



kraith  
collected

volume 6

# EDITORS' PREFACE

Many people have complained that Kraith turns Spock into Superman. The definitive exposition on this subject has been done by R.R. Bathurst for this fanzine. In his short, lucid essay he explores the possibilities of the myth and brings the theme to a startling conclusion. We highly recommend that you study his piece entitled "The Vulcan as Superhero" before reading further. It will give you a sense of perspective.

At this time, we feel that we should put out a general "Call for Papers". Jacqueline Lichtenberg, knowing how patiently her fans have been waiting for the rest of Kraith, cleared two full weeks of her schedule this past summer. She planned to write the detailed outlines for the last Kraith stories. Those two free weeks never materialized. Her publisher sent her two galleys to be corrected, so that the books could go to press. Since professional commitments must come before fanish activities, she used up those two weeks. And she hasn't had any free time since. If there is to be any more "Kraith Collected", then it must come from you fans

Certainly Ceiling Press will continue, for the foreseeable future, to keep Kraith Collected in print. It's just that, without the help of some dedicated fans, there will be no new Kraith stories.

For more information on how we feel about fanzines in general, please turn to "Editors are Ghouls and Cannibals".

Kraith Collected continues, with this issue, it's long established policy of publishing a new volume at least two years later than we promised.

Enjoy.

Carol Lynn

Debbie Goldstein

and

December 18, 1980

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#### DEDICATED TO:

BETH HALLAM & MARGARET DRAPER

BECAUSE

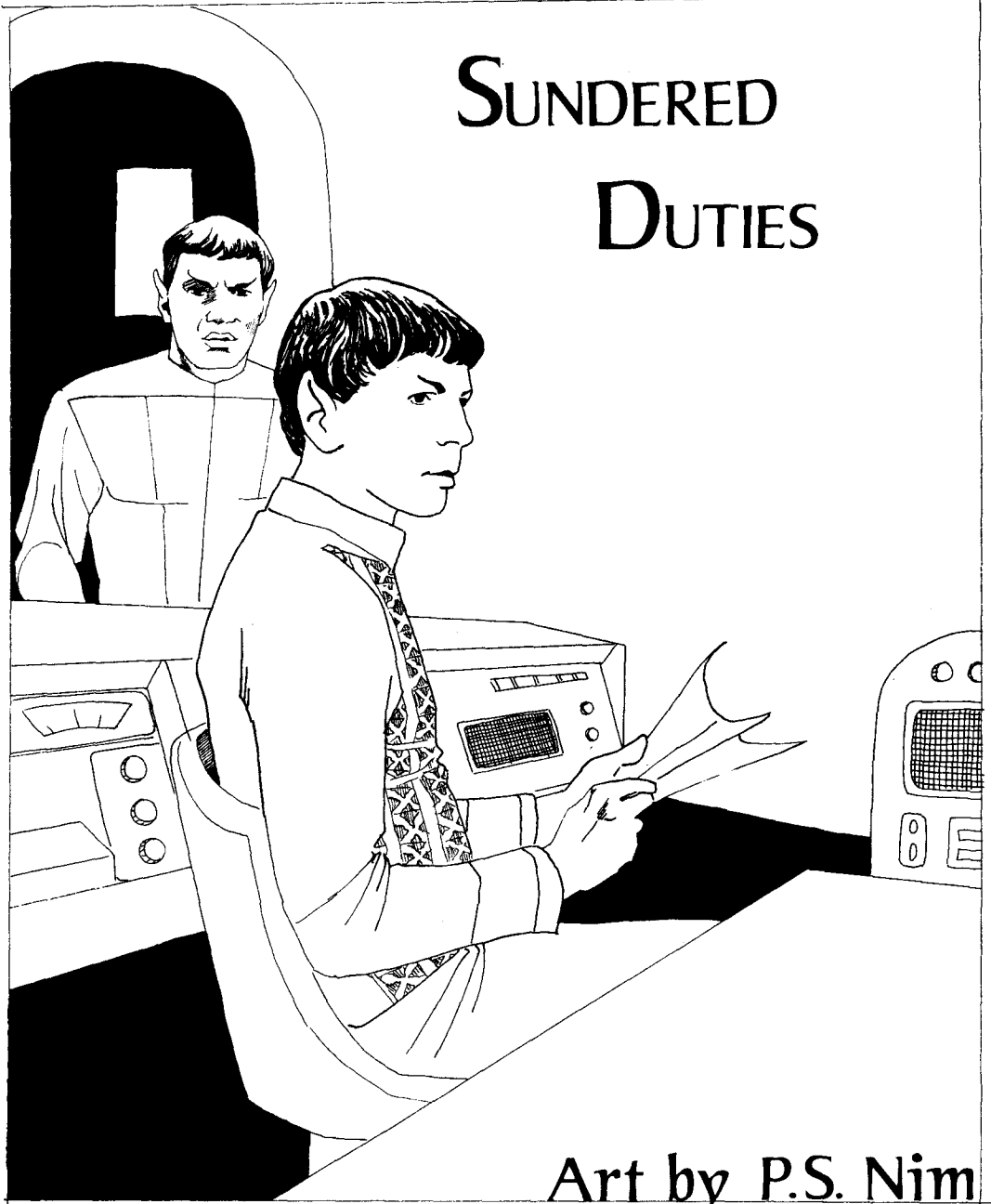
MUSTARD SMUGGLERS ALWAYS RIDE CHICKENS

# kraith Chronology

Key to numbering systems:

aI	stories coming before I	IA	stories coming after a main
I	main series stories		series story
AI	stories coming during a	IA(1)	stories coming after IA but
	main series story		before IB
bI	SUNDERED DUTIES, Frances Zawacky, Linda Deneroff, Jackie Bielowicz (KCVI)		
aI	THREE STEPS BEHIND HIM, Eileen Roy (KCVI)		
I	SPOCK'S AFFIRMATION, Jacqueline Lichtenberg (KCI)		
AI			
IA	SHEALKU, Lichtenberg (KCI)		
IB	ZYETO, Lichtenberg (KCI)		
IC	YEHAENA, Lichtenberg (unwritten)		
ID	A MATTER OF PRIORITY, Anna Mary Hall (KCI)		
IE	THE LESSON, Lichtenberg (outline only, ICM 1)		
IF	SSARSUN'S ARGUMENT, Lichtenberg (KCI)		
IG	THE WAY HOME, Hall		
II	SPOCK'S MISSION, Lichtenberg (KCI)		
II(al)	SAREK'S MEDITATION, Jean Lorrh (KCVI)		
II(1)	LEARNING EXPERIENCE, Jean Sellar (KCIII)		
IIA	T'ZOREL, Lichtenberg (KCI)		
IIB	THE DISAFFIRMED, Ruth Berman (KCI)		
IIC	OPERATION TRANSPLANT, Lori Dell		
IID	TEMPORARY ADDITION DUTY, Beverly C. Zuk		
IIE	INITIATIVE, Lichtenberg (KCIIV)		
IIF	NI VAR, Claire Gabriel (sold to Bantam Bools for ST: The New Voyages)		
	There is a Kraith version for which Jacqueline Lichtenberg wrote a scene, somewhat different from the Bantam version, yet they won't let us publish it.		
IIF(1)			
BIII	TO BE A PART, Ellie Bach		
AIII	THE TANYA ENTRY, Pat Zotti (KCI)		
III	SPOCK'S ARGUMENT, Lichtenberg (KCI)		
III(1)	THE OBLIGATION/THROUGH TIME AND TEARS, Lichtenberg and Joan Winston (KCIII)		
IIIA	FEDERATION CENTENNIAL, Lichtenberg (KCI)		
IIIA(1)	WARDER LIEGE, Lichtenberg (unwritten)		
IIBB	SECRET OF BROSKIN, Lichtenberg (KCIII)		
IIIC	COUP DE BRACE, Lichtenberg (KCIII)		
IIIC(1)	COUP DE PARTIE, Berman (KCIII)		
IIID	JH'NFREYA, Carol Lynn and Deborah Goldstein		
IIIE	OPERATING MANUAL, Hall (KCVI)		
IIIF			
IIIG	A HOUSE DIVIDED, Zawacky, Deneroff (KCVI)		
IIIH	WITH ALL THE WISDOM I CAN SUMMON, Richard Piazza (unwritten)		
IV	SPOCK'S NEMESIS, Lichtenberg (KCIII)		
AV	BONES'S VISION, Roy (KCVI)		
V	SPOCK'S DECISION, Lichtenberg (KCIIV)		
VA	CHRISTINE'S DECISION, Sharon Emily (KCVI)		
VA(1)	ONE FINGERED SYMPHONY, Roy (KCVI)		
VB			
VC	DAYS OF FUTURE PAST, Cynthia Levine (KCVI)		
VD	SPOCK'S PILGRIMAGE, Lichtenberg and Sondra Marshak (KCIIV)		
VD(1)			
VD(2)	KIRK'S TRIUMPH, Deneroff, Lichtenberg, Zawacky (KCVI)		
VE	THE MAZE, Winston		
VI	SPOCK'S _____		
VII	SPOCK'S CHALLENGE, Lichtenberg (unwritten)		
VIII	SPOCK'S MEMORY, Lichtenberg (unwritten)		

# SUNDERED DUTIES



Art by P.S. Nim

Jackie Bielowicz

Linda Deneroff

Fran Zawacky

# Kraith b1

"After all these years among humans, you still haven't learned to smile."

"Humans smile with so little provocation."

"And you haven't come to see us in four years either."

"The situation between my father and myself has not changed . . ."

My father's voice intervenes. "My wife, attend." She turns and walks toward him, leaving me to my thoughts.

## Journey to Babel, Act II, Scene 9B

I sat at the computer console, working on the formula. My father came up behind me, looking over my shoulder at the screen.

"What is this?" he inquired.

"It is the formula for Suvil's experiment tomorrow. He has assigned it to me as a practice."

"Then they still intend to attempt the Uncommon Occurrence despite the danger?" His voice was disapproving.

"Yes." I did not look at him, but continued to work. "You know their reasons. It is the only alternative left."

Sarek did not answer, but stood in silence behind me. Finally, he stated, "I will not allow you to go. There is no reason why an Uncommon Occurrence should be part of your training. It is improbable that you will ever attempt one; it is an unnecessary danger."

A cold sphere settled in the pit of my stomach. Not be with Suvil in this, his greatest experiment? I spoke quietly, forcing my voice to remain steady. "Suvil considers this part of my training."

"I do not. Suvil is your grandfather and responsible for your training in the Tradition, but I am your father. I will not permit you to be endangered by experiments that will add nothing to your ability to fulfill *tsaichrani*. I shall speak to Suvil of this." Once again my father had overruled my wishes in the matter.

He left me and I stared unseeingly at the console screen. A great tension swelled up in me, and, disengaging the computer, I strode out of the house. I walked quickly, the stress building inside me until at last I found myself running across the darkening desert. When I reached the foot-hills of the mountains, I halted, controlling my breathing. I could not remain still; I began to pace, rebellion surging up in me. Once again, my father and I had clashed. While the small part of me that was still calm recognized his concern for me, most of my mind fought against the Vulcan control. Was I really deficient as a Vulcan because of my human characteristics? I sank to the ground, my knees under my chin and my arms wrapped around my legs. Phrases from my childhood floated into my mind: "Earther. . . incapable. . . part human. . . lacks the necessary control. . ." I slammed my fist down on a rock next to me, shattering it and cutting my hand on the shards. Unheeding, I wiped the blood on my shirt. What were these human traits that made it so difficult for me to contribute fully to Vulcan?

The thought was not a new one for me. What did I know of humans except for my mother, who had lived so much of her life among Vulcans? The concept intrigued me, and I sorted through all Mother had told me about human cultures and behavior.

I spent the rest of the night in contemplation and when the dawn came, I had little to show for my time. I was who and what I was. Suddenly I had a great urge to speak with Suvil. He and I had discussed this at various times during the past year and that was why he had encouraged me to put in my application to Starfleet Academy. He considered it the ideal way to complete my education and begin to understand that part of me that was human.

I quickly rose to my feet, starting for home into the rising sun. Though I did not run, I was home before the desert began to heat. Suvil was awaiting me in the main hall as I came in.

He had large, broad shoulders, though he was of average height. His face was almost untouched by time. His back was as erect as a young man's as he stood there with his sturdy legs apart. His gnarled, scarred hands were lightly clasped in front of him as he looked me over carefully. "Did you have an accident?"

I looked down at myself. My shirt was soiled and stained with blood. "No. It is unimportant. Grandfather, Sarek has said that I am not to go with you."

"And you had another of your arguments." He gestured for silence before I could tell him of the meeting. "I have already spoken to your father. You are to go with me." I could only guess at the words that had passed between them.

My argument with Sarek lingered in my thoughts. Our disagreement had been but one of many, each adding to the widening rift between us. The matter would have to be settled, most probably when he learned of my application to Starfleet Academy. To him, it would be a sanction of war, but to me it had come to mean a search for more than existence. If I were accepted, and chose to go, it could cause a complete break between us. But now was not the time for these thoughts. I had to turn all my attention to the experiment.

"Prepare," my grandfather interrupted my thoughts, "we will leave for Beom as soon as you are ready."

I went to my room. My father was with Suvil when I returned, but he did not speak as we left.



Mother once stated that Beom sometimes presents a brooding appearance as one approaches it. Had she made that statement on the last day of my grandfather's life, I might have agreed with her.

As our aircar approached Beom, the sky behind the *utsulan* was overhung with sullen, reddish clouds that threatened one of Vulcan's rare but violent thunderstorms.

Walking to the main building, the air around us seemed to be waiting, though I knew it was merely an effect of the sudden fall in the atmospheric pressure. My grandfather supported my grandmother as she walked slowly across the packed ground. She was a tiny woman, only 1.68 meters tall. Her hair was translucent white and worn pulled back, throwing into relief her wide-browed, pain-etched face. She pressed her hands over her swollen belly. T'Olne was carrying the fruit of Suvil's last *pon farr*, but because of her age, the pregnancy was not proceeding well. The Academy had done all they could and now Suvil had brought her to Beom, hoping to use the Forgotten Sciences to save her and their unborn child.

My grandfather was as he always was, calm and confident. Though he walked with us, he had withdrawn into himself, going over the expected procedure in his mind.

I was torn between pride that I would be helping Suvil and uneasiness because of the unusual nature of the experiment. I knew myself to be too tall, too thin, too young for my seventeen years and I was uncertain that my skills would be of genuine use to my grandfather.

Sinzu, Chief Attendant at Beom, stood in the door of the *utsulan*, waiting for us. He had recently been appointed Chief Attendant and had won great honor for his performance at the *utsulan*. He did not approve of Grandfather's work in the Forgotten Sciences, but at least he had never tried to interfere with it. He frowned slightly as his eyes took in T'Olne's weakened state; she was obviously in no condition to endure the forces of Beom. Sinzu's face was grave as he greeted my grandparents. "Live long and prosper, Suvil." He turned to my grandmother and nodded slightly, "T'Olne."

He stepped aside to allow us to enter the *utsulan* and waited until my grandmother was seated on a nearby bench. Then he turned to Suvil. "All is in readiness. Will you require my assistance?"

"No. Spock is all the assistance I require. Leave us now."

Sinzu, after handing Suvil the Flame Keys, left as my grandfather motioned for me to follow him. T'Olne leaned back against the wall, her eyes closed, gathering her strength in meditation. Suvil and I moved through the long passage to the darkened *wheerr*. As his fingers manipulated the thin strips of metal, columns of brilliant fire rose higher and higher to the dome. I stood waiting as Suvil swiftly used the Keys to open the Hidden Door, squinting my eyes against the powerful glare that it always produced. The massive crystal glittered with deep-laden fires, increasing the light in the normal gloom of the *wheerr*. When the door was unlocked, I moved up to the massive chair, pushed it back, and waited to follow Suvil down to the red-lighted laboratories.

The laboratories were filled with all the tools of power used in ancient times. Neither of us spoke much while we worked; I, only to ask an occasional question, and Suvil, to give an explanation. We worked quickly, setting up the equipment Suvil needed in the *wheerr*. There was the web of power crystals that would connect my grandmother to the larger crystal so that she could draw power from it. There was also a set of controls that would allow Suvil to regulate the amount of power. At last we were ready.

"Spock," said Suvil, and gestured toward the door.

I started back to the entrance of the *utsulan*, but at the door, turned and looked at him as he finished the final adjustments. That is an image of him I will always hold in my thoughts. I wanted to ask him to allow me to stay, but knew that remaining there was not only illogical, it was actually dangerous for a third person to be present during the experiment. I had seen the mathematics.

T'Olne opened her eyes when she heard my footsteps and her face softened as she saw me. "Is it time? Then let us not keep Suvil waiting."

She rose to her feet, and refusing my assistance, preceded me into the passage. The meditation had been beneficial. She seemed much stronger than she had been in days. With no hesitation, she moved to the spot Suvil indicated and stood quietly as I enveloped her in the power web. She and Suvil exchanged no word to each other, but when their eyes met, some unheard message passed between them. They both knew that this was the last and only chance they had. They had both agreed to take the risk. When I finished, she nodded a dismissal.

As I walked to the administration building, the harmonics from the crystal rose. Wind-whipped dust obliterated the sun and static electricity crawled over my skin. Inside the administration building, the sound of the wind was muted, but the pressure was still heavy. I sat out of the way of the attendants and watched the control dials for the *utsulan*. As the dials began to creep toward the danger mark, the tension within the room began to rise. Attendants moved from panel to panel, pushing buttons and moving levers. Sinzu paced the room, checking every dial, his hands gripped tightly behind him. There was the scent of ozone as the panels overheated. Finally, Sinzu sent some of the attendants to the *utsulan* with instructions to use the *anti-wheerr* to protect the *wheerr*, but they were not to interfere with Suvil's work. They had been gone only four minutes when there was a sudden, sharp increase in the harmonics and then, for just a brief moment, there was a disorientation of the world. As everything came back to normal, a powerful explosion came from the *utsulan*, knocking everyone to the floor. Because I was closest to the door, I was the first one out, running for the *utsulan*. Sinzu was close on my heels.

As I approached the *utsulan*, an apparition staggered out of the door. It was Suvil with his blackened clothes seared into his flesh. I learned later that over 80 percent of his body was seared with third degree flash burns. In the areas where the bones run close to the surface, the flesh was burned off his bones. His fingers were almost non-existent. His face was comparatively untouched, though his eyes were closed with the strain of movement. In his arms was what was left of T'Olne. She had been burned brittle, as if she had been totally enwrapped in flame. There was no doubt that she had died instantly. A few feet from the door, he dropped to his knees and she tumbled out of his arms as he fell.

I registered all this as I ran to Suvil's side; I knew my grandmother was dead and wasted no time searching for signs of life. I scooped Suvil up in my arms, and bracing him against my chest, moved swiftly to the Resident's Infirmary. Sinzu ordered two attendants to carry T'Olne's body there and then he continued into the *utsulan*.

The healer was waiting, ready for us, when I entered. I laid Suvil on the indicated bed and stepped back against the wall as he moved in to examine my grandfather.

The healer worked quickly and efficiently, futilely searching for a vein where he could insert the necessary supportive liquids vital to counteract dehydration. His assistant began debriding Suvil, covering the burns with strips of burn-gel bandage. Suvil lay with his eyes closed but conscious, fighting to control the pain. Blood began to trickle out of his nostrils and his breathing became increasingly labored. The healer tried to talk to him, but he made no response. I saw Sinzu quietly enter and stand waiting for the healer to report. Finally, the healer approached Sinzu. "You must contact Sarek. Suvil will not survive," the healer said.

Sinzu glanced at me, but I refused to acknowledge his unspoken question. I did not want to leave Suvil. Sinzu hesitated and then left the room. I moved closer to the bed and looked down at my grandfather. He lay still, though every now and then his head would twitch from the strain he was undergoing. Suddenly his eyes opened and his glazed vision passed around the room until it found me. His bandaged hand stirred and he tried to speak. I laid my hand lightly over his and spoke quietly. "I'm here, Grandfather. Sarek will be here soon. Do you want me to help you into a healing trance?"

His head moved slightly in a gesture of negation and he again tried to speak. I bent closer, straining to hear and as I did so, slipped into the *pykhylsion* link, flinching from the pain that was in Suvil. Faintly, his thoughts came through the pain.

//Spock! Beware...power was...directed.... Danger...error...adjust...through....//

Then my head was filled with a searing orange flame and I felt Suvil die. Pain flowed through my entire consciousness, followed by an icy relieving darkness.

When I regained consciousness, Sarek was seated beside my bed, deep in contemplation. He must have sensed me watching him because he unexpectedly looked straight into my eyes. His were opaque as he asked tersely, "Do you feel strong enough to return home?"

I did not answer, just swung my legs off the bed. There was a slight touch of nausea, but I ignored it and followed my father out of the Infirmary and to our aircar. The thunderstorm had come and gone. The plantlife around the yard of the *utsulan* lay beaten to the ground. The released water was already steaming off the hot earth and the pressure had returned to normal. Suvil's aircar was gone, used to transport my grandparents' bodies to the Place of Preparation. Neither of us spoke while Sarek got the craft airborne and headed for the city. Then I spoke, looking straight ahead. "I would like to serve in your stead at the Place of Preparation."

Sarek shot a quick glance towards me. "Why?"

"Because I feel the need to be there."

"That is illogical. By tradition, it is my duty."

As usual, my father and I were not communicating. Suvil would have understood my need to be with him to the final step without having to be told. But to my father, any deviation on my part from tradition, from the Vulcan way, was to be discouraged. I knew he considered my request to be a human response and wanted to deny it.

"He was my teacher. I feel that it is also my duty."

"I do not agree with your reasons, but if it is necessary to you, then you may go in my place."

Again, there was silence between us until Sarek continued. "Spock, Suvil died because of his studies in the Forgotten Sciences. We have histories of what happened at Top of World when men dealt with that-which-was-better-left-untouched. In my judgment, it would be better if you did not continue Suvil's studies. The unreliability of your mind techniques presents a greater danger than with Suvil. Even with his greater control, he, in this last experiment, has wrecked the *wheerr* and badly misaligned the crystal. Vulcan cannot risk its greatest *utsulan* in experiments of ancient practices."

A great stillness grew within me. My curiosity of the Forgotten Sciences was as great as my grandfather's, but I also knew my father was correct. I have always had the greatest respect for him and knew that his request was made through genuine concern -- both for me and Vulcan.

"It shall be as you have said."

The rest of the trip was made in silence while I prepared myself with private meditation. When we reached the Place of Preparation, my father walked with me to the waiting area.



"I shall await your return. Serve with honor."

With these ritual words, I began my duty. I walked to the preparation rooms. The bodies had already been cleansed and the technicians were awaiting my father's arrival.

In the ancient days, Vulcans had buried their dead. But with the Reforms, emphasis was placed on preserving Vulcan's elements to produce more arable land. Therefore, bodies were used as fertilizer in arid areas. As Vulcan technology advanced, terra-forming became the means of improving land and there was no longer the need to use the dead. In modern times, except for the water in bodies which ritually was returned to the community through the main water supply of the city, all other chemicals were returned to the family.

The room we were in was a giant, orderly laboratory with the machines necessary for reducing the body to its chemical components. The technicians and I placed my grandparents' bodies in the vacuum chamber that would withdraw the water. Because of the charred condition of T'Olne's body, only a kilogram of water was extracted. The dehydrated remains were then transferred to another machine where the remaining chemicals were separated by catalyst and mixed with necessary additives for use in the soil. What few waste materials there were that couldn't be added to the soil were set aside for use in various Vulcan industries.

During the entire process, there was silence in the room. The technicians worked quickly and smoothly. As was my duty, I chose two dark blue urns, fifty centimeters high with hinged white tops and placed in them all that remained of the physical bodies of Suvil and T'Olne. It was a clean, dignified occurrence; the body goes from life to life.

I returned with the urns to where Sarek was waiting. Without a word, he took T'Olne's urn and we began our homeward journey. Mother was waiting for us in the main hall of D'R'Hiset. Though her eyes were reddened, she was calm. This was the first close death she had ever faced on the Vulcan side of the family. She and my grandfather had had their disagreements at times, usually over me, but he would have been pleased at her present peace.

"I have everything ready, my husband," she said softly.

Sarek nodded and we went straight out into the Gardens of Thought. Set out for use was the blending tray where the *tonir* or remains of my grandparents could be blended in death as they had been in life. There was also the *l'atne*, used for loosening the soil around the roots, and the flask of water that would seal the soil after the blending. We each started to work, placing the blended *tonir* within the root networks of all the plants and using the silence to meditate on our memories. The quiet of the Gardens exerted a healing peace over me, and except for Sarek occasionally aiding Amanda, we were each locked in an isolation that was shared. When all the *tonir* was blended and the soil mended, Sarek spoke the only words that are ever allowed within the Gardens. "May they continue to serve Vulcan in peace and honor."

We returned to the house and Sarek left us to return the *komatts*, a duty which, by Vulcan law, only he could perform. As I started to my quarters, my mother put out her hand to halt me until Sarek was out of hearing. "Spock, I grieve that Suvil is gone from you."

"He is not gone as long as I have my memories of him."

"Yes, but he of all of us understood you best." She gave a small smile as she laid her hand lightly along the side of my face. "I know how important that was for you."

I waited patiently, having no answer for her. She withdrew her hand, stood straighter, and changing the subject, said, "Your father said that you became unconscious when your grandfather died. Are you sure that you are all right?"

"Yes, Mother." I knew she did not quite believe me; I also knew she would not impose on my privacy.

With Suvil's death my father became the head of the family and I his heir. Assuming my grandfather's position as head of *xmprsqzntwlf* added greatly to my father's duties. Not only did he have his usual work at the Academy and as Ambassador of Vulcan whenever needed, but he also had to handle all administrative and judicial duties on family matters. Also, he would be responsible for conducting the next Affirmation, a duty of vital importance to all Vulcan.

We saw very little of each other. Sarek was involved in his increased duties and I only saw him in connection with finishing my primary education. The relative freedom of this time had increased my interest in the half of me that I had always been encouraged to control strictly. I began a study of human literature and philosophy, but this left me with more questions than it answered. The sociology tapes only added to my difficulty; there were so many cultures and customs. There seemed to be no one uniting factor, or equivalent to *tsaichrani* for humans. And more often, the question arose in my mind, "Where do I fit in?"

I also began to question whether I would be able to function totally within *tsaichrani*. I was accustomed to the fact that I did not always quite fit, but would it keep me from serving Vulcan fully? Even worse, might I endanger myself or all-Vulcan due to a lack of understanding of my human side? My eighteenth birthday came and went and I felt within myself a great drive to go into the



PS NIM

human culture and learn about my other half there. Each day that passed reinforced that drive. And one morning, as the crimson sun reached its zenith, I took the first step.

The very air of Vulcan was still, lending itself to the spell of silence that seemed to have been cast over the entire area. I permitted its peace to wash over me as I surveyed the view from my study, putting my mind in harmony with the moment.

Then the inner and outer stillness was shattered by a mechanical chattering. I turned from the window and crossed to the computer console. Instead of the confirming figures I had been expecting, there was a communique bearing the Vulcan Science Academy identification. I knew what it said almost before I read it.

The Science Academy is a scholarly institution. One does not apply to it. The criteria used to choose its students are many and confidential. To be one of the chosen is an honor recognized throughout the galaxy; I had been chosen.

I sat at my desk meditating, my work forgotten for the moment. Anyone wishing to call himself a scientist yearned to study and work at the Academy. My father had been granted that privilege -- and expected me to be chosen as well. He was rarely in error and now his expectation was fact.

Yet, in the six months since Suvil's death, the idea of remaining, studying here on Vulcan had become more and more of an impossibility. That, in and of itself was illogical, for with his death my place was here. Suvil would have understood these contradictions within me, but my father.... It only became more difficult to tell him that I must leave Vulcan.

The tasteful and tranquil garden attached to T'Pau's home belied the seriousness of the conversation taking place on the shaded lawn. The air was charged with electricity, as before a sudden storm.

"T'Pau," Sarek's voice was even, "they are on their way."

She stopped in mid-stride and her hand tightened on the sculptured staff of her office. "Thee are sure of this?"

Sarek nodded slowly. "The information is accurate. Starfleet has need of a base in this sector. This time they are determined to see the matter through, and locate that base here. Apparently, they do not wish any delays," he finished grimly.

"I had hoped it might be otherwise..," the lines on her face seemed to have multiplied overnight, "...that they would come to believe the cost too high."

"Vulcan is too strategic...."

She cut him off -- just sharply enough for him to know she was disturbed. "They shall have their base. Thee knows the decision of the Daughters." It was a statement, not a question.

He was not unaware of the weariness in her tone. "Of course. I have planned a dinner to mark their arrival in two standard days. Will you attend?"

"I cannot."

He sensed her weariness again but checked a vocalization of his concern. Instead, he rose to leave. "I shall keep you informed."

"Sarek." He turned toward her again. "What of T'Uriamne?"

"The matter is out of her hands."

"She may not agree."

"That would not be unusual." He turned to leave. "I will see you in one yahvee."

In seconds, the tranquility of the garden was restored. It took longer for the peace to filter through to T'Pau's mind.

The main hall of D'H'Riset was spacious, comfortable, sunny and pleasant, and often used for entertaining guests. When Father left to collect our guests, I was helping Mother with the dinner preparations. It was one of the few opportunities I had had in recent days to speak with her. I wanted her advice, but I did not know how to begin.

"Spock, you're wearing one of your pensive looks. Is there something wrong?" I looked at her in confusion and she smiled as she always did when she knew she had surprised me.

"No," I replied. "Who are our guests tonight?"

"Admiral Malcolme and his secretary, Lieutenant Nadaf. They're here to negotiate a starbase. This is the third time the Federation Council has sent a representative. I would have thought they'd have given up the idea long ago."

I nodded, listening with care. I had not known what had taken up so much of Sarek's time recently. And now I realized that I was applying to Starfleet Academy at the same time my father was trying to block a Starfleet base on Vulcan. No matter where I turned, the same conflict confronted me.

"I know about your inquiries concerning Starfleet." Her smile was gone. "Even if the base were not an issue, your father would never agree to your entering a military organization."

"That is something my father and I will have to reconcile between us."

She said no more, but I knew she was still concerned. Watching Mother, I again realized that I would have to tell Father what I wanted to do within a short span of time. My basic education was finished, Suvil was dead, a career had to be chosen.

"What about the Science Academy?" Mother had ceased working.

"I have heard from them," I admitted. "I do not plan to attend."

A frown momentarily crossed her face. Then concern replaced it. She was aware, just as I was, that one did not lightly turn down an honor such as this. My father would not approve.

"Would you like me to talk with Sarek?" Again her question broke into my thoughts. I considered for a moment. It was a great deal to ask of one's mother. Yet perhaps she, if not I, might make him understand.

"I will consider your offer." When she did not answer, I added, "I believe that Father and I can come to a logical compromise."

Our eyes met for a moment, but "Dinner will be ready shortly," was all she said. I took it as a dismissal and went up to my aerie to study.

Father arrived shortly with his guests and introductions were quickly made. As we sat down to dinner I studied the two offworlders. The human was Admiral Harold Malcolme, known throughout Federation space as a top military strategist. He had worked his way up through the ranks, eventually joining Starfleet's diplomatic corps. The Tellarite was unknown to me; he had been introduced as Lieutenant Nadaf.

The meal passed in silence, as is our custom, but as soon as we had finished, Admiral Malcolme smiled and said, "Mmmn, delicious, Ma'am. I haven't had such a good meal in years."

Mother nodded in quiet acceptance of the compliment. "A good meal should always precede a serious discussion," she replied. "It serves to make both parties more amenable."

The dining area was cleared within seconds. All that remained were the few after-dinner sweets prepared especially for our guests, and coffee.



"You make a stranger feel right at home," Admiral Malcolme said to Mother, smiling as he finished his second cup of coffee. "I, for one, vote that you program our embassy computer. Its coffee tastes more like soap than anything else."

Mother laughed lightly, but I did not see the humor. "The secret of a good cup of coffee," she answered, "is in the brewing. Never trust a machine." The Admiral said nothing in reply, but I noticed that he accepted when she offered him a third cup.

"How long do you plan to be here?" I addressed myself to the Admiral's secretary.

After a few seconds he replied, "We are assuming a standard month." He was apparently having difficulty converting standard time to *yahvee*...or perhaps it was his way of indicating the Federation's importance in this meeting.

"Eight *yahvee*," I computed silently. He looked uncomfortable. "Are you feeling well, sir?" I inquired.

"The heat." His reply was curt. "Could you turn up the air conditioning?"

"Certainly." I rose and went to adjust the controls to make the room slightly colder for Lieutenant Nadaf, but not enough to disturb either Admiral Malcolme or Mother.

My mother's voice interrupted the discussions. "If you will excuse me, gentlemen, I have an appointment with the Legion of Merchants." Mother was assisting in the creation of a more efficient universal translator, a vitally needed aid to interstellar trade. And since I had a tape on quantum physics to study, I too said goodnight and went upstairs. As I walked up the stairs, I could hear Father and his guests in the office.

It was several hours later, and I still had work to do, but I decided I wanted some *prookie* and went to the kitchen. As I was returning through the main hall, I heard the office door open. I waited until the three men entered the room so that I might say goodnight to them again.

"Sarek," Malcolme turned to face Father as they stopped walking, "before we can accept your compromise, I should like to tour the present Space Central facilities." Sarek said nothing and Admiral Malcolme turned to me. "How about it, Spock?" Evidently Admiral Malcolme had studied my family before coming to Vulcan and therefore knew I was an accredited tour guide, but still Father said nothing.

"I would be of service, Sarek," I said quietly.

"Then it's settled!" Admiral Malcolme grinned. "When can we go?"

"I'll check with the spaceport in the morning and inform you," I replied. "Would the day after tomorrow be soon enough?"

"Fine. The sooner, the better."

The Tellarite turned to Father. "There is one thing I do not understand, Ambassador. Your son has applied to Starfleet Academy and been accepted." His speech was harsh and guttural. "Is that not inconsistent with what we have discussed this evening?"

I stood there, turned to stone.

Admiral Malcolme's eyes blazed with anger at his secretary's effrontery and he looked hard at Father, expecting a reaction, I assumed. But I knew Sarek better and though not a muscle flinched, a phrase of Mother's came suddenly into my mind: "There'd be hell to pay."

Father's voice was quiet as he replied, "My son's actions have no bearing on these negotiations. Goodnight, gentlemen."

The door closed behind them before Father spoke again. "Spock, we will talk in the morning."

"Yes, Father," I replied and retreated upstairs.

I knocked quietly and opened the door to the office without waiting for an answer. It closed softly behind me and I quickly surveyed the room. Already it had been re-arranged from the previous evening and Father was at his desk, concentrating on the information on the viewscreen before him. His back was rigidly straight, flat up against the back of his chair. His hands were relaxed, one always ready to adjust the controls. I had no sooner turned to withdraw from the room when his voice broke the stillness.

"Stay."

"I did not wish to disturb you, Father."

"You have not. The work is finished." As if to substantiate the claim, he snapped off the viewscreen. "It would be best if you refused the Starfleet Academy appointment immediately."

"Father...."



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"The Science Academy has notified me you have been selected to study there."

"Father, I do not wish to study at the Science Academy." The words had streamed out almost without thought.

He seemed to stare at me forever. "You have a duty to Vulcan."

"As well as to myself."

We each remained silent for a long moment; Father's fingers were steeped in a meditative position. "Your choice was Vulcan," he said slowly. "Your place is here -- both by heritage and tradition. Would you deny that?"

"No, Father. I would not. But there is more to this universe than Vulcan." I paused, and he did not interrupt. "Starfleet offers me a better opportunity for scientific study." My thoughts were racing furiously; I would need all the skill I had been taught to argue successfully with my father.

"Then you would join Starfleet?"

I folded my hands on the desk and stared down at them. "I feel that studying at Starfleet will help me better understand my human half."

"You did not consult me."

"There was no need. It is my decision. In accordance with Federation law, I am of age to join Starfleet."

"Why Starfleet? It uses the force that we have learned is unnecessary. If you must go off Vulcan, why not simply visit your mother's home world?"

"I do not wish merely to observe human life, but to live within it. Starfleet will allow me to do this and to continue my education at the same time."

"My son, you are Vulcan, bound by its traditions, heritage, philosophy, and belief in peace. Can you reconcile that with Starfleet? It is illogical to expect peace to be bred of violence."

"The Starfleet is a necessary instrument of peace...."

"And of war.... What if the psychology of violence becomes overwhelming to you? The threat to *tsaichrani* is too great."

"No, Father. If our way is right, Starfleet cannot threaten it. We also believe in IDIC. There is much to learn by studying other peoples, other customs, other worlds.... That too is part of our tradition."

"And should it become necessary for you to kill?"

The thought of taking a life disturbed me, as my father knew it would. Still, my voice was quiet and firm when I answered. "I do not know, Father, but it makes no difference; I will do what is necessary."

"Few of our people have gone offworld. You would be alone. The Starfleet makes little provision for our customs and way of life. If you should taint the Affirmation, or miss it..."

He did not need to finish. "The Affirmation will not occur for another 21.86 years." I added hesitantly, "Much will have changed by then."

"And what of your training here?" Father then inquired.

"Suvil was almost finished before he died," I replied. "And you contributed what you could. I will be capable of assuming my place here when the time comes. In addition, my experience in Starfleet will aid me in other ways."

"Vulcan needs you now. Studies are being planned to determine the impact the Federation will have on Vulcan. As a scientist, you can contribute much to this research."

"With a better understanding of my human half, I can contribute more."

"You do not need to leave. *Tsaichrani* is a guide. Amanda has been able to use and live within it."

"My mother is an exceptional woman and has known both ways of life. I have not."

"You are Suvil's heir. You have responsibilities here now."

"They are not pressing." Father knew I was correct, for T'Urianne had recently been appointed to succeed him as head of the Guardian Council. My voice took on a determined tone. "I must leave Vulcan, Father. I have not made this decision lightly. I am Vulcan; my decision is based on logic."

"I do not see the logic." Father paused once more and the silence hung heavily in the room. "Consider well, Spock, before you make your answer to Starfleet. A life's decision deserves such consideration."

"My decision has already been made, Father."

"Despite its consequences?"

I knew there would be consequences in any event. "Yes, Father. Vulcan is --" I paused a split second and continued in a softer voice, "not enough."

I could feel the electricity in the air as we faced one another.

"I am leaving, Father, as soon as arrangements can be made." With that I turned and left the room.

Amanda was on her knees working in the small garden set aside for her use near the house. It was spring on Vulcan, the harvest season, the time of year she'd come to like best on her adopted world. It had been spring when she had first met Sarek; spring when she'd married him; spring when she had come to his house as a bride. She had taken over the garden that year and had continued to manage it thereafter. The unbearable heat of the Vulcan summer was still a thing of the future, and the warm sun and soft breezes made the work enjoyable. It provided a kind of therapy for her. She thought back to the early years of their marriage -- how often she had been angry, held her tongue, and then vented her energies weeding a flowerbed. "I wonder if we would have survived our first year without it," she mused as she worked.

She was proud of the garden. Under her care, fifteen plants from fourteen Federation worlds flourished. As a "Starfleet courtesy", the Admiral had delivered some new seeds. So now, here she was, dressed in coveralls, carefully removing soil to pot the seeds until they could be transplanted to the garden itself and wondering how Starfleet had known about her "hobby".

She brushed back a strand of gradually graying hair, smudging her face with the dirt from her hands, and sat back on her heels at the sound of footsteps. She watched her husband's approach, studying the man she'd married. Was it already twenty years? He hadn't aged much -- not even a little grey at the temples. "He looks tired," she thought. She stood, wiped her hands on her soil-splotched coveralls, and waited for him to speak.

On a day such as this, Sarek knew where he would find his wife, but this time he didn't see her until she rose. "My wife." He almost smiled as he surveyed the soil-smudged face. "The years have done well by her," he thought as he extended the first two fingers of his right hand.

"Oh dear," she thought, touching her fingers to his, "he's being formal. I do hope nothing is wrong."

Almost as if by mutual agreement, they began to walk along the stone lined path.

"Is there something wrong, Sarek?" she asked neutrally, attempting to match his mood.

"I have spoken with Spock. I do not understand his decision to attend the Space Naval Academy."

They walked on in silence. "Why?" she asked.

"Amanda, decisions must be made after all the facts are weighed. I do not believe Spock has evaluated all the parameters involved. Hence, I must disagree with him."

"What parameters? Surely he is entitled to attend whatever school he wishes?"

"Spock has always shown an aptitude in computer sciences. The Science Academy has the best training programs in that field. It is rare that one so young is invited to attend there, Amanda, and he is refusing the privilege. That is illogical."

Amanda was torn; long-smouldering emotion told her that her son must not be trapped by the conventions and dictates of others. "Has he told you his reasons? Perhaps there are some factors unknown to you?"

"We have spoken."

"Sarek," her voice was gentle, "he is your son; he has followed your teachings all his life. But he is not fully Vulcan." She thought of all the difficulties that Spock had borne simply because she was human. "If he is to be at peace with himself, he must understand all his heritage, human as well as Vulcan. That is a conflict only he can resolve; we can only advise and guide, each in our own way. He must learn to combine both heritages for the greater good of both. 'If the father claims thus and the grandfather teaches another view while both disagree with seven of the Great Ones, the child must search for his own truth!' " Amanda knew she had made her point; it wasn't often she was able to show her training and quote from the *Book of Logic*.

" 'The needs of thy son can be fulfilled only by the community', " he countered. "His training and abilities are needed here."

"When he is needed, he will come. We have no claim on him."

"My wife, even you will admit the mores of your culture are sometimes difficult for even humans to cope with. Spock would be surrounded by people who generally make no effort to control any but the most violent of their emotions. And I have found that most humans have no consideration for customs other than their own. Spock's mind control is erratic; he may not be able to protect himself from mental intrusion. I fear for his sanity if he can not."

Amanda stopped in mid-stride, turned, and faced her husband squarely. "Spock has managed to deal quite capably with my emotions, Sarek. I have not driven him insane. And remember, even your father was surprised at the special mind talents he seems to possess. Only time will tell, but keeping him in a cage out of fear is no answer."

"I am thinking more of keeping him alive," he replied evenly as they continued their walk. "Spock is the last of the First Realm with all the obligations that accompany it. It is imperative that he stay alive, remain sane, and have a son. Joining Starfleet will be physically dangerous. And a son lost to *tsaichrani* through insanity might as well be dead. Spock is *kataytikh*; he preserves the past for the future. His death, without a son, without a grandson to train, might be extinction for all-Vulcan. Do you understand, Amanda? Cage Spock? No. But he must be made to see reason."

"Sarek...." She broke off as a series of pictures floated through her thoughts: Spock as an infant, the day he spoke his first words, the passing of the Kahs-wan, his bonding, the preparations for his first trip to the Science Academy, the day Suvil died. "Help me," her mind seemed to scream, "help Spock." She could not let her son be trapped. Quickly, she calmed her thoughts and proceeded with a coolness that belied the depth of her feelings. "Don't you think Spock knows all this? Yet he wishes to go offworld. Isn't it remotely possible that the more totally he understands himself, the better position he will be in to serve Vulcan to the utmost?"





"I do not dispute that, my wife. I merely question the means he uses to gain that knowledge."

They continued their walk in silence, each meditating on what the other had said: Sarek working out the probabilities; Amanda determined to do everything possible to prevent any further rift between her husband and her son.

I arrived at the Enclave at dusk and collected the two offworlders to take them on their tour. It seemed to me to be the best time of day for the excursion for I knew that the heat, even then, would be oppressive to them. The brief walk to the waiting aircar lined Admiral Malcolme's face with beads of sweat while Lieutenant Nadaf grumbled about the heat from the moment he stepped out of the air-conditioned Embassy.

"Does one ever adjust to this climate?" he asked me as we entered the climate-controlled aircar.

"My mother manages quite well," I replied.

I told them about the spaceport as we traveled. "Space Central is located to the east of the Enclave and north of the Lachlelan Forestry. The land on which it was built was originally worthless marsh." I could see the spaceport vaguely in the distance and pointed it out to my passengers before I continued. "Under the terms of Federation membership, Vulcan is permitted to regulate its own interplanetary space lanes." I realized suddenly that Starfleet, and therefore Admiral Malcolme, would be well aware that the strictness of our "maritime" codes sometimes exceeds those of Starfleet.

"They expect to run a starbase from here -- in this heat?" Lieutenant Nadaf's booming tones brought me up short. His contempt was unmistakable.

"I am sure it is not very large by Starfleet's standards," I replied, carefully choosing my words, "but it serves our needs. Vulcan is very nearly self-sufficient," I added by way of explanation.

"Is that why your people are so opposed to converting the present space port into a starbase? Do you fear dependency on the Federation?" Malcolme asked.

I was impressed by his quick insight. "There are those who fear your human-dominated culture would overpower ours," I replied. "A starbase here is seen as another attempt at encroachment."

"You speak as if your planet were outside the Federation," the secretary interrupted in a challenging tone.

I glanced at the Tellarite. We were over the spaceport and I guided the car to its center. Admiral Malcolme's voice filled the awkward pause. He ignored the comment. "But you want to join Starfleet -- or at least attend the Academy. And obviously, since your father opposes a Starfleet base here, he must also have opposed your application. I'm sorry if our being here at this time has caused you personal difficulty."

I said nothing, thankful that for the next few minutes my attention was absorbed in grounding the aircar so that the Admiral could not pursue the matter.

We left the carpark and headed for the administration building. The area was almost deserted and it was the lieutenant who broke the silence as we walked. "No security guards! A spaceport with no security!" He shook his head in disbelief.

"There seems to be no need," Admiral Malcolme spoke quietly before I could explain. "And given that premise, it would be illogical to have security guards." His imitation of Father's voice was extremely good and evidently startled the lieutenant, who turned expecting to see Sarek. "Sorry," the Admiral apologized, "couldn't resist." I could not be sure to which one of us he was apologizing and thought it wiser to remain silent. The Tellarite just scowled.

"The fact that you do not see any security guards," I sought to reassure the secretary, "does not mean that there are no security arrangements." We had reached the administration building and I confirmed our clearance. We borrowed a ground craft and headed for the outskirts of the base; I intended that we spiral in toward the center of the base, winding up in the administration building where we had begun. We examined the loading docks where Admiral Malcolme tried his hand at piloting one of the Vulcan-designed simulator-shuttles used for training new pilots, and then we moved on to the storage silos.

"What's inside?" Lieutenant Nadaf asked as we passed the storage warehouses and it became evident that we were not going to enter.

"At present, grain for the Sirian Colonies. It is being shipped via the Excalibur within two yahvee."

From then on, the secretary seemed content to let Admiral Malcolme ask the questions while he walked around, peering, poking, and always complaining. He never seemed to wander far and was always there when we moved on so I began to ignore his disappearances. I showed them the central transporter facilities and then we headed for the communications center. We had not stayed very long in any one area but the Admiral saw to it that it was a comprehensive tour. His questions were plentiful and demanded my full attention. Since he had clearance, he also spoke with the personnel. After questioning one woman in communications for a rather lengthy time, he turned to me, "How do they do it?"

"Specify."

"If I didn't know better, I'd say that this section is understaffed and everyone here is obviously busy. Yet, when I ask a question, it's as if they had all the time in the world to answer it."

"They all understand the reason for your inspection. Your questions have high priority," I explained. I wasn't sure he understood.

"Well, we could sure use a few lessons in courtesy from your personnel here," he answered ruefully. It was my turn to wonder if I fully understood.

Having satisfied himself at communications, we proceeded to the passenger facilities and immigration services. "We have few arrivals at any one time," I told the Admiral as we entered, "so it is possible to contain all the service and registration sections required by both Federation and Vulcan law in one building." We went up to the next level and I noticed that the secretary again wandered off alone while Admiral Malcolme continued his interviews. When we were ready to leave, the Tellarite was nowhere to be found. The Admiral too had apparently noticed his frequent disappearances for his tone voiced the exasperation I felt. "Now where has he gone?! It would serve him right if we left him behind."

For a moment I thought the Admiral was serious, then I realized his statement was a measure of his unconcern. Then he added, "I expect we'll find he got bored and returned to the administration building."

I hoped he was correct in his assessment; I should not have let the secretary wander off alone.

We walked quickly back to the administration building. The lieutenant was not waiting for us. I called Shiel, chief of security, and informed him of the situation. As he initiated a search detail, he offered us the use of his office while we waited for news.

But I found I couldn't sit there and wait. "Admiral, I'm going to look for Lieutenant Nadaf."

"I'll go with you," Admiral Malcolme offered.

"No. I've already lost one Federation representative -- I have no desire to make it two." It was fully dark now and the secretary had been missing for over thirty standard minutes. I admitted to myself that I would feel better if I were the one who found him.

"But, Spock, Security is searching for him. Where will you look that they won't?"

I stepped out of the opening door without replying. Actually, I wasn't sure where I was going to look. I stopped at the building's entrance to consider the matter. Shiel's sensors would first probe the area where I had last seen the lieutenant and fan outward from there. If I didn't want to duplicate their efforts.... Lieutenant Nadaf had been fascinated with the storage siloes. And we hadn't gone in. Perhaps he had wandered back there to look inside. I took the aircar back to the warehouses.

Once there, I activated the door mechanism and entered the darkness. My eyes adjusted immediately. I suddenly felt very foolish. What would the secretary be doing here? And if he were here, why had he not activated any of the lighting panels? He could not see in the dark. Fortunately, I could. I circled slowly around the upper walkway of the storage silo noting that everything was as it should be and then made my way down one of the ramps leading to the lower level.

"If he has walked back here from the administration building, then he cannot have been here long," I thought to myself. Nothing had been displaced. I had not seen or heard the Tellarite. "I was wrong," I told myself, "he did not come back here. I should have left the matter to Shiel." Turning to walk back up the ramp, I stopped short as I heard something bump into a packaging container followed by a string of Tellarite expletives.

"Lieutenant Nadaf!" I called out, and moved toward the sound.

And suddenly the world was turned upside down. I was thrown to the ground, deafened by the force and sound of the explosion. My last conscious thought was of my grandfather's death at Beom.

I have no recollection of the events that followed and it was only later that the healer told me that I owed my survival to the fact that I had immediately entered a healing trance. I only know that I awoke in the aerie to the sight of Mother's face anxiously regarding mine. When she realized that I was awake, a smile appeared briefly; I could sense her relief followed by a new worry. Then her hand left my forehead, breaking what contact we had, and I was left puzzled.

Ignoring that, I raised myself to a sitting position. I was anxious to learn what had happened, but.... "Mother, I must speak with T'Pau. Nadaf...."

"...is dead," she finished in a flat, quiet tone. "T'Pau has asked to speak with you as soon as you are well. Shall I arrange it?"

I nodded and soon sank into a deep, dreamless sleep

T'Pau arrived at D'H'Riset the next day. My father brought her into his office where I waited and immediately withdrew. Father's office chair seemed to envelop her slight physical frame, yet her presence dominated the room.

"Spock, Lieutenant Nadaf is dead," she began abruptly.

"Amanda has told me this," I answered quietly.

"Thee was responsible for thy guests." For the first time the words were more than just words; I knew the implications. I had been responsible for the Federation representatives, but had permitted Lieutenant Nadaf to wander freely. I was also responsible for their behavior. Had the entire grain shipment been destroyed? Further, I was responsible for Lieutenant Nadaf's death, for when he realized that I had discovered his actions, he had taken his own life.

Suddenly, my thoughts were interrupted when the door opened and Sarek entered the room. Mother followed close behind him, her face awash with emotions she could not control and I could not comprehend.

"T'Pau -- your pardon for the interruption. They found these," Sarek said as his hand revealed three small electronic components. "Shiel felt you should see them."

"Lieutenant Nadaf was a saboteur," I told them.

"Thee knew this?" T'Pau returned her attention to me. "Why did thee not inform security?"

"I could not be certain of my facts," I replied. "Lieutenant Nadaf would disappear and then return. Admiral Malcolme did not find this unusual. He might simply have been making inquiries on his own. Admiral Malcolme only complained about the lieutenant's final disappearance. It was only after Shiel had left that I remembered Nadaf's curiosity about the storage siloes. Logically, it was my place to go after him. My error was that I called out his name. Instead of surrendering, he chose suicide."

"It was a suicide mission," Father said calmly. "Judging from the primitive components, and adding the facts you have just given us, it could be nothing less. Indeed, I would judge the timer to have been set for less than a standard minute." I must have looked surprised for he added, "It is as I have tried to tell you, Spock. Offworlders do not follow the ways of logic."

There was silence as each of us contemplated the new information. I was aware of the truth behind my father's words. Nadaf had tried -- and come very close -- to killing both of us.

T'Pau broke the silence. "Thee will accept the consequences of this judgment?"

"I shall."

"The matter will be considered ended." I heard my mother's gasp of surprise. "The life of the Tellarite was already forfeit. Had things gone as planned, Tellar would have used his death for their own purposes and cited it as evidence of Vulcan incompetence. Your arrival and Lieutenant Nadaf's haste will now allow the evidence to speak in our defense. Admiral Malcolme has indicated that he wishes the matter closed. He assures me that Tellar will replace the grain shipment and pay for all damages." She paused a moment and then continued, "And thee must live with the events of this day all the days of thy life."

A new calm encompassed me as I realized what T'Pau's judgment meant. I had no doubt that Admiral Malcolme interceded. Why he did it, or how he had managed to convince T'Pau, I did not know.

T'Pau left immediately, Father escorting her out. As Mother accompanied me upstairs, I received the answers to some of my questions.

"Admiral Malcolme told us what happened. He was very puzzled and concerned when he discovered you were in trouble. Your father tried to explain to him." Mother smiled and I was relieved to see the worry gone from her brow. "I like that man," she continued. "He honestly tried to understand our way, but he is not one to permit what he considers an injustice. I'm afraid he used a little blackmail." Again Mother's face held an inscrutable smile. "As a condition of Vulcan authority over the new starbase, you are not to be considered in any way responsible for Lieutenant Nadaf's death."

"But I was," I told her.

"Admiral Malcolme considers what you did a service to both Vulcan and Starfleet. Are you going to contradict an Admiral?" she asked.

We remained silent the rest of the way to the aerie. The ways of humans are strange I told myself, and I remained confused over everyone's easy acceptance of T'Pau's ruling. I myself could not accept it. She was correct about the fact that I would have to live with what had occurred for the rest of my life.

Slowly, I realized that I was still free to leave Vulcan and pursue my intended course. The thought crossed my mind to see Malcolme; I knew humans were accustomed to being thanked.

I did not know it then, but I would limp for a standard month after the explosion. I was concerned about what it would do to my chances of succeeding in Starfleet until the healer assured me it was only a temporary condition. No one had spoken of my intent to attend Starfleet Academy, nor had I mentioned it since the accident, but I was still determined to go.

Mother had sent me on an errand that took me to the Enclave. As the healer's recommendation had been exercise, I had decided to walk the distance from D'H'Riset, testing the strength of the injured leg, and was pleased to find that it had healed almost fully. The consulate was my last stop before returning home. The building matched its neighborhood: a low, squat, steel-gray edifice set amongst others of similar architecture and making no use of the locale to enhance its appearance. Mother had once claimed that recent human architecture had no aesthetic value, and on the basis of the Enclave, I had to agree. The auto-receptionist instructed me to the second floor, fourth door to the left. I located Admiral Malcolme's office without any difficulty and knocked on the heavy wooden door.

The Admiral opened the door of his office almost immediately.

"Spock, come in." He smiled warmly and indicated two well-upholstered chairs in an alcove of the office. "Is there some message from your father?"

"No, he does not even know that I am here."

"I see," he responded non-committally. There was an almost imperceptible pause. "Then I suppose I should ask what I can do for you."

I noticed his slight stress on the last word. "I have decided to attend Starfleet Academy," I began.

"In that case, welcome to the Fleet." Admiral Malcolme smiled again.

"Is that not a bit premature?"

"I have no doubt of your capabilities. However, I'm sure that's not that you're here to talk about." He reached over to the small table on his left and picked up a small cylindrical object with a flat stem at almost right angles and placed it in his mouth. "Do you mind if I smoke while I listen?" I had never seen a pipe before. He took my silence for consent and I watched curiously as he lit the cylindrical end. He settled back in the chair, waiting for me to begin. I was uncomfortable in the big plush chair and the knowledge of what I had to say only heightened the effect.

"I should like to know why you interceded on my behalf with T'Pol?" I began awkwardly.

"Well I couldn't let a future Starfleet officer suffer for something he had no control over, could I?" The question startled me. How had he been so confident that I would be going to Starfleet? "If you had discovered Nadaf's treachery earlier, you'd have been a hero," he continued. "And if you'll pardon my prying, I should like to know why you were up on charges in the first place?" I tried to explain something of Vulcan responsibility to the Starfleet Admiral, but I can only conjecture that he was as puzzled by my explanation as I was by his.

Finally, he sighed. "Well, I can't say I'm sorry. I can't even say I feel you did anything wrong. But what are your plans now?"

"I was hoping you would permit me to travel with you as far as Starbase One. Unfortunately, Vulcan has no direct shuttles to the Academy. I have enough credits to pay you and to take a shuttle from there."

Admiral Malcolme looked puzzled. "The term doesn't begin for several months." He seemed pensive then smiled. "Well, there's plenty of room and I'm going to One anyway.... All right, you've got your lift." He paused a moment. "I expect the Federation Council to agree to the compromise momentarily. The actual signing will be left to others, so you may have to leave on short notice," he warned me.

"Agreed," I replied.

"Then I'll call you and try to give you some advance notice."

"That will be satisfactory."

Malcolme saw me to the door and I left the consulate to return home. It remained for me to tell my parents of my arrangements.

We sat in the usual silence as we ate our evening meal, but for several days now it had not been the silence of peace. My mother merely toyed with her food, absent-mindedly pushing it from side to side on her plate. Sarek ate a normal amount, but stolidly and without appreciation. My own meal lay like sand in the pit of my stomach.

Admiral Malcolme had contacted me; it remained for me to tell my parents when I was leaving. As we rose to clear the table, I spoke without looking at either of them. "I leave for Starfleet tomorrow at eighteen hundred standard hours."

My mother passed an anxious glance at Sarek. "Shall we see you off?" she asked me, but her question was really intended for my father.

There was a silence, then Sarek's curt reply. "I have another appointment."

He turned his back and walked into the main hall. My mother clasped her hands together to control their trembling and followed him. "Sarek," her voice was tense, "Spock has made his decision. Accept it as his right. And in this case," she paused slightly considering her next words, "given time the action will pass judgment on itself."

I had followed them and stood passively by as she pleaded my cause. So now Sarek and I stood facing each other, firm and unmoving from our separate positions. My mother moved in between us, laying a hand on each of our nearer arms.

"Spock! Sarek!" There was no response from either of us. "There must be some way you can compromise this. Please! Sarek, he doesn't have to serve on a ship...Starfleet needs scientists in many different positions." Pausing, she turned to me. "Could you not wait to go to Starfleet until you have finished your studies here at the Academy?"

Without looking at her, Sarek removed her hand and answered tonelessly, "Spock cannot choose his assignments, Amanda." His voice became more stern. "I will have no son in Starfleet. If you go, you deny *tsaichrani*."

"Father, I go to find my place within *tsaichrani*."

"There are those older and wiser than yourself who believe that it is best found here." I must have looked puzzled as he knew I would, for he continued, "Admiral Malcolme offered T'Pau a seat on the Federation Council. She has refused it, knowing her place is here."

"I am not T'Pau," I responded quietly.

"Then let us speak of you, Spock. Do you realize what your death now would mean to Vulcan? You are the last of the First Realm. If you should die before you have a son...."

My mother's gasp cut off Sarek's words. It did not matter; I knew he had come as close as he dared to speaking of that which was not discussed -- and to intruding on my privacy. For a brief moment, I stood silently and stared at him. Then I turned and walked out of the hall, leaving a stunned silence behind me.

"Sarek...." Amanda's voice conveyed her shock. She stared from her husband to the place where her son had stood only a moment before.

"The matter is not open for discussion, my wife." Sarek's voice was cold. "Our son's place is here."

"Sarek, he will leave and go to Starfleet. Nothing you have said tonight has changed his decision." The silence hung heavily in the room. "He's your son.... You can't let him leave like this."

"If his choice is to leave, there is little I can do to change it."

His calm tone infuriated her. She paced a few steps before speaking. "Your father accepted Spock's needs in this matter. Can you do less? Have all these years with me taught you so little?" She could not stand the silence. "Vulcan has compromised on the matter of the Starbase, can you not do the same for your son?" His silence defeated her. "Sarek, at least speak with him."

She had asked him for so little in the time they were married; he'd denied her less. But this time... "I cannot."

I went to my quarters, high above the rest of the house. Not turning on the lights, I stood in the darkness, looking out over the starlit view. Slowly, I realized that Mother was standing outside the arras, waiting for me to answer her low voiced call.

I hesitated a moment, and then... "Come in, Mother."

She entered slowly, unable to see in the dark. I reached down and flicked on a small desk lamp. Her face was damp; I knew she had been crying. I deliberately turned my back on her, returning to the window.

"Spock, you can't leave like this. Please, go to your father; the two of you must work this out." I could hear the slight tremble in her voice as she came up behind me.

"Mother, I must do what I consider logical. Have you not often told me that I must accept responsibility for myself?" Suddenly, I realized how difficult this was for her; I tried again. "I have no wish to separate myself from Vulcan or my father. But we do not agree."

She answered evenly, "I can accept your decision, Spock, because I love you, and I understand your arguments. But I love your father too, and I understand his objections." I could sense her tension but could do nothing to relieve it. "If you must go, so be it. But don't leave in haste or in anger. Don't let him lose a son as he has already lost a daughter."

I turned to face her. "Mother, I must leave; it is not a matter of choice now. When Sarek sees that I have done what I must, there will no longer be a separation. It would not be logical to reject proven facts. Until then, we must travel different paths. It is enough that we seek the same goal."

She seemed to be reassured by my words, perhaps because she wanted to believe. She smiled at me and gave me a quick hug. I automatically strengthened my shields.

"Promise me that if he speaks to you, you'll at least listen."

"It would be illogical to do otherwise."

"You sound like your father. Goodnight, Spock."

"Goodnight, Mother."

She left me and I returned to the window. There could be no delay; my decision was made. I quickly packed the few things I planned to take with me. It was then that I found the book. It had been Suvil's and must have been left behind when my grandparents' possessions were removed from the aerie after their deaths. An inscription on the title page -- in Suvil's hand -- read, "The roads of logic are many." Strangely appropriate; I had chosen mine. I slipped the book into my carry-bag. I would leave tonight and stay in the Enclave. When the Aztec left Vulcan, I would be aboard with Admiral Malcolme.

I arranged my room, preparing it for a long absence. When I was sure my parents had retired for the night, I let myself quietly out of D'H'Riset.

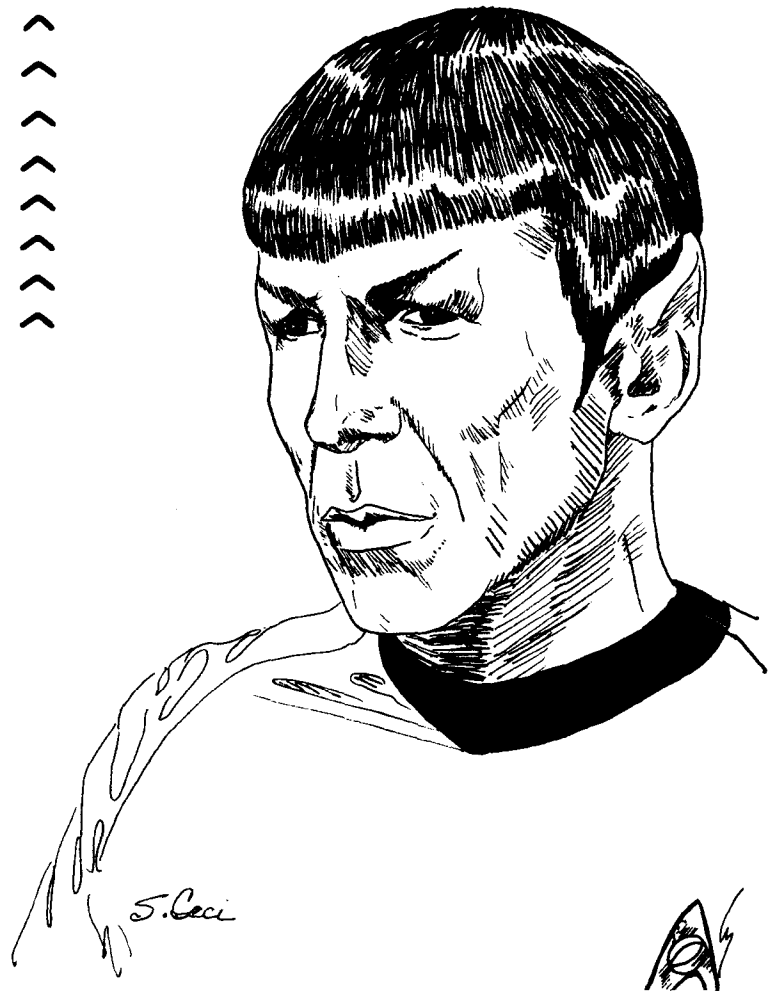
The night quietly enveloped the land. On the horizon, I could see the ever-present lights of the Federation Enclave. I slung the carry-bag over my shoulder and drew a deep breath into my lungs. Then without looking back, I began the long walk toward the lights.



I pull myself out of the memory and turn to leave, only to be brought up short by the Captain's voice: "Mr. Spock. A moment, if you please."



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# Sarek's Meditation

# Jean Lorrain



# Kraith II(a1)

## Author's Note:

This story is the result of typing UNDERSTANDING KRAITH for Judith Segal, 15 Sheridan Dr., Pawling, NY 12564. It takes place during the action of Kraith II, "Spock's Mission." I know I don't think like a Kraith Vulcan, but perhaps I do know how a Disaffirmed Kraith Vulcan thinks. The character of Sarek in this story is not from NTM; it is from my favorite Kraith story, "Initiative."

Sarek sat watching his unconscious son, Spock xtmprsqzntwlfld, Kataytikh of the First Realm, and possibly the last hope for the survival of tsaichrani. All of Vulcan, lying pale and strained on that bunk, while the Halbird pitched and bucked with Thilien's maneuvers to escape the Romulans, and Dr. McCoy worked at rigging a blood filter, muttering angrily each time the delicate work was jarred by some new movement of the ship.

For the first time since his time sense had returned, and he realized he had missed the Affirmation, Sarek had a reason for living: Spock needed his blood, containing the Romulan antibodies that would save his life. It was a simple thing. This man who had proved himself Vulcan beyond all doubt by performing the Affirmation in his father's absence--and with a borrowed Kraith--was now dependent for survival on the blood of a man who was no longer Vulcan, and on the fact that that blood contained a Romulan substance.

There was great humor in the situation. The tight, logical focus of Sarek's thoughts fragmented and randomized, reforming with a new clarity as tension drained from him and he entered a deeper state of meditation.

There was also tragedy inherent here: if Spock died, Sarek and T'Uriamne would be the last members of the xtmprsqzntwlfld left alive. T'Uriamne was a Daughter, and Sarek was Disaffirmed. Yes--that was where the humor lay. Amanda had tried so often to explain to him that the highest comedy lay on the trembling edge of tragedy. Now he understood. He would tell her as soon as he got home; she would appreciate that. Perhaps, if Spock survived, they would laugh together.

This, then, was what it meant to be Disaffirmed, to be lost from the lifestream of his people. T'Aniyeh and Spock understood. Even the humans understood--both Kirk and McCoy had gasped in horror at the realization of Sarek's state. While Sarek himself . . . had made a bad joke of it.

He hadn't expected the difference to be so obvious. He had, after all, been Affirmed before. He had not seen the change in himself while confronted only with Romulans, but the moment he was once more among Vulcans, the difference in him was so evident that he could not conceal it. He had exposed himself practically with his first breath. T'Aniyeh had given the logical greeting to a Disaffirmed: "May you not live long and prosper."

And Sarek had answered, illogically, "Thank you." One does not thank logic.

When Spock had mentioned Amanda's pleasure at Sarek's being alive, he had felt a stab of pain so great that he had spoken in what now seemed a flippant manner. "Your mother is often irrational. She'll get over it." Meaning, she'll get over me, for Sarek did not expect to live to return to Vulcan. He never expected to see Amanda again, and so he had cut himself off from contacting her through their bonding. And now I'm sitting here thinking of her, of laughing with her. . . I cannot even control my own intentions.

How did he dare meld with Spock? What if that spread the--  
No. No, it was less than a year since Spock's Affirmation. Tsaichrani was the complete mold and character of a kataytikh's mind so soon afterward. He need not fear contaminating his son.

In fact . . . .

I need not remain Disaffirmed. Possibly I cannot.

Well, as Amanda would say, that only showed how far from logic he was. Two kataytikhe of the same family, melding so soon after one of them had performed an Affirmation. Sarek would be trans-Affirmed . . . or both of them would die.

Fascinating. He experienced no joy at the thought of rejoining tsaichrani. Why not? It should be worth his life to have the chance. Was not his life worthless as a Disaffirmed?

Worthless to whom? To Vulcans. But . . . Sarek was one of the principle proponents of the idea that other values might be as worthy as tsaichrani. In just the first months he had known Amanda, before there was any thought of marriage between them, her "intuitive logic" had shown him the way to persuade the Federation to accede to Vulcan's needs.

For the first time in his life, Sarek considered not simply the fact that there were other ways of thinking . . . but that he might adopt them. In all the days he had sat in that Romulan prison cell, knowing himself irrevocably Disaffirmed and waiting for Nature to put the logical end to his life, it had not occurred to him that he had any other choice.

Now, when surely he ought to see trans-Affirmation as the only possible course to pursue, now, suddenly he perceived a choice. Remaining Disaffirmed somehow seemed a viable alternative, perhaps as attractive as trans-Affirmation?

Why am I thinking this way? There is no other way of Life for a Vulcan.

Oh? he answered himself. And why not? Others, like T'Aniyeh, become a part of tsaichrani. Why cannot one born Vulcan become a part of another tradition?

Madness, he thought. It was well known that Vulcan children could not be adopted into other cultures. But I am not a child.

What am I?

He considered. It could be said that he had regressed in maturity--but that still left him physically, emotionally, and sexually mature. He ought to be able to function as well as any Vulcan who had not yet participated in his first Affirmation.

However, he knew what always happened to the Disaffirmed: eventually they went mad and died. Did he know that? He had never known anyone Disaffirmed, had never seen it happen. Were his wife Vulcan, he would face death at his next pon farr, for an Affirmed Vulcan wife would have the right to reject their bonding. But what of women? An Affirmed husband would reject his bonding with a Disaffirmed, and remarry. The shock of Disaffirmation, followed by the severing of one's closest relationship? That in itself . . . .

He remembered Amanda's theories that Vulcans, with their total bodily control, actually brought on much of the madness of pon farr themselves, because they believed they would go mad at that time. Although he had never admitted it to her, he thought she was at least partly right; for he, himself, had overcome the madness to speak . . . to win Amanda. He had heard that his son had managed also to speak through the blood fever, and T'Pau, who had been witness on both occasions, credited Spock's ability to his human blood.

That is illogical, Sarek realized for the first time. T'Pau is wrong. Either Spock inherited that ability from me, or it is inherent in every Vulcan, given sufficient provocation.

So . . . it appeared that Vulcans believed things about the madness of Pon Farr that would not stand examination in the light of fact. Perhaps they were wrong about the inevitability of madness among the Disaffirmed.

The question still remained, however: given the choice, why should he consider remaining Disaffirmed? It would mean leaving Vulcan, but he had spent many years on other planets and had little trouble adapting. It would mean leaving his work, but that would leave him free to do . . . anything he wanted! Almost anything. It would be a bit difficult to be a freelance diplomat.

One could, however, be a freelance journalist. Over the years, he had seen events in the Federation influenced as much by the news media as by politicians and diplomats. Sarek knew everyone, and what he might not understand in a given situation, Amanda would.

Would Amanda like that? Journalists, linking their names when they had just met, had almost made it impossible for Sarek to get to know her as he intended. Odd . . . he had never told her that. She ought to know that it was not merely the accident of their being caught in the anomalous Blooming that had made him want her for his wife. Oh, she knew that much. They had been good friends long before that day, despite the journalists. But what he had never told her was that he had begun to choose her that very first day she had appeared at his home, intending to confront T'Uriamne. Even Sarek found it difficult to meet T'Uriamne head on, despite the respect she owed him as her father . . . and there had come that small human woman, determined to tell a Daughter of the Tradition that she was a disruptive influence.

From that day, Amanda had remained a constant in the corner of Sarek's mind, not often in his thoughts, but never far from them. When he found her alone in the Interstellar Restaurant one night, the realization rose to the surface of his mind and he joined her, determined to find out what she truly was. He had felt at that moment as if a long, pleasant time stretched ahead of him . . . with her. He would speak with her, explore what he sensed was a keen mind, show her Vulcan, lead her gently to its philosophy, and eventually . . . .

The point his thoughts had reached by the time he had joined her at her table startled him. Drawing back, he began at the beginning, with her name. Miss Grayson. She bore the "Miss" proudly, although it signified she was unmarried, unchosen. "Grayson" was her father's name; it

told nothing of what she was herself, and Sarek knew nothing of her family. He would ask her soon--but it was not the point at which to begin. Thus far, her name yielded only the important fact that she was not committed permanently to another.

"Amanda", she supplied when he repeated the formal variation, seeking to find more in it than was there. The name her parents had chosen for her, on the other hand . . . .

Searching his mind for the proper references, he recalled that she was from Earth and spoke English as her native tongue. Not a Germanic name--something from the Romance languages. He had learned some Latin, because of the way that dead language cropped up in Federation legalities.

Then he recognized it. Her name meant "Beloved", or "worthy of being loved". That emotion was extremely important to humans--but Sarek did not comprehend it.

I didn't comprehend it then, thought Sarek, meditating on board the Halbird. I chose you logically, my wife, even though Nature forced the choice before I was ready to voice it to you.

Amanda, acting out of love, had gone into their marriage unprepared, unequipped with simple facts of Vulcan biology, Vulcan tradition. It was not a reasoned choice, but she had made it and stuck by her decision. Fortunately, they were able to talk to one another. She asked for what she wanted, and he gave it . . . all except love. He and his son had both disappointed her in that. Sarek could not comprehend the emotion, and Spock had to be raised in tsaichrani, so that it was equally foreign to him.

Sarek pondered that point. It was the one thing he could never give Amanda. She seemed to have accepted that. "I love you anyway", she would say lightly and change the subject.

She had taught him so many incomprehensible things. He recalled how bewildered he had been when she asked him to sleep in the same bed with her, despite the fact that he was sexually non-functional when not in pon farr. Their bonding, though, showed him her need for physical touch . . . and eventually, on those occasions when they were separated, he missed her small body curled up against his. He missed her now.

That was illogical. Everything he thought was illogical, and he didn't care. Amanda, if I knew, absolutely knew, that by remaining Disaffirmed I could learn to love you, there would be no choice. I would choose you over tsaichrani.

Heresy, too. Why was he even surprised? He had chosen her over tradition in the madness of pon farr, and never regretted it. Not for himself. For Spock, at times--yet now he knew that Spock had gained greater strength from growing up half human than he would have if he had been pure Vulcan.

The theft of the Kraith and the kidnapping of Sarek had left a void to be filled by someone of exceptional ability . . . and Spock, Amanda's son, had been there to fill it. Now the father of that son must fight down his own illogic and meld with Spock, to heal him for the future. Before he began the meld, however, he must decide whether he would accept the trans-Affirmation that the meld offered.

His thoughts were interrupted by the appearance of T'Aniyeh with a tray of food. He ate without thinking about it, trusting that T'Aniyeh would not poison him--and was half-way through the meal before it occurred to him that an Affirmed Vulcan might consider poison an act of mercy toward a Disaffirmed.

No--Sarek was needed to save Spock's life, and T'Aniyeh, her mind clear and logical after her recent Affirmation, would undoubtedly also have realized at once that the meld would give Sarek the opportunity to trans-Affirm. It would never cross her mind that he might reject the opportunity.

Am I mad? he wondered. He had made another Life Decision in a state of madness, and never regretted it. It had been right for Sarek . . . and right for Vulcan. The proof that he had chosen rightly lay before his eyes. The son he might have had with T'Kye would not have had the strength of Spock's dual heritage. Had there been no Spock . . . he needed no acasomy to construct the outcome of the theft of the Kraith: a rift in tsaichrani, possibly irrevocable.

How ironic! Sarek could very well say that he had done his duty to Vulcan by producing Spock. Did he have a higher duty now? There lay an interesting problem! Would tsaichrani thrive with Sarek within or without it? If I had five years, I could construct both models. But he didn't have five years. He had to decide now, knowing that Spock would never comprehend what his father felt just now. To be free. To lay the burdens he had carried all these years on Spock's shoulders, and T'Uriamne's. To have a perspective!

No, he wasn't mad. Suddenly he knew that without a doubt he was saner than he had ever been in his life. He found it difficult to concentrate? No wonder! The universe was no longer filtered through Vulcan tradition--his perceptions had expanded radically. He was like a child developing ESP--he would have to learn to control his choices, but at this moment having an infinite number was an overwhelming experience.

I can do anything I want to do.

From the distance of a hundred years, his grandfather's voice seemed to speak to him. "Yes, Sarek, any Vulcan can do anything he wants to do. Within tsaichrani, all he must learn is to control what it is he wants."

And all my life I've controlled what I wanted--except once.

Amanda again. She would understand. She would rejoice in his decision, in his return to her. I can love her now.

A fantasy rose in his mind--as easily, and from the same mechanism, as an extrapolation, but he knew quite well that the application was something entirely new in his experience. He indulged it shamelessly. He was home, walking alone up the steps to the front entry of D'R'Hiset. The doors opened, and Amanda stood framed there, small and elegant, concealing her concern as he approached.

He stopped a few feet from her, looking into her eyes, waiting. Would she accept him now? Her eyes swept over him, assessing him anxiously; he saw relief in them when she found no physical damage. Then, "Sarek", she murmured, "oh, my husband--welcome home!"

She stepped forward, properly offering her first two fingers for him to touch. But Sarek held out his hand, fingers spread, palm up. Hesitating only for a moment, Amanda placed her hand in his.

He drew her to him, there on the front step of his ancestral home, hugging her against him like a child seeking the physical presence of a sehlat as solace after harsh lessons.

But Amanda gave more than a physical presence. He felt her joyful surprise as her arms circled his waist. "Oh, Sarek", she said, "I was so afraid! So afraid they'd hurt you. But you're all right. You're home now. Oh, you're too thin--but I'll take care of you."

"I'm fine, Amanda", he replied. "Just happy to see you."

"Happy?" She pushed away, to look up into his face.

"Yes, happy! I know what it means, Amanda." He picked her up, carrying her inside. "The Dominance of Logic is gone; that's all. It has set me free to choose--and I choose to love you, my wife."

Her eyes were wide with astonishment. Sarek laughed at her. "I haven't gone mad. I'm simply finding my own way now. With you to help me."

"Oh, yes!" she replied, hugging him. He took the opportunity to kiss her, human-style, as she had taught him long ago in that first pon farr . . . .

The fantasy hung suspended, Sarek holding Amanda in his arms, standing in the hall, at the bottom of the great staircase, kissing her--it was a cliché scene, he recognized, from a hundred human stories. It would be fascinating to act it out. Amanda would be pleased, he thought. Unfortunately, that was not the end of the scene. The hero was supposed to carry the heroine up those stairs to a sumptuously appointed bedroom, where he would make love to her.

Slight error in calculation, Sarek told himself wryly. Why had his mind turned up that particular fantasy? To warn him that Amanda had adjusted to him as a Vulcan, and might not adapt readily if he changed? It was his mind doing the fantasizing, though. Where was he going with that scene?

A most unVulcan thought occurred to him: I do have total conscious control of every part of my body.

It was a shocking thought. Sarek savored it. He also had selective memory; he could call up the feelings of . . . .

Incredible the ways in which his mind twisted now! Logic applied on a much larger scope that he had ever before considered.

Deliberately, he turned his mind from his fantasy. He did not have time not to indulge in such extrapolations--sufficient that he had discovered a possibility that would open new worlds to him . . . to Amanda.

He was left once more with the basic question. Forget Amanda. Forget his own desires. He must apply his mind to the question of which would be better for tsaichrani.

Or for the Federation.

That thought had been long on his mind: did not Vulcan owe something to a higher order than itself? All life was to be respected, intelligent life revered. He did not believe that the infinite diversity of Federation races could destroy tsaichrani; he had never believed it.

Suppose . . . he were to remain Disaffirmed, and go forth to live among the other races of the Federation? Becoming a journalist would facilitate that, and would give him a voice within the Federation. He was respected. Everyone would listen to him except Vulcans.

He would have more than half a century to learn what it meant to view the universe through eyes uninfluenced by Vulcan tradition. Then . . . at the next Affirmation . . . .

Theoretically it was possible. Historically, no Exile had ever survived to be Reaffirmed--not with Vulcan the only place he could live, with his family cutting themselves off from him, with people greeting him on every side with "May you not live long and prosper."

Now, however, the Federation provided hope for the Disaffirmed. There were others of this Cycle, he was certain--star travel would inevitably mean Exiles in every Cycle. Vulcan sought to close in upon herself, maintaining tsaichrani at the expense of change, of growth. That way lay death. Had Sarek succeeded in keeping Spock on Vulcan his son would not have had the adaptability to perform the Affirmation, and the First Realm would have ended with his death or Disaffirmation.

Sarek wondered if Spock could understand. Another irony! Father and son had parted in bitterness at Spock's decision to join Star Fleet. Could Spock now comprehend his father's decision to remain apart from tradition--to remove himself across a far more impenetrable void than the reaches of space?

With that, he knew he had made his decision. For Amanda? No, although she was the symbol of the world beyond Vulcan that Sarek would now enter, a world with tradition as valid as tsaichrani.

For a few moments yet, he sat savoring the idea. It was right. Nevertheless, it could become academic.

He had to save Spock's life. Without Spock to carry on the First Realm in Sarek's absence--without Spock as an accepted spokesman for the Federation now that Sarek was unacceptable to Vulcan--Stovam and T'Uriamne would convince all Vulcan to remove itself from the Federation . . . to close itself to growth, and ultimately die.

In melding with Spock, Sarek might not be able to avoid trans-Affirming. The unfettered vision he had glimpsed so fleetingly might be closed to him forever. But at all costs, Spock must live. Possibly . . . if Sarek could not live his vision, he could pass it to Spock . . . or to his grandchildren.

His decision made, he rose and went to Spock's side. The concentration exercises came easily. Placing his hands properly, he began the meld.





# **OPERATING MANUAL**

**Anna Mary Hall**

# kraith III E

McCoy flicked off the viewer and climbed wearily to his feet. He yawned, then stretched to ease cramped muscles. Every entry was up to date, he thought with satisfaction. He could start this voyage with a clear conscience. And he shouldn't have to look at another record until their first stop.

He stepped out of his office into the dimly lit nighttime corridor and turned toward the rec room, then paused at the sound of footsteps. There were only two people on board who walked with a tread so firm you felt every step had been carefully considered. She had to be headed for sickbay.

"Good evening, Tanya," he said as she came to a precise halt in front of him.

The infinitesimal movement of her head might have been an answering nod. "Commander Spock asked that I deliver your copy of the scheduled stops for this quadrant." She dropped the tape in his hand, wheeled smartly, and returned the way she had come.

"Thanks," McCoy muttered at her retreating back. He juggled the tape in his hand and considered. He could look at it now, or wait until morning. With a sigh of resignation he turned back to his office. He dropped the tape in the slot, fixed himself a small drink--a reward for his devotion to duty--and settled down to see what problems the medical department could expect.

The first five entries were routine, but the sixth brought a smile to his face. The mere name evoked pleasant memories. Not that the planet was remarkable; it was an ordinary Class M, hotter and drier than Earth, cooler and wetter than Vulcan. Since no intelligent life had been found, it had been opened to Federation settlers.

Fireside had no great stores of minerals to lure miners, but two groups of farmers decided it filled their needs. Along the coast of one of the seas a small human settlement had taken root and was prospering. In the hotter, drier interior a group of Vulcan agronomists had located territory suitable for the testing of cold-resistant hybrid grains they were developing.

Three times the Enterprise had been the Starship that made the yearly check on their health. McCoy had found the humans congenial companions, always pleased to see new faces. And the planet was a great place to stretch your legs and breathe fresh air.

McCoy chuckled gleefully. When they had been there sixteen months ago, five of the women had been pregnant. He should have a fine selection of babies to examine this trip.

A faint alarm bell began to ring in his mind. Sixteen months? That was either too long, or too short. He turned back to the tape and sat in stunned silence while the terse report spelled out the disastrous chain of events that had taken the lives of all sixteen adult humans. The five babies, the youngest only a month old, had been saved. The Vulcans had filed the report and informed the authorities that they would care for the children until other arrangements could be made. That eased his heartsickness. There were no more conscientious people in the Federation; the children would be well cared for.

McCoy skimmed the remainder of the schedule, then headed for bed, grateful that he had the night to adjust before facing more work. As he prepared for sleep he wondered if Spock had had that in mind when he sent the tape at such an unlikely hour. He snorted. Spock would claim he'd done it that way in order not to reduce McCoy's efficiency during working hours.

The children were still on his mind next morning. He had learned to put aside problems he could do nothing about. There was nothing he could do for the children except have his department ready to care for them, yet they plagued his thoughts all morning. He finally went back to the report to try and find what was worrying him.

The tape was starting for the third time when Christine interrupted with a report for him to sign. He turned back to the viewer in time to see the date on the report--a date eight months old. McCoy whirled to stare at the door that had just swished shut behind Christine--and knew what was wrong.

An attempt to prove or disprove his fears kept him busy checking tapes--ancient medical data, modern child-rearing manuals, one Starfleet personnel record--for the rest of the day.

The information he found confirmed his fears.

McCoy brooded over his knowledge for a few days before he decided to tell the captain. There was nothing to be done about it, but if the worst happened Kirk would want to know why he hadn't been told ahead of time.

Kirk and Spock were finishing lunch when McCoy came in. He got a cup of coffee and sat down at their table.

Kirk almost smiled. He had wondered how long Bones would worry his problem before passing it on. "What's the trouble, Bones?"

"You saw the report from Fireside?" Kirk nodded, and McCoy continued, "I'm worried about those children."

One of Spock's eyebrows slipped upwards.

"Bones, the Vulcans said they would care for them!" Kirk exclaimed.

McCoy nodded.

Spock, aware of McCoy's very real distress, added, "They will care for the human children as carefully as they would for their own."

McCoy nodded again. "That's exactly what I'm afraid of--as they would care for their own. That kind of treatment can kill a human child."

"Doctor, they will receive the best of treatment," Spock stated flatly.

"The best of Vulcan treatment," McCoy corrected softly. "I watched the way you and Lt. Minos handled the Vulcan children. Human babies have to be held, cuddled, played with. It is essential for their survival."

"Bones, are you sure?"

"I wasn't, so I checked some historical tapes. Infants in foundling homes, institutions where orphans or unwanted children were cared for, had a much higher death rate than babies cared for in homes. The deaths were finally traced to one factor. The babies in the institutions did not receive as much 'stroking'. They died of marasmus."

"This fact became so well-known," McCoy added bitterly, "that standard manuals on raising children don't mention it. 'Everyone' knows you have to hold children a lot. As long as 'everyone' is human."

"Then how do you explain Lt. Minos?" Kirk asked.

"Oh, the children don't always die, Jim. Sometimes there just isn't any emotional growth. Tanya doesn't exhibit normal human emotional patterns. Besides, she was four when she was adopted by her Vulcan parents. By that age the security they offered was enough to sustain her."

"The oldest child on Fireside was thirteen months old when the accident occurred," Spock said.

"Would it do any good to skip the intervening stops and go straight there?" Kirk inquired.

McCoy gently swirled the coffee in his cup. "No. The critical period has already passed, months ago. Either the Vulcans discovered what was wrong, or the damage was done long ago."

"Logically...."

"That's the problem, Spock!" McCoy almost shouted. He got his voice under control and continued, "It's knowledge that must come from the heart, not the brain, and you've... decommissioned your hearts."

"I beg to differ with you, Doctor...."

"Gentlemen, please," cautioned Kirk. McCoy's raised voice had attracted attention.

Spock disregarded Kirk's admonition. "Captain, the point should be clarified in the Doctor's mind--the treatment that comes from the human heart would be as deadly to Vulcan infants as normal Vulcan treatment would be to humans. The Vulcan heart is not decommissioned, Doctor, it's range of sensitivity is merely different, and always has been. This is something that the Vulcans on Fireside are acutely aware of...and they will allow for it. You have nothing to fear on that account."

Engineer T'Eeba stood at the door of the bright sunlit room and admitted to herself that she was failing. The human infants had been in her care for sixty days. Today she had taken the monthly growth and developmental measurements to continue the charts begun by proud parents. What had been a tendency too slight to be of significance thirty days ago was now a well developed trend. Growth, in any form that could be measured, was not taking place at the expected rate.

She moved slyly into the nursery, a duplicate of the one at the human settlement. They had deemed it advisable to provide air conditioning for the children as the summer advanced, even though for Vulcan taste it was still wet and chilly. All five of her charges were asleep, a once rare occurrence she had looked forward to, enjoying the quiet it brought on both the physical and mental levels. Now she suspected it to be another sign of her failure.

With the data fresh in her mind she studied each child. Three month old Mary Jane had been the largest and most vigorous of the children at birth. In the last thirty days she had gained only half the average amount the others had during a similar interval. The story was much the same





for Brian, Capella, and Naftale. Fred, at fifteen months, seemed most affected. He had not just failed to gain weight, but had lost three pounds. What seemed even more serious to her, sixty days ago he had been making determined, if unintelligible, efforts to talk. Now the only sounds he made were cries when he was hungry, or wet, or dirty, or....

T'Eeba sighed. If she could complete that sentence there would be no problem.

She stepped back through the air curtain into her office. With her daily thought that this work would be consigned to a computer as soon as they could afford one, she started work on her supply and maintenance lists.

In the other room Capella whimpered softly. T'Eeba moved quickly to her crib, but she was not awake. T'Eeba returned to her work without touching the child. She sat back down at her desk, but did not return to the lists. They concerned only machines, and she was feeling the burden of a greater responsibility.

For the third time she reviewed the steps that had been taken. There must be something she hadn't tried.

They had been on their way to aid the humans five minutes after receiving the call. They had arrived in time to ease the dying of the last four adults with their promise of care for the children. They had gathered the children, all data pertaining to them, all the artifacts that might be associated with them, all of the food supplies, and returned here. The data had been divided and read or listened to immediately, so no mistakes in care would be made. Complete directions for the children's care seemed to be laid out in the manuals. What to feed, when to feed it, what degree of cleanliness to maintain, ailments that might develop and how to treat them--all these were covered in the manuals.

Since all members of their group were equally ignorant of human children, she was chosen as their nurse. Much of her work was normally done around the buildings where her tools were handy. She could care for the children and still carry on her normal routine. Broken field machines could be brought to her, or someone else could watch the children if she had to go to a machine.

T'Eeba had found her task unexpectedly difficult. She had an unusually strong telepathic ability, and a weak shield. Everytime she touched the children she was exposed to their emotions, the sharp emotions of childhood, unblunted by experience or reason.

She had adjusted, working out arrangements that allowed her to minister to the needs of the children with a minimum of physical contact. At every opportunity she retreated to the nonthinking, unfeeling companionship of her machines.

A month ago she had begun to suspect the arrangement was not working. Today's tests had given concrete proof of her failure, and she could not find the fault in what she was doing.

"Fear not your ignorance of the universe; rather strive to enlarge it, for to know that one knows-not is also wealth incomparable," she muttered to herself. It was time she sought help, she decided. Tonight, after the meal, she would lay her problem before her colleagues. Sure now of her next step, she returned to the routine work.

T'Eeba laid aside the last chart. "You now have all the information I can give you. Has anyone a suggestion for further action?"

A thoughtful silence lasted for several minutes before Smoov, the co-ordinator of the group, asked, "Could there be something on the tapes, or in the books, that was misinterpreted?"

"No," T'Eeba stated confidently. "The directions are simple and clear. I have been following them correctly."

"Could something have been left out of the manuals?" Smedle asked, thinking that they might as well get all the obvious questions out of the way immediately.

"I considered that possibility," T'Eeba remarked. "However, I can see no logic in omitting information, especially as it seems to be vital to the infants' welfare. Their parents were having success using the same set of instructions."

Smedle closed his eyes momentarily, then gently chided his bondsmate, "They are not pieces of machinery, T'Eeba."

T'Eeba's chin went up slightly as she answered. "And yet, allowing for a greater latitude of individual differences within certain specified areas, they react much as a machine would."

She considered her statement, then turned to Smoov. "If there is any possibility that it is some lack in me that is causing the trouble, the children should be put in someone else's care."

Smoov looked around the table. "All of us have assisted you when there was need. Your care seemed proper and complete. The logic that dictated your choice at the beginning still applies."

"Smedle might be able to help," T'Volath asserted. She swiveled to face him. "During the trip we made to Haven in late winter you had to wait for me. Didn't you spend the time talking to one of their biologists, in her home, where she was caring for her small baby?"

"I was there only one hour fifty-three minutes," Smedle protested. "The child slept part of that time, too," he recalled, as he considered the event.

"Recall all you can of what happened," Smoov ordered. "Then observe T'Eeba with the children. Perhaps you will notice some difference. The schedules can be rearranged to free you tomorrow."

Smedle watched silently until the children had finished breakfast. He noted, but did not comment on, T'Eeba's grimace as she picked up Capella. Capella was standing in a playpen screaming. She was wet and had had to wait until Mary Jane finished her bottle to be changed. T'Eeba talked to her all the time the diaper was being changed, explaining why she'd had to wait. Capella was sniffing softly by the time the procedure was finished. As soon as she was stood back in the pen she began screaming.

"Her mother sang to her," Smedle commented.

"What song?" T'Eeba inquired.

"The words are unimportant," he said, obviously quoting. "The tone of voice is more important, and the fact she is receiving attention."

T'Eeba squatted down by the playpen and sang, "Hand me one of those books of nursery rhymes. The red one has music with it."

Five minutes later Capella had stopped screaming and was hiccupping loudly. T'Eeba picked her up, gave her a drink of water, and put her down as soon as the hiccups stopped.

"Her mother held her more."

"Her mother had only one child," T'Eeba said in a tone of voice that accused Smedle of stupidity.

His eyebrows rose as he continued. "She was busy when I was there. She was talking to me, finishing the analysis of a fruit, fixing a meal, and caring for the child. Yet, anytime she picked up the child she ended up cuddling her before putting her down."

"I can not do it, Smedle." T'Eeba faced him, chin high. "We seldom speak of it, but you know I have great difficulty blocking out the thoughts and...and feelings of others. It doesn't matter with other adults; their shields are up. Vulcan children are calm and controlled in the presence of an adult."

She gestured toward the children. "Smedle, I can sense their emotions even without touching. They are as strong as the vocal cries." Her voice was steady, but the strain showed just a bit around her eyes, and she averted her face to avoid communicating anything more than that fact to him. "When I hold one of them, the flow of their unstructured, uninterpreted impressions confuses my thinking...almost as if the emotions were my own."

Fred dropped the toy he was playing with. T'Eeba automatically bent and picked it up, glad to have an excuse to move away from Smedle. The strain of the last two months had left her ability to prevent projection of emotions far beneath her own substandard norms.

She returned the object to the boy, and as she did so, he reached out and grabbed her hand. "I won't take it away, Fred," she said, sinking to her knees beside his crib. For a moment, her face registered a profound grief. "A sadness, discontent, abandonment!" she said, turning to Smedle as grief gave way to shock and alarm. "An ebbing will to live! Smedle, that wasn't there before, it wasn't! What have I done!"

She knelt there, holding Fred's hand until the child began to whimper. Breaking out of his own shock, Smedle moved to her side and gently disengaged her hand from the boy's. Raising her to her feet, he held both her hands between his as if warming them from frostbite. "The calm of inward being flows outward to thy charges giving them the will to live."

"So it is with a Vulcan, Smedle, but I have failed him somehow."

"A child lives in a universe he cannot comprehend or control. It is not an inviting universe. But when he sees that you control it, and that you are like him, then he sees himself gaining control of his own destiny. All sentients live by controlling their environments--even humans." As he spoke, he led her out through the air-curtain and pushed her down into her chair at her desk.

When she looked up at him, she took a deep breath and said, "Thank you."

He nodded and let her meditate until she could bear to speak. He could see she was badly shaken, and that in itself was (to his way of thinking) detrimental to the children. At length she raised her eyes to meet his squarely, but the urgency behind her words turned her voice ragged. "We have to do something soon."

Smedle nodded. "Was that the first time you ever deliberately tried to sense his thoughts?"

"Yes, I've always maintained what block I could before."

"Ignoring the emotions, tell me what was in his mind," Smedle ordered.

She began hesitantly, unsure of what he wanted. "Impressions, mostly blurry, of what he's seen, heard, touched, smelled, and tasted. He's beginning to understand cause and effect relationships."

"What was the clearest, strongest?"

"The tactile memories," she said immediately.

"Then that is the way his distress can be most easily alleviated," Smedle observed. "He will have to be touched, and held, and cuddled until he know he has not been abandoned, until he knows beneath verbal levels that his universe is under his control through you."

Seeing T'Eeba's unsuccessful attempt to mask her distress he asked, "Would you let him die?"

"No! But it is going to be...difficult for me. If I do not admit this to myself it will be even harder."

"May I help you, wife-to-be?"

T'Eeba looked up to see him standing beside her, two fingers extended. Gratefully she laid her fingers upon his. They remained that way until her face returned to its habitual serenity.

"How will you go about it?" Smedle asked as she started toward the nursery.

"The way I would any other experiment. Frank will get all the cuddling possible while the others receive the same treatment they have been. If he improves the cuddling will be extended to them." She paused thoughtfully and turned back to Smedle. "It will help if you care for the other four today and allow me to handle only Frank."

She glanced around the nursery. There would have to be some changes made. As a beginning she turned the air conditioning almost off. "If I'm to touch them often, they'll have to move around the buildings with me."

Drawing a deep breath she stepped to Frank's crib where he was listlessly playing with a toy. He looked soberly at her as she stood above him, but made no move to help as she picked him up.

It was a secure hold, but something was lacking, Smedle decided. "Hold him against your body as though you were seeking to warm him with your body's heat," he advised.

Frank drew back momentarily at the touch of the hot skin, then snuggled against her shoulder.

T'Eeba, following her usual routine, switched the nursery's communications on automatic. She would be able to hear a cry anywhere she was working in the complex of buildings. With the viewer she could check to see if the disturbance warranted her presence. Smedle used it twice to ask the location of needed supplies.

T'Eeba kept Frank with her all day. She carried him from job to job, or took his hand and let him walk. When he fell asleep he was placed close by on a soft pad, and moved, pad and all, to the next location.

Frank accepted the attention passively, neither rejecting nor responding to it. The second day he followed T'Eeba with his eyes any time she moved from his side. The third morning he stood up when she started toward his crib and reached for her. That night he patted her cheek and said very softly, "Mommy."

T'Eeba drew heavily on Smedle's strength the next few days as she extended the treatment to the other children. For four days she coped with the problem, then a shared surge of rage caused her to throw a tool at a recalcitrant machine she was trying to fix.

She admitted to herself it could have been a living thing at which she threw the tool. For that instant she had been completely at the mercy of the emotion she was picking up.

The children were safe where they were for the moment. She retreated to the communications panel and called Smoov from the field.

He returned to find T'Eeba pacing the courtyard with her surface serenity regained. He listened to her explanations as they moved indoors and took seats in his office. When she finished he commented, "You should have come to me sooner, nathu. I assumed you had discovered for yourself...." He tried another beginning, "If you were older, the trouble would never have arisen." T'Eeba gazed at him in complete bewilderment. "You have been fighting the emotions, striving to shut them out. This you cannot do. At the...the time of pon farr Smedle's emotions will rage. Will you seek to shut him out?"

T'Eeba stiffened in embarrassment, then relaxed as Smoov continued more formally. "Thee has been taught what thee will need to know at the time of pon farr. Search thy mind, nathu. Thee has been asked to fill the role of Mother. It is fitting to draw these sleeping memories upward now."

She steepled her fingers and concentrated. After a few minutes her rigid form relaxed and she looked across at him, still slightly confused. "It sounds so simple. I simply accept and channel."

"Some problems do have simple answers, T'Eeba. The emotions may still be unpleasant," he warned, "but they will no longer confuse your thoughts."

Smoov sat quietly for a minute and then commented, "If you have no other problems, I am behind in my field work and should return to it."

"There is one other thing," T'Eeba decided as he rose from his chair. "I have completed the repairs on the cultivator. If you take it back it would be in place for T'Volath to begin work on the upper field at first light."

McCoy stood beside the captain's chair and suppressed the urge to demand they hurry up and get it over with. He had waited this long; he could stand a few more hours. He checked the movement of his hand toward Kirk's shoulder.

Without acknowledging that he was aware of the gesture Kirk inquired, "What's our ETA, Sulu?"

Sulu glanced at the chronometer. "Two hours, ten minutes to orbit, sir."

"Thanks, Jim." McCoy left the bridge and went back to sickbay, determined to find something to work on. Once there the reason he had fled before returned full force. All he could remember was the efficient, sterile care Spock and Tanya had given the Vulcan children.

With a shudder he turned to leave and almost tripped over Christine. He realized she had been trailing around behind him ever since he had entered the door. Beneath her usual calm exterior she seemed nervous as she handed him an official form.

"This was delivered just after you went to the bridge," she explained.

McCoy read it, glared at everyone in sight, and stomped out.

Lt. Johnson was sitting peacefully at the Security duty desk reading a report when the door flew open. He bounced to his feet to find he was facing an angry Dr. McCoy.

"The First Officer has notified me that if I do not put in an hour and a half of unarmed combat drill he will not authorize me to leave the vessel on any landing parties," McCoy said icily. "Come on."

"Yes, sir," Johnson responded automatically. He called Kraus to take the desk and followed McCoy to the gym, swearing silently. Instructing McCoy in unarmed drill was like trying to shape plastic putty. As soon as you turned loose it assumed its old form. If you did succeed in teaching him something he applied it with all the verve of a three-toed sloth.

When they were ready to commence Johnson began in a martyred tone, "You attack and I'll defend..." when he realized he was lying on the mat. He rolled in time to avoid McCoy's next attack.

Halfway through the drill McCoy realized he was working off hostility. He spent the rest of the time--to the detriment of his fighting--diagnosing it as a grudge against the universe in general for being so unforgiving of mistakes. Still, Lt. Johnson was happy as he limped back to the Security ready room. He had the bruises to support his claim that their work with Dr. McCoy hadn't been useless.

McCoy, relaxed and calm, re-entered the bridge ten minutes before the Enterprise was due to make orbit. "Doctor," Uhura reported, "I've already talked to Engineer T'Eeba. She reports that all the children are healthy."

McCoy nodded his thanks, but the somber cast of his face did not change. He doubted that a Vulcan engineer would recognize a healthy child when she saw one.

He stood behind Kirk's chair and forced himself to concentrate on details. He watched Sulu, in one smooth operation, place the ship in a perfect orbit directly above their objective, all without any last second call for powered maneuvers.

"Landing party to the transporter room," Uhura announced, then watched the bridge personnel readjust as Kirk, Spock, and McCoy entered the elevator.

McCoy surveyed the dry barren-looking landscape reluctantly. As he turned to face the buildings he saw a sight that dispelled his fears.

A slender woman of Vulcan was walking toward them. A baby--eight or nine months old--was casually balanced on her right hip. The baby was doing most of the work maintaining her position with a one-handed grip on T'Eeba's clothing and squeezing with her legs. The other hand was also busy. It was gently pulling one strand after another of the high-piled black hair free of its restraints.

A brown-skinned little boy trailed from T'Eeba's other hand. He was stretching his legs to keep up with her shortened strides. She spoke to him. He looked up and waved at the visitors.

Because T'Eeba expected it, McCoy ran tests and examined the charts she had kept. The data confirmed his first impression: the children were in perfect physical and mental health. He looked up from the last chart and asked, "How did you do it?"

"I am an engineer, Doctor. I followed the manuals," T'Eeba explained.

"The manuals are incomplete. How did you meet the human needs of these children?"

T'Eeba considered briefly. "I adapted," she said.

McCoy stopped questioning her. Her answers were of the uninformative type Spock gave when he did not wish to discuss a subject. "Your recognition of the children's needs is to be commended. I hope the experience was of use to you."

The doctor's comment surprised T'Eeba. It could have been made by a Vulcan. "I learned from it, Doctor, and knowledge is always useful. I had not known before that human emotions were necessary to their survival."

Behind a blank face McCoy considered several ways that statement could be taken. He reminded himself that he was talking to a Vulcan and limited his reply to a noncommittal, "Yes."

Kirk stuck his head in the door. "We're ready to go, if you are, Doctor."

When they reached the beam down point T'Eeba handed Mary Jane, who had fallen asleep in her arms, to the nearest person. The nearest person was Spock. He held the sleeping child the same way he would have held a sack of fragile supplies.

With a gesture of disapproval, T'Eeba intervened. "Not that way. Her mind cannot touch yours. She must obtain her sense of security through the way you hold her."

Spock silently complied with her directions until he turned the baby over to a nurse in sickbay.

"Why wouldn't you do that with Leonard James Akaar?" McCoy demanded.

Spock raised one eyebrow. "You neglected to explain the purpose of the maneuver, Doctor. I didn't understand what it was I was attempting to accomplish."



Kirk went to sickbay as often as possible during the next few days. At first he thought it was his imagination, but soon it was too pronounced to miss. The medical personnel were tired, glum, and footsore, with one very evident exception. McCoy was as happy as a lark and perky as a new puppy.

Bouncing a laughing Mary Jane in his arms, Kirk cornered McCoy in his office and asked, "Bones, what is going on?"

McCoy faced him for a few seconds with his best I-don't-have-the-faintest-idea-of-what-you're-talking-about-Captain expression on his face. Then he relented. With a grin he said, "I can explain to you, Jim. You know how worried I was. You understand the relief, the joy, I felt when we found the Vulcans had managed beautifully. Having worked with Spock as your First Officer for so long, you will also, I trust, understand my glee when I realized they hadn't done a perfect job."

Kirk looked shocked and McCoy explained quickly, "The children are all right. There is nothing wrong a little retraining won't correct. But right now, these kids are the most spoiled brats in the galaxy!"

# Three Steps Behind Him

Eileen Roy

kraith-a1

"I don't know how you can do it," Uhura said frankly.

"You've got it quite backward, you know." Amanda smiled gently. She could remember her first reaction to the custom, when her marriage was only a few weeks old.

"Sarek!" she had exclaimed, coming in the door. "I just now saw a Vulcan woman walking three steps behind her companion like a Chinese coolie!"

"That would be Saln and Turu," he said--surely she imagined the trace of wistfulness in his voice? "They have been Bonded many years."

"How can she stand to be so subservient, to act like his property instead of his wife?"

"His pro-- Amanda," he turned to face her, looking taken aback, "on Vulcan females are not property. They bring forth and nurture life, they assuage burning madness with their presence. They are the most efficient at locating water, the surest in determining safe paths through desert sands, the sanest council in times of peace, the deadliest warriors when peace has fled. Males," he said dispassionately, "possess the strong bodies and feeble minds. Or so it was held in the time of the Ancients, when male consorts were traded like prize *tupin*."

Amanda's eyes were focused, squinting a little with firece concentration--trying to see into such a different past and culture. "And now?"

"Men have been granted equality, of course, for many centuries in law and custom. Memory lingers, and some few of the traditions. For a woman to trust her life, the fore-testing of her path, the protection of her person and the sifting of superfluties from her consideration to a 'mere male', he must be favored highly. Few have ever been so honored."

Amanda could see it, intellectually; she could trace the reasoning and even extrapolate what Turu's choice might have meant to Saln. But she could not feel it. Her own cultural teachings and assumptions stepped in firmly to bar the way to any sure understanding. She could never do it. It was just too alien. She changed the subject.

"Will you come out to the garden, my Husband? The moonlight is so beautiful."

He stepped to her side, a little reluctantly, and touched her fingers with his own. "T'Kuht is a planet in its own right, Amanda, and not a moon. And I fail to see why you should regard light that has merely been reflected, polarized, and reduced in intensity as 'beautiful'."

She sighed and chuckled at the same time. "Don't worry about it. I love you anyway."

He didn't back away, but he didn't move closer, and his eyes were simply bewildered. "Amanda, I do not comprehend."

This time she merely sighed. "Never mind . . ."

Uhura was waiting, one eyebrow cocked, for some further explanation, but Sarek had just now appeared through the doorway. She excused herself and crossed to meet him, their fingers touching. Sarek had learned, grown, so very much in the years they had been together. She smiled up at him. "How did the examination go?"

His eyes smiled back at her, as he replied in Vulcan. "Dr. McCoy has pronounced me fit to resume all normal activities. So-- the observation deck is deserted at this time, I have found, and the stars shine in their glory like heralds of light, beacons of beauty. Will you come, beloved?"

"I rejoice in our differences" was so easy to say, so hard to mean. Sarek was the only Vulcan Amanda had ever met who had been able to live up to all that tenent of Vulcan philosophy implied. He had turly been able to adopt the best that Earth had to offer. And therefore he was not only a better person, with more resources, knowledge, cultural riches open to him, but a better Vulcan. He had transcended the gap. All of this was in her eyes as she looked at him. "Of course."

She told Uhura, "I'll try and explain later," and left the room with her husband, walking, head-high and with the very essence of pride-- three steps behind him.

# A House Divided

Linda Deneroff &

Frances Zawacky



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# kraith III

CAPTAIN'S LOG: Stardate 7717.1. The Enterprise is enroute to Darian, a planet in the Aldebaran system where synthetic dilithium crystals have been developed and are now being tested. Starfleet is extremely interested in this breakthrough and, pending the outcome, is prepared to fund further research. We have been ordered to be on hand for the preliminary series of tests, to render any assistance necessary, and, of course, to keep Starfleet informed. If these experiments prove successful, the Federation will have an additional power supply. There will be less reliance upon the present sources. In time, the substitute might even replace dilithium altogether.

All bridge personnel were at their posts. The Enterprise had contacted the local space authorities and been assigned an orbit around Darian, a cool blue world faintly reminiscent of Earth. The planet had first been opened to colonization a hundred years ago. Its temperate climate and pleasant environment had resulted in the slow but steady growth of the population. In fact, the Starfleet demographics had noted that a high percentage of the immigrants in recent years were professionals, scientists, and engineers.

The ship was humming with activity and an air of expectation subtly penetrated its atmosphere. Jim Kirk, lightly tanned from a recent shoreleave, sat in his command chair and surveyed the bridge. He turned to his Communications Officer. "Open a channel to a Mr. Edward Grayson, Lieutenant. Grayson Chemicals, Ltd. has offices in Ralos."

Scotty's interest in the dilithium substitute brought him down into the well of the bridge. "I'd like to meet the developer of DS-249," he said quietly.

"You may get the chance." Kirk smiled. His engineer's enthusiasm for anything even promising to improve "his" engines was well-known.

"Mr. Grayson, sir," Uhura interrupted.

The main viewing screen lit up with the face of a man who appeared to be in his late fifties or early sixties, though Kirk would have hesitated to make a more exact guess. He was seated behind a desk in a room deliberately utilitarian and well organized.

"Mr. Grayson," the Captain greeted the image of the screen. "This is Captain James Kirk of the U.S.S. Enterprise."

"Good afternoon, Captain. We've been expecting you." His piercing brown eyes studied the younger man's face.

"Starfleet is very much interested in your discovery, Mr. Grayson."

"That's very kind of Starfleet, Captain." Grayson smiled, but his eyes did not soften. "I was sure they would send observers." Somewhat more cordially he asked, "When will you be beaming down?"

"I understood that the test is scheduled for tomorrow morning."

"That's correct." Grayson paused, lost in thought for a moment. "Why don't you and your senior officers beam down to my home for dinner tonight? We can combine that with an informal briefing on the drone's flight tomorrow."

"Thank you, Mr. Grayson." Kirk accepted the invitation immediately. "We'd be delighted. In fact, I have an Engineering Officer who couldn't be kept away."

"Fine. I'll be expecting you."

The viewscreen went blank and Jim Kirk turned to his left. "For once, Mr. Scott, I believe we have a rather pleasant assignment. And, if everything goes smoothly, you'll have a new 'toy' for the engine room."

"Aye, Captain." Scotty's eyes gleamed with anticipation, though he wasn't sure he shared the Captain's optimism.

"Mr. Sulu," the Captain rose from his seat, "you have the con." Kirk stepped into the turbo-lift, absently murmured "Deck five", and smiled slightly, thinking of the pleasant evening ahead. At the appointed time he joined his three senior officers in the Transporter Room to beam down to the Grayson residence.

They materialized on a lawn in front of Grayson's house. The house was located in a suburb of Ralos and was a recreation of a "small" Victorian cottage surrounded by extensive, well-kept grounds.

Their host was at the door to greet them. The Captain introduced his senior officers-- Grayson seemed a bit non-plussed upon seeing Mr. Spock. He recovered quickly, but not fast enough to hide it from Kirk or the Vulcan. "Good evening, gentlemen. Come in, please." He led them into a spacious room where a man and a woman were engaged in a spirited conversation. Both were in their early thirties though, again, Kirk would not hazard an exact guess. The man was tall, clean-shaven, and slender. He had light brown hair and his hazel eyes were set deeply into a ruggedly handsome face. His clothes were casual, but obviously well cut.

The woman was of medium height. Her sandy brown hair was a mass of curls lightly touching her shoulders. She didn't need what little make-up she was wearing and her russet pants-suit framed her figure to perfection. Kirk caught an impish grin and even from a distance she seemed to radiate a feeling of exuberance which left an overall impression of warmth.

Upon seeing Grayson's guests, they rose.

"May I present my daughter, Sharon, and my son-in-law, Marc Stadler."

"How do you do," the Captain replied courteously, and introduced his fellow officers. They sat down. The Enterprise men had a chance to look around. They were in a spacious room filled with many heirlooms that obviously had been brought from Earth--a curious yet pleasant blending of the old and new, for the house was equipped with all the modern conveniences the import quotas would allow. In the corner was a long table laden with different foods.

"Dad did the cooking," Sharon announced. "Mother died almost ten years ago and for the past six he's fancied himself something of a chef. If it weren't for modern kitchens, he'd be helpless." She smiled, indicating it was an old family joke. "Actually, he's not bad," she admitted.

"Thank you, my dear," Grayson replied. "In fact, I'm a better cook than she is," he said to the others, "but she'll never admit it." He led the way to the table. "Help yourselves, gentlemen."

Light conversation continued all through dinner, and when it was over and the dishes disposed of, Scotty found himself talking shop with Grayson while Sharon and Marc mingled with the others.

Kirk was mixing himself a drink when Sharon came over to him. The idea of travel had always intrigued her. "Captain, what is it like? Living and working on a starship?"

The Captain filled both their glasses before he replied, "Do you have all week?" He smiled.

"No, not really."

"Well, it would take that long to describe."

"It must be exciting."

"It's always different. Being on hand for an experiment, such as the one your father is preparing for tomorrow, is only a small part."

"And how many worlds have you been to, Captain?"

He thought for a moment. For a short second his brow creased, but he said simply, "I've lost count."

"We must seem so provincial to you. Do you know, I've never been off-planet, and I haven't seen much of this one either. But one day I'll travel," she said with such determination that he believed her.

"And where would you like to go?" he asked quietly.

"I don't know exactly. I think I'd start somewhere where I know people."

"That's a good idea. You have relatives elsewhere?"

"On Earth. But I don't think I want to go there, after what I've heard."

"It's not as bad as people make it out to be, you know.--But you haven't answered my question."

Sharon thought for a moment. She glanced over at Spock who was talking to Marc. "I know." Her voice took on a conspiratorial tone. "Dad once said he had a sister somewhere on Vulcan, but then he never mentioned her again. Maybe I can convince Marc to go there and we can look her up." She laughed. "But enough of my pipe dreams."

McCoy, drink in hand, was talking to Marc and Spock. "Now Spock here says our medicine is barbaric. Poppycock!" He finished his drink. "He should see some of the old medical journals I've collected." Spock, refusing to be baited, remained silent.

"There has been a lot of progress, especially in recent years," Marc agreed. "As a matter of fact, we've a new hospital that opened recently. Perhaps I can arrange a tour for you?"

"I'd be delighted--if we have the time. Do you work there?"

Marc laughed as he refilled the drinks. "No, Doctor. I'm a coordinator for industrial expansion in Darian's northern sector. It's a relatively new position, actually, but enough of this planet is now colonized to make it important. However, I'm sure it's not quite as glamorous as working on a starship."

"I assure you, Mr. Stadler," Spock replied, "life on a starship is not 'glamorous.' It can be quite boring at times." He paused, "We have our jobs to do, like anyone else."

Marc was somewhat taken aback. "Surely you don't dislike it, Mr. Spock?"

"It has its advantages."

Scotty and Edward Grayson were lost in the realms of physics, chemistry, and mathematics, and Scotty was impressed at the latter's expertise.

"Dilithium is far too rare an element," Grayson was saying, "for starships to be dependent upon. Because of its scarcity, the Federation is constantly searching out new deposits, in direct competition with the Romulan and Klingon empires. The perfection of DS-249 will not only permit us to avoid any confrontations, but at the same time, will give us a very important military edge--a constant source of power. We'll lock them out entirely." he added, pleased with himself.

He picked up a scratch board and resumed. "The best part of all is that we can cut out some of these circuits, expand these here, and with less power you can get higher warp speeds."

Scotty looked over the notations. "Aye," he assented. "I take it you've built fail-safes into these circuits. You'd better have if you expect them to handle that much power."

"Oh, yes." Grayson scribbled hastily. "There are safety factors here...and here." He had followed the development of DS-249 closely and was familiar with its every aspect. "The laboratory tests have worked perfectly and tomorrow we'll be testing the crystals under actual space conditions. We'll be sending a drone to Deronda, our neighbouring planet. It's class K-1 and unsettled, but we do have some small laboratories there. One of the teams has been assigned to recover the drone, take preliminary readings, and send it back here."

Scotty continued to study Grayson's notes. "May I see some of the crystals?"

"Certainly. If you like, I can arrange a tour of the laboratory tomorrow--before the drone leaves orbit. My assistant, Zafrans, can show you around."

"I'll be there." Scotty grinned.

The evening passed quickly. Grayson and Scott wandered over to where Sharon and the Captain were still deep in conversation. "I have the feeling that Dad wants to talk shop," Sharon commented. "If you'll excuse me...." She joined her husband and Doctor McCoy, wondering how Spock had known the exact moment to detach himself from the two men for the beginning of the briefing.

Grayson spent the next two hours detailing the discovery and the plans for the drone's flight. Scotty seemed particularly impressed. "Captain, if this works, there'll be no more worrying about dilithium supplies."

"My technicians assure me that tomorrow's test will prove entirely successful," Grayson added. "My synthetic dilithium will be a great boon for the security of the Federation."

"Good," replied the Captain, standing. He turned, addressing his other officers as well. "If no one has anything further to add...." He paused. "Gentlemen, I think it's time we depart. Mr. Grayson, Mr. and Mrs. Stadler, thank you very much for a lovely evening."

"Our pleasure, Captain," replied Grayson. Kirk signalled the Enterprise and the shimmer of the transporter appeared and vanished over the "goodnights", bringing the evening to a close.

On board the Enterprise, shift changes were nearly completed. Scotty and McCoy both left for their quarters and the two brothers walked down the corridor to the turbo-lift alone. Thoughts had been set in motion in Jim Kirk's mind and their persistence could not be ignored. He had never asked Spock or Amanda about any human relatives they might have, but could it be possible? He knew what Spock would say, but he felt obliged to ask him anyway. Upon entering the lift, Jim broke his silence. "Spock, did Amanda ever mention any of her human relatives? Parents, siblings, cousins?"

Spock raised an eyebrow. No, Jim. Mother rarely discussed her family on Earth, and on Vulcan, while ancestry is important, privacy is to be respected."

"I see."

"Did you ask for any particular reason?"

"Spock, I was talking to Mrs. Stadler tonight. She mentioned in passing something about a sister of Edward Grayson's who lives on Vulcan. I was just wondering if perhaps...."

"...they were Mother's relatives." Spock finished the statement.

"Yes."

"Jim, I must point out that Grayson is not an uncommon name. The fact that our mother shares that name with these people is quite inconclusive."

"But what if they are, Spock?"

"If they are," Spock replied almost resignedly, "they are."

The bridge doors opened and each man was alone with his thoughts.

Sharon was still caught up in the excitement of the evening after she and Marc returned home. She had been half-serious about finding her "forgotten" aunt, even if she had only joked about going to Vulcan. If only she could just ask her father, but "the old boy", as she affectionately referred to him, was stubborn. Well, she was his daughter and could be as stubborn as he; it ran in the family.

As she and Marc prepared for bed, Sharon decided to enlist his help in this puzzle. "Marc, I was talking to Captain Kirk tonight."

"Yes, I noticed."

"Oh you, be serious; this is important. I want you to do me a favor, check on some family background for me."

"Sure honey. Why?"

"I'm going to ferret out a family secret," she said determinedly.

"Huh? You with a family secret?!"

"Listen." She gave him a playful shove. "The Captain jogged a memory tonight and it's been nagging me. Dad, in a rare moment, once mentioned a sister who moved to Vulcan -- oh, it must have been over forty standard years ago. He mentioned her name too, but I don't remember it; Mandy, Brandy, something like that. Anyway, he never mentioned her again and I never thought about it till the Captain and I were talking while you were with the others." She gave him a sly look and got back to her subject. "I want to find out more about her, that's all. Do you think you could make some inquiries? Maybe the computers might have some information."

"Sharon, be reasonable. If it was forty years ago, what makes you think she's still alive? Or even still on Vulcan?" he said, climbing into bed.

"I don't know. That's part of what I want you to find out. Please, Marc. Find out what you can and I'll go to work on Dad."

"Oh boy!"

"Now what's that supposed to mean?"

"Nothing, Sharon. Nothing. Come to bed."

"Then you'll do it!"

"All right. All right. I'll see what I can do."

"You're a dear," she replied as she joined him and turned out the light. "I knew I could count on you."

Scotty had already had his tour of Grayson Chemicals' labs and beamed back aboard the Enterprise before the space-port authorities cleared the drone for departure from orbit. The drone had been built in space with engine modifications for the DS-249 and special sensors to relay information straight to the computer banks and the labs.

Grayson and his technicians would monitor the drone from the lab on its three-day voyage and were attending to last minute details. All orbiting ships, including the Enterprise, were well out of range of the drone as it cleared the planet at sublight speeds heading for Deronda. The Enterprise left its orbit and followed close behind the drone in order to track it and, in an emergency, salvage it. If all went well, there would be a two-day stop-over on the sister planet while a team of scientists examined the drone before sending it back to Darian.

Everything was proceeding smoothly and quietly. To relieve the boredom, however, Uhura

had announced an "amateur hour", scheduled it for the second "evening", and asked to borrow Mr. Spock's lytherette. So, before he went on duty, Spock found time to strum the harp-like instrument. He had given Uhura his permission and was now checking to make sure it was in tune. Finished, he replaced the lytherette on the wall until she would pick it up, and then he turned his mind to other matters.

Mentally he reviewed the conversation he had had with Jim the night of the Grayson's dinner. Jim's "hunches" were often the result of unconscious telepathic intrusions. Logically, for the sake of this assignment, he had to know the truth of this one. He had long ago learned that with humans, matters such as these were of utmost importance, favorably or unfavorably affecting desired ends.

He moved to the library-computer terminal and depressed the activation key. "Family background information search: blood relatives, not more than once removed, of Amanda Grayson Xtmpsrqzntwlfb. Human relatives only," he added as an afterthought. The terminal hummed a second or two and then a cassette popped out of the job stack. Spock ran the tape and the contents appeared on the scanner above it. He quickly scanned the short biographies of his human grandparents and then Kirk's hunch was fact.

Edward Grayson, brother. Born Greater New York, sd. 7650.7. Married Martha Zales, sd. 7677.5, now deceased. Immigrated to Darian sd. 7678.4. President Grayson Chemicals, Ltd. Main office: Lorry Square, Ralos City, Darian.

Sharon Grayson Stadler, niece. Born Ralos City, Darian, sd. 7686.1. Married Marc Stadler sd. 7711.6. Presently residing on Darian. Economist in planetary government. Office: Plaza D'Oro, Ralos City, Darian.

Spock turned off the tape. "If they are, they are...." The words rose in his mind as if to haunt him. Well, it was now confirmed. The next step, logically, was to tell Jim.

Before he could make any moves to do so, however, the intercom buzzed. "Mr. Spock," the voice of the Chief Engineer sounded troubled, "we're picking up strange energy fluctuations from the crystals. They seem minor, but I can't figure out the cause, or how to stop them."

"Meet me on the bridge, Mr. Scott."

"I'm there now," the engineer replied, but Spock had already closed the circuit.

The Captain was not on the bridge. Mr. Scott started to rise from the command chair when Spock stepped out of the lift, but the Science Officer waved him back and went directly to the library-computer to review the data already collected by the sensors.

"You were correct, Mr. Scott," he said, without removing his eyes from the computer screen. "The fluctuations have been growing steadily for the past hour. The engine will implode if the deviation goes beyond 10.3 per cent of the norm."

Spock nodded to Hansen to relieve him as he and Mr. Scott discussed alternatives. "The drone should be able to withstand a tractor beam," Scott was saying when Hansen shouted, "Sir, the drone is starting to shake apart!" Spock quickly double-checked the sensor readings.

"Tractor beams," he ordered. Over the acknowledgement of the helmsman, he turned to the engineer. "That last fluctuation was twice what the curve predicted. Notify the authorities we're heading back to Darian, Lieutenant," he added, turning to Uhura.

The ship turned back toward Darian, with the drone in tow. Scotty spent most of his time down in Engineering as if to make amends for the crystals' malfunction. Even the offer of a drink from the ship's chief surgeon did little to restore the engineer's natural buoyancy. And Uhura's "amateur hour" did little to dispell the general mood of regret that the drone had not finished its journey.

Spock had immediately ordered a precautionary sensor scan to monitor the drone and then informed the Captain of the fluctuations and his decision. He compiled the sensor data for his official report. When he was done he brought it to Jim, who was resting in his quarters. Kirk rose from the bed when the buzzer announced a visitor and went to his desk as Spock entered.

"Captain, we've taken the drone in tow."

"Very good, Mr. Spock. Is there any explanation for the malfunction?"

"Preliminary findings indicate a breakdown in the components of the artificial dilithium as a result of stress."

Kirk studied the report. Grayson wouldn't like it, he decided immediately. Spock had made the right decision, however. If that ship's engine had blown....

"It looks like Grayson will have to start all over again," he said aloud.



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Jim Kirk had the sudden, fleeting impression that he'd managed to make Spock uncomfortable. "You did what you had to do. I'll back that decision in my log."

"Thank you, Captain."

So it's not the drone. . . Kirk thought. "Spock, there's something else on your mind, isn't there?" he asked.

Spock paused a long moment before answering.

"Jim, Edward Grayson is Mother's brother." His face was as impassive as always, but, over the years, Jim had learned to "read" it as well as any human ever could. And, for a second, Spock's face had shown confusion. He had always known he was half-human, but he'd never had to face human relatives before.

Jim rose from his desk and walked over to Spock, the report forgotten for the moment.

"Spock..." he paused. What could he say?

The tableau remained unbroken for a long moment until Spock spoke. "I do not know if Edward Grayson is aware of the relationship, Jim, and under the circumstances, I am in ignorance as to how to handle the situation."

Jim frowned, remembering his own confusion about Vulcan etiquette and relationships, and now they had this added problem. "Let's wait until we get back to Darian," he suggested. "Perhaps the appropriate time and place will present itself."

Marc rose early in the morning a few days after the party, skipped breakfast, and headed for his office in the downtown section of what was Darian's largest city, though it wasn't quite large enough to justify that title. He had promised to make some enquiries for Sharon, but so far his busy schedule had prevented it. It was one of those dull, rainy days that seemed to make things move more slowly. Though it was early, Marc found himself hurrying to the office, almost in protest.

After two conferences and one argument, Marc decided that he needed a change and proceeded to make those enquiries. He had very little to go on: a half-remembered name and an approximate year of departure for Vulcan. The government's computers were massive, but they did not contain the birth and death records of an entire universe. Then, one possibility arose: Edward Grayson and his wife had immigrated to Darian at a time when colonization was being actively recruited. Government bureaucracy would surely require some family records. Perhaps he could locate those. It was doubtful he would find anything, but it was worth a try, for Sharon's sake.

He put through some calls, pulled some strings, and obtained access to the immigration data banks. It did not matter if Grayson had disowned his sister; Marc knew that Edward, methodical as always, would surely have listed her name on any of the immigration forms requiring it.

Without too much trouble, he finally obtained the information he was looking for. He quickly put through a call to his wife at her office.

Sharon was in conference at the time and found herself torn between her curiosity to hear what Marc had discovered and her duty to her job. She compromised and brought the meeting to an early close, with nothing decided, and quickly called him back.

"Marc, have you found anything?"

"Slow down. Slow down. I've found something; it's not very much, but it's a start. Your father had to list his closest relatives when he immigrated. Your aunt's name is Amanda Grayson something unpronounceable, and at the time she was residing on Vulcan. Your father couldn't list an address for her, however. I then called a friend of mine who's done research on family trees and that sort of thing. He's got connections with the Federation, and they keep extensive records, of course."

"Marc!" Sharon was becoming exasperated. "Get to the point!"

"All right, but I hope you're sitting down. She married Sarek what's-his-name of Vulcan."

"The Ambassador?"

"You guessed it...They had a son---got me so far?---"

"Yes!" She wanted to shout at him.

"---named Spock." There was silence on the line for a minute, or so it seemed. "Sharon," Marc said, almost warningly, "don't start thinking..."

"All right. All right. I'll wait for you to get proof. You will get proof, my darling, won't you?" she said sweetly. "Mr. Spock of the Enterprise," she muttered, almost

to herself.

"Sharon, I'm warning you. Don't say anything. After all, it could be a coincidence of names."

"I won't, dear, until you find out," she soothed him.

"I've contacted Star Fleet Command and asked them to supply me with biographical information about the crew of the Enterprise. They were very nice about it and said they would get it to me. I may even receive it before I leave here today."

"Well, call me as soon as you hear anything more."

"All right. I'll see you later."

"Right," she replied in a tone that Marc thought was just a little preoccupied.

Sharon was delighted at the news. So she hadn't been making mountains out of mole-hills, as her mother used to say. She wondered how her father would react and decided to find out. She would drop in on him on her lunch hour. The fun, she mused, was just beginning.

Sharon smiled at her father's personal secretary. "Is 'the man' busy?" she asked.

"No, he's alone. You can go right in, Mrs. Stadler."

"Thanks." Sharon knocked on the heavy wooden door marked "Private". She didn't wait for a reply.

"Hi, Dad." She walked across the rather large room and kissed his cheek.

"Sharon!" Edward had risen as she entered. He returned her kiss. "This is a surprise."

"I know. I had some time off and thought maybe I could convince you to take me to lunch."

"Oh." Edward looked regretful. "Nothing I'd like better but unfortunately, I'm expecting the Enterprise momentarily and I can't leave. Can we make it tomorrow?"

"All right. I'll settle for some conversation now, though."

"I had a feeling there was a reason for this visit---what's on your mind?" He smiled at her indulgently.

"Dad, your dinner party the other night set me thinking..." her voice trailed off.

"Oh?" Edward's tone asked the question.

"Tell me about my Aunt Amanda," Sharon abruptly requested.

Grayson's entire face darkened. "Who told you about her?" His voice had gone deathly quiet.

"No one." Sharon was rather taken aback by her father's reaction. "I had Marc do some checking," she added. The silence between them grew awkward. "Did you know she'd married a Vulcan Ambassador?"

"I knew." Edward's tone remained cold and hard. "Sharon, listen to me. Forget your aunt..."

"But, why?"

"Because I want it that way. I buried her long ago. All you have to know is that she went to Vulcan---and stayed."

Sharon stared at her father, dumbfounded. "But she had a son. Aren't you the least bit curious about your nephew?"

"No!" Edward's voice was sharp. "And I don't want to hear another word on the subject."

Sharon was grateful that the intercom chose that moment to buzz.

"Yes," Grayson snapped.

"Zafrans, sir," the voice answered. "We've just received word that the Enterprise has achieved orbit. Captain Kirk is waiting to speak with you on line one."

"Have him hold." Edward switched off the unit. "Sharon, I'm sorry, but..."

"I understand, Dad. I'll see you tomorrow." She left the office, secretly glad



to have made her escape.

Grayson paused a moment to collect himself and then took the call from the Enterprise. "Grayson here."

"Captain Kirk, Mr. Grayson. The drone is in tow and one of your technicians is preparing to dismatle the engine compnents. If you'll supply your laboratory coordinates..."

"Of course, Captain. 729-648-754."

"729-648-754," Kirk repeated. "My First Officer and Chief Engineer will be beaming down with the final sensor reports directly."

"I'll be expecting them, Captain." Grayson cut off both the Captain and the connection.

They beamed directly to Edward Grayson's office. Like his home, it bespoke a man both accustomed to comfort and well able to indulge his tastes in such matters. Scotty glanced around appreciatively.

"Gentlemen." Grayson did not rise to greet them. Spock nodded formally. He advanced toward the desk and extended a tape cartridge.

"Your technicians will no doubt be interested in the Enterprise's report on the crystals' performance." Grayson accepted the tape without comment.

"Sir, the drone's engine components were beamed directly to your laboratories." Scotty glanced at each of the two men. "With your permission, I'd like to be present at the stripdown."

"Yes, of course, Mr. Scott." Grayson added as a reminder, "The labs are three levels down."

"Thank you, sir. I'll find them." The engineer left immediately. His interest was in machinery, the reasons behind the crystals' malfunction; the post mortem would explain a great deal. He'd let Spock and Grayson worry about the consequences of the flight's failure.

"The Federation Council for Technical Advancement will expect a full report immediately," Spock said calmly. "They will also wish to examine any further research plans."

"I'm well aware of the correct procedures, Mr. Spock. I assure you I do not need to be reminded of them." The anger in Grayson's voice was unmistakable.

The First Officer raised an eyebrow. "I meant no offense, Mr. Grayson." He paused; Grayson's aloofness where he was concerned---Jim would have classified it as quiet hostility---had seemed apparent ever since their arrival. And Spock suspected he knew why. But, perhaps he was wrong; perhaps it was simply tension from the preparation and then the failure of the crystals. He had ordered the mission aborted. He broke the growing silence. "Can I be of any further assistance, Mr. Grayson?"

For the first time since the two Enterprise officers had beamed down, Grayson looked directly at Spock. For a moment there was anger and annoyance on the older man's face. He'd let Spock see too much. But the businessman took over quickly. The answer came quietly and calmly. "No, you've done quite enough."

"It was necessary."

Grayson's anger flared. "That necessary action has cost me a lot of time and energy, as well as money. I hold you responsible."

Spock said nothing. Yet Grayson's anger grew instead of dissipating.

"It is obvious that something else is disturbing you, sir."

Grayson cut him off. "That's right, Mr. Spock. Something has been bothering me since you arrived here. It's very simple; you're a Vulcan. I had a sister who married a Vulcan. She chose to accept an alien way of life and to forget her heritage. I can never forgive her for that." Grayson had risen to his feet; his eyes were cold and unfriendly. "I thought I'd banished those unpleasant memories. Your presence here has brought them back---for myself and my daughter. I do not intend to encourage her enquiry into this matter."

Spock spoke levelly. "Is that not her decision, Mr. Grayson?"

"The decision has already been made, Mr. Spock. I wrote my sister out of my life long before Sharon was born. I wish it to remain that way. If your presence here interferences with that, I'll request that your Captain assign someone else for the duration of the project."

Spock was thoughtful for a moment. It was apparent that Grayson was unaware of the truth. He would have to be told. "That will not change your family history, Mr. Grayson. Nor

do I think it will alter your daughter's interest."

"I do not believe she'll pursue the matter," Grayson replied coldly.

"If she does, Mr. Grayson, she'll discover that I am your sister's son."

Grayson looked as if he'd been struck. Amanda's son... The thought was staggering. His first reaction was disbelief. Yet, why make such a claim if it weren't true? His second was rage. Spock had known, had been playing with him. No one played Edward Grayson for a fool, or cost him a small fortune.

"Get out of my office!" he demanded.

"As you wish," Spock replied quietly.

The quietness only served to increase Grayson's rage. Still, his uppermost thought was to keep this matter from Sharon. "Stay away from my daughter!" The door closed soundlessly behind Spock.

Edward Grayson sank back into his chair and stared at the door. Resolutely he picked up the papers he'd been working on when the the Enterprise officers had appeared in his office. But, he found that the words kept blurring together and his thoughts kept coming back to Mandy...

She'd been the perfect sister. How many scraps had she gotten him out of? How often had she helped him out without his even having to ask? She'd spent many a night studying with him. And when he'd been short of funds (he admitted to a weakness for poker in his younger days), she'd even lent him money.

"Why Vulcan, Mandy? It's so far away."

"There's a need for teachers in the Enclave there, Ted. Besides, they've a lot to offer. I'm going there to learn as much as to teach." He had tried to talk her out of it--- unsuccessfully.

He'd missed her. Her leaving had left a real void in his life. She'd written regularly---long, voluminous letters. But the mail service between Vulcan and Earth had been far from frequent. He found himself looking forward to those letters until...

They'd been at lunch when the doorbell rang. His father had gotten up and returned with a star-gram. "It's from Mandy!" he'd announced and opened it immediately. He read it silently to himself and them aloud. It was short and very terse. "Have married Legate Sarek of Vulcan. Wish us well." He didn't believe it. What could she have seen in a Vulcan? How could she do this to her family? He was less pleased when he realized that his parents' reactions were far from unfavorable. In fact, his father had sent off a congratulatory star-gram from the family almost immediately; he hadn't even been consulted. Try as he might, he could not understand his parents' ready acceptance. He'd never even read the long letter of explanation that followed that star-gram.

His parents had never met Sarek, or their grandson, before their deaths, two and a half years after Amanda's marriage; nevertheless they'd managed to stay in touch with as much regularity as the mails allowed.

Then there'd been another star-gram: "Sorry you must bear this alone. Know your grief is shared. Amanda." Her marriage had prevented her from attending her own parents' funeral. That for him had been the last straw. It had been easy to sever all his ties to her---especially since he himself had married and moved to Darian shortly thereafter---and he thought he'd banished her from his memory and his life that day.

And now Spock's arrival and disclosure had reopened all the doors he thought he'd closed forever---not only for him but for Sharon as well.

The buzz of the intercom brought Grayson sharply back to reality. "Yes," he snapped as he pushed down the button, "what is it?" He didn't really hear his assistant's report. One thing was certain: Captain Kirk would have to assign someone else.

Sharon took an aircab back to her office, even though the rain had stopped. Her visit with her father had accomplished little and had left her disquieted. "I never realized his feelings ran that deeply against his sister," she thought to herself. She could not push their conversation out of her mind. Even the message that Marc had called did little to alter her mood. She returned his call immediately. His face appeared on the visiphone with a wide grin. In his hand was a cassette.

"Guess what I found, Sharon!"

"I don't know. What?" she snapped at him. "I'm sorry, Marc," she apologized quickly. "I just had an argument with Dad. I didn't mean to take it out on you."

"Apology accepted," he answered and then fell quiet.

"Aren't you going to let me in on your discovery?" she asked quietly.

Marc nodded. "You've got your confirmation. Spock is your cousin." A devilish smile spread across his face.

"Then I was right! And you didn't want to pursue the matter!"

"Wait, Sharon," Marc interrupted his wife, "there's more. It seems your friend, the Captain, has recently been adopted by your aunt and uncle!"

Sharon was stunned for a second. After absorbing the news, she asked, "Anything else?"

"No. I'll bring the tape home so you can read it yourself."

"Thanks." She paused while a number of thoughts raced across her mind. "Wait till Dad hears the news!"

"Why?"

"I went to see him at lunch. I didn't say anything," she added hastily to reassure Marc, "I couldn't. I asked one question and he flew into a rage."

"Then maybe we'd better wait till the Enterprise leaves before we tell your father anything."

"He'll have to be told, Marc."

"Look, honey, we don't want to cause trouble for anyone. They're here on an assignment and we know how your father feels. It would just be awkward for everyone."

"Marc, there are times when you are too reasonable."

"Love you too," he said sweetly.

"What time will you be home?"

"I'll try to get there a little early. Why?"

"Don't forget the wine for the party tomorrow night. Red, and make it something exotic."

"What party?" Marc asked, surprised.

"The one we're giving for the senior officers of the Enterprise. You don't mind, do you?"

"No, but...."

"Good. I'll see you later."

The visiphone went blank. Marc shook his head in despair. He had the bleak feeling that his headstrong wife was going to stir up a nest of ovvulaz, and shuddered.

Spock had left Grayson's office and gone immediately to the labs in search of Mr. Scott. Both officers stayed and witnessed the preliminary tests on the drone's components. Satisfied with the progress, they beamed up to the Enterprise. The Captain met them in the briefing room. Starfleet Command would have to be advised of the situation and he was anxious to hear their reports.

"Captain," Scotty began dourly, "DS-249 may be as practical as pets on a starship. Grayson's engineers still don't know exactly what caused the fluctuations." He looked exasperated and, in his brief pause, Kirk looked to his First Officer for a more specific explanation. But Spock remained uncharacteristically silent as Scotty continued more calmly, "They've got one pet theory they're working on, Captain. Under stress the crystals themselves weren't stable enough to maintain cohesion and the broken bonds formed new alignments. Their uneven breakdown caused the power loss. Grayson's men are looking to confirm that now." He sighed. "One thing is for sure, Captain. Synthetic dilithium is still a thing of the future."

"Thank you, Mr. Scott," the Captain acknowledged formally. "Keep me informed of the findings."

"Aye, sir." Scotty rose, preparing to leave. "I'll get a look at further test results tomorrow. Maybe they'll tell us something more."

"And Scotty," Kirk smiled, "don't take it so personally."

"Aye," Scotty answered solemnly before the doors closed behind him.

Jim turned, suddenly realizing his First Officer had not left. "Is there something further, Spock?"

Spock hesitated before answering. "Jim, I gave the order to terminate the drone's flight and Edward Grayson is determined to hold me responsible. And I'm afraid I didn't help matters when I told him of our relationship. He was far from pleased. In fact," Spock looked directly into Jim's eyes, "this may have adverse effects on our assignment."

"In what way?"

"Mr. Grayson indicated that he wishes someone else to work with him on the final Federation report."

"What? You're by far the most qualified, Grayson knows that and there's a research grant at stake here."

"Nevertheless, Jim, those are his wishes. However, I have no doubt he'll contact you personally on the matter."

"Why, Spock? Did he give you any reasons?"

"Because I am the product of a marriage he could never accept." Spock paused. There was nothing more to be said. "If you'll excuse me."

The doors closed behind him, leaving Jim Kirk alone with his thoughts. Amanda's words, spoken long ago, ran through his mind: "It hasn't been easy on Spock---neither Vulcan nor human---at home nowhere---except Star Fleet."

The evening meal was over and the dinner table cleared. Marc was dozing on the chaise lounge in the living room. Sharon quietly picked up the cassette he had given her earlier and went into the den. She slipped the tape into the viewer and curled up in the big armchair to read it. It wasn't very long, but the content had her full attention; someone had been nice enough to put together as complete biographies of Captain Kirk and Commander Spock as regulations allowed, and just the row upon row of awards and commendations that each man had accumulated set her head spinning. She would have to get to know these relatives of hers better.

Edward Grayson spent a rather sleepless night; his stream-of-conscious thoughts flowed through his head like a gushing stream twisting through some unknown terrain. In the morning he remembered nothing of it, but he retained a vague uneasiness that he tried to ignore as he prepared for the day ahead.

Arriving at his office, Grayson went straight to his visiphone and made contact with the Enterprise. Lieutenant Uhura patched the call through to the gym where the Captain was busy practising a Schillian form of combat, modified for humans. Pausing to wipe his neck, he acknowledged the call. In tones that few would dare disobey, Edward Grayson "politely" requested that the Captain beam down to his office for a conference, with the understanding that he be unaccompanied. The Captain, considering the meeting unavoidable, quickly agreed, broke contact, and resumed his activities.

Two hours later, Jim Kirk beamed down. He was met by Grayson's secretary and ushered into the office. He was determined to be pleasant, but firm.

Grayson remained seated as the Captain entered. Without amenities he began, "Captain Kirk, I'll be brief. I insist that another officer be assigned in place of Mr. Spock. Perhaps Mr. Scott could continue alone."

"Mr. Grayson," Kirk replied just as forcefully, "Mr. Spock is my Science Officer as well as the First Officer of the Enterprise. I assure you there is no one in my crew more qualified to assist you in this matter."

"It is his other 'qualifications' that prevent his assistance, Captain," Grayson answered evasively. "My demand still stands."

"Are you referring to the fact that he aborted the mission or the fact that he is your nephew?"

"So he's told you. I must say, you might have told me."

"We found out you were related to us only three days ago, when we were track..."

"'Us'?" Grayson asked, cutting Kirk off. "Did you say 'us'?"

"I thought you said you knew," the Captain replied, privately enjoying Grayson's discomforture.



"Spock said he but but nothing about you," Grayson sputtered.

"Sarek and Amanda have adopted me," Kirk explained.

Grayson hastily recovered his composure. Surely the Captain was only jesting, and poorly.

"Spock can't help being who he is, I realize that," Grayson began. "But why should you wish to be adopted..." He let the sentence trail, not quite sure what to say.

"...by Spock's family?" the Captain finished the sentence for him. How could he explain? His feelings for his new family and about his adoption were too strong to be put into mere words. Yet, he had to say something to this man, something he would perhaps understand unfettered by his estrangement from his sister.

He chose his words carefully. "Before the Federation there were hundreds of planets that had space travel, but they had no means of cooperating with each other. Interstellar trade was chaotic, to say the least. The Federation changed that; it tied the worlds together for trade, protection, and peace. If the Federation is to continue to survive, and the member-planets as well, they must compromise and share. If a culture gives something up, it gets something back in return; sometimes doubly, triply..."

"I don't understand what all this has to do with your being adopted or replacing Mr. Spock," Grayson interrupted impatiently, "and I don't need a history lesson!"

"The point is unity. Not the unity of one world, but of the entire Federation. Sarek and Amanda, a Vulcan and a Terran, married and had a child. They welcomed me into their home and later adopted me."

Kirk's thoughts raced furiously. Spock and Grayson had to work together, the Federation wanted this dilithium substitute. He tried another approach.

"There's a tradition on Vulcan: IDIC, infinite diversity in infinite combinations. They do not believe that because something is different it is automatically bad. Vulcan honors Spock as one of its top citizens. If they can accept his humanity, can you not accept him as your Vulcan nephew? "

"No, Captain. I cannot."

"And I cannot assign someone else. It would be a disservice to my Science Officer and to the Federation. He made a command decision and I'm backing it completely. We are all working for the same goal, the perfection of synthetic dilithium. Personal feelings must be put aside."

"Very well, Captain," Grayson replied, icicles dripping from each word. "You shall have your report, and as soon as possible."

Kirk nodded in acknowledgement and exited. He had thwarted Grayson, but he was troubled.

Sharon left her office to meet her father for lunch. She entered the building just as Captain Kirk emerged from the lift and started walking across the lobby floor. As he crossed her path, she stopped him with a bright "Hello, Captain. How nice to see you again!"

"Oh, hello, Mrs. Stadler," Kirk replied cordially. "Your father is in his office, if you're looking for him."

"Yes. Thank you. We're going to lunch. Would you care to join us?"

"I don't think that is possible," he answered evenly.

"Oh." She paused. "Well, perhaps you would care to come to a party tonight. Marc and I are having some friends over and if you and some of your officers would care to join us, we'd be delighted," Sharon offered with a smile. She congratulated herself on having called some friends after speaking with her husband yesterday.

"I'm afraid that's not possible either, Mrs. Stadler. You see, I've just had an argument with your father." He explained the situation to her, holding nothing back.

Sharon frowned slightly. "Dad does tend to take his projects rather seriously--and he can be unreasonable at times. And," she continued, "I've known about my relationship to you and Spock since yesterday morning. That's one reason I wish you'd join us tonight."

"I wouldn't want to create any friction between you and your father. There's enough already."

"That's very considerate of you, Cap---Jim, but my father does not live my life for me. And I extend my own invitations. Will you accept? And bring along Spock and the others."

Kirk smiled and nodded, but he still felt slightly uncomfortable.

"And don't worry," Sharon added. "I can handle Dad." She parted company with her cousin and went to see her father.

She greeted his secretary and breezed into the office. "Hi Dad! I just saw the Captian on my way in. Ready for lunch?"

Edward was in no mood for flippancy. "Sharon, I forbid you to mention his name again, and the same for Mr. Spock. Stay away from them."

Sharon was flabbergasted. "Are you serious?"

"Yes."

"Why?" she asked, incredulously.

"Never mind. Just stay away from them."

"Dad, I know all about the crystals' failure and the fact that they're my cousins. Never mind how I know." She cut him off before he could ask the question. "But I'll be damned if I'll let you tell me what to do. In case you've forgotten, I'm a grown woman and I make my own decisions."

They argued for a while longer, but neither could see the other's side.

"Sharon. You don't understand."

"Oh, yes I do. And I'm not going to let your xenophobia run my life." She stormed out of the office, lunch forgotten.

The Captain did not go directly back to the Enterprise after his confrontation with Edward Grayson. He was in a foul mood and did not want to see anyone he knew. So he wandered around Ralos, marvelling to himself how such a tranquil place could casue such big headaches. After a short while, however, his anger disappeared and he beamed up to the ship.

Spock was on the bridge and had just finished running an analysis on the labs' findings which had been sent up in the last half hour. The computers on the ship were a "failsafe" for the labs, and Scotty and Spock were perusing the results of both sets of readouts when the Captain appeared on the bridge.

Scotty shrugged his shoulders. "Well, that's it then. Definitely stress. Do you think Grayson'll get his research grant?"

"I do not know," Spock answered tersely.

"A lot of good it'll do if they can't stabilise the crystals. Like throwing good money after bad."

"That decision is up to the Council."

"Aye. It'll kick Grayson in the gut, though, if he doesn't get it. That's for sure."

The Captain, overhearing Scotty's last remark, joined the two men.

"And it won't help us if we're all unemployed," he hinted.

As Scotty went back to his post, the Captain turned to Spock. "I saw Grayson earlier." Spock's face was void of expression, but Kirk had trouble getting the words out. "He asked me to assign someone else. I turned him down." He looked directly into the Vulcan's eyes. "There's no choice for any of us."

"I understand perfectly, Captain," Spock replied, preparing to return his attention to his console.

"Good." He tried to sound casual as he continued. "Mrs. Stadler has invited the senior officers to a party tonight." Spock did not look up. "I tried to decline; I told her that her father objected to us, and why. But she insisted that we attend."

He prepared himself for one of Spock's lectures on Vulcan privacy or the illogic of partying, but he merely replied, "I see."

"Spock, I know it's hard on both of us...." He broke off, afraid he had already said too much.

"Jim, T'Uriamne never fully conceded in the Argument. If I cannot win acceptance from her, how can I win it from Edward Grayson?"

The Captain was left without an answer as he returned to the lower level of the bridge.

McCoy sat at the bar of the restaurant silently savoring his drink and trying to decide whether or not to order a late lunch. "There are advantages to this layover," he thought lazily. "Marc Stadler was right about the hospital facilities here. They are excellent, and so is the Jerimiada." The studied the pale blue liquor. "Truly excellent."

His thoughts were interrupted by an order to the bartender. The voice sounded very familiar. McCoy turned in the direction it had come from and immediately recognized Edward Grayson who was seated at one of the tables. He debated a moment and then picked up his drink and walked over.

"Mr. Grayson, a pleasure to see you again." Grayson looked up, startled.

"Dr. McCoy...."

"Have your technicians found anything more on the crystals' malfunction?" McCoy inquired politely.

"No, I'm afraid they haven't...." The bartender brought over Grayson's drink. "Thanks, Mike. That's fine. I think I'll skip lunch today. Just put it on my bill."

"Yes, sir, Mr. Grayson."

Grayson turned his attention back to the Medical Officer. "Sit down, Doctor." To McCoy, it didn't seem like much of an invitation, but he could think of no graceful way to decline. Grayson seemed preoccupied and they sat in silence for a few minutes.

"Is it that research grant?" McCoy asked quietly.

Grayson glanced at McCoy, startled out of his reverie. "Is it that apparent that something is on my mind?"

McCoy nodded.

"It's a family matter, Doctor." Grayson paused and then added, "May I ask you a question? I'd like an honest answer."

"Sure." McCoy grinned. "However, I must reserve the right to be my subtle, diplomatic self."

Grayson looked at him quite seriously. "What does the Enterprise crew think of Captain Kirk?" It took McCoy a long moment to adjust to the change in subject. He was somewhat taken aback by the question.

"I'm sure most would agree that Jim Kirk is a fine officer, a gentleman, and...." McCoy began cautiously.

"That's not exactly what I had in mind, Doctor," Grayson interrupted. "What do they think of his adoption by a Vulcan family?"

The doctor's face indicated his puzzlement and his surprise. "Well, I can't speak for the rest of the crew, but for myself, I couldn't be more pleased for him. He's often remarked on the peace he found on Vulcan. A family was exactly what he needed...." His voice trailed off as he noticed the look on Grayson's face.

"Then--you--approve?" Grayson practically choked the words out.

"Shouldn't I?" The words came out without thought.

Grayson said nothing. He finished his drink and with a muttered, "If you'll excuse me...." walked out of the bar without another word. McCoy stared after him, greatly puzzled.

The rest of the day passed uneventfully; the crew shift came and went. And Kirk's headache had returned. He tried to ignore it, but finally decided to go down to Sickbay. McCoy had returned from his visit to the new medical facility and was pleased at the chance for some conversation. Kirk took the red pill the doctor gave him, swallowed it, and listened patiently. It took his mind off other matters.

The doctor, however, also told the Captain of his strange encounter with Edward Grayson, and their subsequent conversation. Kirk, looking tired, proceeded to make the necessary explanations for Grayson's behaviour, but tried to minimize it.

"No wonder he looked so upset when I said Vulcan agreed with you," McCoy commented lightly. The Captain responded with a smile and told him of the party invitation from the Stadlers. At that the doctor's face lit up with anticipation.

"I don't know what you're so cheerful about."

"Think of it this way, Jim. 'Every cloud has a silver lining'."

"And 'it's the calm before the storm'," he countered.



"Well, if you're going to be so cheerful," McCoy answered with mock anger, "you may leave." But he sobered quickly when he realized his friend had not responded.

"What's really bothering you, Jim?" he asked with concern. "Your meeting with Grayson today or the party tonight?"

"I'm worried more about Spock. These are the first human relatives of his he's met. One dislikes him intensely and the other invites us to a party. How would you feel? And, more to the point, what does Spock? I don't like this whole mess."

"Spock usually manages to take care of himself," the doctor said soothingly. "Besides, this party might be the best thing for him, to know his other human relatives aren't all like Edward Grayson." He grinned. "He is a bit of a stuffed shirt." Abruptly he became serious again. "You can't carry the world's weight on your shoulders. We'll get that report and leave. Now, relax, Jim-boy."

"I can't."

"I know," McCoy replied sarcastically, but at the same time sympathetically, "that's why you're a starship captain."

Upon hearing his Chief Medical Officer's reply, Kirk's brooding mood seemed to dispel a little. "You're right, of course, Bones. I should relax more. This party should be just the thing; after all, we're not marching battle tonight." He added to himself, "I hope." He turned, heading for the door. "Oh. Thanks for the pill."

"Don't mention it."

"Do me a favor, will you? Tell Scotty about the party. And..." He looked at his Medical Officer and friend with mock severity. "I think we both better get back to work, Doctor."

"Yes, Captain," McCoy answered formally.

The Stadler's party was just beginning when the four men from the Enterprise arrived. They were quickly introduced to everyone and just as quickly found themselves engaged in conversations. Spock treated the party as if it were a diplomatic reception and remained somewhat aloof from the festivities, but he found himself engaged in several conversations nevertheless. Scotty and McCoy, almost as if by mutual agreement, were determined to enjoy themselves and quickly fit right in with the general atmosphere. Jim Kirk, however, felt ill at ease, almost as if a tidal wave were about to hit. He tried to enjoy himself but he was constantly on alert, anticipating trouble.

The Stadlers mingled among their guests. Marc and the captain were talking with several others as Sharon carried in some hors d'oeuvres. She noticed Mr. Spock in the alcove examining a portrait on the wall. Smiling, she walked over and joined him.

"Dad had it commissioned when I was sixteen," she said quietly. "I hated every moment I spent sitting for it." Spock's gaze went from the portrait to the woman in front of him, acknowledging her presence. Quietly he studied her. She did not resemble his mother, but there was something. He found himself wanting to identify the link. His glance fell to Sharon's hands which still held the tray of hors d'oeuvres. Her hands, graceful in their shape and delicate in their grasp, stirred a memory of his mother. He brought himself back to Sharon and the painting.

"I did not know DeVinier ever did portraits," Spock commented. "It is an exceptional and unique piece of work."

"I'm glad you like it." She returned his scrutiny as she set the tray down and digested the new piece of information regarding her cousin: he was interested in art as well as science. She continued slowly, "I'm glad we finally have a chance to talk."

"I, too, am pleased. I have never before met any of Mother's relatives."

"We're your relatives, too," she admonished him.

"Yes," he replied.

She decided to switch the conversation to a safer area.

"Is Vulcan very different?" she asked, trying to find out more about the birthplace of her cousin.

"All worlds are different," he answered, "in different ways and in different degrees."

"I should like to go to Vulcan and see my relatives."

Spock remained quiet for a long second, lost in thought. In some way, he could sense a personality similar to his mother's, less restrained by Vulcan logic, of course.

"You would be welcome in our home," he replied

"Would you have a holo of your parents?" she asked, somewhat shyly.

"No," he said simply. "But I shall see that you get one."

Her face lighted. "Thank you," she said softly. "I would like that."

Spock gazed once again from the painting on the wall to the woman in front of him. "An excellent likeness," he commented. Sharon smiled.

"Shall we join the others?" she asked as she picked up the tray and prepared to return to the main section of the room. Spock nodded and led the way from the alcove.

Time passed as the four Star Fleet officers exchanged anecdotes and experiences with the Stadlers and their other guests.

The doorbell rang and Sharon went to answer it.

"Dad!" she said with surprise. "What are you doing here? "

"I didn't know you had company, Sharon. I, I want to apologize for losing my temper this afternoon, and also to return these tapes to Marc."

"Well, as long as you're here, come in."

"Just for a moment," Edward said hesitantly. "I can't stay; I've got to get back to the office. There's that damn report to finish." He had barely entered the doorway when he caught sight of a blue uniform. His eyes darkened and anger flooded over him.

"You invited them? You know my feelings on this matter."

"Whether you like it or not, Dad, they are family. And friends."

Jim Kirk caught sight of the tableau at the door. "Trouble," his head throbbed. At that moment, Grayson directly confronted Spock.

"I thought I told you to stay away from my family," he shouted angrily.

"Dad! They're my guests!" Sharon interrupted.

"I see no reason for your anger, sir," Spock replied calmly, his countenance unchanged. "Your daughter is a grown woman. She has her own home and is quite capable of extending her own invitations." Kirk, who had moved to Spock's side, groaned silently. Spock's logic was rarely placating. Grayson seethed.

"I've told you, this is none of your affair. It is strictly between my daughter and myself."

Abruptly, Spock found himself re-living T'Aniyeh's rendition of T'Rruel's Motek. It had convinced Vulcan that secession was wrong; it had failed to convince T'Uriamne of anything. He had spoken to her briefly just before his formal challenge and had asked her to reconsider her position. He did not wish a public confrontation with her. She had been cold, formal, and had asked him if his arguments were so weak that he feared to present them to Vulcan at large.

And when he had won.... She had refused even then to do more than stipulate error. He had hoped that she might return home. Hopeless. She could no more accept her father's marriage than Edward Grayson could accept his sister's. She feared the Federation would destroy all that was Vulcan; Grayson, in a more indirect way, feared an encroachment of alien views. They were more alike than would ever be known to either of them.

"Dad! I didn't invite you in to make a scene. If you don't like my friends, you can leave." The party had come to a standstill; all eyes were on the scene at the door.

"Perhaps I'd better." Grayson prepared to leave.

Sharon turned to Spock. "I'm sorry this had to happen." He nodded, understanding.

Grayson, however, overheard his daughter's words. "You have nothing to apologize for, Sharon, and I will not have you apologizing for me!" He slammed the door behind him.

"Ooh, he makes me furious sometimes," she said aloud, but obviously trying to control her temper. The little group returned to the main room only to find it apparent that the mood of the party had been totally destroyed. The guests quickly took their leaves. The four men from the Enterprise were among the last to depart.

"I'm sorry our presence ruined your party, Sharon." The apology sounded weak, even to Jim Kirk's ears.

"It was my father's fault. I'm the one who should be apologizing to you," she replied.

The captain flipped open his communicator. "Mr. Kyle, four to beam up."

Sharon said warmly, "Goodbye, Cousin Jim." Kirk kissed her on the cheek and then shook Marc's hand.

"Live long and prosper," Spock said formally.

Sharon turned to him and as solemnly repeated the words. "Live long and prosper, Cousin Spock."

"Live long and prosper, gentlemen," Marc added quietly.

Smiling, Sharon added, "I hope we meet again."

The transported beams appeared around them. They shimmered and disappeared.

Jim Kirk had been notified that Grayson Chemicals, Ltd. had put out its final report on the failure of DS-249. He had requested and received an appointment to pick up the official Star Fleet Command copy. He already knew the verdict: the substitute was less stable than dilithium. Under stress it lost its cohesive properties and the bonds re-aligned, making it an impractical source of power, as yet.

Kirk thought bitterly, "Those crystals behaved damn humanly." This meeting, he knew, was a formality, but one that had to be observed. He and Spock beamed down.

"Captain Kirk of the Enterprise to see Mr. Grayson," he said formally to the secretary. He was prepared to forget the incident at the party, but he wasn't sure Grayson would feel the same way.

"Yes, sir. Mr. Grayson is expecting you." She gestured to a door. "Go right in."

Grayson was seated at his desk. He did not rise as the two officers entered.

"Your report, Captain," he said without formalities and handed him the cassette.

"Thank you, Mr. Grayson," Kirk replied. He accepted the tape and handed it to Spock who quietly took it to a viewer for perusal.

"Further research will be necessary, Captain. Without funds that research will be impossible. Be sure your Star Fleet understands that, as well as their responsibility."

"They will have my log report, Mr. Grayson."

"Now, if you will excuse me, gentlemen, I do have work to do." Grayson's tone was cold.

Kirk nodded absently. He glanced at Spock, who removed the tape from the viewer.

"The findings are as anticipated, Captain," he confirmed.

The captain opened his communicator. "Beam us up, Mr. Kyle." The shimmer of the transporter appeared and for the last time they beamed up from Darian.

The tenseness in Jim Kirk's neck did not ease as the Enterprise sped away from the planet with the problem of the DS-249 failure now in the hands of Star Fleet. Spock had not spoken of the incident since they had beamed back to the ship, but the captain felt a personal responsibility for the rift between father and daughter. But then, he argued with himself, there had been no way to avoid it. And instinctively he felt that Sharon and Marc would someday take that trip to Vulca

With a wry smile, he finished his coffee, rubbed his neck, and headed for the bridge.

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# KRAITH VA

Signal lights blinked in standard Federation patterns as the mighty U.S.S. Enterprise sailed through the darkness of deep space, following a heading for Vulcan.

Within the ship, since this was the sleep period for the greater part of the crew, most of the rooms and the corridors were dimly lit, and silent. However, that wasn't the reason for the stillness which had wrapped certain rooms in a heavy shroud. There, the stillness was a sign of the period of mourning which a few members of the crew were observing as a private token of respect to Science Officer Spock--who, once again, had lost his wife.

Not that Spock had wanted anyone to mourn. Far from it! As a matter of fact, when his wife had died, Spock had told McCoy that he wanted the dignity of grieving for his wife in private.

However, both Doctor McCoy and Mr. Scott had prevailed upon him to accept the fact that this ritual of mourning was necessary for those human members of the crew who wished to observe it in the privacy of their own quarters--both as an outward expression of the respect which they had come to feel for Spock (as well as for his wife,) and as a release valve to drain off some of the tensions and pressure created by the ordeal of their recent struggle to escape from the dark star.

Perhaps the stillness and the dimness also reflected the anxious concern of the entire crew, for all were worrying about their captain. There were even some who were overheard saying that the captain behaved like one suffering from severe esper-shock--though that was unlikely, since only telepaths experienced such shock to so severe a degree. Yet...the captain was pale and weak, definitely not his usual dynamic self; somewhat hesitant and slow in his speech and just a bit clumsy in his movements.

Spock, also, Vulcan though he was, revealed indications of strain--only natural since he had just lost his wife--but he seemed preoccupied about something...almost as though only half his mind were devoted to accomplishing his routine tasks aboard the ship, while the other half was dwelling upon something that awaited him on Vulcan.

Or, to quote Doctor McCoy: "The Enterprise, and everyone aboard her, is suffering from one big psychic headache."

However, with the exception of the captain, and to a certain degree, Mr. Spock, the rest of the ship was returning to normal. That lay-over on Schillia had helped. Like Vulcans, Schillians didn't invade minds willingly, even though they were a telepathic race. They were also capable of radiating influences soothing to non-telepathic nerves made raw by a brush with the forces of esper-shock, and with more than four hundred humanoid minds broadcasting such disturbances, the Schillians had had to help in self-defense.

So, in the middle of the ship's "night", all was quiet and reasonably serene. Even Doctor McCoy, on call around the clock, slept, exhausted from the vigil he'd kept over T'Aniyeh and over Kirk before they'd escaped from the dark star. Though, as he was heard to grumble from time to time, there wasn't any real reason for him to feel so worn out. He'd managed to snatch a few hours of sleep in Sick Bay. The trouble was his sleep had been tormented by nightmares. Fortunately, he could remember only disjointed fragments. For some reason, however, he felt as though he were carrying a burden of great responsibility for something...what, he didn't know. Most likely, though, since he was psi-null, he was experiencing a touch of depression as a result of the dark star's influence.

Everyone not on active duty was seeking recuperation in slumber--all, save one.

Nurse Christine Chapel sat alone in her quarters, gazing into the mirror of her soul, shocked and dismayed at what she saw reflected there.

When Spock had married T'Rruel, Christine had been a "good sport" about it. She'd been just as shocked as everyone else when Spock returned from the Vulcan Affirmation Ceremony--a widower. Yet, after a reasonable length of time, she had begun to hope that perhaps now she, Christine, might be....

Then Tanya Minos had been assigned to the Enterprise, and whatever chances Christine had had--though she was already beginning to suspect that she had very few, if any--became as nothing. After all, Tanya had been raised as a Vulcan--as a Daughter of the Tradition, no less! What chance could Christine have in the face of such competition?

Christine had steeled herself to accept the inevitable after Spock had publicly claimed Tanya as "his girl". Even so, she hadn't been able to quell her love for the First Officer.

That love had survived, even during their ordeal on the dze-ut' planet, though it had wavered when she had seen Spock in the throes of his approaching pon farr.

That ordeal... Christine sighed. WHY had Spock taken her down to the planet along with the captain and the others? He could just as well have left her on the ship, locked in the mental cage that had imprisoned the others.

She could almost wish that he hadn't done it, for his action tempted her to wonder if perhaps he wasn't quite as indifferent to her as he'd made everyone--including herself--believe, even though he'd gone on to marry Tanya.

No. Her logical self frowned upon that theory. It would be more reasonable to assume that he'd sensed he was approaching that biological crisis and had wanted her to have the romantic haze banished from her eyes once and for all.

Christine simply didn't know. Besides, she was just too tired and too disheartened to try to reason out the situation. However, she did know that she would watch her step very carefully this time and not inflict her emotionalism upon Spock by expressing excessive sympathy.

She went to bed--not to sleep, because her mind wouldn't stop racing, but to rest before going back on duty.

Spock stood beside the chair at his station, carefully studying Kirk's face. Lines of strain were visible, but the therapy which Ssarsun and Zzlvash had helped to administer had gained promising results. At least, Spock could now shield Jim's mind without seriously draining his own strength.

Yet, he would welcome Vulcan's appearance on the central viewing screen, for he was tired with a fatigue that only returning to his native soil would dispel. The observances of the ancient traditions and ceremonies held at this time of the Vulcan year would bring badly-needed sustenance.

Also, during the time that the Enterprise was being repaired, he had to make a final decision. But, not now. He relegated these thoughts to the back of his mind for consideration at a better time.

The turbo-lift doors opened, and Doctor McCoy came onto the bridge. Spock's keen gaze traveled over the doctor's face. Slight indications of strain, but no signs that McCoy remembered anything definite about that vigil he'd kept over T'Aniyeh and Kirk. Good, that was as it should be. If McCoy had remembered ALL that had happened, his sanity would never have remained intact.

"Bones," Jim inquired, "what are you doing up on the bridge at this hour?"

"Sometimes this doctor still makes house calls, Jim. You neglected to come down to Sickbay for your latest injection. Going too long without medication can set back your recovery, so I'm asserting my rights as your doctor."

"In other words, though I've just managed to talk you into letting me come back on duty, I'm to accompany you to Sickbay--and no arguments?"

"No," McCoy drawled. Nurse Chapel stepped out of the turbo-lift, carrying a prepared hypo spray. "I think I can give you your injection right here without upsetting discipline."

Spock raised an eyebrow. Was McCoy presuming too much, perhaps even undermining the captain's authority? No, not if the half-amused/half-relieved glances the bridge crew were exchanging were any indication. Apparently, McCoy was employing his so-called therapeutic humorous by-play in an effort to reduce potentially dangerous tension.

Eventually, Spock's gaze moved to rest on Nurse Chapel's face--another problem to be solved. Again, his eyebrow lifted. Fascinating. Other than when she was carrying out McCoy's orders, Spock hadn't seen much of Christine since T'Aniyeh's death. As a matter of fact, even when she'd been administering medication or supervising any of the countless duties required by the presence of patients in Sickbay, she'd been totally impersonal, calm, and efficient. She hadn't even made more than a polite expression of sympathy--though there had been many chances for her to say anything more that she had wished.

Now, for example, she was standing beside McCoy, holding the hypo spray ready for his hand, her attention directed upon their patient--as it should be. Not once had her gaze lifted to search for Spock, which was a departure from her usual mode of behavior whenever she was near him.

Had she finally come to realize the logic of the situation? Was it possible that she had extinguished the "love" which she had admitted that she felt for him?

Christine handed the hypo spray to McCoy; then, in spite of herself, her gaze traveled upwards in an automatic effort to locate Spock.

There you stand, tall and silent, she thought, seemingly as emotionless as that panel beside you. Yet, we both know that inwardly you ache with loneliness and sorrow. If only you would allow me to share your burden--if only you'd accept what little support my strength could give. But, you won't. No. You'll follow your usual routine, proud and aloof as ever, ignoring any attempts at sympathy from everyone--especially me! The only thing I can give you now is what you say you want--NOTHING!

No, Spock mused when Christine looked up at him suddenly then deliberately turned her head, the problem of you has yet to be solved--and I am sorry. I have no desire to hurt you, to bring you distress, yet I am convinced that it will be necessary to do so.

Christine felt hot color rising in her cheeks when Spock's dark eyes suddenly met her gaze. She'd resolved to stop watching him like a moonstruck maiden, but here she was, doing it again! Deliberately, she turned her head and reached out for the hypo stray which McCoy had just finished using.

"Okay, Jim. That should hold you for a spell. When you go off for a rest-break--oh, yes, you are! Doctor's orders, remember? I want you to relax in one of the rec rooms. Have a pleasant chat with someone over a cup of coffee. Hold the lift, Christine. We might as well go back to Sick Bay together."

Spock watched the captain carefully for a while, then, satisfied that the injection was building Jim's strength, turned to more routine matters. Eventually, the hour for Kirk's rest-break arrived, and he turned the con over to Spock.

Christine didn't want to be alone with her thoughts again this evening, not for a while, anyway. There weren't too many people in the rec room now, just enough to keep her from being too lonely, without intruding more than she needed.

Picking up a cup of coffee, she went to a table in a shadowy corner and sat down. After a moment, she propped her elbows on the table, leaned her head upon her hands, and stared unseeingly into the depths of the dark liquid in her cup.

"Mind if I join you, Nurse?" said a familiar voice.

She looked up to see Captain Kirk, holding two cups of steaming coffee, standing beside the table. "C-certainly, sir," she responded, half-rising, then sinking back when he shook his head.

He moved her untouched cup of cold coffee to one side and set the fresh cup before her, then he took a seat opposite her, sipping carefully as he studied her over the rim of his cup.

"Drink your coffee before it gets cold," he ordered, smiling to off-set the unconscious sternness of his command.

She obeyed, studying him in turn over the rim of her own cup; the nurse in her concerned over the lines of tension and strain in his face; the woman in her responding naturally to his masculine charm.

"You are very quiet tonight--Christine."

"It's been a long day, Captain."

"We've had a lot of 'long days' recently. It'll be better once we reach Vulcan. We all need a rest. I suppose you've made plans for your leave?"

"I haven't felt like it, Captain, and no one has invited me. I'm alone, and no one cares what I'll do during my leave, absolutely no one."

Her bitter words had revealed more than she'd intended. Embarrassed and quite ill-at-ease, she reached for her cup, intending either to go to another table or to leave the room entirely.

Jim reached out and clasped her free hand gently before she could rise.

"I care, Christine; believe that or not, as you wish." After a short pause, "It's been hell for you, and I'm sorry. You really deserve better than what life has been handing out to you."

Christine looked up, her mouth forming a small "o" of surprise. She'd known that the Captain was capable of great insight and compassion, but how did he know? Save for his silent support while she was watching Spock and T'Aniyeh confronting each other on the dze-ut' planet, he'd seldom had much occasion to be in close contact with her. After that horrible experience he'd shared with her when he'd beamed down with her to meet her fiancé, Roger Corby, the friendship that had sprung into being between them had somehow fallen by the wayside.

Odd, thought Kirk, I'd nearly forgotten how courageous she was while we were on Exo III. She endured that tragedy like a soldier. A rare kind of woman, one well-suited to starship life. There's healing in those hands, soft, cool. She's all woman, with every bit of the heart, the beauty, and the nonsense a woman has to give. What a pity that she's wasting it all on Spock. He'll NEVER let her into his life!

Odd, Christine thought, the Captain is as attractive in his way as Spock is in his. Why is it that the Captain has never touched my heart the way that Spock has? Of course, most of the crew, especially the female yeomen, think he's as unattainable as Spock, that he's married to the Enterprise. Maybe he is. But I have a notion that the right woman could come to mean as much to him as his ship does. A woman who understands his problems of command, who is as devoted to the welfare of the crew as he, himself, is, might prove to be that woman. Perhaps it would be easier if I had loved Kirk.

No, it hasn't been easy. Standing there in Sick Bay, working at McCoy's side, rewarding, but lonely, so lonely. Spock comes in, silent and watchful, wondering if I'll say or do something that'll break that code of his. Yes, sometimes it's unbearable, trying to measure up to his standards. WOULD it be easier loving the captain? It could never be. Spock occupies that niche in the depths of my heart; if he's rooted out, the inner bleeding it would cause could well be fatal.

God! How lonely to love someone who can't--or won't-- love in return. Better, far better to have a heart totally dedicated to duty.

In another place and time, the captain and I might have been good for one another. Indeed, we might have.... As it is, I need a friend.

"You've GOT that friend, Christine," Kirk said softly, reassuringly. "Anything I can do to help you ease the pain. You have only to ask, and...."

The expression of shock on Christine's face warned him that he'd done it again; he'd been answering her THOUGHTS; she hadn't said anything aloud for several minutes!

"My--God!" she whispered, drawing back slightly. "That rumor is TRUE. You ARE a telepath."

"No, Christine. NO. I wasn't really trying. I wasn't reading your mind. It's just that I've gotten to know the members of my crew quite well. I could imagine the general direction your thoughts were probably taking right now."

"Captain," Christine spoke sternly, leaning toward him now that her initial shock was over, "I was down on that planet with you. I KNOW what happened. I SAW. Oh, sir, how are you able to stand it? I remember how Doctor Jones said...! That's why you're going to Vulcan, isn't it? You're going to have to let them teach you how NOT to read thoughts."

"That's what Spock says, though I still don't believe that I'm a telepath. Why wouldn't it have shown up before now? All right, now that you know, I'm going to have to ask you not...."

"Captain, I'm a nurse; I know how to keep confidences. But, I wish there were something I could do to help."

"You've helped by not turning away in horror now that you know what may be happening to me. Expressing exactly what you feel helps a lot, too. Maybe we can help each other. You've got your problems, and I have mine. Perhaps we can lend a shoulder to help one another bear up under the load."

"Bridge to Captain Kirk."

Kirk strode to the intercom and flipped the switch. "Kirk here."

"Captain, we've just assumed standard orbit over Vulcan. I've been informed that Ambassador Sarek wishes to speak with you shortly. Would you want me to patch into your quarters, or...?"

"Unless he specified privacy, I'll take it on the bridge, Lieutenant."

"Privacy wasn't requested, sir."

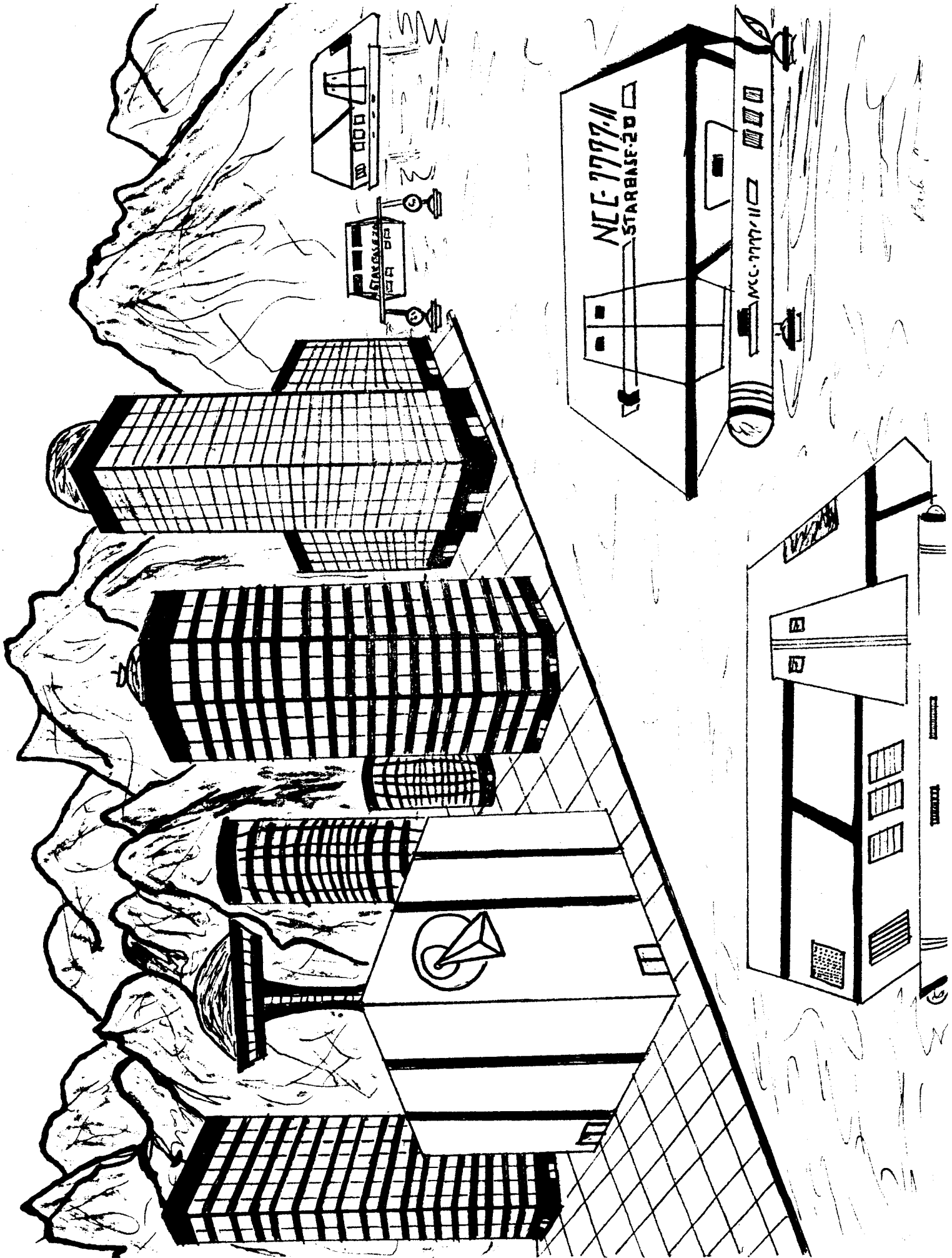
"Then I'm on my way. Coming, Christine?"

"The message doesn't concern me, Captain. I'll go back to Sick Bay and finish an inventory I started this afternoon." Christine smiled, grateful for Jim's thoughtful gesture in offering to take her to the bridge with him to keep her mind off her own problems. However, she was beginning to realize that she had to learn to rely upon her own strength to solve those problems. Might as well begin now. Otherwise, she might wind up as a self-pitying creature of no use to herself, or to anyone else.

Sarek's message had been a somewhat unusual one, yet, since Kirk was now his adopted son, not so unusual after all. Sarek had wanted to know at what time his sons could leave the ship in order to schedule the ceremony of returning T'Aniyeh's name to the Archives, and to record her death.

Kirk and Spock beamed down alone. The rest of the crew began to make their final preparations to go on shore leave while the ship was undergoing repairs. Christine, as per her word, continued with the inventory she had started.





"Bridge to Nurse Chapel."

"What?" Christine stared at the intercom, not sure she'd heard correctly.

"Bridge to Nurse Chapel," Uhura's voice repeated.

"Chapel here."

"Christine, I have a call for you from the Lady Amanda. Hold on, and I'll patch it in for you."

"Christine," came a lovely, familiar voice, "is that you?"

"Yes, Lady Amanda. Peace and Long Life."

"Peace and Long Life. I have not seen you for a long time."

"Duty has a way of keeping friends apart, Lady Amanda."

"Just Amanda, Christine. We've been through too much to revert to that formality. Captain Kirk has told me that you have made no real plans for your shore leave. Is that still true?"

"Yes. I'll probably go to the...."

"Christine, both Sarek and I invite you to be a guest under our roof for a few days. Please say 'yes.' I'd really love to have you."

"Why, I.... Did you say that your husband has invited me, too?"

"Yes, he says that he thinks it would be good for me to spend time in the company of a human female, comparing my memories of Earth with the reality of what it is now. Actually, I think he suspects I've been among Vulcans too long and need a chance to be with my own kind."

"If you're sure I won't be in the way, Amanda, I'd love to come. But, what does Mr. Spock say?"

"Spock won't be here. He and Jim won't be returning home for quite some time. You won't have to worry about Spock while you're with us." Amanda's tone revealed that she knew exactly WHY Christine had hesitated to stay in Spock's home if he were there, too. After all, Amanda had seen Christine in Sick Bay, ministering to her son. She'd been perfectly capable of reading eyes and expressions.

"Then, if that is the case, I shall be glad to accept your invitation," Christine said slowly. It wouldn't hurt to get some idea of what Spock's home environment was like; it might help her to understand him better. "I'll have to check with Doctor McCoy to see when he will let me leave, though."

"Good. Just let us know when you're ready to come down. Everything is ready for you."

Christine immediately went in search of Doctor McCoy.

"Doctor McCoy," she said when she found him. "I've just been invited...."

"To spend a few days at Spock's home. I know all about it; Amanda called me and asked if you'd be free before she called you. Have you finished that inventory?"

"Of course."

"Then I see no reason why you can't beam down as soon as you get packed. Wait a minute, I'd better tell you a bit about some of the Vulcan customs that you'll be encountering."

"I'd be very grateful if you would, Doctor."

He did so, quickly, then grinned. "Goodbye, Christine. Have a good time."

Before long, Christine found herself in a group of milling crewmen who had beamed down to Vulcan. It took several moments to sort herself and her few bits of luggage from the other items that had come down. A private aircar was waiting for her, and she lost no time getting in; it was either that, or turn tail and run back to the ship, for she wasn't sure even yet that she was doing the wise thing. To go to Spock's home, where he had spent his childhood, to sleep beneath the same roof that had sheltered him? Maybe it wasn't such a good idea after all.

The aircar swept over the house in its first pass to approach the landing field. Christine looked down and admired the sprawling construction that looked as if it had been a part of the mountain range beyond it from the beginning of time. True, this was a desert area, but

she'd seen so many worlds and had been exposed to so many cultures that she could see the beauty and the order of the planning that had created this structure. It reminded her of a great temple built to honor the memory of a race that had gone before. "Ancestral home" was the perfect description for it.

The pilot landed the aircar skillfully then descended and extended an impersonal hand to help her out. Her gaze traveled upwards towards the entrance of the house. Oh dear. She hadn't anticipated that Ambassador Sarek would be home. Christine sighed and squared her shoulders unconsciously. She wasn't afraid of Sarek--exactly. After all, he'd been a patient in Sick Bay after that horribly complicated operation which had restored him to health. She'd not hesitated to use her authority when he'd tried to argue the merits of Vulcan healing against plain old-fashioned Federation medicine. McCoy had given in to Sarek when he was convinced it was necessary. He'd also given her orders to follow when Vulcan healing couldn't work with the necessary speed and she'd carried out those orders to the best of her ability. However, that had been in Sick Bay. Meeting Ambassador Sarek on his home grounds was something else.

Christine didn't hesitate to admit that she felt more than a little awed by this tall Vulcan who could sway men and governments with the power of his voice, and with the strength of his logic. A man who could sire such a unique son would be equally unique in his own right. The fact that he'd married a human woman made him that much more of an unknown quantity, one that made her feel definitely uneasy. He was unfailingly courteous whenever his pathway crossed her's, yet, his dark eyes studied her so intently, with a gaze so penetrating that she could almost believe that he knew far more about herself than she did. That he knew she loved his son she didn't doubt. Would he call this fact to her attention during the course of her visit?

Well, she'd find out soon enough. Informing her that her luggage would be taken care of, the pilot motioned toward the house, and she walked toward the waiting couple.

Amanda and Sarek descended the steps, the Vulcan slightly ahead of his wife. "Live Long and Prosper, Christine Chapel," he said quietly, lifting his hand in the Vulcan salute.

"Peace and Long Life, Ambassador Sarek," Christine responded as she lifted her own hand. "To you also, Lady Amanda."

"Enter beneath our roof and be our guest so long as it pleases thee." Sarek repeated the courteous phrase and then turned to one side to allow Amanda to pass him. She clasped her guest's hand in the human form of greeting.

"Come along with me, Christine. I'll show you the building." She turned toward the house, but Sarek did not accompany them. Instead, he entered a path leading toward the side of the house.

"I think you'll enjoy our main living area," Amanda said as they entered the hallway.

And Christine found herself swept into a tour of this castle-like home, seeing where Spock had studied his lessons, the rooms in which the family had spent most of their time, exclaiming with awe and unconscious envy when she saw the real books that Amanda had brought to Vulcan with her, books which Amanda offered to let her read freely.

Yet, all the time that Amanda was taking Christine over the house, she seemed to be waiting for some reaction, revealing only the tiniest bit of disappointment that it wasn't forthcoming. Sometimes, she seemed to hope that Christine would hear something. She did stop and listen, but she could hear nothing except the muted whisper of the air-cooling unit that had been installed to give some rooms the climate so necessary to humans. Christine had the uneasy feeling that she'd failed some sort of test, had missed detecting something that Amanda had wanted her to notice, but she also felt certain that she'd be making a mistake if she asked what it was. Time enough to find out later, if at all.

They descended a flight of steps into what could only be the basement of the house. It was dim in this space beneath the house. It could only be a natural cave. Christine blinked with surprise. Sarek was waiting for them, standing beside a huge stone table in the center, a table which was higher than his chest.

"There is a little ceremony that guests here observe with their hosts," Amanda said quietly.

The two women approached the table and then paused at the edge. Sarek descended a flight of steps that went down beneath the table. Christine ignored a temptation to rub her eyes. No, she wasn't seeing things; that really WAS a pool of crystal-clear water. An artesian well on Vulcan.

Sarek bent to draw a cup of water, rose to come back up the steps, then touched the cup to his lips in a ceremonious gesture. "Please accept our hospitality," he said solemnly, once in his tongue and, in courtesy to the human guest, once in her own, then he handed her the beautifully simple ceramic cup.

Sensing that this was somehow a test of her mettle, as well as some kind of contract entered into by her host, Christine accepted the cup and drank of the water. It was bracingly cold, with a tang in it that hinted of minerals dissolved in the liquid. Quite refreshing and good.

She lifted her head and paused, uncertain as to what to do next. Seeing her confusion, Sarek stepped forward to take the cup from her and carefully poured the remaining water into a



small trough that led back to the well after passing through an algae bed filter.

"My wife, please complete the tour of our home for our guest," he reminded Amanda gently when he saw that she was still studying Christine's face instead of remembering her duties as a hostess.

Eventually, Amanda led her to the double guest suite that was always ready for off-world visitors. Christine was chagrined to find that she was quite tired and short of breath, while the older woman showed no traces of discomfort.

"I'm sorry. I keep forgetting that you're used to a lighter gravity and breathe denser oxygen," Amanda apologized. "Perhaps you would like to rest for a while before the evening meal; perhaps even take a short nap? There will be plenty of time."

Christine didn't argue. She'd fallen into a light, refreshing sleep almost before the door had closed behind Amanda.

Amanda was waiting for her at the foot of the long stairway when she came down. They went out on a low terrace where an oval, greenstone table waited, already set with the utensils and dishes for a buffet-style meal.

"I thought you would prefer a simple meal for your first evening with us, so only the three of us will be eating tonight. Tomorrow, however, many of our neighbors will come to see you. They have heard so much of how human women work in Federation Star Fleet, and they wish to find out for themselves, first hand, what you do."

"I'll be happy to tell them whatever I can."

"I knew you would. Sarek, is everything here?"

"Almost, my wife. I have sent for one final confection that I have been informed our guest enjoys. A minor oversight, but I prefer that it be here as a token of welcome."

At that very moment, a young Vulcan woman brought in a two-sided dish containing several porous cubes on colorful skewers and a bowl of scintillating froth.

"I am correct; you do enjoy yhotekhq?" Sarek asked calmly, his dark eyes intent as he awaited her reaction. "At least, that is what Doctor McCoy told me when I inquired if you had expressed a preference for any of our native foods."

"Why, yes, I do! Than..." Christine stopped. To thank Sarek for an expression of hospitality that was a matter of course was a breach of Vulcan custom, or so McCoy had told her during that quick run-through of Vulcan etiquette that he'd given her before she'd beamed down. "It's a dish that I relish, though I haven't had any since we entertained that group of Vulcans during our journey to Feda XII."

She bit her lip with vexation. Darn it! That was when Spock had met T'Rruel and while Sarek was still prisoner of the Romulans. Couldn't she do or say anything without reviving unfortunate memories?

But Sarek accepted her statement in the spirit in which it had been offered, and he motioned toward the table.

Christine hesitated. Amanda saw her uncertainty and smiled at her without letting Sarek see, then she stepped forward and began to guide Christine through the intricacies of selecting Vulcan foods that would be acceptable to her human palate.

The silence that was a part of the Vulcan meal hour fell over the trio. It didn't take Christine long to discard her feelings of nervousness, and she found that she was able to enjoy everything, especially the yhotekhq.

When the meal was over, Amanda and Sarek moved to clear the table. When Amanda saw Christine's wistful glance, she cast a look at Sarek and, at his silent nod, invited Christine to join them in the task, gratifying her with this widening of their family circle to let her in at the very edge.

Christine had found this indication of a subliminal tie between the couple very revealing. She'd wondered how Sarek had known exactly when they'd reach that natural cavern beneath the house. Apparently, he'd sensed Amanda's decision to turn their steps in that direction and had gone down to wait for her to join him for the ceremony of welcoming their guest.

"My wife, unless our guest is tired, this would be a good time to show her the rest of our property," Sarek suggested after everything had been cleared away.

"Oh, no, I'm not tired," Christine said when Amanda looked at her.

"Then come." Sarek extended his fingers to his wife, and the couple escorted Christine around the grounds immediately surrounding the house.

At last, they turned their steps towards the house, only to lead her up past the guest quarters and on up to the roof, where they stopped on a parapeted roof terrace, a terrace which was characterized by complicated patterns created from lines of stone about knee-high throughout their length. Many pagoda-like structures, with carefully arranged plants growing about them were also visible, and Christine wondered if this might be a Vulcan garden.

"May I ask what this is?"

"We call this the Garden of Thought. It is a place where one may come to meditate in private. Indeed, if one is inside the Garden, no one may communicate with him or her, for any reason," Sarek informed her.

"It's beautiful! Is it--is it forbidden to off-worlders?"

"Our guests may use the Garden at any time that they choose. Do you wish to visit it now?"

"No, I don't think so. Not right now. If the Lady Amanda doesn't mind, I would like to take another look at those books. It's been a long time since I've seen any."

"As you wish. I have work waiting for me. Until later." And Sarek took his leave.

Christine couldn't keep from uttering a soft sigh of relief after the Vulcan was gone. She didn't think she had to be so careful around Amanda, for they'd gotten to know one another quite well in Sick Bay while Sarek had been recovering from that operation.

The remainder of Christine's first evening in Spock's home passed pleasantly as she examined some of the lovely books and visited with Amanda. She'd been afraid that Amanda might ask questions about her son, wanting to know how he was bearing up under the strain of T'Aniyeh's death, but the conversation didn't turn in that direction at all. Apparently, Amanda's years on Vulcan had taught her much restraint and control. She'd seen Spock; she knew that he was taking his loss with his usual Vulcan stoicism.

"I must make preparations for tomorrow. Would you like to accompany me?" Amanda asked finally.

"If you don't mind, I'm beginning to feel a bit tired. Perhaps another time?"

"Of course. Do you know the way to your room?"

"Yes, Amanda. May I take one of these books with me to read until I fall asleep?"

"As many as you wish. Good night, Christine."

And she left, leaving Christine examining the shelves. But Christine realized that she wasn't really that sleepy after all. She wondered what it would be like in the Garden of Thought after the daylight was gone. The air would be cool now, and the stars overhead were said to be a blaze of glory. Well, Sarek had said she could visit the Garden at any time she wished.

Yes, a very pleasant place, quite conducive to deep thought, she concluded as she strolled along one of the pathways. Even though there was no moon, the starlight was bright enough that she could see the marked pathway clearly. So long as she didn't stray, she shouldn't be in any difficulty.

She glanced out and downwards when her ramblings brought her near the wall. She saw a structure below, much like a balcony, jutting from one window. Someone was standing there with his back to her, looking up at the sky, Sarek. Impulsively, she thought of calling some greeting to let him know that she was here, but immediately thought better of it. Hadn't Sarek said that it was forbidden to communicate with someone inside the Garden? That probably worked both ways. Besides, it wasn't necessary for her to let him know where she was; if he wanted to find her, he could do so very easily.

She sat down on a low bench near the wall and leaned her head back to look into the sky. What had he been studying? She couldn't see anything too out of the ordinary.

"My husband," she heard Amanda's voice speaking softly, "will I disturb your meditations if I join you?"

Christine started to rise then realized that she would probably make a lot of noise if she moved. Rather than give the impression that she was spying, she remained motionless, hoping that the couple would go back inside.

"I have completed my meditations, my wife. Come, join me. The stars are exceptionally bright this evening."

"Perhaps they are welcoming our guest."

"One of your human fancies, Amanda? You know that the stars pay no heed to the activities of the beings living upon the surfaces of their planets."

"True, but it's a nice thought, nonetheless. Sarek, thank you for allowing me to invite Christine to stay with us. I wasn't sure that you would let her come."

"Even if she were not an acceptable guest for herself, I would not separate you from the human friends that you have found."

"Yes, she's been such a good friend to me. And I think you do not look upon her with disfavor."

"She is an excellent nurse and, within limits, an interesting personality. I have learned much of human nature observing her."

"I'm so glad you like her."

"Liking does not have a bearing upon the case, Amanda. But, I am confident that you have a reason for this conversation. What is it that you want?"

"Dear Sarek. I've never been able to fool you. It isn't for myself; I-I'm wondering if you would be able to do something for Christine."

"What is it that you wish, my wife?"

"You know how she feels, how she regards Spock. Sarek, I know it can never be. I understand and accept that, and I know she will, too, eventually. But it's so hard for her right now. Couldn't you...? Well, she did help you so much when you were ill. Would it be out of place for me to ask you if you could prepare a Flame for her?"

There was a silence. Christine, totally embarrassed by this conversation about herself, hoped fervently that they would back inside so she could slip away. Not for all the treasure in the universe would she reveal her presence now!

Sarek stepped forward slightly and turned to one side. When he spoke, his voice was as clear as though he were standing on the roof. "I am sorry, my wife. You have asked of me the one thing I cannot do."

"But Sarek, why?" Amanda almost wailed. "You gave one to ME."

"Yes, Amanda, because you were capable of using it. However, the Flame can be incredibly dangerous, especially to humans. A special mind is needed for one to be able to attain a state of Peace which the Flame can preserve. Only a special mind can attain that state without lapsing into insanity. A certain type of psychology is necessary to enable one to benefit from the Flame without risking the self-destruction of addiction. If Christine Chapel had that sort of mind, Spock might have married her years ago. Do you understand, my wife?"

"I-I'm not sure. Are you saying that Christine is--is stupid? I can't believe that!"

"That is not what I am saying at all. She has academic credits and the training and experience to testify that she is intelligent. She is the Chief Nurse aboard the Enterprise. However, though she has much strength of character, what I believe humans call 'sterling qualities', she cannot become attuned to the Flame. If she could, she would be the Chief Medical Officer of the ship, if not of Star Fleet itself by now. But she is not, and she never will be. Now, do you understand?"

"I think so. You can't give her a Flame because the risk is too great."

"It would leave her maimed, and I am confident you would not want that. Surely there will be other ways that she can resolve her problem; it is her duty to find them."

"I hope she finds a solution soon. She's so unhappy. She loves Spock so much, and yet she knows that nothing can ever come of it."

"I wonder."

"'You wonder'? You have said yourself that it's clearly evident that he will never even consider Christine as a wife."

"True. I meant that I wonder if Nurse Chapel's love for our son is the deep quality of that emotion, as you have taught me to know it to be. Do you remember what some of your peers said to you when they first learned that I had selected you as my consort?"

"That, that I 'had a feather in my cap' now because I'd won a Vulcan? I wish you'd never heard that, Sarek. It was so untrue, and so totally unworthy of our true relationship."

"Nevertheless, it is how some individuals must have viewed the situation. As I have come to understand some human females, but you are not one of these, Amanda, that which is beyond reach is most attractive, unless or until it can be obtained. Spock is a most desirable commodity, both because of his ancestry on Vulcan and because of his record in Star Fleet. I cannot deny this. There are doubtless many females who would consider it an asset to win him. Perhaps your friend may nourish a similar feeling in her mind. A knowledge that if she could win Spock, she would gain much recognition."

"No, Sarek, I believe she really loves him."

"An inevitable result of her long years of service aboard the Enterprise. However, I am confident that Christine Chapel is of that breed of women who are destined never to marry, never to have a family in the usual sense of the word."

"You mean like a Daughter?"

Christine thought she detected an indulgent smile in Sarek's voice: "Perhaps a Schillian would put it that way."

It sounded like a private joke, and it made her cheeks grow warm as she became even more convinced that she shouldn't be listening.

Amanda laughed. Instead of a reprimand, there ensued a long silence, during which Christine was literally afraid to open her eyes, for she sensed that looking over the parapet at this moment would be a definite invasion of privacy.

And then Sarek resumed his measure of words. "Christine Chapel does not hesitate to help those in need, but I believe it is not within her to accept and to endure the demands of marriage. She is 'married' to her work in the same way that S'Chames is bonded to his Enterprise, though with S'Chames, it may be only temporary. Christine would be unable to restrict herself to caring for only a few when there are many who need the help which her training and skills can give them."

"Do you also think that she would be unable to meet the demands of marriage to a Vulcan?"

"She would not be able to meet the demands of marriage to Spock. There is a great difference, my wife. Spock is Spock. He can be no less, and it is more than Nurse Chapel could endure and remain at peace with herself."

"Yes, for Spock would demand more than a full Vulcan. Christine could never endure. You're right, Sarek. She could never be happy if she married Spock. But, she will have to learn to understand that before she can ever find Peace. Knowing something and learning to stop loving someone because of that knowledge are two different things. I wish that there were something that we could do to help her."

"Perhaps she will learn much of value while she is with us. If an opportunity comes for me to help her, I shall do whatever I can. Can you ask more, Amanda?"

"No, of course not."

"Then come; the hour is late."

He led his wife back into the house, leaving a very hurt and confused Christine sitting in the Garden of Thought.

Humiliation burned in her throat, almost gagging her as she recalled Sarek's words. She forced herself to become calm and to analyze his words in the same light of reason that Spock would have demanded that she employ, had he been a witness to this scene. All right, galling as it was, she had to admit that Sarek was right about her. She was good at her work, yes, but she had no real ambition to become more than what she was now, the best nurse in Star Fleet. The prestige and the power of the higher positions were enviable, but she had no wish to assume the heartaches and the heavy burdens of responsibility that would come with them. She was content with what she was now, the person who eased pain and brought comfort and healing to those who needed it. And was that really such a bad life? Not at all. And, as for the rest: WAS it true what Sarek had said? Was her love for Spock merely because he represented the unattainable?

Unbidden, her thoughts turned back to Roger Corby, her former fiancé. He, too, had been considered 'unattainable', yet she, Christine, had won him, and how proud she'd been when the news had been made public. But, if she had loved him as much as she'd said, why had she been willing to let him go off on that mission with so little protest? Why had she waited for five years before finally deciding to go out and see what had happened to him? She had to face it: she'd enjoyed the prestige of being Corby's promised wife, but she hadn't loved him enough to hasten the time when she would have had to accept the responsibility of becoming his wife and of living under his shadow.

Christine did a lot of growing up during the next few minutes while she analyzed her reasons for loving Spock: The first time she'd ever seen him, she'd noticed how ALONE he had seemed; yet, there had been other crewmen first coming on board who were equally alone. Hadn't he captured her attention because she knew he was Vulcan, representing the Unknown? Yes. She had come to realize the many unique qualities about him and had finally called this knowledge "love"; but she knew now that she could never be to him what he needed and had to have in a wife. Thus, T'Rruel and T'Aniyeh had been perfect for him, where she could have been nothing but a disaster, perhaps even death.

The better side of her nature had influenced the seed, had caused it to germinate in the depths of her being and blossom forth as love, but it was not the right sort of love. As Sarek had said, she had selected Spock at first because it would have enhanced her value in the eyes of her peer group if she could have won the First Officer, the seemingly unattainable Vulcan.

"Well, Christine. That's that. It isn't pretty, but you know just where you stand in relation to yourself," she whispered after a while. "Now, are you going to be a coward and run off to bury your head in the sand, or are you going to be a woman, face up to the truth, and make the best of it?"



Whatever the decision, she knew she was in no frame of mind to make it now. Instead, she rose and went back into the silent house, grateful that Amanda had retired, for she knew that her expression would have given her away.

She paused after entering the hall and hovered at the foot of the stairway. Should she go straight up the stairs, or should she pick out a book and see if it would help her silence the wild racing of her mind enough to get to sleep? Hardly seemed likely, but it wouldn't hurt to try.

There was the sound of a soft footstep behind her; she turned swiftly, to find that Sarek was standing near her. "Oh, I-I'm sorry. I didn't know you were still up. I-I didn't mean to disturb you." Stop it, Christine. You're babbling, she warned herself sternly.

"It was not my intention to retire until you left the Garden," he replied calmly.

"You knew I was out there?"

He nodded, but remained silent, content to let her pick up the conversational ball and keep it rolling.

"Vulcans have much keener hearing than humans. I'll bet you heard me while you were standing out on the balcony, while you were talking with your wife. You KNEW I was listening."

Again that proud head bent slightly in assent.

Christine was too hurt to cry. It wouldn't help, anyhow.

"Well, it's always nice to know where one stands. I'll say goodnight now, sir, and don't worry. I'll be out of here as soon as possible tomorrow."

Suddenly bewildered, he raised a Spockian eyebrow. "I have not asked you to leave," he commented. "Indeed, I have given you the hospitality of my home."

"Why? So I'd have a chance to hear your opinion of me? I'm sorry that I don't meet your standards, sir, but I can't help it." Her throat became so tight that she couldn't go on.

"You are hurt. That is understandable, for it is evident that you did not grasp the full meaning of all that you heard. It was not my intention that you should be hurt. You have given evidence that you respect the truth. Will you let me enable you to fully understand this matter?"

A Vulcan, seeking to explain his motives to a human? Truly, Sarek must be concerned for her welfare to depart so far from the norm. If he could unbend to make this request, then she could do no less than grant it. "Very well. I'll listen to you."

"Come with me, please." So saying, he made a sweeping gesture towards the entrance of his library/study, that inner sanctum where so few out-worlders were allowed to go, and where she'd never dared imagine she would ever set foot.

Realizing that Sarek was giving her a rare honor, Christine entered the well-appointed room and sat quickly in the seat that he pointed out. He stood close by and gazed at her for a moment, then he sighed. "Please tell me, what did you think I meant when I told Amanda why I could not give you a Flame?"

"I-I guess that you meant that I'm just 'second-rate'; that I don't have what it takes to make it in the Vulcan civilization."

"As I anticipated. You are right, and you are wrong. If by 'second-rate' you mean that you do not have that burning ambition to go ever onward and upward in your field of medicine, far beyond the profession of nursing, that is so. However, I did not wish to imply that you are lacking in mental capabilities. Even so, your mind is not like that of my son's or of Captain Kirk's. They require the healing influence of the Flame because they both are on what you would call the 'unstable genius' level. Their subconsciousnesses are constantly filled with the burning desire to CREATE until it is impossible to create anything more; to risk and to accept peril and responsibility far beyond ordinary limits. They also have the strength and fortitude necessary to meet these demands, and exceed them. But such minds are in a state of constant turmoil and torment, and such minds always hover on the brink of disaster. You might compare such a mind to a meteor that is passing through a planetary atmosphere. It creates a brilliant glow while it lasts, and it inspires admiration from those who see it, yet it is in danger of being totally destroyed by its own forces. However, you, Christine, can be compared to the fire upon a home's hearth, burning with a constant steady glow that lights the way, bringing warmth and courage to face the dangers that await on the morrow. Indeed, the universe needs more flames such as you, just to survive. Now, do you understand?"

"Yes, oh yes!" Christine's eyes glowed with a joy at the tribute which this austere Vulcan had given her. "And, even if I'm being impolite, I thank you! Ambassador, you were right. I really wouldn't be happy with Spock. But, that doesn't change the fact that I'm still in love with him. What am I going to do about that?"

"The way is difficult, but I am confident that you could learn much from us, if you have changed your mind and will remain here?"

"I'd like to, if you'll have me. For some reason, though, I feel like a child when I think of all that I'll have to learn."

"My wife was a teacher. I think she would not hesitate to become one again. Sleep well, my guest."

Oddly enough, Christine did.

It was a much calmer Christine who stood before Spock's ancestral home, taking leave of her host and hostess. She'd learned the proper words; now she tried to speak them in the Vulcan tongue, knowing that Sarek and Amanda would forgive her for mispronouncing the subtle articulations.

Amanda spoke the words of parting, then with a swift side-long glance at her husband, she stepped forward to give Christine a quick hug. Immediately, she turned and went back into the house. Christine understood, for she knew that Amanda wanted to spare her husband the sight of the tears that had risen unbidden to her eyes, so close had she and Christine grown during this visit.

Sarek moved a step nearer, but Christine no longer felt that nervous fear that she'd known when she had first come here. This tall Vulcan had engaged her in conversation whenever the pressures of his work had allowed him to do so, teaching her to understand the Vulcan way, and also teaching her not only to see herself but to understand and accept herself as well.

"The time has come to part," he said quietly. "You have given me much to consider. And, you?"

"You have given me much to consider as well, sir. I think you knew that I would have a decision to make after I heard you talking to Amanda. Somehow, I feel that you have a very keen insight and understanding of us humans."

"You have made your decision."

"Yes." She knew he wouldn't ask, even if he were burning with curiosity. "I'm going to tell you because you, of all concerned, will understand why I have made this decision. Of course, from time to time I'll fail to keep this promise I've made to myself. After all, I'm only human."

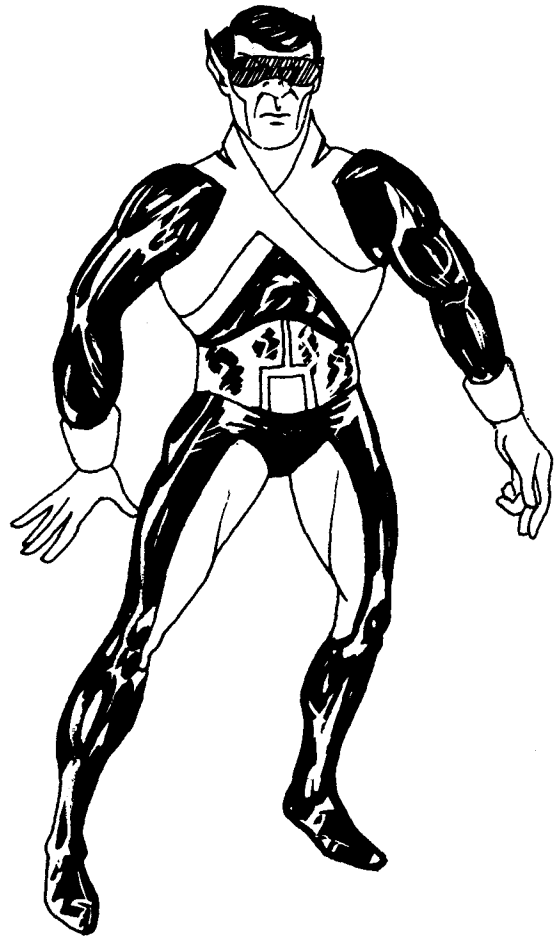
He didn't smile, but there was a gentleness in his eyes that made her feel that inwardly he was amused and approved of her brave attempt at humor.

"I'll stumble and fall flat on my face; I'll make errors, but I'm going to try to do my best. I've accepted the fact that nothing will ever come of my love for Spock. All right. Then I'll do my utmost to become worthy of his respect and of his friendship. Farewell, sir. Peace and Long Life."



The  
VULCAN  
as  
SUPER HERO

Randy Bathurst



AND FOR THOSE OF YOU  
WHO ALWAYS THOUGHT  
KRAITH  
TURNED SPOCK INTO  
SUPERMAN . . .

# ONE FINGERED SYMPHONY

EILEEN ROY

KRAITH-VA (1)

Passing the mirror, Christine saw her eyes looking darkly back at her. A face like a sheep, topped with dust-mop hair. Imbecile. As if there was comfort there.

She left her room an automatic three minutes before the hour, long ago calculated to get her to her shift on time whatever the vagaries of the turbo-elevator. She saw no-one, nothing. She heard only the weary phrases sliding through her brain, ringing the changes on the same old argument, the end predestined at the beginning. But it was so hard, sometimes, to force herself to the inevitable conclusion... Poor baby, she jeered at herself.

Wail alone, baby. Wail alone.

The morning shift was much as usual. A sprained ankle, a broken finger, a cold or two, notes to make, records to keep up to date. After her afternoon break there was a hiatus of sorts, and she escaped to her lab. She only had one series of tests going on at the time, and they were winding to a close. She moved with blind knowledge amid the complicated tangle of equipment. The Enterprise had taught her well how to improvise. For the moment she was safe; even her own thoughts ceased to torment her. She simply worked.

Until a slight noise startled her and she whirled around, a beaker of indicator dye slipping from her fingers to fall slantwise across floor and cabinets. "Sorry," the orderly said cheerfully. "You're wanted in Sickbay. Routine physical." He disappeared.

"No, It's..." she began to answer his departing form, before bending abruptly to mop up the dye, her fingers shaking slightly. Stupid, stupid, stupid, she castigated herself. Alone, it was OK somehow, but let someone watch her and she'd fall over her own shadow. Wreck the lab, easy as not. Clumsy, ungainly, totally undesirable. Speech tripping five seconds behind events, leaving her isolated, never to catch up. Useless.

There was the physical of a new crewmember to get through, endless errands and petti-fogging details. Leila D'Angelo stopped by for a few minutes. When Christine greeted her casually, Leila said reprovingly, "It's the fourth, you know."

"Oh, of course." Christine said blankly, and went to get the implants. The waxy-like contraceptives were injected in every unmarried female crewmember once a month, and Leila was one that never needed a reminder.

Leila D'Angelo. So bright, so young and vigorous, and oh, so promiscuous. It was said she had to look at the room number to find out which man she had slept with the night before. So Leila visited Sickbay regularly each month--Christine finally unearthed the sterile box. What had it been doing under the anti-histimine?--while Christine would give her soul for a child and there is none....

You? Your parents dying young, your own childhood bleed and stunted--any children you would raise would be as misshapen in soul as yourself, tainted by your touch.... You wouldn't be fit as a mother. There is no life in you.

"There you are," she said, releasing the hypo. Professional voice. Professional smile. Come on, smile, let that little ray of sunshine brighten up the day. It couldn't possibly make you look worse. Bed-pan trotter and smiler, fulfill your function for the day. Smile.

God help me, God help me, but I still love him.

It was the final betrayal.

The end of her shift. Night for most of the ship. She stood, palms caressingly against the cool, smooth glass of the pharmaceutical cabinet. Rows and rows and rows of pills, glowing like jewels in the sunshine. A bright casket.... She had read once, "Death is the last refuge from pain." Somewhere, somehow, there had to be an end to pain.

She turned at last, wearily, beaten. Those shining pills were out of reach. For now.

"Why?" she demanded.

The barest sigh before a quick answer. "Why what, Christine?"

"Why?"

"I saw you, and I'd been worryin' about you, so I stayed. That's not the answer, Christine."

It was a moment before she spoke, face turned away. "Useless...."

"You are not useless," he said calmly. "You are the head primary-care nurse on the Enterprise, a competent and occasionally brilliant research doctor, whenever you're left in decent privacy\_\_"

"Why does it matter, what does it mean? Noise...."

He pinched her chin urgently between thumb and forefinger, bringing it up to face him. Their eyes were of a level, his blazing blue icicles.

"Then listen to this. How dare you risk death before you've risked life!"

"Why should I? Why?"

"Because being alive is the only way you can love."

She flinched as if he'd struck her. "And when loving someone is wrong, glory-seeking, self-serving and egotistical...." she whispered. She stood firm, not swaying at all as each word rolled easily out of her memory, to hit with implacable force.

"Who... You were on Vulcan a week, weren't you? With Sarek and Amanda? Did that son-of--?"

"He was right, he was right, he was...." She swallowed the phrase reverberating on its well-worn path of agony, every muscle stiff-tense till it was gone. Rationality must be preserved, at all costs.

As if through a far-away window, she saw of Bones' hands, a fist, carefully unclenching.

"No. He's wrong."

"But...."

"He's wrong. One, love may be unwise, or needlessly painful. But it is never wrong."

Her eyes were on him now, sad, doubtful. She wanted to believe.

"Two. If you can't live with love, then you must live without it."

"Alone?" the cry tore from her.

"Yes. Even alone."

Alone. The word had a ragged, cold sound to it. But it felt, maybe, as if it could be something to hang on to. She'd been falling for so long....

"Sone..." she repeated softly. It was acceptance.

He waited a moment, then drew her firmly away from the cabinet. "Now, I'm going to give you something to help you sleep."

"A pill?"

"No. A hypo, just a mild sedative. You can bed down in the back room for the night. Let me get a blanket."

She knew he wanted her there so he could keep an eye on her, but she didn't really mind. She was shivering slightly, with aftermath or whatever, and pulled the blanket gratefully around her shoulders, to snuggle deep into. She barely noticed the shot.

She was so tired. Not with the drug, but with years on years of trying so hard to win the approval of those around her and the constant fear of failing. Years of being afraid of that limping sound, me and \_\_\_\_, me and \_\_\_\_\_. Now, just me.

"It's like a one-fingered symphony," she murmured sleepily.

"What?" McCoy asked, startled, hand falling away from the light switch.

"Being alone," she said, not very lucidly. "Like you know the whole score of a symphony, but you can only play the piano with one finger. It's not much--but it's better than silence."

"Yeah," McCoy said softly. "A one-fingered symphony." He touched the switch. In the darkness, he looked suddenly older, a little stooped, and before she slipped into warmth and dark, she heard his footsteps, almost seeming to tap the rhythm of a jangling, single-line melody--alone.



DAYS  
of  
FUTURE  
PAST



CYNTHIA LEVINE

# kraith VC

(With special thanks to Fran Zawacky)

STARDATE:

[MESSAGE FOLLOWS]

DEAR SSARSUN:

WORD HAS JUST REACHED THE ENTERPRISE OF YOUR ASSIGNMENT AS CAPTAIN OF THE ENDEAVOR! CONGRATULATIONS! (HAVE ALL YOUR GHOSTS BEEN LAID TO REST NOW?) THE ATMOSPHERE HERE HAS BEEN ONE OF DEEP CONCERN FOR CAPTAIN KIRK AND SPOCK; YOUR PROMOTION WAS JUST THE NEWS NEEDED TO PERK UP A WORRIED CREW.

AS YOU KNOW, THERE HASN'T BEEN MUCH REASON FOR ANY SORT OF CELEBRATION HERE LATELY. THE CAPTAIN HAS BEEN AT DAKAINYA FOR A MONTH AND, ACCORDING TO THE REPORTS TO DR. McCOY, THE PROGNOSIS IS GOOD . . . BUT IT MAY BE A LONG TIME BEFORE HE WILL BE ABLE TO RETURN TO STARFLEET . . . AND HE MAY NOT WANT TO. FROM WHAT I CAN GATHER, HE HAS A PLACE ON VULCAN . . . THE QUESTION IS: WILL HE WANT TO REMAIN THERE?

AS FOR SPOCK . . . ALL WE KNOW IS THAT HE IS ON PILGRIMAGE. WE HAVE RECEIVED NO OTHER EXPLANATIONS FOR HIS INDEFINITE LEAVE AND DO NOT KNOW WHEN, OR, AS SEVERAL RUMORS HAVE SAID, EVEN IF, HE WILL RETURN. BUT, SPOCK HAS NEVER CHOSEN TO EXPLAIN HIS ACTIONS TO THE CREW. (FUNNY, I CAN'T PICTURE THE ENTERPRISE WITHOUT EITHER OF THEM.)

I'VE DISCOVERED THAT I REALLY MISS OUR QUIET TALKS. SOMEHOW, WHILE YOU WERE HERE, I FOUND MY THINKING WASN'T SO MUDDLED. YOU HAVE THE KNACK OF MAKING SIMPLE WHAT APPEARS TO BE INSOLVABLE. (ARE YOU SURE THERE'S NO VULCAN LURKING IN YOUR FAMILY TREE?) BUT I GUESS THESE LETTERS WILL HAVE TO CONTINUE TO BE THE SUBSTITUTE, AT LEAST UNTIL OUR PATHS CROSS AGAIN.

FONDLY,

CHRISTINE

[MESSAGE ENDS]

STARDATE:

[MESSAGE FOLLOWS]

DEAR SSARSUN:

I DIDN'T THINK THAT STARSHIP CAPTAINS EVER FOUND TIME FOR ANYTHING BUT LOG ENTRIES!

YOU KNOW, YOU UNDERSTAND ME TOO WELL. I DON'T KNOW WHETHER IT'S THE TIME WE SPENT TOGETHER HERE ON THE ENTERPRISE OR THE FACT THAT I'VE EXPOSED TOO MUCH OF MYSELF IN MY LETTERS, BUT I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN YOU WOULD REALIZE I WAS LOOKING FOR INFORMATION . . . AND SUPPLY IT WITHOUT MY HAVING TO ASK. YOUR EXPLANATION OF SPOCK'S PILGRIMAGE DID NOT MAKE THE PICTURE CRYSTAL CLEAR, BUT NOW I UNDERSTAND -- AT LEAST A LITTLE BIT -- THE WHYS AND WHEREFORES OF HIS LEAVE. I HOPE YOU DON'T MIND, BUT I PASSED SOME OF YOUR LETTER ON TO THE CREW . . . PARTICULARLY YOUR STATEMENT THAT THE CAPTAIN MUST BE MUCH BETTER IF SPOCK HAS LEFT HIM FOR A PROLONGED LENGTH OF TIME. YOUR STATEMENT HAS BOLSTERED MY FAITH IN THE PROMISING REPORTS WE HAVE HAD FROM DAKAINYA AND HAS STRENGTHENED CREW MORALE IMMEASURABLY. OF COURSE, SCOTTY HAS HAD A LOT TO DO WITH THAT. HE HAS SLIPPED INTO COMMAND AS IF TO THE MANNER BORN ALTHOUGH HE CONSTANTLY WORRIES ABOUT HIS "WEE BAIRNS"! I HAVE SEEN CHANGES IN HIM -- CHANGES WHICH INDICATE HE IS COMING TO TERMS WITH THE "LONELINESS" OF COMMAND. HE HAS OUTWARDLY STOPPED WISHING TO BE DOWN IN ENGINEERING DURING EVERY MINOR CRISIS, ALTHOUGH I'M SURE THAT INWARDLY IT WILL TAKE QUITE AWHILE FOR HIM TO FULLY TRUST ANY ENGINEERING CREW. (IF SPOCK AND THE CAPTAIN DON'T RETURN, STARFLEET WOULD BE MAKING A MISTAKE IF THEY DON'T GIVE SCOTTY PERMANENT COMMAND OF THE ENTERPRISE. AND TO HELL WITH THE FACT THAT HE DIDN'T GO TO THE ACADEMY!)

I HAD BEEN DOING CONSIDERABLE THINKING ABOUT WHAT WE DISCUSSED YOUR LAST EVENING ON THE ENTERPRISE. (HAS IT BEEN ALMOST THREE MONTHS ALREADY?) AND, YOU WERE ABSOLUTELY RIGHT! NURSING IS NOT ENOUGH. SO, I GATHERED UP MY COURAGE AND APPLIED TO THE ACADEMY FOR MY M.D. I JUST RECEIVED MY ACCEPTANCE TODAY AND I'VE DEFINITELY DECIDED TO GO. (SEE WHAT OUR TALKS HAVE DONE?)

FORTUNATELY, THE TERM WON'T BEGIN FOR SEVERAL MONTHS AND, ALTHOUGH WE ARE ON PATROL, I SHOULD ARRIVE IN TIME. I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO IT WITH GREAT ANTICIPATION. I CAN'T REMEMBER EVER FEELING THIS EXCITED. (DR. McCOY SAYS I SOUND LIKE A GIGGLING SCHOOLGIRL!) BUT IT'S A GOOD FEELING -- AND IT WILL HELP ME GET THROUGH THESE DULL MONTHS ON PATROL.

FONDLY,

CHRISTINE

[MESSAGE ENDS]

STARDATE:

[MESSAGE FOLLOWS]

DEAR SSARSUN:

DID I SAY SOMETHING ABOUT PATROLS BEING DULL?

NEWS OF THE DISASTER ON ETHLANA MAY NOT HAVE REACHED THE ENDEAVOR AS YET, BUT EVEN IF IT HAS, YOU PROBABLY DON'T KNOW (OR DO YOU?) THAT THE ENTERPRISE WAS RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF IT . . . WHERE ELSE?

ABOUT A MONTH AGO, STARFLEET COMMAND RECEIVED A CALL FROM THE VULCAN SCIENCE ACADEMY REQUESTING ASSISTANCE IN DISCOVERING THE CAUSE OF A PLAGUE THAT WAS DEVASTATING ETHLANA. APPARENTLY THE CREW OF THE VULCAN RESEARCH VESSEL WORKING THERE HAD BEEN UNABLE TO ISOLATE THE CAUSE BECAUSE THEY THEMSELVES HAD BEEN INFECTED. THOUGH THE ENTERPRISE WAS DUE IN DRY-DOCK, WE WERE GIVEN THE ASSIGNMENT.

WHEN DR. McCOY AND I BEAMED DOWN (AN ENTIRE MEDICAL TEAM HAD VOLUNTEERED BUT SCOTTY WOULDN'T LET THEM TAKE THE RISK WITHOUT KNOWING IF HUMANS WERE SUSCEPTIBLE) WE WERE GREETED -- AT LEAST I THINK IT WAS A GREETING -- BY THE PRIME MINISTER WHO THOUGHT THE DEVASTATION OF HIS PLANET WAS A RUSE BY THE FEDERATION TO TAKE OVER CONTROL OF ETHLANA. I TOOK AN INSTANT HATRED TO THAT MAN; HE WAS THINKING POLITICS WHILE HIS PEOPLE WERE SUFFERING AND DYING ALL AROUND HIM. I FELT EXTREMELY ASHAMED OF MYSELF LATER WHEN I REALIZED THAT ETHLANA, BEING SO FAR OUT IN THE GALAXY, HASN'T HAD MUCH CONTACT WITH OTHER CIVILIZATIONS AND IS NATURALLY SUSPICIOUS OF PEOPLE THEY DON'T KNOW. HOWEVER, I THINK WE MAY HAVE CHANGED HIS MIND; HIS ATTITUDE WAS CONSIDERABLY WARMER WHEN WE LEFT.

WITH THE EFFORTS IT TOOK TO CHANGE HIS MIND, WE WOULD HAVE BEEN ABLE TO MOVE MOUNTAINS IF DISASTER HADN'T STRUCK -- AGAIN. WE WERE CORRELATING THE LOG FROM THE SURAK, AND FOUND THAT THE VULCANS HAD ISOLATED THE CAUSE -- A MUTANT VIRUS STRAIN IN THE VULCAN BLOOD. ONE OF THE VULCANS, WHILE EXPLORING THE ETHLANIAN FLORA, HAD RECEIVED A MINOR CUT FROM ONE OF THE PLANTS. NOTHING SERIOUS . . . BUT, THE PLANT VIRUS COMBINED WITH ELEMENTS IN THE VULCAN BLOOD AND CAUSED THE MUTATION. UNFORTUNATELY, IT SPREADS QUICKLY AND IS FATAL IF LEFT UNTREATED. NEVER HAVING COME IN CONTACT WITH THIS MUTANT STRAIN, THE ETHLANIANS HAD NOTHING WITH WHICH TO COMBAT IT. THE VULCANS DIDN'T HAVE TIME TO FIND THE CURE BECAUSE THEY -- AS WELL AS THE ETHLANIAN MEDICAL PERSONNEL -- HAD ALL BECOME INFECTED. (THE STRAIN IS NOT VERY SELECTIVE, STRIKING ALMOST ANYONE WHO COMES IN CONTACT WITH IT.)

CORRELATING ALL AVAILABLE DATA WITH THE SHIP'S COMPUTER TOOK RELATIVELY LITTLE TIME -- THERE WASN'T THAT MUCH DATA -- AND THE RESULTS WERE NOT TOTALLY PROMISING FROM THE FIRST BASIC TESTS RUN. STARTING FROM SCRATCH (PARDON THE PUN), WE RAN THE TESTS AGAIN, HOPING TO FIND SOMETHING WE MIGHT HAVE MISSED THE FIRST TIME. WHILE WAITING FOR THE COMPUTER TO SPEW FORTH ALL ITS INTELLIGENT GLORY, DR. McCOY SUDDENLY BROKE OUT WITH DIZZINESS, A COLD SWEAT, SHAKING HANDS, AND BLURRED VISION. I HELPED HIM TO A BED IN THE CORNER OF THE LAB, AND WE BOTH REALIZED THE SPIRILLUM PARASITUS VULCANUS (THE NAME WE GAVE TO THAT "LITTLE BEASTIE", TO BORROW ONE OF SCOTTY'S FAVORITE PHRASES) HAD STRUCK AGAIN. I DID MY BEST TO MAKE HIM COMFORTABLE, BUT WITH A FEVER INCHING TOWARDS 105, THERE WAS LITTLE THAT COULD BE DONE EXCEPT PACK HIM IN ICE. I COULDN'T EVEN SEND HIM BACK TO THE ENTERPRISE; I SUDDENLY BECAME BOTH NURSE AND SOLE RESEARCHER.

YOU SEE, THE COMPUTER HAD CHOSEN THAT MOMENT TO COME UP WITH A PROMISING LEAD, AND IT WAS BACK TO THE CULTURE GROWTHS FOR ME. McCOY TRIED TO GIVE SOME DIRECTION TO THE TESTS, BUT WITH HIS HIGH FEVER AND DELIRIUM, HE WASN'T MAKING MUCH SENSE, SO I TOOK THE BIT IN MY TEETH, IGNORED HIM, AND PRAYED I WASN'T MAKING A BIG MISTAKE IN DOING SO. THE ETHLANIANS COULD NOT OFFER MUCH HELP EITHER, ALTHOUGH THEY WERE ABLE TO ASSIST WITH THE SIMPLE TASKS IN THE LAB. I'M CONVINCED SEVERAL COMMUNICATION CIRCUITS WERE BURNED OUT -- I WAS RELAYING MY IDEAS AND CORRELATING DATA ALMOST FASTER THAN THE COMPUTER COULD DIGEST IT -- OR SO IT SEEMED. TEMPERS STARTED TO FLARE AND MANY TIMES I FOUND MYSELF WISHING FOR SPOCK'S CALM PRESENCE TO COOL EVERYONE OFF. BUT, ON THE OTHER HAND, HIS NON-REACTIONS TEND TO INFURIATE PEOPLE EVEN MORE, AND THE ETHLANIANS ARE A VERY EXCITABLE RACE. I CAN'T WIN!

AFTER ABOUT A WEEK OF THIS NON-STOP ACTIVITY (AND IF I NEVER SEE ANOTHER CULTURE DISH IT WILL BE TOO SOON!), THAT PROMISING LEAD DEVELOPED INTO SOMETHING SUBSTANTIAL. FROM THAT POINT ON, IT SEEMED SO EASY -- DEVELOPING THE SERUM AND WAITING FOR COMPUTER CONFIRMATION. TYPICALLY, DR. McCOY INSISTED ON BEING THE FIRST ONE TO RECEIVE IT. IT WAS NERVE-WRACKING TO SIT THERE AND WAIT FOR THE SERUM TO TAKE EFFECT, AND I WOULD NEVER HAVE FORGIVEN MYSELF IF ANYTHING HAD HAPPENED TO HIM. FINALLY HIS FEVER BROKE. THERE WAS SUCH JUBILATION AMONGST THE ETHLANIANS; ALL I WANTED TO DO WAS FIND A CORNER TO CRAWL INTO AND SLEEP.

WE WERE FORTUNATE TO HAVE DEVELOPED THE SERUM IN TIME TO SAVE MANY OF THE INDIVIDUALS WHO HAD CONTRACTED A LESS VIRULENT FORM OF THE DISEASE, BUT WE LOST THREE-QUARTERS OF THE VULCAN CREW AND 63% OF THE POPULATION OF THE CAPITAL CITY. I MOURN WITH THE SURVIVORS . . . THE ETHLANIANS HAVE JUST



AS STRONG A REGARD FOR LIFE AS THE VULCANS. AND I UNDERSTAND WHAT THE LOSS OF SO MANY LIVES WOULD DO TO VULCAN AS A WHOLE.

THE VULCAN SCIENCE ACADEMY WAS MOST PLEASED WITH OUR REPORT. THEY HAVE INDICATED THAT RESEARCH WILL SHORTLY BEGIN ON METHODS TO PREVENT AN ACCIDENT LIKE THIS FROM RECURRING. PERHAPS THEY CAN DISCOVER WHY I WASN'T INFECTED. AT THIS POINT, I DON'T CARE WHY . . . I'M ONLY GRATEFUL I WASN'T SO THERE WAS SOMEONE TO DO THE RESEARCH.

SSARSUN, I AM GOING TO END THIS RIGHT NOW. YOU HAVE TOO MUCH TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT ON THE ENDEAVOR WITHOUT MY ADDING TO IT. BESIDES, I SHOULD REALLY LEARN TO STAND ON MY OWN TWO FEET. THE EXPERIENCE ON ETHLANA CONVINCED SCOTTY THAT I DESERVED A COMMENDATION. MAYBE IT WILL CONVINC ME . . .

TAKE CARE, SSARSUN. MY THOUGHTS ARE WITH YOU.

FONDLY,

CHRISTINE

[MESSAGE ENDS]

STARDATE:

[MESSAGE FOLLOWS]

DEAR SSARSUN:

TOMORROW WE ARRIVE AT STARBASE 25 WHERE I'LL GET TRANSPORT TO THE ACADEMY.

FOR THE PAST FEW DAYS, DR. McCOY HAS BEEN STALKING AROUND SICKBAY LIKE A WOUNDED MUGATO, RANTING AND RAVING THAT I'M LEAVING HIM WITH NO HELP AND, HE CLAIMS, NO ONE ABLE TO FIND ANYTHING. I HAVE TO LAUGH (TO MYSELF, OF COURSE) BECAUSE IT'S NOT AS IF I WON'T BE REPLACED. AND EVEN THOUGH HE WON'T SAY IT, I KNOW HE IS PLEASED BY MY DECISION.

THANK YOU, KIND SIR, FOR YOUR PLAUDITS ON THAT COMMENDATION . . . NEWS DOES TRAVEL FAST. (I THOUGHT ONLY BAD NEWS WAS INSTANTANEOUS!)

OH, BY THE WAY, THERE'S A FOOTNOTE TO THE ETHLANIAN SITUATION. THE FEDERATION WILL HAVE A NEW MEMBER. OBVIOUSLY, WE CHANGED THE PRIME MINISTER'S MIND!

UHURA JUST CAME BY TO DRAG ME TO A FAREWELL PARTY.

FONDLY,

CHRISTINE

[MESSAGE ENDS]

STARDATE:

[MESSAGE FOLLOWS]

DEAR SSARSUN:

SORRY I HAVEN'T WRITTEN, BUT I'D FORGOTTEN HOW HECTIC A STUDENT'S LIFE CAN BE!

THE FIRST DAYS WERE AN ABSOLUTE WHIRLWIND. I SET UP MY COURSE AND LAB SCHEDULES, COLLECTED MY TAPES, AND SETTLED IN. IT WAS ALL WORTH IT -- THE ADMINISTRATION DECIDED THAT MY R.N. AND RESEARCH DEGREES AND EXPERIENCE WERE ENOUGH TO CHOP OFF ALMOST THREE YEARS FROM THE REQUIREMENTS -- I'LL FINISH AND HAVE MY M.D. IN TWO!

I HAVE FINALLY SETTLED INTO A ROUTINE, BUT IT GIVES ME ONLY A FEW MOMENTS OF FREE TIME EACH DAY . . . AND THOSE MINUTES HAVE BECOME PRECIOUS. I THOUGHT I WAS BUSY ON THE ENTERPRISE, BUT WHO EVER HEARD OF BEING OFF-DUTY FOR ONLY TWO HOURS A DAY? I SEEM TO RECALL THAT HISTORY CALLED THAT "SLAVE LABOR". AND I THOUGHT SLAVERY HAD BEEN ABOLISHED!

I'VE ALREADY MET SEVERAL INTERESTING PEOPLE IN THE THREE MONTHS SINCE THE START OF THE TERM . . . BOTH CLASSMATES AND FACULTY. AND WAIT UNTIL YOU HEAR THIS -- ONE OF MY PROFESSORS IS DR. PHILIP BOYCE, THE BIG E'S OLD CMO! (AND DON'T YOU DARE SAY IT'S A SMALL UNIVERSE OR I'LL THROW SOMETHING AT YOU . . . THE NEXT TIME YOU'RE WITHIN MY REACH!) WE'VE SPENT SEVERAL HOURS REMINISCING ABOUT OUR MUTUAL FRIENDS. APPARENTLY SPOCK GAVE PHIL THE SAME HEADACHES THAT HE NOW GIVES DR. McCOY. OUR DISCUSSIONS HAVE HELD A MUTUAL FASCINATION FOR BOTH OF US. DR. BOYCE'S DESCRIPTIONS OF SPOCK IN THE "OLD" DAYS AND MY DESCRIPTIONS OF HIM NOW ARE AN INTERESTING CONTRAST. NEITHER OF US CAN BELIEVE THAT WE'RE BOTH DESCRIBING THE SAME MAN!

I RECEIVED A NOTE FROM UHURA THE OTHER DAY. AFTER LEAVING STARBASE 25, STARFLEET ORDERED SCOTTY TO TAKE THE ENTERPRISE TO CANOPIA FOR LONG NEEDED REPAIRS AND LEAVE FOR THE CREW. IT SHOULD TAKE ABOUT SIX TO EIGHT MONTHS TO COMPLETE THE OVERHAUL AND UHURA HAS PROMISED SHE WILL DROP IN AND VISIT DURING HER R&R. BY THE TIME THE ENTERPRISE RETURNS TO ACTIVE DUTY, SPOCK SHOULD BE READY TO RETURN TO COMMAND. OR SO SAYS THE GRAPEVINE? OR SO STARFLEET HOPES?

HOW GOES IT ON THE ENDEAVOR? I HEARD ABOUT THAT LITTLE ALTERCATION YOU HAD WITH THE KLINGONS ON ARTEMIDI IV. SCUTTLEBUTT HAS IT THAT YOU SOLVED THE SITUATION BEFORE THE ORGANIANS HAD TO STEP IN, AND STARFLEET COMMAND SEEMS PLEASED WITH THE OUTCOME. FROM THE TALK, ONE WOULD THINK THAT STARFLEET CAME UP WITH THE GREATEST IDEA SINCE THE DISCOVERY OF THE WARP-DRIVE WHEN THEY GAVE YOU COMMAND. BUT THEN PEOPLE DO TEND TO CONVENIENTLY FORGET HOW LONG ONE RIDICULOUS REGULATION WAS IN EFFECT BEFORE THE BRASS WAS CONFRONTED WITH YOUR SERVICE RECORD. KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK.

FONDLY,

CHRISTINE

[MESSAGE ENDS]

STARDATE:

[MESSAGE FOLLOWS]

DEAR SSARSUN:

ALL RIGHT, I WON'T APOLOGIZE FOR NOT WRITING.

THESE PAST FEW MONTHS HAVE BEEN BUSIER THAN I EVER COULD HAVE IMAGINED! FIRST AND MOST IMPORTANT, HAS BEEN MY WORK. IN ADDITION TO MY REGULAR CLASSES, I'VE BEEN DOING RESEARCH ON THE ETHLANIAN BLOOD PLAGUE. I SPOKE TO PHIL BOYCE ABOUT IT AND HE ARRANGED WITH THE FACULTY THAT I NOT ONLY BE ALLOWED TO FOLLOW THROUGH WITH THE RESEARCH BUT THAT IT SHOULD BE COUNTED AS PART OF MY DEGREE. HOW'S THAT FOR KILLING TWO BUGS WITH ONE TEST TUBE?

THE RESEARCH HAS BEEN PROGRESSING RAPIDLY AND I SHOULD HAVE THE PAPER FINISHED IN A FEW MONTHS. THEN COMES THE HARD PART . . . WAITING TO SEE HOW IT IS ACCEPTED, NOT ONLY BY FACULTY BUT BY THE VULCAN SCIENCE ACADEMY. THEY HAVE EXPRESSED INTEREST IN MY RESEARCH AND, OF COURSE, HAVE REQUESTED MY FINDINGS.

THEN CAME UHURA'S VISIT. HER TIMING COULD NOT HAVE BEEN MORE OPPORTUNE -- RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE TERM BREAK. WE SPENT A MARVELOUS TEN DAYS DOING WHATEVER WE WANTED WHENEVER WE WANTED . . . NO SET ROUTINE FOR US. I MUST ADMIT WE SPENT MOST OF THE TIME TALKING AND I DIDN'T GET ANY WORK DONE, BUT THERE WAS SO MUCH TO CATCH UP ON. SHE FILLED ME IN ON ALL THE GOSSIP. SCOTTY IS SPENDING AT LEAST PART OF HIS LEAVE ON CANOPIA TO SUPERVISE THE OVERHAUL. HOW VERY LIKE HIM! AND MOST OF THE CREW IS TAKING THE OPPORTUNITY TO GO HOME.

DR. McCOY IS GOING TO VULCAN. I DON'T THINK ANY EXPLANATION OF THAT VISIT IS NEEDED. HE HAS WRITTEN TO ME ABOUT THE REPORTS HE'S RECEIVED FROM DAKAINYA AND I KNOW HE IS CURIOUS ABOUT THEIR TECHNIQUES. HE CLAIMS THAT BY GOING TO VULCAN HE'LL BE ABLE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT VULCAN MEDICINE AND THEREFORE BE ABLE TO COPE WITH SPOCK. PERSONALLY, I THINK HE'S USING THAT AS AN EXCUSE -- HE MISSES THE CAPTAIN AND SPOCK MORE THAN HE'LL ADMIT.

THERE HAVE BEEN SEVERAL RUMORS FLOATING AROUND HERE THAT THE ENTERPRISE WILL HAVE A NEW CREW ONCE HER REPAIRS ARE FINISHED. I WONDER WHAT'S BEHIND THAT MANEUVER? UHURA WAS A BIT RELUCTANT TO TALK ABOUT IT. A SHADOW OF FOREBODING CROSSED HER FACE EVERY TIME I TRIED TO BRING UP THE SUBJECT. THERE MUST BE SOMETHING BIG AFOOT IF COMMAND IS CONSIDERING BREAKING UP THE MOST EFFICIENT CREW IN THE ENTIRE FLEET. OH WELL, THE ONLY SURE THING IN THIS UNIVERSE IS CHANGE.

FONDLY,

CHRISTINE

[MESSAGE ENDS]

STARDATE:

[MESSAGE FOLLOWS]

DEAR SSARSUN:

YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE DONE THAT! THOSE ROSES WERE ABSOLUTELY BEAUTIFUL! I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU MANAGED IT . . . AND I'M NOT GOING TO ASK. I DON'T WANT TO KNOW!

MY HEAD HAS BEEN SPINNING FROM ALL THE CONGRATULATIONS THAT HAVE BEEN FLOWING IN FROM WHAT SEEMS TO BE ALL FOUR CORNERS OF THE GALAXY. I NEVER DREAMED THAT PAPER WOULD CREATE SUCH A FUROR! I EVEN

RECEIVED A STARGRAM FROM THE ETHLANIAN PRIME MINISTER -- BUT THE TWO STARGRAMS THAT MEANT THE MOST WERE THE ONES FROM YOU AND DR. McCOY.

THE ACADEMY HELD A RECEPTION IN MY HONOR YESTERDAY. ALL THOSE FAMOUS PEOPLE, INCLUDING T'SHANN, THE HEAD OF THE VULCAN SCIENCE ACADEMY. I FELT TOTALLY OUT OF PLACE, AS IF IT WAS ALL FOR SOMEONE ELSE. I NOW UNDERSTAND WHY CAPTAIN KIRK ALWAYS GRUMBLED ABOUT DIPLOMATIC FUNCTIONS. SSARSUN, I SYMPATHIZE WITH YOU!

I KEPT WISHING I COULD ESCAPE TO MY LAB AND WORK. THERE IS SO MUCH I HAVE TO CATCH UP ON FOR CLASSES THAT I DON'T KNOW WHERE I'LL FIND THE TIME. BUT I'LL FIND IT -- THIS TERM ENDS NEXT WEEK AND I'VE GOT A LOT OF STUDYING FOR EXAMS IF I EVER HOPE TO GRADUATE.

INSTEAD OF GOING HOME FOR THE BETWEEN-TERM BREAK, I'LL BE STAYING HERE AT THE ACADEMY. A TEAM OF SCIENTISTS FROM DELTA VII APPARENTLY HAS BEEN WORKING ON RESEARCH SIMILAR TO MINE AND THE HEAD OF THE TEAM, DR. MICHAEL GRAHAM, HAS INVITED ME TO CONTINUE MY RESEARCH WITH THEM. I'VE ACCEPTED.

I DON'T KNOW WHY, BUT I HAVE THE FEELING THAT STRINGS ARE BEING PULLED FOR ME. WHEN I ENTERED THE ACADEMY, I DIDN'T EXPECT ANY SPECIAL TREATMENT BUT IT SEEMS THAT EVERY TIME I TURN AROUND, DOORS OPEN THAT NORMALLY WOULD STAY CLOSED. FIRST, IT WAS THE REDUCTION OF TIME NECESSARY FOR MY DEGREE; THEN PERMISSION FOR THE INDEPENDENT RESEARCH, AND NOW THIS OPPORTUNITY TO WORK WITH DR. GRAHAM. SOMETHING IS GOING ON AND I DON'T UNDERSTAND IT.

FONDLY,

CHRISTINE

[MESSAGE ENDS]

STARDATE:

[MESSAGE FOLLOWS]

DEAR SSARSUN:

YOU SEE STANDING BEFORE YOU ONE CONTRITE AND REPRIMANDED WOMAN. I DESERVED EVERYTHING YOU THREW AT ME . . . AND I DIDN'T DUCK. IT WAS CHILDISH TO CONSIDER THE THOUGHT THAT SOMEONE WAS PULLING STRINGS ON MY BEHALF. AFTER DUE CONSIDERATION I CONCEDE THAT MY ABILITIES OPENED THE DOORS. WILL YOU CONCEDE THAT LUCK ALSO PLAYED A PART AND THAT I WAS IN THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME?

THE RESEARCH WITH MICHAEL IS PROGRESSING NICELY. WE THINK ALONG SIMILAR LINES, WHICH ELIMINATES "ARGUMENTS" OVER THE DIRECTION THE EXPERIMENTS WILL TAKE. WE ARE MAKING HEADWAY AND ENCOURAGEMENT FROM T'SHANN SPURS US ON. WE HOPE TO FINISH THIS SET OF EXPERIMENTS BEFORE THE NEW TERM BEGINS. I'D HATE TO HAVE TO LEAVE IN THE MIDDLE OF THINGS -- I FIND THE RESEARCH (AND THE COMPANY) FASCINATING.

BUT, AS FASCINATING AS IT ALL IS, I'M ITCHING TO GET BACK TO CLASSES . . . ONLY ONE MORE YEAR TO GO. I FIND MYSELF IMPATIENT TO FINISH. I MISS STARSHIP DUTY AND CAN'T WAIT TO GET BACK.

YOUR LETTER COULD NOT HAVE BEEN MORE WELCOME. I PASSED ON THE NEWS TO UHURA THAT CAPTAIN KIRK APPEARS TO BE ALMOST READY TO RETURN TO DUTY. I'M SURE SHE WILL MAKE SURE IT REACHES THE REST OF THE CREW.

THOSE VULCAN TECHNIQUES HAVE DONE WONDERS. I WONDER WHAT DR. McCOY THINKS OF THEM? I GUESS I'LL HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL NEXT MONTH TO FIND OUT . . . HE SAID HE'LL BE STOPPING AT THE ACADEMY ON HIS WAY BACK TO THE ENTERPRISE. I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO HIS VISIT. IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME, AND, WHILE LETTERS ARE A GOOD WAY OF KEEPING IN TOUCH, AS YOU ARE WELL AWARE, IT'S JUST NOT THE SAME.

AND SPEAKING OF LETTERS . . . (WERE WE?)

STARFLEET COMMAND HAS STARTED TO MAKE SUBTLE INQUIRIES REGARDING MY PLANS AFTER GRADUATION. I GET THE DISTINCT IMPRESSION THAT FLEET IS PLANNING TO RE-SHUFFLE PERSONNEL. THIS ONLY STRENGTHENS THE RUMORS REGARDING THE ENTERPRISE CREW. OTHERWISE, WHY HAVE ME MAKE MY DECISION A YEAR AHEAD OF TIME?

FONDLY,

CHRISTINE

[MESSAGE ENDS]

STARDATE:

[MESSAGE FOLLOWS]

DEAR SSARSUN:

I CAN'T BELIEVE THAT I CAN ACTUALLY SEE AN END TO THE PAST YEAR'S MADNESS . . . ONLY EIGHT MONTHS TO GO . . .

UNFORTUNATELY, I WAS UNABLE TO FINISH THAT RESEARCH WITH MICHAEL . . . WE HAD A MINOR SETBACK IN ONE SET OF EXPERIMENTS WHICH PUSHED THE SCHEDULE BACK TO THE POINT WHERE I HAD TO LEAVE FOR THE BEGINNING OF THE NEW TERM BEFORE WE FINISHED. MICHAEL HAS WRITTEN THAT THE EXPERIMENTS WERE FINISHED SHORTLY AFTER THAT AND T'SHANN WAS MOST PLEASED WITH THE RESULTS.

AND SPEAKING OF RESEARCH . . . IT SEEMS THAT FOR ONCE BEING A TERRAN WOMAN HAD ITS ADVANTAGES. IT WAS THE ESTROGEN IN MY BLOODSTREAM THAT IMMUNIZED ME FROM THE DISEASE.

NO, SSARSUN, I WAS NOT HINTING FOR A NEW JOB . . . BUT I THANK YOU FOR THE OFFER OF A POSITION ON THE ENDEAVOR. YES, I PROMISE THAT I SHALL THINK ABOUT YOUR OFFER, BUT I MUST CONSIDER IT ALONG WITH MY OTHER OPTIONS . . . AND THERE ARE SEVERAL. STARFLEET COMMAND HAS INDICATED THAT MY WISHES WILL WEIGH HEAVILY IN THEIR DECISION OF WHERE I SHALL BE ASSIGNED AFTER GRADUATION.

WHICH LEADS ME TO DR. McCOY . . .

HE ARRIVED LOOKING HAPPIER AND MORE CONTENTED THAN I CAN REMEMBER SEEING HIM IN QUITE AWHILE . . . AND THE REASON IS FAIRLY OBVIOUS. HIS VISIT TO VULCAN DID HIM AS MUCH GOOD AS IT DID CAPTAIN KIRK.

WHILE DR. McCOY WAS HERE, HE HAD SEVERAL OPPORTUNITIES TO TALK WITH PHIL. FROM THE SNATCHES OF CONVERSATION I HEARD, I THINK THEIR MAIN TOPIC WAS VULCAN AND VULCAN MEDICINE. (OF COURSE, THERE WERE "SIDE TRIPS" ABOUT SPOCK. McCOY HAD THE SAME REACTION AS I . . .)

I MAY NOT HAVE HEARD ALL OF THE CONVERSATIONS, BUT THE ANIMATED LOOK ON McCOY'S FACE WAS ALL I NEEDED TO SEE TO KNOW THAT HE IS GOING TO DELVE DEEPER INTO THESE HEALING TECHNIQUES. HE SAYS HE'S GOING TO NEED THEM MORE THAN EVER BEFORE . . . HE NOW CLAIMS HE'LL HAVE TWO VULCANS ON HIS HANDS!

ALL IN ALL, HIS VISIT WAS A WELCOME BREAK IN THE ROUTINE OF LAB AND WARDS. HE OFFERED ME A POSITION . . . AS ASSISTANT MEDICAL OFFICER ON THE ENTERPRISE. IT WAS A COMPLETE SURPRISE . . . AND I WAS A BIT DISTURBED. AFTER ALL, M'BENGA HAS BEEN McCOY'S ASSISTANT FOR QUITE AWHILE. WHEN I ASKED HIM WHAT THAT WOULD DO TO HIM HE JUST SAT THERE AND GRINNED. SSARSUN, IF YOU DON'T TELL ME WHAT IS GOING ON, I'M GOING TO SCREAM!

FONDLY,

CHRISTINE

[MESSAGE ENDS]

STARDATE:

[MESSAGE FOLLOWS]

DEAR SSARSUN:

WORD HAS JUST REACHED THE ACADEMY! YOU KNEW I WAS RIGHT (WELL, I WAS THINKING IN ALL THE RIGHT DIRECTIONS AT LEAST) AND YOU NEVER SAID A WORD!!! YOU CAN STOP LAUGHING RIGHT THIS MOMENT -- YOU -- YOU ALDEBARAN SHELLMOUTH!

A COMMAND FLEET OF THREE STARSHIPS! THERE HAS TO BE A GOOD REASON FOR THAT MILITARY TACTIC . . . (I SUPPOSE YOU KNOW WHAT IT IS AND NO DOUBT IT'S CLASSIFIED SO I'LL NEVER FIND OUT!) AND, AS IF THAT WASN'T ENOUGH, AN EXTENSIVE CHANGE OF PERSONNEL. I KNOW CERTAIN PEOPLE WHO ARE GOING TO BE VERY UNHAPPY ABOUT THAT . . . I WONDER HOW CAPTAIN -- NO, BETTER MAKE THAT COMMODORE -- KIRK IS GOING TO TAKE IT. HE'LL HAVE TO USE THE PEGASUS AS HIS FLAGSHIP -- THE BRASS WON'T TAKE KINDLY TO HIS NOT USING THE NEW SHIP AS A SHOWPIECE. BUT, I'VE ALWAYS HAD THE FEELING THAT HE BELIEVED THE ENTERPRISE WAS HIS OWN PERSONAL PROPERTY AND I'M SURE HE'D MUCH RATHER HAVE HER . . . OH WELL, IF HE HAS TO SURRENDER HER, I'M SURE HE'S PLEASED THAT IT WILL BE TO SPOCK. HE'LL HAVE TO SHARE THE PEGASUS WITH CAPTAIN AILYEA (WELL, HE CAN'T FAULT HER SERVICE RECORD . . . ALL RIGHT, SSARSUN, SO WHAT IF I DID DO SOME CHECKING . . .). BUT ARE THE RUMORS TRUE? DID SHE ACTUALLY HAVE MICHAELSON "DECLARED UNFIT FOR DUTY"? SHE TOOK A BIG CHANCE -- IT COULD HAVE BEEN CONSTRUED AS MUTINY.

DID YOU NOTICE SCOTTY'S PROMOTION? NOT THE CAPTAINCY I WANTED FOR HIM, BUT HE MORE THAN DESERVES TO BE FIRST OFFICER.

McCOY MUST BE FIT TO BE TIED. WITH HIS TRANSFER TO THE PEGASUS ALL HE'S REALLY DOING IS SUBSTITUTING AN ANDORIAN FOR A VULCAN! I CAN HEAR HIM MUTTERING "BACK TO THE TEXTBOOKS". AND YES, I DID SEND HIM A CONGRATULATORY STARGRAM.

AND YOU'VE GOTTEN LT. COMMANDER UHURA! SHE'S A PERSONAL FRIEND AND A FINE OFFICER. MARK MY WORDS SHE'LL BE A CAPTAIN SOMEDAY SOON. PLEASE MAKE HER FEEL AT HOME.

I'VE JUST RE-READ THIS LETTER. IT SOUNDS LIKE A PROMOTION LIST! I THINK I'LL QUIT WHILE I'M AHEAD.

FONDLY,

CHRISTINE

[MESSAGE ENDS]

STARDATE:

[MESSAGE FOLLOWS]

DEAR SSARSUN:

I CAN'T BELIEVE THAT IT'S ALL OVER . . . THAT I CAN NOW SIGN LT. COMMANDER CHRISTINE CHAPEL, M.D. IT WAS WORTH EVERY BIT OF THE EFFORT!

OF COURSE I FORGIVE YOU FOR NOT BEING HERE FOR THE CEREMONIES AND THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR THE STARGRAM AND THE SCULPTURE. IT'S BEAUTIFUL BUT IT MUST HAVE COST YOU A SMALL FORTUNE.

DR. MCCOY ALSO SENT HIS CONGRATULATIONS -- AND REGRETS. HE WAS UNABLE TO GET AWAY FROM THE PEGASUS SHAKEDOWN CRUISE AND HE SAYS THAT HE WON'T FEEL AT HOME UNTIL HE PUTS SOME ACID BURNS ON THE LAB TABLES!

BURIED AMONGST ALL THE MESSAGES FROM FAMILY AND FRIENDS WAS A STARGRAM WITH GOOD WISHES FROM SPOCK AND I WAS SURPRISED TO RECEIVE IT. IT WAS VERY THOUGHTFUL OF HIM TO TAKE THE TIME. AND WHEN I READ IT, I SUDDENLY REALIZED THAT I HAVEN'T THOUGHT ABOUT HIM IN MONTHS.

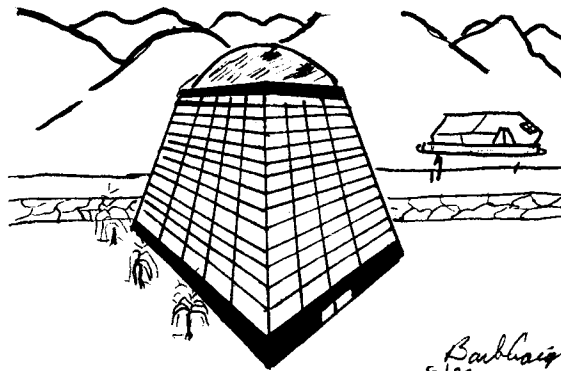
YOU PROBABLY HAVE ALREADY RECEIVED WORD FROM THE SURGEON GENERAL'S OFFICE, BUT I'D LIKE TO TELL YOU MYSELF. I AM YOUR NEW ASSISTANT CMO. I ALSO WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT IT DIDN'T TAKE LONG TO MAKE THE DECISION. IT FELT SO RIGHT . . .!

THAT IS TOTALLY DIFFERENT FROM MY FEELINGS OF TWO YEARS AGO. I NEVER TOLD YOU THIS, BUT RIGHT AFTER THAT INCIDENT ON ETHLANA, T'SHANN OFFERED ME A RESEARCH POSITION AT THE VULCAN SCIENCE ACADEMY. I HAD DECIDED TO GO BACK FOR MY M.D. IT WAS A VERY DIFFICULT DECISION FOR ME TO MAKE -- THE RESEARCH POSITION WAS VERY TEMPTING. BUT I HAD TO LEARN IF THE TEMPTATION WAS BECAUSE OF THE OPPORTUNITIES IN MEDICINE OR BECAUSE IT WAS ON VULCAN AND THE ONLY WAY I COULD BE CERTAIN WAS TO REMOVE MYSELF FROM THE TEMPTATION. I TURNED DOWN T'SHANN'S OFFER, AND, IN RETROSPECT, I MADE THE RIGHT DECISION. SHE RECENTLY OFFERED ME THE POSITION AGAIN AND THIS TIME I TURNED IT DOWN -- WITH NO HESITATION WHATSOEVER. MY PLACE IS NOT ON VULCAN.

FONDLY,

*Christine*  
CHRISTINE

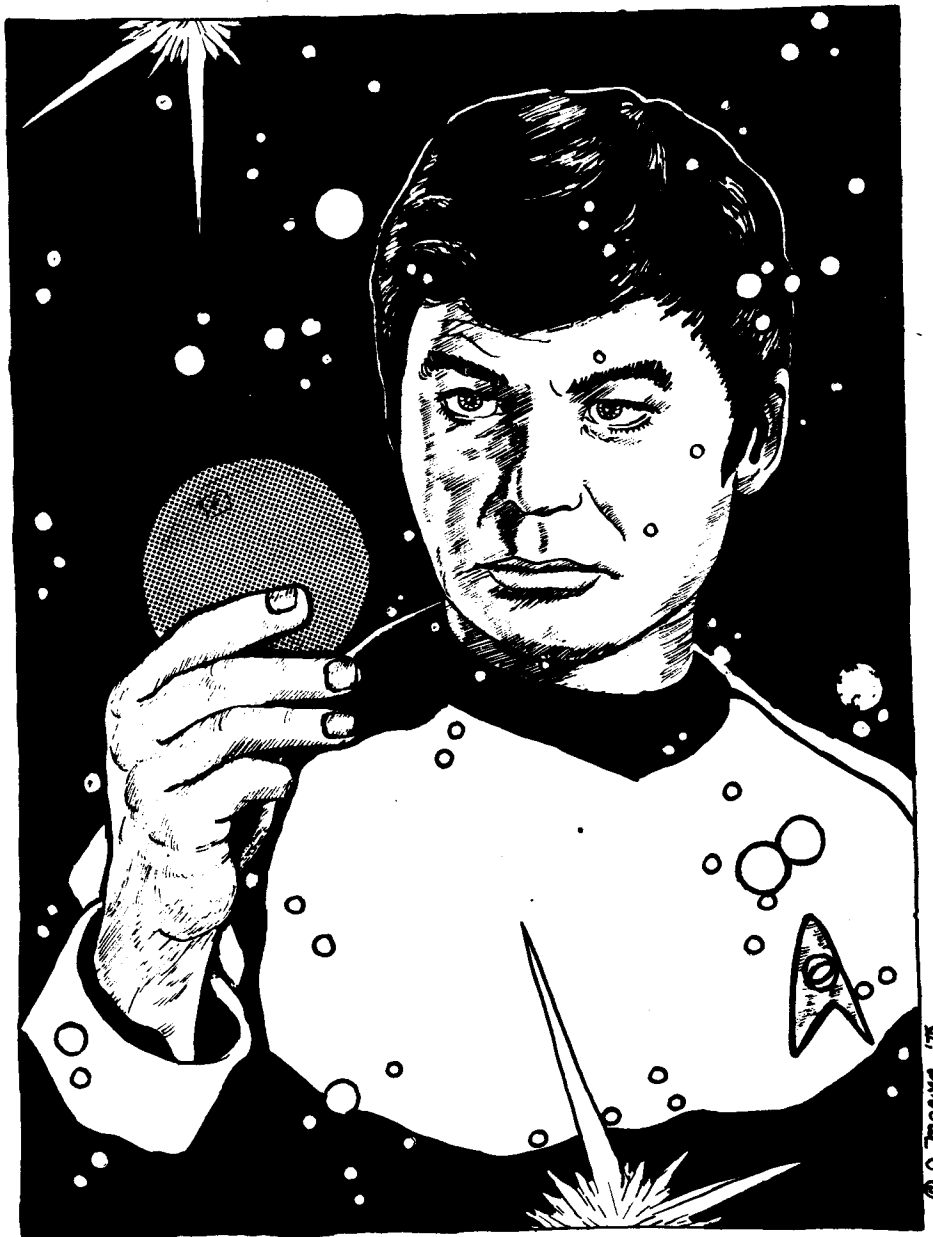
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# BONES'S VISION

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# Kraith AV

Beneath the diagnostic panels Lt. Minos and the Captain lay limp and motionless, readings on both panels oscillating in unison. Bones sighed and rubbed his tired neck--not an easy task in a pressure suit. Four hours to perihelion, he noted. Might as well get some rest. He sure couldn't help Spock or the ship now. In spite of the tension, the heat, his uncomfortable outfit, he was almost instantly asleep. And he dreamed.

At first there were only fragments, like bright pieces of a broken mirror. Tanya, looking so small beside Jim--would she make it? She'll live, he reassured himself. It'll be close, but she'll live to raise that child she bears.... Johanna? She's on Spica VII now, with that young med officer. They make a nice couple. Nothing will come of it, though. Pity. Time you were up and doing, girl!

Wait a second, I haven't seen Joanna in seven years! And how do I know Tanya is pregnant? Thoughts calming, he almost spoke aloud, turning a little in his sleep. It must be the star, he thought drowsily. The star--the star....

They were a year and a half outside Federation borders when Bones confirmed Lt. Minos' pregnancy, six months after their last planet fall. Like it or not, the Enterprise was going to have to serve as part-time nursery until this mission was completed. Bones didn't like it. The medical problems of the pre-natal care, delivery and raising of the first 3/4 human, 1/4 Vulcan child--in a small sickbay not designed for children, with only the resources available to him--worried him severely.

For weeks now he had set away some time each day for going through the computer. It was time-consuming, but if he'd done what Spock had suggested, setting a program to look for the words 'pregnancy,' 'baby' and so forth, he would have had to spend even longer sorting through every piece of junk that machine would come up with--and he'd bet it would miss the most important things at that. No, a human could do this better.

He was busy looking up cross references when the intercom beeped. "McCoy here."

"Could you come to my quarters, Doctor?" Spock's voice said, sounding strained. "T'Aniyeh has fainted."

"On my way." Bones grabbed his med kit and was out the door. A moment later he knelt by the girl, now weakly trying to get up.

"Nothing seriously wrong," he said. "But it's sickbay and bedrest for the next month for you, young lady." Without prompting, Spock picked Tanya up and carried her smoothly to sickbay. There he stood over her until she fell asleep.

Bones turned from examining Tanya to look at Spock closely. "You look as pale as Tanya, Spock. Anything the matter?"

"We are linked," Spock said quietly. "At such times the bond is especially strong."

Bones went through that flat statement several times, digging out every implication. "If Tanya dies in childbirth...."

"There is a 36% chance that I will also die." Spock turned away to stand again over Tanya, eyes hooded. Bones went back to his research, fervor re-doubled. He had to find something!

Soon only the noiseless flicker of pages marked his fruitless search. Some corner of his mind noticed a soft murmur of voices from the other room. Abstractly, he wondered what the two were saying to each other.

Bones fumbled for a moment with a kind of passionless curiosity. One scene blurred and another came into view as he changed focus slightly....

"How do you feel?" Spock asked softly.

"Shaky. All right." She sighed and her eyes fluttered wearily open. "It does not go well."

"If we were on Vulcan, Saptiir and S'Veg...."

"But we are not on Vulcan, and we have only Dr. McCoy, who growls like a busy sehlat and

is so gentle inside." She added, even more softly. "And sometimes I get so scared...."

"McCoy has sworn he will deliver the child as soon as possible."

"But she is so still within my body." Somewhat plaintively, she observed, "I haven't felt one kick."

"A fact for which I cannot help but feel the most profound gratitude." Relenting slightly, he said, "Her mind is strong and vigorous. Physically, she is doing as well as can reasonably be expected."

"That isn't good enough. This body is so frail. If I were Vulcan.... Oh, Spock, I'm so afraid of failing you."

"T'Aniyeh. Look at me." Gently he turned the delicate face to him, keeping his fingers in the near-mind touch position for emphasis. "If you were Vulcan, you would not be you. And you could not fail me if you tried."

There was silence for a long moment, and in T'Aniyeh's eyes that searched his there was only doubt.

"There is no Naming Committee here, but I believe that I may make up an adequate list of available names. There is one that I would choose, if you agree," Spock remarked matter-of-factly, removing his hands.

"What?"

"T'Ekitah."

"T'Ekitah...." She repeated the name slowly, tasting its multiple associations, its lineage, its history. Suddenly she almost, not quite, chuckled. "Such a tall name for such a small baby!"

"She will grow," he prophesized confidently.\* "There is time."

"Not much." As he looked at her sharply, she said, "There is, for example, exactly five minutes before you go on duty."

"I would stay...."

"But you must go--and somehow, I will survive. Lower the lights as you leave?"

Before he turned to go, he stood for a moment, looking at the door behind which Dr. McCoy sat. "I do not trust him," Spock said.

"That is all right," she answered calmly. "I do."

Spock looked at her, startled for a second, thought it over and blinked in assent. He dialed the lights to a dim, velvety red and left to go on duty.

The big room was empty except for T'Aniyeh, and utterly still. There was no one who could have heard her murmur, "T'Ekitah," as she lay there, staring alone into the darkness.

Bones stood at the observation window, too worried even to fume. The tiny baby within the small sterile room was completely motionless. He had to check the monitors again and again to reassure himself that she still breathed, even though he knew alarms would ring loud enough to rouse half the ship if that small sound ever stopped.

He examined her with his eyes once more, looking for something, anything. Though she barely weighed four pounds, she already had a soft cap of fluffy black hair. Her ears might be just slightly pointed, but her delicate eyebrows swept upward in true Vulcan fashion. Yet her color was not either the angry red of newborn human infants, nor the plush green of Vulcan infants, but the paleness of thin porcelain, the color of pearl or ivory. Under half closed lids her eyes could be glimpsed. They were green--not the light color humans called hazel, but the true deep green of emeralds or four-leafed clovers.

She was nestled within an automated crib, or "spider" as the medical personnel had promptly nicknamed it. A pair of hands hung limply at each corner, from alpha pair with enough strength to move the whole crib and life support system, to gamma pair that was too small to see and needed its own microscopic eyes. Beta and delta were childsize, suited to handling an infant. Bones inserted his hands in beta's controls aimlessly; as he flexed his fingers the hands above the crib copied exactly every move the control made. A vial of thick, opalescent liquid hung over the crib; he removed it and placed it neatly on a nearby shelf. Withdrawing his hands, he made some miniscule, needless adjustment to the heat controls.

"You were right about the environmental controls," he remarked. "The extra heat made all the difference. She's breathing easily now; not choking in her own phlegm. If only she'd breathe

\*Author's note: T'Ekitah means, as far as can be determined, a creative blend of authority and responsibility. It has been traditionally associated with great power, for good or evil.



on her own!"

Spock stood at the other side of the observation window. His hands were pressed flat against the glass, his eyes never moving from the small figure within. He didn't respond to Bones' remarks.

Bones, knuckling his sandy eyes, wondered just how long Spock had been standing there. Then, going a bit further, he wondered how long he himself had been up. It had been--what--the evening of two days ago that he had started the Caesarian section? He had been kept busy that night and the day after with first Tanya and then the baby. And then last night he hadn't been able to sleep. Tossing and turning, wild ideas and theories jostling in his head, he had finally given up and come down to the lab again. He hadn't even seen Tanya since the operation.

"Where is Tanya?" he asked idly.

Spock jerked his chin in what might have been the direction of sickbay.

"She is still in sickbay?" Bones asked, astonished. "She could be up by now...."

"She bends her will to the child. What would you have her do, Doctor?"

"Sorry, sorry." Bones sighed. He turned again to look at the child. Sudden frustration made him slam his fist against the control panel.

"I don't know what's wrong! She's breathing all right, and the artificial blood is functioning perfectly. Everything checks out OK.... She just isn't trying to live! She's letting that machine do it all!"

"What was the matter with her blood to begin with?" Spock asked.

Perhaps fumblingly trying to make amends? Bones wondered. No matter. He remembered vividly Spock, during the operation, standing at Tanya's head, her hand between his, eyes closed and bearing rigid, hardly seeming to breathe. Glad that something, finally, had broken Spock's withdrawal, he turned to explain.

"She hadn't been doing well for some time. But there was no indication of anything specifically wrong. Two nights ago, though, the tell-tale warned of a complete circulatory collapse.

"It wasn't her heart; her heart was fine," he continued. "It was the oxygen carrying blood cells themselves. Red blood cells are larger than green blood cells, almost four times as large. But, conversely, there are four times as many green blood cells. That means that a volume of green blood cells can carry almost twice the oxygen as the same volume of red blood cells."

Spock was still again, a graven statue staring into the room. But Bones knew somehow that Spock was listening. He plowed on determinedly.

"As the baby developed, she started to need more oxygen than a completely human baby would. Sites in her bone marrow were manufacturing green blood cells at that time. But those sites were not responsive to need, as human sites would have been. Eventually the difference became too great and she had the equivalent of a heart attack. I had thought that that might be the trouble. Replacing her blood with flurine polymers did the trick--luckily, before any damage could be done."

"How long will it last?" Spock asked abstractly.

"Theoretically forever." Bones shrugged. "Of course, sooner or later she'll need more of it. But it'll be easy to tell when. We'll just have to watch for her blood turning pink, as she grows bigger and needs more oxygen...."

Bones' voice died away. Neither of them said it, but Bones was sure that they were both thinking it. "If she grows bigger...."

The silence that reverberated with that thought was broken by Spock's voice.

"I can't reach her mind," he said softly. "It is as though--as though she were dead."

"She was."

"What?"

"Well, technically. For a few seconds. Not long enough to do any damage to her brain."

Spock was staring at him. "She died within her mother's womb," he said slowly. "And since then the only one to touch her has been a psi-null.... Oh, fool! Doctor, I must get in to touch her."

Though considerably startled, Bones was not forgetful of the facts. "You can't."

"Doctor, she is not trying to live because she does not know that she is alive. If I could touch her, tell her...."

"It would kill her. Spock, that baby has no resistance whatsoever to disease. Tanya

carried her this long only because I dosed her up to the eyebrows with parity tolerance enhancers. And until we know what extrinsic antigens won't react fatally with her own cells...."

"Unless she can be awakened within 2.3 hours, it will be too late anyway. In other cases such as this, two days was the limit. After that time she will die, despite all your machines can do."

Bones stared at Spock, at the baby, made an agonized choice. Cursing, he slapped the intercom button for Sickbay.

"Christine, you can handle the spider controls, can't you? Get up here and bring the vials of human-Vulcan antigens with you. Stat!"

Christine arrived three minutes later--with Tanya, who looked pale but determined. "There is need," she explained quietly. Bones didn't waste time arguing.

The vials were soon sterilized and inside the room. "We'll take them one at a time, waiting five minutes between each injection," he instructed Christine.

"But--" Christine said.

"The reactions we'll have to handle as they come up--and God help us all."

Christine looked as though she wanted to say amen to that.

It was the fourth vial that did it. The baby shivered convulsively, went rigid and then completely limp. Bones, mumbling something under his breath--he didn't know whether it was a prayer or a curse--gave her one drop of cordrazine. She didn't respond. Repeating over and over, "Come on, Kitten, come on. Live!" he carefully gave her a quarter of a drop more. It was enough. The baby sighed softly as her heart started beating again. The rest of the series continued with no overt problems, though Bones knew he would probably be fighting pneumonia, measles, and kirrlian rot in the baby for the next month to come. But for now she was at least partially protected.

With a sigh he released the seal on the door to the sterile room. "All right, you two. You can go in and see her--if you want."

With a look at Bones that Bones preferred not to translate, Spock and Tanya went inside the room.

Bones didn't stick around to see the baby receive her name and first conscious thought from her parents, or to hear the hefty yell with which T'Ekitah greeted that information. He didn't know about anyone else, but personally, he was going to get some sleep.

Bones muttered slightly in his sleep. That peace wouldn't last long. Damn Spock! His stubbornness could have hurt Kitten! Of course, he admitted, he himself could bear some of the blame....

Bones glared at Spock, tight-lipped. Spock glared right back. "Look, Spock. I was right about the formula. You've got to admit I'm right about this too!"

"A lucky guess, made at the last possible moment. And your projected environmental controls would have...."

"She's human, Spock! The combination of a half-human father and a fully human mother could produce nothing else."

"She is also a citizen of Vulcan. She will be raised in Tsaichrani even as her mother was, and none of your interference will be allowed to change that fact. With her telepathic potentialities, human society would destroy her. As it is, even with our full protection...."

The tableau was broken as the intercom beeped. It was Lt. Minos, sounding rather harried. "Lt. Minos here. Doctor McCoy, could you come to my quarters? T'Ekitah is upset and I cannot quiet her." The two men moved together to the door, differences forgotten.

Bones braced himself before entering the 98°F temperature of Lt. Minos' cabin. The baby was indeed crying lustily. He took quick readings on his medical scanner.

"I can't spot anything wrong. Just general feelings of discomfort. Nothing like this has happened before?" Tanya shook her head. "I guess that schedule works--for her." He studied the red and squalling infant again. Something clicked in his mind. At four months? Nevertheless, he inserted a finger in the baby's mouth and ran it gently over the gums. Yes, there was a definite swelling.

"Mystery's solved. She's teething."

"So soon? In those books you gave me...."

"It's precocious, but not unprecedented."

Tanya turned to Spock. "Have you got the li'ka ready yet?"

He shook his head. "I was not expecting it to be needed this soon. But we can manage now that we know what is wrong."

As the two Vulcans encircled the tiny face with gentle fingers, the crying thinned and stopped, transformed into quiet gurgles. As the small fists waved aimlessly Bones felt a newly familiar wrenching at his heart. It had been so long since a tiny hand had curled around his finger, or grabbed at his hair.

The arguments didn't stop--couldn't stop, such was the nature of the problem. A Vulcan does not allow unwarranted interference in his private life, and McCoy had not proven himself one to be given that authority. Yet T'Ekitah was human, or nearly so. Any part of the normal child-care routine for the hardy Vulcan infant could prove superfluous, impractical, or downright dangerous when dealing with a more helpless human baby. The two men had to work together. And Spock's attitude of being a dedicated father protecting his child from the foul suggestions of an African Witch-Doctor, Bones told himself resentfully, was not an asset in reaching that goal.

Bones was trying to remain completely objective--and failing miserably. His growing affection for the small girl-child was stirring up memories he thought had been buried safely long ago, buried with the death of his second daughter and his marriage. He had never looked back. With practice he'd stopped thinking about the past at all. A new life among the stars. And now this little girl...so precious a life. Spock may be Kitten's father, but he doesn't know everything. He could hurt her without even meaning to. Bones had to try and protect her.

And so the two men faced each other, each caught in their private traps of cultural teachings, memories, buried guilts, and tradition.

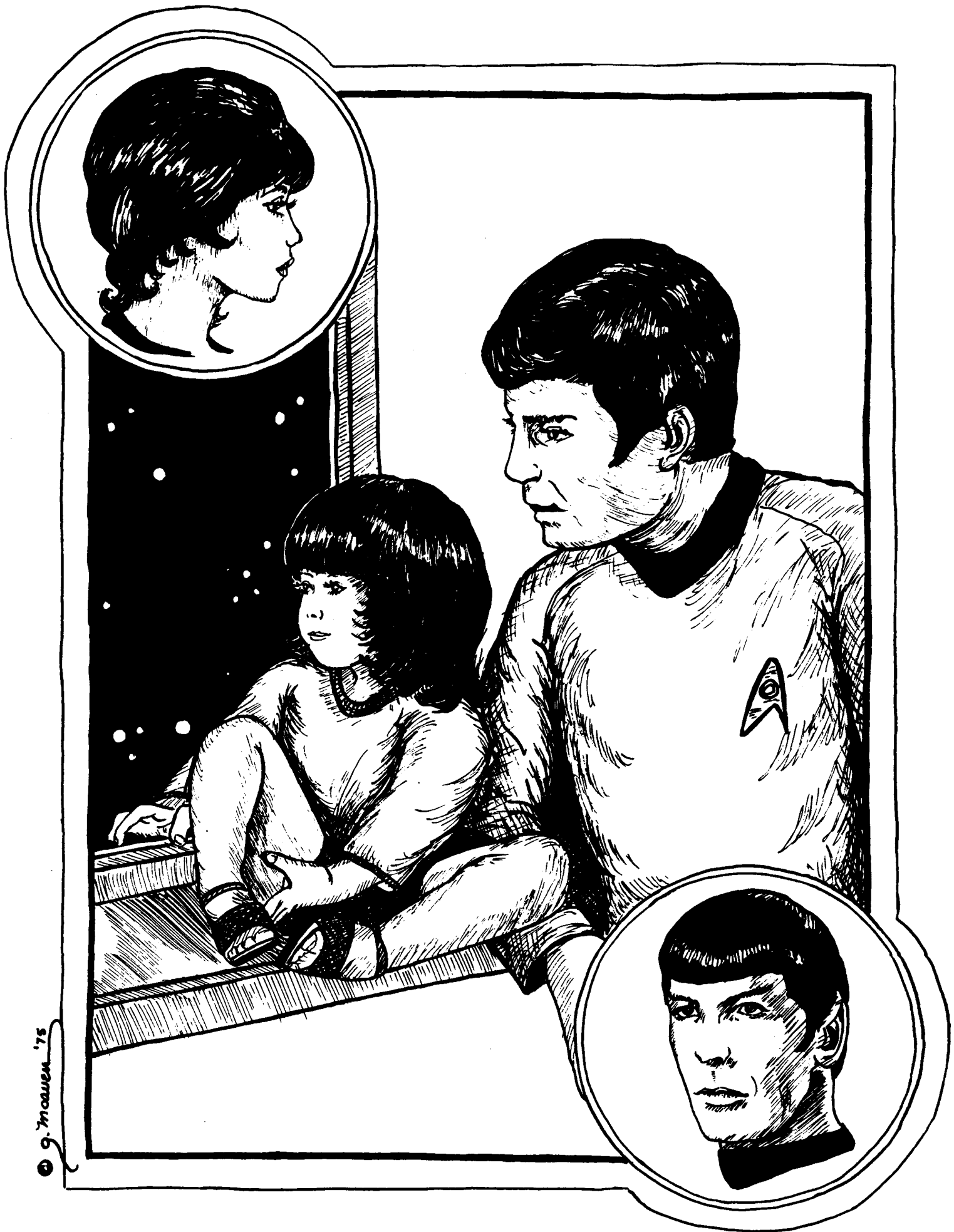
It happened finally. Spock terminated a long, almost totally pointless wrangle with one tired question. "And you the expert? How many daughters do you have, Doctor?"

Bones gulped. Images, scraps of memory whirled through his mind without rhyme or reason. The small grave, Joanna grown and smiling, Kitten's rare smile that was given to him alone, Ethel--oh, what a mess we made of it--Kitten again. She was the important one, really. It was like throwing away a shield and deliberately exposing tender flesh to a rain of fire, but he did it. "Two, Mr. Spock," he said evenly. "One died as a child. The other is doing fine, thank you." Slowly he relaxed, waiting for Spock's response. He wondered a little about his own reaction to the admission. It felt--it felt sort of free. Bones unconsciously stood a little straighter.

Spock froze. His mind moved as fast as the Doctor's but much more coherently. He wasted no time damning himself for somewhere picking up the peculiarly human habit of ignoring the obvious. The doctor's manner and behavior over the years Spock had known him--never mind. The facts were: McCoy had had the experience of raising at least one human female. No one else aboard the Enterprise had had that experience and medical training also. McCoy's affection for the child was obvious, but he had not been possessive to a degree that Spock couldn't handle. His opinions concerning T'Ekitah's physical well-being had met with only 71.5% success, but every prediction of her behavior had proved itself. Spock came back to life in a final, though not total, capitulation. "What do you want me to do, Doctor?" After all, it was a simple matter of statistics.

Bones mused over what would become memories. Kitten grew so fast those two and a half years. She went from creeping directly to walking--didn't want to spend time on crawling. She was talking before she was two, and among her first English words--Bones. Apparently her own idea, too (at least, Jim adamantly denied coaching her.) The first time she was ever on a planet's surface--he still swore she waited deliberately until her parents were out of sight before tumbling into that mud puddle. Oh, she was a wriggling, giggling mess. Later, falling asleep as he carried her--her eyes were a perfect match for the emerald sky.

He remembered her listening docilely as Spock reprimanded her sharply for inattention--then bursting into a wailing tantrum over a pinched finger when alone with Bones. That crystallized a decision for him. Emotion without controls is wrong even for human children. Kneeling beside her,



he spoke gently. "That finger isn't hurt, Kitten, and temper tantrums won't help. I'll come back and see you later, when you've calmed down." He turned and walked away, not looking back at her shocked face. She never needed a second lesson.

It hadn't all been that smooth. There had been that rather dreadful scene when Spock discovered Bones telling a wide-eyed T'Ekitah a fairy tale. One of Grimm's, he thought. In something very like a cold and implacable rage Spock had forbidden T'Ekitah to visit Bones again and whirled the child away. He rescinded the decision only when it became apparent that Bones was genuinely penitent, that the stories hadn't seemed to do T'Ekitah any harm, and that T'Ekitah was slowly fretting herself into illness without her beloved Bones. Their reunion broadcast quiet deep happiness all over the ship. After that Bones OK'd her reading list with Spock.

Much later, there was that truly monumental drunk in Jim's cabin. Safely back within Federation borders, they had just returned from relinquishing T'Ekitah to her grandparents' care. Holding off black depression with both hands, Bones had discovered a bottle so well hidden he had completely forgotten it through almost five years on board ship. Somewhere between the first and second halves of the bottle, Bones found himself waxing philosophical.

"You know, Jim, that child is going to be a Bombshell in the Federation when she grows up. The offspring of a Daughter and a Kataytikh of the First Realm...a genius, steeped in science from the minute she was born...a telepath of her power...both Vulcan and Human as Spock could never let himself be.... That kid is going to be able to do or be anything she wants."

It was Jim, curiously sober, who asked the key, the crucial, question. "What will she want?"

There were visits, with T'Ekitah taller and prettier each time. Her graduation. The memories grew dark and troubled. Ahead of him loomed a terrible foreknowledge. Somehow Bones sensed it, tried to hold it off. But it swept toward him as inexorably as time itself.

He saw her die, slowly, agonizingly, at the hands of a mob the likes of which had not been seen on any civilized world for centuries. Some of the reasons behind it were hidden from him; indeed, some he would not know, even then. But her presence in the tense, turbulent atmosphere of interstellar politics, twenty-five years from now, would form a catalyst. The group of young people who had hijacked the Enterprise, looking for Eden, had not been alone. In twenty-five years such groups would grow enormously, joining young, rebellious people in other worlds and races. They lacked only a head, a leader, a--a martyr. Bones, again, saw her die.

And the start of it all? A few careless remarks made by Bones himself, about the well-nigh intolerable conditions for youth on the more civilized, restricted and crowded worlds.

The knowledge had come too swiftly for grief, only a numb disbelief. Kitten, he thought, and, not again, not twice! Yet still the knowledge came. The movement, given direction for so short a time, did not collapse with her death. The hard-core fanatics gained control, inevitably. Aims and direction perverted, momentum snowballing, it became a Jihad. Holy War, storming through the stars, leaving blood and death and barbarism in its wake. Bones stared aghast into a future he could not accept and not deny.

"No!" he thought. "It can be changed! It doesn't have to happen!" Then he did something with his mind; he wasn't sure quite what. The universe expanded around him enormously and he was looking at the future from the outside, seeing each turning point that determined its form, each small choice that molded the future.

Slowly and carefully at first, he tried changing those factors, almost at random. Each choice gave him a different view of the future, like a pre-atomic train switching to different tracks. They were clear and detailed, or fuzzy and unsubstantial, according to the chance they had of coming true. Each track differed--but not quite enough. The Federation was just not ready for the kind of person T'Ekitah would be if Bones was a part of her life. The clash was inevitable. In most futures T'Ekitah lost, in political double-dealing or a disastrous marriage or a peculiarly Vulcan tragedy Bones didn't understand. In some futures it was the Federation that lost; in some, both. But always, in some manner, Bones bore part of the blame.

In his anguished indecision, Bones reached out instinctively for help, further and further. The black star flared briefly and his range increased ten-fold. For a moment he became one with the Enterprise, traced every tortuous circuit with his fingertips, knew every bulkhead and vent shaft as intimately as he knew his own body, and felt her mighty struggle for life as his own. In one brief second he even glimpsed why Spock and Scotty and all the others loved machines so--but that was not what he was after. Blindly seeking, he narrowed his search, focusing in closer, closer.

Next door, in sickbay, T'Aniyeh's body arched in shock as Bones' raging confusion made contact with her own turmoil. Drawn together by need, divided by their own self-focused retreats from pain, two minds became one.

Under normal circumstances a mind-meld could not proceed so casually. But these were not normal circumstances. The dark star loomed ominously close, diffusing its baleful influence through the Enterprise. Slowly, inexorably, the normal barriers men use to shield mind and soul were being distorted, broken, destroyed. With strength lent it by the dark star's influence, Bones' mind fought the mind-meld even as it reached eagerly for the contact on a subconscious level, sending tendrils of thought that laced into each intricate crevice of T'Aniyeh's mind. He had time for one agonized thought before the linkage was complete. "No! I can't show her Kitten. I can't tell her what I've seen. It would destroy her. Got to conceal--protect--" Then the linkage was complete, and Bones' mind went very still.

T'Aniyeh was not really aware of what had happened. She knew the mind-meld was now a triple, a both more unstable and more dynamic entity; she sensed the intruder's identity, but she refused to pay any attention to those facts. T'Aniyeh had won a precarious refuge from the swirling confusion of Kirk's mind, locked safely in her own memories, and she consciously refused to imperil that safety. Her life and sanity--and ultimately perhaps the safety of Kirk and Bones also--depended on it.

Mainly she strove for memories of Spock. His presence pervaded them; they simultaneously steadied and comforted her. She remembered; long peaceful evenings together, of talk, music and study; absorbing discussions, usually ending up on the one subject that was of primary interest to them both--humans. Their motivation, value systems, unique (cock-eyed) understanding of the universe--how to live with them without going completely insane. In these discussions Spock used impeccable logic, but combined it with a creative insight that sometimes surprised them both.

Oh, he was not a total computer, that tall bond-mate of hers. She had watched him on the bridge, close to the captain. More than once she saw flashes of pride for his brother, pride that he could conceal from everyone but her. And Spock was proud of his brother, she realized. In the new security of 'married life' he was loosening up, showing more and more gleams of almost human humor and compassion. By Vulcan standards, he was becoming increasingly vulnerable. And oh, she couldn't bear to hurt him!

Their union had to be fertile. There must be a child. The scars left by T'Rruel's death--T'Rruel! Bones' mind literally blazed forth, startling T'Aniyeh out of her self-imposed exile. If T'Rruel hadn't died--if he hadn't killed her-- Without further thought Bones hurtled down probability tracks that seemed to him to be almost palpable in their reality, dragging T'Aniyeh helplessly along.

Uh-huh--it was starting to take shape. Delicately Bones shifted three minor factors and brought uncertainties into equal and opposite balance. The future snapped into crystal clarity, like the opening of a sensura, and he skimmed it quickly as he might one of those immersions in fantasy. But his desperation made the similarity tenuous. This was all too real. Every action, every moment of despair or joy could have happened, if only--if only.... Resolutely, Bones wrenched his thoughts away from contemplation of those mind-dissolving words.

If the cyborg pilot had not crashed, there would have been no need for Spock to enter into a premature pon farr, to draw T'Rruel to him. The Bonding would have been entered into properly, well after the rigorous Affirmation that had taken the lives of T'Rruel and Spock's unborn son. But, Bones perceived with growing dismay, this future was no better than the one he had fled from. T'Rruel was, if anything, too Vulcan for Spock. There grew an increasing conflict between the perfectly impenetrable Vulcan Spock forced himself to be for T'Rruel, and the person that time, circumstance and a very mixed heritage had made him into.

This future split neatly into two paths. In the brighter path, Spock left the Service, left his friends, for a post at the Vulcan Science Academy. Split by desperate internal conflict, he nevertheless took the reins of the movement opposing T'Urianne, opposing secession from the Federation. And between them, they managed to tear Vulcan in half. Kirk, unprotected by the training and security Spock had been able to give him when Kirk was formally adopted into Spock's family, died of esper shock within two years. Bones didn't scan the darkened path. What he could sense of it was enough to warn his numbed brain well away. But Bones knew that there, too, he was a pivot point.

The next second T'Aniyeh's reaction burst like Peace Day firecrackers. The glimpse she had caught had startled her out of her self-imposed shell. "What? What was that!?"

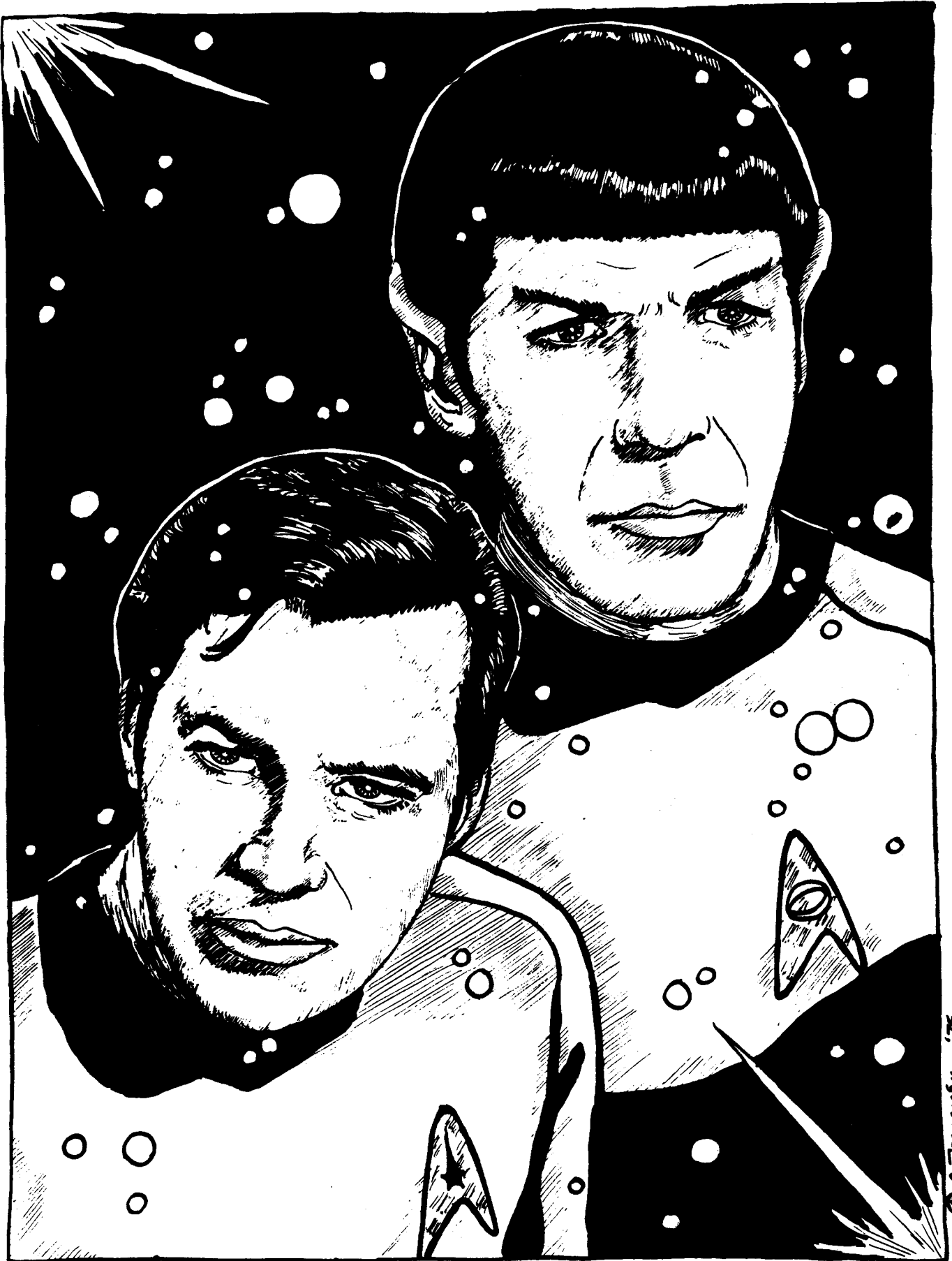
Before he could formulate a response, he sensed a flood of chaos surrounding them, encroaching from the darkness. Lightning streaking through spaghetti-tangled webs of circuitry, nebulas turning into hands that reached and grabbed, faces that gibbered without meaning--a rolling confusion that sundered mountains at a word and cowered from shadows. But beneath that, way, way beneath, something felt familiar, something....

"Jim!" Bones yelled. His mind and Tanya's had been busy trading information on an almost subconscious level. He knew without having to think about it that this was what Tanya had endured for days now, linked to the mind of an uncontrolled telepath.

"But this isn't necessary," Bones told her, almost roughly. He concentrated and did-- something. Again, he wasn't sure just what. T'Aniyeh was a trained telepath, yes, but she could not know all of the more esoteric branches of that science. And the psychic influence radiated by the dark star made it hard to put into practice what she did know. But for Bones, normally psi-null, the star furnished power which he could use where any more sensitive person would have shorted out. He was in his element, doing things by instinct that Vulcan Elders would do with many safeguards and doubts, if at all. He 'focused in' to a small lonely kernel of sanity in the exact middle of the roiling cloud of confusion that was James T. Kirk.

"Jim!" Bones asked worriedly, establishing contact. "Are you all right?"

"No," Jim answered flatly. "It's... (It's a storm of emotions, rage, fear, love, jealousy, grief, contentment, despair, following each other swiftly and departing without discerning cause. It's a voice repeating insanely again and again, "Two plus two is five. Two plus two is five." It's dying a hundred different times, a hundred different ways: blood spouting like a boiling fountain from eyes and ears and mouth and nose in a ruptured spacesuit; lungs bursting, crying for air and finally you breathe and the water rushes in, tasting flat and heavy; gravity pulling flesh



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off bones and squeezing bones into the floor; the sweet acrid smell of flesh burning and it's yours. You think, "Wake up, wake up," and you wake up and for a moment it's all right and then you start dying again. It's seeing something through a dozen pairs of eyes and they all see something different! They call it one name and they see twelve contradictory objects. She--she sees blue and calls it green! And it's being Ensign Freeman and Bones and Lt. Minos and Spock and where am I? Where am I?) It's--bad," he finished.

"What is the situation?" he asked in his command voice, needing something, anything, to concentrate on. Bones told him quickly. Before he finished, Jim's interest was no longer pretense.

"The Enterprise has been trapped by the black star, and unless Spock pulls a major miracle or three, it's an even chance whether she fries or breaks up in the gravity surges," Bones assented gloomily.

The captain thought about it. Yes, he'd known that sooner or later the Enterprise would die, but not with her captain helpless in sickbay, unable to fight to save her life. He had to get out.

"Captain, you can't!" Tanya half-wailed. "I'm protecting you as much as I can. Without that shielding you'd go insane in seconds, probably die in minutes. And," her mental 'voice' sounded defeated, "even if you ordered me, Captain, I don't know if I could. The black star--" She muttered a Martain phrase, "I am only an egg," and lapsed into silence.

Jim considered her statements. "Bones?"

"Jim, I don't even know how I got in here," Bones answered miserably.

Jim tried to sum up the possibilities in his own mind. It wasn't easy to think rationally; the outside horrors were pressing closer and closer. How had Dante known, he thought for a moment, then shunted the thought aside.

"If the Enterprise dies, it doesn't matter what I do. And even if the Enterprise survives, the chance that I'll emerge from this alive or sane are--" he mentally measured, as dispassionately as possible, the effects of what had been happening. He did it awkwardly, but for a rank beginner, quite competently. He finally knew the purpose of some of the mental exercises Spock had made him practice, again and again. The results were not good. I.V.'s can only do so much, and the amount of adrenalin floating in his system was not doing his heart, liver or kidneys any good at all. As he again grew aware of the insanity, creeping insidiously closer, he was struck by a chilling thought. If he were bearing up so poorly under this burden, what must the other two be going through?

It took a direct order before Lt. Minos would respond at all to his question, and then only indirectly. "I can handle it, Captain, until Spock gets us to Vulcan. I have to."

Bones was more honest, once the captain had succeeded in rousing him from his private miasma of grief. "With the star, the heat, the heavy sedation I've had to keep you both under-- it'll be close, Jim. Mind-melds are nothing to fool around with. And with Tanya's--" he stopped abruptly. Even if Tanya lived through the mind-meld, would she be able to conceive and bear T'Ekitah afterward? The thought was tangled and fleeting. Jim didn't notice. "Of course, I'll be in bad shape pretty soon too. No telling how long it'll be till someone puts me under life-support. And without even the minimal training you've had...." He made his diagnoses abstractly, fitting the pieces together with an absent-minded professionalism. It didn't seem to matter.

"Then maybe none of us will make it to Vulcan," Jim summed it up. "Lt. Minos, you can't handle a triple mind-meld alone. And if I can't escape into life--" There is another escape, a voice said from deep within his mind. He half smiled, remembering. 'A beast fears death; a child denies it. Wilt thou seek for the hidden waters and not drink when they are at hand? Wilt thou die alone?' Book of Life. He would join his ship after all, if not fighting with her for life, then sharing her death.

"Lt. Minos--Tanya--I can't take this for the weeks we'd need to get to Vulcan," he told her soberly. It might give her strength to fight. No, without him to focus and relay the mass-meld unconscious, she would have no problems, would she? At least she would no longer have a triple to contend with; the immediate pressure would be taken off. There would be a chance for T'Aniyeh and Bones, then. "Take care of Bones," Jim ordered softly, even as he let go of, one by one, the bonds that held him to life. Above Jim's and Tanya's heads, the diagnostic panels seemed to go crazy for a second, then started a slow march downward. In the next room, Bones' heartbeat slowed, breathing became shallow, skin pale.

Bones saw what was happening, but some how did not care very much. The reaction to all he had seen and done and felt in the last few hours (hours? years) had finally caught up with him. There was an invisible, impenetrable shield between him and everything else, protecting like a cocoon of foamed softsilk. He watched numbly as Jim started slipping away into darkness and chaos. Tanya called frantically for help, but Bones seemed frozen, unable to move. He could only watch as Tanya tried to stop Jim alone, as she failed.

Slowly, inexorably, a third future formed itself in his mind. He didn't even have to skim this one; the salient facts laid themselves out for inspection to his ever more proficient precog sense. He coldly calculated that the chances were at least three out of four that none of them would survive. But even if only Jim died, something would die in Spock as well. He would act the same, behave if anything even more the properly detached Vulcan. But in his second great trial of strength with T'Uriamne, he would lose miserably. Before the resulting procession of tragedy could



present itself to his vision, Bones stopped it with an effort of will that left him shaking. With the clarity of weakness he saw that this could not be. But they were at the end of their rope. His mind searched frantically for an escape.

"Spock!" Bones yelled, his desperation finally cracking the shell that had enclosed him, not knowing that he was going to do it until the summons echoed within his own mind. "You get up here!"

Lying asleep on a cot in Engineering, mentally and physically exhausted from the enormous task of getting the Enterprise out of range of the dark star, Spock woke. Though his body lay lax and quiet, his mind, fully alert, homed in on the source of that urgent call. He assessed the relevant facts (what was McCoy doing in the meld?) and acted on them almost instantaneously.

"Kroyka!" roared Spock, Guardian of the Tradition, Kataytikh of the First Realm, and, for the duration of this emergency, Kirk's Liege-Lord.

Kirk stopped so fast it was as if he'd been poleaxed. Kirk had to obey his Liege-Lord; he couldn't obey him. It was right that he should die; it was wrong. He had to think about what to do, but he couldn't think. Faced with an unresolvable conflict, Kirk did a uniquely sensible thing. He fainted. Retreating deeply into unconsciousness, tendrils of identity curling tightly around the central kernel of being, he didn't have to face conflicts that, at the moment, he was unable to handle. Spock almost sighed in relief. Then it hit him. What was going on here?

No time for questions. Jim had thought that the death of one component of a meld would free the others. Actually, it was far more likely to drag the others along with him into death. And T'Aniyeh was not as strong as the others.

"No, my love," T'Aniyeh said calmly, "it is no use. Even if the mind-meld were broken now, the drain has been too great."

For Spock, time seemed to stand still. "You are sure?" he found himself asking.

"Quite sure," she answered calmly. "The added strain was just too much. I could survive after the meld is broken--mindless. Spock, life is given us for a purpose, though the giver is unknown and the purpose only dimly sensed. When life becomes a useless burden, meaningless, instead of a Joy, it is not logical life should continue. Your people taught me this. They taught me how to live, and die. Krosai kali mar'eelaw n'dali?"

"I can not," he said heavily. "The other two; they could not stand the shock. I'll have to protect them."

"Oh, Spock!" she said, with a moment of aching sorrow for him. Then, calm again, "What must be must be. Remember that I love you. Remember."

He did not reply. He did not have to. He moved, instead, swiftly and competently, catching the two human minds in a web of bracing that would, hopefully, cushion them against a full empathic participation in what was to come. Using his own mind as both a support and a shield, he bore unprotected the full brunt of the savage tearing of delicate telepathic ties. As T'Aniyeh died--alone.

No march to the gates of death, together. No careful disentangling of mind from mind, the two comforting and caressing each other as it proceeded. No moment of final, irrevocable farewell. The kali mar'eelaw n'il, the farewell of two bound closer than life, was aborted before it began. Instead there was merely an amputation, brutally swift. The pain and loss seared his very soul.

Finally, he wearily turned to life again. Later he would pay for this sacrifice, and pay, and pay again. But just now there were duties to perform, two humans to protect and try to heal, a ship to save. He relaxed the shields he had erected and settled a little into their minds, skimming surface thoughts.

Jim? Still deeply unconscious, aware of nothing outside his own pain. Spock could have thanked heaven for that. Jim must never know that he was the unwitting cause of T'Aniyeh's death. The knowledge would destroy him, as surely as...as surely as his own unasked-for telepathic ability was doing now. Once more Spock grimly reaffirmed his own responsibility for that mischance.

The other mind was like the surface of a dark pool, shocked still. Spock gingerly reached in a little farther. He had to discover what damage had been done, and repair it, if he could.

Underneath the surface, in black undercurrents coiling futilely, McCoy's mind was mumbling to itself. "I've killed them all. Erin, T'Rruel, Kitten, Tanya. They're all dead and it's my fault. I'm a doctor, I'm supposed to save lives, and I touch people and they die. I *should* die too. I must die."

As the tenor of the thoughts became more and more obvious, Spock learned an emotion he had known only briefly before: despair. The unquenchable epitome of emotion, coming to this!

"It's like a jinx dogging the three of us," the doctor continued. "Three...." Then it happened. Spock, unprepared and weary, caught only Bones' emotional reaction to what he saw. At first a kind of hurt flinching away, then astonishment, disbelief, and the slow dawning of hope.

"Spock!" Bones burst out. "There is a chance! Vulcan and the Federation can both survive, with no Jihad, nobody dying. There's a chance. I saw it!"

"You have precognitant abilities?" Spock asked slowly.

"What a monumental piece of analytical reasoning!" Bones said blisteringly. "Listen! There is a chance for all of us. But it depends on my being whole and sane. I..." the thought wavered, "I can't take this much longer now. I couldn't handle it for the years we'd need. Remembering, always remembering. Every time I'd make a decision I'd wonder how many people would die, how many worlds would be destroyed, and I'd see her die again." The doctor was shaking, his thoughts disconnected, spurting, accompanied by bursts of emotion Spock could only interpret as pure pain. "I killed them, I killed them, I killed them all," beat a dirge around and through the background of Bones' mind.

From somewhere Bones drew strength, spoke with a dry semblance of normality. "Spock, I am one of the pivot points of every future I can see. Every time I make a non-trivial decision, whichever way I make it, people are going to die. Knowing this, I won't be able to make any decisions at all. And that, Mr. Spock, will bring about the worst future of all. The only road to safety is if I am totally unaware of that responsibility. I can't remember what I've learned this night; therein lies destruction for us all. I have to be as sane, as whole, as unmarked as humanly possible. I can't remember this night, even as only a nightmare."

Bones paused. Not daring to look for Spock's reaction, he forced himself forward, to the final, irrevocable step. "Spock, can you, as kataytikh, wipe memories?"

"No," said Spock firmly. "It is forbidden. Memories are vital components of the personality."

"Even when they would destroy that personality?" Bones asked desperately. At the end of his resources, he dropped back to the half-remembered phrasing of an earlier time of need, underneath an ember-red sky. "I...plead with thee. I...beg!"

This had gone on long enough, Spock decided, more disturbed by that echo from the past than he cared to admit. There was enough justification for *nrat'la*, at any rate.

Bones felt invisible fingers gently tracing the contours of his mind, suppressing gland secretions here, increasing blood flow there. The uppermost level of his mind, the part that had seen and felt and suffered through so much, was being carefully separated from the rest of the identity called McCoy and just as carefully anesthetized. A numbness crept over Bones, a cool, healing paralysis. Below that numb self there was another, smiling, faintly tense. Himself? Yes. All right, you take care of it, Bones thought sleepily to himself, not caring that he wasn't making much sense. His last thought before consciousness fled: "Who ever said Vulcans have no concept of mercy?" The *nrat'la* was complete and he was only watching, without the slightest flicker of interest or concern.

"That's a relief," the other Bones said easily.

"You have been experiencing episodes of precognition?" Spock asked.

"Yes. At least I think so." He gave Spock a quick resume of events over the last few hours, not going into details of each future. He concluded with, "It must be the star. I've never had anything like this happen before. You yourself have said I'm psi-null. Joining the mind-meld must have been a pure accident." He paused a moment. "Spock. I'm sorry about Tanya."

"It was her choice to make," Spock said colorlessly and changed the subject. "You cannot be the only crucial variable?"

"No... But that reminds me. There's something I've been wanting to try for quite a while."

Bones reached out, almost too casually, and gathered first Jim, then Spock into a mental linkage as deep as their previous contacts had been shallow. The bundles of thoughts, images, memories and reactions, dim and confused for Jim, crystal clear for Spock, were drawn inexorably together. A startled Spock tried to break away, but it was already too late. New ties were forged, small areas of resistance were simply plowed through, boundries merged and disappeared. The three had become one.

Union. There was nothing left uncomplete or unfulfilled. Each of them, at one time or another, had become aware of the loneliness that is the birthright of each solitary speck of consciousness, forever alone in a darkly immense universe. They had yearned inarticulately, the while never knowing what was lacking. No longer. Every jagged edge fitted smoothly, every stab of loneliness answered, every weakness shielded by a corresponding strength. They were complete, with an almost physical ecstasy. More than human or Vulcan, far less than what they could be, they knew Joy. No longer alone.

Then Jim moaned softly and broke the contact.

"He can't take it for long, not now. He's really the pivot point, you know," Bones said somberly. The universe seemed grey and lifeless around him. Taking himself firmly in hand, he told himself that that was all the universe he'd known before, and if necessary, it would do quite well for the rest of his life. The surge of longing abated, slowly.

"But that is impossible," said Spock, sounding dazed. "A triad is inherently unstable."

"You mean a triad of Vulcans isn't stable," corrected Bones, sounding smug. It wasn't every day he got to correct Spock on logic. "What a triad made up of a human telepath, a Vulcan kataytikh, and a human psi-nul is, remains to be seen.... We could never have done it, though, if you and I hadn't been so much alike," he said thoughtfully.

"Alike?" Spock echoed numbly.

"Well, of course," Bones said impatiently. "Why else are we always fighting?"

Spock considered that eminently sensible notion for a full half-second before rejecting it out of hand.

"You saw a future in which both Tsaichrani and the Federation may survive," Spock began again. "Does this--ability--have any part to play in that future?"

"That future has no chance at all unless I emerge from this sane and whole, as if this night never happened. I just won't be able to handle it, Spock!" As Spock started to interrupt, Bones continued. "I'm not asking you, Spock, I'm telling you! As Chief Medical Officer of the Enterprise, I'll make it a direct order. The lives and continued sanity of too many people, not excluding myself, depend on it to let some silly, weak-kneed Vulcan ethos stand in the way."

"You are sure your assessment of the situation as regards this one factor is correct?" Spock asked.

"God-damnit, Spock! yes!" Regaining control with an effort, (some day you're going to have to stop losing that temper, he thought, briefly to himself. Granted it's fun, but...) he tried to speak reasonably. "Look, Jim's not the only one who's been studying those Vulcan textbooks. Isn't it true that a kataytikh can be regarded in some instances as a servant to the people, and can be 'hired', when there is a task only he can do?"

"Yes."

"OK, then, I'll do it!" Bones yelled. "Uh--I, Leonard McCoy, here and now contract Spock as Kataytikh for a service to the present, future and past. Accepting this gift of skill, I nevertheless take upon myself the full responsibility of all consequences thereof."

Yet, unaccountably, Spock still hesitated. "Leonard. Do you know what I will have to do to you?"

"I'll risk it," Bones said gently. "Come on, Spock, you're wasting time."

For a moment nothing seemed to happen. He waited. Around him his surroundings melted and changed, merging so imperceptibly into the familiar sickbay that he was not aware of the transition. Under the diagnostic panels Lt. Minos and the Captain lay limp and motionless, readings on both panels oscillating in unison. Bones sighed and rubbed his tired neck--not an easy task in a pressure suit. Four hours to perihelion, he noted. Might as well get some rest....

Step by step, Spock moved Bones through every thought, memory, half-completed association, emotional and physical reaction from the beginnings of the night until the argument with Scotty. There he released Bones from the memory chain. "Hold everything that happened clearly in your mind," Spock ordered tersely. After shaking the fog from his brain, Bones tried to obey. It took a bit of fumbling, but finally he had it to Spock's satisfaction. The tiny electric impulses traced a consistent path, touching each RNA molecule in turn. Trace chemicals drifted, osmotic pressures altered subtly, new pathways quickly dissipated. The scene wavered and melted in Bones' hands like spun sugar, leaving nothing behind but a kind of apathy, a disinclination to pursue any interest further, and a mind-numbing fatigue.

Spock moved to stand closely behind Bones, a dark presence. His silent offer of support stiffened Bones' backbone. "I'm all right," Bones said. "Let's get on with it."

For Spock, the task was not a difficult one, although it was seldom done for another. His reserves of strength as Kataytikh were more than adequate. It was basically a straightforward piece of work. He was startled, therefore, when the pathway of memory he was following abruptly pinched out, then resumed after a brief dead space. Scouting the area gingerly he saw that the missing loop of memory was hidden behind walls of scar tissue too strong for even him to penetrate casually.

Questing further, he saw subtle lines of stress radiating from the blocked-off area, touching gently into every facet of Bones' personality, making large sections of his brain inaccessible even to Bones himself.

Spock brought Bones out of it carefully. "McCoy, why did I change my mind and accept your advice? You gave me a logical reason, but I cannot trace it."

"What?" asked Bones, real puzzlement in his tone. "I don't know what you're talking about."

Spock regarded Bones sharply for a moment. The doctor's bewilderment was genuine, he was sure of it. Something was wrong. But now was not the proper time for an investigation. He dropped the matter immediately, and they continued with the careful, tedious work of complete memory erasure. Soon the periods of rest between each segment of memory lengthened, and Bones no longer disdained Spock's help. But every night comes to an end.

Spock released Bones for the last time, then waited, without speaking, letting him rest. He waited, marshalling his thoughts, until a little of Bones' dazed numbness had begun to clear. He then spoke carefully.

"Doctor, there was a portion of memory I was unable to trace or destroy, it being behind a privacy block of considerable strength. That is, of course, purely your own business. However, stress lines emanate from the block to many vital functions of your mind. The probability that the presence of this abnormality will effect your behavior significantly approaches 100% over a period of five years, plus or minus two point seven months. What do you advise?"

"100%? I don't know what.... But within five years.... Didn't you get anything?" Bones finally asked greyly. Deep within him a tiny pulse of forbidding beat, but he was just so tired-- He just wanted to let go and float.

Somewhat reluctantly, it seemed to Bones, Spock transmitted two items. One, a name, Erin; and two, the sight of an open grave. For almost a full second the shell of fatigue protected him, but then it hit him and he started to tremble.

"No! But you have to," something argued invincibly. "I can't, I can't." He was falling, falling through darkness and chaos and pieces of sanity that wouldn't fit together any more, falling forever until Spock caught him and lowered him gently to the ground.

It was the fastest nrat'la Spock had ever done, and the most complete. He had to extend deeper and deeper to forestall the trauma, blanking out the thalamus, pineal body and pituitary, leaving finally only the uppermost layer of the cerebral cortex still fully active. At this point, Bones' 'voice' sounded rather like a computer read-out. All emotional nuances were gone, although mental characteristics, reasoning capabilities, and memories were, of course, intact.

"Who is Erin?" Spock asked quietly.

Bones hesitated, running over the facts. It appeared there was only one course of action open to him. So he took it. No higher praise of Spock's skill in administering the nrat'la can be given.

"She was my daughter," he said. He told the story simply and drably. Bones had married right out of med school. As two girls were born and grew, increasingly bitter arguments began about the amount of time Bones spent working, away from his family. They ended when Bones arrived home late one night to see his younger daughter, Erin, die in a drop-tube accident while his wife was at work. If he had been there he could have saved her life.

His wife sued for divorce and Bones didn't contest it. On the brink of mental collapse, he was considering suicide when Venerian plague broke out from a contaminated mining ship. That gave him something to fight. When it was over and he, somewhat surprisingly, was still alive, Bones turned to space. Escaped to space.

"It was not your fault," Spock said finally.

"I am a doctor. I'm supposed to save lives. And I killed my own daughter."

That was enough. Spock had the sin-guilt-punishment cycle pinned down now. It wasn't difficult--the cycle was worn so deeply into the doctor's mind it could almost be felt directly. The memories themselves were, in fact, too deeply embedded to be erased. But the false causal links between them; yes, there was a point of attack there. But whether its short or long range effects were good or bad, this event was of first-magnitude importance in McCoy's life. Did he have the right to nullify it? Did he have the right to withdraw now and do nothing? Spock had jumped at the chance McCoy had given him to do what, logically, must be done to save the future and his friend. But if all that had been accomplished was only to involve him in a still deeper conflict between right and necessity, duty and pity, debts and-- wait. A--a paver'ro!

"Doctor. When I agreed to perform a certain service as Kataytikh for you--specifically, erasing your memories of this night--no mention was made of payment." Bones maintained a slightly puzzled silence. "I state and demand it now. It is, that you allow me to destroy certain narrowly circumscribed causal links in your memory."

Bones thought about it for a moment. "That's insane," he stated flatly.

"Not at all. It is a contract of the paver'ro type. One does not encounter such a perfect example twice in a lifetime," Spock said, somewhat reverentially.

"Oh, all right. With this deed, all debts are fulfilled, all false bonds are broken, all harmony is restored, for now and throughout eternity."

For just a second, Spock allowed curiosity to distract him. How many of the textbooks Spock had given Kirk had the doctor gotten to?

"All of them." Amazingly, impossibly, there was a faint flicker of amuzement from the doctor's mind. "And Jim was having the time of his life watching me trying to avoid you."

Not wasting time in reactions, Spock got down to work. Tracing that invisible circle once more, he found and grasped the weakest link. "It was not your fault," he said softly. The words echoed and reverberated within Bones' mind. Bones waited, silent. The second link flared



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brilliantly and died. "You are not to blame." The next step, and the next. "The responsibility is not yours, or indeed, anyone's. It was an accident." The last and strongest link. Spock braced himself and pulled.

"No, it wasn't my fault, was it," Bones said, sounding dazed.

"No," said Spock calmly, and began removing the nrat'la, a level at a time.

Completely and fully conscious once more, Bones stared emptily at nothing for seven seconds, shook himself once and re-integrated violently. "Wow," he said. He showed signs of repeating himself for quite a while. Spock cut him short.

"It is time this meld was broken," Spock said. "We both have our duties to perform. You will sleep, Doctor, and you will remember nothing." There was a stretching, a drawing fine, a--a break. Bones found himself floating alone in his own skull again. He opened his eyes a little. Yes, there was still a world out there, busy with hums and clicks and small movements just glimpsed out of the corner of his eye. There was Nurse Chapel, trying to be quiet, tiptoeing through the small cubical. From nowhere a small vagrant thought intruded.

"Rest, Doctor," it said.

On the very edge of obeying, Bones barely hesitated. The black star still radiated, closer and more menacing than ever. Not pausing to think what exactly he was doing Bones took a long, last glimpse into the future. Jim's wife would be a surprise to all of them. A Vulcan, yes--but what a Vulcan! Then Bones let go of everything, collapsing gratefully into the warm comfort of sleep. This time, there were no dreams.

Spock did not disengage from Kirk's mind immediately. Running through the knowledge he had unwillingly acquired from Bones' mind, he realized that he could not risk anyone else learning what had chanced that night. It must be behind privacy blocks before he ventured in the world again. Spock skimmed the data carefully, placing a value on each bit of information (from 1, light block, to 5, bury in deep hole immediately and forget where the shovel is hidden. The list was weighted toward the 5's.)

But he slowed almost imperceptably and stopped after one particular set of transferred memories--Bones' memories of T'Ekitah, the daughter Spock might have had. The thought came softly, without his bidding. "Of such a daughter," he murmured, "one could be proud." Then he calmly completed the block. But deep within him, where Vulcan and human merged, a tiny flame was born--a flame that would last when will to life itself was gone.

He checked on Jim once more. The captain was slowly coming out of the deep, almost frantic unconsciousness he had retreated to. There was a 73% chance he would be able to hear thoughts directed at him.

"Jim. Hold on. It is difficult; it will become more so. But you must hold on. There is a chance now. Hold on." Waiting beside his captain, for the first time Spock dared to hope.

# EDITORS ARE GHOULS AND CANNIBALS

It appears that "Editors are Ghouls & Cannibals" has become a regular feature of Kraith Collected. At least in this issue, we only have two minor glitches (that we know of!) to apologize for.

Eileen Roy has written two wonderful stories for us in this issue and we have changed the titles of both. "One Finger Symphony" has become "One Fingered Symphony", due to an overzealous use of press-type lettering on a very late night.

While "Bones' Vision" has been published before, a long and tedious search through the grammars of the English language has convinced us that it should be "Bones's Vision". In case you're interested, it has to do with the possessive case for a proper name ending in 's'.

Eileen, we're very sorry. If you want them changed back, we'll do it for the next printing.

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We're also going to use this space to stand on a soap-box and orate. We're giving you fair warning now to stop reading if you mind that sort of thing or don't like to see it in fanzines. None of the following is directed against any specific person or type of story. We read, and enjoy, nearly every fan publication in every media fandom that we find. But we are increasingly disturbed by the trends that we see running across all fandoms.

Kraith is an oddity these days. You hold in your hands a fanzine that has neither descriptive sex nor wanton violence, nor even a blatant 'hurt/comfort' story to thrill the heart. Not that we have anything against sex, violence, or hurt/comfort stories; it just seems that few stories are being written these days that don't fall into these categories. Personal and emotional growth is not necessarily best accomplished to the accompaniment of tears, screams, groans, blood and orgasm.

We think that's because it is much easier to write blood and sex than it is to write characterization and plot, that so many people try to substitute one for the other. Blood only comes in so many places and consistencies. Sex can only be done in so many places and ways. The search for more and different sensation is the road to decadence and, considering that STrek fiction as a whole has only been around for 15 years, we're a little young for that. We can't possibly have exhausted all the plots and permutations that don't call for sex and/or violence.

Continued on page 142.

DEBBIE:  
What?! You're the one who used to crouch down behind cars in foggy parking lots and yell out the witch's chant from MacBeth in a fake falsetto. And how you talked two other people into doing harmony ...

DEBBIE:  
Yeah?

DEBBIE:  
See, I knew you were a ghou!



CAROL:  
I'm not a ghou, but you, Debbie, are definitely a cannibal.

CAROL:  
Oh, that. Well ... Remember the second time we met? I gave you a piece of blood temperature raw meat and you gnawed your way through it?

CAROL:  
I only told you it was steak.

# The Affirmation of Nellie Gray



Roberta Rogow



"Personal Log, Spock recording. The Enterprise has made its semi-annual stop for repairs at Star Base Ten. I have agreed to receive a representative of the Vulcan personnel on this Star Base on a matter of personal importance. The representative, Lt. T'Rass, has not been explicit as to the nature of the meeting. I suspect, however, that it may involve my position as kataytikh. Only that would casuse Lt. T'Rass to call upon my assistance again. Spock out."

The tall Vulcan woman in the blue uniform of a computer officer stood in front of Spock and said in even, dispassionate tones, "Commander Spock, I have been chosen to speak to you on this matter because we are kinsmen, through your father's father's mother. The time of Affirmation is approaching, and fifty-five Vulcans are now on Star Base Ten. We cannot leave this Star Base for logical reasons. There are medical personnel whose presence is necessary, several scientific experiments require constant attention, economic factors prevent some others from continuing their journey to Vulcan. In short, we ask you to officiate as Kataytikh here at Star Base Ten."

Spock steepled his fingers. "I am honored to be asked to officiate," he said. "May I point out to you one error in your computations? You have mentioned fifty-five Vulcans. I need not remind you that fifty-seven are needed for Affirmation."

"I am as aware of the lack as you," T'Rass said. "However, I believe there is a remedy. You have, on board the Enterprise, one who has already had dealings with Vulcan, and is somewhat familiar with our ways. This person has had close ties with a Vulcan, has formed a bond of sorts with that Vulcan, and has even taken part in a marriage ceremony on Vulcan."

"The Captain would be honored," Spock said.

T'Rass open her eyes wide in surprise. "I would not dare to ask Captain Kirk to do such a thing. I was referring to Ensign Ellen Gray, who serves as Captain Kirk's Yeoman."

Now it was Spock's turn to be surprised. "I have observed Miss Gray in the performance of her duties," he said. "She is undisciplined in her demeanor and careless in her speech. She has taken part in several missions, and has been more or less successful in doing what was required of her, but I have not been impressed with either her deportment or her intelligence."

"I admit Ensign Gray's upbringing was not of the best," T'Rass said. "She is, however, capable of great personal loyalty, and will make any sacrifice for those who win her devotion. Moreover, she possesses certain telepathic abilities, albeit on a subconscious level. She could serve as a conductor for the telepathic mind, even though she herself was not aware of it. She is what is called a "sensitive", rather than being a true telepath. I believe that this ability, coupled with her friendship for me, will permit her to accept Affirmation."

"Indeed," Spock said. He flipped on the intercom. "Spock here. Yeoman Gray, Yeoman Ellen Gray, please report to my quarters. Spock out."

Down in Rec. Room B, Nellie Gray, that product of the Spacetown slums, who had managed to find herself a home on the Enterprise, nearly choked over a glass of brew. While she coughed and spluttered, her red-shirted friends in what she called "the Scuzz Squad" speculated on what could have made Spock send for her.

"You didn't hype anything of ahis, did you, Nellie?" asked one brawny type. "A couple of computer tapes, maybe? Or his lytherette strings?"

"Hot jets, I don't know," Nellie said between coughs. "Do I look all right?"

"No worse than always," the red-shirt said.

Nellie ran a hand over her tousled curls and asked, "Where is Mr. Spock's roost anyway?"

"Level Five, three doors right from the Captain's. Good luck, Nellie." The security crew waved her off, and returned to their speculations.

Nellie arrived in her usual state of breathlessness and saluted smartly to Spock. Then she recognized her old schoolmate, T'Rass. "Hey, what's the good word, Shipmate? I was waiting greenie-time to come and see you. How're all the Brains doing down there?"

"Miss Gray," Spock said, cutting short the flow of pleasantries. "Lt. T'Rass has a personal request to make of you."

"Ask away. Shipmates stand together, you know that."

T'Rass said, "I wish you to join in the Affirmation."

Nellie's customary grin faded. "WHAT!"

"We affirm the Continuity of tsaichrani," T'Rass explained. Nellie took a deep breath.

"You want ME -- Dirty Nellie Gray, out of Spacetown -- to stand up for you at this Affirmation? You've been at the Happy Juice, girl. I can't do that. Ask Mr. Spock, he'll tell you."

"Lt. T'Rass is convinced of your willingness to assist her in anything she might ask," Spock said.

Nellie looked from one impassive Vulcan to the other. "Look," she said. "I'm not the one for this kind of job. I'd just blow it all to pieces. I'd laugh or sneeze or something. I know, you could ask Cap Kirk. He'd do anything for you, sir."

Spock raised an eyebrow as if to say, I told you so. T'Rass said, "T'Ellen, fifty-six Vulcans depend on your presence at this Affirmation."

"That's exactly fifty-five more of them than I give two toots about," Nellie said flatly.

T'Rass let one muscle twitch at the corner of her mouth, betraying her annoyance. Then she said, "I place this on a personal basis. It is important to me, to my well-being, and to that of my future spouse, Stavek of the Intrepid, with whom I have become acquainted since our last meeting. The crew of the Intrepid has been recalled to Vulcan for Affirmation, while I am trapped here, away from him. He will Call soon -- and I would not go to him Disaffirmed."

"What about the last moke you were supposed to marry?" Nellie asked shrewdly.

"We would have Affirmed the Continuity at the same time," T'Rass said.

"And this is different?"

"A marriage with Stavek would be suitable in every way. Our tastes and thoughts are in harmony."

"You love the moke," Nellie stated. "All right, I'll do it, but only because I'm a sucker for love stories with happy endings. Where is it, and when?"

"That is for Spock to say," T'Rass said.

Spock bowed his head, concentrated intently, and decided: "The Affirmation will take place at 1400 hours, Standard, in the Chapel of Star-Base Ten."

T'Rass bowed, Nellie saluted, and they left for the Transporter Room, with Nellie talking away. "The things I do for my shipmates! First we fizz an old boy-friend of yours and now this! What happens, what do I wear?"

"You have some tapes with the background information here on the Enterprise," T'Rass said, as they entered the transporter chamber. "As for dress, you may wear any garment but one pertaining to war. Therefore, NOT your uniform. White is appropriate for a human. I shall see you at the appointed place." T'Rass disappeared in a shower of sparks. Nellie leaned against the transporter panel lost in thought until the voice of Captain Kirk from the intercom reminded her that she was supposed to be on the Bridge, on duty.

Kirk sat in his chair looking edgy. Spock stood in his usual place looking stolid. Nellie scampered in, and Kirk said, "Miss Gray, Mr. Spock tells me that you have been offered a great honor."

Nellie looked puzzled. Then she shrugged and said, "Oh, the Affirmation thing. Yeh, I'd like to get shore leave, if it's all right with you, Cap. I mean, sir."

"I'm glad you remembered to ask for it."

"Oh, I was going to, as soon as it came up."

"Very well, permission granted, Yeoman. Anything else, Mr. Spock?"

"All is quiet, sir," the Vulcan reported, after a brief check with the scanners.

"Then, Yeoman, you are dismissed. I have some reports to be transcribed for the permanent files, and then you may take shore leave."

"Thanks, Cap!"

"And Yeoman," Kirk added, as Nellie headed for the doors, "I hope you realize just how much depends on your presence."

Nellie stiffened and turned to Kirk. "It's for a shipmate, Cap. I'll be there."

Some hours later, Ensign Ellen Gray joined the group of Vulcans in the stark chapel of Star-Base Ten, the only room large enough to hold this many people in relative privacy. She had invested several credits of her pay in a startlingly low-cut dress whose full skirt billowed around her ankles. It was, indeed, basically white, but with a pattern of wildly-colored birds perched in trees of every shade of eye-tingling green imaginable. She felt dreadfully out of place among the tall, classically-robed Vulcans. She recognized T'Rass, and waved to her friend, who nodded briefly.

As if it were a signal, the group formed a circle around the sole light in the room, a flickering lamp.

Nellie stood close to T' Rass, completely silent for once. A music tape began to play, weird music with strange quarter-tones that raised the hair on Nellie's neck.

Spock entered ceremoniously, bearing in his hands a Cup -- the Kraith, Nellie remembered from the brief tapes she had read. The Vulcans raised their hands, formed the Symbol, and joined their minds and their hands in the circle. Nellie followed the actions around her, feeling totally baffled. In this setting, she was the Alien, the Outsider, the Intruder. She could feel the force of the Vulcan minds beating against her, but she was unable to discern the content of what was happening.

Spock lifted the Kraith. Then he strode over to T'Rass, as leader of the group, and offered her the Cup. T'Rass drank. Nellie saw it was clear liquid and wondered what it was: water? wine? gin? Spock continued around the circle. As each person took a sip from the cup, Nellie thought, How unsanitary! We never did THAT in Spacetown. You'd think we could all have paper cups at least.

She was uncomfortably aware of the straps of her new shoes cutting into her toes. Her arms were beginning to ache from the strain of being raised for so long in an unnatural position. Her nose had started to itch, and she dared not drop her hands to scratch it. The music was grating on her eardrums. Finally Spock approached her and offered the Cup. She obediently took a sip of the liquid and thought, Hot jets, it IS water!

Spock stared coldly down at her. She met his gaze with her most Finnegan-like grin. He raised an eyebrow and returned to his place.

The circle held for an eternity (actually one minute) more. Then there was a deep sigh, and the circle broke. The Vulcans began to file out of the room, bowing to each other as they went. Spock put the Kraith into a case as if it were a live proton torpedo, ready to explode.

Nellie turned to T'Rass and burst into speech, as if the enforced silence of the last few hours were almost too much for her to bear.

"So that's an Affirmation, is it? Well, I hope I did all right by it."

T'Rass let the corners of her mouth raise one millimeter, and Nellie realized that her friend was smiling broadly.

"All is well, T'Ellen," T'Rass said. "You have enabled fifty-six Vulcans to attain full status in Vulcan society."

"That's nice," Nellie said cheerfully. Spock would have thrown up his hands if he were given to such displays of emotion. Instead he simply walked away, leaving the two young women to enjoy each other's company. He was now convinced that Yeoman Gray was either a brilliant young officer, or the worst mistake Star Fleet had ever made.

As for Dirty Nellie herself, she wished her friend good luck in her new marriage. "I'm glad I was able to give you a hand," she said. "Just tell me one thing: How the hell did I do it?"

# kirk's triumph



Linda Deneroff

Jacqueline Lichtenberg

Fran Zawacky

# kraith vD(2)

It was past midday at Dakainya--one of many that Captain James T. Kirk had spent there, days which seemed to go on endlessly under the crimson sky of Vulcan.

The psionic lab was silent except for the regular click of the advancing tape in the reader on the desk that Kirk had appropriated. The day's work was still incomplete, one more sign of failure to master his newly awakened esper abilities. Frustrated by his tenuous control, he had punched up a beginner's exercise and prepared to start again.

The machinery caught the low rays of the sun, casting drifting shadows over the desk. One shadow caught his attention. It was longer, deeper and wider than those cast by--

He swivelled his chair. Sobruck, the Director of Dakainya, and an unknown Schillian were standing behind him.

"S'Chames," Sobruck said with his usual directness, "Zalinja has agreed to be your new teacher."

Kirk, who had already had three Vulcan instructors since Soled's death twenty-two days before, glanced at the broad shouldered, scaly reptilian. They must be pretty desperate to involve a Schillian.

As if reading his thoughts, the Director continued, "Zalinja's constant contact with-- and ability to draw upon-- the Schillian mind-net may be of assistance to you."

Kirk sat thoughtfully for a moment. A Schillian. Why? He shrugged mentally. As a cripple I'm of no use to Vulcan --or Starfleet. He rose from his seat and determinedly addressed the Schillian. "If you are willing to make the attempt, so am I."

Zalinja nodded silently, then spoke in a deep, rasping voice. "When would you like to begin?"

Kirk had an overwhelming 'sooner the better' feeling. "What about right now?"

Sensing their involvement, Sobruck quietly withdrew from the room.

"If a meld is to be successful," the Schillian warned, "you must learn to trust me completely. Before we proceed with new exercises, we must review the old."

"I'll do my best," Kirk replied.

"You will have to do better than your best," Zalinja countered. "Until your training is completed, you will remain here at Dakainya. Use that fact as motivation, Captain Kirk. Your personality profile indicates that given the proper motivation, you succeed." He glanced at the material on the viewer, then flipped a switch. The screen blackened. "We will not use the psionic equipment today. I want you to feel relaxed here, and with me, before we commence your formal lessons. We shall talk, and when this room is as comfortable to you as your own quarters, we will proceed." He seated himself in another of the contoured chairs around the console.

Kirk spent the next few hours exchanging personal information with Zalinja. The Schillian proved both a good listener and an excellent story teller, and James Kirk was surprised at the immediate rapport that arose between them. Kirk told him about his adoption by Sarek and Amanda and his fear that he would never understand all its implications; the Schillian responded with a story about his young child, Shardar, who had a penchant for "living like the Vulcans". They exchanged other stories about their lives, their careers, hopes and disappointments.

When Zalinja called a halt to the session, Kirk was surprised at the amount of time that had passed. "Well," he asked in jest, "do we move on to psionics next time?"

"I caution you against impatience, James Kirk", Zalinja replied, a hint of warning in his voice, "if you wish a successful meld."

Kirk was waiting for Zalinja at the door of the lab for their sixth meeting. The Schillian was late and puffing heavily as he approached his pupil. "My apologies", he rasped, "I was looking for this." He held up a holographic album. "Are you ready to attempt a shallow link today?"

Kirk nodded, wondering what the album had to do with his lessons, but refrained from asking. Zalinja would tell him when he was ready.

As they prepared themselves, the therapist spoke. "I wish to test two things. One is your ability to use psionics and transmit messages to others. The other is how well you receive."

The first test proceeded smoothly. Kirk felt the lightest of telepathic touches. He braced himself, then, releasing a long-held breath, accepted the Schillian's probe without pain or fear. Zalinja came close to Kirk's barrier, tested its strength, not attacking or trying to surmount it, then withdrew, leaving Kirk drained of energy.

"Good," Zalinja said, rising. He picked the album off the console and handed it to Kirk. "These are holos of Shardar. Pick one and see if you can mentally transmit it to me. You will initiate and control the probe."

As Zalinja reseated himself, Kirk leafed through the holos. He found one he liked; it was Shardar playing in a small shallow pool beneath his home. Kirk smiled, reminded of another picture, one of himself taken at a vacation resort on Earth when he was an infant. He closed his eyes, and attempted the transmission of the image to Zalinja. Gently. Gently. Mustn't let it get out of control. He kept his breathing even, slow and deep. For a second he felt the Schillian's mind. I've done it!

Agony replaced the pleasure of the accomplishment.

Spock paused at the top of one of the many rolling hills overlooking Dakainya. He had lost weight and was more gaunt than the year before when he and Dr. McCoy had brought James Kirk there. Spock had left the aircar and had proceeded to walk the 2-1/2 kilometer distance to the main entrance. The cool, fresh air of the early evening felt good after his convalescence and the walk left him time for thought. The wide, dusty gravel roadway beneath his feet, an artifact of Vulcan's past, descended steeply into the valley and past the school. He was tired, more so than the trip from D'R'Hiset, and the walk should have left him. Another symptom, he noted clinically, to report to Soled. The thought brought with it the impetus to continue.

Finally he stood outside the walls of the school and set the visitors' chimes within echoing hollowly. The setting sun cast a huge shadow before him as he made his way to the Director's office.

"Fear no enemy within these walls," Sobruck greeted him formally.

"Nor shall I bear any weapon," Spock replied.

"You are here to see your brother?" Sobruck asked as he ushered his visitor into a chair in the small office.

"No," Spock said flatly. "I am here to see Soled."

"Spock," Sobruck paused before continuing, "Soled died twelve yahvee ago." A look of disbelief swept across Spock's face. Sobruck continued gently, "He never recovered his strength . . . You did not know?"

"No," Spock replied, ignoring the note of inquiry in Sobruck's voice.

They sat in silence for some time. "Is there anything I can do?"

Spock shook his head. "I think not."

"Then, will you remain and see your brother? Soled was convinced that he was breaking through S'Chames' barrier and teaching him full control over his abilities. But each time they tried, S'Chames complained of severe pain which Soled associated with the higher levels of control."

"I . . ." Spock paused, lines of tension increasing the angularity of his face.

"S'Chames was - disturbed - at Soled's death. He will not speak of the matter, but I believe he felt Soled die."

"And I did not . . ."

"He has not made any further progress. I am hoping Zalinja can change that. Being a Schillian, his mind techniques are stronger and more sensitive."

"He must succeed." Spock's tension increased.

". . . Perhaps if he left here for awhile. Go with him, take a - what is the Earth term - a vacation. He can resume his lessons with Zalinja when he returns. We are concerned about his distress. It would be best to take him to a place where he will not be called upon to use his telepathic abilities."



"I will speak to him," Spock agreed finally. He rose reluctantly, left Sobruck and went to meet his brother. I had hoped . . . no, I did this to him . . . the time has come to tell Jim the truth . . . will he believe me?

Jim sat stiffly in the contoured chair, his right hand on the control knob of the book-viewer and his left hand rubbing his neck. Frustration was building inside him and only the confidence derived from the fact that each day he became more proficient in his mental exercises kept the situation bearable. He could now keep five green lights steady without the aid of his idlomputt, but even Zalinja's most recent attempt at a mind link had left a sharp, searing pain running through him like the short-circuiting of an electric current.

He closed the viewer, suddenly aware of another presence in the room. He turned to see who it was.

"Spock!" Jim's surprise and pleasure were evident in his face. Spock stepped forward, his hands crossed in front and extended palms outward in the ritual kinsmen embrace. Jim quickly stood up and duplicated the gesture, touching his palms to Spock's. Their hands lingered together but a moment.

"I'm pleased to see you're well again," Jim said in his best Vulcanur, then lapsed into English. "I was worried. How's everything at D'R'Hiset? And on the Enterprise? - Has Starfleet . . .?" Jim suddenly sensed Spock's somber mood.

"Everything is well," Spock replied as they sat down. "Sarek and Amanda send their regards . . ." - Jim silently amended that to, 'Amanda sent her love' - "and Starfleet has extended our leave as the Enterprise is still being refitted with new equipment."

"Thank you, Spock. With Scotty in charge, I know she's in capable hands."

"But what of you, Jim? Sobruck said you have been suffering."

Jim framed his answer carefully. "Only occasionally. It's nothing. Soled told me that this might happen and that it was only temporary. I only wish . . ." he stopped, silently cursing himself for mentioning Soled. Somehow, in some unknown way, his and Spock's passage into that alternate universe had caused the elderly Vulcan's death. Kirk hadn't forgiven himself and he was sure that Spock was feeling the same guilt. He was almost afraid to find out how the rest of Vulcan felt - especially their family. After all, as head of the third family of the first realm, Soled had been a patriarch, and he had also been Spock's cousin.

"Sobruck also told me that you are permitted a leave," Spock continued, understanding Jim's need for a change of subject. "He feels that the pain might cease if you were to take some time and relax."

"I seem to recall saying that to you on the Enterprise once or twice."

"You have also said that a change of scenery helps focus one's perspective. You have been through much." Spock paused. "You have never managed to turn down R&R before."

Kirk smiled. "But my kind of R&R isn't available here."

Spock ignored the remark. "I am monitoring a group of children who are going on Rhys-lor. They will be unaware of my presence, and I thought that you might like to come along and see some more of Vulcan."

"When?" Jim asked, his resolve slowly weakening.

"Tomorrow, but we could leave as soon as Sobruck agrees."

"Spock!" Jim said suddenly. "Couldn't you --"

"S'Chames", Spock used his Vulcan name, giving the moment a strange formality. "I was hoping to avoid this; I had hoped that Soled could help you and all would be as it should have been before." Kirk's expression turned puzzled, but Spock held up a hand before Jim could interrupt. "No, listen now -- and try to understand. I committed a grave injustice and left you in ignorance of it." Again Kirk threatened to interrupt, but Spock forestalled him. "The mind link should not be so painful a thing to contemplate and it is my fault that you suffer now."

Quietly, Spock took Jim Kirk back to their search for the Kraith . . .

The air of Briefing Room Six vibrated to the pulse of the engines, straining in the chase.

Kirk turned from the viewscreen. "Okay, Mr. Spock, we should be closing on the Romulan vessel within five minutes. You're sure they've got the Kraith aboard?"

Spock turned to his left where a second table held his Vulcan instrumentation, six specially tuned psionic sensors. It was hard to work in the presence of such a strong mind as Kirk's, and Spock could just barely sense his instruments registering the heavily-insulated Kraith carried by the ship ahead of them. "Yes, sir, the readings indicate they have not only a Kraith, but indeed the very one which was stolen from the Federation exhibit. The implication is that these are in fact the thieves, or accomplices of same."



"Good. Your presence will be required on the bridge, Mr. Spock." Kirk rose and made for the door.

"I would prefer to work from here."

Kirk paused by the door. "There may be a fight. We may have to fire on them. I'll need you there." The thought lay heavily between them: And Sarek is probably a hostage on that ship.

Spock looked up at his captain. "Very well, sir. A moment please."

"I'll wait outside for you." Kirk left, granting his friend the privacy he sensed was necessary.

Spock methodically closed down his psionic instruments. They had done their job. The Kraith was located. Now, two futures stretched before him. Either they would retrieve the Kraith in good condition, or they would destroy it in trying. Either way, his life as he had built it aboard the Enterprise was over, shattered beyond repair.

He shut all thought of the future from his mind. The task now was to survive the holocaust of the next hour or two. It would be worse than the shattering deathscreeam of the Intrepid's four hundred crewmen. This time, it would be amplified by the Kraith - even through its insulation - to mind-ripping proportions. And he expects me to endure that on the bridge, even to help cause such deaths.

With sudden insight, Spock realized how deeply Kirk was suffering for his first officer, his friend - for the wrong reasons, but truly suffering. Emotional pain is nevertheless real. How can his reason function at all in the midst of such agony? Why doesn't he stop it? It was the oldest question of Spock's life.

All at once he paused, tantalized on the very brink of grasping an elusive insight. Kirk was the key. He stood perfectly still, nursing that spark of Vulcan-trained intuition. But it evaporated under the full focus of his mind. As Spock fell back from the brink of insight, he found he had forgotten to breathe.

Gulping in huge lungfulls of the chill, dank air of the Enterprise, he turned back to his task. Another hour or so at this peak of induced psionic sensitivity and he would have been able to bring that insight up to focus. But he could not afford the hour. He was needed on the bridge and he could not work there without barriers.

The last of the equipment boxes snapped shut and locked, Spock rose and turned toward the door. Denying himself the insight he almost had, he closed his eyes and raised his concentration to white heat, carefully focusing on the inner mechanisms of his mind. Within thirty seconds, he had rebuilt his barriers, brutally rendering himself psi-null in the process.

He strode from the room without a backward glance.

At the turbo-lift, Kirk held the door for him. He entered and Kirk let the door close behind them. "Bridge," ordered Kirk. Trapped in the tiny cubicle with the human, Spock marvelled that his barriers were now so tight: for the first time since they had begun the search for the Kraith, he could scarcely feel the rhythmic beat of Kirk's alpha waves, the pre-battle setting of Kirk's mind. And he was getting none of Kirk's deeper theta waves at all.

From previous experiences of peak telepathic sensitivity, Spock knew that Kirk's command training brought these deepest brain waves to a high intensity prior to a battle situation. The strength of that alpha-theta combination overriding stress before a battle was what made Kirk such a formidable commander. Usually, Spock would find himself drawn into Kirk's pattern and rhythm, alien though it was to his own BCP pattern. It had become a curiously steady routine to him.

But today, the most crucially important day of his life, it was missing. In his determination to avoid crippling trauma, he had shut Kirk out, immunizing himself to the battle rhythm of his commander. Kirk could only barely understand the results - and definitely not the reasons - for the necessity of the barriers, but if the Enterprise had to engage in battle in the presence of the Kraith, Spock's only chance of survival would be total telepathic blindness. It had been the only logical choice open to him.

Spock did not want his Starfleet life entangled with that other life -- his life before his grandfather's death, his life as a kataytikh-trainee. The battle for the Kraith brought the moment of choice which would surely follow the artifact's return much too near. The doors flew open onto the bridge, which was bright and throbbing with the Red Alert.

As he took his station, Spock realized how he had come to depend on his telepathic awareness to assist him in the most ordinary work. He tried to establish the sense of timing, of unity with Kirk which had always been the core of their teamwork. But it would not come to him. This time, he stood on the outside as Kirk drew the rest of the bridge crew into tune with himself -- a few soft words asking for reports, a command to raise magnification on the main screen, a flippant remark to a yeoman as he handed back a clipboard. In the space of forty seconds, Kirk had taken command of the humans and brought them easily to battle pitch.

The whole bridge crew seemed attuned wholly to Kirk, extensions of his hands and will. Only Spock himself was left out.

"Coming into sensor range, Captain," said Chekov.

"Magnification twelve, Lieutenant Uhura."

"Magnification factor twelve." Her finger was already on the selector when Kirk spoke.

The spread of stars blurred and re-focused. The Romulan vessel was a bright point at the center of the screen.

"Well, Mr. Spock?"

Startled, Spock gazed fixedly at the captain for one bewildered second, and then realized he should have given the sensor readings. He read them off his scope: size and probable armament of the vessel, power readings, crew complement, defensive armament. He was only a fraction of a second slow, but it was enough to throw the whole bridge team out of step. Kirk had to ask for his next datum also.

They hadn't even made contact yet, and already the battle was going badly. Spock knew it, and simultaneously knew that it was not Kirk's fault. The human captain could draw his human crew under his control by non-psi human methods. Spock would have to bring himself into tune or risk destroying the Kraith -- the most ancient of the telepathic amplifying devices to survive the Reformation, possibly the most valuable single artifact of Vulcan.

We do not know how to make them quite like that any more. And it spans thousands of years. To touch it is to live our history.

"Ready phasers, Mr. Chekov."

"Phasers ready, sir."

Sulu cut in. "Romulan vessel approaching dangerously close to a binary star -- with five gas giants in outer orbits." He shot a glance over his shoulder at Kirk. "They look like they are going to enter that system, sir."

"Mr. Chekov, take over all functions from Mr. Sulu's board. Sulu, I want you to run a continuous plot on that star system. If we get within Zone 'A' of any object large enough to damage us, use your manual override to veer us away.

"Well, Mr. Spock?"

Kirk was looking at him again. The fractional second's lag before he began his report on the stellar system they were approaching irritated Kirk. For the third time, Spock had thrown the well-oiled machine out of timing. He gave his report smoothly and fed Sulu's board all the data they had on the planetary orbits in question. "And", he finished, "there are three inner planets. Two are Class 'M', capable of supporting Romulan or human life. No intelligent life due to the extreme variability of the smaller sun."

"Closing rapidly, Captain," said Chekov. "They've gone sublight and seem . . . Correction: they are entering the binary system."

"Scanning all frequencies, Captain," said Uhura, right on cue. "No signals. Shall I hail?"

"Yes. On all frequencies. Standard identification. They are still deep in Federation territory. Mr. Chekov, take us in after them. With extreme care."

"Aye, aye, sir."

Spock cut in. "Verification coming in on scanners now, Captain. There appears to be no intelligent life in this entire system."

"A good battlefield, Mr. Spock. What do you suppose they want here?"

"An interesting question. I have no data."

"Let me know when you get some."

"Yes, Captain." Spock wished he had time to run one more sweep of the Romulan ship. If he could sort Sarek's readings out, perhaps they could beam . . .

"They're waiting for us, Captain," said Chekov. "They're going to turn and fight."

"Arm photon torpedoes."

"Photon torpedoes armed and ready, sir."

"Lieutenant Uhura . . . all frequen . . ."

The deck shifted under their feet, throwing them to starboard for a moment. "Hit on number four shield, Captain. Holding," said Spock. Now that the battle was joined, he found himself moving and speaking more in tune with Kirk, but still lacking true rapport. It was only habit and drill which had instilled the moves in him. It would not hold much longer in this emergency.



"Ready number one phaser," Kirk ordered.

"Number one phaser bank ready, sir. Tracking automatically."

"Fire."

"Phaser one fired. -- Solid hit amidships."

Spock bent to his scope. "Captain, their number six shield has weakened slightly."

"Good. Number two phaser bank this time, Ensign. I want to hit their number five shield. We don't want to blow them out of space, only scare them a little."

Uhura reported, "They're making no attempt to communicate, sir. Continuing to hail them."

"Make it an ultimatum, Lieutenant."

"Aye, sir."

"Mr. Chekov," Kirk said slowly as he inched forward in his chair as if to put some body-English on the shot, "number two phaser on their number five shield . . . Now!!"

On signal, Chekov fired. Again a hit, but the number five shield showed no sign of weakening.

Spock knew that his own mental blocks were protecting him perfectly from any disturbance picked up by the Kraith. He hoped Sarek was as well protected.

Routinely, Spock had been running the sensor readings through the computer. The ready bleep sounded in his earphone now and he listened intently, rechecking through his direct scope.

"Captain," he said, "I know now what they are doing in this system. Their ship has lost twenty-point-two-three-two tons -- the mass of a large shuttlecraft. It probably dropped away before we were in range to pick it up. I suspect the Kraith is aboard."

"Find it, Mr. Spock."

"Data coming in now, sir."

"All right, Mr. Chekov, think you can hit their number seven shield without touching their six?"

"I've logged forty hours on the simulator, sir, in the last two months. I haven't missed one in three weeks."

The Enterprise lurched hard while the computer was printing a digested read-out onto Spock's viewscope. His screen went dark. He shifted circuits and read out the damage control report. "We took that one at our number twelve shield, Captain. Three computer relays are out but the banks themselves are still functioning. I'm recircuiting now."

He sat down and worked his board around the obstruction. Meanwhile, Uhura routed the damage control crews to the trouble spot. As she worked, he reached over with his right hand and completed the re-routing of her board's sensor access controls. When he had finished, she flashed him a secret smile. "Thank you, Mr. Spock."

He let his eye linger, recording the moment for future analysis. "My pleasure, Lieutenant," he responded almost by rote.

Scott's voice came over Uhura's speaker and she routed him to Kirk's chair. Spock stood to read his scope again, and found the completed printout he had tried to get earlier.

"Captain," said Scott, "we've got a computer malfunction."

Upon hearing that, Spock blanked the printout and went to his Engineering Monitor. "I have located it, Captain," he reported.

Scott went on, "We're controlling the flow by Emergency Manual Override. Those battle drills you ordered are going to pay off today."

"Confirmed, Captain," added Spock. "It will take at least half an hour for my crew to replace and reprogram the flow-control computer units that blew. They have been on it only two and a half minutes."

"All right. Mr. Scott, how soon will I have full power to the phasers?"

"Ye've got that . . ." Scott hesitated, checking something, ". . . now, sir."

At that point, the Enterprise bucked under another hit despite the evasive maneuver pattern they had been running. "Captain," Spock reported, "direct hit on the Engineering hull. All the starboard shielding is down."

Kirk shook his head, staring into the starfield ahead of them. "What kind of devilish fire-power does that ship mount, anyway?"

Spock consulted his scope again, comparing prior and current readings. "As I told you, only fifteen percent greater than standard for their model, sir, but they are desperate: we have hit them only lightly, but their power readings are dropping. I suspect they are overloading themselves for each shot at us. Correction: their power readings are rising again, sir, very rapidly."

Scott interrupted. "Captain, one of my laddies got the starboard shielding back up before he bought it. That was a photon torpedo that hit us. Radiation down here is fierce."

"Some new kind of guidance system on that torpedo," muttered Kirk. He was sweating now. "Spock, where's that shuttle?"

"Sir, I do believe it was the shuttle that dropped that photon torpedo, though how a shuttle could do that is unknown. Trajectories match. The shuttle is now aground on the second inner planet. Since we took that last hit, I cannot reconfirm, but I did have an image of two ships down there: the shuttle and another one with a much higher mass and energy consumption curve."

"Okay, Mr. Spock. We can assume that the Kraith is down on that planet being transferred to a faster ship and we're facing a suicidal rear-guard action."

"That does seem logical." There was no trace of tension in Spock's voice. He might have been passing on the reasonableness of the latest shoreleave roster.

For the first time since the battle was joined, Kirk swivelled to look directly at Spock. Their glances locked for an instant. What passed between them was the knowledge that it was only an assumption, one upon which they would take a calculated risk.

Kirk swivelled front again and bounced out of his chair. "Mr. Chekov, we're going to take them out of the sky this time. Maneuver Alpha."

An electrifying shock passed across the bridge crew as all eyes turned toward Kirk. The Enterprise's "Maneuver Alpha" was the tactical maneuver that had won Jim Kirk the Grankite Order of Tactics, Class of Excellence. He had not used that maneuver since he had taken over the Enterprise. Although extremely complicated and intricate, its value lay in the enemy's complete surprise and relative inability to defend against it.

Stationing himself between the helmsman and navigator, Kirk issued instructions, co-ordinating Sulu's running calculations on the orbits of the gas giants with the intricate maneuver he wanted Chekov to program into the helm battle computer.

In the meantime, Spock had nothing to do but wait. He watched Kirk go through the standard procedure of challenging the other vessel, warning them that they would be destroyed even as he maintained a watch on his sensor readings.

While Kirk pleaded, offering a promise that they would be returned safely to the Romulan Zone if they would surrender, the Enterprise was hit two more times. Monitoring his instruments, Spock reported the damage and routed crews into the malfunctioning areas. Still Kirk delayed. Spock expected to see one of the grounded ships lift off any second. A couple of more hits like the last two and the Enterprise would not be able to follow the speedster.

He knows he is going to destroy that ship, and he does not want to do it, thought Spock. He suddenly felt as if a door had opened up inside his mind, a door through which he could see Kirk clearly for the first time. His emotions are at war with his reason. But he is using his reason to placate his emotions. Kirk was not making excuses for an emotional desire to kill, but rather making sure that he would not later regret ordering the kill strike.

At the O.K. Corral, thought Spock, he wanted to kill, but did not. Here he does not want to, but will. Yet he will not move until both reason and emotion are in harmony, until he wants to do what he knows he ought to do. He is not offering them mercy for their sakes; he is offering it for his own. He will not move until he has found wholeness within himself. He is not always like that, but today, this is James Kirk at his best.

He trusts his emotions . . . but only selectively. That is the key to James Kirk - perhaps to all of humanity. But by what criteria does he select which emotions to trust?

A sudden chill washed through Spock's mind, like the cold, humid ship's air - alien. Incomprehensible. It was like confronting a thing which stood outside of reality. On a deep, cellular level, a Vulcan knew that his reasoning faculties, subject to the overwhelming stresses and subtle ever-present currents of the pon farr cycle, could never be wholly trusted in this one area: the critical evaluation of emotion.

The very idea of using reason to evaluate emotion was unutterably alien, even repulsive. And yet . . . Spock experienced an enticing leap of curiosity. What was true for Vulcans was not always true for him. Perhaps one day he would truly understand.

Kirk turned from the main screen to look searchingly at his first officer. "Something, Mr. Spock?"

"Negative, Captain. The situation remains unchanged."

Fascinating. Did he pick up my thought? That would mean extraordinary sensitivity -- considering my blocks -- and great conscious receptivity for information gained telepathically.

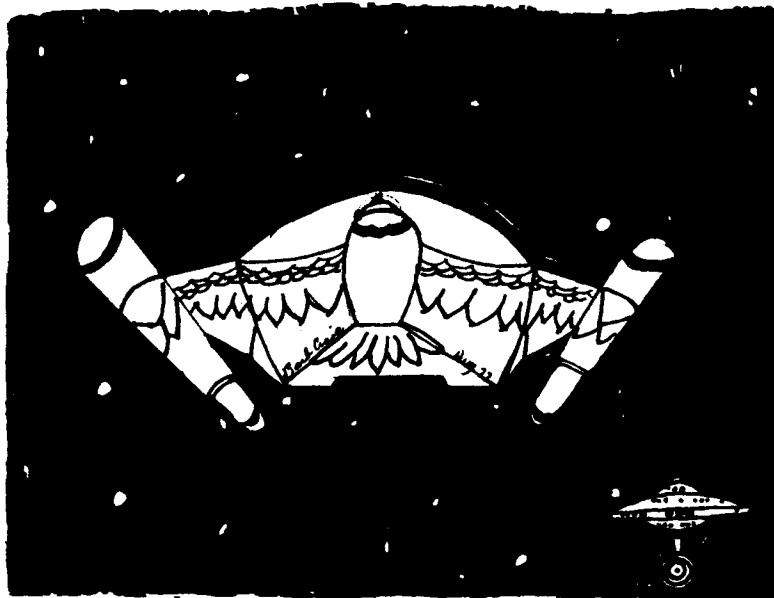
Just then, the ship lurched once more. "Correction, Captain. Number six shield has just buckled. We cannot take another hit on that flank."

Kirk turned decisively back to his helmsman. "Lay in the maneuver. Rig automatic firing."

As the computer took over, the ship veered steeply to starboard and dived down the gravity well of the nearest gas giant planet. As they swung around, the full power of the engines pulsed for one nano-second, kicking the Enterprise through subspace into position above and behind their prey.

Five rapid hits with their phasers and the Enterprise was past the Romulan. The computer released a spread of photon torpedoes in their wake, and, at precisely the correct split instant, again cut in the warp engines for one short pulse. They cleared the explosion just ahead of the photon wave front.

From first to last engine pulse was less than three and a half seconds. The Romulan ship had no chance to respond.



Afterwards - for about two minutes - Kirk stood between the helm and navigation stations, gazing at the main screen as the light shields faded and the stars returned to normal. He did not look like a man who had won a battle. Yet, he looked like a man who would do it again, if he had to.

The intercom on the command chair arm bleeped, and Scott's voice came over. "Captain, just like I warned you: the ship hasn't been built can do what you can dream up. You'll have to get us back to the battle on impulse power while we replace the dilithium crystals. It's our last set of spares, too."

Kirk wearily eased himself into his chair, leaning to one side. "Good work, Scotty. And get your men out of there until it's cooled off!"

"I'm workin' 'em in shifts. In armor. Decontam Chief says another twenty minutes."

Nodding, Kirk issued the orders that would take them back to the second planet of the binary. The bridge crew had disintegrated into separate people again, each bustling about his tasks.

And still, in some odd way, Spock found himself on the outside looking in. Always before, ~~battle was~~ the time he found himself at one with the human bridge crew - and that only through Kirk's power to bring them into a unit. Today he had shared none of it with them, though the entire affair may have been the single most important event in his life, and possibly the last battle he would ever fight in Starfleet.

Never again to feel his whole being pulling energies out of space through the sensors: sifting, sorting, digesting the data and sending it on in a steady stream through the high intensity lens that was Kirk's mind focused to command reality.

I can trust him never to abuse, never to turn any power I give him back on me. I trust him as if -- as if he were Vulcan, alien emotions or no. He has given me -- yes, I had not realized it, but of course, he has given me 'Murhyl.

What would that be in English? My Vocation? The one single creative act that truly matches the nature of my being.

Spock leaned back in his chair, then swivelled around to watch the main viewscreen as the Enterprise hurtled back toward the binary system. Though he gave no outward sign of it, he was deep in meditation.

I am not ready to be human. Nor am I ready to be wholly Vulcan. I dare not assume the position of kataytikh, to mold the public value system to my will through the Kraith. Every way I turn, I perceive contradictions. I dare not move until I understand what I have seen today. Yet, if we do not find Sarek down there, I will have to be the Vulcan I was trained to be; I will have to take Sarek's place. By my Grandfather's hand, in my Father's place -- No! I cannot! I dare not! Yet, the job must be done, and there is no one else.

"Sensor sweep, Mr. Spock."

"Scanning on automatic, Captain. We are picking up the ionization from the destruction of the Romulan vessel. Other than that, there is nothing to report. The second inner planet is still out of range behind the smaller sun."

"Order up a security team, fully equipped to take those two ships on the ground if we have to. Meet me in the transporter room in five minutes."

"Yes, sir."

Spock issued the necessary orders, then left for Engineering, climbing down the Jeffries tube, inspecting it for damage. When he arrived at the core of the transporter mechanisms, he found Kirk already there with a belt light and a magnetowrench.

Scarcely looking around, Kirk said, "Give me a hand here, Spock. We've got to get this holoizer out. It's blown. Scotty's gone to get a replacement. Half his crew is in sickbay with burns." Grunting out the short sentences as he worked, Kirk inched aside to give Spock room to get a purchase on the fitting. "Here we go. Watch your fingers."

The two men wrapped hands alternately, first Kirk's right, then Spock's right, then Kirk's left, then Spock's left, around the haft of the wrench as the captain counted, "One, two, three!"

Together they heaved mightily, and with a squeal, the fitting gave. Spock took the wrench away while Kirk twirled the fitting off its screws and extricated the damaged holoizer. "Whew! Bet that hasn't been removed since they built the Enterprise!" he laughed.

"It was checked and replaced two point three five . . ."

"Ssspooockkk! A joke."

Spock conceded with a raised eyebrow.

Suddenly changing the subject, Kirk said, "Perhaps you'd like to tell me what went wrong up there on the bridge."

"Wrong, Captain?"

"I can't remember the last time your work was so ragged. It threw the whole crew off -- or didn't you notice? Ordinarily, I'd order three weeks of intensive battle drills for a performance like we turned in today, but drill never improves your performance once you've learned a procedure."

"It . . . will not happen again, sir."

Kirk set the twisted, melted crystal holoizer on the deck and leaned the upper point against the transporter housing. It was evident that he was stalling for time to think. "Spock . . . Spock, what the hell is eating you? Call it a hunch, but I know it isn't Sarek."

"You are correct," said Spock without thinking. He accepts telepathic information as hunches.

"Okay, Spock. But if you ever need a shoulder . . ." Kirk clapped a hand on Spock's arm, gave a little shake, and let go. ". . . 'I don't hear too good, but I listen real great.' Oh, here comes Scotty!"

Scott and one of his technicians had the new holoizer installed and clamped down in less than sixty seconds. Then they were on their way to the transporter room with Scott in the lead.

When they arrived, Scott checked over the panel quickly. Then he crawled under the console, ripping out the access panels and pulling at the circuit boards. ". . . she'll be just a moment in the fixing, gentlemen."

Kirk turned to line up the security detachment as they came in the door. Double file, twenty earnest young men faced their captain, ready to do mayhem at his bidding. He lectured them on the objective and tactics of the mission while Spock busied himself at the viewscreen in the corner, focusing on the primeval rain forest on the world below them.

He swept the focal point across the continent beneath them to the point at which he had seen the two ships grounded, side by side. "Sir, readings show the faster ship is readying for take-off."

Kirk stepped to the screen while, under the strokes of Spock's fingers, the focus shifted closer, resolving into greater detail.

"No time for that, Spock. Scotty, is it fixed yet?" He turned to the engineer impatiently.

"A perfect adjustment, Captain. She's ready to go."

"We'll beam down with four men. Scotty, put the other groups down just as I told you." He made for the transporter pads as he gestured to the first complement of shock troops.

"Let's go!"

As Spock and the others took their places, McCoy arrived with his stand-by equipment and stood silently as Kirk issued his final instructions before the transporter grabbed him. "We will arrive within fifteen yards of the two ships. You two will knock out the shuttlecraft. You and you, stay with us. We're going to breach and board that speedster. Scotty, back-up squads forty seconds behind us."

"Aye, Captain."

Kirk knew he was unhappy by the tone of his voice. "No, Scotty. You can't go. I need you here to pull us back if necessary."

"Aye." Scott exchanged glances with McCoy.

The transporter gripped them. The whirling sparks broke the scene into tiny bits. The bits became brighter, changed from gray/blue/red to purple/brown/yellow-green, then merged once more into a cohesive whole.

Visibility came first. They were on a rocky knoll in a large clearing overhung on all sides by giant grasses, tall as buildings, bowing in the heavy humid breeze. They were etched black against the bright yellow-green sky.

As the transporter effect faded, details became visible: the hulking black shuttlecraft with its ramp still down and its door invitingly open behind a semicircle of raw chisled boulders, ocher like the dust.

Some kind of ore. Spock knew when he could register the new thought he was already visible to anyone there, but his senses were still out of touch with this new reality. The transporter had wiped all the nerve currents from his body when it broke him down for transport. It took perhaps a second of subjective time to rebuild the autonomic functions before the field would release him. In that second, he saw doom and was helpless to prevent it.

Two bodies lay twisted on the shuttle's ramp, spilling carelessly over the sides as if their owners had died running pell mell for safety. Three more bodies sprawled around the foot of the ramp. Their arms had been flung protectively about their heads.

Farther from the ramp, among the boulders, the victims had not even had time for self-protective gestures. Their faces were sculpted in terror, the agony of a mind short-circuited into itself.

There, among the Romulan corpses, stood the insulated carry-box of the Kraith, wide open -- empty. The Kraith itself had toppled forward, out of the box, and lay with its bottom at the edge of the box, the open top of the cup facing toward the materializing humans, focused directly at Jim Kirk. At first, the jewel-encrusted ceramic goblet was dull and lifeless. But as the materialization was completed, the Kraith received the first life emanations from the humans and began to glow.

It had been imprinted with the agonized deathscreeams of nine Romulan minds, untrained minds but close kin to the Vulcan patterns. Energized now by the rising emotions of five humans -- one of them a developing telepath whose natural barriers had been weakened by repeated mind melds with a Vulcan -- the Kraith automatically completed the circuit between Kirk and the other humans, pouring the stored contents of those nine Romulan minds, as well as the four human ones, directly into James Kirk, the human most conductive to the energies present.

As Spock's nerve currents re-established themselves, his blocks protected him from the onslaught. He was only dimly aware of the forces activated around him. Part of his mind noted the speedster as it rose into the air to his left; it was already above the treetops when his first perceptions cleared. He also noted that among the corpses within his field of vision there was no sign of Sarek.

The next tenth of a second was perhaps the longest of his life. He had to wait until the transporter released him before he could fling himself between Kirk and the Kraith. He had to wait that interminable tenth of a second before he could begin to demolish the impervious barrier he had built within his mind -- a barrier which now might well result in Kirk's death by keeping Spock from gaining control of the Kraith.



As the field released them, the humans went into bone-bending convulsions. Spock fell in front of Kirk, hands outstretched toward the Kraith, simultaneously ripping the veils from his unprepared mind in one savage, nearly suicidal rending.

In that instant it was already too late for the four human security guards. They died in the same convulsive agony as the Romulans. Their muscles locked; they hadn't even exhaled the last breath they had taken aboard the Enterprise. Behind Spock, Kirk writhed in the dust, his body bent backward, arched in seizure. The back of his skull and his heels beat a tattoo in the dust and a strangled gurgle escaped his locked throat.

Prone in the granular dirt, Spock dragged himself toward the Kraith. The training of his earliest years was alive in him now as if he had never known or done anything else. He was kataytikh, genetically equipped, carefully trained to handle these forces, to command this power and survive. For the first time in his life he was glad to be who and what he was -- it would let him save James Kirk's life.

To do that, though, Spock had to wrest control of the Kraith from Kirk - away from that tremendously powerful mind - and shut off the flow until the Kraith could be blanked, or destroyed.

Spock gathered his knees under him and rose as he concentrated on the lines of force between the Kraith and his captain. He made himself a channel of less resistance to the flow than Kirk was and, spreading his hands wide, he gathered those lines together in his own body, ignoring the pain, ignoring the raw agony of death.

Deep in the back of his mind, he could hear his grandfather's voice coaching, "Steady. There is no hurry. You have plenty of time - at least three seconds. Very still now, do not let the influx mar stillness."

He became the point of eternal pause at the center of all. The forces flowed through him but he did not partake of them. They were in him, but not of him. Until, having accepted in stillness, he became not a refracting lens but an opaque, reflecting lens, turning the forces back on themselves.

An external observer would have seen Spock dash forward, pick up the Kraith, and lock it once more safely into its box. Yet, throughout this apparent motion, he held himself perfectly still within, perfectly quiet, perfectly untouched, perfectly reflecting.

It was a feat very few of the kataytikhe could have performed under those conditions. Spock, being what he was - a half-breed born to the First Realm - had had to make himself the best. As he threw the catches home on the insulated box, he realized in this act, he had served Kirk - a human - as kataytikh. His life was still fragmented into two separate compartments, but the two compartments were now linked through Kirk. Whether he and Kirk were ready or not, whether Kirk had addressed him as kataytikh or not, it was already fact. One day he will know what it means to address me as kataytikh. On that day, I will be whole.

With three of the seven locks dogged into place, Spock turned back toward Kirk. The clenched rigor had drained from the human and his sphincter muscles had relaxed as if in death. Without even touching the clammy forehead, Spock knew that McCoy would have pronounced Jim Kirk dead, irrevocably gone from his body. And, in a way, McCoy would have been correct. All the cardiostimulators and life-support apparatus of Sickbay could only sustain the body. Kirk had retreated from all of that; he had gone where he could not be harmed by the forces unleashed against him. Cardio-stimulators would only seem to Kirk as more of the torment he had already endured.

Astride the body, Spock made his mind a beacon, bright with the promise of refuge. And the fuel of that beacon was his need for what Kirk could teach him - his road to totality, a thing he had admitted before only in the brutal honesty of private meditation, a thing which on this day had been more clearly defined than ever before.

Captain, you cannot leave yet. We have much work to do. Together.

Fear vanished. Stillness came. Brightness was. In one sudden translation, the distant substance became here, and within, then without. Somehow, in a way that could not be put into words, they passed each other. It was in that passing that Spock knew the depths of Kirk's pain.

It hit him in crisp flashes, bright explosions of pain, sear shafts scorching raw wounds, cauterizing, sealing. Afterwards, he found himself in the dust beside Kirk, fingers still locked for life's sake to certain brain centers inside Kirk's skull. Once, mere moments before, those brain centers had been open, sensitive, feeding the conscious levels of Kirk's mind.

Now, though the tissue lived and currents surged within those specialized brain centers, it was a disorganized current - disordered, traumatized, walled away from consciousness in defense of sanity.

I have failed.

From the moment he became conscious of the Kraith during transport, Spock had never really considered the possibility that he might save Jim Kirk's life yet fail both himself and his captain at the same time. He had never failed before. Full success had often been delayed; some successes had been marred by clumsiness and error. He had thought that that was what it meant to fail. Now he learned what real failure was. I have failed as kataytikh. I did not protect him sufficiently . . . and now he's psi-blind. When a world depends on performance, there are no excuses. Such are the standards of the First Realm.

Kirk opened his eyes. He smiled weakly at Spock. When he tried to speak, all that came was a whisper. ". . . you okay, Mr. Spock?"

"We live, Captain."

". . . happened . . . what . . . I don't remember . . . rough beamdown?"

"I'll explain later, Captain." Spock took out his communicator which he suddenly realized had been beeping. He cut Scott off in mid-sentence and ordered Kirk beamed up to a waiting stretcher. Then he ordered the Security detail disbanded and had the Enterprise wait while he finished what had to be done to the Kraith.

He forced his mind to the business at hand. When the Kraith had been finally blanked as best he could do without proper tools and when it had been secured in his quarters for safe-keeping, when all the details of cleaning up the bodies and taking the Romulan shuttle aboard the hangar deck had been finished, when he had written the log of the single minute they had spent on the surface and signed the damage control reports and tested the repaired warp drive and brought the ship onto course for the nearest starbase and reported his responsibility for letting the rest of the Romulans escape with Sarek still hostage -- when it had all been properly attended to, he went to sit beside the Captain in Sickbay.

Save for a few brief, oddly quiet but intense exchanges with Dr. McCoy, he sat there the rest of the night in silence, meditating as he never did except in strictest privacy, both to heal himself of this day and to assimilate the new data.

Spock fell silent, allowing Jim time to accept and absorb the information. When he remained silent, Spock continued. "Because of that accident, your minute telepathic sensitivities were crippled. You locked them behind the strongest barriers your mind could construct. But that could not protect you for long."

"You told me I was a latent telepath when we encountered the dze-ut'."

"Yes. And by that time, your defenses were starting to come down again. Only now you faced the death screams of thirteen terror-stricken minds, imprinted and amplified by the Kraith, if you turned to those channels without protection."

"Why didn't you tell me this?"

"Jim, to have accepted such a reality at that time would have driven you insane. If I had told you all this, would you have believed me?"

"No," he answered hesitantly. "But I accepted the gold flame-sphere as a gift . . ."

"For Dr. McCoy, it was a gift. Yours, however, gave you some protection from yourself. I had to maintain your control until you could be trained. I should have brought you to Dakainya immediately after the destruction of the dze-ut'. However, I allowed my scientific curiosity regarding the black star to affect my judgment. I could not have foreseen the result that decision would have on the entire ship - and on you and T'Aniyeh in particular."

Jim Kirk studied his brother - intensely aware of the pain the Vulcan was experiencing at the recollection. But Spock finished stolidly, "With the flame-sphere gone and T'Aniyeh dead, there was no way to protect you. The Schillians helped erect a new barrier until I could get you to Vulcan. Soled taught you to use the idlomputt until he could train you to use your abilities."

Jim sat staring at his hands.

"So you see, I cannot instruct you. I share with you the moment of memory which is causing your problem. I am the last one with whom you should link."

"No," Jim denied.

"It is true," Spock said quietly.

"Dammit, Spock. You did what you had to do." He jumped out of his chair and started pacing the small room.

"It was not enough and it almost cost you your life."

"You also saved my life." Again the room was silent.

"Jim," Spock's voice was gentle, "I do not have the technical proficiency with which to help you. It will have to be someone else."

"I'll join you on that hike, Spock. I need the exercise and we need to talk. Meet you in ten minutes."

Rhys-lor is a ten-day hike of skill and endurance, a test not only of brawn and stamina but wits and brains, an arduous sojourn in the mountainous deserts of Vulcan.



D.L. GILLIN '74

Kirk's thoughts were in a tumble as they climbed. The Vulcans are not the only ones who believe in training the body as well as the mind. His memory drifted back to the infrequent times he and Sam had gone camping with their father, then flitted forward to recollect the grueling survival training Starfleet Academy instilled in its cadets. It had served him in good stead on several occasions.

He brought his mind back to the task of following the rough and rocky terrain through the foothills leading up to the Kardih plateau. The air was hot and the excessive gravity tiring, but to his surprise, Kirk realized he was enjoying the hike. The tension of the previous weeks had melted away like butter in the heat.

The second morning dawned clear . . . and uncomfortably warm. By afternoon, the sun was beating on his back with unrelenting intensity as he and Spock continued to climb. Spock extended a hand to help him across a wide crevice in the ground.

"We could have gone around," Jim grumbled.

"But it is faster this way," Spock reminded him. "The terrain will begin to level off shortly."

The two brothers walked on in companionable silence. The dust kicked up by his feet stuck to Kirk's sweat-soaked shirt. He removed it and tied it around his hips. Suddenly a discordant rumble filled the air and made them stop.

"A rock slide!"

They started off at a run -- fear for the safety of the children ahead of them uppermost in their thoughts. Jim wondered if Spock actually knew where they were going until they rounded a bend in the mountain trail and started picking their way slowly through the rubble. All they could see was dust and rock and dirt, and a small Schillian child lying amidst the debris. He had apparently been caught by the trailing edge of the slide, or perhaps had fallen from the broken ledge above. They soon extricated him.

"Spock, it's Shardar - Zalinja's **child**."

"The question, Jim, is what is he doing so far from the Enclave?"

Jim covered the child with his shirt. Though the air was hot, he wanted to prevent him from going into shock; he realized that he knew little about Schillian physiology and as he moved away to allow Spock to take his place and examine the unconscious child, he wondered how much the Vulcan knew. If only Bones were here . . . A momentary twinge of guilt interrupted his thoughts; he turned his attention back to the child. A feeling of dread gripped Kirk even before Spock spoke.

"Physically, there are two broken ribs, and I believe he has damaged a gill. I would also surmise that his link with the mind-net was broken when he lost consciousness. A healer will be able to tell us more."

"It should be a simple matter for you to re-establish his mind-bonds." Again Jim felt his stomach wrench when Spock did not reply immediately.

Spock was at a crossroads. If he didn't tell Jim the truth now, the child would die. If he did, his brother - and friend - as well as the child might die. Kill or cure. Jim would insist on trying. If it would save the child, Jim would sacrifice himself. Spock knew his captain's actions for what they were: self-sacrifice, not suicide. But the child might die anyway. It was win or lose - and the winner take all. The mathematics were on the side of both Jim and the child, but only by a few percentage points. Spock had gambled on less. He took a deep breath.

"I am psi-blind, Jim. I cannot tell how long the child has gone without contact. I cannot link with him to provide a new one."

Kirk tried to turn away, to change the subject, not to hear the words he knew would follow, but at the same time he knew he must hear and listen. There was nothing he could say, no comfort he could give. He couldn't. He must. If once again he gave into his fears -- he didn't want to think about that.

Spock broke the long silence. "You will have to do it, S'Chames." His Vulcan name brought back all his memories of what Vulcan had done for him, given him, meant to him, and was now asking of him.

"I can't," he barely croaked out as he stared at the child.

Spock was dismayed. "You can do it, S'Chames. You must. Soled trained you well; you know how and you can do it."

"But the pain, the fear. Spock . . . it's not cowardice. I -- I can't explain but I feel agony at the thought. It's as if I were putting my hand in a fire after knowing the sensation of a great burn. It's not rational, but it's there." A shudder passed over him as he fought for control. Calm once more, he continued. "My training isn't finished. I've never done anything without the idlomutt for assistance. And the child is a Schillian. I don't even know if I can link with him. I haven't been able to link with Zalinja."

"Soled's training reached those levels that you have conditioned yourself to fight against. Your past experience has colored your reactions and you have felt pain each time the barrier was breached. But the fact that you have been able to deal with it thus far is a sign of exactly how far you have advanced. But perhaps you are right. Perhaps you cannot do it. It will serve nothing to risk both you and the child."

Grim determination appeared on Kirk's face. "I'm not about to let him die." He lifted himself off the boulder and walked back to where the child lay, unconscious and breathing raggedly. "Go for help, Spock. I'll manage." He almost added, "but hurry," then realized it was unnecessary. Within seconds Jim was alone with the child.

Tense and nervous, his fingers reached for the contact points on the child's skull. He wasn't sure which he feared more, the contact itself and the pain it would bring, or failure, and with it the child's death.

He realized he had to control his fears if he were to succeed. He withdrew his hands and quickly ran through a calming breathing exercise.

He immediately found himself more relaxed and once again placed his fingers on the child's temples. He touched the outermost thoughts, felt the need to withdraw, but ignored it and continued. Now that the Schillian child had the mental contact he needed -- minimal though it was -- Kirk took his time penetrating to the deeper layers of the child's mind, probing for injury. The small child's breathing became less ragged, although he did not - even through the telepathic contact - respond to any of Jim's questions.

Why doesn't the child awake? The contact should give him strength. He's slipping away. Summoning all his courage and straining to the utmost, Kirk attempted to penetrate to the child's subconscious. He could feel himself being pulled down, drowning in a black bottomless abyss; he was swiftly falling into nothingness, yet he was always reaching for the child's mind. Suddenly an image focused. He was sprawled face down on brick-red sand. He no longer had even the strength to crawl. He was hurt, bleeding; his blood blended into the sand which greedily sucked away at his life force. A searing burn ripped through the shreds of what discipline he had left. He screamed and then suddenly realized that the scream did not come from him alone. He fell back, breaking the contact, but an image of death upon death pervaded his mind and his gut tightened just before he passed out.

Jim Kirk never knew how long he lay there, but when consciousness returned, guilt stung him. How long has Shardar been without contact? The child could not survive much longer this way. He couldn't lose the trust Spock had placed in him, and what would Zalinja believe if the child died? He picked himself up, dusted his hands on his pants, and resumed the contact. Quickly this time, he ploughed through the outer layers until he again faced the barrier that was the Schillian child's subconscious. Fear prickled at the back of his neck, but he resolutely continued, damping his own sensitivity to pain, although he couldn't control it completely, and let the Schillian's own pattern pull him in. Finally, as though a curtain had parted, he was through the barrier, and on the other side.

A wave of pain - distinctly the child's this time - washed over him. He tried to locate the source even as a second one began. Schillians have no equivalent of a healing trance, he realized, and set about using his Vulcan training to block what he could. Several times his own agony threatened to take control, but he pushed it back, ignoring it in the heat of the more important fight.

Hours seemed to pass, although Kirk was sure it was only his own poor subjective time sense. Suddenly he felt a stirring amid his own thoughts and gratefully realized that Shardar was responding, regaining consciousness.

//Relax. You're safe now,// Kirk said soothingly. He was answered by tears in the child's eyes and a soft whimper. //We've sent for help. They'll be here soon.// For answer, he received another wave of intense discomfort. //Can you tell me what happened?// he asked in an attempt to distract the child.

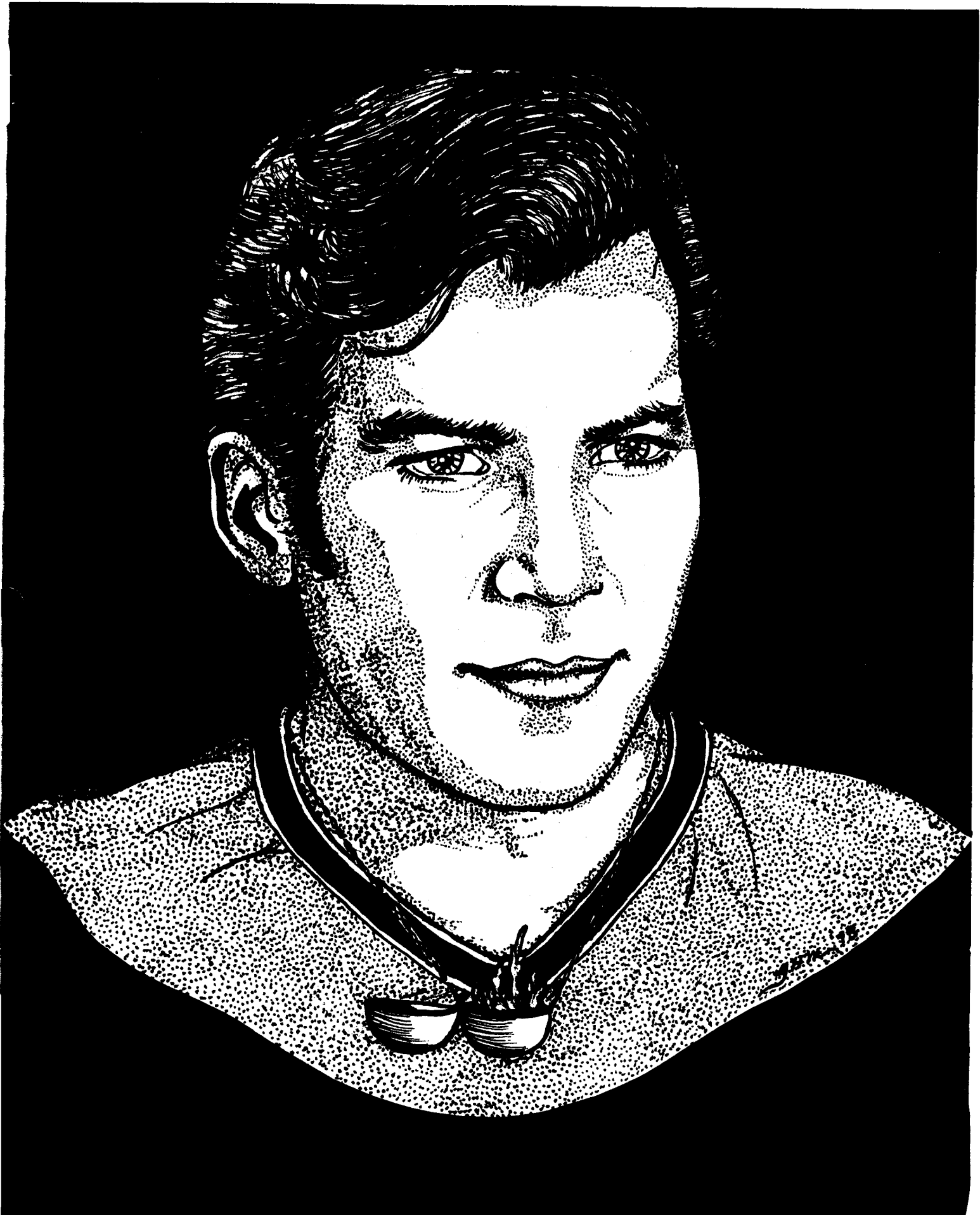
//I wanted to go on Rhys-lor. Like Sorel. Followed him here. I was okay until I slipped and . . .//

Kirk was later to wonder how long he and the child had "talked". He suddenly became aware of a hand on his shoulder. "I'll take over now." He heard the Healer's voice as if from a distance. He gently broke contact and moved out of the way to allow the Healer to examine the child.

Jim Kirk lay quietly in bed, his eyes closed, drifting in and out of consciousness and thinking/dreaming of the events of -- Was it only yesterday? The feel of the bed under him, the quiet coolness, told him he was home. For a few moments longer, he savored the lassitude that a new awakening brings before the demands of the present intrude and bring it to a halt. The Healer did come. I remember Spock's voice. Shardar! Suddenly he bolted upright and jumped out of bed. He grabbed the robe laid out at the foot of the bed and headed downstairs.

Though concern for the child was uppermost in his mind, Jim Kirk savored the peace that being at D'R'Hiset always gave him. It's good to be home, he thought as he entered the main foyer which connects all the different wings of D'R'Hiset, heading for the kitchen.

He found Zalinja there alone, finishing a substantial meal. "Zalinja!" He gave little thought to the Vulcan custom of silence during meals. "When did you get here?" he asked as he dialed for coffee. "How is Shardar?"



"Recovering. The Healer says that I may move him home this evening. And you?"

"I melded with him, Zalinja. Necessity made the torment bearable - and then it disappeared. After that, controlling Shardar's anguish was easy."

"I thought as much."

Kirk looked at him with a puzzled expression and went to get a second cup of coffee. When he returned, Zalinja continued, "There are certain facts of which you should be made aware, S'Chames" he began formally. "The first is that your need for instruction at Dakainya is over. You are in control of your psionic abilities." Zalinja paused to allow Kirk to digest the information.

"I can return to the Enterprise", he whispered.

"If that is your wish."

Kirk didn't really hear him. Bones . . . Scotty . . . the Enterprise again . . . space . . . the feel of the command chair . . . Could he remain here on Vulcan? He seriously doubted it. There was time to make the decision - now that there was a decision to make - after all, the Enterprise was still in drydock.

"I would suggest you get something more substantial to eat. We can discuss the other matters later - after Sarek has returned." With that, Zalinja rose and left the room.

And Jim Kirk suddenly realized how hungry he was.

Late in the afternoon, Sarek returned from the Science Academy and by request joined Spock in the aerie.

"Father, I am at a loss. At the same time that Jim is finally in control of his psionic talents, I seem to have lost mine. The Healer performed the tests last night after we had returned when Jim and the child were sleeping. His findings were inconclusive. There is no physical cause for my psi-blindness -- at least none that he could determine. Nor could he tell me whether or not the condition is permanent."

Sarek's fingers steepled themselves as he meditated on what Spock had just told him. It was only in the past few years, since their reconciliation and even more since Jim's adoption, that Spock had asked his father for advice. Why was it that he rarely received any answers?

"If there is no physical reason for the loss of your telepathic abilities, might there be an emotional one? You have been subjected to many stresses in the recent past and even Vulcans are not immune to stress."

"I do not understand, Father."

"You have gone through the severance of three Bondings. You entered an alternate universe and came face-to-face with yourself - a self with entirely different motivations and principles. You returned with the Blooms - Blooms dangerously close to maturity - from that universe. Perhaps you have simply used your telepathic talents, which have never been stable, to a degree that has taxed your strength. The fact that the Healer's report was inconclusive need not be taken as a diagnosis of a permanent disorder. And," a small, frown appeared around Sarek's mouth, "in this condition, you cannot attempt another Bonding."

"Father!"

"How long has it persisted this time, Spock?"

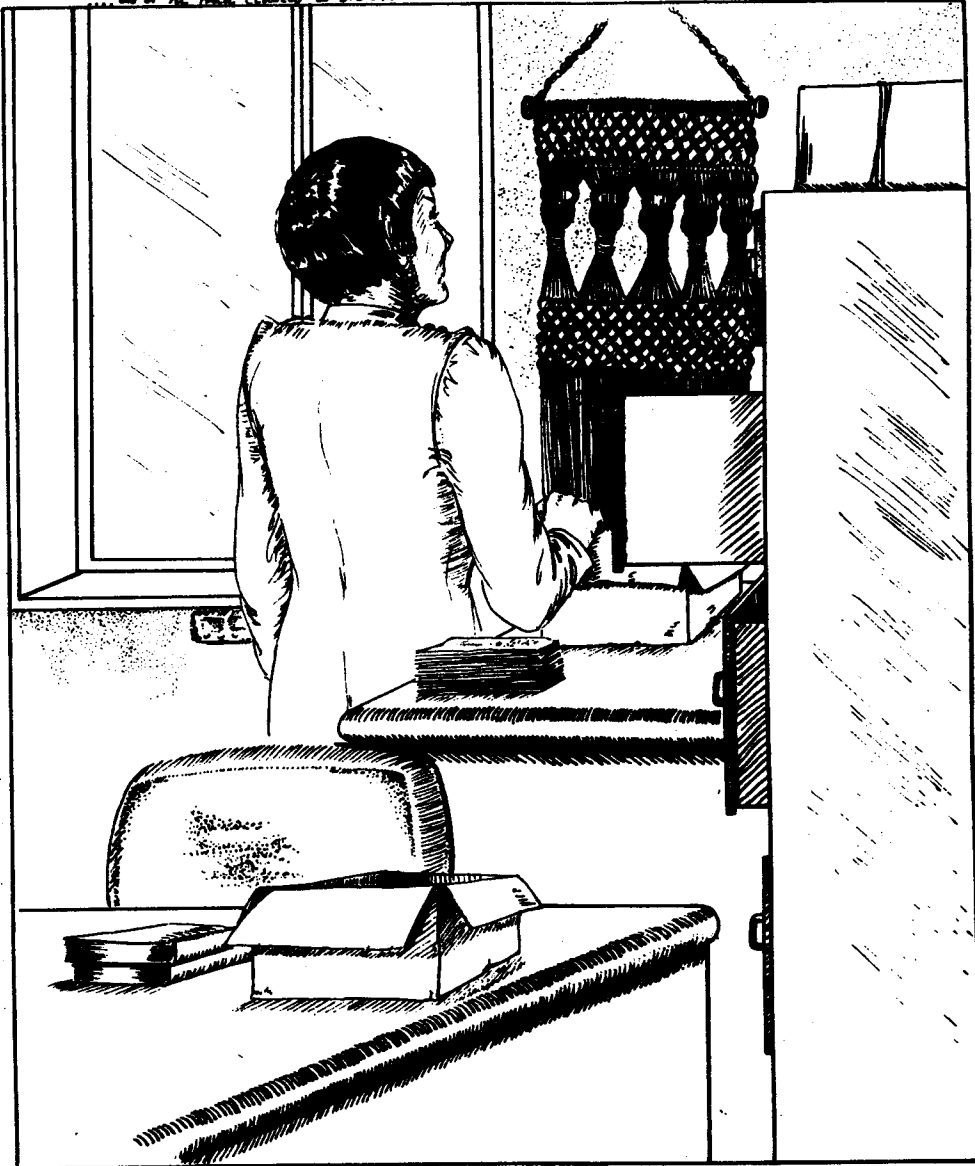
"It has been 47.4 days. It is the longest time I have gone as a non-telepath. If the impairment continues, the Warder-Liege will have to be terminated, or a new Liege found."

"You have time in which to make your decision. Do not be hasty. The Warder Liege may come to a natural end."

James T. Kirk, Captain of the Enterprise, adopted son of Sarek and Amanda, member of the xtmprsqzntwlfdf family, sat in the Garden of Thought, pondering his future. The coming days and weeks would be as no others in his life and he relished the thought of new challenges. A smile spread across his face as he realized the new freedom he had found.

~ e q u i t y ~

"...as if he had ceased to exist..."



JOYCE

YASNER



"You may resign if you wish to, Samijahr," Saida said, settling himself into a more comfortable position on the padded floor mat that ran around the circumference of the low *mojk* table. "I am not going down to the University Center."

"Custom requires that you resign," Samijahr insisted, incredulous at Saida's attitude.

"I see no reason to honor so illogical a custom. I have been released from the University. For me to pretend that I left voluntarily serves no logical purpose."

"The custom does not require that you pretend to have left voluntarily," Samijahr said. "Its purpose is to permit you to acknowledge your place in *tšaichrani*."

"And what place is that?" Saida asked, brows raised. "I am disAffirmed. *Tšaichrani* will want nothing much to do with me. It only seems logical, therefore, that I shall want nothing to do with it." Saida set his *mojk* bowl aside and selected a honey-glazed sweet cake.

"What are you going to do?" T'Eris asked.

"Me?" Saida said, and allowed a brief, wry smile to play across his mouth. "I don't intend to do anything."

"You seem pleased at the prospect of being a parasite," T'Eris said, her voice harsh with disapproval.

"Pleased?" Saida repeated. "No. I am not pleased. My life has been destroyed by an accident I was powerless to prevent. If I am to be a parasite, it is not by choice."

"I don't suppose you plan to go down to the Social Resources Office?"

"Certainly not," Saida said. "Logic demands that I accept my fate; it does not require that I be humble about it."

"You are behaving most illogically," Samijahr said. "I am at a loss to understand your attitude. We are all disAffirmed. Defying our situation will accomplish nothing. It is not necessary that you resign. This is true. But you must ask yourself how you will live, and what you will do."

"I already have a profession," Saida pointed out. "I am a teacher of pre-Reform Agasaaran literature."

"No. You are not. You are no longer qualified to pursue your profession, Saida. None of us are qualified to pursue our professions. That we accidentally missed the Affirmation is irrelevant. We missed it."

"And there is, therefore, a supposedly logical choice to be made?" Saida demanded. "We can do whatever the Social Resources Office finds for us to do or we can accept the charity of the culture. But how are we going to live on a job the Social Resources Office finds for us, Samijahr? What kind of work do you think they will let us do?"

"Whatever kind of work there is, we'll do," Samijahr said quietly.

"And make a virtue of necessity?" Saida asked. "Whatever kind of work we'll do will be without meaning. We cannot be trusted to make decisions. Our judgment is no longer valid. The only work we can be permitted to do is that which maintains the status quo. And when it comes to the efficient implementation of a pre-determined program, a machine is much better suited to that work than we. A machine, at least, does not tire of the monotony."

"What you're saying is true, Saida," T'Eris agreed, "but the fact remains we have no other alternative. If we don't want to live on charity, we'll have to work at whatever we are given to do."

"No. You're wrong about that, T'Eris. There is a third alternative, although it is not a very pleasant one."

"Indeed? What's that?"

"We can all die." Saida got up to leave. "I believe the proper thing to say is, 'May you not live long and prosper?'"

Samijahr sat for several minutes after Saida had gone, staring at the brown sludge of *mojk* left in his bowl. He was a very practical Vulcan, not much given to introspection, and Saida's behavior had disturbed him.

"That was most...interesting," T'Eris said, after waiting patiently for Samijahr to speak. "What do you think is wrong with him?"



Samijahr looked up. "I do not know. I have never seen Saida behave so strangely before. People have been known to become unstable as a result of Disaffirmation. Perhaps that is what's wrong with him."

"If you are referring to Seito's Theory," T'Eris said, "there is no medical evidence to support it. Besides, both you and I are Disaffirmed, and while I cannot speak for myself, certainly, you are not showing any signs of mental aberration."

"Seito is a *kataytikh*."

"Yes. But he's not a physicaian. There can be any number of reasons why a *disAffirmed* person would become unstable: social pressure, the trauma of alienation. No physiological changes have ever been observed. I have no objection to Seito or any other *kataytikhe* speculating on the course of this society, Samijahr, but I would prefer them to leave medical matters to those of us best qualified to debate them."

"Then what is wrong with Saida?"

"I think we have to take into consideration the one factor that significantly distinguishes him from us," T'Eris said carefully. "We are married and he is not. He may be going into *pon-farr*."

Samijahr blanched, then colored with embarrassment. "*Pon-farr*?" He was unwilling to consider the ramifications of such a possibility.

"He is fifty-five, the average age of the initial onset," T'Eris pointed out. "He was restless on the ship and is now showing signs of emotional stress. At first I suspected he was in shock. We all came very close to dying when the ship blew up. But his condition has never improved. *Pon-farr* is the only logical explanation."

"Then he must go to *koon-ut-kal-if-fee*."

"Under ordinary circumstances, I would agree. But he cannot go. His betrothed will challenge the marriage, and given *Saida's* psychological condition, his prospects for surviving are not at all good. He cannot refuse to fight; the executioner would kill him. And if he does not go, he faces death in *plak-tow*."

"There is little we can do to help him, T'Eris, if he refuses to go to the ceremony. His only hope for surviving lies in combat."

"Are you willing to stand with him?"

"Of course; if it will be permitted. But he has to be persuaded to go first."

"Then it is up to you to persuade him."

"Me? I am not unwilling to try, T'Eris, but at least establish that he is in *pon-farr* first."

"That should be simple enough to do, however, awkward; you will have to come with me."

"Now?"

T'Eris had already gotten to her feet.

"I am concerned that he may injure himself."

The streets were deserted but for a few people straggling home from business or entertainment in other parts of the city. Samijahr and T'Eris made their way quickly to *Saida's* home, a garden apartment in the Punjaffe district.

They went in by the garden gate and signaled.

"He *should* be home by now," Samijahr whispered.

T'Eris stared at the door. Several minutes had elapsed since they had signaled, and still *Saida* had not replied. She said nothing to Samijahr of her fear; he was thinking the same thing she was. "I don't like it," T'Eris said. "He should have responded by now." Reaching out, she keyed the door release. The door cycled without protest. "*Saida?*"

They went in.

*Saida* was lying on his side in bed, his knees drawn up to his chest. His color was good, a deep burnished gold against the blood green sleeping *gish* he wore, but his breathing was abnormally slow. T'Eris opened her medical kit and ran a scanner over his body. "Attempted suicide. He's in a *tjdak* trance. I'll get a blood chemistry profile." She pricked a vein in the inside of *Saida's* elbow, drew off a blood sample, and processed it through her kit's biocomp unit. She studied the figures for a moment, then turned to Samijahr.

"The testicular hormone levels are very high," she said, her expression grave.

"Then he is in *pon-farr*. Can you wake him up?"

"Yes. But I wouldn't advise it. He would probably go into *plak-tow*."

"What can we do then?"

"I'll call an ambulance and have him taken to a hospital."

"Can they help him?"

"His bondmate will be contacted. If she is willing to mate with him, she will be brought in. If not, he will be placed in isolation and monitored."

"*Saida's* bondmate will not want to mate with him, T'Eris. We know that. If he's taken to a hospital, he will die."

T'Eris sighed. She had thought out the problem in all its ramifications and had carefully considered each of the possible courses open to them. This, however, was the worst possible situation and she knew that Samijahr would be reluctant to accept her solution to it. Still, logic demanded that she present him with it, no matter how unpleasant it might seem, and that he consider it. "There are precedents for multiple bondings among the pre-Reform Kennacians of the Southern Vastnesses," she said. "If I mate with him, he can be saved."

Samijahr was stunned. "You cannot mate with him. Multiple bondings are nothing but adultery, and I will not permit you to pollute our mating."

"I suppose," T'Eris said, "That under normal circumstances multiple bondings *are* nothing but adultery. But they were conceived by the Kennacians precisely to circumvent the dilemma Saida finds himself in. Because he is disAffirmed, it is as if he has no Bondmate and, although Tradition requires that we take him to the ceremony, we cannot. It would be immoral to take him against his will."

"But is it any less immoral to force yourself on him?"

"In choosing death Saida has chosen to live within the Tradition. But, because he is disAffirmed, the Tradition requires his death. It is necessary that Saida mate; biology demands it, and biology must always take precedence over culture. For any other condition to exist is illogical.

"We know that there are other disAffirmed -- S'Darmeg, for one. Possibly there will be a woman among them who would be ideal for Saida. Until then, he will have to depend on me."

"And you are willing to live outside the Tradition in order to save him? You must understand that I am a civil arbiter, and cannot predict how the Daughters of the Tradition will react. We may both find ourselves in considerable difficulties because of your decision."

"I am aware of that. I am also willing to do what is necessary to save Saida's life."

"And what of us?" Samijahr asked.

"Nothing is changed."

"Everything is changed," Samijahr said, walking across the room. "Everything will change once you have shared minds with him. You will no longer be mine."

"I was never yours, not as you mean it now. You do not own me, Samijahr. I give myself to you because I want to."

"And once you have given yourself to him, what then?"

"He will be alive, and I will not have to give myself to him again."

Samijahr stood staring out the window. When he spoke again, T'Eris could barely hear him. "He will hurt you. I do not know if I can endure his hurting you."

"I will control the pain. There is nothing else I can do."

"And you would do this for him?" Samijahr asked, turning to her at last.

"Yes, I would."

Samijahr nodded. "Do you want me to stay until you revive him?"

"No. It will be too dangerous. I can manage."

"You will come home afterward?"

"I'll contact you as soon as I can. You had better go now."

"Be careful, T'Eris."

"Yes, of course. Live long and prosper, Samijahr."

"And you."

As he left Saida's apartment the despair that up until this time Samijahr had succeeded in holding off came over him. T'Eris, the one person he might have relied on, had betrayed him. Of course, it was logical that she save Saida. Samijahr could not deny that. But in so selflessly sacrificing herself to their friend, she had cut Samidahr adrift. He needed her; he needed her to be the one thing he could rely on not to change. But T'Eris had slipped through his fingers.

It was late. Not ready to face going home to an empty apartment and confronting the knowledge that Saida and T'Eris were having intercourse, he began to walk.

He had no career to return to. Earlier he had taken Saida to task for insisting that they could no longer meaningfully contribute to *tsaichnani*, but Saida had been correct. What work could the Social Resources Office find for them? Most industry was automated. Machines were infinitely more efficient than people in performing redundant tasks, but the machines themselves required supervision. Such work, he imagined, required little judgement, and could safely be given to the disAffirmed. He liked being outdoors. Could he be given supervisory work in agriculture? Samijahr wondered if a disAffirmed could be trusted to determine when a field of *plomeek* was ripe.

There were other jobs he could do more pleasurably. Samijahr had always taken an interest in archeology, and had spent several summers working on digs. The work was too delicate to be done in any other manner than by hand. Even if he could not contribute to analyzing the finds, he could not be stopped from thinking about them. Or could he? If no one would accept his contributions to the study, would he soon stop thinking about the work?

Over the months on the long trip back to Vulcan, one question had begun to torment him. T'Eris claimed they were not suffering from any mental aberration, but if she was afflicted as well, how could she know? Was it possible that he was, in some subtle way, different? Had something happened to his mind discernable only to the Affirmed that made him worse than useless in his culture? Was he, in fact, a threat? If he was incapable of assessing what effect his actions had on *tsaichrani*, then he could, quite unwittingly, set in motion a chain of events that would destroy it. He refused to consider the thought. If he wasn't insane at present, dwelling on such an idea would certainly make him so.

At home the coals in the *mojk* table brazier still glowed faintly. He poured himself a bowl and sipped, frowning at how bitter the drink had become. There was cream in the refrigerator, but that would simply mask the flavor, not improve it. He did not want to wait the time it would take to brew a fresh pot.

He went into the bathroom and undressed for bed. Saida had once remarked that he had the build of a pre-Reform warrior, tall and heavy through the shoulders. Looking at himself in the mirror, Samijahr wondered whether he would have been able to stand idly by and watch Saida be slaughtered at *kal-i-fee*. Thinking about it, he realized that the executioner would have made short work of him. He had never been physically injured beyond the usual scrapes and bruises of childhood. The concept of death by violence held no meaning for him, nor could he imagine himself killing anyone, no matter what the provocation. He could never have talked Saida into fighting, and if he had, he would never have been able to forgive himself.

He knotted his *gish* around his loins and went to bed. Mercifully, sleep came quickly and was without dreams.

T'Apasya Ashokminh, Saida's bondmate, was deeply disturbed when, early the following morning, she realized she had lost contact with Saida. There were only two possible explanations for her severance from him. Either Saida had died, a possibility that T'Apasya discounted, as the pain of her severance from him would have awakened her; or, he had found relief with another woman. But no Affirmed woman, T'Apasya knew, would willingly accept a disAffirmed male. Saida must, therefore, have turned to rape. The Daughters of the Tradition would have to be informed.

It was several hours past dawn when Samijahr rose to bathe, dress, and eat. It was late summer in Agasaar; the sun, bright and hot, reflected from the windows of the city, filling the streets and the faces of the people with light. Samijahr dawdled over breakfast, hoping for a call from T'Eris. It didn't come.

Indistinguishable amid the crowds of passersby, Samijahr made his way slowly to the mono-rail station off Sikora Street. There was nothing left to do but go down to the University Center and resign.

At sixty-five years of age, Samijahr was in the prime of his life. He had been a member of the Agasaar University faculty for ten years, rising from instructor to associate professor in that time. Respected by his colleagues and recognized as an expert in civil law, he had been called upon with growing frequency in recent years to arbitrate civil disputes. Now his career was cut short by disAffirmation.

Agasaar University was the same as Samijahr remembered. Classes were in session and the vast campus was silent but for the whirl of the custodial robots maintaining the grounds and the conversation of a group of students who, free for the hour, shared a rock garden beside the archeology complex.

Samijahr, watching the familiar life going on around him, was filled with rage. He no longer belonged to Agasaar University; the life that until three months ago had been his to share was his no longer. It was illogical to feel resentment, but he was keenly aware of the injustice of his situation and much though he tried to suppress his emotions, he could not. He was no criminal. He had not chosen to be disAffirmed. But Vulcan law had cut him off from his former life as effectively as it would have had he been convicted of a crime.

There was no one waiting for an elevator in the lobby of Wole Senghor, the faculty office building. Sorosh, head of the law department, had his office on the third floor, and Samijahr went toward it dreading the reception he would receive. Sorosh and he had been friends for many years, but their friendship could no longer continue. Signaling, Samijahr waited for the order, "Come," then stepped inside.

Sorosh was seated at his desk working. Samijahr would have been hard pressed to describe Sorosh's expression when, at last, he looked up and saw Samijahr. It was the kind of confused horror rarely seen in any Vulcan, and it pained Samijahr to see it in his friend. Sorosh put his stylus down and got up.

"May you live long and prosper, Sorosh," Samijahr said.

"Samijahr," Sorosh said.

"I must admit I did not think I would see you again, Sorosh. Our ship exploded on the way home and we only just managed to escape. A Federation vessel picked us up a week outside Vulcan."

"Have you come on business, Samijahr?" Sorosh asked. Although there was no hostility in his voice, Samijahr detected no familiarity there either.

"I have come to resign," Samijahr said, and produced the tape he had recorded the night before, prior to Saida's arrival.

"Leave it on my desk," Sorosh said, resuming his seat.

Samijahr set the cassette down.

"Is there anything else?"

"I would like to clean out my office."

"See the building manager. I had your office closed pending the disposition of your case."

"Thank you," Samijahr said.

Sorosh said nothing.

When, after a brief search, Samijahr found the building manager and the man had generously provided him with cartons, he was nevertheless unable to begin packing. He didn't know when his office had lost its impersonal air, but there was no doubt in his mind that this office was, somehow, an intimate part of him. To abandon it, to take out all the objects that made it his, would be, in some strange way like killing a part of himself. Once he was gone, there would be nothing to connect him with Agasaar University. It would be as if he had ceased to exist.

He began by packing his tapes first, as if he could concentrate on storing them in a specific order. Next he packed his papers, the notes he had made for pending cases or articles he proposed to write. Last he wrapped up his *mojk* bowl and the wall hanging T'Eris had given him, in a tape sack he had had since his student days; these items he would carry home himself.

In a few hours the office was stripped. Samijahr extinguished the office lights and turned his voice print key into the building manager's office together with instructions for the shipment of his things. Leaving Wole Singhor was difficult. Samijahr knew he would never return.

As he rode the monorail home from the University Center, Samijahr admitted to himself that Saida had been correct about Vulcan's attitude toward them. At first it had been difficult to believe that, just because he was disAffirmed, *tsaichrani* would want nothing more to do with him, but the finality with which Sorosh had rejected him confirmed this fact, and Samijahr was filled with a very real and unpleasant sense of isolation.

At home, there was a plate of cold stuffed *youbash* in the refrigerator for lunch. As he ate, Samijahr thought of T'Eris alone with Saida, and the knowledge of the agony she was enduring for another's sake was almost too much to bear. He had experienced the horror of disAffirmation for himself, now, and understood why, confronted by the prospect of *kal-i-fee* or suicide, Saida had chosen the latter, but T'Eris's courage in the face of certain suffering was a wound in him. All that had permitted him to accede to her plan to save Saida was logic and his reverence for life. Nothing palpable had lain behind his decision.

He had just put his dishes into the servowash when his desk communicator buzzed. For a moment he thought that it was T'Eris calling, and hurried to his desk to answer. But, rather than T'Eris' face appearing on the viewscreen as he expected, the screen was filled with the image of a white idic on a blue background. Samijahr blinked at the symbol for a moment, before it was replaced by the face of a young woman.

"May you not live long and prosper, Samijahr Malhotra," she said.

Samijahr nodded dumbly in acknowledgement. His caller was a Daughter of the Tradition.

"I regret that I must be the bearer of ill tidings," the woman said, "but we have reason to believe there has been a pollution of your mating,"

Samijahr felt the blood drain from his face. "Indeed?" he said, when he had recovered enough to speak. "What has occurred?"

"We have been informed that the disAffirmed, Saida Bh'mar, bonded to T'Apasya Ashokmihn, did not appear in his time at the place of *kun-ut-kal-i-fee*. T'Apasya Ashokmihn was examined by the *Katayitkh* Seita; Saida is not dead."

"Of what significance are these facts to me?" Samijahr asked.

"Your friendship with Saida is well known to us. You returned to Vulcan in his company. T'Eris is the only woman with whom he might have hoped to consummate his madness,"

"So she has taken to his bed," Samijahr said tonelessly, putting the Daughter's suspicion into words.

"I know it is difficult for you to accept this information, Samijahr. Logic, we know, becomes progressively more difficult for a disAffirmed. But consider the situation for a moment. Are there any disAffirmed women who would give themselves to Saida? Or whose favors he might buy?"

"No."

"Do you know where T'Eris is?"

"No, I do not."

"Then, as we have received no reports of rape and T'Eris is, after all, disAffirmed, from a purely logical standpoint the situation must be as I have described it to you."

"I do not doubt that your argument is logical," Samijahr said. "But your conclusion is based upon a hypothesis unsubstantiated by fact."

"We are, of course, aware of the need to verify our premises," the Daughter said. "Be assured that we will do so prior to taking any action."

"Then why have you called me?"

"T'Eris and Saida will have to be located and questioned. If we learn that there has been a pollution of your mating, they will be sterilized."

"I see," Samijahr said. "And am I to be sterilized as well?"

"Yes, regrettably you must be. Arrangements have been made with the Genetics Center at Punjaffe Hospital to perform the operations with the greatest possible dispatch. You will report there at your earliest possible convenience."

"I see."

"We will contact you as soon as we have determined whether your mating has been polluted. May you not live long and prosper,"

"May you not live long and prosper," Samijahr responded automatically, but the screen had gone blank, the Daughter's face replaced by the image of the idic.

Switching off the communications unit, Samijahr realized that some part of him was trembling in reaction to his conversation with the Daughter, but he suppressed it firmly. He must think clearly, logically.

T'Eris and Saida must have gone out after their initial mating. That was the only explanation for their not being already in the Daughters' custody. There were not very many places they would have gone. Logically, Saida, upon finding himself saved from immanent death, would take up life where he had left off and go down to the University Center to conclude his business there.

Samijahr punched up the call numbers of Saida's office and waited impatiently while the machine signaled three, four times. When, after the seventh ring, there was still no response, Samijahr cancelled the call and tried Saida at his carrel in the rare manuscripts division of the University library. Saida responded immediately.

"I am relieved to have found you. Is T'Eris with you?" Samijahr said, slightly breathless.

"She is," Saida said.

"I have just received a call from the Daughters of the Tradition. They suspect that you and T'Eris have mated. When they confirm it we are all to be sterilized."

"Sterilized?" Saida said, brows raised in surprise. "No one in the history of Vulcan has been sterilized for breaking with Tradition."

"As far as we know," Samijahr said. "Logically, of course, the Daughters have no choice but to sterilize us. Our continued existence is a threat to *tsaichrani*; to allow us to mate compounds the threat immeasurably."

"Then why didn't they sterilize us immediately when we returned?" Saida asked.

"You answered that yourself last night. What kind of life do we face as disAffirmed? We have no meaningful work. All T'Eris and I have is each other's company. How long could we survive on that? But now the three of us are bound together and form a community, a community separate from and yet as viable as *tsaichrani*. Why? Because T'Eris is a woman, and with her we might soon have children. And how many other disAffirmed are there?"

"You make us sound like a conspiracy," Saida said in fascinated horror.

"Aren't we?"

Saida blinked.

"Unless you are prepared to be sterilized, I would suggest that we make plans to get off planet immediately. The Daughters are already looking for you."

"But where can we go?" Saida asked.

"Logically, the Terrans should prove the most sympathetic. They have had experience with eugenics problems in the past. I suggest we seek *asylum* with them. We may claim that our civil rights are being violated."

"Surely we can't explain our situation to them," Saida said, aghast at the thought of describing *pon farr* to aliens.

"We will explain as little as possible. If worse comes to worse and we are forced to go into detail, T'Eris can explain for us. She is a physician, after all, she has had experience explaining such matters in the past."

"I suppose it is the only solution," Saida said, unconvinced. "I only hope we won't regret making so precipitate a decision."

"Unfortunately, there is no time to consider alternatives. The Daughters expect me to report to Punjaffe Hospital immediately. Go to the Terran Embassy now. I'll meet you there."

"I would advise you to be cautious, Samijahr," Saida said. "The Daughters already know where you are. You may be under surveillance."

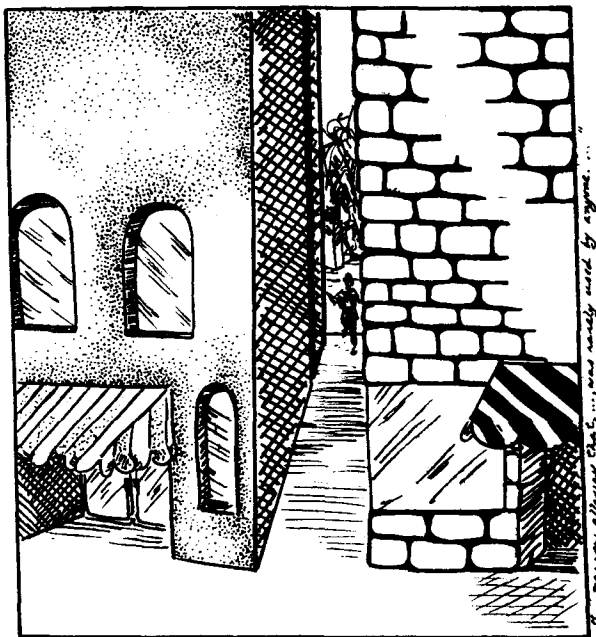
"I will be careful," Samijahr assured him.

It had not, in fact, occurred to Samijahr that the Daughters would have him watched. Now, alert to the possibility, he began to plan how best he might escape. Consulting a directory of the city, he learned that the Terran Embassy was located in Lower Agasaar, fifteen kilometers from Punjaffe. Walking there was out of the question; he would have to take the monorail and avoid, as best he could anyone sent to follow.

Any thought of leaving his apartment building undetected, however, was quickly abandoned. No sooner had he emerged from his building than an enforcer, standing in plain view across the street, made it obvious that he had recognized him. Under less serious circumstances, Samijahr would have been amused by the officer's admonishing stare. As it was, he was obliged to heed the threat, and turning on his heel, walked down Sikora Street, heading in the direction of Punjaffe Hospital.

As one of the most expensive residential districts in Agasaar, Punjaffe had been laid out with an eye toward the comfort of the residents. Parks and plazas, courtyards and cool, garden-shadowed mews dotted the area, turning the streets into a veritable maze where anyone not familiar with the area was liable to, and frequently did, get lost.

One hundred meters down Sikora Street was a short and narrow alleyway that, seemingly leading nowhere, was rarely used by anyone. Samijahr, however, had lived in Punjaffe for fifteen





years and knew that, despite its unpromising appearance, the alleyway was the entrance to Ein Gehii, one of the most beautiful contemplative gardens in Punjaffe. Designed to simulate the oasis at Amrahon where Surak spent the summer of his first pilgrimage, Ein Gehii had been laid out in an intricate pattern of terraced pools and pathways around which plants grew in such profusion that the garden resembled nothing so much as a tropical rain forest. Once on its pathways, Samijahr would be invisible to anyone not directly in front of or behind him, and that fact, coupled with the knowledge that anyone ignorant of the garden's Sikora Street entrance would probably walk past it, made it ideal for Samijahr's purposes.

Hurrying down Sikora Street, Samijahr put as much distance between himself and the enforcer following him as possible. It was late afternoon; shops that had been closed earlier against the heat of the day were now open, their striped and stippled awnings flapping colorfully in the sunlight, and the streets of Punjaffe were filled with shoppers. Samijahr reached the entrance of Ein Gehii undetected and ducked inside. The monorail station was four blocks further on.

Moving quickly along the paths of the garden, Samijahr imagined the frustration of the enforcer who had been following him. Once the officer realized that he had lost Samijahr, he would check each of the streets that intersected Sikora, questioning passersby, the shopkeepers and their clients. He would call his partner, for the enforcers routinely worked in pairs, to see if perhaps he had seen Samijahr. Eventually, however, they would realize that Samijahr had escaped and an all-points bulletin would be issued for his arrest.

Arriving in Lower Agasaar ten blocks short of the embassy, Samijahr found himself growing apprehensive. The ten blocks he had to walk now were all that stood between him and safety, but they were also the ones most fraught with danger. By now, Samijahr knew, all of the enforcers in Agasaar were looking for him, and he did not relish the thought of being captured.

Crossing Makor Plaza, Samijahr paused for a moment to get his bearings. The delay was almost fatal. A shouted command from an enforcer standing across the square sent the people passing on either side of Samijahr scurrying to safety. Caught out in the open, Samijahr had no choice but to run, flinching in anticipation of an immobilizing dart.

Across the plaza the grounds of the Terran Embassy were surrounded by a two-and-a-half meter shade wall. Samijahr threw himself onto it, desperate to scale it before the enforcer caught up with him. The impact of the immobilizing dart, when it came, was much less painful than he had anticipated, although the drug it contained took effect with surprising rapidity. He lost control of his body just as his center of gravity shifted, and fell headlong into the embassy garden below.

Lying helpless, with his vision restricted to the few meters he could see in front of him, Samijahr listened anxiously to the activity around him. Incredibly, the enforcer who had pursued him across Makor Plaza has scaled the embassy wall and the Terran guards were quick to order him down and take him into custody. Next, Samijahr was examined for injuries and, while one of the guards led the enforcer away, others lifted Samijahr onto a stretcher and carried him indoors.

He was bursting with questions. Had Saida and T'Eris arrived? Were they safe? Did the Terrans realize that he was not a criminal who, in fleeing Vulcan law enforcement officials, sought to impose himself in them? His tongue was thick in his mouth, and he was salivating heavily.

He was carried into the embassy dispensary and transferred to an examining table. The Terran doctor thoughtfully placed a towel under his head and positioned him so that his saliva could drain off safely.

"My wife and friend," Samijahr said, struggling to speak clearly, "Did they arrive?"

"Yes, they're here," the doctor said. "You're safe now."

Relieved, Samijahr allowed himself to relax while the doctor went to work removing the needle of the immobilizing dart.

"The third Vulcan you were expecting just came in over the south wall, Ambassador Bailey," Sergeant Larry Genesco, the man who had been on guard when Samijahr arrived at the embassy, reported. "An enforcer managed to get a dart into him. I've got the enforcer in the security staff lounge. Potter or Horvath took the Vulcan in to Dr. Goldstein."

"Was he injured?" the ambassador asked. Across from her, T'Eris sat anxiously listening to the conversation.

"I doubt it. He was paralyzed when he fell from the wall and landed limp."

"Did the enforcer give you any trouble?"

"No, ma'am. He just looked mad enough to spit, that's all."

Bailey snorted in appreciation of the image. "All right. You keep an eye on the enforcer. I'll be there in a moment."

"Right."

"Shall we go, T'Eris?" Ambassador Bailey led the way. In the lounge, she turned T'Eris over to Genisco.

"This is T'Eris, Sergeant. I would appreciate it if you would show her where Samijahr is. The enforcer and I will finish up here."

"Yes, ma'am. T'Eris."

At the dispensary door, Genisco knocked, and allowed T'Eris to go in ahead of him. Samijahr was lying face down on an examining table. His *gish* had been unfastened and lay spread loosely across his buttocks. T'Eris suppressed a twinge of embarrassment for him.

"I got the dart out," Dr. Goldstein, an aging, pleasant-faced man, told T'Eris, showing her a kidney dish in which a long needle lay. "The dart was fired at such close range that the cartridge broke off and lodged the needle under the skin." He shrugged. "Nothing serious. He's beginning to get some sensation in his extremities. He should be able to sit up shortly."

"We are grateful for your assistance," T'Eris said. "But I would like to be alone with him now."

"Certainly, my dear."

"Doctor." Genisco held the door open for him.

When the two humans had gone, T'Eris went around to the head of the table and stood in Samijahr's line of sight.

"Saida and I got here without any trouble," she said. "When we realized that you had a half-hour trip in front of you, we became concerned. I am pleased to see you arrived safely."

"Safely, but not quite unscathed," Samijahr said thickly, his expression wry. "I had quite an adventure."

"But you are here now," T'Eris said, "and that is all that is important at the moment."

"And you," Samijahr said, studying her face. "Are you well?"

"As well as can be expected."

"I am sorry you had to suffer," Samijahr said quietly.

"It was necessary, and I knew what to expect."

"At times I believe you are much more courageous than I can ever be," Samijahr said.

"Perhaps. But do not envy me my decision."

"I don't."

"Would you like to try to sit up now?"

"Please."

With T'Eris' assistance, Samijahr swung his legs off the table and sat up carefully, clutching the edge of the table.

"Ambassador Bailey wanted to wait until you arrived before we began discussing the question of asylum," T'Eris said. "Have you given any thought to what we might tell her?"

"The truth," Samijahr said. "What else is there left at this point?"

"That may prove awkward," T'Eris commented.

"Then we will have to be circumspect. Let's not keep the ambassador waiting."

When they returned to Ambassador Bailey's office, they found Saida waiting for them. The tension Samijahr had seen in him the day before was gone, but it had been replaced by an apprehensiveness Samijahr was unsure he was prepared to deal with. For a long time the two men stood staring at each other.

"Samijahr," Saida said at last.

"I am pleased to see you, Saida," Samijahr said. "I trust you are well?"

"I am -- much better," Saida said, flushing. Then, making a fierce effort to overcome his embarrassment, he went on, "What T'Eris and you did for me was beyond any requirement of friendship. I want to thank you for it."

"One does not thank logic," Samijahr said. "Surely we could not permit you to die because of an accident?"

"No," Saida said, considering the question, "I suppose you could not. It would have been illogical."

"Most," Samijahr agreed. His words, he was pleased to see, had had the desired affect. Saida had relaxed, confident that despite the trauma his relationship with Samijahr had suffered, at least there was the possibility of their still remaining friends. T'Eris merely looked amused.

"Now that Saida has conceded the logic of our saving him," she said, "I think we *must* consider our next problem." She grew serious. "The Terrans may refuse to grant us asylum. If they do, we will undoubtedly be sterilized and, I suspect, separated."

"Indeed," Saida said. "The Daughters cannot permit us to remain together; we are an affront to *tsaichrani*. Separate, they may hope to wear us down, reduce us to a point where we may be dealt with more easily."

"Then we must resolve now to leave Vulcan," Samijahr said, "and direct our individual and collective efforts toward that end. No matter what happens, even if we are sterilized and separated, we must escape."

"I agree," T'Eris said. "There is no alternative."

"Shall we sit down?" Samijahr asked. "The Ambassador should be back shortly."

They had no sooner settled themselves than Ambassador Bailey came in. She took the chair behind her desk, clasped her hands in front of her, and sat looking at each of them in turn.

"All three of you want asylum. Is that correct?" There was an alert aggressiveness in her manner that inspired confidence in the Vulcans.



... THERE WAS AN ALERT AGGRESSIVENESS IN HER MANNER THAT INSPIRED CONFIDENCE IN THE VULCANS.

"Yes," Samijahr said.

"What are you seeking asylum from?"

"The three of us are to be sterilized," Samijahr said.

Ambassador Bailey frowned.

"What crime did you commit?"

"Samijahr and I are married," T'Eris said. "I committed adultery with Saida."

"I see. Is sterilization on the books as punishment for adultery?"

"No, it is not," Samijahr said. "Adultery comes under civil *jurisprudence*. In order for a person to be punished for it, it is necessary that the offended party bring suit. For example, were I to bring suit against T'Eris, which would obviously be my prerogative as her husband, and were she found guilty, then legally I could require her to become my chattel. Were I the one accused of adultery and found guilty, it would be within T'Eris' prerogative to divorce me."

"How do you know all this?" Bailey asked.

"I am a civil arbiter," Samijahr said.

"A lawyer?"

"The functions are similar."

"And there are absolutely no provisions for sterilization for adultery under Vulcan law?"

"None for any crime. Our population problem, as you undoubtedly know, has always been the opposite of yours."

"Then why are you to be sterilized?"

"We are *disAffirmed*," Saida said simply.

"Ah," Ambassador Bailey said.

The Vulcans looked at each other. "You know what the Affirmation entails?" Saida asked.

"I was under the impression it was a ceremony in which you affirmed your commitment to Surak's Construct. Apparently it's a bit more complicated than that."

"The *kataytikhe*," Saida explained, "are responsible for conducting the Affirmation. They are given the authority to determine what course *tsaichrani* -- our culture--will take. Those who miss the Affirmation are considered incapable of participating in *tsaichrani*; their values are no longer those of the culture."

"And this entitles the government to interfere in your sex lives?"

Samijahr closed his eyes in horror.

"I am sorry if I am offensive. It is essential that I understand your situation fully."

"We are considered a threat to *tsaichrani*," Saida said. "We cannot be permitted to reproduce."

"Because your values are different from everyone else's?" Bailey asked. "Do you mean to say that everyone on Vulcan has the same values?"

"That is one of the Affirmation's functions," Saida said uncomfortably, acutely aware that Bailey found it next to impossible to believe.

"So now that you are *disAffirmed*, the laws that apply to everyone else no longer apply to you."

"That is essentially correct," Samijahr said. "We ask only to be judged by the same laws that everyone else is judged by. Our government has chosen to deny us this right."

"So now you want out -- or *off*, I should say."

"Yes."

"You understand that I am obliged to listen to your government's side in this affair?"

"Yes."

"All right. I want you to understand that I can't promise you anything. Personally, I am inclined to favor your position, but the decision will ultimately rest with my government. For now, you may consider yourselves guests of Terra. I'll have the third floor of the embassy closed off for your use. Dinner is an hour after sundown."

"Thank you," T'Eris said.

"Thank me when I've gotten your your asylum," Bailey said. "It won't be easy."

When the Vulcans had gone, Bailey put through a call to the Daughters of Tradition. She wasn't looking forward to talking with T'Uriamne. The Daughter had always impressed her as too arrogant to be trusted. "This is Melinda Bailey, Terran Ambassador to Vulcan," she said to the

woman who answered her call. "May I please speak with T'Uriamne?"

If the Daughter was surprised by her request, she didn't show it. A moment later, T'Uriamne's face appeared on the viewscreen.

"May you live long and prosper, Ambassador," T'Uriamne said.

"Peace and long life, T'Uriamne," Bailey said, acknowledging her greeting. "T'Uriamne, I have a problem. An hour ago, three Vulcans walked into my embassy requesting asylum."

"Samijahr Malhotra, T'Eris Purjda gat-Malhotra, and Saida Bh'mar. I am aware they sought refuge with you," T'Uriamne said.

"They claim they are being persecuted."

"Did they say what the nature of this persecution was?"

"They say they're going to be sterilized."

"And knowing us as you do, do you believe them?"

Bailey considered the question for a moment. "Yes, I do."

"Did they also tell you why they are to be sterilized?"

"T'Eris says she committed adultery with Saida."

"Did they tell you that they are disAffirmed?"

"Yes."

"These facts are a sufficient reason for us to require their sterilization, Bailey."

"Samijahr claims there is no provision for sterilization under Vulcan law."

"He is correct. We are making an exception in this case."

"Would you care to tell me why?"

"Unfortunately, I cannot. You will have to believe me when I tell you it is essential that Samijahr, T'Eris, and Saida be sterilized."

Bailey frowned. "I'm sorry, T'Uriamne, but that doesn't make much sense."

"The fate of Vulcan hangs in the balance."

Bailey looked doubtful. "Why? Why are three people so great a threat to Vulcan that you have to have them sterilized? Why, if being disAffirmed is so terrible, weren't they sterilized in the first place? Why did you wait until now?"

"I cannot answer your questions."

"Then I have no choice but to recommend that they be granted asylum."

"If you were a Vulcan, Bailey, you would understand my position. Try, for a moment, to think like a Vulcan."

"T'Uriamne, I'm trying to understand your position the best I can, but you've refused to give me the information I need to do precisely that. I can't surrender three people's lives to you on the basis of a hypothetical threat to Vulcan. Explain to me why these people have to be punished so severely. I'm willing to understand your position."

"I cannot explain."

"Then you leave me no choice but to go ahead with my recommendation."

"Do so," T'Uriamne said, and the screen went blank.

Melinda Bailey sat drumming her fingers on her desk for a long minute after T'Uriamne's image had vanished from the screen. It was just like the Daughters to demand that Samijahr, T'Eris, and Saida be extradited and yet refuse to explain what crime they had committed. Three months ago, the Daughters had contacted Starfleet Command with the same request regarding Lt. S'Darmeg, a military scout who had also missed the Affirmation. He was mentally incompetent, the Daughters asserted, but Starfleet psychiatrists could find no evidence to support the Daughters' claim, and Starfleet refused to discharge him from the service and send him back to Vulcan.

Bailey gave up trying to understand the Daughters. They were forever warning the Federation that its ill-considered moves threatened Vulcan, and yet, with no understanding of what constituted such a threat, the Federation was left in the frustrating position of being unable to

protect its own interests and respect Vulcan's integrity. Already a large percentage of Federation members, Terra among them, were ready to leave Vulcan to its own devices; the remainder were convinced that they were being played for fools.

Bailey had lived on Vulcan long enough to know that *tsaichrani* was fragile. In constructing it, the Daughters had failed to take one very important factor into consideration.

For all their logic and devotion to empiricism, the Vulcans were people. The laws they obeyed were not absolute, but written by other Vulcans, and only so long as those laws were responsive to the people's needs would the people obey them. If the laws proved arbitrary, or threatened the well-being of the people they were meant to protect, it was the laws that would ultimately be destroyed-- and those who profited by them.

For Lt. S'Darmeg, life outside *tsaichrani* would be relatively easy; he had made a break with his culture before disAffirmation severed him from it permanently. For Samijahr, T'Eris, and Saida, compelled to leave their homes and their world, life would be more difficult. But they would survive. Melinda Bailey, and the people of the Federation, would see to it that they had their chance.



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## "EDITORS ARE GHOULS AND CANNIBALS"

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 102.

The subtle shades of meaning, the various levels of maturity that can exist within a person, the evolving steps and plateaus of multiple friendships cannot be conveyed by the Magic Christian school of writing ("He/she blanked his/her blank". The movie called it participatory pornography). If half the energy and inventiveness that went into thinking up new and different tortures or different convoluted ways that Kirk and Spock can do it with each other or the rest of the crew went into other channels of plot devices, there might be more stories out there that are worth buying.

Now all stories that don't contain sex and/or violence are not necessarily good ones. We hope we never go down on record as thinking that. But a little variety in the types of stories that are written would be an awful welcome relief to these particular individuals.

The thing we disliked most about the book Star Trek Lives! was the harping on the theme of sexual and violent stories in the section that described fan fiction. Maybe the fans who found us through that book think that that is the way it has to be done. We hope not. There were good stories then that didn't depend on sensationalism, and there are good stories now.

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