw her shudder, but she recovered and flashed him a smile.

"It's all right. May I offer you some hospitality while we're waiting? My shelter is just around that bend," she said, indicating the direction opposite the way they'd approached.

As they followed her, Spock fell a few paces behind. Kirk halted, allowing the Vulcan to catch up. He studied him surreptitiously. Spock's gait was wrong; he seemed oddly off balance. When he was but a few steps away, the Vulcan suddenly stumbled and would have fallen had not Kirk been there to catch him.

"What is it, Spock? What's wrong?" Jim asked softly. Spock's fingers on his sleeve were twitching spasmodically.

"I...do not know," Spock panted, wonder in his tone. "I seem to be having difficulty..."

Dr. Chin had retraced her steps to them. "What happened?" she asked in concern. Kirk let go of Spock, who had recovered sufficiently to go on.

"My friend injured his head in a fall during the storm," he explained to her. Affirming that they were ready to continue, she led them the rest of the way without incident.

The shelter she referred to was one of the plastic, prefabricated models available from Space Central. It was roomy, comfortable, and had all the up to date features. But after living here for nine months, Kirk observed that Dr. Chin had stamped very little of her personality upon the living quarters. They were clean, neat, and except for some strange looking artifacts, oddly uncluttered.



As the woman set about setting out food for them, Spock, looking to Kirk more like his own self, was absently fingering and studying the strangely scientific picture tablet which had been painstakingly pieced together on a large dias at the side of the room.

Tearing his thoughts from his problems, Kirk stood contemplating the lovely Dr. Chin. Irrationally, he wanted to ask, 'What's a nice girl like you doing in a place like this' but stiffling the urge, he said instead, "What made you come to Maralanta, Doctor?"

She smiled at him disarmingly. "Call me Lee, Captain.

"I received a grant from the Federation to follow up my theories that Maralanta was the ancient home of a once great civilization," she explained.

Spock stepped over to join in the discussion. "The articles you have uncovered are strangely reminiscent, Dr. Chin, of an ancient Earth race, known as the Mayans." Kirk looked startled, but Lee eyed Spock in affirmation.

"Yes. The early Earth Mayans were, I believe, only one offshoot of the Maralantans within our galaxy. You'll find traces of their culture on half a dozen worlds. And they all tie in. They can all be traced back to Maralanta!" she said rapidly, warming to her subject.

The Captain sat at the small table, his eyes on her delicate fingers as she went on with her tasks. "I didn't think much had been learned about the Mayans," he commented. "Most of their culture was lost, wasn't it?"

"Yes - and no," she replied thoughtfully. "Much of their technology was lost, but enough was uncovered to indicate the scope of their powers."

Spock took a seat at Kirk's right. "The earliest records indicate that the Mayans were on Earth at an estimated 40,000 years ago, Doctor. That means the people of Maralanta were advanced to the level of space flight ---"

"Yes!" she exclaimed. "And Maralanta itself has been dead for at least 30,000 years!"

Kirk thought about that one as he filled his plate with the reconstituted food she'd prepared. "What happened here, Lee? Why did they die out?"

"I haven't been able to determine that," she answered in regret. "I've only begun to scratch the surface here. Why, there are tools, symbols, which in my opinion are superior to anything we have now! And, interestingly enough, from everything I've seen, they did it all with sheer mental capacity." At his blank look, she added, "That is, Captain, they never discovered the computer. Their own brains were the computers."

Kirk looked at Spock in wry amusement to catch the Vulcan's reaction to that one, and he suddenly froze. Spock was staring vacantly ahead, unconcernedly eating a leg of droxen! Knowing full well the Vulcan aversion to animal flesh, Jim felt chilled.

"Spock!" he ejected sharply; for some reason this action disturbed Kirk more than anything else he'd witnessed. The Vulcan merely stared back at him curiously.

"Yes, Jim?"

A sudden crash outside sent Lee Chin flying to the door. Kirk tore his eyes from Spock's expressionless face and went to see what was going on.

One of the huge black trees had been uprooted, and lay on its side outside the shelter door. It had missed crushing the place by mere inches. Lee stood clenching her hands into fists, and fighting back the tears she felt forming.

The Vulcan spoke from behind Kirk's shoulder. "Curious. There was no wind, nothing to make the tree topple at that moment." He walked outside, and crouched beside the roots, examining them closely.

Puzzled, Jim followed, and stood waiting for an explanation. Lee managed to pull herself together and joined them, folding her arms across her chest as though to ward off a chill. Spock turned to Kirk.

"The excessive moisture in the ground may have contributed to the uprooting, but it can only be a partial explanation, Captain."

Spock eyed Lee Chin curiously. "Are you certain this planet is uninhabited, Doctor?"

She choked back a sob. "I'm not certain of ANYTHING, anymore!"

Kirk eased her gently into a sitting position on the trunk of the big tree. "Explain," he requested, authority in his tone. He was getting tired of all these mysteries.

His voice forced calmness back into her. Taking a deep breath, she said tenetively, "Everything was fine until about two months ago. Then....things...began to happen. Like the tree. All the time. Weird, unexplainable things. I really feared I was going mad...that my mind was inventing the incidents. That's when I called Starfleet. But lately, I get the impression that someone or something is trying to kill me! I just want to get away from this crazy place!" she raged.

"What happened two months ago?" Spock asked her, rising to stand beside Kirk. "Did anything unusual precipitate the onslaught of the incidents?"

She shook her head slowly, thinking back, a veiled look in her eyes. "No, just my excavations, but I've been digging in there for nine months," she denied.

"Could you show us the site you've been working on?" Spock requested. Kirk reacted. Unsure of how much damage Spock had incurred in that fall, and considering his strange behavior, he didn't want him overtaxing himself. But the Captain knew better than to put it that way.

"Spock, why don't you stay here and try to contact the ship? I'll go investigate the site with Dr. Chin." The Vulcan raised one eyebrow.

"Captain, I am the Science Officer. I am the most qualified, and I would appreciate a chance to see for myself."

Lee Chin broke in nervously. "Can't we just stay here and try to raise your ship? I really don't want to go back there again!"

Kirk grabbed at the out. "All right. Let's go into the shelter. The Enterprise should be here shortly." He wasn't really interested in what had been happening here. His job was simply to transport the doctor back to civilization. And with Spock's injury, he didn't want to tarry any longer than necessary.

Thwarted, Spock followed them inside.

Kirk and Lee spent the next few hours engaged in idle conversation, trying at regular intervals to make contact with the ship. Spock spent all of his time examining the picture tablet he had been fingering earlier.

After the latest abortive attempt at hailing the Enterprise, concern began to gnaw at Kirk. While Lee was out of earshot, he walked over to Spock.

"I'm getting worried. The ship should have been back before now." Spock's breathing was hard and labored, he noticed suddenly.

"Yes, Captain. I think it logical to assume something has happened," he said with effort.

Startled at Spock's condition, Kirk mentally kicked himself. He'd been sitting just a few feet away, and the Vulcan had controlled himself so well Jim hadn't suspected anything was wrong!

Sensing the Captain's concern, Spock tried to stand up and move away, but his knees betrayed him. Clutching at Kirk for support, he allowed himself to be half carried to the long, low sofa and forced gently into a reclining position.

As Lee reentered the area, Kirk barked at her, "Do you have any medical equipment?"

Sizing up the situation, her reply was succinct. "Ill get it."

Spock lay mutely staring at the ceiling in resignation. As Kirk fumbled in the medi-kit for something that could be of use, the Vulcan brushed aside Kirk's attempt.

"That is unnecessary, Captain," he objected, drawing a ragged breath. Ignoring him, Kirk ran a check with the simple, primary medi-scanner which was all Dr. Chin had available. It wasn't as complex nor accurate as McCoy's, but it would have to do.

Kirk swore to himself at the stroke of fate which had kept McCoy on the ship this time. The doctor was in his own sickbay, laid up with a mild case of stapholocitis. Nothing serious, but he was certainly in no shape to assume active duty. Besides, this had seemed so routine!

Spock held out his hand for the instrument. "May I, Captain?"

Jim watched as he readjusted the dials carefully, the quivering in his fingers making it slow work. Spock's eyebrow rose, the only indication he gave as he interpretted the readings.

"This confirms my suspicions, Captain. There has been massive damage to certain portions of the brain. Here --" he tapped his head, " -- and here."

Lee spoke from behind them. "In a human, that would not be cause for alarm," she said, her implication plain.

Kirk swallowed. "But for a Vulcan?"

"Jim," Spock said wearily, "the Vulcan body is much more dependent on the brain than your human one. What affects the brain must logically affect the body functions."

Kirk stood up in frustration. "All of which just means we've got to get back to the ship!" he declared angrily.

Spock concurred. "The sooner the better, Captain, if it were possible."

"Any thoughts, Spock?"

"One," the Vulcan admitted. "Perhaps the Enterprise has returned."

"You mean something's interfering with communications? Then why wouldn't they send down a search party -- "

"We can only speculate. Whatever is causing the communications malfunction may also be interfering with the transporter system."

"You have a theory?" Kirk asked, discerning his First Officer's intent.

"Yes, Captain, but I must warn you it is only theory. But I believe there is a force at work here which is disrupting this segment of space --- and I believe it was inadvertently unleashed by Dr. Chin."

She reacted visably. "It's pure superstition, Mr. Spock!" she objected. "As a scientist you should appreciate the symbolistic intent ---"

"Wait a minute!" Kirk held up his hand, cutting her off. "Clearly you two know something I should know."

Lee flushed under Spock's cool stare. After a brief hesitation, she said woodenly, "Mr. Spock is referring to the stone tablet I unearthed. It bears a warning."

"Go on," Kirk urged.

"The site of my excavations was a sacred place to the Maralantans. The tablet warns that any interference will conjur up evil forces in the land which will smote all the foreigners on their world. It prophesies death to all. Nothing in the temple must be tampered with. But I can't believe....."

"Did you remove anything from the area?" Kirk asked her.

"I brought a few articles back to study, yes, but you can't seriously believe...."

"Doctor," Spock injected, "the race you are dealing with, by your own admission, had powers far beyond the scope of our

present day knowledge. I hardly think they indulged in superstition."

She was silent, shaken by their accusations. What they postulated was so difficult for her to accept. It just seemed like so much mumbo-jumbo. Like all too many of her colleagues in the academic community, Dr. Chin found it hard to understand anything beyond the scope of the acceptable and explainable. The men of the Enterprise, on the other hand, had seen and known too much that was strange and unusual to take an ancient warning lightly.

"If we returned the items, left the temple as Dr. Chin found it --" Kirk began, directing his words to Spock.

Lee broke in quietly. "It did not work." Their eyes met hers in surprise. She added flatly, "I tried that when the manifestations began happening. I did not wish to overlook any possibility, however remote. As you can see, my actions made no difference."

Spock was thoughtful. "Doctor...the tablet advises of a second codex in the temple, one which shall 'point the way' is the literal translation."



She nodded. "Yes, but I never uncovered it. I know its approximate location, though. Do you think that may be the answer?"

"Let's go find out," Kirk said decisively. "Spock, are you well enough to accompany us? We're going to need your help decoding the thing when we find it."

"Affirmative, Captain. I can make it."

Together, the three headed for the site of Dr. Chin's excavations. As they approached the temple, the early warnings of another storm appeared. The skies turned black, and a forceful gale sent them scuttling quickly for the safety of the temple. Just as the first drops began to fall, they threw themselves into the huge, arched doorway, and began their descent into the maze of twists and turns as Lee guided them. Above, they could hear the rattle and crash of the storm.

If the Enterprise had returned, Kirk hoped grimly she'd had time to veer off again.

Dr. Chin led them into a large, simplistic area which she explained was the temple's antechamber. It had retained its man made beauty well over the centuries of disuse. The damp, metal walls were of an alloy unknown to their tricorder and were frescoed with intricate and eye-pleasing designs. In one corner was a structure, encrusted with shining gems, which resembled a font, into which water cascaded from an undiscovered source. She allowed them only a brief survey of the room, urging them onward.

"The temple itself is right through here," she pointed out.

As they moved to follow her, Spock suddenly collapsed on the floor. Thinking he had stumbled, Kirk moved to help him, but the Vulcan waved him off. Using his arms to manuever, Spock pushed himself into a sitting position, resting his back against the wall.

"Go on, Captain," he urged. "My legs have ceased to function. I cannot travel further."

Lee Chin stood apart from them, her eyes sorrowful. She saw the confusion and hesitation on Kirk's face.

"Captain...." she began, her voice beckoning.

There was nothing to be done for Spock. His primary goal was to investigate the matter of the second codex to enable them to get off this menacing planet, Kirk told himself firmly. Reluctantly, he followed her into the temple.

Here, the sweeping majesty was stunning. As Lee had said earlier, the powers of the Maralantans could only be guessed at. Kirk scrutinized the strange apparatus lining the one wall, while Lee went to the place of the second tablet.

"May I have your assistance, Captain Kirk?" she called.

Jim left his examinations and went to her, helping to lift the heavy stone tablet and brush away the dust of the centuries. From her bag, she extracted a bottle of clear fluid and began cleaning the object, bringing the characters out in sharp relief.

"Can you read it?" he asked impatiently. She shook her head.

"Not much. It appears to be what we suspected -- " She pointed to the top row " -- This translates into 'to set to rights' or 'make well' ... but there are too many strange symbols I have never seen before. I'm sorry."

"We need Spock's help," Kirk mumbled, turning to go after his First Officer. She put a restraining hand on his arm.

"Captain Kirk - Jim - I am the first to bow to Mr. Spock's superior capabilities. Why, he translated in 2 hours what it

took me 2 months to decode!" she explained. "But," her voice grew soft, "he can't help us now."

He halted and stared at her blankly. A feeling was growing in him, and he wasn't sure he wanted to hear any more. Something in her tone sent a shiver up his spine.

Keeping her voice low, she went on. "Hadn't you realized? He's dying, Captain." Her heart went out in pity at the look of pain and disbelief on his face.

"Dying? How?" Jim exploded. Spock's head had been injured in that fall - all right. He'd been experiencing some vertigo, some sensory distortion and temporary disorientation, but surely that wasn't a death sentance!

"Spock tried to explain it to you, Jim. I thought you understood. A Vulcan depends too greatly upon the brain for survival. When brain damage is incurred, the body fails. He has been controlling his metabolism admirably, but it has taken great resevoirs of strength from him."

He looked away, towards the antechamber where Spock lay alone.

"How long?" he asked tightly. She shrugged.

"Not very long, I'd assume. His legs have already ceased to function. That's just the beginning of shutdowns..." She broke off, unable to go into the specific details for him.

"Is there <u>nothing</u> we can do?" he pleaded.

"Ask him," she hedged, turning away. "But it doesn't look like any of us are going to get off this planet alive."

Kirk paused a moment to calm his emotions, then left the temple and returned to the cavernous antechamber.

Spock was seated on the ground where they'd left him, his back against the cold metal wall, his head cocked listlessly to one side. As Kirk approached him, he looked up, putting an enormous effort into the action.

Jim kneeled next to him, settling down on his haunches until he was at eye level with the Vulcan.

"Did you find the codex, Captain?" Spock asked.

Eyeing him carefully, Kirk told him of their findings. "Dr. Chin can't decode it," he finished, his voice resigned. "Spock...she told me you were....dying."

"True, Captain. I regret I am unable to assist in the translation."

"Is there anything I can do to help you?" Jim asked, all thoughts of the codex far from his mind, his immediate frustration and concern being directed on the condition of his dying friend.

A flicker crossed Spock's face, so slight as to be imperceptable to most others, but Jim, so finely attuned to his First Officer's moods, caught it and seized upon it.

"What is it, Spock?" he demanded. "There's something - something you're not telling me." Spock met his eyes with a guarded look.

The Vulcan knew he was vulnerable, weakening, and he was all too aware of his Captain's determination once he was set upon something. He measured his words as he answered.

"There is an act...that can be performed," he began. "The D'Rhushev'L: the lending of strength." He groped for the proper English interpretation. "An energy transfer, Captain. The measure is radical, and the result is only temporary. One touches the other's mind and draws strength from the other."

"Tell me what to do," Jim answered quickly. Spock shook his head.

"It has never been done with a human," he said quietly. "Another Vulcan could perform it with little risk, but I have no way of knowing how you would be affected. It would be extremely dangerous."

"Dangerous? How? Explain." Spock lowered his eyes, but Jim went on. "Spock, you must tell me - if there's a chance..."

Spock suddenly gripped Kirk's wrist with a strength the Captain didn't know he still possessed. His words penetrated like a knife.

"In my present condition, I could not exercise proper control. Your mind may not be able to withstand the onslaught. I...can't remember..." He paused, his tortured brain trying to recall the other times he'd been in contact with the Captain's mind, trying to measure the capacity of Jim's strength. He was not suicidal, he had no wish to die, but he could not risk his friend.

"At best, it would be extremely painful for you," he finished lamely.

"And at worst?" Kirk had to ask.

"It could destroy your mind," Spock told him flatly. He released his grip and slumped back against the wall, spent.

A hushed silence fell over the huge antechamber, and only the noise of the storm on the planet above them beat on their ears. Time seemingly stood still for the two men, locked into this moment together, forging a mutual bond of pain.

Kirk felt a spine chilling terror at the possibility Spock predicted for him - Insanity! But one look at the suffering Vulcan made his decision final.

"Spock," he began, "we'll have to try it."

"No!" Spock answered shortly. "I cannot allow... cannot risk...."

"YOU cannot?" Jim took him by the shoulders and spoke gently. "Spock...in all the years I've known you, you've never knowingly asked anything of me for yourself...never let me...help you." His voice cracked on unshed tears. "You call me friend, you would willingly, have in fact, risked your life and sanity for me. And yet you would deny me the right to do the same for you. Don't you see, that's what friendship's all about - a willingness to give and receive. Without that, it's one sided. It is my right, as your friend, to help you, and your duty to let me."

Spock looked at him incredulously. He had never before considered this; there was still so much he had to learn about human relationships. Jim was a good teacher, and Spock could acknowledge that he'd been right in the past. Kirk, aware that he was reaching the Vulcan, continued.

"Put yourself in my place, Spock. Wouldn't you insist on taking the chance if the situation were reversed? Do you think I can stand by and do nothing - just watch you die - knowing there was a possibility I could have saved you and didn't? Would you doom me to live with that?"

Spock felt his resistance beginning to waver. "But it is not your choice..." he proffered.

"It is my choice!" Kirk cut him off, gripping his shoulders tighter as he felt a rising panic at the Vulcan's stubbornness. "Dammit, Spock -- if you must justify it to yourself, try this for logic: If you die, we all die. Dr. Chin can't translate the codex. Without your knowledge, we'll never get off this planet alive. So what purpose would your death serve then?"

Spock felt the last of his determination slip away. Jim's own use of his infallable logic had rendered him at last vulnerable. This man, who knew how and where to reach him. He nodded in resignation and with a visable effort, drew himself up into a sitting position. Kirk reached out a hand to steady him and their eyes locked in understanding of what must come. The beads of perspiration stood out on Kirk's forehead, and trickled down his face to mingle with the undiscovered tears of emotion.

To say he was not afraid would be untrue. The prospects of what he faced were enough to frighten away most men. But

despite the lump in his chest, Kirk swallowed hard and steeled his mind against the fear. One look at Spock, and he forgot to be afraid.

The Vulcan was visably weakening; that tremendous physical strength of his slipping away quickly. Kirk leaned closer, his voice not much more than a whisper.

"What do I do?" he asked.

Spock positioned his hands in front of him, palms out, in the manner of a benediction. Kirk had seen him do this in preparation for the mind meld.

"Do nothing," he intoned, his voice low and uneven. Despite the good he knew he could accomplish, there was still that hint of reservation. Anxiety over causing Jim pain of any kind made his stomach tighten. "Keep your thoughts steady and as calm as possible," he instructed, bringing the fingers to Kirk's head; one hand in back, the other spanning the temples.

Kirk sat motionless, sensing the feathery contact as it began. Then, slowly, the throbbing began, growing into a demanding, insistant crescendo of pain, consuming his head as though someone were hacking at it with a knife.

A kaleidioscope of colors, lights, fireworks and noises spun behind Kirk's eyes. By sheer force he fought against oblivion, the dizziness and nausea threatening to engulf him. He struck out blindly for something to grab hold of and his hands found Spock's shoulders. Clinging tenaciously to this one piece of solidity, he bit his lip to keep from crying out. Just when he felt like he couldn't stand the pain another minute, the lights went out, the noises ceased, and blackness descended upon him.

Spock caught him as he fell. With a strangled cry, the sweat drenched Vulcan laid Jim carefully on the ground. He stood in one easy fluid movement and strode to the ceremonial alter. Dipping a towel in the font, he returned to his Captain.

He knelt, rubbing the cool wetness briskly over Kirk's face, not allowing a thought to enter his mind past the moment at hand. Not until Kirk opened blank, unseeing eyes did he consider the consequences. A lump of dread formed as he laid a hand gently on Kirk's shoulder.

"Jim...." he said, his eyes gauging, measuring, calculating. The Captain blinked, and focused with difficulty on the wavering face in front of him. His voice was thick, his speech slurred.

"It worked?" he querried. A pent up sigh of relief escaped Spock.

"It worked," he affirmed softly. Kirk attempted to sit



up, but Spock motioned him back. "Rest now," he instructed.

"I've got to get back to Dr. Chin..."

"I shall attend to that. You must allow your body to replenish its energy." Jim nodded.

"All right, but just for a few minutes..." He trailed off, sinking once again into the blackness.

Spock rose and stood quietly at the Captain's side for a moment, listening to the silence about him. The storm on the planet had ceased quite suddenly, and in the ensuing silence he sensed a peaceful stirring around him. He regarded Jim a moment longer, then turned and went into the temple.

Lee Chin looked up in surprise as he came up behind her.

"Mr. Spock! What are you -- "

"This is the codex, Doctor?" he asked, brushing aside her unfinished question; he was anxious to be about the business at hand.

"Yes," she said hesitantly. "But...you were dying!"

He eyed her tolerantly. "The Captain has strengthened me, but as the results are only temporary, I am in somewhat of a hurry to accomplish what I can with the tablet."

"Yes, of course," she agreed, settling down at his side for an explanation of what she'd decoded so far. His efficient, businesslike manner sharpened her own scientific thinking.

"We need the other tablet for comparison," he announced when she was through. "I am recording this one on the tricorder, enabling us to study it at length back at the shelter."

Kirk entered the temple area, walking a bit unsteadily in their direction. Spock moved quickly to his side.

"Captain?" he questioned, further words unnecessary.

Jim smiled weakly. "I"m all right, Spock. How's it going?"

"We were just about to continue the analysis back at the shelter," Spock explained. Kirk heard him out, and nodded his approval. Gathering up their belongings, they left the temple.

They never reached the shelter. On the path, Kirk's communicator suddenly dispensed its familiar beeping, and startled, the Captain whipped it out. The familiar, welcome voice of Mr. Scott brought a grin to Kirk's weary face.

"We were a wee bit worried about you, Captain," the Chief

Engineer crooned. "We were back right after the first storm, but there was such terrible interference in the atmosphere we couldna raise you, nor could we use the transporter. Then that second storm sent us out agin. But she's okay now, and we're ready to bring you aboard!"

With a joyful look at Spock, Kirk gave the order to beam up.

* * * * *

Kirk swung around in his command chair as the elevator doors swished open to admit Spock, followed closely by Dr. McCoy. The Captain grinned at his First Officer.

"Mr. Spock. It's good to see you looking well again."

"Thank you, Captain. I am indeed quite recovered and prepared to resume my duties." Spock crossed to his station, as McCoy came to stand beside Kirk.

"How is he, Bones?"

"He's fine, Jim," McCoy told him. "It's a good thing you were able to perform that....uh...D'Rhushev'L," he pronounced with difficulty, "or whatever it was called. It saved his life."

Kirk had reported to the doctor on what he and Spock had done in the energy transfer. He had not mentioned, however, the risk to his own sanity that had been involved, although he suspected McCoy perceived something out of the ordinary had been involved.

The doors opened again, and Dr. Lee Chin entered. She approached the command chair.

"Captain Kirk - I thought you and Mr. Spock might like to know. With the help of your computers, I've finally managed to translate the second codex."

Spock stepped down into the well beside them. "Indeed, Doctor? And what did you learn?"

Lee looked at him with smug satisfaction. "Nothing that made any more sense than the other one I found, Mr. Spock."

Kirk asked, "What did the tablet say, Lee?"

"It proclaimed, Captain, that the evil forces which were supposedly released by the disturbance to the temple could be subdued only by an act of pure, unselfish love."

Spock raised an eyebrow. "Fascinating," he commented, as he returned to his station. Kirk looked after him for a

long moment, then smiling, he turned back to Dr. Chin.

"That's quite a theory," he remarked.

"Theory," she agreed, "and that's all it is. A good dose of ancient superstition. Someday we will be able to prove the scientific reason behind the abating of the forces, but for right now we can at least know that there was no 'act of unselfish love' that caused it."

McCoy looked at the Captain, then at Spock, and turning to Lee, he asked quietly, "Can we, Doctor?"

Kirk peered over their heads at the navigational console.

"Mr. Sulu, steady as she goes...Warp Factor 3."

VISION FROM ORION

by Beverly Volker

If you hurt and cannot show it
For emotions you must hide,
Still, someway, somehow I'll know it
Then I'll be there at your side.

If your trials sometime seem endless
Being torn in two each day,
Just remember you're not friendless
And together there's a way.
LET ME HELP!

* * *

If command's a lonely dwelling
If you're overwhelmed with care,
When your duties seem compelling,
Just remember, I can share.

If decisions seem to taunt you
And the answer's hard to find
There's no need to let it haunt you,
I can touch you with my mind.
LET ME HELP!

* * *

If you need, then you'll receive it.
Without asking, you'll be heard.
And my friend, you just believe it
There's no secret - Love's the word.
LET ME HELP!

WITHOUT THE GARDENER'S CRAFT

BY KATHLEEN PENLAND

AUTHOR'S NOTE: This vignette is a spin-off from Connie Faddis' "The Gardener's Craft", in which Captain Kirk loses his legs to amputation. In Connie's story, new legs are cloned for him by "the gardeners" and we assume they were as efficient and limber as his own. But one word in the body of the story--prosthetics--triggered thoughts of the fearful possibility of Captain Kirk with artificial limbs, the tremendous adjustment period associated with such a trauma, and this scene materialized nearly intact onto paper. For those bionics fans, a note of explanation: Although bionics or something similar will undoubtedly be in common medical use by the 22nd Century, a starship's sickbay is not equipped to handle such surgery, nor is it likely that starship medical officers are trained in its specialized therapy. Hence the use of the plastic limbs here. They would serve until the Enterprise reached more sophisticated medical facilities and Kirk could have his crude, temporary limbs replaced with bionics.

"The Gardener's Craft" by Connie Faddis first appeared in Candy Silver's fanzine, Energize!

An anguished "No-o-o-o!" cut through the still half-light of the ship's corridors, its lonely echo trapped within the door-lined jaws of Deck 5. Returning from the bridge, Spock slowed to a careful walk, then halted outside the Captain's quarters.

Silence.

Then the unmistakable din of breakables and furniture crashing to the floor. Spock didn't wait for an acknowledgement of his buzz at Kirk's door. As he stepped into Kirk's room, his eyes hadn't adjusted to the tense darkness before the doors snapped shut behind him.

"Captain, are you all right?" he asked with quiet urgency. No answer. Sliding his fingers down the wall to the rheostat, Spock turned up just enough light to discern the room's details.

"Jim!" His voice betraying his concern, Spock looked quickly around the jumbled room searching out his Captain's form among the clutter.

Kirk lay sprawled headlong in the center of the room, the legs unnaturally straight and rigid, his face buried in the crook of one arm. Spock approached and kneeling beside the prone form, laid a

hand on Kirk's shoulder. Spock could feel the muscles contract to a rock hardness as the Captain fought to muffle the sob that escaped his laboring chest.

Reaching over to grasp both of Kirk's shoulders, Spock turned the Captain gently on his back, then with the ease of compassionate concern, lifted his friend's exhausted body into his arms. Spock could feel the cold rigidity of the artificial limbs through the cloth of Jim's trousers and once again his heart was wrung with sorrow and pity.

Kirk clung to his friend's solid strength like a dying man. The burning pain in what was left of his own legs was nothing compared to the despair, the emptiness and the fear that was consuming his very will to live.

Bones had told him it would take time and monumental patience to learn to use his new legs. And the Captain had accepted that. It had been nine weeks since the accident, but Kirk was chafing under the lack of mobility and his anticipation of returning to duty. He had driven himself mercilessly, ignoring the agony of newly-healed flesh on plastic, resting only when McCoy would finally have to confine him to quarters under mild sedation.

But tonight, in the close darkness of his room, his impatience and fear had mounted to a panic that was choking him. He had to get back on his feet, had to regain his agility to turn at the sound of a Red Alert, had to relearn stepping up into his Command chair.

He had thrown back the cover from his legs and used his hands to plant each foot squarely on the floor. Ignoring the walkaids leaning against the wall, he pulled to his feet using the back of a chair clost to the bed. He would stride purposefully over to his small desk, pretending it was the table in the Briefing Room where his senior officers were waiting for his decisions and commands.

Still leaning heavily on the chair, Kirk slowly straightened, making his legs take his full weight. He gasped as his thigh bones ground into the deceptive padding of the new legs. Releasing the chair, he stood, imperfectly balanced, feet not moving, trying to relieve the weight off first one leg then the other. Using all his

combined strength, he tried a first shaky step. Sweating with the effort, his slippered foot only shuffled a mere two or three inches. But his balance was too precarious and he grabbed the cool firmness of the chair's back. He was trembling with pain and exhaustion and the distance from where he stood to his desk seemed even greater than before. He could envision his officers sitting there, still waiting for him. But even as he stood, swaying on his feet, one of them muttered to the others and stood up. To Kirk's horror, they all rose and slowly filed out of the room; he caught snatches of conversation:

"...can't wait..."

"...endanger the ship..."

"...no longer functional..."

Kirk flagged and weakened under the verbal onslaught. His body, a mass of defiant anguish, cried out loud to their deaf ears, "No!" And throwing himself forward, he determined to catch up and show them they were wrong. But between the emotional panic and the physical near-collapse, his legs refused him, and he went crashing heavily to the floor. The chair he'd used tipped crazily and then toppled over into the wall, knocking the walkaids noisily downward. Even as he lay there, completely spent, he could see in his mind's eye the last of his officers retreating and even the Enterprise herself warping out of his reach and out of his life.

****

Spock turned and laid his Captain gently on the bed. Even as he bent down, Kirk didn't release his grip on Spock's arms and Spock had to peel his friend's fingers from the soft nap of his shirt, holding the clammy hands in his own for a brief moment before laying them at Kirk's side. Then Spock bent down and laid his hands on each of Kirk's thighs where living flesh joined the non-living as if to share his Captain's pain and to heal.

Even as Spock's gentle hands sought to relieve the ache in his legs, Kirk's struggle to calm his frantic mind, to still the turbulence of emotion, made his whole body tremble with the effort at control. Spock lifted his hands and straightening up, gazed directly into his Captain's eyes. His dark, Vulcan eyes mirrored Kirk's own

inner turmoil, and he silently wished his friend surcease. His slender fingers reached up and touched Kirk's temple lightly, but to his surprise, Kirk shied away from the contact, his voice an agonized whisper.

"Spock, I'm sorry, but I don't want you to---"

"Share the longest and hardest battle of all?" Spock interrupted softly. He sat down on the bed next to his Captain, his eyes never leaving Kirk's even though the naked vulnerability in them was almost more than he could bear. "Jim, how many times have we seen each other through what we both thought our last moments of life, each trusting the very essence of that life to the other's safekeeping?" His voice was deep, soft, almost hypnotic. Kirk closed his eyes, afraid to hear more, yet desperately hanging onto every word.

"Do not counsel yourself despair. While your injuries are more severe than any man should have to endure, you have the resources and courage to rebuild what has been lost." He paused, seeing the emotional struggle in his Captain's face.

"As in past battles, any weapon I posess is at your command, as well as ready for your protection and preservation."

And this time, when he touched Kirk's face, he met no resistance. His hand smoothed over the distressed forehead as if sealing a covenant between them, coming to rest once again beside the closed eyes. A single tear slipped out from the corner of Kirk's eye, wetting the touching fingertips in the age-old baptism of pain and purification.

Moved to a tender solicitude for a man who had given so unselfishly of himself whenever he was asked--and especially when he wasn't asked, recalling a desperate flight to Vulcan--Spock did something he never thought he would do to any man as long as he lived. Leaning over his Captain's quieted body, he pressed his lips against the still-damp forehead as if in salute to a son's battle well done. His fingers still at Kirk's temple, he quoted softly, his voice a gentle caress in the still room:

"So long as we love we serve
So long as we are loved by others...we are indispensable.
And no man is useless while he has a friend."

He paused, withdrawing his hands, satisfied that Kirk was at

last asleep. Rising slowly, he pulled the bed's covers over the sleeping man.

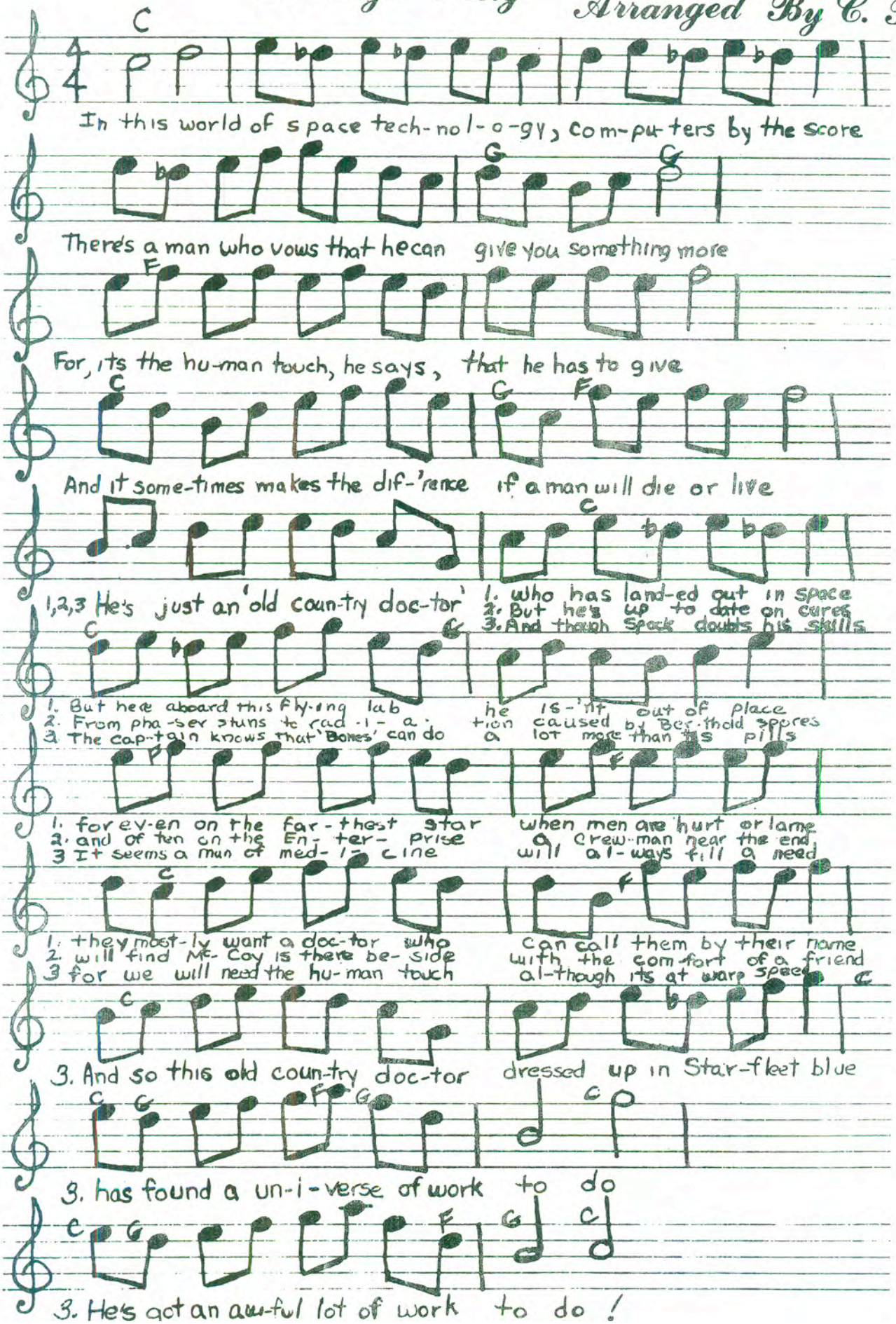
"Goodnight, my Captain."

And turning, he slipped through the whisper of the room's door.



McCoy's Song

By B. Volker
Arranged By C. Tuttle



B A L L A D

by Signe Landon

(to the tune of: "Puff, the Magic Dragon")

CHORUS:

Spock, the half-breed Vulcan, lived in the skies,
And ran computers logically on a ship called "Enterprise".
James T. Kirk, his Captain, loved that Vulcan, Spock.
Their silent bond was stronger than the force which shapes a rock.

Together they would travel through the star-flung depths of space;
As warriors or diplomats they'd meet each newfound race.
In danger their affection was proved time and again -
From loyalty a friendship grew between two lonely men.

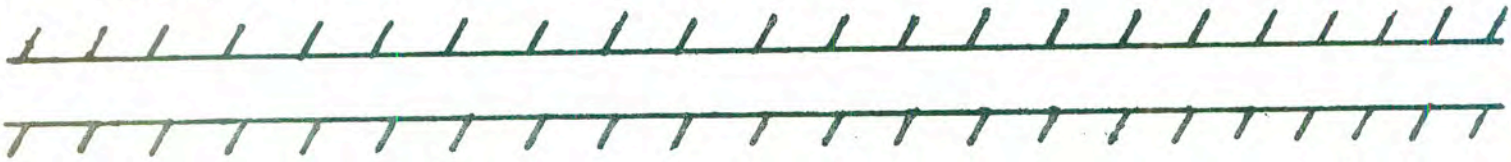
CHORUS

On Omicron and Vulcan, from Janus home to Sol,
With a touch too deep for words, each knew the other's soul
Until, through all their wand'rings, in joy or bitterest strife,
Each knew he had a friend for whom he'd gladly give his life.

CHORUS

Vulcans aren't immortal, but less by far are men.
The time had come when Spock must keep a deathwatch on his friend.
As Jim's life-force ebbed faster, Spock recalled the life they'd known..
One final meld - a Bonded death - and ne'er again alone.

CHORUS



What is friendship? One soul in two bodies.

ARISTOTLE



There is no need for an outpouring of words to explain oneself to a friend. Friends understand each other's thoughts even before they are spoken.

S. P. SCHUTZ

DENEVAN ORBIT

BY JOHANNA CANTOR *

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following story, a follow up to Operation: Annihilate! is an amalgam of what the author felt were the best points in the radically different versions presented on the air and by James Blish in the Star Trek books. The opening scenes are strictly from Blish, whereas Jim's nephew, Peter, appeared on the aired version. We agree that this method makes a much more effective story and we think you will, too.

"Now," McCoy said firmly, "we take you below and extract that thing from you. I will tolerate no further arguments on that score."

"No further arguments are necessary," Spock said. "Its purpose is served." He swayed, and murmered a thank you to the guards, whose grip had changed from constraint to support.

"Lay him flat," McCoy ordered. "I'll get a stretcher up here."

"No!" Spock was revolted. "I can walk."

McCoy, already talking to Sickbay, shook his head, but Kirk moved to Spock's side. "Let him walk, Bones. He's earned it." Carefully he took his First Officer from the guards and supported him as they moved slowly off the bridge, followed by the fuming doctor.

"Sickbay." The slight motion of the turbolift disturbed Spock's fragile equilibrium, and he put a hand on McCoy's shoulder to steady himself. A hand came up to grip his. He was safe.

McCoy grabbed the Vulcan as he slumped. "I knew it!" he snapped, but the doors were opening.

"Quick, Bones. Let's extract that thing before he comes to." The electromagnets were already going. A few minutes later, both men relaxed, drinking in the sight of the peaceful face. "Thank God," Kirk breathed.

* With the help of Matt Perry

He kept watching Spock's face as he called Uhura from an invalid tray intercom and had her call Commodore Anhalt. The orders were not unexpected: return to Deneva and report. He called Chapel over. "Christine, I want you to assume charge of forming the entire crew into medical teams and organizing the necessary briefings, in case we find a substantial number of survivors."

"Acknowledged," she said crisply. Kirk grinned; you couldn't beat competence. He walked over to Isolation. Peter's face was turned away; all he could see through the panel was that impossibly red hair. Sam. Aurelan. He hadn't really had time to realize. Almost instinctively, he returned to Spock.

McCoy was hooking up extra indicators, but Spock's face was still relaxed. "Aren't you going to put him in Isolation?"

"Not indicated. He's immune to most--"

Spock's eyelids fluttered. Both men were by his side instantly. His eyes opened, and he looked at them wonderingly. "It's gone," he whispered. He began to tremble, and covered his face with his hands.

"Let it come, Spock," McCoy said sympathetically.

"No!" The Vulcan stiffened, fighting.

"Bones, darken this area." The doctor obeyed swiftly, and Kirk put his hands on Spock's shoulders. "It's all right. No one can see you." He breathed deeply, trying to communicate calm. Slowly, he felt the struggle ease. Finally the hands came down.

"Thank you." Kirk smiled into the tired eyes. "Not just for now, Jim. Before. I felt your support. You, and the doctor--everyone. I thought I must be hallucinating at first, but--"

"No. I'm glad we got through. It's over now. Rest."

The eyes closed. Soon Spock was asleep.

"Jim, you get some rest too."

"Right."

The intercom woke Kirk. "Entering orbit, Captain."

"Recon party to the transporter room. Any radio contact?"

"None, sir."

That was bad. Kirk's depression deepened, but he dressed quickly. He's stop by Sickbay. Just a look at Spock and Peter would relieve the aching emptiness.



Sickbay was silent. He crossed to Spock's cubicle, and panic shot through him.

"Bones!" He stopped himself, trying to get his grip. He hadn't meant to yell. But the bed was empty. Surely--

"It's okay, Jim." McCoy popped out of Isolation like a jack in the box. "He's all right."

Kirk took a deep breath. "Did you put him in Isolation after all?"

"Not exactly. Come on in, but be quiet."

Kirk tiptoed into Isolation, then stopped in astonishment. Peter lay asleep in bed. Spock, also asleep, was seated on the floor next to him, one hand on the boy's shoulder.

"MacDonald came in with a bad gash," McCoy whispered. "Everyone else is getting ready to go planetside; I had to take care of him. Just as I got the plastiskin in I heard Peter cry out. By the time I could stop, they were like this."

Tears stung Kirk's eyes. But he had a job to do. "Take

care of them, Bones."

"You know I will."

McCoy sent Collins down with the recon party. In view of the shock of the destruction of the central mass, it seemed all too likely that the only personnel the Denevans now required were burial squads. Nevertheless, he made sure he was at the intercom when shipwide activated.

"All hands, this is the Captain. It's good news. An amazing number of the Denevan people are alive, and they're already planning rescue operations. But they're going to need a lot of help. Starfleet is rerouting the Kongo, but until she gets here, it's up to us. I am therefore implementing Plan B. Repeat. Plan Baker. All personnel going planetside report to the transporters as scheduled. Kirk out."

Plan B. The Enterprise would be a ghost ship, McCoy mused. A bridge crew, transporter crew, skeleton engineering crew, and one medical officer. Everything else on total automatic.

"Bones?" McCoy turned.



"They're much better, Jim. I put them together. They've been playing dominoes. I think Spock's teaching Peter probability theory."

"Wouldn't surprise me a bit," Kirk grinned. McCoy waved him toward the door.

He held out his hand as he approached Peter. He hadn't seen his nephew in over a year, and he seemed so much older. But he couldn't resist changing the handshake into a hard hug. Blindly, he held out his free hand to Spock. It was taken, and held firmly. "Peter," he began. "Your parents--"

"I know. Mr. Spock told me." The boy spoke sadly, but something in the calm tone told Kirk that Spock had also helped the boy accept what had happened. He felt a rush of gratitude.

"Are you all right here, Peter?"

"Yes, Uncle Jim."

"Good." Being called uncle by an adolescent was unsettling, but Kirk concealed the feeling carefully, and marched out the door.

The ground duty was sheer hell. The Denevans tried heroically to appear cheerful. But the large decomposition pits told a story, as did the condition of the survivors. Long, patient lines formed at the extraction stations. No one pushed; in fact, the aged, children, and mothers with infants were urged to go first. A large ICU was set up at the stations, but everyone but the patients at risk had to be sent home to recuperate. The Enterprise people organized monitoring teams constantly making rounds, keeping going on stimulants and six-hour rest periods during the Denevan twenty-hour day.

On the Enterprise, the skeleton crew observed the same shifts. Spock and Peter still slept most of the time. But McCoy found that Spock had taken on a responsibility. The Vulcan saw to it that Peter ate, slept, and began to take mild exercise. He monitored his own progress with the same precision, of course; it was the logical thing to do. After two days, he announced that they were ambulant.

"Kirk to McCoy. Emergency. Scotty's been attacked by one of the creatures. We're away from the stations, so we're beaming him up for extraction."

Spock raced for the door, followed by Peter. McCoy yelled after them futilely, then swore and began to activate the equipment. Soon they were back with a stretcher. The Engineer made no sound, but his fists gripped the stretcher frame. His breath

came in gasps. They had him in the field instantly, and the creature was soon gone.

Scotty was shuddering. McCoy injected a tranquilizer, then turned to eject the vial. To his surprise, Spock placed his hands on the shaking shoulders. "It is over." He spoke very distinctly. "It is ended. The creature can no longer hurt you."

Suddenly, Peter fled. A lift of the eyebrow summoned the doctor to Scotty's side. Then Spock was gone, after Peter.

McCoy stayed with Scotty until he fell asleep, then hunted up his other two patients. Spock was coming out of the cubicle; he held a finger to his lips as he moved to a chair. "I am all right, Doctor," he said automatically, as McCoy automatically reached for a scanner.

"Yes, you are." McCoy agreed. "Is Peter all right?"

"Yes. I gave him a sedative. The sight of Scotty brought the whole experience back to him."

"And you?"

"No. It is finished. It can no longer hurt me."

McCoy rested a hand on Spock's shoulder for a moment. Then the intercom sounded. It was Kirk, harrassed and curt. "Bones, are things up there in shape for you to come down? We're extended to the limit, and we just found a whole school of children. A teacher hid them before the things got him. We didn't know about them until he came to. The creatures didn't get them, but they're all -- "

"On my way." McCoy grabbed a kit. "The Kongo had better rendezvous on schedule. Our supplies were never designed for this type of emergency. Hey, what do you think you're doing? Get back into that robe."

"I am fit for duty, Doctor."

McCoy bit back his automatic reaction. "Limited duty, Mr. Spock. I'm counting on that. Someone has to cover Sickbay. In the abscence of medical personnel, that's the Science Officer."

Spock hesitated. Surely the doctor had heard the tense exhaustion in the Captain's voice. But regulations were clear.

"I started synthesizing Vitalizers A and B. Will you monitor that, and get them ready to beam down?"

"Very well."

"Scotty's to stay in bed. Call me if any complications develop. And take care of yourself, and Peter."

"Acknowledged, Doctor. Please inform the Captain I will keep Peter with me."

"Right." McCoy was gone. Spock went to the lab to check the implementation of McCoy's programming, then returned to lie down next to the sleeping boy.

When Peter awoke, the change in his breathing awakened Spock. The Vulcan scrutinized him, then enlisted his help in apportioning the vitalizers. "Ground control has not called for these yet," he explained. "So we can save them time when they do." Peter learned the operation quickly, and flushed at Spock's compliment.

"I helped Mother and Dad in their labs," he explained. "I got my Technical B last month."

"A noteworthy accomplishment for a human of your age. Have you decided what fields of specialty interest you?" Spock's tone was cool, but Peter sensed his genuine interest. To a Vulcan, a boy his age was not an adolescent in the human sense, but a par'n: "one who is soon to be adult".

"I'd like to go into exobiology. But there are no training facilities on Deneva. So I thought maybe I'd stick with Denevan botany. There's still a lot that hasn't even been classified. Mother always said they'd barely scratched the surface since colonization."

"Deneva is noted for its abundance of flora." Spock was punching orders for the new vials as they talked. "I have read --"

The intercom activated. "Spock here."

"Collins. Can you beam down those vitalizers?"

"Give us 20 minutes, Corpsman. What is the situation?"

"Stabilizing. About three fourths of the people who could come to the stations have been treated. We're still finding more, though. And two more crew members have been attacked. Everyone who's searching for victims is taking a chance."

"Corpsman, I do not believe the creatures could penetrate the mesh of the environmental suits. I will beam down a supply."

"That's a great idea, sir!"

"Please inform the crew."

"Yes sir."

Spock was punching more orders. "What are you doing?" Peter asked timidly.

"Tying in remote. Supplies can be programmed from here." Peter watched in admiration as the long fingers swiftly touched

the keys.

"How do you know what to ask for?"

"The code for environmental suits is 0155. The Supplies computers are preprogrammed to do the rest. Will you help me with the medicines?"

"Of course." Together they piled and secured the cases, then locked in the antigravs and took them to the turbolift.

"Please hold the door," Spock said, and walked back to Sickbay. He was back in a moment.

"Is Mr. Scott all right?"

"Yes. He is still asleep. I tied his panel into the bridge. They will monitor from there. Transporter room."

"Isn't there a cargo transporter?"

"Yes, but the Supplies computer will already have sent a load of suits there."

"Wow." In another minute, Spock was answering a catechism on starship operations. He felt no impatience. A par'n was expected to ask questions. Besides, the Captain's nephew showed a quick mind. Teaching such a one was pleasurable.

The teaching developed into a ship's tour. Spock took Peter to his cabin and let him examine his own computer tie-in while he changed to fatigues. Then he took him to the bridge, and showed him the stations. Peter could hardly contain his excitement. Spock looked indulgently at the shining eyes, and called the Captain.

A few words got Peter talking eagerly to his uncle. Spock listened carefully as Kirk replied, then relaxed, pleased with his strategy. It was often difficult to know how to comfort humans. But the grating tone of voice that had galvanized Spock during the earlier call was progressively disappearing as Kirk responded to Peter's enthusiasm for his ship.

Then his voice sharpened again. "Okay, Bones, I'll be right over. Take care of yourself, Peter. Kirk out." Contact was cut.

"Mr. Spock!" Anderson, the officer of the day, sounded alarmed. Spock moved automatically to his own station, and verified what the Lieutenant had seen.

"Contact Captain Kirk."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Spock, the Captain does not answer."

"Screens on."

"Aye, sir." Anderson moved from the command chair to the navigation console.

"What is it?" Peter asked. Spock was punching orders rapidly; it was Anderson who answered.

"A Klingon ship. They're entering orbit."

"Deneva is Federation territory!" Peter was outraged. "We colonized it over a hundred years ago."

"If the Klingons know what happened, they may be hoping to squat. Then we'd either have to make an issue of it or --"

"Peter!" Spock interrupted sharply. "Get down to Sickbay. Wake Mr. Scott. Explain the situation, and tell him he is ordered to the phaser room. He is to lock all phasers on the Klingon ship. Then go quickly to my quarters -- do you remember where they are?"

"Yes sir."

"Get a duty uniform for me and bring it back here. Hurry."

"Yes sir."

It was hard to wake the engineer, and difficult to explain what had happened, but as soon as the man understood, he was on his way. Peter streaked for Spock's quarters and collected a uniform. He got back to the bridge just in time. The Klingon was hailing.

"Good, Peter. Keep out of the video's range." Spock swiftly stripped and dressed, then seated himself in the command chair, composed and dignified.

"All right, Lieutenant. Commander Spock here." A smiling Klingon appeared on the screen. "An unexpected pleasure, Captain Koloth," Spock said smoothly.

"The pleasure is mine, Commander. The souveniers of our last encounter remained with us for some time."

"I am delighted to hear that. What brings you into Federation territory, Captain?"

"We intercepted, quite inadvertently, a message your ship sent some three solar days ago. We gathered from it that a massive disaster had overcome the population of this planet. We came to assist."

"That is most gracious of you. However, the emergency has passed. Rescue operations are well under way."

"Excellent. Please do not hesitate to ask, however, for any aid we can give." The screen went blank.

"They're moving off, sir," Anderson reported. But after a few minutes, he shook his head. "Still there, Mr. Spock. Hovering just out of range."

Spock grimaced. "They cannot be sure we are unable to fight, or they would not have pulled off. However, their sensors will have shown both our limited manpower and our low power use."

"Couldn't we beam crew up?"

"Not without dropping our screens, Peter. And if we did that, they would surely deduce our incapacity. They might try to make us retreat, or even disable the ship."

"That's illegal!"

"The Klingons are not interested in what is legal, Peter, but only in what they might get away with. The prize is rich. And Organia is far away." Spock drew a long breath. "We must convince them we are battleworthy. It is the only way to keep them off. Peter, can you get below to the crew and passenger decks? Take this." Spock crossed to his station and pulled out a flat magnetic key. "Some of them may be locked. Insert this in the slot beneath each buzzer; the door code will automatically punch. Turn on cabin heaters and other power drawers wherever you go."

"Yes sir."

"Lieutenant Anderson, take my station. Program the computer to ---" The turbolift doors closed.

Peter made a thorough job of it, then reported back to the bridge. Spock and the other officers were moving tirelessly from station to station, activating and deactivating systems. But Spock already looked as exhausted as Peter felt.

"We can't keep this up forever."

Spock looked at him reassuringly. "The Kongo is due in less than an hour, Peter. You go below, and lie down."

"No!" An eyebrow lifted. "Please. I want to help."

"Very well. Come to the Environmental Station. This bank controls the temperature of the water and wastes in the outher hull. This control will heat them. This is the cooler. Here are overload lights; if you see even a flicker, stop. Raise and lower the temperature ramdomly; the energy use and heat variations should be quite convincing."

Spock moved back to his own station, intending to route the overload signal to his own board. But as he looked back, he saw Peter checking the overload circuits on the Environmental Board -- good s.o.p. Spock stopped worrying about the hull

signals and sat down to plan an orbit change guaranteed to make the Enterprise look fully operational.

Peter concentrated on his task. The world narrowed to the bright buttons and the unlit overloads. He was aware of nothing else until Anderson shouted.

"They're moving off! Yippee! They've gone into warp!"

"Maintain your posts!" Spock's voice cut sharply into the cheering.

"Yes sir." Anderson was contrite. "But it must be the Kongo."

"Very likely, Mr. Anderson. But it is as well to be cautious."

Soon, however, Anderson was confirming. "It's Federation by configuration, Mr. Spock. They'll be in hailing distance in.. ..Mr. Spock!"

Spock had dropped his head. Now, he clasped his hands behind his neck. "Maintain your posts," he ordered, and after a moment he sat up. The terror in Peter's chest loosened. "Open a channel, Lieutenant."

"Hailing frequencies open, sir."

Spock returned to the command chair, and sat erect. Soon contact was established.

"Mr. Spock! I thought you were invalided."

Spock explained what had happened, and cut off Captain Schmidt's expressions of concern crisply. "May I suggest that you contact Ground Control directly, sir? We have not been in touch with them due to the proximity of the Klingon ship."

"Of course."

"And can you beam over a crew to monitor the Enterprise? This crew would benefit from some rest."

"We'll be right over."

"Thank you. Lt. Anderson, take over, please. Peter?"

Peter had rested his head on his hand for just a minute; now he started at the sound of his name.

"You have done well, Peter." Spock took the boy's arm and guided him back to Sickbay and into bed. He had an odd feeling that the room was revolving around that bright hair, but he held his position until Schmidt and a medical team came hurrying in to Sickbay. He transferred command properly,

and remained stiffly alert until Schmidt had left for the bridge. The room was still revolving; he closed his eyes to make it stop.

****

Spock and Peter were deep in an orbit calculation when an outburst of military language brought them to their feet. Spock almost smiled.

"The Captain is beginning to sound like himself," he observed.

They opened the door as McCoy asked casually, "What's wrong Jim?"

"Do you know what I'd like to do to that Schmidt?" Kirk described his wishes, in detail. "Still," he added, cheering up, "we may actually get through this mission without my taking a swing at him. Well, how are the invalids?"

"Dr. McCoy promised to discharge us tomorrow. What's the problem with Captain Schmidt, Uncle Jim?"

"Nothing that a grenade under the command chair wouldn't cure. Insists on trying to plan for all contingencies for the next six months -- as if anyone could. Get the best team you can, leave them all the resources you can spare -- what more can you do?"

"Six months, Captain?"

"Yes. Seems Starfleet must be improving, doesn't it? Of course, it doesn't have to be a full colonization party. That helps."

"Uncle Jim."

"Yes, Peter? What's the matter? You worried about something?"

Peter took a deep breath. "Uncle Jim, I've changed my mind. I want to stay here."

"Peter, it's all arranged. Your grandmother is expecting you."

"But --"

Kirk was in no mood for adolescent starts, but he tried to speak patiently. "Peter, I understand. You think of Deneva as your home. But there's no family here now, and I really think it's best -- "

"But, Uncle Jim -- "

Kirk's tone sharpened. "Peter, I am your gaurdian, and -- "

"Jim." The reproof was gentle, but it was so unexpected that Kirk stopped dead, staring at Spock. The Vulcan met his look, and went wooden. "I beg your pardon," he said formally. "If you will excuse me, Captain?" He moved stiffly to the door.

"Mr. Spock." Spock stopped, but did not turn. "Did you think I was about to lose my temper?"

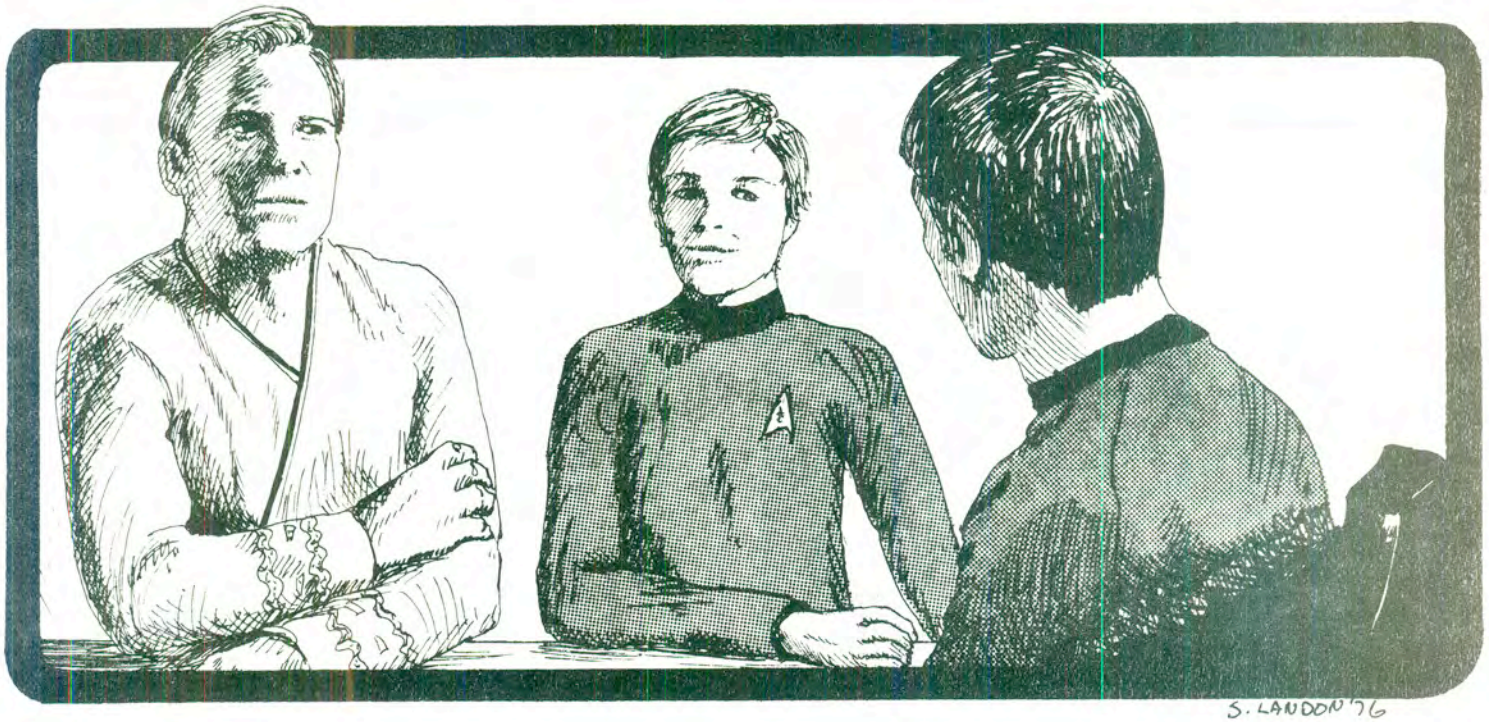
"I have apologized, Captain. If you will excuse me -- "

"Spock. You were quite correct. I was speaking hastily, without thinking. Sit down. Please."

Spock came back. Peter felt better. Odd that it felt so right to have this Vulcan sitting with them. Kirk said nothing for a moment. He was rubbing the back of his neck, calming down. Finally, he spoke.

"What do you think, Spock?"

"It is difficult to make a recommendation. On the one hand, Peter is not yet adult. He requires the guidance of a family. On the other hand, he has, in my opinion, shown himself quite competent to plan his own life path."



Kirk thought it over. "Peter, where would you stay?"

"I'm sure I could stay with Tony Kim; he's my best friend. His mother worked in Dad's lab." Peter saw his uncle frown, and went on hastily. "The thing is, Uncle Jim, I can help here. I have a Technical B rating. And we lost an awful lot of techni--cians. It doesn't have to be for always, but for the next six months we're going to need skilled people."

Kirk listened as Peter went on, but he had a huge lump to get down. It seemed like Sam talking - his face, his voice. Partly, he realized, he'd just wanted to get Sam's son back to the safety of Earth. Atavistic nonsense, of course.

Peter came to a stop. Kirk pulled himself together. "I see. I'd like to meet Ms. Kim."

"I'll place a call." Peter darted out. Kirk rose, but went to Spock.

"Thanks." Spock nodded. "I've never been a guardian before. It's not easy to know what's best."

"No."

"Uncle Jim! I have Ms. Kim."

"Coming, Peter. Would you join me, Mr. Spock?"

Spock hesitated. Kirk moved toward the door, but turned back, waiting. Spock met his look for a moment, then rose and followed his Captain to the intercom.

Trivia

1.) In what episode did Kirk say to Spock, "Thank you, my Vulcan friend."

(a) The Apple (b) And the Children Shall Lead (c) The Enemy Within

2.) Who refered to the 'mirror Spock' as being "very much like our own Mr. Spock"?

(a) Kirk (b) McCoy (c) Scott

3.) Under what circumstances did Spock confess a duty to "that man on the bridge"?

(a) To Stocker in The Deadly Years (b) To Kirk in The Ultimate Computer (c) To Lelia in This Side of Paradise



YOU DO NOT BELONG

by Pete Kaup

How do I reach you
On what plane are you
Do you see my fears
Feel my pain
I stand here watching
I see the purple trees move
I watch the glow of green set in the yellow sky
Watch the red buds burst into bloom
See you stand before me cold unmoving like stone
The night is hot
The lights in the sky are steady
We came here because of orders
But you did not fit in
You do not belong
Now my human friend
You are the one alone
Alien

WRITING CONTEST --- THE WINNERS !!!

Below is the scene we printed in last issue with a challenge to all writers to build a story around it. By February 15th, we were under an avalanche of interpretations. The unlimited imaginations of fan writers have excelled again, and the stories were as varied as there were submissions.

We received a total of 19, and each time a new one would arrive, we'd decide that it would be the winner. They were all so good, we finally realized we'd end up with a 300 page 'zine, 19 free copies, and we'd be bankrupt long before then. For practicality we had to narrow it down to one or two winners.

So we sat down to hours of reading and re-reading, endless fights ("I like this one!" -- "Yes, but read this...") and eventually came up with two that seemed all along to have a slight edge on the others. We felt they were outstanding in their originality, adherence to our theme, and general incorporation of the details in the scene.

To all of you who entered: Our abundant thanks for your efforts and interest, and for providing the editors with such enjoyable reading.

To our Winners: Congratulations!

To our Readers: Enjoy, as we believe you will, the fascinating interpretations of this scene:

Kirk backed out into the corridor. He knew he was trembling; he willed his legs to steady him. A gentle hand touched him on the shoulder and a familiar voice spoke the word, "Captain." Kirk turned to meet the piercing eyes of his First Officer.

Pleadingly, he beseeched, "You saw, Spock?"

Spock nodded. "Yes, it is time."

Kirk fought off a rising panic. His hands felt as cold and clammy as the walls around him. He forced himself not to think, to concentrate on his breathing.

Spock lowered his eyes. For an instant he gripped the Captain's shoulder tightly, then he removed his hand. His voice was steady, quiet as he spoke.

"Jim--I'm sorry. I didn't..." He could not go on.

DEATH IS ONLY A PARTING

by Amy Falkowitz

Jim Kirk turned over on his bed, shivered and awoke. "Sandy...?" he whispered, feeling for the slumbering female form who should have been there. But the spot beside him was empty.

He had no need to question why. He shivered again, unable to hide from himself what he knew---and knew undeniably through their link.

If only...if only he had not fallen truly in love with her. If only they had not found each other mutually attractive, and attractive at a depth and height that neither had ever found before. If only she had not been a telepath, and he a non-telepath, yet one who could be strangely perceptive -- almost a "sensitive". What had Spock said? That he was "psionically attuned" from his various experiences with such creatures/entities as Sargon, not to mention the various times that Spock himself had engaged in a meld with him...

Yet they had fallen in love -- and had been married, much to the shocked delight of his crew. She was a most efficient officer. Her specialty was in life sciences - the research area - and she had also been a welcome and friendly assistant to both Dr. McCoy and Spock. But it was Jim Kirk, Captain of the Enterprise, whom she loved and at last married.

And that had been a time of surprising joy. For after the official ceremony, there had been a private one, given by Spock for his closest friend.

Jim sat up in bed, remembering, and in spite of the pain he was now feeling (both his own and hers--), he had to smile, a gentle, unbelieving smile.

For Spock had come to him in private, with a completely unexpected suggestion.

"Jim," he said, a strange sense of almost embarrassment emanating from him, noticeable only to one who knew him well. "You do truly love Sandra Pendrake..."

Jim looked up, startled, and nodded.

"I...Jim, I can only speak of this to one who trusts me, and I hope, understands me."

"I hope I trust you, Spock. And you, me." And he waited while his First Officer nodded and then smiled, a smile that barely lifted the corners of his mouth, but showed most in the brilliance that played in his dark eyes.

"You know, Jim," Spock at last continued, "that Sandra is a telepath. Not a strong one, to be sure, even when compared to a Vulcan. You know that Vulcans are only touch telepaths."

"Yes. But what does Sandy's telepathy have to do with anything?"

"No matter how strong or weak her powers are, Jim, she is a telepath. And telepaths may gain a relationship as mates that non-telepaths can never gain."

"But I'm not a telepath!"

"True. But you have been--you are--'attuned' to psionic abilities. Not that you have any definable abilities of your own, but because of things which have happened since you became the Captain of this ship, your mind has been sensitized to psionic contacts. It is more responsive than that of a non-telepath who has never, for example, been pulled into a Vulcan mindmeld as you have."

"Even so, Spock, I'm not sure what you are getting at."

Spock was seated, yet now he rose and paced a bit, as if not quite sure how to say what he wanted to. But Jim waited patiently, sensing the importance of what his friend had to say.

"Tonight is your wedding night, Jim. You will take your mate--and both of you will share, one with the other, the pleasures and joys of your bodies. But Jim, will you really share? You do not, cannot, as humans, truly know each other. You cannot share the depths of your minds or your 'souls' you might say. And yet, what if you could? Would you not call that true joy?"

"I...but I've never thought of it, Spock. We love each other, I know it. That's enough for me, and I'm sure it's enough for Sandy."

"But if you could share as I have said, would you not desire to do so?" Spock persisted.

"I guess so."

Spock took a step forward, until he was looking directly into Jim's eyes. "Jim, such is the Vulcan way. This sharing, this surety and knowledge, one of the other. It is what the Bonding does for those who are mated. I know this, even though I am...unmated."

Jim at last began to understand. And he was too overwhelmed to speak.

"I really have no right to do this, Jim, and I am not even sure that it will work. But because I think that Sandra is too weak a telepath to realize the possibilities, and yet she is enough of a telepath to understand them and maintain them if initiated by one who can, I make my offer. I believe that I can help Sandra form a true Bonding with you, Jim. And, if so, you will know such Joy in another as you have never dreamed you could know. This is my wedding gift to you. Will you accept it?"

"I...Spock, there is nothing that can convey what I feel. All I can say is yes...and thank you."

"Then if you and Sandra will come to my quarters in a few minutes--that is, if you do not mind. It will be easier for me to join your minds in my own quarters."

Jim smiled, and grasped the hand of his friend. Spock didn't even flinch at the handclasp, and smiled back. "Yes, we'll come to your quarters, Spock. Besides," the true Jim Kirk showing a twinkle in his eyes, "I think Sandy will be, uh, 'fascinated' by your quarters; she's never seen them."

"Yes, I know."

"Uh, Spock, I have to ask one thing, though. You said that you 'had no right'--what'd you mean?"

Spock looked down for a moment, seemingly disturbed. "The joining of the Bonding is something usually initiated only by certain trained people--such as the Council T'Pau. I have not been trained for it, and besides, my own Bonding was broken. That is all I meant."

"I understand. Go on -- we'll be there soon."

Spock hurried out. And Jim Kirk went tearing down the corridor to Sandra's quarters to tell her what his closest friend had just offered.

******

They entered Spock's quarters quietly. The room was dimly lit, a dull red glow suffusing the air. Spock quietly instructed them to place their hands palm to palm, fingers spread in the Vulcan salute. He recited words, ancient Vulcan, and though neither Jim nor Sandy knew the Vulcan tongue, they both sensed the meaning of the words. They were the ancient and beautiful formula of the Bonding, the "never and always, touching and touched" that Jim had never thought to hear again without pain for Spock. But his own joy was too much.

Then Spock took one hand each and guided them in the head touching that locked their minds together. He spoke a few more words in Vulcan, and then finished in English. "Thy minds are one. Thee is the woman's mate and she is thine. Thee are Bonded, each to the other. This is thy own night of Joy, may thee go in Joy and live in Joy, each in the other. Live Long and Prosper, in Peace and Diversity."

Jim and Sandy dropped their hands. But their eyes still dwelt upon each other, and their minds were one in a wordless communication of Joy that even when it lost its immediacy, would still be theirs to share when they wished. And each would always have that "never and always, touching and touched" of the Bonding with the other.

They left Spock's quarters, and went to Jim's. That was a night of such wonder and Joy that Jim would never forget it. And for him there would certainly never be another woman.

*****

So the Joy lasted for three all too short months. Sandy went down with a research team on an obscure world that the Enterprise had been asked to check out for the science team currently engaged in research there. They brought supplies, and were going to run a full check on the conditions of the science outpost, as well as lend some researchers to the team as a sort of backup. Sandy would be staying a week or so, while Jim took the Enterprise through the rest of the system, running a routine cataloguing check.

Sandy was eager; the science team had been doing some fascinating research with some strange lower form of life they'd found at an outcropping of some sort of new energy-producing ore.

It was research with the ore and the strange fungoid life around it that resulted in the accident. No one knew exactly what had happened, but somehow Sandy was involved, and the stuff had reacted with her, invading her body and starting to grow, mutating in such a way that her very life-force became its food.

It was the cliché of horror come terribly true. It was eating her alive. Kirk felt it take over, driving her into a frantic attempt to escape--but it was already too late. It was within her--and it was consuming her flesh--and her mind.

The Enterprise returned as quickly as possible to pick Sandy up--Kirk was put in Sickbay, sedated. Spock had to explain to a frantic and angry McCoy what was happening to the Captain. He told him then of the Bonding, and of what it did--and that it was the reason for Jim's pain--he was sharing all of his wife's agony.

"You crazy Vulcan!! How could you do that to them?!" McCoy raged.

Spock met the doctor's gaze with a calmness he did not feel. "I did not do anything to them. I made them the offer of a gift, they accepted, and it gave them great Joy. Surely even you saw that, Doctor. But that is beside the point. No one can predict the times of suffering that may come. If I had known that such was certain to happen, I would not have given them my gift. But I did, and now all we can do is try to end their suffering. I think that you should see to that, Doctor, when Sandra is beamed up. If you can--"

McCoy pulled back, the anger dying out of his eyes. "Forgive me, Spock. But you saw what he's going through."

"Yes, Doctor, I saw. And I know, for I've been in meld with others who have been in pain. Surely you remember the Horta."

"Yeah--and other times, too, Spock. I'll do what I can."

And he did. But for all his knowledge and skill, it was not enough. She was dying, and Jim with her.

All they could do, they found, was to lower the temperature and increase the humidity. The clammy atmosphere seemed to both dull her pain and slow the advance of the thing that was destroying her.

But she would die--and if something weren't done, something only Spock could do, Jim Kirk would die, as certainly as his wife.

*****

Jim Kirk got out of bed, climbed into his uniform, and headed for Sickbay. He knew that Spock was waiting for him. But he had to see her, to convince himself that this horror was real (even though he needed no such convincing inside. The pain in him--her pain--was all too real.).

Spock met him at the door to Sickbay.

"Captain?"

"No, Spock. I must see her--alone. You can come in, but do not go with me to her bed. Please."

"All right, Jim. As you wish. But we cannot delay much longer--for your sake."

Jim nodded, entered Sickbay with Spock beside him. Spock glanced at McCoy, then turned and walked back outside to wait...

Jim did not see the Doctor; nor was he aware of Spock leaving. He was overwhelmed by a deadly blackness, which even his strong will could barely hold back. He stumbled as he neared her bed, then went to his knees, sudden terrible pain thrusting through his mind. "Sandy!" he cried, but there was no answer. The form on the bed was too still, the breathing barely moving the blanket. And what he could see of her was a rotting horror. She was being eaten alive, and it was all too evident. Jim struggled to his feet and fled.

McCoy wanted to stop him as he turned and

stood a split instant at the doors, staring, then backed through them. But he only watched helplessly.

Kirk backed out into the corridor. He knew he was trembling; he willed his legs to steady him. A gentle hand touched him on the shoulder and a familiar voice spoke the word, "Captain." Kirk turned to meet the piercing eyes of his First Officer.

Pleadingly, he beseeched, "You saw, Spock?"

Spock nodded. "Yes, it is time."

Kirk fought off a rising panic. His hands felt as cold and clammy as the walls around him. He forced himself not to think, to concentrate on his breathing.

Spock lowered his eyes. For an instant he gripped the Captain's shoulder tightly, then he removed his hand. His voice was steady, quiet as he spoke.

"Jim--I'm sorry. I didn't..." He could not go on.

Jim's eyes answered him. He didn't want to lose her, but he could stand no more, and he was aware that her death, while they were still Bonded, would kill him...the Bonding must be Severed, or he would die.

He found himself reaching for Spock's hand, as a frightened child reaches for its mother's. Spock took his hand firmly, and led him wordlessly to the turbolift and then to his own quarters. They entered the red-lit gloom, and Spock seated Jim at his desk.

"Jim. Are you--"

"Get on with it!" Kirk gritted. But there were already tears on his cheeks.

Spock touched Jim on the face, feeling for the proper points. Gently he eased into his Captain's mind, taking the pain to himself. He could feel some of the rigidity leaving Jim as his stronger mind shielded the human's. Then he probed deeper, finding that strong yet delicate web wherein two minds were joined, originally for life, but very soon now, unless he was successful, in death.

He touched the web, and Jim stirred, cried out in his grasp. This must be done swiftly--he gathered the energies of his mind, and though the Vulcan half of him cried out against it, he struck the blow that tore the web and released Jim from the death that awaited him.

Jim cried out, "NOOOO!!" his voice a tearing wail that wrenched at both the human and Vulcan halves of Spock. Spock broke from the Severence meld, but he still held Jim, his hands now on the human's shoulders. "NO! It cannot be! She isn't dead! NO!" Jim fought, but Spock was the stronger. He knew the pain and shock Jim was feeling, and he knew that he had to stay with his friend until most of that was gone, or else Jim would destroy himself as certainly as if he was still caught in the Bonding.

Spock knelt, pulling Jim close against his own trembling frame. At last Jim stopped struggling, and collapsed, sobbing against Spock, allowing the Vulcan to wrap him in his arms.

"It's over, Jim. It is finished. There was Joy for you, and I sorrow with you that my gift turned on you this way. But we could not know, we could not--forgive me!"

"But she's dead, Spock! I can't..." His voice faded into sobs once more, wracking cries that shook his whole frame.

"Jim--JIM! There is no more to be done. Death is only a parting...you <u>will</u> go on. You must--you are my Captain--"

But Spock was answered only by the now silent shudders of the form he held so close.....

THE LOGIC OF CHANGE

by Jean Lorrah

Kirk backed out into the corridor. He knew he was trembling; he willed his legs to steady him A gentle hand touched him on the shoulder and a familiar voice spoke the word, "Captain." Kirk turned to meet the piercing eyes of his First Officer.

Pleadingly, he beseeched, "You saw, Spock?"

Spock nodded. "Yes, it is time."

Kirk fought off a rising panic. His hands felt as cold and clammy as the walls around him. He forced himself not to think, to concentrate on his breathing.

Spock lowered his eyes. For an instant he gripped the Captain's shoulder tightly, then he removed his hand. His voice was steady, quiet as he spoke.

"Jim--I'm sorry. I didn't..." He could not go on.

He hadn't known. How could he have known that his good intentions would ultimately lead to--this?

The Enterprise was gone, destroyed in that one last treacherous attack by the Klingon-Romulan alliance. McCoy was dead. Scott was dead. Other crew members were scattered about the galaxy now, some retired on disability pay, a very few patched together enough to continue in Star Fleet. Spock had been rescued, unconscious, with a chest wound that would have killed a human; it was two weeks after the battle that he came to in the hospital at Star Base Eight. Two agonizing months after that he had finally been allowed to start his search for his Captain, declared missing in action.

For nearly a year he had gone from one veterans hospital to another, visiting the "John Does", seeking through the mind meld to find if any one with Kirk's blood type, fitting Kirk's description in any way, might be his Captain. And at last he had found him, paralyzed, catatonic, unable to face the loss of his ship, his crew--and himself.

Fighting his way through light-years of red tape, Spock had at last been able to bring Kirk home--to Vulcan. At the Academy, he had worked with the Healers to retrieve Kirk's mind from its retreat, only to have his Captain look at him reproachfully and ask, "Why did you do this to me? I was at peace; why did you not leave me so?"

"Yours was the peace of death, Captain," Spock had replied. "Let me offer you the peace of life."

It had not been easy. It took weeks of agonizing scenes between the two men--scenes in which

Kirk spit out all of his frustrations in attempts to make Spock react, to make him feel, and to punish him for being able to walk around when Kirk had no command even of his own body, until finally Spock's persistence wore him down, and he consented to allow the Healers to help him find peace of mind.

Once he consented, his progress was remarkable. Within days, he was meditating on his own; within months he had found something useful to do with his life; he dictated a book on the tactics of combat at warp speeds which was adopted by Star Fleet Academy as a text.

Nearly three years passed, and Spock looked on with quiet joy as with each visit he found his old friend trying some new mental technique, learning to find the satisfaction in his mind that his body had once given him. And then had come the astonishing day when his visit had been greeted with a smile--and an outstretched hand!

Making no attempt to conceal his own smile, Spock took Kirk's hand. "Jim...why didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't know it would work. I've been nagging T'Pen for months to teach me the healing techniques. I think she was afraid to try for fear I would become depressed again at failure. But I'm beyond all that now."

"Indeed," replied Spock. "You must be, or the techniques would not work for you."

What had happened--or what was happening progressively as the weeks and months passed--was that mentally, Kirk was becoming Vulcan. He had found contentment, not happiness.

Slowly but surely, Kirk regained control over his body, regained his strength--but he was not the old Kirk of the Enterprise. No mischief danced in his eyes these days; instead, they held peace. He smiled seldom, and then only the quiet smile that even Vulcans sometimes permitted themselves.

He was making a new life, a life Spock had always thought of as a better life than that of most humans, yet Spock sometimes felt an illogical nostalgic yearning for the old Kirk. Determinedly, he put such thoughts out of his mind.

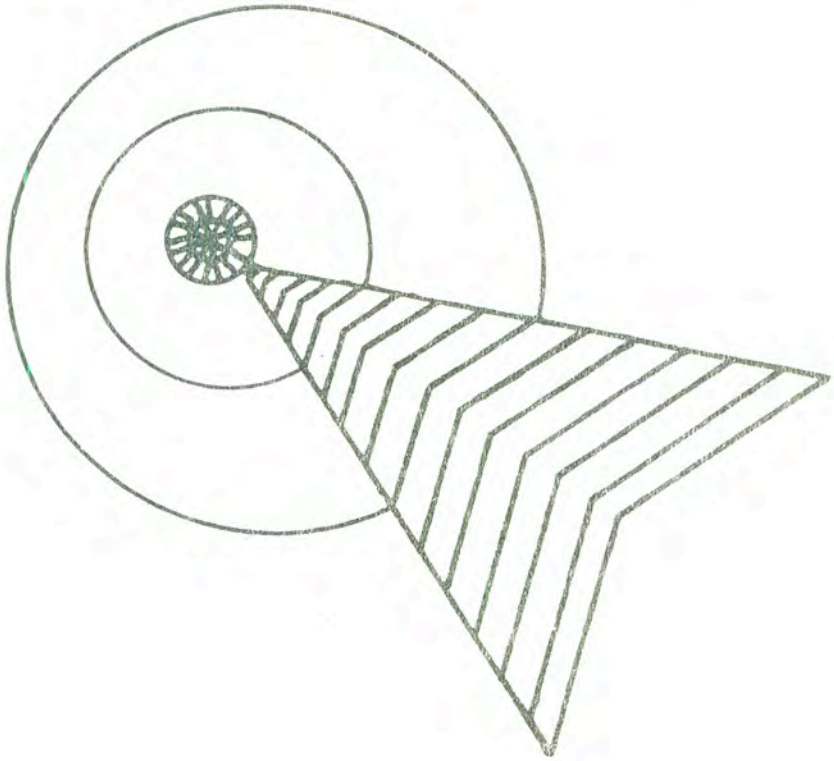
Proudly, he stood for Kirk in lieu of family, when he became bonded to T'Pen, his Healer, a widow with two children, but nonetheless a beautiful woman. Another sign, though, of the change in James T. Kirk--not only a decision to marry, but to marry a dignified professional woman, not at all the vacant beauty that had always attracted the Captain in the past.

And then, what Spock should have realized was inevitable had begun. It had not occured to him, and certainly not to Kirk--but the syndrome was, after all, primarily psychological. At the first symptoms, Spock had brought his friend here, to the Place of Waiting, the maze of cold stone corridors from which it was impossible to find one's way in the state of madness, so that no unprepared person might be unintentionally damaged by a chance encounter.

And now Spock came for his friend, to stand with him again in a less pleasant time. "Jim--I'm sorry," he said. "I didn't..."

Kirk looked up at him. "Sorry? After all you have done for me? Don't be illogical, Spock." At the word, for the first time in the years since the destruction of the Enterprise, that glint of mischief sparkled in the Captain's eyes. "By God, you've made too much of a Vulcan out of me! Here I've been nervous and frightened, when I ought to be delighted! This is not the end of the world, Spock--it's the beginning!"

Waves of relief swept over Spock. All was truly well now. "Come, Jim," he said. "T'Pen waits for you at the Place of Koon-ut Kali fi."



....and now...

WRITING CONTEST #2

Below you will find a simple story extract conceived in the fiendish minds of the editors with no forethought. We challenge you to sharpen your wits and your pencils. Build a story around this intriguing scene and send us the results. Next issue we will publish the best we receive.

CONTEST RULES:

1.) Be as brief as possible (No more than 5 pages, single spaced) and tie in all the details in the scene.

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 JUNE 30, 1976

GOOD LUCK!!

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.

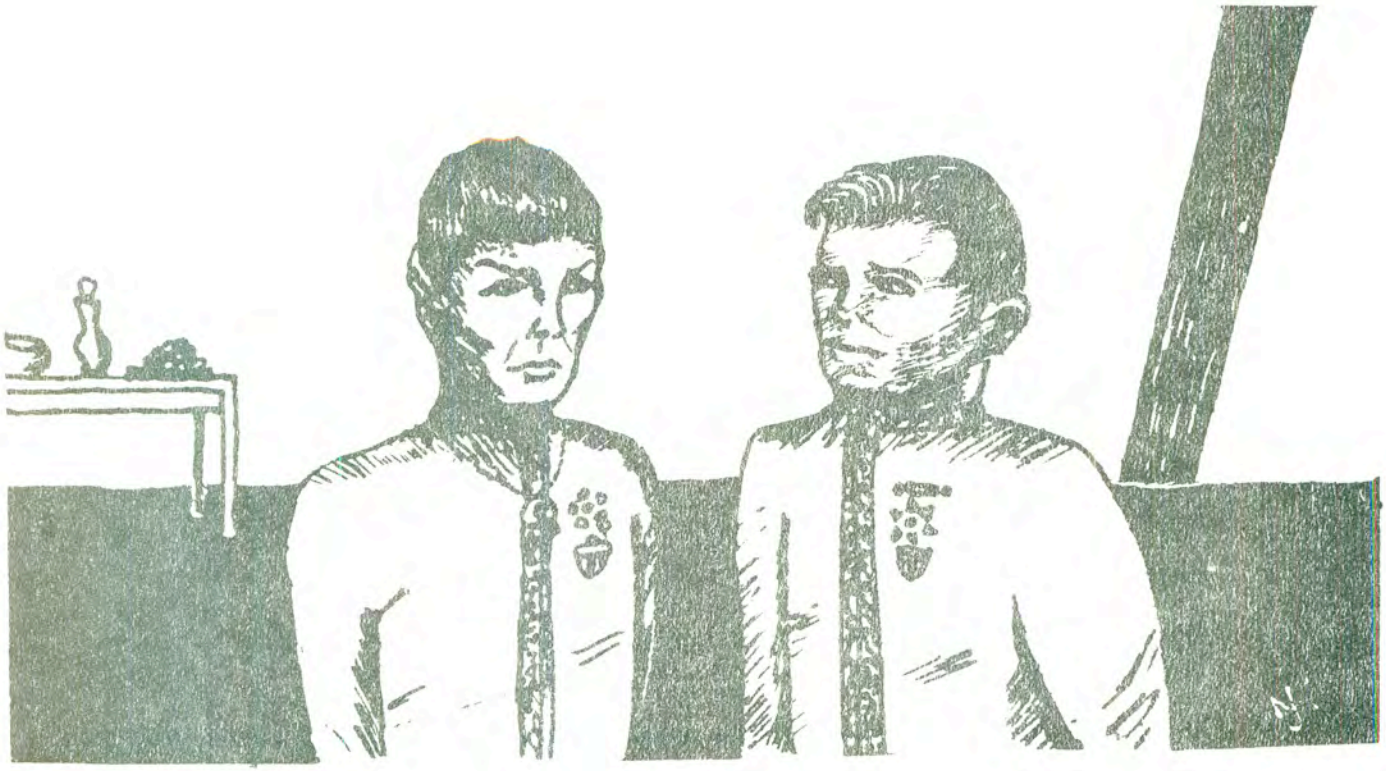
"Captain - please..." he entreated desperately.

"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 LOGICAL CHOICE

BY BEVERLY VOLKER

The Vulcan slipped the chain of the IDIC over his head just as the buzzer to his cabin door sounded.

"Come," he called, and turned as the door slid open to admit James Kirk, Captain of the ENTERPRISE, outfitted this evening in full dress uniform.

"Ready, Mr. Spock?" he asked. Spock nodded.

"Yes, Captain."

Jim scrutinized his First Officer, who also wore the Starfleet dress uniform. "Well, you look very dressed up," he teased. "Admiral Cavey will be duly impressed, I'm sure."

"Captain, on formal occasions such as this, the required uniform of..."

"I know, Spock. I'm just teasing. By the way, I just wanted to tell you, I'm...well, very proud of you." Spock lifted an eyebrow as a reply. "All right," Jim countered, "pride is a human emotion. Well, I'm human. Anyway, the Federation's Medal of Valor isn't something that Starfleet gives lightly; you performed an exceptional act of bravery and you deserve it."

Spock fingered his IDIC idly. "Jim, at the time, I was

merely performing my duty as I logically reasoned I must. Nevertheless...thank you."

Kirk touched his friend's shoulder lightly as they left the cabin and made their way to the turbo-lift that would take them to the ship's assembly hall.

Admiral Cavey and a delegation of several of Starfleet's higher echelons had arrived on board the ENTERPRISE to present Spock and several other officers special awards of merit for the ENTERPRISE's recent confrontation with the deadly amoeba-like phenomenon. Upon reading Kirk's log entry and recommendations, Starfleet had decided the ENTERPRISE had played a decisive and extraordinary part in maintaining the safety of the galaxy. Awards of merit were being presented tonight to Mr. Scott, Dr. McCoy, Lieutenants Uhura, Sulu and Cowell. But the special prize, the coveted Medal of Valor, was being awarded to Spock for the risk he had incurred by taking the shuttlecraft alone into the center of the holocaust.

Kirk sat proudly through the ceremony, as each presentation was made. He felt like a father watching his children being honored, and he felt humbled and thankful at the fate which had put him in command of such a crew. It did not occur to him that his own example of leadership was the driving force behind the 430 members of the ENTERPRISE family.

When Spock was called for his presentation, Kirk felt a lump form in his throat, and the sting of tears in his eyes as he recalled the incident for which his First Officer was being honored. It could have so easily gone the other way, he thought. It had been my choice to send him or McCoy in the shuttlecraft, to doom one of my friends to almost certain death. And it nearly had. For a while it seemed we had lost Spock.

Kirk relived the terror and frustration he had felt then. But, he smiled now, the fates had been kind. Spock had survived; we all had, and so we honor him tonight.

After the presentations, a reception was held. The ENTERPRISE officers, sporting their new medals, mingled with the Starfleet officials. Kirk was admiring Spock's medal when Admiral Cavey approached them.

"Well, Commander Spock, how does it feel to be one of Starfleet's few who have won the Medal of Valor?" he quipped.

"Starfleet honors me, Admiral. I shall attempt to justify that honor."

"I'm sure you will. Captain, I have something that I think will come as a surprise to both you and the Commander," Cavey said. Both Kirk and Spock reacted with proper curiousity as the Admiral continued.

"As you know, the Vulcan ship, INTREPID, was destroyed by the creature you finally succeeded in annihilating. Starfleet is now in the process of building a new Starship to replace her, and it

also shall be manned by an all Vulcan crew. Mr. Spock, I'm authorized here and now to offer you the Captaincy of that ship."

Kirk felt his stomach tighten. A Captaincy for Spock! He hadn't expected that.

Spock looked steadily at the Admiral, giving no indication of his reaction. Finally he spoke.

"I am a scientist, Admiral. Commanding a ship would afford me little opportunity to pursue that field."

The Admiral would not be detered. "I'm sure something could be worked out, Commander. Especially on an all Vulcan ship. Your explorations would be primarily scientific. Let me remind you that most Medal of Valor winners hold at least the rank of Captain, as indeed, in the case of your own commanding officer."

Kirk could hold his silence no longer. "A Captaincy is not a pre-requisite for the medal, Admiral."

Cavey looked at him hard. "No. Of course not, Captain, but this offer of a promotion does go with it." He seemed to see through Jim Kirk. The Admiral was a good judge of human nature. "You wouldn't want to stand in your First Officer's way, would you? It was, after all, your own recommendation that won him the award."

Spock could sense the tension that seemed to be building up in Kirk. He addressed the Admiral.

"Admiral Cavey, I have not considered..."

Cavey interrupted. "You don't have to decide now, Mr. Spock. Take your time and think it over. But remember, things can be worked out for you. Starfleet wants very much to put you in command of that ship. Good night, gentlemen."

As Cavey left, Kirk turned to Spock. "Well, Spock, it's been quite an evening. I think I'll say good night too."

Spock lowered his eyes. "Jim, you know I..." he began, but Kirk interrupted.

"Let's not discuss it right now. Cavey was right; think about it -- logically. Then we'll talk. Good night, Spock."

Kirk returned to his room. Several hours later he lay on his bunk, exhausted, but still wide awake. He wished he could take his own advice and think about this evening's unexpected turn of events - logically. But human emotions kept creeping into all his attempts at reason. He knew what a great opportunity this was for Spock. He also knew that Starfleet would go to great lengths to allow Spock to continue in his scientific pursuits. The INTREPID had been primarily a scientific ship that seldom engaged in acts of diplomacy or combat. The new Vulcan ship would be the same.

Spock deserved a command of his own. Kirk knew he was being selfish for feeling the way he did. Cavey knew it, too. But, damnit, he didn't want to lose Spock. Logically, if Spock were his best friend, he should be happy for him, want the best for him. Then why couldn't he feel that way?

Perhaps part of the answer lie in the fact that Kirk wasn't sure that being the Captain of his own ship would be the best thing for Spock. Jim knew, though he seldom admitted it, even to himself, what he and Spock meant to each other. Spock needed him, depended on him, as much as he needed and depended on Spock. Neither was complete, at his best, without the other. They were a team, they were friends, they...

Kirk suddenly halted his thoughts. What was he doing? This was pure emotionalism. Not a trace of reason. He could imagine, he thought wryly, what Spock would say to such a display. Anyway, it was all theoretical. The choice, ultimately, would be Spock's alone, not his, and Kirk determined he would say or do nothing to influence him.

Nevertheless, he tossed and turned the rest of the night.

The next morning, the grapevine had spread the news through the ship that Spock had been offered command of a new Vulcan Starship. On his way to the bridge, Kirk marvelled at the speed with which gossip spread as he caught snatches of conversation and speculation throughout the ship.

A sleepless night, the prospect of losing Spock, and a gossiping crew did little to improve Kirk's humor. As he entered the bridge, Uhura, Sulu and Scotty broke up what had apparently been another little group of conversation, and returned to their stations. One look at the Captain alerted them all that this was no morning for the usual bridge banter.

Spock crossed to the command chair as Kirk sat down. He handed Jim a report.

"I have the results of those atmospheric tests we ran yesterday, sir," he said. Kirk accepted the report without looking at it. Spock, aware that something was wrong with the Captain, asked, "Is anything the matter?"

"No, Spock, I just didn't sleep very well," Kirk answered shortly, then added, "Too much party, I guess."

Spock nodded and started to return to his station. Then, abruptly, he turned back to Kirk. "Captain, about the Admiral's offer last night..."

Kirk looked at him sharply. "Yes, it seems the whole ship knows about it."

"I have given it a great deal of thought and consideration."

"I'm sure you have, Spock," Kirk cut in. "And I'm sure you will have the logical decision to give Admiral Cavey."

Spock seemed about to reply, then changed his mind and returned to his station.

The rest of the morning passed uneventfully, and Kirk's humor gradually improved in the routine of the ship's activities. But by late afternoon he was beginning to feel the strain of a lost night's sleep in the tightening of his muscles, so he decided to go to the gym and work out.

He spent about an hour there, then went to grab a quick supper before returning to the bridge. As he entered the Officer's Mess, he was surprised to find Spock there, although it was not the Vulcan's usual mealtime.

He looked up as Jim entered. "Captain, I wish to speak with you."

A look of annoyance crossed Kirk's face as he sat down opposite his First Officer. "How did you know I'd be in here?" he asked, stalling for time. He had a pretty good idea what Spock wanted to talk to him about, and he didn't know if he was prepared to listen.

"It is your normal procedure to take nourishment following a session in the gym, Captain," the Vulcan explained, using a tone which indicated he knew Kirk's question was a put-off. Softening, he added, "We must discuss Admiral Cavey's offer, Jim. He leaves tomorrow, and shall want my answer."

Kirk stared at the table. All right, he thought grimly. There could be no further avoidance of the topic now. If we must discuss it, let's get it over with. He looked up at the Vulcan with steady eyes.

"You must know I'm behind you, however you decide, Spock," he said slowly, "but it's your decision entirely."

Spock lifted an eyebrow. "As First Officer of the ENTERPRISE my decision, were I to accept the Admiral's offer, would affect this ship as well," he reminded.

Kirk's heart sunk. Then Spock did intend to accept the command! Of course. He knew that; why had he allowed himself to hope otherwise? Jim chastized himself for being selfish.

Forcing his voice to be light, he said quickly, "Well, it's a great opportunity, and I'm happy for you -- an all Vulcan crew, plenty of scientific research, and an increase in rank."

"Jim," Spock put in softly, "I never desired command."

Kirk smiled wryly. I know, Spock, it's not easy for you either, is it? The Vulcan was so obviously trying not to hurt his feelings, to break it gently.

"Spock, I understand. Starfleet's giving you everything you could ever want."

The Vulcan opened his mouth to speak, but Jim waved him off, warming to this role he was playing. "You've been in the service for eighteen years, Spock. You've served the ENTERPRISE with loyalty, first under Chris Pike, and these past years..." His voice cracked, but he went on, "...under me. You deserve a ship of your own - you deserve this command." He broke off, taking a deep breath. There, he thought. Does that make you feel easier about it?

But the look on Spock's face wasn't easy. A confused, incredulous look had taken over the impassive features.

"You want me to accept the Admiral's offer."

It wasn't a question, but Kirk answered anyway. "It's not a matter of what I want, Spock. It's what makes sense...what is logical." Unable to continue, the Captain got up heavily to leave.

Spock rose too, and put a hand on Kirk's arm to forestall his departure. "Jim..." he pleaded, "I don't understand. If you asked me to stay..."

Kirk looked down at the hand on his arm, then up into Spock's eyes. Cutting smoothly into the Vulcan's sentence, he said, "I won't do that, Spock. I can't."

Without a backward look, he left the room.

Admiral Cavey and the rest of the Starfleet delegation were already in the transporter room with Spock when Kirk arrived the next day to bid them farewell. The Admiral was speaking to Spock, but he looked up to address Kirk as the Captain entered.

"Well, I've been trying to convince your First Officer that he's making a big mistake turning down Starfleet's generous offer, but his mind is made up."

Kirk looked at Spock in surprise, and suddenly felt like a hundred pound weight had been lifted from his shoulders.

"When Mr. Spock makes up his mind to something, he's usually a hard man to change," Kirk told him.

"I don't know what you do, Captain Kirk, but you certainly elicit loyalty from your officers."

Kirk grinned. "Live right, I suppose, Admiral."

The Starfleet officials stepped up to the platform, bid their farewells, and were lost to the sparkle of the transporter. Jim and Spock were left alone.

"That was a very illogical decision, my Vulcan friend," Jim accused.

"Perhaps," Spock said. He lowered his eyes, then looked directly at Jim. "But I have told you I have no desire to command.

I am content to serve aboard the ENTERPRISE under Captain James T. Kirk. Is that illogical?"

Their eyes met and held for a long moment. A myriad of words and feelings that would remain unspoken passed between them. Finally, Jim shook his head.

"No -- that's not illogical at all. Let's get to the bridge."

I account it one of the greatest demonstrations of real friendship, that a friend can really endeavor to have his friend advanced in honor, in reputation, in the opinion of wit or learning, before himself.

JEREMY TAYLOR



KERT RATS

A Star Trek Fable

By Nancy Kippax

Once upon a time, there was a Starship. It was a big, beautiful starship and it was named the Endapride. On this starship were many brave men and women who did brave and wonderful things. Such as destroying gods and temples, ruining paradises and fighting evil, smelly monsters.

One day, the Endapride was handed an assignment. Captin Kerk, who was the brave and fearless leader of the big, beautiful starship was angry. He had to interrupt his chess game and do some work!

"Blast it!" he swore, for he was pure of mouth.

"Phasers on Ready!" ordered Mr. Spokk, who was his First Officer. He was First Officer because he always got in trouble first.

"NO! NO!! Not that kind of Blast it!" Captin exclaimed, laying down his Marvel Comic Book and peering ahead at the pretty stars.

"We must journey through unknown space to the planet Choriomeningitis, where there is a damsel in distress whom we must save," Kerk lectured. He was fond of lectures. Windy.

Yawhora looked up from where she sat, filing her nails. Her lip trembled.

"Captin---I'm frightened!" she wailed.

"Have no fear, your Captin's here!" Kerk sang. "Meet me in my quarters later, lewtenint, for some...ah...communications," he added, for mouth was all he was pure of.

Just then, Dokter Muckoy came onto the bridge, mumbling under his breath. He mumbled a lot. He mumbled because in 79 episodes he'd only gotten the girl twice. Wouldn't you mumble?

"Dokter Muckoy, good to see you again!" Kerk greeted him, for it had been a full 20 minutes since he'd seen him. It was part of the Captin's job to promote good relations aboard his ship.

Muckoy ran a medi-scanner over him. "You'll live!" he asserted.

Kerk looked at him in surprise. "That's a switch for you to say, Boney!! Ladies and Gentlemen and Vulcans -- History has just been made before your very eyes!!"

Ensin Checkoff stopped combing his hair and announced, "Captin, there is the planet Choriomeningitis."

Kerk peered ahead. "Where?"

"That little bright spot in the left hand corner, I think," put in Lewtenint SooLoo, chuckling. He chuckled a lot. And yet, he hadn't even gotten the girl once. But Lewtenint SooLoo was Japanese, so that explains it. Hari-Kari and all that.

The Captin stood up ponderously and the bridge crew cringed. They knew what was coming. Worse than Cling-overs, worse than evil smelly monsters --- the Captin was going to give a speech!

"All hands...feet...fingers...toes...this is your Captin speaking."

Yawhora swooned. Spokk sighed tremulously. Checkoff and SooLoo bowed their heads. Skotti and Muckoy saluted.

"We are boldly going where no man's gone before. A woman has, but not a man. Anyway, there will be dangers to face and we will be required to put our lives on the line again, for this is our job."

"Captin, don't forget to mention how we must go with integrity and honesty for the Good of Mankind," Skotti injected.

"Right, Master Skotti. Thank you. Now, I need three volunteers to rescue the Damsel in Distress on Choriomeningitis. I'll pick... you..you..and you." He swung around, pointing to Spokk, Muckoy and Skotti.

"OOOHH, Captin...I'm frightened!" moaned Yawhora.

"Later, Lewtenint, later," Kerk brushed her off.

"Why are <u>you</u> frightened, Yawhora?" Muckoy asked grumpily. "He didn't pick you!"

"Captin, with all due respect, Sir, is this democratic?" Spokk asked stiffly.

"Right on, Spokk!" Skotti objected. "I was just down on the last mission!"

"You could at least pick an Expendable, insignificant little crew member just to give us a fighting chance!" came Muckoy.

"ENOUGH!!" Kerk shouted into the bedlam. "I am your fearless leader and I will have the say as to who goes boldly!!"

They shrank back as one. Kerk led them, protesting, to the transporter room.

"Captin," Spokk demurred, "why do we always have to bother with these dumb, interfering females?"

"Spokk.." Kerk put his hands on the Vulcan's shoulders. "You are my buddy, but there are times..." He trailed off in exasperation. "Never mind. Now, you three get up on the platform, I'll work the

controls...Let's see, it's up to go down and down to go up---or is it down to go down and up to go up?...Skotti! How do you work these things??"

"You've got to calibrate the doppelganger to reconstruct the frabijet. And be sure you stabilize the bandylock. Then just jettison the pods!!" Skotti told him.

Kerk looked blank. Mechanics was not his specialty. Science was not his specialty, either. Nor was communications, navigation...

"Skotti!!" he screamed. "YOU work the controls -- I'LL rescue the maiden!" Now, that was his specialty.

"A wise choice, Captin," Spokk applauded. "As she is probably for you, James Kerk. Besides, how can we demonstrate our terrific inter-racial friendship if you don't share the dangers with me? If I can't save your life at least once, our fans are going to be disappointed."

And so it came to pass in this Year of the Great Bird, that the same brave trio, the Gleesome Threesome, beamed down to the planet Choriomeningitis to rescue the Damsel in Distress. They set upon their journey and presently they came upon a wondrous castle. The castle was made of plastic, however, as this was after all, the 23rd Century.

From high up in the tower, they could hear the fair maiden cry.

"Help! Help, help," came the tiny voice.

Spokk, running his trusty little tricorder, paused at the bottom of the hill.

"I believe the maiden we seek is in yon castle. The vocal emanations are coming from high up in that tower, at a reading 937.46 mark 2745657.2933."

"You need a tricorder to tell you that, Spokk?" growled Muckoy. In addition to mumbling, he growled a lot. Especially at Spokk. Why did he growl at Spokk? Because he liked him. You figure it out.

"I am alos getting readings from various other life forms. There's a tree roughly 3.28 centimeters from the castle, a bird flying at an altitude of 46.43 feet, a flower--- "

"Okkaay, Spokk, that's enough!" Kerk silenced him. "Come. We must ready our phasers and rescue the damsel. Make sure your weapons are on stun, though---we don't want any violence."

"Don't worry, Jimmy-Boy," reassured Muckoy. "I'm sure whatever dangers we encounter you can out talk."

But Lo! As they approached yon castle, a mean and smelly dragon reared his ugly head.

"Spokk! Didn't your tricorder warn you about this!?" Kerk yelled.

"Of course, Captin, but you didn't let me finish telling you--"

"Never mind! Stun it!" The creature reached out its fiery tongue for Kerk. "Stun it, Spokk!! Stun it!!" he screamed, leaping from the path.

"It appears our weapons are inoperable, Captin. Undoubtedly caused by the massive formation of Z-Rays which is brought about by the atmospheric..."

"I don't care WHY Spokk!! DO SOMETHING!!" Kerk yelped, as the ground at his feet burst into flames. He leaped again.

"Why don't you talk to it, Jimmy-Boy? That always works," advised Muckoy.

Kerk backed up and called to the beast. "Dragon! Listen to me! We are Men of Peace! We come in Friendship and Brotherhood!"

The dragon chased him up the hill.

"We mean you no harm - we just want to rescue the maiden--"

The dragon cased him back down the hill.

"We represent the United Fedrication of Planets - your course is wrong and unjust --- "

They ran around the castle, Kerk in the lead by mere inches.

Spokk looked up lazily from where he sat, under a tree playing fizzbin with Muckoy. "I don't think it's working, Captin," he commented.

"Spokk, I guess you'd better do something," Muckoy said, stiffling a yawn.

"Yes, I suppose so," Spokk sighed, watching balefully as Kerk stumbled and the dragon descended upon him. "The Captin needs my help, Muckoy, and since he is my dearest friend in the whole wide galaxy, I had better----"

"SPOKKKKK !!!!!" screamed Kerk in desperation.

"Coming, Captin. I will save you!" Spokk leaped upon the dragon's back and fearlessly knocked the thing unconscious with his famous Vulcan neck pinch. Vulcans are clever like that.

Huffing and puffing, the Captin sat up, as Spokk and Muckoy rushed sweiftly to his side.

"My dear, true friend, you have saved my life again!" Kerk said, throwing an arm around Spokk. Muckoy joined in, hugging both of them at once.

"You two were terrific," the Dokter exclaimed. "But now it's time for my scene. Are you hurt, Jimmy-Boy? Do I get a chance to play doctor this mission?"

"Well, I have this hangnail, Boney..."

"Gee, that looks painful, Jimmy. Let me give you a hypo - I'm very good at hypos."

"Captin! Muckoy!" Spokk suddenly exclaimed. "The Damsel in Distress! We must hurry!"

"Awww, Spokk, what's your rush?" Muckoy complained.

And again, the tiny voice came from the tower.

"Help! Help, help," she cried.

"She's probably old and wears gym shoes," Kerk commented.

"But we are sworn to uphold the honour of Starfeet," Spokk protested.

The Captin laid an arm on Spokk's shoulder. "Listen, Spokk, I'm the Captin. Would I steer you wrong? You've got to have faith and believe in me."

"I do, Captin, I do," Spokk pledged.

"Well then, look, we're happy now, just the three of us and our big, beautiful ship up there, right?"

"Sure, Jimmy-Boy," Muckoy conceeded. "Why, we're the Galactic Musketeers, right? One for all and all for one and all that jazz."

"Good, Boney, you understand. Now, Spokk, why do we need this dumb, interfering female?"

"Well, Captin, it was your idea to..."

"Yes, but aren't I entitled to change my mind? Must I be perfect in all ways?"

"You are perfect, Captin," Spokk claimed passionately.

And again, that tiny voice in the tower.

"Help! Help, help," she cried.

"Gentlemen -- my buddies -- let's go hime!" Kerk said with finality.

And so, the Endapride lived happily ever after, and the Damsel in Distress had to wait for the next starship.

...THE ABSOLUTE END...

THE ANSWER

By Beverly Volker

How can I break it to him, and what words should be said?
This tragedy awaiting him - the news our Captain's dead.

It's been my duty many times, in many ways gone by
To tell it to the loved ones when I watched somebody die.

I've learned to steel myself against the onslaught of their grief,
And whisper reassuring words that offer some relief.

And even when the pain of loss has also been my own,
I've spoken as a Doctor, in a soft impersonal tone.

But words of comfort will not work; he's not like you nor I.
How can I tell this Vulcan that I watched our Captain die?

***** *****

The parting was a happy one the day Spock's leave came through;
He headed back to Vulcan for a visit overdue.

The Captain teased him fondly, and as he watched him go
He said, "I'll miss him but the rest will do him good, I know."

The time had gone by smooth enough, the weeks somehow slid past,
And yesterday Jim grinned at me, "Spock's coming back at last!"

I had understood his look and knew his happy mood;
He was anxious to see Spock again, and soon tomorrow he would.

Then he'd gone to Engineering, and his step was extra light.
A routine check with Scotty and he'd knock off for the night.

"Good night, Bones," he'd said to me, and headed for the hall --
It was only minutes later that I got the urgent call.

"Scott to Sickbay," came the words. "Hurry, Doctor - Fast!
An accident! The Captain's hurt! A freak reactor blast!"

I still do not remember all the movements that I made.
Spontaneous reaction to the role our lives have played.

I knew it when I reached him. It was useless, still I tried.
But as I knelt to help him, there within my arms he died.

It happened all so suddenly, the crew felt cold despair.
As quiet disbelief set in, and sadness filled the air.

Mechanically, I made the moves, did necessary acts
To fill the void, to keep myself from facing brutal facts.

I still could not believe it, I still was numb with shock,
Yet somehow, very shortly, I must break the news to Spock.

The unsuspecting Vulcan would be beamed aboard today,
And when I went to meet him, what were the words to say?

There was no logic in this - a thing that made no sense.
As I wondered how to reach him, I felt myself grow tense.

His race has no emotions, their feelings they deny,
But yet I know Spock loved Jim Kirk, more deeply still than I.

What comfort can I give this man who won't admit the need?
While still my own despair wells up in every word and deed?

I know he'll feel the bitter loss, the hurt and anguished pain;
The truth that nothing we can do will bring Jim back again.

***** *****

There is the word, the time has come, and I will take my place.
For when the Vulcan beams aboard, I'll meet him face to face.

And as the sparkle's fading, I still can't comprehend
What words to use to tell him that we both have lost our friend.

Then in grief and desperation, I sobbed out, "Spock - Jim died!"
And in disbelief we stood there - and our souls met - and we cried.

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I am not of that feather to shake

off my friend when he must need me.

SHAKESPEARE: TIMON OF ATHENS

Nightmare Ending

By D.T. Steiner & Catherine McCommon

The mountains, black and dismal, harbor many shadows. Night lies like a blanket, undisturbed by mist and wind. Silence. And the Night Ones move through the silence, padding softly, searching ...

In the darkness they come upon the two, huddled together, bodies pressed close against the ruined wall of an ancient building. As they approach cautiously, their lantern light illumines the pair and they are shocked by what they see ... Before there is time for a response, one of the two, the Vulcan, staggers to his feet groaning like a dog, almost snarling. His face is battered and drips blood, all the more grotesque because it's green ... They signal him that they mean no harm; they sit the lamp down and hold their hands out, their eyes popping in their rat-like faces. It is too late. Like an enraged animal he charges at them, fury in his black eyes. They back off and he circles, still making strange groaning sounds in his throat, warding them off. They finally realize that he's protecting the other one, the quiet one that still lies in a ragged heap against the wall. They try again to reason with him -- again they must back off. It is as if he cannot hear, will not understand. He is like a wounded animal defending its helpless young ...

It cannot go on for long. The Vulcan is staggering, weakened, his breath gasping. They will wait until he drops. He retreats a few paces to be nearer the quiet one and stands, his chest heaving. His eyes, burning coals in the distorted face, are beginning to glaze. One of them raises the lamp again and the Vulcan straightens. No, no, not yet, the word goes around and they back off again. They must not touch the defiled alien flesh; they must not be touched by it. A touch from this creature could kill. It is the Human one they must have.

The waiting goes on for too long; dawn is approaching. There must be another way. There are eight to his one. They plan their strategy well and again the lamp is raised, again the Vulcan intercedes his body between them and the quiet one, again he is on the offensive, his face still dripping blood. Too late he realizes the deception in what they are doing and turns, his eyes wild, back toward the wall. The crude club takes him in the side and he reels, staggering -- it takes him again before he can grasp them, this time in the small of the back. He falls, his legs jerking, half-paralyzed with agony. They hit him again, brutal with fear. His forehead is opened, his eyes blinded with blood. He does not move.

Carefully they move around him. Carefully they approach the huddled mass of rags that lies against the wall so quietly. The lamp is raised, its beam turned high. Suddenly one of them gags in disgust and the light wavers.

The Human is no use to them. Not yet dead, they know he soon will be, and wonder at the passionate defense the strange one put

up to protect him. No use to them at all, this huddled mass of blood and ripped flesh. One of them pushes at him with the club so that he falls a little backwards to lie like a broken doll against the wall.

His abdomen is torn open, viscera wetly exposed. His hands tremble in spasm as he holds at himself. He is soaked in blood and the air reeks of it, the ground is red with it where he has been lying. One of them pushes at him again, turning his face toward the light with the end of the club. It is unmarked but for the hemorrhage from the nose and mouth -- a young face that could be called beautiful ... A shame, a waste, one of them mutters in his high sibilant voice. Another drops the club and turns away. Leave him, mutters the third, he will soon die with the strange one and when the Day Ones find them they will feed them to the dogs -- we must go -- must -- it is almost dawn.

The lamplight wavers and fades as they make their way back down the knoll, leaving darkness and silence behind them. Against the wall the quiet one breathes sobbingly, his hand stretching out toward the other as if in supplication; grief; the golden eyes mist and shine, as they stare sightlessly toward the insipient dawn.

*****

A sob caught in his throat as his eyes snapped open. He sat up abruptly. Sweat beaded his forehead and he found that he was trembling violently. He tried to check the physical reactions as his senses grasped at the familiar reality around him.

The guardian still kept its silent red vigil, enveloping the room in its warm, flickering glow, the bed was solid beneath him, his body whole, untouched.

The evidence helped calm his breathing to near normal once more and eased his body's trembling, but his eyes still sought the focal peace of the guardian's light. 'Only a dream', it assured him. 'Neither of you are harmed. Jim is safe, alive, sleeping peacefully in his own quarters.'

The meditation light spoke truly to his mind, yet the dream had been real, too, true in its own reality. He'd had it twice before, the same in every detail. 'Why?' his mind asked the guardian, but as before when he'd asked, there was no answer.

Spock reclined again, sought to relax his body once more and to clear his mind for rest. Yet he knew, as before, sleep would not come again that night. His body fought his mind's control, then slowly, the natural part of his mind slipped from the civilized Vulcan overmind. Once freed, his body joined it against the stern, logical tyrant. That part of him watched as he rose and dressed swiftly -- watched dispassionately as he crossed the corridor between hurridly and buzzed Kirk's cabin door.

It took several rings before Kirk answered the summons himself. But as the opening door revealed him, he did not look as if he'd been asleep. His hair was ruffled, his torso shirtless, yet his face seemed not sleep-filled but as if he were in pain. They simply stared at

each other for several long moments, each taking in the other's condition. Then Spock quietly said, "Are you feeling all right, Jim?"

"I..." Kirk faltered, recovered. "Yes...why...Come in."

He turned away as Spock entered, moving to the desk table to place both hands on it, as if for support. Spock followed him, to pause behind him silently. He heard Kirk's deep intake of breath, almost a shudder, before the Captain spoke, his voice low but under control.

"Why...I mean, why did you..."

"I thought perhaps you might require something," Spock interposed smoothly.

Kirk shook his head, his attention on the tabletop. "I don't understand. How..." He faltered again, was silent this time.

"I do not know," Spock finished softly. "Are you unwell?"

Kirk's bowedhead shook again. "No...I just..." He sighed, went on, "I had a bad dream, that's all."

Spock stiffened. "Dream?"

"I don't want to discuss it, Spock," the Captain said firmly.

"Jim..."

"NO!" Kirk said roughly. "Don't ask me. I can't!"

Spock noticed how pale his face looked, how bloodless his clenched fists lay against the tabletop. "Jim," he said quietly, "if you will permit me, I can block it from your memory."

"No," Kirk refused tonelessly. "I won't subject you to it. It's ...private."

"Then I shall respect your wishes," Spock said softly. "But I can at least bring you sleep."

He put his hand out hesitantly, as if he half-expected to be repulsed. When Kirk made no move, Spock's hand touched his shoulder lightly and then rested there. Kirk's flesh was warm and solid beneath his fingers. "Allow me to help," he added.

Kirk didn't look at him. "I don't want to sleep anymore tonight. I'll dream again."

"You will not dream, Jim. I guarantee it."

Kirk slowly looked up at him for the first time. His eyes, Spock noted, were darker than their usual light hazel and as unreadable as his own. But when he spoke, there was a definite note of suspicion in his voice. "How can you do that without reading my mind?"

"Simple suggestion."

Kirk sighed, broke their look. "All right, I'm tired of arguing with..." Kirk paused, checked his tongue. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean that."

"No apology is required," Spock replied quietly. "You're tired. Are you ready?"

"Yes."

Spock's other hand started to Kirk's temple - was checked as the Captain turned towards him again, his eyes open, searching, vulnerable at last, his voice naked with need. "Spock, do you believe in premonition?"

The Vulcan forcefully checked his sudden desire to break their eye contact. "I believe in reality," he said softly, "not dreams and phantoms." His hand tightened briefly on Kirk's shoulder in emphasis. "This is reality, Jim."

Kirk's face seemed to relax somewhat. Spock's hand was warm, solid - real on his shoulder. He made an attempt to lighten the mood. "At times, your logic does have its uses."

Spock followed his example. "Why thank you, Captain. Now are you quite ready to sleep?"

"If you insist, Doctor."

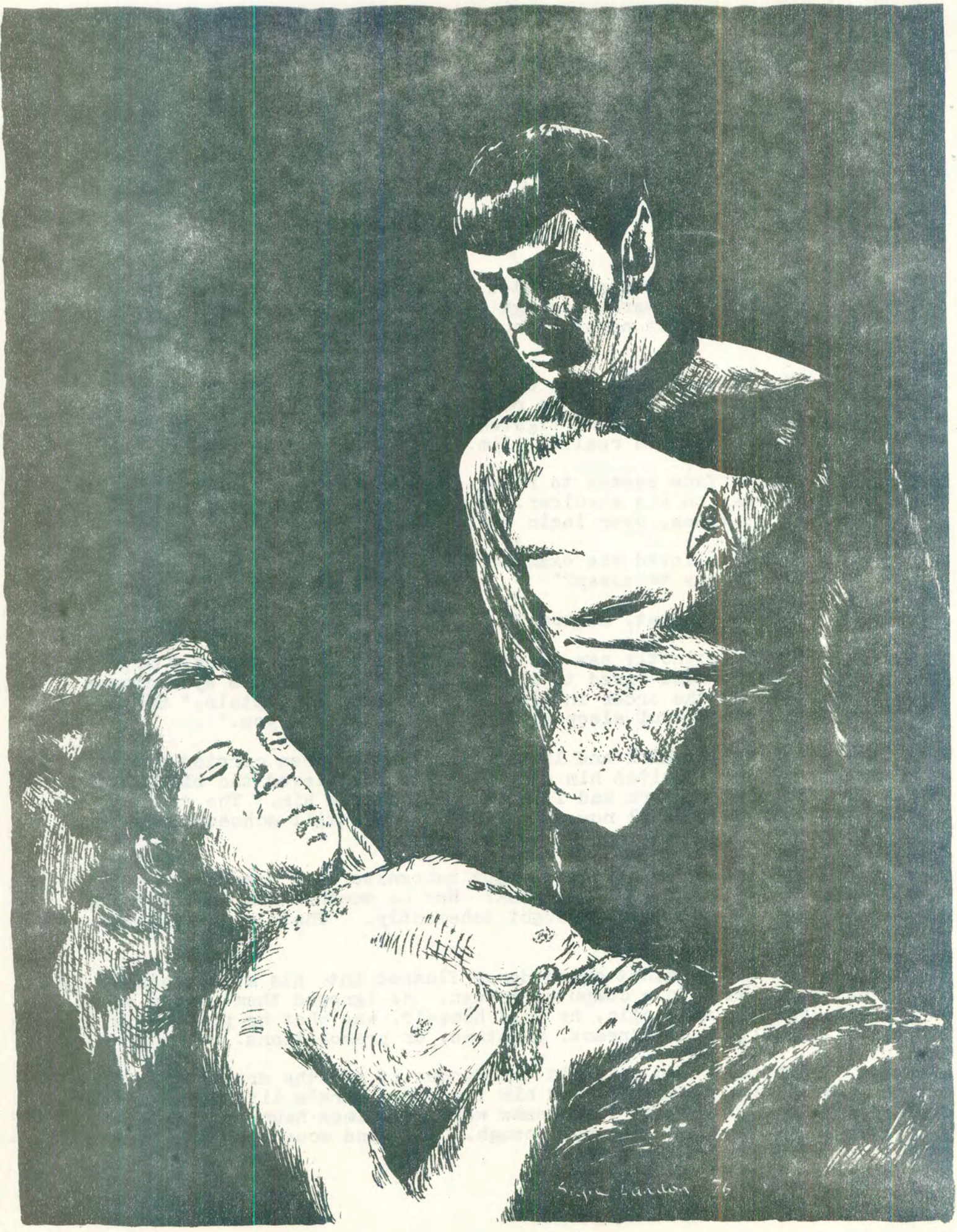
Kirk distinctly saw the flicker of a smile on Spock's lips as the Vulcan's hand moved to his left temple. Then his eyes closed in answer to the order in his mind. 'Sleep, my Captain,' Spock thought. 'Peaceful sleep with no dreams to harm you.'

He caught Kirk and lifted him lightly, then carried him to the bed and deposited him gently. Spock retrieved the blanket from the floor where Kirk had flung it and covered him. The still boyish face looked peaceful now, yet Kirk's words still echoed in Spock's mind.

Premonition - no, he did <u>not</u> recognize such nonsense. But was it? What had caused Jim to ask? Had he somehow shared the dream... had they...'No!' Spock thought vehemently. 'That is impossible. It was coincidence.'

The odds against coincidence flashed into his mind unasked, like automatic data on a computer screen. He ignored them. None of it was logical, and logic, he told himself, was what he placed his trust in. <u>Reality</u> - not dreams, phantoms, or premonitions.

But logic had to admit the danger if not the dream. The Service's hazards were undeniable and his fears for Kirk's life never rested. Perhaps that was why his dreams were sometimes haunted. The explanation, though true, was not enough. His mind sought solace in a memory -



something he had read once:

Though all the galaxies grow cold and dread
My hand to yours
My sword by yours
My body your shield
My heart to yours
My life for yours
Though all should pass away
My soul to yours.

Spock collected himself, came back to reality. His eyes focused on the sleeping human again and he stood gazing down at Kirk for several minutes, gathering the threads of calmness around them both, weaving a cocoon of peace and invulnerability over them, his mind meeting Jim's lightly in the touch that was not.

When it was done, he sighed softly, spent, ready for sleep himself. As he turned to go, a final thought stole quietly over his consciousness. "It is love, not reason, that is stronger than death."

His mind automatically identified the author, 'Thomas Mann, The Magic Mountain.' Of course. He turned at the doorway to look back at his Captain one last time and as the doors separated them, Kirk sighed softly in his dreamfree rest.

TRIVIA

4.) Spock said he felt "great hatred" toward the Platonians because--

(a) They had made the doctor watch the torture (b) They had forced emotion out of him (c) They had nearly made him kill the Captain

5.) Who asked Kirk if Spock and McCoy were enemies?

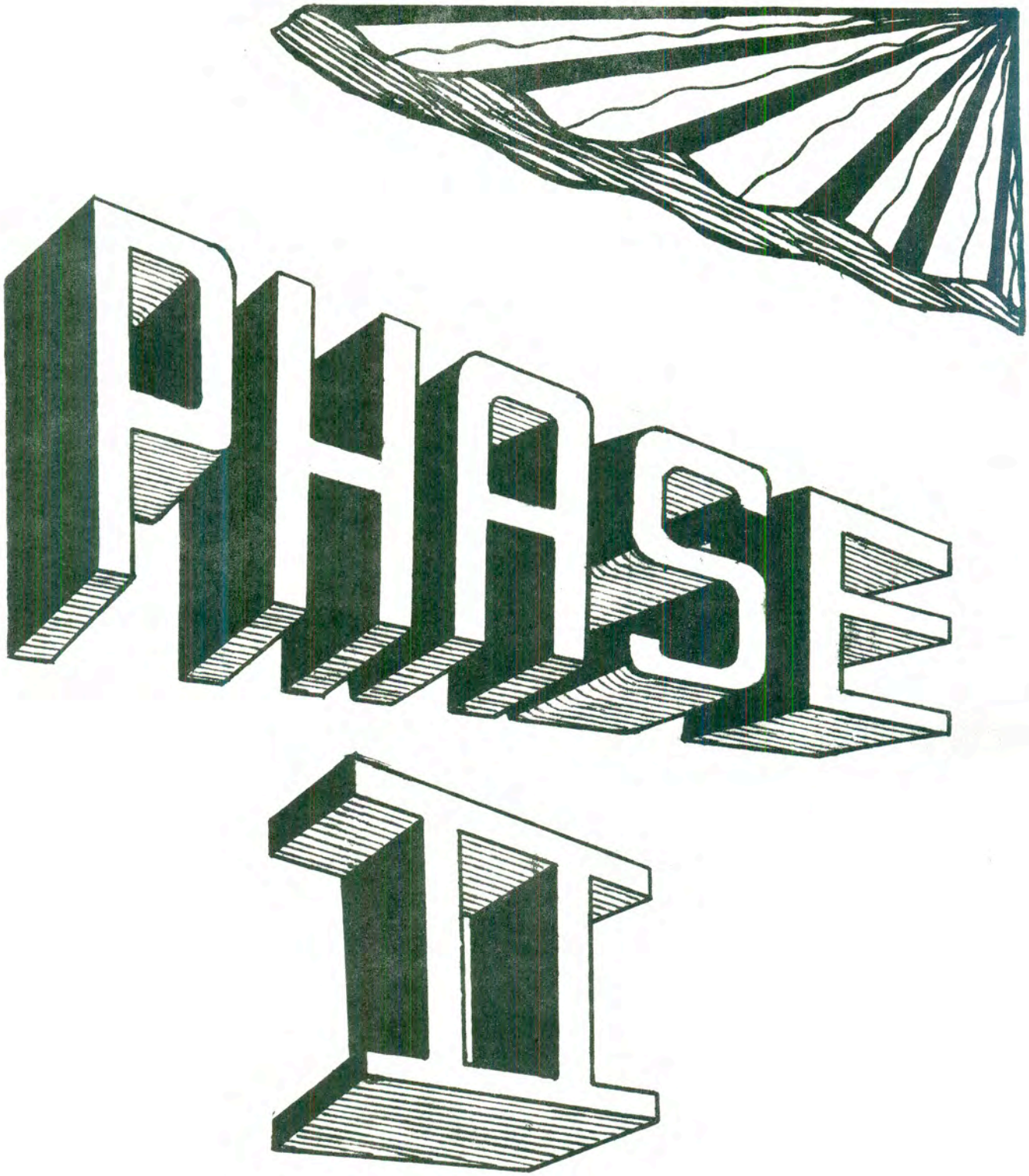
(a) Isak (b) Flavius Maximus (c) Kahn Singh

6.) According to Blish, why did Spock tell Jim he was "sorry" after telling him that Edith Keeler must die?

(a) Because he couldn't be exact about the time and place (b) Because he wasn't sure which future was correct (c) Because he knew Jim loved her.

7.) In which episode did McCoy tell Spock he had a "good bedside manner"?

(a) The Empath (b) For the World is Hollow (c) All Our Yesterdays



BY B. J. VOLKER & N. J. KIPPAX

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTER I: THE INVITATION

On Starbase 8, Admiral James Kirk, a liason officer whose wife, Areel, has recently died, receives an unusual communication: An invitation from Starfleet Command to attend the decommisioning ceremonies of his former ship, the USS ENTERPRISE. At the same time, on the planet Vulcan, Ambassador Spock, living with his wife T'Pania, married son Selik, and daughter T'Prett, receives a similar invitation.

Both men react to this unexpected announcement with a mixture of pride, apprehension and a little guilt, for it has been many years since Spock and Kirk left the ENTERPRISE, after an incident that had been so painful to them both that even now they had been unable to resolve it. Neither had seen the other in these many years.

Over dinner that night, Kirk tells his old friend, "Bones" McCoy, with whom he has remained close, that he will attend the ceremonies. However, he will not travel aboard the USS ENCOUNTER, a Starship provided for the convenience of the former ENTERPRISE officers. Jim's nephew, Peter Kirk, is First Officer on the ENCOUNTER, and the ship is commanded by a Vulcan Captain named Stack - Spock's eldest and illegitimate son!

Instead, Jim tells Bones, he will go early to the ceremonies and will talk to Spock before they are reunited with the rest of their former crew. Together they will at last resolve what they could not before. There is no question in Kirk's mind: Spock will attend; even after all this time he feels he instinctively understands Spock's thinking.

Similarly, on Vulcan, Spock has no doubt that his former Captain will be attending the nostalgic ceremony, and finds himself strangely eager to lay the old ghosts once and for all.

The Ambassador's party arrives first at Starbase 15. While Spock takes leave of his family for private meditation, T'Prett and her mother receive an unexpected visitor - Admiral James Kirk. Having steeled himself for this meeting with Spock, Kirk is surprised when the door is opened by a delightful and charming Vulcan girl who announces herself as T'Prett, daughter of Spock. But if Spock's daughter is all eagerness and curiousity for her father's former Captain, T'Pania's welcome, though cordial enough for a Vulcan, is somewhat less enthusiastic. Understanding that her husband will wish to see his friend alone, T'Pania bids Kirk remain to await Spock's return, while she cooly ushers T'Prett and herself to the quarters of Amanda and Sarek.

Frustrated by her mother's interference with what promised to be an "interesting" reunion, and impatient at being confined on as "fascinating" a place as a Federation Starbase, T'Prett announces she will explore the installation.

Left to her own devices, T'Prett happens upon a building from which the approach of the Starship ENCOUNTER is being monitored. Using her father's influence, she requisitions a shuttlecraft and pilot to taxi her out to meet her half-brother's ship.

Aboard the ENCOUNTER, information of the approaching shuttlecraft is met with quiet reproof from the Captain, and he delegates the task of receiving the Ambassador's daughter to his second-in-command. Dr. Leonard McCoy, passenger, is present on the bridge when the call comes in, and is delighted and curious to learn of Spock's daughter. Accompanying Cmdr. Kirk to the hangar deck, McCoy wonders briefly about Stack's attitude toward his half-sister, but his attention is diverted by the arrival of the girl. Her likeness to her father suddenly reminds Bones of Spock and the infant Stack...Theron, he was called then.

T'Prett tours the ship and is introduced to the rest of the distinguished passengers: Ret. Capt. Uhura and her husband, delegate B'Hustain, shipping magnate Montgomery Scott and his lovely wife Heather, Drs. Christine Chapel Henry and Tyrone Henry, husband and wife medical team, and Gov. Sulu of the Federation colony, New Japan.

Finally, T'Prett questions Peter about the obvious absence of her brother. Awkwardly, Peter makes excuses for his Captain and friend. Later, alone with McCoy, the Vulcan girl confesses she does not know her brother very well and admits he did not live in her father's house as she and her brother Selik did. This came as a revelation to Bones, but it explained Stack - a man whose adjustment was adequate, even to be a Starship Captain - but who, in his experienced eyes, cried out for something. Driven by a desire to help, he decides to tell T'Prett about Spock and Stack's mother. There had been enough damage done by the years of secrecy and guilt.

"I am going to tell you of your father and Stack's mother," he begins. "Her name was Tarra St. John....."

Read now of how it was in days of yore --
And then destruction at the door.
Don't let it be forgot - that once there was a spot -
For one brief shining moment that was known....
As Camelot!



Chapter 2: TARRA

Her name was Tarra St. John. Lieutenant St. John. She came aboard the ENTERPRISE to fill a vacancy as Spock's assistant...

Jim Kirk settled back in his command chair and threw a mischevious look at his First Officer. Spock was standing stiffly at his right, his rigid face emotionless.

"Orbit acheived, Captain," called the navigator.

"Well, Spock, are you ready to greet your new assistant?" Kirk asked. It was getting to be a standing ship's joke about Spock and his unsuccessful assistants. Either Spock found them unsatisfactory, or they found Spock impossible to work for, or more often, a combination of both. Starfleet had sent him six assistants in as many months, and none had lasted.

It wasn't that Spock was not a good teacher; on the contrary, they had all been enriched by their short service under his tutelage. He was a hard taskmaster and his absolute insistance on the standards he set was extremely difficult for most non-Vulcans. The assistants, in turn, found working for a live computer quite frustrating.

Now, amidst the suppressed chuckles of the bridge crew, Spock gave his Captain a withering look, loftily raising one eyebrow wordlessly. Aware that his friend was growing uncomfortable being the butt of his joke, Jim smiled an apology at him. He really hadn't meant to embarrass Spock.

Pushing a button on his console, he ordered, "Have Dr. McCoy meet us in the transporter room. Mr. Spock---"

They found the doctor awaiting them in the transporter room. As Chief Medical Officer, it was part of his duty to fill out the complete medical dossier on any new crew member. Only after McCoy's examinations would they be turned over to the Records Section for the rest of the paperwork.

"Well, Spock, time for another assistant again, huh?" he joked.

Jim was becoming irritated with all the teasing. "That's enough, Bones," he reproved mildly.

"Enough?" McCoy rasped. "Do you realize the amount of work this First Officer of yours is causing me? Between screening 'em in and screening 'em out, I hardly have any time to run my Sickbay! Why, there are 10 seperate forms just for -- "

"Doctor," Kirk warned, "that's enough."

McCoy fell silent, chastized, but as Kirk turned to the transporter officer, he said in a surly tone, "Well, at least this time it's another female. Maybe there are some incentives!"

Kirk smiled wryly at Bones. He couldn't stay angry with the doctor for very long.

"Gentlemen," Spock said evenly, "I, too, am most anxious to receive a competent assistant. However, it is vital for the well-being of this ship that I settle for nothing less than what I deem the best."

Kirk eyed him curiously. That was a lengthy speech for Spock. This thing must be getting to him more than he suspected. The Captain turned, and gave the order for beam-up to commence.

The form assumed shape; a young woman advanced and spoke crisply.

"Lt. Tarra St. John, reporting for duty, Sir. Request permission to come aboard."

"Permission granted," Kirk replied mechanically, looking her over objectively. She was rather pretty, in a standard sort of way. Her short, honey colored hair was brushed back in a casual style and she wore her uniform with an air of pride. But the eyes, Kirk saw, were hard, glittering green points, which revealed a very composed and determined character. Strange in one sho otherwise soft, he thought.

Tarra looked from one to the other. As Spock was introduced, she raised one hand in the oft-practiced Vulcan salute, and said smoothly, "Peace and long life, Mr. Spock." She allowed herself a wave of inward triumph at his startled look and reply. He would never know how hard she had worked digging up that much information on Vulcans at the last outpost she had served on. Knowing only a few days in advance that she had received the coveted post as Cmdr. Spock's assistant aboard the Starship ENTERPRISE, she had scurried about in an effort to learn all she could about Vulcans. Much of what she had heard from fellow human officers had been disheartening. But Tarra was coming to do a job, and learn all she possibly could from Spock. She had worked long and hard to acheive this goal.

She turned to the physician with a genuine smile. The gallant Southern gentleman gently took her arm.

"Now, if you'll just come with me, Lieutenant, we can cut through all this red tape and get you settled into the routine. I think you're going to like the ENTERPRISE. It's a good crew...."

His voice became inaudible as they moved out of the room. Kirk, alone with his First Officer, turned to him with a reassuring smile.

"Brilliant woman, Spock. I have the transcription of her records in my quarters. I'll send them over to you as soon as possible."

Nodding his assent and as he and Kirk too left the transporter room, Spock wondered fleetingly where the Lieutenant had learned that formal Vulcan greeting.

...From the first, it seemed that Tarra was going to make it as Spock's assistant. As the Captain had remarked, she was indeed a brilliant young woman. Orphaned quite young, she had been educated in Federation training schools, which were excellent in recognizing potential. She'd entered the Space Academy, and the tribute to her scholarship and genius lay in the rank she bore. To be a Lieutenant at her age was remarkable in itself, but to have acheived that rank before her first deep space assignment was astounding.

Professionally, she was well matched to Spock, but she was also a warm, witty girl who made friends easily. Uhura, especially, was close to Tarra, and she took the newcomer under her wing and guided her in the everyday routine of life aboard ship.

As time went by, Tarra's optimism began to wear down. For one thing, she found she could not regard Spock with proper detachment. From the first, she was drawn to the curious alien with his cold precise logic, and somewhat in awe of his superior mental proficiencies. She tried her utmost to emulate him, then grew furious with herself when she could not. She attempted to overcompensate by staying one step ahead at all times, by going out of her way to do more than he asked, and sooner than expected.

All her life, Tarra had been equal to, if not intellectually superior to most of her contemporaries, including a number of her instructors and commanding officers. Here was a man so totally her superior, one whose scope of knowledge left her dizzy trying to comprehend. Yet his cool indifference to her, the simple menial tasks he gave her, made her feel that he expected her to fail to throw up her hands and to walk away.

Perhaps he did. Spock had grown weary of this search for a competent assistant, and when Lt. St. John arrived, while he was mildly surprised at her scientific knowledge, he had had far too many failures to expect this human female to be any different. All the same, he must put her to the test, must determine her worthiness, and what Tarra interpretted as cool indifference, was in reality Spock's probing, analytical testing.

The issue came to a head one day, when Tarra handed him a report, a survey assignment he'd given her the day before, to be completed in a week.....

"Here's the report you asked for, sir," Tarra said, laying the papers on his desk.

Spock regarded her with contemplative eyes. "I gave you a week to prepare this, Lieutenant," he said pointedly.

"Yes, sir, I know. But once I got started, I decided to go ahead and finish," she explained, not adding how she'd stayed up half the night to get it to him by today.

The Vulcan merely cocked an eyebrow as he thumbed through the report. "Yes, I see. All right, Lieutenant, carry on."

She pushed. "Is it satisfactory, Sir?" Her voice was dangerously insolent, and Spock regarded her curiously.

"Is there some reason why it should not be?"

"Of course not! I just meant--" She broke off, wavering, uncertain how much liberty to take.

"Then I suggest we move on to the culture samples. Are you prepared to--"

She managed to keep her voice level. "I worked very hard on that report, Mr. Spock. Aren't you at least going to read it?"

He met her eyes steadily. "Not at this moment, Lieutenant. It is not due until next week. There are other matters which demand our immediate attention. It is a case of priorities. You fail to understand--"

Green eyes snapping fire, she slammed her palm down on his desk. "I understand too well, Mr. Spock! From the first day I came here you've done nothing to encourage independent thinking or to give me any sort of recognition as a colleague. You act as though you expect me to fail, then you seem surprised when I don't. I came here with much to learn, yet you refuse to be bothered with teaching. Well, I'm not giving up, I'm not quitting, but you have to realize that I'm not one of your computers! I need feedback, challenge, stimulation -- I want to be your assistant, not just some dunsel to run your errands. If that's what you want, put in for a yeoman, not a scientist."

Her cold fury unsettled his Vulcan composure. She dared to speak that way to her commanding officer, and yet he admired her spirit. Most subordinates wouldn't have such courage in their convictions, and it was possible he might be in error. Her arguments contained certain validities which he must logically acknowledge, although like most Humans she ascribed emotions to him which he could not feel. But most exasperating of all, she was impatient; as with each of her duties, she couldn't wait. Obviously their time synch was not harmonious.

She stood, anger abating, a crimson flush staining her cheeks as he studied her clinically without speaking. Had she gone too far, said too much? But it had to be said, she realized, her spunk returning.

"Tarra," he said at last, using her given name for the first time, "I find your knowledge and skill in your chosen field to be quite satisfactory. You are a highly competent officer and your only failing is a tendency to overcompensate. When I give you a week to prepare a report, I expect it to take you a week. If I ask for two copies, you give me five. I do not expect any more than I ask. You will wear yourself out by your overacheivement, and that is of little benefit to either of us."

She sat down, nodding wordlessly; grateful he had chosen to ignore her insubordinance, and silently recognized the truth in his words. This was precisely what she wanted -- reaction, give

and take, useful, worthwhile talk.

"As for the rest," he went on, "if you can learn to curtail your impatience, you may find the challenge and stimulation you seek."

He had not admitted he was wrong, she noticed. Stubborn, superior.... "Yes, Mr. Spock," she said earnestly, a trace of smile softening her lips. "Shall we get on with the culture samples?"

...Things went better after that. They acheived a more agreeable working relationship. Tarra learned to understand and interpret Spock's style and methods, and to match her pace to his so they functioned as a team. Slowly, subtly, she was proving herself indispensible and perhaps something more.

Spock slowly allowed himself to think that he had found someone he could accept as his assistant. He found he could relax with Tarra; she made no demands, presented no threat to him.

Tarra began to perceive a different side of Spock as they worked closely day by day. She'd known he was half-human, and now she could see the battle he waged with himself. The human Spock crept out from time to time, startling her with the beauty of the IDIC concept.

There were moments when their relationship transcended the ordinary. Precious moments when they came together with mutual triumphs, agonies and experiences. There was the first time that Spock left her in complete charge of the department. He and the Captain were beaming down into a potentially dangerous situation, and Tarra stood watching him go with a lump of fear in her throat, painfully aware that he may not return; realizing, acknowledging at last how very much he'd come to mean to her. She learned to live with that fear, as assignments came and went, just as she lived with the sense of responsibilities he rested on her shoulders. But that first time, he'd seemed to understand, to sense her sudden panic, and while his words remained impersonal, he had held her with a look, a touch, guiding her with his strength.

Another time, an unknown disease ravaged the ship, killing five crew members before a cure was found. Nearly half the crew was infected, including the Captain, and Tarra worked by Spock's side around the clock, perceiving his inner agony and urgency. She knew how very important Jim Kirk was to Spock, and she ached for him - his feeling of helplessness. When at last, fatigued and near exhaustion, they isolated the correct antitoxin, their eyes met across the lab table, joy and triumph mirrored, all barriers down in the ultimate depths of understanding. How very vulnerable and human he seemed at that moment.

She knew now that she loved him in a way she had never believed possible; totally, unselfishly, willing to do anything to avoid hurting him. Although she admitted this feeling to herself, she kept it tucked away in the recesses of her mind and heart, recognizing the futility of it all. Futility? No, not that. Tarra determined to be content to work by his side every day, to be with him, to share, to enjoy, to savor what happiness she could. She was in love; life was full, rich and good, and she was still too young to worry about tomorrow.

Spock was not aware of Tarra's feelings but the happiness and contentment she radiated in his prescence became infectious. He was at a loss to understand the compelling force she exerted over him and he never attempted to analyse it. She was good company, an able and competent colleague, and aside from James Kirk, the only human he allowed himself to relax with.

The Captain noted the subtle change in Spock, the new vigor he showed in his work. He suspected Tarra was the cause, and was delighted. Whatever she was doing, however she was doing it, if Spock were pleased, then so was he.

Then, suddenly, everything changed. Forces of nature, beyond the control of any of them, took over with a swift vengeance, predicating a course of events which would set all of them on a path to destruction...

Spock stood before the lighted flamepot in his quarters, trying with little success to maintain his Vulcan control. His limbs were shivering, despite the intense heat. He'd raised the temperature three times since coming off duty.

It was wrong; it was too soon after the other time, and progressing more swiftly. But, he remembered, there had been no culmination that time, and these things were always unpredictable, or so he'd heard. He pondered what steps he must take now. There was no one waiting on Vulcan...

A sudden soft tapping at his door reverberated in his ears like a gong. A memory stirred... The marriage party approaches...He shook his head to clear it, and wondered in consternation who might be coming to his cabin. He did not wish to see anyone under these circumstances, yet he knew he could not just wall himself up in here; he was a Starship officer, and such luxuries were not allowed. He had learned that the last time. But he would go to the Captain, implore him to lock him away -- again, before he lost control. He shook himself mentally.

The tapping came again, this time the sound in its proper perspective.

"Come," he said, choking the word out of his dry throat.

The door swished open, and Tarra entered, smiling in friendly affection. She was out of uniform, dressed in a comfortable, multicolored caftan. Her scrubbed face was shining, and a ribbon of light blue was woven through her hair.

"I thought you weren't in, that you'd forgotten," she said easily.

He heard the words, but they made no sense. He could hardly think past the dull pounding in his head. Steeling himself, he sublimated the distraction, forcing himself to long practiced

mental disciplines.

"Forgotten?" he querried blankly.

She looked at him thoughtfully, really seeing him for the first time. Concern crept into her voice. "You were to give me a lesson at chess tonight -- Spock, are you all right?"

He shivered again, despite the growing heat in his bloodstream. The adrenalin pumped faster, but he could control it...he must control it. He looked away, not able to meet her eyes.

"Forgive me." His voice sounded husky, even to his own ears. "I am not myself tonight. Another time, perhaps?"

She hesitated, unsure. Should she try to find out what was wrong, or seek outside help, or just leave him with his privacy? Spock was such a complex person it was difficult to know what to do. She considered him carefully.

"Very well," she said at last. "As you wish." She turned to go.

"Tarra...." The word was a plea, wrung from the depths of his being. He took an unsteady step toward her. "Don't go..." he coaxed, feeling the control weaken despite his firm resolves. As she turned back to face him, with concern and care in her eyes, he could feel the beast lurking within himself ready to pounce and claim that which he desired.

"We have worked together. We have shared...much. It is not enough," he said, in that strange rasping tone. There was an odd light in his eyes, mesmorizing, as he slowly closed the space between them. He stood at her side, his mind still fighting for control, as the nearness of her drowned his senses in wonderment. She would understand, he knew somewhere deep inside of him, just as she seemed to understand so much of him. How could there be, why should there be, such barriers between them? A part of him was shamed by such illogic, but another part screamed, NO! This is me, this is truly the me that no one knows! But she knows! -- She has always known! In some mysterious, unfathomable way this one had cut through to the core, peeling away the thin outer layers built up with difficulty over the years.

Tarra understood. She knew, as his fingertips came up hesitantly to caress her cheek with a touch so light and soft it was gentler than a kiss, what it was he needed from her. She didn't have to know why or how this had come about, it was enough that he wanted her. Tentatively, she followed his example, bringing her own fingers to his rigid cheek. She felt some of the tension in him dissipate under her touch.

"It will be more pleasing if we link minds," he offered, his voice steady and assured now. "May I show you?"

She nodded wordlessly, afraid to trust her voice to speak. His fingers moved deftly, strongly into the proper position, and his mind sought hers with an expertise that he momentarily marvelled at. His ways were strange to her, but she trusted and believed in him enough not to be frightened.

They were one. Together they gasped at the Beauty and Joy of it, marveling and delighting in it like two small children. They thought as One, they moved as One, sharing one heart, one soul. He was the stronger, but she was by no means sublimated, as he downshifted to compensate. Tarra sensed the pent up beast in him, the overpowering, all consuming force driving him, and his need, meeting hers, was like a whiplash cutting into them.

Everything else was forgotten as they blended and became whole, losing themselves to the moment of here and now. They rose higher and higher, straining to attain peaks of passion never dreamed possible, and then, having attained them, stood there triumphant before slithering back down in joyous companionship.

Afterward, Spock dissolved the link, and Tarra lay spent and shaking, but the Vulcan moved quickly to sit on the side of the bed, his face in his hands. Reality and logic had returned, with stunning brutality, almost crushing him with shame and guilt for what he'd done. THIS girl was human; they were NOT legally bonded; by all the laws and customs of his people it was WRONG.

Still basking in the glow of their union, Tarra reached to touch him, to bring him back to her side. "Spock..." she whispered his name.

He drew away from her touch as though burned. "Don't," he grated. His senses, his control were still too raw, too tenuous and painful to be tampered with. He took a deep, shaking breath, drawing his proper Vulcan mask firmly into place.

Tarra propped herself up on one elbow. "It was good. It was beautiful," she asserted firmly, perceiving his torture.

"It was wrong. You cannot know HOW wrong." His voice was leaden and dull. Dishonor and repulsion steeped in him.

"How can anything so wonderful be wrong? Explain," she requested, unwittingly borrowing one of his words. She was hurt by the rejection, but she suppressed it for his benefit, believing he didn't mean to sound the way he did. He was back to logic, so she would play the scene his way. Anything to erase that look of darkness from his eyes.

"My ways are different from yours. I should have controlled myself. I had no right..." How could he explain to her about the pon-farr; about the ceremonial ritual and custom that must necessarily accompany it?

"I gave you the right," she asserted. "Spock, we're mature adults, and no one was hurt. Why must blame be affixed to a thing of such mutual joy?" He met her eyes warily, unconsciously seeking comfort in her words, searching for a peace that he would be able to live with.

"Perhaps on your world it is different," she went on. "But it happened, and you cannot go back to erase what happened. Regret is illogical, and blame is never stationary."

Somehow he felt there was a flaw in her reasoning, but he couldn't pin it down. The burden of

guilt lightened slightly, but he could not dismiss the belief that he, alone, was responsible for his actions.

"You know that what happened will never leave this room," she said softly, vowing her silence. He nodded wordlessly. Seeing some of the hardness leave his face, she got up and dressed as unobtrusively as possible. She left him, to rearrange her face and hair in his bathroom, and when she returned, he too had dressed and was sitting on the bed, his shoulders slumped. She smiled at him gently, her own command of the situation increasing. She willed herself not to feel the sting of rejection. She loved him; she would not let him suffer because of his alien creed.

"Now, Mister Spock -- do I get that chess lesson or not?" she challenged, her voice light. There must be, she knew, no awkwardness between them. Tomorrow they must be colleagues, and this incident could not disturb that relationship. She wouldn't <u>let</u> it destroy that!

He looked at her with the barest trace of a smile on his lips, recognizing what she was attempting to do, and admiring her for it. Taking a deep breath, he tried to sublimate the guilt and shame and spoke with forced determination.

"I am not an easy teacher," he warned.

"But I'm a very good pupil," she countered, as they left the room together.

...They went on, as they must, never mentioning that night, struggling to slip back into the roles they'd played before. The weight of guilt and self-recrimination abated in Spock as he tried to accept Tarra's philosophy. He wanted to believe no harm had been done. How could he live with the dishonor, otherwise?

Tarra felt, at first, she could never again be content with only a part of Spock. For a brief glorious time she had all of him, now how could she ever be satisfied with less? But she, too, learned to accept and to go on. She knew it still bothered Spock. Occasionally when she found him regarding her with a curious look on his face she knew he was remembering that night. But it was not long before Tarra had a different problem to be concerned with.

Like every other female crewmember aboard the ENTERPRISE, she received periodical injections for birth-control, so the possibility of any such consequences never entered her mind. Nevertheless as time went by, she began to exhibit all the proper symptoms. Fear crept in. It wasn't possible, it couldn't be...but what if she were?

She attempted to ignore it, avoiding Sickbay and Dr. McCoy, although eventually even Spock noticed her unhealthy pallor, the sudden weight loss, and attacks of vertigo she suffered. Firmly, but gently, he ordered her to Sickbay and reluctantly she complied.

McCoy confirmed her suspicions; she was indeed pregnant, about 10 weeks along.

Tarra was struck by the horror of it. Not for herself, for she discovered she really wanted this baby, this little part of Spock to keep. But she knew what this knowledge would do to him, with his rigid moral code. How could he bear this? How could she tell him what they had done? She loved him too deeply to hurt him this way, yet she could not destroy his child.

Dr. McCoy insisted on knowing who the father was, maintaining he needed gene records, blood factors, medical background in order to treat her. She was reluctant to tell, but the gentle, understanding doctor wore down her resistance, and finally she broke down and confided in him.

He took it calmly, as a medical man should, but he reminded her sternly that this was an alien she was carrying, a fact Tarra had completely overlooked. He also explained that this was the reason for the birth control failure: it simply wasn't effective against Vulcan sperm. He urged her to tell Spock about the baby, but she refused.

After much soul searching, she saw the bitter truth in his arguments, and although the doctor offered to tell Spock himself, freeing her of the burden, Tarra could not put the responsibility on anyone else. She could predict how Spock would react, and knew he wouldn't be happy, to say the least. Neither of them had anticipated anything like this, and while Tarra had adjusted to the situation and exhaulted in the precious, tender emotions which surround every first time mother-to-be, she knew Spock, with his lack of emotion, would regard the situation as intolerable.

Tarra was prepared for any kind of reaction from Spock, except perhaps the one she got. She was not familiar enough with Vulcan mores to fully comprehend Spock's total revulsion. When the words were out, when the thing had been said, the Vulcan merely turned his back on her and walked out of the room. He said nothing. He gave no indication of what he thought or felt about it. She understood, and yet she couldn't understand, not completely.

Her words stunned him as effectively as a phaser. All the guilt and self-revulsion reentered with force. That he could be responsible for this dishonor was such a blow to his Vulcan morals that he could not speak of it. With a red haze before his eyes, he left on unsteady feet, and went to his quarters to meditate...

Spock had been due on the bridge quite some time ago. When he didn't arrive, Jim had him paged, buzzed his quarters and the lab, but there was no sign of him anywhere. Uneasy, because it was so unlike Spock to be late for duty - as a matter of fact, he'd never been late -- Jim went to Sickbay.

"Bones - have you seen Spock in tha past few hours?"

McCoy's voice was uneasy. "I heard you page him, Jim. No, I haven't." He stared at the floor. "Try his quarters. I've a hunch he may be there."

"I buzzed..." Kirk picked up the doctor's discomfort. "What is it, Bones? What's wrong?"

"Jim, Spock may need to talk to you. Find him," he urged.

The Captain wanted to press, but he sensed he'd get no more out of McCoy. His neck bristling in warning, he headed for Spock's cabin.

Kirk sounded the buzzer several times, but there was no reply. Seeing that the door was unlocked, the Captain made an unusual decision. He opened it himself and stepped inside. The darkened gloom that assailed him, tinged by the red glow from the tiny firepot, plus the oppresive high temperature that Spock maintained, never failed to invoke in Kirk a feeling that he had just stepped through the gateway to Hades. The sight of his Vulcan First Officer sitting disconsolately on the side of his bunk did little to allay that feeling. Kirk took an uncertain step forward, but Spock gave no indication that he was aware of another presence in the room.

"Mr. Spock," Kirk began, "you were supposed to report to the bridge an hour ago. I've had you paged all over the ship." Spock looked up at him at last, but did not answer. The Captain glanced at the intercom on the desk.

"Your intercom's open. Why didn't you answer?" Finally, the Vulcan spoke.

"I am sorry, Captain," he said softly. "I did not hear you." It was such a lame answer for Spock, that Kirk felt a sudden twitch of apprehension.

"Spock, what is it? What's wrong?"

The Vulcan took a deep breath, and sighed visably. He had been sitting here, in a semi-trance for an undetermined amount of time, since Tarra had spoken to him. He had been trying to reason it out, think it through. Calling upon his Vulcan powers of the mind, he had been attempting to suppress the human turmoil and emotion that had invaded his being. Spock had reached into the innermost depths of himself to seek a peace that could help him to arrive at a logical solution. The Vulcan/Human had fought an inner battle against the instincts that forced him to accept the only course of action open to him. Finally, having faced what he knew he must do, Spock found himself abhorent to what must come next. The Captain was his Commanding officer - and his dearest friend; if he could allow himself at this point to think in those human terms. He needed to be told, deserved to be told, and yet to Spock the telling was unbearable. To put into words...what had happened. He spoke haltingly, choosing his words with care to make Jim understand so that he would not need to repeat it.

"I have...committed a grave - injustice," he began. "I have not kept my oath of morals, as a Starfleet officer - and have violated Honor as a Vulcan."

Kirk felt his mouth go dry. Whether it was from the heat of the cabin or the wave of nausea that suddenly enveloped him, he didn't know. My God, he thought hysterically. What could have caused Spock to make such a statement? Outwardly, he waited patiently until Spock could continue.

"I must now take the necessary steps to atone for my actions," Spock hesitated, "as is prescribed by Vulcan culture."

"Explain," Kirk choked out the word. Spock met his eyes pleading, but the Captain was relentless. Finally, the Vulcan averted his eyes, and when he answered, his voice was almost inaudible.

"I allowed the madness of the pon-farr to...consume me. I have...ravaged a human female."

Kirk didn't know how he could stand to hear this. Knowing Spock, and loving him as he did, Jim knew what telling this was costing his Vulcan friend. But more, he could hardly bear to imagine what circumstances had caused this incredible thing to occur. Fighting for control, Jim sat heavily on the bed beside Spock. He could see, even in the gloom, the almost imperceptible trembling of the Vulcan's hands, the only flaw in the otherwise calm exterior. Groping for words, his mind a kaleidiscope of questions, Jim said softly, "I see..."

"I think not quite, Jim," Spock began. He seemed to be trying to tell the Captain something, but Kirk could not comprehend. "When a Vulcan is dishonored - violates an oath - his life is no longer sacred. There is no longer...dignity in living. The logical thing is to..." He paused, scarcely able to voice the repulsive thing, "...is to remove oneself from life."

Kirk stared at him in disbelief, sudden realization of what Spock was saying filling his mind.

"That's suicide!" he rasped. "Spock, you're talking about committing suicide!" The Vulcan did not answer, and his silence urged Kirk to go on. "Spock - I know what a terrible experience this must have been for you," he reached out and turned Spock to face him. "Look at me - you can't kill yourself because...because of something..." He found he could not put it into words, not to Spock. Spock's eyes were hard as he stared at the Captain, but they revealed a profound sadness also. His voice was flat, toneless, agonized.

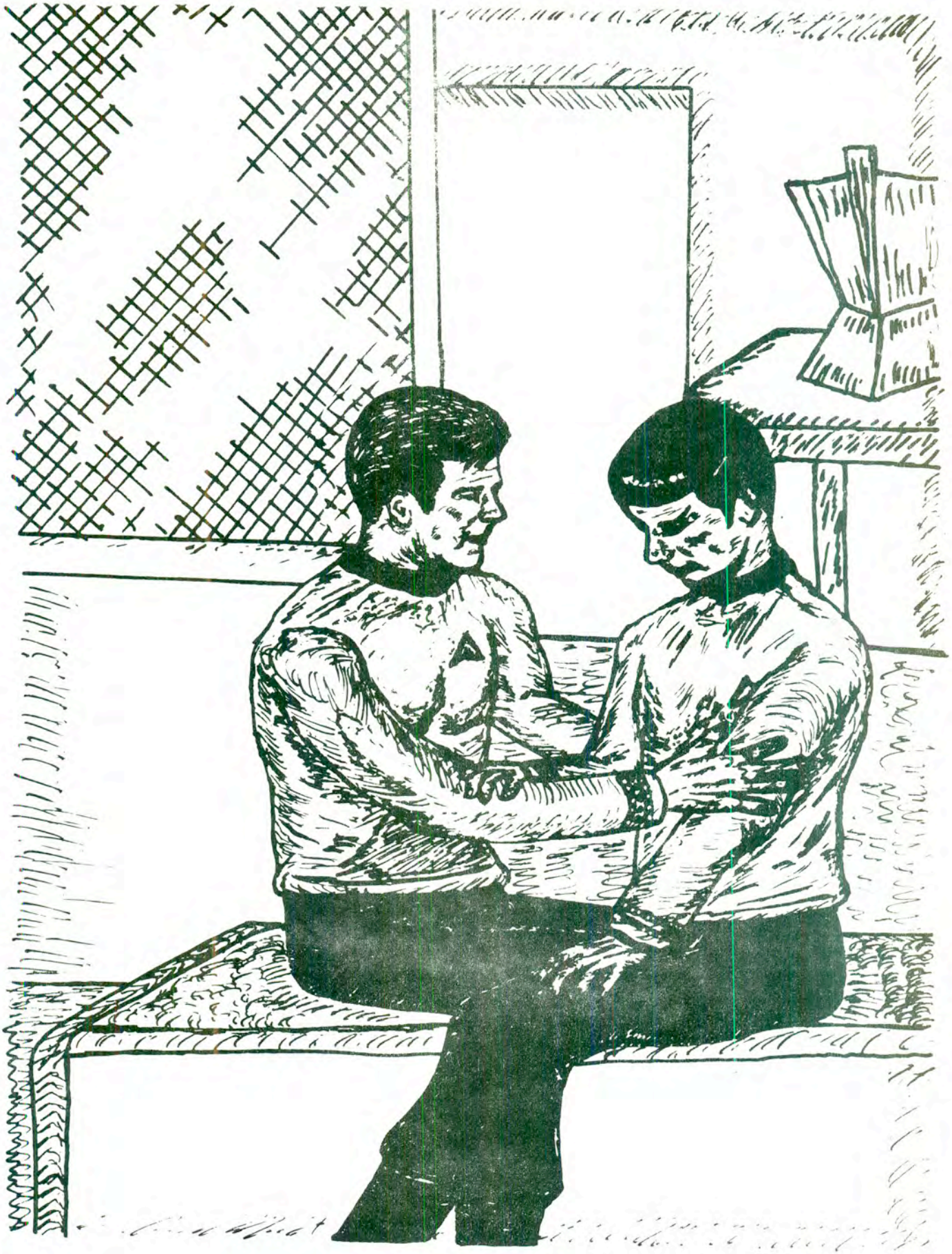
"Lt. St. John carries my..." Spock could not say it, even now. Kirk wasn't sure he understood what Spock was telling him.

"What?" he asked. The Vulcan turned away. Now his hands shook more violently.

"She is going to have a baby, Jim. Mine!" The Vulcan leaned forward, covering his face with his hands.

Jim's face crumbled as his control nearly broke. This was worse than he could have imagined. This could destroy his friend. It was destroying him. Spock was alien by creed, the values he lived by were Vulcan, although part of him cried out to be human. An act, and its result, which might be undesirable, but capable of being coped with by a Human, would be totally devastating to one of Vulcan heritage. Kirk didn't know what to say, how to reach him.

He knew, with a sudden sickening lurch, the process Spock was referring to. It was known as the Kheil-Vae. Spock had explained it to him once when they'd come across the body of a young



Vulcan woman who had been violated by a drunken Orion trader. Although no physical harm had been done, the woman felt dishonored, and had systematically removed herself from life, using the Kheil-Vae technique. A Vulcan had the mental ability to stop his body functions - to withdraw to a place where none could reach, and would willingly use this ability if an oath had been broken or honor sacrificed.

"Spock..." Kirk began, wondering how he could say what must be said. "This can be worked out." Spock shook his head slowly.

"Yes!" the Captain asserted. "No matter what you think now, there has to be a way besides this..."

Spock's voice was sad, revealing a very human grief. "This is the Vulcan way, for one so dishonored, Jim. I do not make the choice lightly."

"And what of Lt. St. John?" Jim asked. "Has she no choice?"

The sorrow in Spock's face was a visable mask of tragedy. Jim wondered again at what could have caused his friend to commit the act - more than the pon-farr, he felt. And something more than guilt was causing the agony now.

"Lt. St. John," Spock whispered her name, "will have her own choices to make. I have no part in them."

"No part?" Kirk asked. "She carries your child and you have no part?"

Spock's face clouded, his eyes glazed over. He wasn't listening, but Jim went on gently. "Spock, you have a responsibility, and a right - to Tarra, to yourself, and to the child. What has happened is past, what lies ahead must..." He stopped, realizing that his First Officer was withdrawing. A rush of panic engulfed him. He's doing it!

Jim moved to Spock's side quickly, grabbing the Vulcan's shoulders roughly, shaking him hard.

"Stop it!" he cried frantically. "This won't help anyone! Spock---" He slapped his face, hard, twice, but there was still no response from the still Vulcan, except for a slight sagging as Spock went limp.

With a sob, he drew Spock into his arms, words pouring out from the depths of his soul. "Please...don't do this! You can't die -- Oh, God, let me reach you -- Spock -- I need you, I can't lose you -- Stop this!" As his voice rose in volumn, the Vulcan stirred in his arms.

Spock heard Jim's words as if from a distant shore, but the force of emotion, the anguish and pain were sharper than a knife, and with great difficulty he focused on them, and brought his mind back to the present. He drew back and regarded Jim with puzzlement. He had no wish to hurt him - he had done enough hurting already. He couldn't hurt Jim - he had never considered...

Jim was still holding on tightly to Spock, his fingers digging into his arms, bruising, hoping the pain would aid Spock to consciousness. His hopes soared at the signs of recognition from the Vulcan. Somewhat calmer, but with voice still trembling, Jim spoke again.

"I won't allow this, Spock. You can't do this! Promise me."

"Jim..." Spock's tone was confused. It was a personal decision, yet if it were to effect others...The hurt and terror emanating from Kirk had brought him back; it had touched him as nothing else could. Perhaps Kheil-Vae was not the proper solution after all.

"Promise, Spock," Kirk rasped. "Give me your word."

The Vulcan drew a deep breath. Somehow the tables had turned, and he realized he must erase this anxiety he had caused. With an uncommon tenderness, he made the vow.

"Very well. I have no desire to inflict further discomfort to anyone." His mind followed his chosen course dilligently. That would include Tarra. It could be the only solution. He would not interfere in her life in any way from now on. He must place no claim on the child, or her decisions regarding it. Perhaps death would have been the easier way.

Jim sat up straight, releasing his hold on Spock. "All right, Spock. I think in time you'll come to feel differently about all this. When you've talked to Tarra, settled things..." The Vulcan was shaking his head solemnly.

"You cannot comprehend the Vulcan way."

Jim looked at him pensively, each man examining his own viewpoint. Kirk stood up hesitantly. It was over, at least, for now.

2.

...As time went on, the situation remained intolerable. McCoy intervened, placing Tarra on night duty status, working with him in Sickbay. Aside from the fact it would enable him to keep close medical scrutiny on her condition, he felt the girl needed relief from any emotional pressures caused by her working with Spock. And for the Vulcan, too, whom he regarded with a mixture of pity and blame. Spock also, needed release from an awkward situation which he would do nothing to alleviate.

McCoy grew very fond of Tarra, regarding her as a sort of adopted daughter. They only disagreed on Spock's attitude toward her pregnancy. McCoy felt the Vulcan should, at the very least, take an active interest in Tarra's condition, but the girl persistantly defended him, claiming she expected nothing of the sort.

And she didn't. Spock owed her nothing, and she wanted nothing from him. As much as Tarra loved him, she knew there would never be any happiness for them, and she was content to await the arrival of his child.

Tarra had two options, professionally. After giving birth, she could either place the baby

in the care of relatives or friends and return to her duties aboard the ENTERPRISE, or she could be reassigned to duty at a Starbase, where she could keep the child with her. In either case, she would be removed from the ship well before her delivery.

She didn't have to think very long about her choice. Though it was painful to give up the work she loved, she had no close relatives or friends to whom she could entrust her baby. After her parents' death, she had been in schools and foster homes with little love or warmth, and she could not accept that for her own child. Rather than allow her baby to be raised by strangers, she would take an assignment on a Starbase.

Spock made no attempt to interfere in Tarra's life during this time. It was not cruelty; he truly felt he had caused enough pain and trouble, and he could not be responsible for more. He was relieved when she was ordered to duty in Sickbay, because her prescence caused him great discomfort. Spock was unable to help, and it would not have profitted either of them for him to try.

As the months flew by, McCoy became increasingly concerned about Tarra. She was on a regimen of pills and injections to compensate for the imbalance between her system and the alien fetus - and it worked - but just so much. The pregnancy was taking a tremendous toll on her health, and he was unsure if she'd be able to deliver safely. He had promised Tarra he would remain with her through the delivery, and had obtained permission from Jim Kirk to go to the base hospital when the time came....

On the bridge, Spock suddenly doubled over, then straightened with a look of surprise. Jim moved quickly to his side.

"Spock - what is it?"

"The baby..." Spock managed to whisper, as Kirk's intercom buzzed. Agitated, not understanding what was happening, Kirk answered.

"McCoy here, Captain - Jim, Lt. St. John just went into premature labor." Bones voice was strained.

"What?!" It was unexpected, but McCoy had warned him of this possibility. "All right, Doc, keep me posted." He looked over at Spock, whose expression had gone rigid and grey. Kirk went to him, keeping his voice low. "Spock, if you wish to be excused..."

"Negative, Captain." The Vulcan's crisp tone belied his inner turmoil. "There is nothing I can accomplish there."

Jim had an urge to scream at him: This is your baby, don't you care? And what of Tarra - can you just ignore her? But he didn't say it; nodding mutely, he returned to his chair.

Several hours later, it was Kirk who went to Sickbay. He'd gotten no word from McCoy, and the suspense was wearing him down.

The doctor came out of the walled in cubicle to greet Kirk grimly, fatigue and defeat lining his face. From within, Jim could hear the loud, gasping breath of the woman as she struggled to maintain the necessary control for natural birth.

"What's happening?" he asked, aghast, as nurses and technicians scuttled to and from the room, bent on their tasks.

Bones shook his head. "It's not good, Jim. I don't know how much longer she's going to be able to take it." Briefly, he outlined the situation to Kirk, ticking off his options one by one. "I can't do a C-section because I can't give her any drugs or anesthetics that could harm the baby; besides, Tarra refused those right from the start. I don't know, Jim, the metabolic and physiological structure of mother and fetus are too damned dissimilar. We're doing everything we can, but it isn't much."

Kirk sat down heavily. If Tarra were to die, what would that do to Spock? How could he go on, feeling he'd caused this girl's death? Would the slender thread of the promise he'd made hold together in light of such brutal reality? Suddenly, Kirk realized he wasn't being fair. Spock was his friend, but what about Tarra? Shouldn't his concern be more for her now, as she struggled to bring this child into the world?

Bones spoke again. "Damn it! I feel like I'm practicing medicine 400 years ago, for all the good I can do! We can all see what's happening, but we're powerless to stop it. We can't relieve her pain, and in her pain she can't deliver. The baby's beginning to weaken, and..."

Behind them, the whisk of the door admitted someone. They turned, to face an ashen faced Spock, standing on unsteady feet. Jim half rose, but the Vulcan waved him back.

"Doctor McCoy, I may be able to help."

Bones was about to issue a sharp retort about all the help Spock had failed to give up until now, but seeing the Vulcan's naked distress, he held off and said gruffly, "If that's true, Spock, what are you waiting for? This way." He took Spock's elbow and led him toward the cubicle.

Tarra tossed restlessly on the bed, her breathing now completely ragged and harsh. The searing pain in her back and abdomen masked all the commotion about her, giving the scene a nightmarish unreality. Delerious, she thought she saw Dr. McCoy enter with Spock, but she convinced herself it was just an illusion. He had no part in this; her mind must be conjuring up visions she wished to see.

The vision sat at her side and stretched out his hands, fingers extended to her temples.

"Tarra," Spock said softly, "let me help you. I can ease your pain."

Whimpering, she nodded wordlessly. Whatever this was, illusion or the real thing, she trusted him completely. What followed was later just a confused blur to Tarra, as Spock entered her mind

and took the pain upon himself.

McCoy watched helplessly as the linked pair sweated, strained and pushed to bring forth this new life, until suddenly, he had his hands full, guiding the near-lifeless infant out of the birth canal and into the waiting hands of the team standing by to take over its care. Voice triumphant, he called to Tarra.

"It's a boy!" He wasn't certain she heard him, until her face beamed a smile at him, and he saw the smile mirrored on Spock's face.

Wasting no time, he ordered analgesics, perfectly safe now, as Spock dissolved the link.

Another member of the team, Dr. Linnardo, took charge of the limp First Officer, moving him carefully from Tarra's bed onto a stretcher; she wheeled him out of the crowded delivery room and into the anteroom where Jim Kirk was still pacing restlessly up and down.

Kirk started at the sight of his friend. Anxiously, he went to the bed, where Linnardo was hooking up the monitors. The young doctor wore a look of concern and awe as she went about her tasks. Noting the Captain's presence, she grew self-conscious, and attempted to explain.

"Mr. Spock went into mind-link with the mother and actually participated in the delivery."

"The baby..." Jim began.

"A boy. We're doing all we possibly can for him." With a glance at the monitors for reassurance, Linnardo returned to the delivery room.

Kirk stood awkwardly by the bed, unsure about what to say, or indeed, whether to say anything. Spock stared mutely at the ceiling, his body controlled and his breathing easy. Yet there was an air of aggitation about him which Kirk had rarely seen.

Jim could not begin to understand the agony of conflict within Spock. He didn't know that Spock, in the process of birth, had touched minds with his newborn son, and in that instant of intimate contact he had perceived that this child's life would be difficult. Part human, part Vulcan like himself, an alien among his own people, Spock knew the torment his son would have to endure, and a part of him wished to guide and buffer life for this tiny being, yet he knew he could have no claim on his son, no right to interfere in Tarra's raising of him. He was torn by guilt toward Tarra, and the sense of unrequited responsibility to his son.

"Spock..." The Captain's voice intruded on his thoughts. Hoping to offer reassurance, Kirk added, "They're doing all they can for him."

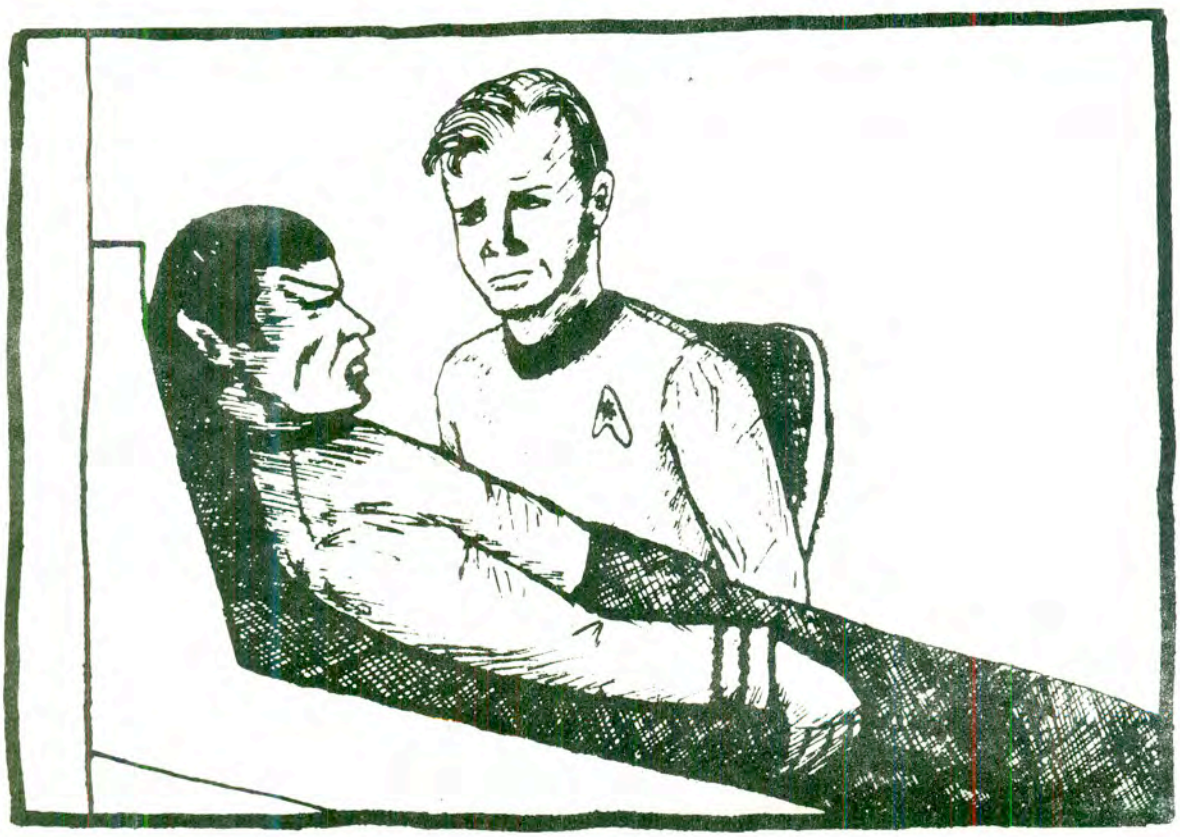
"It would be better for him if he does not live." Spock's voice was toneless. The words, to Jim, were so cruel, so inhuman, that he drew in his breath sharply.

"You don't mean that," he countered swiftly. The Vulcan turned dull eyes on his friend.

"Jim, the child and I are in 'prantis', yet I can bear no claim on him. He is Tarra's child, and I must disengage any bond with him, so do not ask me to suffer your human emotions."

"He's your son, Spock! Yours."

"It cannot be." The Vulcan shut his eyes quite forcefully, as Jim sat beside him.



Kirk could not comprehend Spock's words, yet he knew the torture his friend was going through. To be a father, yet not to be a father. To have, yet not to have; just as Spock had existed for all these years, in a state of semi-fulfillment. And now, he would purposely deny himself this child, when it was so unnecessary.

"Why, Spock? Why must you sever this bond?" he asked.

"He is to be raised as a Human, among Humans. Perhaps it will be better for him that way. Perhaps he will not...suffer so." The words were forced through colorless lips, as Spock struggled to maintain his consciousness. He wished Jim would leave, yet he truly did not want to be alone. If only they could talk of something else; the ship, their missions, anything but the child.

Jim could see Spock becoming more aggitated, and chose not to pursue his line of thought. He laid a hand comfortingly on the Vulcan's shoulder. He didn't want Spock to say anything in a moment of weakness which he might regret later.

"Rest now," he said gently. "I'll stay here if you need me." There was no answer, but Jim saw the shining wetness in the corners of Spock's pressed eyelids.

...The tiny boy was named Theron St. John. His first month of life was a series of one crisis after another, but after that he rallied and began gaining strength and growing. He became, without a doubt, the most popular attraction on the ship, and almost everyone, including the Captain, came to coo and cluck over him. His father remained painfully absent, and Tarra began to doubt McCoy's version of Theron's delivery. Yet she knew Spock had been there, and a part of her could understand Spock's reluctance to become attached to his son. Sadly, she made plans to leave the ship.

Theron was almost three months old before the combined circumstances of a break in their schedule and the medical authorization from Dr. McCoy heralded their departure at Starbase 5. Bones had kept Tarra on the sick list far longer than was necessary, insisting she just relax and take care of her baby. Before long, she was chaffing at the forced inactivity, and anxious to resume her career.

McCoy's reasoning was diverse. He felt that Tarra and Spock would be better off if they were not together, when they were so vulnerable. It could only serve to hurt the Vulcanmore. He didn't really blame Spock for what had happened, but he felt that Tarra's tenuous stability would be threatened if she resumed her place as Spock's assistant. Bones felt she had rearranged her life beautifully to compensate for the unexpected events, and he did everything in his power to reinforce and guide her in her new life. He visited with her and Theron every day, even though they both knew it was just for the companionship between them.

Kirk's rather infrequent visits were more strained, with the unmistakable overtones of a Captain / Lieutenant relationship, due to Kirk's sense of duty. He tried to speak to her of Spock, and what his friend was masking, but they both soon saw the futility of that, and Jim gave it up. What he did enjoy, however, was Theron. The tiny caricature of Spock delighted him, capturing his heart.

Tarra kept him in a specially constructed sensorcrib, which had been lovingly crafted by Lt. Cmdr. Scott, and presented in much embarrassment the day after Theron's birth. Tarra had been touched by the generosity and warmth of the Chief Engineer, just as she was later overcome by kindnesses from so many of the crew. Uhura taught her much of the practicality of infant care, having had baby sisters and brothers to tend to before her entrance to the Academy. Lt. Sulu's latest hobby was J'Loming, the Andorian art form, and he made a lovely plaque with Theron's name and picture done in three dimensions. Lts. Chekov and Riley both offered to escort her to ship functions, and when she declined, chose instead to spend a quiet evening with her and Theron, playing chess and talking. Almost everybody on board offered to babysit. It was all spontaneous, it was all genuine. Tarra began to regret having to leave so many wonderful and dear friends.

At last, the day came, and it was only then that Spock decided to break the wall of silence between them, and came to visit Tarra...

The buzzer to her door sounded, and Tarra did not turn from her packing as she called out for whoever it was to come in. She heard the whisk of the door, and thinking it was Uhura come to help said, "I'm almost finished. I hadn't realized I had accumulated so many things since I've been on board, and so much of it is Theron's..."

She turned. Her eyes met Spock's. He stood just inside the door, his face void of expression and looking much the way he had the first time she'd met him. Her heart froze; she hadn't expected him to come, and his presence caught her off guard. She recovered at once though, and acknowledged him.

"Spock?" She made it a question that would force him to speak, to explain. He did not move his arms from behind his back, and his tone indicated he may have been talking to any other junior officer.

"Lt. St. John," he said, "the Captain informs me that we will be attaining orbit about Starbase 5 at 13[illegible] hours."

"Yes, I know," she told him, carefully matching her voice to his. "I will be ready to beam down at that time."

"Satisfactory." He waited, and Tarra wondered what he intended to say next. Surely he didn't come here just to remind her what time she had to leave. Spock looked around the room at the disarray from packing. He still didn't speak, and Tarra felt herself becoming uncomfortable under his gaze.

"It's quite a job getting everything organized," she explained. He nodded, and at once from that

he had come for some reason, and was having difficulty with it. He's so vulnerable, she thought, knowing this must be as painful for him as for her. She wanted to help him.

"Is there something you wanted, Spock?" she asked kindly, suddenly remembering flashes of his pain filled face, his soothing words, his gentleness the night their son had been born.

"I trust everything is in order for your transfer to the Starbase post," he said.

She nodded. "Yes, I've made all the necessary arrangements." He moved a step farther into the room, so that he was very close to her. His face showed the same kindness she had found him to be capable of in those days when they had worked together, and her heart beat faster with the nearness of him. But if he felt anything toward her, she could not perceive it from his manner.

"I wanted to tell you," he began, "if there is anything I can do - anything you need, I shall endeavor to assist."

She felt herself losing control; she wanted to shout: Yes, Spock, there's something you can do - love me! Love our son! -- At least, acknowledge that he exists! Instead, she shook her head resolutely.

"No, Spock. There's nothing. I've taken care of everything. You don't owe me anything."

"You were an excellent assistant, Tarra," he remarked. "I do not believe I will be so fortunate again." The use of her first name, and the reference to the job she loved, unsettled her completely. Tarra turned from him.

"Oh, Spock, I am sorry about that," she told him earnestly.

It was a good post, Spock thought, one she took great pride in, and I have deprived her of even that. It was not conceit when he recognized that any position she accepted now would be a come-down, incomparable to the Assistant Science Officer aboard a Starship. This too, he must accept the blame for.

A plaintive wail sounded from the cubicle. Spock reacted with a start, and Tarra didn't miss the flicker that crossed the Vulcan's face. She drew a deep breath, suddenly very sick of all this subterfuge. Theron was here, he was real, and there was no sense in attempting to hide him.

"He's hungry again," she laughed nervously. "Dr. McCoy says he'll soon be as fat as a Tarsun piepig."

Spock took a step toward the door. "Then you will be desiring your privacy, so I shall..."

"No, Spock," she pleaded, her voice halting him. "Please, come meet your son." Before he had a chance to voice an objection, she had rounded the corner and bent over the crib. She couldn't bear to leave the ship without at least trying to have Spock acknowledge his son, perhaps to take him into his heart as she had done, wanting to be a part of his life. It was romanticizing, and she recognized it as such, but she was unable to tem the tide of her fantasy. She wanted Spock, not as a part of her life, for she knew the Vulcan would never be hers, but as a part of Theron's, to guide and direct their son as he grew to manhood.

Spock stood where Tarra had left him, unable or unwilling to move. He could hear the gentle tone as she quieted the fretting infant, and a stab of aching lonliness filled him. He did not wish to see the baby, for it would serve no purpose, but it seemed as though he'd be unable to avoid it. He summoned every shred of his Vulcan dignity as Tarra emerged with the gurgling infant.

She stepped hesitantly to his side, and her voice shook as she said, "I will not take your son away from you until you have at least seen him, Spock."

His eyes were on her face, purposely ignoring the bundle in her arms. "I need not see Theron to acknowledge him, Tarra. But I must disclaim any rights to him." As he spoke, he lowered his eyes slowly, reluctantly, to meet Theron.

He was getting chubby, and right now his forehead was damp from sleep, his shiny black hair plastered to his head. He focused on Spock with bright, dark eyes, above which were the faint tracings of thin slanted eyebrows. His tiny puckered lips moved, automatically seeking food, and on either side of his head lay a perfectly proportioned ear, sloping up towards his skull in a graceful arc.

The child was Vulcan. Unquestionably, undeniably Vulcan, and the evidence struck his father, confirming his fears that his son would forever be a half-breed, for he looked Vulcan and would be raised by Humans. Theron could not be free of his Vulcan heritage, and yet he will be, must be, denied it. How could he bear to let him go? Yet let him go he must.

Spock made no reply, and was still for so long, Tarra broke the silence gingerly, proffering Theron toward him.

"Would you like to hold him?"

The Vulcan seemed to mentally shake himself out of his concentration. "No," he said, his voice deathly still. "I must resume my duties on the bridge." He looked up and met her eyes. "Live long and prosper, Tarra," he said solemnly.

Her eyes were wet with unshed tears as he left the room.

3.

...Time passed aboard the ENTERPRISE, as the crew went about their appointed missions, and life seemingly straightened out for her senior officers. But all was not well for Spock, and Jim Kirk knew it with an aching sadness for his friend. A part of Spock had left with Tarra and Theron, and while the Vulcan went about his duties with the same, regular efficiency, there was no longer that spark of enthusiasm.

The Captain knew, for he had initialed the necessary papers, that Spock had assigned a certain portion of his pay sent to Tarra. Other than that slight token of responsibility, he had made no attempt to communicate with his son. As the years stretched on, Kirk found himself thinking often

of the tiny Vulcan boy, wondering what he looked like and how he was getting along. And the young woman who was his mother - how was Tarra making out in her new post? Did she like her job? Had she made a new life for herself and Theron? But most of all, Jim worried about Spock, and what this forced seperation was doing to him. It was unnatural and it was totally unnecessay by Human standards, and there ought to be something he could do about it.

Jim sensed, but never fully realized the agony that tore Spock apart those years. At his post, on a mission or alone in his quarters, Spock would suddenly catch himself remembering that fleeting touch of his son's mind, or see his small chubby face peeking out of his mother's arms.

He is a year old today...Do humans have the same ritual on this important event? On Vulcan, the first day of the second year is a significant occasion, solemn and thoughtfully controlled. The first step on the path to Khas-wan. This young, they begin to train, to study. As Tarra's son, Theron would be denied that training.

He is two now...Probably walking, running, laughing with his Human playmates. Was Tarra raising him with dignity, with a sense of duty and honor? What does he know of his father? Do the other children taunt him because of his Vulcan features?

Three years old...He should be starting his education now, even in a Starbase community. Does he rejoice in the receiving of knowledge? His mother would see to it that he was properly educated...His mother...Spock could not forget her face, her voice, her ways as she'd worked beside him and relaxed beside him. The most remarkable woman he'd ever known. He could not, would not, even now, allow himself to examine what he felt toward Tarra.

They were gone; it was finished. It was a brief interlude which he must forget. But he could not, no matter what Vulcan disciplines he used.

It was more than three and a half years after Theron's birth that the ENTERPRISE stopped at Starbase 5 for refitting and refueling. Jim Kirk knew then what he could do, what he must do, for Spock.

Very casually, he mentioned to Dr. McCoy that he was going to beam down and visit Tarra St. John and Theron. The doctor knew at once what was in the Captain's mind, and he warned him firmly to stay away. It was over, leave them alone, Bones cautioned, but his pleas fell on deaf ears. Tarra was an old friend, Jim maintained, and he was merely going to look her up and see how she was doing....

Jim walked across the green expanse of lawn at a brisk pace, grateful for the shade of the trees after the heat of the city streets. Tarra's home was a good ten minute walk from the base headquarters, where he'd stopped to locate her address, and the noise and activity was minimal here. He looked around him, appreciating the small neat houses laid out in perfect symetry, their architecture harmonizing with the natural beauty of the area. Approaching the door, he raised his hand to press the buzzer. Just at that moment, a small dark blur rushed at him from around the side of the house.

They almost collided. As Jim instinctively bent down to steady the child, for child it was, a lump formed in his throat, and his heart began to race. Two deep, dark, curious eyes stared up at him from beneath gently arched brows.

The boy recovered and moved easily, with a catlike grace, to stand between Kirk and the door. His voice was friendly, and his diction flawless for one so young.

"My mother isn't home yet, if you've come to see her. Mrs. Lawrence is inside. I'm Theron St. John."

Kirk swallowed, recovering his own composure. "Yes, I know who you are. I'm Jim Kirk. I'm - I was a friend of your mother's."

Theron nodded solemnly. He pressed his hand against the identi-lock, and gestured Jim to follow him into the house.

"Theron? If that's you, go wash up, your mama's going to be home any minute, and...Oh!" The round, middle-aged woman broke off, seeing Kirk in the doorway.

"Mrs. Lawrence? I'm Captain James Kirk of the Enterprise. I ---"

"The Enterprise?!" Theron piped up, highly excited. "Then, you must know my Daddy!"

Jim's eyes swung slowly from the housekeeper to the boy's eager face. How much, he wondered, had Tarra told him?

The woman cleared her throat noisily. "Lt. St. John'll be home in a few minutes, Captain. If you wish to wait for her, come in and be seated. Would you care for a cool drink?" As she talked she led him into the main room, a comfortable, lived-in room, cluttered now with the effects of a child's play. It was decorated in tones of brown and orange, and sunlight poured in through one huge, bubbled window. Kirk noticed it all with a cursory glance, preferring to observe the boy. As the Captain seated himself and felt the chair mold itself to his frame, Theron hopped from one foot to another in front of him.

"My Father is the First Officer on the Enterprise - I know," he said anxiously, an oddly out of place smile lighting his Vulcan features. "Did my Daddy send you to see us?"

"Theron..." Mrs. Lawrence began warningly, but Kirk waved her to silence.

"Yes, in a way he did," Jim answered him gently. "Come here." He stretched out his hand, and the boy took it eagerly, stepping into the crook of Jim's arm with that same fluid movement he'd displayed earlier.

"You're a big boy, Theron," he observed drily, giving him a slight squeeze. Kirk's face was a study in gentleness, a glowing radiance relaxing the harried lines of a commander.

"Mother says I'll grow up to be big and strong just like my Daddy. It's because I'm Vulcan."



"Do you go to school?"

"I go to preschool at the 'base. My teacher is a Tellerite, and he says I have a natural apti...aptitude for mathmatics," he informed Kirk, stumbling over a word for the first time. There was a sudden wistful longing on the boy's face. "Is my father going to come to visit us?"

Kirk could sense something; something stronger than a child's need for his father. Could it be that Theron was as attuned to Spock as he suspected Spock was to Theron? The injustice of it stung him anew. They belonged together. Even if it meant losing his First Officer, and he'd considered this before. Jim was willing to make any sacrifice necessary to bring Spock peace.

But the immediate problem was getting them together. He grinned at Theron, conspiring. "Maybe. Maybe you and your mother could come aboard the ship. Would you like that?"

Theron's eyes widened. "A Starship?! Do you mean it? Really?!"

A sudden noise from the doorway brought their heads around. Tarra stood facing them, her back stiff, her green eyes wary.

"Captain Kirk," she acknowledged formally. She bent to pick up a toy, trying though to speak casually. "Mrs. Lawrence, would you take Theron in for his bath now, please? Theron, go...that's a good boy."

Theron moved to her side. "Mother! Captain Kirk is from the Enterprise. He knows my Daddy! He says I might go and visit him! Can I, Mother, please?"

She looked at him, smiling gently at his exuberence. Hugging him, she said softly, "Theron, your father is a busy man. He may not have time for us. Go with Mrs. Lawrence now, so I can visit with Captain Kirk. We'll talk later, darling." She reached up and brushed the hair out of his face, then watched as he reluctantly left with the older woman.

She stood up, studying Kirk thoughtfully. Why would he come here? What did he want from her?

"It's good to see you again, Tarra. You're looking well." He smiled, but she was immune to the famous Kirk charm.

"Why did you come?" she asked bluntly, putting her thoughts into words.

"Why? To see you and Theron, of course. I thought we were friends." There was genuine concern in his voice, and a mild reproof.

She smiled at him, in spite of herself, some of the earlier tension dissipating. Had it been a secret fear at first, that something had happened - that he was bringing her bad news of Spock? Damn it, she cursed, I still do care, after all this time - I still love him.

"I'm sorry if I seem rude, Captain. You took me by surprise. I didn't know the Enterprise was here, and I should have heard."

"We just assumed orbit a few hours ago," he explained. "How have you been, really, Tarra?"

She sat, nodding her head slowly. "I've done well enough, I suppose. My job's a good one, rewarding in its own way. I made First Lieutenant, and in another six months I'll be up for Lt. Commander if I stay here. I've made a life for myself and Theron, one I think is good for him."

"I'm glad. He's a remarkable little boy. He seems so bright for his age." The smile crinkled his face again.

She sighed. "Near-genius is more like it! Would you believe he tested higher than anyone in the base school history? Of course, they've never had a Vulcan..." She stopped herself sharply, clenching her hands into fists. Why did I bring that up?

"Spock would be very proud of him, if he could see him."

Her voice was flat. "Pride is a Human emotion, Captain. Don't accuse Spock of such an atrocity."

"Tarra..." He ignored her jibe. "Why don't you and Theron come up to the ship? Let Spock see Theron." His voice was coaxing.

She shot him a withering look. "What makes you think he wants to see him? He has never bothered to get in touch, never displayed any interest at all. Why should I go to him?"

"Because he needs you," he answered simply.

Her control was close to breaking. "Oh yes, he certainly does! Who do you think you are? You come down here, incite Theron about his father who is too busy to take the time to come visit his son..." She broke off, fighting for composure. "I don't ask anything from him, Captain, I don't want anything. Why can't you just leave well enough alone?"

"It's not well at all. The one thing you fail to understand about Spock is that very often he says one thing when he means another. He'll purposely deny himself that which he wants most if it will benefit someone else. You love him and yet you can't seem to see through the mask he wears."

Her voice was weary, resigned. "Perhaps you love him more than I do, then."

"No, Tarra," he said thoughtfully. "I don't love him more, I just know him better and have been with him longer. These past three years he's changed, and I don't like the change. I get a sick feeling every time I realize what Spock's going through, what he's living with every day."

Her heart ached for Spock, yet still a part of her screamed for perspective. What about me, that side asked. Why should I let him hurt me again? Yet, she knew the answer: She loved Spock too much to feel any selfishness for too long. Why did this man have to come here? It was too much all at once! She stood, pacing nervously, her hands absently rubbing her arms.

"Captain..."

"Jim," he insisted, interrupting. "I want to be your friend, Tarra, I really do." He found he meant it, with a sincerity he wouldn't have believed. He could see why Spock found her so... unique. She was a woman, like countless other women he'd known, yet there was something which set her apart, made her different.

She met his eyes steadily. "Jim...what you're asking..."

He brushed it aside. "Don't give me an answer now. Think about it. We'll be here for about two weeks. Consider coming aboard for a day to see all your old friends. I know they'd love to see you and Theron."

She regarded him skeptically, aware he was giving her an excuse. He rose and took one of her hands in both of his, sandwiching it gently.

"I'll keep in touch," he promised. "Think about it. And remember," he added, as she opened the door for him, "Theron needs his father as much as Spock needs his son. Good-bye, Tarra."

Then he was gone, leaving her staring into the dusk, her mind and heart racing with the tumultous emotions she thought she had put aside.

...When Kirk returned to the ship and told McCoy of his visit, the doctor was livid. He maintained that Jim had no right to interfere, and prophesied nothing but unhappiness to come. McCoy knew that Tarra had nearly destroyed Spock, stirring feelings and emotions which the Vulcan could not express. He agreed with Jim about Spock's shutting himself away from everyone, and although he didn't have a solution to the problem himself, he knew Kirk's solution wasn't the right one. He'd learned long ago to be very careful about using Human reactions when dealing with Spock There was nothing he could do about it now. The rest was up to Tarra. Finally, McCoy contacted Tarra and went to visit her and Theron.

Theirs was an easy, companionable visit. McCoy met Theron, and was impressed. He talked of little else the whole evening. No mention was made of her possible visit, or of Spock until he was ready to leave. Wistfully then, she expressed a desire to see the crew again. It had been the happiest home in her life.

McCoy's heart went out to her, and he touched her hand. "Come, then," he urged, trying to dismiss his misgivings. They would be gone in two weeks; what harm could be done? If she didn't want to see Spock, they could arrange that.

So it was, with Jim's urging, and McCoy's mixed blessings, Tarra and Theron boarded the ENTERPRISE.

They were met by enthusiastic shouts as McCoy escorted them. Everyone who remembered Theron as a baby marvelled at his size and his friendly, open behavior.

Spock was aware they were on board, but chose to remain at his post. He carefully hid any emotions, although inwardly his telepathically sensitive mind shimmered with their nearness, and

he could sense Theron's presence like a jolt of electricity.

While Spock carried on his duties, Jim Kirk met Tarra and spirited Theron away for a 'tour of the ship'. Jim promptly took Theron to the briefing room. He punched the intercom, ordered Spock to meet him there to discuss a problem, then left Theron with the admonishment, "Wait here...your father's coming." He had no doubt that what he was doing was the right thing, and his hunch was that Spock would not be able to reject the child, once they were face to face. It was a dangerous game Kirk was playing, but the stakes - Spock's happiness - were high, and he could not see into the future to predict the unhappiness and misery ahead for them all...

Spock headed for the briefing room, experiencing a slight twinge of discomfort. He would wonder, later, if he didn't actually expect what he found awaiting him: the almost inevitable meeting with his son.

As the doors swished closed behind him, his eyes scanned the room for his Captain. At first, he overlooked the small huddle seated at the table, then, with a start, realized the trick which had been played on him. The boy looked up at him with bright, eager eyes, and started to rise, but something in his father's still, formidable glare halted him.

For just an instant, Spock felt a rush of astonishment at Kirk. He would not have believed the Captain possible of such subterfuge...yet, obviously, he was. How dare he interfere in matters which he had no right...The Vulcan in him clamped down hard. He would handle this logically and rationally, no matter how it came about.

The child spoke hesitantly, in total awe and delight. "You're my Daddy...I know...You really are..."

Spock eyed him skeptically. He looked Vulcan, yet he sounded so...so human! Clasping his hands behind him, Spock walked thoughtfully to his son, regarding him curiously.

Theron could hardly contain himself, yet he sensed the awesome power of this man and was confused by it. He wasn't frightened, but was unsure what was expected.

"Mother said you'd probably be too busy, but I knew you'd see me. Then Captain Kirk said you would come..." He broke off, bewildered by the look of displeasure he was getting.

"Theron, you must learn to control your proclivity towards emotionalism. Such chatter is <u>not</u> welcomed, I assure you."

The boy realized his jaw was hanging; he clamped it shut tightly, the lower lip protruding slightly. A flush stained his cheeks. Never before had anyone spoken to him like that.

Spock pulled out a chair and sat, facing the boy. "Come," he commanded gently, two slender fingers extended in suplication. The child moved closer, and Spock fought a disgusting surge of emotion. He needed objectivity but he was unprepared.

Theron waited silently for his father to make the next move. Strange, he seemed to understand what was expected of him, without the use of a lot of words. This man in front of him was no stranger; both from Tarra's frequent referrals to his father and the unexplainable bond between father and son, they faced each other as long acquantances, and Theron's admiration was so totally unbounded that he would do anything his father bid without hesitation.

Spock, too, even more strongly than Theron, felt the bond of kinship between them. The Vulcan in him grieved that his son was so Human, yet he knew it was his own fault, allowing Theron to be raised exclusively by Tarra. Spock wondered why he had ever permitted such an injustice to his son. What had seemed right three years ago no longer seemed valid. Theron belonged on Vulcan.

"You are being educated?" He made it a question.

"Yes, in basic language, mathmatics, scientific theory...but, I don't like my school very much," he confessed, somehow sensing that this man would understand. His father tilted his head to one side.

"Indeed. Why not, Theron?"

"Sometimes the other children pick on me..." His eyes fell, unable to meet his father's piercing gaze. "They call me...alien. But Mother says I should be proud because I look like you, and besides - " He met Spock's eyes again in fierce determination, "-everyone is an alien somewhere, isn't he?"

Only a slight rise of one eyebrow betrayed emotion as Spock replied. "Logical. And quite accurate." Theron smiled, lighting the fine Vulcan features.

After a companionable silence, Spock seemed to lose some of his earlier tension. Almost lightly, he held up one hand, fingers spred in the Vulcan salute.

"Can you do this, Theron?"

Theron held up a hand and made a determined effort, acheiving the effect after much concentration and a little help from his opposite hand. His father nodded his approval.

"What is it?" Theron asked.

"It is the Vulcan salute, used for greeting people."

A wistful look came over the boy's face. "Father...what is Vulcan like? Mama couldn't tell me much, because she's never been there, and, well...<u>I'm</u> Vulcan," he finished lamely.

"Yes, Theron, you are," Spock replied gravely. "And as a Vulcan you have much to learn of your home, of your heritage, of your people." Spock stood, and Theron rose with him, feeling himself being pulled toward his father's being, although his body didn't move. "You are of the Xtmprsqzntwlfd, and it cannot be denied you." His heritage surged strong in Spock, and he almost smiled at Theron. "I will see to it that you go to Vulcan, my son," he promised.

"Come, we must find your mother."

He found Tarra with Jim Kirk in Sickbay. And he had obviously walked into the middle of a quarrel between them.

"I still say you had no right to..."

"Every right, Tarra! You can't see ... I can ..." Kirk looked up as Spock entered with Theron at his side. His eyes locked with the Vulcan's in rueful chagrin, silently apologizing for the subterfuge he had performed. Spock gazed back, steadily, and there was no sign of displeasure in his look; moreover, there was understanding and perhaps gratitude. All of this passed between the two men instantaneously before Spock turned to Tarra.

Her heart sank when she saw Spock enter with Theron. There was something about seeing the two of them together that made her heart long for the way it could have been for them...for the three of them. She had forced herself to forget him, forced herself to go on, to build a new life, and now, here he was again, tearing down all she had worked so hard to put together. He was still Spock, he hadn't changed, and suddenly it was as if the last three years hadn't even happened.

"Tarra, we must talk." His voice was strong, purposeful. So full of his plans was he that he didn't even allow himself to see Tarra as anything except a means to an end. He had Theron's welfare at heart, and nothing else would deter him.

Jim reached out a hand to Theron. "C'mon, Theron. Let's you and I go see the bridge...would you like that?"

Theron's eyes lept with excitement at the Captain's proposal, but then he hesitated and turned to his father respectfully for permission. Spock nodded, releasing Theron, and the boy ran happily ahead of Kirk through the doors of Sickbay.

After they had gone, Spock turned to Tarra. "You have raised him well, Tarra. I approve."

She smiled softly at him. Despite his formal manners, she could perceive the lonliness. Kirk was right, it had gotten worse. At least she had had Theron. What had he had? In what purgatory had he been living? A rush of pity went out of her for Spock and despite all her resolves, she found herself forgiving him for his neglect.

"I'm glad you had this opportunity to see him, Spock. It will mean so much to Theron."

He nodded sagely. "And you, Tarra. How have you been?"

"Fine, Spock, just fine," she lied bravely, disturbed by the awkwardness between them. She wished there was something she could say or do that would bridge that distance.

"Tarra, I wish to take Theron to Vulcan," he said quickly, anxious to have it out.

"You wish what?!"

"He must learn of his Vulcan heritage, be trained in the ways of my people...I was wrong to deny him this. I intend to rectify the situation."

"Now, wait a minute, Spock..." Tarra gasped, the suddenness of his unexpected proposal taking all the awkwardness away, replacing it with base concern. A great sense of foreboding filled her at his words. Was this what she wanted for Theron, or didn't she have any say in her son's future?

Seeing her startled uncertainty, Spock softened his tone. "Do not forbid this, Tarra. We both want what is best for our son, you know."

"But, Vulcan...I don't even know what Vulcan's like," she protested, wavering at his gentle words, and his reference to 'our son' - the first time he'd acknowledged that.

"It is not necessary that you know, but it is for Theron," he replied.

"Perhaps," she admitted. "But I couldn't consent to this unless I were able to see for myself."

"You wish to accompany Theron to Vulcan?"

"He's very little, Spock; not yet ready to engage in such new experiences alone. And I would have to approve, before I could agree to anything he might learn on your planet. No, I'm afraid if I allow this, it must also include me."

"You may not find Vulcan to your liking," he warned.

"It is not necessary that I like it -- only Theron," Tarra countered.

"Very well, then. It could be arranged," he agreed, to her surprise.

She was thoughtful for a moment, and then she spoke. "All right. We will take Theron to Vulcan for a visit." There was a silent thanks in his eyes; she understood how much this meant to him, and was touched by it.

...Leaves were hastily arranged, and they went to Vulcan; Spock, composed and unruffled by the stir his presence would induce; Tarra, apprehensive and very uncertain what to expect on Spock's very logical homeworld; and Theron, eager and excited, delighting in the company of his strange, yet so familiar father.

They were met by Spock's parents. Sarek and Amanda were polite, but cool, with proper Vulcan dignity which can be so disarming. Tarra was unaware that they had learned only several days ago of their grandson, and still knew none of the details, but Spock knew, and if the situation was an awkward one for him, he gave no indication. There would be time now, he felt, for he and Tarra had both received 30 days leave from Starfleet.

Once Tarra and Theron had been settled into their rooms overlooking the Felistrade, the lovely

irrigated Vulcan garden, Spock returned to his parents and outlined dispassionately the events which had brought him to this point. Amanda said little, letting Sarek speak for them in the manner and custom of Vulcan. His father attributed censure only to the years Spock had been out of touch with his son. No condemnation was uttered that the pon-farr had not culminated in a legal bonding for Spock; it was improper to speak of, and strictly a personal matter. When Spock mentioned his desire to have Theron admitted to the family officially and brought up on Vulcan, Sarek hesitated, warning him that his son was only one quarter Vulcan, despite all the obvious physical traits. Yet, it was Spock's right, and they all knew it, to claim as his heir anyone he so desired. There would come a time, Sarek maintained, when Spock would again be bonded by the laws of his world, and he would be placing Theron above any issue of that joining. But if Spock chose to do so, Sarek logically could only concede. Spock, after all, did have a duty to his firstborn.

Time passed all too quickly. Spock took Tarra and Theron to all the historical sites, filling his role of guide and teacher admirably. They visited the Web of Khylaechyo, the Sdrekian Cove, Mount Pri-Hovei and the nearby cities of Llangor and Shi-Khar. In addition, there were the more personal places: the Vulcan Science Academy, the B'Lemma Spock had attended as a child, the Komeral and the place of Koonit-Kalifee, ancestral holdings of Spock's family.

Through it all, Spock and Tarra built up once again that easy closeness they'd had aboard the ENTERPRISE, and Tarra began to see still another side to this fascinating man, as he settled into his Vulcan homeworld with adroit ease.

But the times apart from their solitary activities were not entirely easy for Tarra. The rigid, impenetrable stares from the Vulcan natives with their quiet, formal ways, was out of context for a Human. Sometimes they would joke - or Tarra thought it must be joking - but such serious, laughterless humor she had never encountered.

And there was Amanda. Tarra had assumed from the beginning that she would at least have a common meeting ground with Spock's human mother, but Amanda seemed as Vulcan as the rest. No, not entirely. She sensed a coldness from Amanda, an emotional frost, not apparent in the Vulcans.

After the first few weeks, Tarra finally got her chance to confront Amanda alone, and although Spock's mother tried her best to submerge it, she ultimately admitted that she didn't think very highly of the girl her son had brought to Vulcan. She told Tarra sternly that it took a certain kind of woman to adopt the Vulcan culture, and the two woman talked frankly for the first time. Tarra held her ground, and soon Amanda began to realize the full extent of Tarra's love for Spock, her willingness to share Theron with his father, and the way she had borne the hurts Spock had inflicted. Amanda, reading between the lines, learned the full story Spock had been unable to share with them, and it gave her an insight into her son as well. Tarra gained a new respect and admiration for Amanda, realizing how difficult it had been for Spock's mother in the beginning, and how even now so much of her humanness must be locked away in order for her to survive on Vulcan.

During the last week of their stay, Spock planned another trip. He wanted to take Theron on a hike up into the Llangon mountains. They would pack a lunch, leave at dawn...as usual he invited Tarra to come along. Even though the end of their leave was drawing near, Spock and Tarra had not yet talked seriously about their futures...

The climb was an arduous one, and Tarra began to have misgivings about her eager acceptance of Spock's invitation. She had always considered herself in top physical shape, but the dense atmosphere and the oppressive heat of Vulcan made her steps falter before they were halfway to the spot Spock had chosen for their meal. She refused to give in to her fatigue, and gave no indication of her discomfort.

Theron scampered happily before them, climbing over the crumbling rocks and sparse vegetation with a practiced ease.

Spock appeared preoccupied with his own thoughts; there was little talk as they made their way up the side of the mountain. At length he paused and indicated she wait while he went off on a side trail.

Gratefully, Tarra sank down on a boulder and dug another tri-ox tablet from her knapsack. Theron skipped back to her side.

"Isn't this a fascinating place, Mother?" he asked, his eyes darting around the dead looking landscape. Tarra regarded him fondly.

"You like Vulcan very much, don't you?" she asked ruefully. She had seen, these past few weeks, a new side to her son's personality emerging. He was like a fish who'd been on land for so long and had suddenly been thrust into the water. The natural adaption to Vulcan ways, coupled with the obvious adoration he showed for his father, made Tarra feel very left out, very much the outsider. She wondered, fleetingly, how Amanda had learned to tolerate it. But then, Amanda had Sarek's love and bonding, she reminded herself firmly.

Theron squinted his eyes and drew his mouth into a hard line, trying hard to emulate Spock's look of thoughtfulness. "Yes, Mother. Vulcan gives me great joy."

At that point, Spock reappeared, gesturing in the direction he'd come from.

"There is a spot just a short way from here which I believe will be adequate for our meal." Tarra looked at him in surprise; her eyes met his in grateful acknowledgement. He had recognized her fatigue and this was his way of being kind.

"Theron, help your mother with that pack."

"Nonsense," she chuckled. "I'm perfectly able to carry it myself."

But Theron picked up the pack anyway, regarding her sternly. "It is illogical to protest,

Mother." Laughing, she threw up her hands in despair and followed them up the path to the clearing Spock had found.

They ate in companionable silence, the hike having sharpened their appetites. Little was left of the food Amanda had prepared, and they quickly gathered up the remains and policed the area.

Spock delved into his kit and pulled out a miniature Tlaitsil, the Vulcan equivalent of an abacus. Arranging himself on the ground next to Theron, he painstakingly instructed the boy in its fundamental principles, repeating the lesson until he was sure Theron understood.

Fascinated, Theron followed his father's guiding fingers and was soon experimenting independently. Rising, Spock went to Tarra, where she sat watching in amusement. She looked up at his approach, a question in her eyes.

"Come," he said shortly. At her glance toward Theron, he added, "The boy will be occupied for a time. We must talk, Tarra."

She followed his lead wordlessly. They left the clearing and Spock gave her a hand as they climbed. Vulcan was really a very ugly planet, she mused. Oh, she had visited some lovely spots and of course the cities were marvelously planned and attractive, but on the whole it was more a case of how well the Vulcan people had triumphed over the natural barrenness of their land. Uninhabited places like this were just bleak and foreboding.

At length he stopped, deciding this place was as good as any for their talk. The ground was covered by a blanket of spongy yellow growth, and Tarra sank gratefully to her knees, luxuriating in the feel of it.

"What is it?" she asked, enchanted

"We call it Mnaapra; it grows wild and is used extensively in the manufacture of bedding and furniture," he explained, settling down a few feet from her.

She nodded in sudden understanding. "I've heard of it -- offworld it's called Napraline, isn't it?" Spock looked startled for a second, and Tarra didn't realize it was because of her sudden reference to anywhere outside of Vulcan as 'offworld'.

Hesitating only half a beat, he replied mechanically, "Napraline is a synthetic derivitive of Mnaapra."

She regarded him solemnly. "But you didn't bring me here to talk about plants, did you, Spock? What did you want?"

He almost retorted that Mnaapra was not exactly a plant, but checked himself mid-thought. She was correct; this line of conversation was not what he had intended.

"Tarra, what are your plans?" he asked gently, curiousity in his tone.

She was silent, a myriad of thoughts running through her head. She couldn't see herself taking Theron and returning to her job and home on Starbase 5; not now, not after this. Yet, what were her alternatives? Stay on Vulcan with Theron? She shuddered.

"I want to do what is best for Theron, Spock," she said slowly, "but at the same time I have my own life. I have a career, work I'm happy with...What's the solution? Do you know?"

"I believe you have already perceived that I want my son...our son," he ammended, "to be raised in the Vulcan tradition. Yet I cannot ask you to stay here at the expense of your own lifestyle. In a few days I must return to the Enterprise. A course of action must be determined."

She sighed heavily. Here on Vulcan they had fallen back into the happy companionship they'd had once on board the ship. They were so comfortable together, so content, and Tarra's love for him had deepened every day they spent here.

As though reading her thoughts, as he was often prone to do, Spock turned the subject away from Theron.

"Tarra, you do realize why I never offered you a legal bonding, do you not?" She shrugged.

"I just assumed...you didn't care," she replied slowly. A look of pain crossed the bland Vulcan face.

"That is not correct, Tarra. I care very much about you...I always have. Nor have I been oblivious to how you feel towards me." His voice was deep and hesitant as he tried to put into words that which he had no words to express.

"I love you, Spock," she interrupted, relieved at being able to say it to him at last.

He went on as though she hadn't spoken, lost to the task of summoning words to explain. "It is precisely because I care that there cannot possibly be anything for us. You are a Human female, with wants and desires which I, a Vulcan, cannot possibly fulfill. If we were to join in a legal bonding, it would eventually destroy you."

"I can't see that," she objected.

"Tarra, you deserve more than I can give you. I could never 'love' you - love is foreign to me. In time you would grow to despise me for denying you that which you need. I could not do that to you."

"I don't want anyone but you," she rasped. "In any way I can have you." He shook his head slowly.

"You shall decide otherwise in time. This is why I stayed out of your life." Her throat felt uncomfortably tight, but she wouldn't give in.

"How can you know what's best for me? Who are you to judge?"



"It's wrong, Tarra!" His voice was desperate, pleading. "I can not give you human love, and that is what you require."

"Your mother..." she began.

"My mother is an unusual Earthwoman. But you are not like her. You could never adjust to a life on Vulcan. I would not allow you to attempt it."

He was so stubborn; there was no way she could break through his stubborness. They were silent for a space, allowing the heat of the discussion to cool. Finally, he spoke.

"What has happened cannot be changed; perhaps these past few weeks we've learned to live with it. I believe I have, and I suspect you, too, are functioning with more efficiency." She nodded, encouraging him to continue, curious as to where he was heading.

"Do you think you could return to the Enterprise as my assistant?"

She was thunderstruck, never having considered this alternative. Her heart raced at the prospect, but she cautiously stilled her enthusiasm.

"What of Theron?"

"I have spoken privately with my parents, and they have consented to keep him on Vulcan and see to his education. He would be formally adopted, in a ceremony legally acknowledging him as my son, of course." At her hesitation, he added, "It would be best for him; you can see that."

Tarra stood and paced over the Mnaapra restlessly. The prospect was enticing, but she had never rushed into things. It would solve so many problems, though. Theron seemed to be happy on this world; he would have the prestige and authority of Spock's family - Theron's family - solidly behind him. Surely it was a better life than she could offer. Also, she would be happy again in the job she loved.

"Could you do it, Tarra? There must be no emotional involvement between us if we serve together. We have our son, and he is of primary importance to both of us, but on the Enterprise we would be merely fellow officers."

"I think we're mature enough to handle it, Spock," she said thoughtfully. "But I can't give you an answer just now. I've got to think about this..." she smiled, "...logically, and decide what's best for me and for Theron. I must admit, though, I like the idea."

He stood, nodding. "Very well, as you wish. Perhaps you'd like to speak with Amanda; she can tell you better than I, what Theron's life will be like." He started down the path to their waiting son.

...In the end, it wasn't really a very difficult decision. Tarra would do anything to be with Spock, to do a job that she not only loved but found rewarding. And she would accept whatever part of him she could. Strings were pulled, red tape cut, and her transfer papers arrived the day before they were scheduled to leave Vulcan.

Together, they had instructed Theron that he would remain on Vulcan with his grandparents, and his excitement was unbounded. Spock reminded him sternly of his lack of control, then spirited Theron off to the Telit-Tene for the formal adoption ceremony. Theron became Stack of Vulcan, son of Spock and a member of the Xtmprsqzntwlfb family. His name had been chosen by his Grandfather, as was the custom. It had been the name of Sarek's Great-grandfather. It was an honored name, and he vowed to bear it in dignity, revering Logic, IDIC, and the Philosophy of Nome. The words were strange to the boy, but his father assured him he would understand in time. During the long and ritualistic ceremony, Tarra often sought consolation in the placid face of Amanda whenever she found herself having misgivings about becoming the Human mother of a Vulcan son.

Tarra and Spock returned to the ENTERPRISE.

At first, all went smoothly. Spock was relaxed and content, Tarra was satisfied to be back at her post. But as time passed and the excitement wore off, Tarra began to have misgivings. She found that she could no more retain that clinical detachment now, than she had been able to before Stack's birth. That, coupled with the frustrating unfairness of it - Why should he deny them a future? - eventually had to have an outlet. And Tarra's outlet came in the form of Jim Kirk.

From the time of Tarra's return to the ship, Jim Kirk made a special effort to be around when he felt she needed someone. He knew Spock better than anyone else, and perhaps he could help her to avoid the disillusionments loving the Vulcan could bring. There was something strangely compelling about Tarra; his respect and admiration for her grew as he learned to know her better. James Kirk had been lonely for a long time, although it was not a thing he admitted easily, and now he had found someone he could enjoy.

Spock was pleased with their friendship. He knew Jim could give Tarra the emotional exchange he could not, and it seemed to benefit them both. Sometimes he joined them in their amusements, and other times he would decline the invitations, prefering his own pursuits.

As adventures and missions flew rapidly by, the friendship grew and deepened. Spock's Vulcanness became more oppressive to Tarra, especially compared with Jim's open warmth. It was to Jim that she turned for a pat on the back, a dash of courage, or a welcome laugh. It was not, could not, be that she loved Spock less, but she began to wonder what she would do without Jim.

Kirk had always been very careful about attachments to female crewmembers; he did not believe it was honorable for a Captain, and he took his position very seriously. There could be no breath of gossip or scandal lest his crew lose respect for him. Yet he never considered Tarra in this way. For one thing, everyone on the ship knew she 'belonged' to Mr. Spock. The other reason was that Tarra and Jim had a totally open relationship. But the crew began to perceive, better than their Captain, what was happening. And many felt that Kirk was better suited to Tarra than was the non-emotional First Officer.

McCoy, too, saw what was developing, but unlike the others he was violently opposed. As much as he cared for Tarra, Bones had not been pleased to have her re-assigned to the ENTERPRISE. He had feared that she would not be able to cope with Spock's aloofness without turning bitter and frustrated. But when Jim entered the picture, throwing his charm, however good intentioned, at Tarra, making himself her buffer, the doctor was filled with a sense of foreboding. He could feel it, but he was powerless to stop it. Jim wouldn't listen to him; Tarra laughed it off; and Spock...Bones couldn't even voice his fears to him.

Jim refused to admit to himself that he was falling in love with Tarra. He knew she loved Spock, and he was equally sure Spock cared for her in his own Vulcan way. But, dammit, that simply wasn't enough for a warm, wonderful woman like Tarra St. John. She needed a man who could give her the love she deserved, a life of sharing and enjoyment. In the beginning, Jim wished that Spock would declare Tarra off limits, thereby resolving for him these conflicting emotions. He found himself growing impatient with Spock for his inability to respond to her, even as a part of him understood and accepted that his Vulcan friend could not.

Then, almost without realizing it was happening, Tarra became an integral part of his life and happiness and Jim knew that he loved her, needed her. Suddenly he was no longer content in the role of friend and advisor. He wanted all of her. He began to envision a life for them off the ENTERPRISE - for he couldn't consider marriage to her aboard the ship. And with Tarra, he would accept no less. He knew there would be problems, adjustments. There was Stack, their careers, yet nothing they couldn't work out.

But again there was Spock, and although he tried, Jim could not reconcile his part in the course their lives seemed to be taking. If Spock did love Tarra, as Jim believed, then could he bear to do this to his friend? Could he be the instrument which would inflict more sorrow on the Vulcan? But what of Tarra? Wasn't Spock hurting her by his show of indifference, whatever he 'felt' inside? Jim cursed, not the man his friend, but the customs and teachings that chained the Vulcan to this non-emotionalism. Kirk knew Spock could not show love for Tarra, but his heart cried, 'Why not?'.

The Vulcan watched what was taking place and could not explain his feelings. Logically, he should be pleased that Jim and Tarra had found this pleasure in each other. He should rejoice in their joy. Then why didn't he? He could reason that part of his concern grew from the apprehension over what effect this relationship might have on the Captain's career. Tarra, though dedicated to her life in Starfleet, would be able to make adjustments. She had before. But Jim - his ship was his life. Was there room in it for anything else? Could he be content.



away from the ENTERPRISE, as Spock suspected Jim was considering. And yet, this was only part of the unexplainable and illogical uneasiness he felt. He had no claim to Tarra, he'd made that clear from the start. The only thing which bound them was their son - was it not? Then why this time, was logic not sufficient to reason out the answers to his doubts?

When Jim first attempted to discuss their future, Tarra put him off. She couldn't believe he really loved her, although he said he did. When it came to his giving up the ENTERPRISE, she would not even consider it. She knew what his ship meant to Jim and she had no wish to destroy that.

Tarra wasn't sure what it was she felt for Jim. It was different from the love she bore for Spock, but it was no less strong in its own way. She knew things couldn't go on like this for very long, and Jim was so gentle, so understanding and compassionate. Never had she felt so at odds with herself; wanting something and yet not really sure that this was what she wanted at all. She had at last forced herself to accept that there would never be any more for Spock and herself than they had now, and while she had believed that it would be enough, she now found herself reconsidering, for the future Jim painted of their life together was suddenly very appealing...

Jim and Tarra strolled slowly along the Observation deck. Her hand was tucked snugly in the crook of his arm, and they were laughing together, recounting an adventure he'd had at the Academy.

"That story can't be true, Jim Kirk," she accused, laughing. "Why, if that were the case, then half the graduating class would have..."

"But they didn't," he interrupted, holding up an index finger. "I was the only one."

Tarra giggled again, shaking her head in disbelief. Then suddenly, his hand cupped her chin, bringing her eyes to his face.

"I love you, Tarra," he said softly.

"Jim, please..." she began, reluctant to let the light moment pass by stirring up all the confusion she felt when their conversations turned to their feelings for each other. Dropping his hands to his side, he walked to the viewscreen where the deep void of space loomed awesome and majestic.

"I've been in space a long time. After a while, it starts to possess you, and it's hard to imagine a life anywhere else." His voice was tired.

She stepped to his side. "You're a very lonely man, aren't you?"

He tilted his chin as though to protest, then faced her. "I don't have to be. You... don't have to be either. Marry me, Tarra. We can have a beautiful life together."

She suddenly felt very weary of all the conflict. It would be so much easier to give in to his gentle demands. Uncontrollably, she swayed against him. His arm encircled her protectively.

"We can get a base assignment together. I won't ask you to give up your career."

"And what about <u>your</u> career, Jim? Could you be content with a base assignment?"

"I know what you're thinking. Could I give up the ship? Well, I've thought about it.



And the answer is yes, I believe I can. As long as we can be together. That's what is important now. You and I."

"What about Theron?" she asked, his enthusiasm beginning to wear her down.

"Whatever you want for him, Tarra. Make your decision and I'll agree." He added gently, "I love him too."

"I know," she agreed. She did know of his feeling for her son. She remembered Jim's delight in the infant after his birth. Since her return to the ENTERPRISE, Tarra had often longed for her son, and many times she had talked at length about Theron (She still had difficulty thinking of him as Stack). She had found a sympathetic and understanding listener in Jim Kirk, as she revealed her anxieties about the little boy she had left on Vulcan. Yes, Jim would be good in her son's life.

"And Spock, Jim? Where does Spock fit in?"

Where, indeed? Jim wasn't sure he knew the answer to that. But with his ever present confidence, he was sure that even that could be worked out. Spock was a reasonable man; he would make him understand the logic of the situation.

"That can be handled, too, Tarra. I'll talk to him if you like. I feel I should. Trust me, honey. It can be worked out, you'll see."

She wanted to believe him, to let him take command of the situation. It was so easy to let him make all the decisions. She was tired of trying to do what was right - for her, for Theron, for Spock...Jim would take care of everything. She would follow her Captain's orders. Nodding in agreement to his proposal, she allowed herself to be pulled into his strong arms. Tarra pushed whatever misgivings she had out of her mind.

...Once they decided to marry, the Captain of the ENTERPRISE and Lt. St. John found themselves confronted by many of the same decisions that faced couples throughout history. They had to determine when they would marry and where they would live. In their case, this would depend on where Starfleet assigned them, how long it took for their applied transfers to be processed, and when a new Commanding officer could be found.

Tarra and Jim decided that when all the red tape had been untangled, they would go to Vulcan before their wedding and together tell Theron. No problems were anticipated there; they would do whatever was best for the boy. Tarra secretly hoped that although he may want to continue his Vulcan education, Theron would eventually wish to live with her and Jim. But before they could put any of these plans into action, there was one thing that must be done. Jim felt he had to talk to Spock.

He was filled with more aprehension than he would acknowledge about discussing this with his friend. He had been greatly disappointed in Bones' reaction when he and Tarra had told him of their plans. The doctor had been the only person on the ship they had taken into their confidence, because Tarra had grown so close to McCoy and wanted to share their joy with him. But although Bones had said all the right things, congratulating them, wishing them well, his silent disapproval had been evident, and Kirk found himself annoyed with his friend for the obvious damper he put on Tarra's enthusiasm.

Now, Jim had the task of telling his First Officer of their plans. He found the opportunity several days later, when he and Spock were relaxing over a game of chess...

Kirk raised his eyes from the chess board and looked across at his opponant. Spock was studying the board with feigned concentration. Jim could tell, from the way he was losing, that Spock's thoughts, like his own, were elsewhere.

The rec room was deserted, the hum of the ship the only sound, until Kirk cleared his throat and shifted in his seat to draw Spock's attention. Measuring his words carefully, unsure how to proceed, he plunged ahead.

"Spock, I've been wanting to talk to you. It's a personal matter, and I guess now's about as good a time as any." The Vulcan regarded him steadily, one hand poised above the chess board. Slowly, he lowered the hand and leaned back in his seat, silently encouraging his Captain to continue. Kirk met the impenetrable gaze, wondering why he felt so uncomfortable about this.

"I think you know how Tarra and I feel about each other. Spock, we're going to be married."

The Vulcan reacted with a slight stiffening, and continued to meet Kirk's eyes. At length he spoke, his words dry and impersonal.

"Indeed? I believe the correct response, Captain, is 'congratulations'."

Jim winced, unsure whether Spock were being genuine or facetious. Sometimes it was difficult to tell. His own mixed feelings might be reading a meaning which was not intended.

"I hope you mean that," he said earnestly. "I'm going to apply for transfer to a base assignment; so is Tarra. No one knows yet, except for Bones."

At that, Spock allowed his brows to knit together in concern. "You'll give up your command?"

"It's only fair. We couldn't have any security on board a Starship," Kirk explained lamely, not citing the real reason why he and Tarra couldn't stay on the ENTERPRISE. What would that do to Spock, seeing their joy yet unable to share it?

"You will not be satisfied in a ground assignment. I would not advise it, Jim."

"I didn't ask for your advice!" Kirk snapped, irrationally furious at Spock's reproach. What he was doing was the best thing possible for all of them. Why couldn't Spock see that? Why

did everyone try to tell him it wouldn't work? He knew what he was doing, didn't he? No doubts, no reservations. What right did Spock have to advise him on his future with Tarra?

"Jim, listen to me," Spock implored. "You were meant to command; it is your life, and if you throw it away now, you will come to hate the woman who took you from it. You'll be left with nothing."

Kirk stood up, his anger soaring out of all proportion. "What's wrong, Spock? Jealous that I can give Tarra what you cannot? What have you ever given her but pain and unhappiness? Who are you to counsel anyone on human emotions, you logical..." Just in time, he broke off and turned away, forcing the storm within himself to calm.

Spock's voice was icy. "Excuse me. You are correct. It is none of my concern."

Jim turned back to face him, the pain on the Vulcan face wounding him. What were they doing? This hurting was just what he'd sought to avoid. He and Tarra would have each other, but what would Spock have? A sickening wave of guilt washed over him.

"No, I'm sorry, Spock," he said slowly, his eyes beseeching his friend to understand. "I know you mean well, but I just can't accept..."

"Intentions have nothing to do with the matter," Spock interrupted, his voice even. "I am basing my evaluations of the situation solely on the logical interpretations of -- "

"Spock,.." Jim groaned, pleading with the Vulcan not to draw himself inward and resort to the verbal doubletalk which always characterized his hiding his real self. If they couldn't be honest with each other now, then what would be left for them?

Partly to cover his own discomfort, and partly to get out from under those soft hazel eyes, Spock rose and moved to another table, absently fingering the buttons controlling the game equipment. More stung by Jim's pronouncement than he would allow himself to admit, he attempted to control the conflicting thoughts. After an awkward silence, as the two men battled with themselves for the elusive peace, Spock turned back to Kirk, a question in his dark eyes, veiled now from the anxiety he met.

"And what of Stack?" he asked.

Startled by the switch, Kirk collected his thoughts. "That's largely up to Tarra. Neither of us wants to take him from his studies or from you, but there may come a time when he'll want to be with us."

"You will not take Stack from Vulcan," Spock intoned heavily, his voice hard and precise.

Jim walked hesitantly to the Vulcan's side. This was vitally important; it must be worded just right. "Spock, I know I could never take your place as Stack's father, and I wouldn't want to. But I love him, too, and Tarra is his mother. Don't we all want what's best for him?"

Spock's implacable expression did not waver. With the same finality, he reitterated, "Stack is Vulcan, he is my son, and on Vulcan he shall remain."

Jim opened his mouth to retort, irritated by the Vulcan's stubborn attitude, but something in Spock's face stopped him. Barely discernable, a muscle twitched in his cheek, telling the force of the emotions held within. The thought returned to Jim that Spock would have nothing once he and Tarra were gone; no wonder he fought so hard for his son. Grimly, Jim reflected, it was not that long ago he was using subterfuge to reunite Spock with his son; could he now plan to take him away? How had this all come about? Would there ever be any happiness for any of them? Despair welled up in him. Tarra would have to understand. He would make her understand.

"All right, Spock," he said softly. "If that's the way you want it, we'll honor your wishes. I'll talk to Tarra; I'm sure she'll understand." Spock's body slumped ever so slightly, the tension draining with Jim's concession. His step was stiff as he went to the chess board and began methodically removing the playing pieces. Kirk stared at his back in desperation. He was losing control of the situation; he had gained nothing from his friend.

"Won't you give us your blessing, Spock?" he asked, forcing his voice to be light. "That's what I originally wanted to ask you. This doesn't have to change anything. I don't want it to."

Spock remained with his back to Kirk. Illogical, he thought, everything is changed. But somehow he heard and understood the plea in his Captain's voice...his Captain...no longer his Captain...yet always his Captain...this very special human who had taught him so much...

He felt Kirk's eyes penetrating his back, probing deep into his being; turning, he met the intense gaze and very slowly, hesitantly, he allowed a tiny smile to soften his features.

"I shall always wish you good fortune, Jim. If my blessings make it easier for you, then they are yours."

Jim's voice shook with emotion. "Thank you, Spock - from both of us." Simultaneously, both men lowered their eyes.

...Tarra did understand when Jim told her of Spock's insistence to keep Stack on Vulcan. By message tape, they informed the boy of their plans, and waited anxiously for a response, but nothing came right back; not unusual with the way subspace communications were. Jim was impatient; he didn't want to wait for their marriage, although Tarra seemed to hesitate. He began making the final plans, organizing their schedules so they'd be able to transfer as soon as possible.

The last mission before the completion of their transfer was a routine delivery of supplies to a heavily populated Rigelian planet. The senior officers were kept busy visiting dignitaries and officials in the capital city.

Concluding the formalities as swiftly as possible, Kirk beamed back to the ship, **full of**

excitement and anticipation at what lay ahead. A jarring surprise was awaiting him.

In his cabin, a message tape sat on his desk. While he and Spock had been carrying out their duties, Tarra had quietly gathered her belongings and left the ship. This was only the first step in her journey into obscurity. The tape she left for Jim explained that she simply could not go through with their plans, could not take him away from his beloved ship, nor could she be sure that what they planned was right for either of them. Insisting she needed time to get herself together and to think it through, she implored him not to follow her or attempt to trace her. Tarra gave no indication where to start searching for her.

Devastated, Kirk went to Spock's quarters, where he found the Vulcan in possession of a similar tape. It urged Spock to take care of Stack while she was away, and admonished him not to try to find her.

Uncomprehending, awestruck, the two men were at a loss to understand the sudden escape. It was inconceivable that any of the past events could have driven her to this. Surely something must be terribly wrong for Tarra to take such desperate measures, and surely, if something were so terribly wrong, she would need them at such a time. Ignoring the pleas, they immediately began trying to trace her movements to discover where she'd gone.

The desperation that drove Tarra to leave the ship, to technically go AWOL, to give up everything, was compassion for these two men that she cared for so deeply. Her thinking was chaotic and confused. One moment she was sure she loved Jim and was willing to marry him, then in the next moment she would realize it was still Spock she loved and always would. She could see what she was doing to both of them, hurting, although it was never intended, and she didn't know what to do about it. Getting out of both of their lives seemed the only answer. It was frightening to lose her identity, to start over, and she cringed at the prospect, but the alternative was no better.

Apparently, they discovered, several days had passed since Tarra left the ship. Employing the civilian authorities on Rigel X, a thorough search was made, while the ENTERPRISE stayed in orbit. A total of seven ships had left the planet which may have been carrying a passenger fitting her description. Since she was not on Rigel X, there was nothing further to be done there, except to employ private civilian investigators, whom they hired rather than contact Starfleet officials. Jim managed to cover her abscence for as long as possible, but even he could not protect her indefinitely.

As negative reports continued to filter back from the investigators, both men had time to examine his part in what had caused Tarra to desert. If Spock had been able to give her the love she desired...If Jim hadn't pressured her about marriage...If only they'd both left her alone and let her work it out...

Months passed. Starfleet became involved, as was inevitable, and they too had field officers searching for Lt. St. John. But, where, in a galaxy, do you look for one small, insignificant person who does not want to be found?

From time to time, Kirk and Spock would get word of a lead in their sector, and would divert the ship to see for themselves. These were usually mistaken identities. Sometimes they arrived a step too late. The picture that emerged from the pieces uncovered by the experts could have come from a horrible nightmare. Tarra kept moving from planet to planet to avoid being found. Some of the places she was reported to have worked or lived were indescribable holes, sewers of humanity, peopled by the dregs of society who existed from day to day, making their living by the most menial forms of labor. What was a woman like Tarra St. John doing in places like that?

Anxiety began to build as the trail led lower and lower, until they wondered where it would end. Jim and Spock rarely said anything to each other these days that was not related to Tarra. She was on their lips, on their minds nearly all the time, as they grimly continued the search.

Almost a year after she deserted the ship, another lead came from the private investigators. Her latest location was a sleazy section of the planet Cymburon, a trading post a few parsecs from their current position. Advising that they would follow up the lead, the ENTERPRISE headed for Cymburon, the investigators' last words echoing in their minds: "The woman is reportedly quite ill, and unable to work."

McCoy beamed down with them, and they found the rooming house with little difficulty. The landlady, a garulous sort, admitted to being the one who had informed the authorities about the woman in her house. She went on at great length about how she had taken care of the lady, fed her, nursed her, let her remain even though there was no money.

Growing impatient with the old woman's obvious pecuniary hints, Kirk plied her with credits while Spock and Bones headed up the stairs. Jim followed slowly, terribly afraid of what they might find.

It was indeed Tarra, or rather, a sickening caricature of her. She was lying in the filthy room, unwashed bedclothes heaped over her for warmth. McCoy went to her at once, noting the comatose condition, and ran the mediscanner over her.

Jim and Spock stood shoulder to shoulder just inside the doorway, neither able to move to the bed. Finally, Jim took the first step, and Spock followed closely as they joined McCoy at her side.

She was pitifully thin, the veins standing out clearly under the almost translucent skin. Her hands were grimy and calloused; her hair was lank and lustreless, hanging in greasy strands around her face.

As they stood there, her eyes opened vacantly, and she cast about for some point of reference. She made unintelligible sounds, then the agitation gave way to a fit of coughing which left her shaking and spent. Whether or not she recognized them, or even realized they were there was doubtful. McCoy did what he could with the equipment at hand. The doctor's look chilled Kirk to the bone; tersely, he lifted her out of the bed, while Spock gave the command to beam them aboard the

ship...

Kirk, Spock and McCoy beamed aboard with Tarra.

"I'll let you know," McCoy said grimly as he headed for Sickbay. Yet somehow they already knew. From the time they'd first seen her, from the cursory examination in the boarding house, they all knew. The doctor's announcement would only verbalize their fear. Tarra was dying.

McCoy and M'Benga did a more thorough examination, ran tests, the results of which McCoy believed would confirm his diagnosis. They changed her into clean clothes, administered vitamins and tissue restorers to her badly depreciated system. A mild stimulant produced a response. Her eyes opened, focusing.

"Bones?" she asked. McCoy nodded.

"Feeling a little better?"

"Where am I?..." she began, then her eyes moved around as she grew more aware. Panic enveloped as she recognized the familiar configuration of Sickbay. "Oh, no," she groaned, turning her head to the side, letting the tears slip freely from her eyes. "How did you find me? Why did you bring me here? I thought I was dreaming..."

"Tarra," McCoy interrupted gently, "we've looked for you a long time. We were all very worried."

"I didn't want...oh, God, I didn't want to be found!"

"I know," the doctor crooned softly, wiping the perspiration from her forehead and turning her face toward him. "But it's over now - all the hiding, all the running. It's over. It'll work out, you'll see, honey. Everything's going to be fine," he lied. She caught the look on his face and loved him for the beautiful lie he was telling her.

"Of course," she murmered, playing the game with him. Then, quite suddenly, "Theron...? How's Theron?"

"He's fine," McCoy told her truthfully.

"I missed him so..." she began, the tears starting again. "That was the worst part, Bones. Not knowing about him...So many times I wanted to...to ask Amanda...but I was so afraid...They were looking for me...everywhere I went..." Tarra was suddenly consumed by coughing; uncontrolable, racking coughs.

"Tarra, easy...easy," he whispered. "You mustn't. It's over, honey, over. You'll see Theron soon..." She shook her head sadly, gulping in deep breaths of air as a hypospray took effect.

"There's no time," she choked. "No time, Bones. I just can't live long enough..." She trailed off into unconsciousness. Dry eyed, McCoy looked at the indicator above her bed. She was quiet now, her body resting, but he knew she was right. Tarra wouldn't live long enough to see her son.

McCoy left her bedside for his office and punched the intercom to summon Jim and Spock. What could he say to them? Anger welled up; it was so unnecessary. Tarra's illness wasn't normally fatal; it was a curable disease if caught early. My God, they'd had a method of treatment for Tuberculosis as far back as the 20th Century. But nothing could be done once it had reached the advanced, disseminated form, and all Bones could do was keep her quiet and comfortable until the end came. Why hadn't she taken care of herself, gone to a clinic before this? Yet, even as the question occured to him, the answer came unbidden. How could she have gone for help when she was running from the investigators that Jim and Spock had put on her trail? If only they'd left her alone!

When the two men entered his office, McCoy made no effort to soften the prognosis. Holding them responsible, he illustrated quite graphically what would happen to Tarra.

"How long?" Jim asked tersely.

"A few days, perhaps a week. I can't say for sure. I wouldn't give her much longer." McCoy's eyes strayed to the Vulcan, observing him carefully. Spock had not spoken since they arrived, his face an unreadable mask. He might have been listening to the ship's last routine sensor report. But the doctor knew the tension, the anguish deep within. 'Damn you, Spock,' he cursed silently. 'You care about her and even now when you learn she's dying you show nothing. Hasn't your non-emotion done enough? Can't you, at least this once, be Human - for her? For yourself?' McCoy turned back to Jim.

"I want to see her, Bones," the Captain insisted.

"She's resting now. When she wakes up, I'll tell her you want to see her."

When Tarra awoke several hours later, she felt stronger and more coherent than she had for days. Bones told her of Kirk's request, and she agreed to see him, adding that she wanted to speak with Spock also. The doctor was reluctant to allow all this activity, but he gave his consent. He knew that it was Spock she needed now, not Jim Kirk. Perhaps it had always been that way.

Jim arrived within minutes and went immediately to her side, taking her hand.

"Tarra," he whispered, bending to kiss her gently on the forehead. She smiled at him. Her hand clutched at his fingers, communicating without words her delight in his presence. "We've been so worried about you," he went on. "Tarra, we looked and looked..."

"I left a tape...I asked you not to."

"You couldn't have believed that we wouldn't. Tarra - why? Just tell me that."

She sighed visably. It was going too fast. There was so much that need to be said and she felt she had no strength with which to say it. We all must face the truth eventually, she reflected. There is no real escape in life.

"I needed to get away...to think. I couldn't marry you. Your ship...your career. I couldn't ask you to give them up...not for a woman who couldn't return your love."

"Tarra..." She reached up to touch his cheek and realized it was wet.

"Oh, Jim...I never wanted to hurt you. I never wanted to hurt any of us. I...care for you. I'm sorry. I couldn't stop loving Spock..." She turned from him, unable to face the pain in his eyes. Tears spilled down her cheeks and her sobs gave way to rasping coughs. She felt a strong arm under her shoulders, lifting her gently, drawing her close, and she clung, letting his quiet strength calm her with a gentle voice, crooning softly.

"I know, Tarra...I know. It's all right. I understand." He held her until the coughing faded to labored breathing. As he eased her back onto the pillow, McCoy came in with a hypospray. Jim met the impersonal eyes. He knew Bones had heard her coughing; he wondered how much else he had heard.

"She needs to sleep now," Bones told him. Jim nodded and bent to kiss Tarra gently. When he straightened, he met the doctor's icy stare. Kirk's shoulders slumped as he headed for the door.

"Jim." He heard McCoy and turned; he faced the doctor and saw that Bones' expression had softened into compassion. My friend, Bones, he thought. It isn't easy for you, either. Nodding his head in silent understanding, Jim Kirk turned and left Sickbay.

He returned to the bridge. Grateful that Spock wasn't on duty at the library computer station, he wondered absently where his First Officer was. Kirk knew it was illogical, but right now the Vulcan was the last person he wanted to see, although he wasn't sure why. Uhura came once, to stand by his chair, asking with her eyes about Tarra. Kirk shook his head, relieved that she understood without his needing to put into words the condition of her friend.

In the science lab below, Spock was using the Vulcan disciplines he'd learned as a child to concentrate on his work. He couldn't explain why he'd picked this, of all places on the ship, to try and suppress that which was so poignantly connected with this very lab. Taking solace from the tasks before him, he was soon deeply engrossed in removing all thoughts of the present from his mind. The calm which he sought, however, would not come.

Simulated night fell on the ship. Lighting was altered, duty shifts changed, but Spock still sat hunched over his work, having the impetus neither to rest nor draw sustenance. He was so withdrawn into meditation, that it was several minutes before he realized he was being paged. It was Dr. McCoy, summoning him to Sickbay. The doctor didn't explain why, and Spock did not take the time to wonder as he acknowledged the call and headed for the infirmary.

McCoy looked up from his desk as Spock entered, and nodded toward the inner room where his patient was.

"Tarra's been asking to see you. She's awake now, but don't stay too long. She needs rest," he told the Vulcan gruffly. One more hurdle. One more truth for Tarra to face before the girl can die in peace.

Spock didn't reply, nor did he move toward Tarra's room. He stood for several moments, staring at the doorway, arms hanging limply at his side. McCoy, who through years of close association could usually perceive what the Vulcan was feeling, was for once not inclined to offer any unasked for advice. He looked away, to a report on his desk, as though it were the most important thing in the Universe. Spock quietly seemed to draw on an inner reserve of strength, and entered the room.

Her first glimpse of him brought the sting of tears to Tarra's eyes. She had lain there, summoning her courage, convincing herself she must not cry when she saw him, but her resolve slipped away as she came face to face with the only man she knew she had ever loved. He was thin, gaunt, she noted, and her heart reached out to him in his suffering. The suffering that she felt she had caused. She mastered her tears as he crossed to her bed, and whispered that beloved name that had been on her lips so often in this past year of nightmare.

"Spock..."

He did not take her hand, as Jim had, nor bend to kiss her. He stood instead, hands clasped behind his back, erect, but his shoulders drooped slightly.

"You are looking much improved," he said formally. He did not say her name.

"Dr. McCoy's efforts have been beneficial," she told him.

"So it would seem."

"Of course, even his skill and knowledge have limits..."

"That does seem to be true of most beings."

Why are we doing this? she suddenly wondered. Why are we playing this game of half truths and unspoken lies? She was so tired.

"I don't have much time," she said weakly, "and there's so much I wanted..." She trailed off. How would she put into words all the thoughts that had been haunting her for the past year, explain all the mistakes and the reasons for them? It seemed an impossible task. She closed her eyes to shut out his image. Very quietly, very gently, she heard him say her name.

"Tarra." He reached out, touching her hand lightly at first, then more firmly, and suddenly she felt his strength, so real that it was almost a physical thing, flow into her. Tarra opened

her eyes and met his dark compassionate ones. She knew then that Spock loved her, as deeply and profoundly as she had always loved him. He didn't have to tell her, he didn't even have to admit it to himself; in fact, he probably couldn't. But it wasn't necessary any more, and she felt peace. When she spoke, at last, it was with a new strength.

"You will be gentle with Theron -- Stack? He is still very young and this will be hard for him."

"He is a Vulcan."

"But he is also Human." Spock nodded.

"True. Amanda will temper the Vulcan teachings for you."

An overwhelming sadness filled her. "Spock, don't let him forget me. I had so little time with him. Please...tell him of me once in a while."

"He will not forget you," Spock replied. Strangely, she knew he meant 'I' will not.

She wanted somehow to say her thoughts, though. She began. "About Jim...I..." His eyes suddenly became hard, and the gentle features of his face drew into taut lines.

"We need not speak of it," he told her stiffly. It was then that she knew how much they had hurt him.

"I love you, Spock," she entreated, but their moment was lost. He drew away his hand and straightened.

"You should be resting," he told her. "Dr. McCoy will not wish his patient to be overtaxed."

"Spock," she pleaded, "will you come see me again - please." His face softened again, his voice tender once more.

"I will be here, Tarra...if you want."

...Spock left then, but he came back. In the next several days, all his off duty hours were spent in Sickbay. Sometimes he would hold her hand, many times he would just sit by her bed as she slept. She lapsed into unconsciousness more and more as the disease progressed. Many times her eyes would flutter open to catch a glimpse of the Vulcan sitting quietly beside her, then she would lapse into unconsciousness again. McCoy kept increasing the dosage of pain killers, but these dulled her senses and decreased her lucid moments even more. He was concerned for Spock, as the Vulcan seemed to be neither sleeping or eating, but his admonishments were ignored. Even his threat to declare Sickbay off limits went unheeded, for they both knew it was an empty threat.

After eight days, Tarra finally lapsed into a coma from which she did not awaken. Three days later, Tarra St. John died.

McCoy dutifully and sorrowfully recorded the event, then went in search of a good bottle to dull the pain. Spock relinquished his position in Sickbay and went stiffly to his quarters to meditate. Jim Kirk, on duty on the bridge, stared dry-eyed ahead, wrapping the dignity of his rank about him, until he was free of the shift; then he, too, went off alone to think his private thoughts and feel his private pain.

Neither man, Jim Kirk nor Spock, could give comfort to the other. Too much sorrow and regret had passed between them, too much doubt and blame, too little compassion and understanding. Each was, in his own way, so devastated by Tarra's unnecessary death that they could not speak of it, could not think of it, could not admit what it had done to them.

Jim Kirk couldn't look at his First Officer without remembering the vibrant young woman he'd been willing to give up his ship for, and her tragic, senseless death, brought about by Spock's inability to love her, and his own overabundance of self-confidence. What had they done to Tarra St. John, he and Spock? It was their fault she had died, their fault...Jim Kirk could not accept this, and seeing Spock only brought it all back to him, as nothing else could.

Spock, too, was going through his own tortured hell, unable to release the agony he was enduring, unable to share his pain with the only Human he'd ever been able to share himself with, alternately blaming his Captain for being the source of the senseless waste and refusing to affix blame for a logical progression of events. No matter how hard he tried, his Vulcan mental disciplines would not serve him, and Spock could no longer function in a rational, well adjusted situation. He could not acknowledge his grief, and his own personal blame in the situation, nor could he go on without acknowledging it.

As time passed, McCoy's indomitable spirit began to return, and he perceived the damage that had been done. He saw his two friends ignore one another, avoid being together, rearrange schedules and assignments so they need not be in the same area of the ship at the same time. When it was necessary for them to perform routine tasks which threw them together, their discomfort touched everyone around. Such events as a simple briefing became uneasy and painful.

Gone were the pleasant off duty hours spent in each other's company, the chess games with the verbal give and take they'd both enjoyed so well. Gone, too, was the easy, light-hearted banter on the bridge. Now, whenever either Kirk or Spock were on the bridge, all unnecessary chatter ceased, and the uneasy crew made no attempt to revive it.

The doctor ached for Jim Kirk, trying so hard to retain control as Captain of the ship, despite his personal loss and grief. The pain McCoy felt for Spock was just as bad; he knew the Vulcan control wasn't helping. Spock moved through the ship like an automaton. When it got to the point that he had to repeat a comment to the Vulcan, something that had never happened before, he knew someone, somehow, had to help Spock. But the one man who could was locked in his own sorrow, and Bones, despite all good intentions and efforts, could not. He didn't have that special quality to touch Spock; he could not be Jim Kirk for Spock, any more than he could be Spock for

the dull-eyed Jim Kirk, whose infectious laughter and boisterous good spirits had once filled the corridors.

The ENTERPRISE was no longer a happy ship. That special chemistry that had sparked everyone who served on her with pride, was gone, leaving desolate the 'finest ship in the fleet'. What a mockery those words had become; how hollow they sounded.

The two men responsible were aware of what was happening, but they didn't know how to stem the tide of grief and reach out to each other.

There were moments when Jim almost tried. His eyes would stray to the library console where Spock was sitting, bent over his circuits with an aching slump in his shoulders. Jim would see the agony, and wanted to go to him, to ease that suffering, yet there was always something within him which denied him this luxury of comfort. He knew they needed perspective and time to surmount the problem; they were both too close to the situation to be able to work together, and he felt powerless to prevent what was happening.

Spock didn't like the situation any more than Kirk did; if anything, he felt it more keenly, attuned as he was to analyzing human reactions. Over the years they had known each other, he had become accustomed to having Jim there whenever he needed to let down his guard, but that door was closed to him now, and he had nowhere to turn. Just as, he realized with an aching sorrow, Jim had nowhere to go with his overwhelming Human grief.

Spock could still feel Tarra's presence in every corner of the ship. Some nights he would awaken, drenched in sweat, his throat muscles constricted, and the oppressive crushing sensation in his chest threatening to engulf him. He would rise and almost start down the corridor, to his friend, but he always managed to stop himself just in time. There was no comfort from that quarter.

It couldn't go on. The tenseness, the discomfort, the intolerable situation was affecting the whole crew. Efficiency dropped. People made careless mistakes. Something had to be done, and after much thought and meditation, it was Spock who made the first move...

The buzzer to his door sounded, and Kirk looked up from the paper he was staring at without seeing the words. He was tired; God, he couldn't remember ever feeling so tired before. It was only his depression causing the fatigue and he knew it, but there was a difference between knowing the cause and being able to do something about it.

"Come," he called, putting as much control into the word as he possibly could. Without knowing who or what command problem was waiting outside his door, he strove to present the most masterful pose he could manage. He was, after all, still the Captain, and he owed his crew that much.

The door swished open, admitting the last man on the ship Kirk expected to find coming to his quarters. The Vulcan First Officer stepped in, and as the doors closed behind him, he hesitated, his step faltering for just a split second as Jim looked up at him steadily. For that brief instant, as their eyes met, time rolled away, and Kirk was sharply reminded of the first time they had been introduced. An aching sadness filled him, a tremendous sense of loss. Not only had they lost <u>her</u>, they had lost each other.

"Captain," Spock acknowledged, his manner formal, picking up easily from the momentary lapse of his irontight Vulcan control. "There is a matter I wish to discuss with you, if you have the time."

Kirk inclined his head slowly. "Yes, Mr. Spock. What is it?" he asked, matching Spock's formality, while within him something cried. He didn't want it to be this way, but there was nothing he could do to change it. Nothing.

"Sir, I've come to ask for your permission as per Starfleet regulations, concerning the matter of a transfer. I wish to be reassigned."

"I see." Kirk wasn't surprised; he had been expecting something like this for some time now. It was obvious they couldn't go on; they were tearing the ship apart and both of them knew that. He regarded his First Officer clinically. "Sit down, Spock," he added dispassionately.

Stiffly, Spock seated himself in front of the desk, his back ramrod straight, hands clasped in his lap.

"Have you any preference for duty?" Kirk asked dully.

"Yes, sir. I desire to be assigned to the base on Vulcan for the remainder of my tour." Spock paused, then apparently decided to be completely candid with Kirk. "I have obligations there, as we both know. Stack will undoubtedly need a father at this time, and I feel my place is with him."

Kirk nodded. Spock was right: Spock was always right. No, he reminded himself bitterly. Not always. Even now, the Vulcan would not admit what he had done to a warm, spirited young woman, nor would he acknowledge what he felt for Tarra. If only Spock could have loved her, Kirk cried silently. Now, it was too late...too late for all of them.

"I have the official documentation in my quarters, and I can see that you have it in the morning." Spock explained, giving no reason why he had felt it necessary to inform the Captain in person prior to official channels. He leaned slightly forward, and his voice became very earnest. "I believe this will be for the best, sir."

"Yes, Mr. Spock. I can find no fault with your 'logical' decision. I'll do whatever I can to get you the assignment you want." They would not, could not voice the reasons behind their agreement. To do so would probe too deeply into what each of them, for their own reasons, wanted kept hidden. The grim, aching truth that they could no longer work together was glaring testimony to how far it had gone. When would the ache stop? Kirk wondered. How long before he stopped

seeing her face on every woman who passed him in the ship's corridors, before he stopped hearing her voice, her laughter? Perhaps Spock was fortunate, after all, being able to suppress his emotions.

The First Officer stood. "Thank you, Captain. I am most anxious to return to Vulcan," he admitted candidly.

A brief surge of bitterness overcame the human. "Why, Spock? They won't be able to help you there, either, you know."

"Sir?" The incredulous look on Spock's face told Kirk that his barb had hit home. Then shame overtook him; it wasn't necessary to strike out blindly in his own pain. Spock had his purgatory, just as Jim Kirk had his.

"Forget it," he dismissed casually. "Be sure that I have the papers in the morning, and I'll get this thing through as quickly as possible for you."

"Yes, sir." Spock drew his shoulders back in a deliberate military stance, turned and left the room without further word.

Kirk watched him go with a mixture of pain and relief. At least now it was over; perhaps he could get back to being the Captain again. With Spock off the ship, he could put Tarra to rest once and for all. With Spock gone...Spock...You never taught me how to do that neck pinch...

...Nothing got better for Jim Kirk. The transfer came, granting Spock the assignment he desired on his home planet. As soon as they were able to get to a base, Spock left the ENTERPRISE, quietly and without fanfare. The only persons present in the transporter chamber were Lt. Cmdr. Scott, who insisted on working the console personally, and Dr. McCoy, who, for once, didn't have anything witty to say to the Vulcan. Roughly, he attempted to say what he was feeling, but somehow the words wouldn't come, and when Spock solemnly parted with, "Live long, and Prosper, Doctor," McCoy replied, "God be with you, Spock." Then the dematerialization was completed, and Bones and Scotty were alone in the chamber. That night, the two of them got quite drunk.

Kirk had thought it would be better once Spock was gone, but the same slim ghost with the honey colored hair followed him about. Spock's replacement came aboard, a human, who through no fault of his own irritated the Captain with every move. Bones tried to warn Jim to take it easy, but his pleas fell on deaf ears. The Captain snapped at his crew, the bridge personnel were irritable, efficiency had never been so low. What was even worse, Kirk could see the pity in the eyes of his friends. Any attempt at sympathy or kindness was met with stern rebuttal. He wanted no pity, no consolation from anyone; how could he possibly command under such a situation? The old fear returned; he was losing command of his ship. Every attempt he made to snap out of it failed, and finally, three months after Spock's departure, Jim Kirk applied for a transfer.

The Admirality was pleased; they'd been trying to get Kirk into administration for a long time. An assignment to one of the best run installations, plus an immediate promotion to Rear Admiral came through with amazing alacrity. Jim began to feel better about it; a change like this was just what he needed. It would give him something new to think about. Assuring Bones that he'd be fine, he gathered his few possessions and prepared to leave the ship. <u>His</u> ship. Now it would be someone else's burden, someone else's headache. There was the official ceremony in which he turned command over to his sucessor, and throughout the entire time he kept up his spirit, constantly maintaining to one and all how happy he was about the whole thing. It was best for the ship that he go with a sense of continuity. So he shouldered the mantle of responsibility for one final time, as he bid his crew farewell. Then, he too, was gone, and the ENTERPRISE warped away with a new Captain, and an almost new First Officer.

In the years that followed, the change of command was frequent. There was a stream of officers, as Starfleet tried out all manner of personnel to emulate the efficiency that the ENTERPRISE had once been noted for, but it was all to no avail. The special magic that had once existed could not be duplicated, and one by one Kirk's former officers transferred off the ship. The first was Dr. McCoy, who found his sickbay not quite the same without his two friends to share the trials and joys of his work.

The ENTERPRISE became more and more obsolete as new ships were added to the line, and her crew became more and more diverse and unfeeling. There was no pride left in the Grand Old Lady, and no one cared very much when they finally retired her and put the ship in mothballs. Whatever she had once contained was gone, and silent, dark corridors could only whisper of the glory that had once propelled her through the void on gossamer wings of dreams.

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McCoy concluded his narrative with a sigh. He realized he'd been speaking for a long time, and now he flexed the muscles in the back of his neck.

T'Prett, sitting quietly across from him, had not stirred during his entire story, never once interrupting for comments or questions. He had tried to stick to the facts as he knew them, injecting some of the emotions he knew had been present. Some of the things he could not have known, of course - the time Spock and Tarra had spent on Vulcan, for instance. But the doctor's perception and understanding of those involved, had filled in the gaps adequatly.

Finally, T'Prett spoke. "The man you describe as Commander Spock is something of a stranger to me, Doctor. I believe you will find my father considerably changed."

McCoy was startled. "In what way?"

"It is difficult for me to see him as you have described. He-who-is-my-father is...not so.." T'Prett found the difference hard to explain to a human. At last, "I...love...my father very much."

At McCoy's raised eyebrow, she almost smiled. "Love is not exclusively a human emotion, Doctor. Vulcans feel it, too. We have simply learned to control the expression of our emotions."

Spock had indeed changed, McCoy reflected, if he could have raised a daughter to admit that. Then what had happened with Stack?

They were both startled by the swishing sound as the door opened to admit Peter Kirk.

"Are you two still here? I've been looking all over the ship for you. We're ready to assume orbit, Bones. And, T'Prett, if you will come with me, the Captain will see you now." T'Prett rose and nodded solemnly, as she followed Peter out the door.

...Many miles below, on Starbase 15, a most interesting reunion was taking place, as Admiral James Kirk met the familiar eyes of his 'considerably changed' former First Officer...

TO BE CONTINUED . . . . .

