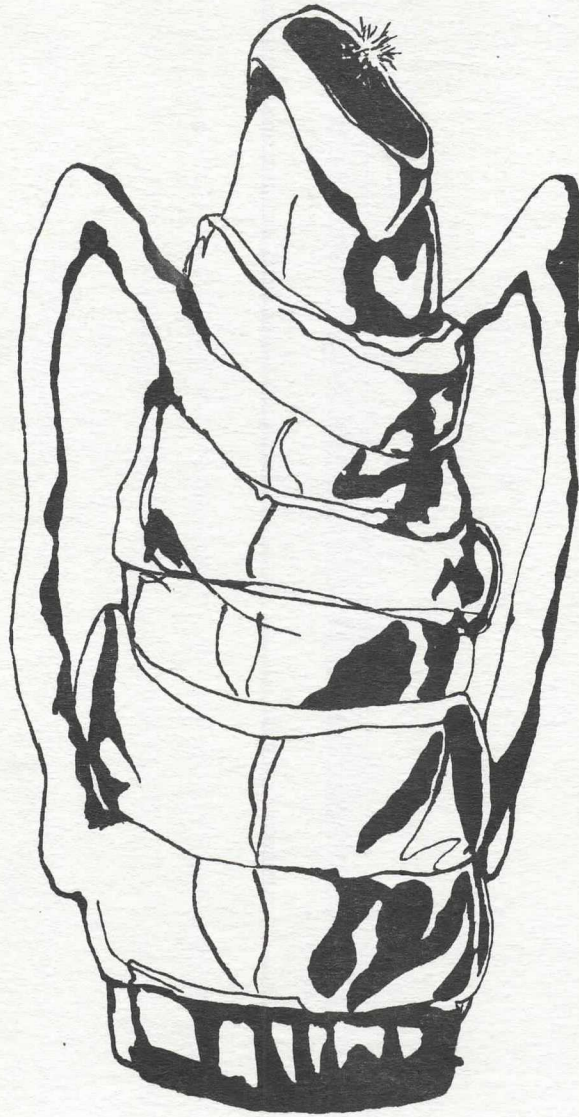


# KRAITH COLLECTED



volume 4

# EDITOR'S PREFACE

This is my first issue as editor of *Kraith Collected*. This strange state of affairs began when I had the time to type the manuscripts which make up this issue. Then Carol handed down the ultimatum: It's your issue, you do the paratype. Well, as it happens, the numbers are press-on, and the lettering is done by John Benson (take a bow, John). So I had no parotyping to do. And Carol is doing the artwork layout as I last minute type Dokamral'nor and this editorial.

But there are problems. You will notice that there is almost no artwork in this issue. The reason is simple--editors are cheap. And when you have 120 pages of typing, before artwork, well, you just cut down drastically on the artwork.

And then there are the problems with the artwork we did, and did not, include. Allan Asherman's beautiful illustration of Commodore Spock, you might notice, shows him with a full head of hair. He is supposed to have a receding hairline. But one just does not tamper with an Asherman drawing.

In regards to the Schillians shown in the last issue (volume 2). I like Roberta Brown's Schillians--they are graceful, as I would assume a Schillian is (whether or not they have tails.) Carol likes Todd Bake's (even though they are short one finger per hand.) So Carol's issue had Todd's Schillians, and my issue has Roberta's--only my issue doesn't have room for Schillian artwork. I demand equal time. (When you're an editor, your demands get met; see page 63.)

For those of you who followed the saga of "denonstarting," we have, this issue, the tale of T'Uriamne's midget. If you can find that typo, you might be able to figure out what it was supposed to be. Something about an aircar, I think.

This issue will probably be the last, for some time to come, to feature a major story by Jacqueline Lichtenberg. Mrs. Lichtenberg now has so many professional commitments that they leave very little time for *Kraith*. We congratulate her on this state of affairs, and at the same time shed a tear for the *Kraith* stories we won't see.

That is not to say that there will be no more *Kraith* stories. We have now enough stories in the works to do volume 5. And Mrs. Lichtenberg's collaborator, Sondra Marshak, is working on the *Kraith* series (see the Author's Preface to *Pilgrimage*.) And there are those whose stories have yet to see print. If you are a budding *Kraith* author, let me remind you: make three copies of your story--you keep one, send one to Jacqueline Lichtenberg (9 Maple Terrace, Monsey, N. Y. 10952), and one to Carol Lynn (11524 Nashville, Detroit, MI 48205.) You will hear from us, though it may take a while. And for artists: get in touch with Carol.

Mrs. Lichtenberg's first professional novel, *House of Zeor*, is now available. Contact your local bookstore, or write directly to Doubleday and Company. Do not contact either Mrs. Lichtenberg or us.

And for the brag department: Jacqueline Lichtenberg has been nominated for a Hugo this year as Best Fan Writer.

Live Long and Prosper,

*Deborah Kay Goldstein*  
Deborah Kay Goldstein  
June, 1974.

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# "EDITORS ARE GHOULS AND CANNIBALS"

While these sentiments were first voiced by Dorothy Sayers\*, I know at least one other person who can echo them with sincerity. This is a public apology to Joan Winston for the mutilation of her story, "Through Time and Tears", by yours truly. I may, perhaps, be permitted a few words of explanation, not to shift the blame (for it is mine), or to excuse it, but to show that the havoc I wracked was not done with "malice aforethought".

Several months before I actively began the typing of Volume Three of Kraith Collected, I received notification from Jacqueline that she and Joan Winston were collaborating on a story. Jacqueline said that she had written a story some months before, but, on having seen a story that Joan had written, had decided that they really ought to be published together. Jacqueline would write a connecting piece between the stories. In the letters it was always referred to as "The Obligation/Through Time and Tears".

I received a copy of the unrevised "Obligation" from Jacqueline with assurances that "Through Time and Tears" would be following from Joan. I rented a typewriter and began typing the rest of the volume. Two weeks before the rental period expired, I received a package from Joan -- containing another unrevised copy of "The Obligation". I immediately telephoned Jacqueline and explained the problem. She dropped a copy of the connecting piece she had written and the copy of "Through Time and Tears" that Joan had given her into the mail.

"The Obligation" in its original form was the story of Spock's contribution at Beom and the discussion of Kirk's adoption in the wheer, as I printed it, up to page 12 of Volume III above "Spock remained seated on the step". The same page, down to the "impeccable logic" line, is from the insert. After that to "My grandfather trained me well" is again from the original "Obligation".

From "Come" to the "He would manage" on the bottom of page 13 is the rest of the insert.

The top of page 14 starts "Through Time and Tears". To the bottom of page 15 is untouched. I cut two paragraphs between "unrest" and "I'm so happy". They dealt with Sarek deciding that the proper course of events should be to adopt Kirk.

To the middle of page 16, "for his father to speak", is the original. Here is the place of butchery: I've cut just over two manuscript (double spaced) pages. They deal with the need for Kirk's adoption from the opposite point of view; it is Sarek who is convincing Spock that Kirk should be adopted.

By this time, I was in a frenzy. The typewriter was due back. I was leaving for nine weeks at Oxford University and had reams of reading to do. I took a liberty that wasn't mine, made the above adjustments, sent the thing to the printers, and promptly forgot about it.

However, as can be seen from my editorial in that volume, I had misgivings about the story. My own guilty conscience speaking.

To all concerned, and very specially to Joan Winston, I offer my sincerest apologies. To all those people who wrote in and protested my editorial, I laud you. You were right.

Live Long and Prosper

  
Carol Lynn  
6/12/74

\* Busman's Honeymoon, p.195. And if you don't think that finding that reference wasn't a good excuse to reread the book, then obviously you have never fallen under the spell of a monocle.

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# INITIATIVE



## JACQUELINE LICHTENBERG

Amanda leaned against the window frame with a deep sigh. The glowing ruby twilight with its hint of cool breezes had ceased to remind her of a glimpse of hell many years ago. But it still fell short of being a refreshing sight.

T'Aryel continued to putter about on the desk behind her. Amanda waited patiently for the girl to leave. As a human among Vulcans, Amanda knew she could never run her office without T'Aryel. Sometimes she suspected they had made up the ancient tradition which had placed T'Aryel, a Daughter, at her service.

Still, she chided herself, all the other wives of kataytikhe who worked beside their husbands had such an assistant.

"Amanda?"

"No more, today. One more insoluble problem and I think I'll explode."

T'Aryel pulled a long face. She was accustomed to the strange human idiom. "I think it is not the work that distracts you, Amanda. I think there is something else which absorbs your strength."

Amanda searched her mind and came up with a formal Vulcanur phrase. "We all have our requirements."

Recognizing the barrier of privacy, T'Aryel started for the door. Amanda turned and said, "Wait...."

"Yes?"

Nonplussed, Amanda gestured, "Can this window be opened?" It was a lame excuse, but all she could think of. As always, though, T'Aryel seemed to understand. She crossed the expanse of resilient flooring, circled the banked desk that resembled nothing so much as a control console, and put one hand to the window mechanism. "Certainly."

The window slid aside, letting in a blast of hot, dry air and a whirlwind of bustling city noise. Amanda heard the rising whine as the air conditioning strove to deal with the heat incursion. Four long stories below her, the city sprawled among Vulcan gardens and broad open parks. If it weren't for the streams of aircars and surface vehicles, you'd never know it was a city.

Absently, Amanda said, "Thank you."

T'Aryel leaned against the other side of the window, breathing the hot air gratefully. "'Thank you?' Now I am certain there is that which bothers you deeply. You are well aware that I realize your fingers lack the strength to operate the window mechanism. And I am well aware that you understand the protocol of gratitude."

Embarrassed, Amanda offered a reason for wanting the window open, thus ending the conversation. "The city is beautiful at night."

"I am not busy this evening. If you can be Vulcan enough to dismiss me thusly, I can be Terran enough to refuse to be dismissed."

"Wouldn't that be illogical?"

"Not in the slightest. I have worked for you since I was but a child. I am certain that I am correct. You suffer pain."

Bemusedly, Amanda stared at the twinkling lights of the city. "And what is the logic of pain?"

"To cause pain is illogical. To fail to alleviate pain is equally reprehensible."

"And what of privacy?"

"The violation of privacy causes severe negative emotional reactions. It is illogical to cause mind-clouding emotions in those with whom one seeks to reason." She paused, then she added, "I do not anger you by my presence."

"Do you know why?"

"Amanda--even Vulcans understand the need to communicate."

Amanda turned to examine the girl closely. It seemed as if the large, limpid Vulcan eyes swam with tears. Embarrassed, she turned back to the view. One by one, the low, rambling buildings were lighting up. "You are a Daughter."

As if reading her thoughts, the girl nodded. "But has it ever occurred to you that the un-mated must find others with whom they can communicate?"

"Yes, it must be lonely."

"Lonely? Amanda...after all these years...you don't know?"

At Amanda's puzzled silence, T'Aryel said, softly, "We belong to each as there is need. We respond to the suffering that is not of the body. Ours is the province of the...soul."

"You have no children, but are mothers to all." Amanda repeated one of the descriptions of the Daughters of the Tradition. She'd never understood it that way before. "But all I've seen are the Daughters concerned with dispensing Justice untempered by mercy."

"You stand outside The Tradition. Yet I believe it is within me to serve you."

Amanda wanted to laugh. A 'mother' forty years her junior. But by the lights of a passing aircar, she saw the young-old face, drawn and serious. T'Aryel wasn't pretty, she was handsome in a timeless way. She wore the weight of the Tradition upon square shoulders and drew her strength from some hidden source that seemed inexhaustible. She wore a simple, long-sleeved dress, winter-weight in the chill office. As if seeking the warmth, she sat upon the deep windowsill, ensconced for a long talk.

Amanda could not resist. She sat down on the sill, ignoring the film of perspiration that beaded her brow. "Have you not served us these difficult years?"

"The concept of service divides into ever finer distinctions between Vulcanur and Vulcanir. In English, all these are bound in one word. How does one explain one's meaning?"

"Often with a tone of voice, a gesture, a facial expression. These have meaning for Vulcans, too."

"I would serve thee as a Daughter. Perhaps it would aid you to think of me as the daughter you haven't yet birthed."

Now the tears were in Amanda's eyes. The twinkling lights blurred, the aircars became streaks. The young hand sought her shoulder, fingers brushing neck for one brief instant of suspended time. Amanda twisted away, retreating against the cool stone wall. "It concerns a matter not spoken of even among Vulcans of one family."

"And especially not by a mother regarding her son?"

"So I have been told."

"By the son's father?"

"Of course."

Sarek holds you in very high regard. That is perhaps your greatest handicap among Vulcans."

"What do you mean?"

"He assumes you understand that which you do not grasp."

"And that is?"

"That which a mother may not speak to the father of her son, she must speak to another--one chosen from those who can solve the problem."

"The Daughters?"

"Are daughters of mothers too, and sisters of brothers, and daughters of fathers. I know Sarek very well, though I've spoken to him only rarely about business. My father, too, is kataytikh, though only of the Ninth Realm."

"The problem is that Sarek will do nothing about Spock. If you know Sarek so well, then you know he will continue to do nothing."

"Because it is not his place to act."

"Neither is it my place to interfere with a grown son's life."

"Have you seen him--since the divorce?"

"Yes, but in the shadow of Sarek's disappearance there was not much discussion of this problem."

"I don't doubt that he's thought of it."

"But not solved it." Amanda sighed. "What can I do?"

"Have you spoken to T'Pau?"

"T'Pau!?" Amanda couldn't bring herself to say that the mere thought of the venerable Daughter intimidated her.

"T'Pau is a woman of deep compassion."

Amanda tried to wipe the shock off her face. "I think we do not use these words to mean the same thing."

"If you will speak to her, you will find she understands your concern far better than you may realize. She may not act irrationally, but she will solve the problem. Is not the alleviation of suffering an act of compassion?"

"Does a Vulcan mother suffer for her son?"

"Any Vulcan woman will know the pain of a displaced son." T'Aryel turned her face out toward the evening, speaking with difficulty. "Spock's condition is a danger to all of us. He is a threat, not just to himself, but to all of us."

"You seem to know more than..."

"In the Halls of the Council of Daughters, lists are kept of all the unmated males who may become a danger." She said it with a remarkable detachment. This was the province of the Daughters, Amanda knew. They would feel no embarrassment discussing affairs in which they could take no part.

"T'Pau would not speak to me about this."

"She is Elder of the First Realm. Who else is there in matters concerning Spock?"

"I wouldn't know how to go about making an appointment with her."

"That is what Sarek assumed you knew. If you cannot reach T'Pau, you come to me with your problem. I will make the appointment for you. And all will be well. Sarek knew that I was here, but did not know that you did not know I was here to serve."

Amanda frowned. Yes. It was so. Everytime she steered the conversation toward Spock, Sarek would make some comment about T'Aryel's ability to 'serve'! She laughed in sudden freedom. It was as if an enormous burden had lifted from her.

One thing she had learned early in her marriage was that Vulcan philosophy pervaded everything Vulcans did. When the planet entered the Federation, they conformed to the outward patterns required for full voting membership--planetary government was duly fabricated and elected by due process, laws were enacted by which offworlders could find their way around Vulcan jurisprudence, and Ambassadors were appointed to represent Vulcan to the Federation and its members.

But there the resemblance ended. The individuals who filled the offices just didn't conform to the Terran-based, human-style idea of what such people should be like. Ambassadors participated in policy making, and legislators spent most of their time farming plomeek. But that wasn't the worst of it. She could live with self-appointed 'governmental fact finding commissions' composed of physics professors and housewives checking up on 'official' land surveys done by schoolgirls. She knew the apparent chaos was only apparent. But she had almost fainted the first time she'd visited the Planetary President's Office. It had seemed to her that just anybody who walked in the door could sit down and use the Presidential Seal.

There were no locks on Vulcan doors, and it seemed as if Vulcans had never heard of a 'safe', or of security. She knew this was not true, but she still couldn't reconcile a Planetary President's Office that looked like a family corporation's living room. She vowed that as long as Sarek held a position of Vulcan's Ambassador, those offworlders who visited the Ambassador's offices would gain an impression more in keeping with the facts. She knew that although Vulcans considered the Federation's variety of government something of an amusing game, they were not really anarchists. There was a logical order underlying everything that Vulcans did. In most cases, that order showed through lending an austere dignity to their business offices.

It was only the somewhat incomprehensible Federation standards that seemed irrelevant to the Vulcans. Take the matter of law enforcement, for example. In a world of logical individuals, why live in a camp armed against illogical acts? Vulcan had no need of traffic police, although most untraveled areas were thoroughly patrolled in case of accident. There was no vice-squad, no homicide squad, no bomb squad, and detectives were both plentiful and hard to find. Plentiful because almost everyone was qualified, and hard to find because nobody who hadn't witnessed the crime would volunteer to work on it. This was especially true since 99% of all crimes were committed by outworlders with whom most Vulcans didn't care to associate. The remaining 'crimes' generally had a logical explanation.

Amanda could well understand that. She, for one, wouldn't dare face a court of the Daughters without a very logical explanation up her sleeve. She thought of T'Pol and shivered as she laid hand to Sarek's office door.

He was engrossed in his viewer, curtains drawn and interior lighting bright. He seemed to her more handsome than ever. She sat down beside the desk and watched him work. He caught her appraising eye. "You disapprove?"

"I was just thinking that it's a strange world where the Ambassador's wife has a heavier responsibility than the elected Planetary President. While the President juggles red tape, the Ambassador's offworld wife is gathering information crucial to Vulcan's survival."

He leaned back in his chair, rocking gently as he considered her at length. "You would like to be Planetary President?"

"Oh, no, not at all. Why do you say that?"

"Which is more important, the title or the job?"

Amanda smiled. "Yes, of course. It doesn't matter who does the job, just so it is done the very best way possible. It doesn't matter who wears the title, because the title is worthless. Credit accrues only for a job well done. How many times have you explained it to me?"

"Four hundred..."

"Nevermind. I guess I'll never understand tsaichrani. But if there is one thing I do understand, it is Federation schools."

"And what have you found?" He was eager now, leaning forward like a hound on the scent of something crucially important.

"Not too much yet. I have another round of meetings and tours tomorrow. But it does indeed look as if you were right. The schools here in the Federation Enclave around Vulcan Starbase do show a measurable influence from the surrounding Vulcan environment." She plugged her recorder into his desk screen and began displaying graphs.

Now she was on her own territory, education. She showed the norms and the variations from norm on dozens of measurable characteristics of the offworld children raised on Vulcan in and around the offworlder's enclave. She showed the graphs of other children in similar situations on other worlds and compared them with Vulcan's. She was as meticulous as she knew how to be. A major policy decision would be based on her work. She finished, "So you see, Vulcan is affecting temporary residents quite strongly. More strongly than most other worlds, despite the fact that other worlds don't isolate the offworld residents..."

"Vulcan does not isolate..."

"Well, they isolate themselves, then."

"Do you have the data from Terra and Alpha Centauri, yet?"

"No. It's supposed to be here within the next few days. Sarek, I think you are really on to something here. There is bound to be an effect on even the most distant colonies."

"Of course there's an effect of intercultural interaction. But it's the quantitative data that will be critical. Is Vulcan affecting the Federation fast enough to prevent the Federation from destroying Vulcan?"

"You sound as if you are trying to construct an acasomy model of the entire Federation!"

"I might have to."

"You're joking!" It was half accusation, half plea. She'd seen the master model of tsaichrani which was a comparatively simple, well-ordered construction. The Federation, with its plethora of illogical species, simply couldn't be depicted in a lifetime of study and thought.

"If your data continue to turn up such promising leads, I will have one of the Science Academy's computer teams assigned to the job. If necessary, we may have to conduct a full scale survey of the Federation's entire education system. Have you contacted Memory Alpha?"

"No."

"See to it tomorrow. Find out what statistics they have. If we must study this, we'll



need a base line drawn before Vulcan entered the Federation, and for each planet joining after that we'll need a baseline on the planetary parameters before exposure."

"Whew! That's going to cost! What do I charge it to?"

"Hmmm. Talk to Spoht at the Academy. I think he's doing some psycho-sociological studies that might have a use for such data. Perhaps he already has sent for it."

"I'll ask him. Where will you be tomorrow?"

"Council of Names." He looked at her as if she'd suddenly lost her sanity. "You juggled the calendar to make room for it yourself!"

"Oh, yes, but that was several weeks ago. I don't have your memory, remember? It's the T'Zorel case, isn't it?"

"Yes. As I understand, the Daughters will be presenting quite an indictment."

"Do you think Spock did right?"

"Spock's actions were entirely logical. The Daughters made an error."

"But did the Council of Names make an error?"

"I don't think so. And if not, the mother's wishes will be upheld. She will retain her name. The mother's right to name a daughter is unarguable."

Amanda blushed, examining her fingers minutely. She would never forget how Sarek had allowed her to choose a name for her son which she could pronounce, at least after a fashion. He had granted her far more authority in the matter than she had a right to expect.

"'Spock' was a far better choice than I realized at the time, Amanda. Your son is going to be a great man. Now, after all these years, I can see that he is a beginning, not an ending."

She looked up, tears blurring her vision for the second time that day. "Thank you."

He got up and came to her, two fingers extended. She rose to meet his outstretched hand. He gazed into her eyes fondly for a moment. Then his free hand brushed her face, gently. His expression changed from tenderness to alertness. "You have news of Spock?"

"No..." Then she realized he must feel her altered emotions. "I have taken steps to secure an appointment with T'Pau."

"Oh," he nodded, relaxing. "Very good. A word of advice?"

"Please."

"Do not mention T'Aniyeh."

"But we agreed..."

"We did and do. But it is not your place to suggest such to T'Pau."

"I understand." To herself she thought, Tanya is human. I could talk to her. No, I will talk to her. She'll understand. "Sarek, do you think T'Pau will consent to see me? She is so old, so frail lately; and this botanical plague has really taken a heavy toll on her."

"She is a Daughter of the First Realm. You are a wife in the First Realm. There is no question."

"But..."

"The plague situation is well in hand. A suitable planet has been located, plants have been quarantined, and volunteers for the temporary transplanting colony are plentiful. The laboratories seem to be making some progress toward finding the cause and eliminating it." He placed a finger on her lips to forestall her objections. His voice was hushed but confident. "The will be another Blooming on Vulcan."

Amanda's thought flicked back to the days of her youth and the first Blooming which had brought Sarek to her.

\*\*\*\*\*

She had arrived on Vulcan flushed with enthusiasm, determined to bring a breath of Terra to the offworld enclave's school. She'd brought the latest texts and the latest teaching methods, and she knew how to motivate children. Looking back at herself from the distance of years, she could see in herself the confidence of a fool. It evoked a wry chuckle.

She'd been assigned five classes in which there was a grand total of fourteen human children, none of them from Terra. They were outnumbered by the nonhuman children studying, for them, alien literature and culture. Despite her best efforts, every discussion centered on comparative xenology with human cultures taking a trouncing that left some of her girls in tears.

Then came the day she'd never forget. The school's Administrative Director, a UFP Civil Servant from Rigel IV, escorted a young Vulcan woman into the classroom as an observer. She was tall and thin, the kind of physique which indicates high-strung nervousness in a human. She sat with the brooding calm of a stone statue, and Amanda froze up under the hostile gaze.

The visitor's name was T'Uriamne, and she followed each of Amanda's classes for week after week. At first T'Uriamne took no part in discussions, but slowly, as she gained confidence in her command of English, she began to inject comments here and there. She'd obviously read the texts and given them serious thought. She'd obviously found them seriously wanting in merit.

After several weeks of being haunted by the Vulcan in every class from kindergarten to university level, Amanda was ready to create an interstellar incident to get rid of her. Vulcans in general didn't seem like bad people to Amanda, but with this one it was hate at first sight--and she was sure it was mutual.

Then, one day in late Vulcan winter, a torrid day when the red mists of the wetlands surrounding the offworld enclave boiled up only to be dissipated by the naked sun in the flaming red sky, Amanda found herself crying with one of her students rather than comforting the girl. T'Uriamne's insufferable remarks had to be stopped.

Trying to clear her mind, Amanda walked out on the road toward the Vulcan zone of the city. For some unofficial reason, the population residence pattern of the enclave had polarized spontaneously leaving a distance of about half a mile uninhabited between the Vulcan zone and the offworlder's zone. The business section occupied the central area with the residential zones growing off it like lobes. The humanoids who could live in near-Vulcan ambient conditions were grouped around the southern perimeter, and their residential zones grew spontaneously until they touched and merged, forming a continuous belt around the business section.

To the north, however, domed facilities for exotic types such as chlorine-breathers were spaced at a distance from one another. To the east, on a rise of ground that thrust itself above the swampish humidity, a miniature Vulcan city had been built. The Vulcans complained that the excessive humidity of this lowland area was unhealthy for them. Few remained in the enclave long enough to be called residents. The Vulcan city consisted mostly of transient dwellings, hotels and apartments, cottages, stores and services.

On the outskirts of the Vulcan settlement, a scattering of dwellings occupied the sloping ground. Here lived the few more or less permanent offworld residents. Many of them were telepathically sensitive, and sought relief from the mental bable of the enclave. Amanda passed on large house where a family of Schillians was enjoying their private swimming pool.

Then she was on the upward slope of the road, walking on the apron in long strides. She found she enjoyed the rhythmic thrust of her thigh muscles against the planet's heavy pull. Her lungs labored in the thin air and sweat poured from her skin. Her lips peeled back with savage glee, as if her triumph over the planet were a triumph over T'Uriamne. It was a clean feeling that dispelled the depression of the morning's encounter with the Vulcan woman.

Then it was over. She found herself at the top of the hill. Looking back she could see the enclave spread out beneath her, steaming visibly. Far to the north, she could discern the spaceport and quarantine facilities that would one day become a full-scale Starbase. She sat on a bench placed under a Rigillian shade tree to catch her breath and enjoy the view. She'd never been up here before.

After a while, she walked the rest of the way into the center of the Vulcan streets. She'd arrived after closing time. The shops were deserted, and vehicular traffic all but non-existent. She found she couldn't read the signs. They were in Vulcan script only. Walking toward the center of the area, she looked back the way she'd come. It was only then she found the street signs printed in three Standard scripts on one side only. The Vulcans weren't that inhospitable. Or, she thought glumly, maybe they just didn't want people asking silly questions. She walked on until she came to a broad plaza with a traffic island in the center. There was a booth on the island, plainly labelled INFORMATION/COMMUNICATION. She went over to it on impulse and punched in the Directory Assistance code. Five minutes later, she was on her way to T'Uriamne's residence.

It was a spacious cottage set well back among what appeared to be a formal rock garden. The plaque bore two names, side by side, Sarek and T'Uriamne. Amanda presumed the man was her husband. She placed her hand on the door signal.

A handsome young Vulcan answered. "Yes?"

Suddenly nonplussed, Amanda stared at her dusty shoes. "I...I thought I might speak with T'Uriamne."

"My daughter is not home just yet. Perhaps you would care to wait within?" He stood aside to allow her entry.

"Ah, no...no, thank you. I'll call back later." She turned to go, not sure why her bravado should fail her so resoundingly.

"Miss..."

She turned back. "Yes?"

"It appears that you must have walked up the hill. I offer you a cool drink and a place to rest while I arrange transportation for you."

"You are most kind. Thank you."

This time, as he stood aside, she entered. The interior of the house was even warmer than outside. But he led her toward the rear where a shaded patio picked up a cooling breeze. She sat, unbelievably glad to take the weight off her feet. Arch-supports or not, the gravity took a ferocious toll. Presently, the man, Sarek, returned with a tinkling glass of iced drink. She accepted it with a delighted cry. "Oh! The last thing I would expect in a Vulcan house!"

"In the Diplomatic Corps, I've had occasion to host many humans. I have never known any of them to consider climbing that hill on foot."

"Anger can be a potent stimulant."

"I sense no anger in you."

"A steep hill can be a potent medicine. Especially in this climate."

"And it was about anger that you wished to speak to my daughter?"

"You hardly seem old enough to be her father." What she meant was that he hardly seemed Vulcan enough to be her father. He seemed to pluck her meaning out of the air.

"T'Uriamne...has a theory. She could be correct, but since so few Vulcans currently agree with her, she has become...somewhat over-zealous in the search for proof of her theory."

Amanda found herself gripped by an intuitive understanding. "You do not agree with her theory?"

The pain in him was plain for her to read. His whispered answer was hardly necessary. "No. We disagree."

Wonderingly, Amanda leaped to another conclusion. "And her theory is that humans are your enemies?"

He had seated himself on a lounge facing her, perched there in the remnants of late sunshine, his hands clasped between his knees. Now his head snapped up, his eyes peared the gloom in which she sat swirling her drink. "How did you know?"

"T'Uriamne has been...haunting...my English classes for the last five weeks. It is impossible to teach with her in the room. I've come to ask her to leave."

"This has evoked anger in you?"

"Not so much in me as in my students. They are young. It is impossible to learn in an atmosphere so charged with emotions."

"She has created such an atmosphere in a place of learning?"

"Well," said Amanda, unwilling to condemn even such a daughter in the eyes of her father, "she has contributed the spark to set off a conflagration which I cannot control."

"In that case, I will see to it that she removes herself immediately. She will bother you no more."

His tone indicated that T'Uriamne was guilty of a disgraceful act by Vulcan standards. "Please don't be too harsh on her. She had her own purposes in mind."

"Vulcan justice is never too harsh. That is a privilege reserved for Nature's justice."

"You don't believe in God?"

"Nor do I disbelieve. Belief is a state of mind reserved for falsifyable hypotheses."

"And you can prove that Nature's justice is too harsh?"

He was startled by her mental acuity. "It is a matter of judgment."

"And you bring judgment against Nature? Has she treated you harshly?"

"She?"

"We refer to Nature in the feminine gender."

"How appropriate. Nature's relentless logic is very feminine."

Amanda laughed.

He cocked his head to one side, puzzled. "Amusement?"

"We consider her--capricious like a woman in love."

"It is indeed a strange universe that humans live in. I often wonder how you tolerate it."

Amanda examined her drink. She, too, often wondered how she tolerated it. "This drink is deliciously refreshing."

Sarek seemed to accept her comment as the termination of the visit. With quiet courtesy, he sent for a car and had her driven home, repeatedly assuring her that T'Uriamne would not disrupt her classes again.

The first few days after that, Amanda waited tensely at the beginning of every class for T'Uriamne to show up. After a while, that tension became such a habit that she was no longer conscious of exactly what disaster she was expecting. And, finally, she was not even conscious of being tense. Then, one day a visiting instructor, a Vulcan by the name of Smain, saw her jump when a student came in late and heard her snap at the hapless boy.

Over coffee in the teacher's lounge, he got the whole story out of her. "You need not doubt, Miss Grayson. If Sarek told you that T'Uriamne would not attend your classes--she will not."

"But she's a grown woman, not a child. What hold could he have over her if she decided on her own to come?"

"Miss Grayson, Sarek is a Vulcan." He said it as if it explained everything with total finality. She took it as if it meant merely that Vulcan integrity was not to be impugned.

And that put her mind at rest. She no longer snapped at late students; no longer jumped at every door opening. But she took to hanging over the morning newscasts on the pretext of an extra cup of coffee, and was inexplicably disappointed all day if some item about Sarek did not turn up before she had to leave for school. She bought the newsheet printouts on her way home regularly every day, though she'd never cared for the local news before. And her evening was not complete before the late news broadcast.

She was busy with her students, planning their term papers and helping them do the extra research. Then there came the organization of the forestry field trip the class had been looking forward to all through this unit on ecology, and the coordination of the lessons so they would know what they were looking at. These kept her so busy that she didn't really notice the change in her behavior until one day she heard the local newsreport that Sarek would be off planet for three weeks representing the Vulcan Science Academy at a regional symposium on computer software.

It was the longest three weeks of her life, and between term projects, that fact was finally driven home to her. When he finally got back to the offworld enclave, she started out several times to call his home or to visit him. But what could she say? She had no business that required his attention, and if the news media were to be believed, he had no time for chatting aimlessly (not a propensity of Vulcans anyway.)

She began to wish T'Uriamne would show up.

She admitted to herself that she was reacting like an addled teenager with a crush. She felt like an addled teenager with a crush. And she hadn't felt so good since she'd been an addled teenager with a crush. Twenty-one was much too old for such nonsense. But on the whole, life on Vulcan had been a bore outside of her work and an occasional friend she would never had made on Earth. She decided she could afford to indulge herself a little. She could tell her grandchildren about the time she had met the famous Sarek of Vulcan (he'd be famous by then, she was certain.)

So, she took to having dinner several times a week at the public restaurant on the ground floor of the Interstellar Building. The 'Special' was usually within her budget, and it was usually some exotic dish from the far reaches of the Federation. She chalked it up to 'Experience'. After all, she had no idea how long she would be assigned off Earth before she met some dashing young Earthman and returned to the dull seclusion of Earthside life. It was a prospect that increasingly repelled her, though she knew that if she found a man worth loving, he'd be worth the quaint old 'whither thou goest,' or she wouldn't marry him. And his career might take her back to Earth.

Her evenings amidst the high level elegance of the Interstellar paid multitudes of dividends, and she wondered why she hadn't come before. She could dawdle over her formal dinner for hours and watch diplomats and businessmen from everywhere imaginable conducting the real negotiations of their trade. She began to wonder if she shouldn't start taking notes for a book, and actually did write down intriguing snatches of conversation.

She felt more now as if she actually were living and working at the hub of interstellar business and not just at some secluded Earth-based outpost. You'd never see so many Vulcan traders and merchants on Earth or anywhere. One time she was asked to witness the signing of a contract and affixed her name with a trembling but proud flourish. That was when she seriously started seeking material for a book by talking to people she'd seen there several times.

But she didn't have much time to devote to that dream. And one day, she came particularly late, and, after most of the tables were vacated, she decided to grade some papers very quickly before going home. Amanda was aware that it was somewhat irregular, and certainly not the kind of behavior expected of the exclusive clientele, but the staff knew her by now and she decided it couldn't hurt anybody since she wasn't taking up needed space.

So she pulled out a neat stack of tapes and inserted the top one into the table's reader, activating the inscriber so she could affix her own notations to the essay. About half way through the third paper, she glanced up and to her paralyzing astonishment, found Sarek of Vulcan wending his way among deserted tables straight for her.

There were plenty of other tables, and a number of other diplomats scattered about the large room, but he headed straight for hers as if it were the only table with a vacant seat. And, just as if it were the only table with a vacant seat, he said urbanely, "Would you mind if I joined you?"

"Cer...certainly not. Please sit down."

A couple of waiters and a few bus boys swarmed around the table making up the Vulcan's setting and taking his order, which he gave with an air of abstraction, as if something vastly more important than eating was on his mind. The staff disappeared in the professional hush for which the Interstellar was famous.

Then he sat forward, elbows propped on the table, fingers steepled before his lips as he gazed intently at her. "Miss Grayson."

"Yes?"

"Miss. Grayson."

"A-Amanda, please."

"Mmmm," he agreed inarticulately. He was studying her with an analytic intensity she found disconcerting and a little frightening. It seemed as if he couldn't be bothered with vocalizing ponderous and imprecise words. His thoughts raced behind hooded eyes.

She never did find out what he would have said, or how long he would have said nothing. Just then, a whole gaggle of reporters boiled through the draped entryway and recorders, mike probes and lights were pointed toward the couple while several started shooting questions at the Vulcan.

"Sir, is it true you are being considered for the Ambassadorship?"

"Sir, is Sdyre really slated to retire?"

"Will T'Wbran be taking over your post at the Science Academy?"

And a dozen others all at once which Amanda couldn't follow. She hadn't been paying that much attention to the newslately, and the questions she heard were stunning in their implications.

Sarek roused himself from his brown study of her features and rose, silencing the ambitious reporters with a commanding presence that sent electric thrills through Amanda's arms. One at a time he answered, relaxed but crisp as only a Vulcan can be.

"I cannot venture any statement regarding the thoughts being considered by others."

"Sdyre's retirement is a matter about which you will have to consult him."

"The Science Academy fills its posts by competitive examination and competency trials. How could I predict the outcome of such?"

"I have no intention of accepting an Ambassadorial post at this time. But that is irrelevant; none has been offered."

"Then you won't be going to Earth?"

"Will you?" Sarek shot back at the young man who asked.

"Well, well, I don't know. Depends on where I'm assigned..."

"Precisely," answered the diplomat, "precisely my point. Good evening, Gentlebeings."

"One more question, Sir, if you please. Will you be attending the Grand Ball of Concord? The Tellerite Ambassador insists you intend to snub them by not attending because they vetoed

your proposal in the Assembly..."

Sarek began a negative gesture, indicating he did not intend to answer after dismissing them. He was known never to comment after such a dismissal. But the whole flock of them raised a mixed protest that this was the hottest issue of the day's news and they had to earn their salary by cornering it.

Then one of them had a brainstorm, and sidling over to Amanda, began aiming his recorder at her and firing rapid questions. Without thinking, she reeled off her name and occupation as if she were being interrogated by the police. She'd never been under this kind of fire before, and in the intensity of the moment simply forgot to be flustered. Her tone, unknown to her, came across as very matter-of-fact, as if she were answering a police challenge in her own classroom, and had every right to be who and what she was where she was.

But when the reporter asked, in low tones behind Sarek's broad-shouldered back, "Miss Grayson, were you by any chance just discussing the Grand Ball with Sarek of Vulcan? It's well-known he's a widower now, and..."

Sarek turned, towering over the human like a rock pinnacle wreathed in dark storm clouds. "Mr. Barry Sumato of Newsnet Interstellar! You shall cease to pry into matters which do not concern you or I shall certainly have your license revoked."

Without taking his eyes off the transgressor, Sarek spoke now to all those present. "Good evening, Gentlebeings."

They did leave this time. One doesn't offend a powerful man on his own planet, not even with the might of Newsnet Interstellar behind you--and none of the others had that much clout going for them.

When Sarek sat down once more, he was filled with words and done with studying. "I must offer my most sincere apologies. I had no idea, when I chose to sit here, that I would be bringing them down on you like that."

"Oh..." she said, waving aside the incident.

"You acquitted yourself with uncommon grace, and I am quite certain that you would have continued to do so, even under such improper questioning. I also apologize for interrupting your conversation. I've been given to understand that humans particularly relish verbal fencing of that nature, and if I spoiled your enjoyment, I am most thoroughly contrite."

"As a matter of fact, I've never enjoyed verbal fencing in itself. You rescued me from a possibly unpleasant situation, and I thank you."

Just then the waiters arrived with Sarek's meal, and with expert polish, he ordered wine for them both, a rare Vulcan wine served hot after boiling off all trace of alcohol. When they had exchanged comments on the drink, Sarek continued his multifold apologies. "I must also offer you assurances that I do not make a habit of exhibiting overly emphatic reactions to relatively minor provocations."

When she'd translated that into 'I'm sorry I yelled at them, and I won't do it again,' Amanda said, "It must be terribly difficult for a Vulcan to suddenly become the target of all those reporters, especially the ones who work for scandal sheets. The strict regard for Privacy is one of the cornerstones of Vulcan philosophy, isn't it?"

"True. Likewise, the supremacy of Logic is also a cornerstone of Vulcan philosophy, and it was not logical to antagonize them in that manner."

She had never heard of a Vulcan admitting to an illogical act in her life. But the solemn and hurt manner betrayed by his closed features, more stone-like than ever, prevented her from pursuing the matter. "Do you think they'll report it?"

"I have no way to predict what such people will or will not do. How can you calculate the odds? How can you evaluate?"

"Well, for example, had you ever thwarted that Barry Sumato before? Or anyone in the group?"

"Thwarted?" he repeated, squinting at the overhead universal translators. "Well, there was the time on Earth five years ago when I was delivering a paper at the Astrophysics Conference in Geneva and he stole my copy right out of my briefcase to duplicate for advance distribution. He was only a child, then, and I merely retrieved my property and the copy. I don't see how he could have been offended since he was obviously in the wrong."

Amanda let out her breath, between whistle-puckered lips, but silently. He was only a child? she thought. Sarek, you are as naive as a baby! "He'll publish. He'll publish the whole thing. And he'll probably get some of his friends on those scandal sheets to do some editorial speculation about your private life. It shouldn't hurt your career very much, but I doubt if you'll like what they'll say."

"I cannot understand on what basis you make this prediction."

"Well, you could call it an instinctive grasp of human psychology, or you could call it intuition, but I doubt if you would. How about, 'logical intuition'?"

Again he darted a glance at the translators. "Logical intuition? I believe that means something different to me than to you."

"Probably. Let's just wait and see what he does, and compare notes again after that."

They spent the balance of the evening talking about everything from philosophy to diplomatic customs, and when he escorted her home, she forgot the tape she had been reading in the table's viewer. She couldn't even remember whether it had been good or bad, but gave the student a high passing grade since the loss was her fault, and the student generally did high passing work.

The next day, the story of Sarek's temper outburst was all over the press and speculation about what pressures he might be under were rampant. The consensus, though, was that the woman who had so brusquely put down the inquiring reporter must have been someone other than who she said she was--a cover-identity. They were so convinced of that, that not one came to the school to check on her, and pictures were not published.

When Sarek called that night to congratulate her on her logical intuition, she was delighted, and drew as near the image on her screen as her pickup allowed. "Amanda, I'm sorry. Everyone at the school must know it was you by now."

"No, not at all. Everyone's convinced it was a mistake, and I think they are withholding pictures to create an aura of mystery. After all, how long has it been since they've had a good 'secret agent' story in the news?"

"Yes, you are right. I had not thought..." He trailed off, gazing at something out of the field of vision on Amanda's screen. It was almost five minutes before he spoke again. "Amanda, this could be detrimental to my career, as well as to Vulcan. And the Federation, too. The merest hint at this time that there are any secret negotiations going on between Vulcan and anybody could..."

"...impugn the integrity of Vulcan in the spacelanes negotiations?"

"Yes. You know that we are fighting to extend the boundaries within which Vulcan law prescribes the operational rules of Merchant vessels..."

"...Oh! Yes, I see now. That whole ugly thing about collusion with the Lepterosites would be brought up again!"

"That rumor was discredited once and for all, before we even sat down to negotiate."

"Sarek, there's an old Earth saying, 'Where there's smoke, there's fire.' Barry Sumato is laying smoke bombs all over the civilized galaxy, and a lot of people--not just humans, either--are going to believe there's a fire causing it. They'll not only bring up the Lepterosites, they'll dig up every other slander ever perpetrated on Vulcans. Wh..."

"Logical intuition, again?"

"Yes, you could put it that way. I know that's where it will lead just as I knew he would publish that incident. S..."

"I see. Then, I shall take preventive measures." In that smooth and inevitable manner that was both polite and irresistible, he said his goodbyes and was gone from her screen before she could propose her own remedy for the situation.

She spent a sleepless night reviewing the call in her mind and teetering on the brink of calling him back to offer advice. But he had seemed very certain that he knew exactly what had to be done. And she was not one to offer unsolicited advice so far outside her field of specialization.

The next day was spent in a pressured whirlwind of preparations for the coming field trip. Four times she was called out of class to speak to officials at Vulcan Tours, who were providing the bus for the excursion, and once she excused herself to check on the luncheon arrangements at the park where they were going. There was a big hassle over getting a driver for that particular date since there were three commercial liners due at the time. But she finally got a promise out of the manager of the local office that they'd find someone or let her drive the bus herself. Since the manager was Vulcan, that was good enough for her.

When she finally got home, she grabbed an iced tea out of the refrigerator, slipped her shoes off and propped her feet up wondering why she couldn't see them throbbing. It was then that she realized she hadn't thought about Sarek all day. She turned on the news to the local reports.

A Tellarite newswoman made an oblique reference to the Lepterosite affair just after delivering a report on Sarek's being closeted with the Vulcan World Secretary for five hours that morning. Then she launched into an item on the coming Grand Ball of Concord. Amanda's stockinged feet hit the floor, and she punched out the long-ago memorized code for Sarek's home.

T'Uriamne answered. Amanda had almost forgotten about T'Uriamne. She said as civilly as she ever had, "I would like to speak to Sarek, please."

The daughter looked at Amanda as if she had been instructed to divert all callers with some excuse. But then she relented. "Very well. Hold. Please."

The screen blanked, and in a few minutes lighted again on a different room of the house. Sarek came into the pickup and sat down. "Miss Grayson."

She could tell he was troubled. He hadn't once called her Miss Grayson since she'd demurred that title. "Have you seen the evening news, Sarek?"

"No."

She told him what she'd seen and repeated verbatim what the Tellarite woman had said. "Your tactic, whatever it was, has failed. I'd like to offer an idea of my own, if you wouldn't consider it out of line."

"An idea stands on its merits, not its origin."

She had considered briefly, and apparently while her mind had been on other things today, her subconscious had worked out a new interpretation of Sarek's actions. He had been protecting her at the expense of all other considerations. And that's why he had failed. "But first, Sarek, I must know if you had indeed intended to be at the Grand Ball of Concord tonight."

He answered her unhesitatingly. "No, I hadn't."

"I need to know why."

"One does not attend such affairs alone, and my daughter did not wish to go. Since my wife died, T'Uriamne has performed the duties of the mistress of the household. It would not be meet to go without her."

"I see. Your absence was not intended to imply what the Tellarites assumed it implied?"

"I did not intend it so."

Amanda caught the slight emphasis on 'I.' "Did T'Uriamne intend it so?"

"It is no secret that T'Uriamne and I disagree on many issues involving Vulcan's role in the Federation. But when we have something to say, we say it. We do not imply. We do not snub. We do not hint, cast aspersions, or indulge in innuendo."

"Your absence from that Ball will be taken as a snub and the innuendo will be quite plain. Other conclusions will be drawn from that absence. Surely your World Secretary pointed that out to you."

"As a matter of fact, he did not."

Amanda drew a deep breath and let it out. "The Tellarites have been saying so in public for quite a while now."

"Amanda, I cannot act on the basis of what some people say they will think. I cannot use the ill-defined feelings of certain people to calculate my own course. I chose not to go to this Ball because it would be inconvenient for T'Uriamne, and it is unsuitable to go alone. There will be other members of the Vulcan diplomatic corps there. If my absence is interpreted without regard to the elementary rules of logic, so also would my presence be. There is nothing that I can do about that."

Adjectives streamed through Amanda's head. Cold. Aloof. Distant. Unpredictable. Uncaring. That was the reputation of the Vulcans throughout the human-settled worlds of the UFP. But the man before her was far from any of those descriptions.

"Sarek, there is a logic underlying the conclusions people jump to over little things like this. At least for humans, at any rate, and most of the rules seem to hold pretty well for a lot of the nonhumans I've met here. I was right about Barry Sumato, wasn't I? I was right about the Lepterosite business."

"I concede."

"Twice could be just lucky guesses. Three times would indicate that there is a system to all this madness, wouldn't it?"

"It would be worth investigating."

"All right. I predict that if you go to that Ball, the Tellarites will withdraw their objections to your spacelands proposals and they'll pass within the next four sessions."

"That's...there is no cause-effect relationship..."



"I further predict that if you take me to that Ball, and be very sure to introduce me around as Amanda Grayson, the whole silly thing with the Lepterosites will die unborn before tomorrow morning's news is recorded."

He leaned forward over his clasped hands, a frown pinching his nose between downward slanting brows. "But, Amanda, those reporters will be after you."

"For a few days. But when they realize there is no further news to be had, they'll go home. I'm not afraid of a few snoopy reporters. When you open a can of worms, the only way to get the lid on again is to empty it, even if they are a little slimy. You just steal yourself to the job and do it."

He objected lamely a few times, but she didn't have to argue very hard. He had known, of course, that the only way to put down rumors was to bring Amanda out in the open. And there was a certain logic to going to the Ball with her and accomplishing both purposes with one act.

With his parting remark still ringing in her ears, "Amanda, if you're right about the Tellerites, I'll be your student for however many years it takes to learn your system," she dragged herself to her feet and began wondering how she had been brazen enough to invite herself to the most gala high-society event on Vulcan. She didn't have a thing to wear, and she only had four hours!

Problems, she told herself sternly, can be solved. Take them one at a time.

And so, she was ready when his aircar came to pick her up. Dressed in a borrowed gown of carmine chiffon, and a new pair of shoes she had bought for her mother as a Christmas gift, with a hairdo coiffed by her neighbor who was a beautician at the Vulcan Hilton, and accessories donated by her closest friend, an Andorian, who taught pre-schoolers at the Enclave (who thought she looked atrocious in red and was more than glad to make Amanda a gift of the set which had been a gift of a well-meaning, departing mother of one of her students), Amanda stepped into Sarek's aircar.

She wasn't about to let on that she knew almost nothing about the formalities of interstellar etiquette beyond what most novelists consider stock-in-trade. She wasn't about to admit that she was a frozen icicle inside and scared to death, nor that she thought her hair was about to fall down in a slump. As a result, she moved with a stately dignity beyond her years, spoke in overly modulated, carefully lowered tones of voice, and was totally incapable of letting her face express anything but the most Vulcanoid responses. She was there, she was alive, and participating. She was quite demonstrably, both the mysterious person from the Interstellar restaurant, and Amanda Grayson, teacher at the Enclave. But she behaved throughout the whole night like a high-society matron, or a diplomat's wife.

When they arrived at the ballroom atop the Interstellar building, Sarek presented his invitation and signed her through the security station while she waited with a stillness not born of poise. Then they were handed smoothly from one steward to another until she found herself beside Sarek on the wide steps leading down onto the Ballroom floor.

Above, the ceiling was an enormous, glittering dome of stars surrounded by jewel-like scintillating fixtures that provided the lighting. The gravity had been adjusted to under one g for the comfort of footweary visitors, but Amanda just found she had to balance her head a little more carefully to keep her hair from falling.

Then, the announcer was ringing the soft chimes for attention, and all those impeccably dressed people down on the floor turned toward her. She thought she'd faint, but when the announcer stopped talking (she never did know what exactly he had said about her), she took her bow with Sarek, for once thanking her mother for those hated ballet lessons.

And suddenly, they were out among those formidable people, and she saw they were just people after all. She counted nearly a hundred famous names before she lost track. And Sarek seemed to know and be known to all of them. She met and spoke with the Vulcan World Secretary, a magnificent, matronly woman who could be none other than Vulcan's Ambassador to the Centaurus colonies, and then passed inspection by the entire Vulcan diplomatic corps present.

After that, she retired to the ladies' room, down a long luxurious corridor and into a tapestried and carpeted lounge where several uniformed women waited to help her repair her hairdo, remove the splash marks someone's drink had made, and generally make themselves useful.

Refreshed, Amanda prepared to return to Sarek's side when an impeccably robed Andorian reporter cornered her. "Miss Grayson, is it true that Sarek's daughter is refusing to speak to her father because of you?"

Gulp. "What? My dear woman," she said, astonished at herself (she had never 'my dear womaned' anybody before), "that is a leading question, and highly improper." And she literally swept out of the lounge.

On the floor once again, Sarek rescued her from the male contingent of the society press by whirling her off into a Venusian Waltz. They skirted the crowd of stiffly formal couples dancing a few dutiful steps apiece--after all, it couldn't be a Ball if there weren't a little dancing--and found a clear space beside the high-arching, clear walls of the penthouse ballroom.

Sarek said, "I had no idea you were such a good dancer."

"Neither did I," said Amanda not at all facetiously.

"I beg your pardon?"

"I said, 'I had no idea you could dance so well, myself.'"

"I stand complimented."

"Sarek, did you see that Andorian reporter that went after me into the lounge?"

"Yes. That's Ythmarsan."

"Huuuh! Oh! Oh, my. The Ythmarsan?"

"The columnist."

She recounted what had been said, and ended, "Sarek, I'm sorry I said that to her."

"You were perfectly correct."

"That's beside the point. Utterly beside the point. Sarek, you just can't snub a person like that. But I was so...well...angry at the effrontery. Well, it doesn't matter, well..." She stopped. She had always said 'well' too often when she got excited as a gangling adolescent. But she had thought she'd whipped that problem. She took herself firmly in hand and turned to him, clutching the railing that separated the people on the ballroom floor from the sheer drop to the town below--it was a forcefield wall, as clear as if it weren't there and so the railing for moral support.

"Sarek, I'm going to find her and give her a civil 'no' for an answer and apologize for being brusque. Then I'm going to tell her that I'll answer any question that's put to me properly."

She had half turned away, searching for the woman among the dazzling crowd, when Sarek said, very quietly, "Amanda, you can't do that."

"Do what?"

"Give her a civil 'no' for an answer."

"Why not? I'm not worried about saving my face, I'm worried about saving your career!"

"Amanda, her information was correct. When I told T'Uriamne that I was escorting you to this Ball, she immediately took steps to sever all relationships remaining between us. She is moving her things right now."

"What!"

He undertook to repeat what he'd said, but Amanda said, "No, I heard you. I think it's past time that I had a talk with T'Uriamne. A long talk."

"Amanda, no. Please try to understand that this has been building for more than a year now. Your presence is only one small factor in a large situation. But it is a family matter."

"I see. Well, then I won't mention it to her, I'll just apologize to Ythmarsan."

"You must not go near her again. She's a professional. She will provoke you into saying something or doing something that she can print. You are news today, Amanda."

Amanda looked out over the crowd. "Yes, perhaps you're right."

"I think we've accomplished what we came here to accomplish. I'll take you home now, if you like. Or would you prefer to stay?"

She looked out over the gala scene, swirling colors, and bright lights. There had been a time in her teens when she had dreamed such things with heady romanticism. But she didn't enjoy being a notorious Cinderella. "We're finished here. Let's go."

During the days that followed, there was some disapproval from the school board over the publicity, but she talked them into believing it would all blow over without a trace in a matter of weeks, since there was nothing at all between her and Sarek. Oddly, there were tears in her eyes as she argued that before the impassive board members seated behind their polished table and clicking their computer keys nervously. She put it down to tears of vehemence and went back to living from the morning news to the noon fax sheet, to the evening news. She didn't go back to the restaurant.

And he didn't call until, several weeks later, the Tellarites had cancelled their veto and the Spacelanes jurisdictions passed by a narrow margin. Vulcan now controlled the largest piece of Federation space except for Earth. Vulcan Space Central was suddenly a Power in the UFP Transit and Communications Boards, and a new Wonder was born for the media to promote. Her notoriety died swiftly after that.

Then he called to ask her advice. He called often after that, always with some perfectly valid excuse, but always talking long after the subject was exhausted. It was the high point of her day. And somehow, she thought it was the high point of his as well. The nights he didn't call were cold ones. One time, they got on the subject of Ythmarsan. "Sarek, have you heard whether she's done anything with my name?"

"No. She must have forgotten about it."

"Oh, I doubt that. Maybe she's waiting for something else to happen."

"She's not even on planet."

"I have an Andorian friend who says Ythmarsan is the type that never gives up, especially on a grudge."

"Are you worried?"

"No. What else can happen that would bring her back to Vulcan? There aren't many society events of the caliber of the Ball that occur on Vulcan. It would take something like a Royal Wedding...and Vulcan doesn't have any royalty, does it?"

He almost laughed at that. "Well," he said, imitating her nervous 'wells', "well, not really."

"Well, in tha..." She laughed, clapping her palm over her mouth. "Oh, Sarek." And they were off on the topic of humor, it's purpose and proper role in etiquette.

Throughout these weeks, the topic uppermost in Amanda's life was the coming excursion and she told many anecdotes about her prodigious battles with Vulcan Tours to avoid getting her class cancelled in favor of people who would only be there a few days of their lives. Sarek would listen raptly with glowing eyes, but she rarely noticed that because she was always so furious when recounting her run-ins with Vulcan bureaucracy. She never asked him for help with this, but told only after she'd solved the new dilemma with some clever innovation--and she told these stories mostly to illustrate the logic of intuition and the systematic application of human psychology.

Time passed swiftly, and then it was the big day, the day of the excursion so carefully worked up to for her ninth graders. She found them waiting in front of the school building. It was another bright, hot, sunny day. The airbus she had fought so long and hard to get had not yet arrived, but standing a little aside from the class was...T'Uriamne.

"Good morning, Miss Grayson," said the Vulcan with chill courtesy.

"Good morning. It was my understanding that you wouldn't be attending classes."

"I will not be attending your class, Miss Grayson. I am replacing the Tour Guide."

"I didn't ask for a Guide."

"Courtesy of Vulcan Tours, the charter includes information services which the driver is not equipped to provide."

Amanda compressed her lips over a tart, "We'll see about that!" and pretended to scan the sky for the bus. The children were already starting to get restless. Some of the boys were starting a game of tag, and her two Schillians were cringing from the unleashed emotions.

Just then, the orange and blue skybus appeared over the hill and circled down toward the school building's landing rotunda. The children scattered to leave room for the bus to settle into place. Amanda gave up her plan to call the Tour company and complain. There was no time for that now. The children were scrambling aboard, their eager feet scarcely touching the steps that extended when the door opened.

The streamlined, egg-shaped vehicle was soon filled with the eager class, leaving Amanda and T'Uriamne alone on the rotunda. A second door opened in the vehicle and the driver swung down from his compartment, an oval bulge on the upper front quadrant of the skybus.

"S'Quen!" said T'Uriamne, stepping forward. "You aren't supposed to be working!" Then she went on in rapid Vulcanar which Amanda's translator couldn't quite handle, though she did garner that there had recently been a death in S'Quen's immediate family, which was the reason he had been given leave.

That struck Amanda as unusual for the unemotional Vulcans, but S'Quen's explanation seemed to satisfy T'Uriamne. As nearly as Amanda could gather, T'Uriamne's presence made the difference. Though that didn't seem logical to Amanda, it apparently made sense to the Vulcans.

Turning from the woman, S'Quen approached Amanda. "Miss Grayson, I regret that there were no other drivers available for this excursion. If you would care to postpone your trip, there will be no extra charge."

Amanda looked from the two Vulcans to the class. "No...the children would be so disappointed, and I doubt if we would have time left in this session to re-schedule the trip."

We've just completed a unit on xenobionics which we built on Vulcan forestry management practices. Isn't today the last day of the forest-harvest?"

"It is," said T'Uriamne with some reluctance. "It would not be proper to deprive the children of an opportunity to acquire knowledge."

"Then," said Amanda, climbing the three stairs into the skybus, "we'd better be going." She turned to look down on T'Uriamne, wondering why it felt good to stand even three steps higher than the Vulcan.

S'Quen climbed back into his cab, leaving T'Uriamne to hand herself into the bus. Amanda took the first seat leaving the Guide's seat--the reversed one that faced the passengers--for T'Uriamne.

The ensuing ride was anything but pleasant for Amanda, but she had to admit that the Vulcan knew her stuff. Not one landmark passed without comment--good comment pitched right to the class's level and all integrated with the forestry subject, too--but it seemed that every work was a barbed reminder to Amanda that she had 'gone over T'Uriamne's head' to Sarek instead of asserting her own authority to handle her own problems.

Finally, though, they did arrive at the Laclelan Forestry. Amanda had thought that the Foresters would provide the Guide for the tour, leaving T'Uriamne to wait in the skybus. But no. Apparently the harvest season was in full swing, and manpower was short. In the end, the driver was pressed into service to drive the train of open gondola cars that would transport the class from observation site to observation site.

This time the driver had to sit right out in the open among the children. At the time, Amanda had thought nothing of the way T'Uriamne clung to the man's side. She had not then known how to recognize apprehension and nervousness in a Vulcan. All she saw in T'Uriamne was the tension of an enemy, and she could not fathom why the woman had come on this excursion.

It was mid-morning by the time they had made three stops to observe the foresters at three different stages of their work. Amanda had the class drawn up in a kind of natural amphitheater overhung with the ashen and ivory-colored tree limbs that, despite lacking green leaves, still provided shade enough. She was lecturing to the class, trying to tie together what they had seen with what they had learned these last weeks.

When the private aircar landed out of sight near their cars, she paid no attention. T'Uriamne was standing behind the last row of seated children, arms folded at her waist, and for once listening quietly. But Amanda didn't like the expression on her face. The Vulcan was planning something. She could tell. It took all of her concentration to continue the lecture.

Presently, a figure appeared beside T'Uriamne. They spoke for a moment, then disappeared into the trees. Relaxing a bit, Amanda continued to talk, putting her whole mind to preparing the class for what they were to see next, and promising them lunch at a unique Vulcan Inn patterned after the pre-Reform culture that had existed in this area.

At length, she got them lined up and headed back for the cars. When she got there, she found the private aircar just disappearing into the distance, and standing with S'Quen was Sarek. They were intensely absorbed in some argument, but as she approached, Sarek turned. "Miss Grayson. I could not allow T'Uriamne to violate my word to you. I will take her place for the remainder of your tour."

Before she could answer, S'Quen interposed. "Miss Grayson, it would be most advisable to terminate your excursion now. I will return the group to the school..."

She looked at the line of children filing aboard the cars. Not a one of them had misbehaved the whole morning. She had told them, and they knew she meant it, that any student who disobeyed any of the rules of conduct would be left to eat alone in the gondolas while the class enjoyed the Vulcan restaurant. Now that they were heading for that restaurant, the class was gripped by a subdued excitement greater than she'd ever seen. Even the problem students who never seemed interested in anything were almost bubbling over. She couldn't let T'Uriamne spoil yet another learning adventure for this class.

Or was she rationalizing? No, she thought. It isn't just that I want to hear Sarek talk. It's the class I'm thinking of. But as she answered S'Quen, she looked at T'Uriamne's father. "If it's at all possible, it would be best to continue according to schedule."

And he looked squarely at her. "That should not be at all difficult."

Amanda often wondered in later years what her life would have been like had she done as S'Quen wanted. But with her decision expressed, Sarek traded another few words with S'Quen and the driver climbed into the lead gondola. Amanda's impression was later confirmed. Sarek had pulled rank. A thing he very very seldom did for any reason whatever. But he never had admitted that he did it because he wanted to be near her, or to please her. He, too, had decided that the children's learning justified the possible expense. He, too, had not anticipated the true extent of the charge fickle Nature would exact.

They climbed into the car, he yielding the reversed Guide's seat to her. "You sit there so you can supervise the class. I'll just pull the microphone across like this so they can hear me." It made her job a lot easier, and somehow, with T'Uriamne gone, the tension too was gone. She relaxed and enjoyed the deep tones of his voice heard both directly and through the

amplifying system. He spoke English flawlessly.

They made two more stops and then hit a broad road that snaked up between rolling hills. "You are now entering virgin forest," said Sarek, without the slightest trace of 'lecture' in his tone. "North of us, to your right, lies the main underground aqueduct that supports both the offworld enclave (T'Uriamne would have called it Useless City right to our faces! thought Amanda.) and the Vulcan World Capital farther to the south. This tract of land is kept in its primitive state for instructional and scientific purposes. At the Korimah where you will have lunch, you will tour the museum which displays the major discoveries that have grown out of this preserved tract."

He ran the microphone back into its receptical, switching off the amplifier. They rode the rest of the way in silence, enjoying the scenery and the fresh, hot, air. She noted that he wore the emblem of Vulcan Tours pinned to his tunic. One day, years later, she would learn that he had worked for them, though at the time there wasn't much offworld tourism reaching Vulcan.

At the Korimah, they found two long banquet tables set up for the class. The dining room was a long, high-ceilinged, rustic hall. The far end of the room was taken up by an enormous fireplace. The tables and benches on which they sat were crudely hewn from stone on which a wood surface had somehow been laminated. Daylight came only from a round hole in the ceiling, and she noted that sconces on the walls about the room bore unmistakable blackening--torches were used at night.

The place was deliberately primitive, but the food was modern and good. Each child was served individually to be sure that the nutritional needs of each species were properly met. But each meal included an assortment of Vulcan delicacies accompanied by a small card explaining how it was produced from the virgin forest's plants.

She had never seen the class so happy, so active, so involved. The young men and women who were serving the meal stayed to make sure the children didn't trade foods for tasting and they answered questions readily. Amanda, Sarek and S'Quen finished early. Amanda knew the children would consume another forty minutes or so going to the restrooms after they finished eating, so when S'Quen suggested that they take a walk, she agreed. "I'll stay with them," said Sarek readily enough. "But don't go far, Miss Grayson."

"Just out for a breath of air. It's rather close in here." Actually, it was stifling. At least outside there was a breeze.

The Korimah was located in a natural clearing, surrounded by spiky grasses traversed by stone pathways. She strolled beside S'Quen toward the cars. He paused to check his control panel to see if any messages had come in while they were gone. Then they walked on down the path toward the edge of the forest.

The cleared stone path continued under the elfen lace trees that seemed carved from alabaster and amber. From the shaded tunnel came a cool breeze wafting to her nostrils a magnificent mixture of fresh scents. It had been a long time since she had walked among such a profusion of life. The cool, pungent air drew her forward when S'Quen stopped. She meant to go only a few steps, but the path curved and the air became even cooler. There must be open water ahead, she thought. I'll just look once and go back. Surface water was such a rarity on Vulcan. It was irresistible.

At length, she came to a glade surrounding a wide spot, not quite a pond, in a rippling brook of clear water. The trees arched overhead producing a midnight gloom here even at the height of the day. It was a luxuriously beautiful spot. She did not know that the path, as well as the others like it that radiated from the clearing of the Korimah, had not been built to lead to beauty. But to her, the beauty of the spot was overwhelming, despite the odor that was stronger here, almost an acrid stab at the back of her nose. Tracing the scent, she decided it must come from the yellow and purple flowers that carpeted the ground on the other side of the shallow pond. They were small flowers, but very intricately formed, with lacy ruffles on the edge of each petal. Not a one was larger than her hand's breadth, but in profusion, they made up for their size. They seemed to have just bloomed, some being only half open, but even the freshest seemed too wilted to hold up its own petals. They drooped along the ground. But they were magnetically alluring.

She stepped into the water--it wasn't very cold--leaving her shoes on the bank of the stream, and waded across. The bitter smell was overpowering at that range, creating a lingering aftertaste on her tongue, bitter as the taste of a perfume. From this edge of the stream, she could see that the blossoms extended back under the trees where it was even darker, but they were all weak, small, and drooping. It looked like the end of their blooming period, so she was certain the authorities wouldn't mind if she plucked just one of the magnificent flowers to show the children. They were so unusually soft and moist for a Vulcan plant, certainly an oddity of considerable academic interest.

She found that the one she had chosen came off its stem with some ease, ripe for the plucking. She held it up to admire its phosphorescent purple edges set off against the white-veined gold of the petals. It was a beauty to feed the soul.

She never knew how long she stood there, turning the gorgeous blossom to catch the whispers of light filtering through the overhead forest. She never knew how long S'Quen had resisted following her down that pathway, nor just when he had recognized the odor. She never

knew how long he had stood at the edge of the clearing watching her wade the stream, pluck the Bloom, hold it up, hum melodically to herself over her joyful find and sway to the rhythm of her song because the hidden beauties of Vulcan uplifted her so.

She knew of his presence only when his booted feet splashed noisily across the stream behind her. Of the next few moments of her life, only one image remained indelibly etched in her mind: The impassive, clean-cut, efficient face of the tour-bus driver--a man of impeccable credentials and utmost Vulcan reserve--twisted into a feral snarl compounded of so many hard-driven emotions it defied interpretation.

One moment, she was at the height of elation feeding on a tranquil joy she never thought existed on the scorched dust world of Vulcan; the next instant, viselike hands clamped on her arms, she was bent back by savage, male strength. She remembered how S'Quen's eyes had seemed to bulge out of their sockets, showing the whites all around them as he looked with some uninterpretable mixture of horror and reverence at the flowers.

She smelled the heat of his dry breath as he dragged in gulp after gulp of the acrid air, panting faster and faster as if smothering in it. She drew breath to demand to be released, but just then what ragged shreds of self-control the man had deserted him. He crushed her body to him with almost all his enormous Vulcan strength and they both fell into the bed of flowers, mashing dozens beneath themselves. The breath she had drawn came out in a piercing, panic-stricken scream.

She struggled, kicking, scratching, biting, to get away from him. She couldn't tell if he wanted to rape her or kill her or both, but all she wanted was to get away from him. Without thinking, she kept the plucked flower away from him.

Suddenly, s'Quen's weight was plucked off of her. She saw him sail through the air and land in the water before she saw her rescuer.

She remembered having said something embarrassingly inane such as, "Oh, Sarek! You saved my life. How can I ever thank you?" followed by a rising shriek of, "Look out!"

Sarek turned just in time to grapple with S'Quen once more. This time, though, the match was more even. They parted again, circling warily. S'Quen spat some words at Sarek's feet, and Sarek glanced at her before replying. There was a hint of the wide-eyed ferocity in his expression now, but she could easily forgive him that. She smiled. He spat his reply to S'Quen and the duel was on in earnest.

They fought their way through the water to the other side, both of them reeking of crushed Blooms, and she followed, her dress stained with the juice of the flowers. At one point, S'Quen had both hands on the back of Sarek's neck in a peculiar hold, and Sarek's face had gone dark green for a moment. Doing something with his feet too fast to follow, Sarek broke the hold. But after that, he was angry--no, more than angry. He was mad--insane with a deepening rage too primal to be described. Sarek wrapped his fist around a rock and rammed it home to S'Quen's lower rib cage, right over the heart. As the man dropped to his knees, Sarek got the neck-hold on him and with apparent gentleness, broke the spinal cord cleanly in two.

Afterwards, he stood, reeling slightly, over the body, empty-handed, for uncounted moments. Then he turned away from the body, and staggering a little, drove himself toward the pathway, the only way out of the glade.

Amanda ran to his side to support him. Over and over in her mind repeated the phrase, "...Vulcans don't kill...". "Sarek, he's not...dead...is he?"

Feeling her come up beside him, he turned, stopping for a moment. And what she saw in his face frightened her almost more than S'Quen had. Horror,unbelieving horror. Beyond reality.

His hands on her shoulders were as strong as S'Quen's, but under the overstrength of urgency there was a gentleness that hadn't been in the other Vulcan. It was there for only the briefest flash, and then with a supreme effort of will, he wrenched himself away from her and lurched toward the tunnel pathway. "Got to get out of here!"

When they got to the end of the tunnel, blaring sunlight struck shafts of pain through their eyes. For Amanda, it was just another pain to add to her collection of bruises, but for Sarek it was the stimulus for a temporary return to sanity.

An aircar sat in the clearing before them, and the two women who got out were enough of an added shock to give him back a measure of self-control. The fresh air helped, too--a little. He walked across the grass, and in low, almost dispassionate tones, explained to T'Pau exactly what had happened. In later years, he often found himself looking back on that performance as the supreme achievement of his lifetime. T'Uriamne's barbed comments were each met with a retort of just the appropriate kind.

T'Uriamne had brought T'Pau to overrule Sarek's usurpation of her place. Instead, the two women were called upon to sit as Daughters and rule on an interstellar incident of incredible proportions. And with the Daughters on the scene, the whole thing was handled with dispatch. Minutes after they had emerged from the Blooming Walk, the rangers had detailed two men to take the children back to the school, Sarek had been spirited away to a private room in the Inn, and Amanda sat before them in an office reserved for the use of the Daughters.

Her wounds had been tended and she had on a new, if somewhat large, garment. Belted, it didn't look half bad, and she at least felt up to talking calmly.

T'Uriamne said to T'Pau, as if Amanda weren't there, "Night blooming plants don't bloom at noon, T'Pau."

"I've already placed a call for the botanists to come and examine them. It's apparently a local phenomenon involving only the one glade. None of the others around the building are active. I examined the flowers personally. They are less than a third their normal size. Possible some plant disease, but I hardly think we can blame it on the human."

T'Uriamne was silent to that, and Amanda was certain the girl would have loved to blame the whole thing on her. It took them half an hour to get four basic facts into her head (she hadn't been as calm as she had thought.) One: the Blooming triggers pon farr. Having never heard of pon farr, it took some mind-stretching to encompass that fact. Two: S'Quen had just lost his wife and had been at that time already overdue for the cyclical drive to comence. He was thus un-mated, and had, in the attack of madness, chose her. Three: in defending her from a man she did not want, Sarek had won her in honorable combat. The applicable laws were so ancient and unused (since widespread Bloomings no longer occurred, and Bonding was the norm, such an instance hadn't arisen in so long, even T'Pau didn't happen to know when it had happened last) that T'Uriamne hadn't even studied them yet.

At that point, T'Pau insisted the girl leave the room. Amanda was surprised how humbly T'Uriamne complied. The next point T'Pau made, number four, was that Sarek would die unless she married him. And there wasn't much time.

"Amanda, I do not want such a mixed marriage among us. But I do not want Sarek to die. He has no son. He is the last of his line, and a precious line it is to Vulcan. It is not right to ask you for such a decision unprepared, unknowing. You two have not yet been joined in Bonding, and so there is still a very slim but real chance we could transfer his desire from you to a more suitable match--if you would co-operate."

She switched to her broken but understandable English. "Thee is not bound by our laws. Thee need not become his property or his wife. If he has no need of thee, he will surely free thee."

At that point, the door opened, but T'Pau continued. "I need his son from this Blooming. You cannot know how rare and how precious this opportunity is. The survival of Vulcan may depend on the choice of the mother of this Child of the Blooming."

"Amanda!" It was Sarek, clutching the door frame for support.

T'Pau interposed herself between the two, and continued talking to Amanda. "T'Kye is on her way. She'll be here within minutes. You cannot handle him now. She can. Yield to her, Amanda."

Sarek said, "You chose me. I chose to give my life for you. I do not want T'Kye."

T'Pau turned to him. "Afterwards, that will not matter."

"I know. Amanda, you must choose again. It will not be easy for you to bear my son. It was not easy for me to answer your call. Choosing is rarely easy, but is always possible."

Knowing now what she knew of the effect of the Blooming, of the dreaded illogic of pon farr, of the pressures even now rising in him, Amanda admired with all her soul the rock-hard composure that was not calm.

T'Pau said, "This joining will be for life. It cannot be un-chosen. One cannot choose wisely in ignorance."

Never did Sarek's eyes waver from hers during those tense moments of choice and re-choice. She still had not spoken when another aircar landed, S'Kye's. Before Amanda ever saw the woman, Sarek said, "T'Pau, you will go with us to D'R'Hiset. It is my right. Amanda, you will have the time of the trip to decide. It must be a true decision."

On the way to the aircars, T'Pau said to Sarek, "It is the power of the Blooming that draws you to her. I can't recall when anyone has suffered such an exposure and lived to tell of it. But, Sarek, it is illogical to choose her. Children of such mixes rarely survive, and if they do, they are sterile more often than not."

"I do not want T'Kye. I feel death when I think of her."

"It is the Blooming. It is not logical."

"It seems logical to choose life. Amanda's eyes breathe life into me. Now, more than ever since T'Yuzeti's death, I want to live." Overhearing those words, Amanda chose.

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And that, thought Amanda, standing with her husband in the Ambassadorial offices, was

the start of all. Today, they knew the weak, sporadic Bloomings had been caused by the onset of the botanical plague that now threatened Vulcan's only intelligent species. Of course, the pon farr wasn't tied exclusively to the Blooming, but the balance was critical. They hadn't yet succeeded in the synthesis of the complexly interacting conditions that could adequately simulate the effect of the Blooming. She was convinced the effect was partly psychological. But she would never be able to prove in it a laboratory.

And the only thing she could prove with airtight mathematical precision was that T'Uriamne's theory had been correct. How ironic. How much can change in forty years. T'Uriamne had been trying to establish that the origin of the unsettling trends just beginning to be discernable in Vulcan's schools was indeed the human element in the Federation. And now it appeared that Amanda was going to prove that the unusual trends within the Federation, and human settlements in particular, were due largely to the influence of Vulcan on the Federation. And then there would be quantitative studies and fancy mathematics to determine relative rates of interpenetration. There would be analysis and logical argument. Who would win?

Amanda shivered.

"Cold? I can open a window."

"No. Let's go home."

During the next few days, as she prepared to face T'Pau, Amanda often shivered. That first confrontation with the (even then) old matriarch had ended with T'Pau conceding to the human. Had Amanda known at the time just who and what T'Pau was, she would never have been able to stand up to her so steadily. But with that one incident at her wedding, Amanda had gained a reputation on Vulcan as a courageous woman.

She had stood before T'Pau in the open amphitheater and she had chosen her man. She too had felt life when she looked into Sarek's eyes. She would have like to spend years getting to know him before taking such an irrevokable step. But she knew that, had their positions been reversed and she had had to answer his call for help, she would have gone.

She had defied T'Pau. She had been right. She had won. And with Spock, she had made good on her implicit promise. Sometimes, she thought he was even a little too Vulcan for his own good. But, on any world, he was a son to be proud of. Now, for his sake, she would approach T'Pau again. If necessary, even knowing who and what T'Pau was, she would defy again. And she would win again!

She hoped.

With a little, dry-throated tremble of awe, she hoped.

But she did more than hope. She prepared herself diligently. And then the day came.

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The Council of Daughters occupied a veritable warren of interconnected buildings at the base of Mount Tsolnek. Some were as ancient as the planet, seemingly carved out of living rock in which flashing gems were embedded.

But most visitors saw this only from afar. The main complex of meeting rooms and offices lay in an extremely modern outlying structure served by a sleekly outfitted parking area. Amanda's cab let her off at the front doors, and she entered the building. It seemed even hotter within than without.

The vaulted lobby was deserted. Vulcans used architectural spaciousness as a form of telepathic insulation. They just didn't like being unnecessarily near one another. She found the directory and managed to get her bearings. She had no trouble finding the appointed room. Moments after she entered, T'Pau arrived in a powered wheelchair and pulled herself up to the softly gleaming table that was the room's sole piece of furniture, save for Amanda's chair.

The room itself wasn't an office. As far as Amanda knew, nobody ever met with T'Pau in her own inner sanctum. There was a veil of mystery shrouding the operations of the Daughters, but that veil was nearly invisible.

T'Pau opened, her voice weary with the weight of centuries. "There is concern in your household?"

Amanda hadn't known exactly what to expect, but it wasn't the simple tone of a conversation picked up after a short pause. The last time she'd spoken to T'Pau had been at Spock's betrothal. But Amanda summoned every shred of control she owned and replied softly, "It appears that T'Pring was the wrong choice, after all."

"It is natural for all mothers to be concerned when one such is at large. However, he is far."

"Can nothing be done?"

"You have spoken to him?"



"No. It is not a mother's place."

Amanda could have sworn that T'Pau smiled, as if inordinately pleased with a daughter who has learned well. "But it is my place. And I have spoken. Repeatedly."

"Yet he has done nothing."

"He must make the first move. It is his right."

"T'Pau. He is my son. He is so very much a Vulcan, that sometimes I think even he forgets."

"He burns like a Vulcan. He will know what to do, and when."

"He travels far. Thus he is no danger to tsaichrani. But he is the last of his line. And he is First Realm. He carries the Tradition from Suvil."

"Thee belabors the obvious."

"He is valuable to thee."

"More than thee knows."

"Is he not worth an extra effort?"

"I have spoken. I have reminded him of his duty and his danger. I have spoken more times than is proper. There is no more that can be done."

"But you have spoken only as to a Vulcan."

"Is there another way to speak?"

"He burns as a Vulcan. But still there is that in him which is human. And that part of him which is human may be that part which makes him most valuable to Vulcan. He is a bridge across a rift that seems to be growing larger every day. If he is worth saving, then is he not worth saving by an appeal to that in him which is human?"

T'Pau considered this. "I have seen him speak from the depths of the plak tow. It was the true blood fever; he did burn. But also he did speak. There is a strength in him which may be born of that which is human. In perilous times such as these, we dare not ignore our strength, even if it is our weakness. He freed T'Pring. He is not devoid of wisdom. He chose T'Rruel, and she chose him. He is strange, but not devoid of merit." She raised her head. "I would like to live to see a child of his mature."

Amanda swallowed, mouth suddenly dry. "Then I have a suggestion. It may be that he hesitates for lack of knowledge."

"If this were so, he would seek knowledge where it can be found."

"A human might not."

"Humans are illogical."

"And Vulcans are sometimes illogical. I have heard of the Linger Death, the Slow Burn. Neither allows for clear thinking on all subjects."

"He has had T'Rruel. The problem is resolved."

Amanda ran a dry tongue over parched lips. "That was immediately before the Affirmation. Have you not wondered about that?"

"He is, in part, human."

"You can think thusly, after the way he Conducted? T'Pau, you are not thinking logically."

"There is no other possibility."

"Perhaps it takes a human or part-human to see it, but there is another possibility. It is a perversion no Vulcan would consider. But weighted against the Affirmation, and the lives that hung upon that Affirmation, and the effect of a massive Disaffirmed group on tsaichrani at such a perilous time..."

Comprehension lit up the ancient features, and those dark Vulcan eyes fairly sparked with indignation. "Why?"

"I have never discussed this with him, of course. I can only guess. But he did tell me that he and Doctor McCoy were trapped on a planet's surface. They made the Affirmation only because the Enterprise found them in the last possible moment. He never mentioned how they found him, but it would seem to me that T'Rruel could have guided the Enterprise straight to Spock under certain circumstances."

If it hadn't have been for a lifetime of firm discipline, T'Pau would have looked as if she'd been told that a Vulcan had fallen in love. Before the old woman could decide to excommunicate Spock, Amanda continued. "Knowing Spock, I doubt whether he could have thought of such a thing himself. And knowing Dr. McCoy, I am certain that the Doctor not only could have but would have thought of it. He's told me how much Spock...wanted...T'Ruel. He's also told me how much it cost Spock not to approach her before the Affirmation--until it was no longer unavoidable. I'm certain that if Spock did that, then it was the only logical alternative."

"If he did, then it is not correct to assume him free of the Slow Burn."

"Tell him the names of those who would be acceptable."

"It is forbidden."

"Life is forbidden? A law which does not apply, should not be applied. Spock is part human. This may be all he needs."

"Thee has a candidate?" The sarcasm came through the heavy Vulcan accent and made Amanda blush. But she forged ahead. "Yes, I think I have."

"I listen."

"Sarek and I have considered carefully. We believe that T'Aniyeh would be the logical choice. But we believe that Spock would hesitate to choose her, for obvious reasons. If the suggestion were to come from you, it might end his hesitation."

"All the more reason not to suggest."

"But he travels far, T'Pau. When the time comes, the choice may be made for him. It may not be a good choice."

Cocking her head in mild amusement, T'Pau said, "Is thee an unworthy choice, Amanda?"

"I am human, T'Pau, and I have pride in that. Sarek chose me, and I chose him."

"The choice was not made for Sarek, but by Sarek. Even the human languages recognize this difference. A choice was made for Spock, and it proved unworthy. Now the choice must be made by Spock. It is the law."

Amanda examined her blurred reflection in the tabletop. "Does not the concept of choice imply at least two alternatives?"

"It is so."

Amanda spoke a Vulcanir phrase she'd practiced to herself thousands of times but never had the nerve to use before. "This is my heart, T'Pau." It was the formal preface to an exposure of the deepest seated emotions. She spoke now without shame, with even a hint of pride. "Spock is my son. He may not be wholly free of the Slow Burn. He travels far, but even on Vulcan he would not be likely to encounter a Blooming that could heal him. Twice he has experienced the Severance of Bonding. The third choice must be right, or he may die. Yet he is part human. He may not be able to bring himself to ask you for alternatives from which to choose."

Amanda held her breath, unsure how the Vulcan would accept the baring of the human heart. She had spoken as quietly and dispassionately as she could. Now she waited.

And slowly, ever so slowly, it became clear that T'Pau, "All Vulcan in one package," would follow the rule of Vulcan courtesy and accept the offering as from a Vulcan. Logic demanded that desires be valued in direct proportion to their tendency to preserve life in the living. "Sarek chose well. It is proper to be concerned for the perils of a son. Yet thee is concerned without need. Spock has proven himself his grandfather's grandson."

"T'Pau, I too had a father. Spock has two grandfathers. You know the Vulcan heart. I know the human."

"I do not understand your logic. There is no reason he might fail to request data."

"When he was barely five years old and could not speak, it was thought he was mentally retarded in some hitherto unknown manner because of his heritage. But I knew it was not so, and I convinced Suvil. And I was right."

"It is remembered that thee was the cause of Spock's debility."

"I was guilty of an error in judgment because of a lack of knowledge. There was that in Spock which touched on my human instincts as a mother. I still believe that what I gave, he needed. If, in the process, his ability to hear and distinguish the fine differences of Vulcan speech was impaired, it was only a temporary impairment which he overcame with Suvil's training. There was both good and bad in my actions. I would do the same today if necessary."

Seeing the thoughtful gaze upon her, Amanda continued, "I acted out of a combination of

ignorance and knowledge, just as you have acted now. I knew the requirements of his human side, but not of his Vulcan side. You know the requirements of the Vulcan, but not of the human. Is it not time that we combined our differences to produce the ultimate Joy?"

T'Pau's gradual yielding was almost a visible thing. After several minute's consideration in which Amanda felt that, if she could have, the old woman would have paced the room like a caged lioness, T'Pau said, "T'Aniyeh is not a proper choice for Spock."

"Why?"

"She is unstable. She will not live long enough."

"What do you mean?"

"She is emotionally unstable. You know her history. Her sanity is deeply in question. Spock cannot afford another Severance, either in life or death. She is human in body. He will certainly outlive her. The effect that Vulcan has had on her psych has been good for her, but would not be good for Spock."

"T'Pau, have you considered the case of T'Zorel? You know that emotional stability is largely chemically controlled. Human females lack the voluntary control of the body's functions. The Bonding to a Vulcan male induces enormous changes in the emotional characteristics of a human, or part-human, female. I know this, T'Pau, with my own body I know it. The effect is not large, and it may be barely measureable with the most sensitive instruments. But it is perceptible. It may be that T'Aniyeh is as she is because she is not Bonded."

"The human equivalent of the Slow Burn?"

"It may be. Sarek and I believe that of all those available, T'Aniyeh is best able to understand Spock. Have they not both chosen a Questing Vocation?"

"It is true."

"And there are no actuarial tables on such as Spock. There is no way to predict the length of his life."

"Mistakes have been made," mused T'Pau, "on both sides. An error in judgment based on an error in knowledge can lead only to illogical acts. The only outcome is disaster. But how can a mortal ever achieve infallible knowledge?"

"Has it not come down into the Book of Fragments that the purpose of life is to live?"

T'Pau started as if knowledge of the Vulcan Books was the last thing she'd expected from a human.

"I have tried to learn the thoughts of Vulcan, as much as I am able. They are not my thoughts, and I cannot live thusly. But I have found many similarities, and many joyful differences. It has been that the mistakes I have made, Sarek has corrected, and the mistakes he has made, I have corrected. Thus have the interests of Vulcan been guarded in the Federation. Our method has produced a son who has brought honor to his grandfather. We would not presume to choose for him again, but we agree that T'Aniyeh should be considered."

Abruptly, T'Pau wheeled her chair back from the table. Turning toward the door, she paused. "A list of choices will be drawn. I will see it is communicated to him at the first opportunity. T'Aniyeh will be considered. Thee has done well. And now thee may rest."

As the door closed behind the Daughter, Amanda found that she was indeed at rest for the first time in years. A shrill voice of alarm within her had been stilled. All would be well.

# AUTHOR'S PREFACE

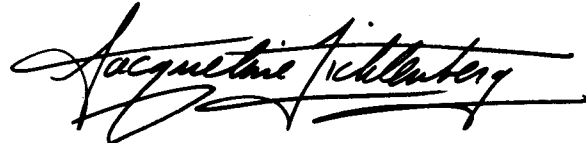
Here is a story which was completed just two years ago and has yet to see print. During that time it has gathered a bit of moss---in the form of several flashback scenes added by Sondra Marshak. These are the first words of Kraith actually drafted by Sondra. And then I made additions to her additions. It was an exciting and stimulating experience. I hope more of the Kraith Creators will be doing things like this.

Way back in 1971, DECISION was scheduled to appear in VOYAGES #3. It has yet to materialize (but just might.) The reasons it did not appear in T-Negative are multiple. For the most part, Ruth just couldn't go this far out on the Kraith limb with me. But also, the story has several structural flaws (which I am loath to correct since it would mean tearing the whole thing down and rebuilding it) as well as creating in some readers a feeling of wearisome and pointless repetition of things already said in Kraith. Much criticism has been leveled at this story. It is the criticism I thought Kraith IV, (NEMESIS) would attract and didn't. Puzzling and instructive is life.

The original Kraith Series conception called for I, II, & III to form a unified novel with IV, V, & VI being the sequel novel, VII standing alone as a novel, and VIII being the denouement or tag ending. So V isn't really a "story" in its own right, but only the bridge or middle part of what was conceived as a single work. V doesn't have a proper fictional "beginning," nor does it have an "ending" (it just sort of peters out if you look at it as a story, but if you consider that you ought to turn the page and find a blank page titled "Part III" then turn again and find a new chapter titled "Spock's Pilgrimage," then you won't feel quite so disappointed, I hope.)

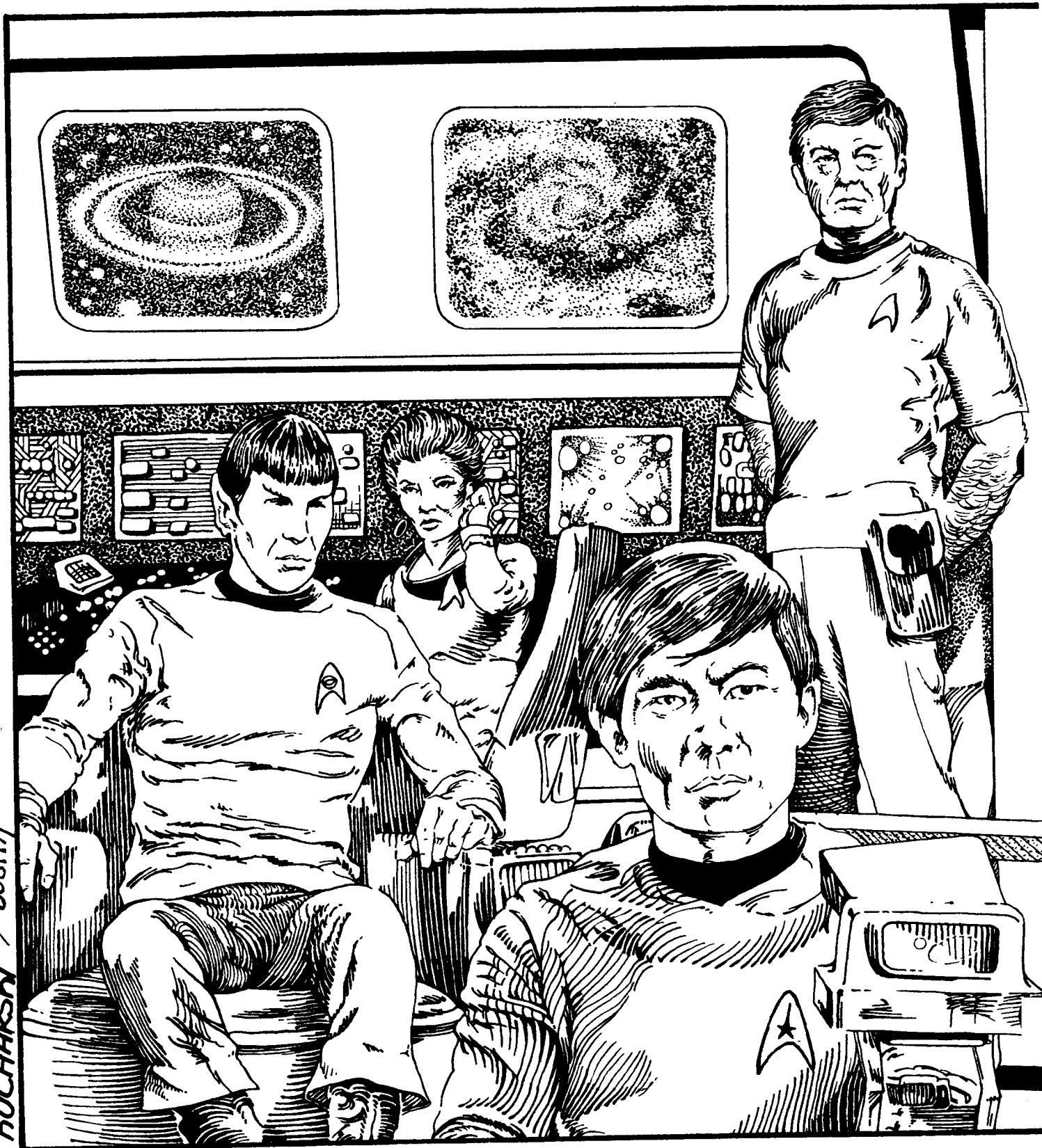
Many people have urged me to write the scene between Ssarsun, Spock and the Elders at the end of DECISION. It actually was in the original story outline. But when I got to it, it no longer seemed appropriate. I'm hoping one of the Kraith Creators will do it for me. Any volunteers?

As always, we are interested in your opinions of this story, and there is a question I'd like you to see if you can answer. "What is Spock's Decision? Or, why do you think this story was titled Spock's Decision in Kraith? Which of the decisions he makes here is the One of significance to the Kraith themes?"



Jacqueline Lichtenberg  
Monsey, New York  
September, 1973

# spock's decision



KUCHARSKI / austin

# JACQUELINE LICHTENBERG

## SONDRA MARSHAK

### PROLOGUE:

Captain's Log: Stardate, 7-5962.8. We are observing a stellar mass from a distance of one light year. Science Officer Spock is collecting full-spectrum sensor readings.

\*\*\*\*\*

Captain's Log: Stardate, 7-5963.4. Science Officer Spock asserts that anomolous conditions of unknown significance exist near the stellar mass. It is a dark star, but it emits in the non-visible portions of the spectrum with unusual density. The radiation bands and shifting gravity phenomena combine to produce a new type of interference pattern which we will attempt to study at closer range in accordance with our mapping and exploration orders.

\*\*\*\*\*

Captain's Log: Stardate, 7-5971.3. Ship's condition, Yellow Alert. Proceeding on impulse power only. All the power of the warp engines has been diverted to our shields which have been modified according to specifications worked out by Mr. Spock.

\*\*\*\*\*

### CHAPTER ONE

On the bridge of the U.S.S. Enterprise, Captain Kirk consigned his log entry to the permanent computer storage bank with a decisive flick of his finger and then signed hugely. He swiveled his command chair around to face Spock who was bent over the hood of his sensor-scope. It seemed to the Captain that the Vulcan had been there, unmoving, for the last nine days...ever since they'd started their first, cautious probe of the dark star that blotted out the center third of the main viewscreen like an ominous storm cloud writhing in a stratospheric wind.

After a few seconds, Kirk could see that Spock wasn't going to notice him, so he heaved himself out of the command chair and trudged up the steps to the Vulcan's side. He stood there quietly for a few seconds, feeling unaccountably weary. All he wanted to do was sleep off the fatigue that had been building for the last nine days.

"Mr. Spock, you have the con. I'm going to the gym for a work-out. Bones says I need to lose five pounds."

Without turning his head, the First Officer said, "Acknowledged, Captain."

Kirk stood a few moments more until it became evident that Spock was definitely not in a conversational mood. Kirk shrugged and sighed again, taking one last look around the bridge. All was still quiet. The duty stations were manned by alert, bright-eyed youngsters who seemed to be getting younger every year.

Abruptly, Kirk's vision blurred. He blinked and the scene cleared again. I'm just tired, he thought. A work-out and a quick nap in the steam-room would do worlds of good. Can't have a Captain who staggers around bleary-eyed during Yellow Alerts!

He dragged himself toward the red blotch that led to the turbo-lift. In the cage, he gripped the handle and said, "Deck five."

The doors closed behind him...the lift's separate gravity system took hold...the car plummeted five decks and came to a bone-crunching 15-gravity halt at the appointed place...all without disturbing its passenger. Kirk reflected that they could have built a turbo-lift that wouldn't give passengers the slightest hint of motion, but they hadn't because it would have been too unnerving for humans. Perhaps the new Starships being built for non-humans would have such exotic features.

The doors opened and he stepped out into the familiar blue-gray corridor. He felt as if he were floating down a tunnel of brilliant clarity that bored a conical hole in a blurred reality. It seemed worse than mere eye-strain. Perhaps he'd better see McCoy about it? But, that would require some initiative and he was so tired his mind just slipped past the idea.

He continued toward his quarters. Walking within the cone of clear vision that cut the mist ahead of him like the prow of a Denebian racing sloop slicing cleanly through a lake fog and heading for the outer marches of human civilization...borne by the winds of forever....

Kirk shook his head. His mind was idling out of gear and throwing up the oddest things. He'd never been on a Denebian racing sloop! He wondered if he might be suffering some aftereffect of the disintegration of the glowstones.\* If so, he ought to tell Spock about it. But not right now. The Vulcan was thoroughly engrossed in unraveling his mystery star. He was like a five year old boy with a shiny new toy starship that really levitated. Give Spock a new scientific puzzle to immerse himself in, and he became more unreachable than Ensign McClintok during a Grand Master Chess Tournament.

Kirk rounded the bend, strode under the intersection brace, and squared off down the center of the long, straight corridor that led to his room. No, he'd just lie down and take a wee little nap. Then he'd feel much better.

"Captain!"

Kirk turned, spotted his Chief Engineer's red shirt bobbing along behind him, laboriously associated the hailing voice with the shirt and blinked. "Yes, Scotty, what is it? Some trouble with the screens?"

Scotty pulled up beside the Captain and clasped his hands behind his back. "Well, now that you mention it, we have been having a bit o' trouble..."

"But nothing you can't handle?"

"Well, no we'll manage. I just wanted to know when we'll be getting away from here. The warp engines are operating on full just to power those screens of Mr. Spock's..."

"...the bastardy things..." supplied Kirk, nodding sympathetically.

Scotty looked sidewise at the Captain. "Well, now...I didna'..."

"But you'd have like to?"

Chin up, he answered, "I must admit, Captain, that I would have liked to."

"Forget it." Kirk dismissed the thought that was in both their minds. "I wasn't reading your mind...I just know you too well. You'll have to ask Mr. Spock for an estimate on how long we'll be here. He's onto some sort of scientific puzzle and you know how he gets..."

"Aye. I suppose we can survive it another couple of days."

"Was there something else?"

"Else? Oh, just a message fro Dr. McCoy."

"Why didn't he call me on the com?"

"He's tied up with a patient. Told me to tell you that he's got some problem with his medical scanners...they bleep or something every once in a while. He blames this dark star and wants to pull back and check out his instruments."

"He'll have to take that up with Mr. Spock." He draped a friendly arm around Scotty's shoulders more to steady himself than to express sympathy. "You two call me if you need a referee. In any event, we'll be pulling out of here in about twenty-four hours. I don't see any reason to endanger the ship over this. See if you can stick it out that long."

Scotty nodded. "Another day or so, we can make it, I think. No sense bothering Mr. Spock then."

"Good. Meet me in the briefing room in twelve hours. We'll discuss it with Bones and our Science Officer."

"Aye, Sir." Scotty looked askance and then shrugged.

Giving Scotty a friendly pat, Kirk turned and leveled off toward his quarters. Somehow, he felt he hadn't been too coherent in that conversation, but his mind kept slipping. He shook his head and plodded on toward his door. He was just tired. He knew the corridor floor was level, but it felt for all the world like he was climbing up-hill.

Finally, he reached his door, leaned on the plate and staggered in, letting the door whoosh shut behind him. He leaned against it heavily and contemplated the desk intercom screen. Maybe something was wrong with him. Maybe he ought to talk to Bones about it? But, no, Bones was busy with a patient. Spock? Forget him! Spock was reveling in his mystery as if it were a vacation paradise.

Kirk threw himself on the bed and swung his boots up, propping his hands behind his head against the bolster. Spock had taken to this problem of the dark star as a human might take to drink...a kind of hysterical rejection of a reality which had become an intolerable burden. Yes, that sounded right.

Spock had been under an intolerable pressure. On the dze-ut' planet, he had revealed a part of himself no Vulcan would ever, willingly, display. His human half must want to flee this ship in an agony of embarrassment. But his Vulcan half would never permit it to show.

Well, thought Kirk, drifting off, let him have his fun. He more than deserved it. If work was his way of keeping his mind off Tanya, it was probably good therapy. All questions of love aside, Spock was committed to her in a way no human would ever really understand.

He heaved himself to his feet and forced his reluctant body to march straight and tall through the corridors to the gym. Stripping his shirt off, the Captain slowly prepared to limber up while he waited for a pair of crewmen to finish with the mats.

Then, Kirk suddenly became aware of Spock standing behind him, watching. "Mr. Spock, I didn't see you come in. Is something wrong?"

"Mr. Scott told me of your encounter with him fifteen minutes ago, Captain. He found you somewhat incoherent...and your uncontrolled mind-linking quite disturbing."

"Spock, I wasn't linking! I just know Scotty too well." He swept one hand out in a depreciating gesture. "I'm no latent telepath - what happened down on that planet was probably just due to the effects of that uh, tower, and your..." Kirk stopped, embarrassed, then continued, "and that mind grenade."

"With all due respect, Sir, you are in no condition to judge at this time. It is vital that we set course for Vulcan immediately so that you can be given the necessary training. Otherwise there exists a 98.4% probability that you will encounter severe difficulties."

"Nonsense, Spock. I..." Kirk began to sway dizzily. He turned a puzzled stare at the two nearby crewmen who were practicing sumate, a highly complex fighting technique. Both men were obviously exerting themselves mightily. "Why are they so angry with each other? Harrison wouldn't foul...what's this nonsense about Jeffries stealing Harrison's girl on Altair IV..." Kirk found himself caught in a sudden whirlpool of frenzied emotions and tangled thoughts. All at once, he was overcome by the blinding barrage of sensations flailing at his consciousness. His knees gave way and the mat at his feet loomed up to meet him. He realized, incuriously, that he was falling. In the next instant, he felt steely arms break the fall and quickly lift him back to his feet.

"No, Spock, thanks, but I'm all right. I can make it alone. I-I can walk."

"I must differ with you, Captain. You cannot." Spock answered quietly, understanding. But he let go of Kirk and waited.

Kirk took a few hesitant steps and collapsed, helpless as the vitriolic, chaotic impressions seared through him. Spock held up one hand as Harrison and Jeffries quit their scuffling and came running toward the Senior Officers. "I will accompany the Captain to his quarters. You may return to your practice. I suggest that you resolve your dispute with rational argumentation rather than with futile brutality."

Turning his back on the startled and abashed crewmen, Spock lifted the Captain gently and effortlessly in his arms and, as if Kirk were a child, carried him to his cabin. Spock placed the Captain carefully on his bed and then stood there, his eyes deep and thoughtful, looking down at him.

Kirk was obviously shaken; the paleness around his lips told the Vulcan of low blood pressure from shock.

"Thanks, Spock. Reminds me of that time on Vulcan when you had to..."

"Yes, Captain, I too am thinking of those two months on Vulcan after Sarek adopted you. It occurs to me that it might be necessary to re-establish the Warder-Liege Relationship between us until you have learned to cope with your new condition."

Kirk looked up at the impassive Vulcan, startled consternation written on the expressive, human features.

"On the ship?!...But Sarek said that, other than on Vulcan, you could only invoke it at a time of vital peril stemming from--. Oh, I see what he had in mind. But surely you aren't certain!" He bit his lip anxiously as he waited for Spock's reply. Spock stood gravely silent.

Kirk said, "Aren't you going to ask McCoy to remove me?"

"I must meditate on whether circumstances warrant it. In the meantime, I suggest you recall the details of your Oath to prepare yourself for what will, in all probability, be required of you." He paused. "If you will excuse me now, Captain?"



Kirk stared at the door after Spock left. The Captain's mind was in a turmoil. He hoped desperately that Spock would not invoke that ancient Vulcan Arrangement. Kirk had come to realize over the last few years that the peace he had found on Vulcan was his only haven in the galaxy, his only home. He knew he could not, would not jeopardize his belonging there. So, if Spock's analysis of the situation invoked it, Kirk knew he would honor his oath - and for as long as the time was called, he would carefully obey the Vulcan's every command.

Finally, the Captain fell into a fitful doze, interrupted by memories of the First Officer's penetrating gaze as he talked about that latent telepathy business. Would Spock order him back to Vulcan for training? Well, he thought, we really would have to go there anyway if Tanya were pregnant.

Idly, Kirk wondered if she would yet become pregnant. It was theoretically possible, Bones had told him over a Saurian Brandy the other night, for an impregnation to occur even up to six months after a single copulation.

Copulation? Yes, that was the word he'd used. It wouldn't be right to talk about Spock's problems in anything less than strictly proper vocabulary.

He wondered what he would do if she became pregnant. He couldn't turn the ship around and head for home...he wasn't the Captain, only the Chief Surgeon. But he hadn't delivered a baby since Capella...and that had been a classical, text-book perfect delivery. Spock's offspring would pose quite a different problem, regardless of the identity of the mother.

He bent over his screen again...those blasted bleeps! Wish Jim would get the hell out of this neighborhood. Had to be that star that was doing it. There! Now he had it.

He straightened, heaved a deep sigh and smiled at the red-uniformed girl seated on the bed dangling pert feet at the ends of her short but exquisite legs. "Well, you slipped by that one, Tanya. You've got one more month's grace. Congratulations!"

The girl looked at him incredulously. "Congratulations?" She cocked her head to one side in a way that reminded McCoy very strongly of her husband...even though she didn't have his slanted eyebrows and upswept ears. If she had, she would have looked like a petit pixie out of an Irish legend.

Her short, dark hair didn't conceal her ears...and she looked just like what she was, a tiny Greek-Italian girl of thoroughly human stock. It often took new acquaintances hours to divine that she was indeed completely Vulcan in philosophy...and that that philosophy was essential to her sanity because of her extreme telepathic sensitivity.

She finally completed her bemused study of the human doctor, the compassionate part of her personality winning out. "You really don't understand, do you?"

She slid down, dropping to the floor like a ballerina completing a leap. "You're so close to Captain Kirk...and the Captain is like a brother to Spock...and neither of you seem to understand that if we fail..." Tears sprang to her eyes, magnifying the dark beauty of them, "...if we fail, it will practically kill him! You've both forgotten T'Rruel...but he hasn't."

Abruptly, she turned and almost ran out the door.

McCoy stared after her. he hadn't realized that they wanted a child that much. This was bad...very bad. Because, according to the blood and tissue tests he'd run last week, Spock's fertility might have been adversely affected by the Romulan virus he'd picked up on their spy mission. He wondered if Spock knew.

Oh, of course he knew. That knowledge was one of the sources of the deep concern he felt. One would expect a doctor of medicine to understand these things without being told. The deleterious effect was progressive. Even with the disease totally expunged, the deterioration would continue at the rate of at least three to five percent every ten years for the rest of his life.

Nonsense! The effect was only temporary! McCoy frowned. It wasn't like him to fantasize disasters.

It's no fantasy. It would be a disaster if I don't conceive this time...and it would be a disaster if I do.

Agreed. Either way, the timing is most inconvenient. But, then, that's traditional with my people.

"Our people!" she corrected absently, offering her husband her two outstretched fingers in formal greeting.

He touched her fingers tenderly. "Agreed," he said aloud, "but there is much work to be done now."

"I beg forgiveness. I thought you'd like to know."

"You did well. But the bridge is no place for such discussions."

She held his eyes with hers. "Spock. Three to five percent? That bad?"

"Probably no worse than that. Now, go, My Wife, I am very busy."

Obediently, Kirk turned toward the red blotches that were the turbo-lift doors. They shimmered, blurred and seemed to retreat into the distance. Two strong hands clasped his fragile shoulders as his legs buckled under him and he fought for breath...red blackness swirling upwards in sparkling shreds.

The last thing he heard before he lost consciousness was Spock's voice saying, "Captain! T'Aniyeh, break it off! You must break it off. The Captain is unable...he doesn't have the training. T'Aniyeh, atondei shrze!"

## CHAPTER TWO

McCoy took the air-hypo from Nurse Chapel, eyed the life-signs indicators over the two beds and turned to Spock who was standing in the corner, apparently communing with the medical computer on the wall.

Spock put out a hand, touched a stud, and rainbows of dancing lights lit up the computer's panel. McCoy said, "Be careful, you'll overload it!"

Spock turned a cool eye on the Doctor, one brow raised in mild incredulity. Then he favored the nurse with a gaze that almost said, "Since when is McCoy a computer expert?" But he didn't answer verbally, and Christine retreated to a corner where she'd be out of the cross-fire.

McCoy gestured to the hypo he held. "I hope you know what you're doing, Spock. Under the circumstances, I would prescribe a stimulant, not a sedative..."

"...and you'd have two very dead patients on your hands, Doctor." The computer beeped quietly and Spock checked the readout, then turned back to McCoy. "My estimate was correct; two milligrams per pound of body weight would be optimum dosage in this case."

McCoy raised an eyebrow. "I knew you'd picked up a whole gaggle of degrees, Mr. Spock, but I hadn't heard that one of them was in medicine."

"Not medicine, Doctor, history. In every recorded instance of this type of occurrence, stimulants killed while sedatives saved."

"How come you're so certain of the type of this 'occurrence'?"

"You forget, I was in the mind-link the Captain forced on us...and so were you, for a time. I am trained to know what I experience."

"How come you and I didn't end up like this?" McCoy gestured at the recumbent patients.

"You, Doctor, are virtually psi-null while I am relatively insensitive and highly trained." He paced over to the Doctor and stood watching the life-signs displays. After a time, he said, "Administer the sedative now, Doctor."

McCoy took one last look at Spock and then at his diagnostic panels. The six needles over the Captain's head danced up and down in exact unison with those over Tanya's head. He'd never seen anything like it before. He took a deep breath, reluctance apparent in every line of his body. But, he lowered the hypo and gave the Captain the calculated dosage. Then he re-set and gave a shot to Tanya.

While they stood watching for the first sign of the effect, McCoy said, "What caused it, Spock? Some aftereffect of the disintegration of the glowstones?"

"Unlikely, Doctor. As I said at the time..."

The intercom whistled stridently and McCoy took it on the wall unit near the door. "Sickbay, McCoy here."

"Scott here, Doctor. I'm sending up two men. They seemed dizzy and confused on the job and I thought it best..."

"Right, Scotty, anything else?"

"Well, I've got four others complaining of headache and double vision. I don't know that it's not related."

"O.K., check your air and radiation levels..."

Hurt, Scotty said, "I've done that..."

McCoy said, "All right. I'll look into it. Sickbay, out." He tapped off the switch and turned toward Spock, but the intercom beeped again. "Sickbay, McCoy here."

"Bridge, Chekov. Doctor, I've sent Lieutenant Uhura to her quarters. She seemed ill..."

blurred vision, confused...maybe feverish. Donahue is filling in for her, but he is complaining of a headache.. and for that matter, so is everyone else up here. I've checked with Environmental Control. All Life Support functions read nominal. I think you better look into this, Doctor."

"I will, Mr. Chekov," said McCoy.

Chekov asked, "Is Mr. Spock there?"

Spock stepped up to the intercom, "Spock here, Mr. Chekov. I heard your report. I'll be up in a few minutes."

"Yes, Sir. Bridge out."

McCoy signed off and turned to Spock, but the Vulcan was punching at the wall-mounted medical computer again, running the specialized unit to full capacity.

From the outer office came the sound of a corridor door opening and then shutting. McCoy nodded to Nurse Chapel. "Go check Mr. Scott's men in. I'll be there in a moment."

She hurried into the office, letting the door slip shut behind her.

After a moment, Spock nodded. "Yes, of course."

McCoy snapped, "Of course what?"

But the Vulcan stepped over to the desk and began hooking the desk viewscreen into the main library computer. Then he connected the bio-computer into his improvised circuit, strode over to an un-occupied bed and appropriated the diagnostic panel without so much as a "by-your-leave" to the Chief Surgeon. That was almost too much for McCoy. Nearly five years ago, just after T'Rruel's death, the Doctor had sworn off needling the Vulcan. But as the Science Officer's movements became swifter and more complex, McCoy's resolve was weakening.

Finally, Spock bent over the desk intercoma and instructed the computer, "Tie intra-ship sensor readings into Averaging Program EDX-2276. Display continuous readout on diagnostic panel 10."

The computer voice answered, "-working-"

McCoy gaped at his precious diagnostic panel as the needles rose from the base line and began to dance as if there were a patient on the bed. "And just who do you think you are, Mr. Science Officer...a pointed-eared, green-blooded Rube Goldberg? Hasn't my equipment suffered enough from you ill-concealed passionate curiosity about this dark star..."

Spock held up a hand and said mildly, "Restrain yourself, Doctor. I'm only attempting to ascertain..."

"I'll ascertain that you've overstepped the bounds of your authority, Mr. Spock!" McCoy was as close to rage as he'd ever been and he was shouting now. "Who authorized you to ruin..."

"I've ruined nothing, Doctor. And, you may recall, that during the incapacitation of the Captain, the First Officer is in command."

"If that's why you wanted him under sedation..."

Turning his back on the human, Spock examined the diagnostic panel he'd commandeered. "I'm merely attempting to ascertain the cause and extent of the symptoms that have..." His voice trailed off as he became utterly absorbed in the display over the empty bed. In effect, he had the whole crew on that bed and was reading the average of each body-function.

McCoy said urgently, "Spock, you're going to overload that panel...it wasn't built to..." But Spock absently waved him to silence.

Eventually the Vulcan moved back to the desk and said, "Statistical analysis."

The computer answered, "-working-"

Spock went on questioning the computer on mean-deviations and curve half-widths while McCoy reflected morosely that some people seemed more at ease conversing with a machine than with flesh and blood people. In fact, McCoy thought, the triumphal satisfaction exuded by the Vulcan was definitely colored with emotional overtones.

At last the Science Officer gave a crisp nod and began to undo all the complex linkages he'd built. He found time to glance over his shoulder at the Chief Surgeon and say, "I'll thank you to keep your thoughts to yourself, Doctor. The next few hours will be a great enough ordeal without deliberate insults."

"What do you mean? I didn't say..."

"No, but you were thinking very 'loudly,' Doctor."

"But you just said I was psi-null!"

Spock put the finishing touches on his work and then came over to face the doctor and look down into his face gravely. "I've put all of your equipment back into its regulation condition, calibrated and zeroed properly...sans bleep."

McCoy looked into those dark, Vulcan eyes for a long moment. It was impossible to stay angry with Spock for more than a few seconds. How can you rage at someone who won't return the complement? He sighed. "All right. Forget it."

Spock nodded and then, frowning deeply, he rested his hands on McCoy's shoulders and said, very softly, "Leonard. We're in trouble. Very, very bad trouble. I need your help...not your hindrance. Remember the tape Jim left for us in his safe?"

McCoy nodded, shocked speechless by Spock's use of his first name.

Spock continued, "The Captain isn't dead yet, but we all will be very soon...if you and I waste our energies in unproductive disputes. Jim advised me to seek your counsel...he advised you to make allowances for my mistakes. And, Doctor, I have made one...perhaps the worst mistake of my career...a mistake that may cost all our lives."

McCoy blinked. The grief he sensed in Spock was like a red hot knife twisting in his guts bringing tears of pain to his eyes. He said, "What can I do?"

Spock released the Doctor and paced across the room taking a deep breath and letting it out very slowly. Gradually, the pain in McCoy's body eased and vanished so completely that he wondered if it had ever been there.

Spock said, very quietly, "You are psi-null, Doctor...but even you are experiencing psi phenomena on several levels of awareness...as is every other member of this crew."

"Why?" McCoy was numb, but his analytical mind plowed on along well worn channels. Symptom to cause to cure...

"Yes, Doctor. It is a pathological condition. Fortunately, our crew is human."

"I thought the day would never come when I'd hear you admit it!"

"Today, I do."

"Why?"

The Vulcan took another deep breath and paced the length of the room, for all the world like a frustrated human. As he walked, he said, "The Kaenerla Psionic Scale rates all the races of the Federation...you are familiar with it?"

"Not in detail. It's rather new and I haven't had time to read through it all."

"In outline, it is a scale of one hundred, calibrated logarithmically. Races like the Metrones, the Organians, the Melkotians rate between ninety and one hundred. The Schillians come in around seventy, plus or minus five. The Vulcans average around thirty, plus or minus two. Humans average about five. Certain individual humans rate as high as forty or even forty-five while others approach zero."

Spock rounded on the Doctor and confronted him. "I took the test twelve times and achieved readings varying from a low of three to a high of forty-seven...the greatest variation ever recorded in a single individual. I've often told you my control is erratic. The results of this objective test have verified that."

McCoy nodded. "Meaning sometimes you're sensitive and sometimes not."

"Exactly."

"But what has this to do..."

"Doctor, I know, from personal experience, what it means to go from being nearly psi-null to a high sensitivity level. I assure you that no untrained human can live through it."

"Are you telling me that Jim is going to die?"

Spock shook his head in disgust. "No, Doctor. I was not speaking of the development of Jim's latent telepathic faculties. I was speaking of you and your crew-mates."

"Not of yourself?"

"No. I shan't suffer greatly from the effect." He walked over to examine the diagnostic panels over the patients' beds. "If this crew were, say, Rigellian, they would be dead already. As it is, they may survive another couple of days...at the most."

"Unless...?" prompted McCoy.

"Unless we get away from this dark star."

"I knew it!"

"Yes, I admit...that I may have become overly intent on the investigation...though, even now, I can not see how I might have predicted this effect..."

"Never mind about that now. Just get us out of here."

"On impulse power, Doctor? It took us a week to get in this close. We allowed two weeks for our retreat."

"Well, put the warp engines back on..."

"The shielas that the warp engines are powering are all that stand between us and instant death, Doctor. That was my mistake...and I may yet live to regret it." He looked down at Tanya, pale and tranquil in drugged repose.

The silence grew painful. Then McCoy said, "What about them? They're both human...both telepathically sensitive...will this field kill them?"

Spock sighed. "I don't know. I believe they are both safe as long as they are under heavy sedation." Abruptly, he turned to the Doctor and ordered crisply, "Have the lab synthesize that theragin derivative you used when the Tholians almost had us trapped. I doubt if it will actually decrease telepathic awareness, but it should help to combat the confusion. If we can just keep the crew functioning a few hours more, we may be able to pull out of here..."

Spock started for the corridor and McCoy called after him, "How...?"

Spock flung the tattered words over his shoulder as he sped out the door. "Through the corona, Doctor...through!"

Stunned, McCoy looked after the retreating First Officer. Had the man gone completely insane? If so, it was his duty to log it and start proceedings to remove him from command. But nobody else aboard had the vaguest notion what was going on. Telepathy, stellar physics, and starship engineering were the Science Officer's domain of expertise...medicine was McCoy's speciality and, he thought, he'd better get busy.

Once he got his body moving, McCoy found his mind returning to his habitual channels of thought and all considerations of the correctness of Spock's command decisions vanished in a flurry of routine. Theragin derivative; intensive care for Jim and Tanya; patients waiting... McCoy narrowed down his concentration and worked with a fiendish intensity that kept his mind off his own growing headache.

### CHAPTER THREE

Spock stepped off the turbo-lift into a maelstrom of un-restrained emotions. The air of the bridge seemed to glow with the free emotional energy snapping between navigator, helmsman, communications and engineering. In the center of it all sat Mr. Sulu in the command chair, squinting at the main screen and rubbing his forehead.

Spock took firm grip on himself and dove into the whirlpool of emotion as if it were a cascade of molten lava. He stepped down into the command arena and took up a stance within Sulu's field of view. Presently, the oriental face turned toward him and Sulu jumped up. "Oh, Mr. Spock!"

"Very good, Lieutenant. Report to sickbay. I think Dr. McCoy may have a good headache potion worked out by now."

"Yes, Sir. Sorry, Sir."

"No need to apologize."

"Yes, Sir," said Sulu imaginatively. Then he hurried toward the lift.

Spock took the command chair and surveyed his crew. Chekov on navigation. Lt. Singer at the helm. Donahue at communications. And Mr. Scott unaccountably at the bridge Engineering Station.

Solemnly, Spock made the required log entries...including a dispassionate account of his own errors and an outline of his current plan. Then he swiveled around to face the communications station. "Mr. Donahue, dispatch log entries to date...capsule drop."

Donahue faced around, removing the earphone from his right ear. "Are we in that much danger, Mr. Spock?"

"That was an order, Mr. Donahue, not a request."

"Yes, Sir." Donahue swiveled around and went to work dispatching the capsule that might be all of the Enterprise that would survive.

Spock went back to staring at the main viewscreen. The writhing sun shot its black plasma into space and called it back in ragged tongues only to be shredded by the unpredictable

variations in the gravitational-pulson density. And, Spock thought, he was planning to take the Enterprise right through that corona without even understanding the reason for the gravity shifts...let alone having a well-tested means of combatting them.

Momentarily, he wondered if he had chosen this course because he wanted to solve these problems and had earlier concluded that the only way to collect the data would be to travel straight through the dark plasma...but he had been thinking of a series of unmanned probes and possibly one, manned, shuttlecraft mission...not the whole Enterprise.

He said, "Mr. Singer, stand by for orbital change. Mr. Chekov, plot an orbit with the following parameters..." then he rattled off the specifications for a hyperbolic orbit that would take them out to a distance where they could drop the shielding and cut in warp power for a complete break-away.

Finally, Chekov answered, "We can't make it, Mr. Spock...not enough power. We'd skim into the corona."

"Re-compute for parabolic."

"Computing." Chikov was sweating now, as if the ship were already overheating. Then he said, "Can't do it, Mr. Spock. Still not enough power in the impulse banks." He swiveled around to face the First Officer. Strange, he thought, Spock must have known that. He could approximate an orbit faster than the main computer.

Spock said, "Yes, Mr. Chekov. I did. Now, tell me, how would you get the ship away from this star in less than forty-two hours...using no more power than is in the impulse banks?"

"You mean without touching the warp engines?"

"I believe I said that."

Chekov's face froze. He said, "We do have enough power to achieve a long elliptical that would swing us out just far enough in about twenty-five hours...but...we'll shave so close to the corona there probably wouldn't be anyone left alive to cut in the warp engines and complete the escape."

"If we cut our orbit directly through the upper coronal layer, we can achieve aphelion within twenty-three hours ten minutes."

"But at perihelion, we'd be torn apart...or fried!"

Spock nodded. "That would be inconvenient. Therefore, I suggest we take precautions. Compute the orbit, Mr. Chekov. Compute it closer than you've ever computed an orbit. I want our position known at thirty second intervals for the twenty-four hours after injection."

"But with the shifting gravity..."

"Do the best you can." He turned to Scotty who was staring from the one to the other in open-mouthed horror. "Mr. Scott, come with me. Mr. Singer, you have the con. We'll be in the briefing room."

Spock rose and led the dazed Scott toward the turbo-lift.

Somehow, the Chief Engineer managed to keep his peace until the briefing room doors closed behind them, leaving him alone with the Vulcan. Scotty was very keenly aware that, during the Captain's incapacitation, he was second in command under Mr. Spock...and it wouldn't be proper for him to argue with the Commander in public.

But, as soon as the doors closed, Scotty said to the First Officer, "Are you daft, man! You canna' take this ship through that sun's corona just to satisfy your scientific curiosity while the Captain is ill. You know he'd never approve!"

"Engineer." Spock seated himself at the computer input unit at the end of the table. "The Captain will never have the opportunity to approve anything ever again if we do not execute this maneuver with superlative accuracy. Nor will any of us. We are in grave peril. If you doubt that, I suggest you consult with Dr. McCoy."

"Peril? What peril?"

Spock leaned forward and propped his elbows on the desk, steeping his fingers and gazing somberly upward until the human decided he'd better sit down and listen.

When Scotty had chosen a seat, Spock began to talk, frankly admitting his own guilt in failing to provide a means of swift withdrawal in the event they couldn't use the warp engines as they'd planned. He went on to explain the nature of the side-effect the star had on brain tissue.

When the Vulcan had finished, Scotty said, "The only way out of the burning barn is straight through the fire!"

"Quaintly put, but essentially accurate."

Scotty sat back shaking his head, "But, Mr. Spock, I've been studying these gravity shifts, and I know this ship canna' possibly take the strains..."

"At present, no. But with several modifications, we might make it. Let me show you my calculations." He fingered the computer and the tri-screen in the center of the table lit up with a schematic diagram of the Enterprise.

As Spock talked, he had the computer put the model of the Enterprise through a grueling simulation of the stresses involved in a close pass to the dark star. Within seconds, he'd captured the Engineer's attention and after fifteen minutes, the dour Scott was flushed with animated enthusiasm for the challenging job...unmindful of the risk to his own life.

Half an hour later, they emerged from the briefing room. Spock headed for sickbay and Scotty for Engineering.

McCoy found the Vulcan standing between the two beds, the Captain on his left, Tanya on his right, gazing fixedly at nothing. The Doctor swirled the Erlenmeyer flask in his hand and fetched a beaker from the supply cabinet. "Here, Spock, you better take a shot of this. Perk you up a bit."

"No thank you, Doctor."

"Come on, now, doctor's orders! It's worked perfectly on everybody else."

Spock straightened, looked at the flask of orange juice, smelled the vodka, and said, "But I am not 'everybody else.'"

Suddenly, the Captain began to moan, a low anguished, tortured sound which sent the doctor to his side, scanner in hand. "You've got to do something for him, Spock! If you won't let me use what I know, then try some of your mind techniques."

"It could be highly dangerous to attempt a link with him now, Doctor. His mind is an overwhelming turmoil of warring sensory impressions and anxieties and terror."

McCoy snorted. "Certainly you're not afraid."

"There is one possibility left."

"Well, out with it!"

"If I can touch his mind before his condition worsens, and impose upon it the peace and tranquility he needs to strengthen him against this thought-barrage, it might help them both."

"If you can possibly do something, do it now. I don't know what to do!"

"There is not sufficient time now to attempt it, Doctor. He must be brought to accept his telepathic sensitivity and the necessity of returning to Vulcan. Then I can try to take his consciousness away from here-now and back to those last months on Vulcan."

"I see. Yes, he's told me something of what that adoption interval meant to him. Can you reach him now, in his present condition?"

Spock looked intently at the two patients. Kirk's moaning had almost ceased and, for the moment, his features appeared less contorted. Tanya's face seemed to reflect a prolonged, tense concentration.

"Possibly, Doctor. The danger of such an attempt is formidable. But perhaps I might succeed in opening a small crack to his mind at first, and widen it later when he can be made to recall and focus on the Leige Control. I will make the attempt as soon as this emergency..."

The intercom whistled for attention and Spock took it at the desk. "Sickbay, Spock here."

"Scott here. I've assigned men to ripping up the floors at the calculated points, but I'm going to need some help shutting down the main coils of the gravitational compensators; can you give me a hand?"

"Not just yet, Mr. Scott. I must supervise the orbital injection. Then I'll have the null-g warnings broadcast. About fifteen minutes."

"Aye, aye. Meantime I'll get my space-polo team outside."

"Good. But be certain they know the exact angles. Those nacelle pylons are extremely fragile and if they activate a g tractor two degrees off, it would tear the ship apart."

"Aye, Sir, I'm well aware of that!"

"Good. Carry on. Spock out."

McCoy gasped, "Null-g! Mr. Spock, what are you up to?"

"We must remove the gravity compensators from luxury duty and put them to work bracing

the ship. Actually, we only need to remove 17% of the units, but to do that, we'll have to shut down the whole system."

"Why? I can't operate a sickbay in null-g!"

"You're going to learn, Doctor. Our gravity compensators work on a cryogenic super-conducting torrus charged with anti-matter electrons...positrons...in order to..."

"Skip the mechanics. I get the picture. One null-g sickbay, coming up. I'm an acrobat not a doctor!"

Spock left McCoy muttering phrases of wry self-pity into his theragin derivative cocktail.

When he entered the bridge, he found Chekov and Sulu standing behind their chairs staring up at the direct-vision dome over the center of the command arena. To Spock's way of thinking, that dome was the most horrendously useless feature of the human-designed ship. It was not only a structural weakness, albeit a minor one compared to the nacelle pylons, it was a source of distraction to bridge personnel.

He walked up behind the two young men, and without himself looking up, said, "What seems to be so interesting, gentlemen?"

Sulu answered, "We thought we saw four men out there in space-polo armor doing acrobatics."

"Is that all?" asked Spock mildly.

Chekov brought his head down, rubbed the back of his neck, and said, "'Is that all?' the man asks. Isn't that enough?"

"It is far too much if you haven't yet completed your assigned calculations."

"Oh," said Chekov, "They're completed, Mr. Spock. Precisely as ordered."

Sulu added, "Ready for orbital injection at any moment you say the word."

"Good," said Spock, taking his place in the command chair, "then prepare for course change, Mr. Sulu."

The two took their places favoring the dome with occasional anxious glances, but finally steadying down to the job in front of them. Sulu wiped sweaty palms on his trousers. "Mr. Spock, are you quite certain we have to do this?"

"Quite, Lieutenant." Spock swiveled around to face the communications desk. "Lt. Uhura, outside intercom, please."

She paused, blinked and then woodenly said, "Outside intercom...Sir? Yes, Sir."

Spock heard her mutter, "Not that there's anybody out there." Then he was talking to the outside of the ship. "Bridge to extra-vehicular party."

"Phillips here," came the tiny voice.

Sulu and Chekov abandoned their ready positions to swivel around and stare at the command chair's speaker incredulously and then up at the dome where two tiny bodies were now visible.

Spock said, without looking up, "Mr. Phillips, Spock here. Secure for acceleration."

"Aye, Sir. Two minutes."

"Two minutes...mark!" Spock cocked his head to one side and viewed the Helmsman and Navigator quizzically. "Gentlemen, mark!"

Crisply, they spun back to the desk, chorussing, "Mark!"

Uhura said hesitantly, "Mr. Spock, could you tell me why those men are out there?"

Patiently, Spock recited, "They are dismounting our tractor-beam projectors and re-positioning them to brace the engine nacelles during perihelion. Any further questions, Lieutenant?"

"Uh...no...Sir...sorry I asked. Just curious."

"Please attempt to restrain your curiosity for more appropriate moments."

"Yes, Sir."

Chekov said, "Thirty seconds and counting. Twenty-five."

Spock said, "Lay in the orbit change, Mr. Sulu."

Sulu hit the switches. "Laid in and tracking on the vernier."



Chekov was chanting, "Fifteen, fourteen, thirteen..."

The elevator doors swished open and Scotty marched in, silently taking his place at the engineering desk. Uhura cast him a beseeching glance. The Scot winked confidently and bent over his board.

Uhura checked her monitors. The countdown was going to the boys outside. She uttered a little prayer for them; she couldn't recall ever riding a course change with people outside.

Then Chekov was chanting in clipped monotone, "Four...three...two...one...zero...plus one...plus two...plus three..." Finally he said, "On course and tracking, Mr. Spock."

Spock rose and moved to glance at the board over Chekov's shoulder. "A fair job, Mr. Chekov. Have we power left for course corrections?"

Sulu brought the appropriate instruments to bear and allowed Spock to see for himself. He was quite proud of the economy he'd achieved, but Spock didn't even comment. Instead he turned to Scotty. "You've cut out all non-essential power?"

"Aye, Sir. And we're still shutting down systems one by one. But, there's one question, Mr. Spock."

"Which is?"

"How are we going to keep the star's magnetic field from disrupting the magnetic bottle of our anti-matter plasma?" He said it with smug satisfaction, hands behind his back as he balanced on the balls of his feet.

All eyes were on Spock as he answered, "We won't."

"Then we're all doomed!" said Scotty gravely.

"Not at all," answered Spock. "When the interference becomes acute, we shall eject the anti-matter plasma."

"But, by then we'll be inside the star's corona. It will trigger an explosion that will rip the ship apart..."

"Anti-matter," said Spock tutorially, "only explodes on contact with matter."

"Exactly!"

"But, Mr. Scott," said Spock, "this star is anti-matter, so obviously..."

Scotty gasped, "Anti-matter..." then his eyes were irresistibly drawn to the star that loomed darkly in the center of the main viewscreen.

Spock waited until the Engineer had mastered his shock. The Vulcan had assumed that, since the star's composition was so obvious to him, it must be obvious to everybody else aboard. That was a type of error he'd never be able to avoid.

Eventually, Scotty turned back, the stricken look fading gradually to acceptance. Spock walked toward the engineering station, looking up at him. "The skin of the ship will be protected by a positive matter plasma trapped in a spheroidal shell by our deflector fields. Outside of the positive matter plasma, the anti-matter plasma ejected from our engines will cushion the interaction with the star's corona.

"Of course," continued the Vulcan, "the two plasmas will be reacting at the interface, but it will be a controlled reaction, releasing power which we will be able to tap to maintain our energon screens. As we approach aphelion, the star's own gravitational peculiarities will strip the plasma from us. We should have at least seventy-three minutes to engage our re-start cycle and attain full power."

Scotty cocked his head to one side and looked the Vulcan up and down. "And just how do you do expect to accomplish all of this?"

"Come. We will shut down the gravity compensators and I'll show you."

"The gravity compensators?" said Scotty blankly. Then a smile quirked the corners of his eyes and he said dreamily, "Ah...now...Ah...begin...to...see..."

Spock took the Engineer's elbow and led him into the turbo-lift. As the doors closed, the bridge crew could hear the Engineer muttering about Romulan Cloaking Systems and sub-dimensional gravitronic field theory. They didn't understand it, but it made them feel better.

#### CHAPTER FOUR

During the fifteen hours following the fateful orbital injection, the Vulcan seemed to be everywhere at once. He was on Deck Twelve supervising the re-alignment of the gravity

compensators as structural braces.

He was in Engineering, sleeves rolled up, hands grimy from helping convert the Emergency Cryogenic Dumpers into hot plasma ejectors.

He was in sickbay, gently solicitous of the drugged patients until surprised by McCoy making rounds.

Then he was in vacuum gear, outside the ship, inspecting the tractor-beam mountings that would brace the slender nacelle pylons.

He was climbing through the Deck Seven Computer Cores, installing the controls for the converted tractor-beams so the computer could compensate for shifting strains.

He was on the bridge programming the computer to operate the jury-rigged strain compensators.

He was waist deep into the guts of the Environmental Engineering Console, stripping down the circuits and shunting all power into cooling. Dark star or no, there was still considerable infra-red flux incident on their screens.

And all the while, he was on the intercom instructing Scotty who was building the power-tap that would utilize the interface reaction so vital to the success of the whole scheme.

In the sixteenth hour, the First Officer was again on the bridge seated in the command chair, crisp and cool under the smudges and grime.

Already, the interior temperature had begun to climb noticeably. Creaks and groans were all too evident to the trained ear and twenty percent of the computer's capacity was engaged in Spock's Stress Compensation Program. The ship was in powered-down condition, lights on minimum, air-cycles on low, some sections shut down completely. The only inhabited area near the naked hull was the bridge, now pared down to skeleton crew.

"Spock to sickbay," said Spock, propping his elbows on the arms of the command chair and steepling his fingers.

"Sickbay, McCoy here."

"Doctor, you may commence Metabolic Reduction shots."

"Spock, is this really necessary? It's bad psychology to force the Starfleet-type human to face death in his sleep."

"I'm well aware of that, Doctor. But which is better, a certain death while awake, or possible life upon awakening?"

"You're sure?"

"You may check my calculations, Doctor," said Spock, leaning wearily on the chair arm. "We've just enough power to make it provided 80% of our crew undergoes a thirty per cent Metabolic Reduction. You must commence Reduction within ten minutes and complete the job within one hour and twenty two minutes. You have the list of personnel subject to Reduction. Please advise me on completion. Bridge out."

The Vulcan sat a moment staring at the main viewscreen. Then he said, "Mr. Chekov, report to sickbay for Metabolic Reduction."

"Aye, Sir," said Chekov, releasing the navigator's console to Computer Control. The low, musical murmuring from the Library Computer station increased a little. Otherwise, there was no apparent change. Chekov rose and headed for the elevator.

"Mr. Sulu," said Spock, "Cut power to the main viewscreen."

"Aye, aye, Sir."

As the image on the screen shrank and winked out, leaving the bridge suddenly a very closed, stuffily claustrophobic place, Chekov gave one involuntary glance at the overhead dome which was now shrouded under metal baffles, then he left.

Now, Spock and Sulu were alone on the bridge.

Spock touched his chair arm buttons. "Bridge to Damage Control. Commence placement of emergency bulkheads according to Schedule A-Prime."

"Damage Control, acknowledging. Schedule A-Prime, in effect."

"Bridge out."

Sulu wiped his palms on his trousers again. This was going to be a helluva ride.

"Sickbay to Bridge," came McCoy's voice.

"Bridge. Spock here."

"We're still having some trouble with headache, dizziness and disorientation," said McCoy. "Request permission to rotate personnel from the Reduction List onto the Duty Roster in accordance with their resistance to symptoms."

"Permission granted," Spock answered without hesitation and then added, "Doctor?"

"Yes?"

"How is the Captain?"

"Delirious. I've had to put him under physical restraints in spite of the tranquilizer."

"I see."

"I don't think you do."

"Your doubts are duly noted and logged. Carry on, Doctor."

"Aren't you even going to ask about Tanya?"

"I know very well exactly what her condition is, Doctor. Bridge out."

When the contact was broken, Spock said to himself, "I know her condition better than you do, Doctor."

Unable to stop thinking about McCoy's patients, Spock made one of his visits to sickbay. And the Captain was, indeed, tossing in delirium. Spock stared down at his suffering friend. It was a kind of suffering which the Vulcan knew he himself was far more capable of enduring.

"My Father was wise to anticipate the need for this," Spock said softly to the anguished Kirk. He placed his fingers carefully on the Captain's face, then, after a few moments, repositioned them on his skull. "We are thinking of the peace washing over you, Jim. Our minds, our memories, are one. Together we will remember, my brother..."

Kirk's eyes moved contentedly from one familiar object to another in Spock's home, luxuriating in this house. And it was his home now, he thought, exhilarated, and soon it would be made official. Sarek's stargram had requested that Kirk and Spock spend their pre-mission leave on Vulcan for the formal adaption ceremony. In a couple of months they'd be on their way to seek out the marauding pirates who had destroyed the Trantu. For now, Kirk was content to reach out and grasp his new family. He brought his attention back to what Spock was saying, realizing that he had missed much of it.

"...are unfamiliar to you, Captain. Indeed some of the traditional ritual of a Vulcan Ceremony-of-Adoption you might find most repugnant to the captain of a starship with his First Officer acting as..."

Kirk interrupted, smiling: "I don't think I would, Spock. I can hardly believe that anything you or Sarek would do, or have me do, would upset me."

Spock was silent. Then, "It is time to go, Captain."

The two men descended a curving staircase which appeared to have been carved from rock. As they entered the underground floor of Spock's home, a spacious natural cavern, Kirk felt as if that inexplicable Peace were reverberating within his being. His eyes rested on the blue-green stone table which seemed to spring from deep within the earth. His gaze was captured by the pure crystal pool of water beneath that wide expanse of natural table. But those chairs which seemed sculpted from the same textured stone, they weren't here before, yet they evoked a sense of familiarity. In fact the entire arrangement, the three chairs raised several feet above the natural floor, the two dozen austere chairs forming, by their placement, the Idic symbol, tugged at some half-forgotten memory chord. Then he remembered. These looked exactly like the chairs used during the Spock/T'Urianne confrontation. Had they been brought here for his adoption? He couldn't be that...

::Indeed you are. The mingling of different cultures which is about to begin embodies the true meaning, the logical implication of the Idic::

Kirk was about to answer when he suddenly realized that Spock had not actually spoken. He was puzzling over this as they drew closer to the dais. His eyes widened as he saw T'Pau, looking older and frailer and more indomitable than ever. He realized that he should have expected that she would be here. He was about to go over to her, but Spock shook his head no.

Kirk's eyes were drawn to the multicolored fire which burned in a long low pit close to the crystal water. The flames soothed him, yet simultaneously, the murmuring sound of the bells filled him with an eagerness, an almost tangible excitement. The fire appeared cool and smokeless but the air was alive with wafted scents which Kirk was at a loss to identify. Mint laced with jasmine and spiced with turmeric and Aldebaran garlic? No, it wasn't that, but something uniquely Vulcan. A symphony of scents, each remaining distinct even while mingled. Almost as if the very air symbolized the spirit of the Idic. Sarek, seated next to T'Pau, lifted his hand, and Spock and Kirk approached him. Spock seated himself in the third chair.

Kirk glanced at the glittering medallion hanging from T'Pau's neck. He remembered Spock saying that this was a komatt, the badge of office of the Daughters-of-the-Tradition. It was the authority of their long, venerated tradition made tangible in a symbol.

T'Pau held up her hand and said, "Kari far!" Kirk was thoroughly startled for a moment, then recalled that those words signified only the beginning of a ceremony which was unchanged for at least two thousand years.

"Thus begins the Koon-ut-Tspoek-Tsaichrani, the joining-of-family-in-Tsaichrani, a joining that can never be sundered from the moment it is completed provided that all those who are to be joined now give their consent. Sarek, do you agree to welcome this man into your family, to guide him in Tsaichrani, to accept him as your true son with all the rights and obligations which will be his by our custom, to do what is necessary that he be taught the ways of our people?"

Sarek's effective voice, wrapped as always in that immutable dignity, answered, "I do so agree."

The bells again rustled the air, a quiet expectant sound.

"Spock. As Kataytikh of the First Realm, do you accept Kirk into you family, as your brother, to teach him our ways, to share with him you heritage, to mingle our differences - according to the Philosophy of Nome - and to stand ready always to show him the way of Tsaichrani despite the great trials attendant upon one who is not Affirmed?"

The Guardian of the ancient Tradition, that stabilizing essence of the Vulcan soul, looked at the human, at his friend, and answered, "I do so accept him." The music of the bells seemed to echo the solemn calm, the resonance of Spock's voice.

Kirk, do you agree to become a son of Sarek, brother of the kataytikh of the first realm, to accept all the obligations, trusts and rights of such a joining and to perform all that is required of you to fulfill this pledged commitment?"

Kirk answered softly, happily, "I agree." Again the bells filled the air and it was as though their trilling voices spoke in solemn finality - and a hope.

T'Pau's gaze brushed each of the twenty-four seated Vulcans, their emotionless faces expressing the dignity of their positions on Vulcan. "It is done. Se'eron, continue."

One of the seated observers rose and came toward the group before T'Pau. He continued past them and to a large case set upon a pedestal. There was a tense silence as he opened the case and extracted a vessel. A stalwart, remote man with the face of a hawk, he turned holding the glittering artifact high enough for all to see. "I have prepared this kraith according to The Tradition."

T'Pau rose, leaning heavily upon her chair but none moved to assist her. "How does thee guarantee its function?"

"With my life, T'Pau."

"If there be one with us who trusts not in Se'eron, let him leave now."

The motionless silence was unreal to Kirk. He had to force himself to breathe.

T'Pau raised her hand, "Kari far!"

Kirk blinked. A ceremony within a ceremony? That seemed somewhat illogically pompous to Kirk. But from somewhere came the answering thought. The formalities were complete. This was an addition which was optional, and which was performed only within kataytikh families. That is why all the witnesses were Guardians, of course. Kirk relaxed, thinking his own reasoning had provided the solution.

Se'eron knelt by the natural fountain, his face limned in blue from the glowing algae that purified the water. Kirk got his first good look at the kraith. It was a dull, unglazed pottery vessel in which were set fragments of sparkling gems of all colors. It wasn't the usual calix shape of a cup or glass, but rather an unusual long trough set upon a tall stem. The trough was shallow and almost broad enough to be called square. The ends curved upward into gem-encrusted spirals so that anyone attempting to drink from it would place his whole head between those intricate horns.

As he watched, Kirk felt his mind going hazy and numb, as if a thousand pounds of cotton had been stuffed between each thought. He found himself accepting this condition with a strange calm, almost as if he'd been told that it was only the linked minds of the company protecting him from the dangers of the kraith.

Se'eron dipped the kraith into the water, and suddenly the whole cavern was lit with a nearly blinding brilliance. Cascades of colors seemed to weave through the air wafted on curliques of scented smoke. It was like being inside a tokiel field with a whirling dervish of a dancer!

Kirk thought his whole body would disintegrate. Every nerve sang with vibrant harmonics.

Vaguely, it seemed to him as if each Guardian of the Idic gathered threads of a single color together and wrapped himself in a sheath of dancing light.

Now, Se'eron was standing, kraith held aloft. Beneath his arms the algae of the pool had come alive, as if fluorescent tubes had been ignited. The light was almost as bright as a class F star. Kirk squinted into the glare as Se'eron spoke. Kirk's befuddled mind could not understand a word that was said, but there was only one explanation--a massmindmeld was in progress, something resembling the Affirmation but shallower.

One by one the Guardians came to Se'eron as he stood with his back to the pool. Each would put his hands over Se'eron's and then take a sip from the kraith. As they did this, the lights would flare up, each time brighter than the last. Kirk was glad Amanda was not here. It was much too dangerous.

Then, finally, it was T'Pau's turn. The kraith was brought to her and as she sipped the intensity of the effect was almost unbearable. Spock confronted Se'eron, placed his hands over the kataytikh's, and paused. The tension was broken by a muttering of bells, muted and distant. Spock sipped and the room went crazy with light and unhearable sound. Kirk nearly blacked out. When his vision cleared, Sarek stood before the kraith, head bent in concentration over the crystal waters. Kirk got the impression of glances being exchanged around the room, though not a head turned. When Sarek finally sipped, the cacaphony suddenly turned to music.

Then all eyes were upon him and he wanted to scream, "No! It'll kill me!" But there was no fear strong enough to get through the cotton in his head. Se'eron was kneeling before him, and Kirk found his elbows attended by two Vulcans. Without knowing how it happened, he was kneeling before Se'eron looking down into the kraith, and through it into a universe of scintillating starpoints. It seemed that each of the Guardians who had drunk from the cup was there within it as a point of distant light, vivid and immense. He was dizzy from the heights, and falling, falling, falling into and through, brushed by gossamer wings of beauty, enfolded by paeans of color, borne on threads of sound so soft he couldn't feel them.

But he did feel his lips touch the water, cold and tingling. It entered his mouth and seemed to fire his brain with a million sharp flames, each tiny flame a memory shared. The curled ends of the kraith, one on each side of his head, nearly at the temples, seemed to grip him. It was as if he were skewered on a thread passing directly through his brain.

And then it was over. He looked up at Se'eron. The two at his elbows helped him to his feet, but it wasn't necessary. He knew he could have floated to the ceiling if he chose. He'd never felt so light, so filled with uncluttered, untarnished joy in all his life.

Spock came to him then, approaching in mind rather than body. His thought was clear as the waters of the kraith, and plain for all to know while meant specifically for Kirk.

::We are as one mind now, yet none has lost his distinct identity. Se'eron has set the safeguards with great skill. You have become as one with us, and yet you remain apart. The Vulcan way will never be your way, yet you have much to contribute. Our way will never waver from the Tradition, yet we may teach you vital truths. All of this will occur within the one family of the First Realm, and all will benefit:::

And Kirk knew the excitement running within the Guardians, the hope that here was the key to survival against great odds. He found himself suddenly treasuring the values of tsaichrani, and in tears at their imminent danger of extinction. There arose within him a great knot of yearning for the triumph of tsaichrani over the Federation.

And at that moment, the meld shattered into a cascade of glittering fragments. In a whirlwind, they were gone more completely than a transporter-image. Kirk took a deep, shuddering breath. The cavern was as it had been before, though now it seemed dark, dingy, and painfully prosaic.

T'Pau, seated once more, said, "You wrought well, Se'eron. The safeguards operated without hesitation, and there was no transference effect."

Se'eron gathered his praise with silent dignity. Then he took the kraith, a dingy, lusterless lump of pottery now, and hurled it into the crevice where the table joined the floor. The pieces fell into the waters of the fountain, disintegrating and dissolving amid furious bubbles. In a moment, there was nothing to show for what had happened here, but Kirk would never forget it--it was his first and only unfiltered glimpse of what it meant to be Vulcan.

T'Pau said, "Sarek, continue."

"My son, may this day be remembered as the beginning of a union that could bring added harmony, that could invigorate the bonds of the friendship between the peoples of the Federation. May you know a life long and prosperous with achievement and serenity. May you surmount with ease the problems of this Joining. You will discover that within yourself which can aid you. But you must be prepared for that discovery. You are Unaffirmed, you know not the full scope of our ways--nor is it incumbent upon you to learn all. However, there is much that Spock can teach you, much distress his teaching can spare you. Thus, T'Pau and I sanction a Warder-Liege Compact between Spock and you. You will recall from the events on Babel<sup>1</sup> the singular esteem in which we hold this Relationship on Vulcan. While it is in force, you will be completely subordinate to Spock. You will owe him total obedience. His welfare will be your

only concern. The Warder-Liege Compact is our most formidable tool for training a mind in the logical disciplines, and for instilling the required respect for mature judgment and expert knowledge. It is the most logical and thorough and expeditious manner in which you can be taught that which you must know. Now you will kneel before the kataytikh and accept the kumattikh, signifying your acceptance of this Compact and his sovereignty over you while it endures."

The younger son of Sarek, the Captain of the mightiest starship in the fleet, looked at his First Officer, who sat there impassively, watching Kirk, waiting for his decision. Through his mind flashed a multitude of never-to-be-forgotten images of what this Vulcan had meant to him--the devoted friendship, the unbreached trust which Spock had given him, the total loyalty, the countless risks the Vulcan had taken for him, the scores of rescues, the life he now owed Spock two dozen times over. And in true homage to the man to whom he owed so much, Kirk sank slowly to his knees and bowed his head.

Spock placed the kumattikh around Kirk's neck. The new Warder raised his eyes to meet the other's level gaze, and felt the approval and admiration emanating from the solemn Vulcan countenance.

"You may rise, Student. Go to T'Pau."

Kirk remembered one of the proper responses he had heard Spock use on Babel. "As you wish, My Liege." In a moment he stood before T'Pau.

"Son of Sarek and Amanda, learn all that Spock will teach you during these two months. When the proper time arrives, you will once again be called to Vulcan and we will meet here for the Ceremony-of-the-Naming and..." she hesitated for a brief moment, "...other problems."

Kirk wondered fleetingly what other problems regarding him she had in mind, but he could not focus on it for more than a handful of seconds. He was too filled with the immediate moment, with the intoxicating feeling of being home, of belonging to these people.

Spock removed his fingers from Kirk's head and drew a deep, lingering breath.

"Well, Spock, were you able to reach his mind?" asked McCoy.

"He will be dreaming now of his weeks on Vulcan, Doctor. But I do not know how long it will last." As he uttered that final sentence, Spock studied Tanya's face which appeared so remote, yet so defenseless to McCoy.

"I must now return to the Bridge, Doctor. Mr.Scott will be awaiting my call."

McCoy watched the austere Vulcan leave, thinking that somehow Spock appeared subtly more controlled than when he had entered the Sickbay an hour before.

The First Officer reached the Bridge and punched the Engineering button.

"Scott here."

"Report."

"All scheduled alterations complete, though I dinna' see how we're ever going to put things back to rights."

"Are your men now accustomed to null-g work?"

"You've got some new scheme in mind?"

"We're going to need a crew of volunteers to operate the plasma ejectors and monitor the energy tap. Five men good in null-g and highly resistant to psychic disorientation."

"I know that! Myself and four others. Standing by."

"Very well. See that your volunteers are in vacuum gear and under adequate medication within seventy-two minutes."

"Aye, Mr. Spock, we'll be ready."

"Bridge out."

Spock folded his hands and stared at the blank viewscreen over steepled fingers. Minute by minute, he could feel the mysterious radiation from the star stripping away his mental defenses, leaving his mind as raw as a freshly skinned specimen on a dissection table.

And if it was bad for him, it was torture for T'Aniyeh. Part of him wished her an easy death while another part begged her to live. Part of him yearned to flee this star's influence while another part strained toward his instruments, probing at the depths of the enigma. Part of him wished to lay down his life to save the Captain and his ship while another part placed his own safety above all else. And the treacherous thing was that he couldn't tell which desires were fostered by his Vulcan half and which by his human half...or, for that matter, which were imposed from without by the rampaging broadcasts of untrained human minds.

Mentally, he drew the vector diagram representing his internal conflicts and attempted to resolve the problem with simple geometric operations. But, somehow, the resultants failed to satisfy all the boundary conditions and he was forced into wilder and wilder approximations. Finally, he sighed hugely and dismissed the issue as irrelevant. His actions were governed by objective reality, not the subjective reality of desires. It would be illogical to allow desires to affect decisions in this situation. Afterwards, perhaps desires could again be considered.

"Sickbay to Bridge."

Spock thumbed the button on the chair arm. "Bridge, Spock here."

"Metabolic Reduction Program completed."

"Very good, Doctor. Standby for one more patient. Bridge out." Spock broke the connection. "Mr. Sulu, report to sickbay for a theragin booster, then take over in Auxiliary Control. Report to me when you're set."

Sulu snapped his board on auto and stood up. "Yes, Sir." He started for the door as Spock moved to take the helm, but as the Helmsman raised his foot to climb out of the command arena, the magnetic boots seemed to weight his feet and he stumbled and went to his knees.

Instantly, Spock was at his elbow helping him right himself. "Mr. Sulu!" But, suddenly the oriental was a deadweight floating in Spock's arms.

Spock anchored the unconscious man to the railing with one of the safety lines that were now strung everywhere in the ship. Six and a half hours to perihelion; twenty-two and a half hours to breakaway; and already he was losing good men.

Resolute, the Vulcan slid his feet to the command chair. "Bridge to sickbay."

"Sickbay, McCoy here."

"Doctor, you'll have to send a corpsman to pick up the patient I mentioned."

"Unconscious?"

"Affirmative."

"Spock, this has gone far enough! I've got twelve..."

"I know, Doctor, and you'll have many more before we're through this. However, I believe recovery will be rapid as soon as we're free of the star's influence."

"I certainly hope you're right! Sickbay out."

No sooner had Spock broken the connection and assumed the Helmsman's station than the doors swooshed open admitting the medi-corpsman who slipped Sulu's limp body onto a stretcher and was gone with professional dispatch.

The Vulcan turned his full attention on the board, mentally calculating the orbital perturbations caused by the shifting gravity strains. As if to underscore his glum conclusions, the ship's superstructure gave a strident groan that sound like a micro-recording of a taffy-pull.

"Damage Control to Bridge!"

"Bridge."

"Deck twelve. Fire Control sections K-9 to T-50 open to hard vacuum. Two dead; none injured."

"Acknowledged. Carry on."

So, thought Spock, it was starting already.

"Bridge to Auxiliary Control."

"Auxiliary Control, Scott here."

"Stand by to take the Helm."

"Standing by."

"Switching. Now! You have the con, Mr. Scott."

"Aye, Sir, that I have, but what can I do with it?"

"Stand by. I'm on my way."

"Aye, aye, Sir."

But once in the turbo-lift, Spock chose to stop at Deck 11 and climb down the Geoffries Tube to inspect the pylon that connected the main hull with the Engineering Hull. Those connections could not fail or Auxiliary Control would lose the main computers and the strains would literally rip the fragile ship to shreds. The resultant matter-anti-matter annihilation would create a strange type of variable for Federation astronomers to study...hundreds of years hence.

As he floated around the stanchions between the bulkheads, able to see only by the hand torch he carried, Spock ran swift calculations through his mind. At first, it seemed like the wildest theory he'd ever concocted--something born of the delirium of exhaustion and excessive mental strain. But then, as he refined the equation by successive approximations, it began to look very promising. It would never occur to him that his sharing of that steadying Peace with the Captain had anything to do with his renewed creativity.

By the time he reached Auxiliary Control, his hands were itching to seize the computer inputs and run some really sophisticated trial calculations. He strode past the Chief Engineer who was standing by the door, in vacuum gear but with the face plate open, holding Spock's vacuum suit like a limp rag-doll. "Here's your gear, Mr. Spock."

"Thank you, Engineer. Just a moment." And he seated himself at the desk and began diverting computer capacity from the Strain Compensation Program.

Scotty looked over his shoulder and gasped. "Now, wait a minute, mon, just what do you think..."

"Silence!" Spock leaned into the job intently, his sensitive fingers flying over the keys. Three seconds before each large gravity shift, Spock would pounce on the console and release full computer capacity to the Compensation Program. As soon as the circuits cleared again, he would seize direct control of thirty per cent of the computer's capacity.

Scotty stood behind the Vulcan, hands on hips, head cocked to one side, looking like the mother of a hopeless genius and feeling like an exasperated Chief Engineer. He knew very well that the orbital perturbations had dragged them in a lot closer than they'd expected to be and he'd been waiting for the Vulcan to order a course change. Now, he watched the clock and the antics of the First Officer with equal anxiety.

After an hour of playing tag with destruction, Spock opened a voice channel to the computer and dictated a complex modification to his Strain Compensation Program. Then he leaned back and said, "That should do it, Mr. Scott."

"Do what?"

As if in answer, the impulse engines growled to life for five seconds, the ship had a sort of gravity, albeit at ninety degrees to the deck. The two held on until it was over, then Spock keyed open his voice channel to the computer instructing it to give ten second acceleration warnings.

Scotty said, eyes wide in amazement, "You've done it! you've predicted the blessed gravity surges!"

"Correct. We can now predict the shifts to ninety-six per cent accuracy. With another hour computer time, we could drive that to ninety-nine per cent."

Scotty beamed. "I'd give an arm and a leg to learn the theory behind this..."

"You may yet have to make that sacrifice, Engineer. Even with the predictions, our power reserves are still critically low. What is our hull temperature?"

"Two thousand and rising."

"Good. At three thousand, we'll release our positive matter plasma. We should have at least four thousand when we jetison the anti-matter, so we'll have a self-starting effect on the interface."

"That's what I calculated, but the magnetic bottle is already showing signs of disruption."

"Will it last another two hours?"

"Well, I think so...."

"All right. I want a man monitoring the bottle constantly and another at the jetison controls. Tell your man on the power tap to get some rest. We won't need him for about three hours. Then get some rest yourself. You may have to relieve me here before breakaway."

"Aye, Sir."

Spock rose and took the vacuum suit that had been checked out for him. "I'll be dressed, so you may consider yourself off duty."



"Aye, aye, Sir."

"Something else on your mind, Mr. Scott?"

"Uh, I was wondering if I shouldn't get some more of Dr. McCoy's headache potion to help me sleep."

"By all means, do. And you may tell the Doctor..."

"Yes...tell him what?" asked Scotty when the Vulcan seemed at a loss for words.

"Tell him that...that..." Spock shook his head as if to clear it, "No, nevermind. He'll find out soon enough."

"Sure you don't need a wee bit o' that potion yourself, Mr. Spock?"

"Quite certain, Engineer."

Shaking his head ruefully, Scotty left and the First Officer sat down to brood over his instruments. Four and a half hours to perihelion; twenty and a half to breakaway. How could he tell McCoy that T'Aniyeh wouldn't make it? How could he tell the Doctor to let her die peacefully? Was it love or was it logic that drove him? He wasn't sure and he wasn't sure he wanted to know.

She would live or she would die...and there was nothing he could do about it. His first duty was to the ship. That was clear and to that he clung like a starving leech sensing its peculiar nourishment. Logic was the nourishment of the Vulcan soul; not love.

But his mind continued to wander the maze of his desires. Was love only an emotion? Or was it more? Was it an objective experience onto which humans projected their uncontrollable emotions?

Yes! He saw it with the sudden clarity of true inspiration. There was an element of love which Vulcans shared with the emotional races of the galaxy. It was that common, shared portion of love which was also the essence of hate...the hate he had experienced on Platonius... Hate was the Exclusion where love was the Inclusion in the balanced logical equation. Emotion was irrelevant.

He sat immersed in the peaceful warmth of his triumphal insight, as one by one, the tensions of his warring desires relaxed. It was as if a tight knot loosened and for the first time in days he was able to achieve the true serenity that was the Vulcan ideal.

"Engineering to Auxiliary Control, Waterman here."

"Spock here."

"Hull temperature approaching three thousand, Mr. Spock."

"Standby to release positive matter plasma."

"Standing by, Sir."

"Countdown."

"Two thousand nine hundred ninety degrees...ninety two...ninety three...ninety four... ninety five...ninety six...ninety seven...ninety eight...ninety nine...three thousand!"

"Jetison positive matter plasma."

"Positive matter plasma jetisonned. Fields balancing."

Spock hit a stud on the computer console and instructed, "Go to tape Able four oh four Baker. Execute instructions."

The computer voice replied, "-executing-"

Waterman cut in, "Fields balanced."

"Hull temperature?"

"Three thousand two hundred."

"Call Mr. Scott."

"He's here, Sir. Just came in."

"Scott here. What can I do for you, Mr. Scott?"

"Check the condition of the magnetic bottle."

"Just did. She's weakening, but will last another half hour at least."

"Very good, Mr. Scott. Post someone to monitor the temperatures."

"I'll take that job myself."

"Then post someone on standby. You may be needed elsewhere."

"Aye, I'll do that."

From then on it was a tedious vigil that left the men all too much time to consider their peril. Spock kept them busy reading numbers to each other, but nobody was fooled as to his purpose.

The minutes passed in increasing tension. Their lives now rode on the Vulcan's judgment--which had already been proved faulty. Nobody was more aware of than than Spock.

Eventually, the call came in. "Outside temperature approaching four thousand, Mr. Spock."

"Auxiliary Control to Engineering."

"Engineering, Scott here."

"Man the power tap now, Mr. Scott."

"That's what I'm doin' mon!"

"Hull temperature countdown."

"Three thousand nine hundred fifty, rising. Three thousand nine sixty...nine-seventy-nine-eighty--nine-ninety...ninety one... ninety two..."

There was a crackling howl over the intercom.

"Magnetic bottle beginning to blow, Mr. Spock!"

"Three nine ninety eight!"

"Jettison anti-matter, now!"

"Anti-matter jettisonned!"

"Get that power tap functioning, Mr. Scott!"

Faintly over the crackling static, Spock heard, "I'm tryin' you green blooded computer! What do ya think I'm doing!"

They'd lost their energon shields! But almost as soon as the storm of ionization started, it stopped.

Scotty's voice came, trembling a little. "Power tap functioning! Congratulations, Mr. Spock, your screens are operating perfectly!"

"Thank you, Mr. Scott. If you can leave the operation of the tap in your assistant's hands, please come to Auxiliary Control."

"Aye, Sir, I'm on my way."

"Spock out."

"Sickbay to Auxiliary Control."

Wearily, Spock answered, "Yes, Dr. McCoy?"

"Spock, can't you do something about this heat? It's a hundred five degrees in here and rising. I've got patients..."

"I realize that, Doctor. We're approaching perihelion. I don't expect the temperature to exceed a hundred forty degrees Fahrenheit. The maximum should not last for more than two hours."

"You sound tired. Maybe you better come in and..."

"Thank you, Doctor. I shall stop by...after I've rested. Spock out."

"Now that," said Chief Engineer Scott, "is the most sensible thing you've said all day. You can use my emergency bunk down the hall. I'll call you if anything comes up."

Spock rose, unplugging himself from the control desk's intercom and fingering the suit's intercom at his throat. "An eminently appropriate suggestion, Mr. Scott. I shall do that." And I shall return in an hour. Meanwhile, you may instruct Damage Control to issue vacuum suits to Dr. McCoy and his patients."

"The suits won't help much, but I suppose you're right. I'll tend to it."

Spock went along the wide corridor and found the Engineer's private retreat. He lay down on the bed, vacuum gear and all, and systematically relaxed his body while reinforcing his mind blocks.

It was an old and well-known exercise for establishing the Warders of Personality before attempting a mind-meld. The familiarity was comforting and he leaned on that, drawing strength from who and what he was...neither human nor Vulcan, but part of both.

#### CHAPTER FIVE

It was only fifty-seven minutes later when Spock strode into sickbay with the gliding shuffle of magnetic boots countering weightlessness...but he knew it was already too late.

McCoy barred his way with one outstretched arm. "Spock...she's..."

"I know, Doctor. It was...mercifully swift."

"Spock, I..."

"You did all you could. It was her destiny to die so. And better dead now than to live...mindless. She would never have recovered."

Trembling with sudden rage, McCoy grabbed Spock's shoulders and spun him around. "Now listen to me, you pointed-eared Vulcan. You can't tell me you cared so little that you shrug off her death..."

Eyes fixed coldly on Kirk's recumbent form, Spock said, "What would you have of me, Doctor? Tears? Hysterics? Would that bring life back to her?"

"No, it wouldn't help her...but it might bring life back to you if you could, just once, honestly admit to pain. There's a dead place inside of you where a part of your own self has been excised..."

"There will be time to feel pain later...after the ship is free." He looked down at McCoy, searching out his eyes through the two suit visors that separated them. "But, remember Doctor, that I am Vulcan enough to prefer to grieve in private. Must I beg you to allow me my own kind of dignity?"

McCoy loosed his grip and stepped back. What did he know of Vulcan dignity? All he said was, "Is there anything special you'd like done with the body?"

"No. She's gone. The body does not matter." He walked over to look down at the still form, encased in a shining vacuum suit, and said, "She honored her name in life and has returned it untarnished to the archives of her people. What more can one demand?"

Touched, McCoy said, "What more indeed?"

Spock turned to the other bed where the Captain lay sleeping..though not peacefully. The diagnostic panel told of the physical turmoil wrought by the mental battle that raged within the still body.

McCoy came to stand across the bed. "Spock, I don't even know why she died. I've no idea what to do for Jim!"

"There's nothing you can do, Doctor. He is as safe as you can make him now. T'Aniyeh was far more sensitive and far less...determined. She wasn't a fighter and she was conditioned from childhood in the Vulcan...outlook. Also, she was weakened greatly by her experience with the dze-ut'."

"But Jim suffered from the disintegration of the glowstones."

"Yes. However, that was a relatively minor injury. He straightened and headed for the door. "He will live or he will die; speculation can change nothing. It is up to him...not us."

McCoy followed him. "Spock, can't you touch his mind...give him the strength to fight on..."

Spock whirled on the physician. "If I could do that, would I not have saved T'Aniyeh?"

Chagrined, McCoy said, "I'm sorry."

"Our concern right now is the ship. If the ship survives, some of us will, too."

"Yes, you're right, I guess. That's the way Jim would want it."

Spock nodded, ponderous in his suit. "Very well, carry on, Doctor. I'll be in Auxiliary Control."

The ship's corridors were deserted and very dimly lighted now. Only a few of the turbo lift routes were operative and often, even on those, there would be long delays in the lift's movements while the computer diverted capacity to deal with the shifting gravity fields.

When Spock finally arrived, Auxiliary Control was deceptively quiet. Scotty sat plugged into the big board. Otherwise the room was deserted.

The Vulcan thumbed the suit radio control at his throat. "Mr. Scott, I'll relieve you now."

Scotty rose, removing his jack from the board. "It's all right, Mr. Spock, I'm nottired."

"Good. I want you to check on the power tap and then make the rounds of the strain compensators."

"Aye, Sir, I'll do that." As he relinquished his place, Scotty nodded at the computer input. "That's a bonny piece of programming, Mr. Spock. Hasna' missed a beat for the last hour."

Plugging himself in, Spock grunted absently, dismissing the Engineer. There was nothing left to do now but wait. Interior temperature was approaching one hundred thirty eight. According to their instruments, they were at perihelion, the thin wisps of coronal gases already enveloping the tiny craft that seemed so large to its passengers.

In various places on the proud ship, paint was peeling and lubricants were oozing from minute cracks opened by the continual strain. The only thing between them and death was a long chain of jury-rigged, emergency inventions, any one of which could fail unexpectedly, and nobody would ever be able to ascertain why.

But what difference would it make? Death one way or the other was all the same. Personally, Spock found, he had no particular reason to go on living.

Of course, he couldn't die without doing his best to save the ship. But, with T'Aniyeh gone, he found himself emptied of motivation...just following orders. What else was there to do?

T'Aniyeh...gone.

No! He shook his head, dragging his mind away from her; no! It's too soon. There's work to do now. There will be time to grieve later. No! I will not! Not now!

But, as usual, his half-human body betrayed him. Such a bond as he'd shared with T'Aniyeh could not be severed without a heavy penalty and, in spite of his will, the reaction set in...the price would be paid, now!

The shaking and the weakness became worse and worse until, in spite of iron determination, he found himself half lying over the console, eyes squeezed shut against nothing at all. Somewhere, one corner of his mind was repeating, over and over, "They must not see me like this! They must not!"

A memory floated up and seized him. The voice of T'Pau, "Are thee Vulcan or are thee... human?"

And he realized that he didn't know.

He only knew that he suffered pain...the pain of yet another loss. But was it human pain or Vulcan pain?

OH, WHY MUST IT ALWAYS BE SO?!

The cry echoed in his empty mind and he had no god to direct it to. He was alone again; one body; one soul; and none to touch, no other was there to tap and drain the anguish. He thought he knew how it must have been for Ssarsun during the Affirmation when he'd had to sever the link that was his sanity.

Another traitorous thought floated up. Perhaps if he'd left Ssarsun's mind a little sooner, he might have saved T'Rruel's life. Perhaps, perhaps, PERHAPS!

How many times, he asked himself desperately, could one person endure the shattering of such a tie? Would he ever have the courage to enter such a linkage again? Would he ever have the opportunity?

His body shook ever more violently, his nerves throbbed, his brain refused to serve him. It seemed a hundred times worse than when he'd lost T'Rruel. His linkage with her had been fresh...unrooted in his deepest consciousness. But T'Aniyeh had been with him for years. T'Rruel had been a sudden brilliance dawning over a bleak life...T'Aniyeh had been the tiny light that never failed.

Somewhere in the distance, he heard a faint voice, a familiar voice, "No, Doctor, I'm all right. It's nothing..."

He was moved, carried, lifted onto a table beneath a softly humming diagnostic panel. He felt restraints tied across his shuddering body. He could not move. He could not care.

Eventually, the blackness of unconsciousness claimed him. He believed it was death and welcomed it.

## CHAPTER SIX

First there was sound...the low, musical, murmur of the diagnostic panel over his head. Then there was an awareness of chill air flowing over his body, the discomfort dispelled only by the infra-red projectors in the ceiling. Then there was a name. Spock. An identity, whole and healed...and alone. Again.

The unmistakable aroma of sickbay brought him fully awake and he sat up blinking, laboriously focusing his thoughts.

Auxiliary Control...the reaction setting in against his will...a vague impression of movement...then, nothing. Now. Here.

He glanced to his right at the Captain, automatically reading the life-signs over that patient's head. Condition almost unchanged. He checked the time--two hours past breakaway!

Quickly he jumped down from the bed and charged for the corridor. But before he reached the door, it flew aside and McCoy strode in. "Spock! You shouldn't be out of bed! Here," he set the clipboard he'd been carrying down, "let me help you back."

"No," the Vulcan brushed the proffered arm aside, "We've got to engage the warp engines and..."

"Scotty already took care of all that! We're free of the star's influence and I've started reviving the crew. Now you just get back on..."

"No, no, Doctor, I'm quite all right...now."

"But I'm still the Chief Surgeon and I haven't discharged you yet. You can't take command until I do, so you might as well get back up on the bed and let me finish my examination."

There was nothing Spock could say to that, so he hoisted himself back onto the bed and waited grudgingly.

"Now," said McCoy, going over the Vulcan's body with a scanner, "just what exactly happened down there? By the time I got there, you were delirious--ranting about freezing to death and Schillian Schlugtamer and trying to tell everyone there was nothing wrong. I've seen healthier looking corpses, so don't try that routine on me!"

"It was nothing serious, Doctor. Merely a momentary side effect of the star's radiation."

"Oh? What kind of side-effect?"

"Doctor," answered Spock scathingly, "Even I do not yet fully comprehend all..."

"Oh, come on now," said McCoy, "level with me. I've never yet seen you struck down by something without your knowing the reason."

Spock didn't answer that and McCoy made some notations, then handed the Vulcan a small bag, pointing toward the narrow door in the corner. "Urine specimen. Then right back to bed. I'm prescribing a hearty meal and a good night's sleep. If all the lab tests are negative, you can go back to work in the morning."

Silently obedient, the Vulcan donned his best long-suffering expression and went. When he returned, Christine Chapel was waiting with a steaming tray and two empty blood specimen cylinders.

Wordlessly, Spock hitched himself up on the bed and presented his arm. The nurse collected the green blood and swung the tray in front of him.

It was fully twelve hours later that Spock finally set foot on the bridge. The regular day-crew was there: Sulu at the helm, Uhura at communications, Chekov navigating and Scotty working over the engineering panels.

The First Officer made the rounds, checking each station in turn and finally coming to engineering.

Scotty said, "I've logged the status reports. Structural damage minimal; only five dead; power and life-support functional. We've restored the gravity throughout the ship and I've got a crew outside right now replacing the tractor beam projectors."

Spock nodded. "What we really need is a complete overhaul."

"Well, now, I don't know. I think we can manage for the next two years."

Spock shook his head. "Your spare parts inventory is depleted, the ship's skeleton

is warped and buckled, the di-lithium crystals are..."

"I didna' say we..."

Uhura interrupted softly. "Mr. Spock, Dr. McCoy wants you right away. The Captain is worse!"

"On my way. Mr. Chekov, plot a course for Vulcan and stand by."

"Aye, aye, Sir."

Spock was out the door in four strides and at the Captain's side in less than two minutes.

McCoy was fretting over the instruments. "He's dying, Spock! Heartbeat, respiration, blood pressure...all down. I'm going to have to wake him. Just pray that..."

"No, Doctor, you must not..."

"...no, what? I must not save his life?"

Spock grabbed the hypo from Nurse Chapel's hand as she passed by. "Once this becomes real to his conscious mind..."

McCoy jerked the hypo from Spock's grasp. "There won't be any conscious mind if I don't wake him now! Who's the Doctor around here, anyway?"

Without waiting for an answer, McCoy injected the stimulant into the Captain's arm. Seeing that there was no more point objecting, Spock subsided and they all watched the hesitant wobbling of the life-signs indicators.

Presently, Kirk's eyes opened, unfocused and very heavy-lidded. His head tossed from side to side feverishly and then a grimace of exquisite terror transformed his features and he loosed a scream of agony.

McCoy dropped the hypo and grabbed the Captain's shoulders. "Nurse, get the restraints on him! Jim! Jim! Take it easy. Nothing is going to hurt you now. It's all over."

Quietly, between Kirk's hoarse screams, Spock said, "I beg to differ with you, Doctor. For him, the worst is yet to come. His mental barriers have been totally demolished and he has no training...no way of coping with the torrential influx of foreign thought."

McCoy said, "Well, can't you do something for him?"

"No. Nothing very useful. I have the training, but it would take at least three strong minds to help him now."

McCoy examined the diagnostic panel. Four of the six needles hovered near the top of the scale. "Nurse, another dose of the theragin derivative."

Nurse Chapel administered the injection and they all stood waiting for the needles to fall. But they did not and Kirk's voice had worn to a husky whisper.

"Doctor, now that you've endangered the Captain's sanity why don't you put him back to sleep?" Spock folded his arms across his chest and watched McCoy narrowly.

The Doctor leaned across the bed, shoving his face at the Vulcan. "Why don't you try to do something to help instead of just standing there like..."

"Calm yourself, Doctor, your anger is literally killing the Captain."

"Spock...do something!"

The First Officer took a deep breath and then strode over to the wall intercom. "Spock to bridge."

"Bridge, Sulu here."

"You have the course for Vulcan, Mr. Sulu?"

"Mr. Spock? Is that you? What's that noise?"

Spock raised his voice and moved closer to the grill. "Ignore it, Mr. Sulu. Do you have the course for Vulcan?"

"Aye, Sir."

"Lay it in. Warp factor seven."

"Aye, aye, Sir."

"Spock out."

Blankly, Nurse Chapel said, "Vulcan?"

"What are you trying to do, Spock?" asked McCoy.

"Save the Captain's life. Which is more than I can say for you. How much longer are you going to make him suffer?"

McCoy looked down at his patient who was still screaming with unabated fury. Then he glanced at the overhead panel. The theragin derivative hadn't helped. Spock couldn't or wouldn't...He turned to the Vulcan. "Can't you put him into some sort of light trance so I don't need such a massive dose?"

"I might have...with T'Aniyeh to help. By myself..." He shook his head.

"Try, Mr. Spock," urged Christine, "at least try. How can you forget what he did for you and Tanya at the dze-ut'?"

"That's right, Spock," McCoy picked up. "You owe him at least a try."

Spock looked from Christine to McCoy and then down at the Captain, face still contorted with unspeakable suffering. Spock felt himself shaking in the backwash of that terror.

McCoy paced nervously. "Spock, why can't you give him some sort of mind shield like you did against the dze-ut'? The necklaces survived the disintegration."

"I beg to differ with you, Doctor. The mind-shields did not survive--in operational order. And if they had, the application would kill the Captain within minutes. No, his only hope is the training available on Vulcan. In seven weeks..."

"Seven weeks! Spock, I can't keep him alive that..."

"Doctor, you have no choice. Allow this," he gestured at the Captain's gradually weakening frenzy, "to continue and he will be hopelessly lost to us within the hour."

McCoy slapped his hand on the foot of the bed, leaning over to thrust his face at the impassive First Officer. "No! Spock, it's you who have no choice! There must be something you can do. You spent the first eighteen years of your life learning..."

"Seventeen years, Doctor. My grandfather died when I was seventeen. Then my father..."

"Nevermind that! Just think! There must be some way to relieve the pressure on Jim's mind without killing his body! Even if it means some sacrifice..." McCoy trailed off. He'd seen that thoughtful look in the Vulcan's eyes before.

Spock lifted the Captain's clenched fist and examined it with clinical detachment. A slight frown brought steeply pitched brows together as the Vulcan regarded the suffering man. There was no doubt in McCoy's mind that some part of Spock harbored a tender compassion perhaps even greater than any known to humans.

After a moment, Spock looked up at McCoy. "There may indeed be a way, but it is dangerous. If we do not survive, tell Mr. Scott to take the Enterprise home."

And then, before McCoy could protest, Spock's hands engulfed the Captain's head and the Doctor could see the rigour of Kirk's body transmitted up Spock's arms to stiffen the Vulcan body. The diagnostic panel went crazy and McCoy moved swiftly to turn it off. With spare parts so scarce, he couldn't afford to burn it out.

Christine stood frozen in wide-eyed stasis as McCoy looked helplessly from one patient to the other. He'd never really understood the link that bound those two. For Jim, it was a real human friendship. But for Spock? What was the 'logical' motivation behind his interest in this one human? That it was a logical motivation, McCoy did not doubt. He'd seen Sarek accept Kirk as a son.\* Under Vulcan common law, Jim was Sarek's adopted son...and brother to Spock. But the why of it escaped the comprehension of a simple, country doctor.

From somewhere far, far away Kirk heard Spock's voice reverberating within his head, displacing a part of the terror. The voice seemed to grow louder and, gently, almost hypnotically repeated: "Warder, is it permitted to allow your Liege to suffer even a momentary discomfort? No, My Liege, Kirk answered the voice silently. "Warder, your uncontrolled turmoil is affecting me. Focus then on the training...let us remember the training together..."

The fiery heat seemed to permeate his very bones as they walked together among the rising foothills. These past weeks on Vulcan had added yet another dimension to the bond between the two men. They had snared adventures, traumas, responsibilities, a devoted friendship in what had been lonely existences--and now they shared a family and a heritage. Kirk suddenly knew that Spock was also thinking of this. The human, as always, wanted to put into words what this past month here had meant to him.

"Spock, I..."

"It is necessary that you always remember to use a proper form when addressing me during

the time of the Warder-Liege Compact."

"I ask your pardon, Sir."

"It is granted. You may speak."

"Sir, I have been wondering--doesn't a Vulcan ever balk at these restrictions, at always being required to follow his Liege's judgment, at owing him 100% respectful obedience? Even in Starfleet, officers are urged to display some initiative, but a Warder must show nothing but total subordination to another's will." Kirk suddenly smiled, the lighthearted sunny expression which he knew others usually found so contagious. "What would happen if a Warder refused an order, if, for example, I refused to go on this eight mile mountain-climbing hike in the middle of the afternoon heat to visit a tokiel school? What if I refused to take another step?"

"A Vulcan would not 'balk' at performing what was expected of him for he has been trained to understand the special nature and purpose of the Warder-Liege Relationship, which is an artificial, highly complex system within the confines of which the Designate must function. This method has evolved as the most efficacious, and thus the most logical manner in which to train a neophyte in the Disciplines which he is required to know, and in Tsaichrani. A Vulcan would not balk at the constraints for he can appreciate how our rituals relate to objective reality. He would realize that in a living, growing, changing culture--Tsaichrani--there is a need for established continuities. A ritual, or a tradition which has remained exactly as it was for millenia, facilitates the maintenance of equilibrium in a society." He paused, then added, "And if you refused to accompany me to the Enclosure-of-the-Study-of-the-Tokiel, since the discipline involved is vital, I would, of course, simply carry you there."

The Captain looked incredulous. "Spock!" Then he recovered smoothly. "Liege, may I respectfully suggest that carrying me there does not answer my question."

"Specify."

"Well, it's one thing for a Vulcan to overpower a human, but what if the Warder were a Vulcan and the Liege therefore did not have the physical advantage that you have over a Terran?"

"A logical question."

Kirk looked gratified. "Thank you, My Liege."

"The outcome would probably be the same. A Liege is usually older than his Student, for it takes many years of study to acquire expertise in the Disciplines. Since he is older, his strength is greater. A Vulcan, unlike a human, does not reach his physical peak until he has lived 43.2 solar years, so he would still be possessed of a physical advantage over his Warder. But not, of course, as pronounced as my advantage over you."

Kirk nodded ruefully. "I see. You are now even stronger than you were when I first came aboard the Enterprise?"

"13.4% stronger, to be exact."

Spock found himself almost smiling again now at Kirk's thoughtful, "Oh."

Kirk's mind-scene suddenly altered and he found himself in the spacious room in his home on Vulcan which had been fitted with the accouterments necessary for a private gymnasium. Each piece of equipment had been carefully chosen for maximum benefits, yet the austere effect was interrupted by the natural waterfall which served as the gym's shower. Kirk felt the sensuous pleasure of the flowing water on his hot skin. It seemed to restore the strength to his enervated, utterly exhausted body. Not for the first time, he wondered what else was in that water besides H<sub>2</sub>O. Another half minute, thought Kirk, of that workout, and I would have collapsed.

"My Liege, I am glad that you ordered a physical-training program to balance the mental-training, but may I respectfully inquire why you chose three hours of it every day?"

Spock briskly towelled dry his sinewy form as he answered, seeming as fresh as before they began the vigorous, long workout. "The Vulcan belief in the connection and interaction between mind and body is quite vital to our system. Total control of one's body is a desired end, and you understand the necessity for this. In addition, your habits over the past eight years made it necessary. As McCoy has pointed out repeatedly, it would be advantageous for you to discard excess poundage. With your diet here, and your training, you appear now as you should. How do you feel?"

"Hauling around twenty less pounds, I feel much better, My Liege. Stronger. More--vibrant. But, may I inquire, you mentioned this morning that you were setting up an additional daily hour of practice. I don't think I could manage one minute more of your idea of a workout. Practice what, My Liege?"

"It is necessary to establish optimum routines for meeting many of the emergency conditions which we frequently encounter during the voyages of the Enterprise. You have learned that one of the Disciplines is to attempt to foresee, through logical projection, any misfortune that can befall us, and then to take all steps to prepare to meet it. If its prevention is unavoidable, it is necessary then to be prepared to cope with the situation."



"Yes, but what has that to do with a training practice here in the gym?"

"Do you remember when Sylvia transmuted herself into that giant cat<sup>2</sup>, and how we escaped the cell it was about to enter?"

Kirk shivered, remembering. "I do, My Liege."

"Then you will also recall that the attempt almost did not succeed. You did not move with the required alacrity, and when you jumped up and I reached down to pull you up and out of the room below, it should have been a smooth, facile maneuver. It would have been so if the necessity for this type of escape had been anticipated and our methods of extricating ourselves rehearsed. But it was not. Therefore, we will begin with practicing that particular maneuver until it can be done in only a few seconds. Then we will discuss and formulate other methods to increase the odds of surviving the many risks which we can anticipate in a Starfleet career."

Spock paused for a few moments and then began to speak again in a cool, even tone. "Since we have been discussing the risks associated with our work in Starfleet, we shall now consider a highly illogical tendency on your part. On many occasions, you have chosen to jeopardize yourself when the person most capable of assuming the risk was myself. Thus, it has often been necessary for me to extricate you from the difficulties you encountered, sometimes only moments away from your highly probable demise. It is illogical for you to assume risks when I am usually the better equipped to accomplish the task. It is also illogical to subject another to unnecessary disquietude. If you acted in this totally illogical manner on Vulcan, you would be severely reprimanded, and if the Warder-Liege Compact were in effect, you would be punished according to custom. However, on board the Enterprise, a First Officer is powerless to stop his Captain, and I must obey you. It is my...hopeful anticipation...that the training you are receiving here will serve to nullify such irrational behavior in the future."

Kirk took a long sidewise look at the tall Vulcan. Irrational behavior, indeed! In his heart, Kirk was certain that he'd always acted as a man should. He filed the matter away for future discussion. He would have to learn enough Vulcan logic to prove that emotion is logical--at least for humans.

Secure in the knowledge that, one day, he would teach his Liege a thing or two, Kirk let Spock's mind guide him back to the penetrating peace that seemed to exude from the very walls of D'R'Hiset, Spock's ancestral home. Together they explored the nature of that peace. Spock knew exactly what he was doing and why he was doing it--this was one of the primary ingredients of that inexplicable Peace of Vulcan.

Kirk felt himself sinking into deeper relaxation as they recalled the evening hours when the family would gather in the shaded garden after the evening meal. And, as he had noticed that last night in the Kirton Tsu restaurant on Babel, when Sarek and Spock were resolving an intriguing problem, Spock would come vibrantly alive under his father's guidance. He would seem almost as an eager boy, imbibing the wisdom and experience of Sarek's century of living.

His reverie dropped away when Sarek addressed him.

"James, the Enterprise will return for you and Spock in 2.4 days. You have learned much here these past two months, and I am well pleased. When you return here, the second phase of your training will commence, after which T'Pol and I must again discuss the problem of a marriage for you."

Kirk was washed with shock and, for once, was totally speechless. Finally, he managed to say, "A--marriage, Sir?"

"Indeed. You have studied the statistics and figures involved in the Vulcan Population Curve. Would it not be fitting for you, the human brother of a Kataytikh of the First Realm, to marry a woman of Vulcan and bring forth new life to live the Philosophy of Nome? There is so much you can show us, teach us. The child of such a marriage would have infinite possibilities before it. The effects on the Vulcan-Federation Problem alone could be significant indeed."

Sarek almost smiled at the stunned expression on his younger son's face. "The problem requires much thought. There is no hurry. We will discuss it when you return here for the Ceremony-of-Naming."

Sarek turned to that he was now facing both his sons. "Tomorrow the present Warder-Liege Arrangement ends, since it is not meet for a Starship Captain to be under the control of his First Officer while in command of the ship. Although, James, I suggest that you should defer more readily to Spock's wisdom. Spock, your brother needs to learn much more. His potential is as yet unrealized."

Spock met his Father's eyes.

"Spock, if an emergency of sufficient magnitude arises, you may re-invoke the Warder-Liege Control. You will be aware of the proper time."

Oh, Spock, he knew all along that I was a latent telepath! Certainly he knew, Jim. And the time has come, my brother, my student. I order you to return to Vulcan with me and to receive the training necessary for a telepath to survive. And now you must try even harder to control your condition for it has been causing me suffering. That is not permitted, Student.

You must assist me in my efforts to help you. I beg forgiveness, My Liege. I will try....

After what seemed half an hour of motionless concentration, the tension began to dissipate and the rigid, double statue melted back into flesh and blood. Then, abruptly, all turgor went out of the pair and Spock collapsed over a limp body that might have been dead.

Instantly, McCoy pounced on his diagnostic panel. "Nurse, get Dr. Mbenga in here. Hurry!"

She left and McCoy squinted at the readings anxiously. At least one of them was still alive, but with two bodies in the scanner's field, there was no way of telling which lived and which had just died.

McCoy heard Mbenga's steps and snapped, "Help me get Spock onto the other bed. Probably some sort of Vulcan trance."

The big black doctor heaved the slender Vulcan body onto a shoulder and laid it out on the adjacent bed...where, just hours before, T'Aniyeh had died. McCoy snapped the diagnostic panel on and went back to Kirk.

The human was still alive--after a fashion. Body functions were almost low enough to qualify as suspended-animation. McCoy swung the encephalograph unit over the Captain's head, eyed the readout, and said jubilantly, "You've done it, Spock! I've never seen Jim look so relaxed."

"Yes, Doctor," said the now conscious Vulcan, "but for how long? We must reach Vulcan--soon."

"Well, that Vulcan tranquility Jim's been murmuring about seems to have done a lot of good..." he eyed Spock quizzically, "...for both of you. No, don't get up. You're in for a complete physical. Nurse, life-support for the Captain. Dr. Mbenga, you can start by running a dermal-optic on our First Officer and then a full set of psych profiles."

"I don't have time..." protested Spock.

"You have," said McCoy acidly, "at least seven weeks. I only hope Jim has that long."

Spock took a deep breath and lay back on the pillow, expelling the moist, cold air slowly, resigning himself to yet another of McCoy's dissections. By the next time he breathed, he was sound asleep...the only condition in which Federation instruments could get an intelligible tracing of the Vulcan brain waves.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

The briefing room was silent except for the quiet thrumming of the computer and the breathing of the three occupants. Spock was seated at the computer console at the end of the table, McCoy and Scotty faced each other across the tri-view screen. They'd been there for some time, engaged in a pointless, circular discussion, a discussion they'd held nine times in the last three and a half weeks.

Scotty said, "But what are you going to tell Starfleet Command when we turn up home without the location of that raider's base? Isn't that what we really came out here for?"

"That, Engineer, is my worry, not yours," said Spock wearily. Privately, he was on the verge of making a pact with himself. If Starfleet ever promoted him to Captain and gave him a crew of humans to command, he'd resign on the spot rather than spend ten years engaged in this type of useless xsjugkrar. The Vulcan slang term was the only one he knew sufficiently damning to apply to what the humans were doing.

McCoy said, "No, it isn't your worry, Spock. It's the Captain's. But you're going to have to explain to him why you've aborted his mission without his orders."

Scotty added, "Would the Captain abandon the mission for the sake of one crew member? Has he ever regarded his own life as more valuable than anybody else's?"

McCoy tapped the table. "And it was a Vulcan ship that was attacked by these people. Vulcan wants and needs that planet out there. Why, the colony would pay for itself three times over within a decade just on pharmaceuticals alone."

"Gentlemen, I am well aware of these facts. And you are aware of my cognizance. Would you prefer to continue the mission and let the Captain die?"

They shook their heads and Spock continued, "During the Captain's incapacity, I am commanding this vessel...and her destination is a Command Decision."

"Based on what, Spock?" asked McCoy. "Logic or emotion?"

The First Officer rose. "I see no reason to sit here and be insulted by..."

"Wait," said Scotty, "he didn't mean anything like that. Sit down, mon, and let's

finish what we came here for."

Eyes fixed on the table, McCoy said, "I didn't intend to be insulting, Spock. It's my medical judgment that's confused. You've changed...all your graphs..."

"I thought I explained that, Doctor. The effect of our experience with the dze-ut' and the subsequent..."

"No," said McCoy, tapping the table in emphasis, "that does not explain it. Even Mbenga agrees..."

"Mbenga knows practically nothing."

"There are physiological changes too, Spock, you can't deny that. And we aren't certain what they indicate."

"I've told you it's nothing that won't clear up with time. Not even an inconvenience."

"And," said McCoy, "you've told us that it's the cumulative effect of para-psychological events, what is called in humans, esper-shock. It may be trivial in a Vulcan, but that doesn't mean it's trivial for you."

"I do not find myself incapacitated..."

"But," interrupted Scotty, "How do we know?"

"Yes," said McCoy, "how do we know what this decision of yours is based on? I'm no expert in reading Vulcan dermal-optics, but even I can see the increased instability..."

"Doctor," said Spock reproachfully, "my Stability Index has come down to the Vulcan average, which is still a good seventy-two per cent above the human average...and some seventy per cent above Starfleet requirements."

"True," said the Doctor, "but it is the significance of the change that bothers us. Your family has a uniformly higher than average Stability Index, so the low reading is abnormal for you."

"For my Father's family, yes."

"Oh, this is hopeless!" McCoy leaned back, letting the chair sway slightly. "We have miles of computer tape on you, but we've no idea how to interpret it!"

Spock corrected, "Not 'miles', Doctor, five thousand..."

Scotty interrupted, "Never mind. Just give us one good reason we should ignore it all and trust your judgment. Maybe the only help for the Captain is back there!" He waved a hand toward the aft bulkhead.

Spock corrected his line by forty degrees. "More...that...direction, Engineer."

McCoy snorted impatiently. "Spock, I don't know of any living being who could go through the series of systemic shocks you've sustained, suffer repetitive esper overloads, and come out of it in mint condition. It would be no discredit to you to declare yourself unfit to..."

"I would not hesitate," said Spock, "to relinquish command if there were some reason I might be unfit. But there is no way I could justify doing so at this time."

McCoy slapped the table with an open palm, half rising from his chair. "It looks like a clear case of clinical fatigue to me."

The First Officer sighed hugely and rubbed his forehead with one hand, a singularly human gesture seldom seen before. Presently, he said, "It is a private matter, Doctor, and none of your concern."

"It's my concern if it involves the safety of this ship or the sanity of her Captain... or her Commanding Officer."

"Very well, since you insist on invoking regulations."

McCoy frowned. "I'm afraid I'm going to have to, Spock, much as I hate to do it. My medical log shows certain entries; I have to account for them. And I have to act on them."

The Vulcan seemed to inspect a point in mid air, halfway between him and the table top, as he said, "The changes you've noted in my psychological profiles are due, in part, to the link which I am still maintaining between the Captain and myself."

"But," said Scotty, "isn't that against Star Fleet regulations, for a ship's commander to be..."

"That regulation, Mr. Scott, was made to prevent races like the Schillians from attaining Command positions. It was born of human xenophobia and will die in the light of human reason, along with a number of other highly questionable routine practices."

"But," said McCoy, "it is a regulation that is now in effect."

"We don't know that," said Spock.

"But, it's still in effect aboard this ship," argued McCoy.

"All right," said Spock wearily, "if Dr. McCoy removes me, that puts you in command, Mr. Scott. What will you do? Continue the mission?"

Scotty examined his hands carefully, then laid them on the table. Very quietly, he said, "No. I guess not. All things being equal, I guess I'd stay on this course."

"And what would you do if, suddenly..."

The intercom whistled. "Mbenga to Mr. Spock."

"Spock here."

"I think you and Dr. McCoy had better have a look at the Captain. He seems restless."

"On our way. Spock out."

"What do you suppose...?" said McCoy, rising.

Spock stood and faced Scotty across the long, shiny table. "All right, Engineer. The situation has changed suddenly. You're in command. The Captain is dying...has only forty hours to live. The Science Officer's own life is inextricably tied to the Captain's. Lose one, you lose both. Forty hours, Engineer. What are you going to do? Quickly! A command decision!"

Scotty looked stricken. "I...I...suppose there's nothing I can do..."

"You're in command, and you're going to let your Captain and your First Officer die, because of an obsolete Starfleet regulation which makes my advise illegal?"

"You mean," said Scotty hopefully, "there's a way out?"

Spock turned to McCoy. "Now it's your decision. Who's commanding this ship?"

McCoy cocked his head to one side and raised one eyebrow. "How do you know..." He shook his head. "You're just making up a crisis that doesn't exist."

"You believe that, Doctor? Then go examine the Captain. I know because it's happening to me, too."

McCoy swallowed hard, staring at the graphs on the tri-view screens.

Spock said, "We must act now if we are to act at all, Doctor. Who is commanding this ship?"

Tightly, McCoy said, "You are, Mr. Spock."

The Vulcan hit the intercom stud. "Spock to bridge."

"Bridge. Sulu here."

"Change course for Schillia, Mr. Sulu. Lay it in as it is computed. I'll be in sickbay. Spock out."

Without waiting for the humans, Spock strode out the door. Thirty-one hours to Schillia. They might just make it. A poor second choice was better than a non-existent first one.

On the first leg of the journey, they were pushing warp ten for several hours, but then, as they entered the more congested Federation lanes they had to slow down. Spock passed the whole thirty-one hours beside the Captain's bed, grave lines etched deeply into his face as he strove to ease his friend's discomfort.

They came into standard orbit around the sparkling blue and green planet on a Priority Three Emergency clearance and it was only minutes later that they received beam-down co-ordinates. The beam-down point was within the largest, and greenest of the shoreline buildings of Schillia's planetary capital. With remarkably little difficulty, Spock had received permission for his group to enter the Temple of Serenity, the Schillian version of a hospital, cathedral and parliament all rolled into one.

At the moment that Spock, Captain Kirk and Dr. McCoy materialized, the Hall of the Silent Fountain was deserted. Immediately, Spock pulled out his communicator to check with the Enterprise, as McCoy knelt beside Kirk's stretcher, distrustful of the effects of beam-down on the weakened human body.

As the First Officer snapped his communicator shut again, McCoy looked up querulously. "Where is everybody? I thought there was supposed to be a team of experts here to meet us."

"Restrain yourself, Doctor. There's plenty of time."

McCoy snorted, but rose and looked around the high-domed room. It was noon outside and the sun shone through the semi-translucent dome casting warm, green light on everything. In the center of the rotunda was a large pool of deep green water. To McCoy's eyes, it looked bottomless. From the dome directly above the pool, translucent filaments were stretched tautly down to the ornate rim of the pool, forming a cone. Along the filaments at irregular intervals, drops of crystal clear water slid silently into the pool like slow, orderly raindrops in conical cascade. The air was warm and humid with the heady scent of tropical ocean, lightly laced with Schillian tingslespice. And it was quiet...almost too quiet for comfort.

Suddenly, the placid fountain waters erupted and spewed forth a sleek dull-gray Schillian dressed only in a body leotard. He levered himself onto the wide lip of the pool with casual grace and McCoy watched fascinated as he paused to convert to his air-breathing system, retaining only a bit of seawater in the bottom of his complex lungs to comfort his gill tissues till his next immersion.

With a discrete cough, the Schillian drew his first breath of air, then parted the curtain of filaments and stepped out beside the land dwellers, somehow managing to convey the impression that they were the victims of some awkward disability for which he didn't blame them.

At that instant a second Schillian emerged from the pool somewhat less gracefully and hastened toward the group. "Spock, I came as quickly as I could." He knelt beside the Captain. "Dr. McCoy, how is the Captain?"

With a little shock, McCoy recognized Commander Ssarsun, the Schillian who had saved Spock's life almost five years ago. The Starfleet Security Officer was now the slightly bluer gray of the maturing Schillian and had shed the plumpness of early youth, but he had the same crisp accent so unexpected of his race. McCoy said, "Uh...he's in bad shape. Critical, I'd say. Spock says your people can..."

"Yes," said Ssarsun, rising. "I think we can help." He gestured to his companion. "This is Elder Zzlviash. He's the Planetary Resident in Alien Psiochometry."

McCoy nodded. "Pleased to meet you, Doctor."

Zzlviash blinked his nictitating membranes in greeting. "May your pleasure increase with deepening acquaintance."

Ssarsun said, "The Elder understands that the Captain has been under your care for many years, Dr. McCoy. Perhaps you can explain the current problem in detail?"

McCoy gestured to Spock. "Our Science Officer knows more about this than I do. I'm a psychologist, not a psichometrist."

The Schillian turned to Spock, who stood with downcast eyes, as if wishing he could sink into the floor.

Ssarsun said gently, "Spock, you need not shoulder guilt. It would have come sooner or later, and in truth, sooner is better than later."

"But," Spock met the veiled Schillian eyes, "This was not the natural fruition we expected."

"Perhaps," said Zzlviash in the blurred accent more usual among Schillians, "we would learn faster in total link?"

Stepping between Zzlviash and Spock, Ssarsun objected vehemently, "Elder, no! Spock is Vulcan..."

"But," said the Psichometrist, "the total link will be required since Spock is holding nerve-blocks for the Captain."

Ssarsun looked from Spock to the recumbent form and back. Then he said, "Ah, I see." He raised all his eyelids in the equivalent of a grave frown. "Spock, you understand what will be required of you?"

"Yes. I do." The Vulcan turned to Zzlviash. "But will you not require an additional operative? Your Varate technique..."

Zzlviash interrupted, "Ssarsun will serve. He has considerable experience with both numans and Vulcans."

"I was chosen," added Ssarsun, "because I have extensive knowledge of this particular type of esper-shock. The latent telepath developing in post maturity..."

"Not developing," corrected Spock. "His barriers were destroyed."

Zzlviash stepped around Ssarsun, offering Spock his hand, fingers spread to reveal the pearly membranes still glistening wetly. "We're wasting valuable time. Spock, come!"

Spock retreated one step, shaking his head. "No, not like that. Allow me to bring you

both in, one at a time."

Zzlviash dropped his hand, blinking assent. "Very well, but hasten."

Spock nodded, all business now. "Try to phase to me. You are familiar with the Vulcan melding technique, Elder?"

Zzlviash blinked, "Yes. I shall follow your guidance."

Spock raised his hands, turning first to Ssarsun. The Starfleet Officer had been raised in the interracial community on Vulcan and was unusually well versed in the peculiarities of the Vulcan mind. He allowed Spock's fingers to encircle his skull, lighting briefly, searching out certain brain centers and firmly rejecting others. The Vulcan mode was superficial compared to the usual Schillian contact, but it would suffice for the task in hand.

An instant later, Ssarsun relinquished his place to Zzlviash, who bore the Vulcan's touch without a trace of the distaste which was practically a racial reflex. He could not have become Resident Alien Psychometrist without adequate training.

For several minutes, the three telepaths stood linked in silent consultation. McCoy knew that beneath the calm exterior, a rapid-fire exchange of information was taking place. He felt suddenly, acutely aware of being psi-null. And, although he knew he was close to the human average, he felt somehow deficient...disabled...yes, and even a bit jealous.

Then, in unison, the three telepaths moved to kneel beside the Captain's stretcher, linking hands across the body for all the world like spiritualists conducting a seance over the recently dead. The circle swayed back and forth gently as if blown by some invisible wind, but other than that, there was nothing to see. McCoy knew that, in theory, what they were doing was capturing Kirk's mind in a web of forces and weaving a wall of protection about him that would preserve the integrity of his personality until he could be trained to handle his new sensitivity.

It was strictly an emergency measure, Spock had explained. It would still be necessary to take the Captain to Vulcan where a group of experts would train him as they had other members of normally psi-blind races.

Before the Federation developed such interplanetary co-operation, such individuals went into a prolonged withdrawal and eventually died. If for nothing else, thought McCoy, the Federation should be preserved for this one function alone. Just before they'd left on this mission, the Federation had undertaken a complete restructuring of the Constitution, and McCoy wondered just how far they'd gone with that. Would they have to testify against Spock at a Court Martial?

McCoy definitely hoped not. What Spock had done had been right, even if it was illegal and against all regulations.

At length the three psi operatives sat back on their heels. Zzlviash said, "It is a great pleasure to work with one of your training, Spock. I thank you for the opportunity."

"You are most gracious, Elder," replied Spock in a manner so courtly that McCoy scarcely recognized the Vulcan.

Ssarsun broke in, "Should not the Captain stay here on Schillia to learn of himself?"

"He would be most welcome," said Zzlviash. "I would personally see that he is well instructed and trained."

"Your generosity is easily a match for your graciousness, Elder. But the Captain will be going to Vulcan with us."

At this point, McCoy saw that Kirk's eyes had flickered open. He knelt reading his medical scanner, as Kirk said, "...some kind of a vicious nightmare, Mr. Spock. I seem to be all right now, though. Put that away, Bones!"

"Jim! Aren't you even going to ask where you are?"

As if just thinking of that, Kirk raised his head to look around. "Uh." He surveyed the two Schillians, the fountain, the green light. "Uh. How did we get to Schillia?" Then he brushed vaguely as if clearing cobwebs from his eyes. "And what are you doing to my head?"

"We are holding the nightmares at bay," said Ssarsun.

"Until we can get you to Dakainya, Captain, where they will teach you to guard your own mind."

"Dakainya?" said Zzlviash. "Why, that's the best of the Vulcan schools. There is rarely space for an emergency student there."

Spock nodded. "It has already been arranged."

"It has?" said Kirk.

"Yes, Captain," said Spock. "All will be in readiness by the time we arrive."

Kirk blinked slowly as if he still had trouble focusing his eyes. "I wish somebody had consulted me!"

"There will be time to discuss it later."

"Spock's right, Jim," said McCoy. "I think you should try to sleep. We'll be beaming up now."

"Yes, Captain. Sleep would be good," said Ssarsun. "But Spock, I'd like a word with you before you go."

Ssarsun beckoned the Vulcan aside while McCoy induced the Captain to lay back on the stretcher. Zzlvash murmured his goodbyes and disappeared into the pool with hardly a ripple, leaving McCoy tending a sleeping human and watching Ssarsun and Spock pacing slowly toward a darkened archway at the far side of the rotunda.

The Schillian said, "You come to me at a time of great need, Spock. I would ask of you a service perhaps greater than you would care to render."

"You have served my Captain generously. I cannot do less for you."

"I speak of a different type of service. I ask your aid in the name of your Fathers' Fathers."

"Then tell me of your problem."

"It is difficult for me to speak of this in words, but I feel your aversion to further mental...invasion...at this time."

"I apologize. I cannot control..."

"I understand. The Vulcan mind has need of withdrawal. And I must offer my deepest condolences. I must take an improper liberty and point out that T'Aniyeh's sacrifice would have been your own had the roles been reversed."

"You speak a truth I had not considered. I am not offended; I thank you. But do not tell the Captain that she died in her efforts to protect him. He would feel guilty and be unable to penetrate the emotion to the greater truth."

"Agreed." The Schillian paused, collecting his thoughts, selecting words. "I come now upon a time of life when I must choose between two paths. To cleave unto my mates and devote myself to the affairs of family, or to remain forever apart. I have returned here, at this time, to consult the Oracle. But the matter is complicated by two things.

"First, I was not raised within the lifestream of my people. I am not Vulcan, but then, neither am I wholly of Schillia. Secondly, the reorganization of Starfleet has begun. I have been offered the Captaincy of a Starship--a post never before held by a Schillian. It would be a good thing, for Starfleet, for Schillia, for the Federation, to have such a Captain. And there is none other so qualified as I. I have spent the last four years training for this. Now that the time has come, I do not know if it would be good for me. And the Oracle cannot help. Do you understand how the Oracle works?"

"It is based on the racial mind-link among all Schillians, is it not?"

"Yes. The Racial Summation can be tapped by the Elders in such a way that our limited, individual precognizance can be focused on one individual's far future."

"What is it you would have of me?"

"The Elders say that since I am not wholly of the Lifestream, I must bring one who shares that part of my other Life so that a balance can be achieved...much as we just did for the Captain. There is none who suits this role better than you. You and I are both products of mixed traditions, and we share devotion to Starfleet. No ordinary Vulcan could endure the deep contact of the Oracle. It must be a kataytikh."

"I see." Spock walked on gravely silent.

"Is it not written," said Ssarsun, "that the kataytikh shall be a never failing source of strength?"

"True. But it is also written that when strength is given the Giver must refresh himself at the First Source."

"Yes. You have undergone enormous strains lately. You would be constrained to set a retirement date...and Starfleet would lose a Vulcan Captain to gain a Schillian one. Hardly an equitable trade. I'm sorry. I am not entitled to ask such a sacrifice."

"The pattern of my life was set when the Kraith was stolen. The time for my retirement would come soon anyway. Also, there are debts which cannot be reckoned this side of Eternity."

No, Ssarsun, you are entitled. We must remain accountable for the effects of exposure to Tsaicarani on any Resident alien."

"Then you will come and consult the Oracle with me?"

"I will try, though I do not know how effective I can be. I, myself, am very close to a state of..."

"I know. But there is healing power in the Oracle, Spock, a power which may strengthen you, if you'll open yourself fully to the rapport."

Spock stopped and turned to look back at McCoy and Kirk, tiny figures in the distance.

Ssarsun said, "It won't take long. Come, the Oracle awaits us. It will be for you a Joy to pale the glory of the Greatest Joy...a blending of differences and a rejoicing in them such as you have never known."

Spock sighed and looked at the amphibian who was practically jumping up and down with excitement. He found it distasteful to speak the Formula of Service to one in such a condition, but he stole himself and said, "I live to preserve the past for the future...you live to mold the present..."

"Spock, no!" Ssarsun interrupted. "I have not Affirmed the Continuity. I cannot accept..."

"What you are asking of me is a depth-meld attainable only within the Affirmation. Accept less and you are committing murder."

"Very well. But not here, not like this. There is another way. Come."

The amphibian led the way through the darkened archway to where five Elders of Schillia sat half immersed in flowing seawater, joined to the Totality of the racial mind to create the Oracle of Schillia. What transpired then was not spoken of by either suppliant for more than one hundred standard years.

Captain's Log, First Officer Spock recording: Stardate 1078.6. On course from Schillia to Vulcan. We have on board Commander Ssarsun of Starfleet Command, who is aiding me in maintaining neural shielding for Captain Kirk, who is still suffering greatly from esper-shock. When we reach Vulcan, Commander Ssarsun will report to Star Base for assignment. Commander Scott will take the Enterprise to be rebuilt and I shall remain for a time on Vulcan with the Captain. Confirmation of official requests pursuant to these plans expected momentarily.

THE END

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\*. Spock's Nemesis, KRAITH IV, in Kraith Collected, Volume 3.

1. Federation Centennial, KRAITH IIIA, in Kraith Collected, Volume 2.

2. Catspaw





# AUTHOR'S PREFACE

Here starts what promises to be a long and fruitful collaboration. What you are about to read is the result of the concert of two minds, though the actual words were drafted by Jacqueline Lichtenberg. In the not too distant future, it is hoped that you will read more words drafted by Sondra Marshak---and if you can detect a difference, I/we hope you will tell us about it since it would be Most Instructive.

The current story, Pilgrimage, is a combination of material that had been pruned out of Kraith VI's outline with an idea that occurred to Sondra as a method of fixing what is wrong with Kraith I-F, Ssarsun's Argument. (BABEL 4 or KRAITH COLLECTED, vol. 2.)

For technical reasons, Sondra's idea would not have worked in Ssarsun's Argument. But I liked the idea itself and suggested she turn it into a story of its own which she would write. For those of you who don't know Sondra---well, suffice it to say that when it comes to logical argument, Spock had just better watch out if he goes up against her! (I lost.)

Sondra's idea was, basically, that the Other Spock of Ssarsun's Argument who had lost his Kirk would not--could not--pass up an opportunity to get Kirk back. It was her idea that the Other Spock would not stop at temporary kidnapping to get a chance to convince our Kraith Kirk to stay with him in this alternate Kraith universe. Then Sondra's incredible mind went to work on enriching and deepening the symphony of conflicts between one Kirk and two lonely and desperate Spocks.

Into this situation I brought the material I had been planning to include in Kraith VI (until I learned enough about plotting to realize It Couldn't Be Done.) That material is essentially the intimate view of Vulcan which you glimpse through Kirk's eyes at Dakainya. The opening at Dakainya was originally written for Kraith VI and then discarded as it became obvious that it would be impossible to move the scene of action from Dakainya out to the spacial quadrant where Nemesis took place without ruining the structure of the story. Furthermore, Kirk had to have his adventures on Vulcan before going into the situation awaiting him in VI.

I had planned for Kirk's Vulcan education to soak up about a year of his life. Several of Sondra's brainstorm's later, it seems it is going to take Kirk several years to extricate himself from increasingly complex entanglements with Vulcan women, Vulcan politics, Vulcan customs, and Spock's Warder-Liege Control. It makes for several hundred thousand words of good drama if any of us have the courage to publish it. We've been talking in a semi-facetious way about a volume of Kraith for Grups Only! Otherwise, there's going to have to be some hatchet editing done!

Some of you may be wondering what ever happened to Kraith V-A, V-B, V-C. Actually, they haven't been written yet. They were to have been done by Pat Zotti (and may yet be, you never know,) but to date none of that material has come to light. As you recall, Kraith V, Spock's Decision, ends with Ssarsun embarking on a career of Starship Captain. In Kraith VI he is already an experienced and celebrated Captain. V-A, V-B, & V-C are the stories which detail his adventures in between.

Though he hasn't appeared much yet, Ssarsun is a major character in Kraith, as I tried to indicate with the title of the first story devoted entirely to him, Ssarsun's Argument. The Kraith there that emerges in Federation Centennial (KRAITH COLLECTED, vol. 2)--the human/nonhuman dichotomy, can be explored very neatly through Ssarsun's adventures. During Kirk's training period and while the Enterprise is being refitted and rebuilt for this special mission of Kraith VI, the rest of the crew is on leave, in advanced training courses in the Academy (or teaching there), etc. These three stories, V-A to V-C, were intended to cover both Ssarsun's exploits during this time and McCoy's personal life. However, the author who finally does fill those slots may change that somewhat. We shall see.

Creating Kraith is always an adventure into uncharted stellar regions. The conjunction and interaction of minds in Kraith is as unpredictable as an explosion but a heck of a lot more fun. We all try to give each other enough room to explode in, and as yet we have been hard put to find a story idea that can't be incorporated into Kraith.

With Pilgrimage, we've begun to open up the alternate universes, and (though there's no structured numbering system for them yet) we hope to see those who disagree with one or another Kraith premise using these alternate realities as fictional stages on which to construct their arguments. For example, what would have happened if (as Devra Langsam suggests) T'Ruel had not died because McCoy found a way to remove and later re-implant the fetus? Or what kind of Vulcan would exist if the entire theses of In Defense of T'Yuzeti were wrong and Vulcans not only could but did use contraceptives?

Many adventures await us before Kraith VI, and sometimes I wonder if we'll ever get there. According to the original plan, VI was to be the story of Spock's final selection of the mate with whom he would live happily 'ever after' and by whom he would have children. (With Sondra along for the ride, though, things may get a bit hairy there.) Kraith VII is a complex novel set entirely on Vulcan and pits Kirk and Spock against Romulan-instigated germ warfare. T'Pau dies in that story, and T'Uriamne and Spock clash in the final and ultimate confrontation. But that wasn't enough for Sondra. She had to have repeated and infinitely complex battles fought between T'Uriamne and Spock before that ultimate, decisive clash. Sondra made T'Uriamne into a Character--a character that you'll never forget.

Sondra and Joan Winston started kicking around some of these ideas, and as a result Joan has a couple more short pieces to contribute (short but incredibly intense) to Kraith. Between the three of us, at this date (September 1973) we have a lineup of titles, about 100,000 words drafted, and at least that much outlined, concerning Kirk's sojourns on Vulcan.

The tentative lineup of titles goes like this: Kraith V-E, The Maze, by Joan Winston. Kraith V-F; The Punishment. Kraith V-G, T'Lel's Option (T'Lel is a name which appears briefly in Pilgrimage and Sondra said, "Who's she?" and I said, "I don't know; you tell me." And so Sondra did! At the time I didn't know Sondra was a fan of Modesty Blaise. Now Kraith has an instellar Modesty Blaise who's also a Vulcan!) Kraith V-H, Spock's Defection. That's right, Spock defects to the Romulans (apparently) and Kirk defies all Vulcan law and custom to go to his rescue. You'll never believe the weapon Kirk uses to get loose from T'Lel's custody! They say the inclined plane was the basic invention man had to make before he could invent the screw. Harumph!

Then there's Kraith V-I, which occurs when Kirk gets back to Vulcan to face the music. 'This is Going to Hurt You More Than It Will Me'; or Kirk's Cure-All. After all of this dreadful adventuring, our two heroes were so frazzled we decided they deserved a rest. Hence, Kraith V-J, Beom Interlude, where Kirk actually gets taken into the wheerr at Beom and Spock teaches him to make his own idlomputt. Spock has some ulterior motives involved in this--mostly Sondra's ulterior motives. The repercussions aren't over yet and Kirk has some legal ensnarlements to disentangle. (Ever seen a kitten wound up in a ball of yarn? That's the kind of plot Sondra turns.) So, Kraith V-J(1), which was simply supposed to resolve all the problems and get us back to Kraith VI.

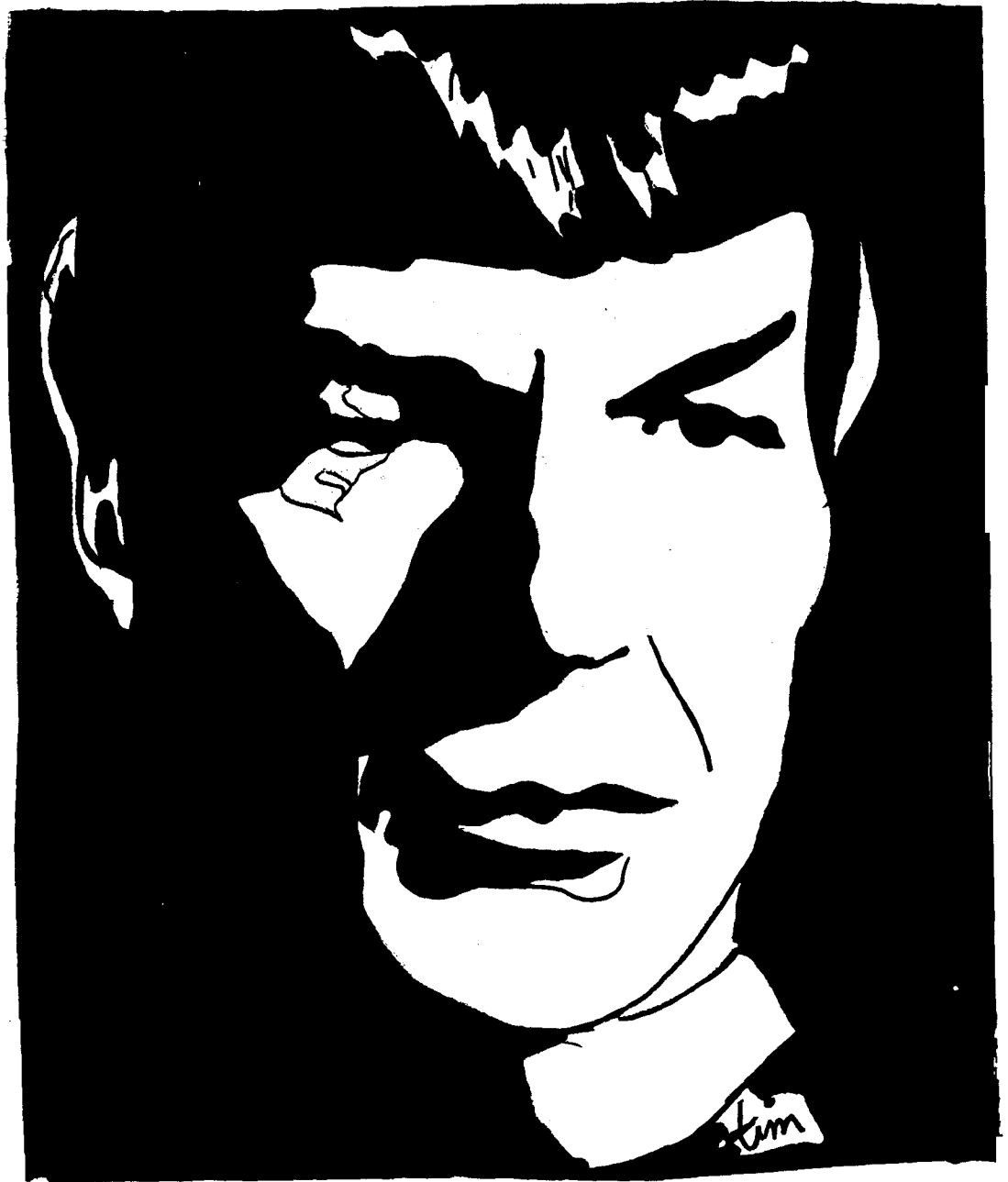
Kraith V-J(1) is titled Kirk's Auction. In Pilgrimage you are going to read about two Spocks locking horns over one Kirk--now imagine Spock and Spock's older pure-Vulcan sister fighting for custody of Kirk. At this point, neither Sondra or I are quite certain who's going to win. It's a fairly even match. But we do know there's another set of events growing out of Kirk's reaction to being the bone of contention. Kraith V-K, Spock's Temper-Tantrum (when Sondra drives a hero to the brink, she really drives him! You'll see that tantrum--and you'll believe it!) is the result.

And Sondra never lets go when she gets her teeth into a worthy hero. After Kraith VII, Spock's Challenge, we have Kraith VII-A, T'Uriamne's Decision (she made me start drafting that one on Chapter 4 and before I finished the story, she made me go on to some middle chapters of other stories that had occurred to us. But then genius is supposed to appear chaotic and slightly demented to mere ordinary mortals like us, isn't it? Anyway, if not, then she's a terrific actress.) I just hope we can calm down enough to deliver half of the promise inherent in these planned stories. We're going to need all the help we can get from the other Kraith Creators, too, because just this segment between V and VI is turning out to be twice as long as the entire series was supposed to be. But we think it's twice as interesting--and 100 times better written and more intelligible. We are anxious for your response. Please write us.



Jacqueline Lichtenberg  
Monsey, New York  
September, 1973

# spock's PILGRIMAGE



# JACQUELINE LICHTENBERG

## SONDRA MARSHAK

### PROLOGUE: THE PLAN

That woman, thought Commodore Spock, is going to ruin everything.

He was seated in his office, looking out over the spreading fields of Starbase Vulcan. It was his Starbase, and he ran it the way he'd always run his laboratories on the Enterprise, efficiently. Now T'Uriamne was turning that very efficiency against him. Among the immaculate records of Starbase Vulcan, his nefarious activities were more prominent than a pair of Vulcan ears on a Tellarite.

I'll just have to make my move before she gets here with that auditing crew. He knew her excuse for auditing the Starbase records was flimsy. There wasn't enough increase in contraband traffic to warrant it. Besides, the contraband wasn't coming from his base. Could it be that she knows?

He sat up, alarm galvanizing him to action, but checked himself in time. No, he wouldn't panic now. He would attempt to complete the plan. He went to the wall-safe, played out the combination, and extracted a stack of tapes, the visual records of his experiments. He knew them by heart.

As he held them in his hands, his mind raced through the scenes they contained, recorded through a window into that other universe where his grandfather's name was Suvil, and a strange race of amphibian telepaths lived in some kind of communal race-mind from which they could not be separated alive.

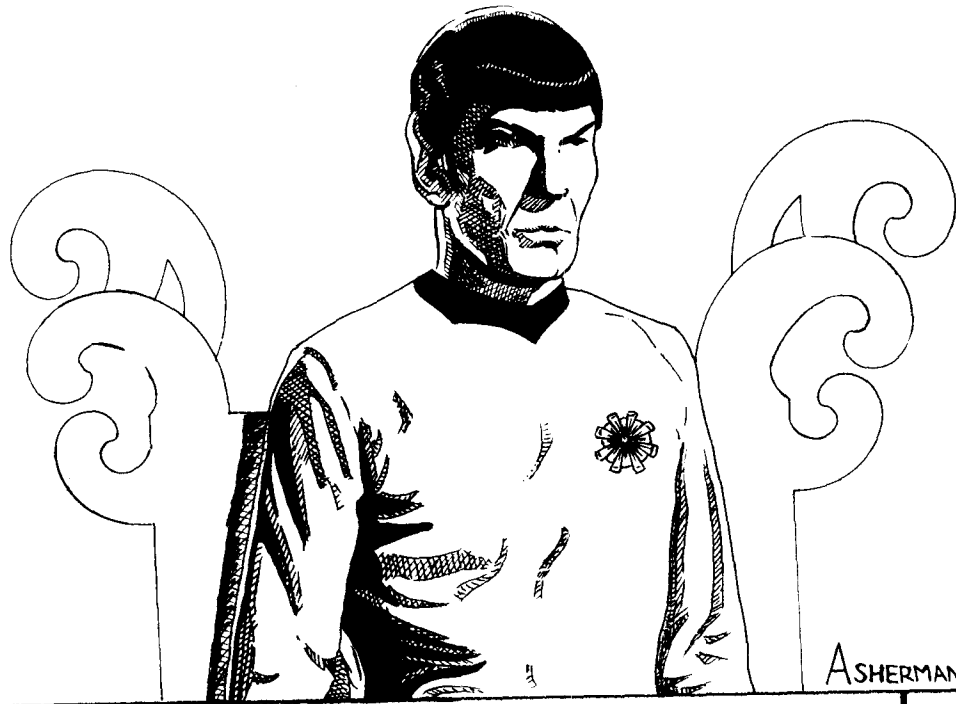
The earliest scenes he'd managed to record were little more than a year after meeting the Schillian. He'd used Kirk's Brain Circuitry Print to calibrate his instruments. It hadn't been difficult to obtain the tracings from the Deceased Records Officer. And his theory that one other Kirk's BCP would be a fair match for the deceased Kirk's Print and paid off handsomely.

His first attempts had produced only fragmentary flashes of contact, but they had been enough to confirm his belief that his alter-ego, the Spock whose grandfather's name was Suvil, was some kind of demented sadist who seemed actually to enjoy torturing his most loyal comrade, his most valuable friend, his Captain Kirk.

That first glimpse had been in a dank, subterranean cavern, filled with people outlined by a ghastly blue light. All he could see clearly had been Kirk kneeling on the cold stone while Spock stood watching in obvious pleasure. The scene had slipped out of focus before he could identify the place.

His next contact had been an audio-portion only. Kirk had been pleading with that Spock not to subject him to a public branding for having made an honest, human judgment. A public branding! Such barbarisms hadn't been practiced here since Surak's time. That Spock seemed to think adopting Kirk gave him the right to humiliate him, even before T'Pau!

After that, he'd worked frantically to perfect his technique. He'd recorded numerous scenes, most of them moments of excruciating torture for Kirk. He'd developed the theory that the focusing device homed in on the emotional peaks. He'd altered his adjustments until he



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began to pick up lesser peaks, and later, as his promotion to Commodore and appointment to Starbase Vulcan had made his secret research easier, he'd refined his equipment until he could pick up Kirk at will.

And now that he was almost ready to attempt to rescue Kirk by transferring him to this universe, T'Urianne was forcing his hand. Clicking the tapes together, Spock thought rapidly. He couldn't take her into his confidence just yet. She had been too strongly attracted to Kirk to be able to remain objective about this new Kirk, especially if he should refuse to believe they meant him no harm.

But later, after he'd convinced this new Jim Kirk that life here would suit him well, his half-sister would prove to be an invaluable ingredient in sustaining Kirk's happiness. In the meantime, she was a threat to his plan.

He strode to his desk and began issuing orders that would cover his absence. The crisp replies came from his Department Heads, "Aye, aye, Commodore." "Yes, Commodore." "Immediately, Commodore." "Affirmative, Commodore." "Acknowledged, Commodore." "Aye, Commodore, your aircar will be ready in twenty minutes."

He swiveled his chair to look out once more over the neat ranks of the Starbase buildings lying deceptively still under the arching red sky. His mind cast forward in time, trying to imagine what it would be like to stand once more beside Jim Kirk, to be once more half of a perfectly matched team.

As if he'd summoned a ghost, Kirk's presence seemed to fill the room. "Spock, the contortions of your logical mind never cease to amaze me! You knew exactly what you were doing every step of the way, didn't you?"

From somewhere deep inside him, yet also strangely far away, an answering echo tumbled toward the fading Kirk-presence. "Affirmative, Captain."

What Commodore Spock did not know was that both the Kirkian admiration and the quiet admission of culpability were not figments of his overly active human imagination, but rather an aborted exchange of actual, living thoughts. Not being trained in the arduous Vulcan science of mind, the Commodore naturally mistook the intrusion for his own thoughts. It was the mistake that would ultimately prove to be the source of his greatest difficulty.

For the moment, however, Spock unconsciously drew himself to his full height, staring unseeingly at the buildings below, and the lonely ground vehicle wending its way between them. It would only be a matter of hours now, and he would have the chance to earn that admiration again. He wasn't aware of drawing a deep breath and holding it as if savoring the rebirth of a sudden spring day.

## CHAPTER ONE

### DAKAINYA

Kirk woke.

His throat was dry when he swallowed. The inside of his nose hurt. The air smelled baked to a dusty dryness. It had the unmistakable flatness of desert in it.

He rolled over on the air mattress and glanced at his window. He'd left it open and forgotten to couple it to the thermostat. It was easily ninety degrees in the small room he called home at Dakainya. He rolled off the bed and closed the window. Immediately, cool, moist air flooded the cubicle. He shivered and turned the thermostat up to eighty-five.

After stretching hugely, he went to his desk which occupied one corner. On the shelf over the desk sat the Culling Flame, the Idlomputt they'd given him when he came to Dakainya eight months before. Kirk never thought about that time any more. He'd been a gibbering wreck on the verge of total breakdown, never knowing whether his thoughts were his own or borrowed from some passing stranger.

The Idlomputt had set him free. It wasn't a real Culling Flame, and he knew it. It was hardly more than a toy by comparison to the elaborate and finely tuned, dreadfully energetic devices the adult Vulcans used. But it served him well enough. He dropped quickly into a grazing rapport with the field and then withdrew using his newest relinquishment exercise. The throbbing red flame brightened briefly in response to his contact, and then subsided. The exercise left Kirk's mind firmly barricaded against stray thoughts. His mind was his own.

With a little salute to the skull-and-crossbones that guarded his Idlomputt in place of the usual Vulcan gargoyle, Kirk stripped off his shorts and stepped into the shower, a stall erected in the other corner of his room. While he soaped and rinsed, he debated whether to have breakfast sent or to go to the mess hall--refectory, he corrected himself. Dakainya wasn't a Starbase, it was a school. Sometimes, he thought, monastery was a closer descriptive and he delighted in the comparison. Sex wasn't forbidden, it was just that his only fellow-student who was female was just five years old. The other women were all Vulcan (except for one Schillian, which didn't help much.) Kirk was determined to win that four-day pass Soled had promised him if his performance were good enough today. He was ready to leave Dakainya's secluded protection, and he knew it.

Dressed, he took one last look around his room. It was about three meters by four, walls of a dusty clay that fended off the sun's heat. In one corner was his bed, another the shower room, and another his desk. A closet with shelves for clothes filled the remaining corner. The window was double-glazed for insulation, and was polarizable. The floor was made of some soft fabric with an intricate, curlicue design in it. The desert sand he tracked in seemed to sift through the fabric and disappear. It was never dirty. The room was designed to be lived in with minimum maintenance. But it was drab. Kirk resolved to use his four-day pass to shop for suitable brighteners.

Cheerfully confident, he headed for the mess-hall--refectory, he corrected himself again. And that was when it happened for the first time. Waves of vertigo came and went swiftly, like a receding tide. He leaned against the wall until it was over. Then he shook his head sharply to clear his mind. It was gone as if it had never come. All that was left was an image of Spock seated before a bank of controls, calmly adjusting knobs and dials, and smiling ever so slightly.

Panic rising into his throat, Kirk charged back into his cubicle and fetched up hard against his desk. With hands and mind, he groped toward the Idlomputt, sending the quiescent glow into a cascade of red-orange brilliance. Eyes drinking in that almost palpable color, Kirk relaxed. While he maintained rapport with the Idlomputt, nobody could break in on his thoughts, nobody could or would touch him in any way because this particular instrument was attuned only to his mind. Any other telepath who touched that field, or who tried a meld with Kirk while he was in phase with the Idlomputt field, would get on helluva shock. That is, any telepath but a trained kataytikh who could phase with anysuch device without endangering himself.

It had taken long hours of practice for Kirk to master the Idlomputt's shielding function, but once Soled, his teacher, had shown him the privacy he could once more have, Kirk had been willing to do anything to attain it.

He'd been master of the Idlomputt for five months now, and he used it with comfortable familiarity. Within the privacy of that field, Kirk turned over and over the image of Spock seated before a bank of controls. It wasn't a familiar place, nor a familiar instrument, but it was Spock. And that, he realized, was bad.

He'd been warned that he must not attempt to reach Spock through the rapport-link that still existed between them. Spock was on Pilgrimage, recovering from the telepathic overload which their latest adventures had brought about. He must not touch Spock's mind, and the easiest way to avoid that was to avoid thinking about Spock--especially in such vivid, visual terms. Kirk didn't even know where the thought had come from. But thinking about the mystery of that would only conjure more thoughts of Spock.

He had to admit he missed his foster-brother in a most un-Vulcan way. It would be several more months before he could rejoin Spock at home. They would be long months.

Kirk put these thoughts aside. He was hungry and wanted his coffee. He completed the Idlomputt exercise that focused his mind securely on his own thoughts. It was a difficult exercise that he'd mastered only recently, but it had been worth it. By using the Idlomputt in this way, Kirk could now establish and hold his own mind-barriers again. He was free to move and think at will, just as before this unwelcome talent had surfaced. And now that he was once again his own master, Soled was willing to let him out of Dakainya for short periods.

Keeping that four-day pass firmly in mind, Kirk relinquished the Idlomputt contact and once more set out for the dining commons. In a hurry, he took a short cut through the inner court yard of the building where the Gardens of Thought werelocated. The sun was still low on the horizon and the sky arched above, a somber carmine bowl presaging another scorching hot day.

As he wound through the Garden, a cloaked figure detached itself from a shaded bench and came toward him. Silently, they walked together out of the Gardens, and into the dining hall.

"S'chames," said the figure, giving Kirk's name a lilting accent common to the western provinces, "I thought you'd like to know that I've approved your request."

Kirk squinted at the man in the dim morning shadows. The cowl of the cloak further hid his features. "Which request?"

"For an additional work period in the fields."

"Oh, thank you, Doctor." Now Kirk placed the accent and the man. "It's been so long, I was wondering if you'd found something wrong with me."

"No. You are in perfect physical condition. In fact, your stay here has strengthened you."

"I'm glad to hear that. I feel fine, and I see no reason I shouldn't begin to pay my own way here like everbody else."

The school's doctor departed with an incomprehensible comment, and it was then that S'chames Kirk realized he'd been speaking Vulcanur. Hastily, he checked to make sure that he hadn't been reading the man's mind. No, his barrier was still intact--fragile bubble that it was. The language sessions were beginning to take effect.

Kirk was inordinately pleased with himself. He paused on the threshold of the refectory. It was a peculiar room, one which Kirk had come to find both fascinating and repulsive. No, he corrected the thought, not the room, but the people in it.

The room itself was pleasant enough for both humans and Vulcans as well as most Federation humanoid races. It was larger than a comparable facility at an all-human institute would be. The main floor stretched almost fifty yards in every direction from the entrance where Kirk stood. Above rose terraced balconies, five levels of them, and on the mezzanine floor there were several smaller rooms for private dinner parties.

Windscreens around various well-marked areas provided control of the food-aromas, though most people didn't use them after the first few weeks. In places, people had pushed the smaller, individual tables together to form dining groups. In a far corner, near the three-story high arched windows that looked out over the valley, a group of Vulcans had formed a square 'U' out of their tables. They were always there, every mealtime, eating 'family-style', but they were no family.

What repelled Kirk about the room was the way the various groups at Dakainya tended to pull apart for their meals. They lived, worked, learned, and played together. But they didn't eat together. And that bothered Kirk. His Captain's mind kept telling him that it was a symptom that something...something drastic...was very wrong with the morale of the place. There seemed to be a kind of...no, not racial, but cultural prejudice.

That would be easily explained if eating habits and foods varied greatly. But humans could just as well eat Vulcan foods, and though Vulcans wouldn't eat most Terran cuisine, Kirk knew that they would eat at the same table. But the fact was that here at Dakainya, even the humans who ate mostly Vulcan foods ate alone or only with human companions.

And that was why Kirk was always discomfited in this room. On the Enterprise, he could take a tray and move in on any of his senior officers without thinking twice. If he invited himself to a table among junior officers, he always tried to be sure his rank wouldn't be an embarrassment. But here, he was at a loss.

Kirk worried the problem as he shoved his tray along beneath the delivery windows, selecting his breakfast. At the end of the service area, he paused to survey the room once more. Several of the Vulcans had left the U tables, but others had joined the group. A few humans were scattered in ones and twos on the main level. He made his decision and went back to pick up a large, chilled serving bowl arrangement of fruit with an attached bowl of a creamy, tart dip.

Then he brought his tray to the U tables. In the center of the U, which was formed of seven square tables, there was an eighth table on which each person to join the group placed something he wished to share. Kirk put his fruit-bowl and dip down among the other partly consumed serving dishes. Then he chose a place at the center of one side of the U, and sat down to eat.

It wasn't the first time he'd eaten among this group, but none of the others who ate here ever ate with other groups as Kirk did. It wasn't enough for the Captain that he was equally welcome wherever he went among the students, and even for the most part among the staff and people there for other reasons.

Presently, one of the late-joiners, Sildon, finished his tray and went to the center table. He chose from the items left there and put his plate back at his place. He was a big, tanned, blond Vulcan with startingly black eyes. And he was the closest to a friend Kirk had at Dakainya. He picked up the fruit-bowl Kirk had brought, dipped one of the partially peeled fruits for himself, and passed the bowl around the table.

When it got to Kirk, it was almost empty. He took a piece, and passed the bowl to the man on his left who returned it to the center table. When everyone had finished eating, the blond said, "Bit of yunyon finishes off a good breakfast. You ever picked yunyon, S'chames?"

"No, not yet. Maybe next year."

"Well, you certainly know the sweet from the sour," said Sildon and the company agreed with ready affirmatives. "Well-chosen, S'chames."

"If you come back next year," said Sildon, "I'll be sure to draft you for my yunyon crew."

One of the other men at the table, a slight, dark-skinned man named S'Brenth, said, "There may not be any offworlders at Dakainya next year, Sildon. So don't draft your harvesters before the seeds are planted."

Kirk turned to S'Brenth, seated at the end of the U. "I didn't know they were planning to close the school."

S'Lor, one of the kataytikhe working as instructors, said, "He wasn't referring to closing Dakainya. Haven't you been following the news?"

"My Vulcanur isn't up to following the local news."

"It may not remain local very much longer," said Sildon.

"Not if T'Uriamne prevails over S'Rewn," said S'Brenth.



Kirk knew that S'Rewn was the current Planetary President. His knowledge of the Vulcan political structure was a couple of decades stale, but he could recall that it was vaguely analogous to a representative democracy, which made the Planetary President the head of the administrative branch of the government. For the most part, however, the average citizen had little contact with the elective officials. They regarded them very much as Kirk regarded his yeomen, useful but not irreplaceable.

"S'Brenth," said one of the older men, S'Kaz, "do you realized what that would imply?"

"I do."

Sildon arched an eyebrow, looking very much like a blond Spock, "She wouldn't attempt to influence S'Rewn's political decisions, would she, S'chames?"

"You're asking the wrong person. I've never met the lady."

"The Daughter considers herself quite desperate," said S'Lor, "as you must be aware from the Argument. Yet I don't think she would dare to express an opinion on a political matter."

"The question of to whom and to how many should visas be granted isn't wholly political," said S'Brenth. "Who do you suppose it was that raised the question in the first place?"

"It was T'Lyehq, according to the record," said Sildon.

S'Brenth let his gaze roam the circle before answering. "Is not T'Lyehq the wife of a kataytikh?"

S'Lor was suddenly intent. "Which implies?"

"Nothing directly. But is she not well-known among the Daughters as the mother of a Daughter?"

S'Lor was dangerously still, now. "Are you impugning her qualifications to serve the Planetary Legislature?"

"I was merely pointing out that the person who raised the question regarding visas was known to T'Uriamne who has siezed upon this issue as if it were made for her opportunity."

S'Lor said, "I do not know T'Lyehq, but I do know that her husband is deceased and her daughter was Pledged before she was elected. She does not even hold Name Rights in any kataytikh family."

"If there were any wrong-doing," said S'Brenth, "it would be on the part of T'Uriamne, not T'Lyehq. You need not defend her."

"I wasn't defending her. I shall withdraw from the discussion."

Sildon called out, as S'Lor was about to leave, "No, don't go." To the group at large, he said, "Is it not disgraceful that a kataytikh can't sit among us without being drawn into a political discussion?"

"Is it not," countered S'Brenth, who was himself hardly more than a youth, "a symptom of the times? We were discussing T'Uriamne. When a Daughter mixes into politics, is it not inevitable that kataytikhe will be questioned on the matter?"

"It may be inevitable," said Kirk, "but it is none-the-less disgraceful." Suddenly, Kirk found the whole group looking at him. His mouth went dry, but he finished what he had to say. "I come from a country on Earth where the founding fathers saw fit to separate functions of law-making from that of implimenting the laws and from enforcing the law. It was a revolutionary concept of checks and balances when they invented it. In the time I've been here at Dakainya, I've come to wonder if perhaps we might not have avoided a lot of bloodshed if they'd separated not only religion and politics, but ethics and politics as well. But those founding fathers didn't have Surak's very elegant Construct. So we ended up trying to legislate morality, ethics, and sometimes even basics of philosophy. We found from experience that it doesn't work. You don't even have ignorance for an excuse. So it's disgraceful."

"Well put, S'chames," said Sildon.

At that single word of praise, Kirk glowed almost as if Spock had approved of his logic. He missed the next few comments, and was brought back to attention by S'Kaz's voice. "I believe S'chames would make a good recruit for the Runtek. He seems to have all the requisite qualities."

Sildon brightened at this new thought. "You have a good point there. What do you think, S'chames?"

"I...I, ah, haven't given the matter much thought," Kirk temporized. In fact, he hadn't given the matter any thought at all. 'Runtek' was, as far as Kirk knew, the Legion of Merchants which had made the Vulcan Merchant the most intrepid traveling salesman the galaxy had ever known. Kirk had never visualized himself in the role of a merchant. From the perspective of the Enterprise bridge, the merchant vessels had always seemed rather un-glamorous. "I suppose

it is inevitable that I'd affiliate with some Legion eventually. But somehow I can't quite see myself operating a merchant vessel."

S'Kaz said, "That's not exactly what I had in mind. Runtek isn't only involved in staffing merchant vessels, you know. I think that your talents would probably lead you into becoming a Representative...hmm, Sildon, is there a term which translates Runtek more precisely?"

"Delegate?" suggested the blond.

"No," said S'Brenth. "I think you mean 'trouble-shooter', a person who works directly for company management's home office and is sent into the field to investigate and correct faulty performance."

"Yes," S'Kaz agreed. "Such a job requires the highly original, creative logic that seems to be S'chames' most prominent attribute, and it would utilize his training in command-responsibility."

"I understand," said Sildon. "A Runtek... 'trouble-shooter' must make field decisions that implement home-office policy and assume the responsibility for the results. Yes, it fits S'chames' talents and would absorb much of his propensity for what he calls 'gambling'."

Kirk watched the conversational ball bounce from Vulcan to Vulcan with a quirk of a bemused smile turning the corners of his mouth. Somehow, being talked about as if he weren't even listening didn't offend him, it warmed him just as if Sarek and Spock were conferring over him. That's it, he thought, they've taken a family interest in me.

"Gambling," said S'Lor. "Isn't that the running of illogical risks?"

"Not always," said Sildon. "A good gambler calculates the odds in his favor and takes only risks where success would achieve a greater end than failure would destroy. I think S'chames' main shortcoming is not the illogic of his risks, but merely faulty arithmetic."

"Then," said S'Kaz, almost smugly triumphant, "S'chames, you should join Runtek. They have the best mathematics department outside of the Legion of Science."

"Well, I don't know. I'll have to look into it. But I suppose all of that is for the future."

"Not necessarily," said S'Brenth. "The Runtek viyw which is involved in 'trouble-shooting' is holding a seminar here next yahvee. You might do well to attend a few meetings, S'chames."

Kirk made some swift calculations. Yahvee was the basic three-day period Vulcans used in place of the week. This was the first day of such a period, so in two more days, the Runtek seminar would be here. "Well, yes, I just might do that. I think my schedule will allow it."

"If not," said S'Lor, "I'll arrange it for you. The subject matter should be of particular interest to you."

Sildon pulled a sceptical face. "I don't see that the theory of psychometry as applied to the mathematics of probability interphases would be of much interest to the best bydo harvester in Dakainya."

"Wait a minute," said Kirk. "Let's have that again? What about probability interphases?"

S'Kaz cleared his throat. "It has to do with the phenomenon of transference between two alternate-probability universes. Sikar's Unified Time Theory states that every event in space-time both is and not-is, and the assemblage of a complete Set of events which constitutes a universe can consist of any combination of events so long as one of each unique event is included. Thus the number of possible universes is simply the factorial..."

"Ah, yes," Kirk interrupted, "Spock never tires of trying to explain that to me. The Enterprise has encountered that situation a number of times, and I think I've a layman's grasp of the principle. But what was this about psychometry?"

"Haven't you been keeping up with your reading of the Correlationist Abstracts?"

"As a matter of fact...no," said Kirk. "That's one of the scientific journals I never seem to get around to."

S'Brenth said, "The last issue had a splendid article on the connection between precognition inaccuracies and interphase phenomena. The mathematics, especially in the gravitic equations, was a work of art."

"The really unusual part of the article," said S'Kaz, "was simply that it was authored by a Schillian."

"That seems reasonable," said Kirk. "Schillians and precognition are practically synonymous."

"True," said S'Kaz, "the Schillians are the only racial precogs with a reliability factor above 70%. However, the Schillians are not known for mathematical prowess. They are competent enough, but this article displayed an unusual amount of imagination."

"That's easily explained," said S'Lor. "The author is Zzvliash, the psychometrist who used to work here at Dakainya."

"I didn't know that," said S'Kaz thoughtfully.

"And," said S'Brenth, "he's the one who's giving the seminar."

"In that case," said Kirk, "I'll be sure to be there. I met the gentleman briefly before I came here."

Sildon said, "Sikar's Unified Time Theory would seem to be somewhat...rarified...an interest for you, S'chames. I never realized you were interested in theoretical physics."

"My line is more practical physics; you're right."

"The seminar announcement said nothing about Sikar's Equations," said S'Brenth. "The discussion was centered on the recently uncovered correlations between the more ancient theories of the Vulcan Science of Mind and the recent discoveries in the field of interphase phenomena."

"Now that," said S'Lor, "is something I would definitely not want to miss. I have always held that almost all of our standard mind-devices from the kraith right on up to the utsulan use multi-universe phase-anchors as their chief stabilizers."

"Nobody believes that superstition any more," said Sildon. "The universe-binder story was concocted to scare the ignorant peasants into being afraid to overthrow the rule of Top of World."

"So we have believed," said S'Lor. "But it is always wise to seek the grain of truth before discarding an old superstition."

Kirk muttered, "Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater."

"What was that?" asked Sildon.

"Nothing, nothing," said Kirk, "just paraphrasing. Isn't it time we got to work?"

Soled's studio was located on the third floor of an adjoining building, and Kirk decided to walk up rather than take the lift. He enjoyed the exercise, his calf-muscles stiffening against the slightly greater Vulcan gravity, his chest expanding to capture every oxygen molecule. He was still on low dosages of ~~tz-ox~~, but his body was slowly adjusting. It had been years since he'd felt so good. Even his back no longer bothered him thanks to the Vulcan doctors who took such concern in the Dakainya students. He felt ready to live to a thousand years and die still hail and hardy.

He entered the classroom almost whistling. It was a fine morning and he could see from the wide, panoramic windows of the studio that the harvest crews were already half done with the day's work. Far out in the fields, almost to the shores of the placid lake that filled the central part of the valley, he could see the line of picking machines and an occasional, tiny figure guiding them. On the other side of the building, steep hills rose precipitously. A roadway descended boldly, straight down into the valley. Along the bottom of the hills in the far distance, obscured by heat-shimmer, Kirk could make out the buildings of the Vulcan school from which Dakainya took its name.

"Peace and Long Life, Captain Kirk."

"Peace and Long Life, Soled."

"Come. We have much to do today. Have you prepared the relinquishment exercise?"

"Yes." Kirk didn't waste time being startled. The old man seemed to take a secret glee in sneaking up on people. "But first I have a question. I was reading a book on Vulcan history last night. There was a reference that puzzled me. It seemed as if the author meant to explain something with it, but it means nothing to me."

"I'm not here to teach history, but go ahead."

"It said," started Kirk, pulling out his note board and flipping the handle rapidly until the screen showed his hand written note, "'Eons of neglect saw crumbled...' That's all it said, in quotation marks."

"The meaning seems obvious. Even the most enduring edifice can be destroyed by neglect."

"What enduring edifice? It was a quotation, but I've no idea what it's from. I couldn't find it in the Book of Fragments Index."

Soled ran a knobby hand over his bald pate and sat down carefully in his teaching chair.

He swiveled the chair this way and that for a moment. Kirk had deduced that that was his gesture of total exasperation with an impossible student. He took his own seat, in front of the training console, and said, "I'm sorry, but I did try."

"Captain. I've never yet known you to fail at something you really tried. It seems to me you could utilize some of that energy in trying to contain your human curiosity."

"I'm not just being idly curious in a random fashion, Sir. As the adopted son of a kataytikh family, I feel it my obligation to learn at least some of the things that are common knowledge on Vulcan."

"Yes. Your family would expect it. Tell me," he said with apparent irrelevance, "have you climbed H'lvin'grey?"

Kirk knew that H'lvin'grey was the plateau behind D'R'hiset, Spock's home...and his, now, too. "Once, I did, with Spock and a group of young people."

"He must have told you the prophecy of Aivahnya."

"Prophecy? Not that I recall. That was long before my adoption."

"Let us see if you have ever heard the Ballad of Dokamral'nor. Set for Recall Drill Three." Nimble old hands flew over the console before him. The wide windows opaqued and a deep hush fell over the room.

Kirk turned to the banks of screens and controls before him. Running the training console was even more complicated than running the Enterprise. He set his hands on the broad levers that controlled his screens. The object of this drill was to make three of the screens light up in bright, clear green. That would signify that his Brain Circuitry Pattern and other emission readouts indicated that his brain was ready to energize any desired memory-circuit, even the unconscious ones of something he'd seen or heard without noticing or understanding.

It took him five minutes to coax a flicker of green into the first screen. Two was the easy exercise. Three screens would bring up those really illusive memories. Kirk was sweating by the time he got that flicker of green on number two.

"Would you like me to set the thermostat?"

"No thank you," said Kirk, "I'd just start shivering."

"Then you'd better let me show you Recall Three again. You haven't got it right, yet."

Kirk tried once more to will that third screen to light. It wouldn't. He released his grip on the levers in which the sensors for the apparatus were humming away. His hands tingled from the vibration. When he did the exercises correctly, there was no vibration.

He sat perfectly still, watching the screens as Soled came up behind him and placed dry-skinned fingers around his head in the now-familiar teaching-meld. As the Vulcan's mind filtered gently through his barriers, matching quietly with his thoughts, Kirk experienced, as always, a deepening respect for the trained Vulcan mind. He could never be such a master. Their control was superb, their accuracy unbelievable. Never once in the eight months and hundreds of hours that Kirk had studied under him, had Soled invaded his mind. Never once had the old kataytikh missed the exact brain-areas he aimed for.

Now, Soled seemed to be taking him by the hand and guiding him through the exercise. There was no way to explain this in words. It had to be taught by direct mind-meld contact, and Kirk realized, you had to already be telepathically aware in order to know what had been done to your mind, so you could do it yourself voluntarily. Everyone's brain-circuitry is affected by the thoughts of those around them. But the effect is so minute that most humans forever remain unaware of it. Telepathy is not a separate and unique talent. It is merely the ability to perceive oneself and to interpret what one perceives.

Spock had inadvertently opened Kirk's awareness of himself, of his own mind and all its responses to the thoughts of others. It took training, however, to learn to interpret those responses. Many times, Soled had had to enter Kirk's mind and show him how it was done. Then, Kirk would practice until he could do it.

He did it now, following Soled's gently guidance. And before him, all three screens pulsed bright emerald. Soled withdrew and Kirk maintained the state by himself. Kirk said, "The Ballad of Dokamral'nor? What does it sound like?"

Soled hummed a note and then sang in quavering baritone,

In the days when Aivahnya came to D'R'hiset  
To quench the green flame of Dohmahay  
the birds danced till the sun had set  
On the bare rocks of H'lvin'grey.

Kirk let his mind follow the tune, realizing vaguely that the words had been in Vulcanir...or perhaps something older than that. From somewhere deep and far away, another stanza swam into his mind. It was as if he were composing it on the spot.

D'R'hiset, the last retreat from Top-of-World  
Where mighty rulers held their seats  
Among lightning flame and boulders hurled,  
Counting enemy's defeats

The thread petered out, leaving Kirk with a tune floating teasingly through his mind.  
Soled picked it up,

When winter closed in to stay  
The mighty fled to D'R'hiset  
In the valley of the Hyboleye Fay  
Name unspoken to them they met.

Then Kirk had it! The chanting of many voices, young voices, breathless from dancing all night atop H'lvin'grey around a fire leaping higher than the dancer's heads. Oh, it had been a grand night, that. But he hadn't know a word of Vulcanur then, let alone this:

Ancient, the revered Hyboleye Fay  
With powers feared a world away  
Dwelt in shadow of H'lvin'grey  
From time unknown, none can say.

Kirk asked, letting the song unfold in his mind, "But you spoke of a prophecy?"

"You tended the temroc plant when you climbed?"

"Temroc?" repeated Kirk and the strange word echoed and re-echoed down the suddenly lengthening corridors of his mind.

At dusk, a ruddy dusk that seemed to smear cheek-rouge over the upthrust bones of the world upon which they climbed, they set out on a trail that snaked up the nearly vertical mountains. McCoy beside him, Kirk had fallen to the rear of the group, puffing against the pull of the planet. Even so, he could hear snatches of conversation now and again, wafted back to him on the faint breeze that came down the valley at sunset like a weak sigh that the day was at last over.

At the time it had been incomprehensible Vulcanur, and he'd suspected these kids of illogical chatter, a holiday from the strictures of their upbringing. Even Spock had seemed more talkative, socializing in a most uncharacteristic way.

Now, as if a tape were being played back for him, Kirk heard that conversation again. Only this time, he picked up isolated words which he recognized. The most frequent were, H'lvin'grey, D'R'hiset, Aivahnya the wife of Domahay, Dokamral'nor their son and his wives This, Lyad, and Fainz. There was much talk of Spock, but in a way which made it obvious they weren't talking about Sarek's son, but rather the first man by that name, the son of This and Dokamral'nor.

But, as kataytikh, Spock had been constrained to discuss the political decision of Vulcan's membership status in terms of abstract ethical principles, never mentioning the application of those principles to the practical problem under consideration. He had used the legend of Aivahnya's prophecy, and the behavior of the two humans accompanying the group, to make several unique points about the philosophy of Nome-Idic. And all the while Kirk had thought he was with a bunch of kids on holiday!

The strange tempo of the dance came back to him then, rising up from his feet to buoy his head to the star-pierced sky. The tang of that peculiar woodsmoke filled his nostrils as the chill winter wind rose from the valley of D'R'hiset. He danced once more in the circle of young Vulcans, only this time his mouth formed the words of their song and his breath came easier in the Vulcan air. The Prophecy of Aivahnya had been fulfilled by his hands, and now he sang out his Joy in the living memory of his family, kataytikh of the First Realm.

When Dohmahay, his bride had freed,  
She ate of largest fruit in hand  
And made him bury seed  
On that barren land.  
Then did she dare to prophecy  
That long as sweet fruits shall grow  
Dokamral'nor would never die  
But his seed would sow.

And it had, he realized. He could look back down the corridors of his life and see how the children of Domahay had multiplied. Two hundred years ago, when he'd been trained by his grandfather, it was a mighty to-do to get the Affirmation together. At one time T'Pau, so young and so uncertain under the burden of office so untimely thrust upon her, had proposed to raise the age of Affirmation. But at the last minute, his grandfather had sent him forward in Daughter's Council, a lad of but seventeen brief years. T'Pau had placed her slender fingers upon him and said, "Soled, are you prepared to take your place as Kataytikh, by your grandfather's hand, but not in your father's place?"

And he had answered, voice trembling, "I am prepared."

Her eyes had bored into his then with the steadiness that was later to become her hallmark. It was the penetrating look that could only be given by The Daughter, the one who held the summation of the Traditions of all-Vulcan. She was young, then, but her memory was clear and unbroken back to the life of Domahay, as was his own. They were each the last of their line, as was Suvil. The last three of the First Realm. The First Realm families had dwindled, but the Second and Third Realms had grown. The Tradition would live on.

Kirk shook his head violently. His eyes saw himself seated in the student's chair, gripping the sensor-probe levers, face bathed in green light from four of the screens. Soled, his teacher, had been chosen for him because they were cousins. He'd had no idea the old man was that often mentioned Third family of the First Realm. No wonder he'd been so patient with S'chames and his incessant questions. He hoped the boy appreciated it. Old eardrums seemed to become more sensitive each year, and the human vocal chords were geared to nothing short of a loud yell.

But then Spock had chosen his foster-brother well, and he owed it to Suvil's memory to give him all he could absorb. Spock, having been Liege during S'chames' Interim, was disqualified. Besides, Spock was on Pilgrimage, and the Pilgrim's mind was sacrosanct. Soled was personally willing to execute anyone who dared touch a Pilgrim's mind. Sarek, as foster-father, was disqualified. Suvil was dead. T'Pau had no brother to carry the Tradition of her family. His own son, Siyr, was in the eighth year, and thus not a good risk. It would be highly improper to expose the human to the instability of a pre-pon farr male.

The eighth year. The doctors said it would be all right. He was still young and in good health. It would be all right. It would have to be all right. Soled must have a grandson. He had a foster-grandson, bound in kraith-adoption, and well prepared to carry the Tradition for him. But it would be the end of First Realm if Siyr produced another daughter.

If only there would be a Blooming somewhere. Anywhere. But the plague had reduced the Bloomings to near non-existence. All attempts at simulating the effect with synthetic chemicals had failed. At best it produced the Linger Death, and at worst...at worst...he refused to think about that.

Last year he had forbidden his son to try that experiment, though he had been desperate with the low-level anxiety building inside him. Siyr had been certain he was entering Linger Death, but the days passed and he became no worse...but neither did it break into fever and terminate. He had sought strength in Pilgrimage, but even that did not help.

Kirk stared glassy-eyed at the five screens swimming before him, pulsing green, blue, green, blue, violet, blue, green, blue, violet, blue, green. Hypnotically, the colors rippled from one screen to the next and back like waves of time lapping the shores of reality. Like waves of sand lapping at his feet, pulling on him as he waded toward the Great Utsulan of Beom.

There was a tiny knot of offworlders, tourists, gathered at the gate outside the fence around the utsulan. They were so small, he couldn't tell if they were mostly human or what. Far off to his left, a cluster of buildings hunkered down into the loose sand, their sculptured walls ready to withstand the onslaught of the worst of the legendary Beom Storms. The tourist buildings.

Equally far to his right, the second cluster of buildings that served the resident Utsulan Attendants of Beom and the occasional Donor presented their streamlined curves up-valley toward the Great Pillars which were supposed to be relics quarried for Top of World but never moved to that locale.

A sand buggy detached itself from the tourist cluster and plowed its way toward him.

He glared at the array of screens on the console before him. His limber hands flew over the switches as he adjusted the sensor probe's focus. The dim violet light cast his face in a ghoulish shadow. He'd been through innumerable Bloomings, one a year for as many years as he'd happened to be on Vulcan during the season, and it had never sent him into pon farr. His human genes seemed to have spared him that agony, though they left him many others. He felt one of them now...extreme, uncontrollable frustration. He'd almost had him! Almost. Then, suddenly, his screens were reading that other Spock trudging through and toward (of all unlikely things!) a functional utsulan. Despite his curiosity to see the thing more clearly, his hands had flown to the board and sought Kirk again. It was Kirk that he'd worked all these years to find, not his other self.

And he'd have him if it took a century. Thanks to that Ssarsun person, he had learned a great deal about this other Kirk, a man so very much like his own Kirk, but quite vitally alive. He would bring him here, and he would find a way to make him happy. It was happiness that humans sought, and this time, Kirk would have it, and in the having, unknowingly perhaps, he would provide one half-human with his own peculiar requirements for contentment.

He'd been working too long, he decided. The screens kept dissolving before his eyes into bleery arrays of greens and purples. But the frustration drove him, and the failure tore at him like howling winds eroding the stone of Top of World. It was slow, but in the end it would destroy him. He didn't have the ability of a true Vulcan to dissolve that frustration before it became a physical thing eating at his body like acid. It burned him, stomach and nerve, body and brain. He heard his throat give a strangled sigh that was almost a sob.

He found his muscles stiff, locked against the surges and currents, the frustration, the anger that came in its wake, the ever-present and always growing loneliness and the constant reaching toward the only friend he'd ever known, or who had been able to know him.

By gathering the shreds of a will now almost exhausted, he loosened his hands, then his arms, his body, and let his legs relax. It was relief when his head fell forward onto his arms, outflung across the console, and he sprawled into unconsciousness.

He didn't see the old man in the instructor's chair fall forward and slowly topple to the floor. He didn't see the riot of clashing colors that warred with each other on the six lighted screens before him. Nor did he see them wink out as a tiny puff of black smoke curled from the back of the machine. The acrid smoke didn't even activate the choking-reflex when it hit his nostrils, as it certainly should have.

## CHAPTER TWO BEOM

Feeling suddenly weak, as if totally drained by the effort of walking through the sands, Spock halted to wait for the sand buggy. At first he thought it must have been the long trek over the hills from where the pump-station crew had let him off. But, no. They'd driven up the canyon to where the road cut through the range of hills, and they'd let him off right at the tunnel-mouth. He hadn't walked so far in the sun that he should feel weak.

A few moments later, the weakness passed. It was like a sudden silence after hours under a dangerously loud noise bombardment. It left his mind 'ringing' in the silence. Then, he knew what it had been. Some telepath groping for contact with his barriered mind. No Vulcan would do that. Not even Kirk. So it must have been someone in the tourist crowd wondering who it was coming across the desert. Well, no harm done.

The sand buggy slewed to a halt and the Chief Attendant, Sinzu, jumped out, hastily adjusting his green robe. Exercising his Pilgrim's right, Spock remained silent. He didn't feel up to exchanging greetings after that attack on his barriers. He merely gathered his glittering black and gold Pilgrim's cloak, and climbed into the open-topped vehicle. He was content to ride the rest of the way.

The late afternoon sun played through the translucent shapes enshrouding the utsulan. Spock traced the shadowy outline of the pyramid beneath the layers of resounders. His eye measured the angles with professional shrewdness. The Beom Attendants were meticulous on maintenance. The last time he'd been here, one of the uprights had been just a hair off true perpendicular to the pyramid face. That had caused several of the resounders on the lines strung between the top of the upright and the edge of the pyramid to be out of place. It hadn't been off enough to affect his donation, but he could see that now the discrepancy had been corrected.

His eye rose to the summit of the huge pyramid. Beom was the largest and oldest utsulan still functional on Vulcan. And it had the largest wheerr. The wheerr, the room atop the shorn-off peak of the pyramid, was englobed by a geodesic dome whose facets glittered with all the colors of the spectrum.

From the wheer, Spock knew he would soon be able to look down into the brilliant orange crystal that filled the central shaft of the pyramid and formed the memory-core of the device. The last time he had been here had been just after T'Aniyeh's Donation. Together, they had delivered so much energy that the basic memory-pattern of the crystal had been reflected through three axes. Her death hadn't erased that contribution. It was there waiting for him, and he was suddenly eager to be aloft the crystal, and to drop into rapport with it. The Pilgrim's Meld would erase the last vestiges of the assault that had been made upon him. Suddenly, he knew that at Beom he'd find the healing which had eluded him for eight months now. Beom was special. Beom was different.

It was no legend. Beom had been the site of the construction of the only dze'ut' erected on Vulcan. It had been the tangling with a dze'ut' that had, in part, caused his current exhaustion. Somewhere, deep in that crystal, was stored the healing combination. It had to be there, and Spock had come to dig it out. He knew he was ready.

The sand buggy's great tires threw up clouds of dust that trailed behind them like giant pale yellow wings against the ruby sky. As the car drew up to the fence that kept the tourists away from the utsulan, those wings caught up with them and enfolded them in a miasma that settled down quickly in the Vulcan gravity field.

The little knot of tourists, all apparently Earth-human from their dress, closed in as soon as the dust settled. They were babbling excitedly, recorders pointed at the occupants of the buggy. Their guide, a young Vulcan boy, climbed up on his lecturn and waved his arms for attention. His reedy voice couldn't cut through the babble, and he didn't succeed.

The Chief Attendant climbed up on the buggy's seat and bellowed in a parade-ground bass voice, "Your Attention Please!"

The clamor subsided to a murmur, then a whisper, and finally the group fell silent. "Gentlebeings, it is regretfully that I must inform you of a change in plans. The utsulan will begin to function shortly. All tourists must leave the area immediately..."

He went on to describe the arrangement for transportation that were at that moment being made, and the refunds of all fees paid in advance. Spock wasn't listening. He was watching the tour Guide. The boy wore the simple red uniform of Vulcan Tours. He was slightly built, with a thin, sharp-nosed face and deep black eyes that seemed to see everything at once. Right now, the boy was looking at Spock with a sort of wide-eyed awe that was the closest to reverence his Vulcan training would allow. He was oblivious to the glances being shot at him by the humans who had been denied their holiday.

Spock guessed what had happened. He'd worked for Vulcan Tours himself at that age... fourteen, he guessed the lad to be. The Beom Tour was a tight schedule, arriving at sunrise and leaving at sunset. But Earth-human tourists were the most unruly in the galaxy. This particular group was predominantly female, and they were all carefully groomed females, too. Even on Pilgrimage, Spock's ability to add two and two wasn't impaired. This tour was hours behind schedule, and the tourists blamed the Guide. Vulcan Tours would also blame the Guide for the unhappy customers if not for the delays.

Spock took pity on the boy. It could have been him standing there. He rose from his seat and placed a hand on the Chief Attendant's elbow. "Sinzu, I'm not in that much of a hurry. Let them finish their tour and have dinner. There's no sense sending them home tired and hungry and with nothing to show for the day."

"But..."

"I insist. I will wait."

He'd said it in English, one of the universals of the human communities, and the language Sinzu had employed. The smiles and smug glances darted toward the Guide attested to the understanding of the message. What the humans failed to understand was the unprecedented nature of the occurrence. A Pilgrim rarely spoke at all, never spoke anything but Vulcanir if necessary, and never, but absolutely never, deferred to anybody for any reason.

The Guide understood, though, and the dumbstruck expression of shock and amazement lingered long after the buggy had passed through the gate and discharged its august passenger at the utsulan's corner door.

The boy's father, however, would have been proud to see that, within moments after the black and gold disappeared from view, his son came to life once more. Clearing his throat of the inhaled grit, he said, "Ladies and Gentlemen, you have just witnessed the arrival of a Pilgrim at Beom, an event which has remained, so far as I know, unavailable to any other tourist group. Now if you will all follow me into the lecture room, you will be shown a tape describing the historical significance of the valley. At one time this was the most fertile region of Vulcan..."

Within the utsulan proper, the boy's voice was inaudible. Thick masonry and layers of a glassy slag insulated the corridors from external influences. However, the pyramid was anything but solid. It was honeycombed with layer upon layers of tunnels and chambers, some of which had been walled up and forgotten for thousands of years.

With the Chief Attendant trotting at his heels, Spock strode those corridors as much in possession of the place as if they were the corridors of the Enterprise. And his darting eyes missed no more than a First Officer's inspection. As he had traveled the face of the planet, he had visited utsulan after utsulan, and in each he had found some irregularities. True, it took only one quick glance at the Chief Attendant, and the situation was immediately corrected. But Spock considered the existence of a correctable flaw as a disgrace in itself. He had taken it as his duty to exact the maximum penalty in each case. And the Attendants Collect had seen fit to back him up in every instance. The wrath of a Pilgrim was to be avoided at all costs. But Spock did not enjoy the exercise of power. He sought only the end of his quest.

And now that he knew he would find it at Beom, strangely enough he wasn't in any real hurry to mount the wheerr. Beom was his during his stay. He would enjoy for a few hours, savoring his anticipation of success at last, the final and complete success that would open the door his Pilgrimage had slammed shut between him and Kirk. Wryly he remembered his words to Stonn, so many years ago. "Having is not so satisfying a thing as wanting." He would indulge himself in wanting for a few hours more.

Outside the utsulan, as Spock prowled the corridors looking for any slightest misalignment, any speck of dust, any chipped or broken components, the tourists piled into waiting sand buggies and prepared for a junket down the valley to see the legendary Pillars, one of the Ten Wonders of Vulcan not to be missed by any tourist. As their Guide began the spiel preceding their caravan down the valley, a tiny speck in the sky grew into an aircar which swooped low over the utsulan, and circled onto the sands beside the buggy which had delivered the Pilgrim.

Wondering if they were being treated to two Pilgrims in one day, the tourists aimed their recorders. As the occupant alighted, there was a general sigh of disappointment. No black and gold, just an ordinary civilian. But then their Guide's voice came over the intercoms. "Ladies and Gentlemen, Ambassador Sarek of Vulcan."

Those who had put their recorders away grabbed them out again, but Sarek's back receded into the shadows of that mysterious door and he was gone. There was an audible sigh of disappointment, followed by a general gabble.



Sarek heard none of this. He was intent upon his own concerns. One of the Attendants escorted him rapidly down to the anti-wheerr where Spock was inspecting the facilities.

For the Pilgrim's Inspection, the nether chamber giving access to the bottom of the main crystal was lighted with portable lamps placed along the downward trending corridor and in the anti-wheerr itself. Whereas in all the other still functioning utsulan, the anti-wheerr was a mere token crawl-space, at Beom it was a luxuriently appointed chamber with walls and floor set in richly patterned mosaics, studded with slivers of gemstones that picked up and broke the light of the main crystal into billions of shimmering pinpoints.

The room that Sarek entered was about forty feet in radius. On a circular rim raised about six inches above the floor, a low bench ran the entire perimeter of the room. It, too, was covered with intricate patterns of tile and gemstone. Apparently it wasn't meant to be sat upon.

From the center of the low ceiling jutted the bottom of the gigantic orange crystal that was the heart of the Beom installation. Directly under the crystal, a dais rose four steps above the floor so that even a short person could reach up and touch the crystal. The dais was surrounded by a rope barrier.

At the barrier stood Spock, gleaming black cloak thrown carelessly off his shoulders, head back as he searched the crystal's reflections. Behind him, the Chief Attendant stood quietly awaiting the Pilgrim's approval which he knew was Beom's well-earned due.

Sarek paused at the door until Spock had completed his examination. Then he stepped forward, waiting recognition. He knew that Spock would be within his rights to refuse that recognition, but he hoped that his son would not refuse.

And he did not. He turned to the Chief Attendant. "Leave us."

Sinzu opened his mouth to protest. It was his duty to be present whenever the anti-wheerr was open. But a Pilgrim...

Spock repeated, tonelessly but firmly, "Leave us."

He shut his mouth and left. Certainly between these two, Beom was in good hands. They would never inadvertently damage the crystal.

Spock folded his arms across his chest, feet braced apart. "Speak, Father."

"I have been waiting the completion of your Pilgrimage for many weeks. It can wait no longer. Yet I must apologize. Were our positions reversed, I doubt if I would listen to such presumptuousness."

"I await the departure of the tourists. I have time to listen."

"You..."

"At my own request, Father."

"Yes, of course." To cover his momentary confusion, Sarek took a few moments to circle the central dais and come up beside his son. "The matter concerns Jim. That is the only reason I considered taking such liberty."

"You did well. Continue."

"Soled informs me that he will soon be ready for his first visit home."

"I would like to be there. If I am finished, I will be."

"That is not my purpose. The matter which must be settled soon concerns his betrothal. Your mother and I have been unable to reach an agreement, and she insisted that you be consulted."

"You have located a suitable choice?"

"Not precisely. I have been unable to convince her that he must marry a Vulcan."

"I see."

"Your decision, of course, as Head of Family, is beyond appeal."

"He is your son. The choice is yours by right. I would prefer to leave it that way."

"You would...?"

"But, as you are no doubt aware, Jim's culture includes the element of independent choice of mate. And he is an adult, even by Vulcan standards. Has he requested tslo-farr?"

"No. But how can he choose logically if he is unacquainted with the possibilities?"

"True."

"Your mother agrees there is no harm in introducing him to appropriate people--as soon as he is ready to meet people that is."

"You expect him to be ready on his first visit?"

"Soled reports that he is an unusually persistent pupil. He has mastered nearly eighty per cent of his estimated maximum during First Session."

"Jim is a remarkable individual. I've never doubted that."

"There are no human females at Dakainya now."

"Ah, now I see!"

"Am I not correct in assuming..."

"Perfectly."

"There is one individual I would like him to meet."

"Hmmm?"

"T'Lel."

"Indeed."

"You approve?"

"No."

Spock had used the Vulcanir negative which indicated that while he did not approve, neither did he disapprove. "Why does Mother disapprove?"

"She expects Jim to..." Sarek paused to consider if he should bring the subject up, considering Spock's Pilgrimage. But Spock beat him to the draw. "...give her the grandchild I have not?"

"You understand your mother."

"Contrary. Her mind illudes me. She has, however, expressed the conviction to me... as politely as she knew how."

"There is no polite way."

"Agreed." Spock shifted uneasily. It was beginning to feel close and stuffy in the underground chamber despite the cool air that constantly moved through the room from the vents.

"Your mother wanted me to make sure you had heard the news regarding T'Aniyeh's name."

"News?"

"The name has been assigned to Siyr's wife, and she has chosen it. Her acceptance speech emphasized that she considered it an honor."

Spock looked back up into the crystal. It was almost dark now, and acting like a mirror. He saw his own face, drawn into long planes and deeply graven lines.

"She was given a full hundred names to choose from."

"I am honored at her choice."

"I can understand that."

"Can you?" As he said it, Spock regretted the utterance. It revealed too much of his own pain. His hand went to the clasp that held his cloak and he released it, flinging the shimmering garment onto the circular bench behind him. He paced off a quarter of the circle and stood looking up into the crystal again. He knew he shouldn't be speaking like this. The strength for it wasn't in him yet. His Pilgrimage was still unfinished, though it lay within his grasp now. He hoped his father would blame that for his slip.

Sarek took his time circling the crystal, the long way around to where Spock stood. When he reached his son, he had made his decision. He took the Pilgrim's shoulders in his hands and forced him to turn away from the crystal. "Spock, my son, my heir, I demand that you accept tslo-farr from me. I demand it in Aivahnya's name."

It was an unthinkable thing for a father to say, yet Sarek said it the way a drowning man calls for help. That very urgency was what undid Spock. At that moment, he wanted nothing more than to accept tslo-farr and let his father choose his next wife.

The next moment, he realized what he had almost said, and what the consequences would be. He pulled back, sweat starting out on his face as he moved his head from side to side, not in the human gesture of negation, but in an attempt to avoid his father's eyes. When he spoke,

it was in a rough whisper, rich with fascinated horror. "Father, I cannot. I...can...not!"

He gathered one last surge of strength and wrenched himself away from that grip, staggering to the bench where his cloak lay. He fell to the floor, beside the cloak, arms resting on the bench, and there he laid down his head and wished he were alone so he could sob out loud.

But his father would not leave him, and now that it was spoken, he could not ask him to. "Spock, what is it? What's happened?"

Fingering the Pilgrim's cloak; Spock took his time gathering enough composure to answer. He had to go through the whole exercise three times before it took effect. But when he finally did speak, he at least sounded rational again. "It is quite simple, Father. The Severance from T'Aniyeh almost killed me. I do not believe I am able to expose myself to that once more. A half-human body has physical limitations that must be lived with...and died with. I only hope that I will have time to train the Second Realm in Suvil's precepts and memory.

"Don't tell Mother just yet. Let her have her grandson from Jim."

"It's not the same."

"True. But it is all she will ever have."

"Perhaps not."

"It is so. Some things never heal."

"You should have had help with the Severance. It was for you like a sixth?"

"Worse. I couldn't control it at all. The pain is still there, walled up, but raw."

"Have you consulted anyone?"

"No. It's no use. To whom can I go?"

"T'Uriamne."

"I couldn't. It requires trust."

"She would do it in good faith. She is Vulcan."

"But I couldn't. I am half human. I have considered all of this at great length. It is no use. And there is no other qualified."

"T'Pau..."

"Is too old. Her heart would fail."

"Soled has granddaughters. They are young yet, but perhaps they will be grown in time."

He was grasping at straws and they both knew it. "Any other mind than a Daughter of the First Realm would collapse. It would be murder. I apologize."

"Unnecessary. You are my son."

"Then let Jim be the grandson I couldn't give you. If I had a brother, he couldn't be closer than Jim."

"The First Realm will be terminated."

Gathering his strength, Spock rose, hoping the action would indicate his acceptance of his fate. "Perhaps it is time for a new First Realm. In any event, there is nothing that I can do..." Spock saw the room recede into the distance, as if he were rocketing away from it at warp speed. The weakness that siezed him then made the experience on the desert sands seem as nothing.

The muscles of his hand relaxed involuntarily, until they were flacid like those of a paralytic. His arms went numb. The all-important balancing muscles of back and abdomen ceased to play against one another, and his body slumped forward, His knees and calves released their grip. Strangely enough, he didn't expect to fall. He flung out his arms as if to lay his head upon a tabletop, but there was no table, and he toppled forward head first.

"Spock!" Sarek's firm grip took him under the arms and eased him to the floor, but he never felt the contact.

Nor did he feel himself being lifted and carried and thrust upward into contact with the Beom crystal. Sarek, in a last desperate attempt to save his son's life, injected his own mind into triple rapport between Spock and the crystal. Seizing upon the power of the utsulan, Sarek sent a spear of pure energy racing back along the linkage that was draining Spock's vitality.

At that moment, he didn't care if that lance of savagely released power maimed or killed the one responsible. He who touched a Pilgrim deserved no consideration.

The crystal began to pulse with glimmers of light, throbbing in increasing tempo. The utsulan awakened, trembling as from a long sleep...it growled from its depths, shaking the ground in ominous majesty. The resounders strung on lines from the uprights at the center of each face of the pyramid began to pulse in resonance, casting up their aura of coruscating light. But instead of the usual, deep purple, the utsulan throbbled blue, occasionally pulsing greenish, and only once in a while was there a glimmer of purple.

But within the anti-wheerr, none of this was visible. The main crystal gave off dazzling displays of oranges, yellows and even reds that seemed to be aimed directly at the chips of gemstone embedded in the walls and floor. The entire chamber became sun-bright with scintillating reflections, dancing shafts of intense light bounced from wall to wall, and increasing with every reflection.

The surge seemed to feed itself, multiplying with frightening rapidity. The deep growl rose higher and higher in pitch, heterodyning into the ultra-sonic range within seconds, until horror-stricken Attendants who had been busy here and there throughout the pyramid stared about themselves wide-eyed, certain that the very crystal would shatter.

The Beom utsulan was operating in a mode that had not been touched in thousands of years...but operate it did. The whole pyrotechnic display lasted no more than fifteen seconds. Then the parasitic mind-meld which had victimized Spock was snapped clean. Instantly, the utsulan reverted to quiescence. But the damage had been done.

Sinzu found Sarek bent over Spock's unconscious body, directly under the lower-most facet of the crystal depending from the ceiling. The rope barrier had been knocked down on the far side of the door. The Pilgrim's cloak lay on the floor beside the rim bench. The room was unbearably hot.

Panting from the all-out run down the corridor to the anti-wheer, Sinzu approached the pair. It was all over now. No point in great haste, yet obviously decisive action must be taken immediately. The Pilgrim's welfare was the first concern. The mysterious surge of power could be investigated later.

Sinzu stepped to a recessed wall-bracket and used the speaker to call for a stretcher, and to order the Resident Physician to attend.

Sarek rose. "He seems to be in total withdrawal. But I believe I acted in time. He'll live."

"You activated the crystal? From down here?"

"I had to. There was some sort of peculiar mindmeld assaulting him. His heart stopped for at least twenty seconds. But he'll live." Sarek looked directly into Sinzu's eyes. "I did not intend to damage the crystal."

"I've set a crew to assessing the results. Any serious damage will probably be due to the presence of out-worlders in the valley."

Sarek had forgotten about the Terrans. "I hope none of them were injured."

The stretcher arrived, and conversation ceased. The physician met them half-way out of the utsulan and accompanied them on the short ride back to the Resident's Infirmary. Spock never did realize it, but he was laid in the same bed where T'Aniyeh slept off the aftermath of her donation to Beom.

At this moment, the room was vacant save for Spock and the cluster of deeply concerned Attendants. Sarek stood at the foot of his son's bed and relived those crucial moments again and again.

There had been much that he hadn't had time to notice or respond to properly. It had happened so quickly! He was now convinced it had been an error to approach Spock with the problem of Kirk's spouse, and the error had been compounded by opening the subject which had led to Spock's forced confession of failure. A Pilgrim should not speak.

Yet he was not totally convinced Spock's collapse was due solely to the over-strain that had preceded the attack. There had been something very strange in that linkage...a doubling of impressions and a feeling of vast distance being spanned. Or no, not distance exactly, but something akin to it. It had been so vague that Sarek refrained from mentioning it to the physicians. It might have been an error in his own perceptual interpretation. It was more elusive than a forgotten dream, no more than a lingering taste of strangeness that nevertheless had a familiarity within it.

But Sarek was ruthlessly accurate in his report of the conversation that had preceded the attack. "We were discussing...personal matters. The strain on him was obvious. At one point, the information that I delivered caused him to attack my competence. From the unwarranted severity of his retort, I deduced that he was in very grave difficulty. His mother is human, and thus he has certain personality traits which are extremely difficult for a Vulcan to understand. Through long exposure, I've developed a fair ability to calculate these aberrations."

Sarek looked from one face to another and saw detached professional interest. These were physicians gathering data to treat a patient. They had to understand that patient's mental

state. "Siyr has only daughters. That could make Spock the last of the First Realm. I came to understand in that moment that because he is half-human, he would continue to refuse to request tslo-farr. I decided it was my duty as a father...and as a Vulcan, to demand it."

Even the professional calm shuddered under that admission. They traded glances around the circle, and then looked to Spock's face, rock-steady in repose. Sarek continued, "I was both right and wrong in that. It was the right thing to do, but the wrong time to do it. There had been an important fact he'd been withholding from me...possibly in the belief that I would not be able to understand.

His Severances had been more severethan is normal for a Vulcan. He now believes himself unable to attain ne'ir once more."

The sharply indrawn breaths were a collective gasp of alarm. Sinzu whispered, "T'Uriamne?"

"There is no trust between them. Spock believes himself totally unable to commit himself in that fashion. She has shown herself only as his adversary."

"For tsaichrani, she..."

"She would, but he cannot. He is half-human."

The Chief Physician said, "He might well prefer this death to that."

"Exactly my point in recounting this. He believes the situation to be hopeless. He lives now only to train the Second Realm, and to finish what he has started."

The men and women clustered around the patient's bed, taking readings and muttering to each other. Sarek left them to their conferences, knowing his son was in the best possible hands. Sinzu joined him.

As they emerged into the late afternoon sun, a sand buggy slid to a stop before the Chief Attendant. The driver, an employee of Vulcan Tours by his uniform, jumped out. "Sinzu, almost all the Terrans collapsed screaming and clutching their heads! We need a full emergency crew at the Pillars immediately. Send who you can spare. I'm going to Tourist Central to alert the ambulance craft."

### CHAPTER THREE

#### COMMODORE SPOCK ACTS

Kirk woke to cherry-red dawn light from the cloudless Vulcan sky that filled every window. The Infirmary room where he'd spent the night was large and airy and lonely. He was the only patient, and the staff took little interest in him since he'd been tacitly discharged as healthy. They'd wanted to monitor his body functions during the night, so he'd remained.

Now he rose and dressed. He didn't feel unwell, but there was a creeping horror lurking somewhere behind a veil in his mind. He admitted a profound aversion to re-entering Soled's studio. Fortunately for his peace of mind, he knew that Soled had been sent to the Academy of Sciences hospital for study by the Legion of Medicine experts. Nobody told him anything more than that it was expected he'd recover completely, but he was quite old.

Seeing nobody about to stop him, Kirk headed for the dining hall in order to avoid the inevitable hospital meal that had been ordered for him. He was assigned field duty for the day, and he wanted some solid calories in him for that. Field duty was the administration's idea of resting up from a long stint at the learning console. And Soled had promised him a day in the fields.

Actually, Kirk rather looked forward to the change. It was freedom of a sort and he relished it. What took the edge off his anticipation was that Soled wouldn't be waiting when he returned. And Soled, Kirk realized with a tiny shiver, was his foster-cousin several hundred times removed. His absence was like a big hole in his life, a big, sudden, hole.

Kirk found his food going down in hard lups despite his appetite. The dining commons was teeming with hasty eaters, and Kirk, seated at a long table with those headed for the fields, failed to respond to the feeling of acceptance, of belonging and warmth that always engaged him when he was a member of a predominantly Vulcan work-crew.

He knew that the other humans mostly found the Vulcans cold and stand-offish. There was no small-talk at the table, very little in the way of traded glances, and absolutely none of the little signals with which humans welcome a newcomer to their company. The other humans at Dakainya gossiped among themselves on the endless topic of the hostility the non-staff-member Vulcans felt toward them.

All of Kirk's attempts to explain Vulcan customs had failed to penetrate their ignorance. "Maybe it's different for you. You're practically one of them. They accept you."

"They do, but not because of any family connections. They accept me because of my behavior. I don't go around wantonly touching minds or seeking to provoke reactions from people. It's not considered polite here."

Kirk supposed it was the eternal gulf between Starfleet and civilian, but they just couldn't seem to understand that one gains entrance to a society by learning to respect its culture. Kirk was especially glad he'd learned that lesson early in his career. He could read his acceptance into this work crew by the gradual relaxation in his presence. And he needed that acceptance now. He needed it in the worst way.

When all the members of Crew Five had finished eating, the company rose from the table, Kirk with them. There were twenty in all, five Dakainya students from off-world, and fifteen Vulcans, three of whom were students from down the valley, the rest being from Dakainya Valley Industries.

In one body, they moved out of the dining commons across the yard, and into the huge open shed where the farm equipment was stored. The lumbering flat-bed truck with a '5' painted on it in Vulcan script waited for them, chugging softly to itself as the driver tested out the power-driven parts.

Sildon, who happened to be with this crew for the day, fetched down a packing case for the shorter ones to use as a step. One of the Vulcan women leaped onto the truck bed and reached down to help one of the off-worlders up. Then everybody was swarming aboard. Kirk ended up in the front of the bed, just under the cab's rear window.

At his right was one of the off-world students, a human boy from some far-out colony. He never talked much, except about Vulcan hostility to the students, so Kirk didn't know him well. On his other side sat a Vulcan woman, one of the students from up the valley.

Sildon called, "S'chames, signal go."

Kirk turned around and pounded on the cab, four times in rapid succession. Then he sat down fast. The truck lurched into gear and circled hard left out of the shed. Kirk had decided a long time ago that the Legion of Agriculture's schools were shockingly deficient in the study of Newton's Laws. Still, he'd never seen anybody fall off the truck. Somehow, the off-worlders always ended up in the middle. Only the Vulcans sat with their feet dangling over the edges of the truck bed.

As they emerged into full sunlight, Kirk donned his sun-visor. It wasn't color-corrected like those the other off-worlders used. Kirk somehow enjoyed seeing Vulcan in all its peculiar glory. It would be a travesty to transform its coloration to Earth-normal. Of course, that was a Service attitude--minimum protection from environmental influences. The others were civilians.

A white-hot sun in a ruby-red sky was striking sparks of blue off the bright orange lake that filled the central chasm of the valley floor. The northern end of that lake, shrouded now in morning mist and incipient heat-shimmer, lapped at a desert wonderland of carved sand-dunes that rose up in weird and sometimes grotesque formations. They were solid stone sand-dunes, wind-sculpted with scintillating jewels encrusting them in the most unlikely places. At night, when the wind would blow, Kirk imagined he could hear generations of Vulcan ghosts gossiping among the fossilized dunes. Or, when it was quiet, he could hear the placid lake currents skirring between the formations, eating away at them until they would come crashing down into the waters and be dissolved.

As he rode the wagon on his way to work that morning, Kirk gazed out over the heads of his companions toward that distant northern end of the valley. Deep inside him there was a frozen knot of thoughts which he dared not touch yet. He had injured Soled! How?

Looking to the north, Kirk caught sight of the Dakainya utsulan. He let his thoughts be drawn to it to avoid asking himself questions, affixing blame. Several yahvee ago, Kirk had accompanied Sildon up that northern road to deliver a load of supplies to the Vulcan school there. Strangely enough, that day was the happiest Kirk had spent at the school. Or perhaps not so strangely. It had been like old times.

On their way back from offloading at the warehouse up there, Sildon had asked, "Ever seen an utsulan?" Kirk had said, "No. I've heard of them but still haven't a clear idea what they're for." Everything Vulcans did was for something, Kirk had discovered, but not always for exactly what humans would expect.

"Dakainya utsulan is one of the most interesting ones. Next to Beom, it's probably the most famous. It's only a few minutes out of our way. Let's drive over there and take a look."

That was how it had started, innocently enough. Kirk had said, "Yes. I'd like that." And the attack, when it started, had practically escaped his notice. North End Park lay below them as they wound down the switchback service road. "Nobody ever comes this way any more. Good to drive it once in a while just to keep the road open," said Sildon.

And occasionally, they did have to stop to roll stones off the road. In one place, they found the edge of the roadbed crumbling over the side of the cliff and placed a service marker buoy so the repair crew would find the spot.

They had stopped at a turnout overlooking the whole of North End where Kirk could get a clear view of the utsulan from above. It lay amid the carved fossilized sand dunes both reflecting their myriad colors and being colored by them. The sun flashed dazzlingly off the utsulan resounders, and Kirk's main impression was of painful brilliance. "So that's a utsulan," he'd said conversationally to Sildon.

The Vulcan had seated himself on a rock beside a piece of undressed pipe that protruded from the sheer cliff behind them. Mineral water dribbled out of the pipe to be instantly soaked up by the dusty ground. Sildon had been sitting there behind Kirk chewing dried bydo slices and drinking the mineral water from a cup he'd found in the truck. The unusual and delicious water was Sildon's real motive in coming this way, Kirk had deduced, and he was prepared to dawdle until his Vulcan friend had drunk his fill.

At length, Kirk wondered at Sildon's lack of response to his comment. He turned--and Sildon was gone!

Searching with quick, Star Fleet trained eyes, Kirk had noted there was no place the Vulcan could have goneto. On one side, the ground fell away steeply to the barren waste of North End. On the other side, the cliff rose straight up. As far as he could see up and down the road there was no sign of life.

Standing beside the empty truck which he'd searched around and under three times, Kirk knew the old thrill of alarm. Danger. Crisis. Nothing ultimately galaxy-shaking, to be sure, but definitely a personal danger both to himself and to his new friend. He had waited long enough to be certain Sildon hadn't merely trotted off to relieve himself. Then he made his decision.

Slowly, with clumsy but deliberate moves, he had lowered his barrier, relinquishing the protection of his idlomputt. Far away, in his room, and in Soled's studio, the pair of devices tuned to him and pulsed briefly and subsided. He stood exposed to reality in a way he had been unable to bear just a few months before. He faced it with a fierce pride, a Captain's pride.

It had been a foolish thing to do. He, of course, hadn't known that at the time. Sildon hadn't told him about the wildlife infesting this sterile-looking wilderness. Even so, the name sepmahnt wouldn't have meant much to Kirk then.

As a result, Kirk forgot all about Sildon and about Dakainya. His feet carried him downslope, to his left along the road, until he came to a narrow gash in the cliffside. He edged through it into a rocky defiaë, hardly more than a cleft in the solid mountain. There was enough ground water to support profuse Vulcan plants, some of a variety Kirk hadn't seen much of in this desert region, fleshy-leaved, almost green in the deep shadows.

High up the sides of the cliffs on either hand, Kirk saw numerous cave openings and recesses that might become caves. But these didn't register on him at all. He was drawn onward by a promise of exquisite pleasure.

All memory of Sildon had evaporated from his consciousness by the time he stumbled on the shallow pond rimmed with drooping willow trees (or what looked like willow trees.) And so it was with every anticipation of experiencing his heart's most satisfying pleasure that he came upon the scene. In that the sepmahnt, being only a beast surviving by usually valid methods, had miscalculated.

Triggered by the sepmahnt's beamed signal, Kirk's mind told him that before him lay Spock helpless under the claws and dripping fangs of a lean, ferocious, and utterly deadly sehlat. The illusion wasn't much, as sepmahnt illusions go, but it was all the poor creature could spare for Kirk after subduing Sildon's better trained mind. Turning Sildon into Spock had been easy. But even Kirk had a hard time visualizing the gigantic beast as one of the charming, domesticated cousins of the sepmahnts.

The illusions shattered. Kirk blinked. And in the split instant that two warring visions occupied his mind, Kirk acted. Unable to choose which was reality, he acted on them both. His greatest pleasure, rescuing Spock, and his intended action spurred by the real situation, rescuing Sildon, both required the same action.

He jumped onto the animal's back, gripping its neck with one elbow, and holding himself with his knees. Instantly, the beast let go of Sildon and reared up on shaggy hind legs. Kirk found himself a good fourteen feet in the air being lashed about mercilessly. Then he was falling, thrown clear as the animal came down on all fours, facing Sildon.

Kirk landed softly on a springy bed of surface-floating plants that covered part of the pond. Splashing to his feet, he found Sildon crouched before the beast as if fighting it with a knife. But the Vulcan had no weapon, except his mind. Wave after wave of thought beat at Kirk's barriers, now only weakly maintained without direct contact with the idlomputt.

And the beast countered Sildon's every suggestion with overpowering assaults of pleasure, ease, safety.

Suddenly, before Kirk's eyes, the sepmahnt became T'Uriamne. She was tall and splendid in rich, flowing robes of golden furs and a queen's ransom in jewels worked through her hair. Without knowing how he knew, Kirk saw her as preparing to march in her own wedding procession (and the thought didn't even shock him); not only her own wedding--but his!

He stiffened as if his skin had been punctured by a thousand needles. The shock was like a thud in his brain, slamming a door closed on another reality. Vulcans don't wear furs! was the only thought in his head when Sildon called, "S'chames! Help me teach this sepmahnt a lesson she'll never forget!"

Kirk slogged out of the tepid water. "What can I do?"

"I've got her subdued now. You hold her while I show her what happens to wild beasts foolish enough to attack people."

It never occurred to Kirk to wonder if he could do it or not. Soled had never given him a task beyond his ability, and he'd come to trust that he could do whatever was given him to do. In short, he had developed psychometric self-confidence. He reached over and took control from Sildon.

Sildon immediately dropped to his knees beside the now recumbent animal and reached up to grip its skull for a mind-meld. The sepmaht whimpered a little, as if in nightmare, and at length, when Sildon released it, it thrashed about on its back and then subsided as if dead.

"There, that should keep it from trying that again," said Sildon. "S'chames? S'chames! You can let her go now."

Kirk came out of it staggering a little but otherwise unscathed. Sildon had sustained a wrenched ankle and an assortment of bruises and cuts. They walked the length of that cleft arms over each others' shoulders for support in a companionable silence.

For Kirk, the greatest pleasure had come when Sildon had hardly thanked him for the rescue. He had accepted it as Spock always did, with a curt nod and a word of acknowledgement. Neither of them knew at the time that the experience would soon save Kirk's life.

Kirk glowed as he watched the rising sun chase shadows from the distant North End Park. There were dangers there, true, but that just added to the attraction for him. He vowed he would visit that utsulan properly before he left Dakainya.

Suddenly, the image in Kirks's mind shifted from tall, proud, formations reaching eternally for the stars into twisted, horrible shapes that slumped and crumbled into dark, oily water.

Kirk shook his head. That wasn't his image. North End Park was a fantasmagora of ethereal beauty. The park was a natural playground, and it exuded some of the elusive Peace that he'd always associated with D'R'hiset alone.

Hastily, he ran a check on his barriers. The sorting and filtering of impressions reaching his conscious mind had been trained into his subconscious again. Most of the time, now, the barriers worked perfectly. But...

Kirk's head whipped around and zeroed in on his fellow student. "Don't do that!"

The truck jounced onto the un-paved field-road. They were passing along the outside of a high hedgerow. The Vulcans seated on that side of the truck drew up their legs and inched deeper onto the truck-bed. The boy started to shrink away from them an irrational inch farther. He raked Kirk with a sullen glance, "Just tryin'a'be friendly."

"Sorry, but I'm not ready for that kind of friendliness just now. I find it...painful... when my barrier is breached."

The sullenness turned to a sneer. "You...damned...Vulcan!" It had been in English, but the single word, Vulcan, spoken in that tone, had certainly carried to every pointed ear aboard, though not an eyebrow flickered.

Down the flatbed, Sildon got to his feet, balancing alertly against the jerky motion. The Vulcans turned to see what he was doing. But he only said, "S'chames, if you are not busy, come here. I have something I think you might appreciate."

Curious, Kirk rose from the crate he'd been sitting on and started carefully toward Sildon. The humans seated on similar crates scattered on the flatbed watched silently. As Kirk walked the length of the heaving flatbed, strong Vulcan hands reached out to steady him, each of the workers rising in turn as he passed. The humans sat clutching their boxes as if afraid they'd fall off the truck even though they were securely seated in the middle.

When Kirk finally reached for Sildon's hand, he began to realize what had happened. And when Sildon pulled him down to a seat on the edge of the truck, Kirk had put a name to it. He'd been included on the Vulcan side of a Vulcan/human joke. Nobody was laughing, but it was still a prime example of spontaneous Vulcan humor. Kirk could tell from the definite relaxation of tension, which was after all, what humor was for.

Now, here he sat sleeve-to-sleeve between two Vulcans, and he was more secure than with thirteen inches of air between him and a fellow-human student. He could feel a...a...pressure lifted from his barriers. And it came home to him what Miranda had meant: "No, not how to read minds...how not to read them."

Sildon gave that peculiar Vulcan nod, a tilting twist of the head to the left. "I thought you'd appreciate that. If you consent, I'd like you to be a foreman today. Most of the others have never harvested bydo before."

"This is the first day I've worked a full shift. I don't know..."

"If you get tired, I'll rotate you into the sorting room and combine two of the picking



crews. But this morning, I'd like to scatter as much as possible. I think the stalv'in field is almost over-ripe for gleaning. The auto-harvesters brought back a heavily yellowed load yesterday, and I'd like to have some intelligent eyes evaluating the crop today."

"You want me to glean the northwest field?"

"Yes. I have to train a new sorting crew this morning."

The implication, Kirk realized, was that next to Sildon, he was the best qualified to boss the gleaning squad. He'd been harvesting bydo now off and on for about five weeks. Most of these here were green recruits by comparison.

The truck turned a corner, throwing everyone seated on the tail-gate, Kirk included, hard to the right. Kirk slid a few inches into Sildon's hard-muscled side. When the truck righted itself again, Sildon gave Kirk a little shove back into position. "You needn't worry, though. I'll keep an eye on the stalv'in boxes, and if you get off I'll let you know."

"Good enough."

"Now this time," said Sildon, as another turn approached, "grip the bed with your legs, like this." He swung his feet back under the bed until his calves touched the bottom. Kirk copied the motion and found he could hold himself in place quite easily. His calf-muscles had developed somewhat during the last few months.

The truck swung into the portable shed used as a base of operations for the field crews. Long sorting tables occupied one end of the complex. Automatic machinery had been scrubbed down and readied for the day's load. The boxes delivered on robot dollies would be dumped onto the sorting tables and conveyed under auto-acanners which would sort the produce according to grade. The sorting crew was already taking its station, beginning to calibrate and program the equipment. Huge stacks of empty crates stood ready at the far end of the shed.

The truck let them off in the picker's area. Sildon stood up on the flatbed of a two-wheeled wagon with enormously tall wheels. He called out names of the four foremen for the day, and then went on to call the names of the groups they would handle and their assignments. He did it all without reference to any list, but there were no protests.

Kirk ended up with a mixed group. Two Vulcans, man and wife, one of the human students from Dakainya, and one of the Vulcan students from up the valley. The five of them were joined by a second group of five with a Vulcan woman foreman. She came over to Kirk as he was passing out sampling kits. "My name is T'kaley. You'll have to show me the criteria. I've never picked bydo before."

Kirk pulled the corners of his mouth in to keep from smiling outright. "I'll bet you're better at eating it than I am, though."

She looked at him measuringly. "It is an acquired taste."

Kirk unlimbered one of the testing kits. "You insert this probe into the fibril. If you get a red light, you harvest; if you get a green light, you pass. But if you get a yellow light, you use your own judgment."

"Yes, I've worked threnr fields often and it is similar. The crucial step is the judgment. Unripe fruits don't contain the necessary nutrients, over-ripe ones can be poisonous, but the question is will a crew be along in time to harvest the almost-ripe before it becomes over-ripe. Therein rests the profit margin for the entire farming operation."

"Right. This field we're gleaning today was picked yesterday by the robos, and they brought in a preponderance of yellows." He glanced at the crew standing behind her. All deeply tanned Vulcans. They'd learn quickly, but his own crew would need constant supervision. "Can you drive the lorry?"

"Yes."

"Good. Take your crew out to co-ordinates three-five-five by nine-nine-two, stalv'in. I'll show you through a row first, then I'll put my people to work. Let's go."

Kirk climbed into one of the lorries behind the driver, the heavy-set Vulcan woman assigned to his team. The high wheels began to turn, and they moved out onto the soft, fertile soil of the cultivated fields. The lorry was built high to straddle rows of plants for inspection, but now, during the harvest season, it went between rows of ripening vines.

Behind it, T'kaley brought the other lorry with her crew. As he threw a glance over his shoulder, Kirk saw they were all examining the test-kits they'd been supplied with. But something in their manner, as they turned the tricorder-like instrument over and over in their hands, told Kirk that they were not merely curious, as Spock would be, given a new tool and job, they were studious in a very purposeful way.

Kirk turned back to face front. His driver cornered the lorry expertly and straightened out along the proper row without instructions. Her husband, seated beside her on the front bench, was also examining the testing kit. His manner was subtly different from Spock's, but it reminded Kirk more strongly of his absent friend. His fingers caressed the instrument with the

competence of the scientist.

It had been a long time since Kirk had seen fingers move with that particular air. The man seemed to be drawing information in through the tips of his fingers. And there was a vague sort of...reverance in the way he handled the nearly indestructible machine. Yes, thought Kirk, here was a man accustomed to using priceless, delicate instrumentation. He leaned forward and said, "Legion of Science?"

The man turned. "Affirmative. Assistant Director of the Academy. Sekei."

Kirk mustered his best Vulcanur accent and said, "Peace and Long Life, Sekei."

The heavy-set woman turned to glance at Kirk without taking her hands off the controls. She said in nearly unaccented English, "May You Live Long and Prosper, James."

Kirk returned the courtesy. These people who were almost from his world pleased him. The others at Dakainya had nearly all been from non-scientific, mono-cultural backgrounds.

How I've missed my ship! The void in his life where Spock belonged suddenly ached like a gnawing hunger. The Enterprise and all the swift problems that passed through her solved by the co-ordinated union of Spock's unmatched mind and his own well-tempered judgment...now seemed so far away and so desirable. That was life. This was unreal.

Suddenly, the symphony of colors loomed before his eyes, transmuting themselves into a garish nightmare. Dakainya's distant buildings lay in ruins on the horizon. The fields lay bare and dead at his feet. Across the sparkling orange lake, the drying beds of the potassium salt mines lay dry and untended, choked with dirt. The white-hot sun pressed down on his head, seeming to pound him into the rock-hard soil.

The barren hostility of the valley was no worse than the emptiness of his life. Of what possible use could an adopted second son be? He didn't even have Name Rights in the family. They could tell him what he must do, but he had no control over their actions.

Kirk squeezed his eyes shut, and used the bright darkness behind his eyelids as a barricade against the scene. With all the strength of his will, he summoned the image of the Idlomputt flame and wrapped its peculiar field about himself as a shield. In his room, deep in the faraway Dakainyacomplex, the Idlomputt flared briefly.

When he opened his eyes, the fields lay spread out around him, lush, ripe, and friendly. He wiped sweat off his brow with the inside elbow of his sleeve. The tough, desert-weave material dried instantly. Kirk let out the breath he hadn't known he'd been holding. Something pierced my barriers, he thought.

What had he been thinking before he broke the contact? A second son adopted without Name Rights? Weird. He not only had Name Rights, he had all the hellish responsibility that went with it. By accepting the kraith of adoption, he'd written Spock a blank check on his future. But it hadn't been without compensations. If Spock had rights over his life, he had just as many rights over Spock's!

The more so now that Spock was on Pilgrimage. Technically, as youngest brother, he was Head of Family in Spock's absence--or would be if he, himself, weren't on the sick-list. In fact, he wasn't qualified to handle the family business and knew it better than anyone else. Sarek tended to the whole job with one-tenth of his total working hours and barely noticed the strain.

Kirk shrugged the affair off. He must have picked up the maunderings of some Vulcan on the work crew and combined that with some long-ago memory thrown at him by another worker. And he thought he'd mastered the barrier! He still had plenty to learn.

The two lorries drew abreast at the end of a long, curved furrow where the vines drooped heavy with the long tendrils of bydo. The soft ground still held the impressions from the robo-harvesters. Kirk could see where they'd been pausing, backtracking and hesitating. This was a job for real pickers, not machines.

As the two work crews jumped down, Kirk stood up on the lorry's floorboards. "Sekei, take your group down to the far end of this aisle and try out your test-kits. But don't do any picking until I get there. T'kaley, bring your group around to this aisle." He jumped down and led the way toward an adjacent row.

The morning went swiftly for Kirk after that. He was busy and it took his mind off his feelings. He was picking bydo, gleaning an important field of it, in fact. The general crop-year had been bad for this staple of the Vulcan diet. Too much rain in the south had ruined their bumper crop. Fire set by heat-lightening had devastated forty per cent of the un-gleaned fields on the western continent. And an unpredicted volcanic eruption had nearly destroyed the usefulness of some of the most fertile northern fields. Dakainya's crop wastherefore trebly valuable. Nobody would starve for lack of bydo-sausage, to be sure. But the open market price was skyrocketing.

Kirk felt he was doing useful, important work. There was nobody around more qualified to do it than he, and it had to be done now while the V-complex content of the bydo was at

peak. Kirk himself didn't much care for the prepared bydo-sausage. The long, bean-sprout-like tendrils of the bydo plant (a kind of 'flower' in that it served to attract fertilizing insects) were twined into rope-like bundles, cemented with an herb-rich paste, and allowed to age gracefully (rot, that is), deep in the caves above Dakainya. The product was then sliced into pastrami-thin segments and sometimes deep-fried in hot oil, or eaten fresh. The pungent flavor did resemble some Earthly cheeses, but Kirk didn't go in for limburger too often. Nevertheless, the average Vulcan consumed about ten pounds a year of bydo-sausage products, and Dakainya was considered the prime producer of the highest quality sausages.

The eight-foot high clusters of vines, spaced in rows only a few feet apart, provided plenty of shade throughout the morning. It was hot, but not unbearably so. It was dry, but the robos that brought the flat boxes and took away the full ones always came with plenty of cold water for the humans. The work wasn't heavy, but it was dirty. The sticky bydo tendrils womehow managed to collect enough muck to cover the pickers with dirt within a few hours. Sweating skin, despite the desert-weave coveralls, still got gritty enough to itch. Kirk was ready to quit for lunch when his com-box gave a low whistle.

Kirk answered it, "Stalv'in."

"Sildon here. S'chames, your crews are to be commended. We're getting ninety-five per cent pass out of your fields."

Kirk swallowed an automatic thank you. "Commendation accepted. We're about ready to come in for the noon break."

"The Dakainya lunch wagon is almost here. Any time you're ready."

"Kirk out." He flipped the recall switch that would bring the crews back to the lorries and send the robos in with the last of the morning's crop. He slung the command-unit communicator over one shoulder and the testing kit over the other, then parting a curtain of bydo tendrils, he stuck his head through to the next aisle where the other human from Dakainya was working. "Lunch break, Chester. Look over the other row and see if Sandruk noticed my recall light."

Chester, a gauky red-haired boy, started to move across the aisle in which he worked. Kirk called, "But don't talk to him. He's in Intensives, you know."

Chester turned back. "How the hell can you know with these people?"

"They get...hmmm...withdrawn. Don't worry, after you've been here a few more months, you'll catch on." Kirk watched the boy cneck on Sandruk, who was already headed for the lorry. Then he angled on down his own row.

Yes, he thought, after a while it was easy to detect the signs of that peculiar, intense concentration of the Vulcan learning-phase. He'd recognized it in Spock for years before he found out what it was. Now he was beginning to be able to tell the difference between the various degrees of Intensive and between the Intensive learning state and the other types of withdrawal.

Kirk winced as he remembered what a boorish clod he'd been just a few years ago. Learning Vulcan manners had sensitized him to the attitudes of the various non-Earth-derived cultures, and the elaborate protocol of Interstellar Diplomacy made much more sense to him now that he could see what it was for. But an Interstellar Diplomat rarely had to deal with intensely personal matters, so the book of rules didn't cover such situations. He'd been good at the book, and even graceful in its applicaiton. But now that he stood with one foot planted firmly in each of two vastly different cultures, he knew he'd be much better at it. Much better.

It wasn't just that he could recognize the symptoms of, for example, pon farr. It was that now, if he didn't know something, he knew how to ask without being needlessly offensive as he had been. The key was both obvious and subtle. Logic.

As he strode along between high rows of bydo plants, Kirk let his mind drift into a daydream. If he'd known then what he knew now, what would he have said to Spock? He wouldn't have pounded Spock's desk. He wouldn't have demanded an explanation. He wouldn't have hounded his friend into seeking to shield himself with the Idlomputt barrier.

He'd have drawn up an argument diagram, as neatly laid out as he could. He'd have weighted each factor in the decision--Vulcan or Altair--as closely as he could, leaving unknowns in each of the places where he didn't understand. He'd have presented his diagram to Spock, displaying his alternatives as clearly as possible, the decision for Altair being mathematically obvious.

Spock would have drawn in the numbers for the x-factors, written the missing equations, and illucidated the result, Altair and death, Vulcan and life. Vulcan and marriage.

Kirk was not stupid. He would have understood.

Ah, it was a nice fantasy. Kirk would have understood. He'd been depending on that, if it become necessary. Kirk wouldn't have asked any painful questions, even though he knew nothing of the pon farr. He was glad it had never become necessary--never would become necessary. He was immune, even to the Blooming. T'Pring would never have a chance at him as she had at Ssarsun's Spock. And that Ssarsun's Spock would have no more chance to abuse his Kirk with his almost-adoption!

Long, competent fingers flew over glowing console. Lights flickered. Between one step and the next, the surrounding bydo plants flickered and disappeared. Kirk stumbled headlong to the parched, bare ground.

He picked himself up, automatically brushing stone-hard clods of dirt from his hands and knees. The sun scorched this valley without benefit of shade or irrigation. Where was he?

There, that lake! And far to the mist-shrouded north--yes, the Park. Dakainya! But... he pivoted, the buildings, the people, the crops...not a trace. Or, no. There did seem to be ruins climbing near where the school buildings used to be. His eye climbed the distant hills, searching--the bydo caves, gone! It seemed as if some heavy hand had crumpled the sheer rock cliff that had harbored the world-famous caves. With them gone, no wonder the valley had died.

But with the valley dead, it was a good five hundred miles to civilization! He'd never make it out, on foot, alone, without transportation. How had he gotten here? He looked around. There was nothing, absolutely nothing in sight.

A movement caught his eye. Far to the north where the mist lay heavy among the rock-formations of the Park, a small aircar rose. In moments it was growing larger skimming low over the cracked, barren soil. It set down expertly not ten yards from him.

The man who emerged was wearing the Starfleet Commodore's uniform with the service patch of Vulcan Starbase blazoned on it. That man was...was...was Spock!

No, no, he mustn't think of Spock. It would endanger his friend, his brother. This was just another mind-incursion. Someone else's memory was inducing these thoughts in him. It wasn't real!

He turned and ran, stumbling, away from the apparition. His throat burned dry after a few steps, but he forced himself to scramble away from the one thing that he must not face. He'd been thinking about Spock, and now look what had happened. He'd indulged himself once too often!

Horrified at the nightmarish quality of the landscape, and the bizarre appearance of a man supposedly half a world away, he ran. But deep in his mind, a cool river of thought remained undisturbed. His incoherent mind was a disgrace to the Name that had been entrusted to him. Something commanded, Stop. Gather yourself. Think.

But he could not heed. Could not. He'd been picking bydo. He'd slipped into nightmare. It couldn't be real. Had to get out...get back.

Get back. Yes. Get back, bring help.

The thought reverberated through a mind suddenly gone empty of all but the almost reflexive service training. Before attempting rescue, report! Hand went to hip, reaching for the communicator that wasn't there.

The Pilgrim who wasn't a Pilgrim called in Spock's voice, "Stop, Jim. I won't harm you."

But he didn't stop. Feet crunched behind him, moving effortlessly. He was weak, too weak to run further. Something was draining his strength, draining away all until he moved as if engulfed by yhotekhq syrup, unwhipped and nearly solid. Seen through the diffracting syrup-crystals, the scene was smeared out into bands of too-bright colors--reds, ochre, browns, brilliant yellow, singing oranges, red, red, red!

It took all his strength and will to drive his right leg forward one more inch. He squeezed his eyes shut and pulled his left foot free of the yhotekhq syrup. He moved slower and ever slower as he strove to race the wind. He knew he was losing. It was as if there were a gigantic hole through which his strength flowed at warp speed, faster than he could generate it.

He felt his muscles giving way, one at a time. His knees folded under him. His thighs loosened. His arms barely held enough to break his fall. An arm encircled his chest, catching him in mid-air, easing him to the ground.

The face loomed once more, the face he mustn't know until the Pilgrimage had been completed. Must report to Soled. Report. Report. Report.

He felt the hard band of the man's arm across his chest, restraining him from sitting up. He put all his will into breaking that restraint. Up, up, he pushed his body, willing to break that contact. Slowly, he rose against it, and felt it parting, breaking away.

Steely Vulcan fingers closed over his shoulder. The pain that couldn't quite be felt before it was gone in the mists of unconsciousness cut off the rising hysteria.

When the Captain awoke, it was to the certain knowledge that what surrounded him was real and could be dealt with using the concrete tools of reality. Clinging to that thought, he sat up and looked around.

He was in a cave...no, he amended that thought, it was some huge, artificial structure. It had the regular outlines of an elongated prism, perhaps all of four or five stories high, resting on its small end. He sat on a field-mattress amidst shards of broken glass, some of

which was pulverized to the texture of coarse sand. Nearby, several portable instrument cases were arranged around a low stool, forming a makeshift control console. An eerie blue light emanated from the instruments. It was just bright enough to make out a stoop-shouldered figure coming toward him out of the gloom.

Kirk pulled his bare feet under himself and stood on the mattress, waiting.

The strange Spock in Commodore's uniform came toward Kirk crunching the broken glass with shiny black boots. In one hand, he held a steaming mug, in the other a plate with slices of some plain bread-like cake. He held them out to Kirk. "Drink. You will feel better."

Kirk hesitated, making no move to accept the offering.

"You will be safe here until all your questions are answered."

"How do I know you aren't trying to drug me?"

"To accomplish what?"

The genuine Spockish surprise convinced Kirk that he'd come to no immediate harm. He accepted plate and mug. Spock moved back into the shadows to reappear bearing two stools which he placed carefully. Kirk sat and pulled on his boots, which had been meticulously arranged at the corner of the mattress. Then he took up the mug and sipped. It was good coffee.

The steam gave off a slightly nauseating aroma to which he'd accustomed himself over the years. Caffeine rarely agreed with his metabolism, but one couldn't expect others to understand such things.

Kirk pulled back from the contact, clamping down his barriers as hard as he could.

"Captain, is something wrong?"

As those words echoed smaller and smaller up the prism-shaped chimney above them, they soothed his parched throat just like the hot coffee, going downward to un-knot his hunger-tensed stomach.

Kirk shook his head to clear away the vertigo of doubled vision, doubled senses. How long it had been since he'd uttered such words! No! He hadn't spoken, he'd drunk the coffee which tasted delicious, not nauseating. Nightmare again! And he couldn't deal with that. Reality. Where was reality?

He hadn't realized he'd spoken aloud until he found Spock's hands on his biceps, shaking him firmly. "Captain, this is real. I am real. You must believe that. This...is...no...dream!"

Kirk twisted away, and Spock let him go. Gradually, he rebuilt his barriers from scratch. To do it, he had to pretend his Idlomputt was right there before him. He worked with the memory of it shielding his mind. They'd told him it could be done like this, but he'd never tried it before. Now, he had to make it work. Had to hold onto reality.

When he'd finished, he turned to look once more at this Spock who claimed to be real. "You..."

"I am real, Captain. But I am not the Spock you've known all your life."

"Parallel universe?"

"Precisely. I brought you here."

"...bu...why? Got to get back."

"No, you needn't worry about returning. There is a place for you here." He gestured, "Sit down, and I will explain."

Knees suddenly weak, Kirk sat. "...can't stay here. Look..."

"Jim, I ask only a few minutes of your time to convince you. You're safe here. You can afford to listen to me, can't you?"

There was something in the way the Vulcan spoke that riveted Kirk's attention on his words. Here there was no trace of that withdrawn, almost mocking detachment with which his foster-brother observed the antics of humans. Instead, Kirk heard a man who had paid an enormous price to obtain an interview, and who asked nothing in return but a few moments time to be heard. Yet there was something else in that voice--or no, not the voice but the silences between the words. It was fear. Fear that that audience would not be granted after all.

"Well," said Kirk at length, "I suppose there's no harm in listening."

Spock drew a deep breath and relaxed systematically as if he'd just won the greatest battle and the rest would be a mopping up exercise. He spoke then, earnestly, in quiet tense words, convincing words. As he listened, Kirk knew that this was Spock driven to an act far beyond desperation.

Kirk learned, in little flickers and flashes, from a phrase here and a word chosen there, something of his other self, that other Kirk who had been the life's strength to this Spock. But there were odd differences in that other Kirk. The choices he made, the things he enjoyed, the things he had done together with Spock--such as the glimpse Kirk got of the two of them sail boating on an Earthside lake, baching it at an isolated mountain cabin during a long layover at Luna Base. Differences.

But this was Spock. Nevertheless, it was Spock. Kirk found himself shrinking from that knowledge in an odd way he couldn't define. Yet, he thirsted to know more of this man so different from his brother. And so he listened.

At length, they shared a meal. From habit of recent months, Kirk ate in silence, giving the flavors his total attention. It was a while after he had finished all but the coffee that he noticed the Commodore, seated tailor fashion before him on the mat, had let his hands fall limply to his ankles while his eyes closed as if in rapt contemplation of some infinite pleasure.

The Vulcan's breathing came in long, deep shudders. For a moment, Kirk thought the Commodore was merely savoring the act of eating once more with his friend--a term he used more readily than Commander Spock ever did. But with the passing seconds and increasing surrender of the Commodore to whatever subjective experience gripped him, Kirk became uneasy and then alarmed.

He looked around him with new eyes. They were sitting, Kirk had learned, in the cavity that had housed the central crystal of the Dakainya utsulan. The shards of glassy material about them were thought to be the remains of that crystal shattered by some pre-historic catastrophe, possibly a quake. But it was essentially the Dakainya valley's North End, and, thought Kirk, the wildlife would be the same only more profuse. Wildlife such as sepmahs, for example. The abandoned ruin would make a good lair for such a creature.

Kirk rose, shaking his legs to uncramp them. Spock didn't seem to notice. Kirk turned, crouched to a fighting stance, eyeing each of the portals opening into the central shaft at various levels above him. Nothing visible.

On his own, ground floor, level, there was only the one dark entryway, a low tunnel leading outward. He wondered briefly if the honeycomb of passages that was the utsulan acted in some way as a sort of waveguide to telepathic signals. If so, the animal (if such it was) could be anywhere.

He bent down and shook Spock's shoulder. "Spock! Wake up! Fight it, man!"

But there was no response. The animal, Kirk knew, having enraptured its prey, would strike soon. It must be near. There were only three things Kirk could think of to do. He could wait for it to strike and try to fight it then. He could open his own mind to its call and be drawn to it (perhaps; Spock hadn't been drawn away, but then possibly he was fighting it). Or he could instigate a mindmeld with Spock and attempt to disentangle the Vulcan from the net before the animal struck.

This last had the advantage of not leaving Spock alone and unprotected while he, Kirk, was wandering around in a daze. It also had a peculiar appeal to Kirk's way of thinking--it put him on the offensive, rather than calling for him to play the helpless victim. It was better, tactically speaking, to take the initiative. Kirk did.

He knelt behind the Vulcan, forgetting in the press of the emergency that this was not his Spock but rather his kidnapper to whom he owed no special allegiance. He had never initiated a mindmeld in his life (except with Tanya and that didn't count since she had done all the work), but he now knew the theory.

He visualized the idlomputt flame and focused his mind selectively on the precise areas of mentation he had to reach, rejecting all others (he hoped). Then, groping to recall the layout maps of the Vulcan brain, he arranged his fingers, one pair at a time, and as if reaching through them and out their tips with his mind, he tried to grasp Spock's thoughts.

He met only a blankness, gray and featureless. He struggled against it for several minutes before breaking contact. Sitting back on his heels, he thought furiously. He had read a description recently--but it had been in Vulcanur and he hadn't exactly understood it--of what contact with a psi-null or reflexively barriered person feels like. The article had detailed ways of breaking through that barrier.

Kirk smiled, but there was nobody there to appreciate the wry chuckle or to see the nervous tremble of his lips as his suddenly dry tongue wiped them. It had been an authoritative article, and totally reliable. Kirk was absolutely certain of that. The author had been Spock. And now Kirk was going to use what Spock had learned by working on Kirk's mind in order to break through to a psi-null Spock, or a reflexively barriered Spock. The article had asserted positively that there was no way to detect the difference.

Once more Kirk scanned the galleries above, black holes leading off the shaft. Not a flicker of movement, but now the mental pressure had increased. He could feel it even though he held his own mind closed and concentrated. This must be a bigger, older, perhaps wiser sepmah than he'd faced before.

Kirk swallowed hard. From somewhere within himself, he found the old steadiness he'd always relied on in tight combat situations. He composed himself, focused his mind as he'd been taught, and launched a piercing assault on that featureless gray under his fingers. One brain center at a time, he opened the Vulcan mind. "We are growing closer, closer. We are Spock...I...am...Spock!"

After his initial, clumsy, overshooting, Kirk withdrew from the deepest personal levels and maintained the contact on the most superficial plane he could manage. Still, the untrained Vulcan mind fought to regain privacy almost harder than it fought the sepmah't.

We must...I must show you how...fight...beast!

Out! No!

Sinking again into languid pleasure. Image: T'Uriamne enrapt by golden furs marching against a red sky. Kirk's face aglow as only Kirk's face could. A future stretching deep before them; shared labors; shared exhaustion; shared accomplishments only their unique teamwork could achieve. Shared celebrations danced beneath the stars among the ancient pillars at Top of World. Kirk and T'Uriamne seated beside each other surrounded by the formal tables of the Federation Council, speaking with one voice for All Vulcan. And beside them, Spock aglow as only Spock can be. Satisfaction. Is.

Not yet! Is not yet!

Is. Peace. Contentment. Future reached and secured.

Is...not!

Serenity. Achieved.

No! Not what will be like. Come. See real.

No.

Come.

And Kirk showed the flaring joy of a true Spockian accomplishment, the sweetness of breath drawn through clenched teeth as a triumph earned opens new vistas to conquer, vanquish this beast with me and experience the reality of this together--share with me!

The reality of shared battle with Kirk drew the ensnared Vulcan mind strongly enough for Kirk to begin. He had never been taught this technique, had in fact developed it himself after observing Sildon at it only briefly. But he had been taught many such techniques by this non-verbal method. Now, gripping and guiding Spock's mind, much as a teacher guides a beginner's pencil, Kirk imparted the control method. Meanwhile, he kept himself aloof from the sepmah't's influence--or so he thought.

The beast had reached through Spock's barriers and touched the pleasure centers of his brain. And Kirk's conscious barriers were tissuepaper compared to the well developed Vulcan's shield. This Spock had been taught, from the cradle, that he was different, that he would never develop any of the inward sensitivity natural in his family. And so it became true.

The young Spock--the different one--had found refuge from long solitary days in exploring old ruins, abandoned places, where ordinary people never went because of the sepmah't and other such beasts. They became his private havens. But, at least one sepmah't had learned a way through to his mind, and through it to Kirk's.

Fighting that silent, formless, gray battle, Kirk taught that precocious sepmah't a lesson just as Sildon had, while Spock held it. It would never attempt its tricks on a biped again!

The two men awoke to find themselves sprawled on sun-warmed sand as night enveloped the utsulan. About them, the sand was churned with overlapping tracks. They helped each other stagger upright, panting and leaning on each other for support.

We did it. The last thought Kirk allowed before he snapped the contact that bound them.

#### CHAPTER FOUR

#### DANGEROUS EXPERIMENT

He felt the hard band of a Vulcan arm across his chest, restraining him from sitting up. He put all his will into breaking that hold. Up, up, he pushed, forcing his way against and through that barrier. And slowly, it parted, giving way before him, falling away as he rose up against it.

"REPORT! REPORT! REPORT!"

The hoarse scream echoed off the gleaming ceramic tile walls. The light blanket that had lain over his chest slid down onto his lap, no longer a dead weight holding him down. An

orange irradiator lamp had been positioned over his body, and he could already feel the strength it infused into his system--better than McCoy's vile potions, good solid, Vulcan medical practice.

Slowly, he re-oriented himself. Utsulan. The face looming over his was Sarek's. Anti-wheerr. Unexpected assault, draining his strength away. Flashes of Dakainya, as it had always been, and then as it might become without the bydo caves. Kirk!

It was a cold shock that ran through him. The pieces of the jigsaw fell neatly into place now that his mind was no longer befogged by that incredible weakness--Jim kidnapped, stolen away across time by a Spock who believed he was rescuing a Kirk from unjust treatment. And Jim was in no condition to present explanation or argument--his mind would soon be losing it integrative factor out of contact with the Idlomputt-shielding device.

"Spock, lay back down. The physician is coming."

Mind racing, Spock allowed his father to push him back into a horizontal position. The orange-red light that bathed his bare skin did feel good. It helped to clear his head, and precise thinking would be needed now. There wasn't a second to waste.

But first the physician must certify him fit for duty. He concentrated on restoring his physical equilibrium. The physician arrived and he answered the routine questions, submitted to the intravenous nutriment, performed the required tests and was discharged. But all the while, his mind focused on the plan to rescue Kirk, and when he was freed, he sought out the Chief Attendant.

The administrative offices of Beom were of the same tile-faced stone as the rest of the Resident's building. One wall was of translucent bricks yielding a blurred view of the utsulan. The Chief's desk was a waist-high strip of table filled into one corner of the translucent wall. Above it hung a complex of monitor screens beneath which were switching controls.

As Spock entered, Sinzu turned from his work. It was plain he'd completely switched attention from the duty rosters he'd been working on to the Pilgrim who had just entered. He swivel' a second chair around in silent invitation. Spock took it, joining the Attendant at his desk. The other occupants of the room went about their tasks apparently not noticing.

After a suitable pause, just long enough to be polite yet short enough to indicate haste, Spock opened. "The experience I have just undergone has brought me to a crucial decision."

It was an opening jarring to Vulcan nerves. One doesn't introduce discord before one's conversant has had a chance to attune himself and erect appropriate barriers. Spock knew he was being harsh, even barbarously human, especially considering that the Beom Attendants lived a somewhat secluded life which spoiled them for the rapid adjustments of the city-dweller. But Spock was now more a Starfleet officer than a Pilgrim. "Traditionally, my position puts Beom under my autonomous control. I have never exercised that prerogative before. It has now become necessary to declare rexath here."

Sinzu's reaction was limited to a slight widening of the eyes. Spock hastened to add, "I do not intend to supplant your authority. It will only be for a short while. I do not have time to argue with you over every step that must be taken, nor to explain the information and reasoning behind my actions."

"I cannot prevent rexath. It is your right."

Spock could see the apprehension behind those words, and he moved to allay that incipient fear by touching Sinzu's thumb with his own in the gesture of sincerity. "Beom means as much to me as it does to you. It is as safe with me as it would be with you. This is truth."

It was an unprecedented gesture from a Pilgrim, and Sinzu didn't take unfair advantage of it. This was no ordinary Pilgrim. He broke the contact after the minimum courteous time and reached out to the intercom switches. All over the Beom installation, except for the dark and silent tourist buildings, his voice echoes. "This is Sinzu. The Pilgrim, Spock, has declared Beom under rexath to him. All strictures regarding a Pilgrim in rexath are to be promptly reviewed by all personnel and hereafter scrupulously observed."

Spock sketched a Vulcan nod. Rexath was extremely rare. He didn't think Beom's recorded history included one such case, so the injunction to review the procedure was well-founded. The closest concept to rexath among the Earth-based cultures was 'usurp', but Spock didn't plan to usurp Sinzu's place, he planned to use the Chief Attendant's skills as Kirk would use his Science Officer's.

"Rig for an internally generated twelfth-mode resonance. Drape the anti-wheerr and all main-crystal access portals with reflectives. I'm going to tap the energy core, and I want the entire output focused upwards through the wheerr." He looked toward the intercom equipment. "Do you have an external com-patch on this desk?"

Silently, Sinzu handed Spock a com-grid with a button lighted for outside communications. Spock said, "Give the orders to commence the procedure while I place this call." Sinzu continued to look at Spock. He'd been prepared for something incredibly outrageous by the request for rexath, but this was unbelievable.

"Spock, I am compelled to offer data on crystal reverberation damping times. Theoretically,



a twelfth mode resonance will shatter the crystal with positive feedback if it's internally generated and under closed portals. At the very least, it will crack the utsulan walls, possibly disintegrate some of the off-spherical resounders. Beom would be destroyed, irretrievably."

"I am familiar with the theory. There will be a powerful energy-tap functioning in conjunction with the emitters. No permanent harm will be done."

Still Sinzu hesitated.

Spock gave a tiny, almost humanly despairing shrug. He couldn't really expect a Chief Attendant to risk destruction of his utsulan without further assurance. He pulled a sketch-slate toward him and wrote out the system of equations that described the high-mode operation of the utsulan. He slashed out the factors his draping would delete. He inserted the energy-drain factor and re-arranged the equations, demonstrating that they balanced perfectly. "You may compute the stress-factors yourself. They are well within safety limits. But first, issue the orders. There isn't much time."

Having seen that Spock knew at least as much of the utsulan's theory as he did, Sinzu capitulated. "Your utsulan, Spock." Then he turned to give the orders. He had violated rexath by asking for credentials, and the Pilgrim had gone far beyond custom in establishing those credentials. He promised himself to seek no further explanations. If Spock couldn't handle Beom, nobody could. He'd been trained by Suvil, and Suvil...ah, Suvil...

While Sinzu's orders shot out to groups of Attendants here and there, Spock placed a call direct to Dakainya. It took a few moments to brush aside the question of the forbidden nature of his call. When he announced he was in rexath, he got action. Someone checked with Sildon in the field-crew and confirmed Spock's assertion that Kirk had disappeared. Computer search confirmed the confirmation. They were convinced.

Spock said, "Get the nearest kataytikh to crate both the Idlomputt flames Kirk was using, the one in his room and the one in Soled's studio. Commandeer transportaion under authority of rexath and have them flown here to Beom as quickly as possible. Keep me informed. Kirk's life depends on getting those devices here by the time we're ready."

"We'll have to de-activate them..."

"Negative! That's why a kataytikh must crate them for you. They must be shipped live."

"But that's against..."

"I am in rexath, and I demand it." It hurt to have to use that power, to cause men to act against their convictions without reasonable argument. Perhaps, Spock reflected, his service training had indeed undermined his Vulcan sensibilities as his father had so often warned. Or perhaps what he was doing was worthy of rexath-power. Perhaps this was why rexath had been created. It hurt, but it was a bearable hurt. He pushed it aside with the same gesture that cut the connection.

Sinzu had completed the arrangements and awaited the next outrage. Spock was ready to supply it. "Bring the repository keys and meet me at the wheerr entry."

Sinzu's eyes closed over this announcement as he refused to violate the Pilgrim once more. Spock took pity on him. "I was planning to do this anyway. Later I will give you arguments that will convince you. There is no time now."

Sinzu acquiesced silently and hurried off to procure the Flame Keys. There wasn't one person on all Vulcan more qualified than Spock to invade that closed realm, yet Sinzu could not help remembering Suvil's corpse. The scene of that death was so deeply engraved on his mind that he was sure it would become part of his descendent's direct memory. It was both Beacon and Warning.

And Spock knew that warning with the same scorching memory as Sinzu. Suvil had sought The Uncommon Occurance--what the humans called a miracle--at Beom, a miracle to save T'Olne's life. To produce it, he had used all the knowledge gained in a lifetime of study of the Forgotten Sciences, that branch of knowledge proscribed on modern Vulcan as being much too costly.

But before he died, he had trained Spock in all he'd learned, that it should not once more be forgotten. Time after time during his young teen years, Spock had visited Beom with Suvil. He had learned the secret of the Flame Keys, he had explored the hidden repository the Keys guarded, he had read the records of all previous experiments with the Forgotten Sciences, and he had learned some of the minor tricks Suvil had mastered.

Then had come that day when Suvil planned his last, and greatest experiment. Suvil's theory, on which he staked his life and that of his wife and the unborn child of what could only have been his last Blooming--a small, local Blooming, one of the very last for the plague was even then in the soil causing erratic, weak, brief and unpredictable Bloomings--Suvil's theory had been based on all the traditionally sanctioned uses of the kraith sciences plus every oblique reference to the Forgotten Sciences in the Book of Fragments. He'd combined all of this with his practical, experimental knowledge of the devices stored in the repository, and he'd synthesized a general theory to explain these phenomena.

He'd been wrong. And now, Spock thought he knew exactly what Suvil's error had been. Suvil had lacked one significant fact to the matrix--knowledge of the dze'ut'. Spock had gained that knowledge at the expense of Kirk's natural barriers--the experience with the dze'ut' and the glowstones had left Kirk wide open to the dark star, and the combined effect had nearly killed him. Now Spock was determined to use the knowledge of the dze'ut', for which Kirk had paid so dearly, to save Kirk's life and bring him home.

Spock used the time it took Sinzu to bring the Keys to inspect the draping of the anti-wheerr. The job had been done with the usual Beom exactitude and Spock found nothing upon which to comment. He climbed back up the passage and made his way around to the tunnel entrance that led to the wheerr.

He found Sinzu waiting there, and Sarek next to him. It was Sarek who bore the draped tray upon which the Keys rested. "I will accompany you."

"That won't be necessary."

Their eyes locked for a long moment. The knowledge that lay between them was almost palpable. Sarek, his grandfather, and his grandfathers before him for uncounted generations had remained unalterably opposed to their sons' tradition of studying the Forgotten Sciences.

"Spock, if we are to train the Second Realm, then let us train them as one."

Spock nodded. "It is your right. Come." And he led the way up the long passage to the wheerr. His stride was steady, but his heart trembled, unspeakably touched by his father's proposal. To unite the alternate generations and hand down an un-bifurcated Tradition...it was often done where the rift was not deep, but the rift was always great in Xtmprsqzntwlf, the greater between him and his father.

He had never expected Sarek to offer this. When they'd mounted the wheerr and stood beneath the darkened dome, Spock turned to take the tray. "Why?"

"Yesterday you lay in my arms dying. Today you live again. But I understand things now that I did not understand before. It will be not many tomorrows until you are gone into space again beside your Captain, to finish what you have started."

"If I survive what I am about to do, yes, I will go where Jim Kirk leads."

"If you do not survive, or if you do not return..."

"Vulcan cannot afford to lose what I have learned."

"We have transaffirmed. The risk should not be that great...certainly no greater than if you'd Affirmed under me."

"There is a device here which Suvil prepared for this time. He believed it would reduce the risk to negligible proportions."

"I wouldn't have thought he'd have considered the possibility."

Spock laid the tray on the brown tile mosaic that formed the floor of the wheerr. The only light was from the dim glow of the top of the orange crystal itself, and from the keeper lights that always glowed around the wall. Squatting beside the tray, Spock removed the draping and carefully folded it aside. "Suvil taught me...the meaning of the idic." He looked up into his father's eyes. "The meaning of my own existence. He taught me to live...with myself. He valued the energy released by the coming together of the dissimilar. He believed that you, too, valued the anti-entropic function of intelligence."

"He did not live to see our separation. It is enough that he foresaw our joining together. I have only one apprehension. Can I withstand what you have lived with all your life?"

"The device makes it unnecessary for you to withstand it at all. My personal memories will be imprinted under call-lock. You will have only what you choose, and that only while you choose." He turned back to the tray.

The Flame Keys spread out before him. Physically, they were nothing more than a strip of intricately carved metal alloy on which every few inches there was a spherical nodule about an inch in diameter. There were a lot of nodules. The strip of metal alloy curved in and out among itself until it covered the tray with its apparently senseless meanderings.

Spock positioned the tray carefully on the mosaic, then twisted his head around to site in on the ceiling, making sure he had it exactly right.

"Spock, are you sure you can operate the Keys? Shouldn't you finish your Pilgrimage first? Or at least explore what Beom can do for you?"

"No time, Father. As you will see in a few minutes, Jim has been kidnapped. He lies helpless and in danger. To save him, I will have to violate almost every tradition of the proper usage of the utsulan. I hold rexath by right of Pilgrimage, yet I must violate Pilgrimage to accomplish the goals for which I seized rexath."

"Paradoxical."

"Later I will stand before the full Council of Daughters. If necessary, I will stand before T'Pau herself. For now I act." He touched some of the nodules in quick succession, and where his fingers moved, flames rose in their wake. Each had a distinctive color, and each grew taller with every passing second. Spock's fingers moved through the intricate combination of the lock between the space of one breath and the next. Yet, he nearly collapsed from the weakness that seized him as his mind sought to attune itself to these external forces.

Sarek's hands on his shoulders steadied him, keeping him from falling into the flames that he commanded. Father raised son to his feet and still the column of colored flames grew, twining into a pillar of flame that stretched up and up until it licked at the chosen panel of the geodesic dome. Half the light was reflected back down into the wheerr from that panel. It shafted straight and true, illuminating the lone chair of the wheerr in a white light that waxed gradually brighter until neither Vulcan could bear to look at it save in a squint.

The jewel-like crystals that decorated that chair sparkled with deep fires, seeming to draw energy from the beam of light that was a mixture of just the right wavelengths applied at just the right angle. When it seemed that the intense light must certainly melt the chair to slag, the beam vanished, snuffed out by an automatic feedback mechanism. Simultaneously, they heard a click.

Spock slumped back on the floor beside the Flame Keys, too exhausted to move. But this time the weakness passed quickly. There was no external drain upon him. Sarek recovered the Keys. "Where is this Hidden Door?" He helped Spock struggle to his feet.

"Under the chair. Where else?" He circled the top of the crystal, putting out a hand to the rope barrier that protected it. The chair was as it had always been, solidly affixed to the dais that raised it high enough for the chair's occupant to see down into the crystal. Spock walked up the first two steps, seized the arms of the chair and pushed. The chair and the next step slid backward revealing stairs leading down.

As he walked down those steps, light came on below, a soft reddish light. Sarek followed. How often he'd sat in that chair, and never suspected what lay just beneath! Here was a series of interconnecting chambers...a veritable laboratory...filled with the stuff of legends. Weapons said to have made Top of World great at the expense of creating The Living Dead; mirrors to peer into future or past; Do-Pass gates for testing thr truths told by those accused of crimes; Memory Eggs lofted on pedestals said to comprise the earliest computers; Power Taps and focusing devices; communicating devices, and at least a hundred items unrecognizable even to Sarek's inherited memory.

Spock went familiarly about the room, not betraying by a single pause the memories evoked by every piece of equipment left askew or oup of place on that last day of Suvil's life. This room had not been visited since then. None would dare. There was nothing that could be done by these things that could not be done cheaper by the purely mechanical sciences.

He found the cabinet where Suvil had stored the Blender he had made for Sarek and Spock. It was still there, ready and waiting. Spock took the slab of transparent, orange substance and placed it on a pedestal at eye level.

"Long ago, before Top of World rose to unite us, do you remember, Father?"

"I remember."

"I visited a world like that during my last tour of duty. They were Vulcanoid, and their world was far richer in the Crystals of Thought than is our own. They never discovered, or forgot, the physical sciences we now use. They used the dze'ut', and they practiced...xholzurd." The word he used was pre-Reform but not forgotten. It was an atrocity so unknown in modern times that the term had become anobscenity. Mind control, or the control of other people's minds.

"My reactions to that world were...illogical, and quite severe. I say this to prepare you for some of what you may find in me. Later, after it was over, I found my peace with those people. The important thing to remember, while among them, is that we too have elected to pay a price to accomplish certain things."

"Go on."

"The kraith sciences are an integral part of the Forgotten Sciences. We did not in fact choose a wholly different road after all. We brought with us from that darkness certain items which we believed we could not live without. The kraith itself, for example. The Idlomputt, the Flame Sphere, the guesting flame--the whole host of related devices, and the utsulan itself. But in each case we crippled ourselves by passing down only that part of the underlying theory that would be necessary to operate the devices for one purpose only."

"And you are going to operate the utsulan for another purpose."

"Because I now believe I have the whole theory behind its functioning."

"Do you understand what you are doing?"

"The results will be my judge."

"We cannot afford to lose Beom--or you either, for that matter."

"I can guarantee that the utsulan will not be damaged, depleted perhaps, but not irretrievably damaged. And you will take that part of me which is all the legacy I have to give, and you will be far away from here when I bring up the energies stored here."

Sarek was silent. Spock knew he was remembering Suvil's twisted and blackened corpse lying beside what was left of T'Olne.

"Come, Father. If we are to join the Traditions we carry, let us begin. Then you will understand what I am doing and why. You will have to mesh very carefully with me before trying the meld. Grandfather did not allow for me being on Pilgrimage at this time."

"Tell me if I hurt you..." He opened his mind, trying to pick up the essential rhythm of Spock's brain emissions. There were very very few of the kataytikhe who were good enough to mesh with a Pilgrim in this particular way. After the first few seconds, Spock signalled a halt. "I felt that. It will be quicker to use a diffraction screen. Over here."

Spock picked up one of the large carboys from under the work bench and examined the clear fluid contents. It still looked good to his trained eye, so he up-ended the huge bottle over a tap-spout and drew some of the clear, colorless fluid into a flat pan. Then he took a loop of wire from a peg over the bench and dipped it in the fluid. On the second try, it came away bearing a thin film of rainbows. He held the loop between him and his father. "You know how to use one of these?"

"Of course. Hold it still."

The first three times he tried the mesh, Sarek broke the film, but the fourth time the rainbows shimmered to colorlessness without parting the film. "A simple device, but effective."

"Now," said Spock, "we will meld through the Blender. At first you will consciously perceive my most recent memories, then the Blending will penetrate to the unconscious level. You will receive all that Suvil gave me, but you will have to provide the call-lock keys yourself. Reddy?"

Sarek positioned himself opposite Spock, looking through the clear orange slab of the Blender. As he reached for that meld, hairline cracks appeared in the blending screen. Their fingertips met, separated only by centimeters of orange. The cracks radiated from those contact points, but the screen held. Suvil had wrought well.

Spock felt Sarek's initial touch with a little thrill of alarm that had become a conditioned reflex during his Pilgrimage. But this time, the touch was not accompanied by that unbearable draining away of vitality. The meld built itself on the solid base of meshed patterns. In effect, Sarek joined Spock's Pilgrimage, deftly avoiding the sorely wounded areas of his brain. The skills of his father opened before Spock vistas of learning, skills and knowledge developed by the fathers and passed only to the grandsons who did not study the Forgotten Sciences.

But their purpose was not to pass Sarek's memory to Spock, rather to imprint Spock's memory on Sarek's brain. The vistas closed under Spock's feet, and Sarek delved deeper into his son's memories.

Spock felt his father stiffen under the impact of the dze'ut' memories despite being forewarned. The older man bore the shock unflinchingly for the few seconds it took to pass through the experience.

What proved to be their undoing came from an unexpected quarter. As they neared the end of the dze'ut' sequence and the glowstones discharged their energy on the Enterprise's transporter pads, it was T'Aniyeh's face that captured Spock's attention. The immediacy of Kirk's danger, which had roused Spock from the depths of incipient plak tow, now receded to nothing under the rip-currents of that last, final Severance. Kirk's injury from the affair had been minor, T'Aniyeh's had been fatal.

Momentarily, Spock fought down the rising anguish of those last few hours. He had thought to skip that episode and spare his father the strain of what would be to him an alien experience. There were elements, he had to admit to himself, in his relationship with T'Aniyeh that were not strictly Vulcan. It had taken a half-human Lythian woman to show him that, and he was forever grateful to Amy for it. But that oddly mixed Vulcan and human pain was too much for the Pilgrim.

The thin membrane of the improperly executed Severance ripped open, plunging father and son alike into a seething cauldron of white-hot emotions. Half of him cringed, shrinking away from that scalding morass while the other half faced it squarely. The odd thing was that it was a mixed half that found the fortitude to confront that Severance, a half composed partly of Spock and partly of Sarek, as was the half that retreated.

Some far, detached portion of Spock's mind knew a wild gratification--Sarek too knew both fear and courage within one body. Father and son retreated together, lending each other strength, and stood shoulder to shoulder facing the illogical terror of the un-monitored Severance.

At the moment when each thought their death had commenced, the Severance broke, plunging

them both into darkness. Their linkage remained, like hands clasped across an abyss, and they stumbled together through uncharted paths of the mind. The Blender intervened then, joining the depths of their minds while raising their consciousnesses above the bottomless sea.

Slowly, sight and hearing returned. Then, gradually, the Blender disintegrated between their fingers, leaving nothing but a ridge of fine, abrasive dust on the pedestal. Their fingers met briefly before they pulled apart, once more separate consciousnesses.

Spock dusted his hands off over the pedestal. "My apologies. That was unintentional."

"Nevertheless, it is well. I understand now why T'Uriamne could not help you with this."

"You have helped...somewhat."

"Not enough'.."

"There is no time now. You have what you came for. I suggest you leave while I complete the arrangements."

About to question what arrangements Spock intended to complete here, Sarek realized he knew the answer...and he wasn't at all content with that knowledge. "Spock..."

"My Captain is in danger. Whatever other reasons I may have for acting thus, that alone would be sufficient."

Before Sarek could frame a protest, he knew how futile such an attempt to dissuade his son would be. If he did not act thusly, he could not face himself as a Vulcan...or, indeed, as a human, ever again. At this point, Spock had nothing else to live for.

Sarek turned and climbed the narrow stair leading up to the wheerr. Spock watched him go, then turned toward an archway leading deeper into the maze of the repository. This wasn't the only repository in the Beom utuslan, but it was the largest. The others contained the records which other families wished to safeguard against accidental loss by death of those carrying the Living Memory. Sinzu had the master-index computer capable of retrieving that data, but the only index to the Forgotten Sciences rested here, within this almost forgotten room.

Spock strode the length of a long, down-trending corridor and entered the room at the end of it. It was like stepping from a thousand years in the past to a thousand years in the future. Wherever the walls weren't covered with viewscreens, they were banked with controls. It was a room as modern and functional as the Enterprise bridge. He seated himself at the control board and activated the readout screens. In moments, he was scanning tapes at his maximum reading speed, entering search problems into the mechanism, and concentrating the searchlight intensity of his mind upon the problem of rescuing Kirk.

It would require projecting his body into the other universe, retrieving Kirk, and then returning the both of them to this coninuum. He had the power. Now he required the focusing mechanism. It was the lack of such a focusing mechanism that had always caused the living beings in the circuit to be killed, and he was not going to construct a dzø'ut' until he knew he could make it safe to operate. The transporters had, upon occasion, been known to tap into other universes. He'd had occasion to write papers on space-stresses and inter-phase phenomena. Now he would use all of that theory plus the full, comprehensive theory of the Forgotten Sciences to control level-transport with the same degree of pinpoint focus the ordinary transporters delivered.

Undoubtedly, it was possible. Commodore Spock had done it. Commander Spock would do as well. The really difficult part would be in convincing the Beom Attendants to enter the wheerr and construct the dze'ut'. Spock knew that he alone couldn't do the job in time. At the very least it would be another twenty hours until he was ready to do.

There would be no time to waste explaining. He would have to use rexath repeatedly, despite his own distaste for it.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### NORTH END MONUMENT

Spock materialized on the parched valley floor. The sun was just rising behind the distant hills. It lent an odd effect to the already eerie landscape--enough light to see clearly yet stars piercing the sky above.

He looked down at his feet and was oddly unsurprised to see that he'd mis-calculated. His clothing had not come with him, nor had a shift in his co-ordinates provided him with native clothing. He realized he hadn't given the matter sufficient consideration. He'd been primarily concerned with the transport of the Idlomputt.

The skull-and-crossbones-guarded device lay between his bare feet flickering steadily. His mind was lightly touching the field, and he could feel its pulsing rhythm change ever so slightly. Kirk was nearby.

That thought, more than the idea of being exposed to the merciless desert sun, galvanized him to action. He picked up the firepot and began walking. He had come in not far from Kirk, no more than a kilometer. The Idlomputt would lead him the rest of the way. But, Spock realized, he needed no such guide. He'd come to the North End Park, just above the lapping waters of Dakainya lake. Before him lay the twisted wind sculptures of North End, and beyond them, the ruin of Dakainya's utsulan.

As he approached that ediface, Spock realized it was indeed a ruin. There was nothing left of the uprights that should rise perpendicular from each surface of the pyramid. There was no trace of the lines that should be strung from those uprights to support the resounders. And of the resounders, Spock found only traces of powder at the base of the pyramid. The glass-slag coating of the utsulan was cracked and powdered away in many places. The wheerr was englobed only by a twisted framework of girders which might once have been a geodesic dome. At the corner where the door should have been Spock found a gaping maw open to the wind, rain, and any stray animal that passed by. There was no trace of the intricate, air-lock type mechanism.

As the sun rose higher into the slowly reddening sky, Spock looked around for a crevice in which to secrete the Idlomputt. He found what he was looking for on the side of a wind-sculpture away from the utsulan. The sun was just probing into a long, narrow hole between tumbled rocks. It was big enough to accomodate the Idlomputt.

He bent to insert the device in its hiding place. It was then that he saw it. A tiny blue stalk just struggling to lift its head above the ground, a few crumbs of dirt clinging to the arch of its stem. As the sun hit it, it seemed to shrink back into the ground again, dormant until nightfall.

Carefully, Spock placed the Idlomputt into the crevice and pulled a loose piece of wind-weed over the opening to conceal the flame's light--not that it was very bright, but it would be noticeable. He didn't have to worry about it's being visible after dark. He'd be out of here by nightfall, or he'd be dead. He hadn't expected such a time-limit either.

He turned from the innocent plant and moved into the cool darkness of the utsulan. Some archeologist had strung eternalamps along the ceiling. They were dim compared to the rising sun, but they would suffice.

Spock ghosted along the familiar corridor layout, bare feet feeling carefully along the cold stone. Every few steps he paused to take a bearing on the low-voiced conversation he heard in some distant chamber. The accoustics of the utsulan structure had been drastically changed by its gutting. He couldn't quite tell where the speakers were, but there was no doubt in his mind as to who they were. He concentrated on following that thread of sound up and up through the maze of corridors stripped bare. The lighting was playing out now. Apparently the archeologists who had strung the lights had never ventured into these ways. He was moving blind with nothing but his sense of direction to guide him. He knew he was on one of the access-portal stairs. But somehow the voices mysteriously grew louder, though by the echo-quality, they were obviously not in the access gallery that must be at the top of the stair.

He was puzzled by this until he came out at the top and drew aside the drape that masked the crystal-access portal. The crystal was gone.

At the core of the utsulan where the gigantic main crystal was housed, there was a gaping hole, an enormous empty shaft. The voices he'd been following boomed out from below, from the bottom of that shaft. Spock let the drape fall back into place and then carefully lifted one corner of the material.

The people below had some regulation field lanterns shedding a blue-white light on the scene. He could make out the dark holes of other access portals around the empty shaft, some of which still had drapes, some not.

At the bottom of the shaft a rude structure of boards closed off the anti-wheer's portal where the main crystal had protruded into that lower chamber. Twisting his head, Spock could just make out a similar plug closing the top of the shaft. The hypothetical archeologists must have deemed those mysterious holes safety hazards.

Spock turned his attention to the two beings below him. One was obviously Commodore Spock, and the other, just as obviously was Jim Kirk. But was it his own Jim Kirk? Spock concentrated on what they were saying, trying to penetrate the booming echo.

"You've kept me here almost two days. Just what are you planning to do?"

"I do not understand why you are so insistent upon returning to that untenable situation. There is nothing there for you. Here you can take your rightful place in the family. I offer you full Name Rights among the sons of Aivahnya. We are few at Top of World, and our wealth is great. What more could you desire?"

"I thought I explained that. I have full Name Rights..."

"But in a lesser family as you admitted. I do not fully understand all the differences between that universe and this, but it is plain that the sons of This, Lyad and Fainz splintered the heritage again and again until there is little left of the glory you command here."

"As I understand it, and realize I've only just begun to study these matters, in my home

universe, the rule of Top of World was one of the bloodiest reigns of terror ever instigated on any world. The early rulers dabbled in psi-weaponry of awesome power, sacrificing the lives of those who operated the weapons as well as those at whom the weapons were aimed. Later, they outlawed that line of research, but it didn't change anything essential--they started a technological arms race that nearly ended in extinction for them all."

"We safely passed that point hundreds of years ago. Top of World is secure and a bastion of peace over All-Vulcan."

"By virtue of the iron fist!,"

"No. By virtue of the parted hand." Spock held up his right hand in the Vulcan salute. "Wherever Top of World holds sway, the parted hand symbolizes the peace of mutual respect."

"And who taught that peace here?"

"A man named Surak. He taught that strength of one kind must respect the strength of a different kind without trying to destroy it."

"Is that all he taught?"

"No. He was a great philosopher, a builder who despised destruction as waste. His books are many as are his buildings. Yet I was given to understand that your Surak was somewhat different."

"His greatest joy lay in the combination of differences. It is sometimes said that he was responsible for the ending of Top of World, though that is disputed."

"Here he is credited with saving Top of World, with rebuilding it, in fact. There is no killing here. It is a good place to live and work."

"I can't stay. I haven't completed my training."

"There are those here who can teach you to guard yourself. The sons of Aivahnya may not be kataytikhe here, but they are not all psi-null."

"But you are psi-null. You are not my Spock. There are differences."

"To combine to create Joy, not so?"

"The differences between one Spock and another cannot combine unless they meet."

High up in the gallery, Spock raised one appreciative brow. That was his Kirk refusing to be distracted.

"I must admit that I would like to meet him. I would like to learn all about him."

"He's not all that different from you. His loyalties are to different things, but apparently just as strong. He's had to fight all his life for those things most people take for granted. He's won most of those battles."

"Does he play chess?"

"Superbly."

"But you beat him, usually?"

"Not usually, occasionally. He's convinced chess is a game of logic."

"It isn't?"

"No. Strategy. And that's logical only against logical opponents with known motives."

"Ah. I see. And you know his motives?"

"Not hardly. I used to think so, but..."

"...he's unpredictable?"

"No. Not really. If you have all the facts he does, you can usually see what he's going to do. It's just that he generally has more facts than anybody else, plus an incredible number of side-conditions he has to satisfy."

"For example?"

"Well...take the matter of my adoption. I thought, at first, that it was supposed to be a symbolic sort of thing. Oh, we were friends, good friends, and I'd become, well, a piece of the furniture around D'R'hiset. But Sarek had the idea that a full, formal adoption would demonstrate to Vulcans that humans aren't so bad and to Earth-humans that Vulcans aren't really so cold. The political ramifications were incredible! And I have to admit the idea appealed to me for many reasons."

"But...?"

"Well, now I'm pretty sure the whole thing was Spock's idea and the reason was that he expected that latent telepathic bump to develop. Only his schemes are always to intricately layered, I'm never sure I've gotten to the main reason for anything he does."

"Can't trust him...?"

"Oh, I trust him absolutely. Whatever he does, it generally comes out well enough. But I'm never sure if the visible results are the ones he considered important, if you follow me?"

"Sounds like you're describing my sister."

Kirk sat up a bit straighter, gathering his knees closer. "Sister? You have a sister?"

"Half-sister. T'Uriamne."

"You know her well?"

"Of course. She's my staunchest ally. If it hadn't been for her intervention, Shariel, my grandfather, might have had me killed at birth for being defective."

Kirk gave a low whistle that roared through the empty shaft.

"I take it the situation is different on your side?"

"T'Uriamne distrusts Spock's motives and judgment."

"And she doesn't welcome you?"

"No, she doesn't."

"You might find that you like my sister very much. She liked our Kirk well enough to consider his proposal of marriage with great favor."

"Marriage!"

"Unfortunately, they never reached koon-ut-kali-fee. Do they practice that rite on your side?"

"Y-yes. But not the Daughters?!"

"Unclear. Not women?"

"No. Women of course, but not the Daughters of the Tradition. The females of the kataytikhe families, of the descendents of Dokamral'nor, are sterile."

"Huuu!" The indrawn breath wasn't quite a gasp. It was comprehension. "Do you by any chance know the genetic code patterns of the kataytikhe?"

"No, I don't. Why?"

"It could explain a lot...about me. But that is irrelevant. T'Uriamne is marriageable. Shariel has wanted her to marry into a distant and powerful mountain clan. But with a Jim Kirk once more available, I'm sure he could be persuaded to alter that plan. You have a home waiting for you. Come with me."

"I'm not leaving this spot."

Spock had started to rise. He sat down again, plainly exasperated. His Kirk had always been interested in women even at risk of his life. "You are being illogical. There is no food or water here. There is no temperature control, no humidity control--at home there are all the amenities of civilization. All the amenities. Why stay here?"

"I'm not going to stay for long. I am going home."

At that point, in the upper gallery where he eavesdropped, Spock realized that Kirk had known all along that he was listening. He'd felt the Idlomputt and figured it must mean rescue was at hand. Only as yet, Spock had no plan save physically overpowering the other Spock and taking Kirk home. His alter-self would, no doubt, be evenly matched with him and would also be disinclined to fight.

Below, Spock said, "Look, Captain, I don't want to rush your decision. Nor do I wish to abduct you by force..."

"You've already done that."

"A rescue is not an abduction."

"It is if you don't want to be rescued."

A faint smile played at the corners of Spock's mouth. "You are Jim Kirk. In some ways,



even better than the original. I don't have to describe to you what pon farr can be like."

Kirk frowned measuringly at Spock "You're not..."

"No. But tomorrow there will be many who will be. It is not a good time to travel, nor is it polite to arrive for guesting too late in the day."

Realization stole over Kirk incredibly. "A world-wide Blooming?"

"Not quite world-wide. But the whole northern continent at the very least. It would be best to be home before then."

Kirk's face fell into grave lines. He passed a hand over his face, considering. This Spock wouldn't lie about a Blooming. Or would he? "I suppose then you are pretty anxious to get home."

Spock rose and walked away from their small impromptu camp. He aimed a tricorder this way and that, scanning the walls. When he returned to the rock he'd been sitting on, he propped one foot on it and leaned his elbow on his knee, letting the tricorder dangle. "There is no place for subterfuge between us. I could claim that I was quite desperate to get home in time. You would come, wouldn't you?"

"Because you wouldn't leave without me?"

"You know I wouldn't."

"Well, I wouldn't care to stay here under those conditions!"

"But those are not the conditions that prevail. Even the Blooming does not affect me. I wish to get home to avoid the effect it has on others, as well as to be courteous, but no other reason motivates me."

Kirk sat, stunned. "The Daughters..."

"Yes. A fascinating aberration. Fascinating. There will be time to study it later. Will you come now?"

"Spock...I...I...no, I can't stay with you. Do you know what the kraith of adoption is?"

"Kraith? No, never heard the term...unless...perhaps you mean the kreth, a kind of cup used in certain ancient rituals."

"The kraith is a kind of cup, but its use is no empty ritual. It's a device which can be used to create a kind of mindmeld among large groups of people. It can be used as a sort of semantic-bridge where ordinary language would fail utterly to convey nuances of meaning."

"Impossible. No living mind could endure meld with more than one other mind at a time."

"Oh, it's dangerous all right, and it's never used lightly. Spock, I made a commitment under the influence of the kraith of adoption. My Vulcan's culture, tsaichrani, is slowly but inevitably being destroyed by the Federation's cultures. Almost everybody sees it happening, but they can't agree on what to do about it. My adoption was part of a plan concocted by Sarek and Spock which would keep the destruction of tsaichrani from becoming the extinction of the Vulcan species. I made a personal commitment to the success of that plan because I don't want to see my friends' family ripped apart by the collapse of tsaichrani."

"From what you've told me, it's not a culture that deserves to survive..."

"But the people deserve the best lives they can build. And, quite frankly, the Federation needs Vulcan very much. After taking the kraith of adoption, I could see both sides of this struggle. There's both right and wrong on each side. My job is to bring the rights on each side together in mutual respect. It seems to be a job uniquely suited to my talents. I fit into that niche, and I'm...well, not exactly comfortable, but at least content. It's useful work, my work, and I intend to do it well. My commitment is the the kataytikh Spock, to the First Realm tradition of my family, to tsaichrani, and to myself as an integral part of all that."

"I do not see the logic in that. What can you do for them?"

"There are things that must be done which a kataytikh and a Guardian cannot do, but they must be done in the name of our family. I hold Name Rights, but I'm no Guardian. Nor am I of the Daughters. It is a peculiar position, but one of great potential power. Twenty years from now, the reputation that I am to build may be all that stands between Vulcan and destruction. If I must...hurt you to build that reputation, then prepare yourself for great pain. I cannot stay here!"

Behind the shield of drapery, Spock allowed himself a grim smile compounded of pride, irony, and a peculiar wry humor. It was Kirk at his impassioned greatest. The speech put him in mind of the exhortations the Captain had rained down upon the heads of the Yangs and Coms. Jim Kirk blended the most formidable human traits with the most admirable Vulcan ones and somehow remained so totally human that he commanded respect for his entire species even from a Vulcan. Spock's own reaction was closer to awe than anything he'd ever experienced.

For the first time since the theft of the Kraith<sup>2</sup>, Spock felt a loosening of the hard tension that had been the only strength he'd found with which to meet the sudden responsibilities thrust upon him. It had been a responsibility far too great for him, and now Jim Kirk had reached up a hand to bear some of that load. Spock was grateful beyond words. It flooded through him, propelling an involuntary reaching for contact with Kirk's mind. Thank you, Jim. Just stall a little longer, and I'll get you out of this.

The weakness that closed in then was a thousand times greater than he'd ever experienced before. The human's mind was so far out of tune with his basic pattern that virtually all his vital energy flowed outward leaving him gasping for breath on the cold stone floor.

Below, Kirk stiffened. The nightmare was starting again, only this time he was well in control of himself. By some miracle, his own Spock had arrived, bringing the Idlomputt with him. Kirk did not question that good fortune, but he was deeply shocked that his disappearance had induced a Pilgrim to divert from his Pilgrimage. With all the firm skill that Soled had taught him, Kirk grasped the Idlomputt field, wrapping it about himself as a sort of mental deflector-shield. That should have sliced off that deadly contact as if it had never been.

Only Kirk didn't realize that Spock had used his kataytikh training to key himself into Kirk's Idlomputt-pattern. With the device effectively welding them into that unwanted rapport, Spock grew weaker and weaker.

In desperation, Kirk struck out at the tenuous bond between Spock and the Idlomputt... a karate chop of a blow, savage and precise. This Idlomputt is mine. Desist!

To his immense surprise, it worked. Spock dropped away, and the field closed over the wound where he had been. Kirk found himself truly isolated for the first time since he'd felt the Idlomputt field which heralded Spock's arrival. It was a panic-inducing sensation, yet he dared not crack that barrier to see if Spock had survived. Another such contact would surely kill his brother.

Commodore Spock put aside his tricorder. "Is something wrong?"

"Oh! No, no, just thought I was going...going to sneeze." To prove his point, Kirk produced a disaster of a sneeze. Then he apologized, "Must be the dust."

"The air at Top of World is crisp and clear. Let us go home."

Kirk rose, circled the box he'd been sitting on, and turned back to this Spock as if seriously considering accepting. "Tell me, how did you come to acquire Commodore's rank?"

"Irrelevant."

"No, tell me. My Spock would find the administrative tedium a waste of his time."

"Oh, it is that. But it was necessary to the prosecution of my plan that I become the highest ranking officer at Vulcan Starbase."

"Commodore? We station a full Admiral at Vulcan."

"Here, perhaps, Vulcan's political importance to the Federation may be somewhat less."

"It's still a prime target of the Romulans...an infiltration point that must be heavily garrisoned."

"Romulans? Why should they infiltrate Vulcan?"

"Hmmm. Maybe the situation here is different. But what plan is it you're engaged in?"

"Why, rescuing you, of course."

"You mean you gave up your position as a Science Officer to rescue me?"

"Oh. Negative. I was a Captain at the time I learned of your plight. It wasn't very long after...after my Jim Kirk had been killed."

"Just how are you going to explain me? I mean, people don't come back from the dead very often, do they?"

"Do not the humans of your universe have the phenomenon of twins?"

They continued talking, Kirk stalling for time, while above, Commander Spock slowly recovered. He raised himself on shaking arms, stood, and martialled his strength. He made no further attempt to touch the Idlomputt field, but after assuring himself that Kirk was still below, he retreated along the tunnel.

At ground level, he picked up the wheerr tunnel and climbed once more to the top of the pyramid. The tunnel opened out onto the unprotected top of the pyramid. The polished tile floor was chipped and weather-marred. The center of the wheerr floor was boarded over with slabs of siding such as archeologists would use to construct temporary buildings. On this planking sat a small, civilian aircar, vents open to prevent pressure build-up under the desert sun.

Spock threw only one glance skyward where the twisted, rotten girders of the geodesic dome rose around the wheerr like some grotesque calix. It appeared that the wheerr had been destroyed by an explosion of some sort, but he wasted no effort imagining what had caused the explosion. He went straight to the aircar.

His swift eye gleaned much information about this Vulcan from that cursory inspection. The doors and the ignition were key operated, though the machine was of Vulcan manufacture. The upholstery was overly soft, promoting bad posture. The controls were laid out with labels as if the driver was not expected to be able to remember his left hand from his right. The computer was much too elaborate for such a craft. And the motor was far more powerful than any aircar could ever need.

However, the doors were unlocked, and he wasted no time systematically rifling the contents of the storage compartments. There was a belted over-tunic and cloak in the colors of Lyad. They were garments such as might have been suitable for holding court at Top of World. He slipped them on. A bit short. Probably brought for Jim.

In the end, he came away with two prizes, a weapon and a vital piece of the aircar's generator. The generator's field-slicer he hid among some rubble...not too deep to be found, yet not likely to be dug out too quickly either. The weapon was also of Vulcan manufacture, according to its blazon. That fact gave Spock considerable pause until he remembered the impending continent-wide Blooming. These people didn't live on the edge of extinction.

Still barefooted, he padded down the long corridor to ground level, and then wondered how they had gotten into the crystal chamber at ground level. A ladder from the lowest gallery? No, they must have used the control-rod's access portal. Normally, that too was filled solid, but this installation had completely crumbled, and it was probably wide open.

He followed the outer corridor lit by the eternalights strung throughout these lower ways, mindful of the occasional animal droppings. The corner chamber where usually the floor and ceiling would be filled with cone-shaped energizers held nothing but a few piles of pulverized colored glass. On the far side of that chamber, he found the low tunnel which had held the connecting links with the main crystal. It was empty now, and its far end gleamed with blue light.

Carefully, Spock made his way through that tunnel, weapon at the ready. He knew that what he carried was a one-setting piece of civilian ordnance and that it was set to kill. A clumsy tool at the very best. He couldn't imagine what his counterpart was doing with it. He didn't want to imagine.

He came out on the scene at the bottom of the crystal's shaft. It was much as he'd left it. The Spock was seated while Kirk paced, saying, "So your people recognize the importance of happiness? Do you realize that I couldn't possibly be happy here?"

"If that is so, then obviously you couldn't be happy there, either. But it is not so. All the ingredients of a productive and enjoyable life have been assembled for you. You will see."

"How did you know I haven't got a girl over there?"

"If so, then her counterpart lives here as well."

"Not true! You've admitted that T'Aniyeh and T'Rruel are alive here. They're dead there. Your Kirk is dead, but I live."

The Spock was silent to that for a long time. Then he said, "I can see in you the results of that other Vulcan's training. It is beautiful."

"Stick to the subject. What if I had a girl?"

"You don't stick to the subject; why should I?"

"You usually do, to the subject of going home, anyway."

"Then let's go home."

"How do you know I don't want to go back to my girl?"

Commodore Spock leaned forward, elbows on knees, hands dangling between legs. "Because, Jim, the only woman who will ever satisfy you lives here. The more I learn of you, the more I can see of how much you'll please her, and she you. Won't you come home and meet her? If, after a time, you still want so much to go back, I will send you back."

"You mean that?"

"It won't take you long to realize this is your real home."

Kirk whirled on him. "And what will it take to make you realize I don't want this to be my real home!"

"With a human, 'want' is an ephemeral thing at best. There, your Name Rights will bring you only a heavy responsibility, and possibly a great deal of loneliness and grief. The Rights I offer you will bring fullness to your life. Nobody lives to make our existence difficult."

"You want to adopt me into your family, and then you want me to marry your sister?"

"Naturally. Is there any other way?"

"Isn't that rather...incestuous?"

"With us, full Name Rights adoption always precedes marriage."

"Oh. Well, that explains it."

Spock surveyed the ground between him and his rival. Evidently, like much of the rest of the utsulan's instrumentation, the main crystal had not been removed...it had disintegrated. Spock allowed himself a moment to imagine what could have caused a main-crystal to disintegrate. His mind shuddered away from the very idea. But his eye could not fail to see the result. The flooring between him and the Commodore was littered with sharp fragments of broken crystal --thousands of tiny knives.

The two occupants of the cavity that had housed the crystal were wearing boots. But Spock was still barefoot. It would be necessary to cross that space...noiselessly...and disable his opponent. He didn't want to threaten to use the civilian phaser he held. That Spock might call his bluff, and he might have to use it. He knew he would if he had to, but he wanted to avoid that situation.

The Spock was seated with his back to the entrance. Kirk faced him, and thus also faced the shadows where Spock lurked. If Kirk could keep him occupied long enough, Spock thought he could cross the ten yards of intervening crushed crystal and get a good pinch-grip on his opponent.

To this end, he took one step out into the open, just far enough so Kirk could see him. He held up the phaser, motioned that it had no adjustments, then signed that he would attempt a pinch if Kirk could keep the other occupied long enough.

Without appearing to notice anything going on behind the other's back, Kirk took up his cue. "Tell me, if I should, by some improbable happenstance, fall in love with T'Urianne, would I have to stand for koon-ut-kali-fi?"

"There is no other form of marriage."

"But if she should challenge..."

"Then you would fight for her. But why should she challenge? If she agreed one day, why would she change her mind on another?"

"Well, human women do that."

"Vulcans don't. Not here."

Kirk increased his pacing, scuffing his boots loudly to mask any chance sound Spock might make. "Well, I'm glad to know that."

"Then you'll come home now? The sun is lowering in the sky already."

"How can you tell? It's so dark in here."

"Time passes none the less."

"Yes. Time. Lots of time must have passed since anyone came here. What is this place, anyway?"

"Have they not such ruins on your Vulcan? I was certain they did."

"Perhaps, but what is it a ruin of?"

"That is what many scholars would like to know. The library computer at Top of World can certainly supply all the data on the subject. Perhaps you can add some bits of knowledge to the guesses. Wouldn't you like that?"

"No. I would like to go home to my own place."

"And I always thought my Kirk was a stubborn man. I..." At that moment, Spock reached out his right hand toward the Commodore's left shoulder while Kirk pretended to sight a bird flying from gallery to gallery. "Spock! What's that?"

He ought to have known better. Ignoring Kirk's distraction, the Commodore twisted from under the descending hand and spun around to face his attacker...and stopped frozen. The robes, native to his eyes, fooled him for a brief instant. But then he said, "So, finally."

The two Spocks confronted each other, one armed, the other not. The Commander said, "He will come with me. You will remain here until we've gone. Then you may go home."

"I doubt that. You've disabled the flyer."

"It shouldn't take you long to correct the slight fault. You can be home before night-fall. Jim! Come."

"No!" cried Spock. "He stays!" And he threw himself toward the armed man.

At that moment, Kirk, who had been circling bearer, leapt between the two Spocks, catching the Commodore's shoulders to hold him away from Spock's phaser. Spock, whose hand had already been tightening on the weapon, deflected the beam skyward, ripping a hole in the distant ceiling-planks. A shower of debris dusted downward, coating all three men with fine powder.

"STOP IT, YOU TWO!" Kirk's voice boomed through the chamber. "I won't have it, do you hear me?"

Simultaneously, the two Spocks muttered, "How could we avoid it?" They looked at one another over Kirk's shoulder. He turned and placed one hand on each chest, pressing them apart. "If either one of you injures the other, I will go with the injured one!"

They thought this over, but it was the Commodore who answered, "And if we injure each other simultaneously?"

"Then I won't speak to either of you ever again!"

Kirk glared his stubbornest glare. Each Spock recognized that look. Kirk meant what he said.

Kirk saw Spock's hand loosen on the phaser. The Commander said, "There must be a logical solution to this dilemma."

"There is no dilemma. He is staying."

"Have you calculated the results on the continua?"

"Most assiduously. He is staying."

"He does not desire to stay."

"He does not know what he desires."

"But you do?"

"I know this world, and I know this man. They fit together."

"He is leaving with me. Now."

"No." Thoughts chased themselves across the Commodore's face as he seized on a new aspect of the situation. "Why did you steal those garments?"

"I did not steal, by the ethics of my own culture. You cannot begrudge me the use of them, and I shall return them before I leave. I am as entitled to these colors as you are...ah! I see. I will not allow you to detain us here until sundown."

"You will not leave here alive with Jim Kirk."

"Gentlemen!" cried Kirk in despair. They desisted, but neither moved. Kirk raked his own Spock with a penetrating glance he wouldn't have known how to throw just a few months before. Reassured, he said, "The question will be resolved well before sundown. But it will not involve injury to either of you. Is that clear?"

Eye-to-eye, the two Spocks chorused, "Affirmative, Captain."

"Now, perhaps we can work out a little compromise. Suppose you each have a seat while we talk this over, eh?"

It took a little doing, but Kirk managed to get them both seated, and felt reasonably safe as long as he was in the middle. "The elements of a compromise," he began, "exist here in abundance."

"I don't see that," said the Commodore.

"That's because you lack certain facts. Spock, have you seen any evidence of the Blooming that is supposed to commence this evening?"

"Yes, the plant I saw seemed large and quite vigorous."

"There, you see? This Vulcan has something tsaichrani wants, and tsaichrani has something this Vulcan wants. Is that not the basic situation of a bargain?"

The Commodore said, "I don't follow that."

"Captain, what do you have in mind?"

"If I stay here for a few weeks and prepare a shipment of bulbs for transfer home,

tsaichrani would profit, and the Commodore would have basically what he wants, a chance to convince me to stay."

"But what if he does convince you?"

"Well, what if he does? Would you begrudge me a chance at some hypothetical happiness even greater than what I've got already?"

Spock's face hardened. "If that were what you really wanted, wanted enough to violate every oath..."

"I admit it's not likely, Spock, but I'm human. Perhaps if I don't have a look-see for myself, I'll always wonder if maybe there might be something here I really wanted."

"But even if," said the Commodore, "you decide to go back, we are to pay with bulbs of the Blooms?"

Spock nodded. "It does sound like an unreasonably high price. And there is no way to tell if it would be of any value to us. These Blooms may be immune to the plague, but more likely they've just never encountered it. The latest theory was that it was from offworld."

"Plague? Ah, I see now."

"Further, we have no way to guarantee your delivery of both the Blooms and the Captain."

"You can stay with him and oversee the whole procedure."

"I cannot stay here."

"You can have T'Pring. I have no need of her."

Spock did not dignify that with a reply.

"She would be glad to have you. There is no other for her, here."

Spock ignored that so thoroughly it was as if the other had not spoken at all. Kirk said, "Ahem! The local Emily Post seems to be as different as the local Surak. I can see you two are not in a bargaining mood."

That earned Kirk two icy stares. He hastened to add, "Not that Vulcans have moods, you understand, just a figure of speech." Kirk's eye fell on Spock's bare feet. "You're bleeding!"

"Not seriously. There's a good doctor at Beom."

"Beom!" Commodore Spock seized on that. "So, that was where I saw you! You know all about these things." His hand swept out in an arc that included the entire ruined edifice around them.

"Negative," answered Spock. "My world has retained a few fragmented records which my family has studied for several generations. Some thousands of years ago, all trace of the underlying theory of the operation of the utsulan was eradicated."

"Utsulan. Yes, that was what you called it. I saw it. It was functional."

Spock remembered that moment of vertigo as he approached Beom. Certain things began to make sense to him now, but..."You could not use the knowledge we've pieced together. Even those who had a complete theory of these sciences found them too dangerous to use. There are, in general, better ways to accomplish most purposes."

"But," put in Kirk, "there certainly must be some knowledge that one of you has which could be traded to make an equitable bargain."

"We have not the time to explore the entire range of knowledge stored in Memory Beta," said Spock.

Kirk felt sweat begin to gather on his upper lip. He was sure he could bring the two Spocks into some sort of agreement if he had enough time...but time was just what he lacked. "Let's review the situation," he said, pacing a short arc between the two seated men.

"An admirable suggestion," said the Commodore.

The Commander donned a patient expression.

"Name Rights," said Kirk swinging around to face the Commodore. It felt strange to deal with a Spock who out-ranked him, and even stranger because the Commodore treated him as if he were an Admiral on vacation. "Name Rights," he repeated. "Just what does that imply?"

"Here," said the Commodore, "one attains Name Rights in the family holdings upon proof of having achieved a mature level of judgment."

"And how does one prove that?"

"The heads of the family determine what tests to apply and when to grant full franchise."

"So how did I pass tests I've never taken?"

"Our Kirk passed every test, and your behavior matches his in every important regard. I have here the records of my observations of you over the last several years. You have but to present them to receive your credentials."

"How can you guarantee the decisions of other people?" asked Kirk.

"I know Shariel and T'Uriamne very well."

"All right. Let's assume that I've been granted Name Rights here. That gives me the power to make commitments on behalf of the family, right?"

"True. And the family on your behalf."

"And, presumably," said Kirk, "you hold Name Rights as well."

"Of course."

"This power," Kirk continued thoughtfully, "is granted only by mutually consenting adults. I suppose it does happen that a child refuses to grant such rights over himself to his natural parents."

"Of course. It is a grave responsibility. One must trust that it will not be abused."

"There is no recourse if it is abused?"

"Little effective recourse, true. Withdrawing the Name after it's been violated is useful only in avoiding further violations." He hastened to add, "This is mere legal technicality. It has never happened in our family."

"Do all families here grant Name Rights?" asked Kirk.

"Yes, naturally. How else would one choose those necessary to act in one's behalf?"

"You mean in all matters, legal, financial, and moral?" Kirk wasn't sure what he was pursuing, but he was hot on the scent of something.

The Commodore nodded. "It takes a full-time expert to administer a large estate to the greatest possible profit. It takes a lifetime of dedicated training to amass skill at determining the most just course of action. It takes professional application to keep up with the latest developments in scientific fields in order to choose the proper expert from whom to solicit opinions. No one person could possibly acquire all the skills necessary to make all the required decisions. You cannot trust someone who is merely hired, and you cannot make these decisions yourself. You must have Name Rights exchange, you must have family."

"Now that may be one big difference between here and home," said Kirk, turning to Commander Spock. "Here the kataytikhe never became the focal point of cultural stability. Surak didn't lay down the foundations of the Legions. So the families have taken over some of the functions normally performed by Legionary sub-units. 'Name Rights' means something quite different here."

Spock nodded comprehension, intrigued despite the rapidly dwindling time left to them. He spoke to his counterpart directly. "With us, Name Rights are largely intangibles. Acknowledging a connection in name indicates that one shares a closer set of values. Strangers, ideally, should be able to judge one's character by one's choice of Name. In practice, though, the trend is toward maintaining hereditary ties as a matter of course and offering one's Legion-status as character credential."

"The Legions," explained Kirk, "are vast organizations of individuals who share many traits in common. They aren't just trade-unions of guilds of people who work at the same jobs. And they aren't exactly armies, either. There are Legions which draw their membership from many other Legions, crossing lines to gather people who think and believe alike. Their sub-orders have this reciprocal responsibility you attach to Name Rights in a family. So you see, you've made a big mistake. You weren't rescuing me from any sort of abuse. 'Name Rights' doesn't mean the same thing here as there. 'Family' doesn't mean the same thing. I'm not being denied anything. I'm being offered everything I can earn, and that's the way I want it."

Commodore Spock pondered carefully before answering. "But here you can have wealth, power, and even love at a much lesser cost."

"He who seeks power for its own sake deserves what he gets," said Kirk, unknowingly giving his own Spock a surge of pride.

"Apparently," said Commander Spock, "wealth is regarded differently here. I think you should realize that for us, material wealth is a liability. The only worthwhile asset is knowledge."

"Is it so among humans as well?"

"Oh, no," said Kirk, "quite the opposite in fact. I'm not at all sure that I grasp the real essence of Surak's position on the nature of assets and liabilities. But I must admit I've always found myself at a loss to understand people whose sole ambition was to get rich--to amass more money than they could possibly need, and to do nothing with it except force other people to cater to their whims."

"Then," said Commander Spock, "you are well on your way to understanding the precepts of liabilities. Material wealth, expressed in the abstract tokenism of money, is worthless unless employed to create further wealth. However, money is a very complex tool. Yet to fail to administer what one owns is the same as failing to properly cage a wild and dangerous beast one keeps as pet. Among us, a gift of money is considered an insult, just as you would not give a cruelly barbed slave's collar to a friend."

"Or," said Kirk, thoughtfully, "like giving a Regular Blood Worm to a Schillian, an animal so dangerous it would be bound to kill him sooner or later?"

"Exactly," said Commander Spock. "So you see, Commodore, you have not chosen your Kirk wisely."

"No," said the Commodore. "I do not see that. We, too, acknowledge the responsibility toward one's possessions, but..."

At that point, he was interrupted by a rending screech and a shower of pulverized board and splinters. They ducked out of the descending cloud and squinted upwards at the planking that closed off the wheerr's floor.

A shaft of sunlight came through the enlarged hole to dazzle them, but they could all make out the corner of the aircar's chassis enlarging the hole Spock's wild phaser bolt had made.

"What started that..." said the Commodore.

"I heard another car landing just as..." said the Commander.

"T'Uriamne!" yelled the Commodore over his shoulder as he raced headlong for the tunnel.

"Come on!" said Kirk and followed, for the moment forgetting Spock's bare feet.

For that moment, Spock, too, forgot his feet. "To the left, S'chames!" he called as he loped after the Captain. But as Kirk emerged from the tunnel into the cone room, he followed the Commodore's echoing footsteps to the right and upwards. "She may be in trouble!" he threw back over his shoulder.

Pausing a moment to brush shards of crystal from his soles, Spock looked after Kirk unaware of the forlorn consternation that limned his face under the eternalights, and totally unaware of the convulsive swallow that bobbed his prominent Adam's apple up and down as he (once again) watched Kirk sprint pell mell into danger...instead of sensibly away from it.

Hoping the open cuts on his feet wouldn't pick up any exotic parasites, he ran to catch up with Kirk. But Kirk's Vulcan conditioning let him keep the lead until they both emerged onto the wheerr floor.

A second and smaller aircar had indeed landed beside the first. Only a corner of it rested on the slatting covering the hole. But that much extra weight, coupled with the weakening Spock's phaser bolt had accomplished, served to buckle the planking. It had been the corner of that aircar they had seen from below. The vehicle was tilted at a dangerous angle, and it appeared to be slipping gradually deeper into the hole as the planking cracked under it. The other car too was now sliding down into the lowest part of the sagging floor.

The occupant of the second car had unlatched the door--which consisted in this ultra-compact model of simply raising the entire front of the vehicle--but couldn't crawl out without tilting the car deeper into the hole, and herself stepping on the part of the planking that was cracking.

The Commodore called, "T'Uriamne, that won't work. Use the emergency exit!"

She released another lever, moving her hand with exaggerated caution and freezing at each renewed snapping of the platform. Atop the car, another hatch appeared, but in flipping open, it set the car to sliding again.

Commander Spock called, "Adjust center of gravity!"

She threw her body into the rear seat, and that stopped the sudden slide--but now she couldn't move to raise herself through the trap door without sending the tiny aircar through the growing hole beneath it.

Kirk said, "Can't she start the engine and raise the car?"

"Won't start at that angle. Safety feature," said the Commodore.

"Domestic manufacture?" asked the Commander curiously.

"Yes. Not supposed to be driven off the controlled lanes."



"Your T'Uriamne is not so different from mine, it appears," answered the Commander, though silently he was quite certain his half-sister would never have such a dangerous car, let alone get herself into such a fix. But courage of a sort they shared.

"Will you help me save her from herself?" asked the Commodore. "Truce for the moment?"

Spock eyed the angle of the sun. "She is...sister to you?"

"Yes."

"I would not deprive you of both Kirk and sister. Let us go."

With one accord, the two Spocks turned and ducked down the stairs into the gloom once again. The Commander walked behind, filled with memories of a moment when he had stood in Guardian Council, the victor in Argument, looking up into T'Uriamne's face as she prepared to descend and exchange places with him. He had wanted to offer the hand of kinship, but before he could move to do so, she had rejected him and all he stood for, with nothing more strenuous than a flick of the eyelids. How he had wanted that filial acknowledgement from her!

The Commodore had that, apparently, and more. It was well that he should keep it. Perhaps, one day, when he'd won his Argument with his own T'Uriamne, she would call him brother as well.

While the two Spocks descended, Kirk stood agape watching their backs recede. His mind had been so busy with the problem of how to save the woman that he hadn't heard what they'd said, except to note that they hadn't advanced any plan of action.

It seemed to him that they had both abandoned her to her own devices, and though that didn't make sense to him, he didn't have time to think about it. The air car was slipping again as renewed cracking echoed off the walls far below.

Grabbing up a few heavy pieces of debris from the pile under which Spock had hidden the slicer from the Commodore's vehicle, Kirk rushed around to the rear of the midget car. The rear wheels of the undercarriage were already tilted too far off the stones to be chocked by his junk. He climbed up on the rear of the car, adding his own weight to T'Uriamne's.

It helped to balance the vehicle away from the hole, but the wheels still weren't on the ground. The chassis was seated on the edge of the hole like the pivot point of a seesaw, but there was more weight forward of that point--probably, thought Kirk, the power plant.

It would be good, thought Kirk, if he could somehow add the weight of the debris to the back end of the car, but there was nowhere to lay or attach it. The back seat!

Carefully, Kirk extended himself and shinned up the sloping back of the car until he was nearing the roof hatch. If the car went down now, he'd surely go with it!

The planking groaned as if preparing to do just that. "T'Uriamne! Catch this stuff, and I'll bring more. It will load down the rear of the car and help balance it as you climb out."

"It won't work, Jim. Unless you're already a ghost, you'd better get off of there!"

"I'm no ghost, damnit, but catch this!" After some difficulty he managed to get the piece of heavy detritus into the car, and having no choice, she caught it and placed it as far back as she could get it. But their motions had precipitated another slide. Now the car was tilted so dangerously Kirk was afraid his climbing off to get more weights would send it sliding down into that hole.

Just then, clattering and calling directions to one another, the two Spocks re-emerged onto the wheerr floor. They were maneuvering two huge pieces of planking they'd ripped up from the lower floor's hole. Kirk never did learn exactly how they'd gotten the large pieces of board around some of those narrow corners--but years later, Spock unbent enough to mention that he'd learned a number of interesting Vulcanir profanities during that climb, the languages being similar.

In the moment of seeing Kirk clinging to the back of the midget car, though, both Spocks dropped the boards and yelled, "Captain, no!" in perfect unison.

The Commodore said, "The risk to one of you is enough."

The Commander said, "Jim, get off..."

The Commodore said, "As your superior officer, I order you to get off of there!"

"No. The whole thing will go down! You'll have no aircar to get home with! Get over here and help me. Bring some of that ballast junk over here. I'll climb up and help her out."

Torn between running to tear Kirk off the precarious perch, and staying to help ram the boards under the front of the still slipping car, the Commander yelled, "We need your weight to help balance the boards and lift the car--it's heavier on the front end than you think, Captain. Look at the way those boards sag!"

"If I get off, it's going to go down!"

Spock took another careful squint at the situation. "Negative. You can just make it, but you must move NOW!"

"I'm going up, Spock. Get over here!"

The Commodore found his voice. "T'Uriamne, say something. Convince him. Jim, don't do it. The co-efficient of friction on this material is..."

"That won't work," said the Commander. And simultaneously, Kirk started to climb, reaching his hand for T'Uriamne's. "T'Uriamne, jump for it. We can both get clear before it falls through. Take my hand."

"Jim, I don't want my life at the cost of yours. Get off!"

"No! We can do it. Together!"

"You're not a ghost! You're you."

"Yes, just as mortal as ever. Get moving!"

The Commander could see the lovely features of the woman's face tighten over the decision. As she was about to move, he yelled, "Stop! I invoke the Warder-Liege Compact under the Kraith of Adoption. On my responsibility as your Liege, I order you to slide down off the back of that aircar, now, and get over here to help us before it's too late. Now, move!"

For one horrible moment, the Commander thought his brother was going to ignore the most invincible oath ever taken. But then, with a wild, anguished snarl, Kirk did back down off that car, and then he sprinted for all he was worth to put his full back into ramming those boards under the front of the car and levering it back into place. And it did take the full weight of all three of them to do it.

As soon as the car was near enough level, T'Uriamne scrambled into the front seat, and without even closing the front canopy, took off. The sudden shift in the balanced forces broke one more piece of planking--and with a hollow bouncing crash, the Commodore's car went down into the utsulan chamber, smashing most of his delicate translevelling equipment.

As that was happening, T'Uriamne landed her midget squarely on the stone flooring with precise, delicate movements, earning a nod of genuine appreciation from the Commander while the Commodore looked down after his car.

She climbed out to stand beside her vehicle, as cool and poised in her knife-pleated, ankle length robes as if holding court at Top of World. "I must thank all three of you." Her eye traveled from her brother to the barefoot copy of her brother, to Kirk, and rested there, penetratingly.

The Vulcans, by common consent, took the space of five deep, slow breaths to compose themselves. Her gaze continued to analyze Kirk as the two Spocks watched her. And, at length, she said, "Mortal, yes, but not my Captain Kirk. Still, there is much that ought now to pass between us. You will accompany me, for the holiday, to D'R'hiset."

"It is not meet," said the Commander, "to initiate our relationship on a negative, T'Uriamne, but it seems unavoidable. Neither of us can stay for the holiday."

She shifted that slow, solemn, but infinitely observant gaze to the Commander. "Ah. And you cannot return, either."

Kirk, unable to take his eyes from the hauntingly different T'Uriamne he had but glimpsed before--in furs, no less!--said, "We had decided to leave, but couldn't abandon you to such a fall. I...I'm glad you weren't hurt."

Again, with the exaggerated poise that betrayed the shock still stirring within her, she turned her gaze once more on Kirk. "I know. You are. You...always...are. And so am I."

Kirk was caught by her eyes, but with part of his mind he was still trying to visualize her in furs. Something about looking at her felt comfortable to him. He'd never seen a woman quite like her before. Never.

Behind him, the Commander said, "So perhaps now you see what I meant, your not having chosen your Kirk wisely. He is well on his way to understanding the precepts of liabilities, but he is much, much too...um, the English word is 'modest'...you grasp my meaning? He undervalues his own life, and as a result still tends to take enormous risks, foolhardy risks, when other avenues are available. All of his other virtues tend only to magnify this flaw--as you just observed, he does evaluate, decide, and act with total reliance on his own judgment, even when he's wrong, as long as the only risks are run by himself alone, or at least in the vanguard."

"My Kirk was possessed of the same characteristic."

"And," added T'Uriamne, "it cost him his life."

"Indeed. I could not stop him short of humiliating him."

"But you will note, my brother, that his own Spock did stop him." She turned to Kirk. "I do not understand what he said that so decided your action, but I perceive only the highest honor in it. You were not humiliated?"

"Exasperated, perhaps. But in a situation like that, it is necessary to co-operate. Somebody has to give in. It all turned out well enough. You can use the midget's radio to call for another car. You'll be home before sundown, and so will we."

Eying the way Kirk and T'Uriamne studied each other, the Commodore said, "Don't you want to get to know her a little better?"

"No," said T'Uriamne, "he doesn't. That would only make it harder, later. He does not belong here. With us."

"I knew your appearance today would upset my plan."

"It is entirely conceivable," said the Commander, "that there is a Kirk who really does need rescue from a Spock who does not understand his peculiar requirements."

"Then it's good bye," said Kirk, still feeding his eyes on T'Uriamne's features.

"I hope," said the Commodore, "that in your universe, random factors favor your success in a long and fruitful association. Take care of him well, Spock. You won't know true loneliness until he's gone from you."

Then, as if unwilling to watch them depart, the Commodore turned his sister toward the midget aircar. "This is the last time you are going to drive one of these!"

"I choose my own cars, Spock, and I drive them when and where I choose."

Kirk and Spock backed out of the family argument and ducked down the stairs. On one of the dark landings, Kirk said, "Well, I guess you're glad they don't always agree."

"Contrary, S'chames. I wish Spock the full gladness of life. If, for him, that means always agreeing with T'Uriamne, then let it be so."

For the remainder of the descent, Kirk let silence envelope them. But once more under the open sky, Kirk took a deep breath of the ultra-dry desert air. "And I thought Dakainya was a desert! This place is depressing. Let's go home, Spock."

"I left the Idlomputt over here," said Spock, leading the way. Half way to the rock formation, Spock turned to favor Kirk with a measuring look. "Are you quite sure you are ready to go home?"

"Yes. Nice place to visit...I just hope he finds the right person, someone who'd be happy here."

"You said you wanted to see for yourself..."

"I know what I said. I meant it...then. How do we get home?" Kirk paced off along the direction Spock had been leading while Spock hung back, thinking. Examining the outcropping of rock, Kirk found the crevice and knelt to extract the Idlomputt, hands reaching for it as if recovering the family's crown jewels--not that Vulcan had any crowns, thought Kirk.

As he reached into the recess, Kirk saw the arched stems just appearing through the sands. There was a big one, and five little ones near it, their budding heads still buried in the sand. The afternoon sun had moved to cast shadow on them, and they were pushing upwards through the soil already bursting with life. "Spock, I'm taking these Blooms home with us."

"Captain, you can't. I used a different system than his to get here. I arrived with nothing but the Idlomputt. That came with me because I was attuned to it. We can't take anything back with us."

"That hasn't been proven experimentally, has it?"

"No."

"And the Blooms are living things. Clothes aren't living. The Idlomputt might be a sort of quasi-life, right?"

"Un-proven, Captain."

"Well, what harm in trying to take the Blooms back? I think I owe Soled something, and a gift to Siyr would seem appropriate. These six ought to suffice, don't you think?"

"One doesn't touch the Blooms. They are not possessions."

Kirk twisted around to squint up at Spock, a stark silhouette limned by the setting sun against the angry red sky. "Is that an order? Are you still on Pilgrimage?"

"I..." In mid-sentence, Spock seemed to discover new data un-noticed until now.

"Are you still holding the Warder-Liege Compact between us?"

"No. I'm not sure..." There was fatigue now in Spock's voice. "Right now I just want to go home."

"I'm going to try to take the Blooms. If it doesn't work, what harm can be done? Out here in the desert, what good can they do? This world has rich and frequent Bloomings. That may account for many of their differences."

"I am in rexath."

"What?"

"Too complicated to explain now, Captain. It means that I am responsible for your decision, regardless of other prevailing circumstances."

"You were willing to consider a trade of the Blooms."

"No. Of the dormant bulbs, not the Blooms."

Kirk squatted on his heels, hands hanging down between his knees, and looked at the rising buds. "Which is worse, touching a Bloom, or failing to avert the Linger Death?"

"Perhaps we can avoid both. What must be done in order to return to Beom might... accidentally...transport the bulbs and Blooms as well, provided your hypothesis of living things is correct."

"All right. How do we do it?"

"The Idlomputt is the key, Captain. That's why I had to bring it. It's twin resides in the wheerr at Beom, at the nexus of power of a dze'ut'."

Kirk sprang to his feet and faced his friend, moth hanging open in a most un-Captainly expression. As the implications of that statement sank in, he brought one hand up to knead his jaw back into place. "Then the dze'ut' is not supposed to be modulated around human operators?"

"Correct. The living brain is a poor substitute for the proper component of the circuit, but even so, the entire procedure is far too costly. The Commodore has a better approach, and I shall write a complete report on it when we've completed our business at Beom. Shall we go?"

"By all means."

"It will be necessary for you to drop into phase with the Idlomputt on the deepest levels you've been able to tap. This one was constructed for you without much attention to Binding Functions, but it still has capacity far beyond your ability to reach...yet. I am going to show you how to form a link between the two devices...they are not identical, you know."

"No, they're mirror images, right?"

"Crudely put, but essentially accurate. You will use this one to activate the other. When activated simultaneously, they will be attracted to one another. Since the other is firmly grounded to the Beom utsulan, this one and all in phase with it will be pulled back to Beom."

"You and I, we can't mindmeld. It almost killed you a few hours ago."

"I'm not sure exactly what will happen when I attempt to meld with you to show you now to operate the Idlomputt. But it's the only way to get home, so we must do it."

"If you're willing, I'm willing. What do I do?"

"Leave the Idlomputt where it is. That will include the Blooms in the field, provided they can be affected by the field. Then simply procede to activate the device."

Kirk squatted down in front of the crevice again. The fading light made the throbbing Idlomputt flame seem brighter. It cast a reddish glow that included the Blooms. It wasn't until many months later that Kirk learned just how dangerous those buds were to Spock at that moment, for as Kirk reached out for the Idlomputt field, Spock joined him, kneeling in the sand beside the Bloom's buds and positioning his fingers around Kirk's skull in the teaching meld configuration Kirk had learned to accept.

Under Spock's direction, Kirk reached down into levels of the Idlomputt he'd never known were there. He did complicated things he could never describe or repeat, then or ever. But he felt the twin device coming alive in that distant place, felt himself falling toward that place, pulled back by an elastic cord stretched to its limit and recoiling now to its normal dimensions.

At the last moment, Kirk remembered the Blooms, forced his eyes open to look for them, and willed them to come with them. The falling sensation increased until they were whirling through torrents of grey-white fog that seemed smeared on the insides of their eyeballs.

It's only sensory overload, he told himself calmly. Hold on a few moments and it will

be over. Only, he says! thought Kirk back at himself ruefully. Freefall training hadn't prepared him for anything like this! His whole body insisted on tensing up for the impact, the racing fog convincing his irrational unconscious that it was sure to be a lulu.

Something warm and strong enveloped him, and he reached out for it. Arms encircled him. His own arms went around a torso every bit as rock-tense as his own. They clung together like children tossed by frothing rapids, and spewed forth to tumble forever down grey cliffs toward unseen, spray-enveloped rocks far far below.

The fog took on an orange tinge, gradually growing lighter, as if a dim, giant sun were slowly rising. A bright orange star appeared on the invisible horizon. It had six dim satellites. The orange fog wrapped them in a downy blanket of silence. The light grew brighter and brighter, turning from ruddy to clear, brilliant, true orange.

Kirk remembered that color. Mind-grenades exploding like orange gelatin. He hadn't been able to face a bowl of orange gelatin since then. He felt that old fear growing and fought it down, forgetting to breathe.

When they landed, it was like hitting a space-net, the kind Kirk had used during his Cadet days for capturing the servicing the tiny relay satellites around Academy Base. The gossamer webbing touched their backs, scarcely impeding their fall at first. It moved easily with them, until ever so slowly, it began to resist, absorbing some of their momentum. They went down and down into the folds of the net until it became hard under them. They rebounded then, bouncing against the net again and again until they came to rest at last.

When Kirk opened his eyes, he was surprised to find himself seated on a solid platform with no net in sight. The orange fog was gone. So was his heart-stopping fear. Self-consciously, he un-wrapped his arms from Spock's naked torso. His own clothes were gone. But the six Blooms and their bulbs lay beside the twin Idlomputt devices. "Spock, look! We did it!"

"I see. We've ...done...many...things."

"Spock!" Kirk abandoned the flowers and came toward his friend, his brother. He had no interest in the arched, faceted dome, or the hastily thrown-together platform on which he sat over the center of the massive Beom crystal. He had no thought for the fact that no other human had ever been inside a wheerr.

The green-robed Attendant who had, with much reluctance, accepted the necessity for his own entry into that one room of the utsulan where the very existence of the utsulan was vulnerable, found Kirk bent over Spock's unconscious body.

THE END

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1. Ssarsun's Argument, KRAITH IF, in Kraith Collected, Volume 2.
  2. Spock's Affirmation, KRAITH I, in Kraith Collected, Volume 1.

# THE BALLAD OF DOKAMRAL'NOR

A traditional Vulcan Folk-Ballad  
Translated from the Vulcanir by Beverly Clark  
According to Harakn

In Top of World the great lords ruled,  
With power of life, with power of death:  
The banner-bearing cities grew, under rocks and thunder fell,

D'R'hiset rested in valley of Hyboleye Fay  
(Ancients of days, most revered people,)  
The power of peace: tradition and retreat.

Here upon a time Domahay burned green;  
Here Aivahnya came to quench his flame;  
Here they kindled fire to change the world.

Through all the day the birds danced on the heights,  
Till dying sun had painted them all red,  
And bathed with crimson dun H'lvin'grey.

But night contained no rest for Domahay.  
Aivahnya saw a deceptive gently flower:  
It was the night of Blooming, night of fire.

They passed the night in watch upon the tower.  
The blooms glowed white upon the midnight sands,  
And through the night the fire burned deeper green.  
Until ad dawn desire would wait no more,  
And bearing with them fruit, the nuptial couple  
Climbed to windswept summit of bare H'lvin'grey.

They met the light upon the rocky flat  
(Always but now avoided by their folk,)  
And there the burning burning eased, a child took life.

Now cool and calm, they ate the morning fruit,  
And so the barren land might share her Joy,  
Aivahnya planted in th ground the living seed.

She prophesied that while its fruit should flourish  
The fruit of Blooming too should not know end:  
Dokamral'nor her son should hold D'R'hiset.

In Top of World Dokamral'nor was lord:  
Lightning peace, sword-brought prosperity,  
And lord, by right of name, of ancient lore.

Lord too was he of D'R'hiset:  
Of single tower, lonely wall, of solitary court;  
Fitting: a lone domain for a single host.

At time of burning, in the ancient way,  
Dokamral'nor wed Thtis, but ancient way was broken--  
He was not cooled, and wed again: Lyad.

Fainz came next while t wo wives were with child,  
Third wife, of knowledge equal to his own,  
To ease the burning of unnatural fire.

Beneath D'R'hiset she led Dokamral'nor  
To pool of soothing water, blue and clear.  
Water quenches fire, but still he was aflame.

Beneath the earth they followed twisting paths,  
Dark and cool as Dokamral'nor was not,  
To heart of Peace where calm and refuge dwelt.

In awed and most strange Heart of Peace they met,  
Two became one, and for a time he cooled,  
And Fainz took unto her a daughter's life.

Nine consorts joined the wives already wed,  
And seed came forth: twenty sons and thirty Daughters,  
Created, from their sire, with unknown, untried minds.

The sons, with wives born of Hyboleye Fay,  
Dwelt by Dokamral'nor in ancient home;  
The Daughters too, by no man ever won, stayed at D'R'hiset.

In Top of World Dokamral'nor was honored,  
And changed the shape of things, though not quite sane,  
And famous for his twisted mind as for his skill,

Mighty men lead shortened lives, perhaps:  
Dokamral'nor was killed, by twelve men frightened of the  
power  
Not solely of the sire, but of the seed.

Leaping fire, funeral pyre burning in the night  
Silhouetted: one hundred two kin of Dokamral'nor,  
Their forms outlined against the starry sky.

Not outlined: sharp as highest noon they stood  
As stars burst into flame and rained white death  
Upon the dreaded family of Dokamral'nor.

One funeral fire for all, but none to honor;  
Screaming folk ran to half-razed D'R'hiset  
Fleeing death; or dead, lay quiet on the ground.

At dawn upon the heights of H'lvin'grey  
Those left living gathered, diminished by a third  
From what they were, and bleak as barren rock.

One spoke, Yehaena of Hyboleye Fay,  
Hard words, advising: "Go, while time is with us:  
Separate and flee: And remember the ancient people."

They fled, to unknown distant refuge, seeking safety  
Far from revered valley and high honored hill,  
Save three, who shunned the Towers of Seclusion.

Two set out (son of Lyad, son of Fainz)  
Along the customary route of seasons' change,  
To found a new life in a distant land.

Hyboleye Fay lived now in thought alone:  
The ancients all departed, gone to none knows where;  
Save for D'R'hiset the valley lay deserted.

The son of Thtis remained at ancient home:  
Spock, first bearer of the name reserved for son  
Of she who brought together most disunited ways.

Spock, called Founder of Dynasties and Dreams,  
Took proudly as his task the care of H'lvin'grey,  
And once each season climbed the wind-washed hill.

He danced upon the summit till the dawn,  
Clad in colors bright against the stars,  
And it was said: the hill holds meaning yet.

Nine sons of him gave life to twenty more,  
And tend the heights; (the line of Lyad numbered days,  
The secret ways were kept by sons of Fainz.)

Top of World is empty, shorn of power,  
A shade of what it was, defeated, grim,  
Its once-great lords turned in upon themselves.

D'R'hiset in its valley waxes great,  
Its power of peace (born of its roots) undimmed,  
Filled with foretold seed of domahay.

Aivahnya's tree upon the hill was kept  
By sons of Thtis, and cherished as the prophecy  
And emblem of their power descended from Dokamral'nor.

The generations-further sons of Spock  
Considered of a way to use their different minds  
To call the people of the valley home again.

After hesitating long they called  
(A task too arduous), and failed; and with them  
failed their minds,  
Their fortune, and the good name of the line of Thtis.

Disaster struck and followed sons of Spock,  
And fearful Rumor: the final death of all Hybole eye Fay;  
A magic lirpa, deadly though its form could not be seen.

Night fell upon the offspring of Dokamral'nor  
(Or different blood perhaps?), and evil tales were told,  
But still some stayed to guard D'R'hiset.

The keepers of the hallowed home were there to greet  
The travelers from afar, who came to dwell therein,  
And lift the shadow from the honored name.

Descendants of Dokamral'nor, aslanted too,  
But whole: speakers of the secret tongue,  
Partakers in the lore, true offspring of the ancient seed.

At proper time they climbed H'lvin'grey  
To pledge their lives to care of D'R'hiset,  
Their minds to memory of Aivahnya's tree.

Their children, T'Evmur and S'ntay, and their sons,  
Preserved the name of great Hybole eye Fay,  
And kept alive the ways of fold departed.

Tradition was their strength, and long they lived  
In peace, unchallenged masters of the hall,  
Bearers of memory come down from Domahay.

Top of World lay crumbled, long deserted.  
D'R'hiset stood firm beneath its hill,  
Arisen once again, its offspring leaders as before.

Like sons of Spock they brought the fold together,  
But sure in knowledge now, and with time and patience  
Wove a net of mind to span the world.'

In time kataytikh minds could join as one,  
But could not spread the peace of D'R'hiset:  
The sands outside flowed green with unstopped passion.

The hands of peace at times themselves brought war.  
The world stood in grave danger of its life,  
As had not happened since the days of Domahay.

A single figure came to D'R'hiset,  
A scholar of the line of sons of Fainz,  
Dweller in the Rains, a man of peace.

He sought an answer, and there, alone,  
Amid the peace of old familial home,  
Found a path to peace for all the world.

Under silent spell the Council met,  
Called by Surak to the revered place  
To hear as he explained the Way of Change.

In ancient honored tongue he spoke,  
Setting out the way to unify the Realms,  
And to fulfill Aivahnya's old foretelling.

The potent peace hung heavy in the hall;  
Stronger still, green violence erupted,  
And when it ended, Surak stood alone.

A call went out from Surak in the hall  
To all the sons and Daughters of Dokamral'nor,  
That they might aid him in his quest for peace.

Upon bare H'lvin'grey First Realm convened,  
The children of Dokamral'nor come home,  
And there they pledged to take forth Surak's way.

Top of World is dust, and unremembered  
Save by poets; the martial arts are turned to peaceful ends,  
And lords of war replaced by lords of other power.

The Peace of D'R'hiset guides the world,  
With greatest strength beneath H'lvin'grey, in ancient home,  
Where sons of Lyad and of Fainz yet dwell.

This version translated from the Vulcanir  
by Darlene Fouquet  
According to S'A'Adshi

Aivahnya came to D'R'hiset  
To quench green flame of Domahay  
And birds danced till the sun had set  
On the bare rocks of H'lvin'grey.

D'R'hiset. Retreat from Top-of-World  
Where mighty rulers held their seats  
Mid lightning flame and boulders hurled,  
Counting enemies' defeats.

When winter had closed in to stay  
The stalwart fled to D'R'hiset  
In the valley of Hyboleye Fay  
Their name unknown to those they met.

Ancient, revered, Hyboleye Fay  
With powers feared by all,  
Dwelt in the shade of H'lvin'grey  
From time none can recall.

Era and eon marched along,  
Sons and daughters of that great tribe  
Earned place in ballad and in song  
And never knew their price or bribe.

Greater and greater rose Top-of-World  
Flinging borders far and wide  
Over conquered cities, like birds, unfurled  
Proud banner sewn of xsthri hide.

But that day was not long to last.  
After the Blooming Aivahnya took  
Domahay and made him fast  
Forevermore unto her look.

Domahay would seek his bed  
As sun declined along the sands  
And D'R'hiset was bathed in red  
But Aivahnya saw the Blooming bands.

The ramparts high of D'R'hiset  
They climbed to watch the glowing flower  
Then at dawn with fruit in net  
They toiled the slope above the tower.

Flat is the top of H'lvin'grey  
Scoured harsh by wind and water  
Abandoned by Hyboleye Fay  
Shunned, despised by son and daughter.

Together in seclusion grand  
They greeted day's first glow  
Trembling hand met trembling hand  
And she took his son's shadow.

There in the spot where he began  
Aivahnya named Dokamral'nor  
Assured that none should ever ban  
Him from ancestral lore.

When Aivahnya Domahay had freed  
She ate of the largest fruit in hand  
And gave to him the glistening seed  
To bury on that sterile land.

Then did she dare to prophesy  
That longer than sweet fruits shall grow  
Dokamral'nor would not die  
But live, through seed that he would sow.

In those days so long ago  
When Top-of-World thought itself great  
D'R'hiset was but a pale shadow  
Of that which was to be its fate.

One tower only could it boast  
One wall, one court, one hall  
Wherein there stood a single host  
To greet those who come to call.

But Dokamral'nor when full-grown  
Stunned the valley up and down  
By burning when his seed was sown  
And wife Thtis had filled her gown.

Lyad took he to him then  
And even she did not quench  
His green flame, and he burned again  
But Thtis from suckle could not wrench.

Fainz took him then to drink  
From the water, blue and clean  
That springs from rock in cavern sink  
Far below high tower's gleam.

Then they traveled hidden ways  
Straight into the Heart of Peace  
That mighty D'R'hiset pervades  
Right to the living crystal face.

And under that strange influence  
She took his daughter's shadow  
And gave it shape forever hence.  
There is no place more hallow.

Top-of-World would know the touch  
Of him who these three wives had taken  
Dokamral'nor did journey much  
Yet D'R'hiset was ne'er forsaken.

He built a calm and peaceful reign  
With might of lightning, chain and sword  
Though it was said he was not sane  
He was a great and noble Lord.

Twenty sons had he begot  
With wives and nine consorts  
Before swift death became his lot  
At hands of twelve cohorts.

Dokamral'nor had lived long  
And none had been more prosperous  
Thirty Daughters sang his song  
And at his shrine burned phosphorus.

Yet not the number of his children  
Gives Dokamral'nor fame  
And brings the curious pilgrim  
But the way that they were lame.

For each was born with mind askew  
In strange and unknown manner.  
Throughout the valley whispers grew  
'Round great D'R'hiset's banner.

The one thing that was soon to see  
Was that each Daughter shunned  
Expectant suitor's company  
And never would be won.

But each of the young men did bring  
A woman of Hyboleye Fay  
Into his Father's house to sing  
Within its walls to stay.

Each wife sang to her husband's lyre--  
Her song rose to his Father.  
And as at first, the sons' green fire  
Drove each to seek another.

At Dokamral'nor's funeral pyre  
Were eighty women, twenty men  
To mourn and honor mighty sire  
But not beyond their rivals' ken.

The funeral pyre caught and flared  
Its flames grew ever brighter.  
Lost in their grief, none was prepared  
To meet more tragic fire.



High in the moonless sky there bloomed  
A white and dripping death  
A fire that engulfed the doomed  
Who drew their last life's breath.

Half of D'R'hiset was lost  
That night of Dokamral'nor  
And of the sons' and daughters' host  
A third did rise no more.

With dawn, high onto H'lvin'grey  
The seed of Domahay did climb.  
Yehaena of Hyboleaye Fay  
Spoke, and lost no time:

Go you must to dwell apart  
Scatter from here and depart  
Before the fire strikes your heart  
Destroying us before we start.

Then they to distant borders fled  
Far from sight of H'lvin'grey.  
Even now cannot be said  
Where they came to stay.

Yet son of Thtis, of Lyad, of Fainz  
Chose not the Towers of Seclusion.  
Each of these three lines remains,  
Their power untouched and no illusion.

From D'R'hiset two more set out.  
But the one that did remain,,  
Seeking not a new life's route  
Is the one of widespread fame.

Son of Thtis, Spock by name  
Yearly climbs up H'lvin'grey  
Head held high, and without shame  
Tends the shrine of Hyboleaye Fay.

Son of Thtis tends the heights  
Son of Fainz, the secret ways  
Each of three maintains his rights  
Though son of Lyad numbers days.

In the Years of Waste when Top-of-World  
Defeated, shrunken, robbed of might  
Lay like an unborn fetus curled  
D'R'hiset shared not this plight.

For here amid pervading peace  
The line of Thtis kept tis hold  
On the memory that was not to cease  
Though Aivahnya's prophecy grew cold.

It seemed thus neither strange nor odd  
To ancient tribe Hyboleaye Fay  
That sons of Spock would gently nod  
When nine of them would come to stay.

And from the nine came twenty more  
To fill the halls of D'R'hiset  
With twenty daughters brought to door  
And each of them well met.

And so waxed great the sons of Thtis,  
But Hyboleaye Fay did wither  
Until the valley did not miss  
That tribe when it went hither.

From D'R'hiset they travelled on,  
Ancient, revered, Hyboleaye Fay  
Mother clan of rulers gone  
To what new place? None can say.

Memory stretches ages back  
But not enough to penetrate  
The foggy night of legend black  
When sons of Thtis did hesitate

To use the power born in them  
Through shadow of Dokamral'nor  
To call their people back again  
And hold them ever more.

'Tis said that all Hyboleaye Fay  
Met death. Now were they missed,  
For with them went the sanity  
Of the sons of Thtis.

Now they walked amid affliction,  
Sorrows too great to be listed.  
Did they realize prediction?  
Aivahnya's son too had mind twisted.

But generations passed unnamed  
Between the sons of Spock  
And the deranged ones who defamed  
D'R'hiset's hallowed rock.

It is unknown, at least unsure,  
If they were the same.  
Had Dokamral'nor's blood run pure  
Or taken a new name?

So when black legend overcame  
The mighty house of D'R'hiset  
And cast its pall upon the name  
Of Spock, and Thtis, and yet

In distant places yet remained  
Several untouched dynasties  
Each in own way rightly famed,  
Unplagued by dark calamities.

They knew the secret language well  
Of ancient tribe Hyboleaye Fay  
Those of the valley could soon tell  
They belonged at foot of H'lvin'grey.

Then saw the halls of D'R'hiset  
New feet climb rugged H'lvin'grey  
And new minds pledge to not forget  
The prophecy of Aivahnya's day.

There there they dwelt for untold time  
Naming their children T'Evmur and S'tay  
By tradition strong and clear of crime  
Upholding remembered Hyboleaye Fay.

So many years did they remain  
Within the walls of D'R'hiset  
That not one rival ever came  
Their reign to challenge or upset.

For they, too, were get of Spock  
With memory live to Domahay,  
Who on black legend placed a lock.  
They were First Realm, but half shut away.

Spock, the secret name that means  
(In language of Hyboleaye Fay)  
Founders of Dynasties and Dreams  
Or so outsiders say

Was given to no other  
Then or now or ever,  
But set apart for mother  
Who greatest bonds did sever.

For Thtis came from far away  
Over mountain, plain and sea  
To dwell among Hyboleaye Fay  
And had to pay the fee.

Eons-long neglect left crumbled  
Mighty ruins at Top-of-World  
Kataytikh minds could only fumble  
They had no lightning bolts to hurl.

But from the halls of D'R'hiset  
Slowly, through the centuries  
Great leaders spread mind's floating net  
Joining kataytikh in all countries.

Yet rivers still ran green with blood  
Spilled in passion on the sands  
At one time it seemed to flood  
Even from kataytikh hands.

Since the days when Aivahnya came  
To quench green flame of Domahay  
And give to him undying fame  
On the bare rocks of H'lvin'grey.

Never had there been such wars  
Fought with help of new science.  
Closed were all the mind's wide doors,  
And locked in firm defiance.

But there arose in line of Fainz  
A scholar, man of peace  
Who searched to loose kataytikh chains  
And make the warfare cease.

He travelled then to H'lvin'grey  
And said what must be done  
To fulfill Aivahnya's prophecy  
And save the Realms as one.

Then the halls of D'R'hiset ran green  
With passion spilled upon the stone  
Despite the waiting Peace unseen,  
Leaving Surak all alone.

He stood beneath dark H'lvin'grey  
And called back Lyad's sons, and Fainz;  
Then in language of Hyboleaye Fay  
Convened First Realm, to start again.

Once more from D'R'hiset went out  
A new order in the world of men  
And those that carried it did shout  
Of the Peace they'd found within.

Unto this day that Peace remains  
Within proud D'R'hiset's walls.  
Through sons of Lyad and of Fainz  
To all the world, it calls.

