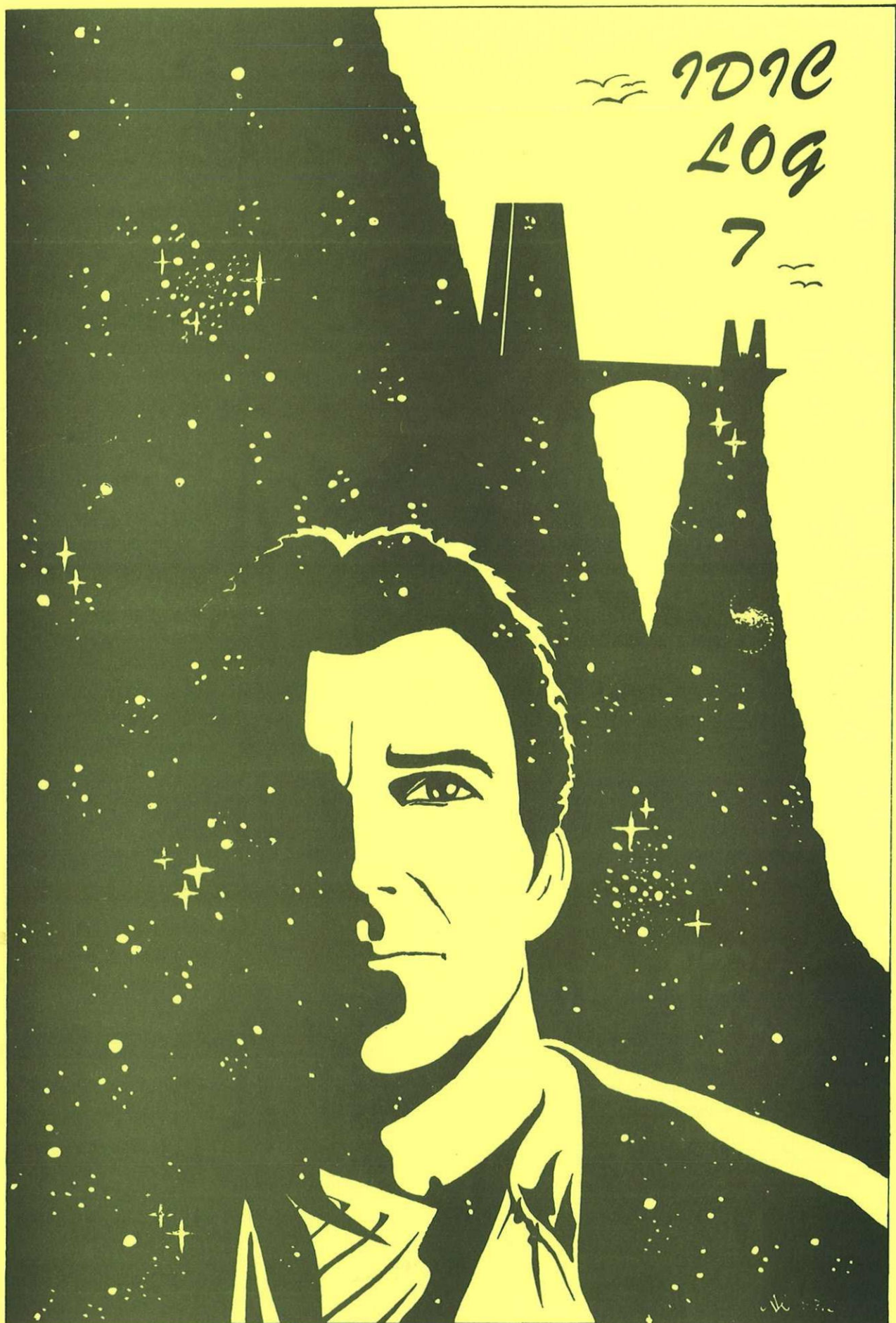


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a star trek fanzine

CONTENTS

Storm's End	by Gail Christison	P 3
A Mother's Prayer	by Christine J. Jones	P 8
Fever	by Patricia de Voss	P 9
Dreams	by Benjamin T. Jones	P 11
A 23rd Century Odyssey	by John A. Mariani	P 12
Of Myths And Legends	by Sue Jones	P 25
Final Farewells	by Kimberly Pederson	P 26
Untitled Poem	by Claire Roberts	P 46
New Beginning	by Helen Cakebread	P 47
Mother, Please Try To Understand	by Linda Wood	P 50
A Perfect Gentleman	by Lindsay McBride	P 51
Ren	by Gail Christison	P 56
Sulu	by Christine J. Jones	P 78
To New Voyages	by Ewan Michael Flett	P 79
What Plans?	by Mrs. Pippin	P 82
That Special Look	by Linda Wood	P 87
Errors	by Teresa Abbott	P 88

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AL 8504

STORM'S END

by

Gail Christison

The wind howled and brilliant flashes of white split the night sky. Between the silhouettes of the great trees, a single figure pressed against the storm.

Suddenly the heavens ripped open. The figure paused, startled, as rain drove in sheets across the isolated plateau. A single, violent, deafening crack of thunder exploded overhead and in James T. Kirk, despair turned to rage.

He had brought himself to this place still smarting over Starfleet's rap over the knuckles for conduct not becoming a flag officer. Not...! His mind raged as the fragrant, sodden beds of pine needles gave way to rocky granite and shale outcrops.

The Enterprise and her people had needed that time, after Vejur, to say and do all that the mission had prevented them from doing - *at least most of them did*, he thought angrily.

The memory of that stony, ungiving, utterly lonely face gazing unblinkingly at them all, willing him, Kirk, not to say anything more, returned.

Kirk's fists clenched. Rain poured down, finding its way inside the turned up collar of his old style lumber jacket and trickling down his neck. His synthetic rubber soled sneakers, though comfortable, seemed a foolish choice now, sodden and squishing as he picked his way up the rocky slope.

He flashed his light at the single fir tree in his path. There was the mark he had blazed hours earlier. He stepped forward and a loose piece of shale dislodged.

A curse echoed through the mountains as Kirk lost his footing and rolled back down the slope, coming to rest against the trunk of a giant oak tree.

For a long time he just lay, winded and disorientated. When it became obvious that he'd done more damage to his jeans than to himself the Admiral slowly dragged himself into a sitting position and shook rain off his face.

The image of Spock returned to his thoughts, and with him the one other thing he valued most in the universe - Enterprise. He'd been so damned certain Nogura would let him keep her, but the old man had ultimately bowed to pressure from the traditionalists, as he had once before.

An old pain stabbed at him. Lori. Poor dead Lori. Jim Kirk was so sick of being let down. And Spock... Spock had let him down too.

For a fleeting moment he had touched the Vulcan's very soul, in Sickbay all those months ago. He'd believed it was a beginning, an

affirmation of all the years of their friendship. Then, at the completion of the mission, the Vulcan had simply withdrawn. For the relatively short time Kirk remained in command of the Enterprise Spock was seen only when on duty and spoke only when absolutely necessary.

Hot angry tears of frustration pricked at Kirk's eyes but they were not allowed to fall, not then, never. He had returned to Terra more alone than he had ever felt in his life, to a job he hated, and to Heichahiro Nogura, who had failed the Starfleet hero, both as a friend and as a superior.

He struggled to rise. The rain had eased and he wanted to get back to his camp and some dry clothes. The light was gone, vanished somewhere down the hillside. Slowly, in the pitch dark, he started to climb, careful to choose large, solid granite rocks as footholds.

As he passed under the fir with his blaze mark on the trunk, a pine cone fell to earth and bounced at his feet. A shiver went down his spine, as if it were Ilia's tricorder bouncing on the deck after the beautiful Deltan had been spirited away to her death.

He kicked it hard and lengthened his stride. For a few satisfying moments his concentration centered on the effort to reach the crest of the hill.

He had gained weight and lost condition after returning to San Francisco. It had become an effort simply to strive. There was nothing left to reach for. Perhaps Harry Morrow would let him teach, but Harry's tenure wasn't due to begin for another eighteen months.

The wind was building again after the short lull, roaring up the canyons and shaking the trees. As Kirk crested the rise it ripped open the curtain of clouds, exposing the jewelled sky beyond.

Kirk stared at the brilliant stars twinkling through the widening slash. A moment later he swallowed hard, tearing his eyes away and struck out determinedly in the direction of his camp. Striding carelessly between two close standing trees, he gashed his cheek on a dead, broken branch. In a split second of fury he struck the tree with his fist. His knuckles attested to the stupidity of the action, but Kirk didn't care.

He hit it again and again until his hand bled.

The fir stood, immobile, undamaged, unfeeling. He leaned against it, feeling its solidity, its support. Suddenly the pain was there again, a nagging ache that could only be ignored but not appeased. James Kirk had been hurt so many times in his life that the reason was not hard to identify, but this pain was somehow unique. After all those years of command, he was, for all the wrong reasons, lonelier now than he had ever been in his life.

"Damn Nogura! Damn Starfleet - and regulations!" he shouted aloud. *And damn Vulcan control!* he added mentally, pulling himself irritably away from the tree.

Kirk had hiked almost all day, beginning in early morning sunshine and good spirits, and now, in darkness, his goal of total exhaustion was being prematurely reached. Placing one foot in front of the other had suddenly become a struggle.

Spock's image swam in his mind, refusing to be banished for long. It was part of the reason he had run to this place, a place from his childhood, a secret place. Only his private secretary knew where he was.

Something acrid reached his nostrils. Fire? In the forest? *Unlikely*, he decided wryly as his sneakers squelched along. The scent grew stronger with each stride. It was some kind of fire, but he couldn't have accidentally started one; he hadn't even taken the time to build one, just dumped his stuff and run as soon as the survival module unwound itself satisfactorily. And yet he could see the orange glow of flames flickering in the direction of his camp.

Kirk drew his only weapon, a hunting knife, from the belt of his jeans. It was much easier to sneak up on the wet ground under cover of the howling wind. It whipped his hair back as he turned into it to circle the site.

At first he could see no-one, squinting as he did through the brambles, then a familiar figure stepped into the firelight.

Spock! Kirk's heart began to pound just as it had when the turbolift had spilled its contents onto the bridge that day. Black, alien contents...

The Vulcan had rearranged the pile of junk into a proper campsite and built a fine fire, somehow, out of the dampness.

Somewhere deep inside, Kirk's last seed of hope germinated. When he left the Enterprise Spock had taken temporary command, in Vulcan mode. There were no goodbyes, nothing to indicate that Spock would ever again reveal to Kirk, or anyone, the unique individual that Kirk had come to call friend.

He stepped into the open.

"Spock?" He managed, somehow to keep the tone even. Dark, unreadable eyes flickered in the changing light. "What brings you out here?" While the voice remained almost too light, never had the hazel eyes so openly pleaded.

"Admiral," the Vulcan began, destroying him. "Your unscheduled absence has been noted by Starfleet Headquarters. You were required to attend - " He saw the glittering rage in the Human's face and stopped Kirk's blow millimetres from its mark, but took the second in the solar plexus without flinching. He clamped long fingers around that arm too, before the Admiral could raise it again.

"Damn you to hell, you son of a bitch!" Kirk croaked. "Nogura's messenger boy!" The only one Daigin, his secretary, would have given his location to. "Let me go!" he demanded, lost in a sea of roiling emotions.

For a split second Spock met the blazing, glassy eyes. This was a James Kirk he had never seen before. He released the sodden arms.

Kirk immediately turned away and moved close to the fire, in ominous silence. Spock waited. The silence continued until the human eventually spoke.

"Why?" he said without turning.

Spock searched for an answer but he did not reply. He saw the achingly familiar head bow in defeat, forcing him to reach desperately for control.

Devastated, Kirk watched the embers being carried up by the warm air over the fire and flicked away on the wind. He heard the Vulcan move.

"Spock!" he called, as the footsteps continued to recede. "Spock, I can't do it on my own. Not this time." The words tumbled out as he turned, without hope, only to see Spock pull the medikit from the supplies. Relief took the last of Kirk's strength and he sat down hard on the wet pine needles.

Wordlessly the Vulcan hunkered down before the bedraggled Human, painfully aware of the wounded eyes burning into his face.

Kirk was filthy. He deliberately hooked a finger under the defiant chin and turned Kirk's face to study the jagged cut. Kirk made no objection but Spock could feel the rigid clenching of his jaw.

As Spock wiped the blood and grime from the wound Kirk flinched, raising his bad hand to push Spock's away. The Vulcan raised an eyebrow at the bloodied mess. Kirk wanted to laugh, and cry, at the endearing expression.

Instead, he pulled his now clean face away, but was frustrated when the Vulcan caught his right wrist in a vice-like grip and began cleaning the smashed and blackened knuckles. The long fingers were gentle, but their master gave no quarter, still trapped by Kolinahr and his own indecision.

Kirk willed Spock to look at him, to half smile in the way of old, to step back into his world.

A moment later Spock did look up from his ministrations, his face as unreadable as it was when he returned from Gol, and in his eyes that same trapped look. Kirk ignored the plea in them and snatched back his hand.

"Why did you go?" The pain in the baritone voice cut through Kirk like a knife.

"I don't understand?" he said softly, hardly daring to hope.

"You gave up your ship, your crew, for a life Captain James T. Kirk would have hated. It was not..." The Vulcan's voice cracked almost imperceptibly, "...logical."

Kirk sought and held his gaze. "I'm sorry," he said simply, but starkly. He saw some of the tension leave the Vulcan's face, but the expression remained unchanged. In the silence every nerve in the Admiral's body remained taut with fear.

Spock stood up suddenly and Kirk scrambled to follow, but fell, unable to flex his left knee. In a second the Vulcan moved forward and located the damage.

The knees were torn out of Kirk's jeans from his tumble down the hill and the left knee itself was cut and swollen. As he worked, the Vulcan's dark eyes shifted from the torn pants to Kirk's face, then down to the medikit. The momentary glint of amusement

was unmistakable.

Unreasonably, Spock's lapse tore down Kirk's own defenses.

He was watching the familiar silken head, so close, so much a part of a yesterday so diametrically opposed to his own sterile existence over the past months, that the angry tears he had withheld earlier threatened again.

Tentatively, Kirk reached across and laid a hand on the Vulcan's shoulder.

The wind had blown itself out, leaving silence in its wake. For a few moments it was all the Admiral heard.

"Jim," the Vulcan said finally, unsteadily, without raising his head.

Kirk threw his own back and grinned, oblivious to the traitorous droplets that now did indeed trickle down the side of his face and, idiotically, into his ears.

"Spock!" he said when he was able, planting both his hands firmly on the bony shoulders. "Simple feeling, Spock," he added softly. There was a tremor in the lean body. Suddenly the Vulcan was very still.

Only then did Kirk realise what he had done. In the exhilaration of defeating Kolinahr, he had failed to realise what it might cost Spock.

"I have never been able to say it before, but... I need you. *You*, not just my First Officer. Is that crazy? Or am I just getting old?"

With a great effort Spock made himself look up. He was pale, and his face still masked.

"As to the first, Admiral," he said in a familiar tone, holding the hazel eyes, "I would say not. And to the second, I would say... undoubtedly."

Kirk laughed, tightening his grip on the alien's shoulder. He had not missed the tension in the Vulcan, still tighter than a watchspring. Perhaps too much had changed. Whether from the chill of the night or his own thoughts, Kirk shivered.

Then Vulcan hands were gripping his elbows. He tensed. Suddenly he was being lifted to his feet and steadied while he put weight on the knee.

Spock's expression was unchanged.

So, he was right. Spock had tried, and now it was over. Reluctantly Kirk withdrew his hand and stood independently.

Spock turned.

"Don't go."

The Vulcan faced him again. "Then you do not wish me to rebuild the fire?"

"Jesus, Spock!"

"Invocation of deity has not been known to improve the energy output of damp timber," Spock replied disapprovingly.

Jim Kirk started to laugh, really laugh. By the time he could catch his breath there was only a couple of feet between them. He wiped at his eyes.

"I missed you," Kirk whispered hoarsely.

And I you, Spock thought, overwhelmed by the strength of Kirk's emotion, and the illogic of their separation. "I have been," he said very slowly, staring at the wound on Kirk's cheek, "and ever shall be, your friend."

Kirk smiled and the two stood wordlessly, for a very long time.

Spock moved first. The fire had died to a single curl of black smoke. The Admiral watched him rebuild it, fondly.

"Spock," he called after the Vulcan. "What you said before - If I ever forget that again, you are ordered to remind me."

"Of that," the Vulcan turned, "you may be certain."

And, Spock thought, looking contentedly at the bedraggled Human, *I will never again let myself forget it, either*

...T'hy'la.



A MOTHER'S PRAYER

Starchild, my beloved starchild,
Where are you now?
You travel the stars with your friends,
Constantly in danger.
Yet I would not ask you to change,
For you are doing what you do best,
And I am proud of you, my child.
So every night I look up at the stars
And wonder where you are.
Hoping that wherever you are
You are safe.
For no matter where you are,
My thoughts shall never be far from you.
And though you are now full grown,
Always shall I worry,
And pray for your safety.
For you are my child,
And wherever you roam,
My love will always be with you.

Christine J Jones



FEVER

by

Patricia de Voss

Something nudged him into reacting. Something unseen, or even felt, touched his mind with a sudden awareness. He resisted its intrusion into his world, he fought to keep at bay what was no longer reality. He then became aware of the heat that surrounded him, heat that grew stronger with every passing minute.

Heat that would burn the skin from his bones if he did not escape. But more than that, he felt the heat burning away what he was and forcing him to remember another.

"No!" escaped from his dry lips.

Then he felt again a sudden coolness wash over him. He reached out for the relief that he knew it would bring. Yet even that too brought back the memories. It was becoming harder to hold on to who he was, as his world and that of the other seemed to merge together.

While outside his world, in the quiet comfort of sickbay, Dr. Leonard McCoy and Chris Chapel stood a silent vigil over their patient. Chapel had spent the last few hours applying cool washers in a vain attempt to get his temperature down, after everything else had failed. At least the readings had come down a little.

"Doctor, you should really get some rest."

"I'll get some when this damn fever breaks. I've never seen anything like it. I'm just glad that Jim is strong enough to be able to fight it off."

"He's certainly fighting something."

They heard their patient start to mumble and looked down at him. Neither McCoy nor Chapel knew what he was saying, as neither could remember having heard that language before. As both were so involved they did not notice Spock come in and stand silently by the door. He too listened to the words that Kirk spoke, but unlike the others he knew from where they came. Before Kirk slipped back into unconsciousness his last word was a name, one that McCoy did not know. It was then that he noticed Spock.

"Chris - I'll be in my office if you need me."

Spock followed him silently out of the room. Once in McCoy's office he waited for the Doctor to seat himself. He knew that McCoy had not left Kirk's side since he had collapsed.

"You should get some rest, Doctor."

"Not till that fever breaks. Besides which, I have grabbed a few catnaps on the adjoining bed."

"And I'm sure that you slept with one ear listening to the

monitor over Jim's bed. Need I remind you that they are all hooked up to alarms?"

"Don't be so damn smart. I'm too tired for it."

"I believe the lab has isolated the virus that caused this."

"Isolating it is one thing. Finding something that will work against it is going to be another. I suppose we should be grateful that it wasn't fatal, or this would be one very empty ship... Did you understand what he was mumbling about before?"

"I would have to check with linguists first, but I believe it to be Caxelian."

"Then that last word he spoke was 'Teila'... thought I was hearing things for a moment."

"Evidently the heat from the fever has brought back those memories."

"As long as they stay memories. I know how to treat James Kirk; I'm not that sure of Araron," McCoy said as he half stumbled as he got up. He was more tired than he was willing to admit to himself or anyone else. Spock reached over to steady McCoy

"Thanks. Guess I *could* do with some sleep... "

Spock was concerned about the Doctor as he knew that McCoy had only recently recovered from the same virus. He also knew that McCoy would be annoyed at him but in the end would forgive him. As McCoy turned his back to Spock intending to go back to Kirk, Spock quietly touched a spot on McCoy's shoulder and then gently caught the Doctor as he collapsed.

Chris Chapel was at first concerned when Spock entered carrying McCoy.

"There is no need for concern, Nurse. McCoy needed some rest; I just made certain he got some."

"Boy - is he going to be mad at you when he wakes up!"

"That is preferable to the alternative. Now if you will excuse me, I have work to do."

McCoy was, as expected, madder than a wet hen and vowing never to turn his back on that blasted Vulcan again. Only Kirk's coming out of the fever stopped him from committing murder.

"Bones... Am I going to live?"

"You'll do... I don't suppose you remember anything?"

"Like calling for Teila... or like the horrified expression on a friend's face?"

"Jim, I... "

"Forget it, Bones. I have."

"Have you really? Can you honestly say that sometimes you wouldn't rather be planetside, hunting your instincts, than having to rely on these machines?"

"Yes. Sometimes I want the wind at my back again. I want to be able to track down an enemy. But that is something that belonged in another world. He chose to come back, and I chose to stay. Now, are you finally going to stop watching me like a hawk?"

"No, because every time I do you end up in trouble."

"Then how about something for a headache?"

"That I can do."

Kirk watched McCoy walk out, and was glad to have such a friend. It had been only three months since they had found him on Caxel; living like a native, with no memory of who or what he was.

Still he wondered about Araron. No matter how much he would tell McCoy that he was buried, Kirk knew deep down that Araron would always be a part of him. Always be there... just like the shadow watcher had been there for Araron. He didn't know whether this was good or not. But then he remembered what he had told McCoy, what he told himself again.

Aaron had chosen to come this way, and he had decided to stay. Jim Kirk would mourn for Araron, but it was his life, and he would live it his way.



DREAMS

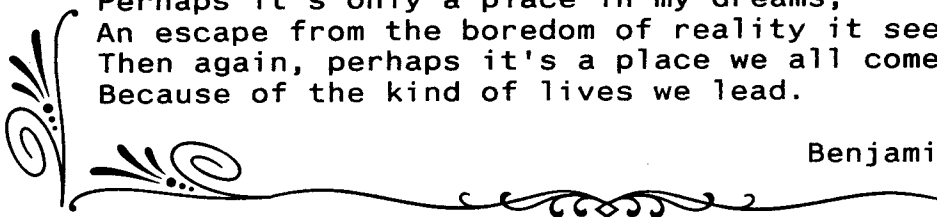
I want to run away to a far distant isle,
Where peace and tranquillity would be mine for a while.
With only the sun, the sand and the sea,
And no-one around to bother me.

To go where only a few may tread,
To clear my mind, my heart and my head.
Away from all the noise and pollution,
From factory work, this is my solution.

To go to a place where I can be me,
With no-one to say what I should be.
Where I don't have to live by the clock,
And hearts are free and no door needs a lock.

Perhaps it's only a place in my dreams,
An escape from the boredom of reality it seems.
Then again, perhaps it's a place we all come to need,
Because of the kind of lives we lead.

Benjamin T Jones



A 23RD CENTURY ODYSSEY

by

John A. Mariani

Foreword

The basic premise of this story is that Gene Roddenberry's "Star Trek: The Motion Picture" was his version of "2001 : A Space Odyssey". There is some slight evidence to support this - his playful footnote in the novelisation which refers to the events of 2001; also some of the promotional text for the film. This story starts by delaying the discovery of TMA-1 on the moon until the 23rd Century and we take it from there ...

By the 23rd century, the Moon had just about had it. Man's first stepping-stone into Space and the first new frontier since America was deserted again. The Galaxy was Man's playground now; he'd left the Moon far behind him.

The few Moonbases were now empty and desolate, clinging yet to the lunar surface in bold defiance of one of the most benignly hostile environments Man had found. The first birthplace of Men not of this Earth.

Now, conquered and ignored but still proud, she hung in the night sky, continuing her age-old task as guardian of Earth's dark hours; her face now covered with the bootprints of hundreds of Humans. Conquered, yes. But not all of her dark secrets had been exposed. Not yet.

In the fourth year of its first five year mission under the Captaincy of James T. Kirk, the Enterprise was sweeping majestically through the solar system under impulse power.

While the Enterprise, like most Starships in the fleet, carried a multi-planetary crew, the majority of the personnel were Terrans. This early and totally unexpected return to their home planet (in their own era, for a change!) certainly filled the ship with undisguised glee. A shore leave had already been promised. The reason for this return? Ambassador Fox was being ferried from the recent successful peace mission between Vendikar and Eminiar VII.

He stood on the bridge, smiling broadly, bathing in the love radiating from the crew. He could do no wrong. Even Scotty, always one to hold a grudge and recalling the threat of a penal colony, felt a twinge of gratitude towards the popinjay Fox.

Captain James T. Kirk sat relaxed and almost redundant in the command chair. The crew knew where they were going; into the vast orbiting drydock. Any orders he would give now would be unnecessary. The ship was safe in the hands of his helmsman, Hikaru Walter Sulu.

Quiet, composed and radiating confidence, a model officer when

on duty, quite unlike the energetic, rumbustious individual when on leave. Thoughts of that leave were breaking through his professional calm. Kirk could almost see Sulu's body vibrate with excitement. *Just an illusion*, thought Kirk. He himself was just as pleased at the chance of some rest.

Sulu did have some extra cause for enthusiasm, Kirk recalled. His sister, Kamehameha, had promised not to wed unless Hikaru could be present. She was engaged about a year ago, and the chance for a wedding a year earlier than expected was good news, indeed.

Kirk looked around. Everyone with even the slimmest excuse for being on the bridge was there, trying to look busy if they could, but mostly just watching. *If anyone else tries to get on the bridge*, he thought, wryly, *I may have to lose some weight! Nevertheless...*

"Uhura?" said Kirk. One more beat than normal passed before her reply.

"Sir?"

"Pipe that picture through the ship."

"Yes, sir!"

The beautiful blue-green globe was growing larger. The joy on board was so strong, it was almost a palpable entity.

"Uhura," Kirk began, swivelling in his command chair, "Call Dr. McCoy to the bridge. I'm sure he wouldn't want to miss this... "

His last words were interrupted by the swoosh of the turbo lift doors. McCoy sauntered hurriedly (if such a thing is possible) onto the bridge, closely followed by Mr. Spock.

"Miss what, Jim?", began McCoy, his eyes focussing on the rapidly growing blue-green bubble on the screen. Blue-green. There was a time when it was anything but. The terraforming experience of the space frontiersmen had allowed Man to terraform the Earth itself. The memory sickened McCoy, as it always had.

"Spock!" exclaimed Kirk, as he noticed his First Officer sweep onto the bridge behind McCoy.

"Yes, Captain?" Smoothly he stopped his motion, squared to face the Captain, and raised an eyebrow in the classic manner.

"Well, Spock, I never knew you had it in you!"

"What, Captain?"

"I mean, I can understand McCoy being here, but you!?"

"I fail to comprehend, Captain."

"Coming up to the bridge, to watch our approach home."

"Oh, no, Captain. I have a perfectly logical reason to be on the bridge at this time. It is my turn of duty at the Science console."

"I see, Mr. Spock," Kirk said, fighting back a smile. A turn

of duty that would last all of a few minutes.

"Carry on." Out of the corner of his eye, he could see McCoy glare at the Vulcan. Everything in McCoy's body said, "In a pig's eye", except his voice. It was such an obvious statement, however, it would have been quite redundant to say it.

"You are relieved, Mr. Chekov," said Spock, tapping the Russian lightly on the shoulder. Like the intense young ensign he was, Chekov had been dutifully averting his eyes from that most welcome of sights now filling the forward viewscreen. As he turned to get up and allow Mr. Spock access to the station, he let his gaze fall on the Earth and his arm accidentally brushed a set of sensor switches.

In response, a number of lights lit up in a telltale pattern on the console.

Spock, contentedly removing his eyes from the viewscreen (hoping no one had noticed him watching), was immediately aware of the accidental situation and the information it presented to him.

"Captain! I am detecting a weak but positive magnetic flux in Earth orbit."

"What? Where is it, Spock?"

"I am attempting to locate it now, Captain."

Spock's experienced hands worked the array of switches and lights on the Science console he had known for so long and he monitored the influx of data on the long hooded micro-monitor tube.

"Definitely a non-natural source. It seems to be emanating... from the Moon!"

My God! thought Kirk. *From Spock, that sounds almost like surprise.*

"Captain?" asked Sulu, half expecting a course change.

"As you were, Mr. Sulu. I expect this mystery has remained undetected for quite some time now. A few more days aren't going to make much difference."

Spock and Kirk found themselves in the office of Admiral Stephen Turner on board the Space Dock.

"So you see, sir," went on Kirk, "it is my belief that Man felt the Moon had been fully explored - after all, we had lived on it for a couple of decades. So, when the newer, more sophisticated, and indeed, more powerful long range sensors were installed in Starships, we never bothered to turn them on the Moon."

"It is a remarkable discovery!" said Turner, slapping a hand on his forehead. "Purely by chance!" He seemed genuinely amazed and pleased.

"Sir," interrupted the calm tone of Spock, "I request permission to investigate further."

"Indeed, Spock?" said Turner, in a perhaps unconscious mimicry of Spock's own tone and facial expressions, "I was just about to encourage it! I suggest then that you take the Enterprise back to the Moon. We clearly require the sophisticated equipment that only a Starship possesses."

The promise of a Terran shore leave shimmered, and somewhat appropriately for a shore leave, got up and left Kirk's mind. The man in him felt a slight rebellion at the turn of events, but it was soundly quashed by the officer in him. Beside, if any other ship had been assigned to Chekov's Discovery, he would have been as angry as hell! How would the crew take it? Oh, well, they'd just put up with the disappointment, buckle down, and become the thorough professionals he knew and respected.

Twenty-four hours later, as the last of the crew returned, courtesy of transporters, from the greatly truncated shore leave, the Starship Enterprise stood prepared for an Earth-Lunar jaunt, one of the first to be made since the late 20th century.

The bridge buzzed with activity, and the babble of preparation filtering onto the bridge from Uhura's board only contained one or two disgruntled but good natured comments about what was now known ship wide as Chekov's Discovery. Kirk could well imagine many a crew member inserting an obscenity between those two words, one that you could almost still detect, conspicuous by its absence.

Well, no matter. Subconsciously, Kirk noted the reports of readiness from the sub-components of the Enterprise, and was well prepared for Uhura's verification of the situation.

Spock straightened himself from the hooded viewer at the Science station, turned while subconsciously pulling at his blue tunic, straightening it in turn, before reporting that all systems were nominal.

"Very well, Lt. Uhura, Mr. Spock." He looked ahead at the viewer. Instead of stars, he saw the distant doors of the huge Space Dock which were already beginning to open. Looking slightly down, he could see the figure of Chekov, the Discoverer. Chekov seemed slightly tense, perhaps over-sensitive to the reaction of the crew to the cancellation of shore leave, but also perhaps wondering exactly what they had discovered.

"Mr. Chekov," Kirk said, softly. "Plot a course for the Moon".

"Plotted and laid in, Keptain".

Kirk's eyes fell on the second shift helmsman. Kirk always missed Sulu's presence at the helm, but Sulu had his sister's wedding to attend. After all, they would be staying within the limited confines of the solar system. Sulu himself had seemed a little forlorn at not being there to follow up Chekov's Discovery.

Still, the second-shift helmsman seemed a more than competent replacement. With a few more star-hours at the helm under his belt...

"Mr. Bowman, you may proceed."

"Aye, aye, sir."

Bowman's hands flew across the helm and the Enterprise made its way, sedately and serenely, towards open space.

Right about now... thought Kirk.

On cue, the turbo lift doors swished open. Feeling in a somewhat mischievous mood, Kirk said, "Hello, Bones," without turning to look.

Without breaking stride, McCoy came down the bridge steps to come to rest at the right-hand side of the Captain's chair.

"Taking lessons from Spock, Jim?" McCoy ventured, in his endearing Georgia drawl. Spock was already in motion, approaching the left-hand side of the chair.

"And what talents are you attributing to me now, Doctor?"

"Oh, just the usual Vulcan mysticism, Spock."

"If by that you are implying some sort of extension of the Mind Meld, that allows Vulcans to recognise people approaching unseen, you are mistaken."

McCoy ventured that perhaps Vulcans could detect people by the aura of the emissions of the brain.

"If detection by brain emissions is your theory, let me assure you, Dr. McCoy, that your unexpected arrival shall forever remain a surprise. Excuse me."

With that, Spock raised an eyebrow at the Captain, turned and returned to his station. Kirk, clamping his jaws to suppress laughter, turned to McCoy, who was speechless for once.

"Hell, Jim," he whispered, "that damned Vulcan is getting a sense of humour! I'll be damned. I'm doing my job too well!" Shaking his head, McCoy went up the bridge steps to the turbo lift and the refuge of Sick Bay.

At impulse power, it would be a matter of minutes before entering Lunar orbit.

Their strategy had been worked out in advance at Admiral Turner's office. A team of observers would beam down to the magnetic anomaly held in the crater Tycho. Then the powerful cargo transporters of the Enterprise would lock onto TMA-1 and beam it to the surface. Kirk stabbed the communications button on the arm of his chair.

"Landing party to transporter room. Science Officer Spock, Geologist Carstairs, Communications Officer Uhura."

Spock turned towards the turbo lift, gathering up Lt. Uhura in his stride, with the natural grace he seemed to possess.

"Mr. Chekov, take over the Science station," ordered Kirk.

"Sair?" said Chekov, almost plaintively.

Kirk knew what the situation was.

"Yes, Mr. Chekov," he replied. It was a statement, not a question.

"Thank you, sair!" enthused Chekov, as he followed Spock and Uhura to the turbo lift.

Damn it! thought Kirk, *if only Bones had been here to see that piece of telepathy!*

Kirk then turned and ordered the second-shift science officer, navigator and communications officer to the bridge.

In a room adjacent to the Transporter Room, the small landing party was dressing in the thin Environmental suits and gathering up equipment they would require on the Lunar surface. Spock slung a tricorder strap over his head. Uhura, pleased to be given something other to do than open hailing frequencies, was briefly refamiliarising herself with a piece of communications equipment she rarely got to use. In simple terms it was a combination of a simple video-camera and a tricorder; it recorded images in several ways -- conventionally, and as infra-red heat images, and as x-rays, and as any number of other ways. It was therefore more powerful than a tricorder. It was part of a Communications Officer's job to accompany landing parties on unusual missions; and this certainly counted as one.

Eagerly, she led the way through to the Transporter room, where Scott, for one, had the honesty to draw breath at the sight of Uhura in a tight fitting silver Environment suit.

Uhura noticed, but chose not to ignore it. While the others were taking up their positions on the Transporter discs, she went over to Scotty, and whispered, "Why, thank you, Mr. Scott!"

As Scott started to blush, she added, "And I think I'll like your moustache when it grows in!"

She turned and, almost elfin-like, skipped towards her spot in the Transporter chamber, leaving Scott to finger the light growth above his lip and to marvel at how Uhura could go from satirical vamping to behaving like an excited child on an outing.

"Aye. Well," he breathed.

"Energise, Mr. Scott," commanded Spock.

"Energising, sir!" Scott moved the levers with a smooth familiarity.

A slight moment of nothingness, and Spock's view of the Transporter room was replaced by the unrelenting black-and-grey harshness of the Lunar surface. The sun had not yet risen above the edge of the Tycho crater, and the Environmental suit's infra-red visor had come into automatic operation. Subconsciously, Spock glanced round to ensure the fellow members of the landing party had arrived. Illogical to do so; if anything had gone wrong with the transportation, Mr. Scott would have already detected it and would be attempting to communicate. Illogical, but nonetheless, strangely reassuring.

Spock fingered a button just below the helmet of his suit.

"Mr. Scott?"

"Aye, sir, ready with the cargo transporter". Scott was still in the number one personnel transporter room, but through the Enterprise's local area computer network his console was now in direct communication with the cargo transporter down in the Engineering section. It now reflected the status and offered the control of the larger system.

"Proceed, Mr. Scott."

The black sky above the flat grey cratered landscape in front of them began to shimmer, but when the last glittering of the transporter effect disappeared, they were confronted by an object that was so black it was difficult to discern its boundaries. It was so black, light itself seemed to fall into it.

Uhura, since beam-down, had been busy with her video-tricorder. Spock joined her, while bringing his own tricorder into play. Carstairs, the geologist, was already intent on a stream of data flowing across the screen of his own specialised tricorder. He was subconsciously moving closer to the object.

"Carstairs!" said Spock, sharply.

"Yes, sir?" Carstairs replied, promptly. Realising the gist of Spock's exclamation, he stopped moving, and replied sheepishly, "Sorry, sir."

"Lieutenant, what are the dimensions of the object?" asked Spock of the geologist.

"8 feet by 18 feet by 2 feet, sir," responded Carstairs, examining one window of the multi-windowed tricorder display; although what he'd reported was straightforward enough, his voice had sounded pleased, but his face held a puzzled look, doubtless caused by a read-out in another window.

Spock considered the dimensions for a few seconds before muttering, "One four nine."

Uhura looked at Spock. "Sir?"

"The ratio of the dimensions, Miss Uhura. The squares of the first three natural numbers. This is a manufactured artifact, not a natural formation."

He turned to Carstairs. "What is puzzling you, Lieutenant?"

"This read-out, sir. I cannot measure its age."

"As I have said in the past, instruments can only measure that which they have been designed to measure. In an infinite universe, there will always be unknowns."

"Exactly, Mr. Spock," rejoined Carstairs. "I am also unable to obtain a 100 percent reading of its chemical composition."

Hidden in the shade of the helmet of his Environment suit, the Spockian eyebrow was rising. "Fascinating."

The Sun was, finally, sweeping up over the lip of Tycho crater. Its rays touched the surface of the oldest object yet

encountered by the Federation, touched something that had remained truly untouched since the dawn of time.

The black monolith responded by emitting a pulse of energy in the direction of Jupiter. The energy covered such a wide band that the tricorders screamed momentarily in protest and Spock, with his elevated telepathic abilities, could even detect a mental wavelength.

So close was he now to the monolith - although he could not consciously remember walking towards it - the shock of mental contact caused him to stumble and lean against it. His gloved hands touched the almost frictionless surface of the monolith, surely the oldest and most sophisticated fire alarm in the galaxy. The message it was sounding was simply, "They are here."

Spock straightened from his Science station, and turned his attention to the forward view screen. The gas giant Jupiter and its red spot filled the screen.

On the Enterprise, Uhura's sophisticated on-board communications monitoring system had easily tracked the energy shout across the solar system, terminating somewhere in the vicinity of Io.

No sooner had the landing party returned to the Enterprise than the ship had leapt - at impulse power - away from its tight Lunar orbit.

"What do you make of it, Spock?" asked Kirk.

"It was clearly some form of test, Captain," replied Spock. "The Monolith had been hidden while your ancestors were but apemen, in the dawn of pre-Human history. It was hidden in a place where only a Mankind possessed of rudimentary space flight could hope to find it. The finders also had to possess technology equal to the task of locating it."

Spock paused. "Indeed, once found, it could only have been excavated by brute force techniques."

Kirk joined in. "We wouldn't have needed a transporter."

"Indeed not, Captain. If our early Moonbases had not been so readily abandoned for the rest of the terraformed Solar System, and without the discovery of the Warp Drive by Zephram Cochrane, we might have found the Monolith several centuries ago."

"Still, Spock," said Kirk, "given the age of that 'fire alarm' - "

"As you so poetically put it, Spock," interjected McCoy.

"- a few centuries either way should not matter."

McCoy looked thoughtful. "Hmm. They were waiting for us to develop space flight. Waiting for Mankind to leave Earth."

"Waiting for the child to leave home?" said Kirk, helpfully.

"Out of the cradle, endlessly orbiting," mused Spock.

"Interesting phrase, Spock," rejoined McCoy. Kirk could sense another Spock-McCoy jag coming on. He sank lower into the command chair, preparing to get out of the line of fire.

"Do you see the monolith as a father figure?" McCoy said, in his opening gambit. "Well, of course you would! Hard, featureless, silent, unemotional. The perfect Vulcan parent!"

As Spock turned towards his station, he said, "I would hesitate, if I were you, before telling my mother she reminded you of a monolith."

"Coming up on Io, Captain," Bowman said.

"Thank you, Mr. Bowman."

A barely perceptible nod of the black haired head was all the detectable response. Hmm. He seemed more inscrutable than Sulu. Bowman had served for a time in Spock's science section, mused Kirk. But, no, he was being unfair to his friend. David Bowman had always been the serious, quiet type of person. He'd go far, but unless he developed a softer edge, he'd probably never make Captain.

"There it is, Captain!" Bowman shouted, excitedly pointing at the screen.

Good grief! thought Kirk. "Thank you, Mr. Bowman," he repeated. Bowman must be really caught up in this. A growing tension in his stomach reminded him that he was, as well!

Another - or was it the same? - black Monolith appeared to be in orbit about Io. Again, against the black starfield, it was hard - though fascinating - to discern its shape.

"Uhura - enhance."

Lt. Uhura manipulated the screen to cause the starfield to whiten to a grey consistency, causing the Monolith to stand out in greater relief.

"Spock?" Kirk knew every sensor on the ship would be hammering at the softly spinning surface of the Monolith; in turn, it was shiny and reflective and then dark and deep in shadow.

"Readings are garbled, Captain. Either our instruments are incapable of recording the alien artifact's general composition, or it has a shielding device."

"Take us in nearer, Bowman"

The Enterprise edged forward.

McCoy, still standing in his usual position next to the command chair, had never seen the bridge so full of people. Departmental heads, such as Scott, had come up to the bridge to man their bridge stations personally. The main viewscreen's contents were being piped throughout the ship, but the sense of history was so great, people just wanted to be here. There had been alien contacts in the past, but this promised to be the first with the oldest and most intelligent of all.

It was all too boring for words.

"Why," drawled McCoy, "it looks just like a damned Hershey bar!"

That had the reaction McCoy had wanted. He even joined in with the general laughter, but it died quickly, in the face of this emblem of an ageless civilisation.

Moments passed in silence on the Bridge.

Wordlessly, as the crew sat mesmerised by the floating, slowly rotating, featureless black Monolith, Spock slid silently out of his swivel chair and headed for the turbo lift.

The lift moved downwards and back towards the Engineering cylinder, and as it opened, Spock glided out into the corridor, a tall, gaunt, almost invisible shadow, moving with the peculiar cat-like grace of his race.

He imperceptibly moved into the Excursion suit locker rooms and seemed almost to materialise behind the Engineering ensign whose duty it was to maintain the suits in working order. Spock's long delicate fingers reached to the nerves running invisibly in the ensign's neck and passed a jolt of bio-energy into the ensign's nervous system, inducing unconsciousness. The Vulcan nerve pinch, a non-violent method of overcoming an opponent, was as much a part of his make-up as a peace-seeking Vulcan as was the stealth required to put one in a position to use the pinch.

Quickly, he donned his Excursion suit and strode to the airlock.

Chekov looked up from the security panel; "Air lock cycling, Captain."

"What?" said Kirk.

"Environmental suit activated - why, it's Mr. Spock!"

Spock let the gravity of Jupiter pull him slowly away from the Enterprise before activating his communicator. He ensured it was set to transmit and not receive.

Uhura turned to face Kirk's back. "Receiving transmission from Mr. Spock."

"Put it on the speaker, Lt."

"Captain. I am endeavouring to make contact with the intelligence that doubtless stands behind the Monolith instrumentalities."

"Uhura, patch me in!"

"I'm sorry, Captain, but Mr. Spock has selected transmit mode only."

"Damn!"

"While on the surface of the Moon," continued Spock, "during my contact with the Monolith's surface, I had a hint of some fleeting mental communication."

Kirk punched the communication button on the thick arm of his chair. "Kyle! Lock onto Mr. Spock and beam him aboard!"

Kyle, acting transporter chief, asked where Spock was. Kirk ordered Uhura to pipe the viewscreen picture down to the transporter room.

"Trying now, Sir... Sorry, Captain, that monolith must be causing some sort of spatial disturbance. I can't lock on."

"Thank you, Mr. Kyle." Kirk looked up, towards the helm.

"Bowman!" said Kirk, sharply.

Bowman, mesmerised by the Monolith, physically jumped at the mention of his name.

"Yes, sir!"

"Sorry about that!" Kirk murmured softly, somewhat embarrassed. In a normal voice, he directed Bowman to get down to the Transport Pod hanger and get out there and bring Spock back.

Spock went on, "I intend to make contact with this larger Monolith."

Bowman, moving with an urgency imbued within him by more than his Captain's orders, launched the Travel Pod "Discovery" out into space in almost record time.

As soon as the Discovery cleared its moorings, the Enterprise's main view screen split into a number of windows, one showing the view to the front of the ship (as usual), another of the Pod's forward view port, and a third showing a constant monitoring of the Pod's status and telemetry.

The constant stream of information presented on the banked area of instruments before Bowman became subliminal sources of data as he shunted the Pod towards the figure of Spock, releasing short bursts of dilithium crystal produced energy.

"I am now activating the rocket pack." Spock flipped open a covering on the arm of his rocket pack and activated the count-down. The slight additional flurry of micro-processor activity registered on the sensors of the Travel Pod. Bowman locked the Pod's systems on the read-outs from Spock's rocket pack. Spock wouldn't get much further away from him now. The Pod's computer system was echoing the rocket pack's count-down, and Bowman braced himself.

"Two One Zero."

A jolt of acceleration, and then the forward view port was filled with black; not the blackness of space, interspersed with the light of distant suns, but the unrelenting monotonous blackness of the Monolith.

Not quite unending blackness. There was the figure of Spock, arms stretching to touch the surface...

No! thought Bowman. *It is not for him!* He was gripped by an insane anger, born of jealousy.

Expertly, he moved the Pod and its fierce looking, clinically white extendible arms towards the figure of Spock, still straining to touch the Monolith although logically he must know he was not near enough to touch it yet, but emotionally questing for the answers to the enigma.

His fingertips brush the surface for a fraction of an instant, and his mind is flame. He feels pain about his midsection and in the next moment is flung away from the Monolith by a white clawed arm.

He begins to spin in empty space before a familiar tingle grabs his body and he is gone.

Bowman begins to try to steady the reaction to the Pod's throwing motion, but as the Pod tumbles over the edge of the Monolith he sees the Enterprise pass beyond the range of his vision and then into the depths of the Monolith itself.

His last recorded words as a Human crackle onto the bridge.

"My God! It's full of stars!"

The Pod is sucked into the Monolith and disappears. On the bridge, both the Pod's front viewport and telemetry windows go dead.

Three hours later, a meeting was convened in the Briefing room. Spock was brought in, sitting in a hover chair, by an angry-looking McCoy. However, McCoy's anger was being held in check by his concern for his colleague.

"Well, Mr. Spock?" began Kirk.

"If by that single word you are enquiring about my state of health I can reply yes, I am well."

McCoy snorted. "For someone whose mind ceased to exist for a fraction of a second..."

Spock's eyebrow lifted. "If, on the other hand, you are intending to elicit an explanation..."

"No explanation, Mr. Spock," responded Kirk. "What you did was wrong, no matter your motives, and I will be forced to enter it in my log and in your record."

Spock's face remained seemingly impassive, but Kirk, who knew him well, could read a resigned "as-you-will" expression.

"However," Kirk went on, "I would like to request a report!"

"Would that I had one to give. At the time of contact, I was privy to a glimpse of an ancient, overwhelming, infinite intelligence and wisdom. A receptacle as small and as primitive as my brain could not hope to capture even an infinitesimal fraction of that galaxy of knowledge and experience."

"Hmm," mused Kirk. Spock had delivered his statement in a silent, reverent tone. Anything that could move Spock to such a religious experience... And yet, it was important to note that he had given equal weight to the wisdom and experience as he had to the

intelligence. Even McCoy seemed moved, unable to follow up what seemed like a straight-line of a situation he couldn't miss out on. Instead, all he said was, "My God! What are we dealing with here?"

"God," echoed Spock, in a whisper.

Three hours had passed since Bowman entered the Monolith. It was clear that this Monolith had the function of a Star Gate, linking this area of space with another. Another, beyond the range of the Enterprise to monitor the telemetry of Bowman's Pod. The description of his voyage and what occurred at its end are unrecorded, and best left to greater talents than those of your current scribe.

By then, Spock had recovered and we find the triumvirate huddled round the central table of the Briefing Room, reviewing what little facts they have available.

"Strange," said Spock.

"Yes?" replied Kirk.

"We have encountered two Monoliths, of vastly differing sizes, yet both in the one-four-nine ratio. Both have different functions: one, a fire alarm; this, a star gate; but both of the same form. Function defines form; yet both forms are the same."

"Could that thing," said McCoy, indicating the Monolith, "lead to the galaxy of the Monolith-makers?"

"I cannot say," replied Spock. "Of the Monolith-makers, we can only speculate. These are the oldest known artifacts within Federation space; they are therefore the artifacts of the oldest known civilisation. From what little we can tell of the artifacts, they are far in advance of any science known to the Federation. Perhaps it is to be hoped that the civilisation is dead. If it has continued to progress -- "

"Surely we would have had some evidence of their continued existence?" said McCoy.

"But space is infinite, Bones," interjected Kirk. "Maybe they passed this way but once."

"Interesting. But why set all this up?" added Spock. "We have met two monoliths in sequence; will we meet more in the future? Or, perhaps, even more importantly, did we meet them... " He paused momentarily.

"In the past!" exclaimed Kirk.

"You mean," joined McCoy, "that when they left a monolith on the moon some three million years ago, they may have also left one on Earth?"

"Indeed."

"And its purpose?" asked Kirk.

"As I said, Captain, the function of the monolith is not defined by its form. We could engage in some creative speculation,

but with the absence of facts, it will simply remain speculation. Nevertheless, at that time, at the dawn of Man, what would be the most worthwhile function of a Monolith?"

"Could they... " groped Kirk... "have set Man on the path that would eventually have enabled him to take the test on the Moon?"

"Hell of a lead-time," murmured McCoy.

Spock's eyebrow rose. "That is, indeed, a piece of logical speculation, Captain. A teaching machine... "

"An evolution accelerator?" interrupted McCoy.

"The missing link?" whispered Kirk.

"And should Bowman encounter a monolith with the same function... " wondered Spock.

The discussion was terminated as, in the next instant, the Enterprise's sensors went momentarily wild, and a pulse of light flashed from the Monolith.

The images captured were replayed on the central viewer of the Briefing room, at greatly reduced speed.

"Well," said McCoy, "it's been a long time since I delivered a baby."



OF MYTHS AND LEGENDS

And is it true that I am old?
The face within my mirror tells me that I am
And so I must believe it.
Yet still my heart leaps up to boldly go
Beyond the farthest star - beyond where Man has dared to go
Though now I'm tied to Earth, for earth I am.
We are Time's puppets and his fools;
We may not cheat the Reaper
Nor deny the Ferryman his passage
The final voyage into eternal night where journeys end.
This is the truth and so I must accept.

Yet surely this is also true,
That locked within the far-flung galaxies where once we walked
The trackless space between the magic spheres,
Remains through all Eternity
The memory of our former selves, forever part of what
we hungered to explore.
So shall we go adventuring beyond the end of time -
For myths and legends never die.

Sue Jones

This poem is dedicated to the Enterprise and her crew and the cast of Star Trek who created the legend.



FINAL FAREWELLS

by

Kimberly Pederson

Captain Jean Luc Picard, in full dress uniform, stood stiffly next to his equally decked out First Officer in Transporter Room 3. They awaited the arrival of a Very Important Person and his family whom the Enterprise was to convey to Huttis VII on the far reaches of Romulan/Federation space.

"Nervous, Captain?" Riker inquired politely, with a mischievous glint in his eye. He knew full well that his Captain was not at all relaxed.

"It shows that badly, Number One? I suppose I should polish up my acting abilities." Picard shifted his weight and clasped his hands behind his back. "Perhaps it is you who should be nervous, Will. Mr. Spock served as First Officer aboard the very first Starship named Enterprise - for several years. He might be here just to check on your performance."

"Vulcan Central reports Mr. Spock and family are ready for beam-up, Captain." Transporter Chief O'Brien interrupted Riker's reply before the words could form on his lips.

"Very well, Chief O'Brien," Picard said. "Acknowledge their message and beam them aboard."

Chief O'Brien went about his task quickly and efficiently. The shimmer of the transporter beam soon materialised five Vulcan figures on the platform; a man, a woman and three children.

"Mr. Spock! Welcome to the Enterprise." Picard's hand opened effortlessly in the Vulcan salute.

"Live long and prosper, Captain, Commander," Spock said. "I thank you." He turned to the woman and said, "Allow me to present she who is my wife."

The Vulcan woman graciously nodded her head and the three youngsters maintained their posture of quiet attention to the proceedings.

Captain Picard made a small, formal bow. "I am honoured by your presence, Mrs. Spock. I hope you and your children find travelling with us comfortable.

"My name is Saavik, Captain," she said, smiling slightly. "Please feel free to call me by my name. And I am sure we shall find our accommodation most comfortable - this is, after all, the Enterprise. The Enterprise has rarely been found wanting."

"You are indeed most gracious, Saavik," Picard said. He gestured to the door. "Allow me to show you all to your quarters."

The family of Spock all began to move towards the door in order

to follow their guide. Riker remained rooted to the floor and stared for a moment.

"Pardon me, ma'am, but aren't you *Captain* Saavik - Captain of the Enterprise B?"

Saavik looked mildly surprised. "Your First Officer is most astute, Captain Picard," she said. She turned to Riker. "Yes, Mr. Riker, I was once Captain Saavik of the Enterprise B. But no more. After several years I decided to change my career to scientific research with my husband and the rearing of our children. Perhaps when we are settled in we could discuss this further. Please look me up when you have some off-duty time. The distraction might prove... invigorating." She smiled at Riker with her eyes.

Both men instantly recognised the invitation and polite dismissal.

"Forgive us for keeping you standing here," Picard apologised. "If you all will follow me?" He again gestured towards the door.

Riker nearly tripped over his feet in his excitement as he turned to follow Mr. Spock's family out the door. Former First Officer Spock was one thing, but add Captain Saavik - ! Her exploits as Captain of the Enterprise B were engraved on his mind like marble. He would have to make the most of this particular "milk run".

As Riker headed out the door he said to O'Brien, "Please see to it that Mr. Spock's luggage is beamed to Cargo Bay S4. And have a team ready to take it to the VIP suite."

"Yes, sir. Will do," O'Brien replied as he turned back to his console.

Back on the bridge, Picard leaned back in his Captain's chair feeling a bit like a schoolboy. He had so many questions he wanted to ask both Spock and Saavik. He shared Will's excitement. It wasn't often that living history walked into a room with one.

In the corridor just outside the VIP quarters in the family section of the Enterprise, a little boy of about 7 standard years leaned disconsolately against a wall. He was in the middle of a sulk and didn't want to be around his family. They all disapproved of him when he was in a mood.

He was staring so intently at the toes of his boots that he didn't notice that he had company until he heard her voice.

"Hi! You're new here, aren't you? At least, I haven't seen you before and I know practically everyone. Daddy said we'd be getting new crew at Vulcan so you must be part of that bunch. I'm almost 8 and my name is Melaun. What's yours?"

All that friendly, non-stop chatter took him by surprise. No-one on Vulcan ever said more than they needed to. He looked up from studying his boots and his gaze met a pert, pixie face with almond-shaped sparkling green eyes and a friendly grin. The hair that framed the face was pulled into a jet-black pigtail on each

side - one of which was trying to escape the confines of the band that held it in place. He'd never seen such a face before. Most of the ones he knew never smiled, except maybe mother once in a while.

"What's the matter? You do have a name, don't you?" Melaun peered intently at him.

He mumbled something.

"What?" Melaun asked. "I didn't hear you."

He sighed. "James. I said my name is James."

Melaun looked startled. "Gee, that's a funny name for a Vulcan! All the other Vulcan boys I know have names that start with 'S' - you know, like Sagin, Suran, Saketh - stuff like that."

"Well, I guess I'm just not a proper Vulcan." The toe of his boot looked very interesting again.

"Really?" Melaun was fascinated. "I've never met an improper Vulcan before. What makes you not a proper Vulcan?" Childhood curiosity overcame courtesy at that point.

James looked at her inquisitive face and decided that he liked her. So he answered her question. "Well, I'm rather a mixed-up sort of Vulcan."

Her eyes widened. "Really? Mixed up how? Do you get all confused or something?"

James almost grinned. "No. I'm mixed up biologically. I'm only half Vulcan. Mother is half Romulan and Father is half Human. That makes me a Vulcan/Human/Romulan mix."

"Human and *Romulan*? Really?" Romulans were enough of the stuff of legends for Melaun that she was totally fascinated by this revelation. "That is so interesting! Does that mean you have emotions and are allowed to smile and stuff? T'Mia and T'Pera never do. They're my friends, but they don't have any emotions and don't know how to smile. Do you?"

The grin actually materialised on James' small face. "Yes. That's my problem. Amanda says I must have got all Romulan and Human genes because I don't know how to be a real Vulcan like she does."

"Who's Amanda?"

"She's my oldest sister. She's almost fourteen and believes that she can be a proper Vulcan even with all the mixed-up genes we have."

"Amanda isn't a proper Vulcan name either," Melaun observed.

"No," said James. "She is named for my grandmother - my father's mother. She was Human. She died a long time before any of us was born. My sister T'Meer is the only one with a truly Vulcan name. She's ten. Mother said that at least one of her children needed to have a proper Vulcan name. She's not named for anyone."

"That's sad about your grandma," Melaun sympathised. "My grandma is still alive. She lives on Earth." Melaun had such a

dynamic relationship with her Japanese grandmother - even long distance - that she could not imagine being without her. She felt sorry for James' loss even though he had never known his grandma. "Well," she said, "if Amanda is named for your grandma, who are you named for? Since you don't have a proper Vulcan name you must be named for someone. James is a Human name."

James nodded. "Yes, it is. Father named me for his Captain. Father was his First Officer aboard the very first Starship Enterprise. He told me that they were good friends. I never knew *him* either." James nursed a small resentment at that. His name was a significant part of his unhappiness on Vulcan. The other Vulcan children in his class at school and in the area where he lived with his parents never lost an opportunity to harass him about his Human name. And if they knew anything about his mother's background, they tormented him with being a violent Romulan as well. James' young heart was surrounded by the pain of non-acceptance and though he tried with all his might he just couldn't seem to master being a proper Vulcan. Thus far the only thing that had helped him through was the fact that he had survived - and quite well - the Vulcan test of Kahs-wan shortly after his seventh birthday. His father seemed to understand and had never once chastised him about not being Vulcan, but James had a hard time accepting himself.

Melaun's voice jerked him back to the present. He had never met anyone who could talk so much!

"Captain James? I never heard of a Captain James of the Enterprise before." Melaun had never been much on history. She was primarily interested in how things worked.

"Not Captain James!" James said. "Captain James T. Kirk of the USS Enterprise NCC 1701." He recited as if by rote; he was totally unimpressed. He wished he had been named for grandfather Sarek. He could have lived much more easily with that. James was a totally illogical name for a Vulcan boy.

Melaun was suitably impressed. She *had* heard of Captain Kirk - at least in elementary history class. "That's really neat, James," she said. "He was a great Captain. You should be proud. We studied some of the things he and his crew did and it was more interesting than the rest of the history class." She made a face. "But that was a long, long time ago. Gee - your dad must be *really* old!"

"He's not too old for a Vulcan." James defended his father from the charge of being elderly. "He's only 130 standard years. That's pretty young for a Vulcan. My grandfather is over 200 standard years and he's only just getting old."

"That seems old to me, though," Melaun declared. "My daddy is 32 and my mom is 30 and sometimes they seem old to me. Imagine being a whole *century* old!"

This discussion on the ages of their parents might have gone on for some time, but the door of the suite where James' family was staying opened and a Vulcan girl stepped outside.

"Mother asked me to tell you to come in for the evening meal," she said, directing her statement to James. "We will be eating shortly and Captain Picard and Commander Riker will be joining us. Please do not be tardy." She went back inside.

"Who was that?" Melaun asked.

"That was Amanda," James told her. "And I had better go inside. Mother won't like it if I am late - especially since I am just out here in the corridor."

Melaun grinned at him. "I don't blame you. I don't like to make my mom mad either. May I see you tomorrow? I have classes all morning, but my afternoon is free."

"I'll ask father and mother," James said, "but I think it will be all right."

"Good!" Melaun grinned her infectious grin again. "I'll see you right after lunch - about 1300 hours. I can show you around the parts of the Enterprise that I can go to and stuff. Would you like to do that?"

James brightened considerably. "Yes! I would like that very much."

"Kay, then! See you tomorrow!" Melaun set off down the corridor in the direction of her family's quarters and James watched her go. He found her fascinating and he liked her. She was the first child that he had met who just accepted him because he was him. It gave him a warm feeling inside. He went inside the door to his new home for while he was on the Enterprise, wondering what Captain Picard and Commander Riker were like.

For the next several days the two children were nearly inseparable. Spock and Saavik had waived James' classroom lessons during the two weeks they would be on board the Enterprise. They had determined that the experience of being on a Starship would be an education in and of itself. They were pleased that young Melaun had taken James under her wing. Since the child actually lived aboard ship she would be able to tell James a great deal from first hand experience. However, both parents wanted to make sure that James and his sisters were not neglected by the adults on board. They wanted the children to have a well-rounded experience of the Starship.

During the course of the afternoons that they had spent together, James had learned a great deal about his young tour guide. Of course, the way that Melaun loved to chatter, it would have been almost impossible not to learn any of her history. Her father was Lt. Sean McPherson who spent most of the days below in engineering. He was forever fixing things and tinkering with those things that didn't need fixing in a continual effort to make them better. Melaun's mother was Lt. Yama McPherson. She was a medical doctor and spent most of her days in sickbay with various patients or with her nose in a book doing some research or other. It was from her parents that Melaun had inherited her great desire to learn how things worked, how to put them together and how to take them apart. She had confided to James that some day she really wanted to be the Chief Engineer on a ship like the Enterprise. James really had no doubt that she would do just that some day.

"Well," Melaun said, swinging her legs back and forth as she sat in a chair designed for the comfort of adults. "What do you want to do today?"

The children were on the recreation deck. They had spent a great deal of time there recently. Without an adult, they were running out of places they could visit with impunity.

James was far from bored. He had inherited a strong dose of the Vulcan trait of insatiable curiosity and had been finding the entire trip... fascinating, as his father would have put it.

"I'm not sure," he said slowly. "We could go back to the school rooms and talk to some of the teachers again. I found Mr. Antheneiid most interesting to talk to." Mr. Antheneiid was a Sulamid who used at least six of his eight tentacles to help him articulate as he taught and the young Vulcan boy had been captivated by the experience.

Melaun made a face. "Spoken like a true Vulcan!" she exclaimed. "We actually have free time and *you* want to go back to school! Yuck!"

"Education is the key to great freedom and knowledge in this life," James said in an injured tone. "Besides, Mr. Antheneiid is not quite like anyone I have ever met before."

"He's a teacher, and I spend enough time with them, I'm sure!" Melaun retorted. She swung her legs in a faster rhythm, thinking furiously. "Say! I've got a neat idea... but you have to promise not to tell." She struck a conspirator's pose, looking at him expectantly.

"What?" he asked.

"Promise first," she insisted.

"How can I promise when I don't know what it is? It isn't dangerous, is it?" James tried not to look worried.

"No, silly! Have I ever done anything that would be dangerous with you?" she asked.

James studied her face. He noticed that she had freckles sprinkled lightly over the bridge of her nose. They looked rather cute there. "No," he said, "but you're asking me to promise something when I don't know what it is I am promising. Is that truly fair of you? We are friends."

"Okay," she sighed. "My idea is neat, but kids aren't really allowed there without a parent or teacher to accompany them. I've been there so many times though that I'm sure we could do it and not get caught."

"Aha!" James sounded as though he had solved a true mystery. "You are talking about something dangerous!"

Melaun shook her head, swinging pigtails from side to side. "No, no, it's not dangerous. It's just the holodeck."

James was curious. "What's the holodeck? I don't remember being there."

"That's because you haven't, yet," Melaun said. "And you have only four days left before we get to Huttis VII, so we'd better try it."

"Perhaps we should get an adult to accompany us if that is one of the rules," James suggested sagely. "We wouldn't want to cause any problems."

"It's the middle of the day," Melaun protested. "They're all busy now and won't want to bother with us. Come on! We won't stay very long, and I know how to activate it. We could have a lot of fun there."

"What is it, first?" James wanted to know. "I have never seen one before."

"Really?" Melaun was incredulous. "It's just a recreation room really. You go in and tell the computer that you want it to look like a spring day on Earth and that you want to ride a horse or something. And the computer simulates a spring day on Earth and even provides the horses for you to ride. It seems so real that you forget that you're on a Starship in the middle of space. The teachers mostly use it for educational purposes. Last month we got to see the Battle of Waterloo as if we were really there. It was neat, but rather gory."

James, not completely up on Earth's history yet, was not about to ask what the Battle of Waterloo entailed, but he was completely intrigued. Imagine a room where a computer could take you to any place you wanted to be - so to speak. His curiosity and desire to experience such a place over-rode his common sense.

"When can we try it?" he asked.

"How about now?" Melaun suggested, a glint in her emerald eyes.

The holodeck was the oddest looking room James had ever seen. It was completely darkened except for the vertical and horizontal white lines that criss-crossed on the floor, walls and ceiling. He imagined they must be some sort of outlet for the computer imagery, but he wasn't sure.

"*This* is the holodeck?" he asked, somewhat doubtful of its promised offerings.

"Yep!" Melaun tossed her pigtails. "Watch this!" Speaking to the air, she said, "Computer, simulate a spring day on the eastern border of Tokyo, Japan of Earth." Melaun loved being in Japan in the spring. She had spent many pleasant days with her grandmother there last year.

Instantly, the room they were standing in disappeared and James found himself standing next to Melaun on a grassy hill, surrounded by young trees. He could see a city in the distance off to the west and birds were chirping their music overhead among the trees.

"Fascinating!" he breathed. "I have never seen anything like this before!"

Melaun flung out her arms and turned in an ecstatic twirl. "Isn't this great? It's almost like being at home with grandma!"

"Is this where your grandma lives?" James asked.

"If we were on Earth, her house would be just beyond the rise

over there. She doesn't like living right in the city," Melaun told him. "She believes in a closer walk with wildlife and green things." She looked slyly at James. "Would you like to meet my grandma?"

"How can I do that if she lives on Earth?" James wondered as he continued to inspect his marvellous surroundings. The walls had simply disappeared and the countryside seemed to go on forever. "How does the computer do this?" he wondered.

"Just watch this!" Melaun said. "Computer, from your personality files on Yokomo Yamamura, make a likeness as close as possible to my grandmother."

"Working," the computer voice responded. "There is a 93.2% probability of producing a compatible likeness of Yokomo Yamamura."

"Then do it," Melaun commanded.

Not knowing what to expect, James turned around in several directions half expecting a computer ghost to appear somewhere. Instead, a warm hand was laid on his shoulder. He turned to see the lightly lined face of an older Japanese woman smiling warmly at him.

"Hello," she said to him. "I am Yokomo Yamamura. And who might you be?"

Startled at the arrival of a third person in the holodeck with them, James was tongue-tied. But Melaun suffered from no such problem.

"Grandma!" She flung open her arms and gave the woman a bear hug with great enthusiasm.

"Melaun, my child!" The image of Yokomo Yamamura returned the hug with equal enthusiasm. "How good of you and your young friend to pay me a visit. However, your mother did not mention that you would be docking back on Earth so soon since your last visit. When did you arrive?"

Melaun grinned up at the older woman. "We're on the holodeck, Grandma. We're still on the Enterprise. I asked the computer to make up a likeness of Japan and you to show James how the holodeck worked. Besides, it gave me an excuse to see you again. I miss you so much, you know."

Her grandmother smiled down at her. "You are so precious, child. How nice that you could bring me to visit you! But I still do not know the name of your friend, and that shows a lack of manners." She looked at James expectantly.

"His name is James, Grandma," Melaun volunteered. "His parents are going to Huttis VII for some scientific research. They're Vulcans," she added for emphasis.

"A Vulcan!" Grandma smiled down at James. "I'm sure that is very nice indeed. I have always been interested in the Vulcan race, but have never met anyone from there before now. I am privileged to meet you, James of Vulcan." Grandma made a small, formal bow to James.

James found that he liked Grandma Yamamura immediately. She was far more reserved than Melaun could ever be, but she was warm,

friendly and open with the young boy. It didn't take long for James to forget that they were in the holodeck and not actually in Earth's Japan.

James and Melaun spent the afternoon with her Grandma Yamamura, but the time quickly came when they had to give up the game and vacate the holodeck before they were discovered by some "nasty" adult who was a stickler for regulations. Bidding Grandma Yamamura a fond farewell, the two children left the holodeck. Melaun let the holodeck doors slide shut before she terminated the program; she just couldn't bear to see her beloved grandmother dissolve away into nothingness. This way she didn't have to think of her just being a computer simulation.

James stared at the doors of the holodeck after they slid silently shut. He was thinking hard and then suddenly turned to Melaun. "Could we come back here again tomorrow? I mean if it is convenient for you? I would like to see this place again."

"Sure! Why not?" Melaun grinned at him. "I'm always for having a fun time with my friends. Besides, I think I just thought of a really neat idea that we'll just have to try. And you're gonna love it!"

"How can one 'love' a nonexistent thing?" James asked her. "Does not 'love' apply to the emotion Human beings have for one another?"

"For crying out loud, James!" Melaun made a disgusted face at him. "Don't suddenly go all Vulcan on me! I just mean that you'll like my idea."

Eyes sparkling with amusement, James said, "I am sure that I will. You have provided a great deal of - fascinating - experiences for me while I have been aboard the Enterprise. Shall we leave for our quarters now so that we won't be missed?"

Melaun laughed. "Well," she said, "I'm glad I'm good for something! C'mon, let's go."

And the two headed for their respective "homes" for supper.

The following afternoon, Melaun met James after classes as planned and they headed off toward their next holodeck adventure. When they arrived, the holodeck was again free. Melaun breathed a sigh of relief because the holodeck was often the most used place on the entire ship. They waited for two security officers to pass and disappear around the corridor before they entered the empty holodeck. *No need to get Lt. Worf breathing down our necks*, Melaun thought. She had an intense respect for the Klingon officer that bordered on utter terror.

Once inside, James turned to her. "What have you planned, Melaun?" he asked. "I am very curious!"

Melaun turned mysterious. "Watch this!" she told him. "Computer. Simulate the bridge of the USS Enterprise NCC 1701 when Captain James T. Kirk was the Captain. And make sure you add the full bridge crew including Captain Kirk as near to their original personalities as you can make it."

"What do you want to do *that* for!" James asked her as the room wavered and rematerialised as the bridge of an old Starship.

"Because," Melaun said, "I think it would be neat to meet your namesake. You did say that you had never met him and I think this would be a great way to do it. Besides, if your Vulcan father gave you a Human name, he must have really liked him or you wouldn't be named James." Satisfied with her conclusion, Melaun spoke to the computer again. "Make this bridge active, computer." And immediately the bridge of the Enterprise NCC 1701 sprang into life.

Melaun and James happened to be standing at the turbolift doors, facing the star-studded viewscreen. The command chair was occupied and their presence on the bridge was announced by the lovely dark-skinned Human woman sitting at the communications console.

"Captain," she said, staring at the children in surprise. "We have company!"

The command chair swivelled around until it faced the two children. Its occupant studied the two of them for two heartbeats and then said, "Well, what have we here? And who are you?"

Melaun and James were feeling a bit awe-struck by the kindly looking man in the gold shirt. If Melaun had been a bit older she might have thought him quite handsome. As it was, they were both feeling tongue-tied in the midst of all these authority figures. Being a child, Melaun had never been on Captain Picard's bridge. Even though she knew intellectually that she was on the holodeck, she still felt she was trespassing on forbidden territory.

The man whom the dark-skinned woman referred to as Captain realised that the children were afraid. "It's O.K.," he said, "I won't bite. I just want to know who you are and how you happen to be on my ship in the middle of space. We haven't been to any planets in the past few weeks and I *know* that you can't be stowaways."

James gulped. "Please, Captain, sir - ah - we don't mean to be a bother." His palms grew sweaty and he wiped them on his pants. "We just wanted to meet Captain Kirk and everything."

The man smiled at them. "Well," he said, "you have managed to do that. I am Captain Kirk. But you still haven't told me who you are."

Getting a hold of herself, Melaun said, "I'm Melaun McPherson - my daddy is Lt. Sean McPherson who works in Engineering. And this is James of Vulcan." She indicated the Vulcan boy. "His father is Spock of Vulcan, and - "

"Spock?" Captain Kirk chuckled. "I happen to know Mr. Spock very well, and I never knew he had any children. Did you, Spock?" He turned to the blue-shirted officer standing beside the science station.

Spock lifted one eyebrow at his Captain. "Really, Jim," he said, "I am as much in the dark on this particular question as you."

James' eyes widened in surprised. "Father!" he whispered. He

had forgotten that his father would have been on the bridge of this Enterprise. He looked at the younger version of his father, half expecting a reprimand.

Spock looked at the boy. "I do not know you and do not know why you would refer to me as 'Father'," he said. "It is on record that I am not married at the present time, and I have no offspring."

Coming to James' rescue, Melaun quickly broke into the sticky situation that was quickly developing. Things were not going quite according to plan. "Please, sir," she said respectfully, "James and I are from the 24th century - the future to you. We are on the USS Enterprise 'D', and - "

"The future!" Captain Kirk's voice escalated a notch. "The Enterprise 'D'? Just how far into the future do you claim to come from, kids?"

The two looked at each other in question. James didn't know, so Melaun said, "Well, to me you're kinda ancient history - I guess it's been almost a hundred years or so. James did tell me his father was about 130 years old, and - "

Jim Kirk's voice interrupted her as he looked at his First Officer and teased, "A hundred and thirty, eh?" He grinned at Spock. "Guess you're a little young for fatherhood yet, Spock."

Spock merely lifted an eyebrow at his Captain. Kirk turned back towards the two children.

"I'm sorry, Melaun," he said. "I interrupted you. Go on."

"Well," she said, looking at the handsome, hazel-eyed Captain, "James told me that his father named him for you - I mean his old Captain - " She hesitated for a moment. "Gee, this is hard!"

"It's O.K.," Kirk told her. "He named him for me. Then what?" Being used to unusual phenomena in all his years in space, he took the visit of two children from the future in his stride.

"So I brought him here," she finished. "Here to the holodeck to meet you, since he said he never knew who you were really."

"Holodeck?" Kirk asked. "What's a holodeck?" He looked around the bridge personnel only to be met with shrugged shoulders and uplifted hands all around. He looked questioningly at the little girl.

"The holodeck is a special recreation room on the Enterprise," she said. "It's a special place where we can to to re-create people or places and stuff like that and pretend we are somewhere else for a while. You are really a computer program."

"A computer program?" Kirk laughed. "I find that rather difficult to believe. I certainly don't *feel* like a computer program."

"You are, though," Melaun told him. "Watch this and I'll show you." She spoke to the air. "Computer, discontinue program of all bridge personnel except for Captain Kirk."

Immediately the people standing around the bridge wavered and dissolved, leaving the Captain standing alone in the middle of his

bridge.

He whirled around, staring at the places where his people once stood. Angrily, he advanced upon the children. "All right!" he snapped. "Who are you really, and what have you done with my people?"

"Computer, freeze program!" Melaun cried, heart pounding. The image of Jim Kirk stopped in its tracks, fists clenched.

"Wow!" James began to breathe again. "Do you think this is such a good idea?"

"It isn't going the way I expected it," Melaun confessed. "Let me think a minute."

"I sure don't want him mad at us," James said. "Maybe it would be easier if we told the computer to make him understand things better?"

Emerald eyes lit up. "Good idea!" Melaun spoke to the air again. "Computer, active program, but make sure you give Captain Kirk knowledge about the holodeck and being a computer program so that he won't be mad at us."

A stirring in the air; the image of James Kirk moved back into life. He smiled at the children. "That does make things a little easier, doesn't it?"

The children breathed a collective sigh of relief.

Kirk held his hands out to the children. "You said you wanted to meet me, James," he said. "Come on down here with me and let's talk."

Smiling, the two friends, one Vulcan with a Human name and one quite Human, stepped down to get to know Captain James T. Kirk of the USS Enterprise, NCC 1701.

Saavik took her cup of tea from the dispenser, walked to the sofa in the VIP quarters and sat down carefully, trying not to spill any of the hot liquid. She sipped it carefully and looked over the rim of the cup at her husband.

"Do you happen to know where our son is this afternoon?" she asked Spock. "He has been spending nearly every day with the young McPherson girl and has been rather close-mouthed about their activities the past day or so."

Spock turned off the computer he had been working with and glanced at his wife. "I would not be concerned, Saavik," he said. "James knows his place, and we both know that he has been..." he searched for a word... "*happier* since we left Vulcan." Of all his family, Spock understood his young son better than James knew. Spock knew what it was to be unaccepted because of one's differences...

Just then the door to their quarters slid open - it would have been flung open had the door not been an automatic one - and James rushed in breathlessly, suddenly halting when he saw his parents. He had thought that they would be at yet another briefing on the

conditions on Huttis VII. He remembered that he was not being a proper Vulcan and tried to compose himself quickly so as not to shame his parents.

Saavik put her tea down on the end table. She looked kindly at her son. "James," she asked, "where have you been all afternoon? Your father and I found that we did not have to attend the briefing this afternoon and did not know where to find you when we returned here. You normally tell us what you have been doing with the young Melaun."

Feeling very guilty, James looked at the toes of his boots. He struggled with his mixed heritage. He wanted to tell her the truth, but he didn't want to reveal that he and Melaun had been doing something that required adult supervision without an adult being there. An internal battle waged, and finally the Human and Romulan side of him quietened the Vulcan. "We were on one of the recreation decks," he hedged. "Melaun was showing me something. Kind of a game," he finished lamely.

"Truly, son?" Spock asked quietly. He discerned that although this was the truth, the story was not being told in its entirety.

James looked at his father. He understood his father a little better now, but he was not quite ready to tell him just exactly what he had been up to with Melaun.

"Yes, sir," he lied. "Truly." That hurt a bit; James had never knowingly misled to his parents before. But this, somehow, was just too private - and he did not know how his parents would react.

Saavik looked at her husband, a question in her eyes. Her mother's instinct was telling her that her son was not "coming clean" as her Chief Security Officer aboard the Enterprise B used to put it. Spock read her unspoken message and turned to study his son's face. He knew that James was usually an honest child, and he thought for a moment. Knowing that his son could be his own worst enemy as far as the demands of a 'real' Vulcan were, he decided that he would let James decide when it was the proper time for the full truth to be told.

James was frightened. He hoped that his evasion would not be discovered. Mother could be formidable when she allowed her Romulan anger to come to the surface. He respected both his parents - however, he suffered from the same ignorance of parents that most children suffer. He underestimated their ability to discern evasions in the midst of small truths. Spock's reaction to his hedging merely served to reinforce that childish ignorance.

"Then that is fine," Spock said. "However, be sure and let us know the next time you wish to go to this... " He paused for a space. "... 'Recreation area' again." He looked at his wife and gave a slight shake of the head. Knowing that her husband had his reasons for letting this one slip by, Saavik settled back against the sofa cushions.

"Go and clean up for dinner, James," she told him. "We are having a special meal with Captain Picard and the command crew this evening."

Relief washed over James like a wave of warm water. "Yes,

mother," he breathed, and hurried off to his room to clean up.

The next morning, James lay in bed thinking hard. There was only one more day. Tomorrow they would be at Huttis VII and he would not be able to talk to Captain Kirk again. The holodeck made him seem so real! He knew that he wanted to see him again - but he wanted to go alone this time. Melaun was a good friend, but he wanted to be alone with the former Captain of the first Enterprise. Jim Kirk had told him so much about his father that he never knew before! Spock never really said more than he heeded to; unnecessary conversation was 'illogical'. The problem was that James knew he was not being particularly 'logical' in his quest - but then the children on Vulcan who were 'real' Vulcans were always telling him that.

Counselor Troi had told him something at the otherwise very tedious (for a child) meal last night that his little heart had clutched at quite illogically. She seemed to sense the loneliness in the boy and centred on him for her conversation. "Sometimes," she told him in her musical voice, "we must look inside ourselves and around ourselves to help us decide that we are special people. You know, James," she said quietly, "you are special. You are one of a kind. There is no-one else quite like you."

"There is no-one else quite like you." The thought whirled around James' brain. "Maybe that was what Captain Kirk meant yesterday when he said I would have to find my own way - like Father did."

Another thought was forming in James' mind. Melaun was attending classes again this morning. She would not be free until later this afternoon. Maybe...

James slid out of bed and dressed quickly. Leaving his room, he sneaked past the kitchen area of the quarters where his family sat eating their morning meal. Coast clear, he ran to and out of the door of his temporary home and down the corridor. By this time, with Melaun's help, he knew his way around the Enterprise fairly well. He greeted a couple of ensigns on their way to their duty stations at the turbolift doors, he waited for them to get off at decks twelve and thirteen, and then told the computer he wanted out at the level of Holodeck 3 - for some reason the deck number kept slipping his mind. But the computer knew, and soon he was at the right level. Heart pounding, he looked up and down the corridor. It was much busier than he thought it would be. A shift personnel were heading towards their duty stations, while D shift personnel were just getting off duty. Not wanting to be discovered, James walked up and down the corridor, greeting the officers and enlisted crew on their way to work or bed. Finally, everyone seemed to be at the place they wanted to go, and the corridors cleared. James entered Holodeck 3.

"Computer, activate program 'James I'," he ordered.

Immediately he found himself on the bridge of the old Enterprise.

"Hi, Jimmy!" The image of James Kirk held out his arms to the child.

"Hi, Captain!" James impulsively hugged the older man. "I just had to come back this morning. There are so many things I want to know!"

Jim picked James up and sat back in his command chair with the boy on his lap. "Where would you like to start, Jimmy?" Jim had begun using the diminutive on the previous day. He told James that 'James' was much too formal if they were going to be friends, and might he call him 'Jimmy'? James was delighted to give his permission. He felt as though he had known James Kirk for ever.

"How about the time my father died and you had to find him and take him back to Vulcan?"

"That will require a time update," Jim said. Reality wavered a moment and the gold uniform tunic was replaced by a maroon one. The bridge of the old Enterprise seemed a little more modern and Captain Kirk looked a little older.

James was startled. "I don't think I am going to get used to this." He shook his head.

"Don't give it another thought," Jim chuckled. "We holodeck people are funny that way.

"Now, let's see. How did that particular adventure start...?" He thought for a minute. And began.

"Back in the days when I was foolish enough to accept a position in the Admiralty... "

Jimmy was enthralled. He lost track of time...

Amanda answered the door chimes. "Hello, Melaun! Come in."

"Hi, Amanda!" Melaun was bubbling as usual. "Is James here?"

Amanda looked puzzled. "No," she said. "I thought he was with you. He hasn't been here all day."

It was Melaun's turn to be confused. "Oh!" she said, surprised. "We had plans for this afternoon. He told me to come here and he would be waiting for me."

Saavik walked into the room. "Melaun. How nice of you to come by. Are you and James enjoying one another's company?"

"Mother," Amanda said, "James is not with Melaun. She just arrived to meet him."

"That is odd," Saavik puzzled. "He has not been here all day." She turned to the girls. "Perhaps we should look for him. It is quite unlike him to do this sort of thing."

Amanda turned to Melaun. "Do you know where he might be?"

"No!" the girl said. "He has always been with me before, but I've been in school most of the day. They were doing a bunch of dumb tests so I couldn't get here any sooner." She thought a moment. "Maybe we could check out the places he and I have been to before. He always did like talking to the teachers. He's kind of

strange that way! Maybe he's visiting Mr. Antheneiid. James likes him a lot."

"Please check, girls," Saavik said. "I do not like not knowing where James is."

The girls left together in the direction of the classrooms. Saavik shook her head. Things seemed to be getting out of control.

Several hours later, the Vulcan family had still found no trace of the child. News had managed to fly through the ship that James was missing. Captain Picard and Commander Riker met Spock and Saavik in their quarters.

"There is one way to locate the boy if he is still on the ship," Picard told him. He tapped his communicator. "Computer, is James, son of Spock, still on board the Enterprise?"

"Affirmative," came the answer.

"Locate him."

"James, son of Spock, is on Holodeck 3."

"The Holodeck is off limits to children without an adult," Riker said.

"Indeed, Number One," Picard said. "Perhaps there has been a bit of mischief afoot?"

"I apologise for my son, Captain Picard," Saavik said. "He does not normally exhibit bad behaviour."

"I will send a security guard to fetch him." Riker's hand went to his communicator.

"Negative, Commander." Spock's hand stopped Riker's before he could summon anyone. "That might serve only to frighten the boy. Allow me to get him myself. Our apologies for disturbing you, Captain, Commander." He left quickly.

Outside the Holodeck doors, Spock paused. He was puzzled. What could his errant son be up to?

"Computer," he said. "This is Spock, father of James. Allow me to enter Holodeck 3."

Silently complying, the doors slid open. Spock stepped inside - straight onto the bridge of the old Enterprise A.

Eyes widened in surprise, both his eyebrows threatened to climb under his bangs, never to be seen again.

"Spock! Old friend! How good to see you!" A hauntingly familiar voice not heard in seventy years met his ears. Spock looked straight into the eyes of James T. Kirk.

"Jim!" Spock's voice came out as a hoarse whisper. There was an unfamiliar tightness in his throat and speaking became

impossible.

Jim Kirk lifted Jimmy off his lap, stood and strode over to his friend. Holding out his hand, he said, "I have been having the most wonderful time talking to my namesake. You have become... shall we say *sentimental*? in your old age!"

Spock grasped the proffered hand; he held tight. It was warm and alive and so real...

"Jim!" he said again. His eyes burned.

"I do believe I have you speechless, Spock!" Kirk chuckled and grinned his lopsided grin. "Bones would be thrilled."

"No doubt he would, Captain," he managed to get out. "He always did want to get in the last word. He still does, in fact."

Unnoticed, forgotten, Jimmy watched his father and his father's former Captain together. He had never seen his father quite so - emotional - before.

Kirk drew his unprotesting friend of many years into a bear hug. Spock allowed the hug and seemed unable to prevent himself from returning it. He had *missed* Jim so much. The passage of the years only served to remind him that Kirk was not at his side. He had his research now, his family, but there was always this place inside him that could never be filled. It was not logical, but then logic never seemed to apply to his relationship with this particular Human.

Jimmy watched, amazed. His father had never hugged *him* before, and here was was, hugging this man from the holodeck! His little heart suddenly realised that there was a great deal more to his Vulcan father than met the eye. He felt like crying for some reason, and had to fight to blink back the tears.

Fighting for control, Spock tried to tell himself that this was not real, that this man beside him was only a computer image. But it was more real than he ever thought a holodeck image could be. Unashamed, he allowed himself to believe in the illusion - if only for a moment. Every feature was the same as he remembered them. Vulcans had excellent memories.

"It has been a long time, Jim," Spock said to his former Captain. "I have missed you."

"If it had been the other way around, Spock," his friend said, "I would have missed you as well - I did once, you know. I hated Khan for taking you from me."

"Then perhaps you understand something of how I have... felt... all these years," Spock said quietly.

"You couldn't be everywhere, Spock." Kirk looked him in the eyes. "You had your job to do. I had mine. You kept the Enterprise and crew together. I wouldn't have wanted it any other way. You know that as well as I do."

The scenes of an ancient battle played itself against Spock's eyes. The Romulans had been everywhere. Shields up, phasers and photon torpedoes going every which way, there was no way to bring up the landing party. No way to help the man who had been his friend

for so many years. Regret welled up inside Spock and he struggled with the intensely familiar feeling of grief that had haunted him for so long after the incident.

"I should have been there," he said illogically.

Kirk shook his head. "But you couldn't be, Spock. I had my hands full at the time. So did you. We both succeeded in our own ways."

"Unfortunately, Captain," Spock said quietly, "you did not survive."

"No, Spock, I didn't." Kirk looked serious. "But would you have expected any less of me or yourself? Did we have any other course of action open to us? We were outnumbered nearly ten to one. You and the ship and crew were fortunate to survive."

Spock knew that what Jim was saying was true. The *Potemkin* and *Exeter* had showed up in time to prevent the Romulans from blowing the *Enterprise* right out of the sky; but it had been too late to help Jim Kirk. He had died with his enemies, protecting the frightened scientists at Outpost 37. There was not even a body to recover.

He closed his eyes for a moment. "Still, Jim, I regret not being there. I did not want you to die alone."

Kirk's eyes were sad, but he chuckled softly. "We always knew that I would be alone when the time came," he said. "But it happened while I was on duty. I was *doing* something. Can you imagine me growing old and feeble and dying in my bed after I was unable to help myself? What a useless way to go!"

"No, Jim." Spock's eyes held a hint of a smile. "I cannot imagine such an unlikely end for you. Logically it would have happened the way it did."

"Of course - 'logically', old friend." Kirk smiled at him. "How many times did we manage together to cheat death or lie our way out of death? Eventually the Grim Reaper was bound to catch up to me. We both know that. And as a Vulcan, your lifespan is much longer than mine - we would have ended up separated in such a fashion eventually. We had a wonderful life together. Don't waste the rest of it in useless regret."

Spock examined the beloved face before him. "Since when did you become so logical, Captain Kirk?" he asked. "I thought that was my department."

"You were so busy taking over my job of blaming yourself for something that wasn't your fault that I thought I had better do yours!" He grinned at Spock and slapped him on the back. "Come on, tell me about yourself and what you have been doing. Jimmy here has told me a great deal about his family, but he has had me talking about you most of the time."

"Jimmy?" Spock asked.

James studied the toes of his boots.

Spock walked over to his son, knelt in front of him and put his hands on James' arms. "Is this what you have been doing the past

few days?" he asked.

James looked into his father's dark eyes. "Yes, Father," he whispered. "Melaun thought it would be a good idea for me to meet the man you named me for, so she brought me here." He stopped for a moment and then continued. "And I liked Captain Kirk so much that I had to come back. It helped me to - know myself. It helped me to know you, Father." His little upturned face looked yearningly at his father and then the unshed tears began to slip from his eyes.

"I remember another Vulcan boy who did not feel accepted by his father," Kirk's quiet voice said over Spock's shoulder. "Don't let Jimmy become another. He *needs* you - especially because of his mixed heritage."

Spock looked back at the face of James T. Kirk and then down onto the tearful face of his seven-year-old son. He was so young and had already suffered so much. Without hesitation, Spock gathered the boy into his arms and hugged him hard.

"I love you, Father," James whispered. "I know that's illogical," he said hurriedly, "but I do."

"There is very little that is illogical about love, my son," Spock said into his ear. "And I ask your forgiveness if I have caused you to think that I do not approve of you. From the moment of your birth I knew that you were special. That is why I gave you the name of James instead of the 'proper' Vulcan name you have always wished for."

"Really, Father?"

"Really... Jimmy." Spock used the diminutive of his son's name with tenderness. Perhaps he had been too hard on the boy without realising it. He made a resolution to re-examine his parenting skills. Perhaps the girls suffered from the same problem. It was something he would have to examine at length. He turned to Jim.

"I find that I must thank you for helping my son and me," Spock said to him. "You always did have an uncanny knack of adding in the Human equation where logic seemed to fail."

"You always did have a hard time with the 'Human equation' at first, Spock," Jim told him. "But you managed."

"You were always a predictable unpredictable in my life, Jim." Spock's eyes smiled at him. "My life was made richer for it. I learned that logic is not always the correct procedure for any given situation. Human intuition always managed to refute my logic!"

Kirk laughed outright. "Then I did teach you something, Spock."

"Indeed, Captain," Spock agreed. "I hope to take that knowledge with me to Huttis VII. Perhaps Human intuition will be of help there."

He turned to his son. "I do not desire to end this time, Jimmy," he said, "but we reach Huttis VII in the morning and we must be prepared."

"All right, Father," the child said. He walked over to Jim Kirk and hugged him hard. "Thank you for everything, Captain Kirk."

"Thank you for giving me a chance to live again, if only for a short while. You are a special young man and you have a special father. Remember that for me, and I know that you will do well in whatever life you choose to lead." He stood and gave the Vulcan salute to Spock.

"Live long and prosper, old friend."

Returning the salute, Spock said, "And peace and long life to you, Jim." Somehow it did not seem a ridiculous thing to say. "And now I must take my leave of you." He paused. "It brings me great comfort to know that this time I can say goodbye to you properly."

Kirk lifted his hand. "Not goodbye, Spock. Only farewell. For we may meet again."

"Farewell, then, my friend," Spock said. "Until we meet again." And he and his son left through the Holodeck doors.

Once through the doors and when they had shut, Jimmy said, "Computer, discontinue program, but save it under the name of - " he looked at his father - "Spock I. We might want to visit him again some day if we are ever on the Enterprise," he explained.

"Wise," Spock murmured. He suddenly felt free, as though a weight had been lifted. He knew that he could continue with his life without the guilt that had haunted him for so long. "Come, Jimmy. Your mother has been concerned about you."

Bright and early the next morning, the family of Spock gathered at Transporter Room I. Captain Picard, Commander Riker and Counselor Troi were there to see them off to their final destination of Huttis VII.

"Thank you, Captain Picard, for your hospitality," Saavik told him. "It has been a pleasure and an honour to be aboard the flagship of the Fleet."

"It has been my privilege, Saavik," Picard told her. "I hope that we can be of service to you again in the future."

Troi put her hand on Jimmy's shoulder and smiled at him. "I hope you will remember what we talked about the other night, James," she said. "Because I am right, you know."

"I will, Counselor," he promised. "I know you are."

"Hey! Wait! You can't leave without saying goodbye to me!" Melaun's frantic voice was heard above everything else. "I don't know when I will get to see you again!" She was breathless as she flew into the room.

"What is that child doing here?" Picard muttered angrily to Will Riker.

"Our apologies, Mr. Spock," Riker said. "We will see that she leaves immediately."

Spock's hand flew up. "Negative, Commander. This is Jimmy's friend. He should have remembered to say goodbye properly. Proper farewells are in order here." He looked at James.

James turned a slight shade of green with embarrassment. "I'm sorry, Melaun. I thought you would be asleep and I didn't want to disturb you."

Melaun hugged him so hard that he was afraid he wouldn't be able to breathe again. "You silly thing! We're friends, remember?"

"Yes, I do remember that!" James said to her. "Thank you for everything."

The children hugged again while the amused adults looked on.

"Huttis VII reports that they are ready for the arrival of Mr. Spock and his family," Chief O'Brien's voice interrupted.

"Then it is time for us to depart," Spock said. He looked at Captain Picard. "Live long and prosper, Captain. And thank you."

Picard returned the salute effortlessly. "Peace and long life to you and your family, Mr. Spock. May luck walk with you on your mission to Huttis VII."

"... and then maybe we could go to Starfleet Academy together," Melaun's excited whisper broke in over the goodbyes. The two friends didn't want to part.

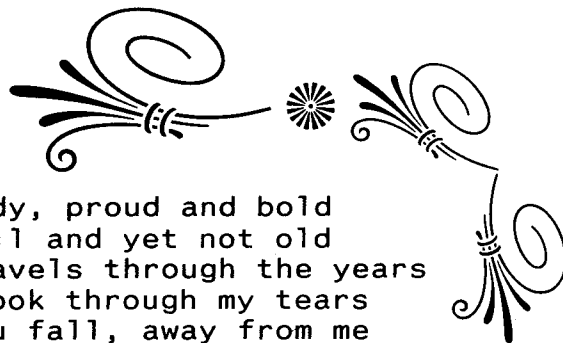
"Come, James," Saavik's voice broke in. "It is time to go." She held her hand out to her son.

Reluctantly, James left Melaun to stand on the transporter pad.

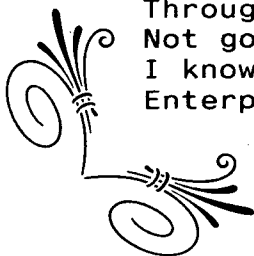
"Energise," Riker told O'Brien.

As the five solid forms began to shimmer, they could hear James' voice say, "When I grow up, do you think I could become the Captain of a Starship too?"

And Spock's voice replied, "There are always possibilities."



Graceful lady, proud and bold
Stand so tall and yet not old
Timeless travels through the years
How I yet look through my tears
To watch you fall, away from me
To your end, away from me
The finest ship there ever was
Gave all of you until the end
Yet at the end you still live on
My own beloved shooting star
From the heavens, from afar
Throughout my night I think of you
Not gone not really far away
I know I'll see you soon one day
Enterprise, NCC 1701-A



Claire Roberts

NEW BEGINNING

by

Helen Cakebread

The mirror looked old with its gilt edging round it.

The young woman looked at herself again to make sure the uniform was correct; she smiled as she remembered the mirror was a present from her father when she entered the Academy such a long time ago. How proud of her he was! It was the only thing she had kept over the years.

Now she had her big chance - a real job on a Starship; but not just any Starship - it was the Enterprise.

Some time later she stood waiting for the transporter to take her to the ship. When she arrived, a Lt. Grey handed her a badge and said, "Your luggage is in your quarters. There's a get-together party tonight - informal dress." With that he turned away. He looked bored.

She soon found her room. By the time she had unpacked it was time to get ready. Uhura put on her favourite dress - it was long and flowing, with soft autumn colours which showed up her dark skin.

The rec room door opened to music and a lot of people talking. Someone gave her a drink. Then a girl stopped.

"Hi. I'm Christine."

"Uhura."

"Yes, I know," said Christine, pointing to her badge. They both laughed; it was the beginning of a friendship.

"Come - I'll take you round."

It was many faces later that Christine finally pulled her over to a small group of crewmen; in the middle stood a young man with fair hair. He turned to greet them and smiled.

Christine said, "This is Jim. Meet Uhura."

"Hello, Uhura. Are you settling in? It must seem very big here after your last assignment, but after a while you'll be saying you wish you had some space," said Jim.

"Thank you. Yes, it is big, but she's a lovely ship," said Uhura.

"If you have any trouble please tell me, or if not me, the First Officer."

"That's a problem," she said. "I know the First Officer is a Vulcan. I only hope I can live up to his standards." She stopped.

"Don't worry. You'll find that if you do your work the best

you can, Mr. Spock will always help you if you ask him. Everyone has to learn - including me."

Christine pulled at her arm. "Excuse me - I think I'm wanted."

"Me too," said Jim. "I think I'll leave you all to it. Enjoy yourselves." He turned away.

"Well? What do you think of him?" Christine whispered in her ear as the door closed behind him.

"He's very nice," Uhura replied.

"You'd never think he was the Captain, would you?"

Uhura turned, opened her mouth, and then shut it. She felt so foolish. "I told him what I thought about his First Officer! What must he think of me?" She touched Christine's arm and pointed to the door. She had to get out.

She started to walk. *How can I face him again? What do I say?* She felt her day was ruined over a silly remark. She walked on blindly, not taking any notice of where she was going until she walked into a wall... and the wall spoke.

"I would advise you to hold your head up."

"Sorry, sir - " She looked up to a pair of gentle brown eyes, pointed ears and swept-up eyebrows, and swallowed. "I... I was thinking," she said.

"Do you do all your thinking with your eyes fixed to the ground?" asked Spock.

"No." She realised he must think her a fool, but as she looked up to see the way back - and realised she was lost - she heard him speaking.

"You are Lt. Uhura, the new Communications Officer. I know your reputation; I am looking forward to working with you."

Before she knew it - and she never knew how he did it - they arrived back at the party. Uhura looked at him; he gazed at her for a brief moment and then nodded his head, turned and left. His long blue robe seemed to float.

The doors opened.

"Where have you been? You're missing all the fun!" Christine said.

"I was just walking, thinking. Come on - what are we waiting for?" asked Uhura.

She knew in her own mind that life was wonderful. In just a short time, Mr. Spock had put her back on top of the world with those little words, *I am looking forward to working with you.*

The doors shut behind them.

The doors of the observation deck opened and Spock stepped in.

He saw Kirk standing by the window gazing at the stars. He was not surprised to find him here. Spock knew he would do his duty and greet the new crew, then he would leave; Kirk was not one for parties. Spock stepped closer. Quiet though he was Kirk heard him, turned and smiled.

"Lovely, aren't they? Did you see them? So eager! I was like that once - so full of myself until I met my current First Officer. I soon found I had a lot still to learn." Kirk turned back to the stars.

Spock thought, *Yes, they are eager... but not one of them had stars in their eyes like you.* He thought back...

When Captain Pike left Spock had thought of moving to another ship, but he had to stay for the new Captain to take over. Then Kirk had arrived, his face beaming and his eyes shining like the Vulcan sun, and Spock knew he could never leave him. He was glad he had stayed to help Kirk when he was sad; when he lost crew members or his ship was damaged; but he also shared his joy.

"Are you staying here all night?" he asked.

"What do you have in mind?" Kirk asked with a smile.

"I could read to you, or we could finish the chess match," said Spock, trying to match his mood.

"Will you read one of your Vulcan books and give me a glass of your wine?" Kirk asked.

Spock noticed Kirk appeared like a small boy who wanted to be fussed over. Whatever the reason for it, he did not care; they were friends, and that meant a lot to him.

"Of course - but on one condition."

"What is that?"

"Stop worrying! Everyone will be on duty tomorrow for inspection. Enterprise will still keep her star for the best turned out ship."

Kirk threw back his head and laughed. "You know me so well! It's a deal, Mr. Spock."

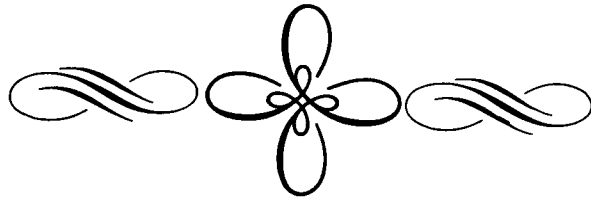
The doors opened and both silently walked out.

The doors opened and Uhura walked a little unsteadily to her bed. She undressed and slipped into bed; she had already set the time for waking and knew she would get only a few hours' sleep, but she did not care. She would be ready tomorrow... *today*, Uhura corrected herself. It had been the most wonderful day! As she closed her eyes sleep took hold of her. Uhura dreamed of many stars.

Not far away in the Captain's quarters Kirk lay fast asleep too. In the next room Spock sat checking that things would go right, then he too settled to rest. For a short while his thoughts

turned to the young lieutenant he had met in the corridor. From her record he thought she would indeed do very well.

Maybe this time they had finally got the crew who would make the ship the perfect entity that Kirk hoped for.



MOTHER, PLEASE TRY TO UNDERSTAND

Mother, please try to understand
That I now must command
This Starship to Babel
Which has a horde
Of Federation passengers on board
In a situation potentially uncontrollable.

My Captain, stabbed, in Sickbay is lying -
Perhaps he is dying -
On his presence I depended.
A murderer walks free;
Surely you must see
That he must be apprehended.

An alien ship may soon attack -
I must get back
To the Bridge before it's too late.
Amidst the confusion
My father's transfusion
Must wait.

You taunt and torment
Bidding me to relent
Chiding me for a worthless son.
You cannot see that there's any way
That the needs of the many
Outweigh those of the one.

Your words assail me,
Whip me, flail me;
In your eyes I cannot look.
My face is stinging;
My ears are singing
From your violent rebuke.

You slam the door in my face;
I'm in deep disgrace,
The door metal's cold on my hand;
But till the Captain can return
My duty I cannot spurn.
Mother, please try to understand!

Linda Wood



A PERFECT GENTLEMAN

by

Lindsay McBride

McCoy looked up as Jim Kirk limped into the office.

"How is he?"

"Breathing on his own. We took him off the respirator 'bout half an hour ago. He's still not out of danger, but it's a step in the right direction. Christine's with him now."

Kirk nodded and sat down carefully. McCoy smiled sweetly.

"And what about our illustrious leader?"

"I'm fine."

"Sure you are," quipped McCoy. "Damned silly of me to ask, really!"

Kirk shot him a warning look.

"Brandy, anyone?" the Doctor asked, standing and crossing to the liquor cabinet.

"I'm on duty."

"So how come," pushed McCoy, carrying the bottle and two glasses over to the desk, "you're here and not keeping your throne warm up there?"

"Spock has the con."

"Then you can have a brandy. Purely medicinal, of course."

Kirk leaned forward, trying to conceal the pain from McCoy, and lifted one of the glasses of amber liquid.

"You should be in sickbay... "

"Bones."

"Flat on your back!"

"Bones!"

McCoy gave up, then frowned at the 'lost' expression on the Captain's face. "Everything O.K., Jim?"

Kirk shook his head. "We just received a call, long range, from Earth - Glasgow, in fact. A... Catherine Ronald. Her mother died a few days ago. The funeral's on Friday; she said that her 'Uncle Monty' would want to go." He gazed into the glass, turning it between his hands. "I don't ever remember Scotty talking about them."

He sat for a moment lost in thought. "Anyway... she didn't know." He sighed deeply. "It's one thing sending off a message to Starfleet to 'inform the family'. It's another having to tell someone face to face, especially if it concerns a friend. And it's a long time since I've had to." He drained the glass, then shook his head. "Poor kid. First her mother, now this."

Christine Chapel called for McCoy as Montgomery Scott moaned softly and his eyes flickered open. As he focussed on the nurse and the surroundings, the memories of the accident came rushing back in a jumble of images.

"The Captain?" he asked, his voice a whisper.

"The Captain is fine," McCoy answered, coming to the Engineer's bedside. "Twisted his knee and his back, but nothing too serious. Couldn't keep him in here for long." He smiled, then asked gently, "How much do you remember, Scotty?"

Scott closed his eyes, gathering his thoughts. "Rock fall. The Captain was... going to be crushed... Tried to push... push him out the way... "

McCoy put a hand on his shoulder, stopping him. "That's fine, Scotty. Get some rest now, we'll talk later."

Montgomery Scott sat in the small cafe, watching Catherine across the table. She had been a godsend during his sick leave. His sister had driven him up the wall within the first week, and he'd resigned himself to another eleven weeks of torture when the call had come through from Catherine, wanting to know if he'd like to stay with her for a while.

"With Mum gone, I'm here alone and... well... I could use some company."

He'd left for Glasgow the next morning.

They'd hit it off from the start. For one thing, she was training to be an engineer, studying for an honours degree, so they talked much the same language. For another, she was out during the day, so he had the flat to himself and could do what he wanted without getting under anyone's feet.

When she got home at night she'd cook something (he'd been banned from the kitchen after his first three disasters), do some work, and then they'd talk - about her, about him, about her mother and how she'd nearly been Mrs. Kate Scott, about Starfleet, about her future plans, or lounge in front of the vidscreen, or watch a film. She'd even taken him drinking once or twice (or three or four times).

Now, however, he could tell that there was something troubling her.

"Cathy?"

She looked up from her coffee guiltily. "Sorry. I wasn't listening."

"Is there something wrong, lass?"

She was silent for a moment. "There's something... important... that you ought to know. I wasn't going to tell you, but that night when Captain Kirk let me know that you'd been badly injured and might not make it... Well, it made me think twice. And having you here these past few weeks, I..." She trailed off and reached inside her bag. She pulled out a sheet of folded paper and handed it to him. "That will explain better than I can."

Frowning slightly, puzzled by her words, he unfolded the paper and read it. He looked up at her, not quite believing his own eyes, then back down at the paper. He sat for a few moments, letting it sink in, then folded Cathy's birth certificate and handed it back.

"Why did she no' tell me?" he asked quietly.

"Because she loved you."

He shook his head. "She should'a telt me."

Cathy leaned forward, searching his face. "What would you have done if she had?"

"I'd have stood by her," he answered immediately. "Married her. Got a job - "

"On Earth?" Cathy interrupted.

"Of course."

Cathy shook her head. "That's jist what Mum didn't want. She knew where your true feelings lay. Aye, she loved you, and you loved her! But your heart lay in the stars then. It still does! She saw that." She sighed and leaned back. "She didn't want to take the chance that you'd stay, because she was afraid that no matter how much you loved each other, you'd begin to resent her - and me - for holding you on Earth, with dreams of 'what might have been'.

"And seeing you here now, having talked with Captain Kirk - aye, and Dr. McCoy, Uhura, and the others - I think she did the right thing. Think about it. *Would* you have been happy, staying here?"

He remained silent. What she said did make sense, but how did he know that he wouldn't have been happy? To see a bairn growing up to be the lass who sat across from him now... But how much *would* he have seen of her and her mother, even if he'd stayed in the Merchant Fleet?

He thought of his life in Starfleet, the people he'd met. Pike, Kirk, Spock - people he'd been proud to serve under; walking onto the Enterprise for the first time. Lt. JG Scott... walking onto the Enterprise, Commander Scott, Chief Engineer. He thought of McCoy, Sulu, Uhura and the rest. Of the banter he'd heard on the bridge between Scott and McCoy, the challenge of keeping the Enterprise up to the standard he demanded and the Captain had come to expect.

He looked up at Cathy and realised that she had taken his silence to mean rejection. She looked away quickly.

"If Mum hadn't died... If you hadn't been injured... I would probably never have told you." She looked back at him, her eyes bright. "I'm sorry."

She began to gather her things. He reached across the table, putting his hand on hers. She sat still but refused to look at him.

"Ye're jist like yer mother, Cathy. She was for ever jumpin' to the wrong conclusion too."

She looked at him, tears sliding down her cheeks. He smiled. "I should ha' known, way back, when you said you were studying to be an engineer. I'll bet your mother had a few words to say about that?"

She shook her head, smiling through the tears. "No. She said that if that's what I wanted to do, then..." She broke down, sobbing.

Scott stood, pulling her to her feet, and hugged her. "Now, who'd 'a thought that I'd have a daughter o' 21 at my age."

He let her go, rummaging through his pocket for a handkerchief and handed it to her. "Now it's no' every day that somethin' like that happens, thank the Lord!"

She laughed, wiping her eyes. "In that case I would love to take my 'old man' for a drink."

"What? And get me a reputation for leading my daughter astray? Best idea you've had all day, lass!"

Father and daughter stood as the figures of McCoy and Kirk materialised in front of them. Kirk smiled when he saw Cathy. "Good to see you again," he said, kissing her cheek as McCoy gave Scott the once-over with a tricorder. "I hope that my Chief Engineer behaved himself?"

Cathy laughed. "Mr. Scott has been a perfect gentleman, Captain. In fact, he's been telling me how you and Dr. McCoy have been leading him astray... in certain bars on certain planets..."

"I assure you, Miss Ronald," Kirk said in mock seriousness, "that at least 90% of the allegations... are probably true." He turned to McCoy, who slapped Scott on the back.

"Fit as a fiddle and ready for duty."

"Good, good," Kirk said, rubbing his hands. "Ready to go, Scotty?"

"I'll be with you in just a minute, sir."

He drew Cathy to one side and McCoy and Kirk discreetly moved to the other side of the room.

"Thanks for everything, lass. I've had a super time. I'll miss you."

She smiled. "Me, too. I'm glad you came."

"And thanks for telling me," he said softly, hugging her.

Cathy nodded, not trusting herself to speak. Scott kissed her on the cheek then walked over to Kirk and McCoy. On impulse, he dropped his kitbag at Kirk's feet and, turning on his heel, strode back over to her.

"You're a smashing lass, Cathy," he said, gathering her in his arms, hugging her again. "I'm proud that you're my daughter!"

She hugged him back tightly, tears running down her cheeks. "Daddy," she whispered. "Take care."

Kirk and McCoy exchanged looks, seeing only a couple's passionate embrace.

"A perfect gentleman, eh, Scotty?" McCoy growled as the Engineer took his place beside them.

"I hope," Kirk said, "that you haven't brought the good name of the Enterprise into disrepute?"

"Captain," Scott said in mock horror, fighting to keep the catch from his voice. "The lassie's young enough to be ma daughter!"



REN

by

Gail Christison

The new long range Starfleet shuttle emerged smoothly from a non-standard barrel roll. Its pilot, James T. Kirk, reluctantly set the auto-helm and leaned back in his chair.

For a short time the turbulent events of the past few days had vanished in the sheer pleasure of piloting the new craft. He shook himself as if to push the memories away, reached out and increased the Atlantis' speed to warp 3 - maximum. *Just*, he thought, *to see if she can really handle it.*

Satisfied, he leaned back again, his thoughts wandering. The Atlantis was the reason the Enterprise was unloading emergency medical relief on Alpha Majoris IV instead of waiting for its beleaguered Captain.

Kirk's stomach tightened at the memory of McCoy's anger, and worse, Spock's censure. The Vulcan's eyes had clearly betrayed his feelings when he argued against Kirk's decision to allow medical teams to beam down to Varaen.

Damn.

His hand shook as it dropped to the arm of the chair. Censured by Starfleet Command for allowing the medical treatment that saved over a hundred people, and damned by his crew for obeying the Prime Directive while thirty-odd others perished...

Perhaps they were both right... but who was he, Kirk, to hold the lives of all those people in the balance, and ultimately, also Reece and Miklovich?

Suddenly Kirk sat up. Something was wrong with the feel of the shuttle. It lasted only a moment; nothing registered on the sensors. After a precautionary check he relaxed again, his mind slipping back to McCoy's vehement demands and Spock's equally strong resistance to taking a medical team down to the stricken Tyrea village.

Compassion had won out, and because of McCoy not one villager died of the terrible diphtheria-like epidemic.

Small Ber and Eli, he remembered, were always underfoot, always smiling... and a week later they had both perished along with Reece and Miklovich, the two medics, in a conflict with a neighbouring village. They, and thirty-three other innocent Varaens.

Kirk closed his eyes. Then suddenly the anomaly was back, audibly this time. The instruments still blithely continuing to read normal as the miniature warp drive went off line. Nothing Kirk tried would bring it back. He switched to the impulse engine and the instruments immediately recorded a huge power drop off. Rapidly, he punched up the charts of the area.

Nothing, except 9114131141. A chill went down his spine. A class M world, but... another closed planet.

Leonard McCoy flopped wearily in his desk chair and set down a bottle and glass. There was great bitterness in his blue eyes and circles under them.

The pungent liquid slid down his throat, burning a fiery path. He did not look up when the door slid open.

"Dr. McCoy, if you have a moment there is something I would like to discuss with you."

McCoy frowned. "It's over, Spock," he said into his drink. "We all have our crosses to bear." He paused. "Besides, the Captain will be back tomorrow. Business as usual..." he muttered.

Spock had seen McCoy distressed many times, but never quite like this.

"If the situation on Alpha Majoris IV has stabilised, Doctor, I suggest you make a report to that effect," the Vulcan told him levelly. His tone softened. "Starfleet wishes to know where your last two reports are."

McCoy looked up, covering his surprise swiftly. "Is that all you came in here to say?" he snapped.

"On the contrary, Doctor." Spock had missed nothing. "I wish to discuss Varanen with -"

Sulu's voice interrupted them. "Message from Starbase 29, Mr. Spock. They've lost contact with Captain Kirk's shuttle. Long range scanners have found no trace of it, sir."

The two adversaries locked gazes.

"Understood, Mr. Sulu. Spock out," said the Vulcan in a deadly even voice.

Only McCoy could see the truth in his eyes.

James Kirk stirred dazedly. Brilliant sunlight poured in through the shattered roof of the shuttle. He shifted under twisted metal and sand. Sand? And grunted as pain lanced through his left leg. It turned into a gasp as he became aware of excruciating pain in his left shoulder. Lucidity suddenly came - and went.

One moment he was reaching up to pull himself free, the next he seemed to be rousing again from unconsciousness. He tried to move his arms. The left one dangled uselessly at his side, so painful that it could only be broken, or dislocated. He did not stay conscious long enough to contemplate the arm or the concussion.

When Kirk stirred again it was dusk. From the outside the shuttle Atlantis was no more than a battered pile of twisted metal wedged in between several rocks on a sandy beach. Behind it lay a long churned up trail where he had used the last of the shuttle's faltering power to belly land the craft, after discarding the warp

sled in orbit.

The symptoms of the mild concussion had subsided, but awareness brought with it more pain and renewed fear.

Sea air tantalised Kirk's nostrils and the roar of nearby surf only spurred his efforts to struggle free of the wreckage. It was useless. His head swam, and he spat blood from a lip slashed by his own teeth in the crash. His heart rate soared as pain racked his body and nausea forced him to stop.

He swore in frustration. The pounding of the waves was far too close. Even the sand that now seemed to be in everything was damp enough to be worrying.

If he was below the high tide line...

"You were saying about Varaen?" McCoy said with bitter irony, his face bleak.

Just for a second, deep hurt crossed the fathomless dark eyes, then the Vulcan turned away.

"Spock." The doctor's voice wavered. "Don't go.."

The dark head bowed momentarily, then he was gone. Gone, McCoy knew, to the bridge to chase miracles.

He poured himself another drink.

Kirk tried to remain calm. Every fourth wave now slapped at the side of the wreck. The terrible pain from the dislocation sapped his meagre strength.

In one last furious effort he lashed out with his good leg, trying to kick free. Defiantly, he turned his cries of pain into dreadful curses.

A rogue wave finally poured into the wreck, causing Kirk to gasp and huff from the drenching.

Suddenly there were hands all over him. Adrenalin pumped through the battered body as they took hold of his arms.

"Nooooo!" he screamed.

High up on the headland an Irya warrior heard the cries of something in agony. He dropped his stick in the fire and kicked sand over it, provoking annoyance from the other three.

He barked an order at them and half eaten shellfish were tossed in all directions as they scrambled to their feet.

Below, a half naked Kirk lay shaking on the sand. Several greenish-golden skinned beings squatted around him. When he could focus, he turned his head. There were two men and a woman. At least he assumed...

They were *almost* Human in appearance, but their green and gold eyes were different, somehow, and their ears, tiny and pointed, more like those of a seal than a Vulcan. They seemed to be listening, on edge, as if to flee some lurking predator.

Suddenly the female snapped her head around and made a sound somewhere between a whistle and a word. The next few minutes became a blur of bodies.

Humanoids! Pale skinned, dark haired humanoids. They came out of the failing light, launching themselves at the green-gold beings in a killing frenzy.

Kirk struggled to raise his head. One of them took the female, still trilling in terror. Sickened, the Captain closed his eyes and waited for the killing blow that must only be moments away. He jerked as a body fell close to him. There was a sickening sound and the trilling ceased.

The last thing Kirk knew was the stench of fish and the feel of calloused hands on his body.

"Drink," said a very young voice.

Kirk lifted his face from the damp earth. Someone wet his lips and he slowly became aware of his new surroundings. He was under some kind of rawhide covering stretched over a primitive framework of bone ribbing.

"Pain..." muttered Kirk, unable to turn over.

"Drink," the small voice said again and the Captain realised that the translator implant had finally kicked in.

Suddenly, strong arms were lifting him into a sitting position. For a few moments the Human was oblivious of all but the agony in his shoulder. Finally, he drew a jagged breath and looked up.

Next to him knelt a child, his enormous yellow and green eyes watchful, yet curious. Near the entrance to the lodge skulked a youth, obviously the one who had lifted him. His face was a picture of impatience and distaste.

"I'll have that drink now," Kirk told the child quietly. By Terran standards he would have been about eight. His skin had the same green gold caste as the ones who had pulled Kirk from the wreck. A shock of fine, cafe-au-lait coloured hair covered the strangely shaped ears, accentuating the almost Human quality of his features. Kirk puzzled over greenish oddly patterned marks on the child's arms and legs as he finished the drink.

When he handed the hide bottle back a cold shiver ran down his spine. A deep, gouging green line trailed down the boy's forearm. They were scars!

"What place is this?" Kirk cleared his throat.

"Camp of Nar, First Leader of Irya warriors," said the boy.

"Irya? Are you - ?" Kirk faltered, his face pale with strain.

"Stupid!" muttered the older youth, still hovering in the background. Kirk ignored him.

"We are Nya," the little boy told him solemnly and began washing the dried blood from the Human's face. "You must be well. Nar only keeps pets who can work."

Kirk's stomach turned at the word. It didn't take much to guess what happened to the unfortunate ones.

"My shoulder must be repaired. I can't do it alone," he said, and went on to explain what was necessary.

"You have done this before?" the child asked calmly when Kirk finished.

"Not on my own shoulder," he replied ruefully. "You must do exactly as I ask or we'll only make it much worse," he warned. Kirk had hoped the youth might offer to help but he had scowled and left abruptly at the mention of the Human's injuries.

"You didn't tell me your name," Kirk said, studying the child's features.

The little boy thought for a moment, his face furrowed in concentration. "Ren. I was called Ren," he said slowly.

"Mine is Kirk. James Kirk." Kirk smiled as the silky head tilted slightly in confusion. "But you can call me Jim," he told Ren, wincing as the boy took his hand in two small ones. They were surprisingly rough.

The little boy looked doubtful, his lips pressed into a worried line. "I will not be strong enough," he said.

"It's not just a matter of strength. It's manipulation and timing. I'll be helping," Kirk cajoled. Ren nodded.

In spite of himself Kirk screamed. The agonising process was over in a few moments but the pain lingered in the hazel eyes.

"Thank you." He half smiled at Ren's worried face. His voice was little more than a whisper and he had begun to shake violently with reaction. He did not move as small hands pulled a cover around him. The fur was gloriously soft and warm.

"Warmer?"

Kirk smiled again at the boy's misunderstanding, and nodded, gingerly stretching his legs. They seemed uninjured. One must have been twisted in the wreck, pinching a nerve.

"We will sleep now. Edon will not be back. He thinks you are Irya and should not sleep with pets," Ren told him.

"I'm not Irya or Nya," Kirk said emphatically. "Why was it so hard to remember your name?" he asked suddenly.

The large pupils that made Ren's eyes seem different appeared to contract slightly. "I have been here a very long time. I have never told it before. Here, they call me the Piat." The translator left the word in Iryan.

"Piat?" said Kirk.

"Little fish," Ren said literally.

"And you don't think I'm Irya?" Kirk shivered.

Small fingers touched his hair. "No. Not like them. Not Nya either. Perhaps that's why Nar didn't kill you. He doesn't really need another tyva."

Kirk nodded and shivered again. It was getting colder.

"Why don't you have a fire?" he asked, looking for something to cover the boy.

"It is not allowed," Ren said simply, trying not to shiver as the night air pierced the toga style garment he wore. Kirk frowned at the frailty of the brightly patterned cloth and carefully opened up the big hide with his good arm.

Ren hesitated.

"If you don't share," Kirk told him solemnly, "I'll have to give it back." The famous charm seemed to work. Cautiously the little boy stepped into the crook of Kirk's arm to be enveloped in warm fur.

"Better?"

Ren nodded silently.

"Then we should get some sleep," Kirk said as dizziness gripped him again. He tipped them backward and cursed when it hurt his arm.

A whistling giggle down in the fur told the Captain that the curse had translated. There were a few slight movements as the little body fitted into the crook of his back, and a muffled yawn.

Kirk closed his eyes miserably. A few moments later he heard the sound of slow, rhythmic breathing. Ren was asleep.

"Good night," murmured Kirk and swiftly followed.

They woke to face a chilly dawn. Kirk was stiff and sore, but his vision was clear and his head only ached mildly.

Ren rolled back the door flap. Outside, the Iryians moved around slowly. Some females carried water, others cleaned fish. The males were conspicuous by their absence.

Kirk stretched his legs one at a time. Very carefully he tested his arm and bit his lip in pain. He knew it ought to be immobilised, but if Ren was right he couldn't afford the luxury.

By the time he stepped out and squinted up at the greyish dawn, the little boy was manfully ferrying wood from a nearby stockpile to the coal pit in the centre of the camp.

Several other Nya, including the moody Edon, were engaged in chores ranging from weaving fish traps to opening shellfish, but none came to help Ren.

Carefully Kirk hefted a good sized log and placed the hand of his bad arm where it would look useful.

Ren frowned as the Human continued to ferry logs, pleased that Jim had found a way to look useful, but concerned about the risk to his damaged arm. The little Nyan shook off the unfamiliar sensation and continued to build the fire.

Kirk watched, fascinated, a short time later as Ren balled up a sizeable amount of dry 'silk' from an exotic grass and proceeded to strike sparks into it with a flint. The blazing tinder was then introduced to the base of Ren's expertly constructed stack, where it ignited a mass of twigs and leaves, sending flames licking up the inside of the chimney shaped arrangement.

As if it were a cue, males now started to appear, bleary eyed, from the tents. Ren pulled at Kirk's good arm as the fire blazed.

"We must prepare Nar's meal. We're late."

They turned to find themselves facing a very large, middle-aged Iryian with long black hair and a heavy beard. He wore only a loin cloth and a fearsome scowl.

Kirk was surprised to see Ren stand his ground unflinchingly and did the same.

"You!" Nar roared at the child. "Why isn't there any food on the fire yet? How many times must it be beaten into your head, Piat?!" He lifted the child by the scruff of the neck and swung him toward the fire. "That's where you'll go if you don't work harder, you stupid Nyan!"

The little body snapped around like a rag doll. Kirk tensed, ready to leap to Ren's rescue, but the big alien laughed at his own words and dropped the child like a kitten.

Ren stood up slowly and dusted himself off as Nar turned to Kirk.

"What's your name, freak?" he rumbled.

Well aware of their now captive audience, Kirk straightened and met the fierce black eyes.

"Kirk."

"Where did you come from, Kirk?" he demanded, "and what do you call that mess on the beach?"

Kirk's mind raced. "I crossed the ocean in it," he lied smoothly. "From a far place. I'm a traveller." He dropped his eyes deliberately as the Iryian sized him up.

Nar grunted. "Piat, food!" he ordered, apparently bored with the conversation. Seizing the opportunity, Ren motioned to Kirk to follow him to the beach.

Together they cleaned four fish from the holding trap and picked a dozen of the loquat like fruits from the trees lining the foreshore. The chill still lingered as they headed back to the camp, the sun not yet fully free of the horizon that held it.

Ren look consideringly at Kirk. "Did you really travel so far?" he asked.

"Further," Kirk told him and paused, fascinated once again by the beautiful gold and green flecked eyes.

They widened. "Further...?" Ren whispered.

Kirk sensed a wistfulness in the boy that lingered until they reached the campsite.

Quickly, Ren set about wrapping the fish in broad green leaves and burying the parcels in the coals. Kirk shivered as he set about arranging the fruit in a cane basket the way Ren instructed. Other tyva and many Iryian young were making similar preparations. For the Irya, breakfast was a feast.

By the time the sun had started to warm Kirk's naked torso, the whole camp was devoted to eating, except for the tyva.

Kirk sat by the lodge with Ren, his stomach rumbling and his arm throbbing painfully.

"Soon." Ren seemed to read his mind. "We can eat on the beach. I'm glad Nar has decided to keep you," he said, his fingers nimbly weaving a length of cord from plant fibres.

"How do you know he has?" Kirk asked in surprise.

"Because you're not dead."

"Wonderful," Kirk said drily, trying to ignore the delicious aroma from the fish.

"Yes," Ren looked up at him, the tawny head cocked to one side. "It is."

Commander Spock sat rigidly in the command chair of the U.S.S. Enterprise as it sped silently through space to Starbase 29. He was considering Admiral Adrian Greer's order that the Enterprise travel all the way to the base before commencing its search. Puzzling over the logic of such a request kept the Vulcan's unnerving sense of frustration at bay.

All around him Spock could feel the Human crew's worry and apprehension, yet they all continued calmly with their work, the notable absence of chatter the only difference in an otherwise normal watch. The permutations of Greer's request suddenly became clear to the Vulcan.

"Mr. Sulu, you have the con." He shattered the quiet. Sulu rose and moved mechanically to the centre seat as the turbo lift closed. Aames wordlessly took over the helm.

"Come." Spock looked up from his efforts to initiate meditation.

A ragged looking Leonard McCoy strode in, halting suddenly at the sight of the black robed Vulcan sitting cross legged in the

leaping shadows of a lit fire pot.

"If I'm interrupting anything - " he said uncertainly.

"Nothing important, Doctor," Spock replied, drawing himself fluidly to his feet. He studied the Human for a moment.

"You are feeling guilty because you ostracised the Captain over his decisions concerning Varaen," he said perceptively. McCoy's eyes widened. "It is a fruitless exercise, Doctor. The Captain made his decisions based on the criteria at his disposal. There were no correct ones in this case. I too, have been most illogically unsettled by the Captain's actions. Only in these last few hours have I recognised that it was my own judgement I was finding fault with... not Jim's."

McCoy found the Vulcan's unexpected candour disconcerting. "And I suppose I shouldn't have let grief interfere with my judgement? But they weren't just numbers, Spock. They were friends, patients, even children!" The Doctor's hands trembled.

Spock's eyes momentarily lost focus. "We cannot change the past, Doctor, only endeavour to mould the future. In approximately sixty hours we will arrive at Starbase 29. I intend to trace the Captain's flight path to the point at which Communications expected him to receive their last transmission."

"You really believe that he's still alive?" McCoy said softly.

Spock's dark eyes held the blue ones.

"Yes."

Ren, Kirk discovered, was a loner. Having been Nar's special pet since he was a toddler, Ren was neither cared for, nor trusted, by the older tyva, or slaves, in the village. Nor did it seem at first that he cared for them. Only after noticing a longing glance here, a droop of the shoulders there, did Kirk really begin to understand the terrible loneliness of the child's life.

Over their mid-morning breakfast Kirk broached the subject of Ren's background. He broke off a chunk of saffron coloured bread and topped it with the delicious lobster like flesh of a rather ugly crustacean Ren had cooked in its shell. It was their one small rebellion. The spidery crayfish were a favourite of Nar's and tyva were forbidden to eat it.

"Ren, have you ever thought about going home?" Kirk asked between mouthfuls.

"Home?"

"To your people."

"My people?" Ren echoed. "No. This is home."

"But it wasn't your fault you ended up here," argued Kirk.

"No," agreed Ren. "Nar killed my parents."

"Doesn't that make you angry? Don't you ever want to escape?"

"I don't understand, Jim. This is home."

"You mean... that once your people become slaves nobody goes back?" Kirk guessed, horror creeping into his tone.

Ren nodded. "Now you understand," he announced, stuffing fruit and crayfish into his mouth at the same time. Kirk watched the small nose wrinkle as he ate and the even white teeth that bit into more fruit. The subject seemed closed..

"So, what are we doing today?" he said when the food was gone.

"We'll go to the beach again. It's much better than firewood gathering or lochat hunting."

"Lochat?" Kirk said doubtfully.

Ren described something very like a terran wild boar and its method of capture. Kirk decided that food gathering on the beach was a wise choice.

"Who watches us while we work?" he asked casually as they dusted the sand off and kicked more over the fire.

"No one," Ren replied as they made their way down the dunes from Ren's private place. It served as both cooking area and refuge for the little Nyan.

"No one?" said Kirk as they reached the flat golden beach.

"There is no need. Even if someone tries to leave another tyva would be punished in his place."

"What's the punishment?" Kirk raised his voice over the roar of the surf.

"Death," Ren replied with a child's simplicity.

Crestfallen, Kirk watched in moody silence as the boy sorted baskets, traps, and tools from a pile above the high tide line. His arm ached and his head throbbed as he carried fish traps to a rocky inlet at the far end of the cove. When he reached the deep tidal race he dropped the traps roughly and set about putting baits in the 'crayfish' trap.

Ren was doing the same at the mouth of the estuary at the other end of the beach.

Brown and white seabirds wheeled raucously overhead as Kirk set the traps. He snatched up the last, the cray pot, with his good arm and stepped up onto the water hewn basaltic rock that overhung the deepest part of the race.

As he dropped into the inky waters of slack tide, Kirk suddenly grew light headed. In spite of the rising nausea he made himself tie off the line securely and backed right away from the edge. His head was pounding fiercely and he found himself trembling.

Too much too soon, he thought grimly and swayed. By the time he bent to vomit Ren was there, silently, at his side. Briefly, the small, calloused fingers touched his brow then withdrew until Kirk came away and sat down on the sand.

"Cool," Ren told him. "It's not the food. Are you sick from your arm, Jim?"

"No." Kirk tried to smile. "I hit my head very hard when I landed. I may have hurt it more than I thought, or it could just be delayed shock."

Ren frowned, but he seemed to accept, if not understand the explanation.

"You must not die," he said slowly.

"Why? Will Nar be angry?" Kirk said roughly, his eyes closed against the pain.

"Don't die... " Ren's voice fell almost to a whisper.

Kirk's eyes sprang open and found the child's. "I'm not going to die, Ren," he said gently.

The little Nyan breathed a heavy sigh of relief and stood up. "The clams must be dug," he announced, leaving the Human to follow at his own pace, and to try to understand the mercurial moods of his small friend.

The passing days saw Kirk gradually grow stronger and the shoulder more difficult. Kirk suspected that McCoy was going to have a devil of a job repairing the mess he was making of the joint.

And Spock will find me, he told himself as Nar lumbered into camp on the fourth day of his capture, a fat young lochat slung over his shoulders. Edon, who'd gone out early with the Iryian, was nowhere to be seen.

Kirk paused in his repair of a broken trap as another Iryian lifted the carcass off Nar's shoulders.

"Where's Edon?" growled the second Iryian.

"Bull lochat got him while I was finishing this one off. Ripped him from belly to knee. Had to finish him off." The two rangy humanoids shrugged and left the porcine beast where another tyva would quickly come to prepare it for the fire.

Kirk's hands balled into fists. He turned to Ren, but the child was still methodically prising open clams and arranging the meat laden shells on a broad tray. The small, cafe-au-lait head turned toward him and Kirk saw blankness in the normally dancing eyes. He squeezed a wiry shoulder.

Ren continued to open the shells.

Starbase 29 hung like a jewelled spindle in its orbit around a lifeless asteroid.

Commander Spock and Dr. Leonard McCoy moved swiftly down one of its corridors.

The Admiral's aide seated them, or seated McCoy at least, in a small conference room.

"Gentlemen." Greer arrived. "Thank you for coming." Both officers regarded him stonily.

"Admiral," Spock said slowly, "I wish to formally object to the abnormal delay in Search and Rescue procedure.

Adrian Greer faced the Vulcan. "Mr. Spock," he said formally, "no trace of the Atlantis has been found. It was the first of its kind. The finest Federation technology. We believe it has either fallen into enemy hands, or... Kirk has turned."

Spock's eyes narrowed dangerously.

"Admiral." His tone was measured. "It is impossible for Captain Kirk to have betrayed his command training."

Greer's watery blue eyes did not waver. "In your opinion, Mister."

"In my opinion, sir."

McCoy gave a silent cheer for the Vulcan. Greer smoothed down what was left of his ginger hair.

"You have been officially placed in command until Kirk's status is ascertained," he told Spock. "The Varan incident was not the first time Kirk has flown in the face of Starfleet policy. I want that shuttle found."

McCoy watched both men carefully. Greer was a desk bound bureaucrat with something to lose. It was pointless Spock trying to reason with him. Neither gave an inch.

"Very well, Admiral," Spock finally said. "Will that be all?"

Greer was not finished. "If Kirk is alive," he said angrily, "and found to be in violation of Starfleet directives, I expect him to be taken into custody and brought to this station for extradition to Earth to face charges at Starfleet Headquarters." The Admiral's voice hardened further to match his reddened face. "Dismissed," he said.

Kirk stirred as sunlight filtered through the edges of the tent flap. He opened his eyes reluctantly. Ren's newly acquired blanket lay unused near the entrance.

He started. Had he slept in? No. Ren would have given him a shove before risking Nar's wrath. Still, after the boy's stoic acceptance of Edon's murder the day before, Kirk found the boy's sudden absence disturbing.

He started to move under the warm fur, then stopped. Carefully, he sat up and rolled back the hide.

Curled up where Kirk's back had been moments before, Ren slept with all the innocence of a Human child, long lashes resting on smooth cheeks and ruffled hair in his eyes. Gently, Kirk brushed it back with his fingertips. Instantly the golden eyes were open and alert.

"Good morning," he smiled.

"Is it?" Ren replied literally.

"Have a bad dream?" smiled Kirk.

"It was cold."

"Yes, I suppose it was," Kirk agreed diplomatically. Ren gave him a measured glance as he rose and went to fold his blanket.

"If we go to the beach early enough we won't have to bury the rest of the lochat," he told the Captain, who was rolling the fur.

It was a magnificent day, with the blues of blue skies, a blazing sun and the faintest of playful breezes to keep the insects at bay.

The tang of the ocean somehow eased Kirk's restlessness as they walked down to the dunes, the ever present seabirds heralding their arrival.

Ren disappeared while Kirk built the little breakfast fire. When the little Nyan returned a short time later it was to present Kirk with a surprise: eggs.

In a small parcel that Ren had brought with him from the camp was a smooth, hard seashell and a slab of pork. Filled with sea water, the shell made an excellent pan to boil the eggs in. He cut the pork into two slices and wrapped them in aromatic grass before tying them up tightly in the protective green leaves. It cooked amazingly quickly in the now red hot coals, and the aroma was tantalising. It tasted even better, complimented pleasantly by the almost almond flavoured eggs.

Kirk shifted his legs to disturb the sand mites that were feasting on them. The decision to retire the shredded fleet issue pants had been an easy one. Wearing the adult native costume, however, took some getting used to.

It was easy enough to wind the flimsy loin cloth around his hips, up over his crotch and tuck it in tightly at the belly, but the thigh length 'skirt' made of soft, sealskin like hide gave him a terrible sense of undress. The notion that some of his favourite historical characters had dressed similarly appeased his vanity somewhat, but it was still damned uncomfortable.

When they were finished eating Ren stood up and kicked sand onto the fire, and consequently into Kirk's lap. He giggled.

Moments later they were racing headlong toward the beach, Kirk in pursuit of the mischievous Nyan.

Ren proved too agile, sweeping up the woven traps and flying down the beach to the estuary. Kirk stopped there, breathing hard, but laughing despite the pain in his shoulder. He continued to smile as he sorted through the now tangled pile of gear.

The morning passed pleasantly. They dug a basket full of brown shelled molluscs together, gathered seaweed and crabs, and threw sandworms to the seabirds.

Kirk watched Ren leaping from tidal rock to rock, exploring the

tidal pools, and occasionally pouncing on some hapless victim.

He was still picking fruit when the child came back displaying his bounty proudly. Kirk put the rainbow coloured creatures in the holding trap.

"A good day." The tender mobile features stared at the giant shrimp. "Nar is very fond of these." Then, suddenly, he was off again, this time sprinting toward the sea. Kirk realised with alarm that Ren was headed for the heavy surf.

The small figure turned. "Watch me, Jim!" he shouted.

Kirk watched until the little boy dived into a massive breaker. Heart in mouth, he raced down to the surf. Ren hadn't surfaced. Without hesitation Kirk strode into the water, only to be deluged and buffeted by the breaking waves that continually rolled in from the open ocean.

He was about to dive under a huge dumper when something leaped high into the air, catching his eye. At the same moment the big wave rolled up into a curling white crest and pounded mercilessly down on the distracted Kirk, knocking him off his feet and sending him rolling along the bottom.

He surfaced in the shallows to the sound of whistling laughter. Clearing his silences and spitting water, Kirk watched Ren porpoise through the waves, body surf others and almost dance on the water with exuberance.

"Ren!" he roared, grinning despite himself. His relief was absolute.

Moments later the golden dart streaked past, laughing. Kirk lunged after it only to have it surface behind him. He lunged again, the muscles in his now tanned back rippling as he stretched. He came up with a handful of dynamite. Ren giggled and squirmed and wrestled, until Kirk's arm could take no more.

"Enough!" the Human conceded and watched the first real smile spread across Ren's flushed face. A moment later Kirk had hurled him through the air. Ren landed in a mess of arms and legs in the shallow water and came up gasping. He swiped water at Kirk in retaliation and a splashing contest began and raged uncontrolled, neither side willing to concede.

Later, stretched out lazily in the sun to dry, Kirk was roused from his languor by a disturbing thought. He turned and leaned on his good elbow, to watch Ren doze contentedly next to him.

Had he done the child a terrible disservice? Sooner or later Spock would come, and he would have to leave. It was far too easy to imagine the child's struggle to return to a life alone.

Ren stirred, opening his eyes slowly and focusing on the troubled face looking down at him.

"Jim?"

"What will you do if I have to go away?" Kirk said quietly.

"No one leaves the camp of Nar."

"I might. I would make sure that Nar thought I was dead, so that no one would be punished."

"Why?" The small voice wavered.

"I do have a home, far away from here, and sooner or later somebody from there will find me," Kirk explained gently.

Ren was unmoved. The light seemed to die in his eyes and he suddenly looked very small.

"Then," he said slowly, "I will do as I have always done. Nothing will change." He stood up and turned away, poised, Kirk realised, for flight.

"Ren!" The tone was stern. "Where I come from friends don't run from each other," he said, rising to his knees.

Turning, Ren tilted his head, the wide golden eyes brimming with tears.

"What is 'friend'?" he repeated, also in standard.

A lump formed in the Captain's throat. The word had not translated. Slowly, Kirk drew the boy into his arms.

"Friend," he whispered, feeling the small body still tensed for flight, and hugged. Then he let go.

A small finger reached out and touched the moisture in the corner of a hazel eye.

"Friend," the child repeated tremulously and waited for Kirk's arms to tighten again.

Kirk obediently repeated the exercise and felt the silky head rest on his shoulder.

"Friend..." Ren whispered contentedly.

Kirk's heart contracted. He closed his eyes.

"Yes," he said.

Ensign Pavel Chekov sneaked a look at his temporary commanding officer, who was staring at the viewscreen, his eyes in unfocused contemplation. Satisfied, the Navigator turned back to the science console and his own thoughts. He put himself in Kirk's place at the time of his disappearance and imagined the new piece of hardware, and the pleasure, he, Chekov would have had flying her, perhaps even trying a few non-textbook manoeuvres...

Then other things began to fall into place: Kirk's mental state after the hearing, the separation from his own ship, and his reputation for unorthodox behaviour.

All at once, Chekov was certain that Kirk would not have left the little ship in regulation transit warp speed. That would place the little ship well beyond the position at which Kirk was estimated

to have gone missing. Spock had ordered the search to extend only to that point.

Chekov hesitated. Spock did not care much for Human hunches. Maybe if he switched to sweeping for residue from the shuttle's engine beyond Kirk's last probable position, he might find something solid to approach the Vulcan with.

The scanners barely registered the tiny amount of residue from the miniature warp engine, but what there was extended well beyond the point calculated by Starbase 29.

"Mr. Spock?" Chekov cleared his throat nervously.

"Yes, Ensign?" The Vulcan turned, after barely a heartbeat to gather his thoughts. Only Jim Kirk would have recognised the strain that the last several days of fruitless searching was having on him.

"I think I may hef some new information, sair," Chekov announced solemnly, instantly gaining a larger audience.

An eyebrow lifted above suddenly sharpened eyes.

"Oh?"

Kirk shifted the big basket uncomfortably. Wood gathering did not promise to make this one of their better days. He noted the changes in the vegetation as they moved away from the sandy coast.

Ren led the way into the pristine rain forest, undeterred by the strong smells of wild animals, and the almost momentary scramble of birds beings flushed from the thick undergrowth.

Behind them, vast cumulo-nimbus clouds, piled high on top of one another, marched up from the western horizon, making the air humid and cloying.

Ren came to a halt in a clearing heavily littered with the remnants of one of the giant trees, long fallen to ground and decayed. The pair gathered wood in silence, filling the baskets with sticks and tying piles of thick branches into bundles to be strapped to their baskets. Eventually, Kirk's arm demanded respite and he called a break.

Ren unwrapped their package of bread, fruit and crayfish.

"We will have to go soon," he said, sucking a claw. "It's going to storm."

Appetite satisfied, the boy rose first and went to prepare his load while Kirk lingered over the pleasant meal. A few minutes later Kirk felt the first splashes of rain on his back.

As he rose he smelled a strong, familiar odour. Crashing and tearing heralded the approach of something large and fast.

"Jim, run!" cried Ren, too late.

The massive bull lochat sprang into the open, its mane of

blue-black pig bristles standing on end and its fierce red eyes white rimmed with rage.

"Ren, climb a tree!" Kirk shouted, not taking his eyes off the heaving creature.

"But - "

"I said now, mister!" he snapped, as the rain bucketed down. Carefully, he began to back away. The lochat lunged. Kirk rolled, crying out as his bad shoulder struck the ground, then scrambled to get to his feet in time.

Dual screams rang out as the lethal lochat tusk tore up a bare Human leg. From his perch in one of the broad conifers, Ren counted Kirk finished, his high pitched cries grief stricken.

The beast thrust down its great box head again, but Kirk had moved. Desperately he pulled himself up against a tree, blood streaming from the leg, and his arm dangling uselessly again.

Momentarily confused, the boar blew mucus from its nostrils and shook its head before trotting after its hapless victim.

Kirk looked around fruitlessly for a weapon. Suddenly the creature shrieked. Sharp edged cones rained down on its rump. Ren!

It screamed as one struck it on the snout and drew blood, then wheeled and galloped toward its attacker.

Safe in his tree, Ren despaired. Jim could not climb, or run and there was nowhere to hide..

The lochat charged the tree and Ren whacked it with another cone as it reeled from the impact.

Through a terrible wall of pain Kirk knew he had to move... but where? He had to stop the bleeding, but -

By force of will he stepped away from the tree, and collapsed. His drenched body was caught by strong golden hands.

"Spock?" Kirk's eyes refused to function properly.

"Jim?" The voice was young and frightened.

Suddenly the world came into focus. The rain had stopped. A strange face leaned over him.

"Who...?"

"Kema. You are safe now. The lochat is dead."

"Ren! Where's Ren?"

The small face moved into view.

"Nira has stopped the blood," he said gravely.

Kirk smiled weakly with relief and lifted his head. The bone deep gash was filled with silvery grey moss. It looked disgusting

and felt worse.

"Kema will help you. He killed the lochat. I must go back. I will tell Nar that the lochat took you. You have spilled so much blood that even Nar will be convinced," the child said unhappily.

"Be careful." Kirk huffed with pain.

Little fingers pushed a lock of hair out of the Human's eyes and lingered on the soft pink skin. Then he was gone.

Kema watched in surprise as moisture collected in the strange tyva's eyes.

Moments later Kirk was unconscious.

"We will take him home," he told the woman, Nira, who was winding leaves around the torn leg. The female nodded worriedly.

"No tracks," she said.

"No tracks," he echoed.

Leonard McCoy watched interestedly as he materialised on the surface of the minor planet Chekov had led them to. Blue sky and golden sand...

He turned to follow Spock and Security Chief Giotto and caught his breath as his eyes lighted on the twisted remains of the shuttle, lying exactly where the Russian said it would be.

That boy may come to something yet, he decided, trying to ignore the sinking sensation in his gut.

Spock did not hesitate. McCoy held his breath as the Vulcan peered into the forward section. A moment later he stepped back, visibly collected himself, and turned.

"He is not there."

McCoy almost laughed with relief.

"Mr. Spock!"

They turned toward Giotto's voice. He was some distance away, waving a piece of cloth.

"From the Captain's tunic," Spock confirmed when they reached the Security Chief. He opened his communicator. "Mr. Sulu, have Mr. Chekov ascertain the co-ordinates of the nearest village. Then have Mr. Scott beam us to a suitably concealed location nearby."

"Aye, sir."

"Spock out."

The village was a fairly typical primitive humanoid settlement. The tricorders showed no sign of Kirk. The two Humans clearly showed their disappointment. Spock simply turned off the instrument and called the Enterprise again.

When the Vulcan mentioned a second surface to surface beaming McCoy toyed with a few well chosen phrases, but remained silent.

The second village differed little in layout from the first one, except that it was peopled by attractive golden skinned beings, and the huts were thatched, rather than the hide 'tents' of the others.

McCoy scowled and unslung his own tricorder while Spock discussed their options with Giotto. He thumbed it on pessimistically and swept it in a wide arc across the settlement. Unexpectedly, the pattern changed. He did the scan again.

"Spock - " he said quietly, and handed him the instrument. He watched, scarcely able to breathe, as the Vulcan duplicated the scan.

"Yes," he confirmed. McCoy's heart leaped.

"Yeah!" said Giotto, who was uncharacteristically looking over the Science Officer's shoulder. A raised eyebrow from the Vulcan damped his enthusiasm slightly. McCoy grinned. Giotto had been with the ship for a long long time. Long enough for Spock and Jake to share a mutual concern for their Captain.

Something suddenly occurred to McCoy.

"Spock," he said grimly, "how the hell do we get him out without tying a reef knot in the Prime Directive?"

Nira frowned. The stranger's leg was red and swollen when it should've been showing signs of healing. The tyva's life was out of her hands now. She turned reluctantly, her heart heavy as she left the hut.

Kirk watched her go. He was burning up. All he could do was lie absolutely still and fight the pain... and wish fervently that he was unconscious.

Suddenly he seemed to be hallucinating. Bright colours danced before his eyes. The room shimmered. He blinked.

"Enterprise, two to beam up on my signal," a voice said and the blanket was ripped off.

Spock.

Kirk blinked again and saw the naked emotion on the Vulcan's face.

"Spock... " he whispered, and passed out.

Almost reluctantly, Kirk opened his eyes. Reality and dream had blurred to the point where he wasn't sure what he was waking up to.

McCoy put down the hypo. "How do you feel?"

How the hell do I know? Kirk thought irritably, before this

particular reality could sink in.

"Bones... " he said aloud, turned slightly and met the Vulcan's calm eyes.

"You found me?"

"Of course."

"How long?"

"You have been aboard 48.72 hours Captain," Spock said quietly.

"My leg?"

"Repaired, mostly," said McCoy, "just like the rest of you. Do you know how much scar tissue I had to remove from that joint to - "

"Bones, shut up," Kirk told him, and smiled a smile of pure affection. "It's good to be home."

"Damn good!" McCoy agreed, then swallowed and walked off toward the open sickbay.

When the Captain turned back Spock's face wore the same expression it had in the hut. Instantly it composed itself.

Undeterred, Kirk reached out and clasped a blue-clad arm. After a beat, Spock's fingers wound themselves around the bare, tanned forearm, and his eyes slowly closed.

Kirk mouthed two silent words.

"Thank you."

"The wreck has been beamed to the shuttle deck. Mr. Scott and his team are conducting a detailed examination," reported Spock a few hours later.

"Good. I want to see that report as soon as possible," Kirk replied, pulling on a second boot.

"Jim," Leonard McCoy leaned on Kirk's desk, "this trip is not a good idea. It takes time for muscle and tendon tissue to spring back after regeneration, and you haven't even managed to completely kick the effects of that infection."

Kirk flexed his shoulder experimentally. "Feels O.K. to me Bones," he said lightly and pulled on his tunic.

McCoy sighed. It was all the answer he was going to get.

"Captain," Spock ventured, "I tend to agree with the Doctor in this case. There is also the problem of the Prime Directive."

It was Kirk's turn to sigh.

"I have to find out what happened to Ren. He may even be dead because of me. I have to go," he said with a finality that brooked no argument.

The Vulcan stepped aside, then fell in with McCoy behind their Captain.

Kirk materialised alone, outside Kema's village. Even in the failing light of dusk, Kema was easy to pick out. The Captain waited until the Nyan went into his hut before circling around the camp to a position which would see him inside the slightly separate dwelling in three strides.

"Jim!" exclaimed Kema a few moments later. Kirk had slipped, unseen, into the hut. "Alive?"

"Yes, but I can't explain. I shouldn't even be here," he admitted candidly, "but I have to know about Ren."

"No one has seen him since he returned to Nar's camp. Other of Nar's tyva saw him return. They have not seen him since."

"That doesn't make any sense. Nar wouldn't hide a killing," the word caught in his throat. "He'd make an example."

Kema nodded agreement. "Nevertheless the tyva say Nar has been in a raging anger since that day. There is little hope."

Outside, beneath the stars, Kirk fought off a terrible ache.

"Transporter room," he said to his communicator.

Kirk materialised on a familiar stretch of beach in darkness. The light of a quarter moon flickered on the unusually subdued waters.

The deep gully in the dunes that Ren called his 'private place' was cold and deserted. A desperate half-hope flickered and died.

Kirk trudged disconsolately back down to the water. There was no question of going into the village again. He pushed a stray lock of hair back and closed his eyes against the rush of memories.

The dull roar of the surf was soothing and the breeze blowing off the sea brisk enough to take the colour from his cheeks, as he sat down on the wet sand. His mind relentlessly continued to search for possibilities - the forest, other villages, was he on his way to Kema right now?"

Kirk rubbed his eyes with the back of his hands and was about to rise when he felt fingers brush against his hair. He froze.

"Alive?" said a tiny, familiar voice.

Kirk wheeled. In the poor light he could just make out Ren's small, battered face.

"Alive!" Ren echoed.

He threw his arms around the Human's neck and was enveloped in a fierce hug.

"Don't go," he whispered.

Kirk's indrawn breath was audible. He did not speak. Ren's arms tightened.

Eventually Kirk slowly sat back. "What happened?" he said unevenly.

Ren's head tilted endearingly. "Nar thinks he killed me. I pretended to die when he was beating me for losing you. All bodies are thrown into the sea. All I had to do was wait until he was gone and swim out. Then I hid in the dunes. I didn't know what else to do. Nar would find out if I went to Kema's village and no-one has ever journeyed to the far villages alone before."

"Will you be safe there?"

Ren nodded, brushing wetness from the hazel eyes. Kirk caught the small hand.

"I have to go home, Ren. I don't want to leave you alone, but I can't stay here."

Ren traced the insignia on Kirk's shirt. "A long way away," he whispered.

"Further... " Kirk said thickly. "Friends?"

The small head nodded.

"Then close your eyes and stand very still. When you open them again you'll be at your new village."

Ren blinked once in surprise then obeyed unquestioningly.

"Transporter room. Lock onto my signal. One to beam up, and one to transport to a Nyan village at least fifty miles from here," Kirk told his communicator surreptitiously.

"Aye sir." It was Spock's voice.

Ren cocked his head curiously but remained silent.

Large fingers trailed tremblingly down a soft cheek. "Goodbye," Kirk whispered. "Energise."

The Vulcan was alone at the transporter console when Kirk materialised, still on his knees, his pants damp and covered with sand. Spock stood silently for several minutes, until Kirk stepped down from the platform, then fell in at his side.

When the door of his quarters slid closed, Kirk turned to face his First Officer.

"You can tell Greer that the Prime Directive may have been bent a little, but it's still in one piece," he said roughly.

"I have already done so, Captain." Kirk shot the Vulcan a questioning glance. "Mr. Scott's investigation has revealed that Admiral Greer's haste in bringing the shuttle on line for last month's commissioning ceremony for the new Intrepid meant that several relays in the warp engine were not adequately stress tested prior to launch. The Admiral has been informed," Spock told him

sedately.

"Security to Mr. Spock.."

Kirk frowned as Spock answered the call.

"Yes, Mr. Giotto?"

"All clear, sir."

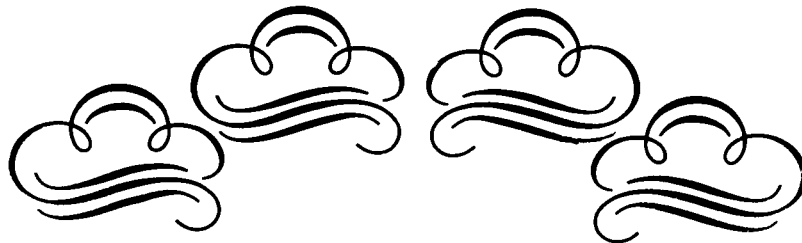
Spock terminated the call and turned to the Captain. "The child has been safely assimilated into the new village. I took the liberty of sending Mr. Giotto down first, to observe proceedings from a distance."

Kirk finally smiled. "Good," he said quietly.

"Y'know, Spock," he mused a few moments later, "that message to the Admiral sounds an awful lot like an I told you so.."

The Vulcan's head tilted in a familiar fashion.

"Sometimes," he said softly, his mouth softening into the near smile reserved almost exclusively for Kirk, "the only way to deal with Humans... is to emulate them."



SULU

(Dedicated to George Takei)

Your name is Hikaru Sulu,
And you are the ship's helmsman,
Perhaps the best in the Fleet.
With your skill and talent
You guide the Enterprise safely
From one destination to another.
With your gift for piloting
You have out-maneuvred many an enemy ship.
Yet you are also known as the ship's hobbyist,
With a particular gift for botany.
You are also a gifted swordsman,
And like to think of yourself
As a dashing swordsman of old.
Like the rest of your friends and fellow officers,
Your talents are many and diverse,
But you prefer, like them, to simply be yourself,
Rather than pretend to be something you are not,
And that is what makes you who, and what, you are.

Christine J Jones



"TO NEW VOYAGES"

Thoughts after *Star Trek V The Final Frontier*,

by

Ewan Michael Flett

The tactical station monitor slowly tracked the Okrona as it slipped away through the vacuum. Jim Kirk watched as it approached the limits of sensor range, and vanished. The whole sector was empty save for the Enterprise, a solitary traveller in the sky. Her own company was all she needed. Jim sighed quietly as he reflected on that, unaware that he had even been holding his breath as he counted down the Okrona's departure. The mission was over, and he turned his command chair round from the tactical readouts, taking a moment to survey the bridge. His bridge.

The new plastic panelling was polished to a perfect sheen, framing monitor screens silently running data and simulations. The recyclers had removed the last tinges of smoke from the air - no mean feat considering that the entire ship operated on a finite supply, and burnt plastic was a particularly lingering and acrid odour. Most of the systems were up and running trouble-free. The Enterprise was on course for home and, for the first time in so many months, Jim felt that he might be on course.

He looked around at the science station, and was reassured by Spock's calm presence. It was less than four months since they had all gone on that disastrous training cruise that had taken them light years distant and finished in a six hundred year round trip. Those few months had led to so many changes. They had lost friends, family, the trust Starfleet had once placed in them, and peace of mind.

Jim's first reaction to Spock's death had been... confusion? He couldn't ignore that, even as Spock died, new life was beginning all around them. Perhaps it was part of the Genesis effect, but for a few hours he had been filled with such a hope. He had seen and felt in living action everything the Federation, Starfleet and he himself stood for. That calm warmth had carried him through the initial shock and anger, and it was only when Starfleet tried to brush the entire incident under the carpet that the pain hit him.

He could understand that they were concerned about security surrounding Genesis, and about the reaction to the whole thing from the other galactic powers. But to cut him off, treat him like an outcast? For so long he had been hiding doubts about himself and the service, and he had been forced to face them both.

To survive, Starfleet had to change, to adapt; that was inevitable. But the changes were wrong. Nothing was blatant or specific, but the *tone* of Starfleet had changed, at least as far as Jim Kirk saw. Instead of pushing outwards, pressing on to the dark unknown as they once had, they had become suddenly preoccupied with securing and thoroughly exploring already mapped and explored regions, fearfully guarding against Klingons and Romulans and all the other unfriendly powers. It seemed logical on one hand, but the result...? Yes, the Enterprise had frequently been the only ship in

a given sector, but when that sector was Sol?

The reaction to Genesis was so typical. It didn't occur to Kirk that such a potential for good could be used as a weapon. When it came down to it, he had to admit that he hadn't given it much thought, preferring to trust the other branches of the Federation to care for theirs as he did his.

But Leonard, Carol and David were all terrified that somehow violence would be the outcome. It would be so easy to pat himself on the back and say it was his peaceful nature that had prevented him from seeing something so obvious, but he couldn't fool himself. Kirk was undeniably a military man, so why hadn't he seen it?

Because he was so caught up in the bureaucratic and military mentality that he couldn't step back and realise that the changes were to the fundamental principles that made Starfleet what it was. Being outside the command framework, the three doctors had been all too aware of the changes. When Jim finally understood, it frightened him to realise just how far the decay had progressed.

When he saw Starfleet's reaction to Genesis, he seriously questioned his part in it all. Perhaps the others saw it, and it was not only their loyalty to him and Spock that had made them follow him when he had chosen what course of action to take. Their careers became less important when it became apparent that the organisation they had fought so hard for was less than concerned about them. It was their loyalty to Starfleet - the *real* Starfleet - that had inspired them to take the Enterprise.

Three months. It had taken Starfleet *three months* to get around to sending the crew their summons. Officially the Council had reached their verdict even before the Bounty had lifted off Vulcan, but there was no way of telling whether their decision had remained unchanged during the events that followed.

There was obviously some rush, the initial condition of the NCC-1701-A was testimony to that. But so often there was difficulty in completing a starship on schedule, even under normal conditions, so did that really mean anything?

But it didn't matter. Perhaps the 'whalesong' crisis had been exactly what Starfleet had needed. It reminded all of them just what their place was, and that they were only a small part of creation. And that there was so much out there to learn about, to explore... And Jim remembered why he had wanted to become a part of it.

He wasn't sure whether what he had told Sybok was instinctive, panic, or his own subconscious guiding him; but he saw now that it was true. It was his pain that made him who he was, that drove him on - pain that he hadn't been able to save Aurelan and Sam, or Miramanee, or Edith, or David. The pain kept alive the memories he had of them. If he gave up the pain, he would lose them, the knowledge he had gained from them. And, worst of all, he could repeat the mistakes, and who might he lose next?

And even as he refused to let Sybok heal his pain, he did it himself. When he admitted that he needed his pain, out loud, to his friends and his enemy, he could accept who he was, where he was, and all the things he had done to get there.

Perhaps Carol would never stop hating him for David's death,

and if she didn't he would accept it, and understand why. But, although he knew that he was in part responsible, he no longer blamed himself. David had paid back the debt of life Spock had given them all - he had chosen to sacrifice himself for Saavik and Spock. Jim didn't know how Spock and Saavik handled their feelings about David. Certainly Saavik was carrying grief, especially painful for a Vulcan, without the simple emotional release of tears. She felt she should have done something to save him. She had been there as he died, therefore it was her responsibility, as David felt all the loss of life through Genesis was his responsibility. But Jim had made his peace with David, as Saavik would do. In time, the slate would be wiped clean.

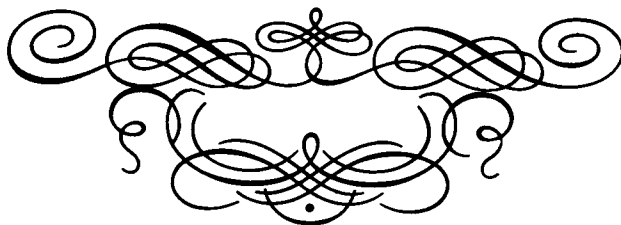
Genesis was gone, Sha Ka Ree and the Okrona were far behind them. Nimbus III was to be rebuilt, and this time the Planet of Galactic Peace would be more than just a name. The representatives now had a common ground to work on. Perhaps St. John Talbot didn't wield as much power as he once did. Perhaps General Koord was a dishonoured old man. And Caithlin Dar was little more than a figurehead - the only external Ambassador of the Romulan Star Empire.

But whoever heard of a Romulan and Klingon, any Klingon and Romulan, sitting down at a table together? Perhaps it wasn't much, but it was a start, and they were determined to make it work. As Jim had heard Mr. Scott comment, "I never thought I'd be taking a drink with a Klingon." Jim hadn't been comfortable about the reception after what they had all been through, but Talbot had pressed, and in the end it was a success. Strange, but definitely a success. Perhaps they didn't like each other, but they respected each others' strength and position, and no diplomatic incidents occurred.

But the mission was over - they had survived, and they would have a new assignment as soon as the remainder of the crew were aboard. They would be together, as they were now: Spock running data analyses at science, Uhura monitoring and co-ordinating communications, Chekov and Sulu managing the course and motion of the ship. Scott was where he was happiest - below decks with his engines. McCoy stood near Spock's station, silently watching his friends, enjoying their company and the calm efficiency of the bridge. He noticed Jim's scrutiny and smiled. Jim smiled back. They were together, as they would always be.

He wasn't so sure he would die alone any more. He hadn't realised he had a family, but he did, he always had done. It was just that he had been too blind to see it. They would be together until the end, he now felt, a family at home among the stars.

But that end wouldn't be for a long time to come; of that Jim was certain.



WHAT PLANS?

(Beautiful Alien Lady - the Return)

Attention please!
It's me again!
(The alien Yeoman Beauty)
I've a tale to tell
Of the Enterprise
At the end of a tour of duty...

The ship docked in at Starbase Nine, prepared for R & R,
As usual several light years overdue.
We needed to recover in a well-stocked Starbase bar
From all the trials which Starfleet put us through.
For boldly-going crewmen, the work had been routine;
The last few months had been like all the rest.
We'd travelled out beyond the stars, where none had been before,
And volunteered for every crazy quest.

The engines stopped, the ship was docked, we stared in disbelief.
For once, our route had not been rearranged.
We'd learned to take no notice when a shore leave was announced
As nine times out of ten the plans were changed.
We often *nearly* reached our goal before they turned us back
And sent us on some peril-laden trip.
It always seemed a bit unfair, that when disaster struck,
We always seemed to be the nearest ship.

We'd risked our lives a thousand times for Justice, Truth and Love,
Brought lasting peace to age-old warring nations.
We'd found the cure for deadly plagues, defeated evil foes,
Shipped countless hordes of Starfleet delegations.
We'd bravely saved the galaxy from all-consuming threats,
Seen several mad dictators overthrown,
And when it got too dull for us, we'd livened up the scene,
By taking short cuts through the Neutral Zone.

The Enterprise was battered from her missions (see above)
And needed several weeks to be repaired.
A shipwide call from Captain Kirk confirmed what we had hoped,
A state of recreation was declared.
We all drew lots for shore leave groups, prepared to hit the town.
I packed my most revealing cocktail dress
And tried to look astonished when I drew the Captain's team
(I'd bribed the man in charge, with great success.)

We headed for the Starbase bar - intent on wine and song,
The Captain, me, Uhura and McCoy.
The Vulcan followed close behind, a long night stretched ahead,
The prospect wasn't filling him with joy.
He found it most illogical to spend his time this way
Instead of in some quiet meditation,
But found it more illogical that, when James Kirk had asked
He hadn't quite refused the invitation.

We found the bar and stepped inside, the Vulcan looked around
 And wished his turn for leave had been postponed.
 He saw bedraggled tribbles, far too drunk to multiply,
 And half a dozen hortas getting stoned.
 Inebriated beings from a hundred different worlds
 Were propped against the bar and on the floor.
 His eyebrow climbed to record heights when Kirk announced with glee,
 "It's just the kind of place we're looking for!"

We made our way across the room to find some empty seats,
 Avoiding toppled chair and drunken horta.
 A round of "Supernovas" was insisted on by Kirk,
 Ignoring Vulcan pleas for Altair water.
 We sat and watched the world go by, the alcohol flowed free,
 Sang bawdy songs, watched dancing girls gyrating.
 The Vulcan soberly observed his shipmates hard at play,
 Concluding we were mad - but fascinating.

*Meanwhile, at the Starbase Docks, a second ship appeared,
 An ancient battered cruiser, shipping freight.
 It hobbled in, a rusty heap, a scarred and creaking hulk,
 A vessel several decades out of date.
 With shipping marks obscured by grime, its origin was blurred,
 It docked beside the Starship Enterprise,
 And none who saw its sorry state saw through the rust and grime
 An old Orion slave ship in disguise.*

The man called "Time", we staggered up, bade newfound friends
 farewell.

The Vulcan led our way across the floor.
 Combined effects of brandy, and Romulan brewed ale
 Had made it pretty hard to find the door.
 We swayed across the dancing floor, a lot the worse for wear,
 The Vulcan (bless him) calm and dignified.
 Despite the four of us in tow, a merry drunken group,
 He managed to maintain his Vulcan pride.

We reached the door, a shadow fell, tall strangers blocked our path.
 We glanced behind, the crowds had disappeared.
 A group of huge Orions moved towards us looking mean.
 Our alcohol fogged senses quickly cleared.
 The Captain gave a stirring speech, he tried to talk them round,
 We females (as expected) sobbed and wailed.
 The Vulcan tried pure logic next, the Doctor raved and swore,
 And still they kept advancing - we had failed!

We slowly backed across the room, our chance of rescue slim,
 Our ship's communicators left behind.
 A peaceful conversation, or a friendly little drink
 Was *not* what these Orions had in mind!
 The odds were quite uneven, we didn't have a hope
 Of spoiling those Orion pirates' fun.
 My last clear recollection was of five Orion smiles
 And five Orion phasers set on stun...

Meanwhile, at the Starbase Docks, on board the Enterprise,
 Repairs were going smoothly, just as planned.
 The Scottish engineer in charge had even had the time
 To give a nearby freighter crew a hand.
 A rusting hulk had hailed his ship, requesting his advice
 On quick repairs to helm and navigation;
 He'd solved their problem, earned their thanks, then watched their
 ship depart
 And wondered at its freight and destination.

I woke on board the pirates' ship, my senses slowly cleared.
 I looked around, my heart was beating fast.
 Close by, my four companions stirred, and struggled to their feet.
 We could not tell what length of time had passed.
 'Twas dark and cold and sinister inside our prison cell
 We were thirsty, tired and lost and hadn't eaten.
 The Captain tried to cheer us up (a second stirring speech),
 Declaring that his crew could not be beaten.

Meanwhile, at the Starbase Docks, a Starfleet call came through,
 With Kirk on leave, it went to Mr. Scott.
 "We need your help quite urgently, some vital plans have gone,
 We think there is a dark and evil plot!
 The thieves escaped on board a ship, a rusting damaged hulk,
 It must not reach its final destination.
 We think it's heading out your way, you must retrieve those plans,
 It's up to you to save the Federation!"

The Scottish engineer turned pale, recalled the recent help
 He'd given to a hulk with unknown freight.
 Not only had he watched them leave, without a second thought,
 He'd also helped the foe to navigate.
 His accent growing more pronounced (this happened under stress)
 He called the shore leave parties back to work.
 They all returned within the hour, except for one small group
 Including Spock, McCoy and Captain Kirk.

Back inside the prison cell, our lot had not improved.
 We found that breaking jail could be quite hard;
 McCoy had faked a dread disease, his cries had been ignored,
 And Spock had failed to 'hypnotise' a guard.
 No lovely lady warder passed so Kirk could win her heart,
 We'd no transponder crystals in our skin.
 No friendly rebel help appeared, the prison bars stood firm,
 Our hopes of reaching home again were slim.

The hours ticked by, a key was turned, the cell door opened wide,
 A huge Orion pirate crossed the floor.
 "It's useless to resist," he boomed, "you must accept defeat!
 I'll tell you what your future has in store.
 The ladies will be sold as slaves, the men will dig our mines,
 A different fate awaits the Vulcan's brain;
 We'll find it quite invaluable for running life support."
 He frowned at our response of, "Not again!"

He turned to where we females sat, and ordered us to move.
 He praised our flawless skin and perfect features.
 Despite James Kirk's objections, he led us to the door,
 "Our leader must inspect these lovely creatures."
 We had to leave our friends behind, the door was firmly shut.
 He led us to the centre of the ship.
 He made the false assumption we were helpless little things,
 We waited for his vigilance to slip.

*Meanwhile, at the Starbase Docks, the crew were quite concerned,
 A search for Kirk and Co. was underway.
 The Scottish engineer was torn; upset at missing friends
 But keen to chase the hulk without delay.
 He compromised; a group beamed down to check Kirk's likely haunts,
 The Starbase bar, the hotel rooms, the jail,
 While Chekov started scanning where the rusting hulk had been,
 Attempting to locate an ion trail.*

Back on board the pirate ship, I told our prison guard
 I suffered from a serious complaint.
 I held my head and moaned a lot, then caught Uhura's eye,
 And ended with a most convincing faint.
 I landed in a graceful heap, Uhura feigned concern,
 Our captor, for an instant, was distracted.
 I grabbed his legs to trip him up, Uhura shoved behind,
 His forehead with the solid wall impacted.

We fled before alarms were raised, then paused to catch our breath,
 We grabbed the stunned Orion's key and gun.
 We heard a distant siren wail, saw lots of flashing lights,
 The hunt for our recapture had begun.
 We headed for the prison cells, retraced our recent route,
 The rescue of our friends our only thought.
 We could not leave McCoy and Kirk to dig Orion mines
 Or Spock to run Orion life support.

We saw a large "No entry" sign and stumbled through the door,
 Uhura flipped a switch to safely lock it.
 A package on the table read, "Top Secret: Starfleet Plans"
 I stuffed it in my belt (I had no pocket).
 We found a ventilation grid, and quickly crawled inside,
 Then tumbled down steep shafts and hairpin bends.
 The maze of pipes confused us, we were running out of time
 To find the cells and liberate our friends.

*Meanwhile, at the Starbase Docks, the search had been in vain;
 We'd vanished with no trace or explanation.
 The Scot's command decision was to leave his friends behind,
 His duty was to save the Federation.
 As hoped, they'd found an ion trail to lead them to their prey,
 The Scot took Kirk's command with heavy heart.
 With Chekov in the Vulcan's chair and Sulu at the helm
 The Enterprise was ready to depart.*

Back on board the prison hulk, we stopped to rest a while,
 Our movements had, so far, escaped detection.
 Despite our calculations we had somehow lost our way,
 We'd failed to find the prison cell direction.
 We struggled on, our spirits low, and tried to overcome
 The odds against our party reuniting.
 Then through the dismal silence welcome voices reached our ears,
 The distant sound of Vulcan/Doctor fighting.

We hurried on, our spirits rose, encouraged by the sounds
 Of Spock's clear Vulcan voice and Southern drawl.
 We traced the noise down winding shafts and found its origin,
 A metal grid embedded in the wall.
 Beyond the grid, two pirates stood outside the prison cell,
 We softly raised the grid, I raised the gun.
 The last clear recollection of those two Orion guards
 Was me, with stolen phaser set on stun...

We quickly freed our captive friends, they greeted us with joy,
 Relieved our rescue bid had gone as planned.
 We tied the stunned Orions up, the Vulcan stood on guard,
 The Captain (as expected) took command.
 "We have to seize the ship," he said, "we have to gain control,
 We have to take these pirates by surprise.
 We'll have to take the bridge by storm and capture all the crew
 Before we call the Starship Enterprise."

The Doctor looked unhappy at the tasks his friend proposed.
 "Surely we don't have to interfere?
 The Enterprise will track us down, defeat these pirate thugs,
 The wisest thing to do is stay right here."
 The Vulcan turned to face McCoy, his eyebrow slightly raised.
 "As usual there's a point you've overlooked;
 Recall our last encounter with Orion pirate ships;
 When threatened with defeat, they self destruct."

The Doctor, irritated at the Vulcan's smug response,
 Declared there was no need to risk a riot.
 If we could find their sickbay he could simplify our task -
 He'd synthesise a drug to keep them quiet.
 James Kirk agreed the thought was sound, he organised our group.
 We had to find the labs without delay.
 We hurried through the open grid before more guards arrived.
 Our plot to thwart the foe was under way!

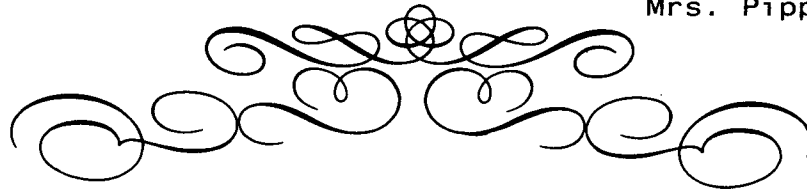
*Meanwhile, at the Starbase Docks, the Starship crew set out
 On yet another peril-laden trip.
 Their orders - to recover, if they could, the vital plans:
 If they couldn't, to destroy the pirate ship.
 For hours on end the Starship sailed through vast uncharted space,
 To follow, at warp speed, the freighter's tracks.
 Till Chekov checked his viewscreen twice, then called to Mr. Scott,
 "I think the pirate wessel's coming back!"*

*The ship was put on Red Alert, the pirate hulk approached,
It gave no hint of danger or aggression.
This didn't fool the canny Scot, he raised his shields at once.
His goal - a swift and bloodless repossession.
His message reached the pirate hulk - its meaning loud and clear.
"Surrender, or we'll blow your ship away!"
To Scott's complete amazement, a familiar voice replied,
"Just try it - and I'll dock you six months' pay!"*

Reunion on the Enterprise! The Captain's safe return!
A cause for shipwide joy and celebration!
The reason why a pirate ship was manned by Starfleet's best
Involved a rather lengthy explanation.
We spoke of huge Orion guards and dismal prison cells,
The anaesthetic gas McCoy discovered.
The endless ventilation shafts, our ultimate success,
With dangers overcome and Plans recovered.

Later, at the Starbase Docks, the Enterprise returned,
She needed two more weeks to be repaired.
A shipwide call from Captain Kirk confirmed what we had feared;
A state of recreation was declared.
Our "gang of five" declined the chance, we stayed on board instead,
We felt return to work was overdue.
We needed to recover, in the peace of outer space,
From all the trials which shore leave put us through.

Mrs. Pippin



THAT SPECIAL LOOK

In Jim's eyes I see that special look
As he sees Spock from afar;
A special look transcending love:
Brighter than the brightest star.

All of life was in his arms,
And all of death as well
When, holding Spock close to him,
We escaped from an exploding hell.

And, though I held Spock's Katra
That drove me near insane
I know that, seeing Jim's eyes now,
I'd do it all again.

Though I realise their souls are one;
That cannot be mistook;
I grieve that from Jim I'll never have
That very special look.

Linda Wood



ERROR

by

Teresa Abbott

No! It could not be possible!

Spock jerked his eyes away from the computer screen, irrationally refusing to accept the information he had seen displayed there. Some part of his mind registered that his hands were shaking, and he fought to control the reaction. He had heard the Human expression about a person's blood turning cold and had never fully understood it. Now he knew that his blood did indeed run cold in his veins. He could sense Kirk crossing the space behind him and could feel the Captain's concern. With speed unnatural even for a Vulcan Spock worked the keyboard, deleting all records of what he had been working on.

"Spock?" The Captain was behind his chair, not yet unduly worried but curious about his friend's behaviour.

Spock swallowed hard, and knew that this time he would be unable to turn and meet Kirk eye to eye. He fought for control, and with an effort his voice sounded almost normal. "Captain, there appears to be an irregularity in the computer system. May I have permission to leave the bridge and investigate?"

He realised, too late, that he was gripping the console in front of him. *Liar!* his mind screamed. *Vulcans do not lie. But a Vulcan would not have reacted in such a manner either.*

There was a stillness on the bridge. His voice had obviously not been normal enough. He sensed Kirk's hesitation behind him, and knew that the Captain's concern was warring with his unwillingness to subject Spock to more questioning in front of the bridge crew.

Let me go, Jim. Please let me go! For a terrible moment Spock thought he had said the words aloud.

"Very well, Mr. Spock. Report to me as soon as you've located the problem." Having made the decision to accept such a transparent excuse, Kirk stepped back to let the Vulcan pass.

Rising stiffly, Spock brushed past him without looking and headed for the turbolift, leaving behind him an awkward, puzzled silence.

In the lift, Spock could control no longer. He knew he would have to go to the computer lab and check his findings. He knew also that no amount of research would disprove what he had found. The full implications of what he had seen on the screen had struck him immediately. He could not reverse those few minutes he had sat on the bridge idly checking records. There were only two logical outcomes to the situation he had uncovered, and either way he would lose that most dear to him. If he had been Human he would have wept aloud. Being only half-Human, he withdrew into himself, hardening his defences, crying inside as he had not done since he was a child.

Leaving the lift, he made his way unseeingly to the computer labs and headed for one of the private rooms, only stopping to tell one of the junior staff that he was not to be disturbed.

Once seated he activated the screen, security coded all the records he required, and finally understood the illogic of hating an inanimate machine.

Edith Keeler. Spock could honestly say that he had not wanted her to die. She was a fine woman, one of the few people one met throughout one's life who possessed that inner vision that made them special. When Kirk had called her 'uncommon', he had understood her completely.

Spock had watched Kirk's attraction to the woman and known it to be inevitable. It had been more than physical love, a drawing together of two souls as his and Jim's had been drawn. Spock had never been jealous of her; had never considered her a threat. He was closer to Kirk than than any other being, and knew that Edith met those of Jim's needs which Spock himself could not. And being the kind of woman she was, she would have known that love had no boundaries, and would not have resented Spock's inclusion in Kirk's life.

When Spock had seen her death on his makeshift computer, he had been saddened, and had tried in his own way to support his friend through the difficult times ahead. After her death, perhaps only Spock had known how deep Kirk's grief had been. Even now, after so many months, occasionally in the joining of their minds he would touch the raw area of loss, and was honoured that Jim didn't hide it from him.

But today! Spock shied away from the revelation. Steeleed himself to check the formulae again.

He had had some free time on the bridge. The Enterprise was on a routine mapping mission through an uncharted quadrant of space, and the junior members of his section were more than capable of handling the incoming information.

He would not have admitted to being *bored*, but even Vulcans occasionally found themselves with time on their hands.

Out of idle curiosity, he had flicked through the records of their previous missions, calling up formulae he had found particularly interesting or mentally challenging - and he had discovered the error.

Even now, he closed his eyes and shuddered at its enormity.

For there had not been two alternative time lines, but *three*. Not simply life or death, but a third possibility. How could it have come about?

Spock knew he had been very tired during those few weeks on Earth. Both he and Kirk had worked long and hard to earn money for electrical spares. He had often worked late into the night after Kirk had gone to sleep. Normally his Vulcan stamina would have sustained him. On the Earth of the past, his Vulcan attributes were a liability.

The temperature had always been slightly too cold for him; there were background noises which he could never shut out; mental pressure from untrained, unrecognised telepathic minds; no vitamins to supplement the sparse diet.

To add to his physical difficulties was his carefully concealed worry for Kirk and McCoy - indeed for all the future Federation - knowing that all of their lives depended on him and on the computations he could make with his inadequate equipment.

He had not let them down. He had found the focal point in time despite burnt-out circuits and hours of lost time. The right action had been taken and they had all survived.

But the mistake was there. Spock realised now that he had never stopped to consider that there might be another possibility. He had never searched further for the truth.

And Jim would never forgive him, or believe that he had acted unknowingly; after all, everyone knew that a Vulcan never made mistakes.

In the privacy of the computer room, Spock's hands flew over the keys, and soon he had clarified the third, albeit fainter, alternative.

Requirement: that Edith Keeler did not start the peace movement, so that the Second World War could proceed as it should. But that did not necessarily mean that she had to die. Spock had seen the error in the equations on the bridge. Now he called up all the other factors on the screen, and soon the complete readout was there before him.

Edith Keeler. Left the small mission she was running and moved into the backwoods of America. Lived for fifty years with her husband, then died. Uneventful life, no offspring.

And Jim Kirk? Listed as missing on a trip through time to save McCoy. The doctor found safely and returned.

So Jim could have stayed and married Edith. He would have told her enough so that she accepted that the peace movement would have to wait for another. They would have had to move away so that no action of theirs would jeopardise the future. No children for the same reason. But fifty years of living, and loving, and being happy!

If Jim had known that he could have had Edith without endangering the Enterprise and the Federation, would he have done so?

Even more important, would Spock ever find the courage to face Kirk and own up to the mistake, and see the friendship he valued above all else change to sorrow, and anger, and maybe even hatred?

Spock understood in that instant that even if Kirk should one day forgive him, he would never forgive himself. A valuable Human being had died, and another had been made deeply unhappy, because of his negligence, and it was a burden he would have to bear for the rest of his life.

"Back to work, everyone." Kirk gave the order as the lift doors closed behind his First Officer, and then made his way back to the Command Chair. He deliberately made his voice unconcerned, knowing that Spock would not want others speculating about the breakdown in the Vulcan's usual impassive behaviour. As Kirk resumed his duties, however, his thoughts were racing. Whatever had Spock come across that had made him react like that? It could not have been something that would affect the safety of the ship or its crew, or the Vulcan would have said so. Curious as Kirk was, he made himself wait five minutes before calling the computer lab.

"This is the Captain. Is Mr. Spock there?"

"Yes, sir, he's working in one of the private rooms." The ensign on duty hesitated. "He asked not to be disturbed, but I can get him for..."

"No, that won't be necessary." Kirk lowered his voice, unwilling to appear to be checking up on his second in command. "Did Mr. Spock say which system he was checking?"

"I think he's undertaking some private research, sir."

"I see. Thank you. Kirk out."

Kirk sat and gnawed his fingernail. Spock had not reacted in the manner of someone doing research. Perhaps he was unwell. Kirk tensed to get up from the chair and follow his friend, when Sulu's voice rang out from the helm.

"Large meteorite approaching. Several more behind."

Kirk reacted automatically. "Full deflectors. Reduce speed to warp two. Mr. Chekov, take over Mr. Spock's scanners."

Damn! He could hardly leave the bridge now because of a vague, unspecified concern. Perhaps McCoy could help?

He thumbed the intercom. "Sickbay. Is Dr. McCoy there?"

"Here, Jim. What can I do for you?"

"Bones, can you pop down to the computer lab and check that Spock's okay. He didn't seem to be behaving normally a few minutes ago."

He sensed McCoy biting back a comment about the Vulcan never behaving normally, as the Doctor heard the genuine worry in Kirk's voice.

"I'll be right down."

Relieved, knowing that despite his reluctance McCoy would do as asked, Kirk returned his attention to the forward screen.

McCoy made his way to the computer labs feeling decidedly disgruntled. It wasn't that he disbelieved Kirk. Doubtless the Vulcan had shown some signs of unusual behaviour. Yet the Doctor had spent some time with Spock in the recreation room less than an hour ago. They had enjoyed a very pleasant argument about the Vulcan's metabolism (yet again!). They had both then left for their

respective jobs, and McCoy couldn't see what could have happened to Spock in the intervening time. Also the sickbay records were getting behind as usual, and he needed the extra time to catch up with the paperwork.

On arriving at the lab, McCoy used a mixture of southern charm and steely medical authority to get past the protecting ensign, and knocked on the door of the room Spock was in. He could see the Vulcan through the small window in the door, sitting with his back to him, hunched over the console.

Seconds later he knocked again, wondering at last what could have so absorbed Spock that he didn't respond to the request for entry. Finally McCoy quietly activated the door release and stepped through into the room. He'd made his way round the table to face the Vulcan before Spock looked up and saw him, and as he did so McCoy froze. It was only there for a moment, but he had seen that look in the Vulcan's eyes before, and the haunted anticipation of loss could only mean one thing.

"Spock?" The Doctor's mouth was dry, all his planned sarcastic comments forgotten. "What have you found? Is there a danger to Jim?"

The Vulcan blinked, surprised once again by the Doctor's perceptiveness. There were only two people in the Universe who knew him so well, and soon...

"No, Doctor, there is no danger to the Captain." Spock's voice was flat and toneless.

"What, then?" McCoy saw the fear and tension in the First Officer's bearing, and was made more frightened by the fact that the Vulcan either could not, or would not, control it. "For heaven's sake, Spock, what's the matter?"

Spock desperately needed to tell the Doctor. He had never fully understood the Human need to confide in another, but now the guilty burden of what he had discovered weighed on him heavily. Yet McCoy, too, had been distraught over Edith's death. He, too, might blame the Vulcan for his mistake.

McCoy sensed his hesitation and reacted angrily. "Spock, if you don't tell me immediately what's going on, I'll have to call Jim..."

"No!" That was one thing Spock could not allow. Feeling he was burning his bridges behind him, he finally looked McCoy in the eye. "Doctor, if I show you something, you must give me your word not to tell the Captain."

McCoy was taken aback. "I don't know if I can, Spock," he answered honestly, "if it affects the wellbeing of the crew, or the safety of the ship."

"It is personal, Doctor. It affects no-one except the Captain and... myself." The last said in a whisper.

Their eyes held until finally McCoy nodded. "All right. I give you my word. Now show me."

Spock punched in the relevant details, then sat back as the Doctor came round the table to read the information on the screen.

McCoy read it through carefully, twice, and when he had finished the room was silent.

The Doctor found it difficult to analyse his reaction. To his shame, the greatest feeling was one of relief that Kirk had not known at the time. Under the pressure of the moment, who could say what the Captain would have done, and although McCoy deeply regretted Edith Keeler's death, he knew he didn't want to lose his Captain and his friend, and would not have coped very well with coming back to the ship without him, and dealing with a Spock destroyed...

Abruptly, McCoy sat up, understanding the fear in the Vulcan's eyes. He spoke urgently. "Spock, you can't believe that Jim will blame you for this. He knows the pressures you were both working under. And even if he had known about this at the time, we can't be sure he would have chosen to go with her."

"Can we not, Doctor? Do you deny that you yourself thought the self-same thing? When I tell him, he will hate me for having denied him the choice, and I will have lost him. The only way I could possibly make amends would be to somehow recreate the situation again to give him the opportunity to make a different decision. Either way, our friendship is finished."

The Doctor was seriously worried now. Many times he had hoped the Vulcan would open up, and show his feelings more freely. Now that Spock seemed to be losing control, McCoy felt ill at ease and concerned for his half-Human friend.

"Then don't tell him! He doesn't have to know. What's done is done, and there's no point in raking up the past." For a moment the Doctor felt like shaking the Vulcan, desperate to snap him out of the unnatural depression he had sunk into, but stopped himself in time. "Are you listening, Spock? I won't tell him, and you shouldn't either. Forget it. I'll call the bridge and tell him you're slightly off-colour and are to have the rest of the shift off. Go to your room and meditate and get things in perspective. It wasn't your fault. You must believe that. Not one man in a million could have achieved even half of what you did with that primitive equipment. Are you listening, Spock?"

Finally the Vulcan nodded. Greatly relieved, McCoy called the bridge. Keeping his voice carefully neutral, the Doctor explained that Spock seemed over-tired, and should have the remainder of the shift off.

Kirk's permission, also carefully neutral, fooled neither of them. McCoy shrugged mentally. He would have to deal with Kirk later. For now, the Vulcan had to be his priority. Turning off the console, he accompanied the Vulcan out of the lab to his quarters, where he left him under orders to have a good few hours' rest.

Meditation didn't help. Nothing lessened the horror of it all. Vulcan disciplines only made it worse, for mental routines based on logic were useless to him now. Vulcan memory didn't help either. Spock could recall each and every moment of those days, and through them all was Kirk's absolute, unquestioning trust in his First Officer, and his plea for help and advice.

"I must know whether she lives or dies, Spock. I must know

what to do."

Spock's replies had been so confident.

"There is no mistake, Captain."

"Jim, Edith Keeler must die."

"Save her, do as your heart tells you to do, and millions will die who did not die before."

He had been so sure of himself! And Jim, so ready to sacrifice the life of the woman he loved on his First Officer's say-so. An intolerable burden to bear.

But what if he *had* probed further, and discovered the third possibility? Would he have had the strength to tell Kirk about it? Could he have watched the relief and happiness in Kirk's eyes? Wished him well and come back alone, to be always alone? Spock groaned aloud at the sense of loss.

However, he knew immediately that somehow he would have to offer Jim the opportunity again, at whatever cost to himself. At the moment, he could not see a way to do so. He resolved that until he could find a method he would say nothing and carry on as usual. He had hurt Jim enough already, and would not allow him to be further needlessly unhappy.

He would cancel their chess game tonight, because he didn't think he could be in the same room as Jim and shield his inner turmoil effectively. Tomorrow, and all the other days left to them, he would bide his time and watch for an opportunity to make amends. He deliberately didn't contemplate what his own life would be like if Kirk decided to go to her.

End of shift, and still no word from either Spock or McCoy. It was a measure of Kirk's trust in the Doctor that he hadn't gone straight down to the computer lab on receipt of that short, cryptic request. But the hours on the bridge passed slowly, even slower than usual, as is always the case when one wishes for time to go quickly. At one point, exasperated, Kirk had crossed to the science station and requested access to whatever it was that Spock had been working on. The information was unavailable, classified under voice authority.

Anger at its unavailability conflicted with Kirk's sense of guilt at having tried to access his friend's personal business. The remaining time in the Command Chair dragged on even more slowly, if that were possible, but the existence of the meteor belt meant that he daren't leave the bridge. Finally the relief staff arrived, and as soon as the danger to the ship seemed to have passed, he was free to make his way off the bridge.

Kirk made it to sickbay in record time, and knew from the glass of brandy waiting on McCoy's desk that he was expected.

"Well?" Sitting down opposite the Doctor, he fixed McCoy with his best Command glare. He knew the Doctor tended to be over-protective where Spock was concerned, and didn't want to be deflected with well-meaning lies.

McCoy was smarter than that. He had had several hours to think about the situation and knew that only the truth (or a carefully edited version of it) would satisfy Kirk. First he needed some facts.

"Have you been to see Spock?" McCoy hid his anxiety about the answer by pushing the glass towards Kirk.

"No, I haven't. I came straight here, thinking I ought to get your opinion first. What's going on, Bones?"

McCoy sat back, relieved. If the Captain hadn't spoken to Spock it made his own part easier.

When McCoy had first told Spock to forget the whole thing, and not tell Kirk, he had done so out of panic. Having thought about the situation, he still held to his decision, although now for more logical reasons.

The chances that any of them would ever be able to return to that particular period in time were extremely remote. It seemed unnecessarily cruel to hurt Kirk any more than he had been already. The Captain might think that he should have stayed behind with Edith, but McCoy knew that Kirk would never be happy without his ship and the thrill of exploring the stars. Edith, too, was not a person to be happy out of the mainstream of life. Sometimes an active death was better than a long, unfulfilled life. They would have given up their worlds for each other, and become increasingly dissatisfied as a result.

As an observer, McCoy could see that. His fear was that Kirk, being too emotionally close to the situation, might spend the rest of his life wishing for something that wasn't right for him anyway.

But he would have to tell the Captain something, and it would have to be plausible.

"Jim, Spock's a perfectionist. You know that. Over the years he's convinced himself that to be truly Vulcan he's got to be even more perfect than all the others, and that's a pretty high standard to live up to."

Kirk nodded impatiently, and the Doctor went on.

"This afternoon, he was checking some formulae on the bridge, and found that he had made a serious mistake in some theoretical mathematical data he was working on. That's what upset him so badly. I've talked to him about it, and tried to get him to put the whole thing in perspective, and I think I've succeeded. I've left him in his quarters to sort out his feelings on the subject."

Kirk was not so easily satisfied. Spock was, above all else, logical, and it wasn't like him to react so emotionally over such an incident.

"What kind of mistake? I know you say Spock seeks perfection, but surely his reaction was a little over the top. If it was that serious, shouldn't I know about it? Is it something that can endanger the ship?"

McCoy sought to reassure him. "Jim, it's nothing that will affect either the ship or its crew. It was simply a mathematical mistake. If you question Spock about it you'll only make him feel

worse. He's upset about it enough already. Can't you just drop it, and forget the whole incident?"

Kirk hesitated. It still didn't quite ring true. He opened his mouth to protest, but McCoy forestalled him.

"Please, Jim. For all our sakes, leave it alone."

And Kirk left it alone.

He would not have been a commander of men had he not known when to step back from a situation and allow it to develop at its own speed. If he felt any hurt at the fact that Spock had confided in the Doctor but not in his supposed best friend, he was careful not to show it. After all, similar situations had arisen before. He was confident that the Vulcan would come to him when he was ready.

As the days turned to weeks, however, he became increasingly unhappy, and began to wonder just how much of the truth McCoy had really told him. On the bridge, he sensed that the Vulcan was grateful for his undemanding approach; certainly nothing was ever said between them. Socially they played chess as usual, both of them carefully keeping to small talk, and each of them aware of what the other was doing.

Then something happened that seriously disturbed the Captain.

He was in the Command Chair, looking through the assortment of message tapes that had come in from Starfleet Command. One touched a particular nerve. Normally, he would have automatically turned to the Vulcan, and shared his reactions. This time he felt ill at ease doing so.

"Mr. Spock." Kirk swivelled in the Chair. "You might be interested in viewing this. Apparently Starfleet Command has finally undertaken to establish a small, select research colony at the Guardian of Forever, and are recruiting any interested scientists."

He wondered what had made him phrase it in quite such a way, and regretted the words immediately. Did he need reassurance so badly that he could almost ask for it on the bridge?

But Spock had actually risen from his seat and come to take the tape from Kirk's hand, and for a moment the Captain read despair in the dark eyes.

"Indeed, Captain. If I may?" Spock had taken the tape and returned to his station with perfect formality, and Kirk wondered if he had imagined that momentary lack of control.

Increasingly perturbed by the situation, he decided that he would have to broach the subject during their evening game. He had respected the Vulcan's privacy for too long, and felt he was owed some kind of explanation. He had meant to raise the subject diplomatically, but was too upset to do so, and ploughed straight in.

"Please, Spock, why can't you talk to me? I know that

something is very wrong. If there's anything at all that I've done... "

"No, Jim." Spock's response was urgent and immediate, and for an instant, as Kirk met the Vulcan's eyes, he could see in them all the warmth and affection that he'd missed for so long. Then the Vulcan hung his head, and when he looked up again his eyes were once again veiled and controlled. "It is nothing you have done, Jim. I am the one at fault here. I think, though, that I will be able to explain everything soon." He faltered. "Very soon."

In the aftermath of such a conversation, neither of them could return to the game. After a few half-hearted attempts, they agreed to call it a night. But Kirk was slightly reassured, remembering that short burst of the inner Spock, and knowing that the foundations of their friendship were still firm. He decided to leave it a few more days. Next time he would not allow his friend to evade the subject so easily.

Meanwhile, Spock was distraught. The fact that he could even consider applying such a highly emotive word to his condition showed him how far he had strayed from the Vulcan ideal of non-emotion.

The computer tape Spock had taken from the Captain lay on the desk before him, and Spock felt trapped by the information on it.

It was the thing he had most wanted in the world, and it was the last thing in the world he wanted. Illogical, contradictory statement, but cruelly true.

Now he no longer had an excuse to stay on the Enterprise with Kirk. Although Starfleet officers were rarely permitted such a radical change of direction in mid-career, Spock knew there would be no resistance to his application for a transfer. On the contrary, he would be welcomed with open arms; after all, most of the papers and calculations on time travel in current existence were based on his research.

In addition, his father would be pleased, and he would be admitted back into the family fold. Once immersed in his work, would it really matter that Kirk was no longer there to be a part of him?

No going back. It had been his error, and he would pay the penalty. Picking up a pen and sheet of paper, he began to write.

Finally, then, Spock went to Jim Kirk's quarters and instead of feeling sad he was relieved that the moment had come. He had lived with the inevitability of their parting for so long that it already seemed a reality to him. Now at last he stood before Kirk's desk, his mind walled off behind rigid mental barriers, and pledged to himself that at least he would leave with his Vulcan pride intact, and not show any emotion.

Kirk saw the cold, withdrawn stranger before him, and shuddered. Unlike Spock, he had few mental disciplines to help him, and the oppressive sense of impending crisis seemed to fill the room and suffocate him.

"Spock?" Kirk was staggered to hear how normal his voice sounded. "You wanted to see me?"

Spock held out a computer tape and with it a slim sheet of folded paper. "Sir, I wish to hand you these."

Fighting back his reluctance, Kirk reached out and took the items from the Vulcan's outstretched hand, noting how Spock was careful to avoid any contact between them.

Without a word Kirk unfolded the paper and read it, and when he finally raised his eyes to those of the Vulcan his face was bleak. "Why? Why a transfer? Whatever mistake you think you've made, we can work things out, talk things through. Please, Spock..."

"Captain." Spock took a step backwards, realising for a frightening moment that he had almost said 'Jim'. "Captain, please view the accompanying tape. If, having seen it, you wish me to withdraw the transfer request, I will do so."

Kirk was almost angry now at the games Spock was playing, but something in the cold face before him made him afraid. Wordlessly, he slid the tape into the computer and activated the screen.

Spock watched the blood drain from his once friend's face, and knew his worst fears were realised. Still, he waited, hoping that perhaps he had miscalculated the effect the knowledge would have on Kirk. But as he noticed Kirk's knuckles turn white where he clenched the edge of the desk, Spock slipped quietly, unnoticed, from the room.

Some part of Kirk's mind did indeed register his leaving, but for the moment, at least, the Captain didn't care.

Nightmare. In his mind, Kirk could see it happening all over again. Her warmth and intelligence. The way they had been drawn together, both sharing the same ideals and hopes for the future of mankind. The screech of brakes and the anguish afterwards.

Edith.

Always he had drawn comfort, if comfort there was to be drawn, from the fact that the decision was inevitable. Much as he loved her, he could not have committed his friends and his future to non-existence.

But now? He could not believe the details on the screen before him.

It was to Kirk's credit that he didn't blame the Vulcan for a second. In that, Spock had seriously misunderstood his friend, unable yet to predict Human reaction accurately. Kirk had been more than aware of the enormity of the task facing Spock on the Earth of the past. He had worried about the Vulcan's health and welfare, seeing that even his alien stamina was suffering under the adverse conditions. No-one knew, or would ever know, that the greater part of their food money went on whatever fresh vegetables Kirk could lay his hands on, making do himself with much cheaper, rougher fare.

That Spock had found two time lines with such primitive

equipment was in itself almost a miracle. No-one could blame him for not spotting the fainter, more tenuous, third.

None of this lessened the knowledge that Edith's death had not been inevitable. If only he had known at the time! If only they had had better facilities, more space and room in which to work! He could have told her about the alternative, and maybe they could have made a life together. If only...! Would he have to spend the rest of his life regretting the lost opportunity?

With a groan, Kirk punched up the next screen - and saw, stunned, what the Vulcan was offering him. It was something he had never expected. An end to the life he was living now, and the chance to begin all over again, with Edith. A cruel, impossible choice, one that no man should have to make.

His decision was instantaneous, based on instinct and on love, but it was a long, long time before he called McCoy.

The Doctor came through the door, took one look at Kirk's face and sat down heavily in the chair opposite.

"He told you." McCoy wondered why he had ever doubted the inevitable.

"You knew?" Kirk's voice was hard.

"Yes. I'm sorry, Jim, I gave him my word not to say anything. And for the record, I recommended that he forgot all about it and wiped the information. I couldn't see the point in opening up old wounds."

Kirk picked up the piece of paper on his desk. "Do you know what this is, Bones? It's a request from Spock for a transfer. He wants to go and work with the research colony at the Guardian of Forever. He thinks that once he's there, in a few months' time he'll be able to suggest a logical reason why that particular period in time should be investigated, and engineer a reason for me to go back and have that chance with Edith."

"Jim!" McCoy swallowed hard, his sense of impending loss almost as great as his fear for the Vulcan.

But Kirk had risen angrily from behind his desk, pacing the room. "Jim what? Did you ever, really, seriously think that I'd go? I can see that you did! You and Spock, you're as bad as each other." He stopped and sat down in the chair, emotionally drained.

"Bones, I loved Edith. More than any of the women I've met in my own time. But we weren't meant to be. We exist in different realities, and I'm grateful for the short time we had together. What hurts me is that both you and Spock think so little of me that you expect me to go off at the first opportunity. All these weeks with Spock walking round in a stupor. You covering up for him. Me, worrying about you both. This could all have been settled at the very beginning. Is Spock so unsure of me, after all this time, that he offers me *this*?" He tore up the transfer form in hurt and disgust.

McCoy's relief at Kirk's decision was overshadowed by his shame. "I'm sorry, Jim. I guess you're right. I've no excuse for my behaviour except that even Humans are sometimes unsure about the feelings of people they care about. But Spock's a different

matter. If he has no confidence in himself, it's only because of the way he's been conditioned over the years to assume rejection. He expects himself to be perfect, and by not spotting that third possibility he felt he had let you down and deserved to be punished. Whatever his reasons, he was willing to sacrifice his life in Starfleet, and his future with you, in order to guarantee you happiness."

Kirk sighed heavily. "Bones, I'm happy now, with my ship and with you and Spock and the crew. Or at least I was. I thought you both knew how I felt but it seems I was wrong. What did Spock expect me to do? Thank him politely and go off with her? How could we be happy knowing the unhappiness we caused? Edith wasn't the sort of person to live out her life in the backwoods, nor am I. But even if we were, how could I live, knowing that Spock was alone in the future because of me? How could he think that I would go?"

"Jim, I think you're over-reacting. We both watched you those first few days after we returned from Earth. You were very seriously disturbed by the whole incident. I think it's only to Spock's credit that he's offering you this. Don't hold it against him. Anyway, there's one possibility you both haven't considered. He could have stayed back in the past with you."

Kirk shook his head. "I've considered that and rejected it. You examined him after we returned. He was seriously run down after only a few days. How could I ask him to spend a lifetime in hiding? On the Earth of the past, he would be an alien, a freak if discovered. If he fell ill, there would be no-one there to tend him. After our deaths, he would still be left alone."

"He might prefer that to returning to the future without you."

Kirk closed his eyes. "Edith - " His voice still broke over her name - "once said that Spock belonged by my side. That he always had done and always would. She must have known that the reverse was also true. What hurts me is that I thought Spock knew it too."

"Jim, if he were Human he would feel it, but his Vulcan logic is getting in the way of his instincts. I think the two of you need to talk. Go and put him out of his misery."

Finally, then, Kirk stood to leave the room, but at the door he paused. "Who will put me out of mine, Bones?"

And for once, the Doctor could only lower his eyes, having no answer for him.

Spock's quarters were dim. Kirk didn't order on the lights, feeling that what had to be said would be better in the masking twilight. The red flames flickered on the walls of the room, dancing in the oppressive heat. Alien. Alien temperature, alien customs. Spock had not risen from the desk where he was sitting, but as Kirk saw him in his home environment, all his anger evaporated. Again he had expected his friend from another world to behave as a Human. It was a trap he had fallen into many times, and he had still not learned from his mistakes.

It didn't lessen his hurt.

"I've torn up your transfer form and deleted all your calculations from the records. I doubt very much whether anyone else will ever be able to duplicate your work."

Spock didn't answer him or look up, but Kirk noticed his hands clench suddenly in his lap.

Kirk's throat was tight. "I'm - disappointed - that you expected me to go, Spock. I thought you understood better than that how things stood between us." He couldn't bring himself to say any more.

The Vulcan looked up then, saw the pain in his Captain's face, and recognised that this was a time for total honesty. "Forgive me, Jim. I was afraid."

It was the best thing he could have said. Kirk himself was no stranger to the emotion. But that the Vulcan should have been so afraid of losing his Human friend that his logic had shattered and resulted in this unnecessary misunderstanding! How insecure they both were in their relationship, each considering himself unworthy of the other, even after all this time.

Wearily, Kirk sat on the bed. "You had no need to be." But he was not angry any more, only very, very sad and tired.

"I'm grateful to you, in a way, for having found the third possibility. It's made my decision to let Edith die easier to live with. I'd always thought that I was pushed into the situation, that events happened so fast I had no time to consider them, or control them. Now I know that even if I had had a choice I would have made the same decision. In a way it's put the whole thing into perspective. I know now for certain that my place is here. You said back on Earth that time was fluid, like a river, pulling people on its many currents to the same point in time. If I had been destined to spend my life with Edith, I would have been born in her time, but I wasn't. I was born in yours. Do you understand me, Spock?"

He waited until the Vulcan nodded before getting up and walking to the doorway. "Somehow we're going to have to put this whole experience behind us, and learn from it. We'll talk it through some other time. I'll see you on the bridge tomorrow morning as usual, but for now I think we both need to be alone."

The Vulcan didn't move as the door closed behind Kirk. Left behind in the darkened room, he could not believe how the situation had resolved itself. Logically, Jim should have gone, but he had not. There would be much to analyse, and ponder on, during the next few days, but that simple truth was the only thing that mattered.

For logically, Jim should have gone... but he had not.



First place, Midcon 1990 fiction competition.



