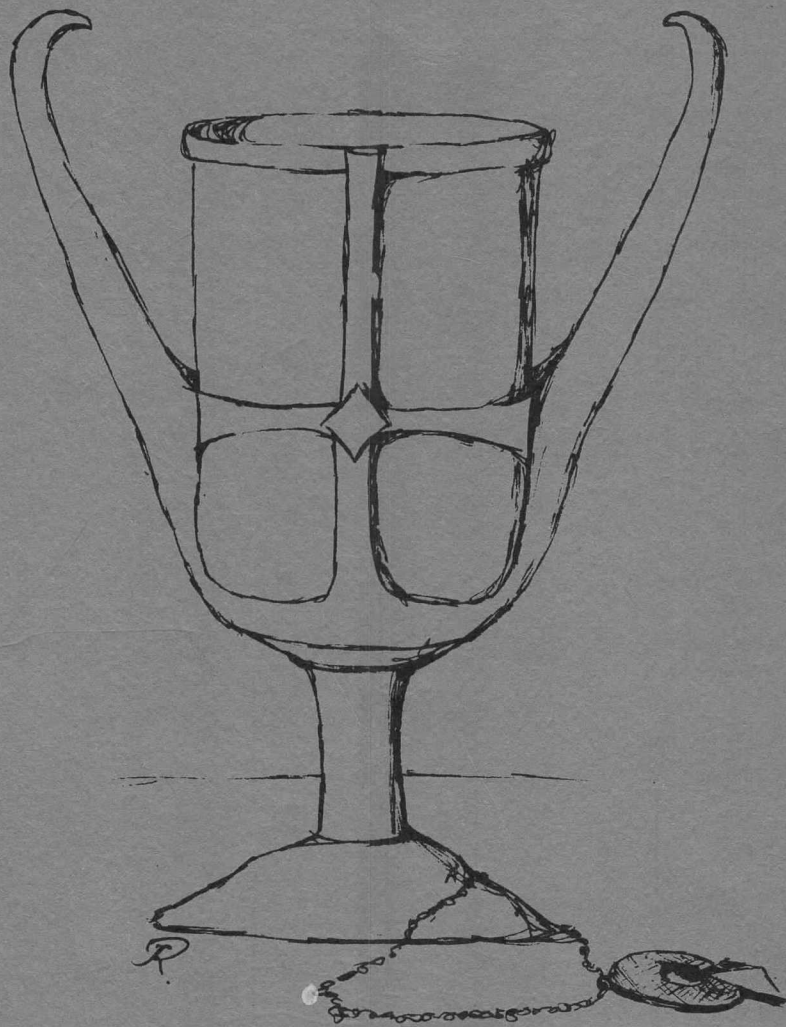


KRAITH

COLLECTED



Volume One

AUTHOR'S

PREFACE

Jacqueline
Lichtenberg

To all of the many Kraith Fans who have asked for the works of the Kraith series between two covers: I am relieved to be able to put these volumes in your hands.

Yes, relieved---your many letters, each in its own way denoting eagerness, have made me feel as if my inability to provide copies for you were a failure of shameful magnitude. You have brought me to understand how very much you have wanted Kraith to be collected. Now, we may all thank our editors, publishers, and devoted Kraith Creators for making this volume available.

However, due to the size of the Kraith Series, and due to the fact that the Series isn't complete yet, what you hold in your hands is only the beginning of Kraith Collected. Future volumes will bring you both stories which occur later in the Series, and stories which occur between the stories in this volume.

For those of you who are not familiar with the many scattered pieces of the Kraith Series, I will attempt to summarize the history and underlying substance of the Series.

Ostensibly, the Kraith Series is just another Spock-gets-married Series. In actual fact, this aspect of the plot is only incidental (an important incident, but only incidental).

I began REMOTE CONTROL in 1968... but I got pregnant, so it wasn't finished until December of 1969. By the time it was finished, there was no serious market, so I submitted it to Ruth Berman's T-Negative. She liked the story enough to xerox herself a copy and she returned it with a request that I rewrite it into narrative. I refused on the grounds that the story was structured for video and could not make a satisfactory narrative. However, I had been deeply entertained by T-Negative all during my incapacitation and I wanted to contribute. I was afraid that cancellation would cause T-Negative and all the other fanzines to fold.

Therefore, I decided to pull out some of my script outlines and see if I could rework them into narrative. It would be about the same amount of work as was necessary to convert REMOTE CONTROL into narrative... and there was no more market for scripts.

I cast about and discovered that I had now gained the freedom to use some really radical ideas about Vulcan in narrative form. I had developed these ideas privately over the past seasons but felt that they were not potentially commercial despite their obvious truth. I had some misgivings about whether fandom would be able to accept anything so radical, but I judged that, if there were to be no more new shows, it was time to infuse some new blood into fanzines. I resolved to use some of my tame, commercial ideas mixed with some wild surmises that I felt had dramatic presence enough to be interesting.

I had been reading a great deal in STREKZINES that supported notions in sharp opposition to my conceptions. I resolved to make my story into a counter statement, proving once and for all that the johnny-one-notes of fandom had been blind to reality. If my story served no other purpose, it would stir up enough controversy to spark some original thinking which had been conspicuously absent.

Therefore, with the zeal of a true crusader, I set about constructing my single story which was to be my only contribution to STREKDOM. I pulled out a set of index cards headed "The Kraith Challenge". I had done this outline with commercial script writing in mind. It dated from just after I had seen AMOK TIME and incorporated only a few vague ideas and very little that was new or startling. I then cast around for supporting detail. I pulled out the cards stapled to that card, shuffled them around, and a story began to take shape. The original script had been planned as a three part episode of deep drama. My story would center on the middle of those three parts. The working title was THE AFFIRMATION.

I set to work outlining and drafting. It took only a few weeks and by the next time I heard from Ruth, I had the thing nearly done. Shortly after that, I mailed it off, certain it would never be accepted because it was so far out. Ruth, however, liked it enough to publish it.

But then I began thinking... now what am I going to do? This story will be published and people will be loosing sleep over "what happened to Sarek?". I re-read AFFIRMATION and stewed and stewed. There was no overt clue in AFFIRMATION about what would happen to Sarek. I'd meant the story to give enough basic information for any intelligent reader to figure out all the rest of the Series... that way I wouldn't have to bother writing it.

But my conscience wouldn't let me rest. So, one night, I sat down and pulled out the old outlines and constructed MISSION. I decided to re-title THE AFFIRMATION SPOCK'S AFFIRMATION. Then SPOCK'S MISSION would be number two in the series and the other stories will all be titled Spock's somethingorother, if Ruth didn't think that was too cutie-cute. Ruth liked the idea and the convention was established.

However, as I finished MISSION, I began to realize that

it wasn't possible to say in a few words enough to tie down my whole concept of what Vulcans are. I knew what I wanted to say, but the readers wouldn't. I had raised questions that I hadn't even hinted at the answers to. I knew the answers, but a reader might develop his own very different answers and spoil the whole Kraith idea for himself. My text books insisted that unanswered questions were dirty pool.

I gave in gracefully to the inevitable. I sat down and mapped out the entire series to Kraith VI... and eventually decided that I'd have to end the monster... so to Kraith VIII. Since the main series would never cover everything I had in mind, I decided that Mark Twain had had the right idea. I made room in the series for the subordinate stories: IA, etc., IIA etc.. It took several months to tie down all the major decision-points and "finalize" my master plan for the series. In fact, it still isn't absolutely immutable. If another Kraith Creator comes up with a better idea than I've been using, and it isn't too late, then I can still make some changes to accommodate these ideas.

I don't feel that this method of sneaking Kraith into the literature is terribly underhanded. The concepts are radical and very strange. Not one in five hundred would be able to accept them. I feel there is justification for holding back information until the groundwork has been laid. This accomplishes not only the gentle introduction, but it also increases the value of your fanzine. STrekzines cost too much. If you can get nine hours of entertainment by rereading a fanzine several times, and if each rereading is more entertaining than the last (instead of less), is that not sound economics? I feel that television should try to use this method to beat the squeeze. Since every series must make fewer episodes, make each episode designed to be reread in the same way that Kraith is designed to be reread.

One of my primary objections to the way the Star Trek script writers worked pertains to the disconnected, or "episodic", format. Since each episode had to be complete in itself, and since it was not supposed to matter in what order they were seen, the writers were limited to a simple "I came, I saw, I conquered" sequence wherein the Enterprise blunders into a situation, sizes it up for two acts, and then solves it in the final act. Kraith departs from this by deepening the significance of every detail.

In this effort, Kraith is not entirely successful. The Kraith Critics complain constantly about many aspects of Kraith, but they are only groping blindly after the reasons for their own dislike of the series. Perhaps the real, primary objection of those who dislike Kraith is simply that the Kraith Series tries to do too much, and in doing so becomes very difficult to understand.

For this reason, we have included in this volume some of the supplementary non-fiction which pertains to those stories in this volume. (Space limitations forced us to cut out much of this. See the Kraith Writer's Manual and the bibliography for more information. ed.) By careful reading of this non-fiction, and by careful thought about the correlations between the fiction and the non-fiction, the reader will be able to discern the overall direction of the series.

The Kraith Critics complain that the Kraith Spock differs far too much from the aired Spock. Kraith fans claim that the Kraith Spock is closer to their own conception of Spock than any other fanzine Spock. Before Kraith, these two types of fans did not know that their concepts of Spock differed so very much, and they did not know in what way their concepts differed.

Now we have several very good writers engaged in the probing of their differences between the Kraith conception of Spock and their own conceptions of him. Gradually, the areas of disagreement are becoming more and more clearly defined. If Kraith does nothing else, it has served its purpose.

But there is one more thing that Kraith might succeed in doing. And that is to point out a choice which the creators of aired-Star Trek apparently didn't realize they had. Star Trek was created to be the vehicle of real science fiction before the mass audience. To do this Star Trek drew upon the entire body of science fiction, extracting a theme here, a character there, an idea somewhere else, and blending them all into a very unoriginal yet new whole. But aired-Star Trek did not go far enough in doing this.

Kraith tries to take another step along this road. Kraith draws upon the entire body of science fiction, and applies certain basic principles to Star Trek in order to discuss in the science fiction-mode many of the very crucial questions of today.

In future volumes of this Collected edition of Kraith, I will attempt to demonstrate how each element incorporated into Kraith was selected, and I will show you where the elements came from.

The creators of aired Star Trek may not have realized they could have used Star Trek to tell a much larger story than they did tell. Kraith chooses to tell such a story, and in doing so, Kraith departs somewhat from the established format. But also, it blazes a trail for future fan-series authors because, by merely altering the chosen ingredients, other equally significant stories can be told.

For the purposes of Kraith, I chose to tell a story on a galactic scale---a story of heroes, of love, of friendship, and of vast sweeping events of galactic politics set against an inter-cultural clash, the echoes of which will take centuries to die down.

The essence of the drama unfolding before the Kraith reader is the disruptive collision between the pre-Federation Vulcan culture and the human-dominated Federation culture. Before the reader's eye, these two cultures are brought into direct conflict.

But then, the sub-plots begin to unfold, and other conflicts take shape. The conflict between "modern" Vulcan culture and the Federation-polluted Vulcan culture erupts in Kraith III, SPOCK'S ARGUMENT.

FEDERATION CENTENNIAL begins to reveal the state of the whole Federation with regard to changing cultural standards. Here the line is drawn between the humans and the non-humans with the Vulcans caught in the middle---for it will be on Vulcan that the drama ultimately works itself out. In this story we encounter our first Vulcan defector--- but he is certainly not the only Vulcan who sees the situation differently from the majority of Vulcans. (FEDERATION CENTENNIAL will be published by us sometime in the future. Meanwhile, Regina Marviny should have it out shortly. ed.)

Ruth Berman's character, S'Darmeg, is another example of a Vulcan of the Kraith universe who is prepared to step far outside of the Tradition to accomplish his ends. He is not alone. And his like will become more frequent as the whole situation ferments.

Ruth was the first to sum up the essence of the Kraith Series with the observation that the real hero of these stories is not Spock but the Vulcan culture. It isn't the "modern" Vulcan culture, the Reform culture, that is the hero of the series, rather it is what this culture ought to become that is the hero. And the Vulcan culture is only one of the protagonists of the series.

Many people have said that I, personally, like the Reform Vulcan Culture of Surak's Construct. I don't believe this is so. If it were, why would I go to such lengths to change it? In Kraith, this artificial culture is brought into sharp conflict with a) the human-dominated Federation Culture, b) the Romulan Culture (Kraith VII), c) the Elloq Culture (Kraith VI and VII)--- and ultimately with itself. Each collision changes the values of the Reform Culture so that we have sub-conflicts raging between various segments of Vulcan Culture itself.

In fictional terms, this translates into a conflict between Spock and McCoy, between Spock and Kirk, and between a changed (or slowly evolving) Spock and various segments of Vulcan culture as it too changes (such as S'Darmeg). The question always before the reader of the Kraith Series is, "Is this right? Or should another path be chosen?" That is an uncomfortable question, a question which drives down deep to the very fundament of our own ethical structure--- and that kind of question can make people acutely uncomfortable, and violently opposed to any story that asks it. That, more than anything, may be the source of the discomfort which some readers feel with the Kraith Spock.

Kraith Critics claim that the Kraith Spock is not the aired Spock which they saw with their own eyes. When the Kraith Spock says or does something "uncharacteristic", the tendency is to reject the Kraith Spock as invalid. That is the easy way out of a moral dilemma of staggering proportions. The more intensely one dislikes Kraith, the more interesting the series should become, at least until an exact definition of the reasons why one dislikes Kraith can be formulated.

For those Kraith Critics who can produce such a formulation, we offer these pages as a platform for discussion from which all of us will benefit. Kraith Collected is intended to gather all the views of Kraith. None who can meet the standards of craftsmanship will be barred from expressing their views---in whatever form they choose. Ruth Berman has chosen to criticize Kraith in fictional form, and the adventures (or mis-adventures) of her character, S'Darmeg, have already contributed to and changed the Kraith Series by being incorporated into the canon.

Joyce Yasner has chosen to criticize Kraith by attacking it via its literary merits, and we sincerely hope to bring you her article in the next volume. She and Devra Langsam have formulated several ideas about the nature of the differences between the Kraith Spock and the aired Spock which they believe account for the dislike of the Kraith Spock among some readers. Devra says, among other things, that the more Spock triumphs, the less interesting he is.

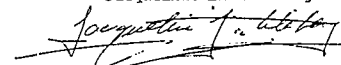
Obviously, some readers do not react this way. In fact, some of the reactions are the exact opposite. Perhaps some of the magnetism of the Kraith Spock lies in the fact that Kraith allows some of his greatness to be realized while at the same time frustrating other aspects of his abilities. Could it be that some readers find exhilaration in watching a Spock meeting challenges which match his abilities, while other readers prefer to watch a Spock who is never called upon to stretch to the ultimate of his capabilities?

That seems possible. But it is more likely that the two groups of readers merely interpret Kraith differently. The blame for the ambiguity, of course, lies solely with me. Kraith is exceedingly difficult to understand. If I were doing it over from scratch, I would do it somewhat differently. The reader reaction to Kraith has taught me a great deal about the writing profession. Yet there remains much more to learn.

I hope that each reader of this collection will write me a letter of comment detailing his positive, and especially negative, reactions to each facet of the series. I may not be able to answer each one individually, but I never fail to learn from such criticism. I am always glad to help with the details of a Kraith story in the making, and to review the final manuscript.

Live Long and Prosper

Jacqueline Lichtenberg



EDITOR'S PREFACE

The first question that anyone will ask upon seeing this volume, will, in all probability, be, "Why on earth, or anywhere else, would anyone want to re-publish all the Kraith?" If your objections are on moral grounds, I refer you to the Author's preface. If, however, you are a pragmatist, who happened to like Kraith, and consider only the time and money that went into this volume, then obviously you have never had the urge to share Kraith. For some reason my not-too-ardent or anti-Trek friends blanch when I hand them a stack of fanzines about two feet high. Even when I explain that the Kraith stories that I have been raving about constitute only a tiny fraction of the wordage that I am handing them, they still tend to reject my earnest efforts to introduce them to serious STrekdom.

For this I can hardly blame them. (Have you ever tried lugging all of Kraith around? So what if there are eleven T-Negatives without Kraith. You think I'm going to unbind them for the six that do?!) Now that Kraith has been collected, you may present your skeptical (eager) friends, family and acquaintances with only a set of slim volumes. This should do wonders for their minds and your back.

I say "set of slim volumes" because eventually there will be more. Volume II will probably be Federation Centennial. Volume III will contain Kraith IV, V, and VI and the appropriate sub-stories. Volume IV will have Kraith VII and VIII and more sub-stories. There may also be several supplements to Kraith Collected containing the sub-stories that go between the main stories in the earlier volumes that are not yet written. The final number of volumes in Kraith Collected depends only on the prolificity of the Kraith Authors. I hope, sometime in the future, to be able to offer an expandible binder with "Kraith Collected" on the cover, in which you can preserve your volumes.

Because Kraith is a growing, dynamic series, its numbering system gets more complex by the minute. Originally, Kraith was mapped out as eight novellas, of which, to date, five have been written, numbered consecutively as Kraith I, Kraith II, etc.. However, when Jacqueline realized that she couldn't say all she wanted about Vulcan in the main stories, she began writing sub-stories that were fitted into the chronology as Kraith IA, Kraith IIC, etc.. Pre-Kraith stories that were formulated on basically the same background are numbered AI, BI, etc.. Eventually, other authors began writing Kraith stories that happened simultaneously with other Kraith stories. These are numbered as Kraith aIIC, etc.. If you are confused as to how the Kraith numbering system works, I suggest that you examine the Kraith bibliography at the back of this 'zine. There, the stories are numbered and listed in chronological order.

I was first introduced to the Kraith series at Fan Fair III in Toronto in the summer of 1970. T-Negative 8 had just come out. I read "Spock's Affirmation" in the Minneapolis in '74 con suite, and spent about a half hour arguing Spock's fertility with Devra Langsam; she on the affirmative. But I didn't get around to writing Jacqueline until the next spring. As I recall, my major question in that first letter was, "Why ha:h'n't Sarek Affirmed the Continuity?" At that time, I thought that missing an Affirmation was like missing a train -- you took the next one and apologized for being late. And since Sarek had probably Affirmed when he was fifty-ish, what was all the fuss about? With patience, grace, tact, and at incredible length she answered all my questions, brought new points to my attention, and made the Kraith series a thoroughly enjoyable experience. Through our correspondence I learned to appreciate the incredible amount of detail that went into the background against which Kraith is set, and I was taught to watch for the nuances that reveal, and hide, so much.

But now the volume of her correspondence has grown so astronomically that if she took the time to bring each questioner through Kraith, as she did with me, personally and at length, she would have no time to write Kraith or anything else.

Therefore, to facilitate the assimilation of Kraith and to provide a workshop for all those people who would like to create Kraith themselves, Jacqueline has suggested that a Kraith Creators Manual be published. The Manual will contain all of Jacqueline's short articles, both the previously published and the unpublished, which will provide much needed background material for those of us who have a demon on our backs and an intense need to communicate through Kraith. It will also contain much information of intrasc to the general reader (on the assumption that anyone who buys Kraith must be a fanatic in the first place).

Story ideas for the Kraith series can be submitted to the Creators Manual in summary form by those who do not feel they can do the writing themselves. Letters of criticism and comment will be included at the discretion of the editor. Submissions should be typed double-spaced on 8 1/2" x 11" paper and sent to Jacqueline (9 Maple Terrace, Monsey, N.Y., 10952). A carbon copy, if possible, should be sent to me. For inclusion in the Kraith chronology, send a copy of the outline, or a description of the story, to Jacqueline and she will assign a series number to it.

In future volumes of Kraith Collected, I hope to be able to include an original story by every Kraith Creator. Volume one has only one original story, "A Matter of Priority" by Anna Mary Hall. I had also intended to include Jacqueline's "Secret of Groskin". Unfortunately, I ran out of space before I ran out of wordage. If one says nothing else about Kraith, one must admit that it is certainly voluminous.

One look at the index should convince you that I did all that I could to bring you as much Kraith as possible. Each page of this zine is the equivalent of four pages of normal typing. The print was photographically reduced 50% to its present size.

Now is the time to dig out your magnifying glasses and read on.

Carol Lynn

A listing of revised credits can be found on page 67.

KRAITH COLLECTED VOLUME ONE

AUTHOR'S DEDICATION

TO

Ruth Berman

Ray E. Block

and

Salomon Lichtenberg

may they live long and prosper

EDITORS' DEDICATION

TO

Suvil

or Shariel

(as D. C. Fontana would have it)

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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

Peace and Greetings:

Talk about neofan optimism! I don't really believe that I said all of Kraith could be contained in four volumes, my first preface to the contrary notwithstanding. Jacqueline and I are now planning on 10 volumes as a nice round number to shoot for, but I have a sneaking suspicion that we'll overshoot. C'est la vie.

This, the first reprinting of a Kraith Collected volume, is quite a milestone for me. I have now been printing for over a year, the ceiling hasn't (yet) fallen in on me, I am (almost) in the black, and my typing fingers are (still) mobile. Unbelievable!

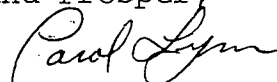
There have been several changes made in the format of this volume since it was first printed. There are six, new, full page pieces of artwork for all those who complained. (These are also available separately for those who purchased volume one the first time around.) Three of these new drawings are unique for Kraith as they are half tone reproduction. The originals to these are in color, but since 4-color repro is way out of my price range, I had to (sob) settle for half tone. Nancy Cleveland has promised me some black and white artwork for Federation Centennial and I hope she will continue to be a regular contributor to Kraith.

A couple of glaring errors and omissions are now corrected. "The Disaffimed" has been corrected to "The Disaffirmed" as was originally intended. And SHIRLEY MAIEWSKI has finally received credit for her poem in "A Matter of Priority". I talked to SHIRLEY MAIEWSKI at Torcon and SHIRLEY MAIEWSKI has forgiven me for loosing SHIRLEY's name so often. Thank you, SHIRLEY MAIEWSKI.

Finally, I have not corrected my all time favorite typo. I ask you, would volume one still be volume one if it had "demonstrating" instead of the carefully corrected "denonstarting" on page one?

Live Long and Prosper,

Carol Lynn



For any of you who may be interested this is Ceiling Press Publication #8. Available from Carol Lynn only at the address on page 3.

Price - \$3.00 - 4th class postage included

\$3.42 - 1st class postage until January 5, 1974.

\$3.56 - 1st class postage after January 5, 1974.

(and gnatpucky on the post awful!)

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Kraith I

Jacqueline Lichtenberg

The Admiral's office was quiet, efficient and so neat it resembled an unoccupied hotel suite. Admiral Pesin sat with both hands on his desk calmly reviewing the curious orders he was about to issue. In the guest chair to the Admiral's left, sat a Schillian security officer. The Schillian looked rather like a man-proportioned toad, or perhaps lizard. The Star Fleet uniform pants and tunic only emphasized his differences.

Presently, a transporter beam built two figures in front of the desk. Captain James T. Kirk and his First Officer, Commander Spock, of the USS *Enterprise*, presented themselves with proper formality and then Admiral Pesin introduced the Schillian as Lieutenant Commander Ssarsun of Star Fleet Security.

"Gentlemen," Pesin said, "be seated."

He looked from Ssarsun to Kirk and finally to Spock where his gaze became unreadable. After a long thirty seconds, he said, "Commander Spock."

"Yes, sir."

"It is ... with regret I must inform you that Sarek is still missing, and the Vulcan authorities insist that, though there is still hope, your father must be declared legally dead."

Raising one upsweppt eyebrow just a tiny bit, Spock answered, "Yes, of course", as if he'd been told that the *Enterprise* uses a matter-antimatter power system.

Pesin frowned. Even Vulcans didn't usually take such news quite so lightly. "I'm sorry I can't even offer you home leave on this occasion, but I've finally recieved instructions from the Vulcan authorities on the disposition of the Kraith. They expressed pleasure that you participated in the recovery of the Kraith and that it remains in your personal custody." Pesin cleared his throat apologetically. He'd tried so hard to argue Spock into putting it in the Base vault for safe keeping.

"Now," he continued, "I'm instructed to ask if the Kraith is still functional."

Spock nodded gravely, "It is." His arms were folded across his spare torso as he sat at attention somehow giving the impression of a vitally alive and interested bystander at events which didn't affect him personally. The complementary lines of the Vulcan's slightly elongated ears and slanted eyebrows seemed to underscore the almost unnatural detachment.

Pesinconsulted his desk reader, "Very well. I'm instructed to ask if you're prepared to take your place as," he read the word carefully, "*kaytavtikh*."

Kirk was watching Spock carefully and could just barely discern him subvocalizing the word several times in an effort to identify it through the human mispronunciation.

Finally, Spock answered, "Yes, I am prepared." He intoned the words as if they were some sacred formula.

"Good. Now these are your orders. There are five Vulcans here on Starbase IX, three dancers and their musicians. You are to take them and the Kraith to Feda XII, and there perform the... uh..." he consulted his reader again, "I give up. The English term is Affirmation of the Continuity, you understand the referant?"

"Yes, sir."

"You know the planet in question?"

"Yes, sir, There's a Vulcan archeological expedition there."

"Right. They recently lost six members in an accident..."

"That explains it." Spock nodded as if all were now clearly logical.

"Explains what?" Kirk put in from the side.

Spock glanced his way then noted the Admiral's blank look and said to both of them, "It explains why the Kraith has not been called back to Vulcan by the fastest ship available. It explains why my father has been declared legally dead, and yet I am not ordered to Vulcan immediately, and it explains why five entertainers and I are to go to Feda XII."

"It does?" Kirk felt, as usual with Spock, that he'd missed some obvious and vital fact.

"Of course. We are to replace the missing archeologists."

"Oh," said Kirk, not at all sure that anything had been explained.

Pesin harumphed and flicked his reader to the next view. "Which brings us to you, Captain. Finances being what they are this year, I'm not going to send the *Enterprise* half way across the Federation as a personal taxi for six people and a ceramic cup, not even if that cup happens to be the most important Vulcan artifact in the universe. There is a group of thirty-seven entertainers, which includes the five Vulcans, assembled here and ready to tour the Federation Bases and entertain the personnel as part of the Federation Day Celebrations. They've been with the Potemkin for the first half of the tour. Now you'll take them the rest of the way. You'll make two stops before Feda XII, lay over until after the ceremonies, and continue. Here," he handed Kirk a tape cartridge, "are your orders."

Kirk took it, "Yes, sir."

"You will do everything in your power to help the entertainers, but remember, the really important part of the mission is to get the Kraith, Spock and those five Vulcans to Feda XII by 5289.72. The Vulcans have warned me that failure to do so may well result in the gradual disintegration of the Federation."

"Yes," Kirk said, "I can see that. If humans don't take the values of the non-human members seriously, there is no basis for unity at all."

"Precisely, which brings us to Ssarsun here. He is to travel with you as Spock's assistant, allegedly being groomed for a post as Science Officer. He will be known as Lieutenant Ssarsun. In reality," Pesin frowned at Spock, "he will be your bodyguard. He will be with you at all times when you're not in your quarters."

"I hardly think that necessary."

"Mr. Spock," Pesin was very grave, "I'm in possession of the most emphatic document I've ever received from Vulcan hands, and it asserts that you are a most important person... at least for the moment. I would be guilty of gross negligence if I didn't take such an elementary precaution. You are familiar with Ssarsun's people?"

"Yes."

"Are you willing to accept him as your bodyguard?"

Spock closed his eyes as if to overcome an illogical reluctance.

Ssarsun spoke into the silence, a crisp elocution unexpected from such immobile lips, "Spock, I was raised from infancy on Vulcan, and after a few years among my own people, I returned to school there. I shant..." he searched for the right word, "disturb you." He'd had plenty of experience blending his highly flammable Schillian personality with the coolly logical Vulcan mind.

Spock took one moment longer to ponder the prospect of allowing the deep and sustained telepathic contact that Ssarsun would require for his very sanity, and to weight that against the possible usefulness of the unusual talents of a Schillian. Then he raised his eyes to the Admiral.

"Mr. Spock, it's not entirely my own idea. When I suggested that whoever kidnapped Sarek and stole the Kraith may very well go after you next, the Vulcan authorities insisted that Ssarsun be assigned to guard you."

"In that case I have no choice. I accept." He turned to Ssarsun, "But not right now. You must allow me time to prepare."

Ssarsun didn't nod; his thick neck wasn't constructed for the gesture, but nictitating membranes veiled his eyes for a moment in assent, "Of course, I understand."

Everyone put in a busy three hours loading the troupe of thirty-seven entertainers of various species, finding rooms for them and their luggage, rounding up stray crewmen who'd been sent on leave; loading supplies of all sorts, and tending to the myriad details of bringing an immense starship from "drydock" status to "operational". But finally all was in order and they were cruising at warp six on the first leg of their zig-zag across the Federation.

Kirk was marching briskly along the corridor heading for his quarters to change for the inevitable full dress banquet in honor of their passengers when the door to Spock's quarters slid open and Spock and Ssarsun emerged almost shoulder to shoulder.

"Oh, Captain," Spock called, "may I speak to you for a moment?"

Kirk stopped and waited for them to catch up, "Surely. What's on your mind, Mr. Spock?"

"I would like permission to offer hospitality to the Vulcan guests, sir." He thought that over for a moment and added, "Vulcan hospitality, that is."

"Vulcan hospitality? Just what does that imply?"

"Technically, sir, you are the host here. But you are not Vulcan, and I am. Therefore, I should offer hospitality in your behalf. So it must be at your order that I kindle fire in the rooms of our guests²⁾ and offer them water."

"Oh, well, certainly, Mr. Spock. See to it for me." Kirk nodded and started away and then a thought struck him. "But, we've had Vulcan passengers before and..."



"Yes, sir, but it is now a time when such observances become... appropriate."

"Oh. I see. Very well, then, carry on."

The large reception hall had been cleared and long tables set up and heaped with exotic delicacies. The guests moved about or clustered in small groups and the air was alive with the singing, clicking, and chattering of the many languages of the Federation.

Spock and Ssarsun entered, surveyed the glittering crowd, then moved to one of the tables to fill glasses.

"Well, Spock," McCoy came up behind them with well lubricated joviality. "Aren't you going to introduce me?"

Spock turned to McCoy, "Of course. Doctor McCoy, this is Lieutenant Ssarsun."

McCoy cocked an eyebrow at Ssarsun, "Schillian, aren't you?"

"Yes, Doctor." The Schillian didn't need to be a telepath to read Chief Surgeon in every line of McCoy's face.

"Never had the pleasure of meeting one of your people before."

"We aren't known for the inclination to travel."

"So I understand." You could almost see him flipping through a medical encyclopedia. Then he frowned, "But don't you require... ah... constant telepathic contact with one of your own kind?"

"No, Doctor, we require constant telepathic contact with a telepath. Mr. Spock has been most generous. I think you will find my psych profile as it has always been."

"Oh, I see. Well, I guess you'd better come down to see me for your routine check-in tomorrow." He half turned, then thought again, "Better make it late tomorrow." He'd have to do some stiff boning up on Schillians.

McCoy turned as a tall, lithe girl in a long, clinging goldengown came drifting over. Her dark hair was piled on top of her head in a helix and was fixed with little tinkling balls that jingled musically to the well coordinated rhythm of her walk. It was some moments before the warm smile on McCoy's face froze at the realization that this was one of the Vulcan dancers.

As she scanned the group and acknowledged his existence, McCoy could visualize a thin film of ice encasing her loveliness. The poise and grace were cultivated not to crack the film. Such a pity! Such a waste! He knew she was as untouchable and as unmovable as Spock. Maybe even more so.

She fixed her gaze on Spock, and they traded Vulcan greetings.

"I am told you are the Kavtavitikh, Spock, son of Sarek, of the line of xTmrsqzntwlfid."

"Correct."

McCoy wasn't sure, but he thought her gaze just a little warmer as she answered, "I am called T'Rruel."

Christine Chapel, resplendent in her dress uniform, emerged from the milling crowd and joined the group. Casually surveying the table, she indicated an arrangement of porous cubes on colored skewers next to a bowl of scintillating froth, "This is a Vulcan delicacy, isn't it, Mr. Spock?"

Spock tore his eyes from the dancer's and followed Christine's gesture, "Indeed it is." He took a cube, twirled it in the froth and examined it, "Try some, I think you might like it."

She copied the gesture with an expertness that belied her ignorance, "What's it made from?"

Spock chewed thoughtfully, "It is the by-product of the metabolism of an insect."

McCoy and Ssarsun had started to try this rare treat, but McCoy froze at Spock's explanation, searching Spock's face for some clue that it wasn't as bad as that. Spock continued as if he hadn't noticed McCoy's discomfort, "It resembles honey in many ways, except it's a true by-product. This is a particularly excellent example."

Ssarsun munched contentedly and reached past McCoy for another cube, "Excuse me, Doctor, but tomorrow you may tell me how much overweight I am. Tonight, I feast." He slipped past McCoy to stand between Spock and Christine, "Oh, yes, Miss, go easy on this one, it's about the only Vulcan food that is fattening."

Seeing that everyone was enjoying the frothy cubes, McCoy bit into his gingerly, lit up with a dubious smile and ate it all, noting with a medical eye that Spock, the only underweight member of the group, had eaten only one.

T'Rruel turned to Spock, "I am also told that you are the Science Officer of the Enterprise."

"Correct."

"We've been having a problem with our tokiel. I wonder if you might help. Our mechanic is not too familiar with the portable model we are using."

Christine looked annoyed at the ceiling translator, and whispered to Ssarsun, "Did you get that? What's a tokiel?"

Ssarsun looked at her; they were about the same height, "Oh, of course it wouldn't translate; there's no equivalent. It's a folk-art dance platform. You have to see it to believe it. T'Rruel is one of the foremost tokiel artists of her generation, a true genius."

When Christine looked back toward Spock, T'Rruel had taken him off in a corner and was explaining something with very graphic body movements that Spock was watching most attentively. She was certain that his gaze lacked some of his usual analytic coolness.

Ssarsun followed Spock at a discreet distance leaving her alone with McCoy who helped himself to another cube, "Wonder what this is called," he mumbled.

Christine answered, "Yhotekhq, l) and turned away.

McCoy followed her with a raised eyebrow.

Late the next afternoon, McCoy was seated at his desk just finishing the section on Schillian health criteria. His viewer showed a final paragraph set in glowing red:

All three Schillian sexes prefer to be referred to by the same, masculine pronoun. The examining physician is cautioned to regard the sex of his patient as confidential and under no circumstances to reveal it to non-medical personnel. He is further cautioned not to indicate to the patient that he has noticed or noted the sex of his patient, though it is commonly understood that he must do so. This is an area of great sensitivity in all Schillian cultures and, as Schillians are noted for their violent temperments, extreme tact must be employed.

McCoy snapped the viewer off just as his door opened and Spock and Ssarsun entered. "Oh, there you are, Ssarsun. I was just about to try and find you."

Ssarsun glanced at McCoy's reader, "I know. Shall we get on with it?" There was a smile in his voice if not on his face. McCoy got a strong impression of a deep sense of humor.

"Very well, then." McCoy gestured to his examination room and they entered. Spock followed and closed the door. He had a fist-sized gadget in his hand and was picking at it curiously while taking readings with the tricorder that was slung over his shoulder.

"Something I can do for you, Mr. Spock?"

"No, Doctor. I'll wait over here." And he went toward a table

"Examinations customarily take place in private, Mr. Spock."

Ssarsun put in mildly, "It's all right, Doctor, Spock is with me."

McCoy looked from one to the other, "It may be all right with you, but it's not all right with me."

Spock assented with raised eyebrows and started for the door. Ssarsun interrupted, "Spock, no. Wait. Doctor, I'd hate to have to bother the Captain..."

McCoy shrugged, "You really want him here don't you? All right, don't see what harm it can do. We'll start with the psych profile. Over here..."

Two hours later McCoy checked his noteboard and said, "You can put on your shirt now. You're as sound as you ever were."

"Thank you, Doctor." He moved to where Spock was reassembling the component he'd been working on. "It was the blues circuit, wasn't it?"

Spock snapped the pieces back together, "Indeed it was. Sukar will be interested to hear your analysis."

The door slid open and Kirk paced in and looked around, "Spock! Just what is that mess spread all over the floor of Rec. Room Four? I promised the Vulcan dancers they could use that room for rehearsals..."

"It's their tokiel, Captain, and we've just fixed it. We'll have it reassembled in about an hour."

"Oh." Kirk said as if that explained everything. "Tokiel."

"Yes, sir."

"Would it be too much if I asked what is a tokiel?"

The door whispered open once more and T'Rruel moved into the room just in time to hear his question. "You've never seen me work, Captain?"

Kirk turned and smiled graciously, "I've never had that honor, no."

"In that case, you must attend our dress rehearsal tonight."



Skahn and I will be dancing the whole Motek, not just the segments we do for the show."

"Now that's something I'd like to see," McCoy said.

Spock said, "I'm sure there will be room for you, too, Doctor."

The Rec. Room was dark when Kirk and McCoy arrived. Spock met them at the door. Just then, Nurse Chapel came speeding down the corridor with a notepad, "Doctor McCoy," she called, "here are the results on Ssarsun, Doctor. Oh, Mr. Spock!"

Spock nodded, "we were about to start, Nurse. Would you like to stay to watch T'Rruel dance?"

She smiled as nicely as she could, "Now? All right. I think I'd like that."

They went in and found places on the chairs grouped on one side. The room was very dark, and, after Spock closed the door, it took several minutes for Kirk to be able to make out the shapes before him.

The center of the room was occupied by a small, oval stage, about half a meter above floor level. Two Vulcan men were seated at a large console at the far side of the stage, and two women and another man stood beside them. They were dressed in a shimmering, clinging material that almost glowed in the dark.

Spock came to sit beside Ssarsun who was just behind Kirk. He leans forward to say softly, "Keep in mind that this is just a rehearsal mainly to adjust the equipment. Some of the color and tone registers are still off considerably."

T'Rruel mounted the dias accompanied by a ripple of sound and a moving burst of rainbow color that seemed to hang in the air behind her like streams of gossamer. She stood still as the glow died around her and she was wrapped in living gold like a candle flame.

Then she moved her head rhythmically, side to side, slowly allowing the movement to grow into a rippling motion of the whole body accompanied by a harmonious chiming of a myriad tiny bells while rainbow streamers curled outward like wisps of smoke.

Spock shook his head, "No. No, there's still something else wrong. What do you suppose it is, Ssarsun?"

"I don't know. I've never seen that effect before."

Spock stood up, "T'Rruel. Try your signature."

She spun around reaching high and lunged forward into a dancer's imitation of a fencer's stance. She was enraptured in a cocoon of purple smoke and the bells turned to plucked strings.

One of the Vulcan men seated at the console called, "Spock. Come look at this."

Spock went over to the console and T'Rruel joined them as the lights came up to very dim. The six of them set up a murmuring exchange in Vulcan. Ssarsun turned to the humans, "Well, he warned you: They'll have it tinkered up in a minute."

Christine, who was seated next to Ssarsun, just behind McCoy, asked, "How does it work? I've never seen anything like it before."

"There's a field projector under the stage, and a computer is programmed to read every fine motion of the dancer's body and translate it into music and light. It's a modern refinement of one of the most ancient folk arts of Vulcan."

"Folk art?" prompted McCoy.

"Yes. To understand it fully, you have to grasp the philosophy of T'Kiamut'h. Briefly, that's the idea that all relationships can be expressed by four parameters, as the simplest algebras can be constructed on four postulates. The Vulcans constantly seek beauty in the fundamental structure of nature..."

"Folk art?" prompted Kirk.

"Yes. You see in tokiel, the four parameters are space, time, color, and tone. There are various classical sequences, but even within them, there is a vast field for the individually creative artist to present his own ideas."

"You mean," put in McCoy, "it's a glorified lecture, if you know how to read it?"

"In a way, perhaps to you it would be, but to a Vulcan it's more the use of beauty to express beauty. I don't understand the Vulcan primary motivations all that well, but it has to do with their incessant groping after a comprehension of Infinite Reality. The test of comprehension is expression, or the ability to recombine dissimilar elements into new beauty..."

He broke off, seeing that he'd lost them. He wanted to explain that "comprehension" and "expression" can be the same work in the Vulcan language, and that an esthetic sense is placed high on the scale of Vulcan values, and that logic is merely one facet of Infinity Reality, but he realized that that wouldn't elucidate the art of tokiel for them. Nor would the fact that the great tokiel artists were, themselves, logicians of the highest order. And calling tokiel the highest abstract form of the Vulcan language would only confuse them.

Just then a chord rippled forth and the lights dimmed. Ssarsun turned toward the platform to see Spock with one foot on the tokiel platform, about to mount into the field. In one incredibly swift movement, Ssarsun was out of his chair running the six paces to Spock's side as he shouted, both mentally and audibly, "Spock, no!"

Spock turned and the five Vulcan performers jumped as if stung by a high voltage current. He'd shocked them on the telepathic level. Ssarsun came up beside Spock and looked around at the performers as the lights came up again, "I apologize. I didn't mean to startle you so, but there is danger."

The Vulcans gathered around Ssarsun while Kirk came over followed by McCoy and Christine. T'Rruel looked incredulously from Ssarsun to Spock, "You're linked!" It was both accusation and condemnation delivered by a statuesque goddess of justice.

As Spock stood mutely under that glare, Ssarsun said, "T'Rruel, I will not obtrude..."

Scepticism and rejection bordering on true loathing were so evident in the usually unreadable Vulcans that Ssarsun fell silent. Kirk and McCoy stood paralysed.

T'Rruel's gaze locked onto Spock's eyes, "Spock, you are Kaytavtikh in your father's place and by his father's hand, and yet you don't seem to realize that you've destroyed your usefulness to us by..." she glanced at Ssarsun and then at the floor, striving desperately not to exceed the limits of good taste by displaying emotion.

Ssarsun turned to Spock, "Bring them together, Spock... right now... show them it's not so. Show them T'Pau knows what she does." He didn't say that the seven way mental blending would show him whether one of them had deliberately set the tokiel stage to kill. He knew that such trivia as attempted murder wouldn't interest them now. He turned to the others, "You five will have to be his nucleus, anyway. He won't have time to select from the others, so it will have to be you. Today, tomorrow. What's the difference?"

T'Rruel leveled a cool gaze at him, "You will have to leave."

"I cannot."

"You must."

"I cannot. I have my orders. Believe me, you won't even know I'm there. Go ahead. Let him try. That will settle it won't it?"

She looked at the others and then at Ssarsun as if to say, "You'd better be right!" Then she moved to confront Spock. They were the same height, and their eyes met levelly for a long minute, then Spock drew a deep breath and raised his right hand, fingers separated in a Vulcan salute. Slowly, she raised her left hand and joined his, palm to palm. A moment later, he looked toward the other Vulcan female who joined T'Rruel's free hand. Quickly now, he accepted the others until the last joined his free hand to complete the circle. Outwardly, nothing happened.

Ssarsun stood on one side, the Captain, McCoy, and Nurse Chapel, on the other, all but forgotten, afraid to move, or to breathe.

Then, as one, the Vulcan's dropped hands and stepped apart.

Spock looked gravely around the circle, "Henceforth, my judgement as Kaytavtikh will be unchallenged, and my authority final." Plainly, he'd vindicated himself and he now dominated the group. He turned to Ssarsun, "You spoke of danger?"

"The vision is now clear." He moved to the tokiel console, "This was accidentally left on reversed polarity when you finished the analysis routine," he threw two switches that went snick, snap, "now it's safe. Go ahead and test it out."

He moved toward the humans and herded them back to their seats as Spock mounted the dias, handed T'Rruel up and proceeded to execute a series of turns with easy familiarity.

The dancers were invisible on the platform and only figures of colored light appeared, grew, moved and faded. The focus and definition were greatly improved and the colors were sharper, blending only in certain areas.

Then a rippling sound accompanied by the rhythmic tolling of a large bell, announced the start of the Motek as Spock returned to his seat.

To the humans, it was a pyrotechnic display of rhythm, form, and sound utterly strange yet somehow pleasing. The dancers themselves were rarely visible, but the total effect was very like a ballet.

Toward the end, long gossamer streamers wove intricate patterns in the air, moving so swiftly, yet never touching, never faltering. Kirk found himself holding his breath as T'Rruel, alone on the platform, spun around reaching high and then lunged forward in a beautiful imitation of a fencer's stance to the accompaniment of a pure, sweet wailing tone.

Later, as Christine lay trying to sleep, she kept analysing the look she'd caught on Spock's ruggedly masculine features as the lights came on. Was it the same lively interest he turned on a mathematical problem? Was it the excitement of conquering a

mystery? Or was it a warmer kind of excitement? Whatever it was, it was certainly more of a reaction than she'd ever been able to elicit. And that rankled.

The rest of the trip to their first stop went without incident, and since the shore facilities there were adequate, practically the whole crew attended the performance and the gala banquet afterwards. Then they were speeding through space toward their second stop.

It was during the second night after the banquet that Ssarsun was walking along the corridor outside Engineering, feeling sorry for himself. Spock had elected to stay on board rather than attend the banquet, so they'd both missed out on a good time, and Ssarsun was feeling the need of less frosty company.

Scotty came along, head down, wiping his hands on a dispo-owel and bumped into the Schillian, "Oh, Ssarsun!" He looked around, "Where's Spock?"

"Sleeping. I'm off duty, but I'm not tired, so I was walking."

"No! Well, come along to Rec. Room Ten. Uhura promised to sing for us... uh, you do like human music..."

"I'd be delighted."

They walked along to the turbo-lift side by side, "Say, Ssarsun," Scotty began, "I don't know much about Schillians. Tell me, do you folks use... uh... alcohol in any form?"

"You mean, have we developed the distiller's art? Oh, yes. There are some particularly fine liquors beginning to be exported in quantity."

"Really! Strange that I've never come across them."

"It's a big galaxy, Mr. Scott."

"Aye. Call me Scotty." The Chief Engineer allowed his diction to revert to his natural lilt.

The turbo-lift carried them within feet of the Rec. Room and when the door opened they could hear Uhura's sweet voice curdling itself around a peculiar melody.

She was standing in the middle of a mixed group of crewmen and some of the performers. Her voice was low, melodic, and rather uncertain.

Ssarsun listened for a minute and then she caught sight of him and stopped. He moved to her side, "Oh, please continue, Miss Uhura. You were doing so well."

Uhura bit her lip and smiled shyly, "I'm really not all that..."

"Please. You've evoked such nostalgia with so few notes. Indulge me a little... here, I'll help," and he picked up the melody where she'd left off, albeit several octaves lower. She joined in and together they wove a wordless duet of blended sound which was springtime and flowers, yearning and joy... discovery and loss. Every eye in the room which could shed a tear of emotion did.

Then, as if realizing they'd launched the party on too solemn a downbeat, someone picked up a drum, someone else a pipe, and everyone was dancing. Ssarsun shook himself, grabbed Checkov and whirled him away in a fair imitation of a polka. Later, he danced with Uhura, and then some of the other non-humans with fine disregard of male-female roles.

Breathless, he made his way to a table where Scotty was seated, puffing, and sat down close to the Engineer. "A while ago you mentioned alcohol. Now, I happen to have brought along a couple of bottles of Schillian Schlugtamer..."

"Never heard of it."

"Certified safe for humans. Becoming quite popular. Feel like experimenting?"

Scotty rose, "Do ye like Scotch, mon?"

"Never tried it, but I hear it's rather mild."

"Mild? Well, now, laddy... you just come along with me..."

It took several hours to admit it, but he'd finally met his match with a bottle. He consoled himself with the fact that the other's metabolism gave him an unfair advantage.

In the morning, they woke, feeling much better psychologically, and much worse physiologically and went their separate ways in remarkably good cheer, promising to meet again.

During the next few days, Spock spent most of his off duty hours closeted with the other Vulcans, or escorting T'Rruel about the ship. Ssarsun always tagged along, and the three of them were a familiar sight.

Spock became his frostiest Vulcan self, and even began slipping into Vulcan phrasing occasionally, a thing unheard of since his first days with the Enterprise. Rumors based on as little fact as possible made the rounds, and the other female crewmembers made sure that Christine heard every one of them.

About six hours before their scheduled stop at Star Base Twelve, Christine was seated in Rec. Room Two, nursing a cup of

black coffee and holding the dietician's report that Spock had just left with her. Spock and Ssarsun, as inseparable as ever, marched out the door as T'Rruel came over to Christine's table.

"May I?" She indicated the second chair.

"Of course. Why not?" Christine was determined to be civil.

"He's a strange one." She sat and folded her hands on the table.

"Who?"

"Spock."

"Not really." She answered noncommittally while her eye traveled down the report she held, automatically checking trouble spots and lighted on Spock's name. He'd refused his last two meals. Her heart thudded into her throat. With the greatest effort she'd ever made, she forced her voice level. "Why do you ask? He hasn't been eating lately, perhaps he's ill."

"No, not ill. It is a time of fasting for us."

Christine took a deep breath and a long drag at her coffee.

"I meant, he seems so..." T'Rruel hesitated, searching for the right word, "well, almost... human at times."

"Oh? Maybe that's because of his mother."

One graceful eyebrow grazed T'Rruel's impeccable hairline, "His mother?"

"Hm... I'm sure she must have imparted some of her traits to him, if only by accident."

"His mother was human?"

Christine put on her best wide-eyed innocence, "I thought everyone knew..."

"Vulcan is a large planet. Not everyone knows everyone else..."

Christine imagined that she'd just poured a whole bucket of water on one very shapely piece of dry tinder. Just then all the ship's hooters began whooping out a yellow alert. Christine gulped her coffee and grabbed the dietician's report, "Excuse me."

The Captain's quarters were spacious enough, but not designed for large conferences. The four-way conference in progress just missed being cramped. Spock stood in one corner, arms folded across his chest like a stone statue. Ssarsun was seated near him while McCoy perched on one corner of the desk and Kirk paced back and forth, unsure for the first time in his career if he'd really considered all the ramifications before issuing a command decision.

"So that's the whole story, Bones," Kirk finished. As usual, the Doctor had gotten caught in the cross fire between him and Spock and had insisted on an explanation. "Now what do you think?"

"Your orders are clear enough about priorities. But..."

"True. But so are our standing orders. Ssarsun."

"Yes, sir."

"You've never served on a Starship before, have you?"

"No, sir. My talents are rarely needed on Starships."

"One of our highest traditions," Kirk paced over to stand in front of the Schillian, "is our... automatic... response to distress signals... especially when there's an indication of armed attack."

"I understand that, sir. But my instincts tell me, very emphatically... this move represents a danger to Spock."

"Spock." Kirk turned toward his First Officer who'd remained silent since his first objection was overruled. "It's true that we can divert to Ahrent III, even spend twenty hours there, and still make Feda XII on schedule, isn't it?"

Spock blinked assent, "Twenty-one hours seventeen minutes."

"Then, tell me again, exactly why do you object?"

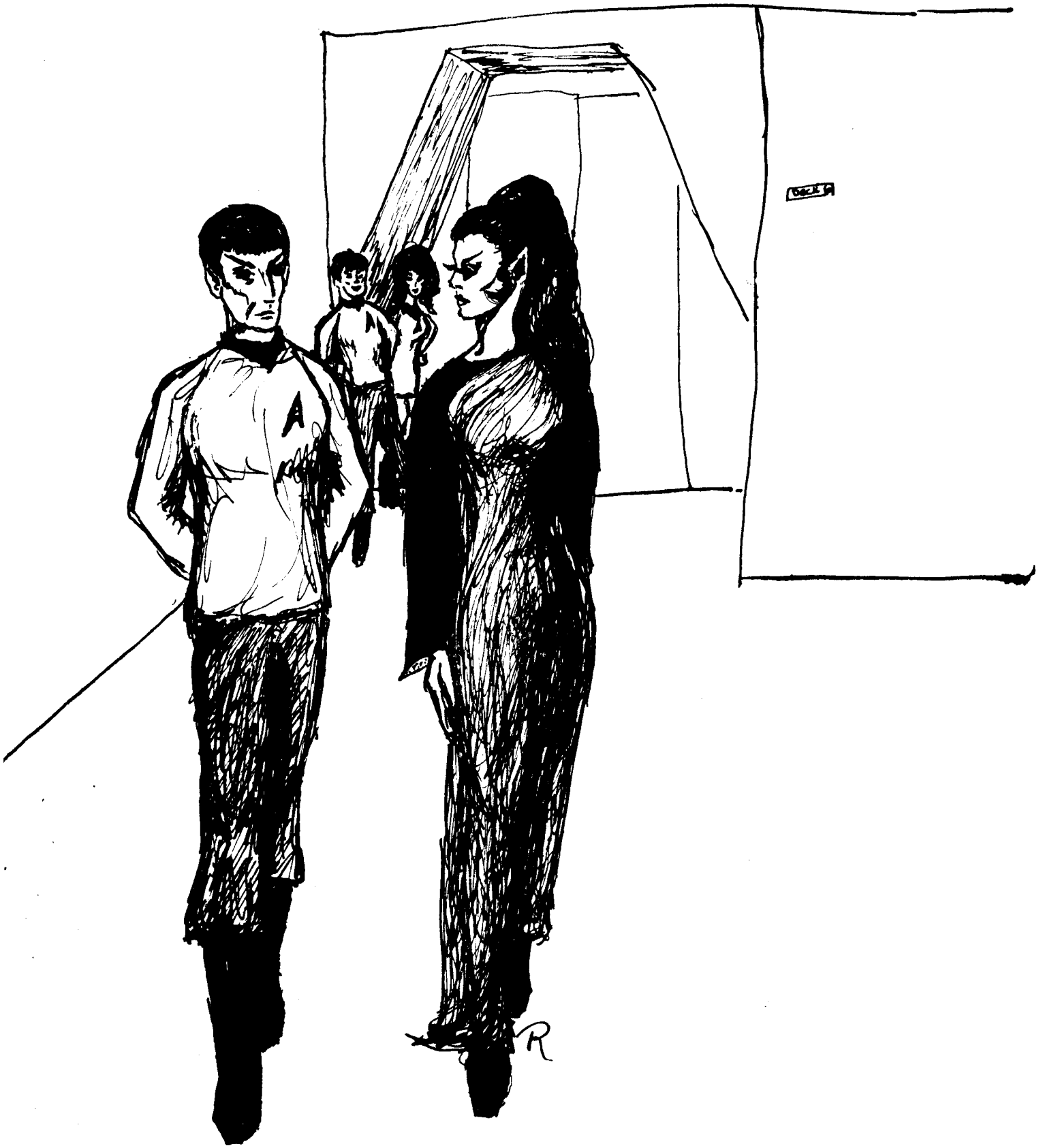
"Because Ssarsun objects, and I trust his judgement." He looked away for a moment, considering, "Also... perhaps my judgement is colored by values that are not yours."

Kirk turned away toward his desk, "The report was that a small raider had attacked a hundred man outpost on Ahrent III and been beaten off, slightly disabled. Now, how could such a vessel pose a serious threat to the Enterprise?"

McCoy put in, "While it could mean death to those hundred men. And they've sustained radiation casualties that need a Starship's facilities."

Spock eyed the Doctor, "Coincidence upon coincidence until credulity is strained to the utmost and still you don't see it?"

"Show us." Kirk invited throwing himself wearily into his desk chair.



Spock took a deep breath, "The patrol ship of this sector is out of range, but the Enterprise can just spare enough time to divert to Ahrent III. A raider, just large enough to pose a threat to the outpost appears, inflicts damage that requires our assistance, and limps off slowly. Bait."

Ssarsun spoke up, "May I respectfully remind the Captain that there have been a considerable number of security leaks on dozens of Star Bases and Posts lately. We theorize that Klingon and Romulan intelligence networks are being strengthened. They must have had excellent sources to execute the theft of the Kraith, if it was they. They might know that Spock and the Kraith are on board the Enterprise."

Spock stepped forward gravely, "This could be a new phase of the war, Captain. Armed conflict is out of the question since the Organian Treaty. They may now try to tear the Federation apart by pitting us against one another. And, Jim, if anything can succeed, this will. I don't think you appreciate the... importance... of this particular Kraith. Nor our attitude in the matter."

Kirk rose and moved around the desk cocking his head to one side, "You mean, if we don't get to Feda XII on time, Vulcan will secede from the Federation and take a bloc of other worlds with them? Just like that? Isn't that rather... illogical?"

"The values may seem strange to you, but I assure you the logic is impeccable. The Admiral's warning was phrased very mildly. The situation is much more critical than he indicated."

McCoy swung his leg thoughtfully, "It seems rather emotional to me."

"Not emotional, Doctor, but far more basic than you realize."

"I just can't believe," Kirk paced out his frustrations, "that if we explained that it was a matter of the lives of a hundred people against..." he stopped to stare at Spock as he realized that he really didn't know what the consequences would be for the Vulcans. His decision had seemed so logical... he'd hardly believed his ears when Spock had objected to his order to respond to the distress call. Now he felt shocked at his oversight.

Kirk threw up his hands and collapsed into the desk chair again, "How can I make Command decisions if I don't have all the facts! All right. Make me understand. What will happen if we're, say, an hour late getting to Feda XII?" He looked at Spock hard. "Is it a matter of life or death?"

Spock sighed, "Not exactly... If it were merely a matter of life or death, your logic, sir, would hold. The problem is that we would not die. Our laws forbid suicide and ostracism. Therefore, Tsaichrani... excuse me, Vulcan... would have to absorb fifty-seven individuals who had not... your phrase is 'Affirmed the Continuity'. This would be a devastating blow to the stability of our culture."

McCoy shook his head, "I don't get it. A mere fifty-seven out of..." he searched the air with one hand, "how many billion?"

Spock looked at McCoy and took a breath to provide a precise Vulcan population count. McCoy raised a hand to forestall the flood.

"Spock," Ssarsun spoke softly, "why don't you give it to them from the beginning. They're groping in the dark. If they understood the importance of the Affirmation, I think they'd change their minds."

Spock clamped his hands behind his back and looked from Kirk to McCoy. He saw two friends... a concept they'd defined for him be their very existence... who had stood by him through the most traumatic experience of his life. They'd learned something of his culture then. Perhaps it was time for them to learn more. "In the beginning, when we who now dominate our planet lived in caves, used chipped stone implements and knew no society larger than the clan, there arose in one tiny enclave, a mutation.

"It was a dominant genetic strain, passed through the male line, and it displayed one single trait that differentiated it."

He saw that he had their attention and continued, "The trait was the ability to draw large numbers of people together into mutual telepathic linkage. Those first ancestors of mine used their gift to forge and perpetuate social values and launched one of the bloodiest periods of history known on any planet.

"Then came the reforms. By then the dominance of the gene, together with a vigorously practiced tradition of exogamy, had spread the trait. The Kaytavytkhe banded together and put all their power behind the reforms. We used the accumulated wisdom of ages to restructure our society for peace.

"But the durability of the structure depends on the transmission of our value system. So we meet in groups of no less than fifty-seven every fifty-one point two three standard years, to Affirm the Continuity. One who doesn't participate... he and his children born during the ensuing interval... are not only lost to the Continuity, but represent a destructive influence within our society. In fifty-two years, fifty-seven people can become as many as four hundred seventy-eight. The damage can never be fully repaired."

He turned and paced away from Kirk. When he turned back, the lecturer's tone was replaced with earnestness, "Consider now, who this particular group of fifty-seven includes. Fifty-one of the foremost of our young scientists. And I doubt if I could ever make you understand the importance of someone like T'Aruel. She

is very young and the brilliance she has shown is a mere foreshadowing of what she may yet do."

Ssarsun leaned forward, "Not to mention Spock himself. He traces his lineage back to the original xmtrpsqzntwlf. Only one other family can make that claim. And Spock is the last of his line."

"None of my father's ancestors has ever missed an Affirmation. The line is unbroken for millenia. I am both custodian and transmitter of a Continuity which my society values... very highly."

Spock fell silent and Kirk discovered that he'd been holding his breath. He let it go explosively.

"But," McCoy asked, "Where does the Kraith fit in?"

During the past month Spock had become accustomed to the various human mispronunciations of Kraith and he fielded that one with veteran smoothness. "The Drinking of the First Water is a social act which symbolizes...well, never mind. It's the act which initiates the Affirmation. The Kraith is the vessel used in the Drinking, and it is...very extraordinary."

"Yes, I've seen that." McCoy could still visualize the twisted corpse that lay beside the Kraith when they'd found it. Spock claimed the Kraith had killed him, but wouldn't explain how. He'd said that only he could touch the Kraith...but wouldn't explain why. Very extraordinary, indeed.

"This particular Kraith is very old. The legend is that it dates from the time of the reforms. It's never been used. When it's been used, it will be destroyed." Spock hoped that that would illustrate how highly his group was valued.

Kirk buried his face in his hands. What a decision! He knew that if he were Vulcan, he certainly wouldn't have sent the Enterprise off course... no matter what. But now they were half way to Ahrent III!

Ssarsun lunged forward and caught Spock's hand, alarm written in every muscle, "Captain! We're being attacked!"

Kirk slapped the intercom button on his desk viewer, "Bridge! Status!"

"Normal, sir!" It was Sulu's voice. "Maintaining Yellow Alert."

"All sensors full out, Mr. Sulu. Scan for an approaching vessel. Sound Red Alert! I'm on my way. Kirk, out." He'd seen Ssarsun in action and was taking no chances, "Come on, Spock." He was out the door almost before the others had a chance to move. The Red Alert hooters were calling all hands to their stations, but somehow, a pathway was always open for the Captain.

The bridge was in a state of quiet tension when the three of them stepped out of the turbo-lift. Ssarsun followed Spock to the Library Computer. Kirk climbed into his chair and waited grimly.

Sulu looked over his shoulder, "Nothing, Captain." Then he turned back to the helmsman's console. The huge main viewscreen filled the forward wall with star studded blackness.

Spock said, "Tie all sensors into the main computer, Mr. Sulu."

Ssarsun moved to stand by Kirk's right hand, "They're coming, sir. Won't be long."

Ssarsun had never seen the bridge in this state before. He could feel the well-trained tension ready to crackle from Kirk as he sat in the central arena of command either toward the twin consoles of the helmsman and navigator in front of him or to his rear where Spock worked over the main computers and Uhura presided over the ship's communications board. The enormous emptiness of the main screen contributed a sense of unprotectedness and insecurity that kept Ssarsun's inner eyelids tightly closed.

Spock barked, "Mr. Sulu, deflectors!"

Sulu hit the switch, "Deflectors on full."

The floor shifted hard under their feet. Uhura started her damage control routine and her board crackled with crisp reports. Spock checked his scanner, "Photon torpedoes. Captain. Delivered from Warp eight. A small vessel, about twice the size of the Galileo. They are turning for another run. This could be the raider."

"That's a favorite Romulan tactic!"¹⁾ said Kirk. "See if you can get her on our screen."

The floor shook again as the gravity compensators labored. Spock shook his head, "No, sir, too fast."

Kirk nodded, "Tie the main phasers into the computer and instruct for maximum dispersion."

"Aye, sir." Spock's hands flew over his board.

Ssarsun blinked all his eyelids in sequence. "It won't work, Captain. We're going to be hit this time."

Ssarsun moved to Spock's side. If a Schillian could tremble in fear, he would have been vibrating the whole ship.

Suddenly, the world stood on its side and for a moment they all floated in free fall. The ship's power died with a turbo-whine

and growl and the lights went out. Seconds later the ship's gravity stabilized and they all fell a good eight feet to the deck and then the emergency power came on.

Sulu was the first to recover and he worked the main screen into focus, "We got him!"

But the steady murmur from Uhura's board told at what price. Sulu turned to assess the damage to bridge personnel and his left hand shot out to his intercom switch, "Medical team to the bridge... on the double."

Combat veteran that he was, he could scarcely overcome his shock at seeing his Captain draped over the command chair like a broken rag doll, the First Officer sprawled on top of Ssarsun who was jackknifed between the Computer Console and the chair, and the Communications Officer gracefully prone in front of the lift doors. He looked around for Chekov, but couldn't find him. He lay out of sight on the floor in front of the navigator's station.

The lift doors swished open and McCoy stood there with a team of doctors. As he looked around, Spock began to stir and Uhura picked herself up. McCoy automatically lent her a hand and then motioned his men to take care of the Captain while he saw to Spock and Ssarsun. Medical scanners in hand, they fanned out with smooth efficiency.

By the time McCoy reached him, Spock was on his feet. McCoy pointed his scanner at Spock and Spock pushed it away toward Ssarsun, "I'm all right, Doctor. But Ssarsun is hurt."

McCoy shifted the scanner to his other hand and completed a once over on Spock while Spock ignored him in favor of a long look at the main screen which now showed the tiny ship that had disabled the *Enterprise*. Then he bent to his instruments, probing the quiescent enemy with every sensor at this command. Nothing. No life forms... no power.

When he looked up, McCoy was wheeling Kirk's stretcher into the turbo-lift which already contained Ssarsun's stretcher. It was a tight fit. Everyone else was in place and functioning.

"Lieutenant Uhura," Spock snapped as he moved to the command chair, "damage report."

"Direct hit Engineering Deck six, near the main gravity compensators. Pressure doors closed. We've lost warp power. Mr. Scott's assessing the repairs now, but he says it's difficult because there's some kind of projectile lodged in the hole and he's afraid to move it. It ticks. They're working in vacuum. Sick Bay reports five dead, seventeen injured... not counting the Captain and Mr. Ssarsun."

Spock eyed the main viewscreen with outward equanimity. Inwardly he was seething with reactions... none of them (he noted with satisfaction) at all emotional. "Remarkable," he muttered, "In fact, fascinating. Mr. Sulu, lock onto our late opponent and bring it onto the hanger deck."

Sulu turned toward Spock about to ask for a repeat of that one, changed his mind and began the procedure... gingerly. As soon as he laid a hand to the controls, the tiny ship erupted into an orange blaze and began to move away at sub-light speed. It was already out of range for the commanded maneuver.

Spock sat forward alertly, "Impulse power, Mr. Sulu. Follow. Deflectors on full." He hit the intercom button on the chair arm, "Bridge to Engineering, report. How soon can we have warp speed?"

"Engineering. Scott here. Maybe thirty hours after I get this... thing... out of my Engine Room."

Very quietly, Spock said, "Make it twenty, Mr. Scott. Bridge out." Then he sat studying the mysterious enemy, so utterly devoid of identifying markings and so unexpectedly dangerous. In thirty hours, it would be too late to make Feda XII. He swallowed a slightly emotional lump of desperation verging on panic. To miss an Affirmation would be a distastefully emotional experience. He turned to find McCoy pointing a medical scanner at him.

"How is the Captain?"

"Slight concussion... he'll be out for hours. The ship is all yours, Mr. Spock."

Spock turned back to the main screen where the raider was fast disappearing from maximum magnification.

"Well," prompted McCoy, "aren't you going to ask how Ssarsun is?"

"I don't have to, Doctor. Torn ligament and the equivalent of a sprained back, slight concussion."

McCoy nodded, "that covers it except for assorted cuts and bruises. So what are you going to do?"

"Follow that raider."

"He's leading us away from from Feda XII?"

"Precisely."

"It's your ship, now, Mr. Spock. Why don't you..."

"I admit I am sorely tempted, Doctor, but it's not my ship. It's Jim's ship, and I must do what I believe he would do were he sitting here."

"I think your wrong. I think he was changing his mind."

"It's too late now, Doctor." He turned to eye McCoy, "It's a command decision." He made the emphasis so gentle, it was almost un-Spockian.

McCoy got the distinct impression that, had he been able, Spock would have burst into tears. Then he pooh-poohed himself, He had an overactive imagination.

Spock took a deep breath. The raider had effectively disappeared from their screens. "Mr. Sulu, you have the con. I'll be in Engineering. Let me know if there is any change."

He rose and went to the lift with McCoy trailing after.

Engineering looked more like an ill-managed construction workshop when Spock marched in looking around for Scotty. He noted the quiet efficiency of Scotty's men with a lack of disapproval which was his highest form of praise. Then he spotted the Chief Engineer near a makeshift lock that had been installed in the emergency bulkhead half way down the corridor. He was dressed in vacuum gear and had evidently just doffed the helmet to wipe sweat from his brow.

Spock made his way across the littered floor, "Engineer, report."

Scotty turned. His face was deeply lined and he looked much older than he had that morning. "It's a Romulan torpedo, Mr. Spock. One of their sonic, delayed detonation models. I have na seen one in years. Come over here, I'll show you."

He led the way to a viewscreen and punched a combination. A four part diagram appeared on the screen and Scotty pointed out the salient points as he spoke, "And... yes... I remembered right, this is the timer fuse circuit. It can be aborted..." he became even more grave, "but... I have na man with a hand steady enough. See how this shaft has to be drawn straight out without the slightest vibration? I can rig up a sling to do the job... but it will take the best part of an hour... and I don't know how much longer we have before that clock runs down."

Spock studied the diagram. He knew the model, but had never defused one himself. He nodded, "Get me a vacuum suit."

Scott looked at the Vulcan a long moment. It was a Romulan machine designed to be defuseable by Romulan hands... presumably. He'd heard that Vulcan specialists had been carried to deal with these babies during the Romulan Wars. He nodded.

Ten minutes later, Spock confronted the softly ticking mechanism with a cautious tricorder probe. Then he reached deep within himself to tap the wellspring of steadiness that was his most cherished heritage, and knelt to the job.

The gloves made it difficult to manipulate the tools with the delicate sensitivity he would have liked to employ, but he was grateful that the anachronistic specialty tools were still regulation equipment. It didn't occur to him to be grateful that Scotty ran a neat, tight department.

He worked with the swift sureness that gave the sweating men monitoring the scene on the intercom no clue that he'd never actually done it before. His tricorder was registering an ominous change in the rhythmic ticking by the time he was ready for the last, and most delicate stage, the withdrawing of the shaft. He flexed his fingers inside the stiff gloves. No. It would never work, and he'd not get a second chance. He made a swift calculation and, sealing the suit at the wrists, he drew the gloves off. Very conscious of the hard vacuum on his bare hands, he grasped the shaft and drew it gently but firmly out.

He forced his hand to drop the cold metal... and with it several pieces of skin... and then he rose and took the five quick steps to the makeshift lock, dripping icicles of boiling green blood.

All during McCoy's ministrations, Spock found he couldn't keep his mind off the subject of Fate. He was even willing to entertain such notions as a "Prime Mover". For instance, yesterday, had he not, in the last instant, pulled himself together and aborted that certain mindtouch... his hands might well have been too unsteady...

Even when he reminded himself that this uncontrollable curiosity alienated him from his own kind, he could scarcely drag his mind back to business. But discipline finally won out and he found himself back in the command chair of the fleetest of Federation ships of the line while it wallowed after an utterly improbable raider.

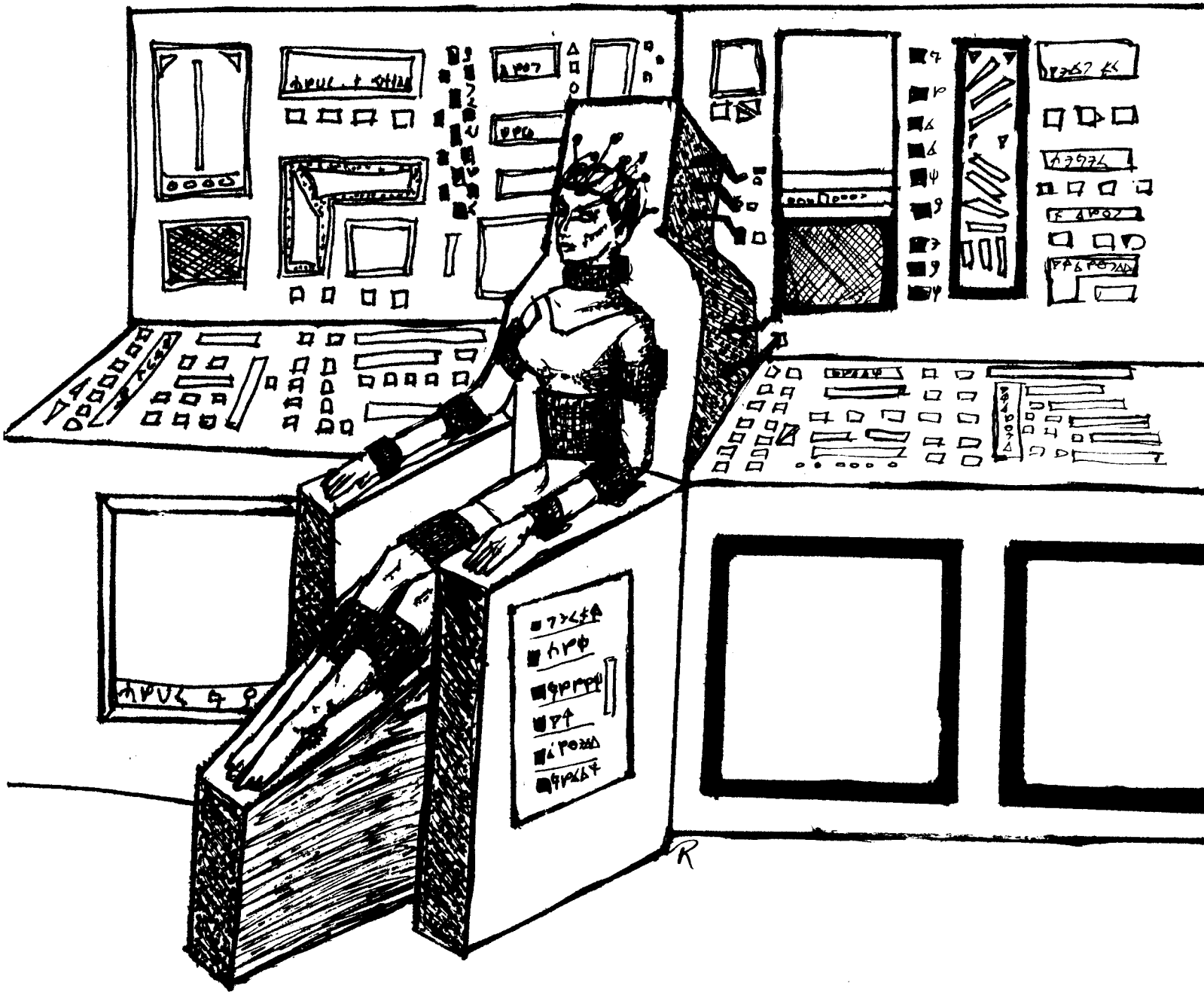
Sulu threw a glance over his shoulder, "They've gone to ground, sir. Landed on the fourth planet of this system."

"Class Six Orbit, Mr. Sulu." Class Six should do it, he thought. Far enough to give them forty-two point seven eight hours before orbital decay required powered maneuvers, yet near enough to use the transporter... sparingly.

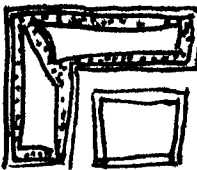
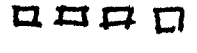
He made the appropriate log entries and then issued orders for a landing party to form. He was virtually certain what his sensors would show as soon as they were near enough.

An hour later, his certainty was confirmed. No life forms... no power. He had no logical alternative. He ordered the landing party down. Then he went to sick Bay to check on the progress of the injured.

Sick Bay was quiet now. Most of the injured had been discharged to their quarters. In the room just off McCoy's office, Ssarsun and Kirk lay next to each other, while Christine monitored their medical scanner readings. It took Spock only a moment to

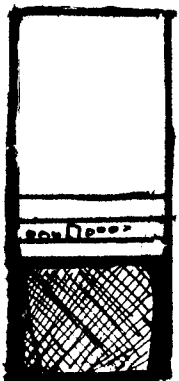


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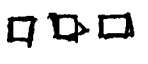
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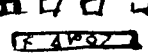
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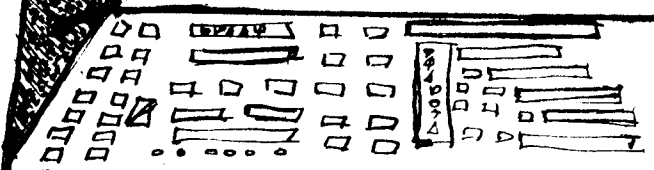
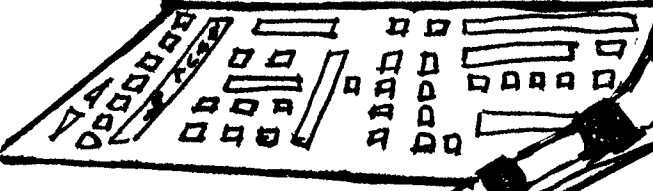


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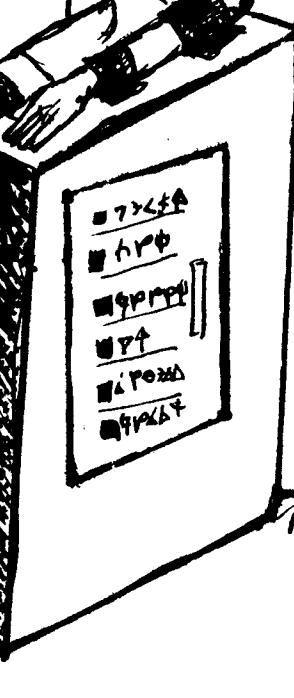


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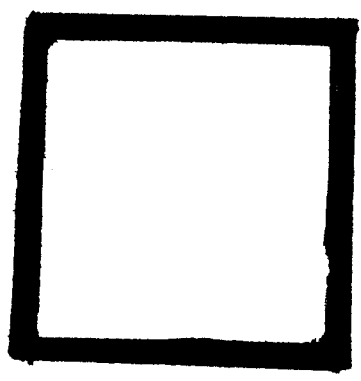
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note their condition and then he approached McCoy who was seated at his desk reading.

The intercom whistled and McCoy answered, looking up at the enigmatic First Officer.

It was Sulu's voice, "Is Mr. Spock there?"

Spock leaned down, "Spock here, Mr. Sulu."

"Landing party report, sir."

"On my way, Spock out. How soon can you have the Captain on his feet, Doctor?"

"Couple of hours if necessary. He's sleeping now. Ssarsun will be laid up for days."

"I know. He's still unconscious."

"Maintaining contact?"

Spock nodded, "Tenuously."

Spock turned to go and McCoy rose to follow, "Landing party?"

By the time they reached the bridge, McCoy had pumped Spock for all the details. Spock folded himself into the command chair and activated the intercom, "Landing party, report."

"Fielding here, Mr. Spock. As you suspected, this little ship is one solid block of machinery... but it did carry a crew of one. In sensor-shielded vacuum gear. She's dead, sir... I think. All the weapons systems are inoperative. Propulsion intact, but we can't raise her until we get a doctor down here to remove the pilot. It's very strange. She seems to have been wired into the controls."

Spock eyed McCoy, "Cyborg?"

McCoy pulled a skeptical face. Spock said, "Very well, lieutenant Fielding. Carry on. Spock out. Let's go, Doctor."

Choking on his protests, McCoy followed Spock into the elevator. They were taking their places on the transporter pads before McCoy could put his objections into words, "Spock, are you sure you're not exposing yourself to an unnecessary risk?"

"A calculated risk, Doctor. If the Klingons or the Romulans are using Cyborg raiders..." he shook his head, "we must have that ship."

McCoy held his peace and went quietly to sparkling pieces. When the world again became visible, it was a sandy plain whose only distinguishing feature, other than a baking desert heat was a tiny craft close to a rosy rock pinnacle. It was clear that if they were to raise the wreck, they would need all of Spock's skill and probably Scotty's too.

They waded through the wind rippled sand, Spock in the lead, McCoy wishing he had the Vulcan's temperature tolerance. The hatch had been sprung in the crash, and they entered the velvet darkness which soon revealed itself to be a well lit interior.

Without even looking around, McCoy knelt beside the pilot, a very lovely Romulan woman. He swore. She was a Cyborg all right. What a perversion! Then his tricorder registered a faint, oh so faint, trace of life. He went to work, trying to nurse that flicker into flame.

He didn't hear Spock order the rest of the landing party back to the ship, but then Spock's sure fingers were working over the Cyborg's control connections, oblivious to the pain from his injured hand.

Suddenly they were slammed back to the rear of the tiny cabin and pinned there by a grueling surge of acceleration. The builders hadn't wasted any space on gravity compensators. Only the pilot's couch was properly rigged and unaffected. Then the engines stopped and they were in free fall. The eerie whine of sliced atmosphere picked up and began to whistle through the cracks around them.

The crash came as an almost welcome release from terror, and McCoy surrendered gratefully to unconsciousness.

Had Spock not disconnected the pilot from the course computer and almost disconnected the engine controls, she would certainly have smeared them over half the continent.

As it was, Spock woke with no broken bones, and only a wrenched ankle as a souvenir. The pilot, he ascertained, was now thoroughly dead. Then he tended to the ankle. A few moments of concentration had the swelling under control.

He left his boot off, hobbled over to McCoy who was sprawled on the canted deck, apparently unmarked, and checked him over with the medical scanner. No damage other than two cracked ribs and a dislocated shoulder.

Balancing on his good foot, Spock braced himself, grasped the Doctor's wrist and gently eased the shoulder back into place. When he checked the scanner again, he was satisfied. Next he reached for his communicator. When he flipped it open, the insides fell out with a tinkle. The Doctor's had fared a little better, but when he tried it on the Enterprise's frequency, all he got was static.

Favoring his abused ankle, he made his way to the entry and had a look around. They were deep in a crevice gouged out of

what looked like metallic crystals. Their position made them invisible except from directly above. The tricorder readings indicated that the rocks were generating random piezoelectric and photoelectric currents. There was no hope of getting a signal out and very little hope that the Enterprise's sensors could spot them unless they'd been tracked. At least, it would take some time.

When he went back inside, McCoy was sitting up probing his shoulder. Spock filled him in on the situation, they treated each other's wounds and settled down to wait. Spock stood in the entry hatch, his eyes roving the loose rock walls of their prison. A climb was out of the question.

The hours rolled by. Spock rummaged through the dead ship taking tricorder readings. He couldn't even get the lights on again, and the only illumination came through the hatch and assorted cracks. Eventually, McCoy found himself asking Spock for the time every five minutes and curbed his tongue. Presently, to make conversation, he said, "I could surely use a drink of water."

Spock turned. He almost looked contrite, "I'm sorry, Doctor. This temperature must be hard on you. There is water about a hundred yards up the canyon." He pulled on his boot, "Come, we'll take a walk."

"You must be thirsty, too. Even Vulcans need water."

"I do not feel the need. Come."

They scrambled and walked, slowly, up the crevice. The silence between them was so thick, McCoy thought he could slice it and serve it with plomeek soup. None of his usual comments seemed less than boorish considering what Spock must be going through. Finally, in a desperate effort to raise his spirits, McCoy said, "How did you know there's water here?"

"I can hear it, Doctor... and smell it. I'd forgotten you couldn't, or I would have mentioned it earlier."

Mentally, McCoy kicked himself. Then they rounded an outcropping and the tiny cascade was revealed in all its wet glory. The pond drained into an underground chasm. McCoy ran a standard tricorder check and then drank. When he rose, he held out a wet hand to Spock, "You really ought to drink..."

Spock backed away from the drops and their splashing as if the water were a deadly poison, "No, thank you, Doctor."

McCoy frowned, "What's the matter?"

The stony mask of a thousand generations of Vulcan forefathers veiled his face. "It's forbidden... there is still a chance... come, let us return to the vessel." He turned and stalked away as if mortally offended. McCoy followed, back to the only shelter from the relentless heat.

Hours later, McCoy was seated on the deck while Spock leaned against the bulkhead and stared out the hatch. The pilot was sure he'd fallen asleep because he remembered dreaming some of his more vivid experiences. The time he'd accompanied Spock to his marriage ceremony and accompanied him "back to Earth."

He stared at Spock, now seated cross-legged on the deck looking out the open hatch at the gathering dusk. He was normally a rather withdrawn type, but these last few hours he'd been positively... elsewhere. McCoy felt as if he'd been excluded, shooed away, barred. If he didn't know better, he'd say that he would treat an animal that just happened to tag along.

"Spock, how much time left?"

"Two hours, eleven minutes."

"Jim must be in command by now."

"Yes."

"What about Ssarsun?"

Spock turned his head to glance at McCoy then looked back out at the thickening night, "Didn't I mention that I'd lost contact with him?"

"No you didn't. When did this happen?"

"When I lost consciousness. I don't know why. Perhaps we moved around the planet, out of range."

"He must be half out of his mind by now!"

"No. One of the others will take him."

"Why don't you try to reach him?"

"I have been trying."

"No luck?"

"Nothing."

What about the other Vulcans?"

Spock turned again, the exterior glow lighting the drawn planes of his face, "What about them?"

"Can you reach them telepathically?"

"No. Telepathy is not directional, Doctor."

McCoy sighed, "Well, let me have another look at that ankle." He heaved himself erect and moved toward Spock.

"That won't be necessary. It's healed servicably enough."

"It has?" McCoy pointed his scanner. So it had. He kneaded his shoulder. "I envy you your Vulcan nervous system, if not your philosophy." McCoy froze. There was something in that... but what? And he had it!

He stood over the seated Vulcan and his heart pounded into his throat. Now, how to put it so he wouldn't get killed in the process.

"Spock?"

"Yes, Doctor?"

"I have an idea. A way we might yet get back to the ship in time to make Feda XII."

"I'm listening."

"You won't like it."

Spock turned with one eyebrow raised to peer at the Doctor. He didn't have to say it; McCoy could read "Irrelevant" in every line of his face. Spock had already spent hours ransacking the wreckage for the components of some type of signalling device. He'd done everything he could think of. Any new idea was certainly worth listening to.

"Spock, you, ah..." McCoy turned and walked away. He'd gathered enough courage to speak, but not to face those analytic eyes, "You kinda like T'Rruel, don't you?"

"What do you mean, 'like'?"

"I mean... she... well, registers on you. I mean, as a female."

"I hardly see that it is any of your concern."

"It's part of my idea. Just answer. It's a fact, isn't it? You do respond to her?"

Spock swallowed hard and breathed evenly for a moment. When he spoke his voice was level, controlled. "I don't know. It's possible."

McCoy interpreted this to mean that Spock was on the verge of falling madly in love. "You say that telepathy isn't directional. Yet, I seem to remember that your engagement ceremony involves a touching of minds that is supposed to form a bond that will draw the interested parties together at the appropriate time. Isn't that directional?"

"Not exactly. Nevertheless, the situation doesn't exist." "No but your ankle is as good as new."

Spock cocked his head and frowned quizzically, "I don't follow your logic."

"Of course not. Cultural inhibitions can create actual blindness. Spock," McCoy squatted down near the First Officer and peered through the darkness trying to read that inscrutable face, "if you wanted her, wouldn't she come?"

"T'Rruel?"

"Yes."

"But, I don't..."

McCoy was sure the other's bewilderment was actual. Perhaps it was impossible, but he'd gone too far to back out now. "You have such perfect control over your body, Spock. I understand this is an area where control fails. But, I'm sure that if you wanted to, you could induce... that state." McCoy held his breath.

Spock was silent a long time. Finally, "Doctor, you don't know what you've said."

"I apologize if I've been offensive. It was unintentional. I had an idea. I had to state it."

"Rightly so. But you offer me the choice between committing murder or suicide. The probabilities are so finely balanced, the unknowns so numerous that the choice is surprisingly difficult. And it is a subject on which I can't trust my own logic."

"I didn't know..."

"Of course not. And I wasn't aware of the choice until you pointed it out, which is, in itself, fascinating."

"Explain it to me."

A moon began a swift tranverse of the night sky. The doubly reflected light gave Spock's normally sallow complexion a graveyard cast while most of his face was etched in black. When he spoke, his voice was pitched low and quiet, with absolutely no hint of what seethed inside him. But McCoy read tension in the straight back and unnaturally still hands. Here was control, not tranquility.

"It's theoretically possible, what you propose. But there is as you guessed a cultural inhibition against... inducing pon farr. Therefore, data on the subject is scanty. This I do know. That, when induced, it goes to completion within hours."

"As well as I can estimate, there is only twenty percent probability that I might be able to reach T'Rruel. I have no way

to estimate the probability that she would accept. If she did not... I would die regardless of when they find us.

"If she did accept, and they find us in time to make Feda XII, there is a sixty-two point seven eight percent probability that T'Rruel would die."

"How do you figure that?"

"We don't practice contraception, Doctor. Our population problem has always been the opposite of yours. A woman in the first days of pregnancy usually can't survive the physically and mentally draining experience of the Affirmation. We go to a great deal of trouble to avoid the situation, which is the primary reason I don't know T'Rruel's thoughts on the subject."

"You're right. I didn't understand. If you try, someone will probably die. If you don't try, they may find us in time, anyway. Or they may not... and there'll be trouble! What a decision."

"And I don't know if my decision to try is logical."

McCoy sat, stunned. His brilliant idea was about to cost a life... and he'd dedicated his existence to saving life.

Spock rose, and McCoy followed, not knowing what to do or say. "Doctor, afterwards... you will neither speak to me nor make your presence known. We will wait in silence. That will be difficult enough." He took a turn around the cabin, stopped at the hatchway to peer into the sky, and then resumed his crosslegged seat.

There was nothing to see. He sat still, but not serene. The shadows deepened again as the moon set. The hour that passed then seemed fifty times as long as the whole time since they'd relieved word of the theft of the Kraith.

McCoy remembered that moment with a crystal clarity that amazed him. He'd been on the bridge to give Jim a routine report. Spock had been overhauling his library computer input when Uhura announced the arrival of two messages at once, one from Vulcan and one from Star Fleet Command.

Kirk had her put the one from Vulcan on the main screen and McCoy remembered the look on Spock's face as T'Pol has spoken, first to the Captain, the common amenities, and a request that the ensuing message be given to Spock. Then she'd spoken to Spock in that strangely euphonous language that served all Vulcan.

Spock had just stood there, woodenly. They were so far from Vulcan that the message was days old when it arrived. And, McCoy realized, he'd never told them what she'd said. The message from Star Fleet Command had sent them after the Kraith and led him inexorably to this point... three feet away from a man who was going swiftly and deliberately mad.

With one smooth motion, like a spring uncoiling, Spock stood up. McCoy did likewise, but with far less agility. The years were catching up to him.

And then, they were caught in a transporter beam and reconstructed aboard ship. T'Rruel and Kirk were the only others in the transporter room. The two humans stood mute as Spock's eyes met T'Rruel's. The tableau lasted an eternity. Then, without word, sign, or gesture, Spock descended from the transporter platform and walked out the door. T'Rruel followed smoothly, without a backward glance.

The two Star Fleet officers turned toward one another and, in perfect unison, heaved huge sighs. McCoy hardly knew where to begin asking questions. His hands solved the problem for him. He found himself pointing the medical scanner at the Captain and asking the routine questions. Then he launched into a quick report of what had happened to them.

When he'd finished, Kirk said, "Yes, of course. When Ssarsun lost Spock, T'Rruel insisted on linking with him on the assumption that Spock would try to reach them mentally. When Ssarsun regained consciousness and still they couldn't reach you, Ssarsun suggested what the next logical move would be. He had some trouble convincing T'Rruel. They argued in Vulcan for half an hour. He finally pointed out that with either of them alone it wouldn't work but the two of them together could zero in on you right away."

"How's Scotty doing? Are we going to make it?"

"We've been traveling at Warp Eight since I plucked you out of that wreck."

Arms around each other's shoulders, the two men moved toward the door. McCoy carried the tricorder with the records of the wreckage. He'd have to compile a complete report on the Cyborg. Undoubtedly some other ship was moving to pick it up. He was sure Spock's report, when he filed it, would be the usual exhaustive and detailed study. He'd have to go some to look as good. But he'd have a head start since Spock would be thoroughly preoccupied for the next several days.

The trip to Feda XII was unremarkable for most of the crew save for the straining and groaning of the ship's skeleton as Kirk tried for new speed records. Occasionally, the engine room crew drew extra duty and hazzard pay repairing blowouts of various descriptions, and once they lost power for all of twelve seconds, but that was routine aboard the Enterprise.

At Spock's request, Kirk logged the marriage and had Uhura dispatch the appropriate notifications. The tone was anything but appropriate for a wedding day, especially when McCoy confirmed the pregnancy the newlyweds already knew about. McCoy restrained Christine from offering them a wedding present. He tried to explain

the absence of the usual atmosphere of joy and hope which should prevail on such occasions, but could not without betraying a confidence.

Alone in Spock's quarters, T'Rruel and Spock looked at one another, the knowledge of the probable futures heavy within each of them. Spock had just had a brief glimpse of the meaning of life; the kind of thing which gives a man, or a Vulcan, drive, purpose, direction, and the only meaningful immortality. It still lay warmly within him reawakening all his childhood yearnings toward belonging, a hope he'd abandoned years ago. In a few short hours, he'd acquired a wife... and a son. His abused system had not yet fully recovered equilibrium, and he found an emotional basis for his reluctance to part with them.

"T'Rruel," the ancient name rolled off his tongue like a song, "I will try to protect you."

She went to sit on the bed, "You cannot. There are only fifty-seven of us. Each must carry his own share... in full. The only chance is to master the changes before the Drinking." She lay back on the bed and in two slow breaths was deep within herself fighting for her life and the life of her child.

Spock adjusted the ambient temperature for her comfort and sat down in his desk chair to wait, and to plan. Nevertheless, he would try to protect her. She was exactly what he'd always thought he wanted in a wife, and he was just beginning to realize how right he'd been.

They arrived at Feda XII without ten minutes to spare, and beamed the Vulcans down to the diggings. Kirk fended off requests for shore leave and the ship settled down to waiting.

Ssarsun and Scotty closeted themselves with a case of good Scotch and even better Schlughtamer that Ssarsun had been saving to work off a really colossal mad. He couldn't imagine anything more colossally maddening than Spock's beaming down into an enemy craft while his bodyguard lay unconscious. Besides, later, he'd have to relinquish the tenuous thread of contact, his lifeline to reality, for a few hours during the peak of the ceremonies when Spock would need all of his concentration just to stay alive. It was always better to be drunk at such times. He'd discovered early in his career that sobriety sharpened the hallucinations unbearably.

Kirk and McCoy passed sixty-five of the sixty-eight hours by pretending to adhere to routine. But finally the tension got to be too much for the Doctor and he took a flask of his best brandy and went in search of the Captain.

He found him in his quarters pretending to read a status report. Silently, he poured two glasses full and sat down to kill the three hours remaining. Life in the service seemed to consist mostly of a series of life-or-death crises strung together by unbearably eternal waits.

Sixty-eight hours thirty minutes had passed before Kirk's communicator tweeted. "Kirk here."

"Captain." It was Spock's voice, level, businesslike. "Five to beam up, sir. Please have the transporter room cleared. I'll be bringing the Kraith with me."

"Right. Five minutes. Kirk out." He looked at McCoy, "She didn't make it."

McCoy capped the flask and rose, "Let's go. When a rigid shaft is forced to bend... it shatters."

Kirk nodded and rose, "Yes. He may need us. But he'll never admit it."

They were out the door and marching along the corridor toward the transporter room as McCoy cautioned, "Jim, don't try to make him admit it. For the present, let him handle it his own way. Maybe later... one day... he'll come looking for a shoulder."

"Right, Bones."

They cleared the transporter room and Kirk locked onto the target, checked by communicator, set the time delay, and left the room.

When they re-entered, four weary Vulcans were making their way silently out of the room. Spock hefted a plain blue case and descended from the platform. He stopped in the middle of the floor to look at his two friends.

"Captain... I'll require about a day before I can return to active duty. I'm quite thoroughly exhausted."

"Granted. Take as long as you like. T'Rruel..."

"Is dead."

Kirk closed his eyes and shook his head. He started to reach out to Spock's free hand. Spock stepped back quickly. "Thank you, Jim. But I still have some unfinished business." He indicated the Kraith. "If you'll excuse me, I'll be in my quarters." He made for the door.

Fifteen minutes later, he was towing the case for safe keeping. The next time they stopped at Vulcan, he'd perform the ceremonial destruction and bury the remains. There was no hurry. He had fifty-two years.

The door chimed. He reached over and tripped the release. Christine came in carrying a tray with two steaming dishes under brightly polished covers. "I made some Pekrewp." The others said it turned out well, so I thought you and T'Rruel would..." She

looked around, "where is she?"

The savory vapors had reached him and he identified the traditional dish by smell. Its festive associations were hardly suitable at the moment, but it would provide the concentrated and easily digestible nourishment he needed now.

"She's dead."

"Huuuh!" her indrawn breath and growing frown culminated in a breathed, "Ohhh! I didn't know. Oh, Spock, I'm so sorry! What an awful tragedy."

"It was the result of actions taken in full knowledge of the probable consequences. It was unavoidable."

"Even so, I'm sorry."

"There is no need to be sorry." He locked the cabinet, and rose to take the tray from Christine. "We live in changing times, Nurse. We have witnessed the end of an era today. An ancient symbol has passed into dust. A new symbol will be made to light the way into the future."

Christine wanted to say, "If you can't feel your pain, I'll feel it for you. But, I know you can, and I want to share it with you and make it easier." But she remained silent and left the tray with the hungry Vulcan.

It didn't even occur to Spock to be grateful for the food, done by hand to perfection. It was a nurse's duty to look after the health of crewmembers. But, as he sat staring at the closed door, he reminded himself of Christine's well known attitude toward him. That was a problem he'd have to grapple with again, soon.

But first he owed his ravaged body a good rest. As he finished the last spoonful, the door buzzed, "Come."

Kirk paced over to Spock's desk, motioning him to remain seated, "I'm sorry to bother you now, Spock, but a message just came in I think you should know about."

"Yes, sir?"

"Spock... I'm sorry..."

"Jim..." how to explain without alienating? "Jim, sympathy isn't necessary. It isn't even welcome. I'm very tired, and the human practice of... 'breaking the news gently' only strains my patience. It's about Sarek, isn't it?"

Kirk nodded, "They found a body tentatively identified as Sarek. They're not sure. The search will continue. We've been ordered into the area as soon as we finish the top."

Spock nodded, noting the way the room spun around him. He was truly on the verge of collapse. His efforts to save T'Rruel had drained every resource of vitality. "Thank you. We'll discuss it later, if that's all right with you."

"Yes, of course." Kirk turned to go then came back, "Spock, I have to say it. I... feel sympathy... so I'm compelled to express it. I want to help..."

"I understand, Jim. But I don't need help... only rest."

Kirk nodded, "Sleep well," and left.

For a moment Spock sat staring at the closed door. Deep inside, he knew that Sarek was not dead. He knew that as Kaytaytikh he would feel that loss as a severance deep within, and there was no such sensation. Perhaps he would yet rescue his father.

He didn't remember stumbling to the bed and tumbling into the deepest sleep he'd ever known.

SHEALKU

Kraith IA

J. Lichtenberg

"Spock," said Captain Kirk chidingly. "Your heart is just not in your chess tonight."

The First Officer looked up from the triplex chess board and said blankly, "Sir, I assure you my heart is firmly secured within..."

Kirk cut him off with a chuckle, "you see what I mean! If you'd been paying attention, you wouldn't have misunderstood me. Ever since T'... he caught himself, T'Ruel was still too sensitive a topic, "ever since your father disappeared, it's been impossible to talk to you. And whatever you're doing, it's always obvious your mind just isn't on it."

Bewildered, Spock shook his head, "Captain, I am paying attention to this game..."

"Oh, no you're not. I have you mated in three moves."

Planting brows rose to horizontal bars in the center of Spock's forehead and he stared at the board as if it had just materialized in the middle of a tangle of computer circuitry. Kirk practically never pronounced his victories in such terms. Finally, the Vulcan looked up, "Three moves, Captain?"

"You don't see it?"

"No, sir," Spock shook his head.

"All right. I'll bet you twenty credits it's my game."

"Captain, you know I don't wager..."

"But, if you're so sure you'd win...it's no gamble."

"No, sir, you don't understand. I have no objection to gambling...but I don't wager."

"What's the difference?"

Spock sighed, "We often gamble our lives on events which have a very low probability of transpiring. But I would never wager with a crewmate on the outcome of an event...regardless of the odds."

"Why?"

"I might win," said the Vulcan simply.

"But that's the object..."

"For a human, perhaps. I wouldn't know." Spock pulled his face into a virtuous mask.

Kirk shrugged. He'd thought that on Ekos, Spock had finally learned...the exhilaration of gambling. He shrugged, "All right, we'll just play the game out...then you'll see."

But before Spock could put out his hand to make his move the intercom whistled and then the corridor speakers were chanting, "yellow Alert, yellow alert...Captain to Bridge. All hands to battle stations. This is not a drill, repeat, not a drill. Yellow Alert..."

Before the announcement ceased, Kirk was out the door, Spock close on his heels.

Fifty seconds later, the Captain and First Officer took their stations and became engrossed in the set routine of the alert. Seconds later, Kirk learned that it was only a distress call from a nearby commercial liner and there was no indication of an armed attack. He said, over his left shoulder toward Communications, "Lt. Borelli, get the Captain of the liner on the screen. Lt. Grosholm, plot a course for the liner's position. Mr. Freeman, lay it in as soon..."

"I already have it, sir," said the Helmsmen crisply.

"Thank you," said Kirk, "Mr. Spock, report."

"No hostile ships in the vicinity. The distressed liner appears to be operating under normal power."

"Captain," said Borelli, "I have the Captain of the liner."

"Main screen," said Kirk.

The large, main viewscreen shifted to display a complex geometric pattern like a geodesic dome cross-hatched in shades of blue. In one corner, a small cut-out box displayed the Federation flag and in the opposite corner, the Vulcan emblem glowed white against a blue background.

Curious, Spock descended to stand beside Kirk's chair.

The Captain said, "A Vulcan ship?"

"Yes, Sir. That's the identification of the Shealku. A class M-1 passenger liner. Rated at three hundred passengers. Carries a crew of one hundred-twenty...mostly human. Five hundred metric tons of cargo. Generally operates between the Earth Colonies, but during this season of the year, Shealku often takes tourists to Vulcan."

Kirk swiveled around to look at his First Officer, "Mr. Spock, sometimes you amaze me."

"In what way, Captain?"

Kirk shook his head ruefully, "Out of seven or eight hundred Vulcan-owned merchant vessels in space, you just happened to have all the statistics of this particular one on the tip of your tongue!"

Spock corrected, "Nine hundred-forty three vessels as of last year. I don't know them all, just the ones..."

He was interrupted by a soft pong as the Shealku pattern shimmered and dissolved to reveal its Captain.

Kirk blinked hard. Spock cocked his head to one side quizzically. Everyone on the bridge looked silently at the figure on the main viewscreen.

It was a Schillian...not a Vulcan or human. And it was a Second Officer...not a Captain. And it sat in the Captain's chair, behind the Captain's desk, in the Captain's office.

Before Kirk had a chance to say anything rude, the Schillian spoke quietly. His accent was fairly good in spite of the imprecise lip of his species. "I am Ltrelud, Second Officer of Shealku. It is I who summoned you because our Captain and our Executive Officer are dead...and as you know, I am unable to take command of any vessel on the trade lines. Can you aid us?"

Fumbly, Kirk nodded. Then he realized that the gesture might have little meaning for the Schillian and said rather loudly, "Yes. We're on our way." He knew the Federation law that prohibited the Commanding Officer of any interstellar commercial vessel from being in close mental linkage with another being. Somewhere in the back of his mind, he'd known that this prohibited the telepathic Schillians from becoming Commercial Starship Captains or Federation controlled route. The Schillians' ability depended on the telepathic link with another telepathic mind. But, until now, the prohibitor hadn't really meant anything to Kirk. The realization was like a viscous lump congealing in his vitals.

Spock said into Kirk's silence, "Have you been attacked? Is there any damage to the ship or personnel?"

The Schillian answered, "No. There's been no attack on the ship. We're spaceworthy."

Spock said to Kirk, "Captain, shall I cancel the 'ellow Alert?"

"Yes, Mr. Spock. Do that." He turned his attention fully on the Schillian, "Uh, Mr..."

"You may call me Luad, Captain. It is a meaningless noise, but at least it is something you can say."

From a Vulcan, thought Kirk, that would be condescension very bitter to swallow, but Kirk could hear the gentle amusement burbling in the Schillian's voice and took it as intended... good nurtured friendship.

"Well, then, Mr...Luad, can you tell me what happened?"

"I wish I could, Captain. The truth is that I do not know. Let us discuss the events within the privacy of walls."

"Very well," said Kirk somewhat confused by the odd mixture of Schillian manners and Vulcan phrasing, "we'll be there in"

Spock surprised from his station, "...approximately three minutes."

The Schillian essayed a perial nod but achieved an oriental hew that Kirk wished Tulu could see, "Good enough, Shealku...out."

Kirk watched the strange blue pattern overlay the screen for a moment before fading. The Schillian seemed to have a good grasp of the Vulcan pronunciation of his ship's name, anyway.

By the time Kirk and Spock materialized in the office of the Shealku's Captain, Kirk was burning with curiosity and surreptitiously watched Spock for signs of Vulcan impatience. He found none, and the First Officer's placidity only served to increase the Captain's agitation.

At last, the Starfleet Officers freed the Schillian across the desk. Kirk scarcely noticed the Vulcan decor...a strange mixture of plush elegance and austere simplicity. Everything in the office, as in the rest of the ship, was of the very best quality, the most durable construction, the most widely accepted esthetic standards, and above everything had the sleek streamline of the strictly functional.

If he stopped to study the decor's effect, Kirk knew he'd be engrossed for hours, so he ignored it and said, "Your coordinates were precise, Mr. Luad. Thank you."

"My pleasure, Captain...please believe...your presence is a great pleasure."

Spock said, "That I got well incoming, Ltrelud, but we have a very serious matter..."

"Yes, of course," said the Schillian, "won't you please be seated. I have here the relevant log tapes," he keyed his desk screen and it lit up with the Shealku pattern, "which will tell you almost as much as I know of the situation."

For the next twenty minutes, Kirk and Spock viewed the log tapes that covered the demise of the Shealku's Captain and First Officer. And, as Ltrelud had indicated, it wasn't really too informative. For fifteen minutes, they watched the two human officers seated across the very desk where they now sat. They were doing a routine audit of Shealku's records. There was nothing to indicate an impending crisis.

Then, suddenly, they both crumpled into peaceful death with no indication of the cause. That was all there was.

Ltrelud snapped the screen off and said, "Half an hour later, I found them like that. Autops indicated a gas poisonous to humans in very small traces but not toxic to Schillians except in high concentration. On the basis of that, the three officers junior to me have filed charges against me and our navigator, the only other Schillian aboard. But, until you came, there was no authority available to which we could appeal. The charges are delineated in the ship's log."

Spock asked, "How long ago did this occur?"

"Six days. I've requested a replacement Captain to be sent from our nearest depot, but he won't be here for fifteen days."

He was interrupted by a knock on the door and said, "Come."

The door slid noiselessly aside and three junior officers in Shealku's uniform, a simple pants and tunic outfit in the same shades-of-blue geometric pattern as the Shealku emblem, marched into the room. As the leader advanced to the desk, Kirk knew at once who they were. You didn't need telepathy to sense the grimness of suppressed anger in the three humans.

"Luad," said the leader, "you can't..."

"Captain Kirk," interrupted Ltrelud urbanely, "this is Engineer Fuller, Director Thompson and our Chief Purser, Mr. Reynolds. Gentlemen, this is Captain Kirk and his First Officer, Mr. Spock...of the U.S.S. Enterprise."

Reynolds was a short man with blond hair and a tenor voice while the other two were dark with a Eurasian cast to

Perforce, the humans acknowledged the introduction and then Fuller advanced to pound on the desk. "Captain Kirk, I demand..."

Kirk said, "Mr. Fuller, you are in no position to make any demands."

"But, Captain, this..." he indicated the Schillian with a flick of his hand, "...man is accused of..."

Kirk interrupted, "I know Mr. Fuller. Won't you be seated?"

Indignantly, Fuller raised his voice, "Captain! A murder..."

Kirk said, "Mr. Fuller, I strongly suggest you take a seat and allow us to proceed with the investigation in an orderly fashion. The legalities are already confused enough without adding prejudice..."

Fuller threw himself into a chair grudgingly while the other two crewmen perched themselves on the edges of their chairs.

"Prejudice!" said Fuller. "So! Luad's been getting his licks in first! Well, let me tell you..."

The door signal chimed again and Luad said, "Come."

A tall Vulcan dressed in a severe black tunic and trousers strode into the room with an air of authority that impressed even Kirk, who found himself rising to greet the man as if he were an admiral.

Ltrelud also rose and the others followed suit as the Schillian said, "Sepaz, I greet you. May I introduce Captain Kirk and his First Officer, Spock, of the Enterprise."

Sepaz turned to Kirk with stately dignity and rendered the Vulcan greeting and then traded greetings with Spock all in a kind of ponderous, slow-motion that somehow took the pressure out of the explosion that had been building between the humans.

At last, Sepaz completed the formalities and took the one remaining seat in the office, making a little ceremony out of the simple act of sitting down. "Captain Kirk, I am most pleased to see Starfleet here at last. Allow me to come directly to the point."

"Certainly," said Kirk readily. He knew how slow a Vulcan could be when standing on ceremony. He rather preferred the Vulcan businessman to the Vulcan diplomats for that very reason. Time is money...a logical equation.

Sepaz pressed a tape into the desk viewer and a list of

names appeared on the screen. "I have been delegated by this group of passengers to present an urgent petition that you place this ship on course for Vulcan immediately. There are pregnant women aboard, live cargo, connections to be made by travelers, appointments to be kept, jobs at stake, and each of us is incurring enormous expense from every hour's delay."

Kirk started to answer but Spock interrupted, "I can easily understand the importance of punctuality to all aboard. However, Federation Law is quite explicit..."

"But," said Sepaz, "this is a Vulcan ship and Vulcan law..."

"You pardon, Sepaz," said Spock deffentially, "but in instellar space, Federation law takes precedence. If this incident had occurred in Vulcan space, Ltreluad would have been able to take command and bring Shealku to terminal-orbit. But here..."

"Here," supplied Ltreluad, "my hands are tied and Shealku immobilized until Captain Kirk completes his investigation."

"Which," said Kirk smoothly, "I shall now start." He pulled out his communicator, flipped it open, and was soon issuing orders to almost every department and lab aboard the Enterprise. With the resources of a Starship to draw upon, the whole investigation would be complete within two days.

Sepaz stood up. "Very well, Captain. However, I must insist that this ship be placed back on course the moment your legal requirements are met."

Kirk said, "I assure you, sir, that it will be."

Sepaz took his leave with the same slow-motion formality with which he had entered. When the door had closed behind the Vulcan, it was as if suddenly the room and its occupants snapped back to a real-time tempo.

Fuller said, "Captain Kirk, I insist that you take command of this ship immediately. No Schillian is allowed to command a ship in the Federation Trade Lanes...and neither is an accused murderer!"

"And," Kirk said, holding his temper in check, "no Starfleet Officer is allowed to command a privately owned vessel engaged in instellar commerce. We'll just have to straighten this mess out right here."

"Then," said Fuller climbing to his feet, "I suggest you get to work. I'll be in Engineering if you need me, Captain."

With a hawk-eyed glare, Fuller collected his junior officers and marched them out the door. But before letting the door close, Fuller turned back to say threateningly, "But, Kirk, you'd better get that Schillian out of this office...right now."

Then the door closed and Ltreluad stood up. "He is correct, Captain, I've no right to occupy this desk. Why don't you make this office the headquarters for your investigation? I'll be in my quarters if you require my assistance."

As the Schillian was about to leave, Spock said casually, "Ltreluad, are you guilty of the murders?"

"No," answered the nonhuman evenly.

Spock asked, "Do you believe it was murder?"

"Yes."

"Who is the guilty party?" persisted the Vulcan.

"I do not know," said the Schillian sadly and Kirk felt the sincerity of that. The Schillians were a race of amphibious telepaths who looked like man-proportioned toads but who shared more of humanity's finer sensibilities than many other nonhuman races and would never snoop in a non-telepath's mind.

After a moment, Spock said quietly, "Thank you. You may go."

When he was again alone with Kirk, Spock said, "Captain, I don't understand how you intend to put Shealku under weigh within forty-eight hours. Ltreluad can't command. His junior officers do not have the necessary papers. None of our crew can..."

"Yes, Mr. Spock; well, I'm sure you'll think of something." Kirk moved to sit behind the desk and survey the elaborate computer installation with some trepidation. "First let's find out who killed the captain and his exec."

The computer was of Vulcan manufacture, as was almost everything else on board. Kirk sighed, heaved himself out of the straight-backed chair that looked comfortable but wasn't and sat at the chair. "It's all yours, Mr. Spock. Set up a search-and-correlate program on events surrounding the time of the murders. Trace the toxic gas. Motive, method, opportunity... you know the routine. Tie directly into the Enterprise's computers if you need to. I'm going to poke around the ship and get the feel of things."

"Yes, sir," said Spock, "Shall I have the labs report directly to you?"

"No. You collect and correlate the findings. I'll be back in two hours for a report."

"Aye aye, sir."

Kirk left the Vulcan to his task, not failing to note the glint of unexpressible delight in Spock's eyes as he laid hands on the Vulcan-made instrumentation. If there was anything that could claim all of Spock's heart, it was a computer...and the cadillac of computers was the Vulcan-made T'Pol which he now commanded.

Federation-built ships, like the Enterprise, used Vulcan-made components, but the programming was human engineered. It took a Vulcan to get the best out of a Vulcan program.

For the next two hours, Kirk walked the luxuriously austere corridors soaking up the atmosphere of the ship. He watched his security men questioning passengers over whirring tricorders; he poked into the public lounges; he watched the cleaning servo's and their human supervisors going about the daily routines; he stopped in the bar for a drink and eavesdropped on conversations; he poked around the crew's quarters and visited the engineering deck to check out the graffiti in the men's room. Everywhere he went, he was recognized and subjected to appeal after appeal to get the ship to port on schedule.

Finally, Kirk found himself marching briskly along the corridor back toward the Captain's office. Suddenly, a passenger wearing the baggy pants and bolero of the Kiltira'ine Colonies stepped into his path. "Captain Kirk, have, may I, a word with you?"

"Certainly, Mr..."

"Rose. Arturo Rose, Captain." He looked both ways to see that they were alone and said, "Captain, has told anybody you of the unhappiness between Captain Sudman and Mr. Luad?"

"Unhappiness, Mr. Rose?"

"Greatly, yes. That you understand Luad is...uh...unwelcome aboard Shealku. Before the murder day, the Captain Sudman was to be overheard chastising Luad."

"What do you mean, overheard?" asked Kirk cautiously. It was bad practice for a Captain to discipline one of his officers in public.

"I had passing beside the outside of Captain-Office and heard the tiringing..."

"Nevermind," said Kirk impatiently wishing Rose would use his translator instead of struggling with English syntax. "What did Sudman say?"

"Abused he Luad for telepathic instructing Navigator while on Watch Duty. Then Sudman insulted generally Schillians... and sequenced to Schillian mating customs. Imuendo to pervertity affair bi-sexual with Navigator and Luad. Luad screamed paining and ran outward from Captain-Office. Unknown to me, Schillians, but was Luad great with rage colliding my body and not cognizant of self."

"I see," Kirk said thoughtfully. The trisexual Schillians were more reserved about sexual matters than Vulcans. Schillians wouldn't even reveal their true sex, preferring to be called "he" wherever necessary. "Well, thank you, Mr. Rose. I'll certainly look into it. Rest assured..."

"Arrested am I," assured Rose graciously, "Good Thank You." With a courteous little bow, Rose hurried off leaving Kirk staring after him blankly. The first passenger who hadn't demanded Warp 8 to Vulcan immediately.

Kirk shook his head and continued to the office wondering what Spock might have turned up. He wasn't long in finding out what the Science Officer had wrung out of the Shealku's computers and he spent the next three hours trying to digest it all along with the evidence that was pouring in from the Enterprise labs. And then he sent Spock to ask Ltreluad about Rose's testimony and another man with a translating tricorder to collect an official statement from the Kiltira'ine.

When Spock returned, Kirk was aching with the fatigue of a day that had gone on too long...but he was too wrought up to think of sleep. He propped his head in his hands and said, "Don't tell me...I just found the tape in your report. Sudman was filing a dismissal recommendation against Luad. Classical motive; method and opportunity against Luad and not one other suspect."

"Nevertheless Captain," said Spock gently, "Ltreluad is not guilty. He knew that, at most, he and the Navigator would have been transferred to another ship, not dismissed. Remember, Shealku is administered by Vulcan even though it is operated by humans. The line has many other ships where the Schillians would be most welcome."

Kirk looked up. Spock seemed to be discounting the emotional volatility of the Schillians. Fatigue soaked through the Captain's brain and left his thoughts gooey. He sighed, "Spock, where did you learn to speak Schillian?"

"I don't actually speak the language, Captain...there are too many sounds and thought-tones that are impossible for me, but I can pronounce some of their proper names. In the last three years, many worthy papers have been published by Schillian physicists on..."

"Nevermind," said Kirk wearily, "let's go play roulette for a while. I need some recreation."

"Captain, I have no..."

"Come on, Spock. If you don't want to play, you can kibb tz for me."

"Very well, Captain," sighed Spock. Through the years, he'd become accustomed to Kirk's fatigue limits and he knew there was no sense arguing.

When the two Starfleet officers entered the large gaming salon, the whirl and bustle of conversation died for a moment and then picked up at an increased tempo. The crewmen running the games worked more intently to keep their patron's interest and soon the passengers forgot the Starfleet uniforms.

Kirk led the Vulcan toward the roulette table in the far corner where he'd earlier seen a woman riding a winning streak. There was a knot of well-dressed passengers at one end of the table while on the long side, opposite the croupier, stood Reynolds, the Chief Purser, cashing in a veritable mountain of chips that the croupier expertly counted into neat stacks and credited on the table's computer.

The game had come to a standstill and Kirk watched quietly while the passengers milled around muttering comments about crazy Vulcan laws allowing crewmembers to gamble on their own ships and how it must be a rigged game. Kirk was sure that Spock heard the comments, but the Vulcan gave no sign that the smudge on Vulcan honor reached his sensitive ears.

Before one of the drunken humans could confront the Vulcan, Kirk steered him away from the roulette table and set down at a blackjack table where a game was just starting. Blackjack was no game for a Vulcan. Eidetic memory could automatically keep track of every card played and give the exact odds on each hand, so Kirk didn't even invite Spock to sit in.

The dealer shuffled the cards and presented them to be cut and Kirk played out the hand automatically. He played the next hand and the next, not keeping track of his winnings, but only abandoning his mind to the soothing routine of the limited universe of the deck of cards.

When the last card in the deck was turned, the dealer collected them and shuffled again. One of the players left the table and another took his place. It took two more hands before Kirk recognized the new player as Reynolds, the Purser.

Something clicked over in Kirk's mind as he watched Reynolds and the Captain began to play in earnest. By the next re-shuffle Kirk had classified the man as a compulsive gambler. It was there in the snap he gave the cards as he checked his hole-card. It was written in the way he destroyed the green felt scratching for a card and the way he held his body when the dealer turned his hand up. Here was a gambler who'd lost heavily and now, suddenly, was winning.

Before the deal began again, Kirk got up and pushed Spock down into his place whispering, "You play this one...play it to win...that's an order, Mr. Spock."

"But Captain, it's not fair against..."

"It's not illegal here, is it?"

"No sir."

"So play!"

The Vulcan shrugged an eyebrow and accepted the hand dealt to him with the same disinterest he would have used on a computer printing out Phabini multiplication tables.

Kirk watched with increasing excitement as a theory coalesced in his fatigue-drenched brain. As the last card was turned and Spock took the pot for the fourth time in a row, Kirk permitted himself a firm smile. Reynolds was broke. All his roulette winnings were now in the Vulcan's hands.

Kirk watched the little man carefully as he stood up. Yes, all the symptoms were there. Here was an impulsive gambler whose losses had just drowned him for the third time. Kirk watched him stumble out of the hall in defeat.

Then Spock handed the Captain the dealer's receipt for his winnings. "Captain, I think you'd better give this to Mr. Reynolds. It would not be proper to..."

"Not just yet, Mr. Spock. Let's go back to the office. I have something I want you to ask the ship's log."

As they entered the Captain's office, Spock said, "I presume you find yourself refreshed, sir?"

"Not really, but I won't be able to sleep until I get this settled. I want you to ask for an audit of the ship's books for this trip. Perhaps we'll learn the murderer's name."

"The books, Captain? I don't understand..."

"Of course not, Mr. Spock. As you yourself said, your ancestors were spared the dubious benefits of alcohol...and gambling fever as well. I wouldn't expect you to understand."

"Yes sir," said Spock meekly and sat down to play the desk computer like a triple-boarded organ. After a few minutes he looked up and said, "Sir, the relevant tapes are gone."

"Where are they?"

"In the possession of Mr. Reynolds, apparently."

"Ahhh!" Kirk glowed with triumph.

"Perfectly routine, Captain. The Purser..."

"Routine on a Vulcan ship. Mr. Spock, but not on a human ship!"

Spock all but shrugged, "Yes sir."

Kirk tapped a forefinger against the credit chips Spock had given him. "Pull the psych profile on Mr. Reynolds."

"Aye, aye, sir." A moment later, the profile appeared on the desk screen and Spock said, "It appears normal to me."

"When was this made?"

"Three years ago when he joined the Shealku."

Kirk sighed. "And not rechecked since?"

"No sir. The Charter requires crew psych-profiles at ten year intervals."

"But humans change more swiftly than that, Mr. Spock... especially when exposed to new temptations. Nevertheless," Kirk went on, "I want an opinion from Bones. Shoot that tape over to the Enterprise..."

"The Doctor would be asleep now. Is it that important?"

"What time is it?"

"Almost breakfast time for the Doctor."

"We've been up all night!"

"Yes sir."

"Well, I want Bones to run a new profile on Reynolds even if he has to skip breakfast. Let's go."

Spock rose, working the controls much as a man might grab a last gulp of coffee before running for a forgotten appointment. Then he was out the door following the Captain down the corridor. If Kirk had been wearing coat-tails, they would have streamed out behind him and fluttered in his wake...

The Captain turned into Officer's Country and slowed just enough to peer at the names over each door-signal. Finally he came to Reynolds' quarters and pounced on the signal.

They waited. Kirk rang again.

Spock said, "Perhaps he's not in."

Kirk shook his head. Such a gambler would return to his quarters, have a few drinks and pace the floor like a caged animal. Kirk gave the door signal a savage poke and when nothing happened, he put a hand out to the door. It slipped open silently.

Instantly, Kirk's right hand went for his phaser, but found nothing. You don't go armed on a Vulcan ship. The Captain straightened.

Reynolds was crouched behind the bed, his hair wildly disheveled, his face glistening with sweat, his hand firmly pointing a pistol-phaser at the Starfleet Officers. Kirk knew he faced a sick and very dangerous man. He suggested, "Put the phaser down, Mr. Reynolds."

"I knew you were on to me!" Reynolds parted, waving the phaser from one to the other. "I knew it the minute you pitted the Vulcan against me at blackjack. I was going to pay it back... all back... really I was!" His voice broke into a hysterical soprano and Kirk could see the whites of his eyes.

Steadily, the Captain said, "You don't need the phaser, Reynolds. We came to..."

"I know what you came for...and you're not going to get me. No! NO!" With one shaking fist, Reynolds grabbed the barrel of the phaser and pointed it at his own head.

Knocking the Captain aside, Spock charged past him and dove across the un-made bed. Just after the phaser fired, the Vulcan's hand jerked the weapon up toward the ceiling where it scorched the bulkhead before Spock could pry Reynolds' fingers off the firing stud. But it was too late.

The headless corpse toppled neatly to the floor...not even bleeding from the cauterized neck.

Kirk saw Spock stiffen in pain and for a moment, he thought his First Officer had been burned too, but then Spock rolled over and sat up on the bed, holding the phaser as if it were a piece of dripping flesh torn from a living man. "You should not have instructed me to win that card game, Captain. That was an unfortunate error."

Kirk pushed himself away from the door-jam and straightened. "I'm sorry, Mr. Spock. You know I wouldn't deliberately have made you the catalyst for his death."

"Yes Captain, I know..."

"...but," finished Ltrelued's voice from the corridor behind Kirk, "intentions do not absolve" as the Vulcans say."

Spock untangled himself from the bedclothes and came to the door saying, "However, in many human traditions, good intentions often do vindicate."

Sepaz's voice joined the discussion from the hall. "I see that you've fulfilled the requirements of your Service, Captain Kirk. Perhaps now you can spare some consideration for the requirements of the messengers?"

Kirk turned and leaned back against the door-jam for his aching frame. "News spreads quickly around here!"

Ltreluad turned to Sepaz differentially. "Sir, I must apologize for carelessly transmitting our shock..."

"Forgiveness flows freely, Ltreluad. The shock of a death is never easy to control." Sepaz gave a formal bow from the waist which Ltreluad answered gratefully.

Kirk mullied out his communicator and ordered the Enterprise medical corpsmen over to clean up and then he turned to Sepaz. "With so many telepaths around here, it amazes me that nobody realized Reynolds had..."

"Captain," Spock cleared his throat significantly, "the greatest effort of every telepathically sensitive person is expended in shielding his own mind from the stray thoughts of others."

Ltreluad said, "Even we who live through the touching of our respect the privacy of those who cannot share our pleasure."

"Yes," said Kirk absently, "I suppose so."

"We are wasting time, Captain," said Sepaz firmly.

Kirk turned to Sepaz and said, "Sir, if I could think of a way to move this ship locally, I would do so. The replacement Captain that Lude requested won't arrive for two more weeks. Short of blowing up Shealku's power plant and then towing her in as a derelict, I can't..."

"I hardly think," said Sepaz, "that such drastic measures should be necessary, Captain. I've been doing some research on the relevant laws and in the case of Merlin versus O'Flannery..."

"Skip it," said Kirk wearily, "if you've found a way, tell us!"

Sepaz blinked twice, slowly. Finally he said, "The Federation does not allow Schillians to command vessels on the shipwreck lanes...however, they may act under the direction of a superior authority. This vessel is owned by Shealdrez Enterprises which is a wholly owned subsidiary of Thzverit Corporation...and Thzverit, as is well known, is controlled by the House..."

Spock nodded smoothly and Kirk could almost see him mentally snapping his fingers, "...of Thruel's Uncle. Yes, of course. In that case, Captain, I hereby request leave effective immediately so that I may book passage on Shealku for Vulcan."

Kirk looked blankly from one to the other, "Huh..."

Ltreluad blinked his nictitating membranes in gleeful succession. "Do grant him permission, Captain! That solves the problem elegantly."

Kirk shrugged. Spock's preoccupation with the search for his father had reduced his efficiency markedly. Perhaps a vacation was just what he needed, so Kirk said, "All right, Mr. Spock, you're on ninety days' leave. Rejoin the Enterprise at Starbase Three."

Spock turned to Ltreluad. "Acting in the name of Shealku's owners, I order you to instruct the Navigator to plot course for Vulcan, Warp factor six, and lay it in the moment the Enterprise casts off her tractors."

With animated enthusiasm, Ltreluad said, "Aye, aye, sir! And welcome aboard!"

Kirk hauled out his communicator, issued orders to withdraw from the Shealku, cancelled the order to Bones, and then asked to be beamed aboard. He was asleep on his feet.

Death of a Flame

Doris Beetem

or

AMANDA'S

MISSION

(Editors' note: This story really has no place in the Kraith Series. The events it depicts did not happen. It is, however, a very poignant and haunting story. Not to include it would be to do an injustice both to Jacqueline, who perhaps did not think of that aspect of the Flame, and to Doris, because this is surely one of the most logical explanations for Sarek's marriage to Amanda.)

Amanda was podding plomiks, dribbling the bitter orange seeds into a bowl, and laying the pods aside to be baked; when, despite the terrible Vulcan heat, she shivered. For an instant she felt like she'd received word of the death of some dear old friend from Earth, or as if Sarek had sent her away forever.

Then she saw the tiny golden sphere lying on the table like just another plomik seed. When she touched it, the device crumbled into dust, its flame forever stilled. It was only a mind-aid, Sarek had said, which would establish the Peace of Vulcan within her until she could do it herself. But she had worn it forty years.

She was finally a mature individual in Vulcan terms. Amanda closed her eyes and attempted a state of Vulcan meditation. But instead all the crutched years fled away, and Amanda felt herself mentally returning to her nineteenth year; when Sarek had first slipped the gold chain over her head.

She'd been terribly mature for her age. Brilliant, her family said. Some of her teachers had even said 'genius'. The kind of girl you gave sculpture to at Christmas---preferably ethnic---to be displayed later at the anthropology seminar she'd---God knew how!---ended up moderating.

Amanda, a very miserable young lady, rubbed the jade ring---Martin's last gift---on her finger, and stared through the dome at the sky. Someone coughed politely behind her. Turning, Amanda discovered that it was the Vulcan Ambassador using one more of 'your illogical human customs' to attract her attention.

Quickly she composed herself. No one wanted to be embarrassed by grief; Sarek had never wanted to see her feelings. "Sir?" she asked. Glancing at his clothing, Amanda decided that the Ambassador was really "Dressed to the nines" in some ceremonial garb. She'd often wondered where the Vulcans found time to invent and carry out

HOPE TO BE SPARED

Kraith AIB
J. Lichtenberg

It was on Starbase III that Sarsun and Scotty finally met again, to drink and yarn as old friends. About half way through the evening, the engineer found himself talking about the Melkotians and the weird time he'd had in their version of Tombstone, Arizona.

Since Melkotians, Schillians and Vulcans had only one thing in common, it was inevitable that the conversation should wander around toward telepathy. And since Sarsun had become the *Enterprise's* greatest living interpreter of Vulcans (with such blithe remarks as "It was just a bunch of Vulcans sitting around and gossiping and telling jokes.") it was equally inevitable that Scotty should find himself telling Sarsun of Spock's solution to the Melkotian hallucinations.

It was something he'd never told anyone before, but he rationalized that it was no breach of privacy to tell Sarsun. After all, the Schillian had been in sustained, deep telepathic linkage with Spock for weeks. There could be no secrets between them. And, what Scotty had experienced was only the briefest flash...a single frame out of a movie. The engineer had been reluctant to discuss it with anyone else only because of the aura of intense disturbance that had surrounded Spock's severing of that contact.

After another drink, Scotty found himself literally shaking with the urgency of his need to communicate his secret and in the warm comradeship of the bar, he asked the Schillian to join his mind and re-live that flash together with him.

...

Vulcan's high provinces
With chill welcome wind
To bid the young Kataytikhe
To camp upon their alopes.

With ebb of bright day's light
One ever apart, seeks out
The highest place in sight
To dwell on deepest thoughts.

Shrill of Qweark-horn blown
By mountain lads who herd
The hearty gubmendik
As did their distant ancestors.

Rich bell-banner symphony
Rebounding from peak to peak
Gather wedding celebrants
Onto time-hallowed ground.

Measured peal upon peal
Multitudes of chanting bells
Enough to set any heart
Asmolder, if not aflame.

Mountain Tribes, so different
Yet so much the same
In custom, tradition, and
.... .. biology.

This one apart called here
To be trained in Mountain
Lore and Liberty finds
So very much to...envy.

Yes. This he must admit
Within the sealed privacy,
Envy...and a shutting-out
From what ecstasy, he'll never know..?

At least such was the doubt
Of those who gave to him
A heretable, blended gene
And set upon him the name,
"Founder of Dynasties."

But might there yet arise
The ancient drive
To pass on the burden
Of his legacy.

He sincerely hopes not.

For to his father's kind
All ecstasy that can be known
Is of the sort that blooms
With cessation of...the agony.

...

Scotty took a deep, shuddering breath and looked up at the Schillian. For once, the aura of jolly comradeship that usually shrouded the amphibian was gone. All his eyelids were down and Scotty could read the deep disturbance in the way he held his head...or was that some wisep of lingering telepathic contact?

No, the engineer thought. The link had been snapped clean. Then what... Suddenly, Scotty gasped. The one other thing that Schillians and Vulcans shared was a profound reticence about sex. The shock washed through him like a douche of ice-water, leaving him suddenly cold-sober and ashamed.

"Ssarsun, I...didna'..."

The Schillian relaxed gradually, but spoke stiffly, "There is no need to apologize, Scotty. Your need to share was great. Better that it should be I who received this. You did well."

"I never thought about you..."

"It doesn't matter. What matters is that you feel better now."

It wasn't a question, but a statement, and Scotty realized he did feel better. It was as if he had been a magnetic bottle containing a plasma ten thousand degrees too hot. The inevitable rupture had occurred, the pressure was released, and the wound healed, instantly. He took a deep breath, essayed a tremulous smile and said, "Have a bottle of Schlugtamer on me. You've earned it!"



Kraith IB

J. Lichtenberg

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The gently curving main corridor of Starbase. III was choked with a crowd of spectators all craning their necks for a glimpse of some central spectacle.

The Starbase itself was an artificial planetoid orbiting in interplanetary space at a crossroads of interstellar trade. It housed, among other things, a space-dock, a luxury hotel, and five levels of warehouses and offices leased to various companies.

At the moment, two ships were in orbit, the Enterprise and a tramp freighter. A third was approaching cautiously as passenger liners are wont to do.

At the end of the main corridor, the turbolift doors opened and the Enterprise's Chief Surgeon strode out followed by the Chief Engineer.

Ten yards from the knot of spectators, McCoy stopped, arms akimbo. "What is it, a groll-fight or a conspiracy?"

Scanning the sea of backs before them, Scott said, "I dinna know, but it must be at least 'interesting'...there are five Vulcans over there."

McCoy followed his eye, "But not Spock."

"Aye, Doctor, not Spock," agreed the Engineer. "There's Ssarsun. Come on."

"Hold it, Scotty. Jim said we were to meet the shuttle and see if Spock is on it. If he doesn't turn up within the hour, Jim will have to report him AWOL."

Scotty waved a hand. "Look at this crowd, Mon! A wee tribble couldn't squeeze through!"

McCoy had to concede the justice of that, and, as he wavered, Scotty struck off toward the Schillian. The doctor had no choice but to follow.

As they neared the familiar figure, McCoy again admired the

amphibian's grace. In spite of the awkward Star Fleet uniform, the man-proportioned body seemed as at home on land as it did in water.

Ssarsun turned away from the spectacle that held the crowd's attention. "I thank you, Doctor. It is always pleasing to be greeted by a complimentary thought."

McCoy snorted.

"Don't mind him, Laddie. He doesn't like having his mind read."

"Scotty, by now you ought to know I never read minds...but I can't help hearing thoughts directed at me even by a psi-null like our esteemed physician." Seeing their discomfort, he changed the subject. "You would like an explanation?"

Between heads, McCoy could just see two Vulcans faced-off in the middle of the cleared circle. One appeared to be a spice merchant. At least his sample case and tunic were embossed with the trademark of the Kevas and Trillium Company Limited. The other looked like many Federation travelers.

They seemed to be arguing, though it's sometimes hard to tell with Vulcans. "Yes, we would like an explanation."

"The merchant," said Ssarsun, "has just made a rather large delivery to one of the transshipping agents here on Starbase III. The other is a forensic-botanist, S'ru by name, who is employed by the agents to certify their merchandise. They took delivery of Salnar's shipment in S'ru's absence and, when he returned, they told him that Salnar had said the Kevas is one-half to two-thirds non-Vulcan in origin."

"When S'ru caught up with Salnar, right here, he insisted that the consignment be taken back for proper labeling. Salnar argued that a difference which makes no difference is no difference. S'ru retorted that it does make a difference to Vulcans who depend on the Kevas for trace metals which are not present in the non-Vulcan grown product. Salnar claimed that since the consignment is bound for a planet where it will be used by non-Vulcans to flavor meat, there's no need to specify the percentage of native grown product in the mixture."

"Then S'ru threatened a false-advertising suit against Salnar's company and Salnar promptly challenged S'ru to zyto. They're in the process of hammering out the rules for the duel now."

"Duel!" chorused McCoy and Scotty.

"...of words," assured the telepath. "It's much quicker than prosecuting a case through Federation Court and the outcome is apt to be more meaningful to a Vulcan."

"You mean like a debate?" said McCoy.

"Precisely. Actually, zyto is the Vulcan version of a barroom brawl, a spelling bee, and a hootenany all rolled into one."

Scotty was more accustomed to the Schillian's picturesque interpretations of Vulcan culture than McCoy, so while the doctor stared open-mouthed at the amphibian's unreadable face, Scotty asked, "How does it work?"

"One person quotes from the basic source literature. His opponent must correctly identify the quotation and then counter it with another. Selecting the right counter requires a deep understanding of the contexts of both sources. The true champion is able to lead his opponent into espousing a view opposite to his declared stand. It gets really fascinating with five or more participants. But with two, it's very much like chess, except that it has the general popularity of space-polo."

Glancing anxiously at the time, McCoy asked, "How long does a duel last?" Jim would be pacing a trough in the deck if they didn't report soon.

Ssarsun listened to the proceedings for a moment, and then said, "Ah, I see. They've decided on only one round. That means eight quotations by each of them. A maximum of about twenty minutes. Listen, somebody has turned up the universal translators for the crowd."

There was a general babbling among the spectators and then they settled down to listen to the zyto match.

Salnar, the merchant, faced his challenger and began, "Greediness is immodest; self-sacrifice, illogical."

Ssarsun whispered, "Yes, A classical opening. But not too imaginative."

S'ru answered immediately, "That is from the Book of Life. But also, 'The honor of the father is the glory of the son.'"

"Touche!" said Ssarsun.

Salnar fielded that one smoothly, "Book of Sources: But also, 'He who serves the needs of another may demand an equivalent in return!'"

"Crafty weasel! I'll bet he doesn't use his own Kevas." Ssarsun stood between the doctor and Scotty but a little behind them so that his sotto voce comments didn't reach any farther than their ears. But McCoy couldn't help chuckling and earned a dark look from Salnar.

A moment later S'ru answered, "Book of Sources: But also, 'He who seeks only justice finds only equity.'"

"Yes, of course," said Ssarsun, "I never would have thought of that. Total recall is helpful in zyto, but the champion player is the one with the ability to associate innovatively."

Salnar said, "Book of Books: But also, 'What greater truth can be spoken than that which is desired?'"

"That," said Ssarsun, "opens a whole new area."

S'ru barely hesitated, "Book of Fragments: But also; 'A truth may be selected to fit any needs.'"

"Book of Logic;" Salnar identified and then thought hard before replying, "What man can judge the needs of his fellows?"

"That's it!" said Ssarsun. "Now S'ru will have to concede."

But the forensic-botanist had other ideas. He stared off into space for the full time allowed and then identified, "Book of Life: But also, 'The necessities of thy life must be provided by thy hand; the needs of thy son can be fulfilled only by the community.' Reference. The commentary of T'Kri on the analysis of S'A'Adshl."

McCoy didn't need Ssarsun to interpret the pole-axed expression on Salnar's face. It took the merchant fully thirty seconds to recover, but then he began to think and at the last moment supplied, "That is from the Book of Sources. But also, 'The seven blossoms of the ahkor are white... while the eighth is yellow. Is the eighth a blossom of the ahkor or is it a fruit of the li'id?'"

Ssarsun said, "The man's a genius! I wonder if he could be in the right?"

McCoy started to snort his disbelief, but S'ru's answer cut him off. "Book of Logic: But also, 'If the father claims that and the grandfather teaches another view while both disagree with seven of the Great Ones, the child must search for his own truth!'"

Ssarsun hissed, "Classic retort. He had no choice."

"Book of Joys," countered Salnar smoothly, "But also, if a man seeks to purchase a draft kovern and the man has need to sell a stud Kovron and the price be agreed...the bargain is fair!"

Ssarsun placed a web-fingered hand on Scotty's shoulder. "He's been maneuvering toward this all along! I should have seen it!"

From the look on S'ru's face, McCoy deduced that the botanist hadn't seen it either. But finally, S'ru said, "Book of Imperatives: But also, 'That-which-lives is a guest in the House of All-Creation.'"

"Touche!" said Ssarsun. "Now Salnar is trapped into Imperatives. He can't win."

Sourly, the merchant made the only reply available, "Book of Joys: But also, 'A guest who disrupts the other guests of the House is like a man who eats the flesh of his brother.'"

S'ru picked that up, "Book of Imperatives: But also, 'A guest must give a greater value than he receives or no bargain can be binding.'"

Unaccountably, Salnar paused to think and Ssarsun coached softly, "Book of Imperatives: But also, 'The value of an object lies in its relationship to its possessor and nowhere else.' Salnar has lost. He may as well concede."

But just as S'ru was about to claim his victory, Salnar held up a hand, "Yes, that is from the Book of Imperatives. But also, is it not written that, 'He who barter coins for goods must know that coins cannot be eaten nor can their worth be told.'"

The amphibian gave one of his soft, gurgly chuckles, "Well, gentlemen, now you see I'm no match for a Vulcan!"

After considerable thought, S'ru selected his final retort, "Book of Logic: But also, 'The measure of the merchant is his ability to dance among the random factors and emerge unscathed.'"

McCoy thought for a moment that Salnar was about to claim victory, but then a stunned look came over the merchant's face as he identified the source of S'ru's last statement, "Book of Fragments."

And then the two adversaries just stared at each other in obvious consternation.

Scotty turned to Ssarsun, "What happened?"

"Draw. No winner. No loser. Most unusual."

Finally Salnar pulled his eyes from the botanist and began to search the crowd. McCoy followed his gaze and noted that he was ticking off the other Vulcans scattered about, obviously looking for someone in particular.

McCoy said, "What are they going to do?"

"They need either a Daughter or a Guardian who is empowered to make a Final Interpretation by which all must abide."

"You mean," said Scott, "like a judge in a civil suit that can't be settled out of court?"

"More or less."

Suddenly there was a stir on the far side of the circle as if someone had just arrived. A small knot of Vulcans at the rear of the crowd ejected one of their number into the cleared circle.

McCoy identified, "Spock!"

Ssarsun placed a restraining hand on the doctor's arm. "Quiet. This should be very interesting."

McCoy's first impulse was to rush to an intercom and call Jim, but then he remembered his communicator was set on the special frequency. So when he reported the First Officer's presence, the Captain's formal reply couldn't hide his delight.

Then McCoy turned back to the argument to find the two contestants

going through a rapid-fire repetition of their battle for Spock's benefit.

When they finished, the First Officer thought for a moment and said, "Fling wide the gates of reason and admit the half-minded to your counsel, for their perceptions may be dulled but their power to destroy is multi-fold greater than that of all the Sarek combined." Then he looked pointedly at S'ru.

The botanist answered, "Book of Imperatives."

Spock conceded that with one eyebrow and turned to Salmar, "Deceive the ignorant in his innocence and then teaches him the art of deception."

"Book of Sources."

Spock turned back to S'ru. McCoy didn't need Sarsun's aid to see it was a sudden-death playoff. Spock said, "The foundations of strife are erected on the sands of deception. The walls of peace are built of the pebbles of honesty."

S'ru identified, "Book of Sources."

Sarsun said, "It's plain which way Spock has decided. But this could take all day. He's got to stump both of them on the same quote. Then his interpretation stands unchallenged."

Spock turned to Salmar and said, "The Outworks and Battlements of Top-of-World were shattered by the silence of wisdom."

Salmar took the full time allotted and then said, "That is either a mis-quote or a non-squitter."

Silently, Spock turned to S'ru who said, "Negative. It is from the Book of Fragments. But it is the T'Veril amendment according to the Commentaries of S'F'F'ashi."

"Correct," said Spock. "But also, 'Let the stranger who feasts at your table know the value of the meal.'"

S'ru looked blurr. "That is not from the Book of Imperatives. I do not recognize it."

Spock turned to Salmar who didn't even claim his thinking time but said, "Nor do I, Spock."

"It is from Sural's Construct. 9:54:27."

The two adversaries looked at each other, eyes glazed as they combed through the text in question. Then, almost in chorus they said, "Non-squitter."

Spock shook his head. "The commentary of T'Kri is pertinent. The decision seems clear to me."

Salmar blinked, "Concede."

S'ru added, "Concede. Deceit?"

"Let it be recorded," said Spock, "that now and henceforth all botanical tradegoods be labeled both in bulk and in retail quantities with complete nutritional assay if they must also bear Class I or II Federation Clearance Stamps."

Salmar turned to Spock, "I rejoice in the precision of your logic and I thank you."

S'ru added, "As do I."

"Then," said Spock, "I leave you with one further thought. The Flame is the total analog of All-Existence. It is destruction and creation. It is chemical and micro-quantum-mechanical. It is a functional servant of intelligence and ruthless master. It exists without being diminished. Like All-Existence, The Flame can be studied for a lifetime and never be fully understood. If intelligent life exists in the universe for no other purpose, it can do no less than to combine the resources of all its generations to the fullest understanding of The Flame."

Puzzled, Salmar said, "I do not..."

"It is from the Commentaries of Suvil. My Teacher."

S'ru said, "May His Memory Bring Peace."

Spock held up his hand, "And May You Live Long and Prosper."

The two former adversaries answered, and, shoulder-to-shoulder departed, apparently the best of friends. Spock came toward his ship-mates as the crowd disappeared.

Scott said, "That's all there is to it?"

"Yes," said Sarsun, "It is binding on all Vulcans now."

"Well, I'll be a Rigilian Snowman," said McCoy.

"I hope not," observed Spock. "I have acquired a splinter which I believe you might be able to remove."

McCoy treated that with the silence it deserved.

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their many rituals.

"I have a proposal to make," the Vulcan said ponderously. "It will sound odd, but I shall explain the logic of my reasoning."

Amanda listened idly to Sarek and the pattern of a nearby honey locust at the same time. It was better, she had found, to hear the Ambassador's ideas out. It was, in fact, impossible to avoid it.

"Control of the emotions is something even a human can learn. You are now no longer bound by a betrothal," he said bluntly. "This means that you are free to make a new disposition of your life."

How had he heard about that, Amanda wondered, as a lump formed involuntarily in her throat. Oh, well, Vulcans didn't mean to be brutal. The direct, heartless form of address was all they knew.

"I suggest that you marry me," Sarek continued. "You will have the full status of an Ambassador's wife, our children will carry on the tradition of a highly respected blood-line, and you will be given the Peace of Vulcan."

Amanda's mouth dropped open. She shut it hurriedly. Vulcans didn't joke! Somehow, the crazy wonderland situation seemed, temporarily, at least, more palatable than reality. "Why?" she asked.

"You are an admirable specimen of human female. You are young enough to be trainable, have an excellent mind, and learn quickly in every field. Some in my family will disapprove, as I am a kaytaytkh of the first rank and have certain genetic obligations. However, the union could be fertile."

Obviously the old, typical cliché questions were not going to be sufficient. "Why any human?" she rephrased.

Sarek frowned infinitesimally. "According to my formulization of the third corollary of Nome, our marriage would significantly improve my grasp of histo-sentient multiplicity. It is difficult to explain fully without tokiel symbolism or the High Vulcan tongue, however."

Amanda hesitated, trying to figure out a Vulcan-polite way to say "No!" or "You're crazy!" or "Damn!". Observing this, Sarek removed from his pocket a tiny gold charm on a chain, and said, "This is not a betrothal gift. It is the Flame of Vulcan, and it provides peace."

He touched her forehead, and a tingling sensation told her that she was being telepathically probed. It was rather awful, not to know what he was looking at; she shut her eyes and shuddered. When she opened them again, a red spark danced within the core of the charm. Sarek damped it somehow before he slipped the chain over her head. Stepping back, pleased, he said, "You will consider my suggestion," and left.

Amanda slid her hand down the chain until she reached the Flame's carved receptacle, lifted it, and pressed it to her lips. The charm emanated a strange, achingly alluring calm. If only she could grasp the sensation, instead of merely touching it!

She smiled, molasses-slow, an entirely new expression in her dreamy eyes. Perhaps she would accept Sarek's proposal, after all. His logic was, no doubt, impeccable.

Any plan can be logical, if you are willing to sacrifice enough for it. So they were married, according to the precepts of Vulcan tradition. On her wedding night, Amanda discovered an unexpectedly strong passion for her Vulcan husband, and more pleasure than she had anticipated from his alien touch. And found at the same time that the Vulcan sexual union, the pon farr, was limited to seven year intervals.

"Why?" Amanda subvocalized, frustrated. If Sarek heard her, he would be perfectly willing to explain in great, and logical, detail.

But she already knew the answer by heart. "It is the Vulcan way." But it wasn't fair. For an instant she almost determined to argue it, and several other things, out with Sarek. Then she sighed, and reached for the gold Flame-charm.

It seemed to her that it always ended that way. Living on Vulcan, being human, had hurt. But she had always found calmness and joy glowing warmly on the end of a chain.

She looked out at the heat shimmering landscape, feeling so separate from the pudgy middle-aged woman who was trying to be Vulcan. The girl-Amanda examined her home, the Vulcan clothing she was wearing, the alien seeds rubbed absently in her hand, and found them strange.

Who could have guessed that at the death of the Flame, she would be thrown back emotionally to her girlhood? Her whole married life seemed vague, the opposite of deja vu, as if it had been viewed through a dancing flame.

Some things, it was true, were impossible to get across to Sarek, but other things you couldn't hide. It wasn't long before he noticed her wondering glances at familiar things. Not long after that she confessed the whole incident.

"Fascinating," he murmured. "What response to the problem do you consider best, my wife?"

Amanda's heart leaped in response to a craving that had been steadily growing since her moment of revelation. She thought suddenly that she would die if she did not find her youth again. Schooling her face into impassive lines, Amanda said carefully, "Perhaps... I should return to Earth for a time. It was there I accepted the Peace... perhaps on Earth I will learn to understand it."

"You would go alone," Sarek said thoughtfully. "My work keeps me here. And I do not follow your logic. Still, it may be the best, if you do not stay long. You have permission."

That was the moment of leave-taking, Amanda thought later, although Sarek escorted her scrupulously to the space-transport and supervised the loading of her luggage. Then he went back to the home of his fathers, to his astrophysics, his logic, and his duties, and waited placidly for her return.

A

MATTER

OF

PRIORITY

Kraith ID

Anna Mary Hall

The planet was dying. In a short time, using the scale by which planets measure time, the last of the moisture and atmosphere that supported life would escape into space. Then the only changes would be those wrought by forces from space; the slow weathering caused by alternating heat and cold; the more sudden changes inflicted by meteor bombardment. But all that was in the future.

The changes made by the present visitors from space were minimal. However, even these minute changes were resented by a large four-legged herbivore. He was the lead male of a small herd, one of the remnants of the herds which had ranged from coast to coast. Now they huddled around the remaining sources of drinkable water and did not know their real danger.

Lt. Leslie viewed the male's sharp hooves with respect and watched him closely. Leslie checked to see that his phaser was set on heavy stun. He was careful to remain between the animal and the other members of the landing party.

When the animal charged, Leslie shouted a warning. He took careful aim and pressed the firing stud. Nothing happened. Since Leslie hadn't allowed time to dodge, he and his phaser were badly trampled before the nearest person stunned the animal.

Leslie was beamed back to the Enterprise and his worried compatriots continued the survey. Just before they finished, Yeoman Barrows slipped while descending a steep bank. She tumbled to the bottom much more quickly than she had intended. She was unhurt, but her tricorder, which had been pinned beneath her, was damaged. It made horrible grating noises and refused to either play back or record.

The gloomy party beamed back to the ship where they were met with the news that Leslie would recover. They were in a very lighthearted mood when they made their survey report (necessary because of the broken tricorder.) The scientific observations were accurate enough, but somehow it came to be recorded that Barrow's tricorder expired "under stress exceeding design specifications."

It was assumed that Leslie's phaser was broken when it was trampled. Leslie was the only one who knew it had been trampled because it was broken. The Enterprise was well on her way to the next stop by the time

Leslie was well enough to talk, and, since no one knew anything unusual had occurred, he wasn't questioned about the incident. He didn't mention it himself. He knew Barrows had caught the whole action on her tricorder.

At the next planet, the landing party had been down less than twenty minutes when they requested in calm but slightly garbled terms to be beamed back to the ship. Scotty complied, pulling the transporter control toward him with slightly more force than necessary. It hit the end of the slot and broke off in his hand. He regarded it dispassionately, the favored it with a few carefully selected words that Kyle later swore blistered its surface.

Scotty and Kyle replaced the handle and completed the beaming up. The landing party had a broken phaser, two nonworking communicators, and a tricorder that was emitting faint tendrils of smoke.

Scotty regarded it with amazement. "There's no way for it to do that!" He took it gingerly. "What ha you been doing to the wee thing, lass?"

Yeoman Jamal was near laughter from Scotty's concern for the small machine. "All I did was turn it on, sir. And I did shake it, once, when it wouldn't work, but not very hard," she hastened to explain when he glared at her.

"Where were these instruments stored?"

"They all came from the locker out in the corridor," reported Lt. Johnson. "I picked them up myself."

"Kyle, run a complete check on the transporter. The rest of you, get all the equipment from that locker. We're going to find out what's going on around here."

An hour later a perplexed Scott sought out Kirk and Spock on the bridge. "Captain, Mr. Spock, we have a problem." He held out his hand flat, revealing a communicator, normal in all outward appearances. "Mr. Spock, what would happen if you took this and squeezed it as hard as you can?"

"It would be crushed," Spoc said patiently.

Uhura had swung her chair around and was watching the action by the captain's chair. "Suppose Uhura tried the same thing?" asked Scott.

"I'd hurt my fingers, Scotty," she said.

He tossed her the communicator. "Try it," and his tone of voice made it more than a suggestion.

Uhura closed her hand and squeezed. She opened her fist to stare at shards of plastic and gleaming metal components.

Spock stirred the mess with a careful finger. "Interesting. Is this the only one?"

Scott shook his head. "Every instrument in the locker by the main transporter room is like this. I have a general check started. We'll see if anything else has been affected."

"Captain, with your permission, I'll begin checking for cause," Spock announced as he left with Scott.

Kirk nodded his agreement to Spock's back and returned to the report he was checking.

Uhura moved to answer a beep from her board. Doing it left-handed required enough concentration that she spilled some of the pieces of communicator on the floor. With an exasperated sigh she crouched to retrieve them, then straightened with a softly uttered, but heartfelt, "Ekos!"

"What?" Kirk asked, turning to face her.

"Sorry, sir. I didn't mean to say it out loud. But look," she twisted and pointed to the back of her thigh, "a run. And that's the third one in three days."

Kirk looked, his enjoyment spoiled by some fact that was clamoring to be recognized. "Uhura, aren't those hose made of the same basic material as the communicators?"

With a look of startled concern she agreed.

"Better get those down to Spock, then check...no, I'll do that. Go."

She went, dumping the communicator at the first opportunity. After replacing the hose she paused. Spock had not mentioned which lab he was headed for. She had no desire to wander from one to another looking for him. She flipped on the intercom. "Computer on."

"Working."

"Voice check. Is First Officer Spock employing your help?"

"Yes."

"His present location?"

"Deck 3, Lab C."

Kirk skimmed through the rest of the report, scribbled his initials on it, and moved over to Spock's station. Lt. Brent started to move, but Kirk stopped him. "Don't bother, Frank. I don't need the scanner. I just have a question for the computer. Computer on."

"Working," came the stilted reply.

"Check records for a recent increase in use of replacement parts."

"Checking. Such an increase does exist."

"When did it become apparent?"

"Five days ago."

Kirk glared at the speaker. The computer had known something was wrong for five days. But no one had asked the correct question, so the information had merely accumulated. If they would just make computers with a little initiative. He checked that thought abruptly. He didn't like computers with minds of their own, either.

"That would be right after Leslie got hurt," commented Brent.

"You might check the survey reports from that planet. See if anything unusual turns up." Kirk didn't consider it too likely. Normally they poked into some strange places. In the months since Sarek's disappearance and presumed death they had checked any world where a Vulcan could possibly survive. He had realized Vulcans were less breakable than humans, but some of the worlds Spock had considered possibilities were well nigh unbelievable. Some of them were much likelier sources of trouble.

"If you don't find anything there work your way backwards, stop by stop. There will be information coming in from the various labs. It might give you an idea of what you're looking for."

Only the senior officers met in the briefing room to discuss the situation. Several hours had passed and Kirk had been informed that enough preliminary reports were in to define the problem. "What have you found out?" he prompted Spock.

"Something is breaking down the heterocyclic unsaturated halogenated polymers that are used in the ship. The damage is wide spread, but superficial, as of now."

Scott reported next. "The check turned up instruments broken, ready to break at the first touch, just barely weakened, and completely unaffected. We aren't finished, but one possible clue has emerged. There are three areas with unusually high breakage: the main transporter room, one of the storage areas in engineering, and the security watch room."

Spock's eyebrow rose at this information. "What does the computer make of it?"

Scott shook his head. "Insufficient data to establish a significant trend. But I think it is significant."

McCoy spoke before Spock had a chance to comment. "Life Sciences has nothing but negative reports. No change in the health of the crew has been noted. We haven't found any organisms not usually present on board, but we're running cultures anyway."

"Any speculations?"

Spock considered, then submitted, "All three locations of high incidence are near the outer hull. There isn't enough data to know if that has any importance, but if it does, the cause might be some form of radiation."

"Source?"

Spock turned to the computer. "Assume the Enterprise had been exposed to a large amount of an unknown type of radiation within the last two months. List most probable sources of such radiation."

"Star Grisson 72. Klingon Battle Cruiser Korab."

"Basis for choices?"

"Star Grisson 72 is of a type not studied closely before. Unknowns possible. Four days spent in vicinity."

"Korab is identified as enemy vessel. Enemies seek to do damage. Korab paced this vessel for 3.7 standard days while both were paralleling Klingon-Federation border."

"Any other information that we need to take into consideration?"

"Aye, Captain," replied Scotty. "Brent reminded me of this. About two weeks ago we made a brief unscheduled stop. We loaned a group of Federation scientists some equipment. Theirs kept breaking."

"The planet would have been certified safe...", began McCoy.

"All that really means is that you're not going to drop dead from breathing the air a few minutes. We've proved that often enough," interrupted Kirk. "How long had they been there?"

"Almost two years," Scotty said. "I was in the transporter room when Jensen brought up the list of what they needed. We served on the same ship once, so he stopped and told me his troubles while the equipment was assembled. Things just started falling apart about a month before."

"If we'd been exposed to something there our equipment shouldn't be showing any effect for 23 months," McCoy figured.

"That is not necessarily true, Doctor," Spock stated.

McCoy started to respond, then limited himself to a nod and a smile, "You're right, Spock. Even if it is some form of radiation, a ship would receive different amounts than a planet surface."

"The radiation is only a theory, Doctor, based on very few facts."

"How long have heterocyclic unsat..., halomers been in general use?" inquired Kirk.

Spock slanted one eyebrow. "Vulcan has been using them some five standard centuries."

"Earth about two and a half," decided Scotty. "Couldna' say for the other Federation races, but they've been independently developed many places."

"No trouble such as this ever reported before?"

"No," agreed his experts.

Kirk considered his next question carefully, then asked, "Just how much trouble might we be in?"

"Quite a lot," Spock said. "Except for the outer hull, the main framework, and wires carrying currents, the Enterprise is 87.3% synthetic materials, 92.1% of which are halomers of one type or another."

Kirk blinked. He hadn't realized they were that dependent on one class of material. "Damage control had better be alerted. They are going to be quite busy, it seems. Scotty, has everyone been warned to keep an especially close watch on vital systems?" At Scotty's nod he continued, "Then we can concentrate on finding the cause."

"The labs are working. There will be more facts available soon," Spock stated.

"We have one more assignment, a data pick-up from some border sensors, before heading back to Starbase XII. In your opinions, does the situation warrant a change in these plans?"

McCoy shook his head.

Scotty frowned. He felt this was more serious than the others seemed to be considering it, but he had no facts to substantiate the feeling. After only a brief pause he agreed with McCoy.

"There should be no immediate danger to the ship. The problem can be studied whichever direction the ship is travelling. It will even give us a few extra days to work on the problem," Spock said.

If I didn't know better, I'd have suspected him of joking, Kirk thought as he headed back to the bridge.

During the next few days facts did accumulate, but they were not very useful. X-ray diffraction patterns showed that the molecular structure of the halomers was being changed. The molecules weren't just coming apart; the bonds within the individual molecules were failing.

The trouble spread throughout the ship, and the patterns of its spread eliminated radiation as a possible cause. Where humans went, equipment broke. The more a piece of equipment was handled, assuming the width of the halomer involved remained constant, the more likely it was to break.

Nothing broke in Spock's quarters. Equipment used only by him did

not break. Even the panel of the library computer required fewer replacements than other bridge equipment.

With radiation eliminated, the search for some foreign substance or organism on board ship intensified.

The crew had at first treated the situation as a joke, albeit a bad one. After the first injuries occurred a certain air of caution crept in. It was rapidly being replaced by outright alarm as conditions worsened.

After McCoy finished treating the acid burns on Ensign McQuady's legs he decided something could be done about this type of injury. (McQuady had been splashed by acid when the bottle of it she was carrying came apart in her hands. Normally her hose would have protected her legs, but the hose developed runs so quickly that the women had stopped wearing them.) He tracked down Scotty in auxiliary control examining the latest piece of broken equipment.

McCoy leaned against the wall and waited. It was a technical discussion and largely incomprehensible to him, so he listened to the voices rather than the words. He reluctantly admitted to himself that he could hear strain in them. In the four days since the problem had been defined Damage Control had been rapidly losing ground. With no improvement in sight, overwork and discouragement were beginning to affect them.

Scott left as soon as the method of procedure was decided. As he headed back for his office McCoy fell in step with him.

"You're getting a little tense, Scotty."

Scott glanced at him, then considered the statement. "Aye," he admitted. "It's almost as though she's tryin' to keep us from helping. You try to fix something and the tool you need to use breaks in your hand. Have you ever had a patient like that?"

McCoy smiled, remembering a young lady named Eileen and a right cross that had helped cure her. "Yes, I've run into patients like that. But I'm afraid the method of treatment can't be adapted to machines. However, I have a problem I need some help with and you're the man who can give it."

Uhura removed the earpiece and stared at it suspiciously. She'd already had four major problems with her board, but the earpiece was metal and should be trustworthy. "Very well, Doctor, I'll inform them." She cleared her throat. "Captain, Mr. Spock, everyone, the Senior Ship's Surgeon requests that all bridge personnel report to Sickbay when they go off duty. He requires our help?"

The party was in full swing when they arrived. On McCoy's shelves and overflowing to the desk top was a truly cosmopolitan collection of beverages. Kirk accepted a Fingale's Folly from McCoy, plucked a canape from a tray carried by Nurse Chapel. He sampled them both, then asked, "Why?"

Scott appeared out of the crowd. He handed a small glass of Saurian brandy to Spock. "The Enterprise," he offered as a toast and drained his glass. The others drank, even Spock, though his was a mere diplomatic wetting of the lips.

"Why?" repeated Kirk to McCoy.

"We need the glass containers for use in the labs. There are substances there that I do not care to have sloshing around in suddenly breakable containers."

"Where did all this come from?" asked a delighted Uhura.

"Scotty and I provided a lot of it, but we think we've got every bottle on board and we're going to empty them tonight."

"Couldn't one of the labs..." Chekov began, then answered his own question. "They do have more important things to do than make glass containers."

Kirk sipped his drink, letting the party swirl around him. If he concentrated he could forget the trouble and pretend everything was all right for a few minutes. He was considering having his glass refilled when a raised voice attracted his attention. He worked his way toward it.

"I did not!" The slender girl in blue was obviously angry. The two ensigns she had backed into the corner outweighed her by 200 pounds, at least, but they seemed to be the ones who needed help.

"Which one of you doltish, fumble-fingered, infantile cretins did it this time?" The ensigns cringed. They seemed cowed not by her rank, or their guilt, but simply by her blazing display of righteous indignation. "Come on! Speak up you lily-livered addebrained shiftless louts! Who did it?"

"Perhaps if you gave them a chance to speak?" Spock suggested quietly from behind Kirk.

Lt. Patz clamped her lips together and forced herself into a similitude of calm. In a pleasant voice she asked, "Well?"

The ensigns, still looking innocent to Kirk's experienced eye, made no use of their chance to speak. Struck dumb again, this time by their high ranking amused audience, they merely shook their heads.

Kirk, finally taking pity on them, asked, "Lt. Patz, what is it you think they've done?"

Dori, aware for the first time who was standing behind her, turned to face Kirk. "I shouldn't have started this here, Captain," she said contritely. "I'm sorry. It's just...they should realize there's a time for fun and a time to settle down and work. Four times I've started a test culture of this one strain of Staphylococcus. Each time, just as the culture is growing well, the plates dissolve."

"Lieutenant, we didn't..." one of the ensigns began.

"Why do you think they have something to do with it, Dori?" asked McCoy.

Dori's brown eyes widened in honest surprise. "The grapevine on board evidently isn't as efficient as I had judged it to be." She paused, gave a sigh of regret, and didn't tell McCoy and Kirk her version, but what they needed to know. "It stems back to several overly officious actions on my part right after I joined the ship. And some well thought-out guerilla tactics on their part to show me the 'right' way of doing it. They have never interfered with any important work. I let my temper get the better of me. I owe them both an apology."

"It happens to the best of us," McCoy said blandly, eliciting a wide grin from Kirk.

The excitement evidently over, the small group that had collected began to drift off in search of fresh drinks. Dori started to leave with a muttered, "If you'll excuse me..."

"Wait a moment before you go. The test you were running. What made you think there was some outside agent affecting it?"

"There hasn't been any observable reason for what happens. The first time I thought I'd found what we were looking for, but had the sense to check before telling anyone. Nothing but plain old staph bacteric."

"Thank you, Miss Patz. Go get a drink; enjoy yourself." Kirk aimed her toward Sulu and applied gentle but firm pressure. "Sulu, take care of her."

"Lones," he called to McCoy, collected Spock with a tilt of his head and worked his way to the door and into the relative quiet of the examining room. "How capable is she?"

"Lt. Patz is one of our most promising young bacteriologists. If she said the culture was set up properly, it was," McCoy explained.

"Most promising?"

"As her own statement showed, she still has a lot to learn, but she knows it. As far as her work goes...she hasn't had much experience working with complete unknowns. She was stuck in some lab running quality control tests on drugs purchased by Starfleet."

"Is there a chance she has found what we're looking for and didn't realize it?"

"It's worth checking!" McCoy plowed back into the crowd. He reclaimed Dori from Sulu, turning his own duties over to him at the same time.

A confused Dori Patz found herself walking swiftly down the corridor between the Captain and Chief Medical Officer, and closely followed by the First Officer. Emboldened by her one drink, she considered stopping and demanding an explanation, but then she thought again and didn't.

"Why are you certain this is the correct strain of staphylococcus, Miss Patz?" inquired Kirk.

"I checked it under the microscope. It has the proper growth rate and pattern. The things that should kill it, do," she listed quickly.

"If the bacteria has changed, it seems to be a minor, internal affair. That will require slow, painstaking testing to pinpoint," Spock said.

"We only need to know if this is what's causing the trouble. Time can be taken to discover precisely what's wrong after we have it under control."

"If I may make a suggestion, Doctor. A comparison with the stock culture might..."

"Of course! Dori, you get the bacteria out of the freezer. Spock and I'll prepare the growth media. Jim, we'll know in a couple of hours."

"Hours?"

"Bacteria will only grow so fast. We'll call you, Captain." McCoy hadn't stopped work. When Dori returned with a freeze-dried sample of the stock culture they were ready. A second flask containing the bacteria Dori had been working with was prepared. When Kirk called back they had two flasks holding cloudy liquid to show for their work.

McCoy explained as Dori worked. "She's mixing some of the bacteria she's been working with into the flask with the stock bacteria. If there has been a change in the bacteria, the liquid should clear as the bacteria die. There will be a 30 to 40 minute delay before any change is evident."

At the specified time the solution cleared. Kirk drew a deep breath. Now he had something he could fight, even if it was only a bacteria.

The next days were hectic ones aboard the Enterprise. All possible means of killing the bacteria were employed. Antibiotics were blown through the ventilation system. Radiation was employed where it would not harm the crew. Ultraviolet lights were used. Antibiotics were added to the water used for washing. Finally, to the indignation of a good part of the crew, they scrubbed down the ship with antibiotics.

Things continued to break during this time. Equipment already weakened gave out under the slightest strain.

Kirk attempted to call the bridge as soon as he woke. He wasn't really too surprised when the intercom failed to respond. It was a wonder it hadn't quit sooner. He dressed hurriedly and went straight to the bridge. He received two shocks immediately. The helm and navigation positions were unmanned, and Uhura wasn't wearing a uniform.

She was barefooted. Her sleeveless dress was a bright turquoise of the same length as her uniform, but made of some thin clingy material.

She had her usual swinging earrings, and had added a thin gold armlet to each arm.

"Good morning, Captain," She glanced at her costume. "The clothing processor was an overnight casualty. This outfit is real silk; it isn't going to fall to pieces." She followed his gaze down to her bare feet. "They are bare by doctor's orders. I wore a blister on my heel. MBenga said to go without shoes till it was healed. You don't mind, do you?"

Kirk shook his head as he settled cautiously into his chair. The arm had been replaced, but none of the buttons worked. "What's the status this morning, Uhura?"

"We are travelling at Warp 2 in the general direction of Starbase XII. Neither direction nor speed can be changed at the moment, though Mr. Scott is working on it.

"Subspace radio is still out and the intercoms are inoperable. Turbo-elevators are mostly working. Engineering advises their use whenever possible," Uhura glanced up from the checklist she was consulting. "The ladders are not reliable. There have been two serious falls."

"How serious?"

"A broken leg and a badly wrenched shoulder," she replied without looking at her paper. "Communicators sealed in some plastic that the lab says won't be affected by the bacteria are available in limited quantities. They are reserved for emergency use. Messenger service is operating to all parts of the ship."

"Where is Spock?"

"In his quarters. The library computer got to the point where he was spending more time fixing it than using it."

"How do we know our direction and speed? Most of the sensors leading from the hull to the computer were out last night. Spock thought they would all be gone by this morning."

"They are. Hansen and Chekov hooked a 'corder into a sensor lead just where it comes through the hull. They take the tapes to Spock, who feeds them to the computer.

"I have a list accurate as of twenty minutes ago on every system not working. I've mentioned the important ones, but if..."

"No, Uhura. I don't need to hear it all. Why are we still co-ordinating from here?" he asked, looking around the almost deserted bridge.

"No one gave me the authority to move to auxiliary, sir," she said formally.

"Seal the bridge when you leave. It'll be a while before we have time to get it back in order." Kirk started for the elevator, Yeoman Jamal on his heels, pad and pen ready in her hands. Kirk turned back to Uhura, "I'll use the messengers to keep you informed of my location."

"Very good, sir. Captain, Dr. McCoy wants to see you as soon as possible. He sounded as though it were urgent." She and the one yeoman left on the bridge began gathering the data they had been working with to maintain an overall picture of the ship's condition. In fifteen minutes the bridge was sealed and deserted.

McCoy turned the patient he was working on over to Nurse Chapel as soon as he saw the captain. "Jim, come into my office, please."

"What's the matter now?"

"It's Scotty," McCoy stated grimly. "He's decided this whole mess is his fault. And he's out to correct it single-handed! Or die of exhaustion in the attempt!"

"How did he arrive at that conclusion?"

"Remember that general check he ordered when the trouble was first diagnosed? He says that's responsible for most of the breakdowns occurring now. Equipment is breaking that would never have been exposed except for that."

Kirk nodded slowly. "He's right about that."

McCoy's eyes widened in surprise. "With that attitude you're going to be a lot of help."

"Yes, I will. But why do you need me?"

McCoy sighed. "I didn't catch him in time. We've gotten into the habit of depending on these machines to keep track of things for us. He's been getting pills from MBenga and me to keep him going. We've both been keeping written records of what we gave him, but no one got the two records together until a few hours ago. He won't listen to us. I'd have to use a couple of security guards to force him to follow my orders. He may still obey you."

Yeoman Jamal sent the first messenger they encountered to tell Lt. Uhura where the captain would be for the next few minutes. She decided as she trailed Kirk and McCoy down the corridor that as a short term condition only, this was rather amusing. It was much more challenging than just carrying a tricorder around.

Kirk considered the equipment inoperable at the moment. He decided correctly that Scott would be working on the steering. They were in an area where Warp 2 was a safe speed if they could guide the Enterprise at all.

Scotty handed the Feinberg block to Leslie when he saw Kirk and McCoy. He moved to meet them, marshalling the arguments he expected to need.

"Can they get along without you for five minutes, Scott?" Kirk asked, in a voice that indicated the answer had better be yes.

"Aye, Captain. Should we go to my office?"

"That'll do," Kirk said brusquely. He didn't speak again until they were in the office, then he wheeled to face Scott. "How much of the mess you caused do you have straightened up?" Kirk snapped.

Scott blinked. "We're beginning to gain on it. Nothing major has given out for her a shift now."

"Has the general check been repeated? Decontaminating everything this time?"

"Aye, sir," Scott answered, with a little more life in his voice this time. "I know my job."

"And when something breaks it's your job to check and see if anything else is going to break?" Kirk's face was hard and his voice harsh as he asked his questions.

"That it is!"

"Then why do you feel guilty? Because a procedure that is correct 99 times out of a 100 turns out to be wrong this time?" Kirk's voice was soft and slightly amused now. "Or is it because you discovered the problem first and started the check before I had a chance to give the order?"

Scott was confused. These were the charges he'd been prepared to convict himself of, but somehow it wasn't turning out as it should. "But she's hurt! And I did it!" Scotty wailed.

Kirk shook his head. "The damage is being caused by bacteria. They're the only villains we're going to find in this incident." Crisply, then, he ordered, "As for working yourself to exhaustion; no new damage means you have repairs started on all major items. Your engineering staff is well trained. Let them do the work. That's an order. They'll call you if they need you."

"I'll see he gets to bed, Jim," McCoy said softly.

Kirk nodded and started down the corridor, Jamal trotting along behind. He slowed and motioned for her to catch up. "Spock's quarters, then I'll get some breakfast."

"Yes, sir," she acknowledged. She sent a messenger to inform Uhura all the while marvelling at Kirk's ability to notice everything, going on around him. She had been sure he hadn't noticed her send the first messenger.

Chekov was waiting outside Spock's quarters when Kirk arrived. "Captain, I just gave him the latest set of readings. He'll be right out."

"Isn't he letting people in?" Kirk inquired half jokingly.

Chekov frowned doubtfully. "Actually, I don't think anyone has wanted in. He has the temperature and humidity set at Vulcan normal. And the pressure high enough that air doesn't rush in when the door opens."

The door slid open. Spock stepped out, accompanied by a wave of heat. When he saw Kirk he moved to allow the door to close. He handed the position report to Chekov who hurried off. "Captain, we are gradually shifting off course. Each time the deflectors nudge something out of our way it has an infinitesimal effect on our course. The cumulative error is growing."

"Engineering is working on it. I had Uhura shift command down to auxiliary. That way they only have to check the circuits to Deck 8."

"Logical, Captain." Kirk had to struggle to suppress a smile as Spock continued. He always felt as though Spock were pinning a medal on him when he said that. "Lt. Patz brought word twenty minutes ago. They have pinpointed the change. She will have the formal report ready in the bacteriology lab in an hour. McCoy is coming and I'm sure they would be honored if you would attend sir."

Kirk decided that while Lt. Patz might be honored by his presence she was also made nervous by it. Part of the problem was that she had been caught short of uniforms when the clothing processor quit and was wearing a white tennis outfit with none of the sang-froid Uhura had shown. Her hair, which she usually piled on top of her head to add a few inches to her basic height of five feet, hung down her back in a heavy braid. She looked about sixteen, and knew it, Kirk decided. He realized he was staring and had made her even more nervous.

"I understand the tennis outfit. Lt. Uhura doesn't have any uniforms, either. But why is your hair down like that?" He asked in an attempt to ease her self-consciousness.

It worked. She relaxed and even produced a faint smile. "The clips I use to fasten it are...were made of a haloner." She saw Spock and McCoy enter the lab. "We're ready to begin, sir."

Once she began the report any impression that she was only sixteen disappeared. "The problem is caused by a bacteriophage, a virus that infects bacteria. This one, that we've named Neyi, attacks a strain of staphylococcus. It is a latent virus; it hooks on to the genetic material of the bacteria and becomes part of it. It's presence causes the production of the enzyme that attacks the heterocyclic unsaturated halogenated polymers. The enzyme is released when the bacteria dies and the cell membrane disappears."

"We picked it up when Professor Nemenyi came aboard. Three of his men went down to the storage area to select what they needed. Two of our security guards helped move the supplies. They even transported down to the planet with one load."

"Thank you, Lieutenant," Kirk said when she finished. "At least we know exactly what we're fighting. Is it likely that our recent activities have destroyed the bacteria?"

"No, it isn't, Captain. Bacteria are hardy. They develop resistance to antibiotics and adapt rapidly to new ones. Oh, it isn't impossible to get rid of them; it's just unlikely that we'll manage to do it alone. We are handicapped—we must limit our choices. It wouldn't really help if we got rid of the bacteria but killed the crew."

"Uhura says she'll have the subspace radio fixed sometime tomorrow. Starfleet will send the help we need." Kirk headed for auxiliary control to check progress.

Spock left the lab, then waited until McCoy, who had stopped to compliment Dori, emerged. "Doctor, may I talk to you, now?"

"Of course, Spock." McCoy glanced at him. "Will my office do? Or should I come to your quarters?"

"Your office will suffice," Spock decided.

He silently accompanied McCoy to his office. There, to McCoy's consternation, he accepted a seat, an offer of hot tea, and courteously waited to be served. McCoy knew Spock considered these human amenities a waste of time, and only observed them on ceremonial occasions. He was afraid to even try to imagine what Spock had to say that would drive him to employ these measures to postpone saying it even a little while longer.

McCoy sipped his tea, wishing fervently for something stronger. He braced himself and inquired softly, "What is it you need to discuss?"

"Have you given any thought to Starfleet's reaction when we succeed in informing them of our trouble?"

"Why they'll..." McCoy stopped. "No, I haven't." He settled back in his chair and slowly sipped his tea. After several minutes he glanced at Spock with a wry grin and drawled, "This here's a plague ship, ain't it?"

Spock nodded.

McCoy settled further down in his chair. "Starfleet's gonna be as glad to see us a tribble is to see a Klingon." He sat up straight and the accent disappeared. "They'll probably order the ship into the nearest star. I hope they take the crew off first," he added thoughtfully.

"Logic indicates they will," Spock said. "After all, it is the ship that has the plague, not the crew."

"Why hasn't Jim...?" McCoy burst out.

"Would you hesitate to treat...?" Spock paused to select the proper disease, "a crewman who had contracted Wellman's dot? Remember, the Rot is contagious and the treatment entails more expense than the person could possibly repay in service."

"What does that have to do...?"

"Considering how well you know the captain, that is a foolish question. The connection should be obvious," stated Spock.

McCoy considered briefly, then his face froze into a professional mas of non-expression. "He considers the Enterprise a living being, at least his subconscious does. And you don't let an intelligent being die just because it is an economically sound decision." He sipped at his tepid tea, then scowled at his cup. "What will Jim do when Starfleet orders him to...to kill the Enterprise, Spock?"

"I am not at all sure, Doctor. But my experience with human captains who have lost their ships leads me to believe Jim's actions will be reprehensible from Starfleet's point of view."

"That is what will happen if we do nothing. With a little time, and our help, he will argue calmly and logically in her defense, accept his failure quietly, and receive an immediate replacement."

"Are you sure?" McCoy inquired sarcastically.

"As sure as one can be when working with human beings. He is capable of reaching logical decisions even when they cause him great pain. I have seen him do it. Given time to think the problem through, he will make the logical decision."

McCoy eventually agreed. "What did you want from me, Spock? So far I've merely confirmed your reasoning."

"That was part of what I wanted, the assurance that I was correct in my assessment of the humans involved. The other part was...when should we tell him?"

"We delay as long as possible." McCoy didn't even pause to consider. "It will be much better if he figures it out himself. We can help turn his thoughts in that direction. If nothing else works, we tell him, before Starfleet does."

Late the next day Uhura got a message off to Starbase XII detailing their troubles. "We should have a reply within 24 hours, sir, unless we are so far off course they can't reach us."

"That's not likely. We can navigate now, and Scotty says they sealed each connection is something the bacteria can't hurt, so it shouldn't go out again." Is the list of priorities complete?"

Uhura flipped quickly through the lists. "Yes, we've agreed on a rating for everything. I'll get the lists in better order. Send a copy down to Mr. Scott and post the other one?"

"Right. I'll be in sickbay when they're ready to be initialled," Kirk said. In the intercom ship it had become second nature to keep Uhura informed of his location.

Two days crept by. The crew had been working long shifts and while the ship was not back to normal, it was no longer existing in a continual state of emergency.

The helm was once more under complete control, but still had to be handled from engineering. Uhura was alone in auxiliary control when the reply from Starbase XII arrived. When she had it decoded, she frowned at it, then wrote it out. It looked no better than it had sounded.

PROMISED TO STARBASE XII AT WARP 1. MAKE NO STOPS. MAINTAIN RADIC SILENCE. POTEKIN WILL INTERCEPT AND FOLLOW IN THREE DAYS' TIME. NO PHYSICAL CONTACT TO BE MADE.

The captain had left orders to be awakened as soon as the message arrived. Uhura checked the chronometer. He had gotten five hours of rest at least. She stopped the first person to pass, a yeoman, and left him in charge of auxiliary control.

There was no immediate response to her signal. She had almost decided the doorcom was broken when Kirk opened the door.

Kirk read the message with a strange lack of surprise. McCoy's vague mutterings had prepared him for this reaction from Starfleet. "See that all department heads read it, Uhura. Then post a copy on the Deck 7 Bulletin Board."

When the intercom had gone out, the bulletin boards had suddenly assumed new importance. Along with the usual club and special interest announcements, poetry, art work, criticism or praise of the poetry, and art work, there was now a section labeled OFFICIAL NOTICES. Daily reading of its contents was required to learn what equipment wasn't working, duty assignments, and current emergency measures. It, plus the messenger service, was so successful that the intercom was very far down the list of things to be repaired.

Kirk stood sleepily blinking his eyes after Uhura left. There was no use in trying to go back to sleep. He'd just lay there and worry. If he avoided McCoy for a couple of hours there wouldn't be another lecture about overwork. The more day should see auxiliary control fully functional. Then he would feel as though he were really in control again.

He sauntered down to the rec room for a cup of coffee and had the unpalatable luck to discover the food dispenser wasn't functioning properly. After reporting it, he really needed the coffee to dispell the chill that he kept telling himself wasn't caused by the Rot.

That marked the beginning of the second wave of malfunctions. These bacteria, descendants of the survivors of the first scrubbing, were resistant to the measures used before. The labs continued working on the problem of finding substances that would kill the bacteria without harming the crew.

The turbo-elevators went out for almost a day. The ladders hadn't been fixed from the previous time. Travel between decks was restricted, but still there were some falls. Cracks developed in a few of the corridor walls. The decks themselves were suspect in several areas.

For a wild three hours the gravity was off. Many members of the crew learned to their sorrow and discomfort just how long their training in weightless maneuvering had been. McCoy and his staff did a brisk business in anti-nausea medications. Spock recognized the period of weightlessness for what it was: the ideal time to fix the ladders. He commenced every able-bodied crewmember Scotty didn't mend. It developed into a race with the last ladder being fixed a scant ten minutes before the agreed-upon fifteen seconds of red alert gave warning of the resumption of normal gravity.

Decks 3 and 4 had to be evacuated for several hours until the air circulating equipment for those levels was repaired. Deck 5's machinery was also off, but for only twenty-three minutes.

During all this new flurry of trouble the small group that had been working steadfastly got auxiliary control in full working order. As soon as the last connections were made the room was cleared of people, sealed, and flooded for an hour with a gas guaranteed to kill the bacteria. A decontamination chamber was set up in the corridor and everyone entering had to pass through it.

When the sensors were activated they discovered that sometime during the blackout period the Potemkin had joined them. She was slightly behind and just beyond maximum transporter range. She was a comfort for a time, then her silent accompaniment became an irritant. More than one person reread the message from Starfleet and wondered exactly what orders the Potemkin had.

Kirk was standing in front of the bulletin board in a fog composed of exhaustion and despair. He had crossed out one of the entries on the TO BE REPAIRED list. As he filled in the time of completion he glanced down the list. There were three new jobs since he had last seen the list. He slumped briefly, then straightened at the sound of footsteps. He peered down the dim corridor, realizing as he did that it shouldn't be that dim. He was wearily making another entry when Dr. McCoy reached his side.

"Evening, Jim. Add one lab equipment processor, Deck 7, Lab F while you have the pen in your hand." McCoy gauged Kirk's exhaustion and judged it to be caused by more than hard work and lack of sleep. He peered over the captain's shoulder at the list. "Hmmm, still losing ground, I see. We should get remission soon though."

"What?" Kirk asked out of his daze, certain something important had been said, even if he hadn't understood.

"Remission. The disease abates. The patient gains strength. Then the disease returns stronger than before. Each time the cycle repeats the disease is stronger; the patient weaker. Leukemia used to exhibit a pattern like that. Old are often does yet, with a different illness each cycle."

"Are such patients ever cured?"

"Sure, nobody ever dies of leukemia any more. That only took thirty years' research and several billion dollars. But, of course expense isn't considered when dealing with a disease infecting intelligent beings." McCoy moved down the bulletin board reading various items until

he found the one he was looking for. "That's a gloomy poem," he commented, poking a small piece of graph paper.

"I haven't read it yet."

"You'd better. I'm not sure we should even leave it up. It can't be doing morale any good," McCoy said indignantly,

Kirk moved down to McCoy's end of the bulletin board and forced his eyes to focus on the handwritten poem.

THE ENTERPRISE

She
Demands.
Always--
Demands.
She's never satisfied--
Demands.
She fills my hours - awake - asleep--
Demands.
I am her Captain - I try - she asks more--
Demands.
I have no thought but for her - still - she--
Demands.
She takes - she never gives - just demands--
Demands.
She feeds on my very soul - one day - she'll demand all--
Demands.
I'll give - she'll take - my life. Then there will be - no more--
Demands.

Kirk nodded. "It's right. It's her right! I'm supposed to supply what she needs. But..." he shook his head, "...not doing very well, am I?"

McCoy scowled. That wasn't the reaction he'd hoped for. No indication there of a realization that a machine had no right to make such demands. He sighed. "Sometimes there's nothing a captain, or a doctor, can do. All things end," he added gently.

"But not now! Not so soon! Not this way!" It was a plea for reassurance.

McCoy held his silence. It would be so easy to give Kirk the encouragement he heeded now. But if he did, the facts would just have to be faced some other day. "You need rest, Jim. Come on, I'm going that way, too."

Kirk accompanied McCoy to Deck 5 in a bewildered silence. He felt as though he'd tried to step up a stair only to discover it wasn't there. He collapsed on his bed and was asleep before the lights had a chance to dim.

McCoy talked to Spock after he left Kirk. "I've got him thinking in the right direction. Unfortunately we seem to have been correct. He isn't going to realize that from Starfleet's point of view the easiest, safest, cheapest thing to do is scrap the Enterprise and start over.

"We'll have to talk to him, Spock." McCoy wiped the sweat from his brow as he glanced around Spock's quarters. It was years since he'd been in them, and they didn't seem to have changed at all. Truel hadn't had time to make any impression on Spock's arrangements. Or did logical Vulcan women rearrange furnishings as did their less logical sisters from other worlds? He longed to ask, but didn't quite dare. "Tomorrow, as soon as he gets up?"

Kirk was conscious of an aching, bruised feeling deep inside when he woke. He felt as though someone very precious to him had been destroyed. Fear flared briefly in his mind, then subsided as he came fully awake.

He lay calmly accepting the knowledge in his mind. It had been growing there, like an ugly weed, for days. During the night, it had reached fruition.

The Enterprise was dying.

She was rotting, falling apart, crumbling inch by inch. With each failure she became more dangerous to her crew, to the technologically advanced planets of the Federation, to anything with which she came in contact.

He himself, with the resources he had to command, could not save her. A starbase, however, could do it.

Kirk began in his mind a sketchy outline of what would be needed. As he considered equipment, material, time, and personnel involved, he realized Starbase XII was ideal. The main part of the base was on an inhabited planet, but there was an experimental station on the nearer moon, and a larger-than-average ship repair facility between the two.

As Kirk drifted back to sleep he was almost content. A small thread of worry, a feeling that he'd failed to consider some statement of McCoy's persisted, but he suppressed it firmly.

Kirk had barely seated himself at a table for breakfast when Spock and McCoy entered. They picked up trays and joined him. He studied their solemn faces. "Yes gentlemen. It's time for a conference. The briefing room, as soon as we've eaten."

Kirk gazed at his three senior officers and let Spock's words echo through his mind. McCoy had known. Scott looked as stunned as Kirk felt, but even as Kirk looked at him he reluctantly nodded.

"Aye, Spock, they'll no want to risk letting it spread. Are you sayin' there's no chance o' savin' the Enterprise...from Starfleet?"

"There is perhaps 1 chance in 5000 that we might save her, if we choose to try."

"If?" Kirk asked flatly.

"The Enterprise has an excellent service record, full of incidents in which she risked her destruction in order to preserve the order and safety of the Federation." Spock paused. "Now you are suggesting that she be saved, even though her salvation would risk the technological collapse and permanent quarantine of the planet that attempts to save her. Starbase XII is situated on a planet with a population of nearly one billion. I estimate the resultant accidents as buildings collapse and famine sets in as the transportation network fails would cost..."

"No! No. No more logic, Spock. I acknowledge the possibilities," Kirk was speaking quietly now, "but she deserves a chance. We'll proceed on the assumption Starfleet will decide to renovate her. Scotty, you and I will work out a complete schedule for stripping the interior, decontamination, everything."

"Bones, whatever they decide, the crew will have to be evacuated and placed in quarantine. That will they be allowed to take with them?"

McCoy considered briefly. "Nothing made of halomers, of course. No clothing of any kind. A few metal or glass objects," he said, thinking of a certain Vulcan artifact resting beneath the Cullinny Flame in Spock's quarters, "if they are of sufficient value to make their cleansing worthwhile. I'll post a bulletin and have people begin clearing articles with the medical staff."

At last Kirk faced Spock squarely again. "If they order her destruction," he managed to say it as though it were some minor training schedule to be planned, "we'll want to salvage some things. Spock, that is your job."

Kirk worked long hours the next five days. If he was exhausted he could sleep. He and Scott finished their plan and plunged back into the fight to keep the Enterprise working.

When the call from Starbase XII came Uhura reacted quickly. "Tonia, inform the captain, then Spock. Hurry!" Only after Yeoman Barrows was on her way did Uhura acknowledge the call.

"Enterprise, Lt. Uhura."

"Commodore Lazinski, Starbase XII. Where is Captain Kirk, Lt.?" The commodore was taking careful note of her costume, which was cut vaguely like a Starfleet uniform but was a bright chartreuse.

"He has been summoned, sir. He should arrive in a few minutes."

"Summoned?" Commodore Lazinski asked.

Uhura paused fractionally. She had received no orders concerning statements about the ship's condition. There was no use evading, she decided and caught Sulu's nod reinforcing her own decision. "The intercom is inoperable, sir. A messenger has been sent to inform him of your call. Communicators are available, but are used only in case of an emergency."

Sulu struggled to keep his face expressionless. He wondered if Uhura were really unaware of the impression she made sitting there in her Ageagian gown icily informing a commodore his call was not an emergency.

Lazinski cleared his throat and said in what seemed to be an attempt at friendly conversation, "You are controlling from auxiliary, aren't you?"

"Yes sir, The captain is here, Commodore Lazinski," she said with an internal sigh of relief.

Lazinski widened the pickup on his end to include the two admirals seated beside him.

By the time the formalities of introduction had been taken care of, Spock had slid into the room. Scott and McCoy came through the decontamination chamber together, practically on his heels. The size of auxiliary control turned this group into a crowd. Sulu was wondering if he and Chekov should leave when the question was settled for him.

"Captain, why not adjourn to the briefing room? It would be more appropriate." Admiral Kelly suggested.

Kirk's voice and face were as expressionless as Spock's. "This is the only part of the ship with fully effective communications, gentlemen. Our discussion must emanate from here. It is also the bridge for now. These junior officers are on duty and must remain at their stations."

The inquiry lasted three hours. Spock dissertated on the bacteriophage. Scott and Kirk reported on the condition of the Enterprise. McCoy answered questions about the crew's physical and mental condition.

Lazinski and the admirals listened carefully. They asked intelligent questions. After they requested and received copies of the evacuation and decontamination plans, they called a three hour recess to give them time to study the plans.

Kirk took one of the cups of hot coffee Yeoman Barrows had ready. "Well, at least they listened. They didn't act like people who had already made up their minds."

"They have two days, Captain. They do not need to hurry their decision."

"Yes Spock," Kirk said with a sigh of exhaustion. "I'll try not to hope. Uhura, I'm going to get some food, clean up, and rest till they call back." He glanced down at the engineer's coveralls he was wearing. "At least I'll be wearing my uniform when they tell me my ship has to die."

When it was time for contact to resume, everyone in auxiliary control was in uniform. Uhura had borrowed Lt. Palmer's last one. It was a bit tight and she was afraid to take a deep breath. Sulu had scrounged one from an ensign. It had the wrong rank markings, but it did

fit. Chekov, who hadn't worn a proper uniform since the second day the clothing processor was broken, wouldn't tell where his came from.

There was a fourth member on the board when they made contact. He was an admiral wearing the familiar caduceus of the medical profession. "Anderson," muttered McCoy. "Epidemiology is his speciality."

Commodore Lazinski acted as chief spokesman once more. He made no attempt to soften the decision. "The risk is too great; the gain too small, Captain. It would cost almost as much to renovate the Enterprise as to build a new ship. The difference is more than offset by the danger. The safety of a planet must have a higher priority than the life of a ship." His face was closed. It was plain no argument could be allowed to influence the decision. It was also plain one was expected. At Kirk's nod of acceptance an expression of surprise crossed his face.

"Your evacuation plan is acceptable. It will be put into effect as soon as you are within beaming range. The crew will go directly to the moon base. The quarantine time may be cut to a week. The base has some ideas they've been wanting to try out.

"Captain," and here for the first time Lazinski seemed uneasy, "I don't enjoy asking this of you, but... Please prepare a plan for the salvage of information and noncontaminated materials. Also deactivate the necessary systems so there will be no explosions or radiation hazards during her...when she is being scrapped."

Kirk didn't even try to speak. He just motioned to Spock.

Spock handed a tape to Uhura. "Transmit this, Lieutenant." He glanced at the view screen. "It is based on the use of Enterprise personnel. Those needed have agreed to stay aboard the two days necessary to complete the work. The first six steps will be completed before we reach beaming range. Can you have the equipment to receive the radioactive material and the anti-matter ready when we arrive?"

A flabbergasted Lazinski requested time to study the plan.

"Spock, you'll talk to him when he calls back. I couldn't do it without yelling at him," Kirk said in a voice under obvious control.

Kirk slept very little during the next two days. He worked wherever he could be of the most help in keeping the Enterprise livable until they reached Starbase XII. He prowled the corridors for hours when he should have been sleeping. He seldom spoke and when he did it was only about the job at hand. He was unfailingly polite and courteous and he worried the hell out of McCoy.

After his third abortive attempt to talk to Kirk, McCoy went to Spock. "He's at least spoken to you, Spock. How is he?"

"He is bereft," Spock said after due consideration.

"Why will he talk to you?"

"I do not try to 'cheer him up.' He has a loss to adjust to. I am willing to let him do it in his own way."

"Meaning I'm not?" asked McCoy. "Well you're right. This time I just can't put myself in his place. I can't understand how someone can care so much about a piece of machinery. The crew is safe. He'll get another command; they've already promised that." McCoy stopped pacing and faced Spock. "Do you understand how he feels?"

"Yes," Spock's manner did not invite further questions, but McCoy was determined.

"Do you feel as he does?"

Spock gave McCoy a look of utter disbelief. "No."

McCoy, intrigued now, tried again. "Do you feel anything about losing the ship? This is the only place you knew T'Ruel."

Spock gritted his teeth. Plainly the only way, short of throwing him out, to get rid of the doctor was to answer him. "Vulcan memory does not depend on mnemonic assists. What T'Ruel and I had, was. Therefore it is mine any time I choose to remember. Now I have work to do."

"Thank you, Spock," McCoy muttered at the Vulcan's retreating back. "It's a shame you empathize so strongly with Jim."

Starbase XII was ready for them. The major part of the crew beamed to the decontamination station on the moon. The Enterprise took up her final station in the space yard and the skeleton crew began the final steps of turning the Enterprise into an empty, powerless hulk.

McCoy finally refused to accept Kirk's evasions any longer and ambushed him as he was entering his quarters. Kirk admitted defeat and waved McCoy in.

"Bones, there isn't anything wrong with me. I know the Enterprise is just a ship. Starfleet isn't murdering her." He swung to face McCoy. "I know this! But I don't feel it yet. It's going to take me a while to work it out. You've been throwing medical metaphors at me for weeks; let me use one on you." His words came with the fluency of something long considered.

"Someone I love has a terminal illness. She is in a coma; there is nothing more to be done for her. I can't talk to her to comfort her, or be comforted by her. I can't reminisce about her because she isn't gone. I can only wait until it is over; then I can begin again."

"Yes, Jim," McCoy said and turned to leave.

"Bones, it isn't supposed to be easy for you to loose a ship. If you're the right type of human to be captain it always hurts like this."

"All right, Captain. I won't intrude again, but when you are ready to talk..." McCoy looked back over his shoulder.

SPOCK: GUARDIAN OF THE TRADITION

J. LICHTENBERG

The name "Spock" (according to the Vulcanur used in the Kraith universe) means "a male who communicates a blended tradition." The name also carries the connotation of "founder of Dynasties". (1,2)

The Spock of the Kraith series is constantly aware of the enormous responsibilities his name imposes on him. "Founder of Dynasties" implies offspring--and fulfilling that prophecy is the closest thing to a "sacred trust" that a Vulcan can know.

But by a slight shift in pronunciation the name becomes "Communicator of a blended tradition"; and this aspect of his name has contributed to the development of his character throughout his lifetime.

The eighteen year old Spock who left Vulcan for Starfleet against his father's wishes did so in part because of his name. His grandfather, Suvil, had given him the tradition of his Vulcan heritage and had taught him all he needed to know as a Katsytkh and Guardian of the Tradition. (3) Suvil's training had been so thorough that this young Spock held within his mind the Vulcan Racial Memory and the values of his culture, Tsaichrani, in a richness of detail utterly incomprehensible to the human mind.

But from his mother, he had received nothing, even vaguely analogous. If he was to justify his name (and retain an integrated sanity) he needed the human analog to the Vulcan tradition he already carried.

Since Tsaichrani was totally sufficient for Sarek, Sarek was unable to understand Spock's need. Spock was unable to make Sarek understand for Spock himself did not know what he was searching for. He only knew that there was an empty place inside himself and as he grew toward maturity, the need to fill that void became an undeniable imperative. Sarek knew, through his association with Amanda, that humans had nothing, even vaguely analogous to the interrelated tradition of Vulcan. But Sarek did not know that Spock felt a need for that which did not exist. Hence the breakdown in father/Son communications that lasted for eighteen years.

During these eighteen years, Spock grew to 3/4 maturity. Slowly and painfully, he learned that he would never be able to "communicate a blended tradition" in the full Vulcan sense because the other half of the world was non-existent. It was only much later that he came to terms with a compromise.

continued on page 47

SPOCK'S

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Kraith II

Jacqueline Lichtenberg

Captain James T. Kirk, still aching to the loss of his ship, drew the dry, firey air of Vulcan's early dusk into his lungs, swung his legs up on the chaise and leaned back to survey the veranda as the waves of memory lapped gently at the shores of his mind.

The *Enterprise* had been a good ship, but he reminded himself with unaccustomed logic, she wasn't really a living being. It was the crew that gave her life and, though the mechanical gadget called *Enterprise*, NCC-1701, was a total loss, every living being aboard had been rescued. The sacrifice had been unavoidable and the Admiralty had already promised to give him a new *Enterprise* from the latest model starship to come out of the Canopian shops...and give him his old crew to a man. What more could he want? They'd even promised to give the new *Enterprise* the old registry number. With twenty-three commendations distributed among the crew, they'd come out of the affair very well.

The illogical ache continued. He knew it always would. But he found the pain overlaid with a strangely peaceful acceptance of the inevitable just as Spock had predicted. He wasn't sure just when or how it had happened, but he seemed to have absorbed some of the famed Peace of Vulcan.

And he'd almost refused Spock's invitation. He'd stood on the observation deck of Starbase XII watching the final wrecking of what was left of his ship. Bones on his right and Spock on his left, he'd said, "Well, Bones, you have several months leave, what are you going to do?"

"I don't know. I haven't been at loose ends like this in years."

"How about you, Spock?"

"I'm going home. It will be a refreshing break in routine."

They'd stood in silence for a moment watching the cutting torches, then Spock continued, "I still have the Kraith to return, but that will only take a few minutes. Later, I intend to visit my family's ancestral home. You were in the amphitheater near there once. You remember?"

Kirk rubbed his jaw ruefully, "How could I forget?"

"The climate is quite mild in this season. Perhaps you would like to accompany me?"

At first Kirk had been unable to believe his ears. He just stared at his First Officer, uncomprehending.

Spock continued, eyes fixed on the wall screen before them, "Mother will be trying to accept Father's death. It is a difficult thing for a human. I don't imagine that I could be of much help. She has expressed approval of you."

Kirk shook his head. It would be an awkward situation.

"I understand," Spock continued eyeing the wreckage meaningfully, "that you also have grief to overcome. The environment is uniquely conducive to the search for inner peace." He shifted his gaze to McCoy, "I believe the Doctor would find it therapeutic as well as an interesting phenomenon."

Spock had allowed one more hesitation before delivering the clincher, "On Vulcan, it is considered impolite to refuse a second invitation to someone's home."

Kirk remembered the first time Spock had invited him to seek the Peace of Vulcan and then, in unison with McCoy, he'd nodded acceptance.

As the dusk thickened, Kirk let the events of the last two months flow before his mind's eye trying to identify the instant he'd acquired this Peace.

When he'd first seen the house from the air, sprawling, parapetted edifice of unthinkably ancient stone blending in natural harmony with the foot of the mountain range that rimmed the barren-looking valley, he'd wondered how anyone could live in such a desert. Spock had taken one hand from the aircar's controls to indicate the valley floor, "This is one of the most fertile regions of this continent. There are certain varieties of fruits grown here which are world famous. It's been under cultivation since the art was discovered."

"I don't see anything that looks like a farm," McCoy had adjusted the sunshades, squinting at the ground.

"It's not cultivated during the cold season, but the vegetation is quite vigorous if you know where to look for it."

Kirk reminded himself that 105°F was a chilly winter day for Vulcan.

Then Amanda had welcomed them into the surprisingly cool interior and immediately, Kirk remembered, there had been a soothing, subliminal impression of peace...almost as if it emanated from the walls themselves. Was it the faint tang of spice or incense that hung in the air? Or... He'd turned to Spock, "Subsonics?"

"No, Sir, the aircooling unit is quite noisy."

Strain as he might, Kirk couldn't catch a hint of machinery noise.

Amanda had taken them on a tour of the house which resembled an ancient European castle or fortress more than anything else in Kirk's experience. All the household services were as thoroughly automated as any starship's, but totally unobtrusive so the impression of solid age was unmarred. Living in such a house was almost like a return to the primitive... without any of the inconvenience.

First, they had descended into the basement, a huge, natural cave in the center of which was a stone table. The only light was a ghostly blue glow from beneath the table. The air was fresh and dry, but cool.

As Amanda led them across the floor, they realized that the "table" was enormous. The top was level with a man's chest. Worn stone steps went down under the table to a pool of water, crystal clear but rolling ever so slightly...an artesian well, purified by blue-glowing plants.

Amanda had dipped up a cupful of that water, touched it to her lips and ceremoniously handed the plain, triple-handled ceramic cup to Kirk, "Please accept our hospitality." She'd said it simply, in English, but somehow the words rang like a gong echoing from ages long past. He sipped the tangy, refreshingly cool water that wasn't just pure, but alive the way only the gigantic distillery of a living planet could make it. And again that Peace had washed through him.

Was it the water? He'd handed it to McCoy and watched carefully but detected no sign that the Doctor felt anything. Instead, McCoy had cross-examined Spock about the source of the water.

Then, Amanda led them upward through the house, pointing out wings that were closed, areas preserved as museums, galleries devoted to the memorabilia of the *xtmprsqzntwlf*d, and finally returned to the currently used area with an admonition not to get lost. They'd continued upward until McCoy paused on one stairway landing and huffingly asked for a rest. The combination of thin air and thick gravity proved too much for him.

"Yes." Amanda had answered, "It takes years to become acclimated. That's why your rooms will be here on the lowest level."

She'd shown them into the double guest suite for off-world visitors complete with the most flexible environmental controls and, Kirk had noted with relief, standard sanitary facilities.

The rooms were ample, decorated in the severe Vulcan style which added to the stone-castle impression, but private and very comfortable. On a lectern in one corner, Spock kindled a small flame in an ornately carved, hollow sphere and said, "That you may never know confusion in my house."

And yet again, the words seemed to have a strangely haunting effect. As the water had given Peace, the fire seemed to give Security...the kind of security that comes with trust that no defense is necessary.

As he thought about it, Kirk could admit that these two welcoming ceremonies had done something to him, something that sensitized him to the mysteriously healing magic of this house.

After resting a bit, Amanda had shown them the remaining three upper floors. Spock's rooms were in a penthouse in the center of the large roof. At a touch, all four walls opened louvre fashion to reveal a studio not unlike his quarters aboard ship, but much larger. There were three desk areas, many colorful artistic hangings of native origin, and numerous musical instruments. The ceiling was an enormous, polarizable skylight equipped with a small telescope.

Then, they'd leaned over the parapet to view the open-air animal preserve where Spock had kept his shehat. McCoy had gone wandering and Amanda feared he'd gotten lost. They'd found him behind the penthouse on the edge of an area set off in intricate patterns by lines of knee high stones. Each area was provided with benches and many pagoda-like housings with well disciplined plants growing in, on, and around them. One little housing in particular attracted McCoy's attention, "What's supposed to be in here? It's empty."

"This will be the," Spock searched for a word, "place of the new Kraith."



"Like the one that was stolen?"

"No. This one will be intended for use."

Standing at the entrance to the stone pathways, Kirk had asked, "And what is this?"

"This area is called The Gardens of Thought. One comes here for private meditation. It is forbidden to communicate with someone who is within the Garden."

"May I stroll through for a few minutes?"

"Please. The Gardens are always available for the use of our guests."

He'd stepped onto that curving pathway and once again he was struck with a peculiar awareness of a pulsing power combing through the tangled agonies of his mind bringing order and Peace. He'd walked among the stoney-looking plants and he'd even sat on some of the benches and leaned over the parapets to view the veranda where he now sat. Everywhere that peculiar Peace followed and grew stronger.

Finally, he had shaken off the feeling and returned to his waiting hosts.

The weeks that followed were packed with activity. More neighbors than he had counted houses in the valley had dropped by to greet Spock. At first, he'd assumed they were offering sympathy at the loss of Sarek, but then Amanda had said, "I wish Spock could understand how proud I am of him when neighbors we so rarely see take the trouble to come and congratulate him."

"Congratulate him?"

She'd nodded, "On his remarkable skill," she looked at his blank face, "...as a Katavtikh. I'm told he's outstanding even considering his family. He's only conducted one Affirmation and already he's received State's Honors. Everybody is eager to touch minds with him, if only as the most formal greeting. It's the kind of thing they tell their grandchildren about."

Then one evening, Spock asked them to escort Amanda to a tokiel performance in a new amphitheater up the valley.

"Aren't you going?" Kirk had asked.

"No. They are dancing the Motek...I've watched T'Ruel's Motek. I will be...unable...to view the piece again for many years. Even though she hadn't completed her rendition, she was such a genius that anyone else's would seem far too...trivial to me."

Remembering the look on Spock's face when T'Ruel had signed her composition, Kirk merely nodded. The loss of T'Ruel must be one of the pains Spock had brought to this house.

Seeing that astounding artform again, this time under the open night sky of Vulcan, had woven a mood that lasted for days.

Then one morning, Spock had come in from a dawn forray into the garden to pick a fresh breakfast, and as he reverently deposited the seeds in the box to be replanted, he announced that a large group of young people would be gathering that day for a night on the mountain and would he and McCoy care to join them?

Kirk had accepted before he was told it would be a hike up the mountain in Vulcan's moonless night, but he didn't back out and neither had Bones.

A mixed group of twenty young adults had gathered through the day. Spock introduced them but obviously didn't expect the humans to remember all the names. Most didn't speak English very well, but they all knew each other and treated the humans considerably.

In the later afternoon they ate a good meal, and at dusk, they set out on a trail that snaked up the nearly verticle mountainside behind the house. The Vulcans struck a brisk pace with Spock and a girl in the lead, Kirk and McCoy fallen to the rear. Puffing, McCoy observed, "These kids are chattering like a bunch of humans on holiday and they're all carrying something, and I'll be damned if I'll ask for a rest!"

After that they'd climbed with stern determination doubting seriously if they should have come. Soon it was full dark and several of the climbers broke out hand torches to point out the trickiest parts of the narrow trail. Two hours later, they reached the flat mesa and everybody found seats on stones and panted for about five minutes.

Then, still chattering earnestly at one another, they'd broken into groups and Spock came over to his guests, "Come. We're about to start work."

He led them to a circular patch of low shrubs that, like all the water-conserving Vulcan plants, looked like lacy stone sculpture and showed them how to use a long probe to cross-pollinate the flowers which strongly resembled ripe cauliflower.

"In two years," said Spock, "the fruit will ripen. I hope you will come to the harvest." And then he left them to take his place. They formed a perimeter around the vegetation and worked in toward the center.

Several hours later they stood beside a roaring fire enjoying the warmth against the night's chill desert wind which diluted the pungent smoke to a nutty fragrance. McCoy snapped his fingers, "I've got it!"

"What?" asked Kirk.

"Why we had to cross-pollinate those plants by hand."

"Why?"

"We're above the altitude of the insects or whatever critter does the job normally!"

Spock came up behind them, "Very astute, Doctor. We maintain this patch because, here, the natural enemies of the plant don't thrive and the fruit grown here is particularly tasty. There's a legend that the first seeds were left up here almost three thousand years ago by a couple who sought solitude. Come. We're about to start the dance."

Kirk could hardly believe his fatigue-deadened ears, but music pealed out into the still night and already lines, circles and triplex were forming with men and women mixed indiscriminately.

Spock showed them a step fitting the strange tempo. Several hands encouraged them to try and soon they were dancing with the Vulcans. It took all the humans' breath, but most of the Vulcans, including Spock, sang as they danced. Eventually, the humans had to quit, but the others danced ever more vigorously until the fire had died to glowing embers and dawn threw the plateau into shadowless relief, a perfect background for the dawn skydance of the silver birds.

Then they policed the area, gathered their possessions, and scrambled down the snake trail, skidding, sliding, and chattering seriously...doing everything humans might do except laugh and complain. Amanda had a delicious breakfast ready and they all retired for a delectable sleep.

And, Kirk realized, that was it. Or rather, it was the minute he woke up. It was high noon and the windows had closed when the thermostat kidded the airconditioner to life. He woke to a frigid normal temperature with the unmistakable impression that he'd lost something. Had he forgotten something on the mountain?

He'd reviewed the whole night and finally decided that the only thing he'd lost was a tension he'd never know he had until it was gone. Had it drained out into the helping hands of the Vulcans as they'd come down that precipitous slope? Or had the walls of the house drawn it out of his weary body as he entered and felt anew that mysterious Peace?

And then he realized something else. He hadn't laughed once the whole night, hadn't had one drink and not even a woman's smile, but he'd had a roaring good time, and he felt better than he had in years. He hadn't had a day's rest since he'd come to this strange house, yet he felt better rested than he could ever remember feeling before.

That feeling was still with him days later on the veranda in the gathering dark. It was no longer new but had grown to be a part of him. He felt totally...refreshed. Eager to accept whatever challenge life might confront him with. He rose and went through the louvre doors into the spacious main living room. Spock was in the Gardens of Thought and couldn't be disturbed, McCoy was sleeping and Amanda would probably be fussing over dinner.

He was standing, hands on hips, wondering which way to go when the hangings parted and McCoy peeked through an arch at the far end of the long room, "Come on," he beckoned, "Supper's ready."

"So soon?" Kirk started toward him.

"Soon? We've been waiting for you for an hour. Spock insisted. But I finally got too impatient and he let me come looking for you."

Shaking his head, Kirk followed the Doctor into the dining room with its oval, green-stone table that always seemed warm as polished hardwood. Spock stood as they entered, "Good. Now that we're all finished here, I have something for you both."

From the table before him he picked up a tiny, ornately carved sphere on a fine chain and approached the Captain with the sphere cupped between his palms. When he parted his hands, the sphere had broken into an empty hemisphere and a closed one with a small hole in the center.

Holding the Captain's eyes with his own, he raised the fingers of his right hand toward the Captain's forehead, slowly, asking permission for that contact.

Kirk nodded. The feather touch of warm, dry fingers that seemed to sink into his skull and comb the convolutions of his brain no longer disturbed him. It lasted only a moment and then Spock took Kirk's left hand and touched the hemisphere's hole.

When Spock released his hold, a miniature, ash-gold flame sprang from the hole as he said, "That you may take with you the good that you have found here," and placed both hemispheres and chains in Kirk's hands.

Wonderingly, Kirk touched the flame and found it tinglingly

cool to his finger and strangely evocative of that recently discovered Peace. When he looked up, he found McCoy staring at an identical flame in his own palm. With the cover on, the spheres became handsome ornaments which they slipped around their necks before they sat down to eat.

All during the meal, eaten in the silence required by Vulcan custom, Kirk wondered about this odd gift striving to find words to ask the questions it raised. When they'd all finished, he said, "Spock, that's the first time I've known you to give a gift, and I've just realized I haven't the vaguest idea how to say thank you."

"Gratitude is unnecessary, Captain."

Turning to Amanda, Kirk said, "Surely, you understand that we want to thank you for your splendid hospitality."

"Of course. But it's not customary. You were invited."

McCoy said, "I don't know about you, Jim, but I'll always consider this," he indicated the sphere, "one of my greatest treasures."

"Not always, Doctor," said Spock, "it will last for several years, but not forever."

"Spock," Kirk started resolutely, "I'd hate to...well... 'look the gift horse in the mouth' but... what is this?" He fingered the sphere, opened it and capped it again watching the flame fold in upon itself as he snapped the cover in place.

"It is part, a small part, of the heritage of my family."

"You mean," Kirk considered, "it's related to the science of the Kraith?"

"In a way."

"How does it work?"

"That I can't explain to you, Captain. Call it a part of the Vulcan science-of-mind you accept so readily."

McCoy said, "But this is mechanical."

"Not really, Doctor. Remember, I never handled both of them at once. That was to prevent accidental cross-linkage that might have proved troublesome. I had to key each to the owner's personal pattern."

Kirk said, "Is it dangerous?"

"Not in the way a Kraith can be. But don't attempt to show it to anyone who was not here with us."

Amanda leaned toward the humans, "Spock is an expert in these matters. Accept his gift, use it, and when it's spent, discard it. But ask no further questions he can't answer."

Just then, Spock's head came around swiftly, hunting the location of a sound, "What's that?"

They waited a moment, then Spock said, "Aircar. Sounds official...yes, it's a Federation vehicle." He stood up and Amanda followed saying, "More company. I'll clear the table, you go receive them."

Kirk rose and suddenly became acutely conscious of his appearance for the first time in weeks. He looked down at the colorful Vulcan tunic and skimpy but comfortable sandals and felt undressed. These clothes were fine for lounging around an oven, but they'd never do for greeting Federation officials.

Noting with some amusement that McCoy was having the same problem, he wondered if he'd have time to change and then he heard the car himself and decided to brazen it out. The three men moved through the living room and on to the front entrance arriving just as the car grounded on the stone and gravel rotunda that was the front approach to the house. As the car touched down, the grounds were lit by huge lamps concealed high on the stone building.

Presently, the car's door opened and a lovely young woman clad in the red Starfleet Communications uniform descended followed by a middle-aged man in...by pure reflex, Kirk snapped to a joint-cracking brace. It was Admiral Whitecroft, the Sector Commander stationed at Vulcan Base.

As the pair approached the house, Kirk had time to appraise the young woman. She was dark-haired, deeply tanned, short but finely shaped. She walked with a springy gait that completed the impression of youthful vitality without innocence or invitation. It was a masculine walk, but to the graceful, female rhythm.

Waiting at the foot of the steps, flanked by his senior officers, no longer conscious of his appearance, Kirk considered his chances with the girl as he drew a breath to greet the Admiral.

But before Kirk could speak, the girl turned to Spock, rendered a casual Vulcan salute and addressed him in what sounded to Kirk like flawless Vulcan. He examined her ears and complexion again. Could the light be playing tricks? No. She look Italian... or possibly Greek, but not Vulcan.

Spock answered, then turned to the Admiral, "Please enter

and be welcome, Sir. You have not interrupted. Our Peace is Complete."

When Amanda had them all installed over drinks at the table, Spock said, "Admiral, I understand that haste is your most comfortable mode, and as host, I offer to waive the usual formalities. Please tell us what it is that has brought you here."

The Admiral cleared his throat and looked at the three officers-without-a-ship who sat opposite him, "Spock, first may I offer my sincere condolences on the loss of your father. His absence will be deeply felt by all the Federation."

"Mortality," said Spock quietly, "is the source of racial vitality."

"Yes." The Admiral smoothed his thinning white hair, "I'm glad that I didn't interrupt anything because I have work for you." His gaze slid over the three officers then rested on Kirk, "Captain. I have a command for you. It's not a starship, but it's only temporary, and in my opinion this command is more important than any of our starships. Interested?"

"Yes, Sir. I was just beginning to wonder what I would be doing next." At that moment, Kirk realized that they'd all come to the end of their visit by mutual agreement without ever exchanging a word on the subject.

"This ship, The Halbird, was specially built for this mission. She's a five man, scout-class vessel built for speed, range, and indetectibility. She has no offensive armament and precious little defense. Still interested?"

"A spy mission?"

"Right."

"Espionage is a bit out of my line."

"You've done alright in the past. But we've arranged a stiff, four week course for you with the Service's sharpest experts."

Kirk nodded, considering, then asked, "Who's my crew and where am I going?"

Nodding at each in turn, the Admiral said, "Mr. Spock, Doctor McCoy, Miss Minos here, and one other. Your navigator will be a Medusan by the name of Thilien."

Kirk whistled.

The Admiral nodded, "Top secret, of course. I forgot to mention that the Halbird is too small for any of the fancy navigation equipment that this mission will call for. Miss Minos has been working with Thilien for almost a year with some rather startling results. They can handle the Halbird quite well."

Kirk looked hard at the girl for the third time. She wasn't blind and she wasn't Vulcan...

Spock said, "T'Aniyeh, you'd better explain."

She said, "Captain, I'm human, but I was raised nearly from infancy by a Vulcan family here on Vulcan. For some unknown reason, I don't actually need to view Thilien in order to establish a deep rapport. What we do is something rather unique...but it works."

Well, thought Kirk, I was feeling pretty cocky a few hours ago. Now I've got the challenge I wanted. He said, "And where are we going?"

"The exact coordinates will remain in Thilien's custody, but I can tell you this. It's deep in the Romulan Empire." The Admiral patted the air at Kirk's rise, "I know it's unusual to ask a Captain to command a ship when only his navigator knows the course, but you must admit that no Romulan can get anything at all out of a Medusan...and what you don't know, you can't tell."

Kirk subsided, "Why not make him the Captain, then?"

"Because he's not qualified."

Kirk thought it over and nodded. "Alright. Am I to be told what we're supposed to do?"

The Admiral leveled his gaze at Spock, "Miss Minos is also the best expert we have on the Romulans. She even speaks the language. She'll teach you everything you need to know to find out how they've been infiltrating Federation space and especially Federation Starbases."

Spock took this with outward equanimity.

The Admiral turned back to Kirk, "Our best security has been shown to be as strong as rotten lace. We've got to know the hows and whys. Suddenly, we got a tip and a break. We can put you in the vicinity of a top level Intelligence Conference with appropriate documents for Mr. Spock to walk right in. The conference will take place in six weeks. You'll just have time to get there."

have done. It was pure reflex. Spock worked as fast as his injured hand would allow. It wasn't really anybody's fault. But that's not the point. Spock has never said a word to me about it.

"Is that bad?"

"No. It's good. I think. I really believe it doesn't bother him. He doesn't blame me. Not even in his human sub-conscious...if he has one. And..." his voice lowered to a penetrating intensity, "Spock was goddamned-awful serious about that girl, Jim."

"Yes. I know, Bones."

"He's been up and down that rollercoaster several times in the last few years. He's learned a lot about himself in the process. How Vulcan he is. An how human. But he's never once been really serious about a female. Take the first time...T'Pring. That was real and it was a fiercely physical experience...but he never cared for T'Pring herself. When the need was gone, he let her go.

"I'm not sure, but I think that Romulan Commander kinda got to him where it hurt. He was so withdrawn after we let her off, I was a bit apprehensive for a while.

"And then there was Zarabeth, back in the ice age of that planet. You didn't see how he was with her. There was harmony there, Jim, the kind we call love. But it was largely due to the effects of the atavachron. It was hard, but he walked away from her. If that had been T'Rruel...he'd have stayed and died there regardless.

"He'd never really gotten it out of his system, if you know what I mean. He's been sensitive, even tense, ever since T'Pring. And it was getting worse, though he'd deny it a million times over. His body was waiting, ready to respond to the slightest trigger. And then came T'Rruel. To save her life, he had to wait. Then I loused it up. And he doesn't blame me. Do you see, now?"

"You no longer think he needs to admit his human emotions?"

"Well. As a psychiatrist...I just don't know. As a human being, I feel it's time to go cautiously. At least until there's been time to forget, time for him to come back to an even keel."

"He'll never forget, Bones. Besides," Kirk fingered the golden orb hung about his neck under his shirt, then fished it out to toy with it in what had recently become a habit. "I think he's found his peace."

McCoy took his Flame from around his neck and twirled it between two fingers, "You may be right. What do you suppose this is, anyway?"

"I couldn't begin to guess. I'm not even sure I want to know."

"He doesn't carry one."

"Amanda said he doesn't need it. He can get the effect anytime without props."

They sat awhile in companionable silence and then adjourned to their routine tasks.

Meanwhile, T'Aniyeh stood outside Spock's quarters, clutching the remains of her lytherette to her shivering body and wishing she'd never been born. Then she shook herself out of it with a Vulcan proverb, "Misused pride is illogical" and touched the door's signal.

"Come."

She entered the cramped cubicle to find Spock seated cross-legged on the bed surrounded by piles of tapes he'd been sorting. "Do you have a few minutes?"

Spock put his hand viewer down, unfolded himself, and stood with an ease that gave no hint of the hours he'd worked in that position. "Yes. I just finished."

"Would you..." she switched to the Low Vulcan idiom that lacked rigorous precision but was more concise than the ultra-precise High Vulcan, "I need a good lra-man."

"Obviously." Spock answered in the same mode, eyeing the wreckage in her arms, "What happened?"

"I don't want to answer."

He acquiesced with one eyebrow and put out a hand for the pieces. She held them out to him and in transferring the pile of trash, his hand brushed hers, hesitated, and closed firmly over her fingers, "T'Aniyeh. Your skin is below room temperature and you're shaking. Why?"

She cast about and chose an English phrase for the non-literal but emphatic quality, "I'm freezing! They were so bent on building this ship with economy they didn't put in an adjustable environmental control."

"You can't..." he switched back to Low Vulcan, "adjust your metabolic rate?"

She shook her head, "I don't have the physiology. My foster-father used to krobia'ach for me when I'd suffer from the heat and

They spent four of those six weeks in the most intensive training program Kirk had ever known. Not even the Academy had been so demanding. Kirk often groaned that he was too old for this sort of cramming, but he forged ahead day by day and soon had scoured the rust off his learning faculties and actually began to enjoy the challenge of a truly high pressure grind. Days went by without his catching a glimpse of Spock or McCoy, and when he did, it was usually only from a distance.

He lost track of day and night as they worked around the clock with only four to six hour breaks for exhausted slumber.

Finally, the day came when they took the Halbird and headed for the neutral zone and their "final exam." The first four days, Kirk and McCoy spent sleeping while the tireless Vulcan and human girl kept up the merciless pace. But eventually, Kirk's reserves were replenished and he began to take notice of his new Command.

He checked out the strange bridge, poking about the computerless, navigator-helmsmanless compartment whose sole familiar feature, other than its shape, was the central free-standing console. But, he reflected sourly, this console held only the special com device and spectrum-shift decoder they'd need to keep in touch with Spock. He was wishing he could talk to Thilien when Tanya came through the door, "Captain. Have you seen Spock?"

"I believe he's in his quarters. What's that you have there?"

"My...what do you call it? Lytherette? It's broken."

"So I see. What happened?"

"Oh. I guess you'd call it an accident. Excuse me, Sir."

She went off in search of Spock and Kirk decided to go share his frustrations with McCoy.

He found him in the galley puttering with the autochef, "Bones. What are you up to?"

"Ach! They didn't give me a lab, they didn't give me a decent sickbay, and practically no medical supplies and the scarcest minimum in instrumentation...so where else can I better look after the health of the crew than in the kitchen playing dietician?"

Kirk sat at the tiny table wondering if, indeed he had it so bad after all. Maybe he was just feeling sorry for himself.

"So, what's eating you, Jim? And what would you like to eat?"

"Nothing really." He looked up at the Chief Surgeon in surprise, "That's the snappiest remark you've made in a long time. Come to think of it, how come you haven't been sniping at Spock?" He considered, "You haven't poked him in the ribs once since...well, since before I lost the Enterprise. Have you given up?"

McCoy sat down opposite his Captain, folded his hands gravely and leaned forward, "I'm supposed to be a pretty fair psychiatrist, you know."

Kirk nodded, "So I'd heard, Bones. Go on."

"Well, Spock is an odd one..."

"Hmmm. Go on."

"He's actually made a pretty stable adjustment to his situation...and there aren't many texts or research papers on human-Vulcan hybrids."

"So what changed?"

McCoy inspected the youthful face heavy with experience for a long moment, then very quietly, he said, "T'Rruel."

Kirk waited encouragingly.

"You know, she died because of me. And Spock has never said a word to me about it. Never once. He even invited me to his home and treated me as an honored guest."

"I don't follow you. Why should you blame yourself?"

Kirk thought, was this why Spock had invited Bones?

"Jim. Don't you realize? Didn't you read the reports? If I hadn't tried to revive that Romulan cyborg before Spock had her unhooked from the controls of that little raider, she wouldn't have been able to take the ship up and crash it in that crevice. If that hadn't happened, Spock wouldn't have had to... well, T'Rruel wouldn't have had to die pulling my chestnuts out of the fire."

"And you feel guilty?"

McCoy thought soberly for several long minutes. "Not any more, I guess. Not really. I did what any doctor would

he helped me up-shift when I went to the Academy, but I made the mistake of returning home and down-shifted so easily I wasn't aware of it. And now I'm suffering. It's so bad, I can't concentrate."

Still holding her hand, Spock moved closer and looked down into her eyes, "Why didn't you tell me?"

"Even if you knew the technique, which is unlikely because it is an archaism that has fallen into disuse, you couldn't help me so soon after conducting an Affirmation, so what would be the point?"

"Logical. However, you can't go on like this, you'll end up in Doctor McCoy's Sick Bay. You still have much to teach me and I can't afford to let you become ill." He took the remains of the instrument from her, laid them on the bed and positioned his hands before her saying, "My grandfather was also your foster-father's mentor. He set stiff requirements. With your permission."

"Don't. I don't want you to overextend yourself. You'll need your vitality."

"I won't strain for perfection."

"All right." She touched his fingers in a complicated caress and then guided them to her forehead as she reached for his. Presently, her shivering stopped.

"That," said Spock breaking the contact, "will have to do." He closed his eyes and took a deep breath.

"You'd better sit down."

"Negative. I'm not fatigued." He turned to the mess on the bed, "I'm not an expert in this, but I believe it can be repaired." He fingered the shattered soundboard, "However, I wonder if it's worth the trouble?"

"To me it would be."

Seating himself on the edge of the bed to toy with the jigsaw puzzle, he said, "T'Aniyeh," picking up the thread of an old conversation, "why won't you marry me?"

She chose English intonation, "Oh, Spock," as if to say, "Dear Spock, I don't want to hurt you." Then she switched to Vulcan, "That," she pointed to the lytherette, "is the main reason."

He looked blankly at the pieces in his hand, "Because I can't fix it?"

"No. Because I broke it."

He stared at the shattered instrument as if demanding an explanation from it, "Why."

"Because I'm human... and female."

"I don't understand."

"I know. And that's why I can't marry you, even though our parents have called it a good match."

"Because I don't understand human female psychology?"

"No. Not even human males understand all that well. Because I do things like this all the time. Last night, after our conversation, I went to my room... and had hysterics."

She turned away, "I'm Vulcan trained. I can step outside myself and watch it happening. I know its chemical-physiological roots. But, nevertheless, there is no surcease but to sob and smash things, precious things, and then sob over their loss. It passes, but it leaves a tangled mess in its wake. You could never live with that. I could never ask you to. I'm too... embarrassed... by my own lack of control."

She turned toward him again, "You see? We don't even have the words. I have to borrow from them to explain myself." And then as a new thought, "Spock, why are you in such a hurry? Why do you want me? And why now?"

"You're right. There's no haste. I want you because you're the logical choice. Have I not said so, many times?"

"Yes. But you ignore that my dedication to logic is strictly emotional. Listen. After T'Pring, you wrote to me, and I said wait. And you waited. And came T'Rruel. Wasn't she worth waiting for?"

"Yes."

"That's what I wanted for you. It didn't work out. Now, again, I say wait."

"I'm not terribly sanguine about hunches."

"The odds are more than ten thousand to one against there ever being anyone for me. I won't have a human. Emotionally, I couldn't bear it. And I won't inflict myself on a Vulcan, so there's no reason for haste. If you ever want me, I'll be there."

Abandoning the smashed instrument, he rose and took her by the shoulders looking down into her eyes somberly, "You force me to say it in words?"

"Apparently."

"T'Aniyeh. My dedication to haste is... emotional. I've been through... hell... these last few years. I need to put an end to it while I can still think clearly and logically. There are reasons for our custom of choosing one for another at such an early age. There is a peace that can only come from that kind of commitment. The chance of someone else like T'Rruel turning up is negligible."

"Yes. But there is yet another point. You carry genes to which you are obligated. It's the purpose of marriage, the only purpose. You must have a son by a Vulcan who can raise him in the proper tradition."

"It is only required that the union be fertile. I have fathered a son by a Vulcan. He died. What I do now is my own, private affair. It's my... professional... opinion that you have the tradition."

She bent her head to avoid his eyes and then melted against him, "I'm going to cry again. Oh, Spock, I'm such a mess."

"You did Affirm the Continuity."

"Yes. But I had no right."

"I disagree."

"She sobbed, "How can you!" She produced a throwie and blew her nose, turning away from him. "I'm sorry."

"Apology accepted." He paced around her in the tiny compartment that barely held the bed and a desk and chair. He dwaled long enough for her to regain her composure and then confronted her, tipping her face up to him as he dabbed at one last tear. His face was set in utterly impersonal neutrality.

"T'Aniyeh. Have you considered that one source of your difficulties may well be that you're not married?"

He'd adopted the syntax of Middle Vulcan, a flexible mixture of the ultra-precise and the informal. She found herself relaxing as the slightly higher level of abstraction let her answer in the abstract. "Marriage-to-a-Vulcan is not-solution."

"True. But-no-marriage-at-all is-also not-solution." He came back to the informal mode, "If I read you rightly, you're not inclined to compromise."

She retained the impersonal mode, "True. But that-does-not-imply necessity to-inflict-misery on someone-else."

With one appreciative eyebrow, Spock conceded formally, "Logical." He switched to English, "We'll leave it at that for now. Come. We must work. There is a great deal I don't yet understand."

They turned to Spock's piles of tapes and became two different people as they bent to their task.

Thilien drove the little, nearly undetectable ship onward, through the neutral zone and deep into the Romulan Empire. Right on schedule, he informed Tanya that they were in position to jettison the warp engines and become virtually undetectable. She informed Kirk, and he tended to the mechanical details on Thilien's cue. They were now merely an impulse-driven disk, as lost among the stars as a coin in a slot machine.

Except for Spock and Tanya for occasional company, Thilien was quite alone in his sealed compartment. He was not a cyborg but he could accomplish nearly the same feats of economy. He didn't mind the loneliness because he had much to contemplate. So he brought his passengers to their destination, informed Tanya, established the requisite solar orbit, and went to "sleep".

"Captain."

Kirk turned from surveying, for the thousandth time, his useless bridge with Thilien's "quarters" solidly walled off in the forward portion. "Yes, Miss Minos?"

"We have arrived. Spock is about to leave."

"Thank you." He couldn't suppress a note of sarcasm, "I'd like to see him off."

"Then come. He's checking out the shuttlecraft."

There were moments, Kirk reflected, when he was glad of her Vulcan background. She might be frigid but at least she could miss, or maybe overlook, his badly chosen intonations.

The shuttlecraft bay resembled an archaic submarine torpedo room more than the spacious hanger deck of the Enterprise. When Tanya, Kirk and McCoy arrived, Spock had just finished a last once-over of the slick but cramped one-man missile and was climbing into the padded chamber when he noticed them.

Kirk approached his friend, "Don't leave without saying goodbye."

"I had intended to. Goodbye is hardly in order."

"I certainly hope not," said McCoy, "But take care of yourself. Remember, I don't have the tools to paste you back together."

"I shall try, Doctor. Captain, communications check."

Kirk, doubling as communications officer as well as engineer, went to the wall screen controls glad that routine preparation of a Command Officer included grounding in every phase of ship's operations, "Ready, Mr. Spock."

Spock closed the canopy of his coffin-like cartridge and activated his throat mike, "Spock to Kirk, do you read?"

"Loud and clear. Do you read?"

"Clear, sir, but not loud. All channels open and functioning."

Spock out."

The serve-motors drove the capsule into its launching tube, whined, whooshed, clicked and whined again. And then the three turned away to begin the familiar agony of the professional spaceman.

Vigils were not strangers to the two men, but the girl, despite mature years, Academy accomplishments and Vulcan training was pacing the narrow corridors and fidgeting restlessly through her days long before the strain wore into her companions' feigned serenity. She couldn't even converse with Thilien because he had withdrawn into private meditation.

Then, the morning of the fourth day, a quick burst of static resolved into a brief message, "On schedule." That was all, but it told the waiting trio that the ticklishly dangerous part of the mission was beginning. If all went as planned, it would be a walk-through. The slightest snag could spell disaster.

By midafternoon, they were all gathered on the bridge near the main com unit. The hours dripped past in an agony of minutes until, less than an hour before the next scheduled check-in, they were all counting seconds and concentrating on not holding their breaths.

McCoy broke the silence, "Tanya, you're nervous. Like all other emotions, anxiety demands expression. The release of emotion is essential to human mental health."

She signed hugely and shook herself favoring McCoy with a ghost of a smile, "I have often observed, Doctor, that the healthy release of emotion is singularly unhealthy for those nearest one."

"Now, where have I heard that before?" said Kirk.

"Platonius," supplied McCoy.

T'Aniyeh looked from one to the other and then shrugged an eyebrow, "If you'll excuse me, gentlemen, I believe I'll go release my emotions in private." She left.

McCoy followed her with an eye and then shrugged, "Well, public or private, perhaps it doesn't make any real difference. But I'll bet she'll be back in time."

And she was. She reappeared twenty minutes later draped in a composure that was somehow infectious. As the seconds ticked by they relaxed in their confidence in Spock. Then the console clock registered check-in time and all their breathing stopped as the plus seconds cooed by to be racked up by the relentless mechanism. Ten seconds. Thirty seconds. One minute late.

"He's in trouble, Bones."

"Yes. With that infernal time sense of his, he'd never be this late without reason."

"Our chronometer must be off," suggested T'Aniyeh.

"Not by this much," answered Kirk.

They waited rigidly, three pairs of eyes riveted on a rolling, digital readout chronometer that just couldn't be more than five hundredths of a microsecond wrong. Five minutes. Ten minutes. Kirk said, "Tanya, ask Thilien."

"Ask him what? He's asleep but I could wake him."

"Do so. Ask him if he can reach Spock. Tell him to go to red alert status."

"There's nothing he could do."

"That was not a request, Lieutenant."

"Yes, sir." After a moment, "He says that Spock is alive, but he can't establish more than that. He says he's been on red alert twenty minutes now."

Kirk grunted an acknowledgement and pounced on the board as the decoder hummed to life, "Physiological difficulty. Contracted contagious disease. Am continuing on schedule."

Kirk's hands flew to the controls before he realized they had no code for "Timecheck erroneous". They looked at each other in horror. "Bones, could a disease foul Spock's time sense?"

"No known disease."

"Chances that he might realize his error?"

"Mighty slim. He's depended on it all his life. He's got his mind on other problems and he's fighting some kind of infection. There's a limit even to Vulcan mental capacity."

Tanya said, "This is a precision mission..."

"I am aware of that, Lieutenant."

She said, "What are we going to do?" It was a request for information not a plea to the gods for help.

"Wait. There's nothing we can do. Unless you'd care to pray. Alert Thilien to be ready to take the capsule aboard and depart for warp-engine-rendevous."

"Yes, sir."

And they waited. In lip-chewing, nerve-grinding silence. Occasionally, McCoy prescribed tension relieving exercise and some-

how remembered to feed them. It was midnight by their clock, a full hour and a half past check-in time when the console hummed and clicked to itself and emitted a mechanical, "Secured. Debarcation imminent."

As is so often the case in a spaceman's life, the action, when it came was so swift as to leave even the professionals helpless.

Three things happened simultaneously. The floor shifted wildly under their feet knocking McCoy and Tanya to their knees while Kirk seized the console to save himself. Thilien reported to Tanya, "We're being towed by tractor beams from three starship class vessels." And the console said mechanically, "Agent captured."

Tanya relayed Thilien's message, but there was nothing they could do. The surprising thing was that they were not simply destroyed. Instead, they were transferred, gently by Romulan standards, to a large, featureless but otherwise not uncomfortable detention cell deep within the maximum security confines of a Romulan free-orbiting Star Base. To add surprise to surprise, they were all herded into the same cell where Spock was laid out on a hard bench in the corner.

Then Kirk got a final shock as their captors left and the inmate of the cell across from them rose from his bench and approached the double horizontal bars of the energy field restraint. The Captain was unaware of the most unmilitary gape of his mouth.

Sarek raised his hand solemnly in the Vulcan salute, "May You Live Long and Prosper, Captain Kirk... Doctor McCoy... T'Aniyeh."

Without the slightest hesitation, she answered, "May You Not Live Long and Prosper, Sarek."

"I thank you, Daughter-of-the-Tradition."

Kirk's gape widened and infected McCoy as they turned to eye the girl and then back to the ex-Ambassador.

Sarek said, "Spock is ill?"

McCoy shook himself and went to Spock, "I've no instruments," he complained touching the Vulcan to check skin temperature, respiration and non-existent pulse. He peeled an eyeball, doubted the result and shrugged, "I think he's just fighting an infection."

Sarek nodded, "Most probably the one that nearly killed me shortly after I sent the message that most probably drew you here. He will have it under control shortly, but he'll require a transfusion of Romulan anti-bodies to whip it completely. It's a self immunizing disease they all contract in early childhood when it's quite minor. It severely affects our time sense, which in a mature Vulcan," he eyed McCoy, "can be fatal."

McCoy approached the barrier to their cell and examined Sarek, "You've lost a lot of weight, Mr. Ambassador. Are you well?"

"Quite fit now, thank you, Doctor. They wished me alive



for purposes best known to themselves so they cured me of the malady."

"And your heart?"

"Your repair job has held up quite well. I'm no longer troubled by malfunctions."

Kirk mastered his confusion, "Mr. Ambassador, we... the whole Federation thought you were dead."

"But you recovered the Kraith."

"Yes."

"And I was declared dead."

"Yes."

"Excellent. And Spock...?"

T'Aniyeh answered shortly in Vulcan and Sarek's face relaxed into the closest thing to satisfaction he'd allow himself, "He is his grandfather's grandson." It was the highest tribute he could pay.

During this exchange, McCoy went back to Spock's side and covertly compared the father and son. With Sarek's new figure, the family resemblance was certainly more apparent.

Kirk began to circle their cell, mentally taking inventory of their ordinance and other assets. Sum total... zero. He eyed the light fixture in the unreachable ceiling, remembering a certain impromptu laser experiment, but they were denied even subcutaneous advantages. Besides, there was no cot to cannibalize. The bench was cast in one solid piece. There were no windows and no sanitary facilities.

He came back to Tanya, "Our only asset is not here."

She started, "Thi..."

"What do you think?"

After a moment she said, "Ready and waiting."

He nodded, "Keep up the good work."

She said, "I will, sir."

McCoy called from Spock's corner, "He's coming around, Jim."

They gathered around Spock as he struggled to a sitting position and McCoy helped him prop himself up against the corner.

"How do you feel?"

Spock eyed the Doctor sourly, "I believe I've discovered the meaning of one of your expressions. I feel 'lousy'. I haven't conquered the creature that has invaded my body and evidently it will be a losing battle resulting in my eventual demise. However, in the meantime, we have a problem... one involving..." his eye fell on Sarek.

The ensuing silence crackled with tension. Then Spock lowered his eyes, closed them for a moment, and when he again viewed Sarek he observed levelly, "Mother will be pleased."

Sarek answered, "She has her irrational moments. But she'll get over it."

"Indeed."

Kirk said, "I don't believe it!" Looking from father to son, "You must feel something!"

Leaning his head against the wall for support, Spock slowly shifted his gaze to Kirk. He had great difficulty obtaining a satisfactory focus. Finally he said, "Sir, certainly you've not forgotten that my father has not Affirmed the Continuity."

Kirk and McCoy shared an indrawn, "Huuuuuuuh!"

Sarek said, "Spock," and continued in the crisp, ultra-precise High Vulcan which, when wielded by a master, could be unbelievably compact while not at all concise. Shortly, Spock closed his eyes to concentrate and eventually was forced to ask his father to slow down.

Kirk turned to the girl, "Lieutenant, what are they saying?"

"The referents are highly abstract. I'm not getting it all. Sarek is recounting his adventures... how he went after the thieves and got taken prisoner... how he got them to abandon the Kraith... now he's telling what he knows of the disease Spock has."

When Sarek finished, Spock remained silent, eyes closed in stony concentration. McCoy moved to his side. Sarek said, "Leave him, Doctor. He's trying a suggestion of mine."

Then Spock was with them again, "With some success, Father. Thank you." He laborously shifted his gaze to McCoy, "Doctor, does your equipment aboard the Halbird include blood filtration apparatus?"

McCoy considered. "No. But I could improvise. Depends on what I have to filter for what."

Sarek said for Spock who was again withdrawn, "I have the requisite anti-bodies... but you are familiar with Spock's blood requirements. Ordinary T-negative blood contains factors his tissues can't tolerate..."

McCoy said, "Yes..." intrigued by the problem. Then, "I think... no, I know I can do it. That much they gave me. But its purely academic."

Spock said softly, "Captain."

Kirk knelt beside Spock. Spock's fingers plucked at the fine chain just visible above Kirk's collar and drew the tiny sphere into the light. Across the corridor, Sarek gave a most un-Vulcan gasp, "Spock, no... you can't! Not so soon after an Affirmation. It'll kill you."

Fingering the golden orb, Spock eyed his father calmly, "Perhaps. But... does it matter? Remember, Father, I am my grandfather's grandson. He who trained me in the six-hundred seventy disciplines knew my weaknesses as well as my strengths. And you, yourself, have said that I am a throwback. I'm not very sensitive and my control is erratic, but I have compensating advantages. However, it remains to convince the captain."

"Captain Kirk," Sarek said, "don't. He is ill. His mind isn't clear. His strength is dissipated on too many fronts."

To Spock, Kirk said, "Explain."

With a glance, Spock drew Kirk and McCoy close and spoke very softly, "We must move quickly, now, before they realize we are able to escape and before they discover Thilien... and before I'm truly incapacitated."

"I gave you this," he fingered the sphere, "and a warning. Do you remember it?"

They nodded.

"I did not, however, give a complete warning. And now, I must." His eyes shifted laboriously from one to the other, "If you give these back to me as I gave them to you, it will cause you greater pain than you brought to my home and left there. It will be what Doctor McCoy would call a psychic trauma. However, I believe that the worst of the shock will not come for a day or two. Enough time, perhaps, to take countermeasures. You are both strong, well adjusted personalities. In my professional judgement, this will cause you no permanent harm... if we live through it."

"But the immediate experience will be very like... attempting to pull one's own tooth. The Flame is a crutch. It's meant to be used to hasten and guide a healing process and when it's no longer needed, it is easily, even eagerly, discarded. But until then... it is very dear."

"It is your decision. I can use them and in the using destroy them. But the path to the Halbird will be opened." He fell back exhausted, withdrawn.

Kirk and McCoy rose, and almost in unison took the treasured gifts from about their necks. Each became lost in his own decision.

For Kirk, it was a panoramic review of each of those moments when he'd heard that singularly pure note of Peace. The Flame could evoke the taste of living water, pungent smoke on desert air, and a soul penetrating quiet that had given him a vague insight into the life based on pure logic. It had seemed as effective in increasing his ability to reason dispassionately as the hours he'd spent exploring the Gardens of Thought.

Though he rarely viewed the Flame, he realized he'd come to rely on that tiny instrument of sanity. His innate distaste for mental crutches, chemical or otherwise, rose in him, and, though he didn't doubt Spock's word that the thing would be outgrown, he determined to part with it one way or another. He looked up.

In his own way, McCoy had come to the same decision. They turned to Spock.

The Vulcan had risen to his feet and stood swaying, one hand to the wall for support. Kirk nodded and a second later McCoy did also.

Sarek said, "Spock, I forbid."

Spock answered softly, "Father. I am Kaytaytikh. You no longer have authority over my professional decisions."

Kirk again had that odd impression of reverberation down the ages, a formula uttered with a simplicity that masked far reaching implications.

After a pause, Sarek said, "Suvil was only one of two grandfathers. This will kill you."

"I don't think so. At least not if I do it now, before I lose control to this sickness."

McCoy said to Spock, "Don't do it if it's too dangerous for you. We'll find another way."

"That is not your concern, Doctor. You will have your own problems to contend with. After, we will have to move swiftly to take maximum advantage of what I will be able to do. I presume you know the way to the Halbird?"

T'Aniyeh said, "Sarek and I can find it. Thilien can guide us because we form a triad."

"Yes." Spock said moving out into the center of the cell, "T'Aniyeh?"

Fighting not to chew her lips or say something impulsive, she stationed herself at the force barrier facing Sarek who turned his back. It took all her determination not to implore Spock to seek another way out.

Spock turned to Kirk, standing firmly with scarcely any

sign of the weakness that grew minute by minute. "Now."

Kirk held the orb out to Spock who held up his hand, "No. Not like that. Remember how I gave it to you?"

"Yes. But you said you keyed it to my pattern. I don't know how to do that."

"I'll do the work, Captain. Open the sphere."

Kirk obeyed. The tiny ash-gold flame leaped.

"Good. Now damp the flame."

"What?"

"Make it go out. Just think that it's not there."

Kirk tried. It took about thirty seconds, but the flame flickered and died. He felt like he'd just lost his best friend. He swallowed the first sting of tears.

"Fine. Now raise the first two fingers of your right hand and touch my forehead." Spock never took his eyes off the empty flame-hole.

After a moment, Kirk remembered that next, Spock had placed his fingers on the hole and started to remove his fingers from Spock's forehead. Spock said, "No. Wait. I'm a bit slow."

They stood like that for a bout a minute until Spock said, "Now I've got it. Take the fingers of my left hand in your right and touch them to the flamehole."

Kirk did so.

"Now, let go."

As the tiny flame blossomed anew it was a full spectrum rainbow too bright to look at. Spock muttered a Rigilian expletive and the ash-gold returned. Taking a deep breath, he shook his head as one who has almost dropped a whole handful of mercury fulminate caps onto a hot griddle and turned to McCoy, "Captain. Go to T'Aniyeh."

In the blind fog of his pain, Kirk obeyed the voice of authority. The girl gathered him in and placed a soothing hand to his forehead somehow stemming the unreasonable flood of grief.

McCoy said, "You'll have to give me that routine slowly."

Spock held the flaming hemisphere in his left hand, "Yes, Doctor, but you will do it in reverse. Hold the hemisphere in your right hand and damp the flame."

McCoy did so but not with ease.

"Now, raise your left hand to my forehead."

"But, don't you have to put the other one down first?"

"No. I must cross-link them. It's tricky and I'm not well, Doctor. Will you get on with it."

McCoy did as he was told and waited the eternity until Spock said, "I've got it. Now, take the fingers of my right hand in your left hand and touch them to the flamehole, release the sphere and step back quickly."

McCoy did that and somehow ignored the overwhelming surge of emotion to watch the spectacle.

The new flame exploded to rainbow brilliance, danced a good foot high and then the other one joined it and they twined to a pillar that nearly brushed the high ceiling. McCoy didn't notice when Kirk and Tanya turned nor when Sarek did likewise. They all watched Spock balancing that pillar on two small hands like a juggler. He turned to face the energy screens, and, as they vanished, the rainbow paled slightly.

Very quietly, without any fanfare or fireworks, the bars slid aside and the field they generated collapsed. As soon as the last trace of restraint had vanished, Sarek plunged across the corridor and arrived at Spock's side just in time to catch him as the flame turned soot black then winked out and Spock crumpled.

Supporting his son, Sarek said, "Let's go, Captain."

Now that physical action was imminent, Kirk and McCoy found they could put aside their loss and procede to run for their lives. Kirk said, "Lieutenant, inform Thilien. Lead the way."

The party took off down the corridor, past guards posts where bodies were strewn in sudden disarray. Around corners, up and down ramps, they pounded. Soon, Spock recovered enough to move on his own, but it was acutely obvious to Kirk that he was using his last wind.

Finally, they climbed a huge spiral ramp that circled a cavernous, multi-leveled machine shop and found the Halbird's disk drawn up to a workbench while the rest of the ship was supported on a pair of runners that led to a shuttlecraft lock. Apparently, work on her had just started. Surprised, Kirk realized that less than an hour had passed since their arrival.

The Captain led the way toward the underhatch snapping orders, "Lieutenant, inform Thilien. Doctor, take care of Spock..."

Suddenly, a phaser beam whizzed and vaporized half the workbench. Before they could gain cover, a second beam brushed Sarek and Spock, knocking them spinning. Kirk and Spock closed up while T'Aniyeh climbed in and turned to give them a hand hauling the Vulcans aboard.

Several more phaser blasts snapped around them, but they got clear with no further injuries.

As soon as the hatch closed, Thilien guided the ship down the ramp, and revved his impulse engines, aiming their field at the lock. The metal vanished with a snapping explosion and Thilien performed the same service for the outer door. Explosive decompression killed several hundred loyal Romulans before emergency doors closed, effectively immobilizing the rest.

At top impulse speed, Thilien, a master of evasive maneuvers, led the remaining Romulans a merry chase. But, while he thoroughly enjoyed himself, his passengers knew virtually nothing of the events outside of a wildly gyrating floor and occasional straining of the ship's skeleton.

McCoy helped Spock onto the Sick Bay's single bed, then turned to Sarek who was at least conscious, "Are you all right, sir?" While he prepared a hypo, he said to Sarek, "New stuff. Guaranteed not to upset your stomach... or so they tell me. It'll ease that phaser burn."

McCoy pressed the hypo to Sarek's shoulder and then to Spock's, and watched the life sign indicators anxiously. Spock was younger than Sarek, but he'd sustained the greater portion of the phaser beam on top of a raging fever on top of an unknown effect of whatever it was he'd done, and shouldn't have. Privately McCoy admitted he'd never seen Spock so near to death. Not even the time he'd had to regenerate a whole organ because they didn't carry a replacement for him.

Spock started to come around and McCoy turned to Sarek, "Well? Feel like a meal?"

Sarek nodded, "Excellent, Doctor."

Spock's head tossed feverishly and then steadied as his eyes opened and McCoy said, "How's your stomach?"

He struggled to a sitting position, "What did you give me?"

"Just something for the phaser stun."

Looking dubious, Spock swung his legs off the bed. The hurt look on his face turned to reproach as he gained his feet and tottered to the little room in the corner and closed the door. The sounds were faint but unmistakable.

Spock returned looking weaker but enwrapped in injured dignity. He lay down again and relaxed systematically as he said, "Doctor, if you ever put that chemical into my body again, I shall have you up for malpractice. I did not offer myself as an experimental subject." Then he quietly and deliberately fainted.

Sarek eyed the Doctor, "You'd better set up that filter while I try to repair some of the damage he's inflicted on himself." He turned to Kirk who'd been watching, "I'll require privacy. I must use a technique which... is quite dangerous in itself. If we both live through that, we will need that filter immediately. It may take several hours, but then I'll be free to do what I can for you both."

The humans left father and son to their hattle and embarked on the all too familiar routine of waiting. The hours went by. McCoy finished his work and Tanya made them all eat and even prepared a meal for Sarek. She fended off Kirk's inquiries about ship's status saying she didn't want to distract Thilien by asking idle questions.

Then, with evident relief, she told Kirk, "prepare to hook in the warp engines."

Glad to have work for a change, Kirk pitched in and was ready to couple the final leads as soon as Thilien had them maneuvered in place. Kirk, as a spaceman, appreciated Thilien's skill in the maneuver and made a mental note to recommend him for a commendation. Then they were hurtling for the neutral zone at warp speed.

Meanwhile, McCoy was called back to Sick Bay, and when Kirk weary but satisfied, returned from his task, he found Spock's bed rigged with filters. A small reservoir of thick green blood was supplying a steady drip into Spock's veins. McCoy came out closing the door behind him, "I think, but don't quote me, that he's going to live. Sarek seems in remarkably good health too, considering."

"Thank you, Doctor," Sarek came up behind McCoy, "the active life agrees with me. It will be hard to return to the desk."

"You will return to Vulcan, sir?" asked Kirk.

Sarek nodded, "Yes, gentlemen, I am now rejoined to the life stream of my people." At thier blank looks he added, "Spock is in a unique position. He is my son, and we are xtmprrsqzntwifd. He recently conducted the Affirmation which I missed. And we now had the necessity to meld in a technique ordinarily not practiced between members of the same family. To save a life, it is permitted. But merely to trans-Affirm... it would result in dual death. But, in this case, it resulted in dual life. And now, Captain, I believe it is your turn to receive attention. I cannot recreate your flame, but perhaps I can cue you to another."

Sarek stepped between the two men, turning them down the corridor, "Rest assured that Spock's standing invitation to you will be honored in our house all the days of my life."

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

When I wrote that scene in MISSION where Spock takes them up the mountain, I had already in mind to tell a far larger tale of interstellar politics of which FEDERATION CENTENNIAL is only a tiny fragment. However, I didn't have the writing skills to do the job. Thus, I left that scene uninterpreted and planned to give another slant on it in Kraith IV. Likewise, the climax of MISSION is not meant to be understood on first reading. It must be re-interpreted in the light of Kraith IV. However, at the time I wrote it, I thought that IV would never be published. I didn't believe that fans would be able to accept the premises of IV involving Kirk. Therefore, Spock's reasons for giving the Flame Sphere remain cloudy in MISSION... also the entire significance of the events in MISSION depend on IV, V, and future stories. (This is admittedly dirty pool, but here you have the maturation of a writer.)

For example, take the often asked question of how the technique Sarek used on Spock at the end of MISSION resulted in a trans-Affirmation. No where in Kraith is the mechanics of this miracle explained. Yet, an explanation would enrich would enrich the understanding of the story. The explanation I had in mind is this: The conducting of an Affirmation impresses a pattern on the Brain Circuitry Pattern which opens direct channels to the Race Memory which is not a genetically passed on memory.

In order to understand the trans-Affirmation and its dangers, one must understand the nature of the Affirmation and its reason for existing. The Affirmation serves to create and pass on the Race Memory. In the mass-meld of Affirmation, memories are shared totally. If the meld is properly performed, the personalities of all participants serve to sift the memories and assign them weighted importance in the overall history of the Peoples.

Thus the composition of a group which is to Affirm must be carefully balanced. There must be at least one representative from each of the many traditions that went into blending Tsaichrani. Thus, the minimum number. There is another, mechanical, reason for the minimum number. Fewer minds than that can't attain the depth-meld and hold it long enough to be effective without causing fatal insanity to all. Perhaps, it might be possible. There is a percentage risk involved when fewer than the requisite number are melded. Any time that requisite number or more are joined through the proper exercises there is no risk to the group, though weak individuals may suffer. Therefore, better safe than sorry.

The pattern formed by the group mind that comes into existence briefly at an Affirmation remains fresh in the Kaytaytikh's mind for about a year afterward. Thus, any telepathic strain can cause insanity and death for the Kaytaytikh during this period. But that pattern can also be used to pass on its information to someone who missed the Affirmation... under certain very rigid circumstances. However, the trans-Affirmation is never without danger. Two minds alone should never attempt it... yet no more than two minds can. Therefore, trans-Affirming is no remedy for missing an Affirmation.

Trans-Affirmation can occur only between members of the same family... and one must be a Kaytaytikh who conducted (not merely participated). It has never been successfully completed between a Daughter and a Kaytaytikh.

In MISSION, Spock had performed a difficult and dangerous maneuver with the FlameSpheres, using his brain as a modulating channel for energies he would handle with care at any time. But he performed this maneuver while the Affirmation's mass meld still held sway over part of him. The maneuver he performed can be understood only by understanding the "ghost" passages of Kraith IV. What Spock did with those two Flame Spheres was drawn from the same science that killed his grandfather... a "forbidden" field of investigation... one that produces more evil than good, if there is such a thing as good or evil. The "modern" mass meld mind says "No", while Spock's will says "Yes"... the conflict creates psychic injury. Sarek had to attempt to heal the injury but in order to reach it, he had to pass through the mass meld. If he had Affirmed, he would have had no problem. Since he hadn't, he had to force himself into that matrix of minds and become a part of them. Since he approved partially of Spock's use of the Spheres, his opinion changed the mass-mind in such a way as to lessen the conflict and hence, he was able to reach and heal the injury.

Ordinarily members of the same family should never attempt this kind of a deep meld because they have common experiences and dispositions that may be strong enough to cause them to lose their identities. It is a risk. Since Spock is half human, the differences between him and Sarek were great enough to prevent this type of confusion. They'd never tried it before, so it was a calculated risk... that paid off. Without treatment, Spock would die. Without Affirmation... Sarek's life was less than worthless. They had nothing to lose. They gambled and won.

Jacqueline Lichtenberg

(Excerpted from a letter to Dobbie Goldstein, dated 3/16/72.)

AMANDA'S MISSION: contd. from page 22

And waited. And waited. And waited...

SURAK'S

CONSTRUCT

J. Lichtenberg

All of Vulcan philosophy rests on the five main concepts embodied in the Vulcan hand salute which is formed by holding the hand up, and separating the four fingers into a V with the two fingers on one side and two on the other while holding the thumb separate. In this symbol, the ring finger represents the philosophy of Nome, meaning "All", while the small finger represents the philosophy of the Idic.¹⁾ The middle finger represents the Doctrine of the Domination of Logic and is paired closely with the index finger which represents the Vulcan Reverance-for-Life. The thumb stands alone, representing the high regard placed on individual Privacy.

To use this salute, together with the phrase "Live Long and Prosper..." is to grant to another the absolutely inviolable right of privacy of mind, the right to be different from the speaker even to the extent of being opposite, and to invite combination of differences to the advantage of both with assurance that rigorous Logic²⁾ will protect all rights to continued worthwhile existence.^{3,4)}

Let us now examine the parts of Surak's Construct as this five part philosophy has been called.

The philosophy of Nome may be stated thus: An infinite variety of things combine to make existence worthwhile.⁵⁾

This is more than the Idic and it includes the Idic Concept. The Idic stands for the idea that the greatest joy in all creation is in the infinite ways that infinitely diverse things can join together to create meaning and beauty.¹⁾

The philosophy of Nome emphasizes that infinite variety is essential to a worthwhile existence while the idic emphasizes the joining of dissimilar elements to create meaning and beauty. The slight shift in emphasis is almost too subtle to capture in English words. However, the interdependence of the two concepts is graphically illustrated by the close pairing of the two representative fingers.

The fingers are separated between Nome-Idic and Logic-Reverance-for-Life because the philosophy of Nome-Idic includes within itself both emotion and logic²⁾, or put another way, both emotion and non-emotion. Within the idic concept such an "illogical" combination is not only permitted but praise-

T'ZOREL

Kraith IIA

J. Lichtenberg

Captain Kirk punched the intercom button on the arm of the command chair and glumly contemplated the familiar orange-red of the planet Vulcan filling the main viewscreen. Then he leaned toward the voice pickup on the chair arm. "Mr. Spock."

"Spock here." The miniature voice came crisp with carefully cultured intonation. Nobody who had not heard that throat forming the intricate syllables of Vulcanic could realize how alien English was to him.

Kirk wet his lips, "We've entered standard orbit, Mr. Spock. Meet me in the transporter room in five minutes. Kirk out."

He took a deep breath. He didn't like getting mixed up in planetary politics, but orders were orders. "Lieutenant Uhura, notify Vulcan Space Central we are prepared to beam our passenger aboard."

"They are already standing by, Sir."

"Thank you." He turned to the engineering panel. "Mr. Scott, you have the con."

The four Scott looked over his shoulder, "Aye, Sir," and went back to polishing adjustments on a digital readout control.

The transporter room was filled with the same sparkling quiet efficiency as usual, but somehow it seemed ominous to the Captain when he entered and nodded briskly to the duty technician. Presently, Spock stepped through the door and assumed a stance beside the Captain.

"What kept you?" asked Kirk.

"I received a mail-packet marked urgent, so I glanced through it before coming."

"Oh. Anything important?"

"Personal."

"Hmm." He turned to the duty technician standing at the transporter

controls. "Energize."

"Sorry, Sir, but I have a hold-signal from the target."

"Hold, then," Kirk went back to examining his First Officer. "Guess we'll have to wait. I wonder what could be the difficulty."

"I wouldn't know, Sir."

Kirk pursed his lips. "Mr. Spock, what do you know about T'Zorel?"

"She is eighteen standard years old, the daughter of Sitor and a human woman named Kathleen Uphouse, a colonial from the Beta Cygni region. T'Zorel was raised as a Daughter of the Tradition, but has recently filed a request in the Federation District Court to renounce her Vulcan citizenship. The Daughters are contesting the renunciation on the grounds that it is unconstitutional and that the Federation Court has no jurisdiction."

"I didn't know she was a Daughter!" Kirk searched his mind for what he knew of the Daughters. They were the females of the Kataytikh families. Since they were sterile and possessed none of the usual female drives, they were never mated but raised and trained to be Judges, Arbiters, and Administrators...paragons of logical virtue demanding vast respect and earning it.

The technician said, "Ready below, Captain."

"Energize."

Three pads of the transporter platform lit up with columns of sparkle that coalesced into three images. One was a young lady dressed in an unadorned Starfleet Cadet uniform. The other two were standard luggage pieces issued to Starfleet trainees.

The sparkle cleared and she stepped down briskly, zeroed in on Kirk and braced. "Captain Kirk. Cadet T'Zorel reporting aboard."

Kirk noted her lightly tanned, golden skin and the pert sweep of slanted eyebrow and elongated ear just visible beside softly curled, black hair. She had the fresh-scrubbed, wide-eyed vitality of youth coupled with an ageless poise as...as what? As a wise old matriarch? Yes, possibly. The Captain blinked hard and once more confronted a young cadet. "Welcome aboard...Cadet T'Zorel. This is Commander Spock, my First Officer. He will escort you to your quarters and see you settled. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to ask." He found himself becoming hypnotized by her limpid, blue eyes...so unusual for a Vulcan. He nodded briskly. "Dismissed."

The transporter technician propped one elbow on the top of the console and cradled his chin in his hand as he stared after the gently awaying, firmly feminine hips that carried their new passenger out the door.

The Captain eyed the long expanse of bared leg, tapered to delicate, but strong ankles. Then, in unison, the two men sighed at the closed door. They looked at each other and the technician said, "I think I've just found a new definition for the word charming...Sir."

Kirk nodded sympathetically. Five feet five inches of vibrant female...but Vulcan. She was only eighteen, but so bursting with ripe maturity, no man aboard was going to ignore it. And, he reminded himself, she was the center of so much high-level interest, he'd better make sure the 'off' rumors started very soon. But, he wondered how effective they would be. His own glands told him it was hardly worth the bother.

He pulled himself together and headed for the bridge.

T'Zorel took her first look around her new quarters, spotted the pile of tapes near the reader and went over to finger them. "Sir, are these the Regulation manuals for the Enterprise?"

"Yes." He added levelly, "My name is Spock...T'Zorel."

She refused to meet his eye. "I am honored to meet you."

"But you do not extend the greeting of Surak?"

"How can I?" Her voice was even with no hint of bitterness in the rhetorical question.

He conceded with one raised eyebrow, "Thus thee sunders the Tradition." He spoke in High Vulcan but with the intonation of a Death Announcement.

She whirled on him, eyes flashing. "What would you know of it?" She caught herself and added coolly, "Sir?"

"T'Zorel, I too bear The Tradition on half-human shoulders."

"I know. And you have chosen a different path from mine."

"This is not a question of--"

"Your pardon, Sir, but it is definitely a question of differences. I know your chosen path and I know that my feet cannot travel it."

"But do you know the path you have chosen?"

"No." She faced him squarely and inquired with one raised brow, "Who asked you to dissuade me?"

"T'Voah."

"Yes. I should have guessed. And will you?"

"I will try."

"Here you are my superior officer."

"I will not use that. When we speak privately of this matter, you are T'Zorel and I am Spock. We have a grave difference of opinion to resolve."

"You must resolve your differences with yourself. You must grant me the right--"

"To abandon your responsibilities? No. Such rights do not exist to be granted. Only death absolves."

"I cannot abandon a responsibility that never existed. I seek only the right to be myself."

"And who are you...T'Zorel?"

"I--" She stopped. She was a Daughter. Her name said so. Her upbringing said so. He had asked "who" in English just to confound her! She opened her mouth to request a more specific phrasing, but he said, "We must find time to argue at greater length. We will be in transit eight days so there should be ample opportunity. Right now, I must go."

He walked to the door, hesitated and turned back to her, holding his right hand up in the Vulcan salute, and said, "Live Long and Prosper, T'Zorel."

She stood, hands at her sides, barely breathing.

"T'Zorel, even a human answers. In Starfleet, we do not require the Commitment of Surak merely because of traded courtesy."

Still, she hesitated. He waited, hand raised.

He said, "There are many Vulcans at the Academy..."

She raised her hand, fingers separated, and said in carefully enunciated English, "Peace and Long Life, Spock."

He held her eyes a moment and then turned and left abruptly.

She looked at her hand, lowered it, and looked at the closing door. He had won the first round. But he didn't understand. He was a Kataytikh and he had been mated at the age of seven.

T'Zorel spent the next few days exploring her first Starship and getting the feel of wearing a Starfleet Cadet Uniform. Everybody in Starfleet outranked her and the experience was disorienting. All her life, she'd outranked more than 99% of all Vulcans just because her father was a Guardian of the Tradition.

On the third day out of Vulcan, she stepped into a turbolift, turned to command the doors to close and found Captain Kirk standing with his hand on the doorjamb.

She said, "Oh, I'm sorry, Captain." She conceded her place, "Your lift..." As she started to sidle around him, he moved to bar her way.

"Where were you going, Cadet?"

"Deck five, Sir."

"Fine." He stepped in, letting the doors close, and said, "Deck five."

The lift vibrated gently under their feet.

"Cadet T'Zorel, these last few days you have given me a number of headaches..."

"I've made your head--hurt you, Captain?"

Kirk thought, damn, she's just like Spock was a few years ago. "Only figuratively. You've been all over the ship..."

"I've been careful of regulations, Sir. And I haven't been in anybody's way..."

"I know. You've been very scrupulous. It's just that--well, the men all stop what they're doing to look at you."

"I try to be very unobtrusive, Captain. If there's something additional I could do...?"

"Well, no. I mean, yes. You're a very attractive young lady, T'Zorel, but you don't seem to..."

She watched him, listening patiently while trying to make sense of what he was saying.

Kirk blushed. How does a man explain sex appeal to the equivalent of a nun? "Well, look, all you really have to do is stop flirting."

"Begging the Captain's pardon. 'Flirting' means?"

Kirk gestured, "Well, it's--"

The turbolift stopped and he put out a hand to hold the doors shut. "Look, I'll send Lieutenant Uhura around to your quarters. She can explain it better than I can."

"The Communications Officer? Very well, Sir. Thank you, Sir. When shall I expect Lieutenant Uhura?"

"She'll call you." Kirk lifted his hand from the door-hold and dove out of the suddenly confining box almost before the doors had opened. He was haunted by visions of wide, blue eyes, deep as the ocean and innocent as a virgin's--hell, he thought, she is a virgin.

The next evening, Spock sat on one corner of T'Zorel's desk watching her pace the room in a strained imitation of human nervousness. He decided she wasn't getting the turns right, and it was spoiling the affect. He said, "You haven't heard a word I've said for the last hour, have you?"

His sudden switch to English caught her attention. She stopped pacing to look at him. "I heard you. I will listen to what you said later."

"Very well. Then there is little point in continuing tonight."

"There is little point in continuing--ever. I have gone through all of this many times. T'Voah herself presided over the Council of Daughters that turned down my request."

"Which request?" he prompted.

"To..." she took a breath. "It was a private matter, but all these arguments were cited. I can listen but I will not change my opinion. Your logic is flawless--but it simply does not apply to me."

"What I have been trying to show you is that it does apply to you. You did affirm the Continuity--"

"Yes, of course I did. But that is irrelevant."

"Then what is relevant?"

She cocked her head to one side and examined the way the light fell across his face. "Spock...do I flirt? Lieutenant Uhura said to ask a man if I didn't believe her. So I'm asking you."

"Yes. You do flirt. And it is most unbecoming for a Daughter."

"But I am NOT a Daughter."

"You have not changed your name."

"I am...half-Vulcan. I will keep the name my mother chose for me."

"Does your behavior honor your name?"

She came close to him, their eyes meeting on a level because he remained seated. "Spock, I do not flirt intentionally. It is possible that my actions are misinterpreted by humans. I find humans fascinating, but I have not deliberately tried to attract attention."

"Then you'd best learn to control your actions. Humans will not understand. You may believe they are very casual about their relationships, but they will tolerate only so much...flirtation. And they can be very...insistent. You could get into trouble--even here on the Enterprise."

She turned away. "They? You forgot I am human, too. Perhaps I want to get into trouble. Perhaps I want to use that part of me which is not a Daughter!"

"Then you'd best talk to Dr. McCoy first."

His tone was so flat, she turned to examine his face for the meaning of that, but his back was retreating out the door and she caught only a glimpse of his expression--chiseled from stone. Then she understood. Starfleet regulations provided an exemption for Vulcan females from the standard contraceptive measure. Spock's swift exit told well enough what he thought about Vulcan females who'd waive that exemption and even seek casual relations...but she wasn't truly Vulcan.

She went to turn up the thermostat, wondering why she suddenly felt so cold. She didn't need Spock's approval. She still intended to find a human husband.

Yet, for the first time since she'd filed her renunciation of Vulcan citizenship with the Federation Court, she felt truly alone... a Federation citizen-at-large, without a family, without a world. She had severed all ties. Ties that had really never existed. But if they'd never existed, why did the severing leave such... desolation?

Four days went by and the Enterprise bored smoothly on toward the Academy graduation exercises. T'Zorel moved about the ship as usual, but somehow encountered the First Officer very rarely. When they did meet, he addressed her distantly as Cadet, refusing to use any form of her given name.

The night before their arrival at the Academy, she accepted one of Mr. Chekov's numerous proposals to attend a group entertainment. Several members of the Engineering crew were staging a production of a play written by a botanist who was an amateur expert on the early Earth colonists. The audience seemed to enjoy it vigorously--if their stomach-cluttering and cries of anguish were indeed to be taken as signs of enjoyment. But she found the play not only confusing but self-contradictory. And when the actors became infected with the...laughter...they were unintelligible.

After those two wasted hours, the Russian insisted on taking her to a Recreation Room where he spent another hour coaxing her to drink fluids she didn't really want. She was trying valiantly to be polite when she saw Spock pause in the corridor to watch them.

She turned back to the Navigator and essayed a smile as she sipped her drink. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw the Vulcan start as if shocked. Then he watched on.

Chekov was chattering about something she couldn't understand in the play. He seemed willing to do all the talking, so she let him. Of the three human officers she'd spent evenings with, Chekov was by far the most interesting. She liked to watch him talk and wanted to tell him so with a smile. Watching the way he gestured with his hands when he made a point, she reflected that humans communicated with their bodies more than with their words.

English was so imprecise when merely spoken, but she had the strong impression from Chekov that if she could but read his sign language, she would understand him clearly. The more she watched him the more enthused he became with his explanations. It seemed to her that the expressions on his face were meant to carry important information and she was wondering what it would be like to touch this glowing young man who seemed about to explode with the pressure of some repressed...emotion...when suddenly, he said, "If you've finished your drink, I'll walk you back to your quarters... if that's where you'd like to go."

She looked down at the glass full of amber liquid and melting ice cubes. "I'm finished with this, yes. But I'm sure I can find my own way back to my quarters."

He rose, took their glasses to the disposal and returned just as she was getting to her feet. She said, "I see that it is very late. I wouldn't want to keep you up if you need sleep."

"Oh, I'm not sleepy, T'Zorel...and the corridors are deserted now. I'll walk you back."

T'Zorel frowned. They all insisted on accompanying her to her door and then made it very difficult to say goodnight. She started for the door walking briskly, but the Russian caught up with her and took her by the elbow as if she couldn't support her own weight.

His hand rested lightly on hers and through the contact his mind burst onto her consciousness amplified a hundred times. But it was like no contact she'd ever known before. It was a whirling, patternless smear of severe contrasts... a rolling mix of...emotions? Yes. That must be it. It attracted her and she allowed the contact to remain while she searched for the source of the attraction.

"T'Zorel, you are the strangest Vulcan I have ever met."

"I am only half Vulcan, Mr. Chekov."

"Yes, but which half? You are so...different...from Mr. Spock... so...well, human. You are very beautiful."

It was a sincere compliment and she found no offense.

His hand lightened on hers, sending exciting shivers down her spine. The closeness, the liveness of him was pleasant. She said, "It pleases me that you find merit in my appearance, Mr. Chekov."

They stopped before the turbolift doors and Chekov faced her, placing both his hands on her shoulders. "We have spent three delightful evenings together and still I am only Mr. Chekov?"

His hands on her shoulders and his face so near hers were confusing. She knew it was wrong. Yet she desired the harmless indignity. She said, her voice quieter than she'd intended, "Is that not your name, Mr. Chekov?"

"For you, I am Pavel."

"Pavel? Very well. It is a nice name. It has meaning for you?"

He put one hand to the lift call-plate, but kept his eyes on her. "It is an old and honored Russian name. Put T'Zorel is also a very nice name. It suits your beauty."

The lift doors opened and she turned to enter, avoiding his eyes as she said, "I am not certain that I still have the right to use that name."

"Why? Has it some special significance on Vulcan?"

As the doors closed behind him, she said, "Yes, it has. And I am no longer entitled to call myself Vulcan." It was strange how cold she felt when she said that. It was the first time she'd said it to a human.

"They cannot force you to change your name, can they?"

"No. But perhaps I shall want to."

Chekov instructed the lift, "Deck Five." They moved close to her side, taking her hand in his, flooding her mind with a lulling confusion that made her forget the cold...

Sickbay was dimly lit and deserted as Spock let himself into McCoy's office. He turned up the lights and sat down in the desk chair. There were no patients and M'Benga, the duty officer, was working in the lab. Spock was unlikely to be interrupted in his search of the Medical Log. Technically, as First Officer, the ship's records were part of his responsibility and as Science Officer, the Medical Department his, but in practice he only initialed the Chief Surgeon's Report. He flicked on the viewer and began a swift review of the last week's entries.

In the corridor outside her room, Chekov leaned his hand against the closed door and effectively dominated T'Zorel. "I have never seen a Vulcan Komatt."

"It is merely a medalion with inscribed heraldic symbols."

"And you have the Komatt of T'Zorel with you?"

"I have it...yes. But I will soon have to return it."

"Could I see it?"

"It is nothing special to look at. Its significance is purely symbolic."

"But this is your last night on the Enterprise. I will never get another chance to see it." He moved a fraction of an inch closer and whispered, "Please?"

Suddenly, she thought she was going to faint. She pushed away and took deep breaths of the rich, moist and chilly mid-air. "Very well. Good night."

But once inside, the human seemed to lose interest in the Komatt. He placed his hands across the small of her back and smiled the strangest smile she'd ever seen. It seemed to transform his face into a glow in the dim light as he blocked her reach for the light switch. Then his arms tightened about her body and he whispered in her ear, "There, now that's much better. I knew you'd see it my way."

His smooth, oddly fragrant cheek moved against hers and then his lips fastened on hers. The turbulence of his mind amplified a thousand times surged through her, shocking her numbed senses.

With sudden strength, she pushed against his muscular chest. "What are you doing!?"

The glow died from his face as if she'd drenched him with ice water. "You invited me in. We are not children playing games..."

His anger, and other fierce emotions for which she knew no names washed through her like a flood of lava. The pain of it sent her staggering against him.

His arms tightened about her again...not squeezing her, but protecting and supporting her with a driving strength of will that was totally lacking in her.

He was whispering in her ear again, "There now, that's better. You can tease and flirt only so far. You've been leading me on all night. You can't stop now. You wouldn't do that to me, would you? No," he answered himself, "I know you wouldn't. You aren't the type to be cruel."

She knew what he wanted now. She didn't remember doing anything to indicate a willingness to assume such a relationship, but evidently he'd misunderstood something she'd said. It would be wrong to send him away unsatisfied. And something in her responded to his sudden need. She'd made up her mind that such things were to become part of her life. Since she was no longer Vulcan, it was harmless to yield to the social pattern of her mother's people.

His lips on hers again cut off the orderly flow of logic and she was drowning in a maelstrom that kindled an answering fire in her green blood. He moved against her and she felt the urgent hardening in his body as his hands held her strongly in place.

His tongue moved between her lips seeking hers. The deepening contact amplified his thoughts again and suddenly she sensed his attitude toward her. It was physical. Purely physical and nothing more. Nowhere in his mind was there thought for the purpose of the act he desired to perform...nor had he any true interest in her future. He desired only pleasure...and for him it was a minor pleasure. A moment that had little significance in the stream of moments that made up his life. He'd found that her presence kindled his desire and he wished to satiate that desire. Nothing more.

It was the human attitude she'd read about. But, first hand it was far more repellent than she'd ever thought.

All at once, his body disgusted her. She pushed away with all her strength, stumbling in a wave of dizziness as his shock washed through her nerves, a blinding white sheet of pain. She fell against the door, bracing herself with both arms, gasping in lung-wracking sobs.

Abruptly, the door slid open and she staggered, off balance, out into the corridor, her vision blurred by the mind-link that had been forming with the human and was not yet properly severed. Then, strong

arms caught her and cool, clear thoughts quested her mind, deftly disengaging the aborted mind-link. Her vision cleared for a moment and she looked up into the classical Vulcan face as Spock said over her head, "Good night, Mr. Chekov."

She tried to turn to apologize to the Russian for her disgraceful behavior but her body failed her and she plunged into unconsciousness as two strong arms took her weight, cradling her like a baby.

She came to awareness lying on a bed. Even with her eyes closed, she knew there was another presence in the room. A Vulcan presence. She opened her eyes and sat up. Spock was seated in her desk chair, hands flat on the hard surface, eyes focused on her. He said, "So, you have found one unpleasant aspect of the path you have chosen. Are you now ready to consider a third path lying somewhere in between?"

"There exists no third path."

"One does exist. It is the path I travel. Another can be constructed for you."

"The Council of Daughters..."

"...can be convinced."

"I have tried. And failed."

"I am not without influence."

"But you were unwilling to aid me."

"I did not understand the nature of the problem. Now I have additional data. Your human genes dominate the Katavtikh genes in one important aspect. You are functionally female. Adjustments must be made to allow for that."

"I'm not sure...why couldn't I...?"

"Chekov is human. You are Vulcan. Cultural patterns cannot be changed by court decree. I knew that. I should not have suggested that you see Dr. McCoy. I should have known you would not consider such a recourse."

She said nothing. She had considered it...and she wasn't sure why she had rejected it.

He continued, "Nor can a Federation Court absolve a Daughter of her obligations. Adjustments can be made, though it often takes time. Grant me the right to speak in your behalf and I will see what can be arranged with T'Pol. If necessary, I also have the ear of T'Pol. Now that I am Katavtikh in my father's place, nobody doubts my allegiance. The compromises that I have made are looked upon with tolerance." He paused, carefully selecting a term for a distant kinswoman. "Nathu, Vulcan needs all the Daughters in these trying times."

"Then speak for me, nathu, and I will accept what must be."

Spock rose and approached the door, but before it opened he turned and said, "Some humans are able to enter into more meaningful relationships...it seems to depend largely on the individual involved, on maturity and on cultural background. I have met human couples who approach our ideas very closely." He raised his hand in salute. "May You Live Long and Prosper, T'Pol."

She answered in kind. "May You Live Long and Prosper, Spock."

SURAK'S CONSTRUCT, contd. from page 39

worthy. Nome-Idic recognizes that emotion is a source of meaning, beauty and worthwhileness in life.

However, Surak's Construct asserts that for the sake of survival logic must be of greater influence in society (and within the individual) than emotion. Hence, Logic, represented by the longest finger, is separated from the philosophy of "All" and paired with Reverence-for-Life indicating that continued existence demands that logic rule over emotion but that almost equal with this tenet is the assertion that infinite variety must be present to make continued existence worthwhile.

The very physiology of Vulcans compels a periodic confrontation with unleashed emotion.⁶⁾ One of the prime goals of Surak's Construct is to turn this everpresent reminder of the power of unbridled emotion into a re-inforcement of the dedication to logic. The Vulcan male is aware of the surging emotions of the pon farr not only within himself but also in those around him. The inability to control emotion leads to a necessity to remove oneself from the mainstream of society for the duration of the condition.⁷⁾ This is one reason Surak places such value on Privacy.

The high regard for privacy was not an innovation of Surak but dates from a much earlier time when Vulcans discovered the literally painful effects of living together in large communities.⁸⁾ They then developed telepathic shields and it soon became the height of rudeness to force one's thoughts and feelings on another. The transgressor often met a swift, violent death.⁹⁾

Surak valued privacy for another and perhaps more important reason. Quite naturally, an individual's highest regard is for himself. This is an ineradicable inheritance from bestial origins and transcends reason. The maintenance of self may be termed dignity. The right to inviolable privacy is essential in maintaining that dignity.

He who attacks the dignity of the individual risks evoking unreasonable and utterly uncontrollable emotion. These reactions are so basic as to be beyond even the enormous control of the Vulcan disciplines.¹⁰⁾ And a Vulcan roused in this fashion can be a very efficient machine of destruction. To insure that such provocation should never exist, Surak made Privacy one of the cornerstones of his Construct. Under no circumstances is it justifiable to infringe the dignity of another living being.¹¹⁾

This attitude is perhaps the key to the Vulcan lack of a "sense of humor" in the human sense.¹²⁾ Here we may also find the motivation for acts of compassion. In Vulcans, such acts arise from the logical necessity to protect the dignity of others as one would one's own. To fail to act to relieve suffering is to fail to acknowledge that the other individual is as important to oneself as oneself...that is, to fail to accord dignity.

The other gestures are derived from the Vulcan hand salute. They, too, are symbols of a living philosophy in action.

The first gesture is the two-finger hand-hold that defines the husband-wife relationship. In Journey to Babel, Sarek held up his right hand with the index finger and the middle finger extended together. Amanda joined his extended fingers with hers held in the same position.

The index-finger represents Reverence-for-Life and the middle finger represents Domination-of-Logic. These are the two dominant elements in the husband-wife union...procreation and preservation of life under the protection of a rigorous adherence to Logic. But note also what has been excluded. The thumb represents Privacy. There is no reserve of privacy in a husband-wife Union. The Nome-Idic Concepts are excluded because each must voluntarily surrender the right-to-be-extremely-different which, in a marriage, would be a source of grief not joy.

The use of the gesture indicates an acknowledgement of Vulcan cultural values for society at large and for the inner life of the individual as well as the family unit. Thus it is the tenderest gesture normally exchanged by husband and wife, even more significant than a kiss, yet totally appropriate in public.

This view of the husband-wife relationship explains Amanda's implication (Journey to Babel) that Vulcan husbands give orders and expect obedience as their rightful due. Such an authoritarian attitude toward females is totally at odds with everything else we know of Vulcan culture unless we assume it is a mutual, voluntary agreement to abide by Surak's Construct.

The second gesture is that of withdrawal into private contemplation. This is a position of the clasped hands with the index and middle fingers steepled, the thumbs folded and touching. This emphasizes Logic, Reverence-for-Life, (suicide isn't an option for a Vulcan) and Privacy. It excludes Nome-Idic because within one's self one doesn't retain sharp, contrasting differences for this is the road to insanity. One must create an internal unity upon which to base the Peace which is the sacred goal of Vulcans. Society can't be at peace unless it is composed of individuals who are internally at peace. On One's first duty to society is one's duty to oneself. The Vulcan's need for that withdrawal into private contemplation is as intense as the human's need to dream. Vulcan contemplation achieves a goal similar to human dreams...but is far more efficient as it uses a symbolic gesture integrated with a ritualistic set of mental exercises.¹⁰⁾

REFERENCES

1. The Making Of Star Trek, Stephen E. Whitfield and Gene Roddenberry, Ballantine Books, 1968.
2. Here and throughout when we refer to Logic we mean the Doctrine of the Domination of Logic over Emotion.
3. Its use by non-Vulcans is tolerated only as a diplomatic courtesy.
4. The Savage Curtain. Surak asks Spock what harm it can do to him to answer Surak's greeting. This is in harmony with the idea presented here.
5. The Savage Curtain
6. Here we use the word "emotion" to refer to the uniquely Vulcan chemical imbalance which is the basis of the pon farr and which is characterized by a "burning" sensation. It's not an emotion in the human sense and is not parallel to "love", but it is incompatible with Logic and it does sensitize the individual to the type of emotion characterized by passion, i.e. anger, frustration, indignation...
7. Amok Time. Spock does not wish to be seen in such condition.
8. The Immunity Syndrome. McCoy to Spock, "Suffer the Death of Thy Enemy... eh, Spock?" Also, Is There In Truth No Beauty?
9. Mirror Mirror. The alternate Spock forces rapport on McCoy. Presumably, the savageness of his society supports such behavior.
10. Plato's Stepchildren. Spock is so enraged by being forced to display emotion publicly and commit acts of violence against his will that he must struggle desperately to overcome hatred. Another reason has been proposed for this behavior, see Appendix II.
11. Journey to Babel. Sarek reprimands Amanda for "embarrassing" Spock. "Not even a mother may do that."
12. A great preponderance of human humor hinges of a loss of dignity.

THE DISAFFIRMED

Kraith IIB
Ruth Berman

"Lieutenant, call sickbay and find out how Mr. Spock is--" the captain was saying.

The signal was very weak, but Uhura had trained her subconscious to be alert. When the whoops of the Federation's standard distress call began registering as a miniscule jiggling on her instruments, she was jerked out of her conscious attention to the captain's orders.

"Distress signal, sir," she interrupted, already at work trying to bring it in more clearly and to track down its location. The buttons on the new board were still a little stiff, but she simply grimaced at them and punched harder, without even wasting time to wish that they had not lost the old Enterprise.

Kirk left his sentence unfinished and instead said, "Mr. Chekov," in a low voice, so as not to disturb Uhura, and pointed at Spock's station.

The ensign swung out of his chair and hurried to the sensors to help in tracing the call. He bent down, blinking into the blue light, then dialled a star-chart onto the viewscreen above the panel, replacing the ornamental rainbow nebulae left on it from last usage. He threw the computer's estimated triangulation on over the chart. "Probably a planet of XA-792, Captain," he reported.

"The signal is automatic, sir," Uhura began at the same moment. They both stopped and both hesitated, about to repeat, but Kirk waved Uhura to continue. He had the command knack of taking in reports from all sides. "I'm sending an acknowledgement of the signal, sir," she said. "Shall I say we are on our way to them?"

"Yes, Lieutenant," said Kirk. "Mr. Chekov--anything more?"

"Affirmative, Captain. One-man scout was reported lost in this quadrant 341 standard days ago. Menash, manned by Lt. S'darmeg. No other ships on record as missing."

"A Vulcan craft?" said Kirk, incredulous despite his own knowledge of the names and registries of Star Fleet vessels.

Chekov, taking the question seriously, obediently looked up the

Menash's registry before Kirk could tell him not to bother. "Affirmative, Captain," he reported.

"Thank you," said Kirk, and swung his chair around to face front, so as to hide his look of distress from Chekov. If the signaller was Lt. S'darmeg of the Menash, he had missed the Affirmation. Spock's own father had missed it, and Spock had been perfectly ready to disown Sarek and ignore him as a non-person on that account, until the chance of Spock's illness made necessary an otherwise forbidden joining of minds through which Sarek shared in his son's Affirmation. That was fine for Sarek, by now safe home on Vulcan, and it was fine for Spock, even if he was confined to sickbay again after trying to resume his work too quickly following his exertions in Romulan territory; but Kirk wondered how it would be for Lt. S'darmeg.

His first thought was to blame the Vulcan ships for not finding their compatriot in the first place, but then he reflected that they probably had searched for him up until the last possible minute. Space was large. If, say, his transmitter had been broken, and if he had not been able to mend it until long after... Kirk scowled and made himself concentrate on logging the events. "So far we do not know if the caller is alive or not; his signal is automatic," he finished up his entry. Possibly, he thought, S'darmeg was dead. That would solve matters, but it was not his idea of a reasonable solution.

They moved in toward XA-792, and the automatic call continued to come in through the rest of the day. Kirk went to bed still wondering if he ought to hope S'darmeg was dead.

The next morning, upon learning the truth, he felt grieved, and then scolded himself for the--he stopped his thought, examined it, and let it go on--for the inhumanity of his reaction. S'darmeg was alive.

Scott's log entries for the watch while Kirk had been asleep included a notice of an end to the distress signal and the reception of a message of thanks from S'darmeg. Kirk ordered Uhura to play him the tape.

"Enterprise, Lt. S'darmeg, on the second planet of XA-792. I camp at the confluence of two rivers, running in the direction of the planet's rotation, on the smallest of three continents. I await your coming."

His English was accented, reminding Kirk of T'Pol's speech, although it lacked her formal archaisms. The Enterprise's acknowledgement had been sent through the translator, which meant, Kirk realized, that S'darmeg had recognized "Enterprise" as the name of the Terran-based vessel, or he would not have replied in English. Which in turn made it a good guess that S'darmeg knew that its personnel included the legendary Spock. Kirk's face twisted wryly as he considered how amusing it would be to ask Spock the precise odds. Instead, he played through the rest of the log entries covering the ship's "night," forcing his mind into careful attentiveness to the routine.

Two days later they entered orbit. Kyle located the castaway within minutes with the aid of the directions given, and Kirk went down

to the transporter to meet him.

"Captain Kirk, how do you do?" said S'darmeg, limping off the transporter disc. His crutches slipped on the step, but Kirk caught him. "I thank you," said S'darmeg quietly. He recovered his balance and, rather to Kirk's surprise, shook hands with him.

"When did that happen?" asked Kirk, looking at the twisted leg.

"When I crashed. The bones will have to be broken again and reset. I applied splints as soon as I could, but it isn't imperfectly."

The stoicism reminded Kirk of his First Officer, although the younger Vulcan did not resemble Spock much, having brown hair and a straight beard, skin pigmented yellow by exposure to the weather, and wide ears that stuck out at right angles. His uniform was rugged at the wrists and cuffs but otherwise, Kirk thought, it had stood the strain better than the wearer had; the cloth flopped loosely on the lieutenant's skinny frame.

S'darmeg started out the door, saying, "Your sickbay is on level seven, I presume."

"Yes, but—" Kirk said, and stopped. He could not very well tell S'darmeg to stay out of sickbay until he could get Spock out of it.

S'darmeg paused out in the corridor and looked back at Kirk, waiting for him to catch up. The corridor was empty, except for a dark-skinned Terran female, who turned around and came toward S'darmeg. Kirk smiled, recognizing Uhura, hoping to gratify her curiosity with a look at the castaway who was, after all, her discovery, by loitering in the vicinity of the transporter.

Her quick sympathy brought her to a halt, exclaiming "Oh!" as she saw the crutches. Then, realizing it would be bad form to express pain on his behalf, she said instead, "What beautiful carving!"

Kirk looked again and saw that the crutches had an intricate design of animals of many worlds twining around the staves. The armpieces were open jaws of two Berengarian dragons. "Lt. Uhura, communications; Lt. S'darmeg, detached duty," he said, glad of a chance to delay the journey to sickbay.

"Communications," S'darmeg repeated. "You are, then, my rescuer?" he said gravely.

"That's right," said Kirk. "You were lucky that one of our best officers was at the communications board when we first came in range of your signal."

"So I had surmised when your acknowledgement came from such a distance." He looked at Uhura. "Your voice was...most welcome."

"I'm glad to have been of service," Uhura said. He was really quite charming, she thought. "I can see you've had a time of it!"

"A time?" said S'darmeg, hesitating at the idiom.

"Interesting and difficult experiences," she said, as an approximation. "Dr. McCoy should see to you," she went on.

"Yes," said Kirk, giving in to the inevitable. "We're on our way there."

Spock looked up, and his eyes widened as the trio entered. The First Officer had heard that they were going to pick up a Vulcan castaway, but he had not heard how long the newcomer had been lost. The length of S'darmeg's untrimmed beard was not a precise measure, and it was even just possible that S'darmeg had affected such an unfashionable style before the shipwreck. Spock closed his eyes and reached inside, toward S'darmeg's mind.

"Live long and prosper, Commander," said S'darmeg, continuing towards the examining table in the next room.

"May you not live long and prosper, Lieutenant," Spock answered.

Kirk felt himself sagging inside. Spock could at least have held off until the poor fellow had had a decent meal. On the other hand, S'darmeg had given the opening.

Uhura looked at the three faces, and held her own face in a professional impassivity. Her communications training had given her an almost Vulcan control of her expression, when needed.

"I do not thank you, Commander," said S'darmeg.

Kirk stared, but caught himself and forced his eyes away from S'darmeg. The lieutenant was not following the lines Kirk remembered. Then, mercifully, they were around the corner and into the next room. Before Kirk could even offer to help, S'darmeg had pulled himself up onto the examining table. He left his crutches leaning precariously against the side. Uhura caught them and carried them into a corner. "You won't be wanting these again, I hope," she said, "unless you collect souvenirs. Have you been to Berengaria, or did you see films of the dragons?"

S'darmeg took a deep breath, turned his head so that he could see Uhura, and said, "Both. I have been there, and I have seen the Tale of Beren."

"That's a beautiful film, isn't it," she said, delighted that her attempt at easing the mysterious tension was succeeding. "Did you..."

Kirk left them and went in search of McCoy. He found him in a nearby lab watching test-tubes peacefully boiling. "Bones, get Spock out of sickbay."

"Back to work, Jim? I don't think he--"

"Just out of sickbay," Kirk said. "And fast."

"Well, I guess he'd be all right in his quarters. But why?"

"Lt. S'darmeg is on board, and he's going to need medical attention."

"Our castaway? But--"

"He was down there since before the Affirmation."

"He... That sure tears it, doesn't it?" McCoy turned off the plates, capped the tubes and shoved them away from the heat, then spun around on one foot, heading off to sickbay to discharge Spock as the first step in taking care of the new patient.

In the evening Kirk went to Spock's quarters.

"Enter, Captain," Spock answered the buzzer.

Kirk stepped in wearily, and found Spock sitting up in bed and just putting aside a viewer. Kirk wondered fleetingly if he should warn McCoy to make sure that Spock didn't overwork himself with study now that he was out from under direct supervision. He cast about for an effective opening, without expecting to find one. If Spock had understood that he would come about S'darmeg, he no doubt already had his own arguments marshalled still. "Spock, if Vulcan continues to take part in the exploration of space, there will be more cases like this one. A synchronous, universal ceremony is barely possible on a simple planetary surface, but between worlds! Your own father missed the Affirmation. You nearly missed it yourself. If Vulcan does not do something to change the nature of the ceremony, there will be even more absentees next time, last forever to...to the tradition. If you should have a son who goes into space... Katavtikh...he may be one such."

Spock was silent, staring at his steepled fingers a long time. At length he said, "Sit down, Captain."

Kirk shook his head.

"As you please," Spock looked up. "What you want is impossible. Jim, if the lieutenant had lost his vocal chords in the crash, would you let him sing in a choir?"

"I would put him up in a white robe and let him hold his mouth open with the others," said Kirk bitterly.

"Argument by analogy is invalid, Captain. You press the comparison further than it will go. However... If the lieutenant had been deafened in the crash and could not tell if he was emitting sounds or not, would you...?" Spock hesitated, searching for a name to give the human the full emotional weight. "Would you put him in the chorus for the 'Ode to Joy' in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony?"

Kirk winced, despite himself. Unbidden, pealing chords of Freude! Freude! sounded in his head. He shook it convulsively and sat down. "Then where does he go, what does he do? You said your society does not ostracize its members, but--"

"He does what he did before. But he does not...participate...in the meetings of the minds. And the ceremonials which are meaningless applied to him are...not applied. It is fortunate for the lieutenant that he has been trained as a scout."

"Good night, Spock," said Kirk, leaving without waiting to hear if Spock made the response to that human ceremony of day's-end leavetaking. He could not shake Spock's logic, and he could not admit that, for the moment, he loathed all that was Vulcan in Spock; surely such loathing must be bigotry. He fell asleep, still trying to admit to prejudice and still trying to find a hole in Spock's reasoning.

In the morning he went to visit S'darmeg in sickbay. His entrance went un-noticed, however, for the young Vulcan already had a visitor. Uhura was singing the songs from the Tale of Beren. Kirk sat down in a chair in the corner to enjoy the performance himself. He observed with relief that she was playing a Berengarian dulcivire to accompany herself, not a Vulcan harp. The thrumming of the soft arpeggios blended with her clear voice.

S'darmeg was listening intently, meanwhile spooning the last of a bowl of thick, red soup into his mouth. It looked vaguely familiar, but Kirk, his mind running on Christine Chapels and plonik, did not identify the stuff until S'darmeg finished the bowl and lay back to listen more comfortably. It was Russian beet borscht. A gift from Chekov, presumably. The junior officers did not know that S'darmeg was still cut off from home, in a sense, but they knew that he had been by himself for months, and sympathy for their Robinson Crusoe (it was, after all, a fate which could befall any one of them) seemed to be provoking attempts at an acceptable expression of the feeling. The borscht and the music seemed to be fairly successful.

S'darmeg shifted restlessly in between songs, apparently trying to ease his twisted leg, but was silent otherwise. Kirk glanced again at the empty bowl and estimated that the Vulcan would have regained enough strength to undergo operations on his leg in less than a week.

Uhura came to the final chords and looked brightly to S'darmeg for a reaction.

"Will you marry me?" he said.

"What?" she said, astonished. Feeling absolutely sure that she had misheard, she amended it. "I mean, I beg your pardon?"

"Why?"

Kirk sat stone-still, trying to figure out a way to remove himself from a scene where he had no right to be and meanwhile hoping to remain unobserved.

It took Uhura a couple of seconds to figure out why "why." She said, "I don't mean I seek forgiveness. I mean, I didn't quite hear you."

"Will you marry me?" he said, in a somewhat louder voice.

"Right now?" said Uhura, feeling herself at a loss for words.

"Not necessarily," said S'darmeg, "but within a year, perhaps, you would be willing?"

"But, S'darmeg--" She stopped and tried to translate the underlying meanings. A face came to her mind. She tried to dismiss the image, because it interfered with her thinking, but she could not shake it off. Suddenly she recognized it: T'Pring, dark hair vivid against the red sky, framed within the Enterprise's main viewscreen. "You are expecting to enter the pon farr then," she said.

A faint green color rose in S'darmeg's cheeks, showing through the strong, yellow pigmentation. "That is correct," he said.

"But, my poor dear," she said, causing a slightly shocked look to come over S'darmeg's face, "don't you have a...an affianced bride?"

He hesitated, weighing the accuracy of the phrase. "That is essentially correct," he admitted. "But her mind will be closed to mine. The odds are 62.3% against her accepting me in that state."

"That's close to an even chance," Uhura began slowly.

"The union of bodies without a union of minds is against the traditions," he went on, not noticing the interruption, "and I myself am unwilling to allow her to accept me."

"But why will her mind be closed?" Uhura asked in bewilderment. "You're not a--" She stopped herself from finishing the sentence: half-breed like Spock. Instead she said, "How can you be so sure that...that..."

"I missed the Affirmation," he said simply.

Uhura knew enough of the implications to make no argument. She sat in silence, going over the words she had heard the two Vulcans exchange the night before. What had been confusing then was becoming miserably clear. "Oh, you poor darling," she said, and added, "If you're going to react to endorsements that way, you'll have to give up the idea of marrying a human."

"I believe I can accustom myself to them, my..." He tried to force himself to use a similar phrase in response, but, failing, closed his sentence, "...in time."

Uhura glanced at him sharply. "In time," she repeated. "You've got a year, S'darmeg. What's the hurry? Why me?"

S'darmeg hesitated.

An unflattering thought came to her. "If you think one Terran is just like another and you could just as well take the first one you meet--you're wrong."

"Indeed," said S'darmeg. "Could you recommend one more suitable than yourself?"

She made the question sound so matter-of-fact that she actually took it seriously for a moment, and tried to think of a good match for him. His first thought was Christine Chancl. The unfortunate nurse's love for Spock might lead her to take S'darmeg as a substitute. Her second thought was that Christine would probably tell her she was wrong. In fact, in one Vulcan was just like another. "What do you think I am, a marriage broker? I don't know what you need--I'm no telepath, and--" She broke off, struck by a new obstacle to S'darmeg's already improbable plans. "I'm no telepath," she repeated, more quietly. "This union of minds you talk about--"

"But I am a telepath. There need be no barrier. If I may demonstrate..." He reached one hand towards her forehead.

She drew back hastily. "No, wait." His tranquility in reaching out for the unknown--specifically, herself--baffled her. "You should at least wait till you get to know me better, or check my service-record, or something, but--"

"I did check your service-record," he interrupted.

"You did?"

"The First Officer speaks highly of your ability to communicate with, and understand, alien beings."

"Yes, but--" She halted, unable to continue the sentence. She had run out of arguments. She looked down at him and smoothed his hair once with her hand, then put her hands in her lap and sat silent for a long time.

"S'darmeg," she said at last, "I scarcely know you. I'm not going to make any kind of agreement now tying my life to yours. But I'll promise you this: if you need someone when the fever comes, I will be yours--for that time. I won't promise to stay afterwards."

"That is a pollution of the mating," he said flatly.

"In Vulcan terms," she said.

"That is true," he said. "Your standards are your own."

She blinked and then stared at him, not used to such ready acceptance of variation in standards. Suddenly she smiled at him. "You take that very logically."

"Thank you."

"Not at all," she said wryly, and thought some more. Then she

said, "If Vulcan women are out of the question, and if you don't find... human love, if you'll pardon the expression...you're going to be forced to choose between death and a purely physical mating. Let's hope that doesn't happen, and you find someone else--" He raised one hand in a negative gesture, whether at the idea of engaging in the activity of hoping or at the idea of finding someone else she did not know, but she hurried on. "If the worst comes to worst--" She remembered to pause to see if he understood the idiom, and saw that he did. "--I will be there."

"I thank thee."

She shivered suddenly, and turned to look again into the long, yellow face, expecting to see repugnance or stiff control hiding it, but there was only a quietness. She said softly, "If I come to love you, I will be yours always--if you find you can accept love."

He reached up again, not towards her forehead, but to her neck, drew her head down, and kissed her.

She knew at once that he had only seen it in films. His lips were stiff and shut, and it did not seem to occur to him that anything was supposed to happen beyond the meeting of faces. She touched her tongue softly to his lips. She did not feel them move, but she became aware of a sense of well-being and was puzzled to realize that it was not her own. Then she understood that it was a perception of his reaction to her kiss. She tried to hold her mind open to the feeling, but in her attempt to concentrate on it, she drew away from his awkward kiss, and the link was broken.

"Thee will teach me, and I thee," he said.

She nodded, unable to speak, and left the room.

S'darmeg lay with his face turned up to the ceiling and wriggled himself deeper into the warmth of the covers.

Kirk felt deeply ashamed of himself for having witnessed so much, but, seeing no way he could have avoided it, he set himself instead to thinking what he could do to repair the blunder. He decided, after a moment, that the best thing he could do was to behave as if he had seen nothing and hope that neither Uhura nor S'darmeg would see through the pretense. He was not entirely sure that a Vulcan male would be upset by an accidental trespass of his privacy, but he was sure a Terran female would be. He rose, stepped silently to the door, stood still a minute to arrange his face, and then said cordially, "Good morning, Lieutenant. How are you?"

"Better, I thank you, sir. Your Dr. Mbenga tells me that he thinks a complete repair of the injured leg will be possible."

"I'm glad to hear it."

"I have a favor to ask of you, sir."

"Yes?"

"The Menash operated out of Vulcan Star Base and was under orders directly from Vulcan. I wish to transfer to scoutwork further out on the Federation frontiers."

"That would mean operating out of one of the more distant bases," Kirk mused. "25, or 26, perhaps? Or would you prefer to join explorations on a Starship such as the Enterprise?" S'darmeg could probably arrange his course to cross theirs fairly often, but it would be easier for him to be with Uhura if they were both on the same ship.

S'darmeg hesitated. "No," he said finally. "My training has been for the scoutcraft. And I should not remain on your ship, sir, because I am no longer a part of the tradition, and-- But you perhaps do not know what that means to--"

"I know something of it."

"Indeed? Ah, from the Commander. Of course." S'darmeg hesitated again. "There have been few like me in our past, sir. I am, I imagine, the only Exile of the new Cycle."

Kirk started to tell him about Sorek, then stopped. The case did not apply.

"In the past there has been no choice except to hold to what little of the traditions remained open, or to live a hermit's life." S'darmeg closed his eyes and stirred restlessly for a moment before opening them and going on again, no longer looking at Kirk. "I have considered this problem carefully during the past months. I think I may call myself expert in it. There is now a better solution: to adopt the culture of another people. The Commander will no doubt approve my solution and agree that I must therefore be out of his society. Will you inform him of my decision?"

"Very well," said Kirk. He did not much like the commission, but he supposed someone would have to do it sooner or later. He went to Spock's quarters and found his First Officer up and playing chess with the computer.

"Leave the traditions!" Spock repeated, when Kirk had explained his errand. His vehemence startled Kirk--and struck the human as being downright unvulcan. Kirk stooped and retrieved a pawn which Spock's involuntary gesture had brushed off the topmost board.

"He thought you would approve," Kirk said, replacing the piece.

"He is in error," said Spock, as if that was a serious crime. "It is true that he is shut out from a large part of our culture, but it is his culture all the same, the society in which he grew up. I do not see how he can hope to find greater peace elsewhere. What does he want?--the uncontrolled passions of Terrans, the violence of Andorians, the--"

"Spock!"

Spock stopped and looked surprised at the Captain's horrified expression. "What is it, Jim?"

"What makes you so damn sure Vulcan culture is better than the others? Haven't you heard something about infinite diversity and--"

"I am sure it is better for those who have been reared in it," Spock interrupted.

"And better for someone who wasn't reared in it, such as you--"

"Be quiet." Spock's voice was soft, but the chill in the contemptuous tone stopped Kirk momentarily.

"Don't give me orders, Mister," Kirk said at last, matching Spock's cold intensity. "I give the orders on board this ship. If you don't like it, go home to Vulcan, where you seem to think you belong."

Spock shuddered and turned away from him, staring at the flickering of the dark red flame in his firepot. "I don't belong there--entirely," he said. "I chose a middle way."

"But, naturally, S'darmeg isn't allowed to do that."

"My way would not help him," said Spock. He did not turn to look at the captain, but remained as he was, as if addressing the little statue which held the firepot. "I live among aliens as a Vulcan. I...I don't find it easy, Jim, and I'm within the traditions. I don't see how he could manage it from outside."

"May he not live long and prosper," Kirk murmured. "I don't suppose he would, either, if you forced him to go on receiving that communication. How long do Exiles live on the average, anyway?"

Spock was silent.

Kirk sighed and left the room to transmit to Star Fleet Command Lt. S'darmeg's request for a transfer of operations-base from Vulcan to Star Base 26.

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Let us pause here to trace the four steps in Vulcan maturation. First comes the physical maturity that corresponds roughly to human puberty. As with humans this occurs somewhere in the teens--certain individuals may undergo this process as early as ten years of age, while others may not reach this point until sixteen or seventeen. However, in the Vulcan male puberty does not complete the process of preparing for parenthood. This completion occurs at first Pon Farr, which is step #3 in maturation.

Between puberty and first Pon Farr comes a step which does not have any true analog in human experience.⁽⁴⁾ It is an acute crisis in the maturation of the personality as opposed to physical maturation. It generally occurs between 25 and 30 years of age and it is heralded by an abrupt change in behavior. We observed this in Spock as the difference in him between the time he rescued Christopher Pike from the Talosians and the present day.

The fourth and final step in Vulcan maturation is participation in the Affirmation of the Continuity. For Spock, this occurred after the end of the "Third Season."⁽⁵⁾ Thus it is that Spock of Kraith II and onward is a vastly different, yet hauntingly similar, person compared to the Spock of the first three seasons.

One informative way of tracing the evolution of Spock's personality is through the stages of his "love life." It is known⁽⁶⁾ that Spock's charisma has attracted human females constantly and it may be assumed that this was true at the Academy as well. At first, the eighteen year old Plebe was, no doubt, quite bewildered by the phenomenon since Vulcan women don't express such preferences. But he learned to live with it in spite of the Vulcan sense of responsibility he felt toward any female who became so attracted.⁽⁷⁾

We may assume that before "This Side of Paradise", Spock was absolutely immovable by any female. However, the "Alien Virus" which had disturbed his metabolism so profoundly in "Naked Time" had left him in a sensitive state so that the effect of the spores on a body ripe for first Pon Farr was strong enough to actually precipitate the onset of the drive--an onset which might never have occurred had it not been for his choice of career as one which would expose him to many alien influences.⁽⁸⁾

As is well known⁽⁹⁾, Spock's first Pon Farr was somewhat atypical in that it ended neither in marriage or death. The Kraith series is founded on several assumptions about the nature of the Pon Farr and consequently the peculiar condition Spock found himself in after "Amok Time."⁽¹⁰⁾ In brief, it is postulated that the Pon Farr could not be properly terminated by the shock of "killing" Kirk...yet it had subsided to a level so low as to preclude any possibility of a normal termination (which is, of course, the reason he released T'Poling.) It is further postulated that this is rare but not unknown among Vulcans.^(11,12)

Episodes aired subsequent to "Amok Time" give eloquent testimony supporting these postulates. In particular, the often quoted "degeneration" or "humanization" of Spock during the Third Season is attributed in Kraith to the systemic tension of the un-broken Pon Farr acting to

produce an affect which looked to human eyes like "emotion" but which is in fact nothing of the sort. After "Amok Time" Spock was left in a state of acute sensitivity of femininity and in fact was profoundly disturbed by A) the Romulan commander of "Enterprise Incident" and B) Zarabeth of "All Our Yesterdays." And he actually appeared to be flirting in "Cloud Minders."⁽¹³⁾

Such a condition is anomalous in Vulcan society since an unmated male might become attracted to another male's wife, resulting in a duel to the death because access to his woman is literally a life-or-death matter to a Vulcan.⁽⁵⁾ Thus we may assume that Spock was under pressure from the Vulcan authorities (T'Pol in particular) to take a mate, and in fact it is this assumption which is used in Kraith to explain the strangely un-Spockian Spock of the Third Season.

While he was yet rational enough, Spock chose T'Aniyeh⁽¹⁴⁾ as the logical candidate and sent her his proposition. But she wrote back putting him off with neither a "yes" nor a "no." Adding this frustration to the state of tension creates a deeper understanding of Third Season Spock.

The other factor operating through Second Season and into Third Season which accounts for Spock's change of behavior between "Galileo Seven" on the one hand, and "Gamemasters of Triskelion" and "Tholian Web" on the other (the latter two being instances where Spock commands the human crew with considerable skill whereas in the former he was ridiculously inept for a First Officer) is the process of learning about humans "in the field."

When he went to the academy, Spock had only a very distorted grasp of what it means to be human. In First Season he was still using phrases like "One of your human emotions." In Second Season that became "I still don't understand human obsession."⁽¹⁵⁾ and in Third Season, "Only such as are inevitable where humans are concerned" and "Forget it, Bones."⁽¹⁶⁾ We see right before our eyes the growing realization that though humans lack a unified tradition and a Racial Memory they do have certain characteristics which serve the race well enough.

So, first Spock recognizes in himself a need for something he doesn't know is non-existent; then he discovers that humanity does indeed have a set of Qualities which can serve as a Tradition if he can only systematize them in some logical fashion.

It is this first attempt at understanding that accounts for his exceptionally human behavior under Captain Pike. It is only after his maturation crisis that Spock realizes he must stand within the Vulcan Tradition or face disintegration of personality.⁽¹⁷⁾ Thus, drawing upon the strength of Tsaichroni, Spock sets about his second (and ultimately successful) attempt at absorbing the human analog of the Vulcan Tradition.

This theory accounts for Spock's dreadfully unbelievable inepititude in "Galileo Seven." He was, in effect, starting over from scratch in his attempt to grasp the essence of humanity. He had discarded his older data as having been gathered under fallacious assumptions and was taking a long, hard look at ALL the basic assumptions of the Philosophy.

This process, no doubt, occupied him for several years, giving rise to Kirk's comment in "Amok Time"--"That just sounds like Spock in one of his contemplative moods." It also accounts for the fact that about seventeen or eighteen years after entering the Academy Spock was still in the oddly un-developed state of "Oh, one of your human emotions." It is unbelievable that such an intelligent person could live among humans for so long, behave as he did under Pike, and yet not at least recognize without comment all the human emotion-words, if not the concepts behind them. The only logical explanation this author can concoct is that he had scrapped all previous data and was starting a new study of humans.

If we assume that Spock's maturation crisis occurred just before Kirk took command of the Enterprise, we then get a very revealing picture of the Kirk/Spock relationship. At first, Kirk would be occupied with establishing a "Command Image" in the eyes of his human crew and with the myriad details of running the ship. He'd probably never worked so closely with a Vulcan before and those he had worked with had been pure-bloods who kept to themselves. Since Spock would perform his duties and run his department flawlessly, while spending all his off-duty time alone in his quarters, Kirk would have assumed Spock was the typical Vulcan and (since he didn't have to establish a "Command Image" in the eyes of a Vulcan to evince high performance, loyalty, obedience, and confidence) Kirk would have left him alone.

After a few months, when he'd finally settled into command of the Enterprise, Kirk's friendship with McCoy and the other crewmembers who had known the old Spock would have brought Kirk to the realization that his first Officer was behaving anomalously. Attracted by curiosity as well as a sense of duty, Kirk would have tried to strike up a deeper acquaintance. Kirk's first impression of Spock would have been of a Vulcan who had never known any humans before. Knowing that, as a half-human, Spock needed an understanding of humanity, Kirk would have set himself the task of "educating" Spock while dismissing the stories he'd heard about the previous Spock's personality.

It is postulated in Kraith that Vulcans have absolutely selective memories--they can forget as perfectly as they can remember. In beginning the new experiment, Spock might have placed all previous knowledge of humanity under a block so that he would not have access to it until some trigger released it.

Under Kirk's tutelage and McCoy's needling, Spock grew to be the person we have come to know and honor. The pressures of the events of the Kraith series continue to force the growth of Spock's maturing personality along lines which reveal his fundamental differences from both humans and Vulcans. The Kraith series can be thought of as the chronicles of:

- A) Spock's search for a permanent mate
- B) the stages of Vulcan maturity
- C) the effect of humans on Spock
- D) the effect of Vulcans on Spock
- E) the effect of Spock on Vulcans, humans, and the Federation as a whole
- F) the impact of the great sweeping forces of

Won't You Walk A Little Faster

OR

TANYA'S ARGUMENT

Doris Beetem

(Editors' note: This is one of the stories that was written by a Kraith Critic in refutation of the Kraith ideas. Careful readers will note the discrepancies between Doris's descriptions and Jacqueline's. In our opinion this in no way detracts from the validity of Doris's statement.)

"Sergei," Lieutenant Tanya Minos called out, "Mind the controls for awhile. I want to take a last swim with Hoopah."

Footsteps approached the deck of the tiny Star Fleet water-ship, Holluschickie, "Tanya, call me Lieutenant Ostrov if you must, but not that stupid, ersatz-Vulcan name. We're both human, even if you pretend you're not." Her ethnology partner appeared in the doorway, and his blonde, bovine face darkened. "If you're not going to use it," Sergei Ostrov said thickly, "then don't flaunt it."

Tanya was casually sliding tanned Grecian legs into a bikini bottom, a scarlet scrap incongruously ornamented with a communications insignia. "You humans attach an inordinate importance to the sight of bare flesh. I, however, was raised on Vulc..." Tanya broke off in sudden horror, as Ostrov, totally unexpectedly, kissed her roughly.

"We've been boxed together in this damn houseboat six months," the young Russian shouted. "Try for a little compassion, Iron Maiden, if you haven't got a heart."

Tanya broke away, blushing furiously, "For this you could be---"

"--- courtmarshalled? Yes, but not an officer in the Fleet would convict me." Ostrov glared, "You were asking for it!"

Indignant at the accusation, Lieutenant Minos stalked away. Flinging herself off the side of the boat in a somewhat sloppy dive, she swam off in search of her friend Hoopah, the Delphinoid Hikchikeran.

Hikchikerah, a water-world colonized by algae-farmers twenty years ago, had only recently been found to have intelligent, aquatic life-forms. Star Fleet had sent her and the---she thought---abominable Lieutenant Ostrov to make rather belated official contact with the natives.

Suddenly, a clammy snout poked her between the breasts, hard. The human part of her mind screamed, "Shark!" and the Vulcan part severely eyebrowed the giggling and snorting Hoopah, Speaker of the Ninth Herd.

"My people make not the long farewell mournfully, Tanya," Hoopah said in the Hikchikeran chuckle-talk, that she had learned.

"We can be serious, though," Tanya answered sternly. Clutching Hoopah's dorsal fin, she allowed him to pull her through the water, looking, had she but known it, much like the naiads of her Greek heritage. "I may come back, you know. I've enjoyed working with your people."

Hoopah swam thoughtfully for a time. "Don't you enjoy working with your own people?"

Tanya stiffened. "Serious doesn't necessarily mean personal." She relented, and asked rather wistfully, "Which people do you mean, Vulcans or humans?"

"Either," Hoopah chattered. "You tell me you've been with Medusans, Hortas, now us. Why stay away from people like yourself?"

"My work..." Tanya muttered inarticulately. Abruptly, she flung her long black hair back, and, pointing to a clump of seaweed in the distance, challenged, "Race you to the kelp!"

Hoopah won, of course, by more than a hundred meters.

The mission was done, the ethnology partnership disbanded. Lieutenant Ostrov had brought Tanya by hydrofoil to the little plastic-spined floatcity that was the human capital of Hikchikerah, and he had insisted on buying her a good-bye drink.

"It would have been different if I thought you really belonged with the Vulcans," Sergei was saying. He'd apologized on the 'foil for his behavior, promised not to bring up the subject again, and was still arguing it.

"The Vulcan way is superior, its logic and controls beneficial." Tanya felt a desperate urge to explain herself to Lieutenant Ostrov, so they could at least part on a basis of amity and understanding. "You're being ethnocentric. I do not follow your patterns, therefore, I cannot be happy. Correct?"

The young Russian shook his taurine head. He was determined, if not brilliant, Tanya had learned, and would rag an idea to death. "Don't you ever regret giving up your birthright, Tatyana?"

Tanya looked around the jerry-built bar at the farmers and their girls, at Fleet personnel and bizarrely clothed traders. She had never truly believed that humans could be as happy as they professed. But there was much laughter in this cheap place, while she could only return a curiously somber expression to her colleague.

"Does anyone on Vulcan love you? Is there any Vulcan you love?" Sergei asked.

She didn't want to explain the nuances of her relationship with her foster-parents. There was no way of knowing if he could consider them kind and loving, or arbitrary and alien. And she did not want to hear his doubt about them. "I'm going to marry a Vulcan," Tanya said impulsively. Her companion waited impassively to hear more.

"He's a Kaytavytkh---a distinguished scientist---from one of Vulcan's first families." She added maliciously, "Also First Officer of the USS Enterprise."

"R.H.I.P." Sergei whistled ruefully. "All that and he loves you, too?"

Why, Tanya wondered silently, had she told Sergei that, before giving Spock her formal consent? Before, even, she was sure she wanted to.

"An engaged woman's safe from me," Sergei said gently, perhaps mistaking her silence for distaste. "Proshchay, Little One. I won't bother you any more."

"Proshchay?"

"It's Russian," he smiled. "It means 'forgive me'---and good-bye for a good long time."

She watched Sergei leave. At the door he was accosted by a red-headed Fleet nurse, and they walked out together. Tanya felt moisture in her eyes and realized, unpleasantly, that she was going to cry. There was a stickiness in her palm---blood. Her cocktail glass had been gripped until it broke.

Hurrying to her quarters, Tanya remembered the Fleet Surgeon's appraisal when she'd confessed her crying jags. "Psychoneurotic symptoms. Do something about them."

"But I have," Tanya told herself wordlessly. "I follow the Way. Vulcan raised me to be sane."

Tanya sniffed, wiped her face, and concentrated on mental control. It was the shock, she thought, of loosing so much at once---

her assignment, her colleague, a chance at a life as tantalizing as repelling, someone she really did care about... and who cared about her. The unfortunate coincidence was that all these things centered around Sergei.

Perhaps her late contact with the uninhibited Hikchikerans brought the idea into her head with such irresistible force. Instead of controlling the the problem internally, why not solve it externally? Before she lost momentum, Tanya dialed Sergei's I.D. number on her room's visiscreen.

His face swam into view against the backdrop of his room. Tanya felt rather faint---the red-haired nurse was with him---not undressed yet, but probably in the mood. In an extremely small voice, Tanya said, "You invited me... to see the city..."

His eyes seemed warm but cautious. "Sure... we can see the sights with Gloria."

"No." Tanya said sharply. "Come to my quarters right away... alone... I want to talk to you." She flicked off the screen, alarmed by her own vehemence, before he could answer.

"She shan't have him---I won't let her!" An icy lump formed in her throat. This, then, was jealousy. Miserably, Tanya considered her situation. She knew nothing about human males; Gloria could easily out-manuever her. And there were any number of other females.

Sergei would come to see what she wanted, and she would have nothing to say, unless....

Tanya ransacked her closet for clothing that looked--- she searched for the word---sexy. Fleet uniforms---Vulcan tunics---Fleet uniforms. She slept nude so there were no nightgowns. Giving up, Tanya hoped that it would not be necessary to act very seductive.

"This is not lawful for a Vulcan female," her foster-father's icy logical voice seemed to warn. Tanya ignored the admonition, and tried not to think of the contraceptive injection she'd refused to take.

"I'll try to give Sergei what he wants," Tanya thought humbly. "It is what you want." The Vulcan voice said in condemnation. She giggled nervously. Perhaps in assent.

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galactic history on an individual and the value of strong interpersonal relationships in supporting an individual who must face such forces.

But most of all, Kraith is the chronicle of the maturation of Spock's character.

FOOTNOTES

1. "Spock" is an ancient and revered name which was offered Amanda and Sarek for their son as a form of acceptance of their marriage. It had been used centuries before by the product of a very daring mixed marriage involving disparate cultural traditions and that child had grown up to leave a laudable mark on both societies.
2. Kraith's Vulcan languages are discussed in Vulcan Sememics, in IMPULSE 5 and 6.
3. For a full explanation of this hereditary designation see Kraith I, II, III, IV, in T-NEGATIVE 8, 10, 12, 13, 16, 17. See also note 10 below.
4. Except insofar as human puberty is accompanied by emotional upheavels. Evidence supporting this four-stage theory may be drawn from the fact that Spock was immune to the plague in "Miri" (First Season). It might have been his green blood that wouldn't support the microbes; but considering his naive phrasing in asking McCoy about the process of puberty in humans, and considering that "Amok Time" occurred AFTER "Miri", his immunity might be attributed to a lack of complete physical maturity.
5. Kraith I, Spock's Affirmation, in T-NEGATIVE 8.
6. "This Side of Paradise."
7. "This Side of Paradise"--the final scene where Spock insists gently that as much as he may regret it, he has no feelings to give. He has none to give because his whole mind and body are bound inextricably to T'Poling.
8. It has been argued that the reason Spock did not request leave in time to get home before the Pon Farr is that, due to his human genes, the onset was much quicker than normal or unexpectedly early. It might also be true that it is a common Vulcan characteristic to deny the loss of control which accompanies Pon Farr since first Pon Farr is the first experience of the repugnant affect. However, I don't recall ever seeing the suggestion that the one-two combination punch of the virus and the spores might have been the cause on an atypically rapid onset. The most reasonable explanation is probably some combination of these.
9. "Amok Time."
10. In Defense of T'Yuzeti, in BABEL 3.
11. In fact, an incomplete termination of Pon Farr due to any of a number of causes such as the attempted use of some contraceptive measure usually results in a long, lingering and particularly terrifying death. Spock was fortunate that he was left well below this threshold. This is the reason that the pacifist life-worshipping Vulcans permit the practice of duel-to-the-death. Better to die cleanly than in unnatural agony.
12. For a sketch of the evolution of the Pon Farr from a mere rut cycle into the do-or-die drive which seems incongruous in an intelligent species, see The Evolution of the Vulcan Primte, in LABEL 2.
13. It must be assumed that all during Third Season, Spock remained un-mated since otherwise he would not have been vulnerable.
14. Kraith II, Spock's Mission, in T-NEGATIVE 10.
15. "Obsession."
16. "Tholian Web."
17. The nature of the bond between Spock and Pike was never fully revealed on the air, but Kraith attributes the unusual (even for a Vulcan) sense of obligation that Spock had for Pike to the fact that it was Pike who stood in loco parentis during Spock's personality crisis. At the time Spock underwent this crisis, he was unwelcome in his home and un-trusted by his father's closest relatives. The only Vulcan who understood him, his grandfather Svudl, had died the year before he entered the Academy. During the crisis, the Vulcan had a truly desperate need for the support of a fully mature personality. Pike assumed this role for Spock.

SPOCK'S



ARGUMENT

Kraith III

Jacqueline Lichtenberg

Chief Surgeon Leonard McCoy looked up from his desk as his office door swished open to frame the neatly poised young lady. She marched in with a springy grace that told McCoy of leg muscles still accustomed to a stronger gravity.

"Lieutenant Tanya Minos reporting for physical, Doctor."

McCoy beamed genially, "Welcome aboard, Tanya. It's been a long time."

"One year, two months and thirteen days, Sir."

"You don't have to 'sir' me. We're old friends."

"I wouldn't put it that way. . . Doctor."

"You're as bad as Spock!"

"Thank you."

McCoy studied the attractive pixie of a girl. Her skin had a smooth, healthy glow, unharmed by the fierce Vulcan weather. The glossy, black hair was short, framing her classical Greek features with unflattering severity. The scarlet uniform suited her air of burning vitality under tight control. If she'd been raised by humans, she'd have been a vivacious extrovert. He'd have to watch her psych profile very closely.

He filed the observation for future reference and rose, "Step right this way, I've got everything ready for you."

"I'm sorry to have kept you waiting, but the Yorktown had to answer a distress call on the way and I had no recourse but. . ."

"Nevermind. I had nothing else to do but wait. You won't believe this, but since we moved into the new Enterprise.. well, nothing ever happens anymore."

McCoy took a clipboard and activated his wall computer input, "Just lie down right here, Lieutenant, and we'll have this over inside half an hour." He went on taking readings and making notations on his checklist. "We've had her for six months now, and all we've done is beat back and forth on patrol. Except for drills, we haven't even fired the main phasers. Not that I'm complaining, mind you. . ."

He became lost in his work and a few minutes later, he tilted the bed down so she could step off. It squeaked. He said, "You see what I mean? Pinches like a new shoe. The beds squeak, there're no acid burns on the work benches . . . and if I didn't know better, I'd say there was still the smell of shipyard in the air..." as if you could still find little piles of cuttings in the corners."

As he talked he led her through the routine, recording responses and measurements until, finally, he took an instrument like an airhypo, and began to insert the subcutaneous contraceptive pellet, "Left arm please. . ."

"No, Doctor. General Regulations, Section D, paragraph 14, subsection Q." McCoy didn't hear the door open behind him.

Blankly, the Doctor asked, "Which one is that?"

"The section pertaining to non-human females."

"But you're human!"

"Physically, yes, But I hold Vulcan citizenship."

"I don't see that that matters. It doesn't make you a Vulcan female. And as an unmarried crewmember, you're required. . ."

"No, I am not required, Doctor. This is an area of extreme sensitivity in all cultures and Starfleet recognizes that range of variation. The culture to which I belong finds such measures unacceptable."

Spock stepped forward allowing the door to close behind him, "She is within her rights, Doctor."

McCoy turned openmouthed. Then he looked from one to the other. Two spacelawyers were two too many for him so he conceded with bad grace and laid the applicator aside, "It will go into my log and the Captain will undoubtedly see it and have my head."

"I don't think so, Doctor." Spock handed Tanya a tape cartridge, "The Regulation is quite explicit in citing citizens of Vulcan among the exemptions."

Tanya turned the cartridge over. "What's this?"

"Mail," answered Spock, "The Stovam Report."

"Oh. Finally. I thought I'd never get a copy."

"I monitored it as it came in. It appears to be a powerful indictment."

"I'll have to read it very carefully."

"Yes," said Spock, "We're already more than seven weeks behind."

She turned to McCoy, "If you're through with me, Doctor. . .?"

"Oh, yes. You can go."

The two left together and as McCoy glumly requested a readout of Subsection Q from the computer, he vowed he'd choke before he'd ask what-the-hell the Stovam Report was.

As they paced along the bright corridor, tall Vulcan and short human, Spock said in Low Vulcan, "Perhaps by now you have reconsidered your position?"

"With respect to?" She answered in the same idiom.

"Me."

"I have reconsidered and come to the same conclusion."

"And I still disagree. We must find time to argue the matter in greater depth."

She half turned to search the set of his face and gauge his carriage and general demeanor. Even his voice-pitch and accent underwent critical analysis before she said positively, "There's certainly no hurry and I should think the Stovam Report would have the highest priority."

"It does, I cannot allow T'Uriamne to remain unopposed now that Stovam has returned this indictment."

T'Aniyeh stifled a gasp.

As they reached the turbolift, Spock said in his deepest, gravest tone, "There will be a battle such as Vulcan hasn't seen for two thousand years. Your presence is a potential distraction. Therefore, precise definition of our relationship attains an equal priority with the Stovam Report. Think about it, T'Aniyeh. We will discuss it again."

The doors opened and she took the lift as Spock continued along the corridor. In the privacy of the elevator, she buried her face in her hands for a few seconds then shook herself, took a deep breath and said, "Bridge."

By the time the main computer had shunted the car this way and that and they up and opened the doors on the bridge, she had regained her surface composure. She marched to the command chair smartly and presented herself to the Captain.

Kirk turned a warm smile to her, "Welcome aboard, Lieutenant. I-A's loss is our gain."

"Oh, they didn't let me go, Sir. They just thought a few years starship experience would make me a better officer. And after Thilien requested leave, there was nothing special I could do."

Kirk nodded, "Well, Tanya, I think you'll find we have an unusually well staffed Linguistic Section." The lift doors screeched open and Kirk winced, "Linguistics is part of the Science Officer's Department, so you'll be working under Mr. Spock." Turning to see who had entered, Kirk called, "Spock," waited for the Vulcan to approach and continued, "Would you show Miss Minos around Linguistics, introduce her to Lieutenant Deeman, and see that she gets settled."

Chekov had just been relieved and was poised near the group eyeing the girl who bore the Russian name. She was shorter than he and, to the Russian's eyes, held something of the dark mystery of the Gypsy. He said, "If you're busy, Sir, I'd be glad to show the Lieutenant around."

Spock turned, "That won't be necessary, Mr. Chekov. I'll see to the details."

"Yes, Sir." Chekov said as the three of them went to the lift, Chekov contriving to observe Tanya's trim figure from various angles. Sulu gave the Russian a knowing glance as they passed behind Uhura who was laboring over her board as a flood of back mail was finally catching up to the Enterprise.

Spock took his place by the wall control and set them on course for Linguistics via Chekov's quarters while Chekov

managed to turn Tanya away from Spock. As the doors closed, the Vulcan heard Kirk's voice, "Maintainance."

Chekov said, "Have you ever served on a Starship before?"

T'Aniyeh answered distractedly, "No."

"I'm sure you're going to like the Enterprise. I'll introduce you around. There's going to be a little get-together in Rec. Room four tonight. I could..."

"No, thank you, Mr. Chekov. I have other things to do."

"Sure. I understand. First day and everything. Perhaps another time. There's always something going on."

"No, Mr. Chekov. I'm always busy."

As Chekov considered this, the doors whined open and he exited, still considering.

When they were alone, Spock said, "The diversions available aboard the Enterprise are limited, but you might benefit by exploring them. Mr. Chekov knows them all quite well. I suggest you accept his offer the next time he asks."

"He'll ask again?"

Spock assented with one eyebrow.

"Strange people, aren't they?"

"Indeed."

The days passed swiftly for T'Aniyeh as she learned the computerized maize of the Enterprise's Linguistic Laboratory, did her daily stint in a gym cubby adjusted to Vulcan conditions, and buried herself in the Stovam Report.

She adopted the habit of taking the Report and her lunch to the gym where she worked through a vigorous exercise routine. Afterwards, she would sit cross legged on the floor and eat while staring at the viewer, and allowing her muscles to cool before subjecting herself to the thermal shock of ship's normal temperatures. She avoided the showers, preferring to cleanse herself with Vulcan oils and powders.

Then, one day as she finished reading the last part of the Report over her lunch, the gym's intercom whistled and paged her to the Captain's Quarters. Puzzled, she acknowledged, left her things in a corner and went directly there.

As she arrived, the door opened revealing McCoy, "Oh, finally, Tanya, come in."

"Yes, Tanya," said Kirk, "Come in." He snapped off his viewer and rose from the desk, "Now tell me, what's this about regulations you were quoting at Dr. McCoy?"

She blinked, bewildered. Then she remembered, "Section K, paragraph 14, subsection Q. It is applicable, Sir."

"I'm sure it is...to the letter...but I'm wondering if you really want to invoke it?"

"I am quite certain, Sir."

"You realize that if...anything happens...it will effectively end your career on Starships? And for the active branch of the IA?"

"I am a responsible adult citizen of Vulcan." She answered with the starchy crackle of a plebe answering an upperclassman.

"I realize that. However, you've been seen around the ship with Mr. Chekov," Kirk searched for delicate words, "and I'm wondering if you've had a sufficiently broad grounding in... well, human behavior patterns..."

Impersonal coolness chilled her voice, "I find the habits of the human male... alien."

McCoy doubted that was a healthy attitude and was about to say so when the door chimed and Kirk said, "Come."

Spock entered, looked about, "I'm sorry, Captain, I didn't realize you had..."

"Quite all right, Mr. Spock. Perhaps you can help."

McCoy opened his mouth but T'Aniyeh interposed, "The issue is closed, Sir, unless you'd care to take it up with the admiralty."

"I don't think that will be necessary," said Kirk, "It's your career. I'll let Spock try to talk some sense into you."

"About what?" asked Spock.

McCoy said, "This Subsection Q business. Jim, Spock's on her side."

"Oh. Well, as I said, Lieutenant, it's your career and

your decision. But I strongly recommend that you reconsider. After all, it's an absolutely harmless and temporary measure." To Spock he said, "What can I do for you?"

Spock approached the desk holding out a clipboard for Kirk's signature, "I need your authorization to tie up this much of our communication potential for private purposes."

Kirk read the form then looked up at the First Officer, "What do you want to do, send facsimile?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Whatever for?"

"I've listed the purpose as outgoing mail." He indicated the clipboard.

"Mail is usually sent by coded computer-squirt; why would you want to send fax?"

"Our computers are not programmed to encode High Vulcan Graphics in such a manner that the Vulcan Space Central Complex could decode reliably enough for my purposes. It would take me three weeks to set up the necessary programs and that would require scrapping several existing programs. In addition, there is a certain urgency attached to the material I wish to send. Such a delay would be unacceptable."

Kirk examined the lighted clipboard carefully then looked up again, "This is a very unusual request, Mr. Spock. I'll have to log a more precise reason than 'personal mail'. What is it that's so urgent?"

"I'm engaged in an important argument, Captain, and since we are weeks from Vulcan and headed away, I'm already far behind."

"What kind of an argument?" Kirk was intrigued. Spock rarely sent or received personal mail.

T'Aniyeh was watching Spock carefully. McCoy observed T'Aniyeh from an inconspicuous post near the door.

Spock said, "I find that I must take exception to some sections of the Stovam Report."

"Stovam Report?"

"Certainly you've heard of it, Sir?" said T'Aniyeh.

"No. I don't recall..."

T'Aniyeh said, "The Vulcan Commission that investigated the theft of the Kraith, Captain."

Kirk said, "They've published a report?"

"Yes, Sir," said Spock. "Nine weeks ago. We received our copies seven weeks later. I've not yet received any publications discussing Stovam's findings, but I'm certain there are many extant. I wish to put my views on record before the question is called."

McCoy said, "And what did Stovam find?"

Spock turned to eye the Doctor and then back to Kirk who was radiating curiosity. He summoned patience and yielded to the inevitable. "Stovam concludes that the Federation was guilty of criminal negligence in failing to protect the Kraith in accord with its value. He asserts that the cause of this negligence is inherent in the structure of the Federation and cites humanity as the specific source of the difficulty. He claims that subsequent to the event, no changes were made that would in any way guard against a future occurrence of a similar nature."

Stunned, Kirk said, "Why that's not true! Security has been tightened all over. Our own mission put a stop to leaks within our Starbases. Personnel are now screened even more thoroughly and a General Order was issued regarding..."

"Yes, Sir." Spock interrupted, "But all that is irrelevant. That particular type of negligence has been corrected, security increased and warning issued regarding non-human artifacts. But the psychology of humans hasn't been changed. The attitude which generated the negligence is untouched and most humans aren't even aware that it exists. It's all around us, all the time, Captain. For example," he again turned to eye McCoy, "the Doctor's attitude toward T'Aniyeh's choice to invoke subsection Q."

He turned back to Kirk, "And your own attitude toward her decision. Both reflect an inability to respect the values of others and a tendency to judge others by your own personal standards. It was this trait which led the Security team in charge of the Kraith to treat it merely as a priceless antique."

"Then," said Kirk, "you agree with Stovam?"

"I agree with his observations, but I disagree with his conclusions. I am well enough informed to guess who will agree with him and to construct their argument lines. Therefore, I've prepared a refutation of the arguments which are, no doubt, currently circulating in favor of Stovam's conclusion."

"Which is...?" prompted Kirk.

McCoy saw those huge, Vulcan lungs fill with air and put in, "Bri-fly...?"

Spock deflated, considered then spoke gravely, "His position cannot be stated in a few English words, but it leads inescapably to the conclusion that Vulcan must withdraw from the Federation."

Kirk and McCoy paused, washed in shock, tingling in disbelief. Finally, Kirk shook his head in bewilderment, "But that's illogical!"

"On the contrary, Captain. Stovam's logic is irreproachable."

"What!?" exclaimed McCoy, "I thought you just said you disagree!"

"I do. But I do not impugn his logic. An argument is a complex composition, Doctor. Logic is only one among many elements." He appealed to Kirk, "How could I explain in simple English a counterargument, which even our main computers are unable to digest from a High Vulcan presentation? Captain, will you authorize this traffic or must I seek other means of communicating with the Vulcan electorate?"

"There will be a vote on this?"

"Of course, As soon as all arguments have been heard and there has been time to call a General Question. If I am forced to seek other means of communicating...I may be too late."

Kirk scribbled his initials and handed the clipboard back to the First Officer, "I'll authorize as much time as you need, but perhaps you should take leave..."

"Not yet, Captain. This could go on for many months."

"Let me know if there's anything I can do."

"I will, Sir."

When Spock and T'Aniyeh had left, McCoy said to Kirk, "Do you thing they'd really do it?"

"Withdraw from the Federation? You know Vulcans. If it's logical, they'll do it. But, they have a great sense of responsibility. They know full well how destructive such an act would be."

Spock took his authorization and his tape to the bridge where Uhura had just added a sixth tape to the pile racked beside her. As the door swished quietly open, Uhura turned, "Oh, Mr. Spock. These are all for you. Looks like another stack of journals or some such."

Spock accepted the rack and placed the clipboard with the tape on her console. "This is to go out immediately. By facsimile."

She checked the authorization and dropped the cartridge into a slot, took one look and turned with one hand removing her ear speaker, "Mr. Spock, this will take about six hours to transmit by such a high resolution fax. I could move it by squirt in four seconds."

"I am well aware of the operating parameters of your department, Lieutenant. You have your orders."

"Yes, Sir." She turned back to her board and went to work. It would be a tedious job to monitor, but the Captain's authorization was explicit enough.

Spock set the rack of tapes aside and went about his routine duties. It was six hours later before he returned to his quarters to fold himself into his desk chair and examine the day's mail. When he did, he took one look at his viewer, then threw a sharp glance in the direction of the bridge wondering if humanity was really all that valuable an influence after all. The "journals" were the long awaited commentaries on the Stovam Report.

Putting all else aside, he buried himself in the complex graphics.

High Vulcan is a more ultra precise mode of expression than the most elaborate mathematics of the theoreticist for it never has to resort to ordinary language for exposition or definition. While the spoken form of High Vulcan must rely on ordinary grammatical forms, the written language is under no such linear constraint and can be tailored to the argument in hand.

Hence, a page of High Vulcan Graphics might resemble a hybrid of a chemical phase diagram, a cubist's nightmare, a Hebrew paradigm, and an oriental filigree expert's idea of a decorative hiding place for a code. It has been likened to a seven-dimensional creature's efforts to portray the world he sees on a two-dimensional page.

The more involved an argument becomes, the larger and more complex the diagrams have to be. When they become too large, a master diagram of the total argument is ruled into numbered segments. Detailed enlargements of each segment are then appended

to the master. The resulting composition is very like a road atlas, and the reading process resembles plotting all possible routes from all points to all points.

Without the Vulcan eidetic memory and powers of visualization, such a tool would be impractical. But even with these advantages, the method can become unwieldy. When that happens, two dimensional expression is abandoned for a three dimensional model. High Vulcan Modular looks like abstract sculpture and can be quite beautiful in itself.

But, beyond the sculpture technique, is the most powerful tool employed by the High Vulcan language, tokiel. Tokiel uses four dimensions (three spacial, one time) and twenty-two color parameters as well as fifteen pure tones. What would take ten hours to read out of a two or three dimensional argument can be assimilated from a skillful tokiel artist in about an hour. Tokiel can handle complexities beyond the range of the most intricate sculpture and yet it is held in highest esteem for its simplistic elegance. It is the tool of the pre-schooler as well as the post-doctoral student, though it is necessary only for problems involving the entire social structure of Tsaichrani.

It was a little after ship's midnight when Spock snapped off his viewer to stare into space over his clasped hands, straining his powers of visualization. There had to be a way out.

T'Uriamne had drawn the conclusion he'd known she would. In his grandfather's name he couldn't fail to oppose her. Yet he could see no way to succeed. The idic had been a cornerstone of Tsaichrani since the Guardian Council of Kaytavytkhe had adopted Surak's Construct three thousand years ago. But there was no logical reason why it couldn't be amended or even scrapped entirely if the electorate was willing to accept the consequences. The day of the illiterate peasant had long passed, and even the Guardian Council would yield to the will of the electorate if it were expressed clearly enough.

But could he be absolutely sure of his own motives? Could he indeed be guilty of the same crime as Doctor McCoy? Was he truly qualified to mold Tsaichrani?

He brushed his self doubt aside. Even though Sarek still lived, he was Kaytavytkh in his father's place and by his grandfather's hand. More, he was Kaytavytkh of the First Realm and thus entitled to speak in Guardian Council which implied the right to judge Tsaichrani and to mold it. But he must go armed with a perfect presentation.

He racked the tape cartridges and took them in search of T'Aniyeh.

It was late and the corridors were dim and deserted. Spock had always liked this shift best because, with most of the ship asleep, the ship took on an air of quiet that extended deep into the telepathic band giving a kind of privacy he cherished.

He made his way to T'Aniyeh's quarters and rang. The door opened and he stepped in to find her drawing a wrap around herself.

"Get dressed. We've got work to do."

She discarded the wrap and quite unselfconsciously reached for her uniform. "At this hour? Remember I'm only human. I do need to sleep once in a while."

Spock paused, "Are you tired?"

She frowned, "Frankly, no. I was thinking seriously about some prookle I made last night."

She'd stripped to her skin and was applying underwear methodically. Spock, ignoring the scenery, went to her desk viewer and inserted one of the tapes, spun it to an overall view of T'Uriamne's proposal and turned to find T'Aniyeh peering around his elbow clad only in panty and bra.

He said, "What do you think of that?"

She didn't answer. He waited a moment watching her face, then reached for her dress, gathered it expertly and passed it over her head with minimum obstruction of her vision. She let him help her squirm into the garment and fasten it.

He asked, "Two portions of prookle?"

"Hmmm. She looked up, "What I don't understand is why my copies of these haven't arrived."

"Unexplainable mail delays are one of the inconveniences of a Service career."

She squirmed into hose and shoes while he retrieved his tape. Stopping at the mirror over her dresser, she ran a brush through her hair, "Humans practice an invasion of privacy they call 'gossip'. It's generally based on exaggerated misinterpretations of minor observations... such as tousled hair and midnight companionship..."

Standing behind her, he took her shoulders and observed her in the mirror, allowing the strength of his touch to say, "It soon will be common knowledge."

She met his eyes analytically in the mirror. Still no sign of urgency. She said, "Not tonight, Spock. Three or four days, alright? We'll argue to a conclusion then."

Blinking assent, he said, "Date,"

They walked the darkened corridors breathing deeply of the thought-free air and feeling light and companionable. She led the way through a door into a rectangular room just large enough for a table and six chairs. Spock started feeding his tapes to the large wall viewscreen as T'Aniyeh continued to another door that led to a tiny galley. She took her lock-box from the walk-in refrigerator and shoved the neatly wrapped prookle squares into the warmer. Then she dialed a steaming red fruitjuice and brought utensils and plates out to the table.

Sipping the juice, she arranged their repast. The aroma of the juice roused Spock from the viewscreen, and he reached over.

"May I?"

"Yes. Skip dinner?"

"Yes."

"Like something more?"

"No. May I keep this?"

"I'll get another."

She went to dial herself another of the red potions that resembled thick applesauce more than juice, and brought the sizzling squares of confection. Prookle looks like a compressed bread pudding and comes in all colors. It's eaten for its high protein content, but wild variations using imported spices are the 'in' thing with Vulcan youth who frequent the all night gathering houses.

By Vulcan standards, Spock was still a youth. He fell-to with more enthusiasm than pleased him as T'Aniyeh studied the tapes he'd fed into the viewer. When he'd finished, he sat watching her face as she struggled with the ideas.

Finally she looked at him. He said, "Excellent Prookle."

"Thank you."

"You should have invited me sooner."

"Didn't think of it."

"Remember me next time."

"I will." She nodded at the viewer, "I've only the vaguest idea of what she's driving at, but it's obvious you'll need a total model. If you like, I'll help you build it. Do you have a large acasomy?"

"Yes, but it's not large enough."

"I have a thousand-piece. Together we might be able to cobble something together...at least to get an idea."

"Good. Three thousand pieces should be sufficient." He stacked his dishes and rose heading for the disposal. "Meet me in Rec Room Eight in ten minutes," he paused on the way to the corridor, "Unless you're too tired?"

"I'm good for a few hours. I don't go on duty until the afternoon so I can sleep later. This is really the best time to work. It's so quiet."

He left and she went to find her acasomy, the three-dimensional model kit model kit more inseparable from a Vulcan than a pocket computer from an engineer.

They worked on their model well into the early morning hours, leaving the Rec Room looking like a primitive printer's workshop. When T'Aniyeh went to sleep, Spock went in search of the captain with a request for exclusive use of Rec Room Eight.

The next few days passed as Tanya and Spock concentrated on their problem using every tool at their command. With Spock sorting pieces and T'Aniyeh constructing, the three-dimensional model of Tsaichrani as-it-is-now was easily completed by T'Aniyeh from memory (a point which pleased Spock more than he would admit) and she then devoted her time to studying her copies of the commentaries which finally arrived.

It was slow reading for her, but she persevered until, three days later, she was ready to tackle what Spock had done to the model. He'd incorporated the changes advocated by T'Uriamne and was searching out all possible repercussions.

Essentially what she suggested was amending the idic concept to exclude combinations which ran more than a 65% chance of destroying one of the combined elements rather than merely altering it.

In view of the Stovam Report, this would require that all ties with humans be severed. The significance of such an action was not merely economic. It would also affect the large and growing community of resident aliens on Vulcan as well as people like T'Aniyeh and Spock who belonged to both sides.

But the most severe effect would be on the value system underlying the whole structure of Tsaichrani. The interrelationships of Vulcan Ethics, Morals, and Values with the existing social order were so intricate and contained so much inertia that the shock waves would last for generations. It was in this area that Spock groped for a weapon to use against T'Uriamne.

Strive as he might, he couldn't isolate any single effect that was absolutely undesirable. He spent hours tinkering with their model and more hours staring into space over his steepled fingers examining his visualization of the model. Then, he'd close his eyes and visualize every movement of T'Ruel's Motek, and try to recapture that flash of insight he'd had as she concluded her performance... that last time she'd ever danced it.

But to no avail. She had been a true genius of the type that turned up once in three generations. It was in such moments that he found himself nursing an emotional regret that T'Ruel had had to die. He was certain that if she'd lived to complete her rendition of the Motek, he's have his answer. He was not in T'Ruel's class and could not supply the missing threads of her reasoning, yet he knew that had she lived, there would be no General Question called on the Stovam Report.

Each time he reached this point, he'd shake himself out of it and go to stare at the model while striving again to grasp the problem as a whole. His ancestors had constructed Tsaichrani and he'd been trained to understand its operation. He'd worked more complex problems than this hundreds of times.

Then one night, as he lay resting, he switched his attention from the problem to himself. There was no reason he should be unable to hold the entire structure in his mind and visualize every possible effect of any change, especially with the physical model as a fifth level abstract and all the computer time he could use.

Unless...

Shocked, he sat bolt upright on his bed, considering. Then he lay back and ran a thorough metabolic check. No. He was sound, healthy, and stable. He composed himself and internalized his attention in what Dr. McCoy would call a self-induced trance for lack of the proper term. He tested every one of his mental "circuits" as carefully as he would a troublesome computer's programs.

The only aberrations he found were the built-in ones due to his dual heritage...save one. Quantitatively, it could hardly be considered disabling. But the effect was out of all proportion to the cause. Nature is an implacable mistress...especially if you're a Vulcan male.

Rechecking to make sure there were no other disturbances originating within himself, he externalized his attention only to find his desk intercom whistling stridently. He rose and answered.

"Mr. Spock!" The captain's voice crackled, "I was about to send a security team looking for you. Where have you been? Didn't you hear the Red Alert?"

"I was asleep, Captain. Trouble?"

"We were only engaged in a battle with a well armed pirate vessel, that's all. Nothing important." Kirk's thinly veiled sarcasm was lost on the Vulcan. "Now we're about to pick up ten very young children, Mr. Spock, Vulcan children. Adrift in a damaged ship with no adults for god-only-knows how long. Our readings show they're in fair health but malnourished. Meet me in the transporter room in three minutes. Kirk out."

Spock dove through the door almost before it could fly out of his path, but he turned left...away from the transporter room. When he reached the intersection, he turned left again but had gone only a few steps when he spotted T'Aniyeh coming toward him.

"Come with me," he said as he about-faced, and made it back to the corner in four long strides. He turned right, sidestepped an astounded Yeoman Rand and cut back into his own room without looking to see if T'Aniyeh were following. As the door closed behind her, he locked it, then disconnected his intercom.

"Do you know about the children?" he asked.

"Children? Are the survivors children?"

"Vulcan children. No adults with them."

She gasped and closed her eyes to master the shock. Then, her features relaxed into a Vulcan mask that said without words, "So that's the way it is to be."

He waited.

She looked up into his eyes calmly. "Whenever you're ready."

He raised his hand in the Vulcan salute. She joined hers to his. The lines of his face melted into a tenderness she'd never seen there and suddenly, she found it easy to open her mind to him. It felt as if her hand melted into his and then he was there, within her mind waiting gently at the ramparts of her soul.

She'd never allowed anyone into that inner keep, not even the Vulcan therapists who'd rescued her sanity and taught her control. They'd taught her to guard her innermost self... they had not taught her to share it.

And then his voice came, deep as a still lake hidden in some mountain cave; cool as black velvet caressing her nerves. The words were ancient ritual, so old they'd all but lost their meaning, but they held the power to unlock the gates of her fortress and cause her to welcome the speaker. Though she'd never been mated, she had Affirmed the Continuity.

She heard herself answering with the same age-old formula. And then she was welcomed to the innermost hearth that is shared only in the ultimate intimacy. And they became one.



It was not a melding of minds, but a mingling of that indelible substance which burns creating the flame of life. It was a touching that did not touch, and yet would always touch.

He withdrew his hand and, instead of the usual, clean separation she'd always associated with the breaking of such a contact, there was a drawing out, as if some rope of connective thought-tissue were elongating. She still felt his living presence within her. The surging dynamics of his life processes, his emotions, were her's to know... always. And she knew he had the same contact with her emotions and that her lack of control could cause him terrible anguish.

They stood poised... within and without one another... for a breathless moment before Spock said, "We must hurry."

As she trailed after the First Officer, she knew his urgency, the tensing for action on which lives might depend. And she surrendered to it because it was the coherent power of a laser beam compared to the chaotic white light of her own near panic... and emotion was what she must not feel now. Curiously, his steadiness actually flowed through her, damping the rising tide of apprehension, readying her for action. And somehow, she knew this new steadiness would be hers as long as the relationship endured.

Arriving at the transporter room door, Spock paused to let her catch up, then breasted the door as if it were a gigantic wave. Within, they found an ocean in torment. It was exactly what they'd expected, but even Vulcans can hope things won't be as bad as anticipated.

The Captain was struggling to hold two silently bloodthirsty toddlers apart in spite of their expert and dispassionate shin kicking-finger biting tactics. Nurse Chapel was striving not to drop one screaming and kicking infant while dealing with two others that still lay on the transporter pads. Three boys and a girl were holding a cowering McCoy at bay. The oldest, a pre-adolescent boy, stood on the rear transporter pad, hands to his ears, too pained by the noise to do anything helpful.

Less than ten seconds' after Spock and T'Aniyeh entered to stand side by side surveying the scene with disapproval, a silence descended.

The toddlers froze, turning their heads toward the couple. The infants ceased struggling. The children around Doctor McCoy came to blank faced attention and the pre-adolescent boy removed his hands from his ears to eye Spock with relief. The humans gaped at the sudden quiet disbelievingly, then followed the children's gaze to the still open door.

When the silence had penetrated everyone's nerves, Spock said to Kirk but including all three humans, "It would be best if you leave this to us."

Kirk straightened, "Spock, where have you been for the last fifteen minutes?"

"With your permission, sir, I'll explain later."

"That should be interesting!" He moved toward the door avoiding the toddlers who still looked like statues. "What did you do to them?"

"Nothing, Captain." Spock turned to McCoy who was extricating himself from the tableau, "Doctor, if you will precede us to Sick Bay and adjust the environmental controls, T'Aniyeh and I will bring the children. Nurse Chapel," he moved to the transporter platform and plucked an infant from her arms, "I suggest you accompany the Doctor." He handed the infant to the oldest boy, one handed, as if it were a dirty doll. The boy tucked the limp figure clad in a pale green jumper under one arm and waited, eyeing T'Aniyeh warily.

T'Aniyeh lifted another of the infants and tucked it, football fashion, but face down, under one arm and went to take one of the toddlers in hand. Spock hefted the remaining infant holding it away from him as one might an untrustworthy spitoat, then he tucked it away and took possession of the other toddler who went docily beside the tall Vulcan.

A few comments in Low Vulcan sufficed to form the procession that marched the halls of the Enterprise in good order. Meanwhile McCoy had turned one of his rooms into a dessicating oven and was demanding three cribs from Stores while his left hand worked his reference computer for a Vulcan infant's diet. Nurse Chapel was on another com alerting the commissary when the procession arrived.

After he'd turned the group over to T'Aniyeh, Spock approached McCoy's desk.

The Doctor pointed to his viewer, "Any recommendations?"

Spock glanced through the medical reference for about ninety seconds, "This seems complete."

"Pediatrics isn't my line, but I'll do what I can, though I don't relish the idea of working in there." He jerked a thumb toward the room that already shimmered with heat.

"The warmth is necessary, Doctor, as the children can't tolerate the ship's frigid ambient temperature. You'll have to manage."

The intercom beeped. "McCoy here."

Kirk's voice snapped, "Tell Spock I want to see him in my quarters right away, Kirk out." He sounded angry.

Spock nodded and ducked into the other room long enough to say, "T'Aniyeh, I'll be back as soon as possible." Then he left.

And Kirk was angry. While Spock entered, snapped to a crisp

attention and waited to be noticed, the Captain paced back and forth, ignoring the First Officer. Never before in Spock's memory had Kirk treated a subordinate so. But he waited patiently, well aware of the battle of reason and emotion that raged before him.

Finally, Kirk wheeled on the Vulcan, met his eyes and said softly, "All right, let's have it. And it better be good. Why didn't you report to the transporter room immediately?"

"Sir, I understood that you wished my aid in handling the children. Had I reported to the transporter room immediately, as ordered, I would have failed to carry out the implied command of calming the children, and, indeed, my presence would only have aggravated the situation. I therefore deemed it necessary to invest thirteen minutes in preparation. In doing so, I exercised an officer's judgement and if you find the results unsatisfactory, it is your prerogative to take disciplinary action."

Kirk took that in silently and turned away as he mulled over the aspects of the problem. He'd never been one to emphasize the letter of command in preference to results. And there was no denying Spock had achieved results. He said, "Spock, what did you do to that mob of... children?"

"Nothing, Captain."

"I don't understand. You certainly did something. What kind of preparations?"

"I did nothing to the children, sir, only to myself. To create peace, it is necessary to be at peace. I took what steps seemed... appropriate. I regret that it took time during which you were exposed to danger. It was a calculated risk."

"Danger? They're just children!"

"Vulcan children, sir, come equipped with a plethora of survival instincts. Some fade with time and some must be trained away but all can be deadly. Fortunately, this group hadn't been beyond the influence of an adult for too long."

Astonished, Kirk was striving not to gape, "I was never aware of that aspect... I mean, they're just..." He sputtered to a halt, one hand circling in the air, searching for an expression.

Meeting Kirk's eyes levelly, Spock said, "There are reasons for our customs, Captain."

Kirk sifted through his paltry inventory of facts on Vulcan children. All he really knew was that they were brought up under a strict regimen, requiring obedience, study, and a serious approach to exercise and other aspects of physical hygiene. Outworlders practically never even see Vulcan children. But he'd always thought the severe treatment was merely the Vulcan method of instilling the disciplines of logic.

He left that for a moment, "I filed the report with Star Base XVII. Commodore Kiri has released us from patrol to take the children back to Vulcan. We're heading there at warp five."

"Did we take their vessel aboard, sir?"

"No. There wasn't much left. We salvaged some pieces of wreckage for the lab. The survivors were nipped off just in time. Which reminds me... I never knew you were such a sound sleeper?"

"Even Vulcans require rest... and I was off duty."

"Yes, I suppose so..."

Kirk turned toward his desk conceding that with a shrug of his shoulders. After all, it'd never happened before. "Very well, Mr. Spock. Your orders are to turn over your administrative duties to your department heads and devote your time to caring for those children with special emphasis on finding out as much as they know about what happened to their vessel. But don't sacrifice their mental health to the Federation's curiosity. I'm sure even Vulcan children must be deeply affected by such a loss."

So, with his job cut out for him, Spock took himself back to Sick Bay.

The trip to Vulcan seemed little different than the months spent on border patrol. But Spock and T'Aniyeh took heel-toe shifts in the nursery until Christine volunteered for the night shift, leaving the children's waking hours to the tranquilizing effects of the Vulcans.

McCoy now had plenty to occupy him. When he wasn't boning up on Vulcan pediatrics, he was arguing Vulcan child-psychology with an adamant Spock and a faintly amused Tanya. McCoy maintained that the children should be encouraged to release their grief in some fashion, if only in undisciplined motor activity. The Vulcans maintained that the only hope of salvaging the children's mental health was in organizing an absolutely invariant daily schedule as close to "normal" as possible and that did not include undisciplined motor activity.

It took a midnight incident to convince the Chief Surgeon he'd better leave the care of Vulcans to Vulcans.

During Christine's shift, all three infants awoke vomiting. She called McCoy, then strove to deal with the sudden chaos before it roused the others. But by the time the Surgeon arrived, bedlam reigned in the "hotroom" and McCoy called Spock, shouting to be heard over the din, before attempting any medical readings.

McCoy was just finishing his examination when the sudden silence told him Spock had arrived. He turned to the First Officer,

"I can't find anything wrong. We'll give them a drink and put them back to sleep."

"Just a moment, Doctor." Spock inserted his lank frame between the human and his patient and ran a huge hand over the infant's head and down over its abdomen and then examined the sodden diaper. "Give those babies any more to drink and you'll have it all over the floor within ten minutes. They vomitted because they'd had too much to drink and, I suspect," he turned to Nurse Chapel, "too much of what you call tender-loving-care. Nurse, did you pick these children up for any reason?"

"Yes, I did. They were fretting just after I came on duty. I rocked them a bit to settle them down and gave them each an ounce of water. A baby needs affection to feel secure."

The Vulcan turned to McCoy nodding, "You'd better instruct your staff more thoroughly, Doctor, before assigning them. For the present," he turned the infant over and stripped off the wet diaper, dropping it into the wall disposal chute, "we'll put them back to sleep. T'Aniyeh will feed them in the morning." He applied the fresh diaper with the impersonal thoroughness he turned on all mechanical routines, flipped the infant onto its stomach, pushed its head firmly down and left it to fall asleep. After performing the same service for the other two infants with the same abruptness as if regretting each unavoidable contact, he shoed the sweating humans out of the dormitory, forestalling the inevitable comments on humans with a stern eyebrow that had the whole room asleep in three minutes flat. Christine was too shocked by the sight of Spock up to his elbows in domesticity to react and McCoy only noted it for future reference. But somehow it seemed no more unusual than Spock up to the elbows in computer circuitry.

Out in McCoy's office, the Vulcan said to Christine, "You'll remain on duty at these monitors until T'Aniyeh comes. If anything at all happens, however insignificant, you will call me and not undertake any sort of initiative." Then he left.

McCoy stared at the closed door, silently capitulating in all issues regarding Vulcan infants... and possibly even children.

From then on, Spock made a habit of dropping in on Christine several times a night. Though his mind was clearer now, he was busier and had even less time to construct his argument. But he worked harder, determined to find some firm grounds on which to challenge T'Uriamne's proposal.

Then, one morning six weeks out of Vulcan, he sat over his model well into the ship's morning hours, desperately groping for something he was certain would have been obvious to T'Ruel. Even though he could now hold the entire fluid structure in his mind and trace effects for three generations, he still hadn't found one item which spelled sure destruction. The number of permutations was astronomical and it could take two Vulcan lifetimes just to think of them all. But he was convinced he was onto something and just couldn't interrupt himself.

Meanwhile, T'Aniyeh dismissed Christine and put the children through their morning routine. She'd seen Spock seated crosslegged on the floor by the enormous, gleaming model and had noted the clasped hands with the raised fingers steepled to a position that spelled trance depth concentration. A Vulcan in such a state simply could not be disturbed.

When it came time for Spock to conduct lessons and he still hadn't shown, she determined to improvise for another hour before ordering the children to drill from the computer. While she got the infants settled down, she reviewed the lessons Spock had been emphasizing and cast about for some supplementary material in which she was reasonably competent.

All she could think of was an elementary tokiei exercise she'd learned from one of T'Ruel's recordings. She'd always admired the way T'Ruel specified her quantifiers with graceful head movements that never detracted from the flow of her argument. T'Aniyeh had worked long and hard to capture the finer nuances and felt confident that she could teach them to the five older children, and the two toddlers would be interested enough and might even pick up a point or two.

So, when Spock walked in fifty-five minutes later, he found T'Aniyeh demonstrating the twelfth movement of the exercise with the seven children seated in a circle around her, captivated. He paused a moment to watch and was instantly impressed with the human girl's mastery of T'Ruel's style.

He knew the exercise well, of course, but hadn't really thought about its components in years. His own execution had always been termed competent but he knew he lacked the style that communicated lucidly. The Twelfth Movement was an extremely versatile sequence which turned up in various guises in some of the most sophisticated arguments.

He watched as T'Aniyeh danced through the last half of the Movement and then, strangely, it seemed to be T'Ruel, herself, weaving the figures before him, joining the linear argument into a perfectly beautiful circle with singular brilliance.

Spock blinked hard, well aware that the dancer was T'Aniyeh, but unable to dissolve the illusion. When she reached the sequence he'd come in on, she sighted him and stopped, not abruptly as any amateur would, but with an ad-libbed step that rounded out her motion with a fluid authority that said, "to-be-continued".

T'Ruel's influence was so strong that Spock experienced again that flash of extraordinary insight. This time he chased the teaser deep into his mind, refusing to be distracted until he'd exploited every last bit of momentum the vision had given him.

To the onlookers, he seemed paralyzed by some odd phaser effect. Frozen in mid-step, without blinking, breathing, or trembling, he nevertheless exerted himself in the most furious activity he'd

he'd undertaken in years. But the Vulcan audience understood instantly and remained still, scarcely daring to breathe. After a few minutes, the younger children began to fret in the cold draft from the still open door.

Before T'Aniyeh could move to close the door manually, Dr. McCoy came up behind Spock reading a clipboard, noted the open door from the corner of his eye and swerved to enter the room.

"Why is this door open? It's heating up my office unbearably..." He collided with Spock who toppled like a statue. McCoy's clipboard flew as the Doctor clutched at Spock's arm trying to let the Vulcan down easily. For one long minute McCoy stood over the rigid body uncomprehending. Then the rigour left Spock's limbs and he melted onto the floor.

Not having been aware of the fall, Spock took a moment to get his bearings and note the expression on McCoy's face. Then, realizing what must have happened, he looked at T'Aniyeh, "It's all right. I've got it."

He retrieved McCoy's clipboard and climbed to his feet, "I believe this is yours, Doctor. You should be more careful with Federation property." He pointed the bewildered Chief Surgeon out the door, "It's getting chilly in here."

As the door closed, he turned and took charge of the class just as if he'd arrived without incident.

Two days later, Spock and T'Aniyeh confronted Kirk in his quarters. It was late, and the Captain was tired. He was seated at his desk, toying with the viewscreen controls as the two Vulcans stood at ease before him. Sometimes Spock's logic gave him a headache.

He leaned back and cocked his head at Spock, "Is this really feasible?"

"I believe it is, Captain," said Spock. Turning to the girl he snapped a command.

She paced forward, paused a moment then spun around reaching high and lunged forward in a dancer's imitation of a fencer's stance.

For a fleeting instant, Kirk actually thought he saw the jet black crown of T'Ruel's long hair coiled in place of Tanya's short bob.

He nodded, "Yes, I see. But a whole composition is more than just a signature. Even I can see that."

"True, Captain. But what is required for the entire Motek is no more than you've just seen... an ability to copy."

"But," said Kirk, "you said T'Ruel never recorded the Motek."

"Correct. But she made many recordings of other compositions. T'Aniyeh has studied them carefully and as you have seen she's captured T'Ruel's style. All tokiei compositions are based on an inventory of standard movements. It's the combinations that convey meaning... as words are taken from a dictionary and placed into meaningful sentences."

Kirk sat forward, "And you believe that you have completed T'Ruel's Motek as she would have completed it?"

"Yes, sir." Spock was being patient.

"I still don't understand how this is going to keep Vulcan from seceding from the Federation."

Spock decided to try a less technical explanation. Apparently Kirk wouldn't authorize something he didn't believe he understood... at least in principle. "The subject of the Motek is the connection between the philosophy of Nome and the principle of the Domination of Logic. As you know, Surak considered these two ideas to be separate elements in his Construct. A number of tokiei artists have proposed views of the connection but none has ever delineated the relationship with T'Ruel's incisive elegance.

"The Domination of Logic is an important concept. Any change which could be shown to endanger that Domination would, I believe, be rejected by the electorate. T'Ruel's Motek, in complete form, demonstrates that T'Uriamne's proposal would result in the eventual weakening of the Domination of Logic. However, T'Ruel's Motek has never been viewed in complete form. I propose to teach T'Aniyeh to perform T'Ruel's Motek and then provide an opportunity for the electorate to view her performance. I believe T'Ruel's statement is clear enough to delay action on T'Uriamne's proposal at least while we search for other means of dealing with the problems cited by Stovam."

Kirk, head cocked to one side, considered that. It appealed to his sense of humor... a human girl arguing a whole planet full of Vulcans to a standstill. He said, "But what am I going to do for a First Officer for the next six weeks? And what about those children?" According to Bones, the only thing between him and destruction is you two."

"My department heads are already handling 90% of my routine work, Captain. I'll still be available for any non-routine problems. And we will remain responsible for the children."

Kirk considered this for a moment. It would be spreading his First Officer pretty thin. And then it struck him that Spock was moving with uncharacteristic haste. "Spock," Kirk rose and paced around his desk, "What's the hurry. Can't it wait until we deliver the children? You and Tanya could take leave..."

Spock examined his boots for a moment, composed his thoughts, and raised his eyes to his Captain, "I received notification this morning that T'Urianne has called the General Question. The vote will take place the day after we arrive."

"What! I never thought Vulcan law could move so quickly! Who is this... T'Urianne?"

Pausing a moment to choose his words, Spock said, "She is the hereditary head of the Guardian Council. She has declared a State of Imminent Peril because she believes Federation membership represents a threat to Tsaichrani."

Kirk strained his memory. All Academy applicants had to pass a test on comparative governmental structures of Federation member worlds, but that had been so many years ago and law wasn't his strongest interest... still... "State of Imminent Peril? Doesn't that close public debate for several weeks before the vote?"

"It amounts to almost thirteen standard days, Captain."

"Then how can you present your argument?"

Spock took a deep breath and turned to pace away from Kirk, circling Tanya who stood impassively listening. Finally, he turned again to the human, resigned. It seemed that every time he had to do something important he had to start by instructing the Captain in the details of Vulcan life. Perhaps it would be better to be a Captain...

Spock sighed, "By calling the Guardian Council into session and challenging T'Urianne's right to the position she holds."

"But you just said it was a hereditary position? What is the Guardian Council... I've never heard of it."

"That's not surprising. It hasn't met in almost two thousand years."

"Two thousand years! Why?"

"Because it wasn't necessary. There's been no serious indictment of any of the elements of Surak's Construct in all that time."

"And the leadership is hereditary?"

"Correct."

"Then how can anyone challenge T'Urianne's right to it?"

"Her father also has a son. If he can demonstrate superior competence, he will succeed to her position. Such an argument will be the only permitted public debate at that time."

"How can you be so sure he doesn't share her attitude?"

A shadow of peculiarly Spockian amusement colored his expression as he answered, "Captain, I do believe I am familiar enough with my own opinions to make such an evaluation with absolute certainty."

It took one very long moment for the implication of that to sink in. Then Kirk said, "I didn't know you had a sister?"

"A half sister, Captain. My father's daughter by his first wife. She left the family when my father remarried. We've never met, but when my father was declared legally dead she automatically succeeded him, and of course she retains the position."

Kirk was stunned. A thirty-odd... nearly forty year family estrangement... and from what the Captain knew of Sarek, he'd wager a year's pay he'd never exchanged a word with his daughter in all that time. Undoubtedly she'd objected to Amanda. And she was in a position to destroy the pan-species solidarity of the Federation. Could a Vulcan do something like that simply because she disapproved of her stepmother? It hardly seemed likely.

Kirk sat down heavily in his chair and looked up at the impassive Vulcan. "And you propose to impeach her on competency charges?"

Spock blinked assent, "Because I believe she made an error in overlooking the long range effect on the Logic Element of Surak's Construct. To prove the charge I must demonstrate the error. The only way I can see to do that is to present T'Rruel's Motek in its entirety. Such a Council Session will be viewed in every home on Vulcan. But it can take place only the day before the scheduled vote... the day we arrive."

Kirk shifted his attention to the girl who'd remained poised but at ease, feet slightly apart, hands behind her back. "Tanya, do you think you can do it?"

She blinked calmly, "I estimate a ninety two point..."

"Nevermind," Kirk held up one hand and turned back to his First Officer, "Mr. Spock, you can tell Scotty to fabricate whatever hardware you'll need. Commandeer whatever space you need."

The two turned to go and Kirk added, rising, "Oh, and Spock..."

"Yes, sir?"

"Good luck...to both of you."

"Thank you, sir," said Spock evenly.

As the door closed behind them, Kirk saw Tanya's expression. Long association with a Vulcan had taught Kirk to know that look and he pitied Spock the long explanations she would exact. Fleeting, he regretted that impulsive "Good luck". But then he thought better of it. They were two of a kind. In fact, Kirk was willing to bet a month's pay that Spock's report on the children's story would be on

his desk by morning in spite of any long explanations.

And it was. The trantu had been carrying a group of Vulcan spice merchants and their families to establish an agricultural station on an otherwise useless desert planet. Vulcan Space Central would undoubtedly have all the other details on the Trantu he'd need to complete his log. The log of the new Enterprise didn't have a single incomplete or unsatisfactory entry. In fact, any Captain would be proud of it. But Kirk was getting restless. He'd become accustomed to the wild adventures and hair-raising mysteries of the last few years.

However, Scotty had become accustomed to the quiet, smooth efficiency of the last few months. The new Enterprise had rooms full of new gadgetry for him to work with and nothing had happened yet to blow his circuits or ruin his crystals or modify his machinery to some alien's specifications. Everything was in mint condition and sounded like it. It left him with precious little to do, but he hadn't yet begun to chafe.

Nevertheless, when Spock came into Engineering looking like work, Scotty perked right up, "Now, what can I do for you, Mr. Spock?"

"I need some items fabricated from a special alloy."

"Right this way," Scotty almost strutted across the room to the corridor, "Mr. Perkins can build any solid solution, alloy or cryocrystal soup, if you just give him the recipe. He really knows metals, that laddy!"

Almost strutting, Scotty led the way down the hall to the gleaming, spacious crystallurgy lab that had the orderly look symptomatic of either lack of work or an impending Admiral's Inspection. The lanky young man who rose from the desk was new to Spock and after introductions, Spock presented his problem with painstaking attention to detail.

Perkins ran a bony hand through his ash blond hair and rubbed one bushy eyebrow with a calloused forefinger. Then he took his courage in his hands, gulped down his prominent adam's apple and interrupted the First Officer, "Uh, Mr. Spock...if I follow you accurately, you're describing the alloy used to activate lokial sensors?"

Spock blinked and raised both eyebrows. Perkins shot Scotty a glance that said, "Did I put my foot in it?" Scotty just stood by the door, arms crossed over his chest wearing his most inscrutable expression.

Spock said, "Correct, Mr. Perkins. You are familiar with the preparation?"

Perkins swallowed again, "Yes, sir."

"Very good, then," Spock pulled a blank clipboard across the desk, "this is the list of items I'll want fabricated."

He began to write on the crystallurgy lab's work-order form with Perkins watching. As the columns of dimensions grew, Scotty could see that Perkins was ahead of the Vulcan again and the corners of his eyes crinkled in anticipation.

Finally Perkins interrupted, "Sir, you'll want a full set of leads from finger bands to anklets?"

Again Spock eyed the young human evenly, "Correct, Lieutenant."

"Who's it for? Couldn't I get the sizes from Personnel?"

Spock blinked once and turned back to the order form to write across the top, Lieutenant Tanya Mnos, "You may complete the form at your leisure, Lieutenant. Send it through channels, the Captain will initial it." He straightened, "Let me know if you have any difficulties, and call me when you've finished."

With that Spock left the lab with Scotty close on his heels, "You see, Mr. Spock. I told you the lad was good!"

Scotty was as proud as if Perkins were his very own invention. But Spock marched down the hall toward the turbo-lift scarcely glancing at the Chief Engineer, "Merely adequately informed, Mr. Scott."

At the engine room Scotty peeled off to check on his crew, making a mental note to soothe Perkins feelings and explain the Vulcan's abruptness. A lad like that deserved a pat on the back.

During the next week Spock worked out a schedule that left T'Aniyeh with a bare five hours sleep a day. It was a grueling routine but they'd done the like before when T'Aniyeh had tutored Spock for his sortie into Romulan territory.

Daily, T'Aniyeh would wake the children up, and get them breakfasted, dressed and drilled. Then Spock would take over for lessons while T'Aniyeh went to the gym to practice the previous day's material, look over the new sequence Spock had recorded and return to the children. During the children's study period, Spock and T'Aniyeh would go over the new material. While she fed the infants, he conducted the afternoon exercises. After the evening meal, Spock would put them to bed while she would go back to the gym. Later, he'd join her and they'd work through the day's material and then spend the last hour in a total review of the composition.

After four weeks of this, Tanya had lost seven pounds she couldn't afford to lose and dark circles rimmed her bloodshot eyes. McCoy was exerting enormous self-control in refraining from offering comments only because Kirk had pled the urgency of the situation. And they'd both seen Tanya's nearly limitless vitality. But on that occasion the routine had involved the tedium of sustained intellectual effort not a daily physical exertion to the point of collapse.

One night, just before midnight, two weeks out of Vulcan, T'Aniyeh and Spock were completing their intensive study of the



last section of the composition. T'Aniyeh had executed the entire sequence several times, and each time a different error crept in.

Spock was standing in front of the improvised platform, arms folded, head cocked critically. "Try it again, T'Aniyeh, this time from the quantifiers."

She nodded, took her position and began the intricate movements again. Then she circled the edge of the platform, gathering the threads of the argument into the conclusion. Slowly spiralling in toward the center, she suddenly lost her balance and fell sprawling across the stage with a resounding thump.

Spock reached her in two enormous bounds but was too late to break her fall. He knelt beside her, grasping her shoulders, "Damage?" he snapped in Low Vulcan.

"Negative." She sat up but made no move to rise.

Still squatting beside her, hands on his knees, Spock reprimanded, "You must be more careful. A fall in this gravity can be dangerous for human bones."

She met his eyes, nodding, "Yes..." Then she crumpled and turned away burying her face in her hands. "Oh, Spock, I can't do it! I'm not good enough! It's no use..." She choked back sobs of despair, overwhelmed.

Spock sat for a moment observing the heaving shoulders, marshalling his inner defenses against the torrential flood of emotion. But he soon discovered he had no defense short of severing the tie between them. Bewildered, he said, "But T'Aniyeh, we've finished. You know it all now."

"But I'll never be able to get through it all without a mistake! What if I fall like that with all Vulcan watching?"

Shaking his head, he shrugged, "Then you'll pick yourself up and go on from where you left off."

Her sobs became uncontrollable hysterics. Spock rose and went to the pile of things in the corner of the gym cubby to find a towel. He brought it to her and waited while she wiped her face. In all the weeks they'd struggled together, she'd never once complained, never once shown any emotion. He'd almost forgotten she was human.

When she seemed to have regained control, he bent to raise her to her feet, and capture her gaze. "Dress," he commanded gently, "We'll stop for tonight and go finish off that prookle you saved. You're tired. You'll sleep and rest tomorrow. There's no hurry now, you've done splendidly and we still have two weeks to perfect and polish."

The mixture of gentle encouragement, optimism and praise raised her spirits. She said, "You're becoming a fair human psychologist, Spock."

Spock allowed a smile to quirk one corner of his mouth. "Quiet!" he commanded in mock severity, "If the Admiralty finds out, they'll promote me."

For a moment Tanya just stared up at Spock's face. Then she broke up laughing, held on her feet by the strong arms of the impassive Vulcan. It was just the medicine she needed and, later, as she composed herself for the disciplined Vulcan sleep, she allowed the amusement to burble about within her. She knew that, unlike his colleagues, Spock considered promotion a disaster. She suspected that the only reason he didn't have his own ship already was that he never let on just how well he understood humans.

The next day, Spock handled the children alone. He'd ordered T'Aniyeh to sleep and that is just what she did, rousing only for meals and necessities. The Vulcan disciplines included not only how to work but also how to rest. Somehow, Spock found time during the day to draft a message and, after he'd gotten the children to sleep he went up to the bridge for the first time in weeks.

Surprisingly, Uhura was on duty. She winced as the doors swished open with a high pitched screech and turned to see who'd entered. Spock glanced behind him to watch the doors close, then said, "I thought the Captain had that fixed?"

"He did. Three times. It started again this afternoon."

Spock nodded thoughtfully and then handed her his tape, "This one you can send by squirt, Lieutenant. But I'll expect an official, signed confirmation in return."

She inserted the tape and glanced at the address. "Executive Assembly, Planetary Capitol, Vulcan. A confirmation would have to come from...uh...the Planetary President's Office, correct?"

"Correct, Lieutenant." Assured she knew what to do, Spock turned to survey the bridge. Lieutenant Rorvix was in the Command Chair and Kevin Riley was at the helm. All else was quiet.

As he caught sight of the First Officer, Rorvix rose, but Spock motioned him back, "Carry on, Mr. Rorvix, I was just leaving."

But he took the long way out, via the library computer, pausing for a half hour to give the sensors a thorough calibration check. Satisfied finally, he toured the rest of the bridge and then headed for Engineering. He had a memo from Perkins that the hardware he'd ordered had been completed.

For the remaining two weeks, Spock cancelled T'Aniyeh's day-time practice sessions and they worked together only three hours a night. He'd installed the field generators under the practice platform and she rehearsed with the metallic sensors all over her body to get the feel of the field's drag though they didn't even attempt to adjust color or tone register on their homemade platform. She'd have almost two hours dress rehearsal on the Council Chamber's tokiel just before the Debate.

The circles disappeared from under her eyes and she put on weight. As some of the blisters healed on her feet, the spring came back into her step and she looked even healthier than when she'd come aboard. Every time Kirk passed McCoy in the halls he'd give a big "I told you so!" wink which McCoy pretended not to notice.

Three days before their scheduled arrival, Spock took to haunting the bridge every spare moment waiting for the confirmation of his Council Call. Somehow, he always found some excuse to be there. One night, he took a tool kit and dismantled the turbo-lift door and put it back together. It took him three hours and when he tested it there was no squeak.

Uhura turned around and said, "Wonderful! Thank you, Mr. Spock." Then she spun back to her board alertly.

When she removed the phone from her ear she faced around awed, "It's your confirmation, Mr. Spock. From the Planetary President, personally."

Spock leaned over and plucked the cartridge from her board, "Thank you, Lieutenant." He hefted the toolbox and entered the lift.

Rorvix and Piloy turned to watch as the doors whooshed open even more quietly than they had on the old Enterprise. Somehow, nobody on the bridge could believe that screech would ever return.

Two days later the Enterprise assumed standard orbit about Vulcan. The Planetary Space Central gave them the parameters for a clear orbit and assigned them a communications spectrum slot.

Kirk was in the Command Chair and Spock and T'Aniyeh were on his right. It was late afternoon, ship's time, and Uhura had just come on duty. Chekov and Sulu were at their stations and McCoy came through the lift doors, a routine report on his clipboard for Kirk's signature.

As the doors closed behind him, McCoy swooped around in a circle to watch. No screech. He cocked his head with a little smile and went to Kirk to present his clipboard.

Uhura said, "Message for you, Captain. From the surface."

"Put it on the main screen, Lieutenant."

The semicircle of the planet's bulk vanished to be replaced by the head and shoulders of Amanda. "Captain Kirk, May You Live Long and Prosper."

Kirk answered, "May You Live Long and Prosper, Amanda. What can I do for you?"

"Sarek has asked me to invite you to our home to watch the Council Session. If Dr. McCoy is available, his presence is also desired."

Kirk glanced at McCoy who nodded. Then he said to Amanda, "We'd be delighted."

"Good. Transmitting co-ordinates to beam-down point," she worked a control beyond the scanners' range, "It will be local noon here. We'll expect you."

"Spock is here. Would you like to say hello?"

Amanda nodded and Uhura widened the scan for her on cue.

When Amanda's eyes met Spock's, she said something the translator couldn't handle.

Without change of expression, Spock said, "Yes, Mother."

Returning her attention to Kirk, Amanda said, "Thank you, Captain. End transmission."

As the image faded, Uhura announced, "I've got an official of the...uh...Bureau of Child Welfare?...on the other frequency, sir."

"Put it on the screen." When the man appeared Kirk said, "I'm Captain James T. Kirk of the USS Enterprise and this is my First Officer, Mr. Spock."

The man raised his hand in salute, "May You Live Long and Prosper, Captain...Spock. I understand that you have some children aboard who may fall under my jurisdiction?"

"That is correct," answered Kirk.

"Very well, then, if you and Spock will beam down with the children, we'll get the legal problems straightened out."

"Ah..." Kirk objected with one hand as the Vulcan was about to cut transmission. "As I'm sure you're aware, Spock has other commitments of an immediate nature..."

"I am very well aware of that, Captain, however this takes priority. Transmitting beamdown co-ordinates. I'll be expecting you momentarily. End transmission."

Kirk sat dazed by the man's abruptness.

Spock stepped forward, "He's quite correct, Captain."

"Correct!? But it's...uh..." he checked the chair-arm readout, "only three hours until the Council Meeting. What happens if you're late?"

"They'll wait."

"The whole planet is going to wait by their viewscreens while some bureaucrat grinds through his red tape?"

"Of course."

At Kirk's incredulous expression, Spock continued, "Sir, The Council is going to meet to attempt to build a world suitable for these children to live in. Does that effort have any meaning if we fail to attend to the more immediate needs of the children? The whole world will wait...for a week if necessary...until every one of these children have been rendered into the custody of proper guardians. However, I doubt if it will take more than a couple of hours. Arrangements have already been made. I suggest we get on with it."

Kirk rose, "Mr. Sulu, you have the con. Maintain orbit. Issue routine shore leave passes only to the Federation Preserve." He headed for the door.

Six hours later, Kirk and McCoy materialized in the spacious main hall of Sarek's home. Even before his vision cleared, Kirk's first impression was of that deep silence lapping at his nerves, soaking up all his tensions, combing the emotional kinks out of his thoughts and leaving a reverberating peace within. It was as strong, and as inexplicable an effect, as it had been the first time he'd encountered it.

When his vision cleared, Kirk saw that the hall was exactly as he remembered it, save that at one end of the long room the hangings had been pulled aside to reveal a wall-sized viewscreen and in the center of the richly patterned area rug that held the room's lone grouping of seats stood Sarek and Amanda. They were dressed formally and Kirk felt out of place in working uniform. "May You Live Long and Prosper, Captain Kirk...Dr. McCoy."

The humans returned the greeting and Sarek motioned them to chairs. "The proceedings are about to begin."

Grateful for the airconditioning, McCoy allowed Amanda to install him in a chair with a Saurian Brandy and said, "Some four hours late, though."

"Four days would not be too long to wait considering..." said Sarek.

Kirk interrupted, "Yes, Spock explained...it would be," he suppressed a wry smile, "illogical." He declined Amanda's silent offer of a drink with a wave of his hand. "Toll me, Mr. Ambassador..."

"I hold no post at the moment, Captain. Just call me Sarek."

"All right, sir. What I wanted to ask...will the issue be decided by the members of the Council today?"

"Possibly."

"Who are the members of the Council?" asked McCoy, swirling his drink and settling into the straight-backed but well-upholstered chair.

"Membership is hereditary, Doctor, and restricted to Katavtikhe who trace their lineage back at least as far as the Reformation, in unbroken tradition."

"Sir," said Kirk, "may I ask a personal question?"

"You may ask."

"Ah...well...what are Spock's chances...in your opinion?"

Sarek glanced at the screen which still showed only a sign in unadorned Vulcan script. As he watched, moving letters crawled across the top of the screen and disappeared. "Yes. Another delay. It won't be long though." He continued thoughtfully, "There are many factors to be considered, Captain. T'Urianne has the advantages of age and gender. Also, on her mother's side, she has an inheritance which Spock doesn't share. That may be decisive." He glanced at Amanda who remained pleasantly impassive.

"However, Spock is an unknown quantity. He is a law unto himself. He has surprised me often in his short life. But I doubt if he would have registered this Challenge if he hadn't judged a fair chance of success."

"But he doesn't know T'Urianne."

Sarek threw Kirk a sharp glance, "True. But he knows her arguments. They've been a part of this family all of his life."

"So I understand."

"What I do not understand, Captain, is exactly how Spock intends to make his point. I have found no flaw in T'Urianne's proposal."

"If he fails..." Kirk didn't know quite how to put it, "Will you remain here?"

Sarek looked at Amanda as he answered, "Yes. I must."

"And I," provided Amanda, "will have to leave."

McCoy said, "And Spock..."

"That, Doctor, is a very good question." Sarek glanced again at the screen as the crawling string of characters reappeared. He rose and detached a control box from the panel under the screen than resumed his seat.

The sign vanished revealing a long, richly decorated, rectangular room. The floor was flat, but around the sides were banks of seats. The chairs were carved of a translucent blue-green stone polished to a finely textured finish. Kirk thought the mineral must have a high copper content and considerable bound water to achieve just that hue.

At the far end of the room, three chairs were raised five steps above the surrounding chairs. They were more ornate than the others

but made of a paler, blue-green stone and the tops of the high backs were set in multicolored gemstones.

In the center of each side of the room, the three chair motif was repeated in miniature. In the center of the floor, a low fire burned in a shallow pit. Around it, chairs were arranged in lines. At first Kirk thought these chairs were placed randomly. The view shifted and he saw that they outlined the idic symbol.

The ancient flavor of the Ceremonial Hall was achieved with so much rich and strange detail that, at first, the Captain didn't notice the other end of the room. Here, also, three chairs were raised, but they were a startling white that seemed to catch the highlights of the fire in a wrinkling dance like a Denebian sundiamond. The tops of these chairs were decorated only in fiery red stones. On the floor in front of the white chairs, an oval platform was raised a single step above the floor.

As the view shifted again, Kirk noted that the straight-backed, armless chairs that formed the idic were all facing outward from the fire, so that the people thus seated faced in every direction. There was a distant sound of bells...many bells, faintly familiar to the Captain. Yes! The ceremonial bells he'd heard at Spock's wedding. But at least an octave deeper.

Sarek turned to the humans, "Loud enough?"

Amanda said, "A little louder, please."

Two bellbanner bearers entered from two doors on either side of the blue-green chairs at the far end of the room. Pacing slowly, they circled the room twice and exited the way they'd come. But the sound didn't die out. It increased. And presently six bellbanner bearers marching in pairs entered through one of the doors. Behind them came four strong men in ceremonial dress bearing an ornate litter.

They marched directly to the white chairs, the curtains parted and a very old and frail woman appeared. She was dressed in a plain black robe with a hood that covered her head. As she ascended the dias, Kirk recognized T'Pau. She looked years older than when he'd seen her last. Age overtook the Vulcans very swiftly near the end of their long lives. But when she spoke, her voice was strong and clear.

Sarek said, "Are you getting any of that?"

"No," said Amanda.

He adjusted his controls nodding, "The translator is keyed in, but even so, much of this will be fairly unintelligible to you. That's the best I can do."

They watched the scene unfold. T'Pau finished her speech and snapped a command to the bannerbearers. They trooped out the other door and came back in slow march with a tall, thin, dark hair beauty of a woman. She marched so smoothly she appeared to float a half inch above the floor. Every few yards, the procession stopped, turned toward the fire pit for a few seconds while the banners were shaken to a vigorous rhythm.

At one point, the group faced the pickup Sarek had chosen and Kirk had a chance to examine her costume. She was dressed in sparkling white robes under a cloak that fell from shoulder to ankle. The high white collar stood almost to the top of her piled hair in neat contrast to its blackness. Under her cloak, her body was hung with loops of heavy golden chain. Kirk could see that each link was carved with an intricate design and supported a tiny medallion. When she moved, there was a euphonous chiming that blended beautifully with the different chords of the bellbanners. It looked like a heavy burden for such a frail body.

After two slow circuits of the room, she stopped at the fire pit and approached the rim of the circular depression. Sarek switched channels to get a closeup of her face as she bent to pick something from the rim of the pit. No Kirk could see the family resemblance. The high cheekbones and distinctive jawline, and the thin, wiry physique were similar to Spock's. But the complexion was far more "Vulcan".

When she straightened, she'd taken a long rod from an array beside the pit. To the accompaniment of vigorous shaking of the bellbanners, she dipped the tip of the rod into the fire, held it for a second, and raised it, planting the bottom firmly in a hole in the stone floor. A tiny red flame blossomed from the rod, a good six inches above her head.

Suddenly, the banners were silenced as T'Urianne about faced and stood gazing up at T'Pau. T'Pau uttered one crackling syllable and T'Urianne quick marched straight toward the center white chair, up and over the low dias as if it weren't there, and up the five steps as T'Pau descended.

T'Urianne seated herself as T'Pau reentered the litter and was borne out of the hall. Then she nodded to the bannerbearers who'd waited beside the pit and they split into two groups of three, formed two triangles, and marched out the doors.

Presently, they returned leading two lines of men dressed in white tunic and sandals but cloaked in blue-green...the exact hue of the chairs of the idic. They formed a large circle around the firepit, outside the chairs. The bannerbearers resumed their position in front of the pit.

Sarek switched to an overhead view of the pit with its single taper burning. Then, one of the men detached himself from the circle, slow marched to the rim of the pit, chose a taper, lit it and placed it upright. Then he faced T'Urianne who issued a command. He took position before one of the chairs of the idic, but remained standing.

Slowly, this was repeated and apparently would continue until each had taken a post. Sarek turned to Kirk and McCoy, "We use fire

as a multivalued symbol. Here, fire gives of itself without being diminished, as one mind may give ideas without diminishing its own knowledge. These men are pledged Guardians of the Philosophy of Nomo."

Amanda said, still watching the screen, "Sarek, I think she's lost weight."

He shifted his gaze to his wife, "T'Pau is nearing the end of her life."

"Not T'Pau, T'Urianne."

"I hadn't noticed."

"Well, you should. She is your daughter."

"That, my wife, is debatable."

A furious shaking of bellbanners drew their attention back to the screen. All the seats of the idic were claimed now, and as silence descended, the Guardians seated themselves. The bannerbearers formed triangles again and retired to return in a moment with six more men, three trailing behind each triangle in a line.

Halfway up the sidelines, they stopped and the bannerbearers formed a line between them and the fireplace, one banner in front of each of the men.

Then, one at a time, each bannerbearer escorted one of the men to the pit for the taper lighting ceremony. These men, Kirk noticed, were dressed in blue-green tunics and white cloaks. Instead of placing the lighted brand in a holder at the rim of the pit, each one slow marched back to a chair on the dias at the side of the room where he planted the taper on his left.

But, instead of seating themselves, they remained standing beside their lighted tapers. The bannerbearers, without further command, formed a double line and went to the left hand door, the opposite one from which they'd escorted T'Urianne.

While they were gone, Sarek said, "These are the Guardians of the Domination of Logic, Reverence for Life, and Privacy."

The two lines of bannerbearers reappeared with another lone figure dressed all in blue-green, the lighter hue of the chairs at the far end of the room, but without any other insignia. They slow marched all around the room twice. Kirk didn't need to see the face in the scanner as they passed by. He knew those sloping shoulders and that balanced walk. Spock's expression was sombre, withdrawn, grave, wrapped in severe dignity. Here he was not the First Officer of the Enterprise but a Guardian of an ancient tradition. There was absolutely no trace of the humanity that had been there a few hours ago.

The bannerbearers escorted him to the pit the same way they'd brought T'Urianne, but he took two of the unlit brands and lit one. Then still carrying both tapers, he about faced and marched through the seats of the idic, across the low platform, up the five steps, presented the unlit brand and backed down the five steps, holding the fire tipped shaft to her level. Kirk wasn't sure, but he thought he detected the slightest hesitation before she lit her taper from his and placed it in the holder to her right.

The bannerbearers moved forward and slow marched Spock around the room and to the light blue chairs at the far end. He mounted the dias, planted his brand, nodded to the bannerbearers and seated himself. Simultaneously, the six Guardians on the sides of the room seated themselves.

Then the bannerbearers retired swiftly and returned leading two lines of men and women dressed all in a dark blue-green with twined yokes of multicolored rope that gleamed with a satiny sheen. These marchers kept coming until all the seats along the sides had been filled.

This time the bannerbearers split into two lines and formed living barriers before the two doors to the chamber.

T'Urianne rose, placed her right hand on the shaft of the taper and began to speak. The translator garbled most of it, but Kirk got enough to understand that this was a formal call to order. Then the translator slipped and skidded so badly that he presumed she was speaking High Vulcan.

She went on in the rapid fire mode for about half an hour. Finally, Sarek said, "She's sketching her argument and proposal for the record. There's been so much public discussion of her position the last few weeks that she doesn't need to give a completely detailed presentation. There isn't a citizen watching who isn't intimately familiar with every aspect of it."

Kirk estimated that it was fully an hour later that she finished her "sketch" and sat down. Silence descended and grew into tension. Then Spock rose. There was another pause as heads turned toward him. When he had everyone's attention, he said, "I claim the right to speak in Guardian Council."

Kirk could feel the held breath, the electric tension building to crackle pitch. So far everything had been ceremony, predictable routine. This was what everyone had been waiting for.

T'Urianne spoke without rising, "If there be no objection, that right is acknowledged."

The pause seemed eternal. But eventually she added, "And it is so."

Spock placed his right hand on the taper that held its flame above his head and spoke. His voice was low pitched, level toned, almost a formula recitation. The translator slipped and slid through this more than it had when T'Urianne held the floor. But every eye in

that hall was on him and not a muscle stirred. Kirk knew the scene was virtually the same in every Vulcan home.

The tension, the absorption, the total concentration of the Vulcans underlined the vital importance of what Spock was saying, but there was no clue as to whether he was convincing them. It wasn't long before boredom made Kirk and McCoy drowsy. Fighting drooping eyelids and cramped muscles through more than two hours of unintelligible speech was the occupation of diplomats, not starship officers, and Kirk was acutely miserable by the time Spock was interrupted by an undisciplined babble among the council members.

Jerked to alertness, Kirk had no idea what was going on. Sarek said, "T'Urianne will certainly contest T'Aniyeh's credentials. This could take all night. Amanda, I believe it is time to offer our guests refreshment."

She rose and left the room and then the sudden shaking of bellbanners silenced the council members and Kirk watched intently. T'Urianne rose and called a series of names, both male and female, and around the room people rose. There were representatives of each group that had entered separately. They stepped out onto the floor and formed a line. Kirk counted twenty in all.

Then Spock called names, also representatives of each group, and they formed a line across from T'Urianne's designates. The bell-banner bearers assumed flanking positions and marched the groups out of the hall. As the bells died away, people got up to mill around and talk to their neighbors. Soon the hall was swallowed by a milling throng. Here and there small groups gathered about various individuals, talking and listening.

Sarek rose, "The committee may take hours to return a recommendation. If they admit here, and she can do what he says she can, it will be an historical occasion."

They went into the dining room where Amanda had set a buffet with many small dishes filled with colorful Vulcan delicacies. Kirk felt as if he'd come home after being away too long. Gripped in the routine of a Vulcan meal, he seemed to relax to the silence, more aware of his reactions to pleasant tastes, aromas, and the all pervading peace that rang silently through every nerve. During the weeks he'd lived here, Kirk had learned his table manners well, and knew better than to engage in attempts at communication. He'd learned what to combine with what and was really enjoying the familiar symphony of tastes. This was a true home to him such as he had nowhere else in all the galaxy.

And his home was threatened. If T'Aniyeh and Spock couldn't convince the Council...he'd never be able to come here again. He felt the terrible desolation that such a rejection would hold and the frustrated helplessness that there was nothing he could do to affect the outcome. It was the same fierce sense of loss he'd experienced when he'd relinquished the flame.

He shook himself out of the mood. He was a guest here. This home was foreign to him. The threat was to the stability of the Federation, not to him personally. The Enterprise was his home. And his soul would just have to find peace without crutches!

Kirk looked up to find Sarek staring at him from across the table. They'd finished eating. Sarek blinked, nodded approvingly and rose to walk around the table to where Amanda sat. He held out two fingers to her. She rose to meet him, matching his gesture.

Sarek said softly, "My wife, your son is a brilliant man, a credit to this household."

She regarded him levelly, "You noticed that?"

They stood looking into one another's eyes for several seconds. Then the distant sound of bannerbells drew their attention. Sarek said, "Come. They are about to reconvene."

He dropped his hand and the humans followed back to the viewscreen.

When they reached their chairs, the screen was filled with a swift scurrying amid flying capes. Within seconds, everyone was back in his place and silence reigned briefly before the bellbanner bearers escorted the forty committee members back into the hall. They drew into two lines, one on either side of the hall and then broke ranks and went to their seats, each leaving one representative on the floor.

T'Urianne rose, "Credentials Committee report."

The man on her right, dressed in blue-green tunic and cloak, took one step forward and said, "We have examined the candidate, T'Aniyeh, and have found that she has Affirmed the Continuity, that she is an accomplished tokiel performer, and that she is adequately prepared to present a version of the Motek. We recommend that she be admitted."

The man on T'Urianne's left took one step forward and said, "We have examined the candidate, T'Aniyeh, and have found that she has Affirmed the Continuity, that she is not an accomplished tokiel performer, but that she is prepared to attempt to present a version of the Motek." He paused and Kirk could feel everyone, himself included, holding his breath. "We recommend that she be admitted... conditionally."

Amid a flurry of bannerbells, the two retired to their seats on the sidelines. T'Urianne said, "You have heard the report of the Credentials Committee. If there be no objection, T'Aniyeh will be admitted, conditionally, to present a version of the Motek."

She waited. There was total silence. McCoy dared to ask, "What does she mean...conditionally?"

Sarek said, "If she makes an error, even the slightest

hesitation, she will be given no second chance. The issue will go directly to a vote." He looked at his guests. "Is she adequately prepared?"

Kirk said, "I only wish I knew. They've certainly been working hard enough."

T'Urianne said, "Since there be no objection, it is so." She nodded to the bollbanner bearers and sat down.

The bannerbearers came together in two lines and when they parted, three of them held two banners and three held nothing. Two of the bannerless escort busied themselves at a panel on the wall while the third retired to the right hand door. The three other bollbanner bearers retired to the left hand door and took up positions there.

As the lights faded, the bannerless escort returned with T'Aniyeh. He led her to the platform and then went to join the other two at a console that had mysteriously sprung out of the floor beside the platform. The lights went out.

Then the toki platform lit up from its own field, a kind of glow that pervaded the whole stage area but didn't illuminate the rest of the room. T'Aniyeh, her skin-tight coverall a golden shimmer in the dimness, mounted into the toki field accompanied by a rippling sound and an explosion of rainbow colors, sharp clear vibrant colors almost too bright to look at.

The colored streamers died around her leaving her enrapt in a golden flame that shaded slowly to purple and went black. Kirk noticed immediately the differences between this stage's effect and those he'd seen on the small, portable toki platform T'Rruel had used aboard ship and the outdoor installation he'd visited with Amanda. Evidently, this platform was geared to the ultimate in precision. There was another difference. Where T'Rruel had been invisible most of the time, T'Aniyeh was always visible. And T'Aniyeh would dance solo as this was a completed composition and no questions remained unanswered.

The rhythmic tolling of a large bell announced the start of the pyrotechnic display of rhythm, form and sound that was becoming familiar to Kirk. But here the effect was different. T'Aniyeh, always visible within the structure of colored shapes she built, seemed always to be a split second ahead of the music her movement created. Some of the figures of living light were strange to Kirk and he was certain he'd never seen them before. He'd surely have remembered that purple spiral wrapped in pink smoke.

But still, something in the forms reminded him ever more sharply of T'Rruel and by the end, he'd almost forgotten the dancer was Tanya Minos. When she made the long gossamer streamers dance and swoop like mating eel-birds and then spun around reaching high to end in the forward lunge of T'Rruel's signature, he knew he was watching a brilliant imitation of T'Rruel's style. Then, she stood back, poised in the center of the stage until the music had died. She raised her hands over her head, trailing rainbows, then dropped to one knee, sweeping her arms around and back in wings of glowing fire to the echoing sound of plucked strings...her own signature.

The fire died to black and she was invisible. The hall's lights had come on before Kirk realized she must have gotten through the whole performance perfectly. He was seized with an impulse to applaud and whistle and jump up and down. But he held still as she was escorted silently from the room and the bollbanner bearers resumed their positions.

Sarek was changing the viewpoint constantly, examining the reactions of the council members. It took a Vulcan to read a Vulcan so Kirk turned his attention to Amanda. Perhaps she could tell what effect Spock's ideas had had on the council.

But she was watching Sarek. Soon Sarek sat back and glanced briefly at Amanda with the barest shadow of a nod that made her relax, a very human smile playing gently about her eyes. He turned his attention back to the screen.

The scene there was frozen so that, at first, Kirk thought he was viewing a still photograph. Then he noticed the attitude of the council members. Most of them sat, hands clasped, staring at their own steepled fingers. As he watched, several lowered their hands and turned their gazes to the man who occupied the center seat on the dias at the side of the room to T'Urianne's left.

Minutes trickled by punctuated by the occasional lowering of hands and turning of heads until, about half an hour later, the last member of the council turned to T'Urianne's left. The man rose, glanced at Spock who nodded and then said, "By Sitar's Lemma I call a poll of the Electorate."

He remained standing as T'Urianne rose. She said, "If there be no objection, the Electorate will be polled."

The pause lengthened until Kirk was sure she was hoping for an objection. Finally she added, "And it is so," and sat down.

In front of the man on the side, a pentagonal pedestal rose out of the floor and grew to waist height. He worked some controls on top of the pedestal and a cylindrical column descended from the ceiling directly over the firepit. The column was a deep, midnight blue.

When the column stopped descending leaving a bare few inches between it and the tops of the still burning tapers that surrounded the pit, the man turned to the bannerbearers. As they responded amid random jangling, Kirk noticed that the tapers that had been burning for hours had strangely not become any shorter.

As Kirk puzzled over this, the bannerbearers assembled before the pedestal and the man said, "You will invite the Electorate."



With a great shaking of banners the escort pivoted until they faced various ways and then scattered in all directions as the whole room climbed to its collective feet. Kirk was at a loss to keep up with all the things that happened then. The first thing he saw was that one bannerbearer was escorting Spock to the pedestal while another led T'Urianne. They timed it so that T'Urianne arrived first.

When she placed her hand on the pedestal, a curtain of blackness surrounded the scene and then blinked away... obviously a light interference effect, for privacy in the casting of ballots. A few seconds later Spock arrived to do the same. Then there were lines forming around the pedestal in every direction as the council members gathered to vote. Kirk wondered how they knew whether a 'yes' vote was for T'Urianne or for Spock. Or if, indeed, that was what they were voting on.

Sarek moved to the screen controls on the wall in front of them and made some adjustment within. Kirk assumed he'd cast his ballot. Presently, he returned to his seat saying, "Now we shall see what the future holds. Watch the cylinder. If it turns white, T'Urianne's viewpoint prevails. If it turns blue, Spock has made his point."

Kirk looked, but the cylinder was still a deep midnight blue. The votes weren't registering yet. He said, "What's Sitar's Lemma?"

Sarek seemed to welcome the opportunity to talk. "When the Guardian Council was established, there was no technology for polling the entire adult population of the planet so no provision was made for anyone but Council members to participate in decisions. Sitar introduced the theoretical basis for allowing total participation and his Lemma provides the criteria by which each individual's opinion is weighted by his personal Achievement Factors."

McCoy said, "Achievement Factors?"

"Yes, Academic, social, economic... but especially in this instance competence in understanding the intricacies of Tsaichrani."

McCoy was incredulous. "You mean your vote is worth more than someone else's?"

"On this issue, yes. On another issue, it might be relatively worthless." Something on the screen attracted his attention, "Look, votes are registering already."

The cylinder had flashed white momentarily, then blinked to the light blue-green color of Spock's chair. Now rainbows chased themselves up and down. Finally, the bands of color smeared into one another producing a muddy mixture that gradually cleared to grey.

After a few minutes, the cylinder began to pulsate fading gradually from blue-grey to white-grey and back again. As the minutes dragged by the period of pulsation lengthened until the change was so gradual Kirk couldn't really tell which way the vote was going.

Finally, Kirk became aware that all the Council Members had resumed their seats and the pulsating had ceased leaving the cylinder a pearl grey... possibly just a bit on the blue side.

Sarek sat forward abruptly, seized the screen's control box and punched out a new setting that focused their viewpoint on T'Urianne. The excessive strength the Vulcan used gave Kirk the first hint he'd had that Sarek actually felt some of the tensions... emotions... of a father watching his only two children fighting such a battle.

Now, Kirk became aware that all eyes were focused on T'Urianne. McCoy said, "It's a draw?"

Sarek answered tightly, "There is no clear majority. The decision is hers alone."

T'Urianne sat utterly still, her gaze apparently fixed on the gery cylinder.

Kirk said, "But that's impossible! If Spock is right, then everyone should see it his way! Isn't that only... logical?"

"Logic does not distinguish between 'right' and 'wrong'... nor between 'true' and 'false' either... it merely designates the clearest path from premise to conclusion. One must add values to formulate judgements... and in this case, nearly half of the electorate judges that the long range weakening of the social fabric is a lesser immediate danger than contact with humanity. I disagree, but I cannot impugn the logic of those who hold that view."

T'Urianne's hand moved on the arm of her chair and Sarek switched views to obtain a close-up of the cylinder. A white band had appeared at the top, and a blue at the bottom. As they watched, the whole length of the cylinder was converted to bands, the top white and bottom blue. Kirk counted forty bands, twenty white... twenty blue. Then the whole cylinder blinked off and came on again. Part of the bottom white band had turned blue.

Sarek said, "Yes, a slight weighting in Spock's favor." and flicked back to a close view of T'Urianne.

She rose and gazed about the room soberly. Then her hand moved to the point at her waist where the golden chains joined. When she brought it away, the chains parted and slid to the floor. She stepped out of the circlet of gold and placed the chains on the seat behind her.

A ragged sigh escaped Amanda's lips.

T'Urianne descended to the floor of the hall, carrying the burning taper that stood beside her. She went directly to the fire-pit and threw the whole brand into the fire. Then she picked up two unlit rods and stood back. Sarek changed views, this time to a close-up of Spock.

Sarek said incredulously, "He's reluctant to accept her terms! He should know better than to expect more than a stipulation of error."

Finally, Spock rose, picked up his taper, descended to the floor and marched directly to the firepit. He threw his taper into the fire and took two steps back to stand empty handed, facing his sister through the forest of upright brands that encircled the pit.

T'Urianne began to circle the pit to her right while Spock walked left until they'd exchanged places. Then he about faced and went to the white chair she had vacated. He picked up the chains and stood, waiting. Kirk thought he could read pain and a little regret in his friend's face, but he wasn't sure.

T'Urianne lit one of her tapers and ascended the dias to present the other to Spock. As he dipped the point of his taper into the fire she held to him, his eyes met hers and Kirk was now certain of what Spock felt. Pain. The anguish of unfathomable loneliness.

Undoubtedly, Spock had hoped that she would change her mind and come home to her father.. and her half-brother. The disappointment was an emotional pain that the half-Vulcan was barely trying to mask. At least, it was plain to Kirk and McCoy. And they both silently resolved to ease that pain or at least teach their friend what little humans know about living with it. Lonliness without laughter would have broken any full-blooded human long since.

When T'Urianne had seated herself in the chair Spock had vacated, Spock nodded to the nearest bannerbearer and, amid the symphonic jangling of the banners, the election paraphernalia was retired and the two lines of bannerbearers formed before Spock. Still holding the golden chains, he descended into the midst of the escort and was marshalled out of the room. By the time he'd reached the doors, orderly lines had formed and the rest of the Council was leaving the hall.

Amanda rose, "He'll be hungry when he gets here. It's almost dawn. I'll fix breakfast." She started away and then turned back to Sarek, "So Vulcan will remain in the Federation. That means you'll be busy for the next fifty years hunting for another solution to the problem. I'll fix you some breakfast too. You'll need your strength."

She walked a few more paces toward the dining room, then turned back to Sarek with an afterthought, "He won't resign from Star Fleet, you know."

Bushy Vulcan eyebrows climbed, "We'll see..."

Kirk couldn't interpret the tone of that. Threat? Promise? Or merely uncertainty?

THE TANYA ENTRY

Kraith All

Pat Zotti

It has been a busy and diverse day. Many things to be worked out, not that I have the chance to sit down and think about them. Of course, while I am writing this, the sorting is easy, but the I look up and there is Len, and my train of thought runs right off its rails. He looks content pouring over that viewer with its endless medical journals. Len lives and breathes them, but he makes sense when he says that with all that is going on in medicine, he has to keep up with it daily or get hopelessly behind. And he enjoys every minute of studying, too. And his joy warms me with echoes.

There were only two other crewmen in this rec room when I came in, a nice quiet place to work on this journal. People have been coming in in a stream since, Len among them. He apologized again for missing me at dinner and I told him again I understand. His line of work has its drawbacks, and they are not his fault.

But now he is off duty and spending his time with me, even if he is buried in his journal and I in mine. He is with me and I am with him.

Later, I will tell him about Tanya, after he is finished and can relax. I don't think I will be betraying any confidences, as she did not ask me to keep what she told me to myself, and surely she must know by now that I would tell him what I think he should know.

I still cannot quite understand why she chose to tell me about herself and the details of her past life. Perhaps, it was her mood, although Tanya is hardly an impulsive person. I'm glad she did tell me, though, for now I understand her better, and understanding between us can have only good results.

It began when she asked me if it is true that my father was human. She was interested in this fact and its correlation with my psionic ability. I told her that although he had a low, even insignificant psionic ratio, it did not seem to make any difference. Apparently, my telepathic ability is a direct maternal inheritance, and one that is unimpared by the human influence.

She thought about this soberly before she told me of her own parentage, and I can never forget her face at that moment--so human and yet so Vulcan. Maybe Spockian would be a better description; at war with

self, aware of emotional imperatives, yet staunchly convinced that sanity requires the deletion of emotion from all behavior determinants.

But Tanya is even more human than Spock, and we were alone in a moment of real privacy. She felt a need to communicate, to give a part of herself, and I could feel that need reaching deep inside myself and finding a response. It was a definite feeling of eternity and she felt it, too. Spock would call it a positive feedback, and shudder fastidiously. I call it one of the joys of living.

We moved our chairs a little closer, enjoying this new spirit of comradeship. We were like school children discovering that someone else shared the feelings and experiences that we had thought were so private.

She told me her parents had been both human and archaeologists. Such a coincidence! I, of course, had to tell her that my Father had been a professor of archaeology.

Her parents were the only humans in a camp of Vulcans on Peda XII. The camp is still there, still worked mostly by Vulcans. It made me wonder privately if Father had known of it and if he would have been interested. Probably he would have been. From what I have been told of him, archaeology consumed him as passionately as medicine consumes Len.

But, to get back to Tanya, the more she told me, the more involved I became. Everything she said reminded me of something and everything I said set her off on another tangent. It was an enriching experience for both of us, and behind it all there was a thread of--not rapport--but awareness, a kind of awareness that arises only between psionic beings.

Tanya is so guarded--so dedrau. I don't think she would ever allow a tropar to grow with anyone. She must carry particularly tender scars. However, daily, I become more and more convinced that she NEEDS just exactly that kind of contact, a channel through which these backed-up emotional charges could drain harmlessly instead of exploding into destructive frustrations. Len does this for me and I suppose I do it for him. Perhaps what Tanya needs most is a love. I will have to talk with Len about this.

People and forces which mold them into such unique entities fascinate me, and Tanya's is a most interesting story.

Her great-grandfather was actually one of the original colonists of Dorn, which explains a lot. I knew that Dorn had been colonized by a group of human telepaths and that they'd had to disband because all the children born there inherited a telepathic sensitivity but failed to develop mind shields to protect themselves. Miranda Jones was a descendant of those same colonists, which was why she had had to go to Vulcan for assistance in coping with her problem. It also explains why Vulcan was so necessary for Tanya.

After her parents were killed in an accident at the dig, Tanya was put under the guardianship of two Vulcans, T'Vret and Sauk, who had a small daughter themselves. T'Vret had after looked after Tanya when her mother was in the field, and Tanya's father, knowing of her telepathic

sensitivity, realized she would be better off with the Vulcans than with humans, so he made I'Vret and Spuk her legal guardians before he died. The Vulcans eventually took Tanya home with them, but when she was four and a half years old, an aunt and uncle came to take her back to Terra. They had apparently gotten documents from a Federation Court and brought Spuk to court for a custody trial.

Len has switched off his viewer. I looked up to find him watching me with an appealing look to those deep blue eyes. He wants to know when I will be finished with this, because he wants me to go to his quarters with him for a brandy. I will go, even though I know the invitation is for more than a brandy. I cannot keep from worrying a little because lately I have spent more nights in his cabin than in my own. I love him so very much. And I know he loves me. He has even said it, although he didn't need to. I know. I also know that I will go on this way for as long as he wants me, even if he never does anything about us. He told me about her, the woman who was his wife, and I know how cruelly she hurt him. We are all afraid of something, it seems, Len of being hurt again, Tanya of her own emotions, and I of losing him.

Len wants to know what I am writing about so I have invited him to read over my shoulder. It isn't often I allow him a peek at my journal.

It isn't hard for me to understand Tanya's reaction to facing her relatives from Terra. She was too young to maintain any effective mental barrier for long and the shock threw her into a state of hysterical withdrawal. Poor child. It leads me to wonder why the Vulcans did not protect her with their own psionic shields. I must remember to ask her about this.

In any case, she was remanded to the Psychiatric Institute where she remained for two and a half years. When she was released into Spuk's custody, she was well again, sound of mind and body, and a legal citizen of Vulcan, for although her uncle and aunt put up a long and difficult battle, they had finally come back to Terra in defeat. Tanya was raised with Spuk's daughter as a daughter of the Tradition.

Now I understand why Tanya is so hostile toward humans and why she clings so tenaciously to the Vulcan way.

Len has scanned my previous pages and he looks thoughtful. I can see the questions he is formulating rising to the surface of his consciousness. Yes, it's that "let's-have-that-brand-and-talk-about-this" expression. A good idea.

Stardate 2152.8

I asked Tanya why the Vulcans did not protect her with their shields at the time of the trial, and she told me that Spuk had explained it to her only recently. For a Vulcan, he has a remarkable grasp of a human child's feelings. Had he told her when she was younger, she would have felt unloved to the point of being unwanted. It takes a Vulcan to see this kind of cruelty as a kindness, but he is right. I shudder to think what would have happened if he had protected her mind from her aunt and uncle during the custody hearing--only to have them take her away among humans where the impact of so many chaotic minds would certainly have killed her almost instantly. I think I might have a nightmare or two before I can rid myself of that vision. Perhaps I should talk to Spock. A dose of Vulcan detachment would do me good right now. I empathize too easily. It was a Terran who said it...there but for the grace...

Stardate 2153.9

I find myself becoming more and more entangled in Tanya's life and I do not know if I like it. The traditional neutrality is nagging at me to leave well enough alone.

But all is not well, and it is distressing to me because I like Tanya and I would like to see her happy, whatever that might mean for her. Tonight, I began to get an inkling of just what that might be.

I was on my way to my cabin to wash the day's problems away before dinner, and I had just reached Tanya's cabin when I walked right into a duolict of rather startling proportions, made even more so by its brevity. It felt like someone had dumped a bucket of needles on me, half of them white hot, the other half at absolute zero. For a moment, I could have sworn that I'd been transported into the middle of a row between undisciplined children at home, and I was puzzled. But then I realized how close I was to Tanya's quarters. She is the only other telepath aboard the ship able to put out such a display. However, any civilized telepath is taught to control. What on Earth could cause her to lose control like this?

I waited, for what I wasn't sure, but shortly afterward, something exploded against Tanya's door from the inside, followed immediately by a wall of stifled frustration. This, too, was brief, but echoed on that same irritating wavelength.

Curiosity and concern were eating me up alive, but on the other hand, my ancestors would be mortified if I did anything about it. So I talked myself into walking right by. And then she began to cry and that did it. I knew I would never forgive myself if I didn't at least try to help.

I buzzed, and the sobbing broke off, only to continue lower, as if muffled by a pillow. I wanted to buzz again, and almost did, when I saw Spock calm down the hull.

I could think of no reason for him to be visiting me, so he must be coming for Tanya, since we have the end of the hull cabins. I knew that whatever was troubling Tanya, the last person she would want to see her that way was Spock, so I met him half-way and asked him to meet me later on for an explanation and blithely went into Tanya's quarters as if I had an approved invitation. I didn't even wait to see Spock go, but I am sure he did. Spock isn't one to intrude where he is not invited.

However, I am. And I was glad in this instance, because poor Tanya was miserable, and she seemed to be glad to see me. I sat her up on her

bed and made her dry her eyes and blow her nose. While she did this, I glanced around the room. I had never seen it in this kind of disarray before. It had been one of her Vulcan statuettes that had crashed into the door, a shame, because it had been lovely. She had turned the lighting down to a barest minimum, making the room glow dimly red. It was almost eerie. I asked her what was wrong.

"Men," she said. "I don't understand them."

"And I don't understand you. A man caused all this?"

"Not one man, many men. The whole crew of this ship."

"In what way, Tanya?"

She seemed to grope for words to express herself. I had never seen her so animated. "They pester you and even when refused, they persist. They don't know the meaning of the word 'no!'"

I had to agree to that. It was beginning to fall into place for me now. Tanya had been getting "rushed." It happens to all new female crewmen, and I rather enjoyed it when it had happened to me--all those attentive men practically fighting over who would take me to dinner. Tanya seemed to be frightened by it, which is understandable, considering her background.

"Tanya, you must understand that--"

She didn't even seem to hear me. "Tonight, for instance, I let one of them walk me here to quarters. He wanted me to have dinner with him and I agreed just to get him off my back. I had some tapes to drop off here first and he came with me."

"Who was it?" I asked.

"Oh, Michaels, from Engineering. They're all alike, anyway. He wasn't in here two minutes when he forced himself on me!"

"He what?" I asked. She couldn't mean that.

"He forced himself on me," she repeated vehemently. "He put his arms around me and kissed me."

"That's all?"

"That's all he had the chance for."

I sighed in relief. "Oh, good. I gather he didn't stay."

"You bet he didn't."

I tried to think of an explanation that she would be able to accept. It seemed strange to be explaining human behavior to a human. "Tanya, try to look at this as...a study in human...er, mating habits."

"I don't want to mate with them. A Vulcan male would never think of imposing himself on a female in such a way."

"Perhaps, but these are humans, not Vulcans. Their ways are different. If you are going to live among them, you must learn to live with them."

"Not to that extent." She shivered faintly.

"Well, I'm not suggesting that you...never mind. Tanya, you are human. What is so repulsive to you about kissing a man?"

Tanya's face revealed more to me than she would have approved of. I could practically feel her wish to don a Vulcan aloofness, but she couldn't manage it.

"It's disgusting. An invasion of privacy."

"Don't Vulcans...uh, kiss and such?" I knew they did, of course. The trick was in getting her to talk about it. Because underneath it all, I don't think she found it so repulsive at all.

"It's a biological function, regarded as such, nothing more."

"Oh, I see. You're supposed to do it because you must but you're not supposed to like it."

She gave me one of those Spockish "You'll never understand so why should I bother?" looks, but I was not ready to let her hide behind it. "You do like it, don't you, Tanya? Your real problem is wanting something you are afraid to have."

She looked at me as if I had found something she had been looking for all these years. It encouraged me to go a step farther. "Tanya, it is not wrong to want a man's kisses, or more for that matter. Not for humans and not for Vulcans. Tanya, it can be wonderful."

For a moment, I was afraid I had revealed too much, if not in words, then in the way they had come out. I had been thinking of Len when I had said them. Oh, if Tanya could only find that kind of joy!

She didn't say anything about it, although she must know. Everyone knows...

"Weren't you mated as a child, Tanya?" I asked, before curiosity had a chance to set in.

"No. My foster father is Kataytikh, so it was left up to me."

"Oh," I said, not entirely sure what she was talking about, but unwilling to get her started on long explanations that would take us away from the real subject. "What are you going to do about it, then?"

"I'll never find the kind of man I need."

"What kind of man would he have to be?"
"Oh..." She thought a minute. "Well, he wouldn't be human. How they can base a relationship on such an unstable thing as love, I'll never know."

I knew, and I wanted to tell her about love, but I was afraid it would only confuse and hurt her more. Considering the first encounter with human love, I was not sure love was the right answer for her, anyway. "A Vulcan, then?"

"A Vulcan would never be able to put up with me. Not for long. I try, but I am far too emotional."

"Then, what's left?" I began to get an idea. "A... Vulcan who understands human emotion enough to live with it?"

"There is no such person."

"How about a Vulcan/Human hybrid?"

She took the hint. "Spock?"

"Why not? Is there anything wrong with him?"

"No."

"How long does a Vulcan woman have to wait to be asked? Or do you do the asking?"

"He...already asked me. I refused. Temporarily."

Now that shocked me. All this conflict with an answer so close! And it would be good for Spock, too. The more I thought about it, the more I liked it. Tanya would suit him so much better than that Y'Pring person Len had told me about--and even better than T'Sruel, too. "Tanya, why?"

She fidgeted uneasily. I don't think she understood her own reasoning. "He's so Vulcan--I would drive him crazy with my emotional outbursts...my tantrums. You just saw one yourself, Amy. How do you think Spock would react to that? Especially if we were bonded and he had no defense against it?"

I didn't know, so I said nothing and let her continue.

"And what about children? His children would need a Vulcan mother who would be equal to the task of raising them in the Vulcan way. He has obligations, you know."

"If he asked you, he must feel you would be the best choice. He must have considered all this. If Spock wants you, his reasons must be logical. Don't you think he is distressed by your refusal?"

"Distressed? In a Vulcan way, he is. But it's for his own good."

"Don't forget that he is part human, too."

"I know that."

"You wouldn't want to hurt him."

"Of course not. My foster-father would never speak to me again if I allowed harm to develop because of my...personal problems."

I smiled. If she could only see what was right before her eyes! She must see it for herself. I could not make her see it if she kept her own blinders on. "Well, it won't hurt to give it some more thought, will it? It's what you really want, you know."

I left her then, hurrying because I had forgotten all about meeting Len for dinner. Now I'd have to do the apologizing.

And I did and he understood. He said he was glad to know all this, that he might need it someday. He was thinking like a psychologist, but I was thinking like a woman. And I wondered what would happen now between my friends.

Stardate 2154.9

Spock finally caught up with me. I knew he would. That curiosity of his would never let him rest until I explained why I shooed him away from Tanya's door. I did not, however, expect him to turn up first thing in the morning!

He must have been waiting outside the door to my quarters about to buzz, because when I opened the door to leave for breakfast, I almost collided with him. "Ch," I said. "Good morning."

He inclined his head a bit and then said, "I wish to discuss the events of last evening."

"Before breakfast?"

"There will not be another opportunity until tonight and I do not wish to wait that long."

"All right," I sighed, wishing my breakfast a fond good-bye. "Do you want to come in?"

"Yes," and he ushered me back into my quarters. I was glad I had been industrious enough to go over the room carefully this morning.

He seemed to be waiting for me to begin, so I did. "You aren't going to like it," I warned him.

"It is not necessary that I like it, but it is necessary that I know it."

"Very well. Tanya needs to marry."

He raised one brow. "Really." It was a statement, not a question. "And that is the reason you would not let me see her?"

"She was upset. I knew she would not want to be seen in such a condition."

"I see."

"No, you don't. Not really." Could I make him see? Should I even try? My poor ancestors must have disowned me by now. And how far did I dare presume upon the tie that was developing between us? "She is trapped between what she thinks she should be and what she is. She told me you asked her to Join--to marry, and she told me why she refused."

"Indeed? Then you know more that I." His composure was thinning visibly, but I told him what Tanya had told me and he said, "That is substantially what she told me. But I don't believe it is...all."

I had gone too far to back down now, and the look on his face coupled with the ripples agitating his mind almost added up to a plea for help. I had almost bitten through my lower lip, but I went on as bravely as I could. "Spock, Lythians regard privacy as do Vulcans, but we speak proudly of love."

"Amy," he said, but could not go on until he had paced the length of my cabin and back again. He picked up my ivory dragon and examined it minutely. "I cherish our differences. They have become a source of great joy to me."

I knew what he meant. Soon after we had met, he had shown me his Idic and explained what it meant to him personally as a hybrid. I had explained the Lythian philosophy as best I could. (I am no expert, but I have studied diligently.) And we discovered our similarities were also Joys.

I could not meet his eyes. "I think she loves you, or needs to. And I think she needs you to love her. But not in the human way. She needs masculine attention and even affection. But most of all she needs a secure relationship in which she can know that her humanity will not be a source of pain to her partner. She has enough pain already. That which she cherishes most, Tsaichrani, is destroying her."

I could feel his intense, anguished embarrassment. With a full Lythian or a full human, he would have been unable to listen. But now he dropped heavily into my desk chair and said, "Go on."

"If she does not find someone to accept her pain and dispell it, to accept her Joys and cherish them--Spock, if you call upon her suddenly, she may become...unable to respond."

"Logical argument has failed. What can I do?" It was a toneless whisper, but I could hear the frustration and anguish. A Vulcan does not need emotion to become thwarted or to surrender to fate. Spock had

taught me much about the detachable emotional component of almost all mortal experiences, but when it came to handling his own emotions, he was still such a child.

"You must offer her what she needs...without demanding any bond."

"I...cannot."

"I know Vulcans don't form relationships outside of Tsaichrani's structure. But it is that structure that is killing her soul. As long as there is no question of...mating...there is no reason you cannot spend time with her, is there?"

"No."

"Then do that. Share your life with her and let her share hers with you. There must always be a period of growing close before one can give one's heart...before trust comes testing." Trust, who was I to tell him about trust when I could not inspire enough trust in my own Love to allow a commitment?"

"Under the Bond, there is no such need."

"But T'Aniyeh is not under the Bond."

"She's seen it. She's Affirmed."

I hadn't known that. Tanya had Affirmed the Continuity? I would have to consider this at length. For the moment, I said, "That is my evaluation. I don't think this is the time or place to argue. We are both too emotionally involved to refrain from fighting."

"I do not fight."

"Well, I might...Spock, I don't mean to offend you."

"I don't take offense needlessly."

"Don't get too caught up in negatives. You know where to find me if you want to discuss this further. That is, if my ancestors don't gather me in for being such a debesont."

I looked up to catch his puzzled expression and realized I had lapsed into Lythian. "Busy-body," I explained. He leaned back in the chair, steeppling his fingers as if he were about to drop into a meditation.

Despite his resistance, I knew he had absorbed what I had said. It remains to be seen what he does with it, though. I hope he can reach her...for both their sakes. I have resolved to do a little researching on pre-Reform Vulcan mating procedures. A purely academic interest, of course. The one person who could help Spock's situation is the only person I could never approach on the subject. Ssarsun. I wonder if I'll ever meet him.

Spock got to his feet and moved toward the door. "You may as well come with me. I have some transference for you," he said, switching neatly from friend to Superior Officer. So I would become only the ship's Records Officer until he needed the friend again.

Amused, I wondered what might be said if someone noticed the First Officer coming from my quarters with me at this hour of the morning. Unfortunately, no one saw us, so I'll have to wait for an answer to that.

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